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Creating a Culture-driven Classroom One Activity at a Time

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Abstract

Despite the calls for a professional paradigm shift from a grammar-driven to a culture-driven curriculum (e.g., Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007), we continue to organize our teaching around the grammatical sequence of the textbook. Points of cultural interest are infused as culture notes, photos, interludes, research projects, and other such add-on pieces, but are essentially optional in the sequencing of the course material and thus enter our classrooms as time permits. This article offers an approach for making intercultural learning the focus of our classes while recasting grammar and vocabulary in a supporting role. Specifically we explore the potential of the products-practices-perspectives model of culture (NSFLEP, 2014) for allowing learners at even the most novice levels to use language at the service of intercultural discovery and understanding. Through example activities from French, German, and Spanish, we argue that the seemingly monumental task of shifting the paradigm from grammar-focused to culture-centered can happen if we work on it one activity at a time.

Introduction

The language major should be structured to produce a specific outcome: educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence. Advanced language training often seeks to replicate the competence of an educated native speaker, a goal that post-adolescent learners rarely reach. The idea of translingual and transcultural competence, in contrast, places value on the ability to operate between languages. Students are educated to function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language. They are also trained to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture. They learn to comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies and to grasp themselves as Americans--that is, as members of a society that is foreign to others. They also learn to relate to fellow members of their own society who speak languages other than English. (Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007, pp. 3-4)

Who can argue against the value of the Modern Language Association's 2007 vision for language instruction? Yet, current classroom practices are not leading our students toward "translingual and transcultural competence." At both secondary and postsecondary levels, the vast majority of beginning and intermediate language classes simply follow a textbook, which, itself, is structured according to a sequence of grammatical forms embedded into thematic chapters. While the treatment of culture in these instructional materials has become more intentional, more colorful, more interesting, more authentic, and more nuanced in recent years, the fact remains that it continues to be optional. If an instructor chooses to skip a grammatical point or a set of vocabulary in a particular chapter due to time constraints, the students will be handicapped in subsequent chapters, unable to complete certain exercises because they do not have the requisite linguistic knowledge. However, if that same instructor opts not to include that chapter's cultural material, there will be no such ramifications as students progress through the course. Cultural content in most textbooks takes the form of contextual information for language activities, decorative photos, points of curiosity, native-speaker profiles, side notes, and optional readings and projects that are not sequenced and do not build on each other from chapter to chapter. It also focuses heavily on describing cultural products and practices with little attention given to helping students discover cultural perspectives and variation within cultures, both as they relate to the cultures under study and to the students' home culture(s). We cannot expect to lay the foundation for "deep translinguistic and transcultural competence" if cultural learning remains superficial and optional.

The Modern Language Association report calls for important changes to the undergraduate language major. While we wholeheartedly agree with the restructuring that is proposed, we are convinced that the paradigm shift to a culture-driven curriculum must begin with the most novice levels, as the vast majority of language students do not persist through years 3 and 4 in high school or through the minor or major in college. We must help novice learners begin to acquire some measure of translingual and transcultural competence while we have them in our classes if we wish to make a dent in U.S. ethnocentrism. The question is "How?" How can we restructure our teaching so that language learning is at the service of cultural discovery and not the other way around, particularly given the language-dominated organization of our textbooks? In this chapter, we offer practical approaches and examples for chipping away at this monumental task one activity at a time.

Intercultural communicative competence

The professional conversation about cultural dimensions of language acquisition has been rich, ranging from theoretical discussions of intercultural communication (e.g., Byrnes, 2010; Kramsch, 2006) to cultural learning within a study abroad setting (e.g., Wilkinson, 2012) to implementation of the ACTFL Standards (Arens, 2009). Building on the view of language learners as social agents evidenced in the Common European Framework of Reference, Byram (2008) equates the term "intercultural speaker" with "intercultural mediator" (p. 68). Intercultural or transcultural speakers (two terms which we view as synonymous in this paper) mediate by "bringing into contact through their own self, two sets of values, beliefs, and behaviors," or by applying "insights gained by one outcome of language learning: the ability to see how different cultures relate to each other—in terms of similarities and differences—and to act as a mediator between them" (p. 72). In order for this mediation to take place, Byram calls our attention to the importance of furthering learners' "conscious awareness" of themselves as cultural beings who share at least some ideas and attitudes about other cultures with those in their own group and use these ideas as the basis for interacting with other cultures (p. 72).

Byram (1997, with additions in 2008) posits that development of such conscious awareness of oneself as a cultural being—and thus of intercultural communicative competence—is fostered if we develop our students' competences in certain areas: attitudes [*savior être*], knowledge [*savior*], skills of interpreting and relating [*savoir comprendre*], skills of discovery and interaction [*savoir apprendre* and *savoir faire*], as well as the most important component of intercultural communicative competence, critical cultural awareness [*savoir s'engager*], defined as the ability to "evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (1997, p. 53). Byram suggests in his later work (2008) that foreign language education has an important role to play in preparing students for intercultural citizenship in a globalized world. He draws extensively on the idea of *politische Bildung* (political education), the concept of educating citizens to live in a democratic society (characterized by a plurality of languages, organizational forms, and approaches to solving difficult problems of human interaction). It is the explicit comparative aspect of language education, in which "comparison is both a means of understanding and an approach to critical analysis" (p. 181) that adds significantly to the idea of *politische Bildung,* in that comparison allows learners to reappraise and challenge the assumptions through which they approach both their own culture and another culture. By using a comparative methodology, language teachers can effectively help learners extend their conceptions of their own and other cultures: "They can present a view of the familiar from the perspective of the other, 'making the familiar strange.' They can also present the unfamiliar from within the perspective of the other, 'making the strange familiar'" (p. 182).

Exploration of the language-culture link helps learners understand how our cultures influence the formation of our own identities. Conscious comparison of the two language cultures can help our students progress towards an understanding of what Arens (2010) terms the "pragmatics of identity formation within the target C2 [nonnative culture]" (p. 322). The learner thus can learn "how to manage constructing an identity in two cultures" (p. 322), a lesson that is much more enduring than any language fluency they may achieve under our tutelage. Byram (2012) points out that there are two other identities that our students develop in the consideration of the language-culture relationship that also lead to greater cultural awareness: "their own personal 'German as a foreign language' identity—i.e., their own feelings about being a German speaker—and their social identity as foreign speakers of German—i.e., how other people perceive them when they speak German" (p. 8). Thus, the language-learning process entails developing insider and outsider identities in both home and target cultures.

Approaches for transforming activities

Within a theoretical framework of intercultural communicative competence, our work in the classroom must undergo a fundamental shift from focusing on language as a set of forms and norms to be acquired to focusing on language as a vehicle for communicating cultural identity and situatedness (Arens, 2010). The teacher's role in this model is then to help students (a) discover their own native-language (L1) and second-language (L2) identities within both native-culture (C1) and second-culture (C2) contexts and (b) develop the skills to mediate between these realms. It sounds like a tall order, but with a step-by-step approach, we can make significant inroads by starting from the most novice level, by focusing our activities on cultural comparison, and by looking for opportunities within the curriculum to connect and recycle cultural learning. Examples of each of these strategies are discussed in the subsections that follow.

Start from the beginning

There is no time like Day 1 for introducing students to the concept of cultural perspectives and cultural variation, and what better example than greetings? On the first day of class, as soon as a group of students has entered the room for their first-semester German class, the teacher enters also and greets students in a way that is typical of group greetings in German culture but not in Midwestern U.S. culture: by giving each student a firm handshake and a steady look in the eye. The teacher also says the appropriate greeting for the time of day and states her last name, implicitly inviting each student to respond with his last name as well. Thus, in the first minute of class, students are asked to participate in a typical conversational exchange that occurs when an individual enters a group setting in Germany.

The lesson then continues with a presentation focusing on two images for German culture and two images for Midwestern U.S. culture: for Germany, a picture of eyes and a photo of a handshake; for the Midwestern U.S., an image of a smile and a picture of a head nod. Through the use of cognates, elaborate gestures, and the introduction of the vocabulary for "yes" and "no," students are helped to compare two different kinds of greeting behaviors, the German version they just experienced and the Midwestern model in which each person met is greeted at least with a smile if not with a head nod as well. Group greeting behavior in the Midwestern U.S., namely a wave to an entire group, is also modeled and contrasted to the greeting at the beginning of the class period.

In subsequent class periods students are introduced to the products-practices-perspectives model of culture study (ACTFL, 2006): products are the images of eyes, handshakes, smiles, and head nods, practices are the behaviors the class has discussed already, and initial perspectives are "it is important to greet everyone you meet" for the Midwestern U.S. and "if you choose to greet someone, you should have physical contact with them" for Germany. While an initial discussion and application of the model needs to be carried out in the students' native language, L2 discussions applying the model in which the teacher provides most of the comprehensible input can begin in the first and second week. For example, students can be introduced to the cognates *Produkte, Praktiken,* and *Perspektiven* and asked to categorize various cultural phenomena as one of these in the first few days of class. Similarly, when students begin to learn question words, the teacher should equate "products" with "what", "practices" with "who, when, where, how, not who, not when, not where, not how" and "perspectives" with "why." Subsequent use of the model throughout the semester can use these German terms to facilitate as much cultural discussion in the target language as possible.

After students have been introduced to the products-practices-perspectives model and have applied it to a number of simple situations, it is important to introduce the topic of cultural variation. A simple survey of class members about their utterances and behaviors in particular greeting and leave-taking situations in their own culture will begin to show that not only do we vary such utterances and behaviors according to context, but also that individuals might modify what they do in similar situations. For example, students can be shown images of many different kinds of handshakes with the question of where such handshakes might be used. Similarly, images of different persons can prompt students to suggest appropriate greetings: a pastor, a policeman in uniform, a funeral party, or football fans in full face paint and team attire. After making students aware of the variation within their own culture, the teacher can introduce variation within German culture, such as regional greeting forms, differences between urban and rural areas, and the importance of role expectations in greetings (or in the conscious decision not to greet someone, an important consideration in German culture).

Our first-semester German course assumes no previous experience with the language. Our course goals are not only to help students gain language skills at the first semester level, but also to orient them to the study of at least two cultures—their own and German culture—as phenomena that can be examined according to the products-practices-perspectives model of culture. Like other units in the course, the greeting unit includes many aspects that are reminiscent of traditional beginning language classes, such as the teaching of typical expressions according to the time of day, role plays involving both the imitation of dialogs as well as the creation of new dialogs, and actions that may be performed during greeting, leave-taking and initial conversations. Students learn how to greet new acquaintances and old friends, how to give and ask for basic personal information, and how to talk about the weather. What is novel is that these structures are not taught simply to allow students to conjugate basic verbs or practice pronunciation or even to help them become more interested in the language (although they do all of these), but rather they are designed to help students begin to see the value of studying cultural perspectives and cultural variation.

Focus on comparison

Just as in the case of cultural perspectives underlying greetings, many cultural topics presented in textbooks can be moved from the sidelines as culture "notes" into a role of central importance if we use the students' own culture as a point of departure to introduce needed vocabulary, grammar, and cultural concepts. Starting with a familiar context to introduce new language allows students then to tackle the new culture with now recycled forms and concepts (Allen, 2014). For example, in a second-semester Spanish class, students study food vocabulary in the context of open-air markets. Rather than beginning from the Mexican market presented in the text, the instructor starts with a visual of a farmers' market in the U.S. as a familiar context in which to learn the new vocabulary. Students indicate their own families' practices with respect to grocery shopping by participating in a questionnaire in Spanish asking them where they buy particular food items on a list. They also answer simple information questions in Spanish about their background knowledge of farmers' markets (e.g., Does your hometown have a farmers' market? Have you ever shopped at a farmers' market? Where? What products did you buy? etc.). Students also indicate the perceived advantages and disadvantages of shopping at farmers' markets by classifying answers from a list in Spanish (quality, cost, location, health considerations, economic considerations, social opportunities, bartering, etc.). The instructor then proceeds to a picture of a U.S. flea market, which is a related cultural product from C1. After doing a parallel analysis of the flea market, students are able to compare and contrast the products, practices and perspectives of the two cultural phenomena in C1. By focusing on the differing practices between the two markets (for example, bartering is expected at the flea market but not expected or generally accepted at local the farmers' market), students are able to see the cultural variation in C1 and understand their own culture before studying C2.

Next, students explore the C2 product of a Mexican *Mercado* (open air market). Because they have already done the analysis twice, they are better able to manipulate requisite vocabulary and grammatical structures, as well as being better prepared to recognize cultural variation and to compare C1 and C2 in an objective manner.

Based on this analysis, the instructor then guides students to create simple survey questions in Spanish that they subsequently e-mail to native-speaking contacts of the instructor. Many of these questions will be ones that the students have already answered (e.g., Is there an open-air market in your town? How often do you go to the market? What do you buy there? Do you negotiate prices? Do you also shop at the supermarket? What do you buy there? Do people negotiate prices at the supermarket? etc.). These questions target cultural practices related to the *mercado*, and the native speakers' answers help students notice cultural variation and begin to hypothesize about cultural perspectives. These hypotheses become the second part of the e-mail exchange, in which students state in Spanish what they have noticed in the survey responses and ask the native speakers to provide feedback on their analysis (e.g., Nine out of ten people surveyed buy farm products at a local market instead of in a supermarket. We wonder why. Is the cost less expensive? Is the quality of the food better? Is it to benefit the local economy? Is it more stylish to shop at the market than at the supermarket? Are there other explanations?). Through the native speakers' input, students gain insight into C2 perspectives and can begin to hypothesize about their own C1 perspectives in comparison. By putting language forms at the service of gathering and analyzing cultural data—first from C1 and then from C2—students are challenged to recast "the familiar [as] strange… and the strange [as] familiar" (Byram, 2008, p. 182). Through a reflective writing assignment in English about the experience of communicating with native speakers and their own developing persona as a nonnative speaker of Spanish, students also add another building block to the construction of their C1 and C2 identities (Arens, 2010). Repeatedly structuring lessons in this way reinforces and develops students' intercultural communicative competence, while actualizing the shift from a language-centered to a culture-focused curriculum, activity by activity, chapter by chapter.

Connect and recycle

Once we begin to focus our cultural learning goals on C1 and C2 identity construction rather than on mastery of factual information, underlying cultural perspectives become central to our mission, and we soon discover that these fundamental cultural values are easily recycled across a wide variety of themes. For example, in a second-semester French class that addresses both food and clothing at separate points in the course, students are able to make connections between the values underlying *la haute cuisine* (gourmet cooking) and those underlying *la haute couture* (high fashion). In both units, students read relevant chapters from *Bringing Up Bébé* (Druckerman, 2012) and Almost French (Turnbull, 2002), two books that compare Anglo-Saxon and French cultures. They complete Internet assignments to learn more about gastronomy and designer fashion. They participate in interviews with native speakers from France to learn about actual experiences and real viewpoints. In the first unit on food, they are led to discover that French society takes great pride in its cuisine, specifically in (1) producing and using ingredients of high quality, (2) respecting the expertise and creativity of highly trained professionals, (3) enjoying the pleasure of artistic presentation and carefully planned tastes and textures. With this background, students can then take a much more active role in analyzing the cultural values related to fashion, since they are essentially the same: quality, expertise, and the pleasure of esthetics and artistry. Many of the students in the course who started in first-semester French will remember some of these same themes from the unit on school. Quality, precision, and esthetics are emphasized in the importance placed on handwriting, for example. Trust in the expertise of faculty is a key French perspective that helps answer the question U.S. students invariably ask about why their French counterparts do not have the option to choose their own classes. Capitalizing on opportunities such as these to connect and recycle cultural themes allows us to sequence cultural learning, building upon students' prior knowledge and expecting more sophisticated analyses with each iteration. It also helps students discover coherence with cultures, which in turn building their intercultural competence and their own understanding of themselves within each culture.

Challenges of shifting the paradigm

While teaching "subjective culture" (such as cultural values, priorities, and identities) is essential for reaching goals of intercultural communicative competence, it certainly presents greater challenges than focusing on "objective culture." Bennett, Bennett, and Allen (2003) provide a long list of factors that discourage teachers from focusing on subjective culture, the most influential of which, from our perspective, relate to time and expertise. As both preparation time and instructional time are limited, teachers worry that moving to a culture-driven classroom will require an unrealistic commitment to lesson planning and will eclipse the time needed for language learning. To be sure, changing not only the way we teach, but also the way we think about teaching requires more preparation time than maintaining the status quo. However, the status quo is not leading our students toward the critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2008) that U.S. Americans so desperately need. While it is not realistic to transform an entire curriculum from one year to the next, it is doable to work on one or two activities per semester and, over a period of several years, make significant progress on the transition. Teachers can be as ambitious or as cautious in their time line as they need to be to fit their own particular situation. Teamwork can also be beneficial. If two or three colleagues (whether in the same school or across the country) collaborate and share lessons and materials, the pace of change can increase dramatically.

With regard to limits of instructional time, the key for us has been to teach language for cultural discovery rather than language and cultural discovery. Our students still learn the same kinds of language forms that they did when language accuracy was our end goal. Now, though, they learn them by using them to analyze their own and another culture, as well as to understand themselves as both native and nonnative cultural participants. Language acquisition is thus at the service of cultural learning, making more efficient use of instructional time than was the case in our language-driven classrooms. We are also able to focus directly on the development of intercultural skills that we believe to be of utmost importance.

One important question that relates to the integration of linguistic and cultural elements is that of language choice. Do we use the students' first language or the target language to analyze cultural products, practices, and perspectives? Clearly, using the target language is in keeping with the aim of integrating linguistic and cultural learning. However, as discussed in the example of German greetings, at very beginning of a novice-level course, students must be introduced to the products-practices-perspectives model in English and taught the terminology in the target language. Beyond the introduction, though, in languages that share many cognates with the learners' L1, much can be accomplished in the target language. Input-based formats (such as classifying cultural practices as C1, C2, or both, matching products and practices with perspectives, or answering yes-no questions) allow novice learners to begin analyzing cultural phenomena in the target language within the first few weeks of the course. Given our curricular time constraints, we prioritize using L2 to analyze both C1 and C2.

In addition to time, the second major area of concern for teachers is that of expertise. Even native-speaking instructors may be limited in their knowledge of target cultures beyond their own, and the cultural knowledge of teachers who have been living outside of their home country for a number of years may also be dated. For nonnative instructors, these problems are often compounded, particularly for those without a lengthy target-culture immersion experience. Our approach to this problem has been to involve native speakers as much as possible in our classes. While we are fortunate to have native-speaking teaching assistants on campus each year through the Fulbright program, we also seek the participation of other target-culture natives through personal and professional connections. Even one contact in a target-culture country can make a substantial difference in the cultural and linguistic authenticity of a lesson. Websites designed to match-make conversation partners, tandem learners, teachers seeking partner classes, and students seeking e-pals provide an option for teachers who do not have personal connections in other countries. Professional organizations (state and regional language teacher associations, AATs, ACTFL) also allow for networking among teachers, native-speakers and nonnative-speakers, alike. We find that involving native speakers in our lessons (through Skype interactions, face-to-face guest speakers, e-mail exchanges, shared blogs, etc.) allows the instructor to learn along with the students. These interactions become a real exchange of novel information for everyone involved, especially if the students are also encouraged to share information about their C1 with the native interlocutor.

Related to the challenge of expertise is the potential for unintentionally promoting cultural stereotyping through analyses that make cultures seem monolithic, particularly if we focus too narrowly on one person's narrative or too broadly on national identities. The antidote to this pitfall for us has been the integration of cultural variation into the design of our activities. Beginning with C1, students are prompted to identify variations in their own cultural practices. For example, the initial questionnaire about the local U.S. farmers' market in the Spanish class allows students to realize that even among their classmates, there is variation in practices and perspectives regarding open-air markets. Some students may come from families that frequent the local farmers' market; others may find the market inconvenient or chaotic or too expensive; still others may have no experience with markets. Once students recognize the potential for cultural variation in their own culture, they are primed to notice the same phenomenon in the second culture. Thus, when there is variation within the e-mail responses they receive from native speakers, they tend to be more guarded about stereotyping and more apt to attend to cultural complexity. It is helpful to recognize that cultural variation occurs most frequently within cultural practices. Cultural products tend to be similar (the market, itself, for example), and cultural perspectives, particularly deeply held values, tend to hold wide agreement across members of the culture. Realizing that certain aspects of culture are more stable and predictable than others can help teachers focus their efforts more strategically in the quest for greater cultural expertise.

While issues of time and expertise have created hurdles on our way to a culture-driven classroom, they have also pushed us to seek creative solutions, which, in the end, have turned out to be beneficial for faculty and students alike. Our classroom time is used more efficiently and effectively to target both linguistic and cultural learning, while prioritizing the development of needed intercultural awareness and understanding. Our work with native speakers has motivated both authentic intercultural communication for students and professional development for faculty. Under such circumstances, we find the extra commitment needed to change our curricular paradigm to be a worthwhile investment with significant returns.

Assessment

Curricular reform must include compatible assessment methods if the transition is to take root. As leaders in the field of intercultural communicative competence all stress (e.g., Allen, 2009, 2014; Fantini, 2009, 2013), assessment of intercultural learning should be integrated into the design of the series of activities targeting its development. Since intercultural communicative competence is not limited to the mastery and application of a series of facts but rather expands with each intercultural encounter, evaluative tools need to assess not only language skills and cultural knowledge but also intercultural skills and attitudes within the context of lifelong learning. While certain aspects of intercultural communicative competence might lend themselves to discrete-point testing, open-ended, performance-based assessments are often better suited to gauging the students' level of intercultural communicative competence with its many nuances. Some of the assessments may require the use of L1 by both the teacher and the student; others may require L2 input on the part of the teacher but not on the part of the student; still others may be possible in L2 by both the teacher and the student. Regardless of language choice, in this section we offer examples of four different assessment types used in beginning-level classes to gauge students' progress in their development of intercultural communicative competence: products-practices-perspectives analyses, explanation of critical incidents, application projects, and reflection assignments.

Products-practices-perspectives analyses

Perhaps the most basic and obvious way to assess students' work with the products-practices-perspectives (PPP) model is to have them classify items into the categories of the three Ps. Students who have more experience with the model can compare two related concepts, such as haute cuisine and haute couture from the French example above. This assessment might take the form of a checklist where students decide whether each cultural statement applies to gastronomy, fashion, neither, or both (e.g., People are willing to pay more for quality. Service is discreet. Esthetics are an essential value.) Alternatively, students might classify statements as reflective of French products, practices, and perspectives or U.S. American ones or both (e.g., Comfort is a key factor in deciding what to wear. People consider what is pleasing to others when making clothing choices. Most restaurants offer children's menus.). These types of assessments are well suited to the novice level where learners are still adapting to the concept of analyzing cultures. Not only do checklists reinforce this approach to analysis, they also give insight into students' developing critical cultural awareness.

Explanation of critical incidents

A second option for assessing learners' progress towards critical cultural awareness is to ask learners to explain a critical incident that they have not already analyzed in class (i.e., an incident in which issues of C1 and C2 are at odds). If the teacher has the expertise, critical incidents can be constructed specifically for the purpose of the assessment, but they are also available on a number of websites, in professional literature, and, most easily, in the experiences of colleagues, family members, and friends. For example, students in the first-semester German course mentioned above are asked after finishing the unit on greetings to respond to questions on the following critical incident taken from the teacher's personal experience:

> Not long after a group of students from a small Midwestern college had arrived in a German city for a semester-long study abroad program, three of them began an experiment. They would go through the main shopping area and town square and smile at everyone who came their way, hoping that someone would smile back. On the second afternoon of the experiment, one student arrived in class after lunch and announced happily, "Someone smiled back at me. I finally found a friendly German!" This was greeted by high fives from the two other students conducting the experiment, and much relief all around. Friendly Germans actually exist!

Questions about the critical incident ask students to address various aspects of the intercultural interaction, and can be modified to meet particular teaching goals. A focus on differences between C1 and C2 ("What specific cultural differences might have led the American students to conduct this experiment?") can help students identify products, practices, and perspectives. Questions of motivation for particular behaviors ("In what way(s) was this smile experiment culturally inappropriate? In what way(s) was this smile experiment completely understandable?") target attitudes and situational factors. The incident can also be used to help students better understand cultural mediation ("You are the students' professor and find out that they are conducting this experiment. What is it that the students don't completely understand? Since the students will be living in Germany for the next four months, what would you say to these students to help them understand it and adapt to German culture?"). Critical incidents make ideal assessment instruments, since it is easy to find or construct examples that target the same underlying mismatch of cultural perspectives. While reusing an identical incident from class on an assessment would privilege memorization, providing a novel example requires students to have assimilated the concepts.

Application projects

Designing projects that require students to apply intercultural mediation skills similarly has the benefit of solidifying their understanding of C1 and C2, while revealing how well they have assimilated the cultural work they have done in class. In the case of the French *haute cuisine* example, the students are asked to imagine that the owner of a gourmet restaurant in France has decided to open a second restaurant in a small U.S. city near their campus. Their job is to redesign the menu, which is available online, for a U.S. clientele, and then explain their redesign to the French restaurant owner. Students work in teams and present their redesign to the class, as well as to a native-French guest playing the role of the restaurant owner. The same activity can be organized the other way around, in which an American restaurant owner wishes to open a second restaurant in France. The students work in teams to choose an appropriate location for the restaurant in France and to redesign the menu for a French clientele. Again, they must explain their plan to the class, using the cultural skills and knowledge they have acquired in the unit. Such application projects require learners to transform familiar cultural products and practices to comply with C2 perspectives, thus "making the familiar strange… and making the strange familiar" (Byram, 2008, p. 182).

Reflection assignments

As Byram (1997, 2008) emphasizes, the components of intercultural communicative competence include attitudes, knowledge, skills of discovery and interacting, skills of interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness. Reflective writing assignments following interaction with native speakers, as was mentioned in the *mercado* example, can help teachers gain an overall picture of these hard-to-measure characteristics. Questions such as "What advice would you give to a friend who has no experience talking to a person from another culture?" or "How was learning from a native speaker different than interacting with your classmates or learning from a book?" can prompt learners to reveal their attitudes about interaction with a nonnative culture. The issue of knowledge of both cultures can be addressed in a retelling of their knowledge to a third party ("What would you tell a friend who is going to study abroad about the *mercado* and it cultural practices?"). Skills of discovery and interaction can be evaluated in addressing student preparation for the encounter ("What did you do to prepare for the interview with the native speaker?"), while evidence of the skills of interpreting and relating can be addressed through questions such as "What strategies helped you successfully evaluate information provided by your native-speaking contact?" or "To what extent did your native-speaking contact agree with your description of the *mercado* and shopping behaviors in Mexico?" Finally, the development of critical cultural awareness can be reflected in answers to questions such as "What cultural differences did you take into account in creating the interview questions for the native speaker?" and "What will you do to improve your communication the next time based on these cultural differences?" Such reflective assessments cannot provide pinpoint positioning of our students in their progression towards intercultural communicative competence, but used in succession over the course of several units can not only track students' overall development but help them to boost their learning from each intercultural interaction.

Conclusion

The question is no longer "should we shift the paradigm from language-focused to culture-driven?" We must change our priorities if we wish to remain relevant to the 21st century needs of our learners. The question is "how?" In this article, we have offered the following recommendations:

1. Start from existing lesson plans and materials. Taking inspiration from what we already do (greetings, food vocabulary, cuisine, fashion, etc.) provides a practical and doable starting point for moving culture to a central role. We do not have to reinvent the whole wheel; we just need to redesign the hub.

2. Add a C1 component before moving to C2. As Allen (2014) argues, using the familiar context of C1 to introduce new language forms lets students focus on one set of novel information at a time: new language forms with familiar culture, followed by new cultural concepts using recycled language forms. This approach also allows for needed repetition and practice of language without competing with intercultural communication goals.

3. Research and discuss cultural perspectives with colleagues and native-speaking friends. In French, there are a surprising number of resources that compare Anglo-Saxon and French cultures (e.g., Druckerman, 2012; Nandeau & Barlow, 2003; Platt, 2003; Turnbull, 2003), making it possible to gain useful information about cultural perspectives through research. Fewer such analyses have been published in English about Spanish-speaking and German-speaking cultures, but some possible sources include Crouch (2004), comparing Mexican and U.S. cultures, Hooper (2006), analyzing Spanish culture, and Schmidt (2007), discussing U.S. and German business cultures. An excellent German-language resource is Hansen (2007). Discussions with native speakers and other language teachers can also lead to fruitful insights about underlying cultural views. Our experience has been that the more we "dig" into our experiences and the experiences of others, the more developed our own critical cultural awareness becomes, which in turn, enriches our students' intercultural communicative competence. The side

benefit of such discussions is, of course, the collaboration among colleagues who can then share the work of changing the curriculum.

4. Make ample use of case studies of cultural misunderstandings. The research and discussions mentioned above can often provide needed examples of critical incidents. Case studies are often more effective than other forms of data analysis because they serve as concrete illustrations of abstract perspectives. Their narrative format and real-life settings are also more accessible and engaging. Starting a collection of multiple critical incident stories on a particular theme allows teachers to draw on them for in-class activities, homework assignments, and assessment items.

5. Work on one unit at a time but keep the full curriculum in mind. Given teachers' busy lives, the only realistic way to reorient the curricular paradigm is to approach the task one activity and one theme at a time. However, we must guard against tunnel vision, or we will miss opportunities to organize and sequence students' cultural learning across units. Intercultural communicative competence is built through cyclical intervention that spirals upward in its complexity and level of nuance. We can only reach this goal if we are attentive to the ways in which the parts contribute to the whole.

In sum, moving culture to the center of our classrooms launches both our students and ourselves into a lifelong journey of cultural discovery, involving new understandings of our multiple cultural identities as we build our intercultural communicative competence. Not only is this paradigm shift necessary, it is also a much more interesting and gratifying way to teach and learn. In our experience, providing 21st century learners with the tools and frameworks they need to analyze their own and other cultures has the power to captivate their curiosity and motivate them in ways that language-driven curricula no longer do. They can readily see practical, professional applications of the cultural mediation skills they are acquiring. The majority of students also find cultural comparison inherently fascinating, and thus salient and memorable. Likewise, if the authors' experience is any indication, culture-driven teaching also piques the teacher's curiosity and motivation, driving us to dig deeper into our C1 and C2(s) for the sheer pleasure of learning and bringing that discovery to the classroom. We keep our language skills sharp and our cultural knowledge current by involving native speakers in our quest. When curricular reform inspires professional renewal, everyone benefits, as students and teachers alike deepen their ability "to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of [more than one] language and culture" (Modern Language Association Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Language Education, 2007, p. 4) and "act as a mediator between [cultural groups]" (Bryam, 2008, p. 72). While daunting, the challenge of this vital curricular realignment is surmountable and sustainable if we tackle it together one lesson at a time.

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