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Building intercultural competence in the language classroom

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Abstract

This article reviews and summarizes the literature on intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence in order to better understand how these notions can impact the cultural component of a foreign language curriculum. Building on various models of intercultural communicative competence, examples of cultural tasks that promote intercultural communicative competence and represent best practices in language teaching and learning are presented and illustrated for classroom integration.

Introduction

The linking of language and culture in the foreign language classroom has been the focus of much scholarly inquiry (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1989; Liddicoat, 2002, Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). With increased globalization, migration and immigration there has been a growing recognition for the need for an intercultural focus in language education. While language proficiency lies at the "heart of language studies" (Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 2006, p. 3), it is no longer the only aim of language teaching and learning. The Standards (2006) define language goals in terms of the 5 C's (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) designed to guide learners toward becoming viable contributors and participants in a linguistically and culturally diverse society.

According to the Standards (2006), culturally appropriate interaction occurs when two individuals engage in a reciprocal conversation based on mutual understanding and an attitude of openness. When language educators plan a standards based curriculum, it becomes clear that language and culture are inextricably linked. Moloney and Harbon (2010) note that within the context of language classrooms intercultural practice "asks students to think and act appropriately within a growing knowledge of the culture within language (p. 281)". This requires instructional planning that provides time and space for cultural exploration and discovery. What kinds of classroom tasks can successfully move students toward intercultural competence?

Research on intercultural competence underscores the importance of preparing students to engage and collaborate in a global society by discovering appropriate ways to interact with people from other cultures (Sinecrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2012). An *interculturally competent speaker of a FL possesses both communicative competence in that language as well as particular skills, attitudes, values and knowledge about a culture.* An interculturally competent (ICC) speaker turns intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships—someone determined to understand, to gain an inside view of the other person's culture while also contributing to the other person's understanding of his/her own culture from an insider's point of view (Byram, 1997).

When language skills and intercultural competency become linked in a language classroom, students become optimally prepared for participation in a global world. This article reviews and summarizes the literature on intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence in order to better understand how these notions can impact the cultural component of a foreign language curriculum. Building on various models of intercultural communicative competence, examples of cultural tasks that promote intercultural communicative competence and represent best practices in language teaching and learning will be presented and illustrated for classroom integration.

What is Intercultural Competence?

Defining intercultural competence is a complex task. At the heart of intercultural competence is the preparation of individuals to interact appropriately and effectively with those from other cultural backgrounds (Sinecrope et al., 2012). As a result, understanding culture becomes an integral component of intercultural competence. Nieto's (1999) definition of culture as, "…the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people. . ." (p.48) makes it difficult to identify which aspects of a given culture should be included in classroom instruction. Furstenberg (2010b) further explains that, "…culture is a highly complex, elusive, multilayered notion that encompasses many different and overlapping areas and that inherently defies easy categorization and classification" (p. 329). An additional complicated dimension of intercultural competence relates to the goal of those who are preparing individuals for intercultural relationships as numerous contexts and multiple models of intercultural competence exist that include international business, study-abroad, international schools, medical careers, living abroad, and K-16 education (Sinicrope et al., 2012). Finally, the fast-paced transformation of

society as a result of science, technology, and globalization, forces intercultural objectives to continuously evolve in order to reflect the needs of modern citizens and communities (Stewart, 2007). It is no wonder that a precise definition of intercultural competence does not exist in the literature.

Although there is no consensus on a precise definition for intercultural competence, there are common themes that emerge from the research literature.

Self-Awareness and Identity Transformation

Various models of intercultural competence attend to different types of self-awareness and internal transformation as necessary initial components in the process of becoming interculturally competent. Bennett's (1993) *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)* charts the internal evolution from "ethnocentrism" to "ethnorelativism" within the context of intercultural interactions. In order to successfully navigate intercultural situations, Bennett (2004) posits that a person's worldview must shift from *avoiding cultural difference* to *seeking cultural difference*. Gudykunst's (1993) *Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Model* explains that those hoping to adjust to new cultural situations must learn to "successfully manage their anxiety in new cultural environments" (Gudykunst, 1998, p. 232). Gudykunst (1993) makes clear that when anxiety about interacting in intercultural situations is too high, sojourners are less likely to accurately interpret the hosts' responses. On the other hand, when anxiety is too low, visitors to other countries engage in conversation believing that they completely understand everything about the foreign culture, and therefore do not remain open to belief changes as a result of what is learned during cross-cultural interactions. This model is often used in training sessions for those planning to live abroad. The training sessions incorporate discussion and role-play so that attendees learn to manage their anxiety in order to effectively communicate with those from other cultures. In Byram's (1997) *Multidimensional Model of Intercultural Competence,* the first factor an individual must address is *attitude*. Byram (1997) uses such words as openness and curiosity to explain his conviction that an individual must remain open to learning about new beliefs, values, and worldviews in order to participate in *relationships of equality*. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) offer a practical suggestion for getting students to consider their own perspectives by collectively recording their preconceived ideas in relation to the foreign culture before the process of discovery begins. This allows the learners to record their perceptions before the unit of study so that they have a reference for comparison once the process is complete.

In addition to the aforementioned models of intercultural competence, scholars stress the importance of self-awareness and internal transformation in the pursuit of intercultural competence (Furstenberg, 2010a; Green, 1997; Kramsch, 2004). For example, when Deardorff (2006) set out to solicit definitions of intercultural competence from university administrators and intercultural scholars, she discovered that both groups privileged the transformation of attitude, including self-awareness and openness to new values and beliefs, as a vital first step to becoming interculturally competent. Regarding the teaching of

foreign languages to secondary school students, Chappelle (2010) emphasizes the significance of exploring identity with Americans who are studying other cultures, and specifically highlights the fact that many students in the United States enter foreign language courses with an unwillingness to consider another point of view as well as a lack of awareness of their own culture. This dilemma is discussed further by Fonseca-Greber (2010), who explains that the main obstacle in a language teacher's quest toward intercultural competency in the foreign language classroom is that few Americans value seeing the world from the perspective of other. Consequently, teachers must be prepared to spend some time guiding students to reflect on their preconceived ideas and perceptions before entering into studies of other cultures in the classroom. The possibility of self-awareness and identity transformation will only exist once students are given the opportunity to recognize where they begin the journey.

Bennet's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)	Gudykunst's (1993) Anxiety/ Uncertainty Management Model (AUM)	Byram's (1997) Multidimensional Model of Intercultural Competence	Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence
Charts internal evolution from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism	Focuses on self-awareness as the key component in building bridges to other cultures	Addresses the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to interact successfully in intercultural situations	Creates a continuous process of working on attitudes, knowledge, internal outcomes, and external outcomes related to intercultural competence

Table 1. Summary of the four major theories and factors that contribute to the development of intercultural competence

Student as Inquirer

When an intercultural classroom environment is described, student learning is frequently depicted as learner-centered, engaging, interactive, participatory, and cooperative (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, 2001; Moore, 2006; *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework, 1993*). Much of the inquiry into intercultural competence defines the student as a researcher, or discoverer of knowledge, viewing the learner much like an anthropologist who explores and investigates a topic both in and outside of the classroom (Furstenberg, 2010a; Kearney, 2010; Lee, 1998; Moore, 2006). Furthermore, 21st century foreign language teachers are no longer expected to transmit detailed information about the culture being studied to learners, rather the teacher assumes the role of facilitator as she guides the learning process in order to actively involve learners as they explore, discover, analyze, and evaluate

meaningful information through primary and authentic texts, audio, video, and media (Byram et al., 2002). In such a learning environment, knowledge is shared, new values and opinions are considered, and students take ownership of their own learning.

Based on the standards found in the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001), Byram et al. (2002) emphasize the fact that since culture is an ever-changing force, foreign language teachers must be prepared to create an environment of curiosity and inquiry in order to guide learners toward intercultural competence. The authors recommend creating an open atmosphere in the classroom and offer an example that allows learners to compare travel guides between the native culture and the target culture. In this situation, the teacher's job is not to provide specific questions and answers in relation to the artifact, rather to pose some open-ended questions to guide learners toward independent discovery of differing worldviews based on common textual material. This places the learner in the role of active gatherer of knowledge and information, thereby minimizing judgment about the culture. Furstenberg's (2010a) approach to intercultural competence in the French classroom, dubbed *Cultura,* serves as a model for involving university students first hand in exchanging ideas and opinions about current events and topics of interest through online forums. Using their native language, American and French students participate in a learning process that guides students toward considering other perspectives. Furstenberg (2010a) reports that her approach does not simply present facts about the other culture, but rather places the French and American students in the role of describing their own culture, beliefs and traditions and "By virtue of engaging learners in a dynamic process of inquiry, discovery, exploration, and interpretation, together with learners from another culture, such a project invariably favors a collective, constructivist approach to learning" (p. 56). Her university students learn by questioning the French students about their cultural practices and products while discovering ways to clarify how American perspectives influence the actions and interactions in their native culture.

Process

One of the most difficult components of preparing students for intercultural competence is assessing and measuring this learning process. Since all students enter the classroom with differing viewpoints and worldviews, it becomes almost impossible to simply expect students to grow interculturally at the same rate. As a result, many researchers of intercultural competence describe the classroom experience as a process (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Moloney & Harbon, 2010). Byram (1997) describes the intercultural learning process as linear. Learners enter the process from different points based on backgrounds, life experiences, and perspectives, and move at different speeds (Byram, 1997). There is no predefined final goal for the students in the classroom, rather each experience becomes its own goal in interculturality (Byram, 1997). Deardorff (2006) explains further the importance of a continuous process toward intercultural competence with her *Process Model of Intercultural Competence.* According to Deardorff (2006),

the journey is never ending as the learner continues to learn, change, evolve, and become transformed with time. Her process orientation model is circular and uses arrows to indicate intersections and movement of the individual between attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, internal outcomes, and external outcomes related to intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2006). Deardorff's (2006) model is open and allows individuals to enter at any point and move freely between categories, sometimes moving ahead, and at other times returning to delve deeper into a concept previously encountered.
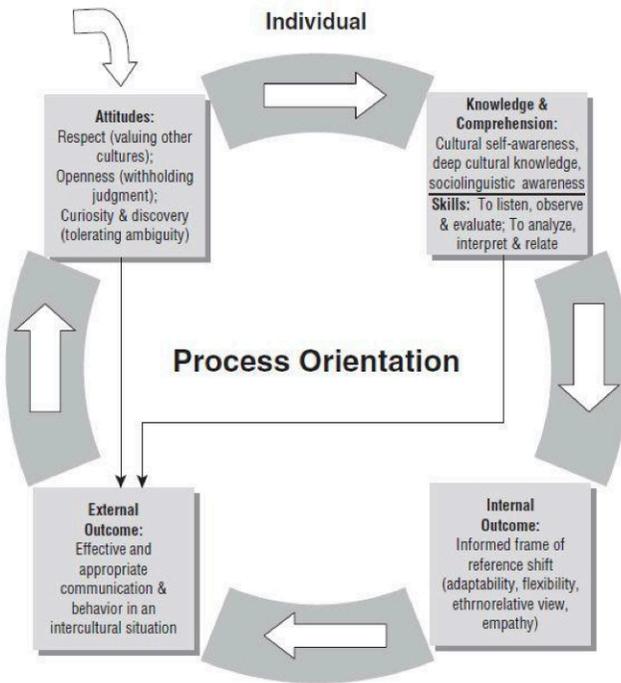
Figure 1. Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2006)

The focus on process in the realm of intercultural competence also informs the types of assessments necessary to record learning and growth. Scarino (2010) proposes an open assessment process that allows student and teacher to work together in documenting learning growth. Portfolios work as effective forms of process-oriented assessments by affording each student the opportunity to interpret meaning, consider judgments, and defend language/culture choices on an individual basis (Scarino, 2010). Schulz (2007) confirms the belief that portfolios are the most effective way to record the process of becoming interculturally competent in the foreign language classroom. She includes in her ideal portfolio space and time for critical reflection, self-evaluation, feedback from peers and the teacher, discussion time, and collaboration (Schulz, 2007). Her final suggestions for teachers planning to use this system for assessing cultural competency include

allowing the learners the time to record new insights, to begin the process in English and transition to using the target language, and to allow adequate time to consider cultural situations in class (Schulz, 2007).

The diversity of definitions and descriptions of intercultural competence reflects the multiple situations in which American citizens are guided toward cross-cultural understandings. Intercultural competence is becoming an integral component as American citizens interact more frequently with those from other countries. Additionally, the notion of preparing globally competent students who understand the importance of the interconnectedness of our modern world is beginning to infiltrate discussions in K-12 education. When Byram (1997) presents the components of intercultural competence, he explains that it involves either interacting with the "other" while continuing to use one's native language or interpreting documents that have been translated into one's native language from another culture/language. In this case, intercultural competence does not require the participant to understand or speak a foreign language. Intercultural communicative competence, however, incorporates the ideas of self-awareness, inquiry, and process as outlined above, but moreover, introduces the notion of communicating in a foreign language as integral to the intercultural situation.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram (1997) depicts someone who gains skills in intercultural communicative competence as an individual who is successful in: building relationships while speaking the foreign language of the other participant; negotiating how to effectively communicate so that both individuals' communicative needs are addressed; mediating conversations between those of diverse cultural backgrounds; and continuing to acquire communicative skills in foreign languages not yet studied. This final characteristic stresses that when an effective intercultural communicator learns to interact with those from a specific culture, a foundation of language and culture learning has been built, and that individual is more likely to continue to gather linguistic information from other cultures in order to broaden her spectrum of intercultural encounters. Gaining intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is about more than simple exchanges, rather it centers on building relationships and engaging in communication even when the participants involved do not share the same worldview (Byram, 1997). What are the objectives of intercultural communicative competence in the context of the foreign language classroom?

In Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997), foreign language teachers are asked to guide learners through the process of acquiring competencies in attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence while using a foreign language. Teachers must lead students through activities in which attitudes about the "other" are considered, and ideally transform the learner. The goal for the students is to start by questioning their preconceived ideas before entering into a process of discovery about the "other" with the intent of becoming more willing to seek out and engage with otherness in order to ultimately experience relationships of reciprocity (Byram, 1997). As students continue to engage in analysis

of other cultures, certain knowledge must be acquired. It is imperative that the foreign language educator allows time to explore the national identity of the home culture and the target culture in relation to history, geography, and social institutions (Byram, 1997). Once learners have taken time to discover the similarities and differences between their culture and that of the target culture, the teacher must craft activities that will prepare students to build relationships with people of diverse backgrounds and languages (Byram, 1997). Next, foreign language students must be provided the time and the space to develop skills in interpreting and relating. When students begin to identify ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings related to cross-cultural situations, they become able to understand and then explain the origins of conflict and mediate situations appropriately in order to avoid misinterpretations (Byram, 1997). Finally, skills in discovery and interaction allow intercultural speakers to identify similarities and differences between home cultures and foreign cultures resulting in successful communication and the establishment of meaningful relationships (Byram, 1997). A successful intercultural speaker seeks out opportunities to meet individuals from diverse cultures in order to share information through communication in a foreign language.

Based on the information provided in Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997), foreign language teachers must reconsider methods for teaching language and culture in the classroom if the goal is to create true interculturally competent speakers of the language. Traditional methods for teaching foreign languages emphasized the importance of students practicing language structures, pronunciation and vocabulary in order to become native like speakers. van Ek (as cited in Byram, 1997) explains that putting the focus on the creation of native speakers actually sets most students up for failure because they are asked to detach from their own culture while accepting the fact that the native speaker holds the power in the interaction. This inhibits growth toward intercultural competence, as the learner is not given equal opportunity to bring his/her beliefs into the conversation. Rather than pushing students toward using a foreign language like a native speaker, language teachers should guide students toward using language that structures new discoveries about the "other" and about themselves (Byram, 1997). The focus shifts from preparing students to communicate without error in order to survive a foreign culture to communicating openly in order to build relationships so that they can thrive in a foreign culture. When the teaching of intercultural communicative competence includes models of reciprocal relationships in which students play the role of a "social actor", students experience the mutual discovery of another language and culture, and language classrooms become places where students and teachers consider questions of values and morals, which can ultimately promote the notion of democracy (Byram, 2003).

The activities that follow exemplify best practices in intercultural communicative competence that build on the theories delineated in this paper. These learning tasks serve as exemplars and are designed to assist teachers in building interculturality among language learners within the context of the foreign language classroom.

ICC Activities for the Foreign Language Classroom

Example 1: *Cultura* online blog exchange

The Internet has made it considerably easier for foreign language teachers to create an environment in which meaningful interactions between American students and students of the target culture can take place. In Furstenberg's (2010a) *Cultura* program, American students studying French engage in online discussions with French students learning English by comparing and analyzing texts of a similar nature derived from both cultures. During the online experience, students from two different cultures are expected to formulate questions for each other in order to fulfill the objective of becoming more open to the other's viewpoint during the perspective exchanging process. All participants write in their native language, but read in the target language, and sessions in the classroom take place entirely in the target language as an extension of what is discovered online. The students involved compare materials such as surveys, films, websites, literature, images, and video. For example, the teacher may ask the students to compare the websites for the two schools involved in the web-based exchange. Based on these website observations, students begin a process of inquiry leading to mutual cultural discovery of the differences and similarities between the two schools. Students from both cultures not only obtain vital information about the foreign culture as a result of having their questions answered, but more importantly are provided the opportunity to present their perspective thus, becoming more aware of their own culture in the process.

Furstenberg (2010a) describes her program as a process of negotiation, in which students work together to make observations, craft hypotheses, and search for patterns, while simultaneously confronting and pondering their own attitudes, beliefs, and values. Online activities, like the one employed by Furstenberg (2010a), guide students toward becoming more open to other perspectives while simultaneously creating the opportunity for students to inquire further into explanations of their own cultural beliefs and actions. Through this never-ending journey of inquiry, students encounter many of the themes weaved throughout intercultural competence such as, self-awareness, student as researcher, and the importance of process. This type of classroom environment creates possibilities for attitude transformation, as well as the acquisition of knowledge of other cultural norms, institutions, and beliefs. Students obtain real-life skills in interacting with others via the online forum. This type of exercise also increases students' acquisition of new vocabulary and grammar structures in the target language through the reading of online material and blog posts from the foreign students.

Example 2: Attitude exploration with OSEE tool

It is vital for students to consider their preconceived ideas and attitudes before entering into the intercultural competence process. The OSEE tool (Deardorff/ Deardorff, 2000) was created in order to help learners analyze their attitudes toward others at the beginning of the intercultural process. OSEE stands for:

- O: Observe what is happening
- S: State objectively what is happening
- E: Explore different explanations for what is happening
- E: Evaluate which explanation is the most likely one

In the foreign language classroom, the teacher may choose to present a film clip on a topic of interest related to the curriculum. For example, a Spanish teacher locates a video clip representing a *Quinceañera*. The teacher begins by presenting the video with the sound off so that students are solely engaged by the images, actions, and interactions thereby providing an opportunity for students to focus completely on what they see during the observation.

During the viewing, the teacher asks the learners to address the letter **O** by simply asking them to **Observe** the actions and interactions seen on screen. After viewing, students address the letter **S** by **Stating** or listing the observable actions without describing the situation as desirable or undesirable. The next step begins with the letter **E** which guides classmates to work in small groups **Exploring** the explanations embedded in the actions and interactions of the target culture. This level of **OSEE** requires students to have sufficient background knowledge of the culture in question, or more specifically the cultural situation being observed (Deardorff, 2011). This may also be an appropriate time to allow students to work together as anthropologists engaging in research and investigation as they explore the cultural viewpoints driving the actions in the film. In the final step of **OSEE**, the learners practice **E** by **Evaluating** the possible explanations in order to choose the most appropriate rationale for the behavior seen in the film clip. This stage is the most difficult due to the fact that human interaction does not follow preconceived rules therefore, many factors must be considered in order to appropriately assess the situation in question. Students may need to continue to collect information about the foreign culture in order to successfully complete the evaluation level of **OSEE** (Deardorff, 2011).

Deardorff (2011) explains that when students reach the final stage of **OSEE**, they are prepared to enter into the conversation. The teacher may choose to present the video a second time with the sound on to allow the learners to hear the target language. In response to the video, teachers may create opportunities for practicing the target language while asking students to refer back to the cultural guidelines learned during the investigation **(OSEE)** process. By promoting communicative activities such as conversations, dialogues, role-plays, skits, and scenarios, the teacher creates an environment in which the concepts of intercultural communicative competence can be practiced. This exploration activity creates space for learners to consider their preconceived ideas about people from other cultures so that negative beliefs are transformed during exercises focusing on objective observation, research, and evaluation.

Example 3: Documenting transformation collectively

It is important to provide evidence of growth to students so that they can see the benefits of the intercultural process. One simple way to do this is to gather students together around a large piece of paper on the first day of a new cultural unit of study, and ask students to share words and ideas that quickly come to mind in relation to

the topic (Byram et al., 2002). For example, a German classroom may be starting a unit on Berlin. As students come up with vocabulary describing their views of Berliners, the teacher records their initial perceptions on paper to use as a reference point throughout the unit of study. During the unit on Berlin, the teacher locates meaningful statistical data regarding the age, race, and religion of citizens in Berlin, as well as information related to careers, housing, and past times. Students take time to analyze graphs, surveys, newspaper articles, websites, and advertisements in order to discover basic information about the citizens living in Berlin. The teacher's role is not to prepare questions and answers related to the texts explored, rather the teacher encourages the students to freely discover contrasts and connections between the citizens of their city and the citizens of Berlin. At the end of the Berlin unit, students reconvene around the original piece of paper, which documented their preconceived ideas, and converse about the changes that have taken place in their attitudes and beliefs. A new piece of paper is filled with discoveries based on factual information researched in the classroom and online during the unit of study. Tech-savvy teachers can alter this activity slightly by preparing a before-and-after template on padlet.com or popplet.com. Students can record their perceptions online and have access to these documents throughout the duration of the unit.

In relation to Byram's (1997) *Model of ICC*, this activity provides time for learners to record and consider their preconceived attitudes toward citizens of another culture. The goal of the activity is to open students' eyes to the fact that many of their perceptions are not based on factual information. As the teacher provides adequate time for gaining knowledge about the target culture while encouraging students to make meaningful connections between the home and target culture, learners begin to experience the process of identity transformation as informed perceptions of German culture replace incorrect preconceived ideas. This activity provides many opportunities for students to gain skills in comparing and contrasting two distinct cultures.

Example 4: Values in proverbs

Through the study of proverbs, students can begin to uncover the cultural values expressed in language (Hiller, 2010). Since proverbs are often inaccessible to outsiders because typically they are handed down in families from one generation to the next, a unit of study on proverbs would provide a way to explore the attitudes of those from another culture. A teacher in a French classroom begins a unit on proverbs by asking students, "What is a proverb?" and "Did you know that many proverbs originated in France?" in order to evaluate learners' background knowledge on the subject.

Once students have had time to share their prior knowledge, the teacher prepares students to complete a jigsaw learning task by researching basic information about proverbs. Learners are placed in home groups consisting of four individuals. Each individual selects one topic upon which s/he becomes an expert. Students choose one of the following topics to research:

- Group 1: What are proverbs? What are some original sources of proverbs?
- Group 2: Who generally uses proverbs while speaking?
- Group 3: How do proverbs reflect cultural values? Give examples.
- Group 4: Why are many French and English proverbs similar?

Once students have selected the topic of their choice they move to their respective expert groups and begin to collect information, summarize and share the most important findings. Students in the expert group discuss and record the newly acquired information and return to their home groups where each member presents information about his/her topic until all four topics have been summarized. Each group prepares a poster synthesizing the information gleaned from this project and present the results.

The follow-up activity focuses on the exploration of French proverbs through an envelope activity. In pairs, learners work together to match five French proverbs with their English equivalent. This provides an opportunity to see that numerous proverbs used in American culture have their origins in the French culture. In addition, this task encourages students to use their knowledge of French vocabulary and grammar to extrapolate the appropriate English equivalent. Some possible proverbs for inclusion are:

- *Vouloir, c'est pouvoir.* [Where there's a will, there's a way.]
- *Tout est bien qui finit bien.* [All's well that end's well.]
- *Tout ce qui brille n'est pas or.* [All that glitters isn't gold.]
- *Paris ne s'est pas fait en un jour.* [Rome wasn't built in a day.]
- *On ne peut pas avoir le beurre et l'argent du beurre.* [You can't have your cake and eat it too.]

As the class takes time to discuss the appropriate responses, the teacher can ask students to consider the values shared by both cultures as well as how the specific vocabulary and language used in the proverbs demonstrate different perspectives and viewpoints. This exercise serves the dual purpose of engaging learners in considering their own linguistic and cultural background alongside that of the target culture, a vital component of intercultural communicative competence (Chappelle, 2010).

Students are then asked to imagine themselves living with a family in France as an exchange student. The scenario goes as follows: To welcome you, the host family hosts a dinner party. While engaging in conversation at the party, a particular phrase is used that makes little sense to you as an American. You ask for clarification and discover that it is a proverb, but find it extremely difficult to grasp the meaning of the phrase. You search the Internet for the meaning behind the proverb and how it reflects and relates to French culture. Once the scenario has been explained carefully, the teacher hands out a different French proverb to each student, or to small groups of students, and asks them to engage in research related to the proverb. When finished, the students share their discoveries with the entire class so that French values can be uncovered, documented, and considered.

As a culminating activity, teachers ask students to use L2 to create unique proverbs that are relevant to their lives. Each student is asked to write an original proverb in the target language that relates to their life. This provides an opportunity for students to be creative and craft something meaningful, thus making the learning experience more powerful. Once students feel confident about their written proverb, their assignment is to create an avatar using voki.com. This free Web 2.0 tool allows students the opportunity to create a character who speaks the target language. Voki.

com is equipped to present short speeches in most of the foreign languages taught in American school systems. On the final day of this lesson, the students participate in a gallery walk equipped with computers and head phones to watch and listen to the Voki presentations. Students record the main idea of the proverb and try to identify who created the Voki.

Example 5: Artifact exploration

When artifacts related to practices of the target culture are presented alongside open-ended questions to students in a foreign language classroom, an opportunity is created in which learners gather information independently in order to become more knowledgeable about cultural practices and beliefs. This activity presents a model representation of the teacher working as facilitator in the classroom while students do the work of evaluating information about the target culture (Byram et al., 2002). In a Chinese classroom, the teacher creates a context by asking learners to imagine being an American living in China who gets invited to a friend's birthday party. Upon arrival, the American student sees that the objects found at a birthday party in China are different from what is typically seen at a birthday party in the United States. The student notices that long noodles in bowls are being served for dinner, the cake is decorated with fruit, and a tray with multiple objects (i.e. coins, musical instrument, book) is sitting on a table near the presents (typical for a first birthday).

Once the context is introduced, the teacher asks students to work in small groups to inquire about the birthday artifacts. Students are put into groups and each group is given a different object to consider. The teacher explains that students are not allowed to research their artifact, but rather are encouraged to make assumptions about the item based on background knowledge. Students begin by recording the name and purpose of the object, as well as the impression students have of people from China based on the object. Once finished, small groups share their ideas with the entire class as the teacher plays the role of mediator. This creates an opportunity for the teacher to see what attitudes students have about Chinese people at the onset of the lesson, while also helping students to become self-aware of any preconceived notions they may have about the Chinese people and practices.

The second part of the lesson asks learners to engage in inquiry related to their object. Once they have become aware of their preconceived notions, it is imperative to allow time for discovery learning so that cultural facts can be uncovered. Students are provided the following open-ended questions by the teacher to guide their research about their specific artifact:

- Who would use it? What is its purpose? When is it used at a birthday party? Why is it used at a birthday party?
- Did you discover a connection between Chinese culture and your native culture?
- Were any of your original ideas proven true or false?

By using research tools to help reveal cultural facts, students learn that knowledge about cultures can be gained through inquiry. It is effective to have students present their findings to the class using an iPad app like StoryKit or a Web 2.0 tool like Glogster. This phase of the artifact exploration lesson not only guides

learners in independently uncovering knowledge about other cultures through research, but more importantly it creates an opportunity for learners to practice skills in comparing and contrasting so that connections are made between the target culture and home culture.

Once informed about Chinese practices at birthday parties, the learners can engage in activities that instill skills in communication. The teacher can provide input on such topics as manners at a Chinese birthday party, ingredients needed to make a Chinese birthday cake, or how to shop for and buy an appropriate gift for a birthday party in China. These extension activities create time and space for the learner to connect communicative skills to the intercultural context of a Chinese birthday party. As the teacher continues to guide the learners in how to appropriately communicate in the target language, the learner is able to connect vocabulary, grammar, and culture in a meaningful way. This builds on the skills needed for intercultural interactions and fulfills the essence of intercultural communicative competence in that learners become equipped with the tools needed to engage in reciprocal relationships with those from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

If teachers want to prepare students for success in a globally interconnected world, intercultural competence must form an integral part of the foreign language curriculum. Researchers have identified themes (e.g. identity transformation, student as inquirer, process) that characterize an ICC classroom that can assist teachers in creating learning tasks that will move students toward intercultural competence. When intercultural competence is an integral part of the language classroom, learners experience how to appropriately use language to build relationships and understandings with members of other cultures. They can examine their own beliefs and practices through a different lens, negotiate points of view different from their own, and gain an insider's perspective of another culture.

The activities presented in this paper represent a variety of approaches to teaching and assessing intercultural competence based on recognized theoretical frameworks on interculturality. By including such activities in the foreign language curriculum, students begin to see how their attitudes, knowledge, and language skills can affect their intercultural experiences. As a result, students will gain an understanding of how to enter into intercultural situations with an open mind, resulting not only in more successful communication, but in building meaningful relationships with target language speakers.

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