Online Learning Communities for LCTLs

NFLRC Summer Institute
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• Content
• Activities and tasks
• Role of language learning
• Use of media
Goals of Cultura

• Bring students to understand the attitudes, concepts, values, ways of thinking and interacting embedded in another culture.
• Bring them to gain an insider’s view of the culture they are studying.
Goals of Cultura

• “Culture is the logic by which I give order to the world. Part of this logic is tacit, invisible, it is everything that goes without saying.” Raymonde Carroll, *Evidences invisibles/ Cultural Misunderstandings*

• *Silent Language, Hidden Dimension* (Edward Hall)
Pedagogy and Technology

• Synergy between intercultural communication (which implies encounters between people) and the Internet (which facilitates such encounters).

• Simply connecting students does not automatically mean they will develop intercultural understanding.
Underlying Pedagogical Principles

• Intercultural understanding has to be constructed around specific materials and tasks.

• Learners need to be engaged in a dynamic process of discovery, exploration and inquiry - which favors a constructivist approach to learning.
How Cultura works

• Two classes of students from two different cultures:
  - compare similar materials drawn from their respective cultures presented in juxtaposition.
  - exchange perspectives about their differences and similarities, via online discussion forums
"La seule véritable exploration, la seule vraie fontaine de Jouvence, ne serait pas de visiter des terres étrangères mais de posséder d'autres yeux, de regarder l'univers à travers les yeux des autres."

Marcel Proust
Initial stage of a Cultura exchange

• At the very beginning of the semester, both groups of students answer three sets of intercultural questionnaires anonymously, online, in NL

• Word associations
• Sentence completions
• Hypothetical situations
The questionnaires

- Meaning behind key concepts and basic aspects of everyday life
- “Ideal” types of relationships with different people and what their roles are perceived to be
- Different kinds of potentially conflicting situations in different contexts and with a variety of people
Comparing the answers

• Week 1: analyzing answers to word association; intercultural forums
• Week 2: analyzing answers to sentence completion questionnaire; intercultural forums
• Week 3: analyzing answers to hypothetical situations questionnaire; intercultural forums
How students work

- Before coming to class, students are assigned to pick three items from the word associations list and compare the answers
- Word associations to ‘individualism’
- Student worksheet
- Work in the classroom with their peers
How students work

- Observe the differences
- Make hypotheses about what the differences seem to reveal about the other culture
- Ask questions to their French partners to verify their hypotheses
- Answer questions that their partners might have posted
How students work: the online forums

• One separate forum for each item in the questionnaires lists and for each different module (such as film, data, images); written in NL; asynchronous; take place outside of class; open to the whole class and collective; instructor does not interfere

• Their end goal is not to create a consensus among all students but rather to enable a discussion where issues are raised and debated.
How students work: the online forums

- Students share observations (*I noticed that*..)
- Formulate hypotheses (*is it possible that*..)
- Ask questions (*what do you mean*..)
- Answer their partners’ questions
- Allude to the context (*many of us, especially at MIT*..)
- Confront clichés (*that does not mean we ignore the needs and wishes of others*)
- Raise paradoxes
The online forums - language

- Provide raw material for language learning, authentic language:
- acronyms: HLM, RER, CDI
- Cultural references: *flics*, doughnuts
- Register (different ways to say ‘be quiet’ in French): *taisez-vous, taisez-vous s’il vous plait, tais-toi, la ferme, ta gueule!*
The online forums – language register

- “Le fait de dire : "je lui demande de se taire" ne donne pas de précision sur la manière dont on demanderait à cette personne de se taire: ça pourrait être: "tais-toi" ou "taisez-vous" ou "taisez-vous s'il vous plait", "est-ce que vous pouvez vous taire s'il vous plait"... et en dernier recours, "la ferme" ou "ta gueule" dans le cas où on est carrément excédé!”

- Saying ‘I ask him to be quiet’ does not give any information about how one would ask the other person to be quiet...
The online forums - language

• Illustrate current use (and frequency of use) of particular grammar points, such as relative pronouns or the subjunctive:

- A good job/un bon emploi est un emploi dans lequel on s’épanouit, qui permet de s’épanouir, où on peut s’épanouir, pour lequel je me lève chaque matin...
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Marcel Proust
Working with statistics

• Statistics and surveys are a way to put into perspective the different items the students have been discussing so far.

• “Please post here any message related to polls or statistics that illustrates, illuminates, or seems to contradict an aspect of American or French culture that you have been investigating. When you make a reference to a particular document on the internet, please make sure you provide the url.”
Working with statistics

• Student generated
• Health, education, marriage, unemployment, immigration, genetically modified food, alcohol consumption...
“Lots of the discussions on this site have centered around the family and the importance of the family in each culture. It got me wondering as to the average size of a family in France and the number of families. I found the following statistics. I’m not sure of the exact number for the US, but the number of French couples without children surprised me as being higher than I had expected.” J.W.
"La seule véritable exploration, la seule vraie fontaine de Jouvene, ne serait pas de visiter des terres étrangères mais de posséder d'autres yeux, de regarder l'univers à travers les yeux des autres"

Marcel Proust
Comparing a Film and its Remake

Because it unfolds within a limited time frame, a movie must work from a large number of implicits common to the film makers and the audience, a large number of things which are ‘self-evident’. R.Carroll
Comparing a Film and its Remake

The variations between the foreign film and the American film are the result of deliberate choices. Analyzing these differences can reveal the underlying cultural presuppositions upon which the original movie and its remake are built.
Comparing two trailers of a same movie

La marche de l’empereur

March of the Penguins
Comparing a Film and its Remake

• Our goal is not to decide which version is best, as some critics would do, usually evaluating a movie against ‘the original’, which becomes the norm, or the real thing.

• It seems more interesting to underscore the cultural differences which come out when two versions of the same story are juxtaposed.

Brigitte Humbert
Comparing a Film and its Remake

• We do not hand our students a list of differences between the American or French cinematic tradition.

• We ask them to look, compare, and make sense of what they see. They discuss it in class and with their online partners.
Trois hommes et un couffin
Three Men and a Baby
Trois hommes et un couffin
Three Men and a Baby

• Students are asked to watch the French film before the remake, and ideally to watch both films in one sitting or in close succession.

• They receive a list of questions to show that have seen the movie and to pick up on vocabulary.
Trois hommes et un couffin
Three Men and a Baby

• Two steps:
  - global analysis of the differences
  - scene-by-scene comparison

What is different? What has been added, removed, or changed in the American version?
Looking at the differences

• When comparing the two movies, you will probably have to use comparatives. But make sure to avoid value judgments.

• Avoid statements such as “movie X is funnier,” “scene X is less interesting”. Compare only to present objective facts, such as “there is more action in the American movie.”
Looking at the differences

• The main goal to observe and analyze (not judge) the differences, and try and understand the underlying reasons behind these differences.

• After we list these differences, we will try to answer the following question: what caused the American director (L. Nimoy) to make these changes?
Trois hommes et un couffin
Three Men and a Baby

• Students work in class and online
• They work alone and in small groups
  - they share their observations
  - they discuss with their partners to make sense of the differences
Sylvia’s Return - forum

“[It was] interesting to see how much more enthusiastic Sylvia was in her body language and comments in conversation with Mary directly and the men in the English version. It appears as though she is genuinely happy to be reunited with her daughter. In the French version, it's not that she is unhappy to see her daughter, but she does not express the same level of enthusiasm and excitement upon her arrival. I think that might be just because the French (from the Cultura questionnaires) seem to be not as open and expressive with their emotions.”
Film critics

- Students read film critics after they have worked on the film.
- French film in France, and in the US.
- American film in the US, and in France.
- Sometimes as a way to test how much they have uncovered about each movie/culture.
Comparing commercials

“Faire du ciel le plus bel endroit de la terre,”

**Air France**

“Going Home,” **American Airlines**
"La seule véritable exploration, la seule vraie fontaine de Jouvene, ne serait pas de visiter des terres étrangères mais de posséder d'autres yeux, de regarder l'univers à travers les yeux des autres"

Marcel Proust
Working with Images

• Images add another layer of reality to topics discussed on the forums

• Students see them not just as illustrations of different cultural realities (different content), but as illustrations of deeper cultural traits.
Me
My Friend with a Funny Hat
My Half of the Room
La résidence Albert Camus
A Classroom
Une salle de classe
Pizzeria on Campus
La pâtisserie
La ficelle Picarde
Reflection on the Methodology

Those who try to better understand the other will, at the same time, gain a more in-depth understanding of their own values and behaviors, for seeing them through the mirror of another culture.

Abdallah-Pretceille M.