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CRITICAL LITERACY AND THE WORLD LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: COMPLICATING CULTURE EDUCATION

by

Anah Victoria Malamut

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree
in Teaching and Learning (Developmental Reading)
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

July 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Carolyn Colvin

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

There is a struggle within the field of world language teaching to design culture curricula that promote respect, acceptance and understanding of world cultures, positioning those cultures as different but equal to the cultures of students. The purpose of this paper is to (1) provide background about the history and current practices of culture education in world language classrooms, (2) explain critical literacy as a theory, its possibilities for instructional methodology, and how critical literacy can address the struggle in world language education and help teach students a deep, complex understanding of culture, (3) outline an adapted culture curriculum that uses critical literacy as a bridge to understanding culture, highlighting the practices, goals and purposes of the adapted curriculum, and (4) provide support for the adapted curriculum in current research and national standards for education. This paper will demonstrate that the ultimate goal of culture curricula is instilling in students the ability to look at a person from any culture with curiosity and respect, without superiority or inferiority, and that critical literacy is a tool for achieving that goal. Building on and extending current practices in culture education, critical literacy provides students the opportunity to come to their own understanding of new cultures through thoughtful inquiry and exploration that emphasizes deconstructing preconceived notions about culture, moving beyond surface knowledge of the target culture to becoming thoughtful, respectful world citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

When two people meet, it usually only takes a few exchanges of pleasantries before someone asks, "So, what do you do?" Whenever asked the question myself I answer, "I teach 8th grade world language." The very words I use clearly mark my philosophy: only recently have teachers begun to use the term *world language* to replace what previously has been referred to as *foreign language*. This shift reflects a struggle within the field of world language teaching to promote respect, acceptance and understanding of world cultures, positioning those cultures as different but equal—in other words, not foreign—to the cultures of our students.

This struggle is not only reflected in labels within our field. It echoes throughout the many activities developed for teaching culture that somehow still leave students with rudimentary, if not stereotypical, perceptions of culture. It resonates in the discussions of preservice teachers asking again and again for "how to teach culture." Although I have taught 8th grade Spanish for four years, my background in English and reading instruction heavily influenced my thinking, particularly about the power of language as it relates to culture and the culture curriculum, and provided the inspiration for designing an adapted culture curriculum—and by adapted I mean a curriculum that extends what I already do rather than start over with something new—that uses critical literacy as a bridge to cultural knowledge to address this struggle.

The purpose of this paper is to (1) provide background about the history and current practices of culture education in world language classrooms, (2) explain critical literacy as a theory, its possibilities for instructional methodology, and how critical literacy can address the struggle in world language education and help teach students a deep, complex understanding of culture, (3) outline my adapted culture curriculum that uses critical literacy as a bridge to understanding culture, highlighting the practices, goals

and purposes of the adapted curriculum, and (4) provide support for the adapted curriculum in current research and national standards for education.

If my students take nothing else from our class, I want them to leave with respect and appreciation for the many cultures they will encounter in their lifetime. For the purpose of providing a foundation for my reader, I begin by defining culture as "a shared way of life." However, my work is influenced by the belief that teaching "culture," through a single, succinct definition camouflages the complexities required to understand the concept. As my students and I use our own experiences to attempt to define culture at the beginning of the year, we quickly realize that no "way of life" is stagnant, and neither, then, can the definition be stagnant. We instead use our experiences to develop a working definition that evolves as we study, examine and expand our knowledge. Students open their eyes open to the way culture is perceived and received in our community and their minds open to understanding ways of life that are different from their own. Open eyes and open minds: that is what culture study is about, and that is how I design my curriculum.

However, how many times have we, as teachers, heard the term "follow with fidelity?" As a group, we are the objects of marketing with thousands of packaged products that promise an answer to educating our students regardless of differences in their backgrounds or in ours. We know to be skeptical of these packaged products, and rather than outlining a packaged curriculum that will work for all students I use this platform to provide insight and ideas that stem from my own struggle with teaching culture that they may help others in the same position. So while I share my research questions and discoveries, describe critical literacy and the place it has attained in my classroom, I write from an understanding that no one strategy or set of strategies will work for all teachers and all students. But I also believe that we—teachers—are each other's best resources for improving our practice. I hope to begin a dialogue about the way critical literacy might address our struggles and relieve some of the pressure world

language teachers feel when tackling the difficult challenge of culture instruction and to use my experience to provide suggestions for what teachers can do to adapt their own curricula in ways that are useful for them. I encourage readers to take what they find in these pages and mold it to fit their own environment.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN WORLD LANGUAGE EDUCATION

I have no memory of the moment I learned that, in the United States, it is not okay to kiss your friends.

My brother and I spent our youngest years in the embrace of our Brazilian family, learning through feeling and seeing and being what family really means. We were never far from a hand squeeze, lips brushing on cheeks, the warmth of arms. We learned to embrace our friends as family, with hugs and kisses in greeting and goodbye, and to treasure this embodiment of emotional closeness. It was so hard, as I got older, realizing that American friendships do not share the same outward display of affection. And even though living in the United States all my life, and in Iowa since I was 8 years old, meant I was able to navigate this cultural code-switching fairly easily, to this day I have never been able to let go of an innate cultural need for physical closeness.

My students laugh when I tell them these stories, so different from their own experience, punctuated with embarrassing moments of my own forgetfulness—like the time I almost kissed and completely invaded the personal space of a friend's grandfather. I still don't know which of the two of us was more embarrassed. In the same way these moments impact my understanding of the world, my personal experiences have a powerful ability to shape my students' understanding of the multi-cultural interactions in our communities that are so important. My stories help me challenge my students to think about what the word *culture* means in their own life, to think about the times they interact with other cultures and to consider what they felt, why they felt it, what others might think or do in the same situation, and what differences their actions can make. I am the daughter of an immigrant and a Spanish teacher myself. I want my students to question what they have learned about culture in their fairly homogeneous community. I want them to form their own opinions based on educated information. I want them to

learn to be aware of their actions and the effects their actions have on the world around them.

One can imagine, then, how I felt at the end of a 9-week exploratory world language course during my first year of teaching, after six weeks of exploring new languages overlapping two weeks reading and discussing excerpts of a 15-year-old foreign exchange student's memoir and three more weeks of culture research, when my students' research projects widely included "facts" like:

"Mexican girls wear colorful dresses and flowers in their hair."

All teachers must dread these moments as much as I do. Staring down at my students' final projects I was faced with evidence that so clearly demonstrated something had gone wrong. My earnest students had spent hours on their final projects to show me everything they had learned about Mexico and the Spanish language, and what they learned in our class was the very thing I thought I was working so hard to prevent: stereotypes. I felt embarrassed, frustrated, confused. But what kind of teacher would I be if I didn't follow the mantra I always share with my students: there are no losers, only learners!

As I reflected on the quarter I was hit with several realizations at once, all of which would change the course of my teaching. (1) My students saw "culture" as something outside of themselves, perhaps even looking at other ways of life as inferior and strange rather than equal and different. (2) My students could explain what stereotypes were but didn't know how to apply that knowledge across contexts, to their own thoughts or feelings, to how they acted or how they saw the world. (3) I expected my students to identify and challenge stereotypes, but I gave them almost no guidance or practice doing so. And finally, (4) The time, effort and enthusiasm my students put into their projects showed me they were ready to do more. My students were curious. They wanted to explore culture and learn a language. They were ready to examine the connection between the two. The only problem was that my teaching wasn't supporting

their learning. If I wanted to achieve my goal of helping students look with curiosity and respect at world cultures, all I had to do was change the way I taught the class.

I began looking through materials from my teacher education courses, thinking back to my experiences as a Spanish student and talking with my colleagues about ideas for teaching culture. The more I read and discussed the more I realized I wasn't the only teacher struggling to determine what it means to teach culture. Defining the role of culture in world language classrooms has been a struggle to world language educators for decades. It requires defining *language* and *culture*, examining the relationship between the two, and determining the time and strategies required to teach both. And at the core of the issue lies an essential, debated question: What is it that students should learn in a world language classroom?

The Evolving Culture Curriculum

Claire Kramsch (1986) is widely cited for her early role in raising questions about the status quo of world language education. She contested the validity of the 1986 American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines, which focused classroom instruction almost solely on student grammar and vocabulary accuracy, largely ignoring knowledge of the discources in which language would be situated (Kramsch, 1986). Kramsch argued that world language classrooms should teach students to communicate in the target language (L2) but that the Proficiency Guidelines limited students' learning by ignoring an essential aspect of effective communication: cultural understanding. Her example of a third-year French student who struggles to order a cup of coffee in a French restaurant is to the point. Although the student knows all of the necessary grammar and vocabulary, little can be done while lacking understanding of the different social relationships in France or the attitudes French waiters could have of American citizens (Kramsch, 1986).

In 1999, after increasing demand from world language teachers, ACTFL revised its guidelines and released the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning. The 1999 ACTFL standards became known as the *Five Cs* for its five standard areas: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. Not only did culture now have its own category in the national standards, but it was also emphasized in the benchmarks which asked students to "demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between practices and perspectives…and products and perspectives of the culture studied," "recognize distinctive viewpoints that are only available though the foreign language and its cultures," as well as "demonstrate an understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own," (ACTFL, 2006).

Helping students look with curiosity and respect at world cultures is a valid and defensible goal. National standards envision culture as equal in importance to vocabulary and grammar instruction in world language education. They encourage teachers to move towards a more complicated definition culture and cultural knowledge, moving beyond what I experienced as a Spanish student of traditional foods and famous artists. But while the standards and research literature agreed on this important transition, the question of how to present and help students reach this more complex understanding of culture remained.

As teachers explored strategies for teaching culture, new trends emerged in world language education. Claire Kramsch's concerns echoed across the spectrum of professional literature and have been drawn from and extended into the modern world language classroom. Her (1986) seminal work, "From language proficiency to interactional competence," along with Morain's (1983) "Commitment to the teaching of cultures," and a review of literature on culture education in the past ten years highlight characteristics of the shift in teaching culture from the 20th to 21st century.

Three Key Theoretical Shifts in Culture Education

The research literature points to three key shifts in teaching culture. First is a shift away from focusing solely on grammar and syntax to including semantics and pragmatics in language study. Byram (2010) provides a rationale for this shift rooted in world history. American involvement in world conflicts required understanding not only of language but also the context and connotations of language use. After World War I American schools saw an increased interest in German language and culture studies and the same was seen with a rise in Arabic enrollment and middle-east culture study in our post 9-11 society (Byram, 2010, p. 318). This change of focus was widespread in schools. The shift from grammar and syntax to semantics and pragmatics in world language classrooms was mirrored in, for example, language arts classrooms where the focus changed from a simple comprehension of vocabulary to developing complex understanding of text as a cultural artifact of the time and place in which it was created (Tang, 2006).

The second shift is a move away from reading, writing, listening and speaking skills as the core of the world languages curriculum. Traditional curricula focused on the four areas (reading, writing, listening and speaking) while positing culture as extra to or outside the main agenda. Culture lessons were separate from language lessons and involved learning isolated facts about the arts or an aspect of daily life. Over time, this trend led to cultural knowledge becoming fragmented into two subcategories, now commonly referred to as *Big C* and *Little c* culture, the first emphasizing culture as fine arts and the second emphasizing culture as daily life and value systems (Morain, 1983; Tang, 2006). The current trend in the field is to revalue the integration of combined language and culture study, working to "[reconceive] language learning within a more consistent educational framework that teaches language and culture in tandem, with its goal a joint literacy about a second language (L2) and culture (C2)," (Arens, 2010, p.

321). Reading, writing, listening and speaking remain focal points of the curriculum, but there is an attempt to situate each language event within social and cultural contexts.

Finally, the third shift is to emphasize the relationships within and between cultures, frequently through comparing one's own culture (C1) to that of the target culture (C2). World language teachers realized that separating language and culture learning and fragmenting culture into discrete facts positions culture as something static, foreign and outside students' lived experiences. Culture becomes the domain of *the other* rather than a part of all interactions. Comparisons between C1 and C2, as advocated by teacher-researchers (Bush, 2007; Calvin, 2005; Kearney, 2010; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005; Tang, 2006) and reinforced by the ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning (2006), help students see their own relationship to culture and understand it as a dynamic part of communicating. It helps students understand that all transactions with language are situated within a social context that affects how the language is understood. It is hard to deny Byrnes' (2010) and Furstenberg's (2010) assumption that in today's societies, where students interact closely with people of diverse cultures in person and across great distances, understanding comparisons within and between cultures is critically important.

Taken together, these three shifts point to a growing consensus within the field of world language education that language and culture cannot be taught separately. There is a realization that crafting and conveying one's own meaning as well as understanding the meaning of others requires knowledge of the specific contexts and discourses surrounding language use.

An Overview of Current Practice

Teaching is a social practice. Deciding what and how to teach is a constant negotiation between teachers, students and their surrounding communities (Dewey, 1938). As I recognized in my students' perceptions of culture the concerns about culture

education echoing across the spectrum of professional literature, I saw the need to shift my own instruction. I began by consulting my teaching community. Just as a beginning definition of culture provides a foundation for culture study, a review of literature highlighting current, common practices provided me a starting point for adapting my own curriculum. This literature review was my first step in beginning to answer the question of how exactly world language teachers can integrate language and culture learning; which strategies support the development of complex understandings of culture and its relationship to language, and which, if any, strategies help us reach the complex understanding of culture emphasized in the national standards and research literature. In the sections that follow I outline techniques and approaches recommended in my literature review.

Study Abroad

Kearney (2010) points to study abroad as the most accepted strategy for accessing "real" culture. In study abroad experiences students leave their homes for a few weeks up to a year to live in and study the target language and culture firsthand. While there is no question about the validity of the study abroad experience it is simply not practical for widespread use. Not all students have the time nor do their families have the resources necessary for this kind of travel. And while an excellent strategy for students outside the classroom, study abroad does not address the need to find new strategies for teachers and students within school walls.

Interviews

The ability to speak with a member of the target culture is one of the closest approximations to the study abroad experience. Like study abroad, interviews with native speakers give students an opportunity to ask questions, make comparisons and challenge stereotypes through personal, meaningful interactions. Interviews can foster positive attitudes about the C2 and also "toward culture learning in general," (Bateman,

2002, p. 327). Bateman (2002) had students interview native Spanish speakers in person, but other teachers have used chat rooms, e-mail exchange or online discussion groups as means for allowing students access to native speakers of the L2 (Abrams, 2002; Furstenberg, 2010; Moore, 2006).

An additional benefit of interviews is the possibilities they provide for integrating language and culture learning. Students have the opportunity to use language in-context for real-life purposes, increasing their knowledge of and ability with the L2 and C2 simultaneously.

Thematic Unit

The thematic unit was originally suggested in 1975 (Morain, 1983, p. 405). The thematic unit attempted to integrate language and culture by organizing vocabulary and grammar concepts around cultural experiences. For example, in a thematic unit about shopping students would begin by learning any vocabulary and grammar necessary to make purchases, returns or ask questions while shopping. The vocabulary and grammar knowledge would present concepts and encourage discussion about what it means, culturally, to shop in the C2. Students might explore similarities and differences between shopping in the C1 versus the C2. The thematic unit remains popular with current textbooks, still commonly organized this way (Boyles, 2004).

Photographs

Photographs can capture the essence of culture by illustrating places, people, emotions and situations students might not have access to otherwise (Morain, 1983). Calvin (2005) introduced her students to pictures of graffiti from the C2 and discovered the concept of graffiti, familiar to her students in the C1, helped students make comparisons between graffiti in their community and the graffiti in the pictures, ask questions and make hypotheses about why similarities or differences exist, make more general comparisons between C1 and C2 and think about the situation of language within

social contexts (Calvin, 2005). Students would not have had access to the same knowledge without the use of Calvin's photographs.

Bush (2007) explains how photographs, when linked to vocabulary terms, can simultaneously aid in remembering vocabulary and illustrating cultural concepts. He demonstrates his point with the word *pain,* French for *bread*. When an American student hears the word bread she might envision a loaf of Wonder Bread versus a French student who, upon hearing the word pain, imagines a long, crusty baguette (Bush, 2007, p. 730). One photograph, however, would illustrate this cultural difference, help students compare C1 to C2 and help with vocabulary retention.

Role-Play

Because the shift in world language education is toward a realistic use of language situated within cross-cultural interactions, role-play has been used to help students predict and practice social situations in the C2 (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005; Tang, 2006). Tang (2006) also suggests role-play as a strategy to help students analyze and understand cultural differences by making concrete what actually happens when two people communicate. Savignon & Sysoyev (2005) suggest role-playing cultural concepts to nonnatives. The concept of Thanksgiving is one such example. These role-plays involve anticipating and eliminating misunderstandings and in doing so foster making comparisons between C1 and C2 that lead to deeper understandings of each. Savignon & Sysoyev (2005) also suggest having students role-play talking about controversial issues with respect in order to practice understanding different perspectives.

Narratives

Narratives have the potential to seamlessly integrate language learning with cultural knowledge. Herron & Cole (1999) had students watch fictional narrative videos in the L2 and found that the videos increased students' knowledge of culture. Watching

the videos required students to understand the language while also providing them an opportunity to observe and explore cultural contexts surrounding the language use.

Kearney (2010) introduced students to a wide range of authentic texts from the C2 including written texts, videos, images and spoken narratives. While her study also saw the benefit of using language for real purposes in real cultural contexts, Kearney adds that the use of cultural texts can "relieve the teacher from serving as the authoritative voice on cultural issues" and demonstrate the complexity of cultural issues as messages within the various texts echo and contradict each other (p. 335).

Culture Portfolio

The premise of the culture portfolio is a student-based research project that focuses on one or many aspects of the C2. Students compile vast amounts of research on their topic from a wide variety of sources throughout a term or unit of study. The project goes beyond simple research, however, and becomes a "portfolio" with the addition of comparative and reflective pieces. Students are asked to discuss and reflect on similarities and differences across their research, compare their findings with the research of their peers and finally reflect on the relationship between C1 and C2, perhaps drawing conclusions or asking questions to direct further research (Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byon, 2007; Pearson, 2004; Wright, 2000). Its long-term and in-depth nature along with its various iterations and adaptability to different classroom contexts makes the culture portfolio an exciting possibility for culture study in the world languages classroom.

Big C, Little c

It is important to note that traditional approaches do persist in world language classrooms. In some classrooms language and culture learning remain separated and culture fragmented into its Big C/little c components. As Savignon and Sysoyev (2005) found, culture often remains "little more than the recognition of a few isolated historical

and geographical facts, holiday customs, and food preferences associated with speakers of a language other than English."

The Theme of Technology

Technology is universally recognized for its potential to expand the walls of the classroom. Digital cameras and photographs, CD-ROMs and DVDs with video programs, television, and the Internet can, in moments, cross physical boundaries to bring real people and situations to world language students, providing an infinite number of ways for them to interact with the target language and culture.

But as Lear (2003) cautions, the use of technology itself is not enough. When encountering information on the Internet students need to learn to read critically: to analyze the origin and quality of websites, to question what is posited as truth and to recognize that not all information is equally valid or reliable. Any form of technology can perpetuate dangerous latent messages if students are not taught to recognize them. Does a Spanish video program, for example, present main characters who are rich and of European decent, perpetuating our tendency to ignore or devalue Spanish speakers in other cultures or demographics (Lear, 2003, p. 547)? Furthermore, teachers must ask themselves if class time is better spent browsing the web or discussing culture topics. Teachers must consider how to balance the time necessary for both.

The Theme of Ethnography

A cross-curricular approach to world language education can help minimize the dangers of overgeneralization and latent messages from technology use or in the curriculum in general. The study of culture is largely the work of ethnographers, encompassing fields like anthropology, psychology, philosophy, religious studies and history. Including ethnographic studies in a world language classroom can illuminate values, beliefs and perspectives of the cultures studied (Tang, 2006p. 97) and the comprehensive view of culture resulting from such study helps students challenge

narrower views they encounter elsewhere, whether within or outside of the classroom. Research spanning 30 years, from Morrain (1983) to Furstenberg (2010) connect culture study to ethnography, a useful reminder to educators to consider the benefit of cross-curricular approaches to teaching culture.

The Theme of Constructivism

A common theme in study abroad, interviews, exploring narratives and the culture portfolio is the process of constructing knowledge about a culture rather than simply accepting and absorbing facts. A constructivist approach gives students the option to choose a topic of interest to them, to explore culture by asking and answering their own questions and the time to compare information they find to personal life experiences. A constructivist approach is generally long-term, over the course of an entire semester or year, as students continually compile research and reexamine their growing understanding of the C2. Wright (2000) conducted research in his classroom comparing fact-based and constructivist approaches to teaching culture, using the Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) to measure the effectiveness of each approach. The CCAI predicts students' abilities to cross cultural boundaries efficiently based on "tolerance of ambiguity, nonjudgementalism, ethnorelativism regarding cultural difference and cognitive and behavioral flexibility," (p.331). It is unsurprising that the constructivist approach proved more effective in building cultural receptivity in students because it allowed them to make personal connections with other cultures by using their curiosity to motivate engagement and make comparisons to their own lives. Rather than positing culture as discrete facts that, once learned, can alone define a way of life, constructivism allows students to build and understanding of culture within the complex context of human experience.

BEYOND CURRENT PRACTICE: COMPLICATING CULTURE EDUCATION

The techniques and approaches above, outlined in the research literature, all have their place in world language classrooms. Thoughtful teachers engaging their students can build excitement and empathy for the C2. But if our goal is to teach students about culture, and if our working definition describes culture as a way of life, we have to help students recognize how complex this really is. That if culture has to do with how people are in the world, there can't just be one C2; there are many ways of existing, differing beliefs and dispositions even within one culture. We must help students understand culture as a part of the human experience; helping them to be aware of the way culture influences every person; teaching them to be skeptical of the broad generalizations of culture that limit how we understand the concept. Critical literacy can be a bridge between surface knowledge of the C2 and a more complex understanding of culture in general.

A Journey Towards Critical Literacy

Sometimes teaching is like creating a recipe. First you add ingredients you know will work, then you add some you think will work, but ultimately you just close your eyes, inhale the scents and add spices until it smells right. And sometimes, completely by accident, you make the best-tasting sauce of your life.

Fueled by the multitude of ideas I was encountering in professional literature, I began experimenting with new approaches to teaching culture in my classroom. One of the first activities I tried was watching the video, "Audio Slideshow: About Enduring Voices" from the Enduring Voices Project (National Geographic, 2011). The video raises questions about the connections between language and culture by asking, What is lost, other than words, when a language dies? This text, framed by this particular question, had the potential to address the fact that the students who enter my classroom

often saw culture as something different, something outside of themselves. My students accept the fact that different languages exist without one being better than the other. Maybe asking students to explore the connection between language and culture would be the necessary link for them to begin seeing culture in the same way.

I put the question to my students: What else dies when a language dies? We discussed before watching the video and after, and in our discussion I could already sense the shift the class was taking. With the help of this text, students realized that people would have to die in order for a language to go extinct, and so they began to consider histories, traditions and ways of life that could be lost with the loss of a people and a language. This one video and surrounding discussion planted a seed in students' minds and they began to understand culture as something, like language, that we all have. We all have stories and histories and traditions. And because we all have culture, we were able to further inspect the meaning of the word by examining what traditions or ways of life would be lost if our language died.

Not every student was convinced, and the students certainly didn't leave the classroom that day proclaiming the validity of all world cultures. But our discussion, begun and aided by this text, had fostered a conversation that forced us to examine culture in a new way. It was an invaluable experience. By breaking down preconceived notions about culture and language we would be able to build a new foundation upon which to explore the idea of culture with curiosity and open minds.

It was one of those teacher-aha!-moments when an existing idea—sometimes an obvious one—suddenly ignites new possibilities. If I wanted my students to build a complex understanding of culture we first would have to recognize, confront and question the perception of culture they already had. I needed to find other activities like the Enduring Voices Project video that would help us break down our preconceived notions of culture. I needed to think about why this activity worked and how I could repeat and extend it.

And that's when critical literacy became the secret ingredient in my culture instruction.

What is Critical Literacy?

Critical literacy is based on the assumption that every text—and "text" here is used broadly to incorporate anything that can be "read" from books to magazines and newspapers to television shows, movies, photographs, street signs, advertisements and beyond—is written from a point of view and is, therefore, fallible. Critical literacy is about examining the world, and all the texts we encounter within it, thoughtfully and skeptically, remembering that our interactions with text are influenced not only by author bias but by our personal experiences as well, insofar as they affect the way a text is read. According to Molden, (2007),

> [Critical literacy] asks us to second guess what we believe is true, ask harder and harder questions, see underneath, behind and beyond these texts, see how these texts establish and use power over us, over others, on whose behalf and in whose interest…[it allows us to] see the text from all angles, not just [believe] what is written down. (p. 50-51)

For Behrman (2006), critical literacy is a theory with implications for practice, not an instructional methodology. Behrman's definition highlights a challenge: it is the responsibility of teachers to take this theory and apply it, envisioning how it informs instructional practice. But the challenge of critical literacy is one of its strengths as well. In envisioning a critical curriculum, teachers have the space to use their knowledge of students, subject and community to decide the most appropriate critical practices for their classrooms.

Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008) describe "critical social practices" as disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on the sociopolitical and taking action to promote social justice, and describe a "critical stance" as consciously engaging, entertaining alternate ways of being, taking responsibility to inquire and being reflexive (p.6). The goal of the critical literacy curriculum, then, is to

use all the resources available within and outside the school walls to help students develop a critical stance and engage in critical social practices.

In an attempt to help teachers beginning to explore critical literacy approaches, Behrman conducted a literature review examining how teachers were applying critical literacy in lessons. His review "organiz[ed] the classroom practices into six broad categories based on student activities or tasks" that are consistent with Lewison, Leland and Harste. These practices echo throughout the critical practices suggested by other teacher-researchers and anchor my adapted curriculum:

> (1) reading supplementary texts,
> (2) reading multiple texts,
> (3) reading from a resistant perspective,
> (4) producing counter-texts,
> (5) conducting student-choice research projects, and
> (6) taking social action (Behrman, 2006, p. 492)

Because of my background as a reading teacher, I was intrigued by the idea of using critical literacy as a bridge to culture knowledge. And as a world language teacher, an important rationale for incorporating critical literacy into classroom instruction is that it allows me to take what I already teach and extend it. Many of the strategies currently used for teaching culture are perfect for a critical thinking element—most already use a variety of texts and some even allude to critical literacy practices. I don't have to learn a whole new set of strategies, purchase new materials or take more classes. I can get students to a complex understanding of culture by teaching them to read media portrayals of culture critically and with skepticism. I can teach them to beware of bias and stereotypes by learning how to read our own culture and compare what we learn to what we learn about different cultures. I can teach tolerance via lessons on multiple perspectives, openness to new ideas and exploring how different does not equal less.

In our 21st century world where media is instant and our students are constantly surrounded by texts depicting a variety of cultures, I found that critical literacy encourages students to learn more deeply about our target, Hispanic culture, but to also

think twice about what we know about any culture, to consider the "facts" presented in the news and recognize the stereotypes that frequently surround discussions about culture in general. Adding the ingredient of critical literacy teaches us to question everything we read in order to come to our own conclusions about the fairness and accuracy of those texts, to examine what our own beliefs about culture are, where those beliefs come from, and teach us to question everything we hear and all we think we know about culture.

Critical Literacy as a Bridge to Understanding Culture

I work from the philosophy that a culture curriculum is about more than teaching students ways of life in countries that speak the target language. Ultimately, a culture curriculum is about teaching students to learn, understand and accept ways of being and thinking that are different from their own, regardless of where in the world those ideas may originate. "Critical literacy begins in awareness, ends in social action, and, in between, supports us in envisioning a different world," (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2008). In critical literacy I found an ability to open my students' eyes and minds to culture in a way I had never managed to achieve before. As we examine text for bias, look for multiple perspectives and question what is presented to us as fact my students began to understand that culture is much more than discrete facts about a way of life: it is organic, evolutionary, and an integral part of our daily existence.

In my past two years researching and experimenting with the application of critical literacy in my classroom, it has become my tool for reaching my goals and supporting national standards to teach students a complex understanding of culture. Because it is more a philosophy than a strategy, there is no one way to "do" critical literacy. This presents an advantage because every teacher has the flexibility to make critical literacy work in the classroom based on his or her particular interests and students' needs. But the challenge is that broad philosophies are difficult to narrow down into manageable concepts upon which teachers can build a foundation.

In the following sections my goal is to provide examples of critical literacy in practice that teachers can use in adapting their own curricula. I hope to arm teachers with an arsenal of ideas they find as simple, effective and exciting as I have.

Building the Foundation for Critical Literacy

Before providing my one-year outline for culture study that has become my adapted culture curriculum, it is essential to discuss the foundation needed to support critical classrooms. There are themes across the research that I found critical to building the necessary foundation for incorporating critical literacy: establishing a classroom community, choosing meaningful texts, scaffolding, teaching questioning, examining multiple perspectives, and defining and adhering to a clear purpose.

Establishing a classroom community

In order to broaden students' understanding of culture I need to help my students learn to open their minds, be honest about their own experiences and feel comfortable doing both. Linda Christensen said that a classroom exploring critical literacy should be participatory, experiential, hopeful, joyful, kind and visionary; that students should be partners in learning (Golden, 2008). I found building a community to be a prerequisite for bringing critical literacy into the classroom because "students are more willing to take risks, make mistakes and learn more when they feel safe in a classroom" (Golden, 2008). Reading critically means opening oneself up to questions that can be uncomfortable and being completely honest and open-minded. Change is scary, and before I can ask my students to change their idea of culture, it is imperative that I make them feel safe enough to do so. I must implicate myself in the same way I ask of my students. I must be willing to take risks, make mistakes and be open to learning in new ways.

I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year having students get to know each other. We play the name game—which we all claim to be too old for but secretly love.

We do a variety of short partner activities and we switch seats at least once a week in the first weeks of the year.

Linda Christensen (Golden, 2008) and Mary Nicolini (2008) both recommend using writing to build their classroom community. Christensen asked her students to write about a time they stood up or a time they were treated unfairly and then share their writings with the class. She modeled and encouraged "listening with an empathetic heart," to this sharing of life experiences (p. 64). Nicolini used letter exchanges to give students a way to organize their thoughts on paper before sharing them publicly and as a way to bring in voices of students who didn't regularly contribute to discussion (p. 78). Nicolini also found that the "anonymous nature of the correspondence was liberating for the students, allowing them to express their ideas freely without reproach" (p. 78). Bringing Nicolini and Christensen's ideas into our class, giving students time to write their ideas down before sharing, either with their graphic organizers or with short journal responses to in-class activities or out-of-class examples, then giving students the opportunity to share their writing—anonymously, if they preferred—did help to create a safe, respectful and supportive classroom environment. It is no coincidence that in my classes where students have bonded the most the discussions are richer and insights deeper.

In addition to providing students the opportunity to get to know one another, I have found that it is equally important for me to get to know them, and to allow them to get to know me as well. I need to show my students that I will take part in anything I ask them to do. That I will be as respectful and open-minded as I expect them to be. That I will be the first person to be open and honest. And that I will always listen to their ideas and consider their thoughts as seriously as I consider my own. I have found that something as seemingly obvious as caring—and showing it by opening myself up—can make all the difference in building a trusting classroom community.

An added benefit of creating a classroom community is the fact that it models a critical perspective. Critical literacy is about giving voices to those who have been historically silenced, recognizing and changing power dynamics. What better way to model this than to challenge the power dynamic of the traditional classroom? To allow students choice in the classroom? To allow their voices to influence instruction? To give them ownership of the curriculum? If I want students to question everything they think they know about culture, then I have to be prepared for—and even encourage—their questioning me and what happens in our classroom.

Perhaps the most important reason for bringing nontraditional voices and perspectives into my classroom, not only voices of different cultures but also the voices of my students, is that it models the idea that "ours is not the only awareness out there" (Smith, 1999). Jonsberg's (2000) insight into traditional school climate shows us that "School as we know it pathologizes - treats as ABnormal - all who are not of the dominant class…and then we wonder why our students punish each other, just as we do, for failing to be 'normal'" (p. 28). Building a classroom community that supports critical literacy helps students to challenge the very premise of 'normal' by looking at how many different versions of 'normal' exist in the world and in our own classroom. In this environment the dominant culture no longer represents our only awareness. Students' new awareness changes the way they see themselves, their peers and individuals throughout the world, providing the foundation for them to take their learning outside the walls of our classroom.

Choosing meaningful texts

In *Creating Critical Classrooms*, Jerry Harste (2008) writes, "Teachers often complain to me that they cannot get good literature discussions going in their classrooms. They want to know the secret. The secret is, 'Read a book worth talking about'," (p.72). If a teacher wants to get his or her students thinking deeply, the topic and the literature

must be worth the effort. Few would argue the validity of motivational texts, but the challenge is that each class has its own dynamic and what is motivational to one is not necessarily motivational to another.

In my first year teaching I had a really quiet class. Although I would succeed in initiating discussions in other classes, these students would sit looking at me. In silence. Then, one day, I shared a segment I had heard on the morning news about the disproportionate number of African-Americans jailed in Iowa jails. This text resonated with my students who had strong opinions on the subject. The class erupted. Students were debating the very premise of the story, asking questions about why something like this would happen or why we should care if it does.

There were certainly other factors during my first year teaching that would affect the success of class discussions. But a big one, I discovered, was the importance of finding the right text for that particular group of students.

We can't always know what will support our students' learning while sparking their interest. But anyone who has fallen in love with a story knows that engaging with the right texts can help us change the way we see the world. So how do teachers find those powerful texts for their students? In an interview with John Golden about critical literacy, Linda Christensen makes four suggestions, (1) use texts that reflect students' interests and needs, (2) look for texts that include the voices of all members of our diverse society, (3) chose texts in which characters overcome obstacles to change, and (4) find texts that force us to consider new perspectives or "rethink our world" (Golden, 2008).

Two of the ACTFL (2006) standards for foreign language learning, Cultures and Comparisons, heavily stress students' examination of the relationship between culture and daily practices as well as comparing students' own culture to the culture studied. Christensen's suggestions not only support critical literacy but also fit incredibly well with a culture curriculum whose goal is to help students open their mind to new cultures.

Reading texts from a variety of voices helps us look at culture from many angles, using texts in which characters overcome obstacles to change demonstrates for students that they don't have to accept the status quo for perceptions of culture in our society. Texts that force us to rethink our world are critical to a classroom that hopes to shift students' perceptions. Christensen's advice to look for texts that reflect students' interests and needs also connected to what my own experience had shown me that connecting school to students' personal lives increases motivation and achievement.

Choosing meaningful texts is not only about student engagement, however. It is also about finding texts—especially at the beginning of the year when students are still learning about what it means to question a text and read critically—that lend themselves to the kinds of activities that promote reading from a critical stance. As teachers continue to read about critical literacy and explore the activities that follow, think about how the available texts could fit with those activities. In addition to Christensen's recommendations, critical classrooms take advantage of texts that already include multiple points of view to begin teaching students about the idea of perspective and how to read critically (Behrman, 2006; Clark & Whitney, 2009; Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2008). Texts written from multiple perspectives give students a model for looking at a topic from all sides and, in the next section, I describe how beginning the year with models for student thinking is so important to helping students internalize reading from a critical stance.

I look for texts everywhere. Books, magazines, the Internet, television, news sources, local and national radio stations have all become resources for my classroom. I look and listen for texts that catch my attention in some way, whether because they make me angry, they teach me something new, discuss current political controversy or are simply entertaining. Then, before choosing to bring a text into my classroom, I ask myself if the text is current, if students would have heard about or interacted with it, if it challenges us to consider new perspectives, and if it could help us transform what we

believe and extend our knowledge. Ultimately, I look for texts we can examine, question and challenge; that lead us to new perspectives, a better understanding of culture, the world and our place in both.

Scaffolding every part of the process

The first year I began using critical literacy as a bridge to teaching culture I interspersed reading activities with regular instruction somewhat randomly. There were weeks where we finished a chapter on a Wednesday so I decided to use Thursday and Friday for culture activities, or days we had extra time at the end of class, or sometimes a really interesting news story would steer our discussion for that day's class. The way my students' looked at and talked about culture absolutely changed that year, but there was a lack of cohesion to our learning. It seemed that some days students were on a roll and other days our discussions—even about incredibly provocative topics—seemed less engaged.

Scaffolding is integral to any teaching, and new strategies for culture education are no different. Critical thinking does happen organically, but it is finessed with instruction that helps students not only recognize critical thinking but learn how to apply a critical lens in various situations. Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar's research on scaffolded instruction (1986) proposed that scaffolding could be used to make a "task simpler, thereby enabling success with the endeavor" (p. 2). In Palincsar's research, students had "greater awareness of what strategy they had been taught, the contexts in which it should be used and how to employ the strategy" (p. 5). I want students to own their newfound strategies of questioning and reading critically and Palincsar's research provides a method for teaching them to do so.

As described by Palincsar, scaffolded instruction follows three basic steps. First the teacher models the strategy for students. Second, the teacher encourages students to participate as she models. She builds understanding of the strategy from students' current

knowledge, "[receiving what the students offer, [recasting] their offering and [evaluating] their understanding" (p. 17). Third, students are encouraged to participate more and to do so without being prompted until students have become the teachers, initiating, questioning and clarifying, and the teacher only intercedes "for the purpose of restoring direction to the dialog" (p. 20-21).

There were two essential pieces of information about scaffolding for me to remember in order to build a foundation for critical literacy in my classroom. The first key factor was remembering that every activity requires at least some scaffolding. If I want students to have a discussion, to read a text from multiple perspectives, to look for examples of culture in our society, or to question, or do research and more, then I have to give them the tools to do so. I have to model the skill and give students ample time to practice it. Once I finally internalized the need for scaffolding at every step of the process I began experimenting with strategies for scaffolding my students through the work of learning to read critically. I combined my personal experience with what I had read from Palinscar and also from McLaughlin & DeVoogd (2004) who emphasize the importance of scaffolding in their work as well, though describe it slightly differently as a five-step process where teachers and students "explain, demonstrate, guide, practice and reflect" (p. 56). I started to think of scaffolding in my classroom as a continuum from beginning to end of the year with four essential layers.

First, I follow both Palinscar and McLaughlin & DeVoog's process for scaffolded instruction, moving from modeling, to guided large-group practice, to guided small-group practice, to individual practice. Each step releases a little more responsibility to students until students, rather than the teacher, are directing learning. Teachers become guides who encourage and support students' own discoveries.

Secondly, I move from concrete concepts at the beginning of the year to more abstract concepts towards the middle and end of the year. For example, asking a student to look at the complexities of an issue like immigration in the United States simply won't

work in August. Abstract concepts like the economic factors involved in immigration and the nuances of immigration law—like search, seizure and deportation differences across the country—are more than a little mind-boggling. Instead, I always begin the year talking about gender differences in our culture. This is a conversation all of my students can participate in because it is something we all have experience with—it is more concrete, easier to grasp. Furthermore, the abstract factors we discuss relating to culture all year, such as the influence of the media or how personal experience can shape our understanding and behavior, can almost always be related back to gender. Beginning with a more concrete concept like gender allows students to build a foundation for learning how to think critically and for understanding more abstract concepts later in the year.

The third and fourth layers are very much related. I move from fiction to non-fiction texts and from game-like activities to research-based activities. In my experience, both fiction and non-fiction texts have been equally valuable in teaching students how to think and read critically. However, if we are talking about the culture curriculum, we have to teach our students how to think critically about non-fiction as they question how culture is portrayed in our society and how those portrayals affect our perceptions and actions. The most significant reason I begin the year with fiction and games, then, has to do with the classroom community. At the beginning of the year students are much less likely to feel comfortable sharing and discussing research and non-fiction because it often means sharing personal experiences or opinions which, as we know, requires a lot of trust in both the teacher and classmates that needs to be established over time. It is much safer to discuss multiple perspectives in a fairy tale than in local news headlines. Another factor in beginning the year with fiction and games relates back to the idea of beginning with concrete versus abstract concepts.

Allow me to digress for just a moment to insert here one of the extra benefits of bringing critical literacy with fiction and non-fiction texts into world language

classrooms. We know this practice supports the ACTFL standards for foreign language learning. But in addition, this practice supports national standards. Jennifer Soalt demonstrates how "reading preferences and interest in a particular genre create the initial purpose and momentum for reading, and the common topic acts as a bridge to the other less immediately compelling genre, which the student might end up appreciating more deeply" (2005). My 8th graders love it when I read stories aloud to them at the beginning of the year. I have seen how their motivation with the use and analysis of fictional texts could be work as a bridge for analyzing non fiction texts in the same way. I also agreed with Soalt (2005) that "fluid movement between genres helps children become more sophisticated and diverse readers who are prepared to encounter a variety of genres of discourse in school, home and eventually the working world," (p. 681). Producing sophisticated and diverse readers is only one way critical literacy ties to national and state standards by connecting to all subject areas, allowing students "multiple modes of expression," integrating technology and exposing students to various kinds of texts (Molden, 2007).

One might infer how these layers must all work together. Choosing the right texts makes the layering much more intuitive. Teachers can imagine how beginning the year with *The Three Little Pigs* and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* could include modeling, discussing the multiple perspectives that are made concrete by the contrasting stories, and game-like activities like character interviews. But if you are someone who might struggle to imagine how these layers intertwine, the one-year outline for critical literacy should help you imagine how this kind of layering could work in your classroom. Note in the highlighted layer and month (in red) for each activity in the outline. And finally, as I mentioned above, the critical element in scaffolding is to remember that every activity teachers expect students to engage in needs some form of scaffolding. These layers have worked for me, but these suggestions could take slightly different shapes in your classes.

The second key factor for scaffolding in the classroom was remembering that scaffolded instruction is intended to help students direct their own learning. In my classroom the most noticeable changes in learning happened when I had the courage to step back. After all, how can students practice thinking critically if I am always telling them what to think? To say I was amazed at what sophisticated thinking students could engage in would be a gross understatement. I never knew what they were capable of because I had frequently stifled their voices, not allowing them the chance to take the reins and lead us in a process of discovery that was within our curriculum but related directly to their interests and experiences.

Teaching questioning

Questioning is the natural companion of a critical curriculum in which students are encouraged to accept nothing and challenge everything. In creating and phrasing questions that connect to their own background knowledge, students read deeply and construct meaning from a text in ways that make sense to them (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). This does present one of the struggles with teaching questioning: as students construct their own meaning from a text they might not get to the meaning that we, as teachers, expect. As guides for student learning we can certainly introduce our own theories and thoughts in discussions. But I had to learn to be okay with the fact that sometimes our interpretations would take a direction I didn't expect. I will say, though, that as I released responsibility for directing discussion to students and gave students the space to ask their own questions they often surpassed my expectations. Eventually students almost always did mention the points I would have mentioned myself. But the fact that *they* had raised the point made it more meaningful and empowered students to find the strength in their own voice.

Questioning, then, becomes a tool for comprehension itself as well as supporting critical thinking skills. When I scaffolded my students to questioning texts on their own

the students could better identify, understand and discuss the many complex issues related to understanding culture and where our ideas about culture come from. Furthermore, listening to students' questions and answers allows a teacher to gauge the understandings students are pulling from a text and help us plan further instruction (to extend or redirect) depending on the direction students take.

I started by explaining to students that in order to understand a text and the ways that texts influence us, we have to read everything like detectives, trying to uncover all obvious or hidden meaning in the text, often referring back to Molden's defintion of critical literacy as looking at a text from all angles (Molden, 2007). The idea of detective work resonated with my 8th grade students and the concrete concept helped them understand that every fact is open to interpretation.

I then followed Bourke's (2008) suggestion to model questioning for my students with fairy tales. I provided my students with the list of questions below, which I complied after seeing them recur frequently in literature about critical literacy:

> Who is in the story?
> Whose Voices are missing…or marginalized?
> What does the author want readers to believe?
> Whose viewpoint is expressed?
> Whose voices are silenced or discounted?
> How might alternative perspectives be represented?
> Why has the composer of the text represented the characters in a particular way?
> What view of the world is the text presenting?
> How else could the text have been written? (Nicolini, 2008)
>
> Given what the author has already told us, how do you think (character's name) will handle this situation?
> What is the author's message?
> That's what the author says, but what does it mean? (Beck, 1996)
>
> Whose values are being promoted in these different versions? (Behrman, 2006)
>
> How does the text depict age, gender and/or cultural groups?
> What different interpretations of the text are possible?
> How would we read the text differently if we switched: the gender of the characters? The theme of the story? The setting? The clothing of the characters? The ethnicity/race of the characters? The language of the characters? (Molden, 2007)

We discussed the questions as a class. I asked students to consider why we might ask the questions, which questions seemed most useful across a wide variety of contexts, which questions seemed specific to certain contexts and which questions were confusing. Over and over again I reminded students that questioning helps us fully understand a text and how it might influence on our thinking, and that we practice questioning frequently in our class because our ultimate goal is to consider how various texts describing culture in our society might influence our thinking about culture in particular. I can't over-emphasize the importance of reminding students of our purpose frequently, so they understood how each activity is part of an overarching culture curriculum rather than an isolated event. I also reminded students that this list of questions was only a beginning; that it served to help us practice but I reminded them they would come up with their own questions as well that might be even more meaningful and useful to our culture study.

I began by reading fairy tales aloud to my classes. During and after reading we practiced questioning together and I challenged students to, again, think like detectives and try to uncover the overt and hidden messages in the stories. We practiced questioning together as a large group over the course of two or three weeks. It amazed me how sophisticated some students' questions became, as well as their answers to those questions. When able to generate their own questions based on their personal experiences and interests students were able to bring their voices clearly to our discussions and shape new understanding of the texts. Students then moved into small groups to question fairy tales of their choosing and share their expanded understanding of the text with the class. Towards the middle of the year students were able to apply their questioning to texts outside our classroom as they engaged in individual research projects.

It is important to mention here that if a teacher is going to expect students to think critically and skeptically and question everything, the teacher has to be comfortable with students questioning the very activities that occur in the classroom as well as the

curriculum itself. We cannot say that all questions are meaningful tools for learning and then restrict the questions we allow students to ask. But this is scary! Opening up a classroom to students' personal experiences and thoughts to question our understanding of the world and interpret and discuss texts can raise controversial issues that may not be appropriate depending on your school setting. Don't let this deter you. Let my failures and successes with controversial student statements, which I discuss in the next section, help you consider how you might re-frame statements like these to make them learning tools. Often acknowledging the power of student questions but reminding them of our purpose in our particular classrooms is enough to redirect discussion while avoiding undermining students or stifling the courage they are beginning to find in their own voice.

Examining multiple perspectives

Though discussed earlier, the usefulness of texts with multiple perspectives is important enough to warrant more detail here. In their article, "Walking in Their Shoes: Using Multiple-Perspectives Texts as a Bridge to Critical Literacy" (2009), Lane W. Clarke and Erin Whitney suggest that texts which clearly demonstrate multiple perspectives can be a powerful resource for helping students internalize critical literacy strategies. I strongly agree. One of my goals in using critical literacy as a strategy for teaching culture is to help students understand that no one culture has a monopoly on the 'right' way to live. Looking for and examining multiple perspectives often forces us to put ourselves in anothers' shoes, which as Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008) point out, "is sometimes unpleasant…especially if we do not approve of that person's actions. But this might be where understanding and tolerance begin," (p.99). In my experience, there hasn't been a better way to help students recognize a variety of ways of life and see them as equal than teaching students to first recognize that multiple, valid perspectives exist in the texts we come into contact with in our everyday lives. When students can connect the

idea of cultural differences with the idea that there are at least two sides to every story, they form a strong foundation from which to examine new ideas and ways of life thoughtfully and respectfully.

A text with multiple perspectives can be as simple as a story with more than one narrator. Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008) recommend the book *Seedfolks*, which not only tells the story of a community garden with 11 vignettes from 11 different points of view, but also addresses cultural differences as each of the characters has a different cultural background. I spent one quarter reading one to two vignettes aloud a week, and as students examined the ways different characters reacted to the community garden the stories spurred conversations about differences of opinions in our own community, thereby connecting the idea of multiple perspectives (from the story) to real life (differences of opinions in our own community). Multiple perspectives can also be in two opposing texts, like two news stories about immigration—both factual—but with clearly opposing viewpoints. Students are forced to confront the idea that truth is not one-sided.

Many teacher-researchers exploring critical literacy use examining multiple perspectives as a strategy for helping students to read and think critically. In his work to bring critical literacy into his classroom, Ryan Bourke (2008) asked his first-graders to look for missing perspectives in familiar fairy tales. His class used questioning as a strategy examine the validity of the very premise of each story: Were the "bad guys" really so bad? Did the bad guys have feelings? Was it okay to ignore them? Similar to Bourke's work, Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan and Worthy (1996) asked teachers and students to use a strategy called Questioning the Author to construct meaning from texts, and demonstrated how questioning can successfully assist students in looking at a text from multiple perspectives.

Combining these ideas from my research, my students and I engaged in a critical literacy lesson that has become one of my favorites. We begin by re-telling the story of

The Three Little Pigs together. I ask students to look at our re-telling with two questions in mind: (1) Which character(s) tell the traditional story of the three little pigs? and (2) Which characters don't get a fair chance to tell their side of the story?

We then read *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, a counter narrative told from the wolf's point of view. The students enjoyed discussing familiar fairy tales from their childhood and were also enthusiastic about questioning those fairy tales to looking for perspectives that might have been missing. We moved on to Cinderella, this time with students taking on the roles of different characters, acting out the story as I narrated. After acting out the story we borrowed the idea of the "character chair" from Sandy Kniseley, an activity in which "students answer questions as if they were the characters from books" (Allington & Johnston, 2002, p. 120). We invited the characters (student actors) to our classroom 'talk show', and the 'audience' used what we had learned about questioning to interview each character. Our goal was to discover parts of the story or perspectives of characters that Cinderella, as the main character, might have left out.

Students who were actors had to look at the Cinderella story from a different angle in order to create a back-story for their character and answer the audience's questions. The rest of the class, the audience, quite literally saw and heard the different perspectives within the text as they created and had their questions answered. This activity is almost always a huge success in building a foundation early in the year for us to relate back to as we talk about differences between cultures. When we encounter a new idea and students say things like, "That's weird!" or "Why would you do that?" it is easy for me to say, "Remember *Cinderella* and *The Three Little Pigs*?" and make a connection between our self-centeredness and the self-centeredness of Cinderella and the Pigs, only thinking about one side of the story.

Defining and adhering to a clear purpose

I mentioned earlier that Linda Christensen emphasized in an interview with John Golden (2008) that a critical classroom should be "participatory, experiential, hopeful, joyful, kind and visionary," where students and teachers are partners in learning and, in addition, a critical curriculum "examines society to help students understand how things came to be," (p.60). Christensen's goals reflect so much of the research literature on critical literacy that they are worth repeating here. In order to achieve this kind of classroom experience, students must be aware of and committed to purposes for learning. I start every culture lesson, regardless of activity, reminding students of the purpose of culture study in our classroom: open eyes, open minds. I emphasize again and again how important it is to be open to and understand ideas and ways of living different from our own—no matter where in the world those ideas and ways of living come from. I remind students that we practice opening our eyes and minds by reading our world critically, examining our own beliefs about culture and dissecting where those beliefs come from. I also frequently invite students to share their own opinions about culture study, whether they agree with its importance or disagree. Conversations about the purpose of culture study that encourage multiple perspectives only support a critical curriculum and motivate student participation by showing them their voices matter.

Stating and re-stating our purpose was essential for many reasons. It helped my students and I to see the trajectory of our learning, understanding that each activity or lesson was one in a progression that would take us to our goal. It was also an incredibly useful tool for dealing with controversies that can arise when students are given a safe place to share ideas and opinions.

As you will read in the one-year culture outline, most of my activities with students in the first half of our year have to do with studying culture in our own, immediate communities. One set of activities helps students recognize and question the initial reactions we have to people who, for whatever reason, are different from us. We

ask why our these first reactions might be positive or negative, and students often uncover subtle influences in our community that affect our subconscious and our reactions without us ever realizing it. Later in the year, when we ask the same questions of our reactions towards different cultures, students have a strong foundation to work from. The more abstract study of attitudes about cultural differences is easier due to our more concrete study of our home community.

But these lessons can get messy. In one such lesson, as we discussed how our perceptions of people are often based on first impressions that may or may not be accurate and are often related to, if not based on, stereotypes, one student raised his hand to share an observation: "Yeah, it's like when you see a guy who's all, like, dressed different and talks funny, you might think he's gay even though he's not." This one simple statement was packed full of insight as well as multiple problematic stereotypes. Ten other hands shot up in the same split-second that it took for my heart to start racing.

Not only did I know the topic of homosexuality was taboo in our school district, I also knew that allowing this conversation to continue could quickly spawn a conversation about personal beliefs that could be detrimental to our classroom community. On the other hand, the student had raised a fair point, and in a critical classroom I felt it was wrong to avoid difficult topics solely because they could be controversial. After all, "Complexity is messy and at times, unruly, but so is the world," (Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2008). Furthermore, if I stifled his voice, why would he want to participate again? So, what now?

I fell back to our purpose. I interrupted the conversation before other students could respond and cautioned my students: "Remember, our goal is to think about why we might have negative reactions to people who are different from us. I want to make it very clear that while we are discussing these ideas we are not discussing what we personally believe to be right and wrong. Remember, we are acting like detectives and scientists studying human behavior related to culture. We all know that many people have strong

opinions about homosexuality, and while I think those opinions are important and valid, our classroom today is not the place to have that discussion. Please keep our purpose in mind before responding."

And students did. A potentially inflammatory topic was sidestepped without undermining students' voices or belittling the power of this particular student's observation. "The way we interact with children and arrange for them to interact shows them what kinds of people we think they are and gives them opportunities to practice being those kinds of people," (Johnston, 2004). If a teacher avoids controversial issues or silences student voices when those issues arise, the message to students is "I can't trust you," or "You are not capable of engaging in intelligent conversation about difficult topics." However, teachers do have to walk the line between acknowledging student thoughts and opinions and challenging school policies or community expectations. I cannot overstate the power of a clear purpose to help in situations like these that will inevitably arise when students are encouraged to think critically about their world—especially about new cultures and ideas. By re-directing students to the class purpose, the implicit message to students becomes "I trust you," and "You are capable of engaging in intelligent conversation about difficult topics, *but right now I need your thoughtful insights to guide our learning by focusing on the topic at hand*."

Every so often I am also faced with fairly insensitive student questions. A common one is something along the lines of "Why should we let Mexicans come to the US if they're just going to deal drugs?" It is difficult, sometimes, to be patient with questions and attitudes like these. By the time we reach our in-depth study of immigration it is the end of the year and questions like these make me wonder if my instruction has been at all effective. But again, I fall back to the purpose of culture study to help put this in perspective—and if you find yourself in a similar situation, here are the thoughts that help me do so.

First of all, culture study is all about exposing ourselves to new ideas. The key word here is *new*. Students' questions are sometimes insensitive because they are simply ignorant. Secondly, if students are asking questions, it means they are *questioning*! I remind myself that they probably have internalized many negative stereotypes about immigrants (or culture in general) that result from the media and attitudes within our community that they most likely have not questioned in the past—but now they are questioning them. This is wonderful because, as Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008) write, "[Tension] is often seen as something to be avoided at any cost [but] to us, tension is a plus that goes hand in hand with diversity and difference and opens up spaces for more voices to be heard," (p. 67). Finally, if students are questioning we can have the discussions in our classroom that help dispel negative stereotypes by thinking critically about our own opinions. I would much rather have negative attitudes arise in my classroom where we can discuss them rather than having those attitudes go unquestioned and negatively influence students' interactions with different cultures in the future.

A clear purpose also helps me, as the teacher, stay on track despite the exciting digressions that are an inevitable result of student-centered instruction. It is just as easy for me to get caught up in the many different and exciting paths students' ideas take. My students often help me see something I never considered before, I want to hear more of their thoughts, have every discussion, go down every path; the energy of discovery in the classroom is intoxicating. I don't want to imply that this is negative in any way. Considering the importance and motivational value of using students' voices and life experiences becomes a valuable starting point for learning in the classroom (Johnston, 2004; Lewison, Lelang & Harste, 2008). But every teacher feels the time pressure and having a clear purpose allows me to always hold it in mind and think about how to channel that energy of discovery towards our goal. When students' ideas take us on a tangent, I am guided by the following principles:

1) I remind myself of our goal of thinking critically about culture,

2) I ask myself if I can use this tangent in a critical literacy lesson about culture instead of another activity I have planned.

3) If the answers to these questions are 'yes', I run with it. But if not, I remind myself that sometimes we have to simply leave an idea, no matter how exciting, and redirect the course of discussion to stay focused on our goal.

THE ADAPTED CULTURE CURRICULULM

Notes on the Organization of Curriculum

In this section I walk teachers through culture study in my 8th grade Spanish 1 classroom. I explain how I've broken culture study into manageable sections, the timing and sequencing of activities, and how students and I track the changes in our thinking over the course of the year. I also emphasize the importance of critical literacy outside the world language classroom and remind teachers that this curriculum is filled with suggestions, not mandates. Finally, I will provide my one-year culture outline, explaining each set of activities in detail, defining our purposes and sequencing as well as highlighting the ACTFL standards and research that support these practices. I connect my classroom practices to current practices in culture education to demonstrate the way critical literacy fits into and extends current practice rather than adding on to the many expectations teachers already have to meet on a daily basis.

Breaking down culture study into manageable pieces.

In order to reach our goal of understanding culture with open eyes and open minds, I mentally organize our year-long culture study into three parts: (1) Activities that introduce students to culture study, (2) Activities that help students discover and strengthen their critical lenses, and (3) Activities that apply our critical lenses to understanding culture within and outside our community, promoting open eyes and open minds. These three parts, outlined below, are sequential from the beginning to the end of the year, and each is comprised of sets of activities sharing a common purpose. Each set of activities is one in a progression of activities that scaffold students to achieving our overarching goal.

Timing and sequencing.

I never know how long a set of activities is going to take. Sometimes students are excited about a new idea and have a lot to discuss, while other activities we work through quickly. Rather than thinking of each activity as one day, I try instead to decide in which month I want to complete a set of activities. I only do culture activities once a week, so this gives me some flexibility if a certain set of activities spans two or three days—which is two or three weeks in my classroom. Also, even though our year-long outline is in three parts, I think of parts 1 and 2 as the first half of the year and part 3 as the second half, as these activities need more time because they necessitate research as well as more in-depth questions, discussions and discoveries.

Tracking the progression.

Because our culture study is all about scaffolding, progressions and new discoveries, it helps to have a way to track the way our thinking about culture changes from the beginning to the end of the year—especially because students' final project is a portfolio that asks them to reflect on their growth. I ask students to save one notebook for culture study, and to use that notebook for all of our activities about culture, including the times I ask them to jot down ideas or track ideas outside of class. This notebook is an essential tool for their individual research projects and culture portfolio at the end of the year, when they use all they have learned to make new observations.

Outside the world language classroom.

While I created this culture curriculum for my world language class, one could argue that a culture curriculum is important in any subject. Paulo Freire (1970) argues that the search for knowledge in any field can begin with culture study: "As [students] discuss the world of culture, they express their level of awareness of reality, in which various themes are implicit," (p. 105). While courses within the social sciences might lend themselves more obviously to incorporating a culture curriculum, any course that

encourages critical thinking and seeks to empower students to learn independently through thoughtful observation and analysis could benefit from at least one of the activities below, and likely all of the activities, albeit in adapted plans that relate directly to the subject area. I encourage any teacher to look at the yearlong outline below and alter the plans in ways that make them meaningful and purposeful for his or her course and students.

Suggestions, not mandates.

I again emphasize that while I share the ways critical literacy has come to impact my students and I, I write from an understanding that no one strategy or set of strategies will work for all teachers and all students. I share with you what worked in my classroom. But I implore teachers to take the ideas they like, leave the ones they don't and adapt what they need for this to work for them and their students.

Coda

As readers continue into the final sections that outline the details of my adapted curriculum, I leave them with this anecdote from a former student, perhaps the most telling measure of the success of the curriculum I describe.

"Hailey," a student from my second year teaching, came to visit me a few months ago at the end of her sophomore year of high school. She brought a plaque she had made in her advanced pottery course. "Señorita M.," she said, "I made this for you!" The plaque was glazed white and had words like "discrimination," "stereotypes," "fear," and "hatred" etched around the edges, barely legible because the white glaze painted over the background had seeped into the cracks and camouflaged them. In the middle, the word "Equality" was spelled out in large, bright, capital letters. "See," she explained, "the different colors are for all the shades of diversity and if we have equality, everything standing against diversity—like those words—get blocked out."

Each year I explain to my students the goals I hope to achieve before our time together comes to an end: That their minds are open to new ideas and ways of living. That their eyes open to the stereotypes about culture so easily internalized and so rarely questioned. Hailey's plaque is a reflection of the power of critical literacy to help achieve these goals. As an added layer to the culture curriculum, critical literacy provides students with the potential for moving beyond working knowledge of one particular new culture to a lasting, changed attitude towards world cultures in general.

Critical literacy offers students new lenses with which to view the world. With these skills, students are empowered to see multiple points of view, question what they believe to be true, and build empathy for people who may seem quite different. Current practices to teach culture in world language classrooms provide students knowledge about new ideas and ways of life, but I contend that we need one more layer. What is the ultimate goal of a culture curriculum? If teachers hope to instill in students the ability to look at a person from *any* culture with curiosity and respect, and to learn about culture without a sense superiority or inferiority, then even the enthusiasm and wonder created by current practices isn't enough. We must also offer students the time and practice needed to come to their own understanding of new cultures. We must provide them a place and strategies for thoughtful inquiry and exploration that emphasizes deconstructing the preconceived notions about culture that can interrupt or even stall our learning about new people and places. We must, through our classroom instruction, offer students the chance to become thoughtful, respectful world citizens.

A One-Year Outline for Teaching Culture

The brief outline in Figure 1 introduces orients teachers to culture study in my classroom. Visualizing the entire curriculum in a glance allows readers to place the detailed descriptions of parts, sets and activities that follow in the next section within the context of daily instruction.

Part One: Introducing students to culture study.
Set one: Language walk.
Set two: Enduring voices video.
Set three: What is culture?
Activity A: Boys and girls.
Activity B: Whose culture?
Activity C: Culture questions part one.

Part Two: Discovering and Strengthening our Critical Lenses.
Set One: Perspective and critical literacy.
Activity A: Cinderella and The Three Little Pigs.
Activity B: Gender in children's books.
Set Two: Origin of attitudes about gender and influences on behavior.
Activity A: Gender scavenger hunt.
Activity B: "Tough Guise" video.
Set Three: Origin of attitudes about culture and influences on behavior.
Activity A: Good guys/bad guys.
Activity B: Culture in pop-culture.

Part Three: Applying our Critical Lenses: Open Eyes & Open Minds.
Set One: Influenced By and Influencing Our Own Culture.
Activity A: Advertising and perspective.
Activity B: "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" article.
Activity C: Relating to minority cultures.
Activity D: What does it mean to be _____?
Set Two: Empathizing with "the other."
Activity A: Whose truth? Thanksgiving and Columbus Day.
Activity B: myimmigrationstory.com
Set Three: Hispanics in the U.S.A.
Activity A: How is Hispanic culture perceived/received?
Activity B: Immigration law and deceptions in the media.
Activity C: "Under the Same Moon" video.
Set Four: Individual research projects.
Activity A: Culture questions part two.
Activity B: Perception of culture in our community.
Activity C: Public service announcement.
Set Five: Culture Portfolio

Figure 1: A One-Year Outline for Teaching Culture

Language Walk: Part One, Set One

The purpose of the Language Walk (Figure 2) is to begin to establish the community of critical thinkers within the classroom that is essential to a classroom engaging in critical literacy (Jonsberg, 2000; Golden, 2008). My students and I usually engage in this activity in the first week of school and the puzzle of the languages gets student interacting and helping each other right away. In this activity I show students I am willing to step back from the 'teacher as director' role as students have the freedom to organize information in a way that makes sense to them. Choice Worlds Quote This establishes from the very beginning of the year that their thoughts and opinions matter not only to me but to the learning of the entire class. Finally, the language walk invites students to wear the identity of objective researchers—an identity they will use and need to be comfortable with for the rest of the year.

Enduring Voices Video: Part One, Set Two

Two of the goals of a critical curriculum are helping students learn that every 'truth' is told from a certain perspective, and that in order to build a comprehensive understanding of any topic we need to question the beliefs we hold as well as the beliefs shared with us. The Enduring Voices Video activity (Figure 3) supports both of these goals well: as the video informs students about language extinction, students are asked to question the belief that language extinction is a natural and acceptable part of our progressing world, and as speakers and researchers of dying languages share their stories and experiences students are exposed to many perspectives about language extinction. Teachers of critical literacy, like Clark (2009) and Behrman (2006) suggest using texts with multiple perspectives to promote reading critically. The conversations I have experienced with students following watching the video have continued moving students towards these goals as they often share their own opinions and we, as a class, discuss our own experiences and ask our own questions as we try to form our understanding of the

The Language Walk Activity in Detail

Before class: Post posters with the word "friend" around the room in ten different languages, including English. Each poster should have a number. These languages should represent different parts of the world and different alphabets.

For students: Students should have a handout with ten numbered boxes and a list of the ten languages used. (See Appendix A for an example)

During class, Part 1: Give students about five minutes to attempt to match the words around the room with the name of the language it is written in. Then have a discussion addressing the following questions:

Which languages are similar?
Which languages are very different?
What do they think the words mean?

During class, Part 2:

Teach students what a "linguist" is. Tell students their job is to be professors of linguistics. Together as a class they are going to decide how to teach students about different languages that exist in the world and explain why and how certain languages are related. Are there families of languages? If so, how could we categorize them? Why might language families exist?

Supports ACTFL Standards: Connections (3.2) and Comparisons (4.1)
Builds Upon Current Practices: The themes of ethnography and constructivism
Suggested Timeframe: August
Scaffolding Layers: Large group practice, concrete concepts, non-fiction and games

Figure 2: Detailed Description of Part One, Set One

situation. And when students observe and internalize how much culture is lost when languages die, students are introduced to the argument so many researchers have made that culture study is an integral part of language instruction (Arens, 2010; Kramsch, 1986).

What is Culture? Part One, Set Three

The main purpose of these activities (Figure 4) is to build a foundation for scaffolding students through culture study. Connections are established between understanding similarities, differences and expectations in gender (something relatively concrete that students are familiar with) and similarities, differences and expectations in culture (something relatively abstract that students are unfamiliar with). These kinds of comparisons and connections are incredibly important in learning to understand new

The Enduring Voices Video Activity in Detail

The connection between language and culture is difficult to understand. It's an abstract concept, particularly for students who have never had the opportunity to immerse themselves in another language or culture. The Enduring Voices Video (National Geographic, 2011) does a nice job of raising questions about the connections between language and culture by asking: What else is lost, other than words, wh›en a language dies?

- **Before viewing**: Students jotted down their thoughts after being prompted with two questions: Are language and culture connected? Why or why not? and What happens when a language dies? What do we lose? After a brief time for students to collect their thoughts, we shared and discussed our ideas as a group.
- **During viewing**: Students were encouraged to continue thinking like researchers and add to the list they began at the beginning of class as they watched the video.
- **After viewing**: Large group discussion about student observations. We also asked the question, "Why is this conversation important?" Students almost always hit on the important key points like whether or not it is right for Americans to expect immigrants to speak only English, American stereotypes of immigrants and immigration, and the connection between language study and culture study.

Supports ACTFL Standards: Cultures (2.1), Connections (3.2), and Comparisons (4.1)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Narratives, Photographs, Interviews and the themes of ethnography, technology and constructivism
Suggested Timeframe: August
Scaffolding Layers: Large group practice, abstract concepts, non-fiction and research

Figure 3: Detailed Description of Part One, Set Two

cultures, and will extend and deepen throughout the year as students build up from this foundation (Bush, 2007; Calvin, 2005; Kearney, 2010, Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005; Tang, 2006). Each activity presents an opportunity to talk about the purpose of culture study in the classroom, and as students internalize the purposes and get a feel for what culture study will feel like, these activities help them continue to understand and wear the identity of researchers and critical thinkers—quote about choice words. This set of activities also moves from large group to small group to individual practice and back again, giving students many opportunities to share their thoughts in ways that are both comfortable for them and help them understand the place their voices have in the classroom.

What is Culture? Activities in Detail

Activity A: Boys & Girls

- Students split into small groups and each group brainstorms answers to one of the following questions:
  - What does it mean to be male?
  - What does it mean to be female?
- Make a t-chart as a large group. Emphasize the importance of thinking like researchers and attempting to make a list that is as complete and scientific as possible.

Activity B: Whose culture?

- Ask students, "Who has culture?" Student answers and resulting discussion usually leads to the fact that we often consider culture to be something that 'other' people have, but that we actually all have culture.
- Students work on creating a poster that answers the question, "What does it mean to be a (student's last name)?" Encourage students to look back at the lists we made about gender to help them come up with ideas.
- Share student posters. Encourage students to teach us about their culture as if they were the researchers in the Enduring Voices Project, discussing cultures that most people don't know about or understand.

Activity C: Culture Questions

- Take out the class t-chart on gender and have students take out their personal culture posters. As a class, use all of the information to attempt to make a set of questions that, if asked, would help us understand any person's culture. Save the list of questions as you can look back to it during a similar activity later in the year and look for growth in the class' understanding of culture.

Supports ACTFL Standards: Connections (31. & 3.2)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Interviews, Big C Little c, and the themes of ethnography and constructivism
Suggested Timeframe: September
Scaffolding Layers: Modeling, Large-, small-group and individual practice, concrete concepts, non-fiction and games

Figure 4: Detailed Description of Part One, Set Three

Introducing Perspective and Critical Literacy: Part Two, Set One

The core of this culture curriculum is to help students learn about culture by looking for multiple perspectives and reading their world critically. In order to internalize these practices and use them on their own, this set of activities (See Figure 5) help students to begin thinking about defining the terms and determining for themselves

what it means to read critically. Fictional texts build a strong foundation for critical literacy by creating "the initial purpose and moment for reading" and "[acting] as a bridge to other…texts," (Soalt, 2005). Bourke (2008) used fictional texts as a scaffold for reading non-fiction texts critically and found that fictional texts helped even his first graders to explore different perspectives and build empathy by "empathizing with a character other than those framed as most important," (p. 305).

While examining multiple perspectives and reading critically were modeled in Part 1, this set of activities continues scaffolding by engaging students in guided and independent practice as they directly explore the terms "perspective," "multiple perspectives," and "critical lenses," (Palinscar, 1986). Furthermore, these activities introduce students to the idea of author bias and fallibility, "[deposing] the authority of text"—an important feature of a critical curriculum—in a low-stakes environment (Beck, 1996). All of the independent practice with familiar, fictional texts is important for future activities that ask students to use these skills with abstract, non-fiction concepts.

Origin of Attitudes about Gender and Influences on Behavior: Part Two, Set Two

These activities (See Figure 6) are all about practicing reading critically. Students learned about perspective and critical literacy in the last activity and now they simply need a chance to practice. One of the biggest advantages about these two activities is that they often raise differences of opinion within the class. The activities build on what Beck (1996) calls "Questioning the Author," a strategy in which "discussions …[provide] students with an opportunity to consider what the author [has] written in terms of what they [know] and what other students [know] and to use that knowledge in building a collaborative representation of ideas in the text," (p. 393). In both the scavenger hunt and watching the "Tough Guise" video, reading with critical lenses leads students to see different messages in one image (a poster, sign, object, video

Introducing Perspective and Critical Literacy Activities in Detail

Activity A: Cinderella and The Three Little Pigs

- *Part One*: Read two opposing versions of *The Three Little Pigs* aloud to students. I recommend the traditional version found in *English Fairy Tales* by Joseph Jacobs and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka. After reading, ask and discuss:
    - What is "perspective" and what does it mean to have "multiple perspectives"?
    - What examples of "multiple perspectives" can you think of in the stories we've just read?
    - What examples of "multiple perspectives" can you think of in real life?
- *Part Two*: Before reading Cinderella aloud to students, assign each student one of two roles: a character from the Cinderella story or a talk show host. Tell students that their task during this read-aloud is to work together to uncover perspectives that might be missing from the original Cinderella story.
    - If assigned a character, students' job during reading is to imagine what his/her character might add to the story if that character was the narrator, much like Mr. A Wolf does in *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs.*
    - If assigned the role of talk show host, students' job during reading is to think of questions for the Cinderella characters that might help us find more information about the perspectives that are missing from the story.
- *Part Three*: After reading host a talk-show in the classroom whose audience attempts to uncover the "true story of Cinderella" by interviewing each character one at a time. This activity, adapted from Allington (2002), is fun as well as challenging: actors have to imagine what their character might think or feel and the audience members have to generate questions that would illuminate what a biased author (who obviously loved Cinderella) would leave out when telling his or her version of the story.

Activity B: Gender in Children's Books

- *Introduction*: Explain to students that their task is to start learning how to use their "critical lenses." I always tell my students to envision a special pair of glass that, when worn, allow students to see hidden messages or perspectives they've never noticed before. In my experience, the more literal the better. Some teachers have had students cut out a pair of glasses from paper, and I have asked students to keep a pair of "critical lenses" (often sunglasses) with their culture notebooks and allow them to wear the glasses during activities such as these.
- *Part One*: Ask a student to read one of the children's books aloud to the class. Ask students to wear their critical lenses during the story and use those critical lenses to look for messages about how boys and girls are expected to act. In other words, if this children's book were a manual for behavior, what would girls and boys learn from it about how to behave? Allow students to interrupt the reading to share anything they see while reading.
- *Part Two*: Ask students to continue their list about expectations of boys and girls by working in groups and reading the multiple books around the classroom with their critical lenses on.
- *Part Three*: Discuss the lists students created as a class.
    - Were there patterns across lists? What might that mean?
    - Do they think we actually do learn something about expectations of behavior from the stories we encounter as children? Why or why not?

Figure 5: Detailed Description of Part Two, Set One

Figure 5 Continued

Supports ACTFL Standards: Connections (3.1 & 3.2) , Comparisons (4.1 & 4.2), and Communities (5.1)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Role-play, narratives, interviews, and the themes of ethnography and constructivism
Suggested Timeframe: October
Scaffolding Layers: Modeling, small –group and individual practice, concrete concepts, fiction and games

etc.), and raise questions about how our own experiences influence what we see and that two opposing viewpoints can both be 'correct.'

The many viewpoints elicited in these activities also help build the classroom community as students talk with each other. Despite the many different opinions elicited, these activities allow students to practice and emphasize the importance of listening respectfully to all thoughts and opinions shared. Both activities are useful reminders to students that culture study is going to mean talking about topics we might disagree on, and considering many different perspectives and opinions regardless of whether we agree with them. If we expect students to have empathy and understanding outside the classroom, we must practice these skills within it (Jonsberg, 2009).

Origin of Attitudes about Culture and Influences on Behavior: Part Two, Set Three

Prior to this last set of activities in Part 2 of culture study (Figure 7), students have been encouraged to read critically inside the classroom and in small or large groups. Now students practice using their critical lenses across a wider variety of situations with more precision and sophistication by taking their critical lenses outside the classroom and examining "how texts work, what texts to do the world, [and] how social relations can be critiqued and reconstructed," (Behrman, 2006). This helps prepare students for the kinds of research, reflection and discussion they will be participating in during the last half of

Origin of Attitudes about Gender and Influences on Behavior Activities in Detail

Activity A: Gender Scavenger Hunt

- *Introduction*: Remind students that they practiced using their critical lenses in the last set of activities to look for hidden messages or perspectives about gender in children's books. Explain that this activity asks them to do the same thing, but instead of looking in children's books, students are looking around their school. I take the opportunity to remind students about our purposes for culture study, and that this is one of their first opportunities to use their critical lenses in their community—which is what we hope to be able to do easily, all the time, by the end of the year.
- *Part One*: I always tell students they can't talk during this activity because I want them to concentrate on seeing through their critical lenses—not through the critical lenses of others. Walk through the halls of the school with your students. Towards the beginning you might point out a couple examples, like a bathroom sign (What do you think it means that the girl is wearing a dress?) and something like a trophy case (Do you see anything about the trophies that tell us something about gender?). Ask students to jot down their observations in their culture notebooks, a similar t-chart to the one they used for the children's books.
- *Part Two*: Don't worry about spending too much time around the school. Ten minutes has been a good amount in my experience, but of course it depends on the size of your school and your students as well. When your class returns to the room, ask students to share their observations in small groups, choosing two or three observations that surprised them or that they think the class could learn from. Record these ideas as a large group, and encourage students to write down anything they didn't already think of in their notebooks as material to use again later in the year.

Activity B: Tough Guise Video

If you have the time in class, I strongly recommend watching the full, 84-minute documentary "Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity" from the Media Education Foundation (1999). However, as time is a precious commodity in our school year, the link above is a 7-minute summary that uses clips to piece together the major points. The downside of the summary is that it does move very quickly and assumes the audience can use inferences to complete some holes in the argument that result from summarizing. I use a handout (see Appendix B) to help walk students through the clip and to organize our discussion.

- *Before viewing*: Read through the handout with students. I always emphasize the note at the beginning of the handout reminding students that the clip portrays one of many perspectives and that the activity is not intended to persuade them but rather make them explore one perspective they might not have considered. Ask students to make some predictions about some of the answers they will find in the video. Judging from the handout, what do they expect the clip to be about?
- *During viewing*: Students use the handout to organize their notes about the video, completing as much of it as possible as well as jotting down additional information they find useful or surprising.
- *After viewing*: Large group discussion while reading through the handout again. This is usually a good time to remind students about the purposes for culture study, and explain that the class will be having many conversations throughout the year about perspectives they may or may not agree with—and that's ok! If we want to open our minds, we have to be able to consider all these perspectives.
    - What information did students use to complete the handout?
    - Thoughts/opinions about the information?

Figure 6: Detailed Description of Part Two, Set Two

Figure 6 Continued

- How do students feel about the argument? Is the media responsible in any way for our behavior within genders? Do students feel the media could be responsible for similar behavior relating to culture?

Supports ACTFL Standards: Cultures (2.1), Connections (3.1 & 3.2), and Comparisons (4.2)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Narratives, interviews and the themes of ethnography, technology and constructivism.
Suggested Timeframe: October
Scaffolding Layers: Large-group and Individual practice, concrete concepts, non-fiction and games

the year in Part 3. The practice strengthens students' individual use of their critical lenses by providing time for individual practice reading the world critically but continuing to provide feedback about student observations in small and large-group discussions about their discoveries (Palinscar, 1986). Listening to and discussing other students' observations supports critical thinking in and of itself because it exposes students to a variety of perspectives on culture within their community.

Influenced By and Influencing our Own Culture: Part Three, Set One

One of the biggest struggles I have experienced in teaching culture is that my students, as part of a majority culture, consider their life experience as "normal" and see culture as something that *others* have or experience. Deborah Lo (2001) would explain this attitude as ethnocentrism and suggests that our current educational system needs to incorporate a global curriculum that teaches students how to look at other cultures without a perspective of superiority or inferiority. Now that students have had ample time to practice critical thinking, this set of activities (Figure 8) pushes them to examine many different perspectives in order to consider how complex culture is and how our own experiences influence the way we see and react to cultures different from our own.

As mentioned earlier, examining multiple perspectives is an essential strategy in critical literacy as it helps students deconstruct and examine prior experience in order to reconstruct new meaning (Behrman, 2006; Clark, 2009; Lo, 2001; McLaughlin, 2004; Nicolini, 2008). These activities build empathy for different cultures by thinking about how me might walk in others' shoes, which, while encouraging comparisons, defies frameworks of superiority or inferiority. Beginning to build empathy by looking at culture from different perspectives also establishes the necessary foundation for the next set of activities that ask students to consider bias in historical representations of cultural interactions in the United States.

Empathizing with "the Other": Part Three, Set Two

Palinscar (1986) found that through scaffolded instruction students had a "greater awareness of what strategy they had been taught, the contexts in which it should be used and how to employ the strategy," (p. 5). These two activities (Figure 9) are an important part of scaffolding critical thinking because they extend the conversation about where our ideas of culture come from by providing real-life examples of cultural representations in our community and use those real-life examples as evidence for the importance of questioning where our ideas about culture come from. This set of activities begins to shift the classroom conversation from culture in general to Hispanic culture in particular and also presents perspectives that force students to re-think what they know. These activities release control to students as they generate observations and questions that lead the classroom discussion. Practicing making and discussing observations that are personally meaningful is important in establishing the independence and responsibility will play a major role in their research project at the end of the year.

Hispanics in the U.S.A.: Part Three, Set Three

As culture study narrows to focus more specifically on Hispanic culture, this set

Origin of Attitudes about Culture and Influences on Behavior Activities in Detail

Activity A: Good Guys / Bad Guys, adapted from Bourke (2008)

- *Before class*: Create a PowerPoint, Word document or print of about 20 pictures of heroes and villains. This activity works best if heroes and villains pictured are from films or stories students aren't familiar with. Number each image and put them in random order.
- *Part One*: Ask students to write the numbers 1-20 (or as many images as you have) and to write "good guy" or "bad guy" next to each image as it appears before them. They should not talk during the activity, and they should only have a few seconds to decide the character's role. Without further detail, run through the images with the students.
- *Part Two*: Have students discuss the following questions in small groups, then review them together as a large group:
    - How do you know if the character is a "good guy" or "bad guy?"
    - Are there common physical characteristics that go along with "good" and "bad" when looking at and judging people?
    - Are there common images that go along with "good" and "bad" when looking at and judging objects? (For example, a DANGER sign versus a WELCOME sign)
- *Part Three*: Ask students to think about the class conversation and to journal individually in their culture notebooks an answer to the question below. Writing can be a barrier for some students, so providing enough time for students to draw or collage or make lists is an important part of this reflective piece.
    - How do images of "good" and "bad" in movies and books affect how we feel or act when we see and react to people or objects in real life?

Activity B: Culture in Pop Culture

- *Introduction*: Remind students about the argument Jackson Katz makes in "Tough Guise" that the media can affect the way we view masculinity. The last activity asked students to use their critical lenses to think about how images of "good" and "bad" in the media can affect our reactions to people and objects in real life. Students are going to do some research outside of class to see if they think the same is true for the way we view culture.
- *Part One, Research*: This activity begins with student research. Students need to keep their culture notebooks close to them at all times for one week. Their task is to watch the world with their critical lenses on and write down what they notice about culture. Leaving the research somewhat open-ended can be instructionally beneficial because students will interpret their task differently and bring different kinds of observations to discussion. However, if students need further direction, telling students to write answers in their culture notebooks to these guiding questions can be helpful:
    - How are people of a certain culture acting (in real life? on TV? in movies?)? What are they wearing? What are they eating?
    - Do you see patterns in the roles certain cultural groups are frequently given in TV shows and movies? (For example, Jackson Katz mentioned Asian men being frequently cast as martial arts experts) If so, what?
    - What patterns do you notice in commercials? (What is the commercial for and who is using or *not* using the product? Why do you think the casting directors for the commercial made that choice?)
    - In your community, which places do you and your friends go most often? Why? Where do you go least often? Why?
- *Part Two, De-briefing*: Students discuss their research in small groups and choose particularly surprising or insightful discoveries to share with the class in large group

Figure 7: Detailed Description of Part Two, Set Three

Figure 7 Continued

discussion. The purpose of these small-group and large-group discussions is to try to come to a consensus, as a class, about whether or not the media can affect how we react to culture. The following questions are suggestions for discussion.

- Based on your research, which culture(s) do you think we are more likely to be afraid of? think of as intelligent? think of as hardworking?
- After doing some research about culture in the media, have you ever had a reaction to someone that you think was based on cultural stereotypes?

Supports ACTFL Standards: Cultures (2.1 & 2.2), Connections (3.1), and Comparisons (4.2)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Photographs, interviews, Big C Little c, and the themes of ethnography, technology and constructivism.
Suggested Timeframe: November
Scaffolding Layers: Large-, small-group and individual practice, abstract concepts, non-fiction, research and games

of activities (Figure 10) is meant to directly challenge preconceived notions about culture and also the way culture is perceived in students' communities. Paulo Freire (1970) writes, "The basic thing, starting from the initial perception of these nuclei of contradictions…is to study the inhabitants' awareness of these contradictions," (p.93). But in order for students to study their own thinking and the contradictions they find in their community, they have to be engaged and find the study meaningful. These activities apply Golden's (2008) suggestion to make culture study relevant and meaningful to students by making it personal: exploring our own community and the current events surrounding controversial issues relating to Hispanic culture in our society. Perhaps most importantly, in order to reach our goal by the end of the year of having open eyes and open minds, students have to be able to recognize, understand and respect the many different perspectives that are a part of culture. These activities allow students to practice and develop those skills as they think critically and objectively about the way culture is represented in their community.

Influenced By and Influencing our Own Culture Activities in Detail

Activity A: Advertising and Perspective

- Students collect as many advertisements from home as they can find over a weekend and bring them in to the class
- Together in small groups students compare their advertisements and organize them into categories. Students should decide what the categories are, and the advertisements can fit into more than one category if needed.
- As a large group, discuss:
    - What categories did you create? Why?
    - How are advertising and perspective related?
    - What is bias? How is it related to advertising? To perspective?

Activity B: "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"

- This activity is challenging because it often radically shifts students preconceived notions about culture and can raise passionate opinions. It is always important to explain the purpose of activities to students, but I find it especially so with this one. I emphasize two points in particular:
    - 1) After defining the term "white privilege" I explain that it is a controversial concept that is somewhat outdated, and that many people either passionately agree or passionately disagree with the concept.
    - 2) Our purpose for using the article is not to debate whether the concept of white privilege is valid or invalid, but to use the article as an example for exploring:
        - a) how discrimination can be unintentional
        - b) how putting oneself in another's shoes is an important part of understanding culture
        - c) how our own culture or history or experiences affects how we view the world—but our perspective is only one of many. Not everyone experiences the world the same way.
- Create an excerpt of Peggy McIntosh's article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," to read with students. Even though an excerpt will be short and focus on key points from the article (I usually include the introduction and a partial list of privileges) it will still be dense with academic language and requires reading as a class and stopping every so often to discuss key terms/ideas.
- Discuss points a, b & c above as a class.

Note: This has been an activity I've received parent phone calls about. As I mentioned in the section ***Defining and adhering to a clear purpose,*** *knowing and being able to explain my purpose for the activity has always been enough to dispel concern. Something like: "Mr./Mrs. _____, I am so glad you called me about this concern. I'm happy (your student) is talking with you about our coursework at home! Please understand that I explain to students (purpose for activity and points a, b & c) and I emphasize to them that the concept of white privilege is controversial and somewhat outdated, and while students can form their own opinions about the concept itself, our discussions in class are not for that purpose." It is also helpful to explain how the activity fits within the scope of the culture curriculum, so I usually explain how this activity connects with the next activity as well as describing the purpose to parents.*

Activity C: Relating to Minority Cultures

- *Introduction*: In the previous activity we began thinking about the ways people of different

Figure 8: Detailed Description of Part Three, Set One

Figure 8 Continued

cultures experience the world, and particularly how it might feel to experience the world as part of a minority culture. In this activity we explore how examining our own culture can help us understand and relate to people whose culture is different from our own.

- *Part One*: Have students to think about a time in their life when they have felt like a minority; a time when people who were different from them in some way have surrounded them. I remind students that these experiences could be positive or negative and give students examples because this can be a hard concept for them to consider:
    - Times when I have gone to friends' houses and accidentally started eating before they prayed because I didn't know that sometimes people pray before dinner.
    - Being an American watching a World Cup soccer game between England and the USA in England.
- *Part Two*: After brainstorming some ideas, discuss as a large group:
    - How does it feel to be surrounded by people who are different from you in some way? (If students struggle, I go back to scaffolding strategies and model my own thoughts in the examples I gave above.)
    - What is good about it? Bad?
    - How can this kind of conversation help us think about and understand culture?
- *Part Three:* As a class, think of an experience that someone from a different state wouldn't be familiar with. As Iowans, a common experience my students often think of is de-tasseling corn or going to the Iowa State Fair.
    - In small groups, have students write down a list of important concepts for someone not from Iowa to know if they were to participate in one of those experiences
    - After returning to the large group and discussing students' concepts, discuss what would be important for *us* to keep in mind if we would go somewhere and experience something unfamiliar to *us*.

Activity D: What does it mean to be _____?

- Write the question above on the board before students come into class.
- Students' task is to fill in the blank with any cultural group they can think of. I ask for students to shout out ideas and record them on the board.
    - Students usually give answers like "American" or "Girl" or "Black" or "Christian." Without writing headings down or explaining to students what I'm doing, I group their responses with other like responses. In other words, I start forming categories on the board. I write all the religions together, places together, ethnicities together etc.
    - Students quickly catch on to what I'm doing and I ask them how we might title these lists. Students think of category names, which I write on the board above each section.
    - I then ask students if there is any person that fits into ONLY ONE category and none of the others. In other words, can someone be a girl but not be from any place. Obviously the answer is "no," and students acknowledge this quickly.
    - We then discuss:
        - How might we define the word "culture" if it is something so complex?
        - Using these lists as a starting point, what challenges do you think exist when we try to understand a person's culture?

Supports ACTFL Standards: Cultures (2.1 & 2.2), Connections (3.1), and Comparisons (4.2)

Figure 8 Continued

Builds Upon Current Practices: Narratives, role play, interviews, and the themes of ethnography, technology and constructivism. **Suggested Timeframe**: December **Scaffolding Layers**: Modeling, large- and small-group practice, abstract concepts, non-fiction, and research

Open Minds: Community Based Critical Research: Part Three, Set Four

In this last set of activities (Figure 11) before students' final reflection on their learning, students are applying the skills they've acquired over the year to practice "reading the world" independently (Freire, 1970). Don Smith's (1999) commentary about the power of literature provides one echo of Freire's work: "Reading teaches us to construct contexts, temporarily suspend understanding, make and check hypotheses and closely read the details for significance. That interpretive skill is what much of life is," (p.20). In this set of activities students demonstrate how they have learned, through critical literacy, to stretch their thinking as they analyze the community around them. The thinking skills, discussions and projects that result from student research complete the year-long culture study but, by cementing the foundation of keeping open eyes and open minds, it is only the beginning of the shift in students' thinking.

Students learned throughout the year to challenge preconceived notions about culture and question where those ideas come from. Once the teacher has modeled, encouraged student participation and provided time for student practice, students are prepared to engage without being prompted. And with the choice for students to study an aspect of culture personally relevant to them, students are allowed to become teachers themselves (Palinscar, 1986). They question rather than accept the many sources on cultural knowledge they encounter in their research and bring what they have learned into the classroom to share with others. I have found that these skills, once internalized, will

Empathizing with "the Other" Activities in Detail

Activity A: Whose Truth? Thanksgiving and Columbus Day, Adapted from Lewison (2006)

- *Part One*: Students work in small groups to create a list in their culture notebooks of everything they learned in elementary school about Christopher Columbus, Pilgrims, the first Thanksgiving and Native Americans. Read aloud two typical children's stories about the first Thanksgiving. Students use the stories to jog their memories and add to their lists. After reading the books, discuss as a large group what students came up with and address the following questions:
    - What stories are left out of the traditional Thanksgiving books?
    - Whose perspective(s) are left out? Why?
- *Part Two*: Watch "Reconsider Columbus Day" (NuHeightz Media, 2011)

  This video examines Columbus Day from the perspective of descendents of indigenous peoples killed by Columbus. After viewing, reflect on the video and the traditional lessons about Thanksgiving by having students share their thoughts about opinions. Discuss:
    - Based on what we have learned this year and the activity we just completed, why is it important to question what we think we know about culture?
    - Is all truth equal?
    - Why might we ask "whose truth?" after reading non-fiction information about culture?

Activity B: Perspectives on Immigration

- *Before class*: Select two or three blog posts from myimmigrationstory.com to share with students. I try to find shorter posts that will be particularly interesting for my students by doing a keyword search within the blog to find stories of immigrants from our state or immigrants who are of similar age to my students. I print the posts on a handout to pass to each student. I also look for posts that represent different kinds of immigration, both legal and illegal
- *During-reading*: Ask students to read the blog posts. Have them underline anything they think is (a) surprising, (b) interesting, (c) confusing/raises a question (d) important to understanding immigration in the United States.
- *After-reading:* Ask for volunteers to share their underlines phrases. Before volunteers share their reason for underlining the phrase give the rest of the class a chance to brainstorm his/her reasoning. This is a great strategy for discussing reading because it asks students to be reflective but takes pressure off because all possibilities could be correct. Finally, allow the student to share his/her reasoning and move on to another volunteer.
- The discussion surrounding these blog posts often generates many intelligent questions surrounding immigration. I attempt to jot down all the questions that come up so we can use those questions to frame our research into immigration law in a later activity.

Supports ACTFL Standards: Cultures (2.2), Connections (3.1 & 3.2), and Comparisons (4.2)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Narratives, photographs, Big C Little c, and the themes of ethnography and constructivism.
Suggested Timeframe: January
Scaffolding Layers: Large- and small-group practice, abstract concepts, non-fiction, and research

Figure 9: Detailed Description of Part Three, Set Two

carry outside the classroom and transform students' lives; "Once we start noticing certain things, it is difficult not to notice them again; the knowledge actually influences our perceptual systems," (Johnston, 2004). One of my favorite moments in teaching happened when a former student came to visit me during her freshman year of high school and said, "Señorita M., I can't take my critical lenses off!"

The Culture Portfolio: Part Three, Set Five

Lewison, Leland and Harste (2008) define having a critical stance as "consciously engaging, entertaining alternate ways of being, taking responsibility to inquire and being reflexive," (p. 6). The culture portfolio (Figure 12) is a way for students to demonstrate these skills through their selection of and reflection on artifacts. But more importantly, the culture portfolio is a way for students to assess their own learning by reflecting deeply on ways they changed from the beginning to the end of the year. The importance of giving students a voice in the classroom has been reiterated throughout this paper, and if teachers hope to provide students a voice in instruction they must also provide students a voice in evaluation.

Finally, social action and student empowerment is an important piece of critical literacy emphasized across the literature on the subject (Behrman, 2006; Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2008; Molden, 2007). As students create the culture portfolio and reflect on changes they have made, they see within themselves the ability to make a difference because if their thinking has changed, they know they have the ability to change themselves and influence others.

Future Research

I have seen firsthand the power of critical literacy as a bridge to teaching culture in world language classrooms and compiled research to extend and support the practice. The next step in my research is to collect data to demonstrate the efficacy of this

Hispanics in the U.S.A. Activities in Detail

Adapted from Nicolini (2008)

Activity A: How is Hispanic culture received/perceived?

- *Introduction*: Explain to students that in groups or individually, they will generate interview questions to ask members of their community. These questions should address how Hispanic culture is received and perceived in the community, but should be subtle enough to spur honest, detailed answers rather than short, defensive ones. For example, no one is going to answer "yes" or expand upon their answer to a question like "Do you discriminate against Mexicans or other Hispanic people?"
- *Brainstorming*: As a large group, brainstorm one or two questions that could be a part of the survey. Then, individually or in small groups, students should complete their surveys.
- *Part One, Interviews*: Give students one week to complete five interviews using their survey questions. Ask them to keep the responses in their culture notebooks.
- *Part Two, Reflection*: Either in small groups or as a large group discuss the survey results. The discussion about the surveys should revolve around the following questions:
    - What different kinds of reactions did people have to being asked about Hispanic culture? What do you think that means?
    - Based on these survey results, how is Hispanic culture perceived in our community?
    - Based on these survey results, how is Hispanic culture received in our community?
    - Do you think the community opinion of Hispanic culture is fair? Accurate? Why or why not?

Activity B: Immigration Law: How is the media deceptive on all sides?

- Provide students with a variety of articles about immigration. Refer to the section ***Choosing Meaningful Texts*** for more ideas, but generally look for articles that are current, local (if possible) or somehow relevant to students' lives, considered factual, from reliable resources, but in direct conflict with one another.
- Break students into small groups and have each group read a different article. I try not to let on that the articles are different as I ask students to do the following:
    - Read the article with their group
    - Use the information from the article to jot down notes that explain important points about immigration in the United States.
- Come back as a large group. Under the title of "Important Facts about Immigration" record ideas from the different groups. As conflicting information is written down, ask students to consider:
    - Which information is wrong? (The idea being that none of it is wrong, but each piece of information is told from a particular perspective)
    - Why do we have conflicting information on our list?
    - Does this mean that we can't trust news sources or "facts?" Why or why not?

Activity C: "Under the Same Moon"

- *Before viewing*: Send home permission slips explaining the purpose of watching this feature-length film about immigration. The film is PG-13.
- *During viewing*: As students watch the film, I ask them to again jot down any scenes they find (a) surprising, (b) interesting, (c) confusing/raise a question (d) important to understanding immigration in the United States.
- *After viewing, Part One*: Have a de-briefing discussion about the film with students, emphasizing but not limited to the notes students jotted down.

Figure 10: Detailed Description of Part Three, Set Three

Figure 10 Continued

- *After viewing, Part Two*: Students have been doing some in-depth thinking about culture over the year and are about to embark on personal research projects. Before doing so, generate a list as a large group with the following question in mind:
    - What are the top 10 things every person needs to know about exploring a new culture?

Supports ACTFL Standards: Connections (3.1 & 3.2), Comparisons (4.2) and Communities (5.1 & 5.2)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Narratives, interviews, and the themes of ethnography and constructivism.
Suggested Timeframe: February – March
Scaffolding Layers: Small-group and individual practice, abstract concepts, non-fiction, and research

method. Reliable measures of change in student attitudes—the goal of this culture curriculum—are challenging and will require time on my part to design these tools. I suggest using pre- and post-surveys on culture (See Appendices C and D for examples) administered at the beginning and end of the school year, to provide reliable and useful data, as well as a collection of student artifacts including their culture notebooks, research projects, culture portfolio and notes from classroom discussions to provide insight into students' thinking.

Student language in the surveys and artifacts described above provide a beginning source for evidence of change in student attitudes. As students complicate and deepen their knowledge of culture, change in their language use can be documented in five key areas: (1) the length and content of students' responses to prompts or discussion topics about culture, (2) students' ability to consistently provide examples to support their thoughts or opinions about culture, (3) students' personal and academic connections to culture topics addressed in school, (4) students' demonstration of questioning generally accepted perceptions of culture, and (5) students' sense of empowerment and desire to influence the way culture is perceived in his or her community. The language assessment rubric in Appendix E outlines examples of noticeable changes in these five areas that

Open Minds: Community Based Critical Research Activities in Detail

Activity A: List of Culture Questions, Part II

- Pull out the list of culture questions students came up with at the beginning of the year. Have them re-examine it in light of what they have learned throughout the course and using the list of the "Top 10 things every person needs to know about exploring a new culture" they created during the previous activity. Modify the questions as a class, encouraging students to make notes in their culture notebooks.

Activity B: Student Choice Research

- *Introduction*: The end goal of the culture curriculum is for students to apply their critical lenses—keeping open eyes and open minds—to their encounters with different cultures outside the classroom. Remind students of this purpose and explain that in their final project students will use their critical lenses on their own to explore how a particular cultural group is represented in their community. Provide students with a graphic organizer outlining the following:
- Student Choice: Students will choose a specific cultural group they are interested in studying. (I have had students work individually or in groups, and have had successful results with both). As students decide, remind them to keep in mind the many different cultures talked about throughout the year, from gender to age to race to lifestyles etc.
- Student Research: Using everything students have learned about culture and culture study, and keeping in mind all of the different activities and places the class has looked to study culture, student will attempt to answer the following questions about the particular group they've chosen to study:
    - How is this culture perceived in our community?
        - Where does this attitude come from?
    - What stereotypes or myths exist about this culture?
        - Where do these stereotypes or myths come from?
    - What would a person need to know in order to truly understand and respect this culture?
    - How did students use their critical lenses to complete the research?
    - What would students NOT have noticed without their critical lenses on?
- Student Product: Students choose a way to share their research with the class**. Regardless of the product, students need to demonstrate what they learned, how they used their critical lenses, and provide examples to support their claims (giving evidence/proof to convince the class that their perspective is well-founded). The product could be one of the ideas below, or a different idea that students plan with the teacher ahead of time.
    - Public Service Announcement (TV, Pamphlet)
    - Video
    - Website
    - Presentation
    - Video Podcast

**I pair my 8th grade students with 6th graders in our building who end the year with a unit on Latin America. This has worked incredibly well because the 8th graders work in groups to prepare a lesson about culture for the 6th graders, which gives them a real audience and forces them to think about condensing their research into the most important points they've learned. Each 8th grade group focuses on a different aspect of cultural knowledge they find important and

Figure 11: Detailed Description of Part Three, Set Four

Figure 11 Continued

the 6th graders rotate through stations.

- *Planning*: Provide students time to brainstorm and make a plan for research in class. Although the research will take place outside of class, creating and sharing a plan for research will help students stay organized. Furthermore, modeling academic language for students by discussing their research in class and talking about their work as ethnographers sets the expectations and tone for the seriousness and importance of the research.
- *Work Time*: It is important to provide students a time and place for asking questions, sharing their ideas and getting feedback over the few weeks they work on their research. This continues the modeling of academic language and sharing ideas will help students expand their thinking and move forward if they get stuck.

Activity C: Sharing research

- Whether students are sharing with each other or sharing with other students in the school, sharing research should be a big deal. Students have worked hard and they should be given a platform for sharing that mirrors the weight of the research. When I have not had the opportunity to pair my 8th graders with younger students, we set up our classroom like a conference over a few days. Students used their product in sessions where they created mini-lessons or activities for other members of their class. I encouraged them to think of the activities we completed throughout the year as examples to get ideas, emphasizing the potential for their session to teach their classmates something they wouldn't have thought of before.

Supports ACTFL Standards: Cultures (2.1), Connections (3.1 & 3.2), Comparisons (4.2) and Communities (5.1 & 5.2)
Builds Upon Current Practices: Narratives, photographs, interviews, and the themes of ethnography and constructivism.
Suggested Timeframe: April – May
Scaffolding Layers: Small-group and individual practice, abstract concepts, non-fiction, and research

could provide beginning data to inform future research. Noticing change in student language also serves to document and more richly describe what is occurring in my classroom when using critical literacy as a bridge to understanding culture.

The Culture Portfolio Activity in Detail

Part One: Explaining the Purpose

- The purpose of the culture portfolio is to provide students a place for reflecting on what they've learned and how they've grown. There are no right or wrong answers in the portfolio; the focus is on student reflection. Students' reflections on their learning demonstrate whether and how they have achieved the goal of looking at culture with open eyes and open minds.

Part Two: Selecting Artifacts

- Students select 5 or more artifacts from the year-long culture study that have particular meaning or relevance to them. Because the power of the portfolio is in independent reflect, I attempt to provide as much flexibility and as little direction as possible for what artifacts students can include. But if students struggle I help them by providing these ideas for what to include:
    - example from an activity that changed your thinking
    - example from an activity that you enjoyed or that was frustrating
    - example of a text that you would look at differently now than you did at the beginning of the year
    - an object that represents a change you made this year or a change you will make in the future relating to culture

Part Three: Reflection

- For each artifact, students provide a brief reflection (a few sentences to a page, depending on the age of the students) explaining why the student included the artifact and how it demonstrates a change in the student's thinking about culture from the beginning to the end of the year.

Part Four: Future Implications

- Students include an artifact at the end of the portfolio, whether a short piece of writing, an image, a song, or anything else the student can think of, to represent what the student will do differently or how the student will impact culture and culture study in the future.

Supports ACTFL Standards: Cultures (2.1), Connections (3.1 & 3.2), Comparisons (4.2)

Builds Upon Current Practices: Culture Portfolio, narratives, photographs, interviews, and the theme of constructivism.

Suggested Timeframe: May

Scaffolding Layers: Individual practice, abstract concepts, non-fiction, and research

Figure 12: Detailed Description of Part Three, Set Five

APPENDIX A

LANGUAGE WALK MATERIALS

Provide students a handout that looks something like the one below (Figure A1):

Name: _____ Period:__

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**

French Hebrew Portuguese Spanish Arabic

English German Chinese Turkish Swahili

Figure A1: Student Handout for Language Walk

Enlarge and post the words below at different points in the room. Students have to guess which language from their list matches the words posted on the classroom walls (Figure A2):

1. صديق	2. rafiki	3. arkadaş	**4. freund**	**5. amigo**
6. 朋友	*7. ami*	8. friend	9. רבח	10. amigo

Figure A2: Word Wall for Language Walk

APPENDIX B

"TOUGH GUISE" OUTLINE AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Reflecting on: "Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity" with Jackson Katz

Remember, as we watch this excerpt and take notes our goal is just to understand Katz's argument. Understanding what he says allows us to decide, for ourselves, whether we agree or disagree with him and why. This video argues that the media is largely responsible for influencing our opinions and behavior concerning gender. We will be looking for the same kinds of influences in the media about culture later in the year. But remember, learning about culture requires us to **understand** many different viewpoints but not necessarily **agree** with them. This activity is not meant to convince you, only to make you think.

A "Guise" is defined as a "false appearance or pretense" (dictionary.com).

1. The first quote of the movie is: "Boys and young men learn early on that being a so called "Real Man" you have to take on this tough "guise". IN other words, you have to show the world only certain parts of yourself that the dominant culture has defined as manly."

   How is "manliness" defined in the documentary and WHO is defining it?

2. Katz talks about "fitting into this narrow box that defines manhood." **What keeps boys and men from getting OUT of the box?**

3. Katz says that there is a lot of pressure put on boys and men to conform ("conform" means to "be similar to" or "to act like").

   What are they being pressured to conform to?

   Who is putting pressure on boys and men; keep them "in the box"?

4. Finish this quote: "So the question is, where do boys learn this? Obviously they learn it in many different places. … But one of the most important places they learn it is the powerful and pervasive media system which provides a steady stream of images that define manhood as connected with:

   a. D _____

   b. P _____

Figure B1: Tough Guise Student Handout

Figure B1 Continued

c. C _____

5. Though the media system provides defining images of manhood across ALL racial and ethnic groups, which groups are hit the worst? How?

   a. Latino men are almost always portrayed as _____.

   b. Asian-American men are almost always portrayed as _____.

   c. _____ _____.

6. There has been a connection made in our society between being a man and being _____.

7. How can girls and women help to change the "tough guise"?

8. What benefits come from trying to change the image of masculinity in our culture?

APPENDIX C

PRE-SURVEY ON CULTURE (FALL)

Name: _____ Period:_____

1. What is culture?

2. Where does your definition or understanding of culture come from?

3. Who has culture?

4. What is the relationship between stereotypes and culture?

5. Give an example of a stereotype and explain if / how that stereotype might affect a person's actions.

6. (How) Can we change our understanding of culture?

7. (How) Can we change how stereotypes affect us?

8. What are "critical lenses" and how do they relate to our understanding of culture?

9. (Why) Should we study culture and stereotypes in a Spanish classroom?

10. We are going to watch a commercial. Please explain how this commercial relates to culture.

Figure C1: Pre-Survey on Culture

APPENDIX D

POST-SURVEY ON CULTURE (SPRING)

Name: _____ Period:_____

1. What is different about the way you understand "culture" now than what you understood at the beginning of the year?

2. Why is it different? Where does your definition or understanding of culture come from?

3. Who has culture?

4. What is the relationship between stereotypes and culture?

5. Give an example of a stereotype and explain if / how that stereotype might affect a person's actions.

6. (How) Can we change our understanding of culture?

7. (How) Can we change how stereotypes affect us?

8. What are "critical lenses" and how do they relate to our understanding of culture?

9. (Why) Should we study culture and stereotypes in a Spanish classroom?

10. We are going to watch a commercial. Please explain how this commercial relates to culture.

Figure D1: Post-Survey on Culture

APPENDIX E

CULTURE AND CRITICAL LITEERACY RUBRIC

Essential Question: How is a student's understanding of culture changed thought one academic year based on instruction received and as evidenced through change in language use?

Characteristics of Language Use in Culture Questionnaire, Blogs, Discussions and student work samples	Sensitivity Towards Culture		
	1 (Insensitive)	**3 (Sensitive)**	**5 (Empathy and understanding)**
Length of Response	Student responses to prompts and/or discussion topics are typically short, ranging from 1-2 sentences.	Student responses to prompts and/or discussion topics are typically adequate, ranging from 3-4 sentences.	Student responses to prompts are/or discussion topics are typically long, 5 or more sentences.
Examples	Student does not provide examples to support thoughts or opinions about culture, even when prompted.	When prompted, student is able to provide examples to support thoughts or opinions about culture.	Student consistently provides examples to support thoughts or opinions about culture, usually without being prompted.
Personal Connections	Student language does not connect culture topics addressed in school settings to student personal life.	Student language contains an example demonstrating a connection between culture topics addressed in school settings and student personal life.	Student language contains multiple examples demonstrating a connection between culture topics addressed in school settings and student personal life.
Questioning	Student language does not contain any questions about generally accepted perceptions of culture nor statements that reflect skepticism about culture or cultural perceptions.	Student language contains 1 question about generally accepted perceptions of culture and 1 additional statement that reflect skepticism about culture or cultural perceptions.	Student language contains more than 1 question about generally accepted perceptions of culture and multiple examples of skepticism towards culture and cultural perceptions in society and in personal life.
Empowerment	Student language does not reflect a desire or ability to influence the way culture is perceived in student's personal life or in society.	Student language reflects an ability to influence the way culture is perceived in student's personal life or in society.	Student language reflects an ability and desire to influence the way culture is perceived in his or her personal life or in society.

Figure E1: Rubric for Assessing Student Sensitivity to Culture

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