Fostering Learners' Intercultural Competence with CALL

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There is increasing pressure on world language educators to expand the cultural instruction in their curriculum and to advocate for their language programs as a means to prepare learners with 21st century skills (The Four Cs: Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, and Critical thinking). In similar vein, ACTFL's *Global Competence Position Statement* (2014) further described the need for language instructors to foster learners' interactional abilities and behaviors to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from self. Yet many language educators are confused about best-teaching practices during this transition time from methods that focus primarily on students' ability to use the language to communicate, to a time where it is increasingly emphasized that students should access content information through the language for meaningful cultural reflection. This paper demystifies some confusion about fostering learners' intercultural competence in instructed language learning and concludes with a variety of tools and techniques to integrate computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and meaningful cultural inquiry at beginning levels of instruction.

Key Words: Intercultural Competence, Culture Instruction, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

I. Problematizing Cultural Instruction in Foreign Language Learning

Part of the confusion around intercultural competence is due to the extensive interpretation of the definition of culture. As Block (2003) pointed out, "the sociological literature is full of definitions and even full-length treatments of culture" (p. 128). The view of culture used in this paper echoes the definition found on the website for the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition for the purpose of their Intercultural Studies Project where culture is defined as "the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also *distinguishing* those of another group" (emphasis added). *Socialization,* the key construct in the definition, *distinguishes* groups from each other. Accordingly, the cultural component of foreign language instruction must guide learners

through the socialization of target culture practices and products that are distinguishable from one's own. Yet, research shows that pushing learners into the shared identity patterns of members of communities where the target language is being spoken can threaten learners' own cultural identity. Meaningful cultural inquiry into target culture practices and products must   respect learners' agency to choose their own believes, behaviors, and values of their first culture, the second culture, or a third space (Bhabba, 1994; Kramsch, 1993) between both cultures.

Cultural models—the Onion Model (*Figure 1*) and Iceberg Model (*Figure 2*)— elucidate aspects of the type of socialization instruction needed to ensure student exposure to distinguishable perspectives toward cultural practices and products within communities where the target language is spoken.

FIGURE 1	FIGURE 2
Onion Model	Iceberg Model
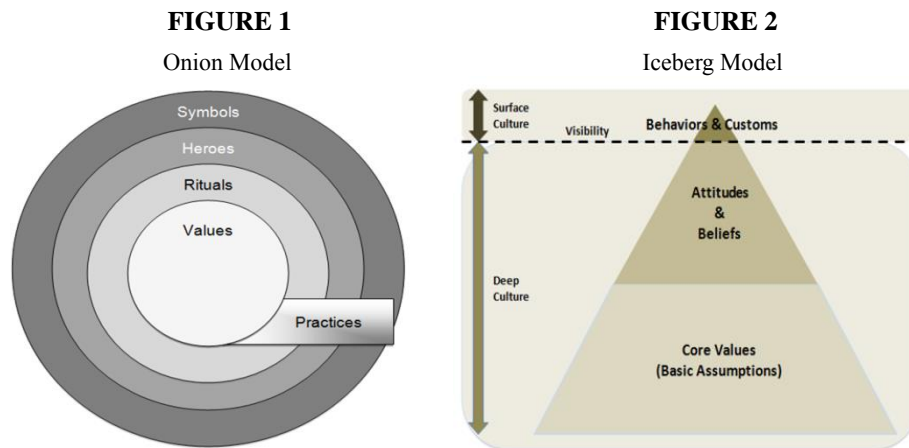
Both models describe the outer, superficial level of culture as being visible with behaviors and customs, or cultural practices with the deepest, invisible or hidden layer being core values/ basic assumptions within a shared cultural community. Specifically, the Onion Model (Fig. 1) describes a community's culture in layers that deepen from (1) symbols—such as flags and national anthems, to (2) heroes—such as presidents, actors, athletes, to (3) rituals—such as greeting, gift giving, apologizing, to (4) the inner layer of values. It is noted within this model that cultural practices cross each of these layers, always informed by the core cultural values. Similarly, the Iceberg Model (Fig. 2) demonstrates that the behaviors and customs, also referred to as cultural practices, are visible above the water, built on the hidden attitudes and core values that lie hidden beneath the surface. It is only with socialization, or deep cultural exploration that one can start to understand the core values and attitudes that inform the visible cultural practices in a culture other than one's own.

The problem with cultural exploration that does not consider students' reflection on the diverse worldviews within their own culture, is the way in which learners' respond to and internalize information about alternate perspectives. As long noted by Bennett (1993), a common first response to cultural difference encounters is to take an ethnocentric perspective, either not accepting that an alternate cultural perspective possibly exists with deliberate avoidance of all contact (the Denial Stage) or positioning one's own culture as superior to the other, denigrating indicators of difference. Likewise, stereotype formation is an all too common response, especially under the influence of the subconscious stereotypes that exist in one's own culture about the other. Geertz (1975) described the coherence that culture creates within social groups through "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in a symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (89). Constraints can be formed within groups of what is thought to be appropriate behavior (Libben & Lindner, 2008). Behavior differing from a group's accepted norm is marked. When marked behavior is repeatedly perceived, stereotypes, or fixed mental images of members from another group can form, whether these images are real or imagined. National stereotypes formed within one's culture of another culture are commonly perpetuated in the media including movies, television commercials, books, cartoons and the press. Concerning French cultural stereotypes, Verdaguer's (1996) review of the representation of France in the U.S. media found a common negative portrayal of French people as rude, sexually promiscuous and dirty. When the media portrays the French as such, it is subsequently reinforcing the message that Americans are polite, sexually reserved, and clean, by contrast. Verdaguer further describes the positive portrayal of France in the media as a country full of renowned arts, perfume, fashion, and desirable wines and food, which by contrast emphasizes the U.S. puritan values of living simply, with less concern for fashion and high cuisine. As foreign language educators, it is difficult to combat the stereotypes perpetuated in the media when attempting to transmit to students cultural aspects that influence the identity of members of the target culture.

Stereotype formation might be amplified in cultures with differing cultural dimensions, due to more behaviors appearing marked. Hofstede identified distinct national cultural dimensions from the factor analysis of the values from a world-wide survey of IBM employee working in over 50 countries in the late 1960's. When Hofstede analyzed his database of culture statistics, he found clear patterns of similarity and difference along the four dimensions: (1) Individualism-Collectivism; (2) Power Distance; (3) Uncertainty Avoidance; and (4) Masculinity–Femininity. In 2011, a fifth dimension was added, (5) Long Term—Short Term Orientation by Minkov from his

work in Asia. Hofstede suggests that understanding alternate national core values can prepare speakers for the alternate perspectives they might confront in intercultural communication.

Despite strong concerns about Hofstede's national cultural dimension scales appearing too reductionist, they can serve as a starting point for student investigations to compare the target culture and their own. For example, Hofstede's comparison of U.S. compared to Korean national cultures (*Figure 3*) reports great differences across the five dimensions in Hofstede's model:

FIGURE 3

Comparison of South Korea and U.S. Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede Institute)

South Korea
in comparison with United States

Power Distance: South Korea 60, United States 40. Individualism: South Korea 18, United States 91. Masculinity: South Korea 39, United States 62. Uncertainty Avoidance: South Korea 85, United States 46. Long Term Orientation: South Korea 100, United States 26.
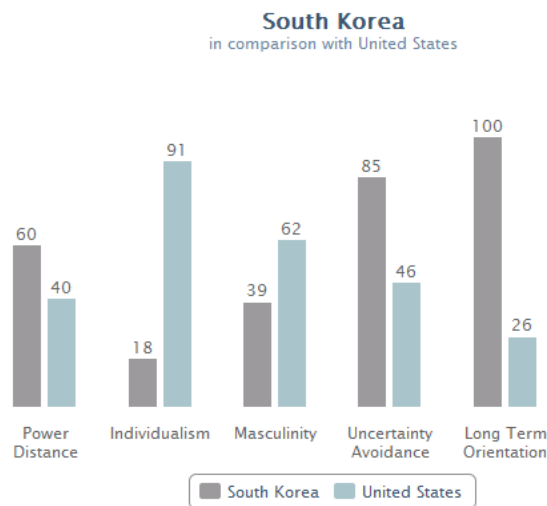
South Korea   United States

Figure 3 suggests several differences in attitudes, values, and behaviors across Korean and U.S. cultures. Firstly, the U.S. (40/100) has a smaller Power Distance than Korea (60/100) signifying that Korean culture might more readily accept that all individuals in a society are not equal whereas U.S. culture supports treating children as equals and consulting subordinates in projects. The U.S. has a much stronger individualism (91/100), meaning people are commonly "in it for self," whereas Korean culture is more collectivist (18/100), where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group and offence leads to shame and loss of face. The U.S. Masculinity: 62/100 "admire the strong, don't care for the weak—work over family" whereas Korea (39/100) the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. The U.S. has low Uncertainty Avoidance (46/100) whereas Korea (85/100) exhibits high Uncertainty Avoidance, maintaining rigid codes of belief and behaviors and

security is an important element in individual motivation. Lastly, the U.S. (26/100) scores very low on long-term Orientation, meaning there is less interest in the past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future, whereas in Korean (100/100) society, they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.

So, what happens when you try to teach U.S. Korean language learners about South Korean cultural practices? For example, how would the behavior of U.S. students' who have always had their educational experiences cater to their individualism—the right to be excused from school to worship their individual religious holidays, individualized learning plans (IEPs), and right to speak up to question a teacher's authority—fare with a newly arrived Korean teacher who did not understand this aspect of U.S. culture? Or, how would the U.S. Korean language learner perceive the idea that at a restaurant, the menu everyone is likely to choose will be the one the most senior person at the table selects? A U.S. student with low intercultural competence is likely to think, "but I am an individual snowflake and should be able to order anything I want," without concern for this tradition. Furthermore, the idea, "I don't like this culture that limits my individualism" might emerge, directly affecting that students' language learning success. A stereotype on the lack of originality or individualism might form in the student's head of Korean culture. Although it is impossible to recognize the multitude of individual differences within a cultural group, particularly when considering that cultural codes and frames of reference are continually changing. Instructors can, however, foster the type of critical thinking that promotes learners' intercultural competence, reducing learners' essentialization of target cultures and their defense of alternate cultural practices and products.
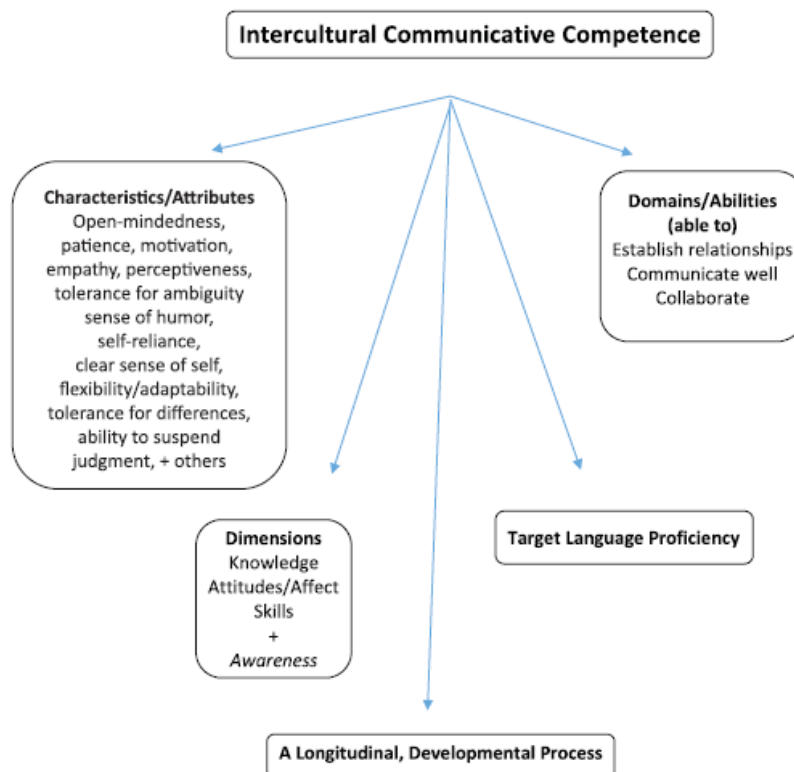
II. Defining Intercultural Competence

Byram (2000) described successful intercultural learners as "conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural" (p.10). Echoing Byram, the recent ACTFL Global Competence Position Statement (2014), identified the increased need to foster second language learners' ability to understand target culture members' perspectives in addition to honing learners' language skills. Perhaps the most profound statement I have considered on the role of cultural instruction in language learning comes from Fantini (2006): "Grammatical errors are less likely to offend than cultural gaffes." I cannot imagine a second language speaker who has avoided the shame

of committing a cultural gaffe compared to the experiencing the kindness and flexibility granted by native speakers with their grammatical errors.

Fantini (2015) provided an exhaustive overview of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) based on his survey of over 238 publications with findings from studies conducted in seven languages. From this review of the literature, Fantini summarized ICC as the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with those who are linguistically and culturally different from ourselves (Fantini, 2015; Fantini & Garrett-Rucks, 2016). In *Figure 4* below, Fantini further identified commonalities among descriptions of ICC studies and summarized is findings on: (1) various characteristics or attributes, (2) Three domains or areas, (3) Four dimensions, (4) Proficiency in the host tongue, and (5) a developmental process:

FIGURE 4

Components of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Fantini & Garrett-Rucks, 2016).

Some of the various characteristics and attributes Fantini found across the literature of individuals with developed intercultural competence from *Figure 4* are: patience, sense of humor, curiosity, motivation, open-mindedness, self-reliance, perceptiveness, and a clear sense of self. The three IC domains or areas identified across the literature are the ability to: (1**)** Establish and maintain relationships; (2) Communicate with minimal loss and distortion, and (3) Collaborate to accomplish tasks of mutual interest. The Four Dimensions are (1) intercultural attitudes, (2) knowledge, (3) skills, and (4) critical cultural awareness. Lastly, Fantini's model of ICC components acknowledges the importance of second language learning and the developmental process of ICC development.

It is helpful for language educators to understand the various characteristics and attributes of ICC to inform one's instruction. For example, a teacher can guide learners through the process of acquiring competencies in three areas: Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills to foster the development of their intercultural awareness. At a 2016 ACTFL presentation, Moeller provided examples of Can-Do statements to share with students concerning ICC goals: (1) Attitudes: I can question my preconceived ideas and become more open to interacting with people from other cultures; (2) Knowledge: I can explore and analyze facts about my own culture and the target culture, (3) Skills: I can discover through practice how to communicate and form relationships with individuals from other cultures. Moeller then described how to guide students to question their preconceived ideas before entering into a process of discovery about the "other" with the intent of becoming more willing to seek out and engage with otherness in order to ultimately experience relationships of reciprocity. Moeller suggests a three step process: Step (1) Examine a cultural practice in students' first culture; Step (2) Have learners investigate an alternate cultural practice in the target culture; and Step (3): Create an environment of curiosity and inquiry. In this process, the student works as a researcher, knowledge discoverer, and an anthropologist. The teacher works as a facilitator, guide, and mentor. Knowledge is shared, new values and opinions are considered and students take ownership of their own learning. Examples of inquiry research are interviewing native speakers, open-ended or guided Internet research, or having students investigate relevant information provided by the instructor. Example ICC activities are creating a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting own culture with target cultures, asking groups to talk about their experiences, and/or having students document how their perception of the target culture and their own culture changed.

In a classroom where ICC is stressed, the learner acts as a cultural anthropologist who explores and investigates a topic both in and outside the classroom. It can be done at the beginning of a unit, kept up on the wall and revisited at the end of the unit to

document progress. It is a learner-centered classroom where learning is interactive and cooperative and the goal of the teacher is to create an environment of curiosity and inquiry. For example, I often conduct a smiling activity in my classroom where I teach introductory French to US learners to reflect on smiling practices in their own culture compared to French culture. For the first step of the activity, I ask students to consider, "What do you know about cultural views toward smiling in your own culture. I have students write down their ideas, and then direct students to look at U.S. smiling practices found on their drivers' licenses, keeping a class tally of the smiling photos versus not smiling photos found in the classroom. For Step 2, Student as Inquirer, I ask students to write down, "What do you know about French smiling practices?" and send them to research the French *carte d'identité online.* For Step 3, after researching, students come back together and examine what they originally wrote for their beliefs about French culture, then ask them to consider what needs to be deleted, changed, or expanded upon in a discussion of the new information they found out. Together, we create a Venn diagram about cultural smiling practices comparing and contrasting French and U.S. practices and perspectives (*Figure 5*).

FIGURE 5

Venn Diagram for learners' research findings concerning smiling practices
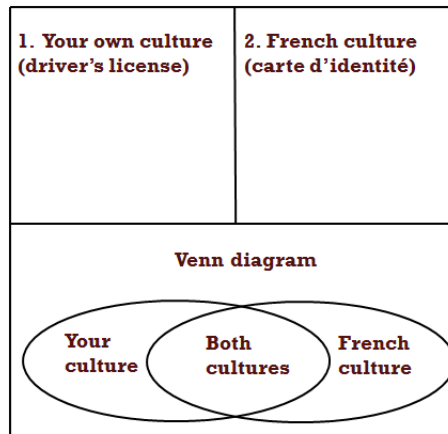
III. An Intercultural Approach to Language Instruction

Taking an intercultural approach to language instruction is a paradigm shift in language education. In the ICC approach, there is a shift from using the language to communicate to now, accessing content through language. This shift of emphasis is also present in the latest revision of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign

Languages (ACTFL) National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996, 1999, 2006), now called the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (2015). According to the ACTFL Director of Education, Paul Sandrock, the *World-Readiness Standards'* connection with interculturality is made more explicit in the revised *Cultures Standards* that now use the verbs "*investigate, explain,* and *reflect on*" the relationship between cultural perspectives and practices or products. The inclusion of these words goes a long way toward guiding teachers in how to integrate language learning and cultural inquiry, especially compared to the original wording of *Cultures Standard*s, "demonstrate an understanding of" – which often led to a focus on explaining the practice or product without exploring the perspectives behind them. Some example activities at the novice level from Progress Indicators of the *World-Readiness Standards* (2015, pp. 76-77) include:

    (1) Learners use appropriate gestures and oral expressions for greetings, leave takings, and common classroom or social interactions (e.g., please, thank you, may I . . .);

    (2) Learners participate in or simulate age-appropriate cultural activities such as games, birthday celebrations, storytelling, and dramatizations;

    (3) Learners create or propose simple cultural triangles connecting practices to associated products and perspectives.

Learners across all proficiency levels can use the target language to investigate and explain the relationships between practices (or products) and cultural perspectives, exploring authentic resources and forming hypotheses about culture to explore deeper through additional evidence and comparison, although the "reflect on" element may need to occur in learners first language at novice levels.

The question of "which language" to use—the target language or English—in cultural reflection has long been debated in the U.S. foreign language education context. The ACTFL Position Statement on the Use of the Target Language in the Classroom draws from research that reports effective language instruction must provide significant levels of meaningful communication and interactive feedback in the target language in order for students to develop language and cultural proficiency. ACTFL therefore recommends that language educators and their students use the target language "as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time and, when feasible, beyond the classroom" (ACTFL Board, 2010). Contrary to the insistence on target language use institutionalized in U.S. foreign language education, Garrett-Rucks (2016), informed by a Vygotskian perspective, suggests the need for learners to use their first language as a tool for reflection in meaningful cultural reflection. Fortunately, there are several applications of technology that can make these

two ends meet—providing a means to stimulate learners' deep cultural reflection outside of instruction time, preserving target language use in the classroom. Accordingly, the next section describes such use of technology with descriptions of cultural activities within: (1) hypermedia text use; (2) online classroom discussions; and (3) the flipped classroom model.

IV. Technology-based Cultural Instruction Practices

This section describes three different technology-based practices that prepare beginning learners to "investigate, explain, and reflect on" diverse perspectives toward cultural practices and products in target cultures and their own in English (in the U.S. context), outside of classroom instruction time. The three practices discussed in turn are (1) hypermedia text use; (2) online classroom discussions; and (3) the flipped classroom model.

(1) Hypermedia Texts

Hypermedia text is a nonlinear medium of information which includes images, audio, video, plain text and hyperlinks. This term is also related to the field of electronic (e-) literature or e-texts. One important claim in the literature on hypermedia and e-learning is that it offers more control over the instructional environment as well as agency to the reader or student. Another claim is that hypermedia text use supports differentiated learning among students of varying abilities due the optional affordances such as translations of unfamiliar words or cultural information needed to understand the context (Garrett-Rucks, Howles, & Lake, 2015). Information can be in any medium, for example, text-based translations, audio definitions, or videos of grammatical explanations and cultural references. The cultural references within a text prepare learners to talk about the text during face-to-face classroom discussions, fostering the development of learners' oral proficiency, instead of the instructor needing to waste instruction time to explain the texts to the learners.   Further supporting learners' second language development with hypermedia texts is the use of audio recordings of the text itself to foster learners' L2 pronunciation, as well as images, animations and videos for visualization to scaffold learners' understanding of complex terms or grammatical concepts.

(2) Online Classroom Discussions

Classroom discussions have been a staple of teaching since Socrates. Online discussions are a great tool to extend classroom conversations and learning by getting

students to engage with class material online. Online discussions are often arranged by discussion boards, forums, and threads. The best discussions keep everyone active, either by sharing or thinking. Even those students who rarely, if ever, contribute can still participate in other ways.

It has been widely recognized across the professional literature that developing cultural understanding is a process that involves a series of stages that take the cross-cultural learner along a journey of discovery and reflection (Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). Garrett-Rucks (2013a; 2013b) investigated the use online classroom discussions in response to computer-mediated cultural instruction to foster beginning French language learners' intercultural competence. In her study, the cultural instruction and online discussions took place in English, outside of classroom instruction time where the target language use was preserved. Each of the online discussions about each cultural topic lasted 5 weeks and consisted of two phases--Phase 1, learners accessed explicit cultural instruction about alternate cultural practices and translated authentic texts, posting their reactions Week 1 and responding to two peers' postings Week 2; and Phase 2, learners accessed pre-recorded YouTube interviews with 4 French informants describing their perspectives toward U.S. and French cultural practices, posting their reactions Week 3, responding to two peers' postings Week 4, and making a final posting about the topic Week 5. The findings from her study provided empirical evidence of some of the internal, personal processes of three learners as they shifted identities and entered into a third space of intercultural understanding of alternate cultural practices. The ability to personally relate to a French perspective appeared paramount in maximizing learners' intercultural competence and minimizing their stereotypes of the target culture. The online classroom discussions provided learners the opportunity to self-reflect and mediate their thoughts on the diverse perspectives found in the target culture and their own culture as learners' expanded their own worldviews toward alternate cultural practices.

(3) Flipped Classroom

The term "flipped classroom" describes an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning (face-to-face and virtual) that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside of the classroom. In essence, "flipping the classroom" means that students gain first exposure to new material outside of class, usually via reading or lecture videos, and then use class time to do the harder work of assimilating that knowledge, perhaps through problem-solving, discussion, or debates. In terms of Bloom's revised taxonomy (2001), this means that

students are doing the lower levels of cognitive work (gaining knowledge and comprehension) outside of class, and focusing on the higher forms of cognitive work (application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation) in class, where they have the support of their peers and instructor. This model contrasts from the traditional model in which "first exposure" occurs via lecture in class, with students assimilating knowledge through homework; thus the term "flipped classroom."

According to Brame, (2013) the key elements of a flipped classroom are : (1) Provide an incentive for students to prepare for class; (2) Provide an opportunity for students to gain first exposure prior to class; (3) Provide a mechanism to assess student understanding; (4) Provide in-class activities that focus on higher level cognitive activities. Some examples of second language learning activities with the flipped model in Spanish include having learners research weather conditions in South America outside of classroom instruction time prior to an interpretive task in the classroom where they watch a current Spanish language weather forecast from Peru. Another example is first exposing learners to a video about the Day of the Dead in English, outside of classroom instruction time, then in the classroom, discussing a native speakers' description of her activities for Day of the Dead in Spanish. This last example illustrates how students can access deeper levels of alternate cultural perspectives in their own language prior to using the language in a more superficial way.

V. Conclusion

This paper demystified some confusion about fostering learners' intercultural competence in instructed language learning and concluded with a variety of tools and techniques to integrate computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and meaningful cultural inquiry at beginning levels of instruction. The goal is to open students' eyes to the fact that many stereotypes are not based on factual information, rather the presence of an alternate world view toward a cultural practice or product. Getting students to identify the beliefs, values and behaviors found "under the iceberg" in target cultures and their own helps foster the development of learners intercultural competence. It is important for learners to question themselves and document how their perspective has changed, noting what is new, different, or similar. Learners gain an insight into their own culture, "the familiar," by looking at it from the perspective of the "other." They also realize they share some ideas and attitudes with the target culture.

Teaching interculturality means teaching students to engage in culturally appropriate interactions even if they don't share the same worldview. It allows students to learn how different cultures relate to one another. It encourages them to look for similarities and differences so that they can act as a mediator between the two. Developing intercultural

communicative competence is the type of self-awareness and identity transformation that foster responsible global citizenship beyond any knowledge we could possibly relay to students. As noted by Albert Einstein, "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding." By infusing an intercultural reflective dimension into our instruction, we can help prepare language learners to become responsible global citizens.

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