Teaching history and culture here and abroad

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Abstract

Intercultural competence is recognized as a necessary goal of foreign language classes, particularly at the college level. Considered on par with grammatical and lexical proficiency, intercultural competency allows non-native speakers of a language to function and participate in a society where the target language is spoken. Teaching for intercultural competence requires that the language teacher first bring students to an awareness of the various aspects of culture that play a role in the way they themselves function in daily life. It is only then that students are ready to learn and understand the hows and whys of life within the new culture, with the ultimate goal being empathy towards speakers of the target language. This paper reports on the practice of teaching language and culture through an intercultural lens in college-level French and German history and culture classes. Specifically addressed are intercultural strategies used in the US classroom and the modifications made to those strategies when the course is taught in the target culture.

The question of what to teach in the foreign language classroom has been and continues to be the topic of discussion among foreign and second language teachers at all levels of education. In the mid-20th century, Kaplan (1966) noted the shift away from prescriptive grammar to a more culturally based curriculum. Now, in the early 21st century, language curricula in higher education require that the culture associated with the target language be integrated with language instruction. Second language learners in a new country must learn not only to speak the language, but also to be able to function in the culture in which
the language is situated. Foreign language learners learning a language outside of a country where that language is spoken, often have different purposes for learning the language. For them, being acquainted with how to participate in the culture on a day-to-day basis is not immediately necessary. Nevertheless, as Brody notes, sociologists, anthropologists and linguists all agree “Language and culture are inextricably tied. Culture is negotiated in large part through language, and language codifies many cultural assumptions and values” (2011, p. 40).

It is in this broad context that the authors/instructors report their practices in the undergraduate level foreign language history and culture courses. In a small Midwestern liberal arts university where the foreign language programs are small (no language majors other than Spanish, only minors in Spanish, French, German, and several area studies minors), the instructors have the rare opportunity to offer French and German culture courses to language students in overseas contexts. French and German culture courses are offered on a regular rotation, but also scheduled are the same courses every two years in French-speaking and German-speaking countries for a 3-week May Term. While the bond between language and culture remains the same, the opportunity to teach culture within the cultural setting presents a valuable opportunity to teach through a different approach and from a different perspective.

The purpose for including a history and culture course in the college language curriculum provides a focus for further language study while acquainting students with the target people group. Teaching about the arts, literature, and historical or cultural events, “Big C” culture (Peterson, 2004), has been a traditional element of such courses and remains necessary as a means to tie language to the history of its speakers. However, as Saville-Troike notes, “the aspects of culture that should be taught are dictated by the student’s reason for learning” (2003, p. 15); thus, “little c” culture (Peterson, 2004) is the element of culture that will have greater effect on students, especially when they travel to a country where the language is spoken. Little c culture can be defined as the day-to-day elements of culture that are often hidden or unseen by the casual observer, but that dictate how a native participant of the culture will react to any given situation.

The Cultures Standard, one of the 5Cs of the National Foreign Language Standards (Communications, Communities, Comparisons, Connections and Cultures), disseminated by the American Council on Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL, n.d.), establishes three components that teachers should include in teaching culture. Perspectives are the underlying, philosophical “beliefs, values, attitudes and traditional ideas of a society”; Practices are “patterns of behavior that are socially acceptable within the group”; and Products are tangible and intangible products ranging from food and dress, to literature and art, to legal and educational systems (Ohio, n.d.). These 3Ps build on and elaborate the concepts of Big C and little c culture. By teaching both history and culture, we present elements of Big C and little c culture that are products of the German and French cultures. Familiarity with these products allows students to examine Practices and Perspectives that create recognizable distinctions of the German and French peoples.
As students become acquainted with the 3Ps of the target culture, the Comparisons standard of the 5Cs comes into play. When they examine Perspectives, students engage the Comparisons standard, by making a well-informed comparison of their own cultures to the targeted culture(s), thus striving for the goal of intercultural competence.

**Intercultural Competence**

Culture can best be taught through an intercultural lens, where learners are called upon to consider elements of their own cultures as they learn elements of the new. Byram (1997) defines intercultural competence as an interaction within the language learner between his or her own culture and the new culture. The learner brings to the learning situation knowledge of his or her own culture and must recognize cultural differences without bias. Byram further defines intercultural competence as an additional layer of communication that involves an effort on the part of the speaker to relate to the target culture by establishing and maintaining relationships. Thus, in preparing students to interact with and eventually form relationships with native speakers of the target language, teaching little c culture, that is, bringing students to an understanding of cultural perspectives is more important than merely teaching about cultural products. Kramsch (2003) notes that the purpose of teaching culture through an intercultural perspective is not to expect the students to become “little French or little Germans,” but rather to help learners “understand why the speakers of two different languages react [differently to the same situation] and what the consequences … may mean for the learner” (p. 32). For these reasons, the inclusion or, more importantly, the infusion of language teaching with culture is important for language learners. Byram reminds us, “Teaching for linguistic competence cannot be separated from teaching for intercultural competence” (1997, p. 22).

Teaching through an intercultural perspective requires not only adaptation on the part of the teacher, but also adaptation on the part of the students. A culture course must teach cultural facts; however, it must also bring students to an awareness of the differences between their own culture(s) and the culture(s) associated with the target language, and how these cultures interact and intersect (Wintergeist & McVeigh, 2011; Dykstra-Pruim, 2008; Altmayer, 2008; Lafayette, 2003). In order to develop cultural awareness, students need to look at their own culture(s) for the purpose of analyzing their own beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, ethnocentrism, and enculturation (Wintergeist & McVeigh, 2011). Only by first examining their own culturally-based beliefs, can they then come to a point where they can recognize and resolve misunderstanding due to cultural differences (Dykstra-Pruim, 2008).

In order to be able to create relationships and develop empathy for the target culture, it is important to have knowledge of the history related to the culture, the country and the people group associated with the target language. Martin and Nakayama (2007) note the “dialectical interplay between past and present” (p. 118) involved when people of different cultures interact. They claim, “…culture and cultural identities are intimately tied to history because they have no meaning
without history” (p. 119). Multiple sources cite breakdowns in intercultural communication when historical contexts have not been considered. Frances Fitzgerald, in her book *Fire in the Lake*, places blame for the Vietnam War on a total lack of Vietnamese historical context on the part of the American government. President George W. Bush only added fuel to the fire of the Iraqi War when he used the term “crusade” in a speech (White House Archives, 2001). Recently, a spa hotel in Germany advertised its Kristall-Nacht as a special event (BBC, 2013). The teaching of culture must involve situating that culture within its historical contexts. Without this context, language learners will not be able to understand why the people they want to know react the way they do to certain situations.

Approaching language learning from an intercultural perspective requires added effort on the part of the students: the students must adopt an attitude of reflection. Nostrand (1996) notes the need to develop in our students “the affective capacity for empathy” (p. 6) toward the culture, while learning and reflecting about one’s own culture. Smith, Paige and Steglitz (2003) maintain that before we can truly understand another culture, we must first “make the effort to achieve a deep sensitivity to differences…and [develop an] objective awareness in…our own subjective perspectives” (p. 97). By cultivating a deep sensitivity or empathy towards other cultures, we teach our students “to elicit attitudes without imposing attitudes” (Nostrand, 1996). According to Smith, Paige and Steglitz (2003), “Failure to do this leaves us open to the dangers inherent in making inferences and judgments without an understanding of either our subjects or ourselves” (p. 97). It is by recognizing our own system of values and beliefs that we are able to avoid bias and be open to understanding other culturally-based perspectives.

**Teaching Intercultural Communication Here**

Teaching a culture course for the purpose of integrating intercultural competence can take place outside the target culture or inside the target culture. Outside the target culture presents a situation where the teacher must be creative in bringing that culture into the classroom, and therefore into the consciousness of the students without relying on stereotypes (Damien, 2003). Groenewold (2005) notes the benefits of participating in the target culture for developing intercultural competence; thus, the teacher outside of the cultural context must make efforts to provide creative opportunities for participation. By examining other cultures nearby, i.e., cultures other than the culture of the students and the target culture, students can develop a perspective on cultural differences. They can begin to examine aspects of their own cultures that play a role in their own worldviews. Groenewold (2005) suggests role playing and participatory learning as means for opening intercultural possibilities. He describes “discover a German”: ways to engage the culture without being there. He says such role playing can raise questions that might not arise when simply learning facts.

Giving students the opportunity to reflect on, experiment with, and develop new situations are ways that Altmayer (2008) suggests for opening students’ minds to other viewpoints. Lafayette (2008) echoes these suggestions by noting foreign language teachers can learn from the field of anthropology by making use of their
methods of awareness and comparison, and making use of learning-centered learning. Damien (2003) adds to this an affective layer by suggesting that cultural learning be non-threatening, be on-going throughout language study, and make use of all the senses. She also suggests that students be taught to translate culturally instead of linguistically. Schier (2008), for example, outlines a curriculum for focusing on the concept of time, beginning with a broad perspective across cultures and ending with materials that focus on the specific ways the target culture deals with the concept. Included in her outline is the specific example of teaching speech acts along with topics such as politeness, showing respect, candidness and tolerance for the purpose of integrating the instruction of language and culture.

Teaching Intercultural Communication Abroad

Of course when a culture class is taught within the target culture, multiple opportunities for learning about and engaging the culture abound. The teacher has authentic resources easily at hand and does not have to create or search for them. However, even this situation cannot be described as alles in Butter (smooth sailing). Groenewold (2005) notes that it is questionable whether a student in the classroom can ever learn a country the way one might learn culture. It is at this point that participation in the cultural life of the country is necessary. Students need to participate as much as possible. Altmayer (2008) says students need to participate in situations where they “walk in the shoes” of the other in order to develop a different mindset. Damien (2003) affirms that the role of the teacher is essential in fostering cultural enquiry, and Maijala (2008) notes that teachers need to provide opportunities for their students to develop empathy with the target culture. One way of doing this is to be sure they encounter both the “good” and the “bad” in everyday situations. But, as Damien (2003) cautions, the best learning situation is non-threatening. Phipps (2008) notes that while risk will be involved, it should only be the risk of communicative failure. When this type of risk is used as a teaching/learning tool, there is no end point in the learning situation. The teacher must foster cultural enquiry even when the learning environment is in the target culture.

No matter how astute and competent the teacher is, or how authentic and full of potential the environment is for preparing students for face-to-face intercultural experience, the success of the situation ultimately depends on the willingness and motivation of the students to learn. Lovik (2008) recounts a case study of a student who was prepared for an intercultural learning experience, but who did not cooperate with the host family’s rules. The situation provides clear evidence that one can learn how to be höflich (polite/courteous), but may choose not to be höflich. Such a situation reminds us all that learning a culture ultimately lies in the students’ personal motivations.

Strategies for Intercultural Competence

As noted earlier, the authors teach French and German History and Culture courses on a regular rotation in our language curriculum on campus in the
Midwestern United States. The setting is a traditional lecture or seminar, with the inclusion of as many authentic materials as possible (films, guest speakers, online access, etc.). Three-week sessions (taught during May Term) of the French and German History and Culture courses are also offered in France, Germany, and Austria. This is not a study abroad situation where students study for a semester or a year, but rather a short term experience designed to get the students into the culture that they are studying, although briefly. Logistical situations change from year-to-year, but generally students live in either a dormitory situation or at a hostel. Organization for the trip is coordinated through a cooperative effort with the university’s travel studies program and an agent of another university with locations in the other countries. The authors design and teach the courses with assistance in planning by the hosting agent. Class time includes actual time in a lecture/seminar session, but also time participating in the culture.

Reflection

The authors have both adapted before and after essay assignments that they use in both contexts, here and abroad. The before essay assignment is made up of two essays. In order to prepare the students to reflect on and define their own cultures (Smith, Paige and Steglitz, 2003), the instructors require that the students write an essay about themselves. In this essay they are asked to reflect on the influences in their lives that impact their worldview, such as religion, family, familial background/country of origin, citizenship, society, friends, etc. (Wintergeist & McVeigh, 2011). This essay is assigned and due during the first week of the semester (course taught here) and before departing the US (course taught abroad). The second essay is short and requires students to consider their perspectives on the inhabitants of the country or countries in which the target language is spoken. They are asked to write about their impressions (no research involved) of the French or Germanic peoples, respectively. They may include perceptions, suppositions, first-hand experiences, stereotypes, etc., and are asked to note what or who has influenced these perceptions. As with the first essay, this essay is due either during the first week of the semester (here) or before departing the US (abroad).

The after essay is assigned as the final paper for each of the courses. It is a formal essay requiring examples, citations, and references. In this paper students are required to write in an informed manner their interpretation of the inhabitants of the French and Germanic countries, based on the material covered during the course. For students in the courses here, they may include information from the textbooks, guest speakers, and any supplemental materials or events. The students in the courses abroad are required to use the same information, but may also include personal experiences. For the students here, this assignment calls them to consider how the history of a land plays a role in the current culture of its inhabitants. For the students abroad, who are able to incorporate personal experiences, reflection on and analysis of who the other is, how and why he is different from themselves, summons them to consider the validity of other cultural norms (Dystra-Pruim, 2008). In the May term course (abroad), the final reaction paper is due approximately two weeks after the students’ return to the US,
after they have had a chance to reflect on their experience, as also suggested by Spenser and Tuma (2002) in their plan for preparing a short-term overseas course experience.

Preparation for Cultural Encounters

In preparation for the courses abroad (in France, Germany or Austria), the instructors include pre-departure cultural training. These weekly sessions are scheduled on campus six to eight weeks before leaving. Spencer and Tuma (2002) suggest that a pre-course orientation of this type is useful to prepare students to handle the stresses of change and cultural and linguistic learning that will go on in an intensive schedule in France (or Germany or Austria).

An example of the impact of the pre-departure session on the students came at the beginning of a recent three-week course in France. The group arrived in the country just hours before a three-day weekend, in which the stores would be closed for the entire three days. The group had about a half an hour to buy some groceries, as the students were to be cooking their evening meals. The students with less cultural preparation (students participating in a general education course, not the French History and Culture course and who had no French language background) were upset to discover that the concept of “the customer is always right” was not a value in France, and that the store managers had no intention of staying late in order to accommodate this group of customers. Those in the culture class had discussed this topic in class (and were also more comfortable as they spoke the language and so were able to understand the managers’ comments). They were neither surprised, nor bothered, reacting with equanimity and advising their peers on the subject. They had reached an attitude of discovery. Byram (1997) states

“Atitudes which are the pre-condition for successful intercultural interaction need to be not simply positive, since even positive prejudice can hinder mutual understanding. They need to be attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others’ meanings, beliefs and behaviours.” (p. 34)

Similar pre-departure “survival” sessions are offered for students traveling to Germany and Austria, and are open to all students participating in the Germanic History and Culture course as well as to any other students who will be participating in a course in a German-speaking country. The focus of these sessions has been to reacquaint students with necessary vocabulary that they will encounter upon arrival and which will be particularly important for their first 48 hours in country. Examples include the mundane: the importance of recognizing drücken and ziehen (push and pull) on doors; comprehending that in addition to the labels of Damen (ladies) and Herren (gentlemen) on restroom doors, a door labeled WC serves the same function.

As a result of having taught Headstart German for the US Army in Germany for many years, the German instructor recognized how important these seemingly trivial cultural elements can be. Students learn hello and good-bye greetings, numbers, pronunciation of the alphabet, food vocabulary, restaurant culture, what
Unlock the Gateway to Communication

to expect when traveling on public transportation (both local and long distance), shopping conventions, how to ask and receive directions, and about free time activities. Because this information is taught in one-hour sessions for eight weeks, instruction is made up mostly of repetition drills. At this point it is not important that they understand why, but simply that they can properly ask or respond in a given situation. The most enjoyable and memorable aspects of these lessons are the situations where they must determine why a person has made a cultural faux pas.

Cultural Participation

A strategy not easily dealt with here is the need for cultural participation (Schier, 2008; Allison, 2008; Damien, 2003; Groenwald, 2005). In the United States, the authors introduce cultural products via multi-media: internet, recordings, concerts, films, photographs, etc. In addition there are excellent books that explain and outline cultural practices.

In order to align the courses here with the courses abroad, the instructors use textbooks, which present both practices and perspectives. For the French course, the textbook Les Français (Wiley & Brière, 2001) is used. The first part of this textbook deals with the interpersonal cultural differences between Americans and the French, such as the subjects of personal space, view of time, values, and body language and gestures. In the second, longer part of the course, using the same textbook, students look at French history, government, education, and current trends in French society. Other textbooks that may be used during the semester include Au Contraire: Figuring Out the French (Asselin & Matron, 2010), Cultural Misunderstandings (Carroll, 1998), as well as the corresponding French title Évidence Invisibles (Carroll, 1987), and Les Valeurs des Français (Bréchon, 2003).

Students always respond to the course, whether here or abroad, by some change in attitude toward the French, as they become aware of the reasons for certain general behaviors of the other culture; however, not all reach the state of empathy, what Byram (1997) calls “savoir comprendre” (p. 105). Some students will fix on whether they agree or disagree with the French. Sharifian and Palmer (2007) speak of the necessity to go on to “new cultural conceptions” (p. 34)—that is, “schemas that are largely culturally constructed” (p. 34). Other students are able to take on what Saville-Troike (2006) calls “knowledge of the culture [including] content, context, and linguistic elements…as well as an understanding of the wider societal structures and practices that influence norms and conventions of language interpretation and usage” (p. 134). Thus, in the culture course in the United States, learners work through topics hypothetically (although taking advantage of guest French speakers in class, and students from French-speaking countries who mentor or converse with students in “language partnering” (Shaver, 2012).

For the German courses, the German instructor makes use of the books written by Hyde Flippo (e.g., When In Germany, Do as the Germans Do), and the various Xenophobe’s Guides, such as the Xenophobe’s Guide to Germany (Zeidonitz & Barlow, 2008). All of these books provide well written and easily understood cultural differences that language (and cultural) learners need to recognize and be able to use. The sometimes light-hearted approach to differences in daily life
between Germanic peoples and Americans make the material memorable without creating stereotypes. Personal experiences, including faux pas, recounted by other students and professors provide an experiential element, albeit secondhand.

Students abroad have the opportunity for participation in and interaction with the culture, which provides chances for students to deal personally with the other culture and to create their own memories. In order to provide as many varied experiences as possible, German students are mandated to participate in at least 10 cultural experiences. They are then required to keep a cultural journal where they reflect on differences and similarities they see. Journal entries are expected to be a reflection on the experience as they consider why the experience was (or was not) unusual or different. These experiences include day-to-day, individual activities such as attending a church service, sporting events, theater or concert, visiting a museum, going shopping in a store, shopping at an open air market, riding public transportation, eating in restaurants, or sitting in on a university lecture. One experience that was especially well received by the students was a scheduled visit to a bank, which included a tour and explanation of the banking system in Germany. In order to ease the students into the new culture, the German instructor has provided regular walking opportunities where the students stroll through areas as a group. Going as a group to areas off the beaten path, helped them realize that they could navigate on their own, without feeling threatened. It was also an opportunity to explain subtle cultural differences they might not expect to see.

In the French course, the French instructor also requires students abroad to keep and turn in a diary, detailing their experiences, reactions, and attitudes in encountering the culture, and facilitating the students’ preparation for the final reflection paper. Students are also required to write “Culture Vignettes” during the three weeks in France, in which they write about encounters in interacting with the French people and French society and reflect on what they think was happening either in terms of success in communicating or in terms of misunderstanding. They learn, as Byram (1997) cautions, to “manage dysfunctions which arise in the course of interaction, drawing upon knowledge and skills” (p. 38). Many of the encounters take place during afternoon walks, visits, and experiences, and thus bring up some of the topics which could only be discussed hypothetically in the U.S. classroom. An example of this is the way in which students studying in context in France can see for themselves the historical environment, noticing plaques on nearby buildings concerning historical events, and taking into account the historical information surrounding them. This kind of immediate history effectively takes the place of more hypothetical classroom historical knowledge, although without prior preparation, students might not be able to recognize all that they are seeing.

When students are successful in the required individual and group experiences, they gain courage to create their own intercultural moments (Levine, 2008). One male student in Vienna joined in a pickup basketball game at a park near where he lived. Not only did he report a positive experience, but those he played with were able to experience their own intercultural moment with an American. The
same student reported several (unrequired) shopping excursions, including a secondhand shop. This student had been outside the US before, but not to Europe. On the other hand, another student (female) who had never been outside the US before her trip to Austria, always stayed with a group. She often acted as translator for those whose German was not as good as hers. Her reports of experiences and reflection on intercultural differences were well considered, but she was never able to feel comfortable venturing out on her own.

Similarly, understanding differences between the French and American cultures, worked well for the students in France. They began a spontaneous, quiet attempt to indicate to their non-French-speaking peers some of the important points of politeness in French culture, which they had studied and were subsequently experiencing firsthand. For example, they taught cultural norms on French table customs, how to order, and how to ask questions. The French-speaking students were rather taken aback at realizing that their English-speaking peers were using normally pitched voices in the restaurant, and they tried to influence their fellow students to modulate their voices to a level more usual in France.

Another reaction of the French-speaking students was enjoyable to watch, as they woke up to the fact that they could actually communicate and function in the culture. At one point, when French learners went out to a café, they responded to the situation with certain courtesies such as initial greetings, using their utensils in French fashion, keeping their hands on the table, talking politely with their hosts/café patrons, and saying a polite cultural good-bye on leaving. They overheard the host telling the instructor that “these students are so polite”—and it definitely added to their confidence in confronting the culture alone afterward.

The students gained confidence quickly, and some of them felt comfortable to strike out on their own, exploring the city and encountering French people. They also had been following certain issues in French society during earlier French classes. This enhanced their perceptions of those situations in the French context. For example, in earlier courses, the group had been following the situation of the Roma in France, and questions of immigration. On a visit to Versailles, one of the students, meeting a Roma woman during the lunchtime picnic, sat with her and carried on a conversation for about an hour, later writing about the conversation in her diary and talking about her perspective on the immigration situation in general, and the Roma in particular. The encounter had turned an academic discussion on current events, usual in the stateside class, into a more personal and vivid realization of the reality of the situation in France. The student has since spoken on the subject in lower level French classes, on returning to her studies in the U.S.

The reasons for mandating participation in these experiences followed by personal reflection are many: to encourage the students to “walk in the shoes” of Germans and Austrians (Altmayer, 2008); to create moments of intercultural communication through participation (Levine, 2008); and to assist them in maneuvering through differences both good and bad (Majala, 2008). Saville-Troike (2006) discusses the way in which “learning a second language for communication purposes requires knowledge and skills for using it appropriately… Taking a social
perspective…L2 interpretation and production are influenced by contextual factors,…[and] the nature of social interaction may facilitate or inhibit L2 acquisition” (p. 130). The French and German students had the valuable, although sometimes frustrating, experience of finding themselves able to translate for their fellow students who had not had the benefit of language study. In this way, the groups encountered positive cultural communication situations, and also moments of cultural adjustments and frustrations. These experiences show the essential nature of cultural education as integrally part of the communication process. Students were able to make the “leap of insight … defined by Byram (1997) as savoir comprendre” (p. 105). It is encouraging that participation in the culture, aided by pre-training in cultural communication as well as the language, had resulted in the communicative competence which Saville-Troike (2006) discusses, and that their training in reading, speaking, listening, and writing, had been enhanced by the study of culture, so that students could function, communicate, and experience in a satisfying way in their encounters with the people and environments of France, Germany and Austria.

Teaching History

The course titles include history with culture; thus, history must be a part of instruction. Groenewold (2005) notes the need to include generational knowledge in the teaching of culture, and Dykstra-Pruim (2008) discusses the role that history has played in the development of culture. Knowing the importance of including history in courses has lead the authors to experiment with different strategies, some successful and some not as successful.

As noted earlier, both the French and German instructors rely on textbooks to guide instruction and to provide referential material for the students. For the purpose of teaching Germanic history, several textbooks have been selected, including A Concise History of Germany by Mary Fulbrook, A Concise History of Austria, by Steven Beller, Germany: A New History by Hagen Schulze, and Deutsche Geschichte by Manfred Mai. For various reasons, the German instructor has taken different approaches to the teaching of history. Here, the instructor has experimented with two approaches to the teaching of history, with the second strategy being more successful than the first. Because the instructor has wanted students to have an understanding of the history before discussing cultural elements, the study of the history comprises the first half of the course and culture completes the second half. This order of presentation has been unwieldy for the instructor and for the students. Trying to digest 1200 years of history in seven weeks is difficult for the most astute student. A better strategy is that of dividing history into 12 segments and introducing it one segment per week. The students are not overwhelmed and the students reading in German have longer to prepare between readings. In addition to the previously discussed culture texts, the text Modern German Culture, edited by Eva Kolinsky and Wilfried van der Will, is used which ties history and culture together for an in-depth look at the Germanic people. This historical approach to culture serves to reinforce both history and culture for the students. Before class discussions, students are required to write
a brief response to the reading. This works well because students come to class prepared to discuss instead of to listen to a lecture.

As difficult as it is for students to digest 1200 years of Germanic history in 15 weeks here, it is significantly more difficult to absorb in a course that lasts only three weeks. This conundrum has no best solution. For the most recent trip to Vienna, the German instructor tried a new approach to teaching history. The instructor taught the book backwards, beginning with the last chapter and continuing to the front. The purpose in doing this was to introduce the students as quickly as possible to the current historical, political, and social context of Austria. While teaching the last chapter of the textbook first accomplished that goal, this backwards chronology unfortunately left the students somewhat confused and unable to sort through the correct sequence of events.

The course in French includes less history taught systematically. Wylie and Brière (2001) in Les Français present an historical timeline from the vestiges of a France beginning to the events of modern times. This text also takes a look at the role of the French family before and after 1986, and the changes that have come to French society in modern times. The French government and the demography of France serve as examples of how France has changed since the world wars (Wylie & Brière, 2001).

While touching on history in the current courses, both here and abroad, the French instructor is considering adding more of a comprehensive timeline for the students in order to emphasize the importance of history as a framework for French culture and to give them a feel for history that they will experience in France. One possible source, Lenard’s Trésors du Temps (2005), gives a very student-accessible compilation of the history of France, and could be useful to present short segments to enlighten students to the framework of historical knowledge that French people share from their schooling and their surroundings. Also, an excellent source for background on the more modern history of France is the four-volume series Histoire de la France Politique by Berstein and Winock (2004). The concept of the timeline demands that, to understand French points of view, one must also understand the role history plays in society, not only as the past that is over and done with, but as part of the ongoing shaping of society (Wylie & Brière, 2001).

Conclusions

Teaching culture with the goal of developing intercultural competence must be a required element in the language teaching curriculum. Language learners cannot expect to participate in the society of a people group without understanding the culture that is intrinsically fused with the language they are learning. Similarly, without understanding the whys and hows of the culture, students cannot expect to create and maintain relationships with other peoples. Generally speaking history and culture courses are upper level courses for students who have completed the intermediate level of language learning. At this point in this institution’s curriculum the authors are turning from a focus on language infused with culture, to teaching culture informed by the language they have learned (Brody, 2003). The
question the authors pose to themselves is whether instructors can help, aid, or speed up acculturation by teaching culture in a three-week session in the target language (Brody, 2003). The authors recognize that teaching for intercultural competence must be approached differently when teaching here (in the US, where the target language and culture are not the norm), and abroad (specifically in France, Germany or Austria where the target language and culture are the norm). The authors have described strategies for teaching intercultural competence that are commonly addressed in the literature: reflection, preparation for cultural encounters, participation in culture and understanding historical contexts. Each of these strategies can be included in teaching contexts both here and abroad; however, the authors have made a conscious shift in how intercultural competence is addressed due to location. Being able to participate in the culture while learning about it can be a matchless experience for language learners. Teachers must provide maximum opportunity for student participation in and encounters with the culture. We must focus on “public” interactions: elements of politeness, how to fit in, and recognizing what is esthetically pleasing or accepted (Smith, Paige, & Steglitz, 2003). At the same time, through the use of authentic materials and creativity on the part of the teacher, students learning another culture here can be prepared to address cultural moments when the opportunity arises or in Kaplan’s words, “[classroom-taught culture can] provide the student with a form within which he may operate, a form acceptable in this time and in this place” (1966, p. 20).

Note

1. Because Germanic History and Culture satisfies requirements for both the German Minor and the General Education requirement for Global Awareness, the course is taught in English, with students minoring in German required to read the history in German (Manfred Mai) in order to maintain and practiced their German language skills.

References


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Appendix A

Suggested Textbooks

**French History and Culture**


**Germanic History and Culture**


