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National and State Foreign Language Standards: A New Impetus for Integrating the Teaching of Culture and Language

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The teaching of culture has long been a major goal of foreign language instruction. In practice, however, a number of problems have made this goal difficult to achieve and have even relegated cultural learning to a position of secondary importance. One of the major difficulties has been the problem of vagueness in stating the goal itself. More often than not, teachers have worked from personal definitions of culture or have assumed that this concept is easily understood. In fact, scholars often have disagreed about the nature of culture, its relationship to language, and what aspects of culture should be taught. The problem of how to integrate culture and language in teaching and learning and how to assess what is being learned is still a major concern.

Progress in this area is being made and new perspectives on teaching culture and language are being offered as a result of the development of national and state standards for teaching foreign languages. This paper briefly surveys some of the recent scholarship regarding culture and its relationship to language and considers current classroom practices in teaching about culture and assessing what has been learned. National and state standards are discussed in terms of their potential for bringing about positive change in the way we teach and learn about other cultures and several brief conclusions are presented for consideration.

Evolving Views About Culture and Language:

Foreign language scholars have recognized for many years that establishing a functional definition of culture and deciding what aspects of culture to teach is not an easy matter. Prior to the 1950's, teaching about culture in foreign language classrooms often meant teaching about the aesthetic expressions of a culture, especially literature, the visual arts, and music. Instruction about these aspects of culture was usually not delivered in the target language until students reached the higher-level language classes. New perspectives on culture and its role in foreign language instruction were presented by scholars in the 1950's and 1960's. In 1959, the anthropologist Edward T. Hall published The Silent Language. *Hall emphasized ten elements of culture, including interaction, association, temporality, territoriality, gender roles, and learning, among others. One of the major contributions of Hall's analysis was to stimulate discussion of culture in the foreign language and social science disciplines.*

In his 1960 essay, "Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom," Nelson Brooks points out that Hall's list is only one way of thinking about culture and suggests his own themes which could be used to organize instruction and student inquiry. These themes include symbolism, value, authority, order, ceremony, love, honor, humor, beauty, and spirit. Brooks goes on to focus on one of five definitions of culture which he calls "culture4" or "patterns for living," the interaction between the individual and the existing social circumstances.

(22-24) He divides culture4 into two complementary areas, formal *culture and* deep *culture. Formal culture refers to the relationship of the individual to personal refinement (culture2) and literature and the fine arts (culture 3) as well as social organization, economic activities, politics, religion, and professional discipline. Deep culture is the almost subconscious, life-long process by which the individual learns to accommodate himself to all of the aspects of everyday life practiced by those around him, including speaking, eating, dressing, thinking, living, and valuing. (25-26) The idea that there are both formal and deep aspects of culture (sometimes called "big C" and "little c") proved to be very influential in foreign language instruction. While this division of culture into two distinct areas would later be questioned, one thing that it accomplished was to give legitimacy to efforts to teach about everyday life as well as aesthetics.*

Other scholars have also focused on analyzing and organizing a vast amount of cultural information in order to make it manageable for the teacher and meaningful to the student. Howard Lee Nostrand (1978) proposed an inventory model that includes six organizing principles: the culture, the society, conflict, the ecology and technology, the individual, and the cross-cultural environment. In Teaching Culture: Strategies for Intercultural Communication*, H. Ned Seelye builds upon Nostrand's ideas as well as his own previous work in proposing seven goals for cultural learning. Significantly, these goals are expressed in terms of student achievement. For example, Goal II - Interaction of Language and Social Variables states:* The student should demonstrate an understanding that such social variables as age, sex, social class, and place of residence affect the way people speak and behave. *(50) Seelye argues that the study of culture should be purposeful and that there should be a sound reason for the selection of any type of cultural activity. He provides classroom activities that are linked to each of his goals and discusses testing strategies. Seelye's work provided a systematic approach to culture-based instruction. Seelye, Robert Lafayette (1988) and others have also contributed to the discussion of cultural learning by pointing out that communication takes place in a cultural context and that the teaching of language and culture should be integrated.*

The emergence of the national standards movement has continued the conversation about the relationship between language and culture. The 1996 Standards for Foreign Language Learning *establish five major goal areas: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Two goal categories, Culture and Comparisons, provide specific standards for cultural learning. (See Figures 1 and 2) Cultural learning is also implied in a number of the standards for the other three goal categories. The Standards define culture as ". . . the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products–both tangible and intangible–of a society." (43) The three components of culture are intertwined. Practices are considered to be patterns in the way people behave and relate to each other. Products are the results of all types of human endeavor–language, art, music, laws, food, tools, games. Both are derived from and contribute to the philosophical perspectives, or the world view, of a cultural group. (Figure 3) In his essay,* Planning for and Using the New National Culture Standards, *Dale L. Lange points out that this definition avoids segregating culture into "big C and little c" components by interweaving the formal and informal aspects of life. This is a more realistic approach and provides teachers with a high degree of flexibility in organizing instruction. As Lange states, the Standards point " . . . directly away from culture as information and toward culture as an integrated aspect of language learning." (61) The problem remains of how to help students reach the desired outcomes. Lange indicates that if the high expectations of the Standards are to be met, changes must be made in curriculum, instruction/learning, and assessment.*

Changing Classroom Practices:

What impact are the Standards beginning to have on classroom practices? A recent study by the Social Science Education Consortium (SSEC) explores various aspects of this question. The project focuses on six topics related to the amount of time teachers devote to the study of culture; the kind of cultural content selected; cooperation between foreign language and social studies teachers; factors supporting cooperation; and what materials, staff development opportunities, and institutional support foreign language teachers believe they need in order to teach about culture more effectively. The research project relied upon self-reporting via a survey which was mailed out to 12,000 senior high school foreign language teachers and 6000 senior high school

world history teachers. The rate of return was 13.5% for the foreign language teachers and 9.33% for world history teachers. Follow up interviews were conducted with a sample of 402 foreign language teachers.

The conclusions of the study suggest that there may be a gap between foreign language teachers' perceptions of what and how they teach and their actual teaching practices. When asked to define culture and describe how they teach about culture their responses were less substantial. No definition of culture was common among the teachers studied. When asked in an interview, most foreign language teachers were able to list such elements as food, literature, and greeting behavior. On forced-choice survey items, foreign language teachers indicated that the most commonly taught topics are tangible products, cultural practices, and cultural perspectives. Social studies teachers were more likely to choose factually oriented topics relating to geography, the environment, and history. Both groups indicated that one of their least taught topics is the relationship among cultural perspectives, practices, and products. This suggests that ". . . neither group has a well-developed conceptual framework for culture that they use in organizing instruction or in helping students place cultural information in context." (4)

Teachers generally expressed support for teaching about culture and selected more sophisticated reasons for doing so. Nearly two-thirds of the survey respondents (63.9 percent) selected the following rationale: "Culture is woven into the language of those who live in the culture, and thus understanding culture is critical to language learning." According to the study, however, the interview responses of foreign language teachers suggest that most teachers' cultural lessons are not well integrated with language instruction. Both social studies and foreign language teachers in the study state that one of the most important outcomes of teaching about culture is to help students appreciate similarities and differences between their own culture and the target culture. Once again, however, researchers raise the concern that ". . . the lack of systematic and in-depth teaching about culture allows the focus on similarities and differences to occur without a context that would help students make sense of the information presented."(4)

Teachers surveyed report using a wide variety of materials and methods for teaching culture. Most foreign language teachers (43.6 percent) report that they teach about culture on a daily basis. Another 32 percent say that they teach cultural topics weekly. When teachers described these practices in interviews, however, some of this teaching seems to be making use of random moments to answer student questions about culture or to tell about one of their own travel experiences. Interview results indicate that much of the cultural content presented is superficial, is not taught in a systematic way, and is not given much weight in assessment of student progress. Over 88 percent of the teachers surveyed weight cultural learning as 20 percent or less of students' grades. (5)

Some factors appeared to make a major difference in teachers' level of comfort in cultural teaching. A majority of the foreign language teachers surveyed reported having spent time in a culture where the language they teach is spoken. Teachers who have spent a significant amount of time in another culture seem to show a stronger commitment to teaching about culture and to participating in professional development activities. Teachers with recent degrees do not appear to be better prepared to address the conception of culture reflected in the national standards. In fact, their lack of teaching and travel experience may put them at a disadvantage. Approximately 30 percent of the foreign language teachers in the survey believe they are well prepared to teach the foreign language standards relating to culture. Around 50 percent believe they are adequately prepared and 15 percent think that they are not adequately prepared. Living and traveling in another culture and independent reading and study were cited as the most useful experiences in preparing to teach about culture. (6) Teachers of both foreign language and social studies reported very little cooperation and expressed the need for more time to plan and work with other teachers. While they report that materials are abundant, money is often not available to buy what teachers want. The foreign language teachers in the study expressed the need for more support for teaching about culture and for teaching foreign languages in general.

One of the major flaws of the SSEC study is that it depends upon self-reported data. It is highly dependent upon teacher perceptions of themselves. Even so, a number of implications for future research can be drawn. Perhaps the most important is the suggestion that current classroom practices are not likely to support the type of cultural learning described in the national standards and that major professional development efforts will be needed.

Changing Textbooks and Materials:

Most of the teachers in the SSEC study reported using textbooks as their major resource and many expressed the view that texts are improving in terms of their treatment of cultural content. While this paper is not intended to carry out a survey of textbooks, the comparison of two Spanish texts in relationship to the cultural learning goals of the national standards is included for the purposes of discussion.

¡Bravo! *is a first-year text published by McDougal Littell/Houghton Mifflin. The stated goal of this text is the development of proficiency in communication skills through the "Natural Approach," based on the second-language acquisition theory developed by Stephen Krashen of the University of Southern California. The focus of the text is on providing comprehension and communication experiences that allow students to acquire language. Each lesson presents vocabulary and grammatical forms and structures that students need to communicate on a particular topic. Teachers are advised to focus on the topic presented in each unit and to emphasize listening and oral communication activities that expose students to vocabulary and grammar.*

This text is a departure from the grammar centered approaches of several years ago and the target language is used throughout. Cultural learning, however, is clearly of secondary importance. The text is rich in photographs, examples of realia, works of arts, and cartoons. These items of cultural interest may relate to the theme of the unit in some manner but are not presented in a way that would allow students place them in any kind of a framework for understanding specific aspects of culture. The theme of Unit 2, for example, is ¿Cómo Somos? *and deals with physical characteristics and personal information. Cultural objectives are stated as follows: Students will become familiar with different meanings of gestures in different cultures; the Colombian artist Fernando Botero; the forms of addresses in Spanish-speaking countries; and the importance of immediate and extended family in the Spanish-speaking world. (114) Among the cultural items presented in the unit are a painting by Botero; a magazine photo; information about Spanish last names, abbreviations, and addresses; a magazine ad for Hispanic pen pals; and photos of Hispanic families and young people with text in Spanish. Students may be entertained by the variety but it is difficult to see how they can construct any cultural meaning from it.*

A somewhat different approach is taken in ¡Dime!, *also a first-year text, published by D.C. Heath. One of the advertized features of this program is the ". . . systematic infusion of Hispanic culture." The authors of this text state that its primary purpose is to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing competency in Spanish. Students are given the opportunity to perform a variety of language functions in different contexts, such as home, school, traveling, and shopping. The text makes an effort to use "real-life language" as it would be used by native speakers and avoid "teacher talk" and "textbook language." Dialogues and narratives are not limited to the structures and vocabulary previously taught.*

¡Dime! *organizes units of instruction around specific themes designed to introduce students to different parts of the Spanish-speaking world. Unit 5, for example, is* ¡Bienvenidos a Madrid!,

Getting Around and Shopping in Madrid. Unit objectives are stated as follows: "In this unit, students will study and compare the custom of ***el paseo*** *in Madrid; the numbering of floors in a department store; and a department store directory." Cultural items include photographs of Madrid, people sightseeing, street maps, dialogues and cartoons featuring directions, a Metro map, scenes in a restaurant and department store. The purpose of the first lesson in this unit, is ". . . to focus students on the language related to tourism and*

sightseeing and to encourage students to observe and compare differences and similarities between Hispanic cities and their own."

Probably due to the influence of earlier versions of the national standards, ¡Dime! *attempts to integrate the teaching of language and culture. While the cultural content here is in sharper focus, the text still fails to provide teachers or students with any kind of framework for organizing cultural ideas. Its cultural objectives are not stated in ways that are measurable and few effective assessment strategies for cultural learning can be identified. Both* ¡Dime! *and* ¡Bravo! *are widely used and represent positive changes in approaches to teaching language and culture. While it is dangerous to make assumptions about all textbooks on the basis of this limited review, these two examples seem to suggest that many textbook publishers have not yet determined how to implement the national standards in regard to teaching language and culture together in context.*

National and State Standards - Integrating Language and Culture:

Although progress may be slower than hoped, the Standards for Foreign Language Learning *and related state standards provide models for future materials development and classroom implementation strategies. The Sample Learning Scenarios collected from teachers across the country are particularly effective as demonstrations of teaching and learning which incorporate the standards. For example, in the scenario* Doing Business in Japan*, students in a partial immersion Japanese language program compare the geography of Japan with the geography of the United States and the various regional products that each country has for export. (76) The teacher then leads the students in a discussion of products that Japanese and American businesses might wish to import or export. The teacher then introduces the concept of the business card and its importance in Japanese society. Students examine authentic business cards and identify the types of information included. Then they design their own cards and pair up to introduce themselves and their product to each other. This activity involves students in listening, reading, writing, and speaking the target language in a cultural context that is significant to the culture being studied. The inclusion of geographic and economic concepts helps maintain student interest. Expanding student knowledge in these areas also enriches their understanding of the culture being studied. In terms of both language and cultural learning, this teacher created activity is far more powerful than the textbook examples cited above. Hopefully, examples like this will encourage teachers who are inclined to develop their own learning activities and lead textbook publishers and others to consider new approaches to the development of materials.*

State standards projects also have the potential to impact curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In The Indiana Foreign Language Proficiency Guide, *learning goals are listed along with Sample Performances appropriate for each grade level and instructional level. For example: GOAL 5 states that students will ". . .recognize the interrelatedness of languages, literatures, and cultures through a knowledge of the artifacts, expressions, and traditions of the culture." the related Content Standard 5.5 states that students will " . . . recognize the contributions of the language and culture studied to American society and the world." (77) The following are related Sample Performances for each level:*

ELEMENTARY GRADES:

Cultural Context: THE WORLD OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE

While going through his/her wardrobe, the student makes a list of where the clothes are made.

MIDDLE GRADES/LEVEL I

Cultural Context: MEETING PERSONAL NEEDS

In an American restaurant, the student identifies food on a menu that are originally from the culture being studied.

HIGH SCHOOL/LEVEL I

Cultural Context: FINE ARTS

Using pictures of a variety of American buildings, e.g. churches, homes, government buildings, etc., the student identifies the architectural elements that originated in the foreign culture, e.g. the roofs, arches, doorways, windows, etc.

The Performances are intended to be examples of how a student could meet a particular content standard. Sample Performances suggest both instructional strategies and assessment tasks. A companion publication, The Indiana Assessment Tasks, *gives examples of specific assessment tasks which are directly related to and correlated with many of the Sample Performances. As teachers throughout Indiana become more attuned to the state standards, more authentic forms of classroom instruction and assessment will begin to take place.*

Conclusions:

The development of national and state standards has established a new direction for integrating cultural teaching and learning. It is clear, however, that having standards alone will not be enough to change the "state of the art." The findings of scholars over a period of years, recent findings such as the SSEC study, as well as analysis of existing materials suggest that in order to bring about significant change, teachers will need more support that they have at the present. The following conclusions might be drawn from this discussion:

1. Considerable attention must be paid to professional development for teachers already in the classroom. Staff development should not focus solely on teaching materials and strategies. Attention should also be given to substantive cultural study as well as strategies for teaching and assessment of cultural learning.

2. Both pre-service and in-service teachers should be provided with the systematic, conceptual study of culture. This may require re-thinking the way culture and cultural content is taught to teachers at the college and university level.

3. Greater dialogue should be encouraged between foreign language teachers and teachers in other fields, such as fine arts and social science, where cultural learning is an important goal.

4. Teachers and foreign language scholars should continue to work with textbook publishers to encourage the development of materials that integrate culture into both instruction and assessment.

5. More research should be conducted into what students and teachers are actually learning about culture.

6. The dynamic nature of culture should be recognized and given a larger role both in teacher professional development and in the design of standards and related materials. One of the greatest problems in cultural teaching is the tendency to view cultures as static. For this reason, frequent direct experience living and traveling in the target culture should be encouraged even for veteran teachers.

7. Greater efforts should be made to integrate the cultural expertise of native speakers of all types into the classroom. These efforts include enlisting parents and community members as resource persons, planning so that students in our classrooms who are native speakers are able to share their cultural knowledge while they also receive appropriate language instruction, and carrying on teacher exchanges, such as the ones established by the agreements between the states of the United States and the government of Spain.

8. Make direct experience with the target culture part of the foreign language learning experience for every teacher and every student.

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