Chapter 7
Teaching Culture through CALL

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Language teaching can no longer make do with focusing on the target language and target countries — and on cultures as territorially defined phenomena ... Apart from developing the students’ communicative (dialogic) competence in the target language, language teaching ought also as far as possible to enable students to develop into multilingually and multiculturally aware world citizens (Risager, 2007 p. 1).

PREVIEW QUESTIONS
1. How would you define culture?
2. What does culture learning entail besides acquiring knowledge?
3. What impact have the Internet and Web 2.0 had on languages and cultures?
4. How do you think the Internet can be used to integrate culture learning into the language classroom?
5. How aware do you think students are of their own cultural identity and the influence of language and location (be it physical or online) on their culture?
6. What considerations do teachers need to take into account when planning to use CALL for culture and language teaching?
7. What skills and competences do teachers and learners need to engage in culture learning through CALL?

1. INTRODUCTION
Ever since scholars began studying and researching culture, there has been debate regarding exactly what is meant by the term “culture”. Although it is a word used commonly in everyday language, depending on the context or field of study, it may have very different meanings. As Levy (2007) points out, there are hundreds of definitions of culture from across various disciplines. The field of second/foreign language (henceforth L2) learning and teaching through CALL has not been
immune to the difficulty of defining culture.

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996; henceforth Standards) take an important step in defining culture for L2 teaching and learning. One of the five Cs in the Standards is Cultures, the others being Communication, Connections, Comparisons and Communities, all of which are inter-related. The Standard regarding Cultures (Standard 2) presents the three Ps of culture, a triangular model of practices, perspectives and products. According to the Standards, practices refer to "patterns of behavior accepted by a society and deal with aspects of culture such as rites of passage, the use of forms of discourse, the social 'pecking order,' and the use of space" and derive from perspectives, which are "the traditional ideas and attitudes...of a culture" (p. 50). The Standards recognize that cultural products can be tangible or intangible, but it is important for students to be aware that whatever form a product takes, "its presence within the culture is required or justified by the underlying beliefs and values (perspectives) of that culture" (p. 51). Standard 2.1 regards students' awareness of the relationship between the first two Ps, practices and perspectives, and Standard 2.2, the relationship between the second two, perspectives and products.

Across the Atlantic, in Europe, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) has become a key reference document for foreign language educators. The main aim of the CEFR is to provide a European standard for the teaching and assessment of foreign languages in order to promote mobility throughout the multicultural, multilingual European Union. In this document, the key to developing plurilingualism and pluricultural competence is interculturality. The document states that in learning a foreign language:

the learner does not simply acquire two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating. The language learner becomes plurilingual and develops interculturality. The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences (p. 43).

This notion of interculturality stems from the work of Michael Byram (1997) who has developed a model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) for foreign language learning. ICC comprises different types of knowledge, what he calls 'savoirs,' which include attitudes of openness and curiosity, skills of discovery and interaction, interpretive skills, knowledge of social groups and their products and practices and finally critical cultural awareness, i.e. "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." (p. 101).

In both the CEFR and the Standards, culture is recognized as an important part of L2 teaching and learning and is related to knowledge about the culture being studied and the sociocultural norms and practices required to be effective inter-
cultural communicators. However, references to 'a culture,' 'the culture,' 'that culture' and 'target culture' in these documents reflect a notion which is popular in many L2 teaching and learning contexts where one language is still considered to equal one culture and where culture is associated with a nation (e.g., French culture is that of France). In strong versions of this 'national' paradigm, the standard language of the native speaker is idealized and the language learner is seen as aspiring to the native model including what is considered to be appropriate behavior in the target culture. This process of acculturation assumes that there is indeed a standard language and, consequently, a standard culture. These concepts have been problematized by many applied linguists (Kramsch, 1998; Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010; Ortega & Zyyik, 2008; Scollon, 2004) and particularly in the field of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Cogo, 2009; Huelinbauer, 2009; Kaur, 2009; Seidloher, 2009). The transnational paradigm (Risager, 2007) challenges this native speaker model and places the learner in a local and/or global context, not the target, national context. L2 learners, complex, often multilingual subjects with multiple identities, appropriate the language(s) and cultures studied in a way that they find comfortable, without losing or disguising their original identity/ies.

They should aim to become intercultural speakers, able "to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings...and those of their interlocutors" (Byram, 1997, p. 12).

In this chapter, we assume that cultural identity cannot simply be defined by language or nation state, and that cultures are complex, diverse and multifaceted. In educational, and particularly CALL contexts, what is needed is a fluid definition of culture that incorporates the multiplicity of cultures and subcultures which are present and indeed continuously changing not only within societies but online as well. A definition of culture which we feel can accommodate this more fluid view is Pierre Bourdieu's (1993 in Arens, 2010) definition of culture as 'field', namely:

any site or region within which a group acts, communicates, and evolves its characteristic knowledge and identities...furnished with a tradition of institutions, group behaviours, pragmatic practices, discourses (verbal and otherwise), ideologies, and a characteristic knowledge base (pp. 321-322).

2. CULTURE LEARNING IN L2 TEACHING AND IN SOCIETY

It is not only the definition of culture that is problematic, but also the role of culture in L2 teaching. Why should educators include culture in the L2 curriculum? The answer will clearly depend on who is asked. We will briefly describe the 'responses' to this question from the U.S. government, the Modern Language Association in the U.S. and researchers and practitioners in the Modern Language Journal.
2.1. The U.S. government

Knowledge of foreign languages and cultures has become of strategic interest to
governments and is related to economic, political and in some cases ‘security’
issues, which is reflected for example in the National Security Language Ini-
tiative (NSLI) created by the U.S. government in 2006. The aim of the NSLI is
to promote and increase the number of U.S. residents who are able to effectively use
what are called “critical need foreign languages”, for “now more than ever, it is
important that Americans have the necessary linguistic skills and cultural knowl-
edge to promote international dialogues, support American engagement abroad,
and attain better understanding of global cultures and issues” (NSLI Youth web-
site, para. 2). As a result, government funds have been directed to the learning of
these critical need languages, which are not traditionally taught in U.S. schools,
through study abroad programs for linguistic and cultural immersion.

2.2. The Modern Language Association

In 2007, the Modern Language Association (MLA) set up a committee to examine
the effects of the 9/11 crisis on L2 teaching in higher education, this time from the
educator’s, rather than the government’s, point of view. The report notes that: “as
recent world events have demonstrated, deep cultural knowledge and linguistic
competence are equally necessary if one wishes to understand people and their
communities” (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007, p. 2). In
a similar vein to Byram’s notion of ICC, the report proposes “translingual and
transcultural competence” as a goal for foreign language education, which
includes an openness to difference, the consideration of alternative ways of seeing
things as well as functional language abilities including “critical language aware-
ness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social
sensibility, and aesthetic perception” (p. 4). Rather than specifically focus on the
concept of critical need languages, the MLA report focuses on the important role
of culture in all L2 education.

2.3. Modern Language Journal

In the perspectives column of edition 94 of the Modern Language Journal (MLJ)
2010, the role of culture is revisited because of the drastic changes that the ‘con-
text of culture’ and the ‘context of situation’ have undergone in the last decade
or so. The Standards, the Common European Framework of Reference and the
MLA Ad Hoc Committee report share a “use-oriented role” for the teaching of
culture, as each document “assumes that language use must be seen as embedded
diverse social activities in the lives of people and peoples around the world as
they interact with each other in increasingly varied and surprisingly intimate
ways, even across formidable distances” (Byrnes, 2010, p. 316). However, Byrnes
argues that this utilitarian approach should not necessarily form a dichotomy with
an approach that gives importance to the intrinsic educational value of teaching
culture in and of itself, but rather the two approaches can and should be bridged.

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3. NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND CULTURE

The recent policy documents and reports discussed above acknowledge changes
in contexts of culture and language use yet they make few direct references to
the Internet. This is surprising given the transformation in global communications,
which Kramsch (2003) has described as “not just a change in degree, but a
change in kind” (p. 3). This omission, together with the frequent mentions of
study abroad, reflects a common conviction that languages are ultimately learned
for sojourn in foreign countries and that cultural understanding can only be ac-
quired through residence abroad. However, as Kearney (2010) points out:

Although recent research has found that study abroad is not the universal
remedy for providing students with access to culture and the desired level of
cultural (or linguistic) learning (e.g., Kinginger, 2008; Wilkinson, 1998), the
unsaid reverse proposition—namely, that classroom environments are in-
capable of fostering profound cultural understanding simply because they are
physically distant from communities of target language speakers—is hardly
ever challenged (p. 332).

Internet communication offers new ways of communicating and collaborating
with members of distant communities from within the classroom, as the growing
body of literature on telecollaboration shows. Yet, as O’Dowd (2010) highlights,
this approach to learning culture has not yet gained institutional recognition and
support. This is all the more surprising when we learn that “less than 2% of Amer-
ican students ever participate in such [study abroad] programs, and according to
the Institute of International Education (IIE), only 1.3% of college and university
students received academic credit for study abroad participation” (J. Rubin, per-
sonal communication, August 5, 2010). The situation in Europe is similar (Gallup
Organization, 2009).

Another important issue is the virtual communities across the Internet have
began to develop their own cultures and, for example in the case of online game-
ing, even their own community-bound ‘languages’. In his seminal work on ICC,
Byram (1997) states the importance of “defining models of ICC according to the
requirements of the situations in which learners find themselves” (p. 7) and his
own model clearly reflects the European educational context in which it was de-
developed, i.e., before the dramatic rise of the Internet and Social Web. In stark
contrast to the 2% of American students who study abroad, a 2007 study from the
Higher Education Research Institute in the U.S. showed that “an impressive 94
percent of first-year students reported spending time on online social networking
websites during a typical week” (p. 3). Indeed, the online context has become an
authentic context of communication in both education and work. As Thorne
(2006) explains, “Internet-mediated communication is now a high-stakes envi-
ronment that infuses work processes, educational activity, interpersonal commu-
nication and, not least, intimate relationship building and maintenance (Castells
1996)” (p. 21). He also argues that these new environments carry “interactional
and relational associations, preferred uses (and, correspondingly, inappropriate
uses), and expectations of genre-specific communicative activity” (p. 21). Con-
sequently, new online contexts have given rise to the emergence of online communities which can be considered online cultures that develop their own products, practices and perspectives.

The role of languages and cultures on the Internet has not been without debate, in particular with regards to issues of power-play and linguistic and cultural hegemony. On the one hand, the Internet is viewed as yet another vehicle for the hegemonizing effect of English as the language of communication spreading Western culture and values (Holton, 2000), responsible for cultural homogenization and the extinction of hundreds of ‘minor’ languages. On the other hand, there are those that look at how the rise of the Internet has permitted the diffusion of less known cultures and languages to a much wider community. For instance, the Internet is seen to have provided a ‘home’ for languages which have not had or still have no nation such as Kurdish or Armenian (Bakker, 2001). Whichever stance one takes, L2 teachers cannot ignore the immensity of the phenomenon and, taking a critical approach, have resources for culture and learning on the Internet that were simply not available a decade ago. However, as Furstenberg (2010) points out, “the same old questions of how to ‘incorporate,’ ‘integrate,’ and ‘infuse’ foreign language classes with culture and ‘what culture’ to teach seem to persist even in this medium” (p. 329). The rest of this chapter aims to look at how teachers and researchers have been approaching culture through CALL to try and find answers to these questions.

4. CULTURE AND CALL: REVIEW OF PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The definition of CALL we adopt in this chapter is taken from Levy (1997) who broadly defines it as “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” (p. 1). Given the exponential developments in Internet technologies in the past decade, here our concept of computer applications focuses in particular on Internet-based applications. Not only has the Internet made its way into the daily routine of many people’s lives, but Internet technologies now include many of the multimedia affordances of the software applications traditionally associated with CALL, e.g., video, interactive applications, and multimodal tools.

Our review of L2 education practice and research studies indicates that the practice of teaching culture through CALL has focused on three broad types of activities used alone or in combination. We have categorized these as follows:

- **Access and produce**, providing access to a wealth of authentic cultural resources available in a multiplicity of media and the possibility for teachers and students to either access resources on the Web, or create new culture resources and share them on the Web;

- **Communicate and collaborate**, exploiting the opportunities for interaction offered by the Internet to set up intercultural exchanges whereby learners interact, and hopefully develop meaningful intercultural relationships with distant peers; and

- **Bridge**, attempting to bridge learners’ Internet use and identities outside class with language learning in formal settings.

In this section we shall look at examples of these activities in practice and attempt to relate them to the predominant research paradigms found in the literature on Culture and CALL, which is still in its infancy (Abrams, 2006). Since telecollaboration, or Internet-based foreign language exchange, has from the outset focused specifically on culture in language learning, we dedicate considerable space to this area of research. The framework we have adopted for the research paradigms is that devised by Blyth (2008) who categorizes CMC (computer-mediated communication) research into four main categories: technological, psycholinguistic, sociocultural and ecological, on the basis of theoretical, methodological and linguistic criteria. Like the approaches to teaching culture through CALL described above, these research paradigms have developed chronologically, with the ecological approach still emerging. New approaches often develop as outgrowths of previous approaches and the success of one does not entail the abandonment of the previous ones. There are no strict rules governing which research approach should be used for different uses of CALL for culture learning; the overview we provide merely reflects trends we have found in the literature.

4.1. Access and produce

4.1.1. Practice

Initially culture teaching through CALL was approached using multimedia CD-roms and/or video technologies which offered opportunities for learners to acquire knowledge about cultural products and practices. Audio and visual support can offer examples of practices in ‘action’ as it were, thus making them more interesting and relevant for learners (Herron, Dubreil, Corrie & Cole, 2000, 2002). Two well-known and widely used examples for French are the multimedia, interactive CD-roms, A la rencontre de Philippe (Furstenberg, 1993) and Dans un Quartier de Paris (Furstenberg & Levet, 1999). The authors “purposefully juxtaposed video segments in which different people (within a same culture) would use a same word or a same speech act [in order to] uncover the different meanings a same word (e.g., travailler, to work) may have for different people” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet, 2001, p. 58). The power of electronic media for culture learning according to the authors of these materials is “the capacity to bring forward, juxtapose, and connect different and multiple types of materials on the same screen” (p. 59), which can make comparisons and connections more salient to learners.

The Internet too is used to bring culture into the classroom and has progressed from being very much text-based and static to offering the same multimedia capacities as CD-rom technology, and more. The advent of the so-called ‘Information Society’ in the late 1990s offered L2 teachers and learners almost instant access to a wealth of authentic cultural resources from online newspapers to government and other institutional websites, commercial and educational resources online, etc. The number of cultural resources available online has continued to grow rapidly through national and transnational initiatives such as the Project
Gutenberg, and, more recently, the Digital Libraries Initiative promoted by the EU. The spread of high-speed Internet connections accompanied by new technologies has meant that content is increasingly multimedia and dynamic and ranges from hypertexts and interactive images and video to virtual worlds with reconstructions of historic environments. Examples of such virtual worlds are Virtual Harlem and Virtual Montmartre (Carter, 2010; Sosnocki, Harkin & Carter, 2006) and Galileo’s Laboratory (Bani et al., 2009) in Second Life which learners can enter and explore as avatars, interact with other avatars and, at an advanced level, build new environments.

Another significant change brought on by technological advances is the ease with which materials can be produced by regular users of the Internet. Whereas online materials in the first decade of the Web were largely produced by experts and web masters, with the advent of the Social Web and its characteristic user-friendly applications for publishing online content (e.g., blogs), anyone with Internet access can now publish their thoughts, works, and ‘texts’ online. This gives teachers and learners access to a wide array of genres, or cultural products, and ‘voices,’ or perspectives, that was not previously possible. One of the great advantages for culture learning is that now it is not only the ‘dominant’ or mainstream cultural voices that we can find on the Internet, but also other perspectives, those which the mass media and commercial educational publishers tend to ignore or address superficially: perspectives from the multiplicity of sub-cultures, indigenous cultures, nation-less cultures, who have found a voice online. Furthermore, teachers and students alike, with limited tools and an Internet connection, can construct and share their own cultural products, and hence perspectives, with a potentially global audience.

The project entitled “Las Voces de las Mujeres” (Lane, 2005) is an example of how educators can produce materials for culture teaching which offer insights into alternative products, practices and perspectives compared to those presented by mainstream commercial publishers, national media and cultural institutions. Lane (2005) explains her choice to use women’s voices in particular: “the voices heard in the media from Latin America are overwhelmingly male voices [but] women carry the principle responsibility to socialize their children, and therefore are rich sources of cultural views and information” (p. 1). Available for free on the Internet for language educators and their students, the aim of the project is to engage students in ethnographic inquiry in order to develop their listening and speaking skills at the same time as acquiring insights into different Spanish-speaking cultures. Lane (2005) interviewed 20 women from each of the following: the Maya community of Quetzaltenango (called Xela or Xelajú by the Mayan community), Purepecha from the Morelia region of Mexico, Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic and San Sebastian, and the Basque area of Spain and created a multimedia website where students can listen to the interviews with these women in which they talk about the most important things in their lives, values they learned from their mothers, important experiences, their problems, opinions about the future and their dreams and desires. All the women were asked the same series of questions and before watching the videos, students are asked to answer them as well. This prepares them linguistically for the listening and it also allows them to explore shared cultural values and individual variation within their own group as a starting point. Careful analysis of in-class responses, through inductive reasoning, models the process learners then need to use for analyzing the voices from the other cultures and for comparing their cultural perspectives, both shared and individual, with those of the women in the videos. By accessing a variety of individual perspectives on these issues, learners can seek to identify patterns, make hypotheses about reasons behind these perspectives and about what products and practices can be derived from these in the particular communities studied. They can carry out further research using Internet resources to test some of their hypotheses and to try to find further information, for instance historical background, factual information, cultural practices or more generalized public opinion by accessing statistics, surveys and opinion polls. Within this approach, the major issue then for L2 educators and learners is to develop the skills to search for, evaluate and select resources which are appropriate for their contexts of language and culture learning.

4.1.2. Research

There is little research which specifically measures culture learning through multimedia in the CALL literature using what we have called the access and produce approach. Many studies fall into what Blyth (2008) would categorize as ‘technological,’ that is they focus on descriptions of the particular technology used, often comparing and contrasting use of this technology with 'traditional' tools and stressing the potential benefits of technology. An important study on multimedia for language and culture learning is that by Kramsch and Andersen (1999) who acknowledge that multimedia:

offers the possibility of developing the sociocultural competence of language learners more readily than the pages of a textbook or the four walls of a classroom. In effect, computers seem to realize the dream of every language teacher—to bring the language and culture close and as authentically as possible to students in the classroom (p. 31).

However, simply providing multimedia clips illustrating language in context is not sufficient, for whilst in real life participants experience context, in watching a video clip much contextual and background information is missing. Kramsch and Andersen (1999) argue that for context “to be made learnable, especially in an academic setting, it has to be transformed into analyzable text” (p. 33) and multimedia offers great possibilities for this. The authors illustrate the process of textualization, that is how the different sources contribute towards the understanding of the ‘text,’ through an analysis of the multiple resources in a multimedia cd-rom: a scene based on an ethnographic film of a hearing in a village in Peru, interviews with a native consultant/anthropologist, and a written ethnography. They highlight the importance of helping learners develop media literacy and the ability to deconstruct the mediated ‘text’ they are presented with through approaches such as discourse analysis and critical ethnography. Although ‘technological’ studies
have been criticized for their lack of a theoretical framework and for being tech-
nocentric (Huh & Hu, 2005), as Blyth (2008) points out, descriptive studies which
concentrate on new tools, technologies or environments and how they have been
and should be used continue to be published (see for instance Levy, 2009), and
continue to be of interest to practitioners for they introduce new tools and suggest
how they might be used by teachers and to what advantage.

Other studies have looked at the use of Internet through guided tasks for lan-
guage and culture learning (Gaspar, 1998; Osuna & Meskill, 1998), and the
design of pedagogical learning tasks about culture which make use of the Internet
(Brandl, 2002). Reported advantages are measured through feedback collected
from students in pilot studies and include the authenticity and currency of mate-
rials, visual stimuli and multimodality, the interest and enjoyment it arouses, as
well as the information provided about cultural products. Few experimental stud-
ies which actually ‘measure’ cultural knowledge acquired through Internet-medi-
ated culture learning have been carried out, with the exception of Dubreil, Herron
& Cole (2004) who conducted an empirical investigation of whether authentic
websites facilitate intermediate-level French language students’ ability to learn
culture. Through pre- and post-tests the researchers measured gains in cultural
knowledge as regards cultural products and practices and found that use of the
Internet (information pages and static images) led to a gain in knowledge about cul-
tural products, which was confirmed by student perceptions as measured through
an evaluation questionnaire. This approach is useful in measuring the knowledge
component of culture learning, that is the acquisition of factual knowledge about
particular cultural products or practices, but does not measure sophisticated un-
derstanding of different cultural perspectives, or the development of intercultural
communicative competence. Furthermore, accessing the Internet as a resource is
what Levy (2007) describes as a “receptive means” of accessing culture, which
does not take advantage of the most revolutionary feature of the Internet, that is
the possibilities it offers for communication and more productive and interactive
ways of engaging in culture learning and developing intercultural communicative
competence. These will be discussed in the following sections.

4.2. Communicate and collaborate

4.2.1. Practice

A large part of the literature on CALL and culture in the past decade in particular
has focused on using digital technologies to create exchanges involving interac-
tion between language learners in geographically distant locations, telecollabora-
tion. This approach is based on a social constructivist view of learning inspired
by Vygotskian theories of learning as a social activity and importance is given to
the development of intercultural communicative competence, as defined by By-
ram (1997), as well as language learning.

Traditional models of telecollaboration such as the Cultura model (Furstenberg,
et al., 2001) and institutional forms of eTandem learning (Kötter, 2002; O’Rourke,
2007) involve language learners in geographically distant locations engaging in
bilingual, bicultural exchanges (Thorne, 2006). The Cultura model is based on a
comparative approach to culture learning and is very structured. Initially students
respond to a series of questionnaires in their native language (L1), compare the re-
sponses individually and in their classes and then online with their foreign peers,
again in L1. Although it may initially seem odd that students in an L2 course are
using their L1 with their foreign peers, the authors of the project argue that only
in the L1 can students truly express the complexity of their own ideas and culture
with their peers abroad. The L2 learning comes through students’ reading their
peers’ entries in the online forums and through classroom and homework activi-
ties. Whereas the main goal of Cultura (as the name itself implies) is to focus on
intercultural issues, eTandem models have a more language-development focus.
Again, as the name implies, tandem learning is based on reciprocal giving and
sharing and as such students spend half of the time communicating in L1 and the
other half in L2.

The advent of the Social Web has increased the modes of communication freely
available on the Internet and thus the scope of possible telecollaboration partners-
ships and projects, offering practitioners opportunities to expand on these more
traditional models for both language and culture learning. Telecollaboration prac-
titioners have until recently mainly focused on written communication, both asyn-
chronous and synchronous, because, from a technological point of view, video-
conferencing was the only viable means available for oral communication but
was costly and logistically complex to organize. The availability of VoIP (Voice
over Internet Protocol tools such as Skype) has, however, made desktop video and
audio-conferencing possible at a much lower cost, leading to the development of
telecollaboration exchanges organized around oral communication. Meguro
and Bryant (2010), for example, were interested in offering students of Japanese
at Dickinson College in the U.S. the opportunity to work on their oral skills. At
the lower levels, the aim was to have students be able to interact in the L2 before hav-
ing mastered the written script, and at the higher levels to help prepare students
for study abroad in Japan. The main challenge with synchronous communica-
tion between the U.S. and Japan is the significant time difference which makes it
nearly impossible to organize class-to-class exchanges. To overcome this, using
a custom-made tool at Dickinson called Mixter® and by tapping into the very
popular social network site Mixi™ in Japan, they were able to find tandem partners
for their students who then used Skype to speak with native speakers in Japan.
The Skype exchanges proved very successful, particularly among the lower-level
students, and increased their interest in Japanese culture and, hence, their moti-
vation to study abroad. More advanced learners were able to conduct interviews
with Japanese speakers about cultural products, practices and perspectives such as
the education system, health care, pop culture, and gender roles. The information
acquired from these interviews had to be written up in assignments and presented
to class members.

Practitioners have not only responded to the new tools available, but also to
new possible configurations given the ever-changing demography in today’s glo-
balized world. Telecollaboration projects have involved, for example, heritage
speakers (HS) paired with language learners (Blake & Zyzyk, 2003; Hughes, 2010; King, 2010) or groups of non-native speakers using a foreign language as a lingua franca (see for instance Basharina, 2007) to exchange perspectives on their respective cultures as well as on global issues.

An interesting project which introduces a new model of telecollaboration, based on moderated group discussions addressing global and cultural issues such as politics, religion, media, cultural identity and conflict, is the Solyia Connect Program. The project engages students from the ‘West’ and the ‘predominantly Arab and Muslim world’ in dialogue through group video and text discussions using English as a lingua franca. Byram (1997) and others argue that an important initial step in culture learning is becoming aware of one’s own culture and the ways in which our own individual culture influences our vision of the world and world events. One of the main tasks in the Solyia project has students use video footage from the Associated Press and Al Jazeera to produce 3-5 min. videos regarding a specific news event, e.g. the election of Hamas in Gaza. Students then share their videos with one another and many are encouraged to upload them to YouTube. As Genet (2010) explains: “the individual videos the students produced can be seen as ‘cultural products,’ as their cultural background and beliefs inevitably influence their editing choices” (p. 405). Indeed, the discussion sessions that follow the viewings of the videos in each group demonstrate how, even unwittingly, students present their own cultural perspectives through the choices they make regarding the footage they use, the accompanying music, and oral and/or written text in the videos. As one Solyia facilitator comments in a video published on Youtube: “students learn about their identity. They learn who they are. They learn why they think the way they think. They learn why they act the way they act.” Clearly, students also learn about the cultural products and perspectives of others through the facilitated discussions in English and are encouraged not to necessarily agree with or ‘accept’ different viewpoints, but to understand their origins and to respect them. This opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions with people from other cultures through the Internet is likely what has led to the significant increase in the practice of telecollaboration in L2 classrooms around the world in recent years.

4.2.2. Research

While initial research into telecollaboration, and still some research today, focused on technologies, the trend has increasingly been to adopt psycholinguistic and sociocultural approaches to better understand the type of language and culture learning that takes place in these contexts. The psycholinguistic approach tends to focus on language development, whereas the sociocultural approach, as its name suggests, is more relevant to the study of culture learning.

Most of the research using the psycholinguistic approach has focused on linguistic issues such as negotiation of meaning (Blake, 2000; Pelletieri, 2000), communication strategies (Chun, 1994; Lee, 2001), and questions and requests for clarification or more information (Abrams, 2001; Chun, 1994; Sotillo, 2000).

Recently there has been an interest in the pragmatic aspects of language use; for instance Tudini (2007) investigated the development of the ICC of Australian learners of Italian by analyzing the language they used in online chat rooms with native speakers. Through her analysis she identified a new category she calls “intercultural negotiation” which included intercultural-pragmatic triggers such as respecting rules of politeness and adjacency pairs in conversational openings and closings, introductions and thankings routines. She argues that, although this quantitative study focuses on lexis, “formal/near aspects of vocabulary, alongside idiomatic and figurative expressions...should be distinguished as an intercultural-pragmatic aspect of language learning [as they are] an important part of learners socialization into the chat environment” (Tudini, 2007, p. 581). She notes that her findings show that the informal setting of the chat room encouraged the sort of self-initiated negotiation sequences that indicate the skills of discovery and interaction identified by Byram (1997) with reference to the “intercultural speaker” in face-to-face contexts.

What interculturalists see as a drawback in psycholinguistic approaches to telecollaboration research is their focus on language with no consideration of sociocultural context. As Reinhardt (2008) writes: “it is difficult to consider the negotiation of pragmatic, interactional, or interpersonal meanings in an analysis that does not consider the context of situation and individual learner motivations and histories in interpretation” (p. 229). The development of pragmatic competence, i.e. the ability to effectively communicate with others, which is considered a part of learning culture, cannot be adequately addressed by a psycholinguistic approach to research. This has led to a ‘social turn’ in SLA studies with an ever-growing emphasis on contextual factors.

Much of the literature which focuses on culture and intercultural learning is based within a sociocultural paradigm. Warschauer (2005) describes the three main notions of Vygotskyan thought which are important for an understanding of sociocultural perspectives on CALL: mediation, social learning and genetic analysis. Mediation is the notion that “all human activity is mediated by tools or signs” (p. 41) and that what is significant about these tools is not their properties, but rather how they affect and transform human action and, at times, society itself. The concept of social learning, the view that learning occurs collaboratively through interaction, is also fundamental to the sociocultural approach and is particularly relevant to culture in language learning through CMC. Finally, there is the concept of genetic analysis, according to which:

it is possible to understand many aspects of mental functioning only if one understands their origins, or histories, and developmental process. These origins include microgenesis (the unfolding of particular events), ontogenesis (the development of the individual), sociocultural history, and even phylogenesis (the development of the species) (Vygotsky 1962, 1978) (Warschauer, 2005, p. 43).

This emphasis on development in sociocultural research has led to a focus on the teaching and learning processes of individuals or small groups of learners (as op-
posing to entire classes) engaging in telecollaboration and intercultural learning.

Socially-oriented research studies are generally qualitative and tend to look not only at communication generated by authentic tasks carried out in telecollaboration exchanges (forum discussions, emails, wikis, blogs, chat transcripts) but also texts produced by learners during exchanges such as reflective diaries (Hauck, 2007; Helm, 2009), final projects (Müller-Hartmann, 2006) and contextual factors which regard the learners themselves and the classroom context. Information about learners can be collected through questionnaires, attitudinal surveys, interviews, assessments of language and intercultural awareness. Other contextual information ranges from the classroom level (e.g., tasks, teaching approach, assessment methods) to the institutional level (e.g., constraints, regulations, policies, procedures) and higher up to the geo-political level (e.g., national policies and curricula). The model of intercultural learning which is used in these studies tends to be Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence and researchers analyze and code data from student interactions, productions and interviews for evidence of attitude, skills, knowledge and sometimes critical cultural awareness (see for example Liaw, 2006). A limited number of studies have used quantitative tools, such as adaptations of Chen and Starosta’s (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, in combination with qualitative ethnographic data (for example Jin, 2008).

The learning outcomes of telecollaboration practice reported in socially-oriented studies include: linguistic and sociolinguistic advances (Kötter, 2003), ‘communication’ skills development (Egert, 2000; Lee, 2004), construction of new intercultural knowledge (Chun & Wade, 2004), intercultural communicative competence and critical cultural awareness (Liaw & Johnson, 2001; Müller-Hartmann, 2000; O’Dowd, 2003) as well as gains in motivation and learner autonomy (Lomicka, 2006). Key issues that have been addressed include task-design (Müller-Hartmann, 2000), the role of the instructor (Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003; Müller-Hartmann, 2006; O’Dowd & Ritter, 2006; Ware & Kramsch, 2005), cultural patterns of use (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Thorne, 2003) and failed communication (O’Dowd & Ritter, 2006). This last topic has drawn significant interest on the part of researchers, but rather than seeing tensions in communication as obstacles and problems to be avoided, there is a growing tendency to see them as opportunities for intercultural development (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Ware, 2005; Ware & Kramsch, 2005). Researchers following this line see instances of contestation as “rich points” as defined by Agar (1994), which should be addressed and dealt with as a productive source for learning in a dialogic approach to online exchanges. Schneider and von der Emde (2006) try to make the dialogic approach more explicit to help students feel more at ease with conflict rather than encourage them to avoid conflict and seek immediately to find common ground. In their study, the authors report on two American learners insistently posing questions until they receive a response from their uncomfortable German partner, and they see this in a positive light as it helped them learn about Germany’s “complex” relation to its past. They also report how students, when working on their projects, “used their engagement with the target culture to shine a critical light on their own” (Schneider and von der Emde, 2006, p. 191) and thus gained a sense of critical cultural awareness. Key to this approach is an emphasis on reflection and meta-reflection which, they believe, allows conflicts to become opportunities for learning.

Potential problems with qualitative research in this field include the risk of researcher bias in the content analyses (Belz, 2003a), generic claims of ICC learning which are unsubstantiated by evidence, and a lack of attention to negative results and limitations of studies (Huh & Hu, 2005). Yet it would seem that most telecollaboration researchers are well aware of these risks. As Lam and Goodfellow (2010) write:

the field of telecollaboration for language learning ... has been remarkable for its willingness to review its own effectiveness regularly over the decade and a half of its existence, to document failure (Ware 2005; O’Dowd and Ritter, 2006; Müller-Hartmann, 2007; O’Dowd, 2007), and to move from the notion of “conflict as accidental finding of research” to “conflict as object of research” (Schneider and van der Emde 2006). Findings are mixed, with some successes and many challenges (p. 109).

Although the psycholinguistic and sociocultural approach have been presented as two distinct approaches, the former predominantly qualitative and the latter qualitative, increasingly ‘mixed approaches’ are being adopted which combine features of each. Several studies have looked at the development of pragmatic competence in terms of pronoun use (e.g., Belz & Kinginger, 2002; Kinginger, 2000; Thorne, 2008) and how it develops through interaction in telecollaboration exchanges, using a mixed approach which combines linguistic data analysis with information about the sociocultural context and the salient characteristics of a given context.1 Belz (2003b) laments that the development of intercultural competence has not been looked at in linguistic terms and calls for researchers to “broaden the investigative focus on what learners say to include how they say it” (p. 69) through linguistically grounded analyses, such as Appraisal Analysis (Martin, 1995; White, 1998) which she uses in her study of the development of attitudes of curiosity and openness in telecollaboration (Belz, 2003b). Her study combines the quantitative analysis which characterizes much of the psycholinguistic SLA research with attention to social aspects of the participants and the telecollaboration project she describes.

4.3. Bridging

4.3.1. Practice

In telecollaboration contexts, as in the examples mentioned above, it is often the teacher who chooses the online resources, chooses the partner class, and sets up the tasks. Some scholars, however, have begun to argue that this is too restrictive and if we really want to tap into our students’ existing online practices, if we really want them to be exposed to a wide variety of the online cultures present on
the World Wide Web, maybe we need to ‘let them go’ and provide them with the tools they need to survive, and learn, out on the Web. As de Nooy (2006) states:

despite the promise of the Internet to ‘connect learners with authentic culture’ and serve as ‘a gateway to the virtual foreign world where real people are using real language in real context’ (Osuna & Meskill, 1998), discussion activities -- whether email exchange or discussion lists -- are often limited to teacher-determined topics and the cultural comfort zone of student-student interaction. ... Students are still safely within the classroom, virtual though it might be, and despite its advantages, it suffers the limitations of any language classroom in providing genuine opportunities to engage with the ‘target culture’ in roles other than that of student (p. 73).

The question posed here is whether or not we are truly doing our students, especially more advanced ones, a service by ‘controlling’ their learning environments. If our ultimate aim is to help students become autonomous intercultural communicators, it may be worthwhile to expose them to authentic environments where they have to engage both their linguistic, intercultural communication and online literacy skills in order to be effective communicators.

In 2003, Hanna and de Nooy began to explore whether or not linguistic competence and cultural knowledge were enough to allow students to participate effectively in an authentic context of online fora such as those on the website of the French newspaper Le Monde.15 The authors saw these online environments as virtual locations where members from numerous cultural backgrounds come together for a specific purpose, i.e. to discuss a topic. From the researchers’ point of view, they were interested in understanding the culture, in particular the practices of online fora and how to equip students with the necessary tools to be effective in these environments; from a pedagogical point of view, they were interested in promoting language and culture learning.

Hanna and de Nooy (2003) focused on four students who participated in an online discussion forum on the Le Monde website. They found that the most ‘successful’ student actually used French very little and chose to take part in the French discussion forum using his native language, English. Rather than being excluded from the community because he did not use French, he was included because of his engagement in the discussion. On the contrary, two British students who were consistently apologizing for ‘their French,’ even though it was quite good, were not included in the online community because they were not willing to fully participate in the discussion at hand. Although the authors found several instances of the members of the forum explicitly or implicitly trying to ‘teach’ these students the acceptable rules in their sub-culture, the students were not able to step out of their learner shoes. In the forum, understanding and being able to negotiate the rules and behaviors of the online community’s culture were prerequisites for successful participation and the process was relational, not unilateral. On public Internet fora, the other participants are not there to help students learn, they are there to discuss, debate and interact. Apart from a degree of competence in the language(s) used in the forums, the type of ‘cultural knowledge’ required, as in any online community (or cyberculture), involves propositional knowledge of the community’s topics as well as knowledge of norms of interaction established by the online community, some of which may be stated on the website in terms of guidelines or rules, but many of which are to be inferred as one begins to engage with the community.

Allowing students to venture out into the real ‘virtual’ world within an institutional course clearly requires preparation, awareness raising and monitoring. Examples of successful and failed communication could be used to expose students to the types of skills they will need when posting to the forum, or other online environment as may be the case. The behavior patterns of members of online communities are unpredictable so teachers need to prepare students for the often harsh reality of online communication and scaffold them throughout the experience with effective monitoring. Hanna and de Nooy (2003) conclude that despite the challenges, students ‘learn by participating in the cultural practice rather than asking for special, student-centered experiences focusing on themselves’ (p. 78).

Though not stated explicitly, the “cultural practice” they refer to is not limited to the culture of people from France, but rather includes the online culture that characterizes the forum in Le Monde.

In the U.S., a Pew Internet & American Life survey reported that “64% of online teens in the United States spend time using interactive social media, creating original content, and sharing this content online” (Lenhart et al., 2007 as cited in Thorne, 2010). These teens make up the bulk of students in higher education institutions in the U.S. so one could presume they are quite literate in accessing, interacting with and producing multimedia Web content, participating in social networks, and/or communicating with same-interest peers around the globe. The more literate ones most likely also have one or more online identities or personas, such as one in an online game, another in Facebook, and yet another on YouTube. Thorne (2010) suggests that rather than leading students into teacher-chosen media on the Web (e.g., Hanna and de Nooy above), we should tap into students’ existing online personas and exploit the learning that is already going on ‘out there’. Thorne (2010) calls this “intercultural communication in the wild,” defined as learning experiences that are “situated in arenas of social activity that are less controllable than classroom or organized online intercultural exchanges might be, but which present interesting, and perhaps even compelling, opportunities for intercultural exchange, agentic action and meaning making” (p. 144).

Thorne (2010) provides examples of the type of learning that takes place among avid users of fan-fiction sites and online gaming.16 Briefly, fan-fiction refers to “the publicly shared writings of enthusiasts of various popular cultural media who build from existing literary tropes, settings, characters, and storylines to construct their own fictional narratives” (Thorne, 2010, p. 144). These sites, often hosted in blogs, wikis, or other similar social media, are based around popular cultural artifacts, such as the Harry Potter series or popular television series like Lost. Participants often come from varied cultural-linguistic backgrounds so that even when there is an ‘official’ language, plurilingual communication tends to be the norm and, as in the discussion fora mentioned above, successful participation
in these communities may depend more on intercultural competence and understanding the ‘culture’ of the online environment (i.e., values, interactional aims and practices of the community) than on language proficiency. In these online communities, newcomers often receive comments for improvement and encouragement from more experienced or established members. Thorne (2010) argues that this context supports the Vygotskian principles of social learning within the Zone of Proximal Development. He provides examples from the work of Black (2005, 2006, 2008), who has shown that English language learners actively participating in fan-fiction sites make linguistic, affective and intercultural improvements by developing relationships with individuals who share the same interests. In his paper, Thorne (2010) provides the example of one learner whose linguistic and intercultural development was visible through the increasingly sophisticated English language texts she created. She succeeded in creating her own identity by including elements from her other languages and cultures, which she contextualized for her readers through author notes, thus demonstrating intercultural awareness, and, as Thorne notes, positioning herself biographically as an author. The success of her development could be measured by the number of reader reviews she received (7000) from an audience spanning several continents and cultures, an evaluation which is more authentic and significant than any teacher’s assessment could be.

The question remains, however, how to integrate this type of learning into the formal, institutional language learning environment. Language teachers face the conflict of having to choose between “the critical importance of high stakes power genres (i.e. formal registers of language taught in schools) and the emergent contingent logics of digital vernaculars” (Thorne, 2010, p. 156). In an attempt to work around this conflict, Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) propose a pedagogical framework, called “bridging activities,” to bring these potential learning experiences into the classroom. (See chapter 8 for more information on bridging activities.) They suggest a three-phase activity. First, students bring digital vernacular texts (cultural products) they have produced or been engaged in, into the classroom. Then, together with the teacher and peers, they analyze the texts to identify ways in which they differ and align with conventional literacy and genre forms. Finally, students are ‘sent back out into the wild’ to implement, in the online cultures they participate in as part of their private sphere, what they have learned in class. Though appealing, this proposal presupposes that students are ‘willing’ to share their personal online identities with classes in formal settings and that, indeed, students have online identities to share. The research has not yet challenged these questions, and most of the research in this field is still centered on the U.S. context. Nonetheless, as young people around the world become more ‘connected,’ through whichever medium they choose, this model of intercultural learning in the wild and bridging activities in the classroom may become more relevant for language teachers around the world.

4.3.2. Research

The concept of bridging informal and formal language and culture learning is very much in its infancy as, inevitably, is research in this area. What the research community has recognized, however, is the need for a more holistic approach to research, synthesizing the different fields of research rather than creating dichotomies, and giving increasing importance to the context of language and culture learning. A new metaphor has been found in the ‘ecological’ approach to language and culture learning which represents, according to Van Lier (2004), a natural continuation of sociocultural theory and CMC approaches to research, expanding the focus of sociocultural approaches to include more and more contextual information. Lam and Kramsch (2003) write:

A critical ecological perspective on SLA does not mean replacing schools with computers that simulate the process of socialization in more “natural” or loosely institutionalized environments. It means examining the relationship between the learner and the context, and how a particular metaphor of SLA is part and parcel of a self-organized, self-regulating ecology of language learning. In other words, we need to examine how different parts of an environment fit together to constitute a system that has its own logic of functioning (p. 156).

An ecological approach views learners “as living organisms engaged in a complex network of relationships with the other elements in the environment” (Blyth, 2008, p. 54). It places an integral focus on person, process, context and time. The unit of analysis is the learner and researchers examine how learners use language and other tools, hence also technologies, to create context and to construct identities and communities. Research procedures and strategies within this approach have not yet been clearly defined, though some key concepts have gained importance, such as that of affordance. An affordance is proposed by van Lier (2000) as an alternative to input and is defined as “a particular property of the environment that is relevant, for good or for ill, to an active, perceiving organism in that environment. What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it” (p. 252). An affordance is thus the relationship between the actor and the object, between learners and their environments, also the relationship between cognitive and social processes that lead to learning.

Lam and Kramsch (2003) present the ecological perspective in their case study of a Hong Kong Chinese learner of English who experienced failure and discrimination in a U.S. school context but then successfully socialized into a global, online, English-speaking community. The case study provides detailed descriptions of the learner’s social status and context as well as the offline and online environments in which he used English. The authors also analyze data from interviews with the learner, his website and transcripts of online chats. Through the case study they show how the ecology metaphor allows consideration of social and political conditions that determine a learner’s adaptation to the circumstances of language use. “The ecology metaphor of language learning as socialization through symbolic interaction with other individuals engaged in a shared common activity
and participating in a shared social community" (Lam and Kramsch, 2003, p. 155) aptly describes the Web-based acquisition environment in which the learner developed his English language competence. It is important to point out that though Lam and Kramsch are concerned with the acquisition of English language in this study, they reveal how the learner was initiated into a new culture defined not by geographic boundaries but by an online environment. It is thus an illustration of how such an ecologic approach can be useful for documenting culture learning in online contexts. The multidimensionality of the ecological approach is believed by researchers to be able to meet the challenge of analyzing language use and language learning in multilingual and multicultural settings (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008) and thus seems suitable for addressing research on culture through CALL, where culture is viewed in the sense we described in the introduction, as field, a fluid, ever-changing context co-constructed by its participants and surrounding histories and ideologies.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

At the end of the introduction to this chapter, we cited valid questions posed by Furstenberg (2010): “how to ‘incorporate,’ ‘integrate,’ and ‘infuse’ foreign language classes with culture and ‘what culture’” (p. 329). Up to now, we have provided a survey of what has been done. The rest of the chapter will be dedicated to providing more practical examples of what teachers and learners can do, and what skills and competences they need to answer the questions posed by Furstenberg.

In teaching culture through CALL, language teachers have, as we explained above, a variety of options available to them. They can:

- access and produce resources which provide for culture learning about products, practices and perspectives;
- communicate and collaborate through the practice of telecollaboration whereby learners interact, and hopefully develop meaningful intercultural relationships with distant peers; and
- bridge learners’ Internet use and identities outside class with language learning in formal settings.

These options are not mutually exclusive of course. For example, teachers can choose to set up telecollaboration exchanges which involve learners sharing and discussing resources with distant peers and then have learners collaboratively create their own resources which can be made available to the outside world. Whatever the choice, it needs to be well-informed, taking into consideration the operational skills required on the part of both the teacher(s) and learners, awareness of the complexity of culture learning, and a critical approach to all activities. The teacher(s) and learners must also be aware of the need to be flexible and adapt what has been ‘planned’ to what actually ‘happens’. Below we discuss some key issues for teachers to consider for each of the approaches.

5.1. Access and produce

5.1.1. Selecting resources

The vast array of resources available on the Internet means that, yes, culture learning can be enhanced by accessing a wide variety of multimedia resources, but this availability can be disorienting and overwhelming. Resources can be used in many ways and indeed it is how a resource is used that is more important than the quality of the resource itself. For example, a website containing stereotypical and reductionist representations of ‘the target culture’ may be deliberately chosen for a task involving critical analysis. The teacher’s role lies in the critical selection of appropriate resources to meet the needs of the task(s) in mind and in guiding learners in the reading and interpretation of the cultural resources selected. Some questions teachers may want to ask themselves may be the following:

- For what is the resource to be used?
- Who produced the resource and for what was it originally intended?
- What are the underlying theories and values of the resource?
- How does the resource represent language and its cultures and subcultures: multiple, diverse, dynamic and changing or monolithic and static? Does it represent an ‘online culture’ and/or culture(s) in the ‘physical world’?
- Does the resource help learners to make connections between products, practices and perspectives?
- Does the resource allow learners to make connections between their lives and experiences and those represented?
- What opportunities for exploration does the resource afford learners?
- To what kind of opportunities for interaction does the resource lead learners (e.g., e-mail address, link to Facebook page)?
- Is the resource appropriate for the intended learners?

If the materials chosen are stimulating and the learners motivated, they will also want and need to move on to their own cultural explorations, thus the teacher also needs to help them acquire the necessary practical but also critical skills necessary to search, find and evaluate their own resources and learn from them.

In order to move beyond information retrieval, learners should start reflecting, comparing and analyzing cultural artifacts together with their classmates or distant peers. The input can involve any number of different cultural artifacts, for example institutional websites, parallel texts, class responses to questionnaires, statistical reports, the same news story in different online resources, etc. Traditionally, contrastive approaches have focused on comparing and analyzing the products and practices of two nationally-defined cultures. However, it is also possible to compare perspectives of different cultures, for example how different cultural groups view a particular global issue, how these views are or can be transmitted through different media in different countries, and the impact of the choice of media and language on the message. Such an activity is facilitated, but also complicated, by the quantity of information available on the Web today and involves considering the cultural context of the online world in addition to the
culture of the source of information.

5.1.2. Publishing Content Online

If we ask students to produce content, for example on blogs (Hauck, 2010), wikis (Guth, 2007), or YouTube (Genet, 2010), we are exposing our students to risks that do not exist in the protected environment of the classroom. In many CALL contexts, teachers use password-access learning management systems (LMS) such as Blackboard or Moodle to post content, have students engage with it, exchange ideas and opinions, and even carry out assessment. There may be institutional requirements or pressure for teachers to use their university systems, and there are advantages in terms of tracking learner activity, copyright issues, privacy and security, student familiarity with the tool, etc. However, we might compare the LMS to a sort of ‘holiday resort’ where learners, like tourists in a resort, are protected, controlled and limited, where they will interact with other learners like themselves and engage in activities they are familiar with. Depending on the task at hand, this might be the right solution, but, as we have noted above, there is a growing trend to let learners venture out and explore, particularly in higher education contexts. The LMS has limitations in terms of visibility, authenticity and learners’ development of the knowledge, skills, literacies and critical awareness required for publishing on the WWW.

Understanding of issues regarding copyright and plagiarism are fundamental for both teachers and learners when publishing on the Web. Whereas on an LMS, teachers and learners alike can upload and share content (texts, images, video) protected by copyright, the same does not hold true on the open Web. When creating a website, blog or wiki with cultural content, learners may well want to include content from other sources on the Web; yet they need to understand the risks of using copyright protected material. For example, students can be directed to contents covered by copyleft, e.g. Creative Commons licenses, and explicitly taught how to incorporate content from other sites into their own sites without risking plagiarism. The latter might include learning how to make links to the original source, learning how to cite sources and learning to paraphrase text. These are basic skills that seem to have fallen through the cracks in education in recent years. In the past, plagiarism and copyright infringement on a paper may have led to failing a course, but the same mistakes in an open digital context could lead to real legal consequences.

As part of an advanced-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course for students working on their Master’s dissertation, Guth (2009) developed a series of tasks with the primary aim of promoting awareness of the numerous issues surrounding ‘online cultures’ through the medium of English. A public course blog\(^\text{17}\) was created to post weekly tasks (see Table 1), to offer help pages such as ‘how to add an image to a blog without copyright infringement’\(^\text{18}\), and to serve as a hub for students’ personal blogs for the course. Through pre-course surveys, Guth (2009) found that her Italian university students were not aware of these issues. The aim of the blog was to develop a community of learners exploring online cultures by engaging in them as part of the learning process. The reason for using public blogs was to raise awareness about the potential global audience when publishing online and the consequences of this. Indeed, most students received comments on their blogs from outside users on the blogosphere and several have continued blogging on their own personal cultural interests, e.g., literature.\(^\text{19}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Aim</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the blogosphere</td>
<td>To become familiar with the extent of information in the blogosphere.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blogging</td>
<td>To develop and start posting on personal blogs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feed aggregators for collecting online resources</td>
<td>To learn how to use RSS feeds and feed aggregators to manage the information overflow on the Web.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bookmarking for managing online resources</td>
<td>To learn how to use social bookmarking as a way to save and share important online resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating online resources</td>
<td>To collectively develop criteria for evaluating online resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting Copyright and avoiding plagiarism</td>
<td>To understand the reality of copyright laws and avoid risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting referencing conventions</td>
<td>To learn how to effectively cite online (e.g. hyperlinking) and how to cite online sources on paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical awareness on the Web</td>
<td>To be aware of the risks involved when publishing information on the Web, downloading software, participating in online communities, etc.</td>
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The blog was part of a wider blended course and the tasks have since been used in the context of telecollaboration exchanges using online tools such as wikis. Just as we expect students to learn about the conventions of particular cultural groups in order to be able to participate in them actively and effectively, during study abroad for example, so must we equip them with the skills to do the same in online contexts.

5.2. Communicate and collaborate

5.2.1. Choosing an Environment and Communication Modes

The practice of telecollaboration for culture learning makes a great deal of demands on teachers in terms of organization and collaboration with partner teachers and classes. It is, in all its aspects, a lesson in intercultural development for the teacher too who has to find a partner teacher she can collaborate effectively with and who shares the same goals and pedagogic approach. In addition, calendars have to be established and the communication tools chosen (see Dooly, 2007, for an overview of tools for telecollaboration). Two issues arise here: whether to use one institution’s closed proprietary system as opposed to a ‘neutral’ online space, and whether to engage in synchronous or asynchronous communication, or both. With regards to the former point, as Guth and Thomas (2010) point out: “when the LMS belonging to one of the partner institutions is used, it may well reflect the cultural and educational bias of that particular institution and/or culture” (p. 48). Furthermore, using an LMS involves issues of ownership, access, and familiarization. Regarding mode of communication, some practitioners prefer asynchronous communication as they feel it allows students the time to reflect both on what they have read and want to say, thus enriching the cultural exchange. Others argue for synchronous communication because it helps students learn the skills required in real-time cultural exchange. Ideally, an exchange would involve both forms of communication, for example video-conferencing and e-mail (O’Dowd, 2006b), wiki and Skype (Guth & Marini-Maio, 2010), or e-mail and Instant Messenger (Jin, 2008; Thorne, 2008).

5.2.2. Designing and Sequencing Tasks for Telecollaboration

Telecollaboration projects are made up of a series of tasks, which should follow a certain order to lead learners through a process of developing language and intercultural skills and competences. The literature about online learning (Salmon, 2000, 2002) and telecollaboration (Müller-Hartmann, 2007; O’Dowd & Ware, 2009) indicates that successful learning in such contexts progresses from initial phases of socialization and familiarization, followed by tasks which involve comparison and analysis to finally collaborative tasks. The types of tasks which appear in the early stages should focus on exchanging information in order to ‘get to know’ one another and the online environment. Figure 1 shows the pre-exchange tasks for an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) exchange between students in Italy and students in Germany using a wiki for asynchronous communication and

Figure 1
Pre-exchange tasks in a German-Italian telecollaboration project using wiki and Skype.

1. Our course website is a wiki! What is a wiki? Watch the Common Craft video on Teacher Tube for an explanation.
2. Sign up to be a “writer” of this wikiiespace by clicking on the “To join this workspace, request access” link on the right or if you try to edit a page it will ask you to log in or request access.
3. Individually, in their respective classrooms, on their own time, students watch the video Single Story, in English (the lingua franca of the exchange). Students then write a short comment on the same page explaining what their single story of the ‘other’ country is and where they think it comes from, e.g. media, books, family, vacations, etc. Comments on this page function like a discussion forum in the sense that BEFORE you write your comment, read those that come before yours in order to relate back to other ideas and avoid repeating the same thing over and over again.

Deadline: Wednesday, April 28 12.00 pm.
4. On their personal pages students post a brief introduction of themselves.
5. Students complete the Pre-Exchange Questionnaire.
6. In-class or on their own time, students ‘play around’ with the wiki in order to become more familiar with it using the tutorials on the Trouble Shooting page. Doubts or questions can be posed as comments to this page.
7. Students read each other’s introductions and single story comments.
Deadline for pre-tasks 2-5: Thursday, April 29 10.00 am.

Subsequently, tasks can become more complex as learners engage in interaction and knowledge construction through activities of comparison and analysis. Whereas exchanging information merely involves learners sharing what they know about themselves and their culture, when comparing and analyzing, learners interpret cultural products and practices, discussing the perspectives that may be behind them. When parallel texts exist, such as La Femme Nikita (Besson, 1990) and the American re-make of the film Point of No Return (Badham, 1993), they can be a salient source of perspectives and practices to be critically analyzed by learners. Teacher guidance during this stage is extremely important in order to lead students beyond superficial observation to critical thinking. Teachers can, for example, select reviews of the films in the two countries, focus on specific scenes
in the films and provide thought provoking questions for students to consider before communicating online. Even when there are no useful parallel texts, the representation of a specific aspect of cultures can be compared by analyzing different media. For example, in an Italian-American bilingual exchange, again using a wiki and Skype, students were asked to watch The Godfather: Part I (Coppola, 1972) and I Cento Passi (Giordana, 2000) in order to compare representations of the Italian mafia in American cinema and Italian cinema. They were also asked to access different online media, from YouTube to online newspapers in ‘third’ countries such as the English version of Al Jazeera, to compare and contrast how the Italian Mafia is represented in different cultures and in different cinema. Through this process, students, in this case the Italian students in particular, are engaged in a process of learning about their own culture and how it is viewed by others not only abroad, but in different regions of their own country as well.

The third and final stage, possible only once learners have become familiar with the online environment and tools and established a relationship with one another, can engage learners in tasks that require collaboration and product creation. The complexity of this final stage is indeed heightened by the degree of collaboration required as learners negotiate roles, set deadlines, come up with workplans, etc. This sort of activity is complex enough in face-to-face contexts and even more so in the online intercultural context of telecollaboration where students may have to reflect on, interpret and overcome cultural differences, for example in providing and receiving peer feedback. Figure 2 provides an example of the collaborative project in the Italian-American exchange mentioned above. In groups of 4-6, students were to produce an L2 text on the wiki and encouraged to interpret ‘text’ in the broadest sense possible in order to include various media and cultural products (see Step 3). The most challenging aspect, however, was respecting deadlines and coming to agreement on contents. For this reason, each group had to assign a leader and the roles of the various participants (see Step 2). Nonetheless, the teachers had to monitor the progress of the various groups in order to guarantee full participation. Teacher guidance was also useful during Step 5 when students had to provide one another with feedback both on the language used and the contents. In this exchange, for example, the American students found the feedback provided by their Italian peers to be too ‘direct’ whereas the Italians felt their American peers were not ‘clear’ or ‘straight-forward’. Teacher intervention used this ‘conflict’ as an opportunity for culture learning.

Figure 2
Final project in a bilingual Italian-American exchange using a wiki and Skype.

Padova-Dickinson Fall 09: FINAL PROJECT

Aim
The aim of this final project is to create a bilingual wiki page on the mafia (organized crime) and related issues in the U.S. and Italy.

General Description
The final wiki page will be divided into sections, much like magazine articles are. In your

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groups you will work on one section in the language you are studying and help your peers edit their work. When each group has completed ‘their’ part, the instructors will then assemble these in the wiki to make a coherent, single piece.

Tasks
Step 1: choosing topics
In class, the American groups will choose/or be assigned one of the topics. The topics include history and structure of the mafia in Italy and U.S., other Mafia-like organisations, the Mafia today, organised crime and illegal immigration, Mafia and politics.

Step 2: Roles and workplan
In school and work, when working in groups, it helps if roles are assigned. Use the common function in your group page to do this or you can contact one another via Skype, email, instant messaging, Facebook, etc. However, since it is Thanksgiving in the States this week, your communication will have to be ‘on your own’ time and asynchronous.
First of all, choose a group leader. This person will be responsible for making sure that each team member is doing their part, and report back to the instructors should there be problems with participation.

Then decide who is going to focus on what, and by when.
Write the name of your group’s leader and the students’ names with their specific assignments in the table.

Step 3: Research
Research your topic on the Web. Wikipedia should be seen as a STARTING POINT and NOT the only reference for your research. When you find useful information and sites, copy and paste the URLs onto your group pages or personal pages.
Since the Americans are writing about Italy and the Italians about America, you may be able to help one another locate ‘good’ resources on the Web, e.g. online newspapers, government sites, etc., to help your peers in their research.
Finally, since we are using digital text, you can add images, graphs, videos, etc. to your pages in a way that is not possible on paper. Please take advantage of this!

Step 4: Writing
Each person should write a minimum of 400 and a maximum of 500 words for their part. Therefore, your aim is to be clear and concise rather than long-winded, and to identify only the MOST relevant information for your part. Again: quality not quantity and cite your sources!

Step 5: Editing and peer feedback
Once each person has produced their ‘text,’ you should give peer feedback. You can do this by using the Comment section or by directly editing your peer’s work (you can then use the ‘history’ function and ‘compare versions’ to see the changes that have been made). Each group should decide how the members would like to give and receive feedback on their use of the language (vocabulary, syntax, tone, etc.), style, and organization. You will also decide ‘who’ is going to correct ‘whose’ work. The project is collaborative, therefore helping each other is admitted and welcome, provided that the groups comply with three basic rules: 1) each part should write its own piece in the target language, 2) the edits are explained and understood on both the sides, 3) all this work is clear and can be traced in the wiki (‘comment,’ ‘history,’ or ‘compare versions’ functions). Please take this part of the project as a great learning opportunity!

Step 6: Project due
Once each group has finished with the editing, the project is ready to go. After December 18, 11:59pm, no more changes will be possible and the instructors will start working on the formatting of the “web-magazine.”

Step 7: Survey
All the students will fill out a brief survey in order to provide feedback about their own and their partners’ contribution in the project. The survey is anonymous and will help the instructors to assess the students’ work.
Reflective practice between sessions, both in the form of classroom discussions and individual learner diaries, should be an integral part of any exchange. As Guth & Marini-Maio (2010) argue: "it is just as important for students to step back and reflect on what they are learning and saying about their own culture as it is to have synchronous conversations with peers about the ‘other’ culture" (p. 419). Following the compare and contrast example provided above, one Italian student wrote in her learner diary:

Reading the articles I read (from different countries) and watching the Godfather, I directed my attention to the different situations that Italy faces, I’m lucky because I don’t live in a society dominated by Mafia, but for people (above all common people) who have to, I think it’s terrible. I’m astounded by the conspiracy of silence which reigns among those people, but, in a way, I also understand them because they live in a dangerous situation. I don’t know if in their shoes I would be braver.

This student comes from the North of Italy and is learning to reflect on the situation of her fellow citizens in other parts of the country. As we have stated above, culture learning should be transversal, i.e., rather than focusing solely on one ‘target’ culture, even in a bilingual exchange, telecollaboration should offer learners the opportunity to become more aware of the various ‘cultures’ that exist both in the ‘foreign’ country as well as in their own.

6. ASSESSMENT

We will only briefly touch on the issue of how to evaluate outcomes in the context of culture learning as it is extremely complex and brings up ethical and moral issues. While cultural knowledge can and indeed often is measured by discrete item tests or written essays, more complex and controversial aspects of ICC, such as attitudes of openness and curiosity, are difficult to measure. Several tools for measuring cross-cultural, intercultural or global competence have been developed, many for the field of business. In the CALL literature we have reviewed, ICC learning tends to be assessed by the researchers conducting the studies rather than being an integral part of the formal assessment of the learners in their classroom contexts.

O’Dowd (2010) reports “a dearth of literature” (p. 344) on the assessment of intercultural learning in L2 online contexts. Yet surely if teachers are engaging learners in online communication and activities aimed at promoting the development of ICC, should they not be assessing learners’ developments in these areas? O’Dowd argues that indeed they should and reports that practitioners are encountering problems with regard to the evaluation of intercultural communicative competence; he writes: “it is evident that while teachers contribute great importance to this area, they are finding great difficulty in establishing how it can be assessed appropriately” (p. 347). To date, the favored assessment procedures by teachers involved in foreign language education in higher education include clear assessment rubrics for tasks such as essays on intercultural issues and online portfolios.

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Several models of portfolio have been developed, many following the model of the European Language Portfolio, which has three sections: a Passport which includes bio-data and information about assessments and certification, a Biography in which learners are asked to report and reflect on their personal intercultural experiences, and finally a Dossier in which learners are required to provide evidence for their intercultural learning. More recently, the Council of Europe has published an Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters which is a tool designed to encourage people to think about and learn from intercultural encounters that have made a strong impression or had a long-lasting effect on them. In discovering what underlies these encounters, users become more aware of their experience and their reactions, thereby developing their intercultural competences (What is the autobiography section, para. 1).

For assessment purposes, however, it is often the Dossier component of a portfolio which learners are asked to produce, which can be assessed in and of itself or through oral interviews in which the portfolio is discussed. Figure 3 provides an example from O’Dowd (2010) of the information students are required to include in their portfolios at the end of a telecollaboration exchange.

Figure 3
Example of portfolio instructions for a telecollaborative exchange (O’Dowd, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Exchange Portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is a Portfolio?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A portfolio is a collection of your work that represents your development as a writer, language user, and intercultural communicator over time. The aim of a portfolio is to show how you have developed and how you have reflected on this process. You should not necessarily place your best work in your portfolio, but the work that most clearly represents your development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should your exchange portfolio contain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your portfolio should show proof that you have developed as a foreign language and culture learner during your online exchange and that you have also reflected on the learning process. To do that, you should include some of the following things:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. An example of a post you wrote to your partner where you tried out new vocabulary and/or grammatical structures or ones which you do not usually use. Explain which are the new structures and vocabulary and how you felt about trying out new language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A dialogue which shows a post you wrote which has some mistakes you made in English and then the answer from your partner where he/she corrects you. Explain whether you think your partner corrected you in a useful way or not. What did you learn from the corrections?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. An extract of a message from your partner where you learned new vocabulary or where you noticed how a certain grammatical structure works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. An extract which demonstrates something you learned about the foreign culture or where you realised something new about your own culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. An extract from your exchange where you and your partner had a misunderstanding or disagreement. Discuss what you learned from this breakdown of communication and how you resolved the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Your reflections on what you learned about communicating and working in an online environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Self-assessment is also commonly used in ICC assessment. Descriptors of ICC have been developed for this purpose to help learners assess their competence, as in Figure 4 below taken from the EU funded INCA project which developed assessment tools for intercultural competence in training or workplaces. Like the Dossier component of portfolios, however, it is useful for students to provide ‘evidence’ of learning by specifically citing, for example, encounters learners have had online or in person that demonstrate effective intercultural communication.

Figure 4
ICC descriptors for self-assessment developed by the INCA project

Level Dimension
Overview of competence

Level 1 Basic
I am already willing to interact successfully with people of other cultures. I tend to pick things up and learn from them as I go along, but I haven’t yet the experience to work out any system of dealing with intercultural situations in general. I respond to events, rather than planning for them. At this stage I am reasonably tolerant of other values, customs and practices although I may find them odd or surprising and approve or disapprove.

Level 2 Intermediate
As a result of experience and/or training, I am beginning to view more coherently some of the aspects of intercultural encounters I used to deal with in a ‘one-off’ way. I have a mental ‘map’ or ‘checklists’ of the sort of situations I am likely to need to deal with and am developing my skills to cope with them. This means that I am more prepared for the need to respond and adapt to the demands of unfamiliar situations. I am quicker to see patterns in the various experiences I have and I am beginning to draw conclusions without having to seek advice. I find it easier to respond in a neutral way to difference, rather than approving or disapproving.

Level 3 Full
Many of the competences I developed consciously at level 2 have become intuitive. I am constantly ready for situations and encounters in which I will exercise my knowledge, judgement and skills and have a large repertoire of strategies for dealing with differences in values, customs and practices among members of the intercultural group. I not only accept that people can see things from widely varying perspectives and are entitled to do so, but am able to put myself in their place and avoid behaviour I sense would be hurtful or offensive. At this level of operation I am able to intercede when difficulties arise and tactfully support other members of the group in understanding each other. I am confident enough of my position to take a polite stand over issues despite my respect for the viewpoint of others.

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O’Dowd (2010) argues that questions and sections of both rubrics and portfolio design, shared with students at the onset of an intercultural experience, “are vital for increasing student awareness of what the learning outcomes of telecollaborative activity can be” (p. 355). In other words, students can be presented with rubrics throughout a course, or asked to gradually compile documents for a portfolio, and through teacher guidance and classroom discussion, these can promote culture learning through formative assessment.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have sought to present recent discussions surrounding culture and language teaching and relate these to the use of CALL. The key point we hope to have made is that L2 educators, now more than ever, need to take into account the complex, multi-faceted ever-changing nature of culture that characterizes today’s world—physical and online. This certainly makes addressing culture in L2 teaching a more complex task than representing a monolithic, static view of culture, yet it opens the doors to an exciting, dynamic but also critical approach which can be enhanced through CALL and in particular Internet technologies.

The view of culture learning we have presented regards not only knowledge of cultural products, practices and perspectives but the acquisition of intercultural competence and awareness which is not specific to any culture but which is transversal and allows individuals to ‘step outside of their own shoes’ and effectively communicate in varying physical and online cultural contexts and understand different perspectives. The Internet offers a rich source of authentic cultural material and an environment for intercultural learning to take place with multiple channels for exploration and modes of interaction with distant learners. However, as we hope we have shown, it is not the technology or the resources themselves which enhance culture learning but the uses to which they are put, the tasks and activities which are designed to lead the learner through a journey of intercultural understanding where they can develop the attitude, knowledge, skills and critical awareness to become active citizens of the world. Learner-centered pedagogic approaches which arouse students’ curiosity in other cultures, lead them to adopt ethnographic techniques in their explorations of other cultures by accessing resources and communities online that can lead to intercultural learning. The factors that can contribute to or hinder learning are many, and increase with technological and social changes. Future researchers will have to find methods which can account for this multiplicity of factors—the diversity of individual language learners but also of their educational, social and political environments, the interaction of global, local and emergent online cultures, the affordances of different online environments and tools for culture learning, and the relationship between formal and informal learning. Despite the many challenges, we believe that we cannot ignore the educational value of teaching and learning about different cultures and perspectives, acquiring an intercultural stance and a sense of critical cultural awareness.
NOTES

1 As described on the official website of the Council of Europe, the CEFR provides thorough descriptions of "i) the competences necessary for communication, ii) the related knowledge and skills and iii) the situations and domains of communication." In addition to descriptions of overall general competences, the CEFR "defines levels of attainment in different aspects of its descriptive scheme with illustrative descriptors scale."

2 The 7 "critical" languages addressed by the NSLI and the NSLI Youth Program are: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Hindi, Korean, Persian (Farsi), Russian, and Turkish.

3 Starting in 1971, Project Gutenberg set to digitize and archive cultural works that have received copyright clearance in the U.S. and can enter the public domain. The project is based on volunteers and involves cultural works in numerous languages and formats. http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page

4 The Digital Libraries Initiative "sets out to make all Europe’s cultural resources and scientific records — books, journals, films, maps, photographs, music, etc. — accessible to all, and preserve it for future generations." At the time of writing the European portal (http://www.europeana.eu/portal/) reports that it links to 6 million digital items — images, texts, sounds, videos some famous and other hidden treasures from Europe’s museums and galleries, archives, libraries and audio-visual collections.

5 http://www.secondlife.com — N.B. Second Life is only accessible to adult users so suitable only for higher education students.

6 An avatar is an onscreen representation of the user.

7 http://arc.sdsu.edu/voices/

8 This type of activity has been called networked-based language teaching (Warschauer & Kern, 2000), Internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education (ICFLE) (Belz & Thorne, 2006), telecollaboration (O’Dowd, 2006a) and online intercultural exchange (O’Dowd, 2007).

9 http://www.language-exchanges.org/

10 http://mixi.jp/

11 http://www.soliya.net

12 Go to http://www.youtube.com and search for the word 'Soliya'.

13 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oo8T2_uBaU

14 This approach is also known as a sociocognitive approach (see Reinhardt, 2008).

15 http://forums.lemonde.fr/perl/wwwthreads.pl

16 See Chapter 10 in this volume on online gaming.

17 http://bloggingenglish1.blogspot.com


19 See, for example, the blog of one student who started blogging for the course in October 2007 and has continued ever since: http://cla83.blogspot.com/

20 See Fantini’s list of assessment tools http://www.sit.edu/SITOccasionalPapers/feil_appendix_f.pdf

21 For instance the INCA project http://www.incaproject.org/en_downloads/23_INCA_portfolio_English_final.pdf

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do the issues brought up in this chapter relate to your own context and practices?

2. After having read this chapter, if you were asked to define ‘culture,’ what definition would you give and how would you go about ‘teaching’ this concept?

3. Which of the practices described in the chapter do you think you could implement?

4. What role, and how much responsibility, do you think FL teachers have to effectively teach culture in the FL classroom?

5. How would you incorporate the Internet into your classes to teach culture? What challenges would you face? Find an Internet resource that you feel would be useful for focusing on products and perspectives. Find a resource for practices and perspectives. Develop a lesson plan for using these resources with your students.

6. Explore an online discussion forum in the foreign language that you teach. What kind of information does it provide about the ‘target culture(s)?’ Would you feel comfortable using it with your students? What considerations would you have to make?

7. Which way of assessing intercultural competence described in the chapter appeals to you the most? How do you assess your learners’ cultural knowledge or intercultural communicative competence, if at all? What factors influence your approach?

8. Would you be prepared to dedicate the time and energy to designing, setting up and monitoring a telecollaborative exchange for your learners? How would you ensure their active participation in the exchange? How do you think you would feel about conflicts if they occurred during an exchange?

KEY TERMS

CALL
culture
intercultural communicative competence (ICC)
sociocultural approach
Web 2.0
Social Web
telecollaboration
ethnographic approach
reflection
Research
An instructor of second-semester beginning Chinese has set up a telecollaboration project with Chinese students because her American students were very keen to learn more about the culture(s) related to that language. In response to questionnaires at the end of the first semester, her students indicated a desire to better understand the relationship between certain practices and perspectives. Specifically, some practices that students had read about in their first-semester materials were very different from their own and they had difficulty understanding and even accepting them. Because her students' competence in Chinese was not sufficient for them to discuss issues in the L2, she decided to set up the project using English as the main language of communication. The partners she found for her students were Chinese students who had been residents in the U.S. for at least 3 years and were enrolled in an advanced English course. She decided to dedicate one of the four 50-minute weekly classroom sessions to Skype sessions with these Chinese peers in which they discussed culture-related issues stemming from short texts they had read or extracts from films (with English subtitles). At the same time, the American students were open to answering any questions their Chinese peers might have about American culture. Students were asked to record their discussions and make these accessible to their instructor. After their chats, they wrote journal entries reflecting on their culture learning. One additional 50-minute weekly session was then dedicated to focusing on language using the contents of students' Skype exchanges. Gradually the teacher encouraged students to attempt to "try out" some of the language they were acquiring in the classroom with their online peers. Students were very enthusiastic about the exchange, but a few weeks after the beginning of the exchange, the head of department told her that she was concerned that the students were spending too much time communicating and writing in English and that there was no need for the Skype sessions.

Discussion Questions
1. From an intercultural competence perspective what arguments could you use to support the integration of the mainly English-language telecollaboration exchange in the Chinese course?
2. How could you demonstrate that culture learning was taking place?
3. How could you demonstrate a connection between the culture learning taking place in the Skype chats and the language learning taking place in the other three classroom sessions?
4. Outline a research project based on the data you have from student interactions and journals that would look into students' understanding of the relationship between practices and perspectives (Standard 2.1) and perspectives and products (Standard 2.2).

Teaching Case
An instructor of intermediate Spanish has set up a telecollaboration project using Spanish and English between her students in the U.S. and intermediate students of English in Guatemala. The aim of the project is for students to learn about each others' cultures and also to discuss global issues which are important to students on both sides, such as human rights and poverty. Once a week partners engage in synchronous audio-video discussions in small groups; students also have to participate in asynchronous online discussions and collaborative writing using a wiki. The students in Guatemala are participating from a computer lab which is well equipped, with webcams, high speed Internet and technicians on hand to help if necessary, and they are all in the lab twice a week, once for video conference and another session to work on the wiki. Some students do not have access to Internet from their homes, however, so need to do all of their work in the lab. The university limits access to certain websites, in particular social networking sites, and Skype is not available on computers. A proprietary software is used for video-conferencing sessions which take place through the Guatemalan University's account. Students in the U.S., on the other hand, have one session a week in the lab for the video-conferences, and the rest of the time connect from their accommodation or libraries where there is a good connection, and no regulations regarding social networks.

After the first two weeks of getting to know each other and exchanging personal information, the students are asked to start working on a collaborative wiki about human rights in the U.S. and Guatemala and are organized into 3 groups of about 8 students, with equal partners from both countries. After a few weeks the teacher explores the wiki to see how students are progressing and notices that there is a considerable amount of content on wiki pages about each individual country, but suspects that much of it is simply copied and pasted from other websites. Looking at the history of the wiki pages, she notices that few of the pages have been edited by more than one person, and on the discussion pages, little activity has occurred. On asking her students if they have had contact with their peers in Guatemala, some report having established contact in Facebook and/or email, others complain that they have tried engaging with their peers outside of the sessions but never get responses to their mails or messages. The teacher is disappointed, and is wondering how to get students to collaborate on the wiki pages, and engage more deeply in the issues and in dialogue with their distant peers (i.e., compare and contrast the situations in the two countries, explore underlying issues and causes, begin to understand the diversity within each of the countries, understand different perspectives and practices).

Discussion Questions
1. What was the pedagogical objective for this task? What were the conditions of this activity (group constellation, specifics of the assignment)? Would you consider this activity a "disappointment"? In what way? From the information you have, what do you think was lacking in this project?
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What do you think were the causes of the lack of communication?
2. What would be the challenges of collaborative ‘product creation’ activities? What could the instructor have done to avoid students’ copying and pasting content? How could dialogue between the distant peers have been promoted?
3. Could this activity have been preceded by other tasks? What kind of support could the learners have been given?

IDEAS FOR ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

- **How do I approach culture teaching in my classes?** Do I focus more on products, practices and/or perspectives? Do I focus on one specific target culture, various target cultures (as may be the case, for example, with Spanish or English), online cultures or global cultures? How can I enable my students to interpret the cultural perspectives that underlie cultural products and practices? Keep a journal recording your plans and aims for class sessions on culture; after these sessions, write your reflections in the journal. Regularly go back and read through your journals to develop hypotheses about your practice. Throughout the course you may want to conduct informal interviews with students to investigate whether students’ impressions of your teaching match yours. You could also develop an end-of-course questionnaire with the same aim.

- **What are the cultural topics that my students want to investigate, and how can I incorporate their cultural interests into my lessons?** Carry out a survey with open questions using an online tool, for example Google docs or Survey Monkey. Look through your students’ responses and find common themes. Select one of the most popular ones to explore in class and design a few lessons around this theme. Collect feedback from your students using another online survey and on the basis of this, design lessons for another of the topics. As an alternative, you could present students with results from the survey and ask them to identify common themes. Based on this, you could organize them into groups and have them do project-based tasks to develop the various themes on a wiki page, as a video, or as an in-class presentation. Students could then provide one another with peer feedback with their impressions of the culture learning that has taken place in each group.

- **What are the global issues that my students are interested in?** How could I enable them to learn about different cultural perspectives on these same issues? Choose one specific current topic and ask students ‘where’ they get their information regarding the topic, e.g., online newspapers (which ones?), television (which channels and programs?), blogs, forums, etc. Record this information in a format where it can be retrieved (learning management system, a wiki, or even paper). Then provide students with 3 or 4 ‘alternative’ sources of online information and ask them to search for additional ones for homework. Encourage students to search for resources where users contribute either through forums, Twitter or wiki-based collaborative production. Develop a chart or guidelines for students to follow to compare the perspectives provided in the various resources. Record the following classroom session in which students are asked to engage in a think aloud protocol based on what they have found. Analyze the recording to identify salient points and bring it to the classroom to discuss with students.

- **Do my students participate in ‘online cultures’?** If so, would they be willing to share their knowledge and experience of these cultures with me and the rest of the class? How could I use their experience and the products, practices and perspectives they bring to share with the class for culture learning? Carry out a survey on your students’ online activities out of class using, for example, the form function on Google docs. Ask students with interesting experiences if any of them would be willing to share their experience and some examples or samples of their online cultures with you and the class. Discuss these individually with the student(s) involved in order to find out more about them before designing a class activity which they would feel comfortable with. Ask the student(s) to provide specific examples of language in use in their online context and develop an in-class task to analyze and discuss what language and culture mean and their role in this specific context. Carry out the activity in class and collect feedback from students.

- **How aware are my students of the origin of their own values and beliefs?** How can I help them to develop critical cultural awareness? Develop a series of activities which will encourage learners to reflect on the origin of their own values and beliefs and to compare their values to those of others. For example, the *Cultura* project has an archive of results from student responses from different cultures to word association questionnaires, sentence completions and situation questionnaires (e.g., ‘What would you do if you saw a parent slap their child in a supermarket?’). You could have your students respond to the same questionnaires and then compare them with those available in the *Cultura* archive. Ask students to keep journals from the very beginning of these experiences, providing them with prompts for reflection. You may want to discuss with students whether they wish to share these journals with other students (e.g., on a blog or wiki), or if they want to keep private journals to hand in to you regularly. Analyze students’ diaries looking for evidence of which activities proved most fruitful in stimulating reflection and critical cultural awareness.
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(p. 211-237). San Marcos, TX: CALICO.


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RESOURCES
It is not possible to provide resources for the multiplicity of languages and cultures which are taught, so the resources provided below regard websites which we feel provide interesting perspectives from a multiplicity of cultures, in particular voices which are perhaps not so commonly heard, resources with news, statistics and surveys from many different countries and finally links to websites related to telecollaboration.

Perspectives

Global Voices is a community of more than 300 bloggers and translators around the world who publish reports from blogs and citizen media, with emphasis on voices that are not ordinarily heard in international mainstream media. This resource is plurilingual. <http://globalvoicesonline.org/>

6 Billion Others offers interviews with the inhabitants of 75 countries on issues such as family, love, happiness, war, values or beliefs in 4 years to interview the inhabitants of the Earth. <http://www.6milliardsdautres.org/>

LangMedia has webpages with resources for many languages and cultures, in particular less widely taught languages. <http://langmedia.fivecolleges.edu/index.html>
International News, Statistics and Surveys


*NationMaster:* A compilation of data from sources such as the CIA World Factbook, UN, and OECD which allows for comparison on a host of statistics, and easy generation of maps and graphs on all kinds of statistics. <http://www.nationmaster.com/>

*World Values Survey* <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

*Pew Global Attitudes Project* <http://pewglobal.org/>

**Telecollaboration**

*Cultura:* This website provides information for teachers about the Cultura project, a teachers’ guide, model site and an exchange tool which will allow teachers to design their own exchange with questionnaires, resources and online fora. <http://cultura.mit.edu/>

*E-Tandem:* This website provides an explanation of what E-Tandem is and how it works, suggestions for tools to use, resources for teachers and learners, and a partner-finding function. <http://www.sl.f.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/etandem/etindex-en.html>

*The Mixer:* This is a free educational site for language teachers and learners to find partners for language and culture learning. It offers a partner-finding function for Skype exchanges and blogs for learners and teachers. <http://www.language-exchanges.org/>

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**About the Authors**

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**Chapter 8**

**Beyond Comparisons: Frameworks for Developing Digital L2 Literacies**

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**PREVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Think of your own experiences becoming “literate” in your first and other languages. How was this experience a process with a beginning and an end, and how was it (or is it) an ongoing process? How might you think of your literacy in the plural, as ‘literacies’?

2. How would you define literacy? What are some problems with traditional definitions of literacy with regard to second/foreign language (L2) learning and teaching? In what ways do you think traditional definitions of literacy are challenged by technology-mediated uses of language and other forms of meaning making?

3. In your experience learning an L2, how did you use comparison as a means to learn about the new language and culture? How was comparison used in learning activities that you did? As a teacher of L2, how have you incorporated comparison as a teaching and learning technique?

4. Examine the ACTFL Comparisons standard below. What aspects of this standard involve the development of literacy as you understand it? How does the notion of comparison and contrast develop critical awareness?

5. Although the standard mentions comparing one’s own language and culture with the language and culture being studied, many teachers believe that the learners’ first language (L1) should rarely, if ever, be used in the classroom. In the case of comparisons, when might it be pedagogically appropriate (if ever) to use or analyze the learners’ L1, or to explicitly contrast L1 and L2 languages and/or cultural practices?