Fostering Culture Through Film

Fostering Culture Through Film

A Resource for Teaching Foreign Languages and Cultural Studies

Edited by

Patrizia Comello Perry
and Elda Buonanno Foley

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Fostering Culture Through Film:
A Resource for Teaching Foreign Languages and Cultural Studies

Edited by Patrizia Comello Perry and Elda Buonanno Foley

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2016 by Patrizia Comello Perry, Elda Buonanno Foley
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-8916-4
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8916-2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction 1

PART ONE: THEORETICAL APPROACH

Fostering Intercultural Teaching Through Film 7
Patrizia Comello Perry

Fostering Culture in the Millennial Classroom: A Pedagogical Approach 27
Elda Buonanno Foley

The Role of Film in Teaching the Chinese Language 45
Ling Luo

The Making of EFL Students into *Great Debaters* of Human Rights in the L2 Classroom.. 61
Ana De la Cruz and *Marialuisa Di Stefano*

The Versatility of Cinema as a Tool in the Foreign Language Classroom.. 85
Fabiana Viglione

Promoting Global Cultural Awareness through Film in the Classroom .. 107
Maria Enrico

PART TWO: RECONSIDERING PRACTICE

Keys to the City: Opening the Gates to Italian Culture 119
Roberta K. Waldbaum

Immigrant Identities in Contemporary Italian Cinema through *La giusta distanza*, *Coverboy*, and *Io sono Li*.. 139
Tiberio Snaidero

Overcoming Stereotypes through Teaching Language 155
Elisa Saturno Paasche

Using Film to Challenge Assumptions in a Spanish American Culture and Civilization Class 169
Anne Fountain

Sugar: The Betrayal of the American Dream 187
Alicia Bralove Ramírez

Contributors 203

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I realize that making a book is like producing a film, and as a producer I know that making a film is a collaborative experience. Before sharing a common list of acknowledgements with Elda—and we have a few—I would like to have this personal space to express my gratitude to the people who have been instrumental in this project on my side. First, I would like to thank Craig Svonkin for accepting to include—far beyond the deadline—my panel subject, "Teaching Languages and Culture through Film," at the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association (PAMLA) conference in 2014. It inspired the beginning of this book.

I am thankful to Elda for accepting to share the work of this project with me. I thank Alan Hartman for giving me my first teaching assignment at Mercy College in Manhattan. I thank my chair, Maria Enrico, for her continuous support and guidance, as well as Borough of Manhattan Community College. My students and Borough of Manhattan Community College have given me not only a job but also a sense of purpose for which I can use all the skills I have acquired, integrating my passion for film and my experience as a producer. I thank my Italian family: my mother, Clara; my more-than-a-father; Giancarlo; and Francesca, Edoardo, and Pietro. I also thank my American family: my husband, David, for his patience and support, and especially my daughter, Julia, for being a permanent source of joy. This book is mostly for her.

—Patrizia Comello Perry

I would like to thank Patrizia for having given me the great opportunity to work on a book together as an editor while sharing the same vision in teaching and learning culture.

I feel indebted to all those colleagues, friends, and family who have helped me in so many ways while I was working on my essay and on this publication. In particular, I would like to thank those who have read, shared, and provided valuable suggestions for the essays and the book: Laura Shea, IONA College; Joanne Steele, IONA College; Tom Mussio, IONA College; my extremely supportive husband, Kieran, for the countless sleepless nights spent listening to my anxiety over the book; and my three fantastic children, the light and heart of my soul who have been very patient with their mamma.

Patrizia and I are extremely grateful to Sally-Ann DelVino for her editorial and technical guidance, assistance, and support in revising and formatting this manuscript. We would not have made it without her.

We are also truly grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for allowing us to publish a manuscript on such a diverse and interesting subject and for supporting our view for a better learning and teaching community. Finally, we thank our book contributors for their passion and commitment to this wonderful profession.

—Elda Buonanno Foley

INTRODUCTION

The perceived lack of understanding of cultural diversity in the American learning community leads instructors to challenge assumptions and stereotypes while addressing misconceptions: teachers of foreign languages and cultural studies, in particular, feel the need to redesign curricula and lesson plans to better serve the learning community of the twenty-first century. A paradox exists in that global access to information makes learners aware of the infinite variety of cultural diversity, however this does not make them critical thinkers. For this reason, there is opportunity to reshape critical thinking within a more global perspective, while enhancing the tools to identify, interpret, and compare the different cultural models that learners encounter.

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate the theories and practical applications by which instructors use contemporary film to provide insightful readings on diverse local communities, communities that form the basis of global culture. This collection of essays serves as a pedagogical tool and resource, offering methods and examples of a communicative approach to analyze and integrate cultural diversities, similarities, and problematics in the second language curricula, methods that expose students to different cultural models while scaffolding their critical approach to multiple layers of common and specific values.

Our contributors share our vision of making the second-language acquisition class a space for reflection and critical thinking, to ultimately create a productive environment to foster student reflection on intercultural reality and experience and the relationship of language, culture, and meaning. Language is the way we are and the way we represent the world and represent ourselves in the world. Film proves an effective tool in the classroom, and instructors choose those films and scenes that pertinently address the issues relevant to their learning community. Beyond the syllabi briefly introduced, these essays represent the commitment and relationship that instructors of all foreign languages feel for their students. While analyzing aspects of global challenges in contemporary life—aspects connected with identity and integration in this mobile world, linguistic identity, and cultural aesthetics—students engage in critical discussions and instructors enhance the communicative approach from diverse perspectives. This book, by offering alternative layers of interpretation, hopes to present to instructors of all disciplines in the liberal arts curricula ways to transform learners from passive global viewers into more conscious and informed global thinkers, by offering them meaningful cultural experience.

In part one, *Theoretical Approach*, the essays describe theories and challenges in the foreign language class and identify strategies to foster intercultural identities and global communities. Patrizia Comello Perry in her essay shares the process that led her to re-evaluate her role as an instructor and to question the limitations of the talk-for-talk's-sake communicative method in which the linguistic aspect of beginners instruction omits most of what really matters: culture. Elda Buonanno Foley in her essay describes a lesson unit on film and the different learning objectives and performances achieved by the students within a very diversified community. Ling Luo portrays the challenges in the cultural environment while teaching Chinese in the American diversified community, exploring the linguistic obstacles and the teaching and learning instrument of film to convey a more cultural and profound understanding of language content. Ana De la Cruz and Marialuisa Di Stefano in their essay investigate the challenges of EFL teachers and their work to provide opportunities to expose the learning community to authentic communicative environments. Fabiana Viglione in her project seeks to establish a cinematic vocabulary and grammar foundation for discussion and analysis in Italian of cinematic techniques and genres, inviting cultural comparison with the American cinematic tradition. Maria Enrico in her essay provides insight and guidelines for achieving global cultural awareness in the classroom through film while promoting the type of cultural interest and understanding that can lead to a desire to learn a *foreign* language.

In part two, *Reconsidering Practice*, the essays describe practical examples of teaching a foreign language within a multicultural learning environment. Roberta K. Waldbaum in her essay describes the ways in which literature and film in the language classroom may be used to address the complex issues and urban challenges that city dwellers confront by living, interacting, and integrating with diverse individuals, groups, and societies. Tiberio Snaidero in his essay introduces a compelling perspective on capturing the interest of the learning community by making students aware of the current social and cultural changes in the target-language country—focusing on Italy of the last decades—using a syllabus based on Italian films that dramatize the immigrant experience. Elisa Paturno Paasche in her approach investigates methods and strategies to recognize and overcome cultural stereotypes while teaching a foreign language, to elucidate real cultural content embedded in a language. Anita Fountain in her essay depicts a thought-provoking approach to teaching cultural content, using film to convey linguistic and cultural information about Jewish and African communities in Latin America. Alicia Bralove Ramírez in her study indicates the ways in which learning communities (LCs) incorporate a broad range of integrated activities to provide students with further opportunities to flourish scholastically while solidifying the skills necessary to progress in the complex processes of reading, understanding, analyzing, interacting, internalizing, and writing about texts at the college level.

With this work, we hope to begin a dialogue and long-lasting conversation on methodologies and teaching strategies rethought, reapplied, and remolded to the new learning environments.

PART ONE:

THEORETICAL APPROACH

FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL TEACHING THROUGH FILM

PATRIZIA COMELLO PERRY
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Currently many opportunities exist to learn a foreign language for commerce and tourism. In this article, I hope to reclaim the fundamental pedagogical role of foreign language and culture courses in the college curriculum for the era of globalization.[1] Claire Kramsch's research has directed my teaching practice and provided invaluable examples of the importance of focusing on culture as a holistic approach to teaching language. Early in my professional experience, I felt the need to address the contradiction intrinsic in the pedagogy of language acquisition, a contradiction in which linguistic proficiency is favored and cultural conflicts are eliminated. Categorically, culture remains at the margins of instruction, especially in beginner courses. Kramsch's book *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, published in 1993, considers methods that use classroom interaction to achieve both:

> Rather than dealing with the teaching of each of the traditional 'four skills', and then the teaching of 'culture', it takes the impetus from a concrete occurrence of cross-cultural miscommunication in a language class and takes context as its core.[2]

Considering context allows focus on meaning and content as two essential elements of instruction for which the communicative method is the chosen approach: instead of eliminating cultural differences, the idea becomes creating opportunities to reflect on culture and cultural values essentially intrinsic in language and language learning. Specifically, what we talk about should matter.[3] Language and culture are inseparable, and adding a foreign language course to a curriculum should signify more than simply a graduation requirement or preparation for a *tourist's* visit to a foreign country.

Ryoko Kuboda's view on foreign language instruction should be the basis of every language instructor's practice:

> Foreign language education will continue to be viewed as a major educational agenda in the age of globalization. At the same time, it inevitably will be situated in increasingly more diverse society. Researchers and practitioners must shift their attention beyond apolitical appreciation and celebration of foreign culture, to critically explore issues of diversity and sociopolitical aspects of human communication and to make foreign language education instrumental in creating greater equality.[4]

The unique environment of New York City, where I teach, offers many opportunities to stimulate "a greater critical awareness of the international and global dimension of language teaching."[5] Wonderful intentions aside, foreign language instructors must contend with the constraints of course requirements and syllabi, so implementing this ideal agenda proves a challenge. In this article, I want to share the process that led me to re-evaluate my role as an instructor and question the limitations of the talk-for-talk's-sake communicative method in which the linguistic aspect of beginners instruction omits most of what really matters: culture. I will describe some practical examples of tasks I have tried in my efforts to address and overcome curriculum limitations, limitations that encompass the separation of language and culture and of teaching culture with a big *C* and culture with a small *c*.[6] To bridge the divide, I have applied a sociological approach to culture that calls for context explanation, where stress on content and meaning (the application of the intercultural dimension) shifts the practice of simple language acquisition to complex (culturally relevant) language acquisition. Thinking about *making meaning* in a new language obligates students to think critically about the relationship between language and culture.[7] Students become aware of the role of this relationship in a world saturated with practical communication dispersed in a lingua franca (English) that offers superficial comprehension, in which interaction fulfills only a rudimentary objective: purchase something or go somewhere.[8] Learning to communicate in a different language does not mean to simply translate but requires a thorough understanding of the values and representation the speakers of the language have of the world and how these speakers represent themselves in their cultural production.[9]

Engaging with the Complexity of Language, Culture, and Meaning

In 2012, two years after I began teaching, I started to become more adventurous and decided to take advantage of the limitless possibilities of the communicative method and the free access to a broad range of authentic material in order to create more meaningful tasks for my students. I asked my beginners class to perform a dialogue I found on YouTube, entitled *Adeguarsi*, from the movie *La banda degli onesti*,[10] which presents the two actors Totò and Peppino De Filippo talking at a bar. The interaction between Totò and Filippo is wonderful; the students observed Totò's mimicry and gestures. I divided the students into groups and assigned roles within each group. One group of three students—each from a different cultural background (Japanese, Mexican, Romanian)—was so engaging that I recorded their performance.

Through this experiment, I hoped to help students engage with the pragmatics, gestures, and proxemics of the language. I had accomplished my first objective. In fact, a student who had played Totò (in the group I had recorded) wrote me a thank-you letter that the performance had allowed her to appreciate the richness of Italian language and gesture. My second objective concentrated on the meaning within the dialogue: I hoped my students, in learning the dialogue, would connect with the significance and cultural context of the words. In the film, shot in 1956, Totò warns Peppino about the dangers of capitalism; I was optimistic the students would associate the content of the dialogue to present-day news. In 2012, Occupy Wall Street should still have been very present in the students' mind, as that movement had challenged America to rethink its values. I hoped not only to allow the students to practice the language but also to direct them to reflect on the culture of 1956 Italy—of the Italians' questioning the social outcome of post-war industrialization—and to draw connections to the current issues of sustainability in America and the American economic system. But I did not attain this second objective, and for the same reason I began to question my role as an instructor: the students did not question the significance of the dialogue, nor the context. The absence of critical thinking puzzled me, and I wondered if I should have addressed the issue openly; I felt I had missed an opportunity. I had intended to integrate meaning and context into language instruction. I had also sought a justification for showing Totò and Peppino's debate in my classes.[11] Like many foreign language instructors, however, I hesitated to focus on the meaning of the dialogue, unwilling to trespass boundaries:

> In American classrooms, foreign language teachers generally shy away from a too conflictual clash of opinions, especially if they pertain to sex education, religion or politics.[12]

This is the conflict intrinsic in our profession. Kramsch advocates redefining the boundaries of foreign language teaching beyond "communicative happiness."[13] I had no intention of taking a political stand, but I realized that the students had failed to engage with the meaning of the language. My solution has been to first integrate culture and consequently meaning to language teaching. Since then, my first question to my students has reflected this strategy: *Why do you want to learn Italian?* The answers include wanting to go on vacation and talk to Italians, as well as liking pizza, fashion, and art. Yes, they appreciate some of the easy, available artifacts that represent Italy, and food is high on their list. Italy is very cool right now. Kramsch labeled this perception "imagined community."[14] Accordingly, I start with pizza and Prada to challenge my students' superficial curiosity and guide them through the many variables of Italian culture, hoping they will ultimately discover Dante and the Renaissance and also develop the skill "to engage with diversity at a personal level,"[15] in particular with the diversity of cultural values.

In the beginners' classes, we start with the easy *culture*—food, fairs, and festivals[16]—to initiate a picture of a culture that is different as students explore the language. The current organization and outcomes of foreign language curriculum present the challenge for obtaining a more profound objective. My students require two semesters of a foreign language to complete their degree, which, with the previously mentioned reasons, motivates their interest. Reflecting on these motivations, I reconsidered what the deeper significant objectives are for learning another language. Certainly English is considered a lingua franca for commerce and work, as are other languages, such as Chinese and Arabic.[17] But beyond reasons of commerce, I sought a broader and more far-reaching rationale for incorporating foreign language instruction into the higher education curriculum, and the rationale for students who sometimes have no prior foreign language instruction. This broader and far-reaching objective is found in the words of Byram and Kramsch: "to be taught critical language awareness, interpretative skills and historical consciousness," or more simply, to be able to see the world and another culture "on its own terms." [18] But again, which culture? Culture has been conveniently compartmentalized. We have high culture with a big *C*—artifacts, literature, film, art—to fit the syllabi. And then we have low culture with a small *c*, [19] which can be interesting and enriching if we apply a sociolinguistic approach to the concept, where culture is viewed as practice and what we frequently access through authentic material. It is culture with a small *c* that is always present and that we use in interaction for language purposes and teaching, the small *c* from which we acquire most of the student commentary. It is with this understanding that I realized the need to guide students to recognize the kind of *text* we were watching.[20] So, my role as instructor becomes pedagogically richer as I incorporate the roles of sociologist and anthropologist,[21] as I continue to investigate the culture I left behind. When I return to Italy, young people, American and Italian, all seem to be behaving similarly on smartphones. The culture I am accessing when teaching language provides me a framework to teach the language, but I wonder if I am teaching Italian using American culture, to simplify the material, or if I am teaching Italian to illustrate Italian culture[22]—again, this is the intrinsic contradiction in current language acquisition pedagogy. And how do I show the difference? How do I illustrate the Italian culture on its own terms? Sometimes I feel as if I too have become part of the imagined community, as globalization levels behaviors and values.[23] Now, to fully understand one culture I need to use a mirror and follow the recommendation of the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin:

> It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly. A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another foreign meaning.[24]

The emphasis is on the words *fully* and *profoundly*! To teach students to understand another culture, I need to hold that mirror before them and have them reflect on their own culture. And it is by this concept and method that culture as practice potentially becomes a pedagogical tool for reflection and critical thinking to develop "translingual and transcultural competence." [25] The classroom space becomes the laboratory for an intercultural experience:

> If language is viewed as a social practice of meaning-making and interpretation, then it is not enough for language learners just to know grammar and vocabulary. They also need to know how the language can be used to create and represent meaning and how to communicate with others and to engage with the communication of others. This requires the development of awareness of the nature of language and its impact on the world, where learners necessarily engage with diversity at a personal level.[26]

In their 2014 book *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning*, Anthony Liddicoat and Angela Scarino suggest that language, meaning, interpretation, and culture should exist at the core of instruction. This particular approach incorporates the many variables of culture and identity—changing the focus from the language-only and culture-later approach—and helps me in my classes, where I am not working with the juxtaposition of one native culture and one foreign culture but with many layers of cultures and identities. When I ask my students *Di dove sei?* (Where are you from?), nobody replies *I am American*. They all claim other additional identities: *sono afro-americano*, *sono dominicano*, *sono cinese-americano*. They may be new immigrants or international students from Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Nepal, but when I ask *Dove sei nato?* (Where were you born?), most answer New York City. The question *Dove abiti?* (Where do you live?) prompts answers of specifically defined boroughs and neighborhoods: not just New York City, but Queens, the South Bronx, Harlem. My journey and the students' journey into layers of diverse cultural identities can begin in the classroom as a "transcultural" experience.[27] When I say that I am Italian, from Milan, and American (an identity I added subsequently), I suggest that we are all composite human beings. I also invite students to imagine an encounter with an Italian: would they be so specific about their cultural background? Would they anticipate such deep knowledge of their American regional neighborhood when often they don't know the difference between Tuscany and Florence? My questions are meant to guide my students and to express and encourage the need to pause and reflect on these questions of cultural identity. The work of Michael Byram and Genevieve Zarate on developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching proves particularly useful in the context of my classroom. In 1997, these two scholars formulated a theoretical approach to intercultural language teaching, a framework for instruction adopted by the European community.[28] The goal of the document was to offer all European language teachers a method to incorporate culture with an intercultural focus into their classes. The overall objective was to nurture citizens of the European Union open to accepting otherness as an enriching experience and avoiding the stereotypes of thinking of one singular identity rooted in geographical space:

> The concept of culture has changed over time from emphasis on literature, the arts and philosophy to culture as a shared way of life.[29]

Byram theorizes that to emulate a native speaker is the goal of language education. I would say that such a goal is improbable within two semesters and does not really represent the objective of our students. In contrast, Byram continues:

> The intercultural dimension in language teaching aims to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity.[30]

Byram and Zarate proposed the development of a set of skills and attitudes summarized in four *savoirs—savoir s'engager*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir faire*, *savoir être*—to foster the ability to interpret and compare, ultimately to develop attitudes, skills, and awareness toward values and texts as much as to develop knowledge of a particular language, culture, or country.[31] One of the words used by Byram in the description of these skills is *decentre*, the ability to see oneself and one's culture from another point of view, an ability that can be a portable skill applicable to any encounter.[32] Byram and Zarate suggest that fostering the development of these attitudes and skills[33] forms part of the pedagogical role of language instructors, because in our modern era, culture and identity are portable accessories, not defined by geographical location.[34] From my students' answers to questions of identity, it becomes clear to me that New York is an epicenter of this intercultural mix and that my instruction can shape new insight into culture. The process of acquiring a new language and culture is dynamic and evolving, as we assume different identities during a lifetime. Ideally the intercultural teacher and student never stop in this development; to the contrary, they become increasingly aware of the factors involved in the communication process. Liddicoat and Scarino define this type of teaching as an art form:

> We see language teaching as an art that is developed over time and which remains in a constant state of development.[35]

Shifting from communicative and linguistic competence to intercultural, the intercultural approach focuses on language as a social practice of meaning making, where culture is also a "shared way of life." From my experience, this approach creates more meaningful interaction with the students. The Modern Language Association adopted this model in its 2007 report, recommending the "translingual and transcultural" focus in higher education. Kramsch emphasizes that the most serious issue in implementing this teaching has been the strict division of the curriculum between language and culture.[36] I would add my own observation that even with a realized theoretical model of intercultural teaching and learning, problems arise regarding assessment. It is easier to assess linguistic ability. But the particular skill of the intercultural focus, as Angela Scarino argues, develops and reveals itself through interaction.[37] In regard to teaching, most books prove inadequate for genuine practical examples. Scholars themselves acknowledge that classroom interaction accomplishes only so much and promote the use of authentic material and out-of-the-classroom activities to enrich the learning experience.[38] Study abroad offers the most significant opportunity for experience and interaction but, again, requires guidance. Travelling for tourism or study may not allow a real "epiphany," and Byram clearly delineates the difference between the tourist and the sojourner.[39]

Lacking the possibility of travelling the world with my students to seek opportunities to engage in "cultural experiences,"[40] I realized that film, as authentic material, with the appropriate adaptation and guidance, can provide a powerful tool to project rich and genuine insight into a culture. Perhaps the greatest impediment to reflection on cultural differences in language education resides in the fact that, from the start, foreign language education has always maintained a strong focus on methodology. Methodology only as the underlying theory of classroom practice does not consider the rich diversity and complexity of our classrooms. N.S Prabhu, theorist of task-based instruction, states:

> Methods omit much that is important in teaching. Rather than defining good teaching as the implementation of a good method, it is necessary to think of good teaching as an activity in which there is a sense of involvement by the teacher. A prescriptive method implemented routinely or mechanically will not constitute good teaching, because the method does not embody the teacher or the learner.[41]

The methodology of language instruction recommends I keep my instruction at the basic language level needed to teach beginners, but if I incorporate cultural practice, I need to shift levels, because culture is complex and requires language that the students have not yet acquired, language that I need to explain and problematize. Therefore, to method and language we need to integrate variables of context and learners and, above all, reflect on meaning. In the classroom, we can discuss what is relevant to our times and to our students to add complexity to our instruction, to help students reflect on the ways in which the language represents something, that language has meaning. What follows is a practical example that illustrates how the most common tasks assigned from language textbooks prove ineffective. We need to pay attention as teachers to our learners and to grasp every opportunity to reflect on our practice. *Oggi in Italia*[42] and *Avanti*[43] attempt to catch up with technology by upgrading names of devices—*VHS*, *DVD*, *iPhone*—but fail to update the tasks. My students do not need to ask the time or directions; they have a smartphone. They order pizza online without talking to anyone. The communicative method falls short if the communication remains only a language exercise and students are not genuinely attending to the words and expressions. If I ask my students to chat about the weekend (to practice the language), they don't have much to say. For the question *Cosa* *hai fatto nel weekend?* (What did you do over the weekend?), the students are meant to use the free-time activity language—and the textbooks list a few, such as *sono andato al cinema* (I went to the movies) and *ho giocato a tennis* (I played tennis**)**. Some of my students reply, "*Ho lavorato molte ore!*" (I worked many hours!), which conveys the truth and makes me feel the rote answers provided as example are irrelevant to their life. The communicative method is based on the assumption that the participants are able to assume their identity as language learners and speak for language's sake, but also that they commit to starting the complete journey into another language and culture, to see the world and another culture on its own terms and, by doing so, realize they are a foreign culture to others. The term *communicative* implies a real conversation that expresses form and meaning in a series of activities in which the learners can understand the reason what is said is said and in what context.

The next example indicates the need for students "to reflect on the nature of language and its impact on the world." In my efforts to integrate literature and culture into my instruction, I was puzzled—actually, preoccupied—that the symbolic meaning of the words was not considered part of the task. In the first chapter of *Avanti,*[44] the students study the seasons, the basic rules of pronunciation, and the articles. To these lessons I thought of adding a little *Culture* with a big *C* by assigning my students to recite Giuseppe Ungaretti's poem "Soldati":

Si sta
come d'autunno
sugli alberi.
Le foglie.[45]

Considering my students need to memorize the seasons, I introduce more vocabulary and invite them to change the season to create another poem, assuming that seasons can be associated easily to life phases. I provide a word bank in which the students can infer analogy between childhood, spring, and flowers. The students collaborate in groups and are usually diligent in their work, with some able to complete the task quickly, but usually not all finish. Pronunciation also part of the exercise, I ask the class to practice the recitation of the poem and send me a recording using the software program Vocaroo or PowerPoint (where I can insert comments). When students submit a poem comparing a young person to winter, the sadness of the association makes me wonder whether what is expressed reflects the students' actual state of mind. When I inquiry, the reply is often that there are no personal feelings involved in the words: that words do not carry symbolic meaning in these exercises makes me consider more deeply how students approach and understand this work in translation. So, teaching Italian means also to remind students that words can change meaning when associated with other words and to show them that language is a system in which meanings are negotiated through social practice and that words carry symbolic meaning that have shared values.[46]

We should not leave the complexity of the relationship between language and culture learning to advanced courses only. Intercultural learning needs to be reconsidered and included wherever instructors find the opportunity. Byram, in his article "Linguistic and Cultural Education for 'Bildung' and Citizenship," states that language instructors need to redefine an overall "purpose" for their instruction and demands more from teachers and learners in times of "critical societal change."[47]

The Intercultural Teacher Develops Intercultural Mediators

We need to engage with the dynamic dimension of culture, because the interaction in the classrooms calls for reflection on our teaching practice every day. There is Italy and there is the perception of Italy, which is constructed by and dispersed through commerce and the media. In Italy, there is a perception of the United States, which is also a projection of an imagined community with certain characteristics. I would like to be able to connect my students with young Italian people (who want to come to New York) to initiate genuine conversation. The outcome would be interesting. In 2001, four professors—two from MIT in Cambridge and two from the Université des Sciences in Paris—attempted a particular experiment, developing a course that would give students direct access to a target language. They called their experimental project *Cultura*. The essay on the outcome, "Giving a Virtual Voice to the Silent Language of Culture,"[48] attributes Byram's intercultural teaching framework—with its notion of *cultural comparisons*—as the inspiration of the initiative, which incorporates Bakhtin's side-by-side viewing of similar items from two different cultures to explicitly mirror those cultures. The students shared a digital forum in which they exchanged impressions after watching French movies and the American remakes of these movies. From this online exchange, the students compared and juxtaposed their impressions of the films and replied to a questionnaire that highlighted various mental representations underlying certain words (representations that are very often a hidden aspect of culture). Words such as *suburbs* and *individualism* held very different connotations between the French and American students. While the French students associated the idea of *banlieu*, translated as *suburbs*, to an area of racial tension and economic disadvantage, the American students projected an ideal image of tranquility and white picket fences. While *individualism* to the French connoted selfishness, egoism, and solitude, to the Americans the word connoted self-expression, creativity, and freedom.[49] I used this idea in my own classroom to challenge the connotations of some words I felt to be charged with cultural interpretation for Italians and Americans. If we examine closely, we cannot escape culture as dynamic practice: I must profoundly consider language, culture, and meaning, and I want my students to follow this practice. From the first chapter of *Avanti*, we find definitions for the words *bar* and *piazza*.[50] Now *piazza* could be associated with a square; however, the features of the Italian landscape are difficult to immediately and fully grasp, because they connote and reflect a shared way of life. In small towns, a simple walk around the main piazza—where the architecture has often remained untouched since the Middle Ages—is a means to directly encounter the community. To highlight this aspect to my classes, at some point I have displayed an image of the Piazza del Duomo in Milan from the 2010 movie *Benvenuti al Sud* and from the 1956 movie *Totò Peppino e La Malafemmina* to illustrate that the piazza has remained pristine and untouched for sixty years. Comments from the students that the two are holding hands, made me realize that they are not reading the text correctly. That students comment tend to focus on the two characters holding hands and not on the architectural landscape calls to mind Byram's *savoir s'engager*, the ability to critically evaluate products in one's own and another's culture is essential to intercultural development.[51] In this case, I usually introduced the clip indicating the production year, so my students' comment made me question if the students were aware that open display of homosexuality was taboo in 1950. Following the piazza segment of the lesson, I address the scene that takes place at an Italian bar. To teach the concept of the Italian *bar*, including what one can order at an Italian bar, I explain that I am allowed to take my child with me to a bar to have a sandwich, which causes some students to question the appropriateness of bringing a child to a place where people drink alcohol (resisting the unfamiliar idea of a *bar* as a coffee shop).

I have since incorporated authentic material into my courses to help students understand the cultural import of such scenes. I have shown Italian films, juxtaposing similar examples from American films and shows. I have shown clips from the movies *Bar Sport* (2011), directed by Massimo Martelli and adapted from Stefano Benni's novel; *Caro Diario* (1993), by Nanni Moretti; and *La banda degli onesti* (1956), starring Totò and Peppino. Viewing film clips helps students envision cultural and historical atmosphere. However, I could not find comparative material in an American movie; I found only some scenes from television shows: *Cheers*, situated in a bar (a bar in the American sense), and *Friends*, where the characters commonly meet at the cafe Central Perk. Like the piazza in Italian villages, a bar is almost an extension of the Italians' living room, a social place, a community center! The textbook instructs students to pretend to order at a bar. Though the students know very little Italian, the instructions are formulated to allow them to interact with and use the language—maybe. Organizing the students in groups, I give clear instructions that only one in each group places the order for the group, and I allocate time for the groups to work on their orders. As I walk around to check how the exercise is evolving, asking the groups to demonstrate their results, usually not a single group does as instructed: each student orders and pays individually. Students also ask how to express in Italian *he didn't tip me.* The question offers me the opportunity to present a piece of cultural information. I explain that, in a bar in Italy, tipping is not mandatory and normally not expected when ordering a quick coffee at the bar or even a more leisurely coffee while sitting at a table**.**

Considering how my students usually perform, I assess what the language exercise implies. Does the exercise require the students use only language or does it propose a cultural way to order coffee (as a social practice)? I thought about the social interaction involved in a coffee invitation in Italy, that Italians reciprocate the invitation, that coffee is often a moment for socializing, that Italians have time to chat over a *pausa caffè* (and actually accomplish much work in this way). I reflect upon my students' interaction, the individualism of their performance, that for most of them waiting tables is a reality and they rely on the tip to supplement their minimum wage—while in my explanation of the Italian bar, the waiter, a fulltime employee with a regular salary and access to healthcare and benefits, does not require the tip. And I realize that my students, "brought up on global communication technologies, do not realize how restricted their view of community is compared to the view of people around the world who still operate through local face-to-face interaction in real time."[52] So, bars and coffee breaks reflect a way of life and interaction in communities. I was disappointed to have been unable to fully demonstrate this practice; I could only talk about it:

> Because intercultural speakers/mediators need to be able to see how misunderstanding can arise, and how they might be able to resolve it, they need the attitudes of decentering but also the skills of comparing.[53]

As a teacher, I may not possess all answers to potential cultural misunderstanding, but, as Byram suggests, I can develop the students' attitudes and skills necessary to recognize the possibility of a cultural difference. This focus on comparison and attention to misunderstandings—I would call it *the glitch*[54]—is crucial, with the verb *engage* described previously, to reinvent the content of our instruction within the communicative method. We give *touristic* instructions to teach our students to order from a menu, but this simple activity can be permeated with misunderstanding. If I had to present extensive information on the subject of coffee, food would prove even more complex and the greater challenge, as Italian food relates so integrally to Italian identity. In fact, chapter five of *Avanti*—in which food sets the cultural frame of the language instruction—renders me powerless. How can my students appreciate the diversity of Italian food and the regional varieties of dishes, as well as the pride involved in these traditional recipes, if they know only the Italian chain-restaurant?

In fall 2014, I approached the topic of Italian food, incorporating an intercultural objective. I used two films, each containing a sequence of interactions between Americans and Italians that exemplified different cultural values. Through a recommendation I found in *Avanti*, I chose segments from the film the *Big Night* (1996). In this movie, an Italian waiter and an Italian cook, named Primo and Secondo respectively, have opened a restaurant on the New Jersey shore. A customer orders risotto as well as a dish of pasta with meatballs. The cook is outraged by the request for such an excessively starch-filled meal, but, instead of explaining *the proper Italian way* to savor a meal, the cook expresses anger that the customer does not understand this point of view, while the waiter mediates between the determined customer and the intransigent cook.[55] I showed this and a scene from *Once We Were Strangers* (1997) by Emanuele Crialese,[56] in which the Italian cook, Antonio, discusses with an American customer the reason he cannot put garlic in the carbonara sauce. The situation is the same.

After the two sequences have played, I ask the students to determine for themselves who is right and wrong, the cooks or the customers? I give them a multiple-choice questionnaire, so they can converse and discover new vocabulary. Class opinion remains divided: *The customer is always right* is the most common answer, but students also conclude that if the cooks were famous, nobody would question their way of cooking.

The debate is one of values, and the students realize this. Ultimately, most agree the cooks have the right to defend their integrity. In the aftermath of this interaction, reflecting on my classroom practice in light of the intercultural guidelines, I realize I should have asked my students if the characters could have resolved the tension in an intercultural way. Could the characters have decentered to see the other's point of view—another culture's point of view—as an opportunity to encounter a different culture and enrich their own experience? The tension emerges between the cultural identity of the clients, who feel it their right to order the food they want, and the cultural identity of the cooks, for whom food is not just a product but intrinsically connected to their sense of identity. When the students subsequently performed the role-play of ordering from an Italian menu, they each followed their individual inclination. Some ordered gelato as a *primo*, others, pasta and french fries. I decided not to feel disappointed, because I cannot genuinely reproduce for them the lifestyle and cultural experience[57] of a *pranzo della domenica* or the practice of *prendi un caffè*.

At the end of the semester, I wanted to learn if my students had gained something from these activities. I asked them to share what they had learned about Italian culture and if their perception of the culture had changed. I received many different comments; a few encouraged me. Many of the students had become even more interested in Italian culture and wanted to experience Italy in person**.** They realized that *piazza* and *bar* represent complex connotations for Italians that differ from the American understanding of these words. My favorite comments pertained to new perceptions regarding food. The students clearly recognized food as a fundamental cultural aspect of Italian life, also recognizing that this aspect did not hold the same importance in their own life experience. I was particularly impressed that some comments reflected a deep appreciation of the Italian way of life and culture and expressed desire to experience this way of life directly: I felt in these comments that my students had developed the *sojourner* state of mind. Seeing the value of interacting within a cultural framework offered these students the insight that language and culture embody more than tourist attractions. The intercultural dimension of language teaching and learning fosters the intercultural speaker, a mediator.[58] With the Internet connecting so many cultures, the role of mediator embodies an essential competence to acculturate thoughtful citizens for the global era.[59]

Conclusion

I conclude with a quote from Claire Kramsch's book *Language and Culture* (1998):

> Geographic mobility, professional change, and the vagaries of life may give a person multiple social identities that all get played out alternately on the complex framings and reframings of daily encounters. […] A growing gulf is opening up not between national cultures, but between those who can afford to be supranational cosmopolitan – through access to the internet, travel privileges, knowledge of several languages beside English ability and freedom to code-switch between them – and those who are rooted in one national or religious culture.[60]

Internet access is not creating a gulf between who has access to the Internet and who does not. The divide stands between who can read messages from the digital world with a critical approach to language, culture, and meaning—with an awareness of the invisible culture underlying—and who passively watches without engaging in the complexity. The latter defines the reality for most students who have not learned intercultural skills in language instruction. The values behind words can be lost. Our role as language teachers is to foster intercultural skills in our students, to teach them to decipher and interpret so that they may develop into intercultural mediators to better understand the world we live in.

Notes

[1] Claire Kramsch, "Teaching Foreign Languages in an Era of Globalization: Introduction," *The Modern Language Journal* 98, no. 1 (2014): 296–302.

[2] Claire Kramsch, *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.

[3] Katra Byram and Claire Kramsch, "Why Is It So Difficult to Teach Language as Culture?" *The German Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 21–34, accessed December 11, 2014, http://www.jstor.org /stable/27676139.

[4] Claire Kramsch, "The Language Teacher as Go-Between," *Utbildining & Demokrati* 13 (2004): 43.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Gilberte Furstenberg, "Making Culture the Core of the Language Class: Can It Be Done?" *The Modern Language Journal* 94, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 329–332, accessed June 13, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40856137.

[7] Anthony Liddicoat and Angela Scarino, *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 2.

[8] Edgar Morin, *Insegnare a vivere. Manifesto per cambiare l'educazione* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2015), 51.

[9] Claire Kramsch, *Language and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

[10] *La banda degli onesti*, directed by Camillo Mastrocinque (Italia: D.D.L., 1956), YouTube.

[11] I did the project with students of Mercy College, Manhattan Campus, NY, in the fall of 2012. See Patrizia Comello Perry, "How to Teach What We Can't Teach of the Italian Language and Culture: Totò and Zuccotti Park," *Rivista Luci e Ombre* 3, no. 1 (2015): 28–36, www.rivistalucieombre.com.

[12] Kramsch, *Context and Culture*, 85.

[13] Ibid., 8.

[14] Kramsch, *Language and Culture*, 8..

[15] Liddicoat and Scarino, *Intercultural Language Teaching*, 15.

[16] Byram and Kramsch, "Language as Culture," 20–21.

[17] Kramsch, "Teaching Foreign Languages," 299.

[18] Byram and Kramsch, "Language as Culture," 20–21.

[19] Furstenberg, "Making Culture," 329.

[20] Michael Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* (Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, 1997), 37.

[21] In Byram and Kramsch ("Language as Culture," 21), authors argue that language teachers are called to explain to students and engage them to understand that "the position of the United States in the world today depends on our understanding others and others understanding, but they [language teachers] are not historians, nor anthropologists, nor sociologists. […] In other words, they are challenged to teach not language and culture, but language as culture."

[22] Kramsch, *Context and Culture*, 12.

[23] Kramsch, *Language and Culture*, 8.

[24] Mikhail M. Bakhtin,, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), quoted in Gilberte Furstenberg, Sabine Levet, Kathryn English, and Katherine Maillet, "Giving a Virtual Voice to the Silent Language of Culture: The Cultura Project." *Language Learning and Technology* 5, no. 1 (January 2001): 57, accessed June 13, 2014, http://lltmsu.edu/vol5num1/Furstenberg/default.html.

[25] Byram and Kramsch, "Language as Culture," 20.

[26] Liddicoat and Scarino, *Intercultural Language Teaching*, 15.

[27] Kramsch, "Teaching Foreign Languages," 304.

[28] Michael Byram, Bella Gribkova, and Hugh Starkey, "Developing The Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching" (Report for Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2002), http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Guide_dimintercult_EN.pdf.

[29] Ibid., 9.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 12–13: According to the document, the definitions are: *savoir être*, "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and beliefs about one's own," which can be called the ability to decenter; *savoir comprendre*, the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own; *savoir faire*, the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability