



# Languages for Today's World

## DIMENSION 2006

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## **Review and Acceptance Procedures** **SCOLT *Dimension***

The procedures through which articles are reviewed and accepted for publication in the proceedings volume of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) begin with the submission of a proposal to present a session at the SCOLT Annual Conference. Once the members of the Program Committee have made their selections, the editor invites each presenter to submit the abstract of an article that might be suitable for publication in *Dimension*, the annual volume of conference proceedings.

Only those persons who present *in person* at the annual Joint Conference are eligible to have written versions of their presentations included in *Dimension*. Those whose abstracts are accepted receive copies of publication guidelines, which adhere almost entirely to the fifth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The names and academic affiliations of the authors and information identifying schools and colleges cited in articles are removed from the manuscripts, and at least three members of the Editorial Board and the editor review each of them. Reviewers, all of whom are professionals committed to second language education, make one of four recommendations: “publish as is,” “publish with minor revisions,” “publish with significant rewriting,” or “do not publish.”

The editor reviews the recommendations and notify all authors as to whether their articles will be printed. As a result of these review procedures, at least three individuals decide whether to include an oral presentation in the annual conference, and at least four others read and evaluate each article that appears in *Dimension*.

## 2006 SCOLT Editorial Board

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## Introduction

The theme chosen for the joint conference of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) and the Florida Foreign Language Association (FFLA) in Orlando, Florida, February 16-18, 2006, was “Languages for Today’s World,” and the articles included in this volume address the topic in a variety of ways. Readers may observe that the majority of the selections connect the theme either to various manifestations of culture or to electronic resources, and in several cases both elements are central to a particular article. It would perhaps be naïve of the editor or readers to make too much of the predominance of these features. On the other hand, an interest in culture and technology may indeed reflect some of the current concerns of language professionals as we move from the national “Year of Languages” campaign of 2005 to a lengthier, decade-long (2005-2015) initiative labeled “Discover Languages.”

In “Engaging Students in the L2 Reading Process,” Marcia Wilbur argues convincingly that many second language (L2) teachers are so eager to develop oral communication skills that they too frequently view reading as an advanced skill that can be postponed to a later period and overlook its power as an integral part of all stages of language development. Wilbur, on the contrary, thinks of reading as a clearly developmental construct, and while maintaining a special focus on authentic texts, she offers a progression of pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities that can facilitate skills development.

Jean LeLoup and Robert Ponterio, whose names are familiar to thousands of L2 teachers acquainted with the popular FLTEACH Web site, invite language professionals to participate in an initiative that promises considerable benefit to those eager to take maximum advantage of electronic resources to enhance their teaching. “FLTEACH Project: Online Database of Model Lessons with Cultural Content” describes a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities that has facilitated the creation of an online database of Standards-based lesson plans that incorporate authentic materials and sound pedagogy for the dissemination of cultural content. Following their description of the program from its inception through its current structure, the authors offer readers an opportunity to become actively engaged in the development of the project.

Further addressing the possibilities of utilizing technological resources to the fullest extent, Zachary Jones and Bernice Nuhfer-Halten suggest in “Uses of Blogs in L2 Instruction” ways that an immensely popular communication mode can be used creatively in the classroom, both to develop students’ language proficiency and to enhance their understanding of the cultures of those who speak the languages they are learning. In addition to citing a number of strengths and limitations of blogging, the authors suggest a variety of activities that have proved successful in their own institution and record some of the reactions of students who have participated in their blogging project.

Kenneth Gordon's "Developing a Contemporary French Civilization Course: An Annotated Review of Internet Resources" offers yet another bow to technology. Concerned that the typical L2 educator lacks sufficient time to sift through the seemingly infinite number of Web resources that promise much, yet often deliver too little, Gordon assumes a leadership role in directing teachers of French Civilization courses to timely, accurate, and often entertaining Web sites. Although the author is primarily concerned with contemporary French and Francophone civilization, a large number of the Web sites he examines and his comments on them will prove useful to those teaching French at any level.

Teachers of Spanish have in recent years become increasingly aware of opportunities to participate in pilgrimages, mini-pilgrimages, or simply brief visits to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, as educational and tourist organizations seek ways to entice teachers and students at secondary and post-secondary levels to travel as groups or individuals to replicate the experiences of those who centuries ago ventured for hundreds of miles, usually by foot, to one of the three great medieval pilgrimage sites. Steven M. Gardner, Carlos Mentley, and Lisa Signori describe a modern-day pilgrimage to Santiago in "The Road to Compostela: An Immersion Experience in Germany, France, and Spain." The unique feature of their program is its involvement of students and teachers of different languages in a venture that provides an opportunity for all participants to experience a part of the pilgrimage in three different countries. Particularly impressive are the amount and quality of preparation required of participants in their program, and the authors' discussion of practical concerns should prove invaluable to anyone contemplating a similar experience.

In "Talking About Music: Ethnographic Interviews on Traditional Hispanic Songs," Paula Heusinkveld offers a special take on the connection between culture and traditional music. She discusses ways in which students can become truly engaged in the cultural underpinnings of the authentic music they examine in the foreign language classroom through their pursuit of opportunities to discuss with native speakers the memories, overall impressions, and special associations they experience when they hear particular songs. In addition to providing several useful activities that can be adapted for language classrooms at many levels, Heusinkveld includes both a "Music Self-Awareness Survey" that might be used as a point of departure for those interested in replicating her organizational framework and a list of "Selected Resources for Music in the Foreign Language Class," which will prove especially useful to teachers of Spanish.

"Teaching and Learning American Sign Language in U.S. Schools" represents a dramatic departure from the type of article many readers would expect to encounter in the proceedings volume of a "foreign language" conference. Yet it is precisely because the subject matter will be viewed by some as being beyond the purview of our profession that Rebecca Burns-Hoffman, Jennifer Jones, and Christie Cohn argue passionately that L2 teachers at all levels need to reflect upon the content of their article. Following their review of the history of sign language linguistics, the authors discuss the importance of American Sign Language (ASL) among the world's languages, as well as the reasons for its current popularity and



their concern that it has not been accorded the prominence it deserves from government agencies and educators. Finally, and of greatest importance to those of us who teach second languages, the authors provide a concrete list of ways in which professional language educators can support the teaching and study of ASL in the United States.

The editor calls to the attention of readers the fact that at the time the articles were being prepared for publication, every Web site and electronic source cited in this volume functioned perfectly. However, one of the downsides of our newer technological tools, particularly Web sites, is that they are remarkably fluid, so much so that major Web sites can have their addresses slightly altered, be completely renamed, or simply vanish overnight; and access to online journal articles and other electronic resources is often susceptible to limitations as to how long they may remain posted. That having been said, the editor of *Dimension 2006* is confident that all readers will find at least two or three of the articles not only engaging reading, but perhaps useful resources that will make them want to keep the volume available as a convenient reference tool.

C. Maurice Cherry, Editor  
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## Acknowledgments

A volume of this type is the product of considerable work by many individuals. Most critical, of course, are the efforts of those whose work has been selected for publication. The involvement of the authors is required through several stages over a period of as many as 9 months, beginning with the screening of the abstracts submitted for possible conference presentations. Those invited to prepare such sessions must then decide whether the concept underlying a specific presentation appears suitable for development into an article. A potential writer must then prepare a separate abstract for a proposed written contribution and subsequently be invited to develop it into a manuscript. Authors whose work is viewed most favorably by members of the Editorial Board and the editor must then sift through a variety of general and specific requests for changes, suggestions for improvement, and, in some cases, recommendations for additional research before they prepare revised manuscripts. Even after they submit their final drafts, contributors are often asked to supply last-minute clarifications of wording, provide additional bibliographical information, submit authorization for the reprinting of published material, or verify the spelling or punctuation in a title or quotation that may strike the editor as being highly unusual.

The editor is delighted that *Dimension 2006* represents work by 13 authors from seven states and are equally pleased that the geographical backgrounds of the members of the Editorial Board include readers from 11 states, both within and beyond the SCOLT region. Each reader carefully evaluated several articles, gave a global assessment of the assigned manuscripts, based on the overall quality of each piece and its likely appeal to our readership, and provided detailed suggestions for changes that needed to be made in content, organization, and wording. In several cases the readers were able to steer the authors of an article to background material that was either helpful or essential to the preparation of a revised manuscript. In some cases those who reviewed a particular paper were unanimous in their praise. More often than not, however, the assessments varied to the extent that the editor was required to exercise judgment as to which articles could be most easily revised and which would have the broadest appeal.

As always, the Board of Directors of SCOLT and the *Dimension* editor are particularly eager to acknowledge the substantial support that has been provided to us by the Administration of Valdosta State University. Without the space and support services they have been willing to share, the publication of *Dimension 2006* would never have been a reality.

C. Maurice Cherry, Editor  
Furman University

# 1

## Engaging Students in the L2 Reading Process

**Marcia L. Wilbur**  
*The College Board*

### **Abstract**

*This article will consider a necessary departure from more traditional paradigms, where speaking skills are the primary focus and in which reading is viewed as something intermediate or advanced learners do with authentic literature once they have mastered a particular level of grammatical structures. Instead, reading will be considered as an important component of L2 instruction that, when included along side other input modes, can enrich students' second language acquisition. Concepts and strategies on which to build classroom practices as well as practical suggestions for implementing pre-, during-, and post-reading activities are included. Considerations that place learners at the center of the reading process will help build their confidence and ensure their success.*

### **Background**

As K-16 world language (WL) instructors consider pathways to student proficiency during pedagogical training, in conference sessions with a teaching focus, and in other venues, much attention is given to the development of interpersonal skills and the fostering of person-to-person communication. Second language (L2) reading has historically taken a back seat to verbal communication in terms of its importance in the beginning and intermediate curricula and may be perceived as a classroom activity teachers engage students in if there is time, or as a “reward” for achieving mastery of a particular grammatical structure. Influenced by their own past practices or the way they themselves were taught, teachers may believe that students have to first get through language acquisition before they possess the necessary skills to dissect a piece of text. They may also feel that the goal of language acquisition is to be able to read classical pieces of literature in the target language. Reading and analyzing authentic literature may be seen merely as a supplemental activity in beginning and intermediate WL courses, where “language acquisition” is the focus (Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Tesser & Long, 2000). While the study of literature certainly has merit, engaging in literary criticism may not be the personal goal of 21st-century students. This article examines the reading process as it pertains to many types and styles of texts and offers suggestions for potential ways to equip students to be more able and confident readers.

## Teaching Reading

Second language instructors need to consider the many benefits of engaging in reading as an integral means to second language acquisition (SLA), rather than limit engagement in reading to upper-level literary analysis. Once equipped with the necessary strategies, students are generally able to comprehend reading passages slightly beyond their attained level of output proficiency. In keeping with Krashen's (1985) *i+1* theory of comprehensible input, reading becomes an excellent source of new learning and vocabulary acquisition. However, given the apprenticeship of observation model (Lortie, 1975)—or lack of model, if reading was an infrequent activity—for teaching reading strategies to beginning and intermediate students, teachers may lack the necessary methodology for transmitting those skills. As the result of their own previous language learning experiences, the only teaching of reading classroom teachers may have seen could have been in upper-level L2 literature courses they attended as students (Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Tesser & Long, 2000). Bernhardt claims, “most trained teachers have only had between one and six hours of instruction in the teaching of reading” (1991, p. 177).

A further complication of the issue can be seen in an examination by Gascoigne (2002) of the treatment of reading in an assortment of beginning college-level L2 textbooks. She concluded that the treatment of L2 reading was absent or lacked pre- and post-reading strategies for students and teachers. Because beginning and intermediate WL instruction is widely guided by a textbook coverage model (Chaffee, 1992), the importance of equipping teachers with a sufficient array of strategies for teaching reading is heightened even more. Tesser and Long call for the “explicit teaching of reading in all classes” and define explicit as “making salient . . . the *process* that guides our negotiation with a text to acquire or create meaning from it” (2000, p. 606).

Gascoigne (2002) classifies typical models of reading comprehension into three types. In the *bottom-up model*, readers decipher text word by word, depending on vocabulary recognition, grammar, and a dictionary. It is this first type of reading comprehension activity that causes students to grieve, because of the level of difficulty and the lack of guarantee that the appropriate meaning will be extracted from the text. This approach can undermine students' confidence in their ability to read in the L2. And students who have a low tolerance for ambiguity—those who prefer complete and exact scientific or mathematical-like explanations for every detail—will undoubtedly be frustrated. The *top-down* model focuses instead on the readers, the background knowledge that they bring to the text, and a general comprehension or gist of the text rather than a decoding of each word. Third is the *interactive model*, which considers both the text and the reader, combining the message in the text with the reader's background knowledge to arrive at new knowledge. “Comprehension is achieved when new information gleaned from a text is fused with the reader's existing or background knowledge” (Gascoigne, 2002, p. 344).

Keeping in mind that all learners have preferred learning styles (Bailey, Daley, & Onwuegbuzie, 1999), the author would argue that the interactive model will create a successful learning experience for the greatest number of students. Stu-

dents with a low tolerance for ambiguity will appreciate the learning of specific strategies to deduce meaning, and all will appreciate the success that ensues when reading for making sense of the gist. Teachers must keep in mind that the type of reading piece (e.g., magazine ad, newspaper article, poetry), as well as the purpose for reading it, will help to determine the chosen approach and the depth of comprehension needed.

### **The Reading Process**

Ask any WL teacher how typical students react when an announcement is made to the class that they are about to engage in a reading activity. Students tend to react negatively, because for most of them, reading means a painful exercise in translation—decoding the “wall of words” in an attempt to extract semi-incomprehensible, surface-level meaning about a topic that may be of little interest to the reader. With no choice in the matter and less than enthusiastic effort, cooperative students begin the exercise. Sellers explains that “reading in any language is a cognitively demanding process, involving minimally the coordination of attention, memory, perception, and comprehension processes” (2000, p. 513). It is no wonder that teachers find the teaching of reading a daunting task.

When students are to be introduced to a reading, it is essential that both teachers and students understand the purpose of the reading: for information gathering, for gaining cultural awareness and insights, for literary analysis, and even for fun! Making students aware of the purpose of reading and helping them to understand that it is an additional opportunity to be exposed to meaningful input may help relieve to some degree students’ resistive tendencies.

Much like writing, reading is also enhanced by a consideration of the reading process, comprised of pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading steps or levels of engagement with the text. And the steps are not always linear. Pre-reading can involve reading; comprehension checks occur both during and after reading; and so forth.

### **Pre-Reading Strategies**

While the selection of pre-reading strategies will vary, depending on the purpose, content, and linguistic complexity of the piece, there are some overarching concepts related to building students’ confidence in their capacity to read well in the L2. Pre-reading is a time for equipping students with the tools they will need to unpack the meaning embedded in the text and for over-familiarizing them with the content prior to the actual reading. Students may need lexical tools that can foster additional SLA. But even more critically, they will need the background knowledge essential for framing the content of the reading into a meaningful experience.

As we continue to consider L2 reading as both a means of acquiring new knowledge from the text in which students engage, as well as a language acquisition

opportunity, we are reminded that in order for new learning to be meaningful, students must be able to connect it to their prior knowledge (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). Ruiz-Funes writes that

both prior knowledge (the reader's general knowledge of, or cultural familiarity with, a given topic) and context (as for example, the title of a text, illustrations, etc.) have a significant impact on comprehension, stronger than the teaching of vocabulary or other lexical features, especially for beginning and intermediate L2/FL students. (1999, pp. 515-516)

For L2 reading, learners' background knowledge is comprised of their existing reading strategies, the accrued L2 vocabulary, semantic and pragmatic understanding of how the language functions, personal experience and interest, and a familiarity with the socio-cultural context of the reading at hand. Therefore, before embarking on the application of any text, the effective instructor will consider the piece in light of the group of learners and offer pre-reading strategies that will serve to close the gap on any of the aforementioned background knowledge necessary for success, but not yet evident in students' repertoires.

Because they represent a first exposure to any reading text, pre-reading strategies are critical for numerous reasons. It is precisely students' lack of cultural, linguistic, or intellectual backgrounds that leads to angst and despair about L2 reading. By engaging in pre-reading activities, teachers can help to bridge the gaps between the learners and the text. Pre-reading might include hypothesizing about content based on the title or the setting, identifying historical and cultural references that help to predict implied meanings, using the author's biographical information to predict a tone or point of view, and beginning to interpret simple symbols (e.g., those expressed by colors, animals, weather), as appropriate in the target culture. And the opportunity exists to pre-teach or to review pertinent vocabulary or structures key to comprehending a passage. The reading passage may offer a rich context within which to visit vocabulary and structures; however, these should not be the only pre-reading activities. Most importantly, time spent on pre-reading should help students activate their prior knowledge about the topic.

As we consider prior knowledge, we must discover whether the text resides within students' lived experiences and cultural context. If not, then providing that background knowledge is essential. Bragger and Rice (1999) maintain that when using authentic materials, it is necessary to choose content carefully, keeping in mind the cultural input from the piece. They expand Krashen's (1985) *i+1* theory to include *C+I*, the pattern that represents the content to be presented. If the content is too far beyond the students' realm of experiences and contexts, it will not be effective. Teachers must then consider how to pre-teach background contexts to students prior to the reading, while considering the practices, products, and perspectives of the target culture. Whatever the appropriate context establishment might be, whenever the reading is over, it is equally important for teachers to return to the hypotheses and predictions that students made during the pre-reading phase, so that students can reconsider whether their conjectures were appropriate or if they need to be reshaped yet again. For example, when reading a piece of

authentic literature, students typically consider the author's biographical data as a pre-reading exercise. Perhaps too infrequently, insufficient time is spent during post-reading to draw conclusions about the reading, based on the thought processes that were begun during the pre-reading phase.

Koda (1989) determined that "L1-L2 [first language-second language] linguistic distance has a considerable impact on reading strategies" (p. 537), and that more proficient readers have the tools needed to interpret information embedded in L2 clues. For this reason, it would seem important to draw students' attention to any particular syntactic element in the text that is key to unlocking meaning. One way to equip students is to favor the structure by asking them to skim the passage, searching for all examples of a potentially problematic L2 syntactical feature without actually reading the text. This sort of pre-familiarizing students with the reading before they engage in it can serve to build their confidence, as well as to reinforce the use of significant types of syntax within a context.

Another means of over-familiarizing students with the text during pre-reading is to spend time developing their decoding skills. As a homework activity, students might be asked to list or highlight any unknown vocabulary in the assigned text. Then, working in pairs, students should do all that they can to unravel meaning by considering cognates, word roots, parts of speech, sounds of words, context, and so forth. The L1 may be effective in helping students decode L2 if the language being learned has an orthographic system similar to English. The greater the difference between the two writing or character systems, the less helpful L1 is to the L2 decoding process (Koda, 1989). Nevertheless, students need encouragement to reflect on their metacognitive activity and to share their most effective decoding strategies with other students in the class. Individual students may provide some amazing ideas as to how they personally unravel L2 meanings, and their approaches can be translated into useful new tools for their peers. Asking students to begin by highlighting all the words that they *do* understand in the target language is also a useful strategy for building students' confidence about the skills they have acquired thus far.

An effective way to broach a new reading text, once students are familiar with its context, is for the teacher to read the first two or three paragraphs aloud to them, asking them to simply listen carefully. The instructor may then read the passage a second time and ask students to take notes in the target language about the most important points that they understand. In pairs, students should then write a short summary of the excerpt, followed by sharing some of their summaries aloud with the class. Classmates should be encouraged to add details to the summaries as necessary, based on the reading they have heard. Having shared a few sets of the summaries and discussed them with the class, the teacher should direct students to complete the reading aloud with a partner or at home, if their skills are sufficiently developed. In this way teachers have created an activity that combines all of the modes of communication and have pre-familiarized students with the reading piece before they ever lay eyes on the text. Having heard, discussed, written about, and re-discussed the opening, students have much greater confidence in getting started with a given piece.

Koda also demonstrated that “L2 readers will benefit from explicit vocabulary instruction” (1989, p. 537). WL teachers may wish to facilitate the reading stage by spending time during pre-reading to acquaint students with new vocabulary that is paramount to comprehension. Teachers may wish to consider ways to present the key vocabulary in contextually appropriate ways, such as using pictures, synonyms, cognates, and definitions in the L2. The amount of time spent on pre-teaching vocabulary will depend on the goal. Does the teacher expect students to retain items that may in fact be useful, high-frequency expressions? Or, on the contrary, are some of the terms low-frequency items simply in need of decoding for the understanding of the reading at hand? Just a short amount of time spent on ensuring the understanding of key words and phrases might go a long way towards building students’ comprehension, confidence, and enjoyment of the reading piece.

Vocabulary and structural knowledge alone, however, are not sufficient as pre-reading strategies to help students find meaning in a text, but rather are some of the necessary tools to help unlock the richness within the reading. By first considering the learners’ prior contextual knowledge and subsequently pre-teaching any vocabulary or structures that may overly frustrate students during reading, the teacher will have made great strides towards making reading accessible to the audience. By being sent repeatedly into the text to examine vocabulary that needs to be decoded, or for the purpose of gaining familiarity with a new structural feature prior to the actual reading, students will gain confidence about reading, based on their closeness with the words. It is exactly this over-familiarity with the text that will prepare students for a successful reading experience.

### **Using Authentic Texts**

The current direction of WL education includes the use of authentic texts, that is, those from the target cultures, in the L2 classroom. Possible sources of authentic texts can be the Internet, magazines, newspapers, e-mail, advertisements, literature, or other print material. Thus, teachers are faced with making any authentic text culturally and linguistically accessible to the learners. Teachers need to rely on their own knowledge of the target culture’s products, practices, and perspectives in order to introduce an accurate context to students. Having a network of native speakers can be helpful to non-native teachers of the target language for those cases when the cultural context may be unfamiliar. When instructors choose reading texts beyond the scope of the textbook or textbook series, there are bound to be lexical items that are unfamiliar to students. Sellers discusses the impact of students’ perceptions about the difficulty of L2 reading on their anxiety levels associated with the task (2000). She posits that, “learners should be exposed to authentic texts in ways that reduce their anxiety to minimal levels, so that they do not feel tension that inhibits second language performance and creates resistance to natural language acquisition and learning” (p. 515). Instructors must thus consider how to transform authentic pieces into “comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985) for a given community of learners, thereby minimizing learning anxiety.



There are many ways to make a text salient to the learners: (1) Teachers might consider creating an electronic text to share with students, using the “highlight” and “comment” features in Microsoft Word to add a synonym, cognate, picture, or definition in the L2 for a new vocabulary item. After trying out their decoding skills on the new word, students can click on the word for confirmation of their success. (2) Teachers should feel free to rewrite simplified versions of authentic texts when the goal is to present an interesting or valuable concept from the target culture. During the simplification process, care must be taken to preserve the cultural and pragmatic intentions conveyed by the original rendition, while removing unnecessary, confusing text and replacing higher level vocabulary with simpler counterparts. (3) Assigning pieces of the authentic text to pairs of students and asking them to use a dictionary to select the appropriate meaning based on the context and to rewrite their segment in level-appropriate language can be a meaningful way of teaching students about the selection of correct dictionary meanings and of attending to L2 in language that will communicate meaning to their peers. Teachers may wish to consider the students’ own writing, once completely revised and as error-free as possible, as a source of original reading texts, since classmates share both a similar breadth of vocabulary and the same general level of ability and comprehension.

Instructors must keep in mind that the selection of the reading piece can be as important as the strategies they use to teach students about reading. Any reading text should be chosen because of its intrinsic value. The text will serve to enhance SLA, will provide students with new desirable information, will be culturally enriching, or will be entertaining. The instructor may additionally want to consider which reading strategies will be needed for student comprehension of the chosen piece. Reading pieces ought to be selected to fulfill a particular instructional goal rather than used simply because of their availability.

### **During Reading**

Beginning and intermediate readers need encouragement to read aloud as much as possible, as is the case when young children are taught to read in their first language. Reading aloud with a partner during class can be a good warm-up activity and serves to keep all students focused on the text. The exercise also helps to establish sound-symbol relationships for beginners. Hearing words may also help to trigger comprehension of their meanings. And for auditory learners, blending the visual print with the sound of the text is an excellent way of building language acquisition.

Once again, the purpose of the reading (i.e., what teachers hope students will gain from the text) will determine the types of during-reading activities. Helping novice readers learn to read for the gist and to be tolerant of their own inability to decode every word will lead them away from the temptation to read by translating the words. Summarizing a text can serve as both a during-reading comprehension check and as a post-reading activity requiring students to generalize the gist of a

passage. As a comprehension check, students might be asked to provide a one-sentence summary of the main ideas read thus far. As a possible post-reading activity, students might summarize with a partner or share the summaries that they have written with a small group. The ability to summarize well depends on students' ability to grasp and to acknowledge what information is the most important to the overall text. Hodge (1998) demonstrated that students with mild learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), may have difficulty assigning value to the content of their learning. For this reason, allowing students the opportunity to share summaries with one another is one way to ensure that all students assign the appropriate value to the important messages within the text.

Other types of simple comprehension checks can be used along the way during reading to make sure that students are grasping the overall sense of the piece. Possibilities include the following: (1) Pairs of students can create true/false sentences about the text to share with the class. (2) Working in pairs, students can write complete-sentence answers to any two or three of the questions that accompany the reading, possibly textbook-made questions. Then, students share single answers in any order, without revealing the number of the question being answered. The class listens to the answers and indicates which question matches the given response. (3) Students might draw stick figures or other illustrations of the sequence of primary events in the reading and use the drawings to re-tell the gist of the story to a classmate. Working with another student during these activities creates a sort of "safety net" for students who might otherwise struggle with sense-making.

A final challenge in our microwave culture is to encourage students to engage in multiple readings of a text. Comprehension often requires repeat visits to a passage, and it is through redundancy that students retain information and become quicker at information retrieval (Ruiz-Funes, 1999). Teachers can facilitate multiple readings by sending students back into specific segments of a piece with a particular task in mind. For instance, they could reread the last three paragraphs, verses, or sentences in search of a figurative meaning. These revisits should be guided by the purpose of the reading.

## **Post-Reading**

One of the most common forms of post-reading activities is answering questions about the reading. At early stages, questioning may indeed serve as a means to check comprehension. Over time, however, students should progress to higher-order thinking levels of questions (Stewart & Wilbur, 2005). Beginners might answer simple content questions, such as "who?," "what?," "when?," and "where?" Intermediate readers can begin to provide "why?" and "how?" questions. More advanced students should be asked to consider questions that cause them to draw inferences, to make analogies, to offer new perspectives, and to elaborate. Using

the same short text in subsequent years, while changing the level of questions as the learners progress, is a way to build students' confidence—since they know the text—and to build the skills required to help them become reflective thinkers.

Textbooks may offer post-reading questions that move learners directly from the “who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how?” level directly to reflective and analytical types of questions. Teachers may attempt to move immediately from the easier factual recognition questions through the reflection questions at the same pace. The author's experience is that classroom discussions often fall flat when students are asked to produce on-the-spot reflective answers. When provided with time to discuss reflective questions with their peers, students are more likely to arrive at insightful answers and should be allowed the luxury of time to formulate and articulate their thoughts in the target language. Otherwise, learners can be frustrated by their comprehension of abstract concepts in a piece of text that they are unable to sufficiently and clearly articulate in the target language. By gradually developing leveled questions, students have the opportunity to engage in a more critical reflection of the text. Instructors should consider allowing students an appropriate amount of time to discuss and create meaningful conclusions, inferences, and analogies.

Writing about reading affords students the opportunity to consider how their prior knowledge about the subject, combined with an interaction with the text, has led to the development of new learning or ideologies (Ruiz-Funes, 1999). Students might be asked to summarize a reading, to rewrite a piece of fiction with a new beginning or ending, or to rewrite it from the perspective of a different character or from the vantage point of an inanimate object. These sorts of post-reading activities can be fun, create a means for practicing L2 writing skills, and lend themselves to the continual building of the redundancy needed to cause deep learning.

How teachers assess students on L2 reading is a post-reading consideration. The teacher should determine the specific type of assessment prior to engaging in a text by asking what it is that students ought to gain from experiencing a passage. Teachers may wish to assess whether students have gained cultural or content knowledge, language skills, analytical abilities, and so forth. The author proposes a departure from the traditional approach of “read the text and answer the questions” for the purpose of student assessment. If we consider that beginners are both learning to read and reading to learn, then it might behoove us to first determine if students are developing the necessary tools for successful L2 reading. Beginner-level assessments might focus on the students' metacognitive approaches, asking them to connect the context of a passage to a context that is familiar to the student, to explain how they arrived at a successful decoding of a difficult word, or perhaps to identify the gist or main message of a text. Intermediate students might demonstrate comprehension by summarizing, dramatizing, or explaining a text for their classmates. Only after students have built a solid repertoire of reading tools should they be assessed on their ability to analyze, infer, and interpret a reading passage. Higher-level skills can certainly be practiced by novices, but

pushing students too early to perform at levels beyond their abilities can cause frustration that leads to program attrition. By giving a rightful amount of attention to building L2 reading skills, teachers can ensure that their students' confidence will increase, resulting in more enjoyment of texts and an increased desire to read.

### **Conclusions: Building the Program**

A meaningful and successful WL curriculum considers and recognizes the value of all types of reading as essential input that results in students' SLA. Helping to shepherd novice readers through an understanding of the gist of a passage can serve to build the confidence needed to motivate learners; success is a great motivator (Ellis, 1997). Because advanced WL studies remain an elective subject in most secondary and post-secondary curricula, students are unlikely to commit to advanced study if their L2 experience is riddled with failure and frustration. If students are provided with the tools, strategies, and steps to become competent L2 readers, they are more likely to continue with long sequences of WL study needed to result in eventual L2 fluency.

Recognizing the importance of vertical curricular articulation—making decisions as a department as to when L2 students will learn good dictionary usage skills, reading strategies, and so forth—will alleviate any presuppositions on the part of teachers about what students can do with a reading text, based on their learned skills and experiences from previous levels of study. As Ruiz-Funes (1999) warns,

Adequate transition from intermediate to advanced FL classes is often lacking and students move from one level to the next without the necessary preparation in reading and writing processes and strategy use that would allow them to succeed in the advanced courses (p. 521).

Because working to build students' reading skills may be time-consuming, curricular decisions about how to allocate instructional time must be considered. And since increased anxiety about reading results in even more increases in learner processing time (Sellers, 2000), the investment in teaching beginning and intermediate students to be solid L2 readers will provide great benefits to the overall SLA quest and can eventually result in more efficient readers.

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# 2

## FLTEACH Project: Online Database of Model Lessons with Cultural Content

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### Abstract

*Foreign language teachers are busy professionals who could benefit from ready access to educational materials that address the Standards for Foreign Language Learning and are also useful to their own particular curricula. This article will explain a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities that provides such access through the creation and development of an online database of FL lesson plans that are Standards-based, follow sound pedagogical models, use authentic materials, and focus on cultural content. The article describes the project rationale, the structure of the database, and procedures for submitting lesson materials. Pedagogical models (Interactive Model for Integrating the Three Modes of Communication, the PACE Model, and the Culture 3Ps) are explained and are suggested for submission of lessons.<sup>1</sup>*

### Background

With the advent of the 21st century, the expanded use of technology is evident in nearly every aspect of life. Communication technologies are of prime interest to foreign language (FL) professionals because communication is the main thrust and emphasis in FL teaching (Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot, 1994; Garrett, 1991a, 1991b, 1998; Oliva & Pollastrini, 1995; Phillips, 1998; Terry, 1998). These technologies can put FL learners in direct contact with native speakers (NSs) and authentic materials as never before, and lessons employing such authentic materials have tremendous potential in the FL classroom for directly addressing the goal areas of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (LeLoup, 2000; National Standards, 1999). These technologies are also a means for FL educators to participate in a grass-roots-level exchange of ideas, materials, and lessons that will enhance their teaching and, consequently, the learning of their students.

This article details a portion of an *Exemplary Education Project* under the *Dissemination* category entitled “FLTEACH: A Model for Professional Development and Foreign Language Instruction.” This project is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and is designed to provide an infrastructure for the collection and dissemination of pedagogically sound lessons for FL instruction that use authentic materials from the World Wide Web (WWW) and address the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. (The NEH Grant #ED-22243-02 has a period of 9/1/02-8/31/06.) The primary focus here is on a two-fold project that includes (1) the collection, categorization, and dissemination of online resources and lessons containing rich cultural content that meet rigorous pedagogical standards and (2) the creation and maintenance of a database for dissemination of these materials, which will enhance the humanities content of FL curricula.

### **Project Explanation**

The grant project is an outgrowth of FLTEACH, an electronic discussion list for FL teaching methods (FLTEACH—the Foreign Language Teaching Forum) and its accompanying ancillaries on the FLTEACH WWW site. FLTEACH has been cited as the “FL teacher’s flagship for information and discussion on methods as well as for access to specific teaching materials and other resources” (Finnemann, 1996, p. 6). The WWW home page of FLTEACH (<<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/>>; see LeLoup & Ponterio, 2005) presently serves as a global resource of links to target language sites, authentic materials, and archives germane to FL curricula. As a result of the NEH project, the FLTEACH Web site will continue to serve a clearinghouse function for FL resources and, in addition, will provide the infrastructure for the dissemination of these materials through a searchable database using primary keyword identifiers, where applicable, such as language, level, topic, pedagogical model, grammar structure treated, and language skills addressed. Given the high visibility of the FLTEACH discussion forum and its ancillary Web site, the latter is well positioned to be a national dissemination vehicle for FL resources. Current calculations indicate that the FLTEACH Web site is already widely used by both subscribers and non-subscribers. The entire site received an average of 130,000 total hits per month in 2005, and the primary FLTEACH page received over 11,000 hits per month.

### **Project Rationale**

The central goals of the project are to make available a plethora of instructional resources for teachers and to provide an infrastructure for dissemination of well-designed standards-based teaching materials for use by any FL educator with access to the WWW. The end result of these goals is the enhancement of instruction and an enrichment of the humanities content of FL classes, both of which should lead to an improvement in student language learning. Technology has made



it possible for FL teachers to bring the world into their classroom and make direct connections between their students and NSs of the language of instruction. Ready access to authentic materials, NSs, and actual target language (TL) use will foster sustained study of second languages and their cultural contexts. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999) emphasize cultural knowledge as an integral part of language learning and recommend the tri-part examination of cultural products, practices, and the perspectives underlying them. This exploration of cultural products, practices, and, more importantly, perspectives, is greatly facilitated by using Internet technologies.

More and more FL teachers are employing communications technologies and Internet resources in their instruction to enrich their course content. Indeed, attendance at any FL conference shows that the sessions dealing with technology and use of authentic materials from the Internet are overflowing with participants. Nevertheless, the much-increased access to authentic materials online does not automatically translate into their successful integration into the FL curriculum. Indeed, many teacher-made materials that can be found presently online are conspicuous for their lack of sound pedagogical basis, and frequently FL technology workshops focus too much on technique and not enough on pedagogical application. Teachers need to be able to take advantage of Internet technologies to gain access to quality resources, integrating them in a useful way into the FL curriculum (Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot, 1994; Cubillos, 1998; Garrett, 1991a, 1998; LeLoup & Ponterio, 1995; Martínez-Lage & Herren, 1998; Salaberry, 1996).

### **So Many Materials, So Little Time**

Most teachers have Internet access, either at home, at school, or both. They are able to find much in the way of authentic materials to use in their classroom. However, the creation of pedagogically strong materials that support exemplary humanities teaching is a very time-consuming task. Busy teachers often lack the time for development of sufficient materials of this ilk. The clearinghouse portion of this project solicits, collects, and categorizes quality Standards-based lessons and materials that employ sound pedagogical practice. A number of products created by FL educators and consortia were located and are included in the database. In addition, materials submissions are encouraged from FL educators in general. Such submissions will need to conform to an established format in order to facilitate the categorization and dissemination of these materials in the database. A sample of the format for lesson submission can be found on the Web page (<<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/lessons/>>).

The aim is to provide access to pedagogically sound materials that are rich in cultural content, an area in which FL teachers continually express a desire for assistance. To facilitate searching, the categories of lessons sought follow the topics stipulated by the *Modern Languages for Communication: New York State Syllabus* (NY State Education Department) and represent a broad base of cultural information that is included across all levels of FL instruction. A list of these

topics and their subcategories is supplied on the lesson submission form online and in the online edition of the *Modern Languages for Communication: New York State Syllabus* (NY State Education Department, pp. 21-26). To ensure that these lesson plans will be usable by teachers, materials for inclusion in the database are screened for varied and appropriate cultural content, including adherence to the tri-part approach of products, practices, and perspectives espoused by the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999), attention to the standards, observance of current educational practice, use of sound pedagogical models, and accuracy. If some necessary information or components are missing from the original lesson submission, the author is contacted and asked to supply the remaining data before the lesson becomes active in the database.

### **Pedagogical Models**

Some pedagogical models have been suggested as an aid to lesson plan development. While it is not mandatory that all lesson submissions follow the models completely, they are meant as guidance for teachers who wish to incorporate all or part of the steps involved in these respective models. The models selected as templates for lesson plan and resource submission are the “PACE model” for grammar instruction in a whole-language context (Adair-Hauck, Donato, & Cumo-Johanssen, 2005); the “Interactive Model for Integrating the Three Modes of Communication” (Shrum & Glisan, 2005) for instruction of listening and reading, using authentic materials; and a generalized model presenting the triangulation approach toward the studying and teaching of culture that is advocated by the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999). This triangulation underscores an in-depth consideration of products and practices, along with their concomitant perspectives.

#### *PACE Model*

The PACE Model represents a story-based and guided participatory approach to the teaching of grammar in the FL curriculum (Adair-Hauck, et al., 2005). In this approach, teachers and learners work together to co-construct a grammar explanation for forms salient in a selected authentic text. PACE is an acronym for the steps of the model:

**Presentation:** The teacher foreshadows the grammar explanation through the use of integrated discourse; emphasis is on literal comprehension and meaning.

**Attention:** The teacher assists students in focusing their attention on a particular language form or grammatical structure.

**Co-construction:** Using guiding questions, the teacher and students co-construct the grammar explanation by discovering the underlying patterns or consistent forms.

**Extension:** Further activities enable the learners to use the grammatical structure and to communicate on an interpersonal level.

(Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002, p. 279)

The success that many educators have had with this model stems from the following key features:

- Presentation of grammar in context
- Use of authentic materials
- Focus on structures that are conspicuous in the text
- Co-construction of grammar through guiding questions

The PACE Model advocates presenting language structures in context rather than as isolated, discrete-point items. Second language instruction has evolved from a complete focus on grammatical forms as individual items to be internalized (a bottom-up approach) to the comprehension of language structures as part of the whole (a top-down approach), acquired through meaningful language use (an interactive approach). Contextualized language instruction is accepted as a more effective and efficient way of aiding second language acquisition (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). This model also employs authentic materials, for students need to work with such materials regularly if our goal is to have them function in the TL environment. The challenge of finding authentic materials wherein the grammatical structure or form is truly salient necessitates a new approach to materials evaluation and collection. We need to view all authentic materials from the perspective of what they can help us teach, rather than deciding what to teach and then frantically scrambling to find materials that serve that purpose. The Co-construction phase of the model is a radical change from the teacher-presents/students-take-notes structure so often employed in FL grammar instruction. The “co-” portion indicates collaboration between the teacher and the students to formulate rules about the language feature of interest. With appropriate guiding questions posed by the teacher, students can come to an appropriate understanding of the grammar point and can articulate usage guidelines in their own words, thus establishing ownership of the lesson outcome. They also discover their own language potential and often gain more confidence in language use.

*Interactive Model for Integrating the Three Modes of Communication*

Originally conceived as a six-phase model (Shrum & Glisan, 1994), it has been modified and revised to reflect the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999). The model contains five phases for student activities that can employ any of the communication modes (offered as examples in parentheses):

- Preparation phase:** preview text; predict meaning; activate background knowledge (*interpretive mode*)
- Comprehension phase:** skim for gist and scan for specific information; main ideas and key details determined (*interpretive mode*)
- Interpretation phase:** interpret text; identify cultural products, practices, and perspectives, discuss inferences and opinions of the text (*interpretive + interpersonal mode*)
- Application phase:** create a summary of text and/or create a presentation or product relating to text (*presentational mode*)
- Extension phase:** analyze two texts and compare content and organization (*interpretive, revisited*) (Shrum & Glisan, 2005)

The model is interactive and integrative, guiding the learner through interactions with the text, activities using different modes of communication, and exploration of cultural perspectives embodied in the text. The notion of “text” is very broad, of course, and can be a printed, an aural, or a video sample.

*Culture*

The third “model” is really not a model per se but rather an emphasis on the *Cultures* goal area of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999). The two standards in this area deal with products and practices of the TL culture. The most compelling portion of these standards, however, is the examination of the perspectives that underpin these manifestations of culture. Without this insistence on exploration of the “why” behind actions, articles, and beliefs of the TL society, we run the great risk of trivializing culture by reducing it to facts, figures, and fun on Fridays in the classroom. In our classrooms we frequently confront the skepticism or outright rejection of elements of the TL culture: “Do they really eat that?”; “How dumb!”; “Ugh, what a stupid thing to do!” Our students often do not understand that they too have a culture that may appear strange, different, or unattractive to others. Sometimes just finding out *why* something is done can help students view the TL culture in a more positive light and understand more about the products and practices that pervade the everyday lives of the speakers in the society under study. The *Comparisons* goal area can further students’ comprehension by drawing parallels between TL and native language cultural products and practices. For instance, finding and illustrating in a Venn diagram the commonalities between a *quinceañera* and a *Sweet Sixteen* party can

make much difference in how these celebrations are seen by each culture. Sometimes it helps to look for points of convergence rather than to underscore differences of any proportion.

Sample lesson plans developed using these models are available online on the lesson page. Several sample lessons are online at <<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/lessons/>>. The intent is not to create an all-inclusive list of FL resources but rather to make available a selection of excellent FL cultural materials and resources that can be readily incorporated into the curriculum to enhance its humanities content. The project also gives creative teachers an easy path to follow to share with colleagues around the world their favorite activities that work.

## Online Database

The technical implementation of this project is built upon a Microsoft Access database located on a Web server set up to allow the construction of a Web-based interface. A Web page written in ASP (Active Server Page) code, essentially a combination of HTML code with Visual Basic programming, collects information from and returns information to the user as it communicates with the database via the database language SQL (Structured Query Language). The interface clearly presents options to the user, responds appropriately to requests, formats information for the user, and passes on commands to the database in SQL format for querying or modifying the database. (We explain below the rationale for the format of information collected in the database and give an overview of the interface that the user sees when submitting a lesson plan, but we do not go into the technical details as to how this is accomplished.)

The database design reflects the need to accurately identify and describe the lesson, include contact information for the author, offer useful search categories for locating lessons, and provide access to the actual lesson. The Web interface for submitting a lesson plan follows the basic format of the database record itself (see Appendix). It also includes pop-up information to answer any questions the submitter might have while filling in the lesson plan submission form.

The first few fields request the author contact information: last and first names, e-mail address, and school. These entries allow users to know something about the author, let the maintainers of the database contact the author in case of problems, and provide a route for feedback to the author from other teachers using the materials. The lesson title and brief description serve to uniquely identify the lesson to the users and aid them in browsing for lessons that they might potentially use in their own classes. A number of additional fields not only help describe the lesson but, more importantly, make it possible to search the database for lessons matching certain parameters. The topic and subtopic fields specify the syllabus topic for which the lesson is designed (see the NY State Education Department site for topics and subtopics of the NYSS: <<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/lote/pub/modernl.pdf>>). A link is included in the submission page to help the contributing teacher select the best topic and subtopic to accurately identify the lesson.

The grammar topics field is useful for lessons designed to focus on one or more

specific grammar topics. The keywords field allows searching on words or expressions that do not fit neatly into other categories but that the lesson author has chosen to help describe a particular lesson. The language field is essential to identify the language being taught. The textbook field is helpful in searching for lessons specifically tied to a certain textbook and might also be useful in helping a teacher better understand how a selected lesson may fit into the presentation order of a particular text. The skills-targeted field includes Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Culture, and may certainly represent more than one of these.

Because one of the purposes of the database is to facilitate access to lessons based on sound pedagogical models, a choice of such models is included in a database field for the models described above: *PACE*, *Interactive model*, and *Culture*. A link is included in the submission page to an online description of these models. The class-level field indicates the level for which a lesson was originally intended, though a lesson may certainly be appropriate for a variety of different levels. Finally, the Standards field identifies which of the standards are addressed by a lesson. To indicate that a standard is addressed by a lesson, the submitter simply checks those that are present in the lesson; for instance, *2.2 Products of Culture* (National Standards, 1999, p. 9). As a reminder, each standard named is a hot link that opens a window with a brief description of the standard.

These search fields serve dual purposes. They function as search criteria, allowing a teacher to specify any combination of these to locate lessons matching a particular need. At the same time they provide important information that helps the teacher quickly see how a lesson might be integrated into one's own syllabus. The date field is for internal use, allowing the administrators to identify the most recent version of a submission in cases where a lesson may have been submitted more than once.

Two options are offered to provide access to the actual lesson. The best use of the Web suggests that the ideal solution is for the author to place a copy of the lesson on a Web site where anyone may access it and where the author can easily make corrections or improvements over time. Nevertheless, some teachers may not have access to Web space or may not know how to place their lessons online. In these cases it is possible to include the actual lesson plan in the fields set up for this purpose in the database itself: Objectives, Materials, Procedures, Cultural information, and Technology. These fields follow the outline proposed in the models described above.

Language teachers can access the submission page for this database and easily enter the requested information about their lesson. If the lesson is already online, it is a simple matter to include the address that points to it. If not, the teacher can copy and paste the necessary information from any word processor document to the various fields on the submission page.

## Invitation to Participate

Foreign language teachers are among the most creative and productive in the education profession. They also tend to be very generous with their time, talents, and expertise—sharing ideas, lessons, and readily supporting their colleagues with materials, suggestions, and assistance. One reason for this is the vast amount of information and knowledge of language and culture that FL teaching presupposes. No one teacher can know everything about the myriad TL cultures she should address, but teachers with experiences in 10 different TL countries can pool their resources and have a very good repository from which to draw. The FLTEACH online database is an excellent opportunity for FL teachers to contribute to their colleagues in particular and the profession as a whole by submitting standards-based cultural lessons they know to be effective. The authors invite their fellow educators to add to the store of pedagogically sound FL cultural materials online and to take advantage of all that this database project has to offer. Readers interested in more details on the project, submitting lessons, and searching for FL resources in the online database should access the project page at <<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/lessons/>>.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> This article is an expanded and revised version of one appearing previously in W. Heller, Ed., *Celebrating the Teacher Within*, Annual Meeting Series No. 20, pp. 57-62. Schenectady, NY: New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers. (See LeLoup & Ponterio, 2003.)

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# 3

## Uses of Blogs in L2 Instruction

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### **Abstract**

*Blogs are one of the newest tools in L2 instruction. This article offers a brief overview of the literature on blogs in L2 teaching and an outline of how they can be used in class to encourage language production and cultural awareness in learners. Also detailed are conceptual and practical concerns related to these activities. Finally, an overview is presented of what students think of using blogs, and a few topics are proposed for further research.*

### **Background**

The expression of ideas using the typewriter, computer, and networks of computers has often been compared to writing. Differences between writing on paper and using computers to “write” are numerous. Therefore, as technological expression continues to become more mainstream, the question arises: Are these new technological media, particularly blogs, useful in teaching the more traditional skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as addressing cultural topics?

A review of the literature indicates that the use of blogs in second language (L2) instruction is relatively novel, with some of the earliest articles on the topic published online in 2003. This review indicates that blogs are a dynamic vehicle that L2 professionals can apply to the teaching of L2 skills. Ward (2004) mentions this application to writing instruction for ESL students and provides a definition and history of blogs, stating that blogs look more like Web sites than e-mail, although they have qualities of both. He defines blogs as “a free online publishing house for anyone who cares to write and for those who care to read it” (p. 2). In citing Stiler, he further differentiates blogs from journals, in that the former are more like reporting, and the latter are like diaries. Ward then emphasizes the benefits of blogging in composition classes. The readers are authentic, and the language is communicative, as opposed to mechanical, with the emphasis on the process of writing, with peer review or editing. The effect is that of reducing inhibitions regarding the act of writing, or what he denominates “disinhibition.” Furthermore,

the technology itself provides “dynamic content, connecting multiple authors,” facilitating “an interactive relationship with an infinite and unknowable audience.” He concludes that bloggers and their readers have “expectations and ‘needs’ that may not have existed in previous modes of communication” (p. 3).

Ward (2004) also argues that blogs aid in the development of reading skills. For his study, blogs were readily available in English for his ESL students. Blogs are also increasingly available in non-English target languages, such as Spanish and French. These may be used as authentic reading material. Ward, however, lists some of the drawbacks of blogging, including the fact that it may lead to superficial reading and sloppy writing. These problems can be avoided with judicious moderating by the instructor of the exchanges in a blog. The possibility remains, too, that blogging may be just the latest flash in the technological pan, an outgrowth of e-mailing and perhaps the sibling of IM-ing (Instant Messaging), another technology—this one synchronous—that could also have application to L2 instruction.

Ward’s article provides a solid background of blogging, but there is a Web site with a virtual catalogue of ideas as to how to apply blogging to many aspects of L2 teaching. Paul Hampel’s (2004) Web site offers many good suggestions for using blogs in education, including creating a reflective-journal-type blog, ideas to start a class blogging, and ideas to encourage students to start their own individual or shared blogs.

Godwin-Jones (2003) points out that the advantages of blogging include maintaining a log of exchanges among students, a more serious consideration of language (as opposed to the language used in e-mails), and the encouragement of community language learning by electronic means. Godwin-Jones indicates that “self-publishing encourages ownership and responsibility on the part of the students, who may be more thoughtful (in content and structure) if they know they are writing for a real audience” (p. 13).

*Edugadget* is an online publication whose subtitle is “Plain-Talking Technology Reviews for Teachers.” In one of its 2005 articles, Steve Brooks plants blogs as a platform from which listening to sound files, viewing posted graphics, and speaking to classes in other countries are all possible using Audioblog, Flickr, and Skype, respectively. As further corroboration that the use of blogs has attained mainstream status in L2 education, the authors cite prospectuses of studies of their use in classes and announcements of conferences about the topic.

## Setting

Before outlining the uses of blogs in an L2 classroom, the authors wish to describe the particular setting that served as the basis for their study. All activities and courses discussed in this article took place in public university courses. At Southern Polytechnic State University, campus technological resources are many, including multiple high-speed Internet-connected computer labs. The department involved in this study also maintains its own language lab with 28 computers.

In the elementary courses used for this study, students ranged in age from approximately 18 to 50. Many of the students in the Elementary Spanish II course are “non-traditional” and come to the class after non-academic work during the day. During the semester in which these blog activities were implemented, approximately 20 students were enrolled in Elementary Spanish I, 28 in Elementary Spanish II, and 12 in Intermediate Spanish II. Blogs were also used minimally in advanced-level Spanish classes: Techniques of Translation and Advanced Grammar and Composition.

The elementary and intermediate classes met in one of two locations—the main classroom or the language lab. At the front of the main classroom there is a SmartBoard connected to a computer and projector, and the desks are arranged in a large circle. The language lab is arranged with an instructor’s computer at the front and the student computers in carrels. Both the classroom and language lab computers are connected to high-speed Internet.

A voluntary survey completed by 23 students from the elementary courses at the end of the semester revealed that most students rated their “familiarity with computers” very high and their “familiarity with the Internet” even higher. Only two students rated their “familiarity with computers” as “average,” and only one student rated his/her “familiarity with the Internet” as “average.” No students rated themselves below average in these two areas. These results are key to understanding the setting and students with which these blog activities were used, namely underscoring the fact that the majority of them are technologically trained.

## Goals and Objectives

The language goals for the elementary courses described here adhere closely to a list of performance outcomes provided by the university system. As such, these courses could be described as objectives-based or competency-based. Further, these outcomes are divided into the four language skills and do not address culture.

A main goal in implementing blogs in the elementary L2 classrooms was to improve student writing. Blogs were seen as an opportunity to decrease inhibition in writing, to encourage self- and peer-editing, and to practice writing strategies. A lesser goal in the Elementary Spanish II and Intermediate Spanish II courses was to increase opportunity for reading of authentic materials through target-language blogs.

Many of these blog activities were designed specifically to meet the outcomes listed under the writing section of the university system outcomes. Some of these include “write short paragraphs about self, family, school” (Elementary Spanish I); “write short notes to classmates about plans for the weekend or descriptions of last weekend” (Elementary Spanish II); and “write expository prose of one to two pages, consisting of a description or an opinion, about very familiar topics” (Intermediate Spanish II). Thus, blog tasks were often guided by these desired outcomes.

Once the use of blogs for teaching writing was established, their uses to teach other skills became evident. There are services that include the capacity to publish sound files, including MP3 and WAV, and podcasts, or the posting of a sound file to a blog that readers will download and listen to on a portable player, much as they would listen to a radio program. One disadvantage is that some services charge a long-distance fee that makes participation of all students too costly. Additional services include storing, searching, sorting, and sharing graphics for their use in class, both “big *C* culture” graphics, as well as “little *c* culture” graphics of everyday life in the target culture. An additional advantage to blogs is one’s ability to make long distance phone calls over the Internet, thus facilitating the possibility of having a class in the U. S. talk to one in another country.

### Activity Types

Over the course of the semester, students were asked to use the blog in four main types of activities. A fifth activity, authentic blog reading, was explored relatively little, due to time limitations.

#### *Assignment prompt*

The instructor posts a prompt on the blog and students are expected to respond to it. Prompts were often directly related to the vocabulary presented in the chapter and being considered in class. Responses to the prompt would sometimes be assigned as homework. Some examples of prompts follow:

“¿Cómo eres? ¿Qué te gusta hacer?” (*What are you like?*)

*What do you like to do?*)

“¿Cómo es tu familia?” (*What is your family like?*)

“¿Qué haces todos los días?” (*What do you do every day?*)

“Haz un plan para tu bien estar.” (*Make a personal health plan.*)

Although superficially quite similar to traditional paper journal prompts, blog prompts allowed for a sense of community to develop. Students knew that a real audience, their peers, would see their replies. Further, as the blog was on the Internet, students also knew that their audience was not only limited to their classmates, but perhaps expanded to the larger Internet community.

The two instructors used this activity in several ways, one as a required homework activity in which the blog writing was viewed as product itself, and the other as a means for the students as a class to analyze their errors. Thus, the first instructor required that students include their names on the assignment, whereas the second encouraged the use of aliases. Future research could be done comparing the alias method to the more traditional one in order to determine the efficacy of one method over the other.

The instructor using the alias method relied on intrinsic motivation and frequent reminders in class of the benefits of this writing to motivate the students to

write. At times the class as a whole would use part of a class period to respond to a blog assignment prompt. As responses to a prompt were perused, the instructor looked for recurring errors, though he never corrected them immediately. At the beginning of the course, the instructor specifically alerted students that their blog posts would not be corrected for accuracy unless they specifically put “PLEASE REVISE” in the subject line. Instead, during the next class, using these posts as the basis for discussion, the instructor taught or retaught certain vocabulary or grammar points. Besides language content, the instructor often focused on revision strategies that could be used to identify and improve on these types of errors; for example, finding and underlining all adjectives and then checking their agreement with the nouns they describe. As the students were encouraged to use aliases in order to ensure anonymity, there was little anxiety that the instructor was criticizing an individual’s language use.

The blog assignments at the advanced level were obligatory. Students of Advanced Grammar and Composition were asked to complete the following creative writing exercise:

Ahora les propongo una historia de no más de 100 palabras. La idea, la historia, el formato, se los dejo en sus manos, sólo una condición: yo le proporciono el final. Su cuento debe terminar con la siguiente frase: “A las cinco de la tarde, se callaron todos los relojes.” ¡Ojo! Esta frase no puede estar ni al principio ni en el medio, recuerden, sólo al final.

*(Now I propose that you write a story of not more than 100 words. The idea, the history, the format, I leave in your hands, with one exception: I determine the ending. Your story should end with the sentence: “At five in the afternoon, all the clocks stopped.” Careful! This sentence can be neither at the beginning nor in the middle, but remember, only at the end.)*

On the other hand, the class in Techniques of Translation had a more mundane assignment:

Favor de definir las siguientes siglas en el contexto de la traductología. Luego, haz un comentario sobre cada una:

*(Please define the following abbreviations in the context of translation science. Then, provide a commentary on each:)*

1. TM
2. EMBT
3. CAT

In the case of each assignment, the students were later asked to post comments on their opinions of their classmates’ submissions, including form and content. The result of this use of the blog was that of creating a greater sense of community, of sharing ideas, and of group learning than would have otherwise been possible without the blog.

For the Business Spanish course, an extra-credit section was set up so that students who attended outside activities, such as business conferences, could share their observations about them by posting comments on the blog.

### *Free Write*

Each week in the elementary courses, students were asked to post something on the blog. The assignment was purposely generic and open-ended in an attempt to lower the students' inhibitions to write. As blogs are often used in the "blogosphere," or blogging community, to discuss random personal day-to-day topics, students were encouraged to use the class blog in a similar way in Spanish. While the topic of the assignment prompt was often limited to the content being discussed in class, the content of the free write activity was much more open. To discourage inappropriate content in the free write, students were reminded as to what would be inappropriate to post on the blog, such as links to pornographic material, copyrighted material, inflammatory comments, or abusive language. As students used aliases on the blog in the elementary level courses, these free-write posts could not be used for grading, since the instructor could not and did not necessarily want to identify the students.

### *Describe a Scene*

Although the previous two activities were done mainly outside of class, the "Describe a scene" was done during class time in two computer labs (the language lab and another). Used to teach writing, reading, and culture, this activity was created in an attempt to mimic a typical, authentic communication exchange over the Internet. Although these students would perhaps rarely write a physical letter to someone describing their "plans for the weekend or descriptions of last weekend," a desired outcome mentioned earlier, they would use the Internet for such exchanges much more often.

On the days when the class would "describe a scene," all students would meet in the language lab. First, the activity was explained to the class as a whole. After receiving this explanation, the class was divided into two rooms with computers and access to the blog. The activity would start with a print of a painting displayed on the main projector at the front of the room. Each student's job in Room 1 was to write a post describing the scene in the picture. Each student's job in Room 2 was to read all of the posts from the other room and recreate the scene to his/her best ability. Then, after all individuals had completed a rough sketch of what the scene looked like, they would all compare their drawings and discuss in L2 how they arrived at this picture, perhaps by using key words they had read. Following such discussion, students would choose one of the pictures (or redraw a new one) that was most representative of the posts they had read. Then the two groups would be rejoined in the language lab, and the two original pieces of art would be revealed and compared.

This activity requires a great deal of logistical planning, including the availability of two labs in close proximity, and two projectors. Further, to ensure that

the students in Room 2 were not waiting for those in Room 1 to post, those in Room 2 had their own picture to describe. Thus, two iterations of this activity were going on simultaneously.

Once the activity was in place, however, the process moved quickly with little direction from the instructor. Occasionally when students were stumped as to where to start, the instructor would ask them questions in the L2 about the painting, such as “Where is this?” or “What are these people doing?” This prompt usually kick-started their writing. To keep the activity moving, time limits were imposed on each part of the activity, namely how long the students had to examine the picture, write their post, read the posts of the others, draw a sketch, confer, and choose a representative sketch.

The most productive part of the activity came when the groups were rejoined and the two pictures revealed and compared. Often, students would gasp at the revealing of the picture. Students were often amazed that their pictures looked generally like the original: a successful communication exchange! Time was also allotted to discuss the communication exchange and problems that arose, as well as the cultural aspects of the piece of art.

### *Structured, Peer-Edited Process Writing*

The blog, because of its collaborative nature, was also found to be a useful medium for structured, peer-edited process writing. Students in Elementary Spanish II used the blog to brainstorm ideas, post first drafts, receive peer feedback, request feedback from the instructor, and post final drafts. The fact that the most recent posts were presented first on the blog, followed by older posts—a feature that has come to be termed “reverse chronology”—allowed for quick recognition of the steps the final product had gone through, thus facilitating a focus on process.

Though done in all elementary levels, the largest implementation of this activity occurred as an intra-departmental project. Students in Intermediate Spanish II were assigned to write a newspaper article on a current news item particularly applicable to the Spanish-speaking world, such as the death of the Pope. Students posted their first drafts on the blog. Revision strategies were taught, such as underlining the verbs and checking for verb/subject agreement, to equip the students to be peer-editors. Once the first drafts of all students were up on the blog, students were then assigned to post revision comments on two of the articles. All students were assured that their papers were looked over by at least two of their peers. Then, students in the Advanced Grammar course were assigned to play the role of Editor and revise these articles again. Finally, students in Translation Techniques were assigned to translate the final drafts back to English. The two final editions—one in English, one in Spanish—were then put together to create a bilingual departmental newspaper addressing current topics.

The implementation of such a large-scale project as the one mentioned required an extreme degree of coordination among classes and faculty members. Because of the particular circumstances of the semester and the novelty of the activity, the newspaper never made it to print. The articles remained only in their



online forms. However, highlighting the process was more important to this activity than the product.

### *Authentic Blog Reading*

Because an early focus of the blogs was an effort to improve writing, this last activity was used only briefly at the beginning of the semester and thus needs to be explored more fully in the future. Students were asked to join an authentic target-language blog, where topics ranged broadly from movies to philosophy. They were asked to read posts from the blog on a weekly basis. As it was extremely hard to check whether they were actually doing this assignment, this activity was dropped early in the semester. It might be possible in the future for students of corresponding target languages in other countries to correspond in their L1s, thus allowing each student to read authentic texts.

### **Affective Concerns**

Besides disinhibition, as cited above in Ward (2004), the use of the blog in teaching writing in L2 classes encouraged more writing and naturally reduced the negative affective responses to writing, especially among reluctant writers. As mentioned earlier, a main goal in using blogs in the elementary courses was to lower inhibition to write in the L2. One possible way to do so would be to use new technology, such as the blog, which encourages greater speed and less inhibition.

On the other hand, the use of new technology creates its own affective concerns. Though most students used the blog with ease, it is helpful to consider the comments of the few who responded in a survey that they “experienced technical problems.” Here are some unedited comments a few students made:

“I didn’t check the confirmation e-mail on time and therefore couldn’t post on the [blog].”

“[The blog] is hard to navigate.”

“Hard to make ñ and accents, difficulty navigating, posting, and reading others comments sometimes (basic unfamiliarity).”

“My entries went into outer space.”

To avoid the anxiety and frustration caused by technical problems and unfamiliarity with the medium, the instructor could distribute a handout at the beginning of each semester that outlines the exact steps of how to use the blog. Students could further be alerted to the possibility of difficulties and how to handle them.

### **Culture**

Both “big *C*” and “little *c*” cultures can be integrated in blogs. In addition to integrating cultural topics and materials into the blog assignments (such as the “describe a scene” activity), the use of blogs encouraged discussion on the real-

life use of technology in Spanish-speaking cultures. The blogging service used by the class, <Livejournal.com>, hosted many Spanish-speaking blogs, just one of which the students were encouraged to read. Students got to see and imitate the authentic Spanish-language use of technology.

Further, students saw that language representing the technology of the computer and Internet is greatly influenced by English. The most basic example of this is that students learned that “a blog” in English is merely ‘un blog’ in Spanish. As mentioned earlier, many students quickly learned that their American-format keyboards were not the most efficient for “writing” in Spanish on the blog. Students initially struggled with key-codes for the entry of Spanish characters. These pedagogical tasks gave the students practice for Spanish-language uses of technology in future academic and real-life settings. One student in Intermediate Spanish II commented in class that “he had never typed in Spanish.” This particular use of technology would be useful in his lifelong learning of Spanish.

### Practical Concerns

Students from the elementary levels were asked to voluntarily submit comments regarding the use of the blog throughout the semester. Their comments reveal topics of practical concern that instructors may need to address. Though not exhaustive, their comments are divided into three areas: amount of technical knowledge necessary, preference for medium, and organization of posts.

Regarding technical knowledge, students offered the following comments in response to the questions “What did you like least about the blog?” and “What suggestions do you have for future use of blogs?”:

“Unfamiliar with site.”

“The fact that one had to be Internet capable or live on campus.”

“Explain the site better.”

“To give a more thorough explanation of how to use the blog.”

These comments show that instructors should incorporate technology training, perhaps in L2, into the classroom when using blogs as a medium for assignments. Even at a technically-oriented university, some students will benefit from training.

Furthermore, teachers themselves may require some instruction with the medium to take full advantage of its capability. One of the instructors exclaimed that the medium was rather easy to learn, however. After setting up the blog, this instructor exclaimed, “I was flabbergasted that *I* could do this!” The other instructor took advantage of previous technical knowledge to later compare various blogging services and software, concluding that hosting one’s own blog with blogging software, such as Wordpress or MoveableType, may be preferable to using a blogging service, such as <Blogger.com> or <Livejournal.com>.

Other student responses on the questionnaire showed that some students merely prefer to use a technological medium over a more traditional one or vice versa.

Comments revealing these preferences follow:

“It is on the computer, and I would rather edit papers online because not everyone’s handwriting can be read easily, for example, mine.”

“I like the interface and the chance to use a new medium.”

“Students should be given a choice between blog and paper.”

“Easier to write on paper.”

“I think paper is more forgiving when trying to learn.”

“I computer-compose better, so I enjoyed that a lot more.”

“I simply prefer writing to typing; it is easier for me to absorb information.”

“It is just as easy to blog as it is to write a paper.”

When considering the use of blogs, instructors may need to weigh student medium preferences along with time constraints, technology constraints, and lifelong learning benefits.

Students were particularly vocal about the organization of posts on the blog. Their comments included the following:

“Often I would be intimidated by all the postings; I couldn’t find which one applied to me.”

“Trying to find assignments and sorting through posts which were irrelevant to me.”

“Make more sections for study help, random posts, class material, etc.”

“Sections on the site would be good.”

“I don’t like how people post outside of the topics; it messes up my friend’s page.”

More organization of the posts can be added to a blog through the use of categories or tags. The blogging service that the class used during the semester did not support categories or tags. Thus, in the future other blogging services or private hosting may be beneficial.

## **Conclusion**

For the setting considered here, blogs proved effective for teaching writing skills. Their most important characteristic became their facilitation of peer review and collaboration. Students commented on this aspect frequently in response to the question “What did you like best about using the blog?”:

“It provided opportunity for extra feedback.”

“It was easy to use and it allowed me to learn from the work of fellow students.”

“You can get other people’s input very easily.”

“The ability to quickly communicate with many people and receive rapid feedback.”

“Easy access and able to read what others posted.”

“Being able to talk outside class.”

Some future topics for research suggested by this study include the effect of blog use on the quantity and quality of final writing products, as well as on student perception and motivation. The effect of blog anonymity versus identification may also be explored. Further, the use of target language blogs as reading material was discussed only briefly here. Finally, there is a possibility that further technological advancement may replace blogs with another technological medium, much as word processing has replaced the typewriter. The definition of “writing” in light of technological advancement thus continues to change with each new writing medium. Blogs may play a role in shaping future communication, placing them as a tool to be considered in L2 instruction.

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# 4

## Developing a Contemporary French Civilization Course: An Annotated Review of Internet Resources

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### **Abstract**

*Identifying appropriate materials for a class on contemporary French civilization is a challenge. Even the newest texts are somewhat out of date when they arrive. Resources available on the Internet present a solution to this problem. However, the sheer number of Web sites can be overwhelming. The quality and reliability of material provided can vary widely, and one often encounters dead links when using any of the major search engines. The most comprehensive and academically sound sites tend to be those maintained by cultural institutions, universities, government ministries, and similar groups. In the manner of an annotated bibliography, this essay reviews Web sites that provide the up-to-date information the instructor seeks and sources of materials for student projects.*

### **Background**

One of the most important and challenging courses to teach in the college French curriculum is a class on contemporary French civilization. However, just defining the term “contemporary” can be difficult. Does it refer to the period since 1945, 1968, the advent of Mitterrand, or the elections of spring 2002? Any of these landmark moments in French history could serve as a marker. In our program, we have three civilization classes. The first class ends with the French Revolution; the second with World War II. We have found 1945 to be a logical breaking point for us, since the third class, Contemporary French Civilization, assigns considerable importance to the Francophone countries that emerged subsequent to the independence movements of the post-war period.

There are several well-known texts that can be used in contemporary civilization. Though out of print and slightly dated, Hester’s *Initiation à la culture française* (1991) is still valuable, and Wylie and Brière’s *Les Français* (2001) remains a classic. Another approach is to use a text written for French students. Two publications from Hachette, *Histoire CM* (Nembrini, Polivka, & Bordes, 1985) and *Mon histoire de France* (Méric, 1996), are written for students at the upper-

elementary level. However, the author has found that the level of French used in the texts is appropriate for students at the fifth-semester level. While these texts have much to offer, where does one find truly up-to-date information? The Internet offers an answer to this question.

In this article, online resources useful in developing a contemporary French culture class will be identified. The features of a number of Web sites will be capsulized and reviewed by means of a modification of the annotated-bibliography approach. As an organizing principle, the author has selected four thematic units: government, education, the Francophone world, and the arts. In a typical course for juniors or seniors, 2 or 3 weeks would be spent on each topic.

### **Government (Structure, Ministries, Political Parties, Etc.)**

Even for those who follow French politics carefully, it is a daunting task to keep track of the changing players and even the names of the parties. A good place to start is the *Site du Premier Ministre—Portail du Gouvernement (Prime Minister's Site—Gateway to the Government)* (<[www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/fr](http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/fr)>). By selecting *gouvernement (government)* in a section titled *toute l'équipe (the entire team)*, one can quickly find the names of the various ministers and the individual Web sites for each ministry. The *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Foreign Ministry)* (<[www.diplomatie.fr](http://www.diplomatie.fr)>) provides considerable information about day-to-day political events in France. A major subdivision of this site, titled simply *Découvrir la France (Discover France)*, is further divided into *La France en bref (France in Brief)* and *La France de A à Z (France from A to Z)* (<[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/france\\_829/decouvrir-france\\_4177/index.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/france_829/decouvrir-france_4177/index.html)>). Both of these areas provide points of departure for student research on topics such as the economy, foreign policy, *La Francophonie (The French-speaking World)*, education, immigration, and religion. For election results, the site of the *Ministère de l'Intérieur (Interior Ministry)* (<[www.interieur.gouv.fr](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr)>) provides a wealth of information. This site in turn leads to the page of the *Assemblée nationale (National Assembly)* (<[www.assemblee-nationale.fr](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr)>). Here one can easily access graphs showing the composition of the legislature, with the names of the political parties. A special link for children (<[www.assemblee-nationale.fr/juniors/kit/sommaire.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/juniors/kit/sommaire.asp)>) presents a simplified view of the structure of the government. Pedagogically, this site is very sound and could serve as the basis for an in-class report by students. Of course the President of France is not to be outdone by his ministers. The Web site of the French Presidency provides a history and explanation of the office and offers a link for writing directly to the *Président de la République* (<[www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr)>). For links to the various political parties, one could consult the *Centre d'étude de la vie politique* of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (<[www.ulb.ac.be/soco/cevipol/index\\_en.htm](http://www.ulb.ac.be/soco/cevipol/index_en.htm)>). Any of the political party sites could serve as the basis for classroom lectures or student projects on the origin and evolution of the parties, and for learning how the multiplicity of parties necessitates in most elections two rounds of voting.

The various French newspapers are also an important and reliable source of information. The Web sites of the major Parisian newspapers are easily accessible. The *page d'accueil* (*home page*) for *Libération* (<[www.liberation.fr](http://www.liberation.fr)>) includes politics, society, and the economy among its daily features. An interesting aspect of this site is that the entire front page of the newspaper is accessible daily as a *pdf* file. *Le Figaro* (<[www.lefigaro.fr](http://www.lefigaro.fr)>) offers similar information, and direct access to other publications, such as the weekly *Figaro Magazine*. Other Parisian newspapers and many publications from the provinces are listed in *onlinenewspapers.com* (<[www.onlinenewspapers.com/france.htm](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/france.htm)>). For current news, one can also refer students to the Agence France-Presse site (<[www.afp.com](http://www.afp.com)>) or any of the television channel sites, such as France 2 (<[www.france2.fr](http://www.france2.fr)>) or La Chaîne info, an all news channel (<[www.lci.fr](http://www.lci.fr)>).

## Education

The French education system is another essential area of any civilization class. Whether the instructor is looking for materials or the students need to find information, an excellent point of departure is Onisep (<[www.onisep.fr](http://www.onisep.fr)>), the Office national d'information sur les enseignements et les professions (*National Office on Teaching and Professions*), an agency of the Ministry of Education. This Web site provides very detailed information about the various options students have at different points in their academic life. For example, there are sites such as *Après la 3ème* (*After the 3rd Level*) (<[www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/college/cadre.htm](http://www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/college/cadre.htm)>) and *Après le bac* (*After the baccalaureat degree*) (<[www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/lycbac/cadre.htm](http://www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/lycbac/cadre.htm)>). The links to the *filières* (*tracks*) among which students might select offer particularly clear graphics in flow-chart format. The effort to harmonize the French system with the general European model is reflected in the use of terminology such as *master professionnel* and *master recherche*. This site also offers extensive information about studying in France. The general site of the Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (*Ministry of National Education, University Instruction, and Research*) (<[www.education.gouv.fr](http://www.education.gouv.fr)>) contains a large amount of background information on the history of the French education system, the administrative structure of the Ministry, and practical items, such as the academic calendar. However, for the purposes of a civilization class, the Onisep site appears more useful. For example, it lends itself to a role-playing exercise. The students can assume the role of French students who have reached a particular level, such as *la 3ème* or *le bac*, and who now have to research options and make decisions about future educational plans. Or, in the form of a debate, students can present the pros and cons of different educational options.



## The Francophone World

In using this term, the author refers to French-speaking areas other than Metropolitan France. A map provided by the Department of Romance Languages at Colorado College ([www.coloradocollege.edu/Dept/RL/Courses/FR308Wade/francophone\\_world2.htm](http://www.coloradocollege.edu/Dept/RL/Courses/FR308Wade/francophone_world2.htm)) provides an interactive approach to identifying French-speaking areas of the world, and Discover France ([www.discoverfrance.net](http://www.discoverfrance.net)), a commercial site, provides another good point of departure. It offers brief, yet informative introductions to many French-speaking areas, including the *Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer (Overseas Departments and Territories)*. Official information about the DOM-TOM is available on the site of the *Ministère de l'Outre-Mer (Overseas Ministry)* ([www.outre-mer.gouv.fr](http://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr)). There are maps to serve any purpose, up-to-date information on political and social matters and links to the appropriate regional tourist offices. In a typical classroom situation the instructor might assign one department or territory to two or three students. The instructor might wish to guide the students somewhat by suggesting areas of study, such as history, government, or the economy.

The point of departure for official Quebec government information is the *Portail Quebec (Gateway Quebec)* ([www.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.gouv.qc.ca)). Two very useful links on the site are *Parlement et gouvernement* and *Portrait du Québec*. The latter site offers historical information, maps, and a cultural panorama, including an informative section on *gastronomie* for those who wonder about *cretons* (potted pork patties) and *tartes au sucre* (sugar pies). An extensive discussion of literature in *L'Encyclopédie de l'histoire du Québec* explains that Québécois literature begins after the Seven Years War. First confined to political writings, other manifestations of literature begin to appear in the 1830s, as economic issues stabilize ([www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/Roy1948.htm](http://www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/Roy1948.htm)). Finally, another useful Québécois Web site is the *Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (Quebec National Library)* ([www.bnquebec.ca](http://www.bnquebec.ca)).

The official portal of the Belgian government is available in Dutch, French, German, and English ([www.belgium.be](http://www.belgium.be)). Statistical data and a brief history of the country are provided. A link titled *La Belgique (Belgium)* takes one to a page that treats *Le Pays, La Culture, L'Etat fédéral* and *La Belgique et l'Europe (The Country, Culture, The Federal State and Belgium and Europe)*. Under *La Culture* one finds a link titled *C'est du belge (That's Belgian all right)*. In reviewing rubrics such as *les frites (fries)*, *les gaufres (waffles)*, *Lucky Luke*, *les Schtroumpfs*, and *Tintin*, one is quickly reminded of uniquely Belgian contributions to the French language and Francophone culture (e.g., *les frites* owe their name to a 19th-century Belgian by the name of Frits; however, it was American soldiers, eating this product during World War I with their French-speaking Belgian comrades, who mistakenly called them French fries). If one is looking for information related to tourism, the portal of the Belgian Tourist Office ([www.visitbelgium.com](http://www.visitbelgium.com)) is a good place to start. This site treats Belgian history in a succinct, but more than ample fashion for the purposes of a student report. A section on things to do provides background information on the country's Jewish heritage, its role in both

World Wars, and gastronomic traditions.

Finally, with respect to Belgian literature in French, an often overlooked part of French-language civilization classes, one cannot ignore the giants, such as Georges Simenon, Henri Michaux, and Maurice Maeterlinck. For serious literary studies one could consult the Belgian Francophone Library series (<[www.visitbelgium.com](http://www.visitbelgium.com)>).

## The Arts

Both “large C” and “small c” manifestations of culture figure prominently in an area of study under the heading “the Arts.” A good starting point would be the *Réunion des Musées nationaux (National Museums Group)* (<[www.rmn.fr](http://www.rmn.fr)>). There one finds links to the Musée d’Orsay, the Musée Picasso, and regional museums, such as the Musée Magnin in Dijon and the Musée Message Biblique Marc Chagall in Nice. A comprehensive online store provides easy access to the many multimedia products that have been developed by the various member museums. The *kaléidoscope* link of the Musée du Louvre (<[www.louvre.fr/11v/oeuvres/liste\\_approche\\_visuelle.jsp](http://www.louvre.fr/11v/oeuvres/liste_approche_visuelle.jsp)>) allows the instructor to select a slide show based on one of many different themes (historical scenes, landscapes, mythology, etc.). By accessing a particular artist or school of painting, one can easily build a slide show. The Centre Pompidou (<[www.cnac-gp.fr](http://www.cnac-gp.fr)>) offers live broadcasts of lectures over the Web and video on demand. The Web site of the city of Paris (<[www.paris.fr](http://www.paris.fr)>) provides easy access to information about the 15 municipal museums, including the Musée Carnavalet (<[www.carnavalet.paris.fr](http://www.carnavalet.paris.fr)>), les Catacombes (<[www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/musee\\_carnavalet/catacombes/presentation.htm](http://www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/musee_carnavalet/catacombes/presentation.htm)>), the Maison de Balzac (<[www.balzac.paris.fr](http://www.balzac.paris.fr)>), and the Musée Cognacq-Jay (<[www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/cognacq\\_jay/default.htm](http://www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/cognacq_jay/default.htm)>), museums of considerable interest, but often overshadowed by more famous names. Though mainly historical in nature, these museums present students with background about the growth and development of the city of Paris. It is important for students to understand that the central role of Paris in the administrative, cultural, and economic life of the French today is but a continuation of a long tradition.

Those wishing to catch up on current music would be well advised to start with the TV5 Web site (<[www.tv5.org/musique](http://www.tv5.org/musique)>). Video clips of the “tubes” of the week are a regular feature of this page, and the site includes nearly 500 biographies of performers, words to songs, and extensive pedagogical activities. The video clips of the week are broadcast on TV5, as part of the regular programming schedule. For cinema, the French Cultural Services offer a list of data bases and information about French cinema festivals in the U.S. (<[www.frenchculture.org](http://www.frenchculture.org)>). *Label France*, a publication of the Ministère des Affaires étrangères, regularly treats French cinema. Of particular interest is a retrospective titled *Cent ans de cinéma français (100 Years of French Cinema)* (<[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/label\\_france/FRANCE/INDEX/i19.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/label_france/FRANCE/INDEX/i19.html)>), as it helps students to place contem-

porary cinema in a broad context.

Finally, one should not forget that the libraries of Paris are very much a part of an expansive notion of French culture. Both the old Richelieu location and the new François-Mitterrand complex have special exhibits and provide information about their unique role in disseminating and preserving French culture (<[www.bnf.fr](http://www.bnf.fr)>). For literary texts, one might consult the listing of electronic texts noted on the site maintained by the library of the University of Virginia (<[www.lib.virginia.edu/wess/etexts.html#french](http://www.lib.virginia.edu/wess/etexts.html#french)>). Clicnet, a site hosted by Swarthmore College, provides information and texts on contemporary poetry, as well as information about the current literary scene (<[clicnet.swarthmore.edu/litterature/litterature.html](http://clicnet.swarthmore.edu/litterature/litterature.html)>).

The student who has taken a French civilization class should have at least some confidence in getting around in France. Consequently, some “small c” culture, or what might be called a thematic unit on survival skills in France, could include references to the SNCF (*French National Railroads*) (<[www.sncf.fr](http://www.sncf.fr)>), the RATP (*extended Parisian Metro system*) (<[www.ratp.fr](http://www.ratp.fr)>), France Télécom (<[www.francetelecom.fr](http://www.francetelecom.fr)>), and for tourist information, the Maison de la France (<[www.maison-de-la-france.fr](http://www.maison-de-la-france.fr)>). All of these sites are maintained by governmental or quasi-governmental agencies and offer reliable, accurate information.

### **Megasites for Teachers and Students**

There are a number of Internet megasites that group thematically hundreds of other sites. These megasites are maintained by academic, professional, or governmental organizations and are kept up to date. Thus, they are a good starting point for further information on themes treated above or for other themes the instructor might wish to introduce in a contemporary civilization class. The sites of the American Association of Teachers of French (<[www.frenchteachers.org](http://www.frenchteachers.org)>), Tennessee Bob's Famous French Links (<[www.utm.edu/departments/french/french.html](http://www.utm.edu/departments/french/french.html)>), and FLTeach (<[www.cortland.edu/flteach](http://www.cortland.edu/flteach)>) were among the first to appear on the Web. La Documentation française (<[www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr](http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr)>) is a rough equivalent to the U.S. Government Printing Office. Many types of booklets and reports prepared by government agencies are available for purchase online. A new site, Espace Francophone (<[www.espacefrancophone.org](http://www.espacefrancophone.org)>), is a project of the French Cultural Services in New Orleans. It is a French instructor's dream. History, culture, *Francophonie*—they are all part of this site. Of particular importance is the audiovisual section. One can download entire programs, many of them from TV5, with appropriate pedagogical support materials. Also available are an audio library and slideshows. Another recently established site, *Frenchresources.info – le Portail éducatif du français aux Etats-Unis* ([www.frenchresources.info](http://www.frenchresources.info)), is a joint project of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy and the University of Wisconsin. This site allows one to select from four different profiles (as a teacher or student in different types of institutions) in order to maximize effective use of the site.

## Conclusion

Innovative teaching materials are a key to success in any course one is teaching. The Web sites discussed in this article provide a point of departure for assembling the types of unique materials that motivate both teachers and students and provide an opportunity for the development of creative learning experiences.

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## The Roads to Compostela: An Immersion Experience in Germany, France, and Spain

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### **Abstract**

*Following a medieval pilgrimage route in Europe provides the student of languages with an exceptional opportunity for immersion in European language, culture, and history from the Middle Ages to the present. One of the most important of these is the Road to Santiago de Compostela. Although usually associated with Spain, pilgrimage routes to Santiago cross Germany and France as well. This article explains the rationale behind and outlines the preparations for an academically oriented undertaking of the German Jakobsweg, the French Chemin de St. Jacques, and the Spanish Camino de Santiago. It presents a cohesive linguistic and cultural program for this multi-week trek, an academic program that includes essential background readings, preliminary classes, task-based learning activities, and student research projects; all of these unite language and cultural learning. In addition, the article discusses related practical concerns, such as budget, equipment, physical preparation, and travel arrangements.*

### **Background**

Colleges and universities recognize that study abroad is one of the best ways of preparing students to live and work in a global, multicultural society. A substantial body of literature is devoted to overseas study, but it focuses almost exclusively on long-term residential study or internships designed for language majors and minors (Abernethy, 2004; Freed, 1995; Hill, 1987; Krueger & Ryan, 1993; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002; Vahlbusch, 2003). However, students who do not major or minor often take language courses simply to fulfill a requirement and then abandon language study, in great part because they do not have the opportunity to use their language and cultural knowledge outside

the classroom. Gorka and Niesenbaum (2001) propose that a short-term experience abroad affords precisely that opportunity. In fact, they maintain that a short-term overseas experience presents students with an initial exposure to another culture, shows them that they need not be fluent to communicate effectively, gives them a new perspective on the world, and inspires them to continue language study and even to schedule a semester abroad during their academic careers. Gorka and Niesenbaum (2001) and Raschio (2001) advocate short-term residential programs in which students live with local families. But for learning cultural competence in a global society, we serve our students best by providing them with an experience that crosses several national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. We believe the ultimate expression of such an experience is an international pilgrimage across Europe to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain.

The history of the pilgrimage to Santiago spans more than 1000 years. According to legend, St. James, one of the original 12 apostles, had preached the Gospel in the Iberian Peninsula. He was subsequently martyred, and his body was buried and forgotten in Galicia. His remains were discovered in the early ninth century, and the city of Santiago de Compostela was founded on the site. Soon afterward, pilgrims from every corner of Europe began traveling to the apostle's burial site. Though a few pilgrims to Compostela are recorded in the 10th century, and many more in the 11th, it was in the 12th and 13th centuries that Santiago de Compostela came to rank with Rome and Jerusalem as one of the great destinations of medieval pilgrimage. Even then, the pilgrimage was a model of cultural diversity, as people of varied origins intermingled on their way to Compostela. The Renaissance and Reformation were hard times for the pilgrimage, and participation declined drastically. The route has undergone a renaissance in the last two decades, and the present-day rehabilitation of the pilgrimage to Compostela has greatly improved the infrastructure of walking paths and lodging, not only in Spain but in France, Germany, and other parts of Europe as well. The route was named Europe's Premier Cultural Itinerary in 1987, and UNESCO has since classified the routes in France and Spain as a World Heritage Site, attesting to the pilgrimage's worldwide cultural, historical, and artistic importance. In the 21st century, the pilgrimage to Compostela provides the perfect opportunity to place American students in direct contact with the cultural and linguistic diversity that constitutes the European community.

## **Rationale**

The authors use the pilgrimage to Compostela to create an experience in which students learn about the connections between the people, languages, and cultures of Germany, France, and Spain.<sup>1</sup> Several specific characteristics of our pilgrimage make this possible. We travel in a small group of not more than 12 students; we walk; we traverse a variety of physical settings (cities, towns, villages, countryside); and we visit several countries. The benefits of these characteristics are enormous. Our small group size allows us to avoid the professional tourist-circuit

treatment that plagues so many educational travel experiences. In a group of eight or even 12 pilgrims, we travel comfortably without overwhelming our surroundings; to the contrary, we are often welcomed and embraced by our hosts. Because we walk, we avoid the types of transportation and lodging (tour buses and tourist-class hotels) that all too often insulate visitors from host cultures. As we walk, our students necessarily come into close personal contact with the people who live along the pilgrimage routes. The variety of rural settings through which we walk provides a much less intimidating immersion environment than the streets of Paris, Berlin, or Madrid for language students to work on their speaking skills. Finally, the rhythms of walking encourage us to reflect, thereby ideally leading participants to self-discovery, maturation, and perhaps even spiritual growth.

In addition to interacting with the local population, our students enter an international community of pilgrims, in which people from all over the world come into contact with one another. This contact is fostered by the existence of *albergues* (also called *refugios*) in Spain, *gîtes* in France, and *Pilgerherberge* in Germany—inexpensive accommodations frequented by pilgrims. Both on the road and at the end of the day, conversation flows and friendships form. Codd (2003) has observed, “Before long an easy familiarity develops among those who night after night take shelter under the same roof. Put simply, they become friends; fear or distrust disappears quickly” (§ 4). When this happens, we begin to see beyond our own limited cultural perspectives, expand our human horizons, and break out of our linguistic isolation. When pilgrims interact, many languages come into use: not only French, German, Spanish, and English, but also Polish, Swedish, and many others. At these moments, as Codd says, “Those who knew two [languages] would cheerfully translate for those who knew only one; somehow, almost miraculously, the ongoing cross-translations made possible precise communication no matter the linguistic differences of those gathered together” (§ 6).

We build into the experience of walking the pilgrimage to Compostela a wide variety of activities that appeal to students and faculty from different disciplines. For those who like to hike, walking across the European countryside through forests, mountains, towns, and villages is a special treat. Those who are interested in history are drawn to the important role the pilgrimage to Compostela has played in European and world history. Those interested in art and architecture are enthralled by the wealth of Romanesque and Gothic buildings found along the route. Those interested in modern-day Europe are fascinated by how the medieval and the contemporary coexist in the 21st century. And finally, many are attracted by the chance to investigate the spiritual heritage of Europe, as well as to explore their own spirituality. These activities and others show how a short-term overseas experience on the pilgrimage to Compostela provides an opportunity for faculty and students from different disciplines and different linguistic backgrounds to collaborate.

In this article we outline the preparations for an academically oriented undertaking of the German *Jakobsweg*, the French *Chemin de Saint-Jacques*, and the Spanish *Camino de Santiago*,<sup>2</sup> present a cohesive program for this short-term overseas experience that unites language and cultural learning, and discuss pertinent travel concerns.



## **Preparing the Pilgrimage**

### ***Creating an Itinerary***

The pilgrimage itineraries that we develop emerge in part from our multicultural academic focus. In 2004, for example, we fashioned an experience in which students learned about the connections between three European cultures. This 3-week trip involved a German, a French, and a Spanish faculty member. Each professor was allotted a certain number of days, and he or she planned the itinerary that would be followed in the country of his or her expertise. Our initial idea was to walk segments of at least 4 days in Germany, 6 days in France, and 8 days in Spain, at the end of which we would arrive in Santiago de Compostela. A different type of experience was created in each country, in accordance with the personality of both the country and the professor. The trip worked because each leader was flexible and open to the different visions that the others brought to the experience. We managed to maintain a harmony that has permitted us to offer the pilgrimage a second time.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from faculty personalities and academic focus, a number of interrelated concerns influence the length and cost of a pilgrimage experience. How much time is available to walk? We believe that in terms of overall cost, it is difficult to justify less than 2 weeks of walking in one country, and less than 3 weeks of walking in more than one country. It takes at least 2 days to travel from the United States to a starting point on one of the pilgrimage routes. Walking in stages in several countries requires additional time to travel by bus or train between countries. The itinerary must also include sufficient time to visit Santiago de Compostela and then return to the departure site for the flight home.

How many kilometers per day will be covered? A less strenuous walking schedule of about 18 to 24 kilometers per day allows for more sightseeing and culturally related visits. A more strenuous schedule of about 28 to 35 kilometers per day covers more territory, but at the expense of time and energy for cultural visits.

Which countries will be included? Besides the interests of the pilgrimage leaders, the costs of food, lodging, and transportation in any particular country need to be taken into account. In Spain, an entire infrastructure set up specifically for the pilgrim includes inexpensive restaurants, cafés, and lodging at convenient intervals. In France, an extensive infrastructure for hikers also exists, but it is relatively more expensive. And in Germany, the infrastructure dedicated to pilgrims is less comprehensive, and it is often necessary to lodge participants in more expensive hotels.

Which sections of the pilgrimage routes will be traversed? In each country there are several traditional routes. Their varied topography is perhaps even more important than the particular cultural and artistic heritage that each possesses. Certain segments of each route offer significantly more strenuous walking conditions than others.

When can the pilgrimage be undertaken? Spring and fall, the seasons with the best weather, are usually out of the question for faculty and students. Winter walk-

ing presents three important limitations: bad weather, relatively little daylight, and limited lodging and meal facilities. On the other hand, in winter there are no crowds, and it is much easier to establish contact with people who live along the pilgrimage route. Early summer is an ideal time, because there is ample daylight, most facilities are available, and there are many pilgrims from around the world also walking. However, contact with residents is more difficult due to the increased numbers of pilgrims and other hikers. In July and August, the pilgrimage routes are usually crowded, and the weather is often uncomfortably hot.

A wealth of information dedicated to itinerary building is available in books and on Web sites. Pilgrim walking guides describe in detail the paths and roads that constitute the pilgrimage route, often include trail maps, and offer practical information on the availability of food and lodging. Country-specific walking guides that we have used are available in English (Brierley, 2003; Davies & Cole, 2003; Raju, 2003b), in German, (Fleischer, 1999a and 1999b; Heusch-Altenstein & Flinspach, 2005), in French (Fédération Française de la Randonnée Pédestre, 2004a, 2004b, and 2004c; Siréjol & Laborde-Balen, 2004), and in Spanish (Bravo Lozano, 1999; Nadal, 1999; Pombo, 2004). The British Confraternity of Saint James publishes booklet-sized guides to pilgrimage routes in Spain (Bisset, 2005), France (Raju, 2004), and Germany (Raju, 2003a); these are updated every year with the latest information on walking conditions and where to stay and eat.

### *A Note on Lodging and the Pilgrim Passport*

When we set up an itinerary, our choice for where to end each walking day depends on the type, cost, and availability of lodging. *Albergues*, *gîtes*, and *Pilgerherberge* are where most pilgrims stay. Accommodation in them is often in mixed bunk-bed dormitories, and the close contact between pilgrims in them encourages new friendships. They are also the least expensive, averaging less than 15 euros per person in France and Germany and less than 10 euros in Spain. *Albergues* are plentiful in Spain, and are generally located within 10 kilometers of one another. French *gîtes* are also common, but are normally not open in the winter. The number of German *Pilgerherberge* is still limited, and one may not be available in every town. In Germany and France, we recommend reserving accommodations, even if only a day or two in advance. In Spain, however, *albergues* do not accept reservations, and may on occasion be full by midday. In all three counties alternative accommodations are available, but hotels cost significantly more and often do not facilitate easy contact between pilgrims.

The pilgrim passport is a simple official document that indicates the pilgrim's starting point and date as well as mode of travel (on foot, by bicycle, or on horseback). Each day the pilgrim acquires a signed and dated stamp. These stamps are obtained typically at the place of lodging, but they are also available from churches, tourist information offices, restaurants, cafés, and even shops. In Spain, a passport is necessary for access to the *albergues* (although it is not for *gîtes* in France and *Pilgerherberge* in Germany). At the end of the pilgrimage, a completed passport can be used to obtain the *Compostela*, a certificate issued by the diocesan

pilgrim office in Santiago. In this case, the passport certifies that the pilgrim has walked at least the last 100 kilometers of the *Camino* in Spain. Pilgrim passports may be obtained at traditional starting points in France and Spain, such as Le Puy, Conques, Saint-Jean Pied-de-Port, Roncesvalles, León, and Astorga. We suggest, however, that they be ordered before departure from the Web site of the American Pilgrims on the Camino, a national organization dedicated to the pilgrimage.

### ***Developing a Budget***

Even though a budget needs to be developed at least a year before departure so that participants will know how much money they need to raise, any pilgrimage budget remains necessarily tentative because the dollar-to-euro exchange rate fluctuates daily, because anticipated inexpensive accommodation may not be available, and because prices in Europe increase from season to season. We use Internet sources, current editions of general country guides, and country-specific walking guides to develop a budget. Items that need to be included in a working budget are airfare, ground transportation, lodging, food, and activity fees. To find and purchase international flights as well as air and ground transportation within Europe, we make extensive use of Web sites of individual airlines, airfare consolidators, bus companies, and national train companies. For those planning the lodging budget, the following sources provide up-to-date information: *Miam-miam-dodo* for France (Clouteau & Clouteau, 2005) and Spain (Champion, 2005), and the Confraternity guides for all three countries. Lodging information can also be found in the walking guides for each country. For Spain, it is important to overbudget for accommodations, since *albergues* may sometimes be full and only higher-priced hotels available. Even though there are a number of meal options that range from eating in restaurants to cooking in the *gîte* or *albergue* to having a picnic, experience has shown that it is best to budget between 20 and 30 euros a day for food. We suggest that, with the exception of an occasional group meal, students be responsible for buying their own food. Other costs for which students are individually responsible include entrance fees, cultural activities, and entertainment; although in certain cases it may be more convenient or less expensive to pay from a group fund. In either case, these costs must be included in the budget.

### ***Recruiting and Selecting Students***

We begin to publicize the trip shortly before holding a formal informational meeting. We recruit participants via individual invitations, root e-mails, posters, and in-class announcements. Because the pilgrimage is such an intense experience, it is imperative that the instructor have complete control over the selection of participants, as one problematic student can negatively affect the entire group. The informational meeting takes place a year before the event, at which time application forms are distributed. When students turn in their applications, they sign up for an interview. Selection criteria should include the applicant's language ability and previous hiking experience, and the professor's personal acquaintance with the applicant. The selection process should be completed far enough in advance

so that students have at least a summer for fund-raising. Soon after the final selection is made, group members attend an initial meeting at which they receive the reading list and have a chance to meet one another.

### **Meetings and Assignments**

The academic and pragmatic preparations that we make on campus before leaving constitute a necessary foundation for the learning that will take place overseas. We have found it best to schedule regular class meetings during the semester prior to departure. Common class readings are all in English; language-specific readings may be assigned to students who know that language, and those students may then be held responsible for providing an overview of the information in English to the other students. In addition to completing required readings and attending classes, students take a final cumulative exam and complete an individual research project.

### ***Research Project***

Early in the semester we give students a list of possible research topics relevant to the pilgrimage. Several topics that have worked well for us are Charlemagne and the *Chanson de Roland*, winemaking and local wines, cheesemaking and local cheeses, Gregorian chant, monastic life, and the Knights Templar; however, the list can be modified according to the itinerary and the interests of the participants. Students select a topic, investigate it, and prepare a report of 10 to 15 minutes of solid information intended to enhance the group's understanding and enjoyment of what we will see and do overseas. A written version of the report must be completed and handed in before departure to allow for faculty evaluation and response, but the oral presentation will be delivered on site during the pilgrimage.

### ***Class Sessions***

In our first class session we present a brief historical and cultural introduction to the pilgrimage to Compostela. For this and for subsequent class lectures on specific topics, two comprehensive bibliographies (Davidson & Dunn-Wood, 1993; Dunn & Davidson, 1994) provide annotated lists of works in their original languages and, if available, in translation. To supplement the lecture material, we have students read sections of *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook* (Davidson & Gitlitz, 2000) and the translation of Book V of the medieval *Liber Sancti Jacobi* in *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela* (Melczer, 1993). For additional information on history and culture, students can also visit the Web sites of organizations dedicated to the pilgrimage (American Pilgrims on the Camino, the Confraternity of Saint James, the Association Française des Pèlerins de Saint Jacques de Compostelle, the Deutsche St. Jakobus Gesellschaft, the Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago, and the Arzobispado de Santiago de Compostela).

In the next two class sessions, we address pragmatic concerns: hiking equipment, physical conditioning, and first aid. During one of these two class sessions, certain practical travel matters also need to be dealt with, such as passports, college waivers, medical insurance forms, International Student ID cards, and money matters. The class session on hiking equipment must take place several months before departure, as participants need sufficient time to select, try out, and become comfortable with their gear. Participants will receive their packing list at this time. We invite a local hiking outfitter to speak to the class about how to purchase and use appropriate gear. Students should be fitted for shoes and backpacks by a reputable outfitter before they buy anything, whether in a store or online. The class session on physical conditioning and first aid also needs to take place early in the semester. It is essential that all participants prepare themselves for the physical rigors of walking 15 to 35 kilometers per day across Europe with a full backpack in all sorts of weather conditions. We ask an athletic trainer to devise a conditioning plan specifically for the pilgrimage, and to demonstrate basic first aid, such as taping ankles and treating blisters. Before leaving, we also require that everyone take part in at least one 15-to-25-kilometer group hike in full gear; this exercise reveals to participants how ready they are and what further preparations they need to make.

For the next class session, in keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of this project, we invite a professor from the art department to lecture on Romanesque and Gothic art and architecture in a European, rather than country-specific, context. In addition to information presented by the art professor, we have our students read selections from *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook* (Davidson & Gitlitz, 2000) and from the Web site for the Confraternity of Saint James. Informative sections on the art and architecture encountered along the route are also found in most of the country-specific walking guides.

We have found that students are interested in the religious aspects of the pilgrimage, and attending Catholic Mass can be an enriching part of the experience. Since not all participants may be familiar with the structure and meaning of the Mass and sacraments, we devote a class session to a presentation by a local Catholic priest, who can also suggest resources for further reading about the liturgy and the history of the Catholic Church.

Now that the students have an understanding of the historical and cultural underpinnings of the pilgrimage, it is useful to dedicate a class to the experience of the contemporary pilgrim. To help students anticipate and prepare for the adventure that awaits them, we have them read at least one recent personal account of the pilgrimage (Aviva, 2001; Hoinacki, 1996; Lash, 1991; Schell & Schell, 2001; Stanton, 1994). The accounts we have chosen offer insight into the reality of the modern pilgrim's daily life on the road and thus invite our students to imagine what impact the pilgrimage might have on them.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these personal accounts, we assign one common required reading, from which students gain a wider understanding of the contemporary pilgrimage. In *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*, Frey (1998) presents a multitude of perspectives on the modern pilgrimage, analyzing a large number of personal accounts by pilgrims

from around the world in an effort to discover what leads people to make the pilgrimage and what difference it makes in their lives.

At this point we dedicate a class session to the topic of travel journal writing. The personal accounts that the students read will serve as models for their own journal writing during the pilgrimage. Our paradigm for journal writing is based on three steps outlined by Raschio (2001). First, our students are to record the conditions and events of each day: the weather, the landscapes, people they meet, the lodging for the night, notable events on the road. They may also include memorable sayings, information about places they visit, the day's meals, and what they are thinking. In the second step, students are to describe their perceptions of and reactions to what they have experienced during the day. This segment should include anything of interest and importance to their understanding of the people, culture, history, and society of the host country. In the final step, students are to analyze their reactions and reflect on their personal growth. At the end of this class session, we assign the first official journal entry, in which students are to explain how they anticipate that this pilgrimage will change them.

In our last class session we review selected aspects of adapting to a culture other than our own. We remind students that they will encounter foods, schedules, and social situations to which they are not accustomed. We encourage them to be flexible, open-minded, and willing to try new things, although never at the expense of safety or common sense. We also remind students that they may be out of contact with home for several days at a time and that they need to let their parents know that. Finally, we work out the logistics of traveling to and then back from our departure airport. In some situations, for example, the use of school-owned transportation may be most convenient, while in others, car-pooling between families of students may offer an advantage.

## **During the Pilgrimage**

### ***Overseas Group Dynamics***

Upon arrival in Europe, one of the leader's greatest responsibilities is to keep tension at a minimum and try to eliminate anything that interferes with the enjoyment of the pilgrimage. We prefer to move quickly to the starting point of our walk, on the same day if possible. That evening, after the stresses of so much travel, our first shared meal helps establish a positive group dynamic. Throughout the pilgrimage, in fact, shared meals serve several important purposes. They acquaint students with the local cuisine and ideally encourage a willingness to try new foods. Even when the entire group does not eat together, mealtime becomes the moment when pilgrims relax and recount the day's events, thereby promoting group camaraderie. At the conclusion of the meal or just before "lights out," we talk about the following day's walk, so that everybody has an idea of what to expect and knows where to find our next night's lodging. We suggest scheduling a group meal at the beginning of the walk in each country, as well as a celebration meal upon arrival in Santiago de Compostela.

Preserving a positive group dynamic also depends on students' having an appropriate level of freedom. For example, how late will students be allowed to stay out on their own at night? During the day's walk, will there be intermediate stops at which the group will reassemble, or will students walk at their own pace and reunite only at day's end? Will there be a limit to how much time students are allowed to spend online at cybercafés? Although we address these matters in class during the semester prior to departure, we also bring them up often during the pilgrimage. On occasion, a particular rule may need to be adjusted, as we need to maintain enough flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. It is worth emphasizing to students that they be on time for required group activities.

### ***Mechanics of Walking***

Early in the pilgrimage, participants will establish their own walking rhythm. Some will walk fast, and some slow; some will make frequent stops, and some none at all. We have learned that it is essential to allow individuals to walk at their own pace. Trying to keep a group together during several hours of walking causes discomfort and frustration. It is also important to allow individuals to begin walking in the morning when they are ready. Pilgrims will depart and walk alone or in pairs or in small groups as they choose. This flexibility serves to enhance participants' feelings of independence. Because individuals or groups can choose the wrong trail or miss a turn and get lost, we recommend that all leaders and at least several students carry their own trail guidebook or trail map. Being able to refer to a guide or map can also encourage a less adventurous student to walk the trail with greater confidence.

Even the most well conditioned pilgrim can get sick, twist an ankle, or develop blisters. We believe it best to expect illnesses and injuries and be prepared to deal with them when they occur. Many *gîtes* and *albergues* have first aid supplies, and most towns have a pharmacy; but just to be safe, we always carry our own first aid kit (with pain relievers, muscle rub, epsom salts, band aids, antiseptic, moleskin, needles, thread, and scissors). More serious illnesses or injuries may require a visit to the clinic or hospital. A faculty member, if possible one who speaks the local language, should accompany the student on the visit. If a participant cannot continue walking right away, arrangements can be made to meet at the following night's place of lodging, and he or she can travel ahead by bus or taxi and rest for a day. The group, however, should continue its pilgrimage as planned.

### ***Learning on the Road***

Although this pilgrimage experience is not primarily a language class, language learning is an important component of it. Student participants who are not majoring or minoring in German, French, or Spanish will probably have studied one of these three languages to fulfill their language requirement. We assign task-based activities that allow students to utilize their language skills in relevant situations. The activities range from simple to complex; for example, asking for directions, locating a good restaurant for a group dinner, finding a hotel when the

*albergue* is full, and describing an illness or injury to a pharmacist. Not surprisingly, those students who have studied the local language soon take on “teacher” roles as the other students turn to them for help in translating and in acquiring basic words and expressions. The happy consequences of this situation include a redistribution of communicative responsibility away from the faculty to among the students, a developing of mutual respect between students who speak different languages, and a growing consciousness of our linguistic connectedness, not only within the group but in the larger world as well.

Besides regular daily entries, two other journal options present themselves. From time to time, faculty may wish to assign specific topics for student observation, reaction, or reflection. In this way a professor can focus student attention on matters that may otherwise escape notice or consideration. In addition, as they walk, students can create a “situational dictionary” of German, French, and Spanish words and expressions that they find useful but did not know prior to the pilgrimage (Raschio, 2001, p. 541). With these two final components, the journal becomes a means for language acquisition as well as for cultural comparisons.

Each student makes an oral presentation of his or her individual research project, either just before or when the group encounters that subject on the road. For example, an appropriate site for the presentation on the Knights Templar would be the *domaine du Sauvage* in France, where in the 13th century the Templars operated a hospital for pilgrims. Students should be held responsible for remembering the information presented in these oral reports, as well as what they learned in class the semester before departure. We find that there are ample opportunities to reemphasize key information over the length of the pilgrimage. For example, the Templar church at Eunate and the castle at Ponferrada, both in Spain, are ideal places to review the information first presented in Sauvage.

Finally, cultural activities abound on the pilgrimage route to Compostela. Many, such as visits to museums, churches and abbeys, or attendance at religious services or national holiday festivals, we can schedule into the itinerary as either required or suggested activities. Others, such as concerts, art exhibits, and smaller local festivals, we may discover only as we run across them. All of these activities, valuable in and of themselves, also provide an excellent opportunity for comparisons across cultures.

### **After the Pilgrimage**

Although the walking may be finished, the pilgrimage continues after our return home. Post-pilgrimage assignments and activities give students the opportunity to reflect, and they provide faculty with materials to evaluate the outcomes of the short-term overseas experience. A crucial academic exercise that remains is the concluding evaluative essay, in which students describe the most important things that they learned about the pilgrimage, about medieval and modern Europe, and about themselves. They then analyze the impact this new knowledge has had on them. In order to explain how they have changed, students should look back



over their travel journals, beginning with the pre-departure entry. This essay should not be due sooner than a month after students return to the United States, so that they have time to contemplate their journey before they begin to write.

One way we maintain and reinforce the enthusiasm of the pilgrimage is to schedule a reunion within several weeks of our return. At the reunion we prepare our favorite pilgrimage foods, share photos and post-pilgrimage stories, and talk about how to build on the pilgrimage experience, both academically and personally. Besides providing an environment for all of us to reconsider our experiences, these reunions reinforce the relationships that developed overseas.

Another possible post-pilgrimage assignment is the creation of a group journal, which consists of journal entries that students select and revise, the texts of their individual on-site presentations, a short biographical sketch of each participant, and selected photos. The final document can be put on the Web or even published. These same sources also provide the materials for the development of a student-created video about the pilgrimage. We have found that the visual and audio aspects of video permit students to express themselves in compelling ways, which have included composing and singing songs and reciting poetry.

After having developed all these materials, students are not only ready, but eager to help publicize the pilgrimage. Foreign language faculty constantly encourage students to study overseas and to major or minor in a language. Sometimes students listen; many times they do not. But when these messages are delivered by other students, they can have a remarkable impact. Having students give presentations in classes, at dorm socials, and at campus convocations is a tremendously effective way to promote interest in the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

Finally, students may also engage in a service project in Spain. Every year, the Federación de Asociaciones Españolas de Amigos del Camino de Santiago invites people to work as volunteers operating the *albergues*. Volunteer *hospitaleros* need only to have made the pilgrimage and to have a desire to welcome and care for pilgrims. Some degree of communicative competence in Spanish is recommended, and ability in other languages is always desired. Further details are available on the Web site of the Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago (<[www.caminosantiago.org](http://www.caminosantiago.org)>).

## Conclusion

We are gratified by the degree to which our students have realized the goals of short-term overseas experiences. A total of 21 students participated in the two pilgrimages that we led in 2004-2005. Of these, two had already spent a semester overseas, five have subsequently studied or worked in Europe or Spanish America, and an additional three plan to do so. For two students in particular, the pilgrimage had a great impact, sparking their interest in further language study. Both decided to minor in Spanish, and one of them, a rising senior, chose to delay his graduation in order to study abroad for a semester.

Post-pilgrimage essays and interviews attested to the students' recognition of the value of contact with our host cultures. One student wrote, "I was able to see and learn so much more throughout this trip . . . because I was a traveler and not a tourist. This allowed me to see and experience things I would never have been able to . . . if I was traveling around Europe on a tour bus." The contact with other cultures enabled students to come away with new perspectives on the world and a greater appreciation for different peoples and lifestyles—important first steps in preparing to live and work in a global, multicultural society. Upon returning, another student reflected, "Did I really want to leave walking? No, I didn't. Did I really want to leave Spain? No, I didn't. Why? Because I was leaving . . . a country that appreciated simplicity, that appreciated living off the land, appreciated one's family, [and] friends." Yet another student recalled the personal interaction he had with his hosts:

One of the most amazing things about the Camino were the different people that you met along the way. . . . One of the really friendly people that I met was a little girl named Tatiana . . . [who] was so excited to have people come into her home and let us ask questions about her life, and she got to ask us questions. And we had hot chocolate and coffee. Tatiana, who was about five, walked us the rest of the way into town to the *albergue* and she showed two of the others to the market. It was just a really nice experience to feel connected to the town and the people.

In every respect, the pilgrimage experience more than fulfilled our expectations. And it has inspired each of us to prepare for yet another walk with students across Europe to Santiago de Compostela.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In their article "An Academic Pilgrimage to the Twelfth Century: The Art of Simulation," (1987) David Gitlitz and Linda Davidson describe many of the same characteristics and benefits that we note. The essence of their project, however, was to simulate a 12th-century pilgrimage. The nature and aim of our pilgrimage is radically different.
- <sup>2</sup> Within each country, many historical pilgrimage roads lead to Compostela. In our pilgrimages with students, however, we have kept to the routes with the best developed infrastructures for contemporary walkers: the Nürnberg to Konstanz route in Germany, the *Via Podiensis* from Le Puy to St.-Jean Pied-de-Port in France, and the *Camino Francés*, which continues from St.-Jean Pied-de-Port to Santiago de Compostela. We do not mean to suggest that these are the only or even the best routes for everyone. Furthermore, we recognize that a pilgrimage to two or only one country may be most appropriate

for a group, depending on the time available, budget, and the interests of the participants. We feel that this flexibility of the pilgrimage to Compostela is one of its great advantages.

- 3 This particular example illustrates an ideal situation, in which a faculty member from each language was able to participate with full institutional funding. However, it is not necessary that three faculty member accompany the students. Our other pilgrimages have been led by one and two faculty members, with and without institutional funding, as part of the regular teaching load and outside of it, with groups of between 6 and 12 students.
- 4 Three titles which we have chosen not to include in our course reading list are Paul Coelho's *The Pilgrimage*, Jack Hitt's *Off the Road*, and Shirley MacLaine's *The Camino*. Although they are well known, these texts do not reflect the type of intercultural encounter that our project advocates.

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# 6

## Talking About Music: Ethnographic Interviews on Traditional Hispanic Songs

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### **Abstract**

*This article proposes a variety of activities designed to enrich the study of authentic Hispanic music in the foreign language class. As an integral part of any lesson on a culturally authentic song, students interview native speakers, both in and out of class, to learn about the cultural context of various songs. Of special interest are songs that have strong associations with specific cultural practices, such as “Las mañanitas.” In other assignments, students interview native speakers about their musical tastes, seek out songs from native informants, and then share these songs with the class. The cultural information obtained from the interviews and the personal contact with native speakers enrich the lessons on Hispanic music on both a cognitive and an affective level. At the same time, the universal theme of music provides rich material for productive and satisfying conversations with native speakers. These activities address all “Five C’s” of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning.*

### **Rationale**

Over the past several decades, foreign language practitioners have increasingly come to appreciate the many benefits of using music as a resource to enhance lessons in both language and culture. The professional literature is rich with articles that reflect the wide range of linguistic and cultural learning objectives that can be achieved through the use of music. For example, Purcell (1992) demonstrates the use of Spanish songs to reinforce pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary and grammar. Willis and Mason (1994) recommend the use of contemporary Latin popular music to teach language and motivate students. Delière and Lafayette (1985) describe a unit they developed on French culture based on several songs with a similar theme. Griffin (1988) recommends studying Latin American culture through a country’s folk music. Abrate (1983) and Failoni (1993) propose a wide variety of strategies for using music to teach both language and culture. Barry and Pellissier (1995) propose a “whole language approach” to teaching music. Sporborg (1998) proposes various ways to use music in FLES programs. Heusinkveld (2001a)

proposes cultural lessons based on songs of nostalgia from various Hispanic countries. Schmidt (2003) recommends the use of German rap music to integrate lessons on language and contemporary culture. These are only a few of the helpful articles available on this subject. In urging teachers to incorporate more culture into their classes and to make connections between foreign language and other disciplines, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1999) confirm the appropriateness of music in the classroom.

Foreign language teachers are also aware of the positive benefits of conducting interviews with native speakers. Through contact with native speakers, either in the classroom or in the community, students realize with excitement that the language they are studying “really works.” Ethnographic interviews help to break down stereotypes, develop cross-cultural sensitivity, and increase interest in cultural learning. Bateman (2002) argues convincingly that ethnographic interviews have a positive effect on students’ affective attitudes toward cultural learning. Students who practice their language in “real” contexts are more motivated to become life-long language learners. Further, Allen (2000) points out that ethnographic interviews heighten awareness of one’s own culture as well as the target culture, thereby providing a basis for cultural comparisons. Thus, interviews with native speakers address both the “fourth C” (Comparisons) and the “fifth C” (Communities) of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1999).

This article proposes a variety of activities that combine these two powerful motivational tools—music and ethnographic interviews. As an integral part of any lesson on a culturally authentic song, students interview a native speaker in class about his/her knowledge about and associations with the song. After gaining confidence by practicing in class, students conduct a variety of interviews with native speakers in the community to learn more about the cultural context of various songs. In other assignments, students seek out songs from native informants and then share them with the class. Of special interest are songs that have strong associations with specific cultural practices, for example, the Mexican birthday song, “Las mañanitas.” The cultural information obtained from the interviews and the personal contact with native speakers enrich the lessons on Hispanic music on both a cognitive and an affective level. At the same time, the universal theme of music provides rich material for productive and satisfying ethnographic interviews.

The idea of conducting ethnographic interviews about songs learned in class may be attributed to a serendipitous incident that happened several years ago in Morelia, Mexico, where the author was teaching a course for U.S. high school teachers called “Integration of Music in the Spanish Class.” One day, as we were practicing a traditional Mexican children’s song called “La marcha de las letras,” a member of the language school’s staff knocked at the door with a message. When one of my students casually asked this middle-aged Mexican woman if she knew “La marcha de las letras,” her face broke into a radiant smile. To our astonishment and delight, Doña Rosalía set down her papers and broke into a lusty rendition of the song, marching in place and vigorously swinging her arms to keep time to the music as she sang! After a hearty round of applause, students peppered

Doña Rosalía with questions. When did she first learn that song? Where did she hear it? Did all her friends know it? Did she ever sing it with her children? Could she sing other similar songs for us? Could she join us in class again?

Doña Rosalía's singing and the questions and answers that followed enriched our class in several ways. The song we were studying acquired new meaning for both teacher and students, as it was clearly "real." As they asked questions of Rosalía, students were creating with the language and communicating with a native speaker. At the same time, they learned interesting information about the cultural context of the song. Perhaps most importantly, Doña Rosalía's singing created bonds of empathy that became stronger over the following days and weeks. She had helped to break down barriers, both cross-cultural and generational, through the universal language of music. In succeeding days, my students in Morelia brainstormed on all the ways we might use native speakers to enhance the study of music in our foreign language classes back home. The result for this writer has been much experimentation in classes of all levels, eventually providing the basis for this article.

Any song, even a jingle created specifically for use in the foreign language class, provides an effective way to enhance practice in listening, pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary. (See Appendix A for musical resources for the foreign language class.) The undeniable appeal of music makes it a powerful motivational tool for any language lesson. But a culturally authentic song has rich dimensions that cannot be found in a song created specifically for the foreign language class.

A song created by a member of a particular culture reveals insights about that culture, even as it reinforces language and delights the students. The lyrics constitute an authentic text that reflects the perspectives of the culture where it was created. Many songs contain references to specific aspects of the culture—geographical landscapes, foods, heroes, literary characters, holidays, and place names, for instance. Other songs have universal themes, such as love, with no specific cultural references. But even these songs have a cultural context—venues where they are performed or sung, memories they elicit, and possibly cultural practices associated with them. The more traditional the song, the more likely it is to evoke associative memories in the mind of a member of the culture where the song was created. It is all these cultural contexts that we invite students to explore in interviews with native speakers. As the incident in Morelia demonstrates, contact with a native informant will enrich the study of the song and can lead to valuable cross-cultural connections.

### **Inviting a Native Speaker to Class**

The best way to introduce students to the concept of ethnographic interviews is to invite native speakers to class, so that the students can ask them simple questions about the song that the class is currently studying. The songs that seem to work best for such interviews are those most likely to be familiar to people from different age groups and different Hispanic countries. Traditional children's songs



work especially well, since they are more likely to evoke memories for the native informant. Tapping into these childhood memories of familiar songs helps connect the students with the native speaker on an affective level in a way that is not often achieved through straight biographical questions.

My experience has shown that for this first interview, the teacher should ascertain in advance that the invited guest is indeed familiar with the song. One children's song that is familiar throughout Latin America and Spain is "Los elefantes," the whimsical song about elephants swinging on a spider web. Questions for our invited guest on this song may fall into several categories, as follows:

### **Familiarity/Recognition:**

¿Conoce Ud. la canción "Los elefantes"	<i>Do you know the song "Los elefantes"?</i>
¿Podiera usted cantarla?	<i>Can you sing it?</i>
¿Sabe todas las palabras?	<i>Do you know all the words?</i>
¿Es una canción muy conocida?	<i>Is this a very familiar song?</i>

### **Context**

¿Quién canta esta canción— los viejos, los jóvenes, o todos?	<i>Who sings this song— old people, young people, or both?</i>
¿Dónde se escucha esta canción?	<i>Where would you hear this song?</i>
¿Se escucharía esta canción en la radio /la tele/en la escuela/ en una reunión familiar/en una fiesta?	<i>Would you hear this song on the radio/ TV/at school/ a family reunion/a party?</i>
¿En qué ocasiones se canta esta canción?	<i>On what occasions do you sing this song?</i>
¿Qué instrumentos acompañan esta canción?	<i>What instruments accompany this song?</i>

### **Reaction/Affective Aspects**

¿Le gusta esta canción?	<i>Do you like this song?</i>
¿Por qué o por qué no?	<i>Why or why not?</i>

### **Memories/Associations**

¿Cuántos años tenía Ud. cuando oyó la canción por primera vez?	<i>How old were you when you first heard this song?</i>
¿Qué palabras asocia Ud. con esta canción?	<i>What words do you associate with this song?</i>
¿Tiene Ud. recuerdos específicos asociados con esta canción?	<i>Do you have specific memories associated with this song?</i>

With this list of questions in hand, students build confidence addressing a “real” native speaker. In order to give more students the opportunity to practice, no student is allowed to ask more than one question. Obviously, other questions are possible, especially if the lyrics of the song include specific cultural references, such as the name of an unfamiliar place or a regional food.

For a song with specific cultural references, it is best to invite a guest to class from the country where the song originated. For example, the Dominican mega-hit, “Ojalá que llueva café,” mentions specific place names and regionalisms particular to the Dominican Republic. A Mexican informant in the community would not likely be able to identify the specific places, regional foods, and dialectical variations mentioned in this song. We could send students to the Internet to find this information, as there are excellent Web sites that gloss the lyrics (e.g., Ureña, 2004). Even so, a Dominican guest in class would provide an exciting new dimension to the lesson—a human dimension that would bring new meaning to the song. For the beloved song, “Guantanamera,” a Cuban visitor would make an ideal informant. For a lesson on the song “Mi Viejo San Juan,” we would invite a Puerto Rican, preferably an older person who could identify on a personal level with the lyrics expressing nostalgia for the homeland. (See Heusinkveld [2001a] for ideas on teaching songs of nostalgia.)

Native informants should be encouraged to elaborate on any memories or associations that they may have with a song. After the questions and answers and any discussion that may follow, we invite our native informant to sing the song with the students. Students truly enjoy this activity. Just as we discovered with Doña Rosalía in Mexico, singing together creates empathy and connects people across cultures on an affective level.

### **Interviews with Native Speakers in the Community**

Once students gain confidence by interacting with the Hispanic guests invited to class, they should be ready to conduct their own ethnographic interviews in the community. Students are provided with the preceding list of questions and a short list of three or four songs to investigate. The list should include at least one traditional and one contemporary song of the students’ choice, possibly a current Latino hit. For example, students could ask about “Cielito lindo,” “Los elefantes,” and one current hit each by Shakira and Enrique Iglesias. These interviews are likely to generate more interest than the one done in class with an informant hand-picked by the teacher, as the results will be more unpredictable. Also, students will be eager to inquire about songs of their own choice.

If students are timid or if the number of Hispanics in the community is limited, students can work in pairs to find native speakers to interview. Most communities have a significant number of native Spanish speakers. Local Mexican restaurants, Mexican grocery stores, and Spanish-language church services are good places to find native speakers who may be willing to have a conversation with a young student of Spanish. If native Spanish speakers are scarce in the area,

the teacher can assemble a list of names and telephone numbers of willing volunteers. The international studies office of a nearby college or university should be able to supply names from a variety of countries. (See Heusinkveld [2001b] and Bateman [2002] for ideas on implementing ethnographic interviews.)

At the beginning of each interview, students should ascertain the subject's name, approximate age, and country of origin. Every effort should be made to obtain interviews with native speakers of different ages and from various countries. For each song discussed in the interview, students should be ready to report on the following information: Did the native informant know the song? Did he/she like it? What other information did the informant provide about the song? Did the song produce special memories for him/her?

The follow-up assignments in class will vary according to students' ability levels and the time available. Possibilities include the following:

1. Students could write a brief report such as the following one:

*Arturo Gómez es de Puebla, México, y tiene 45 años. Le gusta la canción "Los elefantes" porque es muy cómica. Aprendió la canción en la escuela, a la edad de cinco años. Dice que la canción es buena para aprender los números. Ahora sus hijos cantan esta canción, y les gusta también.*

(Arturo Gómez is from Puebla, Mexico, and is 45 years old. He likes the song "Los elefantes" because it is very funny. He learned the song in school at the age of five. He says that the song is good for learning numbers. Now his children sing this song, and they like it, too.)

To make this task easier, the teacher could provide a template, such as the following:

*(Nombre de la persona) es de (ciudad, país) y tiene \_\_\_\_ años. Le gusta/ No le gusta la canción (título de la canción) porque \_\_\_\_\_. Aprendió la canción a la edad de \_\_\_\_ años.*

[*(Name of the person) is from (city, country) and is \_\_\_\_ years old. He/ She likes the song (title of the song) because \_\_\_\_\_. He/She learned the song at the age of \_\_\_\_ years.*]

2. Students could form small groups to share orally with one another the information obtained in the interviews.
3. Students could give individual or team reports to the class.
4. Students could work in groups or as a class to make a simple grid showing responses, as follows:

Song	Know the song	Don't know it
“Cielito lindo”	23	2
“Los elefantes”	21	4
“Livin' la vida loca”	13	12

In a more sophisticated grid, teams of students could compare recognition of various songs according to the informant's age or country of origin.

#### “Cielito Lindo” – Traditional song from México

Country	no. of informants	Know the song	Don't know the song
Mexico	12	12	0
Puerto Rico	4	3	1

#### “Livin' la vida loca” by Ricky Martín

Country	no. of informants	Know song age 0-30	Know song age 31-99	Don't know age 0-30	Don't know age 31-99
Mexico	12	5	2	1	4
Puerto Rico	4	4	n/a	0	n/a

Not surprisingly, this grid indicates that Ricky Martin is better known in Puerto Rico than in Mexico and that young people are more likely than older people to listen to his music. Students can share these data in class with a minimum of English, using the present tense of the verb “conocer”: *Cinco personas jóvenes de México conocen esta canción y dos no la conocen.* (Five young people from Mexico know this song, and two do not know it.) The actual statistics matter less than the language practice, intercultural contact, and motivation that result from conversations with native speakers. In all cases, interest in the songs increases as a result of these interviews. Perhaps more importantly, the contact with native speakers increases overall motivation in learning language and culture.

#### Musical Interest Survey

The preceding activities are designed to enrich the study of specific songs. If teachers would like for their students to engage in more extensive conversation with their native informants, students can be asked to conduct ethnographic interviews using general questions about musical preferences. Heusinkveld (2001b) proposes a detailed musical interest survey consisting of a series of questions about musical tastes and listening habits. Informants are invited to share information as to when and where they listen to music, which style of music they prefer,

favorite musical artists, and so forth. Students first complete this survey in class in a think/pair/share format, in which they answer the questions themselves, compare notes with a classmate, and eventually share their answers with the whole class. In another format, students conduct paired interviews and then report their partners' musical preferences to the class.

Students then use the same series of questions to conduct ethnographic interviews with native speakers in the community. The questions are accessible to first-year students, as they are framed in the present tense and address a topic that is of universal interest. The information gathered from these interviews provides the basis for a variety of in-class activities in which students report on the musical tastes of their Hispanic informants and compare these preferences with their own.

### **Comparing Cultural Practices: “Happy Birthday” vs. “Las mañanitas”**

In nearly all cultures, certain songs are associated with special events, holidays, or other cultural practices. Examples of such songs in English include “Happy Birthday to You” and “Here Comes the Bride.” Hispanic songs associated with special events and holidays can provide the basis for especially interesting interviews, in which students obtain information about cultural practices associated with these special songs in various Hispanic countries.

The song “Las mañanitas” has often been described as “the Mexican Happy Birthday Song.” But there are significant differences between “Happy Birthday” and “Las mañanitas” that will be revealed through word association games and ethnographic interviews with native informants (Heusinkveld, 2001b, p. 143).

As a vocabulary exercise, students are asked to write the title “Happy Birthday to You” in the center of a piece of paper and to brainstorm in small groups to make a word map of words they associate with that song. The teacher can circulate among the groups to provide Spanish equivalents for words such as “party,” “birthday cake,” “candles,” “ice cream,” “presents,” “children,” and “balloons.” The completed list reveals much about the cultural practices associated with the “Happy Birthday” song in the United States. In a multicultural classroom, students from another country could do a similar exercise with a holiday song from their culture.

The next step is to interview native speakers about “Las mañanitas,” either in class or in the community as described above. It is important to find informants from different countries, as we would like to ascertain whether “Las mañanitas” is sung exclusively in Mexico, or whether it is also familiar to people from Puerto Rico, Argentina, or other Hispanic countries. The most important question for this interview will be “What other words do you associate with the song ‘Las mañanitas’?” Students may want to share their own word maps on “Happy Birthday” with the informants to clarify the nature of their inquiry. Back in class, when all these words are pooled together on the board, students may see words like *balcón* (balcony), *madrugada* (dawn), *serenata* (serenade), *guitarra* (guitar),

*chocolate* (hot chocolate), because “Las mañanitas” (literally, ‘Morning Songs’) is traditionally sung as a serenade in the early morning under a balcony, often accompanied by a guitar, to awaken the honoree. After the serenade, well-wishers are invited into the home for hot chocolate and *buñuelos*. If these associations were not clear to students in the interviews, the teacher can help to fill in the gaps. Students should also learn from their informants that the song is sung in Mexico for saints’ days, Mother’s Day, anniversaries, and generally any celebratory occasion, including December 12, in honor of the beloved Virgin of Guadalupe.

Students can make cross-cultural comparisons of birthday practices in Hispanic culture and their own by arranging all this information into a Venn diagram. In this activity, students make two concentric (overlapping) circles. The characteristics pertaining only to Hispanic culture are written in the circle on the right; those pertaining to their own (U.S.) culture fit into the circle on the left; and items common to both cultures are written in the center, where the two circles overlap. For example, in my classes my students have used the Venn diagram to compare American Halloween with the Mexican Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*). Students receive a list of words associated with the two holidays (e.g., “black cats,” “skull candy,” “cemeteries,” “costumes,” “masks,” “family altars,” “picnics at the grave site”). Working in teams, students make three columns (Halloween, Day of the Dead, and Both) and try to guess which words fit into each column. The element of competition increases motivation, as students are eager to discover which group can come up with the most accurate answers.

In order to compare the cultural practices associated with “Las mañanitas” and “Happy Birthday to You,” students can make a Venn diagram with the words they have gathered in their interviews, as well as with those generated in class. In the right-hand circle are words that Mexicans associate with this song: *serenata*, *guitarra*, *balcón*, *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. In the left-hand circle are words that American children may associate with “Happy Birthday,” such as “Ronald McDonald.” In the center section formed by the two concentric circles are words common to both cultures, such as “party,” “birthday cake,” “candy,” “balloons.” Converted into three lists, the vocabulary collected in the interviews might look something like this:

“Happy Birthday to You”	Both Songs	“Las mañanitas”
ice cream	party	window
Ronald McDonald	birthday	Saint’s Day
birthday cards	gifts	guitar
McDonald’s	birthday cake	serenade
	children	Virgin of Guadalupe
	balloons	dawn
	candy	chocolate con churros
	games	piñata

Clearly, these word associations do much more than practice vocabulary. They teach us about cultural practices, even as we study a cultural product—the song. This activity is an excellent way to help students learn cultural differences between Anglo-American and Hispanic holidays.

Another difference between “Happy Birthday” and “Las mañanitas” is the nature of the lyrics themselves (Appendix B). A study of the lyrics of “Las mañanitas” will reveal vocabulary words associated with morning (“dawn,” “morning,” “wake up”) and nature (“birds,” “moon,” “flowers,” “nightingales”). The contrast between the poetic language of “Las mañanitas” and the brief “Happy Birthday to You” reflects another cultural difference: Most Hispanics enjoy flowery, elaborate language, especially on special occasions, such as birthdays and patriotic holidays.

Most Mexicans are able to recall special memories of a particular birthday when they were awakened by a serenade of “Las mañanitas.” Students enjoy having a guest come to class to share these memories, and to join the class in singing the song. Once again, singing together creates empathy and brings people together across cultures and generations.

### **Associations with Song Titles: National Anthems**

Whereas “Happy Birthday” and “Las mañanitas” are associated with personal celebrations, the national anthem of each country is sung or played in honor of an entire nation. Ethnographic interviews about national anthems bring out a wealth of interesting cultural information and help students realize that national pride is an important element of every culture.

To explore the cultural connotations of the “himno nacional,” students begin by considering their own national anthem. Just as they did with “Happy Birthday,” students complete a word-mapping activity. They write down the title, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” in the center of a sheet of paper and create satellite categories around it, such as “foods,” “dates,” “colors,” and “events.” In groups, students then brainstorm to think of words we associate with this song. Anglo-American students are likely to write down words like “Fourth of July,” “baseball games,” “hot dogs,” “fireworks,” “red/white/blue,” “parades,” and “patriotism.” In a multicultural classroom, students could do the same exercise for the national anthem of their own country. Again, the teacher can circulate through the room to provide Spanish equivalents for vocabulary as needed.

Ethnographic interviews with Hispanics, either in or outside of class, reveal a wide variety of cultural practices associated with national anthems of various countries. Students can guide their native informants in making a semantic map like the one described above. What dates, colors, events, foods, and activities do native speakers associate with their own national anthems? If we ask Mexicans what words they associate with the “himno nacional” of Mexico, they are likely to mention the colors of the Mexican flag (red, green and white); the favorite sport of Mexico (soccer), and several dates: September 15 (Mexican Independence Day),

May 5 (Cinco de Mayo, that is, Battle of Puebla), and February 5 (Day of the Mexican Constitution). Colombians are also likely to mention soccer, but they would mention as well red, yellow, and blue, and *arepas*, a food commonly eaten at soccer games.

After conducting their ethnographic interviews, students can work in groups to compile their information in a grid, as follows:

### Words Associated with National Anthems (Himnos Nacionales)

Country	Dates	Colors	Sports	Foods	Events
USA	July 4	red, white, blue	baseball	hot dogs	parades, fireworks
Mexico	Sept. 16	green, white, red	soccer	tortas	flag-raising ceremonies
	May 5		Olympic		flag
	Feb. 5		games		at school/in plaza
Colombia	July 20	red, blue, yellow	soccer	arepas	high school graduations

### Gathering Information: Other Holiday Songs

In a different but related activity, students try to discover through ethnographic interviews whether Hispanics have specific songs for holidays for which Anglo-Americans do not. Questions might include the following: Do you know any specific songs that you might sing in your country at a birthday party? What songs might you hear at a wedding or wedding reception? Do you sing any special song on the first or the last day of school? Is there a special song for graduation? What songs do you sing at Christmas? Do you know any other patriotic songs?

The advantage of this activity is that it may yield a wealth of interesting cultural information beyond what the teacher could provide. However, because of the open-ended nature of these interviews, they may very possibly need to be conducted at least partially in English. The advantages of the contact with native speakers and the motivation that occurs when students do their own cultural “research” outweigh any perceived disadvantage of occasionally speaking in English. Indeed, Bateman (2004) found that ethnographic interviews conducted in English were just as successful as those conducted in Spanish in achieving various objectives, such as increasing motivation for cultural learning.

For retrieving songs from native informants, students should take a tape recorder and have the informants sing the song. Also, the student should have the informants write down as many words as they can remember. If the informants seem to have more information than the students can absorb, students may ask for phone numbers, so that the teacher may make follow-up calls. If possible, one or more informants could be invited to class to teach a song to the students and explain its cultural context.



For my students, these interviews on holiday songs have yielded fascinating cultural information. One of the most frequently mentioned songs is “Dale, dale,” sung by Mexican children as they take turns putting on a blindfold and wielding a long stick to try to break the *piñata*. The lyrics of this song urge each child to “hit it, hit it!” The lyrics also warn that the child who fails to break the *piñata* will look as silly as “*el conejo Blas*” (Blas, the Rabbit), who turns out to be a character in another popular Mexican children’s song.

Another song mentioned in this type of ethnographic interview is “*La víbora de la mar*.” It seems that Mexicans sing this song at a wedding reception at the moment the bride is to toss her bouquet. One informant explained that as the bride stands on a chair with her long veil extended behind her, all the single young women at the wedding form a conga line and dance under the veil, as they sing “*La víbora de la mar*.” As the dancers weave their way under the veil and around in a circle to duck under the veil again, they resemble an innocuous sea snake, a *víbora de la mar*.

These are only a few examples of the interesting cultural practices that may come to light through ethnographic interviews about music. Again, the follow-up assignments in class will vary according to students’ ability level and the time available. Students could form small groups to share the information from the interviews, report to the class, or prepare a brief written report. The language in which these activities are conducted will depend on the degree of complexity of the information, as well as the students’ own linguistic levels.

### **Music, Ethnographic Interviews, and the *Standards***

Whether students undertake a series of detailed ethnographic interviews in the community, or whether the teacher simply invites a Hispanic guest to class to join the students in singing, the interaction with native speakers can greatly enhance the study of culturally authentic songs in the foreign language class. In all these activities, the study of Hispanic songs and the ethnographic interviews complement each other for the mutual benefit of both. The interviews on music with native speakers bring an added dimension to our study of traditional Hispanic songs. Not only do the native informants provide all manner of insights on the cultural context of each song; the participation of the native informant in the learning process creates bonds of empathy and increases students’ motivation.

At the same time, music is a topic with universal appeal that allows students to conduct interesting and satisfying ethnographic interviews. Music reflects the soul of a culture. Whether students are eliciting nostalgic memories, exchanging ideas about musical taste, or singing together with Hispanic informants, music serves as a universal language that helps to break down stereotypes and to increase interest in cross-cultural learning.

The activities described in this article represent a thorough integration of lessons on language and culture. Not only do these activities incorporate all of the “Five C’s” described in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National

Standards, 1999): Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities; they can effectively broaden and deepen our conceptual understanding of the *Standards*. Students practice all modes of communication as they listen to the songs, interact with native speakers and fellow students, and present their ideas both orally and in writing. Aside from the classroom notions of communication, students are engaged in real communication with Hispanic people in the community.

Every authentic song studied in these activities is a *cultural product* that reflects *perspectives* of the culture where it originated. Songs such as “Las mañanitas” give us insights into specific *cultural practices*. Beyond the specific information about Hispanic culture, this unit helps to create a cross-cultural sensitivity and curiosity.

Any activity involving music addresses the *connections* standard, as we learn about melody, rhythm, musical instruments, and the poetry of the lyrics. This standard is further addressed as students learn about geography, history, ethnic foods, and so forth in songs such as “Ojalá que llueva café.” Also as part of this standard, students use their foreign language to acquire new knowledge, as they interview native informants. More importantly, students feel a connectedness with native speakers through the universal language of music. In the activities on holiday songs and national anthems, students make all manner of *comparisons* about cultural practices. As students learn about birthday customs in Mexico and other countries, they become more aware of their own culture. Finally, as students and native informants join together in song, they form a *community* of learners. The interaction of all parties should increase motivation to promote a lifetime of language learning.

In conclusion, the activities described in this article address virtually all the Standards for Foreign Language Learning that serve as our guideposts as we prepare young language learners for the 21st century. Ultimately, the ethnographic interviews and the culturally authentic music work together to enrich the lives of both teachers and students, helping them become more sensitive human beings.

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## Appendix A

### Selected Resources for Music in the Foreign Language Class

- Anton, Ron. VIA Musical Communications. Web site: <[www.viamc.com](http://www.viamc.com)>. E-mail: <[viamusic@excite.com](mailto:viamusic@excite.com)>. Phone: 800-222-0189.
- Cantos, ritmos y rimas*. Vibrante Press, P.O. 51853, Albuquerque, NM 87181-1853. Web site: <[www.vibrante.com](http://www.vibrante.com)>. Phone: 505-298-4793.
- Grupo Cañaveral, P.O. Box 521866, Miami, FL 33152. Web site: <[www.hispanicmusic.com](http://www.hispanicmusic.com)>. E-mail: <[info@hispanicmusic.com](mailto:info@hispanicmusic.com)>.
- Lozano, Patti. *Latin American Legends: On Page, on Stage, & in Song. Music that Teaches Spanish!: Original Songs, Rhymes, Creative Activities. More Music that Teaches Spanish: Original Songs, Rhymes, Creative Activities. Spanish Grammar Swings!: An Interactive Songbook*. Dolo Publications, Inc., 12800 Briar Forest Dr. #23, Houston, TX 77077. Web site: <[www.dololanguages.com](http://www.dololanguages.com)>. Phone: 800-830-1430. FAX: 281-679-9092.
- MacArthur, Barbara. *Sing, Dance, Laugh, and Eat Tacos*. Phone: 800-832-2437.
- Medina, Jorge. *¡Cantemos, niños!* CD, Spanish lyrics, © 2005. *Latino*, CD, Spanish lyrics, © 2002. *Sabor latino*, CD, Spanish lyrics, © 2003. 3037 Creekside Dr., Seneca, SC 29672. E-mail: <[jorgemedina02@yahoo.com](mailto:jorgemedina02@yahoo.com)>. Phone: 864-882-8238.
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- Sing 'n Speak Spanish*. [Excellent for elementary curriculum]. Web site: <[www.singnspeak.com](http://www.singnspeak.com)>. Phone: 619-223-2508.
- Songs and Rhymes*. Education in Motion, P.O. Box 224, Chico Rivera, CA 90660.
- Sporborg, James Douglas. *Music in Every Classroom: A Resource Guide for Integrating Music Across the Curriculum, Grades K-8*. Libraries Unlimited. Web site: <[www.greenwood.com](http://www.greenwood.com)>. Phone: 800-237-6124. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED430861)
- Teach to the Beat*, 1268 Pear Wood Way, Uniontown, OH 44685. Phone: 216-896-2756.
- Teaching Spanish through Music. Web site: <<http://www.caslt.org/research/musicsp.htm>>.
- Tipton, Stacey. "Musical Spanish." Web site: <[www.musicalspanish.com](http://www.musicalspanish.com)>. E-mail: <[Stacey@spanish.bz](mailto:Stacey@spanish.bz)>.

**Appendix B****“Las mañanitas”: Canción mexicana para el día de cumpleaños**

Estas son las mañanitas  
 que cantaba el Rey David.  
 Hoy por ser día de su santo,  
 Te las cantamos a ti.  
 Despierta, mi bien, despierta,  
 Mira, que ya amaneció,  
 Ya los pajarillos cantan,  
 La luna ya se metió.

¡Qué linda está la mañana,  
 En que vengo a saludarte!  
 Venimos todos con gusto  
 Y placer a felicitarte.  
 El día en que tú naciste,  
 Nacieron todas las flores,  
 Y en la pila del bautismo  
 Cantaron los ruiseñores.  
 Ya viene amaneciendo,  
 Ya la luz del día nos dio,  
 Levántate, de mañana,  
 Mira, que ya amaneció.

These are the morning songs  
 That King David used to sing.  
 Today, because it's your Saint's Day,  
 We sing them to you.  
 Wake up, my dear one, wake up,  
 Look, the dawn has already come.  
 The birds are already singing,  
 The moon already went down.

How pretty is the morning,  
 In which I come to greet you!  
 We all come with happiness  
 And pleasure to congratulate you.  
 The day on which you were born,  
 All the flowers were born,  
 And at your baptismal font  
 All the nightingales sang.  
 The dawn is already coming,  
 The light of day has already touched us,  
 Get up this morning  
 Look, the dawn is already here.

1. Acknowledge the fundamental linguistic parity of all human languages, including signed languages.
2. Support literacy instruction through the language best known to the learner, including signed languages. The Shared Reading Project outlines 15 basic principles for using ASL with storybook reading with young children. For more information, go to <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Literacy/srp/15princ.html>.
3. Support high academic expectations for deaf students. The National Association of the Deaf is the largest political voice for Deaf youth in the United States. Find out more from their webpage at <http://www.nad.org>.
4. Support high standards for ASL interpreters in education. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is the largest organization solely devoted to improving the quality of sign language interpreting. Visit their website at <http://www.rid.org>.
5. Support recognition of ASL and related sign language studies as credible modern language enterprises. A short informative handout is available at <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9212/sign.htm>.
6. Support the recognition of sign language literature through visual records of ASL poetry, theater, and story-telling. Sites on the Internet that display visual works include [www.aslquest.com](http://www.aslquest.com), [www.slope.org/asl/](http://www.slope.org/asl/), and <http://raymondluczak.com/index.html>.
7. Support the recognition of Deaf culture through the written work of Deaf authors. Locating literature by Deaf authors is possible with a simple search on the Internet. The largest collection of literature by Deaf writers is at Gallaudet University Library.

In the 45 years since Stokoe demonstrated the linguistic basis of sign language, science has made tremendous gains in understanding ASL and human language. The popularization of signing has brought welcome attention to ASL, but much remains to be done to support the bilingual, bimodal role of ASL in homes, schools, and communities. We look to the professional language teaching community for the leadership that is needed to support ASL as an asset in today's world.

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# 1

## Engaging Students in the L2 Reading Process

**Marcia L. Wilbur**  
*The College Board*

### **Abstract**

*This article will consider a necessary departure from more traditional paradigms, where speaking skills are the primary focus and in which reading is viewed as something intermediate or advanced learners do with authentic literature once they have mastered a particular level of grammatical structures. Instead, reading will be considered as an important component of L2 instruction that, when included along side other input modes, can enrich students' second language acquisition. Concepts and strategies on which to build classroom practices as well as practical suggestions for implementing pre-, during-, and post-reading activities are included. Considerations that place learners at the center of the reading process will help build their confidence and ensure their success.*

### **Background**

As K-16 world language (WL) instructors consider pathways to student proficiency during pedagogical training, in conference sessions with a teaching focus, and in other venues, much attention is given to the development of interpersonal skills and the fostering of person-to-person communication. Second language (L2) reading has historically taken a back seat to verbal communication in terms of its importance in the beginning and intermediate curricula and may be perceived as a classroom activity teachers engage students in if there is time, or as a “reward” for achieving mastery of a particular grammatical structure. Influenced by their own past practices or the way they themselves were taught, teachers may believe that students have to first get through language acquisition before they possess the necessary skills to dissect a piece of text. They may also feel that the goal of language acquisition is to be able to read classical pieces of literature in the target language. Reading and analyzing authentic literature may be seen merely as a supplemental activity in beginning and intermediate WL courses, where “language acquisition” is the focus (Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Tesser & Long, 2000). While the study of literature certainly has merit, engaging in literary criticism may not be the personal goal of 21st-century students. This article examines the reading process as it pertains to many types and styles of texts and offers suggestions for potential ways to equip students to be more able and confident readers.

## Teaching Reading

Second language instructors need to consider the many benefits of engaging in reading as an integral means to second language acquisition (SLA), rather than limit engagement in reading to upper-level literary analysis. Once equipped with the necessary strategies, students are generally able to comprehend reading passages slightly beyond their attained level of output proficiency. In keeping with Krashen's (1985) *i+1* theory of comprehensible input, reading becomes an excellent source of new learning and vocabulary acquisition. However, given the apprenticeship of observation model (Lortie, 1975)—or lack of model, if reading was an infrequent activity—for teaching reading strategies to beginning and intermediate students, teachers may lack the necessary methodology for transmitting those skills. As the result of their own previous language learning experiences, the only teaching of reading classroom teachers may have seen could have been in upper-level L2 literature courses they attended as students (Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Tesser & Long, 2000). Bernhardt claims, “most trained teachers have only had between one and six hours of instruction in the teaching of reading” (1991, p. 177).

A further complication of the issue can be seen in an examination by Gascoigne (2002) of the treatment of reading in an assortment of beginning college-level L2 textbooks. She concluded that the treatment of L2 reading was absent or lacked pre- and post-reading strategies for students and teachers. Because beginning and intermediate WL instruction is widely guided by a textbook coverage model (Chaffee, 1992), the importance of equipping teachers with a sufficient array of strategies for teaching reading is heightened even more. Tesser and Long call for the “explicit teaching of reading in all classes” and define explicit as “making salient . . . the *process* that guides our negotiation with a text to acquire or create meaning from it” (2000, p. 606).

Gascoigne (2002) classifies typical models of reading comprehension into three types. In the *bottom-up model*, readers decipher text word by word, depending on vocabulary recognition, grammar, and a dictionary. It is this first type of reading comprehension activity that causes students to grieve, because of the level of difficulty and the lack of guarantee that the appropriate meaning will be extracted from the text. This approach can undermine students' confidence in their ability to read in the L2. And students who have a low tolerance for ambiguity—those who prefer complete and exact scientific or mathematical-like explanations for every detail—will undoubtedly be frustrated. The *top-down* model focuses instead on the readers, the background knowledge that they bring to the text, and a general comprehension or gist of the text rather than a decoding of each word. Third is the *interactive model*, which considers both the text and the reader, combining the message in the text with the reader's background knowledge to arrive at new knowledge. “Comprehension is achieved when new information gleaned from a text is fused with the reader's existing or background knowledge” (Gascoigne, 2002, p. 344).

Keeping in mind that all learners have preferred learning styles (Bailey, Daley, & Onwuegbuzie, 1999), the author would argue that the interactive model will create a successful learning experience for the greatest number of students. Stu-



dents with a low tolerance for ambiguity will appreciate the learning of specific strategies to deduce meaning, and all will appreciate the success that ensues when reading for making sense of the gist. Teachers must keep in mind that the type of reading piece (e.g., magazine ad, newspaper article, poetry), as well as the purpose for reading it, will help to determine the chosen approach and the depth of comprehension needed.

### **The Reading Process**

Ask any WL teacher how typical students react when an announcement is made to the class that they are about to engage in a reading activity. Students tend to react negatively, because for most of them, reading means a painful exercise in translation—decoding the “wall of words” in an attempt to extract semi-incomprehensible, surface-level meaning about a topic that may be of little interest to the reader. With no choice in the matter and less than enthusiastic effort, cooperative students begin the exercise. Sellers explains that “reading in any language is a cognitively demanding process, involving minimally the coordination of attention, memory, perception, and comprehension processes” (2000, p. 513). It is no wonder that teachers find the teaching of reading a daunting task.

When students are to be introduced to a reading, it is essential that both teachers and students understand the purpose of the reading: for information gathering, for gaining cultural awareness and insights, for literary analysis, and even for fun! Making students aware of the purpose of reading and helping them to understand that it is an additional opportunity to be exposed to meaningful input may help relieve to some degree students’ resistive tendencies.

Much like writing, reading is also enhanced by a consideration of the reading process, comprised of pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading steps or levels of engagement with the text. And the steps are not always linear. Pre-reading can involve reading; comprehension checks occur both during and after reading; and so forth.

### **Pre-Reading Strategies**

While the selection of pre-reading strategies will vary, depending on the purpose, content, and linguistic complexity of the piece, there are some overarching concepts related to building students’ confidence in their capacity to read well in the L2. Pre-reading is a time for equipping students with the tools they will need to unpack the meaning embedded in the text and for over-familiarizing them with the content prior to the actual reading. Students may need lexical tools that can foster additional SLA. But even more critically, they will need the background knowledge essential for framing the content of the reading into a meaningful experience.

As we continue to consider L2 reading as both a means of acquiring new knowledge from the text in which students engage, as well as a language acquisition

opportunity, we are reminded that in order for new learning to be meaningful, students must be able to connect it to their prior knowledge (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). Ruiz-Funes writes that

both prior knowledge (the reader's general knowledge of, or cultural familiarity with, a given topic) and context (as for example, the title of a text, illustrations, etc.) have a significant impact on comprehension, stronger than the teaching of vocabulary or other lexical features, especially for beginning and intermediate L2/FL students. (1999, pp. 515-516)

For L2 reading, learners' background knowledge is comprised of their existing reading strategies, the accrued L2 vocabulary, semantic and pragmatic understanding of how the language functions, personal experience and interest, and a familiarity with the socio-cultural context of the reading at hand. Therefore, before embarking on the application of any text, the effective instructor will consider the piece in light of the group of learners and offer pre-reading strategies that will serve to close the gap on any of the aforementioned background knowledge necessary for success, but not yet evident in students' repertoires.

Because they represent a first exposure to any reading text, pre-reading strategies are critical for numerous reasons. It is precisely students' lack of cultural, linguistic, or intellectual backgrounds that leads to angst and despair about L2 reading. By engaging in pre-reading activities, teachers can help to bridge the gaps between the learners and the text. Pre-reading might include hypothesizing about content based on the title or the setting, identifying historical and cultural references that help to predict implied meanings, using the author's biographical information to predict a tone or point of view, and beginning to interpret simple symbols (e.g., those expressed by colors, animals, weather), as appropriate in the target culture. And the opportunity exists to pre-teach or to review pertinent vocabulary or structures key to comprehending a passage. The reading passage may offer a rich context within which to visit vocabulary and structures; however, these should not be the only pre-reading activities. Most importantly, time spent on pre-reading should help students activate their prior knowledge about the topic.

As we consider prior knowledge, we must discover whether the text resides within students' lived experiences and cultural context. If not, then providing that background knowledge is essential. Bragger and Rice (1999) maintain that when using authentic materials, it is necessary to choose content carefully, keeping in mind the cultural input from the piece. They expand Krashen's (1985) *i+1* theory to include *C+I*, the pattern that represents the content to be presented. If the content is too far beyond the students' realm of experiences and contexts, it will not be effective. Teachers must then consider how to pre-teach background contexts to students prior to the reading, while considering the practices, products, and perspectives of the target culture. Whatever the appropriate context establishment might be, whenever the reading is over, it is equally important for teachers to return to the hypotheses and predictions that students made during the pre-reading phase, so that students can reconsider whether their conjectures were appropriate or if they need to be reshaped yet again. For example, when reading a piece of

authentic literature, students typically consider the author's biographical data as a pre-reading exercise. Perhaps too infrequently, insufficient time is spent during post-reading to draw conclusions about the reading, based on the thought processes that were begun during the pre-reading phase.

Koda (1989) determined that "L1-L2 [first language-second language] linguistic distance has a considerable impact on reading strategies" (p. 537), and that more proficient readers have the tools needed to interpret information embedded in L2 clues. For this reason, it would seem important to draw students' attention to any particular syntactic element in the text that is key to unlocking meaning. One way to equip students is to favor the structure by asking them to skim the passage, searching for all examples of a potentially problematic L2 syntactical feature without actually reading the text. This sort of pre-familiarizing students with the reading before they engage in it can serve to build their confidence, as well as to reinforce the use of significant types of syntax within a context.

Another means of over-familiarizing students with the text during pre-reading is to spend time developing their decoding skills. As a homework activity, students might be asked to list or highlight any unknown vocabulary in the assigned text. Then, working in pairs, students should do all that they can to unravel meaning by considering cognates, word roots, parts of speech, sounds of words, context, and so forth. The L1 may be effective in helping students decode L2 if the language being learned has an orthographic system similar to English. The greater the difference between the two writing or character systems, the less helpful L1 is to the L2 decoding process (Koda, 1989). Nevertheless, students need encouragement to reflect on their metacognitive activity and to share their most effective decoding strategies with other students in the class. Individual students may provide some amazing ideas as to how they personally unravel L2 meanings, and their approaches can be translated into useful new tools for their peers. Asking students to begin by highlighting all the words that they *do* understand in the target language is also a useful strategy for building students' confidence about the skills they have acquired thus far.

An effective way to broach a new reading text, once students are familiar with its context, is for the teacher to read the first two or three paragraphs aloud to them, asking them to simply listen carefully. The instructor may then read the passage a second time and ask students to take notes in the target language about the most important points that they understand. In pairs, students should then write a short summary of the excerpt, followed by sharing some of their summaries aloud with the class. Classmates should be encouraged to add details to the summaries as necessary, based on the reading they have heard. Having shared a few sets of the summaries and discussed them with the class, the teacher should direct students to complete the reading aloud with a partner or at home, if their skills are sufficiently developed. In this way teachers have created an activity that combines all of the modes of communication and have pre-familiarized students with the reading piece before they ever lay eyes on the text. Having heard, discussed, written about, and re-discussed the opening, students have much greater confidence in getting started with a given piece.

Koda also demonstrated that “L2 readers will benefit from explicit vocabulary instruction” (1989, p. 537). WL teachers may wish to facilitate the reading stage by spending time during pre-reading to acquaint students with new vocabulary that is paramount to comprehension. Teachers may wish to consider ways to present the key vocabulary in contextually appropriate ways, such as using pictures, synonyms, cognates, and definitions in the L2. The amount of time spent on pre-teaching vocabulary will depend on the goal. Does the teacher expect students to retain items that may in fact be useful, high-frequency expressions? Or, on the contrary, are some of the terms low-frequency items simply in need of decoding for the understanding of the reading at hand? Just a short amount of time spent on ensuring the understanding of key words and phrases might go a long way towards building students’ comprehension, confidence, and enjoyment of the reading piece.

Vocabulary and structural knowledge alone, however, are not sufficient as pre-reading strategies to help students find meaning in a text, but rather are some of the necessary tools to help unlock the richness within the reading. By first considering the learners’ prior contextual knowledge and subsequently pre-teaching any vocabulary or structures that may overly frustrate students during reading, the teacher will have made great strides towards making reading accessible to the audience. By being sent repeatedly into the text to examine vocabulary that needs to be decoded, or for the purpose of gaining familiarity with a new structural feature prior to the actual reading, students will gain confidence about reading, based on their closeness with the words. It is exactly this over-familiarity with the text that will prepare students for a successful reading experience.

### **Using Authentic Texts**

The current direction of WL education includes the use of authentic texts, that is, those from the target cultures, in the L2 classroom. Possible sources of authentic texts can be the Internet, magazines, newspapers, e-mail, advertisements, literature, or other print material. Thus, teachers are faced with making any authentic text culturally and linguistically accessible to the learners. Teachers need to rely on their own knowledge of the target culture’s products, practices, and perspectives in order to introduce an accurate context to students. Having a network of native speakers can be helpful to non-native teachers of the target language for those cases when the cultural context may be unfamiliar. When instructors choose reading texts beyond the scope of the textbook or textbook series, there are bound to be lexical items that are unfamiliar to students. Sellers discusses the impact of students’ perceptions about the difficulty of L2 reading on their anxiety levels associated with the task (2000). She posits that, “learners should be exposed to authentic texts in ways that reduce their anxiety to minimal levels, so that they do not feel tension that inhibits second language performance and creates resistance to natural language acquisition and learning” (p. 515). Instructors must thus consider how to transform authentic pieces into “comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1985) for a given community of learners, thereby minimizing learning anxiety.

There are many ways to make a text salient to the learners: (1) Teachers might consider creating an electronic text to share with students, using the “highlight” and “comment” features in Microsoft Word to add a synonym, cognate, picture, or definition in the L2 for a new vocabulary item. After trying out their decoding skills on the new word, students can click on the word for confirmation of their success. (2) Teachers should feel free to rewrite simplified versions of authentic texts when the goal is to present an interesting or valuable concept from the target culture. During the simplification process, care must be taken to preserve the cultural and pragmatic intentions conveyed by the original rendition, while removing unnecessary, confusing text and replacing higher level vocabulary with simpler counterparts. (3) Assigning pieces of the authentic text to pairs of students and asking them to use a dictionary to select the appropriate meaning based on the context and to rewrite their segment in level-appropriate language can be a meaningful way of teaching students about the selection of correct dictionary meanings and of attending to L2 in language that will communicate meaning to their peers. Teachers may wish to consider the students’ own writing, once completely revised and as error-free as possible, as a source of original reading texts, since classmates share both a similar breadth of vocabulary and the same general level of ability and comprehension.

Instructors must keep in mind that the selection of the reading piece can be as important as the strategies they use to teach students about reading. Any reading text should be chosen because of its intrinsic value. The text will serve to enhance SLA, will provide students with new desirable information, will be culturally enriching, or will be entertaining. The instructor may additionally want to consider which reading strategies will be needed for student comprehension of the chosen piece. Reading pieces ought to be selected to fulfill a particular instructional goal rather than used simply because of their availability.

### **During Reading**

Beginning and intermediate readers need encouragement to read aloud as much as possible, as is the case when young children are taught to read in their first language. Reading aloud with a partner during class can be a good warm-up activity and serves to keep all students focused on the text. The exercise also helps to establish sound-symbol relationships for beginners. Hearing words may also help to trigger comprehension of their meanings. And for auditory learners, blending the visual print with the sound of the text is an excellent way of building language acquisition.

Once again, the purpose of the reading (i.e., what teachers hope students will gain from the text) will determine the types of during-reading activities. Helping novice readers learn to read for the gist and to be tolerant of their own inability to decode every word will lead them away from the temptation to read by translating the words. Summarizing a text can serve as both a during-reading comprehension check and as a post-reading activity requiring students to generalize the gist of a

passage. As a comprehension check, students might be asked to provide a one-sentence summary of the main ideas read thus far. As a possible post-reading activity, students might summarize with a partner or share the summaries that they have written with a small group. The ability to summarize well depends on students' ability to grasp and to acknowledge what information is the most important to the overall text. Hodge (1998) demonstrated that students with mild learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), may have difficulty assigning value to the content of their learning. For this reason, allowing students the opportunity to share summaries with one another is one way to ensure that all students assign the appropriate value to the important messages within the text.

Other types of simple comprehension checks can be used along the way during reading to make sure that students are grasping the overall sense of the piece. Possibilities include the following: (1) Pairs of students can create true/false sentences about the text to share with the class. (2) Working in pairs, students can write complete-sentence answers to any two or three of the questions that accompany the reading, possibly textbook-made questions. Then, students share single answers in any order, without revealing the number of the question being answered. The class listens to the answers and indicates which question matches the given response. (3) Students might draw stick figures or other illustrations of the sequence of primary events in the reading and use the drawings to re-tell the gist of the story to a classmate. Working with another student during these activities creates a sort of "safety net" for students who might otherwise struggle with sense-making.

A final challenge in our microwave culture is to encourage students to engage in multiple readings of a text. Comprehension often requires repeat visits to a passage, and it is through redundancy that students retain information and become quicker at information retrieval (Ruiz-Funes, 1999). Teachers can facilitate multiple readings by sending students back into specific segments of a piece with a particular task in mind. For instance, they could reread the last three paragraphs, verses, or sentences in search of a figurative meaning. These revisits should be guided by the purpose of the reading.

## **Post-Reading**

One of the most common forms of post-reading activities is answering questions about the reading. At early stages, questioning may indeed serve as a means to check comprehension. Over time, however, students should progress to higher-order thinking levels of questions (Stewart & Wilbur, 2005). Beginners might answer simple content questions, such as "who?," "what?," "when?," and "where?" Intermediate readers can begin to provide "why?" and "how?" questions. More advanced students should be asked to consider questions that cause them to draw inferences, to make analogies, to offer new perspectives, and to elaborate. Using

the same short text in subsequent years, while changing the level of questions as the learners progress, is a way to build students' confidence—since they know the text—and to build the skills required to help them become reflective thinkers.

Textbooks may offer post-reading questions that move learners directly from the “who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how?” level directly to reflective and analytical types of questions. Teachers may attempt to move immediately from the easier factual recognition questions through the reflection questions at the same pace. The author's experience is that classroom discussions often fall flat when students are asked to produce on-the-spot reflective answers. When provided with time to discuss reflective questions with their peers, students are more likely to arrive at insightful answers and should be allowed the luxury of time to formulate and articulate their thoughts in the target language. Otherwise, learners can be frustrated by their comprehension of abstract concepts in a piece of text that they are unable to sufficiently and clearly articulate in the target language. By gradually developing leveled questions, students have the opportunity to engage in a more critical reflection of the text. Instructors should consider allowing students an appropriate amount of time to discuss and create meaningful conclusions, inferences, and analogies.

Writing about reading affords students the opportunity to consider how their prior knowledge about the subject, combined with an interaction with the text, has led to the development of new learning or ideologies (Ruiz-Funes, 1999). Students might be asked to summarize a reading, to rewrite a piece of fiction with a new beginning or ending, or to rewrite it from the perspective of a different character or from the vantage point of an inanimate object. These sorts of post-reading activities can be fun, create a means for practicing L2 writing skills, and lend themselves to the continual building of the redundancy needed to cause deep learning.

How teachers assess students on L2 reading is a post-reading consideration. The teacher should determine the specific type of assessment prior to engaging in a text by asking what it is that students ought to gain from experiencing a passage. Teachers may wish to assess whether students have gained cultural or content knowledge, language skills, analytical abilities, and so forth. The author proposes a departure from the traditional approach of “read the text and answer the questions” for the purpose of student assessment. If we consider that beginners are both learning to read and reading to learn, then it might behoove us to first determine if students are developing the necessary tools for successful L2 reading. Beginner-level assessments might focus on the students' metacognitive approaches, asking them to connect the context of a passage to a context that is familiar to the student, to explain how they arrived at a successful decoding of a difficult word, or perhaps to identify the gist or main message of a text. Intermediate students might demonstrate comprehension by summarizing, dramatizing, or explaining a text for their classmates. Only after students have built a solid repertoire of reading tools should they be assessed on their ability to analyze, infer, and interpret a reading passage. Higher-level skills can certainly be practiced by novices, but

pushing students too early to perform at levels beyond their abilities can cause frustration that leads to program attrition. By giving a rightful amount of attention to building L2 reading skills, teachers can ensure that their students' confidence will increase, resulting in more enjoyment of texts and an increased desire to read.

### **Conclusions: Building the Program**

A meaningful and successful WL curriculum considers and recognizes the value of all types of reading as essential input that results in students' SLA. Helping to shepherd novice readers through an understanding of the gist of a passage can serve to build the confidence needed to motivate learners; success is a great motivator (Ellis, 1997). Because advanced WL studies remain an elective subject in most secondary and post-secondary curricula, students are unlikely to commit to advanced study if their L2 experience is riddled with failure and frustration. If students are provided with the tools, strategies, and steps to become competent L2 readers, they are more likely to continue with long sequences of WL study needed to result in eventual L2 fluency.

Recognizing the importance of vertical curricular articulation—making decisions as a department as to when L2 students will learn good dictionary usage skills, reading strategies, and so forth—will alleviate any presuppositions on the part of teachers about what students can do with a reading text, based on their learned skills and experiences from previous levels of study. As Ruiz-Funes (1999) warns,

Adequate transition from intermediate to advanced FL classes is often lacking and students move from one level to the next without the necessary preparation in reading and writing processes and strategy use that would allow them to succeed in the advanced courses (p. 521).

Because working to build students' reading skills may be time-consuming, curricular decisions about how to allocate instructional time must be considered. And since increased anxiety about reading results in even more increases in learner processing time (Sellers, 2000), the investment in teaching beginning and intermediate students to be solid L2 readers will provide great benefits to the overall SLA quest and can eventually result in more efficient readers.



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## FLTEACH Project: Online Database of Model Lessons with Cultural Content

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### Abstract

*Foreign language teachers are busy professionals who could benefit from ready access to educational materials that address the Standards for Foreign Language Learning and are also useful to their own particular curricula. This article will explain a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities that provides such access through the creation and development of an online database of FL lesson plans that are Standards-based, follow sound pedagogical models, use authentic materials, and focus on cultural content. The article describes the project rationale, the structure of the database, and procedures for submitting lesson materials. Pedagogical models (Interactive Model for Integrating the Three Modes of Communication, the PACE Model, and the Culture 3Ps) are explained and are suggested for submission of lessons.<sup>1</sup>*

### Background

With the advent of the 21st century, the expanded use of technology is evident in nearly every aspect of life. Communication technologies are of prime interest to foreign language (FL) professionals because communication is the main thrust and emphasis in FL teaching (Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot, 1994; Garrett, 1991a, 1991b, 1998; Oliva & Pollastrini, 1995; Phillips, 1998; Terry, 1998). These technologies can put FL learners in direct contact with native speakers (NSs) and authentic materials as never before, and lessons employing such authentic materials have tremendous potential in the FL classroom for directly addressing the goal areas of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities (LeLoup, 2000; National Standards, 1999). These technologies are also a means for FL educators to participate in a grass-roots-level exchange of ideas, materials, and lessons that will enhance their teaching and, consequently, the learning of their students.

This article details a portion of an *Exemplary Education Project* under the *Dissemination* category entitled “FLTEACH: A Model for Professional Development and Foreign Language Instruction.” This project is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and is designed to provide an infrastructure for the collection and dissemination of pedagogically sound lessons for FL instruction that use authentic materials from the World Wide Web (WWW) and address the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. (The NEH Grant #ED-22243-02 has a period of 9/1/02-8/31/06.) The primary focus here is on a two-fold project that includes (1) the collection, categorization, and dissemination of online resources and lessons containing rich cultural content that meet rigorous pedagogical standards and (2) the creation and maintenance of a database for dissemination of these materials, which will enhance the humanities content of FL curricula.

### **Project Explanation**

The grant project is an outgrowth of FLTEACH, an electronic discussion list for FL teaching methods (FLTEACH—the Foreign Language Teaching Forum) and its accompanying ancillaries on the FLTEACH WWW site. FLTEACH has been cited as the “FL teacher’s flagship for information and discussion on methods as well as for access to specific teaching materials and other resources” (Finnemann, 1996, p. 6). The WWW home page of FLTEACH (<<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/>>; see LeLoup & Ponterio, 2005) presently serves as a global resource of links to target language sites, authentic materials, and archives germane to FL curricula. As a result of the NEH project, the FLTEACH Web site will continue to serve a clearinghouse function for FL resources and, in addition, will provide the infrastructure for the dissemination of these materials through a searchable database using primary keyword identifiers, where applicable, such as language, level, topic, pedagogical model, grammar structure treated, and language skills addressed. Given the high visibility of the FLTEACH discussion forum and its ancillary Web site, the latter is well positioned to be a national dissemination vehicle for FL resources. Current calculations indicate that the FLTEACH Web site is already widely used by both subscribers and non-subscribers. The entire site received an average of 130,000 total hits per month in 2005, and the primary FLTEACH page received over 11,000 hits per month.

### **Project Rationale**

The central goals of the project are to make available a plethora of instructional resources for teachers and to provide an infrastructure for dissemination of well-designed standards-based teaching materials for use by any FL educator with access to the WWW. The end result of these goals is the enhancement of instruction and an enrichment of the humanities content of FL classes, both of which should lead to an improvement in student language learning. Technology has made

it possible for FL teachers to bring the world into their classroom and make direct connections between their students and NSs of the language of instruction. Ready access to authentic materials, NSs, and actual target language (TL) use will foster sustained study of second languages and their cultural contexts. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999) emphasize cultural knowledge as an integral part of language learning and recommend the tri-part examination of cultural products, practices, and the perspectives underlying them. This exploration of cultural products, practices, and, more importantly, perspectives, is greatly facilitated by using Internet technologies.

More and more FL teachers are employing communications technologies and Internet resources in their instruction to enrich their course content. Indeed, attendance at any FL conference shows that the sessions dealing with technology and use of authentic materials from the Internet are overflowing with participants. Nevertheless, the much-increased access to authentic materials online does not automatically translate into their successful integration into the FL curriculum. Indeed, many teacher-made materials that can be found presently online are conspicuous for their lack of sound pedagogical basis, and frequently FL technology workshops focus too much on technique and not enough on pedagogical application. Teachers need to be able to take advantage of Internet technologies to gain access to quality resources, integrating them in a useful way into the FL curriculum (Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot, 1994; Cubillos, 1998; Garrett, 1991a, 1998; LeLoup & Ponterio, 1995; Martínez-Lage & Herren, 1998; Salaberry, 1996).

### **So Many Materials, So Little Time**

Most teachers have Internet access, either at home, at school, or both. They are able to find much in the way of authentic materials to use in their classroom. However, the creation of pedagogically strong materials that support exemplary humanities teaching is a very time-consuming task. Busy teachers often lack the time for development of sufficient materials of this ilk. The clearinghouse portion of this project solicits, collects, and categorizes quality Standards-based lessons and materials that employ sound pedagogical practice. A number of products created by FL educators and consortia were located and are included in the database. In addition, materials submissions are encouraged from FL educators in general. Such submissions will need to conform to an established format in order to facilitate the categorization and dissemination of these materials in the database. A sample of the format for lesson submission can be found on the Web page (<<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/lessons/>>).

The aim is to provide access to pedagogically sound materials that are rich in cultural content, an area in which FL teachers continually express a desire for assistance. To facilitate searching, the categories of lessons sought follow the topics stipulated by the *Modern Languages for Communication: New York State Syllabus* (NY State Education Department) and represent a broad base of cultural information that is included across all levels of FL instruction. A list of these

topics and their subcategories is supplied on the lesson submission form online and in the online edition of the *Modern Languages for Communication: New York State Syllabus* (NY State Education Department, pp. 21-26). To ensure that these lesson plans will be usable by teachers, materials for inclusion in the database are screened for varied and appropriate cultural content, including adherence to the tri-part approach of products, practices, and perspectives espoused by the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999), attention to the standards, observance of current educational practice, use of sound pedagogical models, and accuracy. If some necessary information or components are missing from the original lesson submission, the author is contacted and asked to supply the remaining data before the lesson becomes active in the database.

### **Pedagogical Models**

Some pedagogical models have been suggested as an aid to lesson plan development. While it is not mandatory that all lesson submissions follow the models completely, they are meant as guidance for teachers who wish to incorporate all or part of the steps involved in these respective models. The models selected as templates for lesson plan and resource submission are the “PACE model” for grammar instruction in a whole-language context (Adair-Hauck, Donato, & Cumo-Johanssen, 2005); the “Interactive Model for Integrating the Three Modes of Communication” (Shrum & Glisan, 2005) for instruction of listening and reading, using authentic materials; and a generalized model presenting the triangulation approach toward the studying and teaching of culture that is advocated by the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999). This triangulation underscores an in-depth consideration of products and practices, along with their concomitant perspectives.

#### *PACE Model*

The PACE Model represents a story-based and guided participatory approach to the teaching of grammar in the FL curriculum (Adair-Hauck, et al., 2005). In this approach, teachers and learners work together to co-construct a grammar explanation for forms salient in a selected authentic text. PACE is an acronym for the steps of the model:

**Presentation:** The teacher foreshadows the grammar explanation through the use of integrated discourse; emphasis is on literal comprehension and meaning.

**Attention:** The teacher assists students in focusing their attention on a particular language form or grammatical structure.

**Co-construction:** Using guiding questions, the teacher and students co-construct the grammar explanation by discovering the underlying patterns or consistent forms.

**Extension:** Further activities enable the learners to use the grammatical structure and to communicate on an interpersonal level.

(Adair-Hauck & Donato, 2002, p. 279)

The success that many educators have had with this model stems from the following key features:

- Presentation of grammar in context
- Use of authentic materials
- Focus on structures that are conspicuous in the text
- Co-construction of grammar through guiding questions

The PACE Model advocates presenting language structures in context rather than as isolated, discrete-point items. Second language instruction has evolved from a complete focus on grammatical forms as individual items to be internalized (a bottom-up approach) to the comprehension of language structures as part of the whole (a top-down approach), acquired through meaningful language use (an interactive approach). Contextualized language instruction is accepted as a more effective and efficient way of aiding second language acquisition (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). This model also employs authentic materials, for students need to work with such materials regularly if our goal is to have them function in the TL environment. The challenge of finding authentic materials wherein the grammatical structure or form is truly salient necessitates a new approach to materials evaluation and collection. We need to view all authentic materials from the perspective of what they can help us teach, rather than deciding what to teach and then frantically scrambling to find materials that serve that purpose. The Co-construction phase of the model is a radical change from the teacher-presents/students-take-notes structure so often employed in FL grammar instruction. The “co-” portion indicates collaboration between the teacher and the students to formulate rules about the language feature of interest. With appropriate guiding questions posed by the teacher, students can come to an appropriate understanding of the grammar point and can articulate usage guidelines in their own words, thus establishing ownership of the lesson outcome. They also discover their own language potential and often gain more confidence in language use.

*Interactive Model for Integrating the Three Modes of Communication*

Originally conceived as a six-phase model (Shrum & Glisan, 1994), it has been modified and revised to reflect the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999). The model contains five phases for student activities that can employ any of the communication modes (offered as examples in parentheses):

- Preparation phase:** preview text; predict meaning; activate background knowledge (*interpretive mode*)
- Comprehension phase:** skim for gist and scan for specific information; main ideas and key details determined (*interpretive mode*)
- Interpretation phase:** interpret text; identify cultural products, practices, and perspectives, discuss inferences and opinions of the text (*interpretive + interpersonal mode*)
- Application phase:** create a summary of text and/or create a presentation or product relating to text (*presentational mode*)
- Extension phase:** analyze two texts and compare content and organization (*interpretive, revisited*) (Shrum & Glisan, 2005)

The model is interactive and integrative, guiding the learner through interactions with the text, activities using different modes of communication, and exploration of cultural perspectives embodied in the text. The notion of “text” is very broad, of course, and can be a printed, an aural, or a video sample.

*Culture*

The third “model” is really not a model per se but rather an emphasis on the *Cultures* goal area of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999). The two standards in this area deal with products and practices of the TL culture. The most compelling portion of these standards, however, is the examination of the perspectives that underpin these manifestations of culture. Without this insistence on exploration of the “why” behind actions, articles, and beliefs of the TL society, we run the great risk of trivializing culture by reducing it to facts, figures, and fun on Fridays in the classroom. In our classrooms we frequently confront the skepticism or outright rejection of elements of the TL culture: “Do they really eat that?”; “How dumb!”; “Ugh, what a stupid thing to do!” Our students often do not understand that they too have a culture that may appear strange, different, or unattractive to others. Sometimes just finding out *why* something is done can help students view the TL culture in a more positive light and understand more about the products and practices that pervade the everyday lives of the speakers in the society under study. The *Comparisons* goal area can further students’ comprehension by drawing parallels between TL and native language cultural products and practices. For instance, finding and illustrating in a Venn diagram the commonalities between a *quinceañera* and a *Sweet Sixteen* party can



make much difference in how these celebrations are seen by each culture. Sometimes it helps to look for points of convergence rather than to underscore differences of any proportion.

Sample lesson plans developed using these models are available online on the lesson page. Several sample lessons are online at <<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/lessons/>>. The intent is not to create an all-inclusive list of FL resources but rather to make available a selection of excellent FL cultural materials and resources that can be readily incorporated into the curriculum to enhance its humanities content. The project also gives creative teachers an easy path to follow to share with colleagues around the world their favorite activities that work.

## Online Database

The technical implementation of this project is built upon a Microsoft Access database located on a Web server set up to allow the construction of a Web-based interface. A Web page written in ASP (Active Server Page) code, essentially a combination of HTML code with Visual Basic programming, collects information from and returns information to the user as it communicates with the database via the database language SQL (Structured Query Language). The interface clearly presents options to the user, responds appropriately to requests, formats information for the user, and passes on commands to the database in SQL format for querying or modifying the database. (We explain below the rationale for the format of information collected in the database and give an overview of the interface that the user sees when submitting a lesson plan, but we do not go into the technical details as to how this is accomplished.)

The database design reflects the need to accurately identify and describe the lesson, include contact information for the author, offer useful search categories for locating lessons, and provide access to the actual lesson. The Web interface for submitting a lesson plan follows the basic format of the database record itself (see Appendix). It also includes pop-up information to answer any questions the submitter might have while filling in the lesson plan submission form.

The first few fields request the author contact information: last and first names, e-mail address, and school. These entries allow users to know something about the author, let the maintainers of the database contact the author in case of problems, and provide a route for feedback to the author from other teachers using the materials. The lesson title and brief description serve to uniquely identify the lesson to the users and aid them in browsing for lessons that they might potentially use in their own classes. A number of additional fields not only help describe the lesson but, more importantly, make it possible to search the database for lessons matching certain parameters. The topic and subtopic fields specify the syllabus topic for which the lesson is designed (see the NY State Education Department site for topics and subtopics of the NYSS: <<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/lote/pub/modernl.pdf>>). A link is included in the submission page to help the contributing teacher select the best topic and subtopic to accurately identify the lesson.

The grammar topics field is useful for lessons designed to focus on one or more

specific grammar topics. The keywords field allows searching on words or expressions that do not fit neatly into other categories but that the lesson author has chosen to help describe a particular lesson. The language field is essential to identify the language being taught. The textbook field is helpful in searching for lessons specifically tied to a certain textbook and might also be useful in helping a teacher better understand how a selected lesson may fit into the presentation order of a particular text. The skills-targeted field includes Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Culture, and may certainly represent more than one of these.

Because one of the purposes of the database is to facilitate access to lessons based on sound pedagogical models, a choice of such models is included in a database field for the models described above: *PACE*, *Interactive model*, and *Culture*. A link is included in the submission page to an online description of these models. The class-level field indicates the level for which a lesson was originally intended, though a lesson may certainly be appropriate for a variety of different levels. Finally, the Standards field identifies which of the standards are addressed by a lesson. To indicate that a standard is addressed by a lesson, the submitter simply checks those that are present in the lesson; for instance, *2.2 Products of Culture* (National Standards, 1999, p. 9). As a reminder, each standard named is a hot link that opens a window with a brief description of the standard.

These search fields serve dual purposes. They function as search criteria, allowing a teacher to specify any combination of these to locate lessons matching a particular need. At the same time they provide important information that helps the teacher quickly see how a lesson might be integrated into one's own syllabus. The date field is for internal use, allowing the administrators to identify the most recent version of a submission in cases where a lesson may have been submitted more than once.

Two options are offered to provide access to the actual lesson. The best use of the Web suggests that the ideal solution is for the author to place a copy of the lesson on a Web site where anyone may access it and where the author can easily make corrections or improvements over time. Nevertheless, some teachers may not have access to Web space or may not know how to place their lessons online. In these cases it is possible to include the actual lesson plan in the fields set up for this purpose in the database itself: Objectives, Materials, Procedures, Cultural information, and Technology. These fields follow the outline proposed in the models described above.

Language teachers can access the submission page for this database and easily enter the requested information about their lesson. If the lesson is already online, it is a simple matter to include the address that points to it. If not, the teacher can copy and paste the necessary information from any word processor document to the various fields on the submission page.

## Invitation to Participate

Foreign language teachers are among the most creative and productive in the education profession. They also tend to be very generous with their time, talents, and expertise—sharing ideas, lessons, and readily supporting their colleagues with materials, suggestions, and assistance. One reason for this is the vast amount of information and knowledge of language and culture that FL teaching presupposes. No one teacher can know everything about the myriad TL cultures she should address, but teachers with experiences in 10 different TL countries can pool their resources and have a very good repository from which to draw. The FLTEACH online database is an excellent opportunity for FL teachers to contribute to their colleagues in particular and the profession as a whole by submitting standards-based cultural lessons they know to be effective. The authors invite their fellow educators to add to the store of pedagogically sound FL cultural materials online and to take advantage of all that this database project has to offer. Readers interested in more details on the project, submitting lessons, and searching for FL resources in the online database should access the project page at <<http://www.cortland.edu/flteach/lessons/>>.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> This article is an expanded and revised version of one appearing previously in W. Heller, Ed., *Celebrating the Teacher Within*, Annual Meeting Series No. 20, pp. 57-62. Schenectady, NY: New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers. (See LeLoup & Ponterio, 2003.)

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# 3

## Uses of Blogs in L2 Instruction

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### **Abstract**

*Blogs are one of the newest tools in L2 instruction. This article offers a brief overview of the literature on blogs in L2 teaching and an outline of how they can be used in class to encourage language production and cultural awareness in learners. Also detailed are conceptual and practical concerns related to these activities. Finally, an overview is presented of what students think of using blogs, and a few topics are proposed for further research.*

### **Background**

The expression of ideas using the typewriter, computer, and networks of computers has often been compared to writing. Differences between writing on paper and using computers to “write” are numerous. Therefore, as technological expression continues to become more mainstream, the question arises: Are these new technological media, particularly blogs, useful in teaching the more traditional skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as addressing cultural topics?

A review of the literature indicates that the use of blogs in second language (L2) instruction is relatively novel, with some of the earliest articles on the topic published online in 2003. This review indicates that blogs are a dynamic vehicle that L2 professionals can apply to the teaching of L2 skills. Ward (2004) mentions this application to writing instruction for ESL students and provides a definition and history of blogs, stating that blogs look more like Web sites than e-mail, although they have qualities of both. He defines blogs as “a free online publishing house for anyone who cares to write and for those who care to read it” (p. 2). In citing Stiler, he further differentiates blogs from journals, in that the former are more like reporting, and the latter are like diaries. Ward then emphasizes the benefits of blogging in composition classes. The readers are authentic, and the language is communicative, as opposed to mechanical, with the emphasis on the process of writing, with peer review or editing. The effect is that of reducing inhibitions regarding the act of writing, or what he denominates “disinhibition.” Furthermore,

the technology itself provides “dynamic content, connecting multiple authors,” facilitating “an interactive relationship with an infinite and unknowable audience.” He concludes that bloggers and their readers have “expectations and ‘needs’ that may not have existed in previous modes of communication” (p. 3).

Ward (2004) also argues that blogs aid in the development of reading skills. For his study, blogs were readily available in English for his ESL students. Blogs are also increasingly available in non-English target languages, such as Spanish and French. These may be used as authentic reading material. Ward, however, lists some of the drawbacks of blogging, including the fact that it may lead to superficial reading and sloppy writing. These problems can be avoided with judicious moderating by the instructor of the exchanges in a blog. The possibility remains, too, that blogging may be just the latest flash in the technological pan, an outgrowth of e-mailing and perhaps the sibling of IM-ing (Instant Messaging), another technology—this one synchronous—that could also have application to L2 instruction.

Ward’s article provides a solid background of blogging, but there is a Web site with a virtual catalogue of ideas as to how to apply blogging to many aspects of L2 teaching. Paul Hampel’s (2004) Web site offers many good suggestions for using blogs in education, including creating a reflective-journal-type blog, ideas to start a class blogging, and ideas to encourage students to start their own individual or shared blogs.

Godwin-Jones (2003) points out that the advantages of blogging include maintaining a log of exchanges among students, a more serious consideration of language (as opposed to the language used in e-mails), and the encouragement of community language learning by electronic means. Godwin-Jones indicates that “self-publishing encourages ownership and responsibility on the part of the students, who may be more thoughtful (in content and structure) if they know they are writing for a real audience” (p. 13).

*Edugadget* is an online publication whose subtitle is “Plain-Talking Technology Reviews for Teachers.” In one of its 2005 articles, Steve Brooks plants blogs as a platform from which listening to sound files, viewing posted graphics, and speaking to classes in other countries are all possible using Audioblog, Flickr, and Skype, respectively. As further corroboration that the use of blogs has attained mainstream status in L2 education, the authors cite prospectuses of studies of their use in classes and announcements of conferences about the topic.

## Setting

Before outlining the uses of blogs in an L2 classroom, the authors wish to describe the particular setting that served as the basis for their study. All activities and courses discussed in this article took place in public university courses. At Southern Polytechnic State University, campus technological resources are many, including multiple high-speed Internet-connected computer labs. The department involved in this study also maintains its own language lab with 28 computers.



In the elementary courses used for this study, students ranged in age from approximately 18 to 50. Many of the students in the Elementary Spanish II course are “non-traditional” and come to the class after non-academic work during the day. During the semester in which these blog activities were implemented, approximately 20 students were enrolled in Elementary Spanish I, 28 in Elementary Spanish II, and 12 in Intermediate Spanish II. Blogs were also used minimally in advanced-level Spanish classes: Techniques of Translation and Advanced Grammar and Composition.

The elementary and intermediate classes met in one of two locations—the main classroom or the language lab. At the front of the main classroom there is a SmartBoard connected to a computer and projector, and the desks are arranged in a large circle. The language lab is arranged with an instructor’s computer at the front and the student computers in carrels. Both the classroom and language lab computers are connected to high-speed Internet.

A voluntary survey completed by 23 students from the elementary courses at the end of the semester revealed that most students rated their “familiarity with computers” very high and their “familiarity with the Internet” even higher. Only two students rated their “familiarity with computers” as “average,” and only one student rated his/her “familiarity with the Internet” as “average.” No students rated themselves below average in these two areas. These results are key to understanding the setting and students with which these blog activities were used, namely underscoring the fact that the majority of them are technologically trained.

## Goals and Objectives

The language goals for the elementary courses described here adhere closely to a list of performance outcomes provided by the university system. As such, these courses could be described as objectives-based or competency-based. Further, these outcomes are divided into the four language skills and do not address culture.

A main goal in implementing blogs in the elementary L2 classrooms was to improve student writing. Blogs were seen as an opportunity to decrease inhibition in writing, to encourage self- and peer-editing, and to practice writing strategies. A lesser goal in the Elementary Spanish II and Intermediate Spanish II courses was to increase opportunity for reading of authentic materials through target-language blogs.

Many of these blog activities were designed specifically to meet the outcomes listed under the writing section of the university system outcomes. Some of these include “write short paragraphs about self, family, school” (Elementary Spanish I); “write short notes to classmates about plans for the weekend or descriptions of last weekend” (Elementary Spanish II); and “write expository prose of one to two pages, consisting of a description or an opinion, about very familiar topics” (Intermediate Spanish II). Thus, blog tasks were often guided by these desired outcomes.

Once the use of blogs for teaching writing was established, their uses to teach other skills became evident. There are services that include the capacity to publish sound files, including MP3 and WAV, and podcasts, or the posting of a sound file to a blog that readers will download and listen to on a portable player, much as they would listen to a radio program. One disadvantage is that some services charge a long-distance fee that makes participation of all students too costly. Additional services include storing, searching, sorting, and sharing graphics for their use in class, both “big *C* culture” graphics, as well as “little *c* culture” graphics of everyday life in the target culture. An additional advantage to blogs is one’s ability to make long distance phone calls over the Internet, thus facilitating the possibility of having a class in the U. S. talk to one in another country.

### Activity Types

Over the course of the semester, students were asked to use the blog in four main types of activities. A fifth activity, authentic blog reading, was explored relatively little, due to time limitations.

#### *Assignment prompt*

The instructor posts a prompt on the blog and students are expected to respond to it. Prompts were often directly related to the vocabulary presented in the chapter and being considered in class. Responses to the prompt would sometimes be assigned as homework. Some examples of prompts follow:

“¿Cómo eres? ¿Qué te gusta hacer?” (*What are you like?*)

*What do you like to do?*)

“¿Cómo es tu familia?” (*What is your family like?*)

“¿Qué haces todos los días?” (*What do you do every day?*)”

“Haz un plan para tu bien estar.” (*Make a personal health plan.*)

Although superficially quite similar to traditional paper journal prompts, blog prompts allowed for a sense of community to develop. Students knew that a real audience, their peers, would see their replies. Further, as the blog was on the Internet, students also knew that their audience was not only limited to their classmates, but perhaps expanded to the larger Internet community.

The two instructors used this activity in several ways, one as a required homework activity in which the blog writing was viewed as product itself, and the other as a means for the students as a class to analyze their errors. Thus, the first instructor required that students include their names on the assignment, whereas the second encouraged the use of aliases. Future research could be done comparing the alias method to the more traditional one in order to determine the efficacy of one method over the other.

The instructor using the alias method relied on intrinsic motivation and frequent reminders in class of the benefits of this writing to motivate the students to

write. At times the class as a whole would use part of a class period to respond to a blog assignment prompt. As responses to a prompt were perused, the instructor looked for recurring errors, though he never corrected them immediately. At the beginning of the course, the instructor specifically alerted students that their blog posts would not be corrected for accuracy unless they specifically put “PLEASE REVISE” in the subject line. Instead, during the next class, using these posts as the basis for discussion, the instructor taught or retaught certain vocabulary or grammar points. Besides language content, the instructor often focused on revision strategies that could be used to identify and improve on these types of errors; for example, finding and underlining all adjectives and then checking their agreement with the nouns they describe. As the students were encouraged to use aliases in order to ensure anonymity, there was little anxiety that the instructor was criticizing an individual’s language use.

The blog assignments at the advanced level were obligatory. Students of Advanced Grammar and Composition were asked to complete the following creative writing exercise:

Ahora les propongo una historia de no más de 100 palabras. La idea, la historia, el formato, se los dejo en sus manos, sólo una condición: yo le proporciono el final. Su cuento debe terminar con la siguiente frase: “A las cinco de la tarde, se callaron todos los relojes.” ¡Ojo! Esta frase no puede estar ni al principio ni en el medio, recuerden, sólo al final.

*(Now I propose that you write a story of not more than 100 words. The idea, the history, the format, I leave in your hands, with one exception: I determine the ending. Your story should end with the sentence: “At five in the afternoon, all the clocks stopped.” Careful! This sentence can be neither at the beginning nor in the middle, but remember, only at the end.)*

On the other hand, the class in Techniques of Translation had a more mundane assignment:

Favor de definir las siguientes siglas en el contexto de la traductología. Luego, haz un comentario sobre cada una:

*(Please define the following abbreviations in the context of translation science. Then, provide a commentary on each:)*

1. TM
2. EMBT
3. CAT

In the case of each assignment, the students were later asked to post comments on their opinions of their classmates’ submissions, including form and content. The result of this use of the blog was that of creating a greater sense of community, of sharing ideas, and of group learning than would have otherwise been possible without the blog.

For the Business Spanish course, an extra-credit section was set up so that students who attended outside activities, such as business conferences, could share their observations about them by posting comments on the blog.

### *Free Write*

Each week in the elementary courses, students were asked to post something on the blog. The assignment was purposely generic and open-ended in an attempt to lower the students' inhibitions to write. As blogs are often used in the "blogosphere," or blogging community, to discuss random personal day-to-day topics, students were encouraged to use the class blog in a similar way in Spanish. While the topic of the assignment prompt was often limited to the content being discussed in class, the content of the free write activity was much more open. To discourage inappropriate content in the free write, students were reminded as to what would be inappropriate to post on the blog, such as links to pornographic material, copyrighted material, inflammatory comments, or abusive language. As students used aliases on the blog in the elementary level courses, these free-write posts could not be used for grading, since the instructor could not and did not necessarily want to identify the students.

### *Describe a Scene*

Although the previous two activities were done mainly outside of class, the "Describe a scene" was done during class time in two computer labs (the language lab and another). Used to teach writing, reading, and culture, this activity was created in an attempt to mimic a typical, authentic communication exchange over the Internet. Although these students would perhaps rarely write a physical letter to someone describing their "plans for the weekend or descriptions of last weekend," a desired outcome mentioned earlier, they would use the Internet for such exchanges much more often.

On the days when the class would "describe a scene," all students would meet in the language lab. First, the activity was explained to the class as a whole. After receiving this explanation, the class was divided into two rooms with computers and access to the blog. The activity would start with a print of a painting displayed on the main projector at the front of the room. Each student's job in Room 1 was to write a post describing the scene in the picture. Each student's job in Room 2 was to read all of the posts from the other room and recreate the scene to his/her best ability. Then, after all individuals had completed a rough sketch of what the scene looked like, they would all compare their drawings and discuss in L2 how they arrived at this picture, perhaps by using key words they had read. Following such discussion, students would choose one of the pictures (or redraw a new one) that was most representative of the posts they had read. Then the two groups would be rejoined in the language lab, and the two original pieces of art would be revealed and compared.

This activity requires a great deal of logistical planning, including the availability of two labs in close proximity, and two projectors. Further, to ensure that

the students in Room 2 were not waiting for those in Room 1 to post, those in Room 2 had their own picture to describe. Thus, two iterations of this activity were going on simultaneously.

Once the activity was in place, however, the process moved quickly with little direction from the instructor. Occasionally when students were stumped as to where to start, the instructor would ask them questions in the L2 about the painting, such as “Where is this?” or “What are these people doing?” This prompt usually kick-started their writing. To keep the activity moving, time limits were imposed on each part of the activity, namely how long the students had to examine the picture, write their post, read the posts of the others, draw a sketch, confer, and choose a representative sketch.

The most productive part of the activity came when the groups were rejoined and the two pictures revealed and compared. Often, students would gasp at the revealing of the picture. Students were often amazed that their pictures looked generally like the original: a successful communication exchange! Time was also allotted to discuss the communication exchange and problems that arose, as well as the cultural aspects of the piece of art.

### *Structured, Peer-Edited Process Writing*

The blog, because of its collaborative nature, was also found to be a useful medium for structured, peer-edited process writing. Students in Elementary Spanish II used the blog to brainstorm ideas, post first drafts, receive peer feedback, request feedback from the instructor, and post final drafts. The fact that the most recent posts were presented first on the blog, followed by older posts—a feature that has come to be termed “reverse chronology”—allowed for quick recognition of the steps the final product had gone through, thus facilitating a focus on process.

Though done in all elementary levels, the largest implementation of this activity occurred as an intra-departmental project. Students in Intermediate Spanish II were assigned to write a newspaper article on a current news item particularly applicable to the Spanish-speaking world, such as the death of the Pope. Students posted their first drafts on the blog. Revision strategies were taught, such as underlining the verbs and checking for verb/subject agreement, to equip the students to be peer-editors. Once the first drafts of all students were up on the blog, students were then assigned to post revision comments on two of the articles. All students were assured that their papers were looked over by at least two of their peers. Then, students in the Advanced Grammar course were assigned to play the role of Editor and revise these articles again. Finally, students in Translation Techniques were assigned to translate the final drafts back to English. The two final editions—one in English, one in Spanish—were then put together to create a bilingual departmental newspaper addressing current topics.

The implementation of such a large-scale project as the one mentioned required an extreme degree of coordination among classes and faculty members. Because of the particular circumstances of the semester and the novelty of the activity, the newspaper never made it to print. The articles remained only in their

online forms. However, highlighting the process was more important to this activity than the product.

### *Authentic Blog Reading*

Because an early focus of the blogs was an effort to improve writing, this last activity was used only briefly at the beginning of the semester and thus needs to be explored more fully in the future. Students were asked to join an authentic target-language blog, where topics ranged broadly from movies to philosophy. They were asked to read posts from the blog on a weekly basis. As it was extremely hard to check whether they were actually doing this assignment, this activity was dropped early in the semester. It might be possible in the future for students of corresponding target languages in other countries to correspond in their L1s, thus allowing each student to read authentic texts.

### **Affective Concerns**

Besides disinhibition, as cited above in Ward (2004), the use of the blog in teaching writing in L2 classes encouraged more writing and naturally reduced the negative affective responses to writing, especially among reluctant writers. As mentioned earlier, a main goal in using blogs in the elementary courses was to lower inhibition to write in the L2. One possible way to do so would be to use new technology, such as the blog, which encourages greater speed and less inhibition.

On the other hand, the use of new technology creates its own affective concerns. Though most students used the blog with ease, it is helpful to consider the comments of the few who responded in a survey that they “experienced technical problems.” Here are some unedited comments a few students made:

“I didn’t check the confirmation e-mail on time and therefore couldn’t post on the [blog].”

“[The blog] is hard to navigate.”

“Hard to make ñ and accents, difficulty navigating, posting, and reading others comments sometimes (basic unfamiliarity).”

“My entries went into outer space.”

To avoid the anxiety and frustration caused by technical problems and unfamiliarity with the medium, the instructor could distribute a handout at the beginning of each semester that outlines the exact steps of how to use the blog. Students could further be alerted to the possibility of difficulties and how to handle them.

### **Culture**

Both “big *C*” and “little *c*” cultures can be integrated in blogs. In addition to integrating cultural topics and materials into the blog assignments (such as the “describe a scene” activity), the use of blogs encouraged discussion on the real-

life use of technology in Spanish-speaking cultures. The blogging service used by the class, <Livejournal.com>, hosted many Spanish-speaking blogs, just one of which the students were encouraged to read. Students got to see and imitate the authentic Spanish-language use of technology.

Further, students saw that language representing the technology of the computer and Internet is greatly influenced by English. The most basic example of this is that students learned that “a blog” in English is merely ‘un blog’ in Spanish. As mentioned earlier, many students quickly learned that their American-format keyboards were not the most efficient for “writing” in Spanish on the blog. Students initially struggled with key-codes for the entry of Spanish characters. These pedagogical tasks gave the students practice for Spanish-language uses of technology in future academic and real-life settings. One student in Intermediate Spanish II commented in class that “he had never typed in Spanish.” This particular use of technology would be useful in his lifelong learning of Spanish.

### Practical Concerns

Students from the elementary levels were asked to voluntarily submit comments regarding the use of the blog throughout the semester. Their comments reveal topics of practical concern that instructors may need to address. Though not exhaustive, their comments are divided into three areas: amount of technical knowledge necessary, preference for medium, and organization of posts.

Regarding technical knowledge, students offered the following comments in response to the questions “What did you like least about the blog?” and “What suggestions do you have for future use of blogs?”:

“Unfamiliar with site.”

“The fact that one had to be Internet capable or live on campus.”

“Explain the site better.”

“To give a more thorough explanation of how to use the blog.”

These comments show that instructors should incorporate technology training, perhaps in L2, into the classroom when using blogs as a medium for assignments. Even at a technically-oriented university, some students will benefit from training.

Furthermore, teachers themselves may require some instruction with the medium to take full advantage of its capability. One of the instructors exclaimed that the medium was rather easy to learn, however. After setting up the blog, this instructor exclaimed, “I was flabbergasted that *I* could do this!” The other instructor took advantage of previous technical knowledge to later compare various blogging services and software, concluding that hosting one’s own blog with blogging software, such as Wordpress or MoveableType, may be preferable to using a blogging service, such as <Blogger.com> or <Livejournal.com>.

Other student responses on the questionnaire showed that some students merely prefer to use a technological medium over a more traditional one or vice versa.

Comments revealing these preferences follow:

“It is on the computer, and I would rather edit papers online because not everyone’s handwriting can be read easily, for example, mine.”

“I like the interface and the chance to use a new medium.”

“Students should be given a choice between blog and paper.”

“Easier to write on paper.”

“I think paper is more forgiving when trying to learn.”

“I computer-compose better, so I enjoyed that a lot more.”

“I simply prefer writing to typing; it is easier for me to absorb information.”

“It is just as easy to blog as it is to write a paper.”

When considering the use of blogs, instructors may need to weigh student medium preferences along with time constraints, technology constraints, and lifelong learning benefits.

Students were particularly vocal about the organization of posts on the blog. Their comments included the following:

“Often I would be intimidated by all the postings; I couldn’t find which one applied to me.”

“Trying to find assignments and sorting through posts which were irrelevant to me.”

“Make more sections for study help, random posts, class material, etc.”

“Sections on the site would be good.”

“I don’t like how people post outside of the topics; it messes up my friend’s page.”

More organization of the posts can be added to a blog through the use of categories or tags. The blogging service that the class used during the semester did not support categories or tags. Thus, in the future other blogging services or private hosting may be beneficial.

## **Conclusion**

For the setting considered here, blogs proved effective for teaching writing skills. Their most important characteristic became their facilitation of peer review and collaboration. Students commented on this aspect frequently in response to the question “What did you like best about using the blog?”:

“It provided opportunity for extra feedback.”

“It was easy to use and it allowed me to learn from the work of fellow students.”

“You can get other people’s input very easily.”



“The ability to quickly communicate with many people and receive rapid feedback.”

“Easy access and able to read what others posted.”

“Being able to talk outside class.”

Some future topics for research suggested by this study include the effect of blog use on the quantity and quality of final writing products, as well as on student perception and motivation. The effect of blog anonymity versus identification may also be explored. Further, the use of target language blogs as reading material was discussed only briefly here. Finally, there is a possibility that further technological advancement may replace blogs with another technological medium, much as word processing has replaced the typewriter. The definition of “writing” in light of technological advancement thus continues to change with each new writing medium. Blogs may play a role in shaping future communication, placing them as a tool to be considered in L2 instruction.

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# 4

## Developing a Contemporary French Civilization Course: An Annotated Review of Internet Resources

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### **Abstract**

*Identifying appropriate materials for a class on contemporary French civilization is a challenge. Even the newest texts are somewhat out of date when they arrive. Resources available on the Internet present a solution to this problem. However, the sheer number of Web sites can be overwhelming. The quality and reliability of material provided can vary widely, and one often encounters dead links when using any of the major search engines. The most comprehensive and academically sound sites tend to be those maintained by cultural institutions, universities, government ministries, and similar groups. In the manner of an annotated bibliography, this essay reviews Web sites that provide the up-to-date information the instructor seeks and sources of materials for student projects.*

### **Background**

One of the most important and challenging courses to teach in the college French curriculum is a class on contemporary French civilization. However, just defining the term “contemporary” can be difficult. Does it refer to the period since 1945, 1968, the advent of Mitterrand, or the elections of spring 2002? Any of these landmark moments in French history could serve as a marker. In our program, we have three civilization classes. The first class ends with the French Revolution; the second with World War II. We have found 1945 to be a logical breaking point for us, since the third class, Contemporary French Civilization, assigns considerable importance to the Francophone countries that emerged subsequent to the independence movements of the post-war period.

There are several well-known texts that can be used in contemporary civilization. Though out of print and slightly dated, Hester’s *Initiation à la culture française* (1991) is still valuable, and Wylie and Brière’s *Les Français* (2001) remains a classic. Another approach is to use a text written for French students. Two publications from Hachette, *Histoire CM* (Nembrini, Polivka, & Bordes, 1985) and *Mon histoire de France* (Méric, 1996), are written for students at the upper-

elementary level. However, the author has found that the level of French used in the texts is appropriate for students at the fifth-semester level. While these texts have much to offer, where does one find truly up-to-date information? The Internet offers an answer to this question.

In this article, online resources useful in developing a contemporary French culture class will be identified. The features of a number of Web sites will be capsulized and reviewed by means of a modification of the annotated-bibliography approach. As an organizing principle, the author has selected four thematic units: government, education, the Francophone world, and the arts. In a typical course for juniors or seniors, 2 or 3 weeks would be spent on each topic.

### **Government (Structure, Ministries, Political Parties, Etc.)**

Even for those who follow French politics carefully, it is a daunting task to keep track of the changing players and even the names of the parties. A good place to start is the *Site du Premier Ministre—Portail du Gouvernement (Prime Minister's Site—Gateway to the Government)* (<[www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/fr](http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/fr)>). By selecting *gouvernement (government)* in a section titled *toute l'équipe (the entire team)*, one can quickly find the names of the various ministers and the individual Web sites for each ministry. The *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Foreign Ministry)* (<[www.diplomatie.fr](http://www.diplomatie.fr)>) provides considerable information about day-to-day political events in France. A major subdivision of this site, titled simply *Découvrir la France (Discover France)*, is further divided into *La France en bref (France in Brief)* and *La France de A à Z (France from A to Z)* (<[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/france\\_829/decouvrir-france\\_4177/index.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/france_829/decouvrir-france_4177/index.html)>). Both of these areas provide points of departure for student research on topics such as the economy, foreign policy, *La Francophonie (The French-speaking World)*, education, immigration, and religion. For election results, the site of the *Ministère de l'Intérieur (Interior Ministry)* (<[www.interieur.gouv.fr](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr)>) provides a wealth of information. This site in turn leads to the page of the *Assemblée nationale (National Assembly)* (<[www.assemblee-nationale.fr](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr)>). Here one can easily access graphs showing the composition of the legislature, with the names of the political parties. A special link for children (<[www.assemblee-nationale.fr/juniors/kit/sommaire.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/juniors/kit/sommaire.asp)>) presents a simplified view of the structure of the government. Pedagogically, this site is very sound and could serve as the basis for an in-class report by students. Of course the President of France is not to be outdone by his ministers. The Web site of the French Presidency provides a history and explanation of the office and offers a link for writing directly to the *Président de la République* (<[www.elysee.fr](http://www.elysee.fr)>). For links to the various political parties, one could consult the *Centre d'étude de la vie politique* of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (<[www.ulb.ac.be/soco/cevipol/index\\_en.htm](http://www.ulb.ac.be/soco/cevipol/index_en.htm)>). Any of the political party sites could serve as the basis for classroom lectures or student projects on the origin and evolution of the parties, and for learning how the multiplicity of parties necessitates in most elections two rounds of voting.

The various French newspapers are also an important and reliable source of information. The Web sites of the major Parisian newspapers are easily accessible. The *page d'accueil* (*home page*) for *Libération* (<[www.liberation.fr](http://www.liberation.fr)>) includes politics, society, and the economy among its daily features. An interesting aspect of this site is that the entire front page of the newspaper is accessible daily as a *pdf* file. *Le Figaro* (<[www.lefigaro.fr](http://www.lefigaro.fr)>) offers similar information, and direct access to other publications, such as the weekly *Figaro Magazine*. Other Parisian newspapers and many publications from the provinces are listed in *onlinenewspapers.com* (<[www.onlinenewspapers.com/france.htm](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/france.htm)>). For current news, one can also refer students to the Agence France-Presse site (<[www.afp.com](http://www.afp.com)>) or any of the television channel sites, such as France 2 (<[www.france2.fr](http://www.france2.fr)>) or La Chaîne info, an all news channel (<[www.lci.fr](http://www.lci.fr)>).

## Education

The French education system is another essential area of any civilization class. Whether the instructor is looking for materials or the students need to find information, an excellent point of departure is Onisep (<[www.onisep.fr](http://www.onisep.fr)>), the Office national d'information sur les enseignements et les professions (*National Office on Teaching and Professions*), an agency of the Ministry of Education. This Web site provides very detailed information about the various options students have at different points in their academic life. For example, there are sites such as *Après la 3ème* (*After the 3rd Level*) (<[www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/college/cadre.htm](http://www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/college/cadre.htm)>) and *Après le bac* (*After the baccalaureat degree*) (<[www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/lycbac/cadre.htm](http://www.onisep.fr/national/orientation/html/lycbac/cadre.htm)>). The links to the *filières* (*tracks*) among which students might select offer particularly clear graphics in flow-chart format. The effort to harmonize the French system with the general European model is reflected in the use of terminology such as *master professionnel* and *master recherche*. This site also offers extensive information about studying in France. The general site of the Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (*Ministry of National Education, University Instruction, and Research*) (<[www.education.gouv.fr](http://www.education.gouv.fr)>) contains a large amount of background information on the history of the French education system, the administrative structure of the Ministry, and practical items, such as the academic calendar. However, for the purposes of a civilization class, the Onisep site appears more useful. For example, it lends itself to a role-playing exercise. The students can assume the role of French students who have reached a particular level, such as *la 3ème* or *le bac*, and who now have to research options and make decisions about future educational plans. Or, in the form of a debate, students can present the pros and cons of different educational options.

## The Francophone World

In using this term, the author refers to French-speaking areas other than Metropolitan France. A map provided by the Department of Romance Languages at Colorado College (<[www.coloradocollege.edu/Dept/RL/Courses/FR308Wade/francophone\\_world2.htm](http://www.coloradocollege.edu/Dept/RL/Courses/FR308Wade/francophone_world2.htm)>) provides an interactive approach to identifying French-speaking areas of the world, and Discover France (<[www.discoverfrance.net](http://www.discoverfrance.net)>), a commercial site, provides another good point of departure. It offers brief, yet informative introductions to many French-speaking areas, including the *Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer (Overseas Departments and Territories)*. Official information about the DOM-TOM is available on the site of the *Ministère de l'Outre-Mer (Overseas Ministry)* (<[www.outre-mer.gouv.fr](http://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr)>). There are maps to serve any purpose, up-to-date information on political and social matters and links to the appropriate regional tourist offices. In a typical classroom situation the instructor might assign one department or territory to two or three students. The instructor might wish to guide the students somewhat by suggesting areas of study, such as history, government, or the economy.

The point of departure for official Quebec government information is the *Portail Quebec (Gateway Quebec)* (<[www.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.gouv.qc.ca)>). Two very useful links on the site are *Parlement et gouvernement* and *Portrait du Québec*. The latter site offers historical information, maps, and a cultural panorama, including an informative section on *gastronomie* for those who wonder about *cretons* (potted pork patties) and *tartes au sucre* (sugar pies). An extensive discussion of literature in *L'Encyclopédie de l'histoire du Québec* explains that Québécois literature begins after the Seven Years War. First confined to political writings, other manifestations of literature begin to appear in the 1830s, as economic issues stabilize (<[www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/Roy1948.htm](http://www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/Roy1948.htm)>). Finally, another useful Québécois Web site is the *Bibliothèque nationale du Québec (Quebec National Library)* (<[www.bnquebec.ca](http://www.bnquebec.ca)>).

The official portal of the Belgian government is available in Dutch, French, German, and English (<[www.belgium.be](http://www.belgium.be)>). Statistical data and a brief history of the country are provided. A link titled *La Belgique (Belgium)* takes one to a page that treats *Le Pays, La Culture, L'Etat fédéral* and *La Belgique et l'Europe (The Country, Culture, The Federal State and Belgium and Europe)*. Under *La Culture* one finds a link titled *C'est du belge (That's Belgian all right)*. In reviewing rubrics such as *les frites (fries)*, *les gaufres (waffles)*, *Lucky Luke*, *les Schtroumpfs*, and *Tintin*, one is quickly reminded of uniquely Belgian contributions to the French language and Francophone culture (e.g., *les frites* owe their name to a 19th-century Belgian by the name of Frits; however, it was American soldiers, eating this product during World War I with their French-speaking Belgian comrades, who mistakenly called them French fries). If one is looking for information related to tourism, the portal of the Belgian Tourist Office (<[www.visitbelgium.com](http://www.visitbelgium.com)>) is a good place to start. This site treats Belgian history in a succinct, but more than ample fashion for the purposes of a student report. A section on things to do provides background information on the country's Jewish heritage, its role in both

World Wars, and gastronomic traditions.

Finally, with respect to Belgian literature in French, an often overlooked part of French-language civilization classes, one cannot ignore the giants, such as Georges Simenon, Henri Michaux, and Maurice Maeterlinck. For serious literary studies one could consult the Belgian Francophone Library series (<[www.visitbelgium.com](http://www.visitbelgium.com)>).

## The Arts

Both “large C” and “small c” manifestations of culture figure prominently in an area of study under the heading “the Arts.” A good starting point would be the *Réunion des Musées nationaux (National Museums Group)* (<[www.rmn.fr](http://www.rmn.fr)>). There one finds links to the Musée d’Orsay, the Musée Picasso, and regional museums, such as the Musée Magnin in Dijon and the Musée Message Biblique Marc Chagall in Nice. A comprehensive online store provides easy access to the many multimedia products that have been developed by the various member museums. The *kaléidoscope* link of the Musée du Louvre (<[www.louvre.fr/11v/oeuvres/liste\\_approche\\_visuelle.jsp](http://www.louvre.fr/11v/oeuvres/liste_approche_visuelle.jsp)>) allows the instructor to select a slide show based on one of many different themes (historical scenes, landscapes, mythology, etc.). By accessing a particular artist or school of painting, one can easily build a slide show. The Centre Pompidou (<[www.cnac-gp.fr](http://www.cnac-gp.fr)>) offers live broadcasts of lectures over the Web and video on demand. The Web site of the city of Paris (<[www.paris.fr](http://www.paris.fr)>) provides easy access to information about the 15 municipal museums, including the Musée Carnavalet (<[www.carnavalet.paris.fr](http://www.carnavalet.paris.fr)>), les Catacombes (<[www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/musee\\_carnavalet/catacombes/presentation.htm](http://www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/musee_carnavalet/catacombes/presentation.htm)>), the Maison de Balzac (<[www.balzac.paris.fr](http://www.balzac.paris.fr)>), and the Musée Cognacq-Jay (<[www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/cognacq\\_jay/default.htm](http://www.v2asp.paris.fr/musees/cognacq_jay/default.htm)>), museums of considerable interest, but often overshadowed by more famous names. Though mainly historical in nature, these museums present students with background about the growth and development of the city of Paris. It is important for students to understand that the central role of Paris in the administrative, cultural, and economic life of the French today is but a continuation of a long tradition.

Those wishing to catch up on current music would be well advised to start with the TV5 Web site (<[www.tv5.org/musique](http://www.tv5.org/musique)>). Video clips of the “tubes” of the week are a regular feature of this page, and the site includes nearly 500 biographies of performers, words to songs, and extensive pedagogical activities. The video clips of the week are broadcast on TV5, as part of the regular programming schedule. For cinema, the French Cultural Services offer a list of data bases and information about French cinema festivals in the U.S. (<[www.frenchculture.org](http://www.frenchculture.org)>). *Label France*, a publication of the Ministère des Affaires étrangères, regularly treats French cinema. Of particular interest is a retrospective titled *Cent ans de cinéma français (100 Years of French Cinema)* (<[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/label\\_france/FRANCE/INDEX/i19.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/label_france/FRANCE/INDEX/i19.html)>), as it helps students to place contem-

porary cinema in a broad context.

Finally, one should not forget that the libraries of Paris are very much a part of an expansive notion of French culture. Both the old Richelieu location and the new François-Mitterrand complex have special exhibits and provide information about their unique role in disseminating and preserving French culture (<[www.bnf.fr](http://www.bnf.fr)>). For literary texts, one might consult the listing of electronic texts noted on the site maintained by the library of the University of Virginia (<[www.lib.virginia.edu/wess/etexts.html#french](http://www.lib.virginia.edu/wess/etexts.html#french)>). Clicnet, a site hosted by Swarthmore College, provides information and texts on contemporary poetry, as well as information about the current literary scene (<[clicnet.swarthmore.edu/litterature/litterature.html](http://clicnet.swarthmore.edu/litterature/litterature.html)>).

The student who has taken a French civilization class should have at least some confidence in getting around in France. Consequently, some “small c” culture, or what might be called a thematic unit on survival skills in France, could include references to the SNCF (*French National Railroads*) (<[www.sncf.fr](http://www.sncf.fr)>), the RATP (*extended Parisian Metro system*) (<[www.ratp.fr](http://www.ratp.fr)>), France Télécom (<[www.francetelecom.fr](http://www.francetelecom.fr)>), and for tourist information, the Maison de la France (<[www.maison-de-la-france.fr](http://www.maison-de-la-france.fr)>). All of these sites are maintained by governmental or quasi-governmental agencies and offer reliable, accurate information.

### **Megasites for Teachers and Students**

There are a number of Internet megasites that group thematically hundreds of other sites. These megasites are maintained by academic, professional, or governmental organizations and are kept up to date. Thus, they are a good starting point for further information on themes treated above or for other themes the instructor might wish to introduce in a contemporary civilization class. The sites of the American Association of Teachers of French (<[www.frenchteachers.org](http://www.frenchteachers.org)>), Tennessee Bob's Famous French Links (<[www.utm.edu/departments/french/french.html](http://www.utm.edu/departments/french/french.html)>), and FLTeach (<[www.cortland.edu/flteach](http://www.cortland.edu/flteach)>) were among the first to appear on the Web. La Documentation française (<[www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr](http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr)>) is a rough equivalent to the U.S. Government Printing Office. Many types of booklets and reports prepared by government agencies are available for purchase online. A new site, Espace Francophone (<[www.espacefrancophone.org](http://www.espacefrancophone.org)>), is a project of the French Cultural Services in New Orleans. It is a French instructor's dream. History, culture, *Francophonie*—they are all part of this site. Of particular importance is the audiovisual section. One can download entire programs, many of them from TV5, with appropriate pedagogical support materials. Also available are an audio library and slideshows. Another recently established site, *Frenchresources.info – le Portail éducatif du français aux Etats-Unis* ([www.frenchresources.info](http://www.frenchresources.info)), is a joint project of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy and the University of Wisconsin. This site allows one to select from four different profiles (as a teacher or student in different types of institutions) in order to maximize effective use of the site.



## Conclusion

Innovative teaching materials are a key to success in any course one is teaching. The Web sites discussed in this article provide a point of departure for assembling the types of unique materials that motivate both teachers and students and provide an opportunity for the development of creative learning experiences.

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# 5

## The Roads to Compostela: An Immersion Experience in Germany, France, and Spain

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### **Abstract**

*Following a medieval pilgrimage route in Europe provides the student of languages with an exceptional opportunity for immersion in European language, culture, and history from the Middle Ages to the present. One of the most important of these is the Road to Santiago de Compostela. Although usually associated with Spain, pilgrimage routes to Santiago cross Germany and France as well. This article explains the rationale behind and outlines the preparations for an academically oriented undertaking of the German Jakobsweg, the French Chemin de St. Jacques, and the Spanish Camino de Santiago. It presents a cohesive linguistic and cultural program for this multi-week trek, an academic program that includes essential background readings, preliminary classes, task-based learning activities, and student research projects; all of these unite language and cultural learning. In addition, the article discusses related practical concerns, such as budget, equipment, physical preparation, and travel arrangements.*

### **Background**

Colleges and universities recognize that study abroad is one of the best ways of preparing students to live and work in a global, multicultural society. A substantial body of literature is devoted to overseas study, but it focuses almost exclusively on long-term residential study or internships designed for language majors and minors (Abernethy, 2004; Freed, 1995; Hill, 1987; Krueger & Ryan, 1993; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002; Vahlbusch, 2003). However, students who do not major or minor often take language courses simply to fulfill a requirement and then abandon language study, in great part because they do not have the opportunity to use their language and cultural knowledge outside

the classroom. Gorka and Niesenbaum (2001) propose that a short-term experience abroad affords precisely that opportunity. In fact, they maintain that a short-term overseas experience presents students with an initial exposure to another culture, shows them that they need not be fluent to communicate effectively, gives them a new perspective on the world, and inspires them to continue language study and even to schedule a semester abroad during their academic careers. Gorka and Niesenbaum (2001) and Raschio (2001) advocate short-term residential programs in which students live with local families. But for learning cultural competence in a global society, we serve our students best by providing them with an experience that crosses several national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. We believe the ultimate expression of such an experience is an international pilgrimage across Europe to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain.

The history of the pilgrimage to Santiago spans more than 1000 years. According to legend, St. James, one of the original 12 apostles, had preached the Gospel in the Iberian Peninsula. He was subsequently martyred, and his body was buried and forgotten in Galicia. His remains were discovered in the early ninth century, and the city of Santiago de Compostela was founded on the site. Soon afterward, pilgrims from every corner of Europe began traveling to the apostle's burial site. Though a few pilgrims to Compostela are recorded in the 10th century, and many more in the 11th, it was in the 12th and 13th centuries that Santiago de Compostela came to rank with Rome and Jerusalem as one of the great destinations of medieval pilgrimage. Even then, the pilgrimage was a model of cultural diversity, as people of varied origins intermingled on their way to Compostela. The Renaissance and Reformation were hard times for the pilgrimage, and participation declined drastically. The route has undergone a renaissance in the last two decades, and the present-day rehabilitation of the pilgrimage to Compostela has greatly improved the infrastructure of walking paths and lodging, not only in Spain but in France, Germany, and other parts of Europe as well. The route was named Europe's Premier Cultural Itinerary in 1987, and UNESCO has since classified the routes in France and Spain as a World Heritage Site, attesting to the pilgrimage's worldwide cultural, historical, and artistic importance. In the 21st century, the pilgrimage to Compostela provides the perfect opportunity to place American students in direct contact with the cultural and linguistic diversity that constitutes the European community.

## **Rationale**

The authors use the pilgrimage to Compostela to create an experience in which students learn about the connections between the people, languages, and cultures of Germany, France, and Spain.<sup>1</sup> Several specific characteristics of our pilgrimage make this possible. We travel in a small group of not more than 12 students; we walk; we traverse a variety of physical settings (cities, towns, villages, countryside); and we visit several countries. The benefits of these characteristics are enormous. Our small group size allows us to avoid the professional tourist-circuit

treatment that plagues so many educational travel experiences. In a group of eight or even 12 pilgrims, we travel comfortably without overwhelming our surroundings; to the contrary, we are often welcomed and embraced by our hosts. Because we walk, we avoid the types of transportation and lodging (tour buses and tourist-class hotels) that all too often insulate visitors from host cultures. As we walk, our students necessarily come into close personal contact with the people who live along the pilgrimage routes. The variety of rural settings through which we walk provides a much less intimidating immersion environment than the streets of Paris, Berlin, or Madrid for language students to work on their speaking skills. Finally, the rhythms of walking encourage us to reflect, thereby ideally leading participants to self-discovery, maturation, and perhaps even spiritual growth.

In addition to interacting with the local population, our students enter an international community of pilgrims, in which people from all over the world come into contact with one another. This contact is fostered by the existence of *albergues* (also called *refugios*) in Spain, *gîtes* in France, and *Pilgerherberge* in Germany—inexpensive accommodations frequented by pilgrims. Both on the road and at the end of the day, conversation flows and friendships form. Codd (2003) has observed, “Before long an easy familiarity develops among those who night after night take shelter under the same roof. Put simply, they become friends; fear or distrust disappears quickly” (§ 4). When this happens, we begin to see beyond our own limited cultural perspectives, expand our human horizons, and break out of our linguistic isolation. When pilgrims interact, many languages come into use: not only French, German, Spanish, and English, but also Polish, Swedish, and many others. At these moments, as Codd says, “Those who knew two [languages] would cheerfully translate for those who knew only one; somehow, almost miraculously, the ongoing cross-translations made possible precise communication no matter the linguistic differences of those gathered together” (§ 6).

We build into the experience of walking the pilgrimage to Compostela a wide variety of activities that appeal to students and faculty from different disciplines. For those who like to hike, walking across the European countryside through forests, mountains, towns, and villages is a special treat. Those who are interested in history are drawn to the important role the pilgrimage to Compostela has played in European and world history. Those interested in art and architecture are enthralled by the wealth of Romanesque and Gothic buildings found along the route. Those interested in modern-day Europe are fascinated by how the medieval and the contemporary coexist in the 21st century. And finally, many are attracted by the chance to investigate the spiritual heritage of Europe, as well as to explore their own spirituality. These activities and others show how a short-term overseas experience on the pilgrimage to Compostela provides an opportunity for faculty and students from different disciplines and different linguistic backgrounds to collaborate.

In this article we outline the preparations for an academically oriented undertaking of the German *Jakobsweg*, the French *Chemin de Saint-Jacques*, and the Spanish *Camino de Santiago*,<sup>2</sup> present a cohesive program for this short-term overseas experience that unites language and cultural learning, and discuss pertinent travel concerns.

## **Preparing the Pilgrimage**

### ***Creating an Itinerary***

The pilgrimage itineraries that we develop emerge in part from our multicultural academic focus. In 2004, for example, we fashioned an experience in which students learned about the connections between three European cultures. This 3-week trip involved a German, a French, and a Spanish faculty member. Each professor was allotted a certain number of days, and he or she planned the itinerary that would be followed in the country of his or her expertise. Our initial idea was to walk segments of at least 4 days in Germany, 6 days in France, and 8 days in Spain, at the end of which we would arrive in Santiago de Compostela. A different type of experience was created in each country, in accordance with the personality of both the country and the professor. The trip worked because each leader was flexible and open to the different visions that the others brought to the experience. We managed to maintain a harmony that has permitted us to offer the pilgrimage a second time.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from faculty personalities and academic focus, a number of interrelated concerns influence the length and cost of a pilgrimage experience. How much time is available to walk? We believe that in terms of overall cost, it is difficult to justify less than 2 weeks of walking in one country, and less than 3 weeks of walking in more than one country. It takes at least 2 days to travel from the United States to a starting point on one of the pilgrimage routes. Walking in stages in several countries requires additional time to travel by bus or train between countries. The itinerary must also include sufficient time to visit Santiago de Compostela and then return to the departure site for the flight home.

How many kilometers per day will be covered? A less strenuous walking schedule of about 18 to 24 kilometers per day allows for more sightseeing and culturally related visits. A more strenuous schedule of about 28 to 35 kilometers per day covers more territory, but at the expense of time and energy for cultural visits.

Which countries will be included? Besides the interests of the pilgrimage leaders, the costs of food, lodging, and transportation in any particular country need to be taken into account. In Spain, an entire infrastructure set up specifically for the pilgrim includes inexpensive restaurants, cafés, and lodging at convenient intervals. In France, an extensive infrastructure for hikers also exists, but it is relatively more expensive. And in Germany, the infrastructure dedicated to pilgrims is less comprehensive, and it is often necessary to lodge participants in more expensive hotels.

Which sections of the pilgrimage routes will be traversed? In each country there are several traditional routes. Their varied topography is perhaps even more important than the particular cultural and artistic heritage that each possesses. Certain segments of each route offer significantly more strenuous walking conditions than others.

When can the pilgrimage be undertaken? Spring and fall, the seasons with the best weather, are usually out of the question for faculty and students. Winter walk-

ing presents three important limitations: bad weather, relatively little daylight, and limited lodging and meal facilities. On the other hand, in winter there are no crowds, and it is much easier to establish contact with people who live along the pilgrimage route. Early summer is an ideal time, because there is ample daylight, most facilities are available, and there are many pilgrims from around the world also walking. However, contact with residents is more difficult due to the increased numbers of pilgrims and other hikers. In July and August, the pilgrimage routes are usually crowded, and the weather is often uncomfortably hot.

A wealth of information dedicated to itinerary building is available in books and on Web sites. Pilgrim walking guides describe in detail the paths and roads that constitute the pilgrimage route, often include trail maps, and offer practical information on the availability of food and lodging. Country-specific walking guides that we have used are available in English (Brierley, 2003; Davies & Cole, 2003; Raju, 2003b), in German, (Fleischer, 1999a and 1999b; Heusch-Altenstein & Flinspach, 2005), in French (Fédération Française de la Randonnée Pédestre, 2004a, 2004b, and 2004c; Siréjol & Laborde-Balen, 2004), and in Spanish (Bravo Lozano, 1999; Nadal, 1999; Pombo, 2004). The British Confraternity of Saint James publishes booklet-sized guides to pilgrimage routes in Spain (Bisset, 2005), France (Raju, 2004), and Germany (Raju, 2003a); these are updated every year with the latest information on walking conditions and where to stay and eat.

### *A Note on Lodging and the Pilgrim Passport*

When we set up an itinerary, our choice for where to end each walking day depends on the type, cost, and availability of lodging. *Albergues*, *gîtes*, and *Pilgerherberge* are where most pilgrims stay. Accommodation in them is often in mixed bunk-bed dormitories, and the close contact between pilgrims in them encourages new friendships. They are also the least expensive, averaging less than 15 euros per person in France and Germany and less than 10 euros in Spain. *Albergues* are plentiful in Spain, and are generally located within 10 kilometers of one another. French *gîtes* are also common, but are normally not open in the winter. The number of German *Pilgerherberge* is still limited, and one may not be available in every town. In Germany and France, we recommend reserving accommodations, even if only a day or two in advance. In Spain, however, *albergues* do not accept reservations, and may on occasion be full by midday. In all three counties alternative accommodations are available, but hotels cost significantly more and often do not facilitate easy contact between pilgrims.

The pilgrim passport is a simple official document that indicates the pilgrim's starting point and date as well as mode of travel (on foot, by bicycle, or on horseback). Each day the pilgrim acquires a signed and dated stamp. These stamps are obtained typically at the place of lodging, but they are also available from churches, tourist information offices, restaurants, cafés, and even shops. In Spain, a passport is necessary for access to the *albergues* (although it is not for *gîtes* in France and *Pilgerherberge* in Germany). At the end of the pilgrimage, a completed passport can be used to obtain the *Compostela*, a certificate issued by the diocesan

pilgrim office in Santiago. In this case, the passport certifies that the pilgrim has walked at least the last 100 kilometers of the *Camino* in Spain. Pilgrim passports may be obtained at traditional starting points in France and Spain, such as Le Puy, Conques, Saint-Jean Pied-de-Port, Roncesvalles, León, and Astorga. We suggest, however, that they be ordered before departure from the Web site of the American Pilgrims on the Camino, a national organization dedicated to the pilgrimage.

### ***Developing a Budget***

Even though a budget needs to be developed at least a year before departure so that participants will know how much money they need to raise, any pilgrimage budget remains necessarily tentative because the dollar-to-euro exchange rate fluctuates daily, because anticipated inexpensive accommodation may not be available, and because prices in Europe increase from season to season. We use Internet sources, current editions of general country guides, and country-specific walking guides to develop a budget. Items that need to be included in a working budget are airfare, ground transportation, lodging, food, and activity fees. To find and purchase international flights as well as air and ground transportation within Europe, we make extensive use of Web sites of individual airlines, airfare consolidators, bus companies, and national train companies. For those planning the lodging budget, the following sources provide up-to-date information: *Miam-miam-dodo* for France (Clouteau & Clouteau, 2005) and Spain (Champion, 2005), and the Confraternity guides for all three countries. Lodging information can also be found in the walking guides for each country. For Spain, it is important to overbudget for accommodations, since *albergues* may sometimes be full and only higher-priced hotels available. Even though there are a number of meal options that range from eating in restaurants to cooking in the *gîte* or *albergue* to having a picnic, experience has shown that it is best to budget between 20 and 30 euros a day for food. We suggest that, with the exception of an occasional group meal, students be responsible for buying their own food. Other costs for which students are individually responsible include entrance fees, cultural activities, and entertainment; although in certain cases it may be more convenient or less expensive to pay from a group fund. In either case, these costs must be included in the budget.

### ***Recruiting and Selecting Students***

We begin to publicize the trip shortly before holding a formal informational meeting. We recruit participants via individual invitations, root e-mails, posters, and in-class announcements. Because the pilgrimage is such an intense experience, it is imperative that the instructor have complete control over the selection of participants, as one problematic student can negatively affect the entire group. The informational meeting takes place a year before the event, at which time application forms are distributed. When students turn in their applications, they sign up for an interview. Selection criteria should include the applicant's language ability and previous hiking experience, and the professor's personal acquaintance with the applicant. The selection process should be completed far enough in advance



so that students have at least a summer for fund-raising. Soon after the final selection is made, group members attend an initial meeting at which they receive the reading list and have a chance to meet one another.

### **Meetings and Assignments**

The academic and pragmatic preparations that we make on campus before leaving constitute a necessary foundation for the learning that will take place overseas. We have found it best to schedule regular class meetings during the semester prior to departure. Common class readings are all in English; language-specific readings may be assigned to students who know that language, and those students may then be held responsible for providing an overview of the information in English to the other students. In addition to completing required readings and attending classes, students take a final cumulative exam and complete an individual research project.

### ***Research Project***

Early in the semester we give students a list of possible research topics relevant to the pilgrimage. Several topics that have worked well for us are Charlemagne and the *Chanson de Roland*, winemaking and local wines, cheesemaking and local cheeses, Gregorian chant, monastic life, and the Knights Templar; however, the list can be modified according to the itinerary and the interests of the participants. Students select a topic, investigate it, and prepare a report of 10 to 15 minutes of solid information intended to enhance the group's understanding and enjoyment of what we will see and do overseas. A written version of the report must be completed and handed in before departure to allow for faculty evaluation and response, but the oral presentation will be delivered on site during the pilgrimage.

### ***Class Sessions***

In our first class session we present a brief historical and cultural introduction to the pilgrimage to Compostela. For this and for subsequent class lectures on specific topics, two comprehensive bibliographies (Davidson & Dunn-Wood, 1993; Dunn & Davidson, 1994) provide annotated lists of works in their original languages and, if available, in translation. To supplement the lecture material, we have students read sections of *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook* (Davidson & Gitlitz, 2000) and the translation of Book V of the medieval *Liber Sancti Jacobi* in *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela* (Melczar, 1993). For additional information on history and culture, students can also visit the Web sites of organizations dedicated to the pilgrimage (American Pilgrims on the Camino, the Confraternity of Saint James, the Association Française des Pèlerins de Saint Jacques de Compostelle, the Deutsche St. Jakobus Gesellschaft, the Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago, and the Arzobispado de Santiago de Compostela).

In the next two class sessions, we address pragmatic concerns: hiking equipment, physical conditioning, and first aid. During one of these two class sessions, certain practical travel matters also need to be dealt with, such as passports, college waivers, medical insurance forms, International Student ID cards, and money matters. The class session on hiking equipment must take place several months before departure, as participants need sufficient time to select, try out, and become comfortable with their gear. Participants will receive their packing list at this time. We invite a local hiking outfitter to speak to the class about how to purchase and use appropriate gear. Students should be fitted for shoes and backpacks by a reputable outfitter before they buy anything, whether in a store or online. The class session on physical conditioning and first aid also needs to take place early in the semester. It is essential that all participants prepare themselves for the physical rigors of walking 15 to 35 kilometers per day across Europe with a full backpack in all sorts of weather conditions. We ask an athletic trainer to devise a conditioning plan specifically for the pilgrimage, and to demonstrate basic first aid, such as taping ankles and treating blisters. Before leaving, we also require that everyone take part in at least one 15-to-25-kilometer group hike in full gear; this exercise reveals to participants how ready they are and what further preparations they need to make.

For the next class session, in keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of this project, we invite a professor from the art department to lecture on Romanesque and Gothic art and architecture in a European, rather than country-specific, context. In addition to information presented by the art professor, we have our students read selections from *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook* (Davidson & Gitlitz, 2000) and from the Web site for the Confraternity of Saint James. Informative sections on the art and architecture encountered along the route are also found in most of the country-specific walking guides.

We have found that students are interested in the religious aspects of the pilgrimage, and attending Catholic Mass can be an enriching part of the experience. Since not all participants may be familiar with the structure and meaning of the Mass and sacraments, we devote a class session to a presentation by a local Catholic priest, who can also suggest resources for further reading about the liturgy and the history of the Catholic Church.

Now that the students have an understanding of the historical and cultural underpinnings of the pilgrimage, it is useful to dedicate a class to the experience of the contemporary pilgrim. To help students anticipate and prepare for the adventure that awaits them, we have them read at least one recent personal account of the pilgrimage (Aviva, 2001; Hoinacki, 1996; Lash, 1991; Schell & Schell, 2001; Stanton, 1994). The accounts we have chosen offer insight into the reality of the modern pilgrim's daily life on the road and thus invite our students to imagine what impact the pilgrimage might have on them.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these personal accounts, we assign one common required reading, from which students gain a wider understanding of the contemporary pilgrimage. In *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*, Frey (1998) presents a multitude of perspectives on the modern pilgrimage, analyzing a large number of personal accounts by pilgrims

from around the world in an effort to discover what leads people to make the pilgrimage and what difference it makes in their lives.

At this point we dedicate a class session to the topic of travel journal writing. The personal accounts that the students read will serve as models for their own journal writing during the pilgrimage. Our paradigm for journal writing is based on three steps outlined by Raschio (2001). First, our students are to record the conditions and events of each day: the weather, the landscapes, people they meet, the lodging for the night, notable events on the road. They may also include memorable sayings, information about places they visit, the day's meals, and what they are thinking. In the second step, students are to describe their perceptions of and reactions to what they have experienced during the day. This segment should include anything of interest and importance to their understanding of the people, culture, history, and society of the host country. In the final step, students are to analyze their reactions and reflect on their personal growth. At the end of this class session, we assign the first official journal entry, in which students are to explain how they anticipate that this pilgrimage will change them.

In our last class session we review selected aspects of adapting to a culture other than our own. We remind students that they will encounter foods, schedules, and social situations to which they are not accustomed. We encourage them to be flexible, open-minded, and willing to try new things, although never at the expense of safety or common sense. We also remind students that they may be out of contact with home for several days at a time and that they need to let their parents know that. Finally, we work out the logistics of traveling to and then back from our departure airport. In some situations, for example, the use of school-owned transportation may be most convenient, while in others, car-pooling between families of students may offer an advantage.

## **During the Pilgrimage**

### ***Overseas Group Dynamics***

Upon arrival in Europe, one of the leader's greatest responsibilities is to keep tension at a minimum and try to eliminate anything that interferes with the enjoyment of the pilgrimage. We prefer to move quickly to the starting point of our walk, on the same day if possible. That evening, after the stresses of so much travel, our first shared meal helps establish a positive group dynamic. Throughout the pilgrimage, in fact, shared meals serve several important purposes. They acquaint students with the local cuisine and ideally encourage a willingness to try new foods. Even when the entire group does not eat together, mealtime becomes the moment when pilgrims relax and recount the day's events, thereby promoting group camaraderie. At the conclusion of the meal or just before "lights out," we talk about the following day's walk, so that everybody has an idea of what to expect and knows where to find our next night's lodging. We suggest scheduling a group meal at the beginning of the walk in each country, as well as a celebration meal upon arrival in Santiago de Compostela.

Preserving a positive group dynamic also depends on students' having an appropriate level of freedom. For example, how late will students be allowed to stay out on their own at night? During the day's walk, will there be intermediate stops at which the group will reassemble, or will students walk at their own pace and reunite only at day's end? Will there be a limit to how much time students are allowed to spend online at cybercafés? Although we address these matters in class during the semester prior to departure, we also bring them up often during the pilgrimage. On occasion, a particular rule may need to be adjusted, as we need to maintain enough flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. It is worth emphasizing to students that they be on time for required group activities.

### ***Mechanics of Walking***

Early in the pilgrimage, participants will establish their own walking rhythm. Some will walk fast, and some slow; some will make frequent stops, and some none at all. We have learned that it is essential to allow individuals to walk at their own pace. Trying to keep a group together during several hours of walking causes discomfort and frustration. It is also important to allow individuals to begin walking in the morning when they are ready. Pilgrims will depart and walk alone or in pairs or in small groups as they choose. This flexibility serves to enhance participants' feelings of independence. Because individuals or groups can choose the wrong trail or miss a turn and get lost, we recommend that all leaders and at least several students carry their own trail guidebook or trail map. Being able to refer to a guide or map can also encourage a less adventurous student to walk the trail with greater confidence.

Even the most well conditioned pilgrim can get sick, twist an ankle, or develop blisters. We believe it best to expect illnesses and injuries and be prepared to deal with them when they occur. Many *gîtes* and *albergues* have first aid supplies, and most towns have a pharmacy; but just to be safe, we always carry our own first aid kit (with pain relievers, muscle rub, epsom salts, band aids, antiseptic, moleskin, needles, thread, and scissors). More serious illnesses or injuries may require a visit to the clinic or hospital. A faculty member, if possible one who speaks the local language, should accompany the student on the visit. If a participant cannot continue walking right away, arrangements can be made to meet at the following night's place of lodging, and he or she can travel ahead by bus or taxi and rest for a day. The group, however, should continue its pilgrimage as planned.

### ***Learning on the Road***

Although this pilgrimage experience is not primarily a language class, language learning is an important component of it. Student participants who are not majoring or minoring in German, French, or Spanish will probably have studied one of these three languages to fulfill their language requirement. We assign task-based activities that allow students to utilize their language skills in relevant situations. The activities range from simple to complex; for example, asking for directions, locating a good restaurant for a group dinner, finding a hotel when the

*albergue* is full, and describing an illness or injury to a pharmacist. Not surprisingly, those students who have studied the local language soon take on “teacher” roles as the other students turn to them for help in translating and in acquiring basic words and expressions. The happy consequences of this situation include a redistribution of communicative responsibility away from the faculty to among the students, a developing of mutual respect between students who speak different languages, and a growing consciousness of our linguistic connectedness, not only within the group but in the larger world as well.

Besides regular daily entries, two other journal options present themselves. From time to time, faculty may wish to assign specific topics for student observation, reaction, or reflection. In this way a professor can focus student attention on matters that may otherwise escape notice or consideration. In addition, as they walk, students can create a “situational dictionary” of German, French, and Spanish words and expressions that they find useful but did not know prior to the pilgrimage (Raschio, 2001, p. 541). With these two final components, the journal becomes a means for language acquisition as well as for cultural comparisons.

Each student makes an oral presentation of his or her individual research project, either just before or when the group encounters that subject on the road. For example, an appropriate site for the presentation on the Knights Templar would be the *domaine du Sauvage* in France, where in the 13th century the Templars operated a hospital for pilgrims. Students should be held responsible for remembering the information presented in these oral reports, as well as what they learned in class the semester before departure. We find that there are ample opportunities to reemphasize key information over the length of the pilgrimage. For example, the Templar church at Eunate and the castle at Ponferrada, both in Spain, are ideal places to review the information first presented in Sauvage.

Finally, cultural activities abound on the pilgrimage route to Compostela. Many, such as visits to museums, churches and abbeys, or attendance at religious services or national holiday festivals, we can schedule into the itinerary as either required or suggested activities. Others, such as concerts, art exhibits, and smaller local festivals, we may discover only as we run across them. All of these activities, valuable in and of themselves, also provide an excellent opportunity for comparisons across cultures.

### **After the Pilgrimage**

Although the walking may be finished, the pilgrimage continues after our return home. Post-pilgrimage assignments and activities give students the opportunity to reflect, and they provide faculty with materials to evaluate the outcomes of the short-term overseas experience. A crucial academic exercise that remains is the concluding evaluative essay, in which students describe the most important things that they learned about the pilgrimage, about medieval and modern Europe, and about themselves. They then analyze the impact this new knowledge has had on them. In order to explain how they have changed, students should look back

over their travel journals, beginning with the pre-departure entry. This essay should not be due sooner than a month after students return to the United States, so that they have time to contemplate their journey before they begin to write.

One way we maintain and reinforce the enthusiasm of the pilgrimage is to schedule a reunion within several weeks of our return. At the reunion we prepare our favorite pilgrimage foods, share photos and post-pilgrimage stories, and talk about how to build on the pilgrimage experience, both academically and personally. Besides providing an environment for all of us to reconsider our experiences, these reunions reinforce the relationships that developed overseas.

Another possible post-pilgrimage assignment is the creation of a group journal, which consists of journal entries that students select and revise, the texts of their individual on-site presentations, a short biographical sketch of each participant, and selected photos. The final document can be put on the Web or even published. These same sources also provide the materials for the development of a student-created video about the pilgrimage. We have found that the visual and audio aspects of video permit students to express themselves in compelling ways, which have included composing and singing songs and reciting poetry.

After having developed all these materials, students are not only ready, but eager to help publicize the pilgrimage. Foreign language faculty constantly encourage students to study overseas and to major or minor in a language. Sometimes students listen; many times they do not. But when these messages are delivered by other students, they can have a remarkable impact. Having students give presentations in classes, at dorm socials, and at campus convocations is a tremendously effective way to promote interest in the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

Finally, students may also engage in a service project in Spain. Every year, the Federación de Asociaciones Españolas de Amigos del Camino de Santiago invites people to work as volunteers operating the *albergues*. Volunteer *hospitaleros* need only to have made the pilgrimage and to have a desire to welcome and care for pilgrims. Some degree of communicative competence in Spanish is recommended, and ability in other languages is always desired. Further details are available on the Web site of the Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago (<[www.caminosantiago.org](http://www.caminosantiago.org)>).

## Conclusion

We are gratified by the degree to which our students have realized the goals of short-term overseas experiences. A total of 21 students participated in the two pilgrimages that we led in 2004-2005. Of these, two had already spent a semester overseas, five have subsequently studied or worked in Europe or Spanish America, and an additional three plan to do so. For two students in particular, the pilgrimage had a great impact, sparking their interest in further language study. Both decided to minor in Spanish, and one of them, a rising senior, chose to delay his graduation in order to study abroad for a semester.

Post-pilgrimage essays and interviews attested to the students' recognition of the value of contact with our host cultures. One student wrote, "I was able to see and learn so much more throughout this trip . . . because I was a traveler and not a tourist. This allowed me to see and experience things I would never have been able to . . . if I was traveling around Europe on a tour bus." The contact with other cultures enabled students to come away with new perspectives on the world and a greater appreciation for different peoples and lifestyles—important first steps in preparing to live and work in a global, multicultural society. Upon returning, another student reflected, "Did I really want to leave walking? No, I didn't. Did I really want to leave Spain? No, I didn't. Why? Because I was leaving . . . a country that appreciated simplicity, that appreciated living off the land, appreciated one's family, [and] friends." Yet another student recalled the personal interaction he had with his hosts:

One of the most amazing things about the Camino were the different people that you met along the way. . . . One of the really friendly people that I met was a little girl named Tatiana . . . [who] was so excited to have people come into her home and let us ask questions about her life, and she got to ask us questions. And we had hot chocolate and coffee. Tatiana, who was about five, walked us the rest of the way into town to the *albergue* and she showed two of the others to the market. It was just a really nice experience to feel connected to the town and the people.

In every respect, the pilgrimage experience more than fulfilled our expectations. And it has inspired each of us to prepare for yet another walk with students across Europe to Santiago de Compostela.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In their article "An Academic Pilgrimage to the Twelfth Century: The Art of Simulation," (1987) David Gitlitz and Linda Davidson describe many of the same characteristics and benefits that we note. The essence of their project, however, was to simulate a 12th-century pilgrimage. The nature and aim of our pilgrimage is radically different.
- <sup>2</sup> Within each country, many historical pilgrimage roads lead to Compostela. In our pilgrimages with students, however, we have kept to the routes with the best developed infrastructures for contemporary walkers: the Nürnberg to Konstanz route in Germany, the *Via Podiensis* from Le Puy to St.-Jean Pied-de-Port in France, and the *Camino Francés*, which continues from St.-Jean Pied-de-Port to Santiago de Compostela. We do not mean to suggest that these are the only or even the best routes for everyone. Furthermore, we recognize that a pilgrimage to two or only one country may be most appropriate

for a group, depending on the time available, budget, and the interests of the participants. We feel that this flexibility of the pilgrimage to Compostela is one of its great advantages.

- 3 This particular example illustrates an ideal situation, in which a faculty member from each language was able to participate with full institutional funding. However, it is not necessary that three faculty member accompany the students. Our other pilgrimages have been led by one and two faculty members, with and without institutional funding, as part of the regular teaching load and outside of it, with groups of between 6 and 12 students.
- 4 Three titles which we have chosen not to include in our course reading list are Paul Coelho's *The Pilgrimage*, Jack Hitt's *Off the Road*, and Shirley MacLaine's *The Camino*. Although they are well known, these texts do not reflect the type of intercultural encounter that our project advocates.

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# 6

## Talking About Music: Ethnographic Interviews on Traditional Hispanic Songs

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### **Abstract**

*This article proposes a variety of activities designed to enrich the study of authentic Hispanic music in the foreign language class. As an integral part of any lesson on a culturally authentic song, students interview native speakers, both in and out of class, to learn about the cultural context of various songs. Of special interest are songs that have strong associations with specific cultural practices, such as “Las mañanitas.” In other assignments, students interview native speakers about their musical tastes, seek out songs from native informants, and then share these songs with the class. The cultural information obtained from the interviews and the personal contact with native speakers enrich the lessons on Hispanic music on both a cognitive and an affective level. At the same time, the universal theme of music provides rich material for productive and satisfying conversations with native speakers. These activities address all “Five C’s” of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning.*

### **Rationale**

Over the past several decades, foreign language practitioners have increasingly come to appreciate the many benefits of using music as a resource to enhance lessons in both language and culture. The professional literature is rich with articles that reflect the wide range of linguistic and cultural learning objectives that can be achieved through the use of music. For example, Purcell (1992) demonstrates the use of Spanish songs to reinforce pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary and grammar. Willis and Mason (1994) recommend the use of contemporary Latin popular music to teach language and motivate students. Delière and Lafayette (1985) describe a unit they developed on French culture based on several songs with a similar theme. Griffin (1988) recommends studying Latin American culture through a country’s folk music. Abrate (1983) and Failoni (1993) propose a wide variety of strategies for using music to teach both language and culture. Barry and Pellissier (1995) propose a “whole language approach” to teaching music. Sporborg (1998) proposes various ways to use music in FLES programs. Heusinkveld (2001a)

proposes cultural lessons based on songs of nostalgia from various Hispanic countries. Schmidt (2003) recommends the use of German rap music to integrate lessons on language and contemporary culture. These are only a few of the helpful articles available on this subject. In urging teachers to incorporate more culture into their classes and to make connections between foreign language and other disciplines, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1999) confirm the appropriateness of music in the classroom.

Foreign language teachers are also aware of the positive benefits of conducting interviews with native speakers. Through contact with native speakers, either in the classroom or in the community, students realize with excitement that the language they are studying “really works.” Ethnographic interviews help to break down stereotypes, develop cross-cultural sensitivity, and increase interest in cultural learning. Bateman (2002) argues convincingly that ethnographic interviews have a positive effect on students’ affective attitudes toward cultural learning. Students who practice their language in “real” contexts are more motivated to become life-long language learners. Further, Allen (2000) points out that ethnographic interviews heighten awareness of one’s own culture as well as the target culture, thereby providing a basis for cultural comparisons. Thus, interviews with native speakers address both the “fourth C” (Comparisons) and the “fifth C” (Communities) of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1999).

This article proposes a variety of activities that combine these two powerful motivational tools—music and ethnographic interviews. As an integral part of any lesson on a culturally authentic song, students interview a native speaker in class about his/her knowledge about and associations with the song. After gaining confidence by practicing in class, students conduct a variety of interviews with native speakers in the community to learn more about the cultural context of various songs. In other assignments, students seek out songs from native informants and then share them with the class. Of special interest are songs that have strong associations with specific cultural practices, for example, the Mexican birthday song, “Las mañanitas.” The cultural information obtained from the interviews and the personal contact with native speakers enrich the lessons on Hispanic music on both a cognitive and an affective level. At the same time, the universal theme of music provides rich material for productive and satisfying ethnographic interviews.

The idea of conducting ethnographic interviews about songs learned in class may be attributed to a serendipitous incident that happened several years ago in Morelia, Mexico, where the author was teaching a course for U.S. high school teachers called “Integration of Music in the Spanish Class.” One day, as we were practicing a traditional Mexican children’s song called “La marcha de las letras,” a member of the language school’s staff knocked at the door with a message. When one of my students casually asked this middle-aged Mexican woman if she knew “La marcha de las letras,” her face broke into a radiant smile. To our astonishment and delight, Doña Rosalía set down her papers and broke into a lusty rendition of the song, marching in place and vigorously swinging her arms to keep time to the music as she sang! After a hearty round of applause, students peppered

Doña Rosalía with questions. When did she first learn that song? Where did she hear it? Did all her friends know it? Did she ever sing it with her children? Could she sing other similar songs for us? Could she join us in class again?

Doña Rosalía's singing and the questions and answers that followed enriched our class in several ways. The song we were studying acquired new meaning for both teacher and students, as it was clearly "real." As they asked questions of Rosalía, students were creating with the language and communicating with a native speaker. At the same time, they learned interesting information about the cultural context of the song. Perhaps most importantly, Doña Rosalía's singing created bonds of empathy that became stronger over the following days and weeks. She had helped to break down barriers, both cross-cultural and generational, through the universal language of music. In succeeding days, my students in Morelia brainstormed on all the ways we might use native speakers to enhance the study of music in our foreign language classes back home. The result for this writer has been much experimentation in classes of all levels, eventually providing the basis for this article.

Any song, even a jingle created specifically for use in the foreign language class, provides an effective way to enhance practice in listening, pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary. (See Appendix A for musical resources for the foreign language class.) The undeniable appeal of music makes it a powerful motivational tool for any language lesson. But a culturally authentic song has rich dimensions that cannot be found in a song created specifically for the foreign language class.

A song created by a member of a particular culture reveals insights about that culture, even as it reinforces language and delights the students. The lyrics constitute an authentic text that reflects the perspectives of the culture where it was created. Many songs contain references to specific aspects of the culture—geographical landscapes, foods, heroes, literary characters, holidays, and place names, for instance. Other songs have universal themes, such as love, with no specific cultural references. But even these songs have a cultural context—venues where they are performed or sung, memories they elicit, and possibly cultural practices associated with them. The more traditional the song, the more likely it is to evoke associative memories in the mind of a member of the culture where the song was created. It is all these cultural contexts that we invite students to explore in interviews with native speakers. As the incident in Morelia demonstrates, contact with a native informant will enrich the study of the song and can lead to valuable cross-cultural connections.

### **Inviting a Native Speaker to Class**

The best way to introduce students to the concept of ethnographic interviews is to invite native speakers to class, so that the students can ask them simple questions about the song that the class is currently studying. The songs that seem to work best for such interviews are those most likely to be familiar to people from different age groups and different Hispanic countries. Traditional children's songs

work especially well, since they are more likely to evoke memories for the native informant. Tapping into these childhood memories of familiar songs helps connect the students with the native speaker on an affective level in a way that is not often achieved through straight biographical questions.

My experience has shown that for this first interview, the teacher should ascertain in advance that the invited guest is indeed familiar with the song. One children's song that is familiar throughout Latin America and Spain is "Los elefantes," the whimsical song about elephants swinging on a spider web. Questions for our invited guest on this song may fall into several categories, as follows:

### **Familiarity/Recognition:**

¿Conoce Ud. la canción "Los elefantes"	<i>Do you know the song "Los elefantes"?</i>
¿Podiera usted cantarla?	<i>Can you sing it?</i>
¿Sabe todas las palabras?	<i>Do you know all the words?</i>
¿Es una canción muy conocida?	<i>Is this a very familiar song?</i>

### **Context**

¿Quién canta esta canción— los viejos, los jóvenes, o todos?	<i>Who sings this song— old people, young people, or both?</i>
¿Dónde se escucha esta canción?	<i>Where would you hear this song?</i>
¿Se escucharía esta canción en la radio /la tele/en la escuela/ en una reunión familiar/en una fiesta?	<i>Would you hear this song on the radio/ TV/at school/ a family reunion/a party?</i>
¿En qué ocasiones se canta esta canción?	<i>On what occasions do you sing this song?</i>
¿Qué instrumentos acompañan esta canción?	<i>What instruments accompany this song?</i>

### **Reaction/Affective Aspects**

¿Le gusta esta canción?	<i>Do you like this song?</i>
¿Por qué o por qué no?	<i>Why or why not?</i>

### **Memories/Associations**

¿Cuántos años tenía Ud. cuando oyó la canción por primera vez?	<i>How old were you when you first heard this song?</i>
¿Qué palabras asocia Ud. con esta canción?	<i>What words do you associate with this song?</i>
¿Tiene Ud. recuerdos específicos asociados con esta canción?	<i>Do you have specific memories associated with this song?</i>

With this list of questions in hand, students build confidence addressing a “real” native speaker. In order to give more students the opportunity to practice, no student is allowed to ask more than one question. Obviously, other questions are possible, especially if the lyrics of the song include specific cultural references, such as the name of an unfamiliar place or a regional food.

For a song with specific cultural references, it is best to invite a guest to class from the country where the song originated. For example, the Dominican mega-hit, “Ojalá que llueva café,” mentions specific place names and regionalisms particular to the Dominican Republic. A Mexican informant in the community would not likely be able to identify the specific places, regional foods, and dialectical variations mentioned in this song. We could send students to the Internet to find this information, as there are excellent Web sites that gloss the lyrics (e.g., Ureña, 2004). Even so, a Dominican guest in class would provide an exciting new dimension to the lesson—a human dimension that would bring new meaning to the song. For the beloved song, “Guantanamera,” a Cuban visitor would make an ideal informant. For a lesson on the song “Mi Viejo San Juan,” we would invite a Puerto Rican, preferably an older person who could identify on a personal level with the lyrics expressing nostalgia for the homeland. (See Heusinkveld [2001a] for ideas on teaching songs of nostalgia.)

Native informants should be encouraged to elaborate on any memories or associations that they may have with a song. After the questions and answers and any discussion that may follow, we invite our native informant to sing the song with the students. Students truly enjoy this activity. Just as we discovered with Doña Rosalía in Mexico, singing together creates empathy and connects people across cultures on an affective level.

### **Interviews with Native Speakers in the Community**

Once students gain confidence by interacting with the Hispanic guests invited to class, they should be ready to conduct their own ethnographic interviews in the community. Students are provided with the preceding list of questions and a short list of three or four songs to investigate. The list should include at least one traditional and one contemporary song of the students’ choice, possibly a current Latino hit. For example, students could ask about “Cielito lindo,” “Los elefantes,” and one current hit each by Shakira and Enrique Iglesias. These interviews are likely to generate more interest than the one done in class with an informant hand-picked by the teacher, as the results will be more unpredictable. Also, students will be eager to inquire about songs of their own choice.

If students are timid or if the number of Hispanics in the community is limited, students can work in pairs to find native speakers to interview. Most communities have a significant number of native Spanish speakers. Local Mexican restaurants, Mexican grocery stores, and Spanish-language church services are good places to find native speakers who may be willing to have a conversation with a young student of Spanish. If native Spanish speakers are scarce in the area,

the teacher can assemble a list of names and telephone numbers of willing volunteers. The international studies office of a nearby college or university should be able to supply names from a variety of countries. (See Heusinkveld [2001b] and Bateman [2002] for ideas on implementing ethnographic interviews.)

At the beginning of each interview, students should ascertain the subject's name, approximate age, and country of origin. Every effort should be made to obtain interviews with native speakers of different ages and from various countries. For each song discussed in the interview, students should be ready to report on the following information: Did the native informant know the song? Did he/she like it? What other information did the informant provide about the song? Did the song produce special memories for him/her?

The follow-up assignments in class will vary according to students' ability levels and the time available. Possibilities include the following:

1. Students could write a brief report such as the following one:

*Arturo Gómez es de Puebla, México, y tiene 45 años. Le gusta la canción "Los elefantes" porque es muy cómica. Aprendió la canción en la escuela, a la edad de cinco años. Dice que la canción es buena para aprender los números. Ahora sus hijos cantan esta canción, y les gusta también.*

(Arturo Gómez is from Puebla, Mexico, and is 45 years old. He likes the song "Los elefantes" because it is very funny. He learned the song in school at the age of five. He says that the song is good for learning numbers. Now his children sing this song, and they like it, too.)

To make this task easier, the teacher could provide a template, such as the following:

*(Nombre de la persona) es de (ciudad, país) y tiene \_\_\_\_ años. Le gusta/ No le gusta la canción (título de la canción) porque \_\_\_\_\_. Aprendió la canción a la edad de \_\_\_\_ años.*

[*(Name of the person) is from (city, country) and is \_\_\_\_ years old. He/ She likes the song (title of the song) because \_\_\_\_\_. He/She learned the song at the age of \_\_\_\_ years.*]

2. Students could form small groups to share orally with one another the information obtained in the interviews.
3. Students could give individual or team reports to the class.
4. Students could work in groups or as a class to make a simple grid showing responses, as follows:



Song	Know the song	Don't know it
“Cielito lindo”	23	2
“Los elefantes”	21	4
“Livin' la vida loca”	13	12

In a more sophisticated grid, teams of students could compare recognition of various songs according to the informant's age or country of origin.

#### “Cielito Lindo” – Traditional song from México

Country	no. of informants	Know the song	Don't know the song
Mexico	12	12	0
Puerto Rico	4	3	1

#### “Livin' la vida loca” by Ricky Martín

Country	no. of informants	Know song age 0-30	Know song age 31-99	Don't know age 0-30	Don't know age 31-99
Mexico	12	5	2	1	4
Puerto Rico	4	4	n/a	0	n/a

Not surprisingly, this grid indicates that Ricky Martin is better known in Puerto Rico than in Mexico and that young people are more likely than older people to listen to his music. Students can share these data in class with a minimum of English, using the present tense of the verb “conocer”: *Cinco personas jóvenes de México conocen esta canción y dos no la conocen.* (Five young people from Mexico know this song, and two do not know it.) The actual statistics matter less than the language practice, intercultural contact, and motivation that result from conversations with native speakers. In all cases, interest in the songs increases as a result of these interviews. Perhaps more importantly, the contact with native speakers increases overall motivation in learning language and culture.

#### Musical Interest Survey

The preceding activities are designed to enrich the study of specific songs. If teachers would like for their students to engage in more extensive conversation with their native informants, students can be asked to conduct ethnographic interviews using general questions about musical preferences. Heusinkveld (2001b) proposes a detailed musical interest survey consisting of a series of questions about musical tastes and listening habits. Informants are invited to share information as to when and where they listen to music, which style of music they prefer,

favorite musical artists, and so forth. Students first complete this survey in class in a think/pair/share format, in which they answer the questions themselves, compare notes with a classmate, and eventually share their answers with the whole class. In another format, students conduct paired interviews and then report their partners' musical preferences to the class.

Students then use the same series of questions to conduct ethnographic interviews with native speakers in the community. The questions are accessible to first-year students, as they are framed in the present tense and address a topic that is of universal interest. The information gathered from these interviews provides the basis for a variety of in-class activities in which students report on the musical tastes of their Hispanic informants and compare these preferences with their own.

### **Comparing Cultural Practices: “Happy Birthday” vs. “Las mañanitas”**

In nearly all cultures, certain songs are associated with special events, holidays, or other cultural practices. Examples of such songs in English include “Happy Birthday to You” and “Here Comes the Bride.” Hispanic songs associated with special events and holidays can provide the basis for especially interesting interviews, in which students obtain information about cultural practices associated with these special songs in various Hispanic countries.

The song “Las mañanitas” has often been described as “the Mexican Happy Birthday Song.” But there are significant differences between “Happy Birthday” and “Las mañanitas” that will be revealed through word association games and ethnographic interviews with native informants (Heusinkveld, 2001b, p. 143).

As a vocabulary exercise, students are asked to write the title “Happy Birthday to You” in the center of a piece of paper and to brainstorm in small groups to make a word map of words they associate with that song. The teacher can circulate among the groups to provide Spanish equivalents for words such as “party,” “birthday cake,” “candles,” “ice cream,” “presents,” “children,” and “balloons.” The completed list reveals much about the cultural practices associated with the “Happy Birthday” song in the United States. In a multicultural classroom, students from another country could do a similar exercise with a holiday song from their culture.

The next step is to interview native speakers about “Las mañanitas,” either in class or in the community as described above. It is important to find informants from different countries, as we would like to ascertain whether “Las mañanitas” is sung exclusively in Mexico, or whether it is also familiar to people from Puerto Rico, Argentina, or other Hispanic countries. The most important question for this interview will be “What other words do you associate with the song ‘Las mañanitas’?” Students may want to share their own word maps on “Happy Birthday” with the informants to clarify the nature of their inquiry. Back in class, when all these words are pooled together on the board, students may see words like *balcón* (balcony), *madrugada* (dawn), *serenata* (serenade), *guitarra* (guitar),

*chocolate* (hot chocolate), because “Las mañanitas” (literally, ‘Morning Songs’) is traditionally sung as a serenade in the early morning under a balcony, often accompanied by a guitar, to awaken the honoree. After the serenade, well-wishers are invited into the home for hot chocolate and *buñuelos*. If these associations were not clear to students in the interviews, the teacher can help to fill in the gaps. Students should also learn from their informants that the song is sung in Mexico for saints’ days, Mother’s Day, anniversaries, and generally any celebratory occasion, including December 12, in honor of the beloved Virgin of Guadalupe.

Students can make cross-cultural comparisons of birthday practices in Hispanic culture and their own by arranging all this information into a Venn diagram. In this activity, students make two concentric (overlapping) circles. The characteristics pertaining only to Hispanic culture are written in the circle on the right; those pertaining to their own (U.S.) culture fit into the circle on the left; and items common to both cultures are written in the center, where the two circles overlap. For example, in my classes my students have used the Venn diagram to compare American Halloween with the Mexican Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*). Students receive a list of words associated with the two holidays (e.g., “black cats,” “skull candy,” “cemeteries,” “costumes,” “masks,” “family altars,” “picnics at the grave site”). Working in teams, students make three columns (Halloween, Day of the Dead, and Both) and try to guess which words fit into each column. The element of competition increases motivation, as students are eager to discover which group can come up with the most accurate answers.

In order to compare the cultural practices associated with “Las mañanitas” and “Happy Birthday to You,” students can make a Venn diagram with the words they have gathered in their interviews, as well as with those generated in class. In the right-hand circle are words that Mexicans associate with this song: *serenata*, *guitarra*, *balcón*, *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. In the left-hand circle are words that American children may associate with “Happy Birthday,” such as “Ronald McDonald.” In the center section formed by the two concentric circles are words common to both cultures, such as “party,” “birthday cake,” “candy,” “balloons.” Converted into three lists, the vocabulary collected in the interviews might look something like this:

“Happy Birthday to You”	Both Songs	“Las mañanitas”
ice cream	party	window
Ronald McDonald	birthday	Saint’s Day
birthday cards	gifts	guitar
McDonald’s	birthday cake	serenade
	children	Virgin of Guadalupe
	balloons	dawn
	candy	chocolate con churros
	games	piñata

Clearly, these word associations do much more than practice vocabulary. They teach us about cultural practices, even as we study a cultural product—the song. This activity is an excellent way to help students learn cultural differences between Anglo-American and Hispanic holidays.

Another difference between “Happy Birthday” and “Las mañanitas” is the nature of the lyrics themselves (Appendix B). A study of the lyrics of “Las mañanitas” will reveal vocabulary words associated with morning (“dawn,” “morning,” “wake up”) and nature (“birds,” “moon,” “flowers,” “nightingales”). The contrast between the poetic language of “Las mañanitas” and the brief “Happy Birthday to You” reflects another cultural difference: Most Hispanics enjoy flowery, elaborate language, especially on special occasions, such as birthdays and patriotic holidays.

Most Mexicans are able to recall special memories of a particular birthday when they were awakened by a serenade of “Las mañanitas.” Students enjoy having a guest come to class to share these memories, and to join the class in singing the song. Once again, singing together creates empathy and brings people together across cultures and generations.

### **Associations with Song Titles: National Anthems**

Whereas “Happy Birthday” and “Las mañanitas” are associated with personal celebrations, the national anthem of each country is sung or played in honor of an entire nation. Ethnographic interviews about national anthems bring out a wealth of interesting cultural information and help students realize that national pride is an important element of every culture.

To explore the cultural connotations of the “himno nacional,” students begin by considering their own national anthem. Just as they did with “Happy Birthday,” students complete a word-mapping activity. They write down the title, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” in the center of a sheet of paper and create satellite categories around it, such as “foods,” “dates,” “colors,” and “events.” In groups, students then brainstorm to think of words we associate with this song. Anglo-American students are likely to write down words like “Fourth of July,” “baseball games,” “hot dogs,” “fireworks,” “red/white/blue,” “parades,” and “patriotism.” In a multicultural classroom, students could do the same exercise for the national anthem of their own country. Again, the teacher can circulate through the room to provide Spanish equivalents for vocabulary as needed.

Ethnographic interviews with Hispanics, either in or outside of class, reveal a wide variety of cultural practices associated with national anthems of various countries. Students can guide their native informants in making a semantic map like the one described above. What dates, colors, events, foods, and activities do native speakers associate with their own national anthems? If we ask Mexicans what words they associate with the “himno nacional” of Mexico, they are likely to mention the colors of the Mexican flag (red, green and white); the favorite sport of Mexico (soccer), and several dates: September 15 (Mexican Independence Day),

May 5 (Cinco de Mayo, that is, Battle of Puebla), and February 5 (Day of the Mexican Constitution). Colombians are also likely to mention soccer, but they would mention as well red, yellow, and blue, and *arepas*, a food commonly eaten at soccer games.

After conducting their ethnographic interviews, students can work in groups to compile their information in a grid, as follows:

### Words Associated with National Anthems (Himnos Nacionales)

Country	Dates	Colors	Sports	Foods	Events
USA	July 4	red, white, blue	baseball	hot dogs	parades, fireworks
Mexico	Sept. 16	green, white, red	soccer	tortas	flag-raising ceremonies
	May 5		Olympic		flag
	Feb. 5		games		at school/in plaza
Colombia	July 20	red, blue, yellow	soccer	arepas	high school graduations

### Gathering Information: Other Holiday Songs

In a different but related activity, students try to discover through ethnographic interviews whether Hispanics have specific songs for holidays for which Anglo-Americans do not. Questions might include the following: Do you know any specific songs that you might sing in your country at a birthday party? What songs might you hear at a wedding or wedding reception? Do you sing any special song on the first or the last day of school? Is there a special song for graduation? What songs do you sing at Christmas? Do you know any other patriotic songs?

The advantage of this activity is that it may yield a wealth of interesting cultural information beyond what the teacher could provide. However, because of the open-ended nature of these interviews, they may very possibly need to be conducted at least partially in English. The advantages of the contact with native speakers and the motivation that occurs when students do their own cultural “research” outweigh any perceived disadvantage of occasionally speaking in English. Indeed, Bateman (2004) found that ethnographic interviews conducted in English were just as successful as those conducted in Spanish in achieving various objectives, such as increasing motivation for cultural learning.

For retrieving songs from native informants, students should take a tape recorder and have the informants sing the song. Also, the student should have the informants write down as many words as they can remember. If the informants seem to have more information than the students can absorb, students may ask for phone numbers, so that the teacher may make follow-up calls. If possible, one or more informants could be invited to class to teach a song to the students and explain its cultural context.

For my students, these interviews on holiday songs have yielded fascinating cultural information. One of the most frequently mentioned songs is “Dale, dale,” sung by Mexican children as they take turns putting on a blindfold and wielding a long stick to try to break the *piñata*. The lyrics of this song urge each child to “hit it, hit it!” The lyrics also warn that the child who fails to break the *piñata* will look as silly as “*el conejo Blas*” (Blas, the Rabbit), who turns out to be a character in another popular Mexican children’s song.

Another song mentioned in this type of ethnographic interview is “*La víbora de la mar*.” It seems that Mexicans sing this song at a wedding reception at the moment the bride is to toss her bouquet. One informant explained that as the bride stands on a chair with her long veil extended behind her, all the single young women at the wedding form a conga line and dance under the veil, as they sing “*La víbora de la mar*.” As the dancers weave their way under the veil and around in a circle to duck under the veil again, they resemble an innocuous sea snake, a *víbora de la mar*.

These are only a few examples of the interesting cultural practices that may come to light through ethnographic interviews about music. Again, the follow-up assignments in class will vary according to students’ ability level and the time available. Students could form small groups to share the information from the interviews, report to the class, or prepare a brief written report. The language in which these activities are conducted will depend on the degree of complexity of the information, as well as the students’ own linguistic levels.

### **Music, Ethnographic Interviews, and the *Standards***

Whether students undertake a series of detailed ethnographic interviews in the community, or whether the teacher simply invites a Hispanic guest to class to join the students in singing, the interaction with native speakers can greatly enhance the study of culturally authentic songs in the foreign language class. In all these activities, the study of Hispanic songs and the ethnographic interviews complement each other for the mutual benefit of both. The interviews on music with native speakers bring an added dimension to our study of traditional Hispanic songs. Not only do the native informants provide all manner of insights on the cultural context of each song; the participation of the native informant in the learning process creates bonds of empathy and increases students’ motivation.

At the same time, music is a topic with universal appeal that allows students to conduct interesting and satisfying ethnographic interviews. Music reflects the soul of a culture. Whether students are eliciting nostalgic memories, exchanging ideas about musical taste, or singing together with Hispanic informants, music serves as a universal language that helps to break down stereotypes and to increase interest in cross-cultural learning.

The activities described in this article represent a thorough integration of lessons on language and culture. Not only do these activities incorporate all of the “Five C’s” described in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National

Standards, 1999): Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities; they can effectively broaden and deepen our conceptual understanding of the *Standards*. Students practice all modes of communication as they listen to the songs, interact with native speakers and fellow students, and present their ideas both orally and in writing. Aside from the classroom notions of communication, students are engaged in real communication with Hispanic people in the community.

Every authentic song studied in these activities is a *cultural product* that reflects *perspectives* of the culture where it originated. Songs such as “Las mañanitas” give us insights into specific *cultural practices*. Beyond the specific information about Hispanic culture, this unit helps to create a cross-cultural sensitivity and curiosity.

Any activity involving music addresses the *connections* standard, as we learn about melody, rhythm, musical instruments, and the poetry of the lyrics. This standard is further addressed as students learn about geography, history, ethnic foods, and so forth in songs such as “Ojalá que llueva café.” Also as part of this standard, students use their foreign language to acquire new knowledge, as they interview native informants. More importantly, students feel a connectedness with native speakers through the universal language of music. In the activities on holiday songs and national anthems, students make all manner of *comparisons* about cultural practices. As students learn about birthday customs in Mexico and other countries, they become more aware of their own culture. Finally, as students and native informants join together in song, they form a *community* of learners. The interaction of all parties should increase motivation to promote a lifetime of language learning.

In conclusion, the activities described in this article address virtually all the Standards for Foreign Language Learning that serve as our guideposts as we prepare young language learners for the 21st century. Ultimately, the ethnographic interviews and the culturally authentic music work together to enrich the lives of both teachers and students, helping them become more sensitive human beings.

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## Appendix A

### Selected Resources for Music in the Foreign Language Class

Anton, Ron. VIA Musical Communications. Web site: <[www.viamc.com](http://www.viamc.com)>. E-mail: <[viamusic@excite.com](mailto:viamusic@excite.com)>. Phone: 800-222-0189.

*Cantos, ritmos y rimas*. Vibrante Press, P.O. 51853, Albuquerque, NM 87181-1853. Web site: <[www.vibrante.com](http://www.vibrante.com)>. Phone: 505-298-4793.

Grupo Cañaveral, P.O. Box 521866, Miami, FL 33152. Web site: <[www.hispanicmusic.com](http://www.hispanicmusic.com)>. E-mail: <[info@hispanicmusic.com](mailto:info@hispanicmusic.com)>.

Lozano, Patti. *Latin American Legends: On Page, on Stage, & in Song. Music that Teaches Spanish!: Original Songs, Rhymes, Creative Activities. More Music that Teaches Spanish: Original Songs, Rhymes, Creative Activities. Spanish Grammar Swings!: An Interactive Songbook*. Dolo Publications, Inc., 12800 Briar Forest Dr. #23, Houston, TX 77077. Web site: <[www.dololanguages.com](http://www.dololanguages.com)>. Phone: 800-830-1430. FAX: 281-679-9092.

MacArthur, Barbara. *Sing, Dance, Laugh, and Eat Tacos*. Phone: 800-832-2437.

Medina, Jorge. *¡Cantemos, niños!* CD, Spanish lyrics, © 2005. *Latino*, CD, Spanish lyrics, © 2002. *Sabor latino*, CD, Spanish lyrics, © 2003. 3037 Creekside Dr., Seneca, SC 29672. E-mail: <[jorgemedina02@yahoo.com](mailto:jorgemedina02@yahoo.com)>. Phone: 864-882-8238.

Orozco, José Luis. *De Colores and Other Latin-American Folk Songs for Children*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1994.

*Sing 'n Speak Spanish*. [Excellent for elementary curriculum]. Web site: <[www.singnspeak.com](http://www.singnspeak.com)>. Phone: 619-223-2508.

*Songs and Rhymes*. Education in Motion, P.O. Box 224, Chico Rivera, CA 90660.

Sporborg, James Douglas. *Music in Every Classroom: A Resource Guide for Integrating Music Across the Curriculum, Grades K-8*. Libraries Unlimited. Web site: <[www.greenwood.com](http://www.greenwood.com)>. Phone: 800-237-6124. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED430861)

*Teach to the Beat*, 1268 Pear Wood Way, Uniontown, OH 44685. Phone: 216-896-2756.

Teaching Spanish through Music. Web site: <<http://www.caslt.org/research/musicsp.htm>>.

Tipton, Stacey. "Musical Spanish." Web site: <[www.musicalspanish.com](http://www.musicalspanish.com)>. E-mail: <[Stacey@spanish.bz](mailto:Stacey@spanish.bz)>.

**Appendix B****“Las mañanitas”:** **Canción mexicana para el día de cumpleaños**

Estas son las mañanitas  
 que cantaba el Rey David.  
 Hoy por ser día de su santo,  
 Te las cantamos a ti.  
 Despierta, mi bien, despierta,  
 Mira, que ya amaneció,  
 Ya los pajarillos cantan,  
 La luna ya se metió.

¡Qué linda está la mañana,  
 En que vengo a saludarte!  
 Venimos todos con gusto  
 Y placer a felicitarte.  
 El día en que tú naciste,  
 Nacieron todas las flores,  
 Y en la pila del bautismo  
 Cantaron los ruiseñores.  
 Ya viene amaneciendo,  
 Ya la luz del día nos dio,  
 Levántate, de mañana,  
 Mira, que ya amaneció.

These are the morning songs  
 That King David used to sing.  
 Today, because it's your Saint's Day,  
 We sing them to you.  
 Wake up, my dear one, wake up,  
 Look, the dawn has already come.  
 The birds are already singing,  
 The moon already went down.

How pretty is the morning,  
 In which I come to greet you!  
 We all come with happiness  
 And pleasure to congratulate you.  
 The day on which you were born,  
 All the flowers were born,  
 And at your baptismal font  
 All the nightingales sang.  
 The dawn is already coming,  
 The light of day has already touched us,  
 Get up this morning  
 Look, the dawn is already here.

## 7

## Teaching and Learning American Sign Language in U.S. Schools

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### Abstract

*This paper initially describes the remarkable beginning of sign language linguistics and follows with the basis of current scientific interest in sign languages. The authors then discuss the popularity of American Sign Language (ASL) in the United States, exploring the basis for the current popularity of learning sign language and the disadvantages of popularization for high proficiency standards for sign language interpreters. The final sections of the article discuss the pressures on ASL in today's world, including advances in cochlear implant technology. The authors conclude with an appeal to professional language teachers to be informed supporters of teaching and learning ASL.*

American Sign Language (ASL) is one of the most widely used languages in the United States and Canada. In addition to its use by Deaf persons (capital *D* is used to refer to cultural deafness; lower-case *d* refers to biological deafness) and their hearing family members, ASL is used by a growing number of hearing, second-language students. Despite the growing popularity of ASL in schools and society, numerous misconceptions linger as to the nature of ASL, its importance, and its usefulness in the world today. This article will trace the history of our current understanding of ASL, will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of ASL's current popularity, and will make recommendations for support of ASL in the school curriculum in the future.

### History of Sign Language Linguistics

Language teachers are aware that all languages and their varieties have interesting histories and that many language histories include derision, prejudice, and oppression. The history of American Sign Language is notable for its relatively

recent recognition as a language. Before 1960, lay people and linguists alike believed that signing was an insufficient medium for the full expressions of a language. Sign was obviously a communication system, but it was regarded as functionally limited and on par with animal communication systems. But in 1960, William Stokoe published the first scientific description of sign language grammar, and scientists could no longer ignore the common linguistic properties of both signed and spoken languages.

It is interesting that no one before Stokoe convincingly equated spoken and signed languages, particularly during the boom of descriptive linguistics from 1900 to the 1960s, when the languages of the world were documented and described by anthropologists and field linguists in the tradition of Franz Boaz and Leonard Bloomfield. There have always been hearing/speaking children of Deaf parents (Children of Deaf Adults [CODAs]) who have grown up to be fully bilingual signing and speaking individuals. This population intuitively experiences the linguistic equivalence of signed and spoken languages through experiencing the full range of functions in each language, including two-way translation. However, the scientific community needed a more convincing demonstration of the linguistic status of proficient signing. The necessary documentation of the rule-governed behavior of sign language would require a form of sign language notation. This demonstration of the linguistic principles of sign language is what made Stokoe's 1960 article, "Sign Language Structures: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the American Deaf," the beginning of a new era in understanding human language.

On the surface, Stokoe was not an obvious candidate for a revolutionary language reformer. He was not bilingual in ASL and English, nor was he specifically trained as a linguist. He was, in fact, a professor of English at Gallaudet University, the only institution of higher learning for the deaf in the United States, at a time when spoken and written English were the media of instruction throughout the university. Students signed in the hallways and residences, among one another and with the signing Deaf faculty and staff. At that time, however, signing was not used to support instruction in reading and writing English, and the predominant ideology in education was that signing "impeded" a student's progress in English. Stokoe's (1991) vision allowed him to see the flaws in the accepted policy. His leap of insight was fueled primarily by the fact that he was a dedicated teacher, determined to connect with the intellectually talented students he met every day: "I was not a linguist. . . . I was a teacher, deeply interested in the amazing abilities of students who could not hear my voice but could learn and learn and learn, despite my shortcomings as a communicator" (p. 100).

Stokoe was also well read in contemporary linguistics and knew several languages. He closely observed the signing used by his students, and over the course of 10 years he worked out a system of describing the signing he saw at Gallaudet. In fact, Stokoe devoted the rest of his career to the work of documenting the linguistic properties of sign languages. He faced opposition and ridicule, but he ultimately changed the world's definition of human language. As he explains,

What I hoped to accomplish first with *Sign Language Structure* and the *Dictionary of American Sign Language*, and later with *Sign Language Studies* and other writings, was to persuade those with open minds in traditional scientific disciplines, whose ideas sometimes trickled down into departments of education, and even into special education, that sign language has a structure just as any language has, and that it should not be despised or ignored as it had been from 1880 through 1960 and beyond. (1991, p. 103)

Stokoe's work on sign language linguistics occurred during a remarkable period in modern linguistics. Chomsky published *Syntactic Structures* in 1957, and in the 1960s, Roger Brown worked on language acquisition studies with a talented cadre of graduate students at Harvard University. One of the students from Brown's lab at Harvard, Ursula Bellugi, founded the first sign language research lab at the Salk Institute in San Diego in 1970. These events all formed the foundation of sign language studies as it is known today. Stokoe's recognition of the linguistic basis of signing was in harmony with Chomsky's description of abstract syntactic competence, and Brown's methods of studying language acquisition informed the sign language studies done at the Salk Institute. In the 35 years that have followed, sign language linguistics has contributed enormously to our understanding of human language and cognition.

### **Importance of ASL Among the World's Languages**

It is now widely understood among linguists that all signed languages make use of the hands, face, upper body, and the space in front of the body to articulate all the meaningful components of human language. That is, signs are composed of specific hand shapes, palm orientation, hand locations in relation to the face and upper body, hand movements, and facial expressions. Signs contrast with one another along these dimensions in systematic ways that comprise the morpho-phonology of the language. Because signs are articulated in a space that is significantly larger than the oral space, multiple points of articulation can be used simultaneously. The limits of speech production in the oral space do not permit speakers to speak more than one sound, syllable, or word at the same time. Thus we refer to the linearity of spoken and written language. But in the sign space, two or more morphemes can be articulated simultaneously. This phenomenon is one of the signature features of sign language complexity. In ASL, the verb complex can be simultaneously constructed with the hand movement signaling the verb stem, location of the hand signaling tense and modality, the hand shape signaling the object, and palm orientation signaling modification of the object.

Current research in sign language linguistics continues to describe the grammatical complexity and systematicity of ASL and other signed languages through the subsystems of phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and discourse. Neurolinguists have found that sign languages are mapped in modules in the brain

very much like spoken languages. Vocabulary meanings, whether from signs or spoken words, are stored in Wernicke's area of the brain. Grammatical information, whether from signed or spoken language, is stored in Broca's area of the brain. Left and right hemisphere specialization for language works much the same way for both deaf and hearing individuals (see Petitto, n.d.).

This emerging model of how the brain is biologically endowed for human language, regardless of the manual or spoken modality, is the most compelling reason for the importance of ASL in today's world. Indeed, the bilingualism of the Deaf signer who proficiently reads and writes a written language is a critical source of data on human linguistic achievement in that it provides the basis for understanding the full potential of bilingualism and literacy in today's world. And there are such people—those who are born deaf who become proficient readers and writers of the spoken languages of their communities and are proficient signers in the sign languages of their communities. These people are a small minority of the deaf population overall, but they are present in every group of successful deaf professionals—teachers, entrepreneurs, artists, scientists, and civic leaders. Bimodal multilingualism in all its varieties is what linguistic theory must ultimately account for, and ASL and its users hold a critically important place of significance in building such a theory.

### **Popularity of ASL**

While scientists have developed a strong interest in ASL as a subject of inquiry, the language is also growing in its general popularity. The 2002 foreign language enrollment data collected by the Modern Language Association (MLA) show that student enrollment in ASL courses in institutions of higher education increased more than four times the enrollments in any other language. In addition, the MLA data show that ASL ranked fifth overall in foreign language enrollment—preceded by Spanish, French, German, and Italian, in that order (Welles, 2004). These enrollment figures also indicate the increase in the number of institutions of higher education, state governments, and public schools that officially recognize ASL as meeting foreign language study requirements. As ASL instruction grows, so do the numbers of ASL teachers. The ASL Teachers Association (ASLTA) was founded in 1975 (known then as Sign Instructors Guidance Network [SIGN]) as a program within the National Association of the Deaf. In 2004, ASLTA was established as an independent professional organization with more than 1,000 members. The significance of its size and history can be appreciated when we consider that the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, ACTFL, was founded only 8 years earlier, and with all languages and professional roles combined, is larger by a factor of only seven (having had 7,000 members in 2004).

Other indicators of the popularity of ASL are equally apparent. Choices of ASL curriculum materials are increasing every year, along with high-quality dictionaries and teacher training materials. The momentum of ASL curriculum design and the popularity of learning ASL have come together in the success of sales of

infant ASL curricula. According to a recent story in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, Joseph Garcia's *Sign with your Baby* (1999) book and video set have sold almost a half million copies in the United States and is currently selling well in the UK, where sign language learning is undergoing a similar wave of popularity (Atkins, 2005). British Sign Language (BSL) is the second most popular subject taught in vocational night school classes, second only to First Aid (Sutton-Spence & Woll, 2004).

The popularity of signing with babies is supported at least in part by the practical advantage of enhanced communication with infants before they are using their first words. Babies may use signs as early as 8 months of age, while first words may appear at 11 months or later. The video material that accompanies Garcia's popular *Sign with your Baby* (1999) shows a vignette in which a mother describes how, while driving her car, she was alerted by her 8-month-old child in the back seat, who used sign language to alert her to the presence of a bee. On the scholarly side, when subjected to rigorous experimental conditions, the advantage of early signing with infants tends to wash out over individual differences in language development over the course of time (see Abrahamsen, 2000a). A specialist in the field of early language and cognition, Adele Abrahamsen gives the following bottom-line analysis in a list-serve exchange:

Enhanced gesturing (baby signing) doesn't belong on any must-do lists—but does provide one way we adults can adapt to the nature of babies in the face of all the ways babies have to adapt to us. For most families it's enjoyable, and there are some modest but real benefits. And for those whose babies turn out to be late talkers (not yet known when you start baby signs), the advantages may be considerable. (2000b, Info-childes archive, 25 Mar 2000)

Many teachers of world languages might envy the popularity of ASL teaching and learning, and indeed most teachers find students to be highly motivated in the initial stages of learning. Jacobs (1996) points out that students typically sign up for an ASL course with the ultimate objective of using the language, whether to become interpreters, to teach deaf children, to do social work in the Deaf community, to communicate with a deaf friend or family member, or just for fun. At the very least, students are drawn to learning ASL to avoid the discomfort of pronunciation problems or past failures in language learning.

It is true that the beginning ASL student has opportunities to feel successful with the barest of skills in the target language. There are Deaf communities throughout the United States, particularly in larger urban areas, which have organized social clubs as an important means of socializing. While a novice ASL student who visits a Deaf club meeting is likely to experience the same disorientation as that of those immersed in languages they do not know, novice ASL learners are very likely to be well supported in their most minimal attempts to participate in social exchanges. The novice is likely to be approached by a club member who will sign and gesture and possibly voice in English to communicate a simple greeting

and introduction. Typically the visitor might be asked what her name is, and all novice ASL students can fingerspell their names. Being accommodated to a high degree in real social exchanges in the target language adds to the enthusiasm of beginning ASL learners.

In addition to the usability of the first bits of ASL language learning, students of ASL can actually consider attractive professional careers based on relatively few years of language study (Jacobs, 1996). Learning ASL for professional development is an important factor in reported enrollment figures for ASL in institutions of higher education. A professional career based on a few years of language study in any other language is not typical. For instance, Jacobs cites only three interpreter training institutes for spoken languages in the United States, while finding that there are 93 English-ASL interpreting programs, the majority of which are in 2-year community colleges.

### **Low Expectations for ASL**

While ASL is obviously a useful and popular language, it is linked to deafness and to the perceptions of deafness by mainstream society. These perceptions affect the way ASL is taught and learned and bears on the future of ASL in the United States. Deafness has consistently been viewed by the hearing world as a disability, and so the signed languages used by the Deaf are, by association, seen as evidence of a communicative handicap. This view is in sharp contrast to that within the Deaf community, where deafness and signing are normal.

The misperception of ASL as a language handicap is perpetuated by the association of ASL interpreting with federal legislation, primarily the Americans with Disabilities Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. With the current emphasis on educating all students within the mainstream of instruction, generally referred to as a philosophy of inclusion, the result is a large number of education sign language interpreters working in schools. These interpreters have far less bilingual language competence than professional translators of spoken languages, a dilemma summarized by Jacobs (1996) as follows:

It is a Catch-22 that more and more people are seeing ASL-English interpreters and recognizing the reality of ASL, yet they are associating this recognition with the ADA, which reinforces the disability mindset. Even those (hearing people) who study ASL and use it are often seen as “benevolent,” “altruistic,” or at best “fascinating,” rather than as learners studying a second language/culture and its people, and accorded the requisite value. When was the last time anyone told a student of Spanish or even Japanese, “Wow, that’s fascinating, so do you plan to teach Spanish/Japanese children?” as if that were the logical extension of studying the language? Interpreters and students of ASL are asked this question regularly. Alternatively, ASL is seen as a fun elective, not something valued as appropriate to complete a liberal arts education. (p. 200) [Authors: This attitude is also slowly starting to change.]



ASL also compares unfavorably with spoken languages in its institutional support, being taught typically in departments of speech and language pathology, rather than in departments of modern languages. Perhaps most devastating of all these examples of linguistic inequality and misunderstanding is the fact that ASL is not listed in the 2000 U.S. census list of languages encoded for population tables. When the authors asked the Education and Social Stratification Branch Population Division of the U.S. Census Bureau to explain the absence of ASL from the language code list, the consultant informed them that ASL users were counted as using English.

Such misconceptions about the use of ASL and sign languages in general continue in spite of the wave of popularity for learning ASL. Language popularity does not seem to be generating language proficiency. One of the reasons for this superficial aspect of using ASL can be found in the close contact between English and ASL in the residential schools of the recent past, a point discussed further in the following section.

### **ASL in Today's World**

Reference has been made to structural aspects of ASL and its history of association with disability and handicapped communication, but a further elaboration is warranted as to why Deaf communities may accommodate beginning sign language learners better than spoken language communities accommodate language learners. Early success with learning and using ASL results from a combination of Deaf sociability and the amenities of signing. The reference to "amenities" is intended to include the linguistic resources of finger spelling, gesture, the iconic nature of some signs, and the social tolerance of transliteration (using signs in English word order).

Sociability in the Deaf community has its roots in the system of residential schools for the deaf that were the norm in the United States until the 1990s, when legislation widely supported the education of all children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. In the traditional residential schools for the deaf, oral and written English were the delivery systems of instruction, and students used sign language among themselves and with the few Deaf instructors. Opportunities to communicate freely in sign language held a special value, and traditions of sociability were nurtured.

Many children arrived at residential schools for the deaf with no knowledge of any sign language. Since 90% of all deaf individuals are born to hearing parents, and most hearing parents do not learn a signed language, most children in residence schools learned signed language as older children and with peers as language models. In this language contact situation, ASL was learned and used with varying degrees of transliteration of signs onto English syntax. Deaf children raised in entirely oral English language environments came to residential schools and colleges for the deaf with no sign language, and hearing faculty and staff in these institutions were typically not trained in sign language, thereby establishing

English as a linguistic endpoint on a continuum of language creolization in institutions for the deaf. On the other end of the language spectrum were the few deaf faculty and staff, along with the deaf children of deaf parents, who brought fully proficient ASL into contact with signers of other varieties of ASL. As a result, ASL vocabulary was often signed in English word order and with English semantic organization in order to achieve mutual intelligibility along this linguistic continuum.

One consequence of this pattern of language contact along an ASL-English continuum is that the use of ASL varies widely, and standardization is a serious topic among ASL signers. Another consequence of language use along such a continuum is the tradition of social tolerance for English-based signing in educational settings. Artificially constructed, educational intervention systems such as Cued Speech and Signing Exact English have been implemented in schools and clinics to support English immersion, the language experience of deaf school children. These intervention systems at best incorporate a single visual dimension to what is English syntax, morphology, and phonology. These systems do not function as human languages due to their limited range of use and limited functional complexity. Nor do they function as human languages, as they do not pass naturally through intergenerational transmission.

However, the ultimate artificial intervention in deafness is cochlear implantation, and this quickly advancing technology has serious implications for ASL. The implantation procedure is a major surgery that includes the severing of the auditory nerve bundle from the natural cochlea, permanently eliminating any natural hearing in the implanted ear. Only one ear is implanted, typically the ear with the least residual hearing. The artificial cochlea is wired directly to the brain, and the patient wears a small magnetic receiving device on the outside of the skull, behind the ear. After the surgery, the patient requires extensive auditory training for the brain to organize itself for processing the new signals. The physical devices have become smaller, and the procedure has become generally more successful with time; however, not all surgeries have positive outcomes.

Since the procedure was first approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1985, the number of people eligible for the surgery has widely increased, and in 2004 it was approved for infants as young as 12 months of age. The FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health sponsors a Cochlear Implant Home page that includes very clear statements of the benefits, risks, and limitations of cochlear implants. The home page can be accessed at <http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/cochlear/>.

Despite the increase in the availability and success of cochlear implant surgery, there are many reasons why ASL is not likely to be eliminated by the technological advances in speech and hearing for the deaf. The use of ASL serves as a cultural emblem of Deafness in the United States. Deaf adults who have chosen to have cochlear implants maintain their use of ASL and value it along with hearing and speech. School-age children often abandon their cochlear implant receiving devices (worn externally on the body), rebel against the rigors of speech and hearing training that are necessary for an implant to be successful, and prefer

the company of other Deaf youth with whom signing is the norm. Only with signing peers do Deaf youth find a social setting in which they can enjoy “sameness” and a level social playing field.

In today’s world, English is having an increasing impact on ASL through technology (communications and surgical procedures) and through the social dynamics of education and the Deaf community. The monolingual, native signer is increasingly rare. The loss of residential schools in the mainstreaming of deaf education means a loss of ASL proficiency in the school-age population, a loss of dialect variation from region to region, and repeated re-creolization of the language through transliteration practices (Sutton-Spence & Woll, 2004). At the same time, forces exist that support the validity of ASL as a unique and important language separate from English. Increasing official recognition of ASL, increased availability of high quality language resources, and even the superficial popularity of ASL are all influences that can lead to standardization of the language and the development of new register variants of ASL in academic, artistic, technical, and governmental spheres. As deaf persons have increased access to written communications through the Internet, text messaging, instant messaging, and other popular media, it is not unreasonable to expect a variety of written Deaf English to become conventionalized along with the other World Englishes we now know.

Technology is also supporting the life of ASL through its contribution to preserving ASL literature. Dramatic productions, ranging from those at the nationally acclaimed National Theater for the Deaf all the way to performances at community schools and playhouses, can be shared and studied through the means of video-archiving and Internet and television broadcasts. Similarly, ASL poetry, conveyed through signing, is recorded and shared and influences the new works of developing poets. Deaf writers also add to the value of sign language. They do so directly in their reflections on the sign language experience, and they do so indirectly through the example of their bimodal linguistic accomplishments.

### **ASL in Tomorrow’s World**

The last important reason to be optimistic about teaching and learning ASL in the United States lies with the profession of language teaching. Within this special profession lies the critical experience of how long it takes to become fully proficient in a new language, how non-cognate languages are learned, how professional interpreting requires the highest standards of bilingual language proficiency, how linguistic knowledge transfers in learning a new language, and how second-language writing presents deep cognitive challenges. Professional language teachers are a unique source of knowledge and experience who readily demonstrate the transformational power of overcoming linguistic barriers. Language teachers model and enable everyday transformations of human flexibility, creativity, and understanding. Thus it is that we call upon professional language teachers to take these actions, which are well within their means to support the teaching and learning of ASL in the United States:

1. Acknowledge the fundamental linguistic parity of all human languages, including signed languages.
2. Support literacy instruction through the language best known to the learner, including signed languages. The Shared Reading Project outlines 15 basic principles for using ASL with storybook reading with young children. For more information, go to <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Literacy/srp/15princ.html>.
3. Support high academic expectations for deaf students. The National Association of the Deaf is the largest political voice for Deaf youth in the United States. Find out more from their webpage at <http://www.nad.org>.
4. Support high standards for ASL interpreters in education. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is the largest organization solely devoted to improving the quality of sign language interpreting. Visit their website at <http://www.rid.org>.
5. Support recognition of ASL and related sign language studies as credible modern language enterprises. A short informative handout is available at <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9212/sign.htm>.
6. Support the recognition of sign language literature through visual records of ASL poetry, theater, and story-telling. Sites on the Internet that display visual works include [www.aslquest.com](http://www.aslquest.com), [www.slope.org/asl/](http://www.slope.org/asl/), and <http://raymondluczak.com/index.html>.
7. Support the recognition of Deaf culture through the written work of Deaf authors. Locating literature by Deaf authors is possible with a simple search on the Internet. The largest collection of literature by Deaf writers is at Gallaudet University Library.

In the 45 years since Stokoe demonstrated the linguistic basis of sign language, science has made tremendous gains in understanding ASL and human language. The popularization of signing has brought welcome attention to ASL, but much remains to be done to support the bilingual, bimodal role of ASL in homes, schools, and communities. We look to the professional language teaching community for the leadership that is needed to support ASL as an asset in today's world.

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First name:

E-Mail:

School:

Lesson Title:

[Brief description:](#)

[Topic:](#)

Subtopic (optional):

[Grammar topics:](#)

[Keywords:](#)

Language:

Textbook:

(optional)

Skills targeted: Reading  Writing  Speaking  Listening  Culture

[Model:](#) PACE  Interactive reading/listening  Culture

Class level: Elementary  Middle School  HS I-II  HS III  HS IV-V   
College Elem.  College Intern.

Standards:  1.1 [Interpersonal Communication](#)  1.2 [Interpretive Communication](#)  
 1.3 [Presentational Communication](#)  
 2.1 [Practices of Culture](#)  2.2 [Products of Culture](#)  
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