

AAUSC 2015 Volume—Issues in Language Program Direction

Integrating the Arts: Creative Thinking about FL Curricula and Language Program Direction

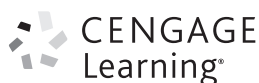
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Language Program Direction:
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Chapter 1

Languages in Partnership with the Visual Arts: Implications for Curriculum Design and Teacher Training¹

María Luisa Parra and Elvira G. Di Fabio, Harvard University

We may distinguish between two types of imaginative process: the one that starts with the word and arrives at the visual image, and the one that starts with the visual image and arrives at this verbal expression.

Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988, p. 83)

Introduction

Although the teaching of culture is by now recognized as a key component of Foreign Language (FL) pedagogy, scholars and practitioners have struggled to define what exactly we mean when we talk about culture in the FL classroom. Recent institutional initiatives have integrated culture into their statements about the goals of our profession. The MLA's report (2007), for instance, calls for the development of students' "translingual and transcultural competence." ACTFL's updated "World Readiness" Standards (ACTFL, 2015) focus on "creat[ing] a roadmap to guide learners to develop competence to communicate effectively and interact with cultural understanding." The College Board's newly redesigned Advanced Placement course proposes to "[engage] students in an exploration of culture in both contemporary and historical contexts" (2011, p. 4), across all modes of communication. Each of these statements reflects a shift in the U.S. vision and goals for linguistic and cultural education and toward the integration of these competences in the classroom.

The central role given to cultural education is changing the FL profession in fundamental ways. In particular, recent discussions emphasize the need to teach students about the products, practices, and perspectives of the target culture (TC) in order to develop their cultural competence and raise their cultural "quotient." In her seminal article, Byrnes (2010) asks: What are the concrete ways we can incorporate culture into our curriculum? What resources can we access to make the learning experience of culture tangible and productive for our students?

¹We dedicate this chapter to the memory of Patrizia Rodomonti Duggan.

(pp. 315–317). Middleton (2014) states that “the process of understanding another culture requires a great deal more than a map and a phrasebook. It requires Cultural Intelligence” (pp. 10–11). Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is understood as “the natural evolution from the now well-established notions of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and Emotional Intelligence (EQ)” (p. 7).

As early as 1995, Claire Kramsch had already conceived of the problem of integrating culture in the FL classroom, calling for a deeper formulation, where “teaching culture means teaching not only how things are and have been, but how they could have been or how else they could be” (1995, p. 85). Furthermore, she asserts that neither an exclusive focus on formal expressions of Culture (Big C) nor an emphasis on the cultural practices of everyday life (little c) can offer the “imaginative leap that will enable learners to imagine cultures different from their own” (1995, p. 85). She therefore calls for embracing the teaching of culture through language, or “language as culture” (1995, p. 83). From this perspective, discourse—as generated by both the TC and the individual student’s experience—is seen as a cultural expression of beliefs and values that can be critically analyzed to bring into question the “traditional boundaries of self and other” (1995, p. 89). This exercise of analysis and reflection paves the way for the development of symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006) and the emergence of a new multilingual identity of self (Kramsch, 2009). More recently, Arens (2010) defined the challenge as “reconceiving language learning within a more consistent educational framework that teaches language and culture in tandem, with its goal being a joint literacy about a second language (L2) and culture (C2)” (p. 321).

Materials and activities are key components of any methodological and pedagogical attempt to address this linguistic-cultural tandem. Visual works of art, as cultural products, are powerful multimodal texts that, when properly chosen, can facilitate the understanding of cultural perspectives and in turn stimulate new ways of thinking, of representing daily life, and of conceiving of the world.

Responding to this volume’s focus on the arts, this chapter has three main purposes: first, to present the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of visual arts integration in FL classes as a means of challenging students’ cultural beliefs through new forms of expression and as a means of facilitating access to the beliefs of others. Second, this chapter presents the methodology and results of a two-year Harvard project called “Language through the Visual Arts: An Interdisciplinary Partnership.”² This project had two main goals: (1) to incorporate work with visual arts (paintings, sculptures, installations, artifacts, and digital images) into the curriculum of Beginning Spanish (first and second semesters) and Intermediate-Advanced Italian (fourth semester); and (2) to develop an intra-institutional partnership with the university museums. The project sought to respond to the aforementioned call for cultural teaching in a systematic,

²This project was funded by a Hauser Grant from the Harvard Initiative for Learning and Teaching (HILT).

meaningful, and innovative way within the established language curriculum. Third, following recent calls for greater FL professionalization (Allen & Maxim, 2011), we provided our teaching assistants (TAs) with instructional opportunities that aligned with their literary backgrounds, in an effort to bolster their professional training as scholars of literature and the humanities in general.

Our discussion is divided into three main sections. In the first section, we highlight seminal work that supports the teaching of culture through visual arts and explores its implications for FL learning (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011; Kern, 2000, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; Kramsch, 2009; Ortuño, 1994). This section also presents some benefits of using museums as teaching spaces. In the second section, we describe our project and the accompanying activities through the lens of the recent initiatives for teaching in the art museum (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011).³ From free writing to structured interpretive tasks, all activities were designed to develop students' critical thinking skills, through the scaffolded manipulation of language competencies and modes of communication. We present vignettes and student comments, gathered from qualitative surveys, to assess the learning experience at the museum. These comments are useful for reflecting on the benefits of expanding the teaching/learning spaces of FL courses. Finally, the last section of the chapter discusses the challenges and effects of integrating art into the language curriculum from the perspective of TA training.

Working with Visual Art

Teachers at all levels of language education typically incorporate visual arts into their programs as a learning tools, whether in English language arts classes, ESL programs, or FL programs (see, for example, New York State Education Department, 2010; Seidel, Thisman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009; Yenawine, 2013). In simplest terms, working with art objects helps develop students' capacity to observe, interpret, and communicate their own ideas. It fosters creativity, provides possibilities for making connections, and acts as a window for understanding different dimensions of our world and other worlds and cultures. Art also serves to raise students' awareness of issues related to community as well as civic and social justice.⁴

In the context of the FL classroom, visual art (including paintings, sculptures, installations, artifacts, and digital images) is a powerful and dynamic multimodal tool with the potential to transform traditional teaching approaches into a versatile, multiliteracies pedagogy (Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996; Unsworth, 2001). First, visual art brings to bear perspectives that expand the limits of monolingual

³While this project was developed in collaboration with the Harvard Art Museums, Italian modules were also developed for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Fine Arts Museum of Boston, and experimented with virtual museum spaces available through the Art Project at the Google Cultural Institute (<http://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project>).

⁴For further reading, see Garber (2004) and Dewhurst (2014). For use of art in an intermediate-advanced Spanish language course see Parra (2013).

understanding. When properly scaffolded, the use of art is a fruitful avenue for fostering literacy development and critical thinking (analysis, evaluation, synthesis) in the target language (TL). Kern (2008), for example, contends that art is one of many constructs available that “offer students the chance to position themselves in relation to distinct viewpoints and distinct cultures” (p. 380). Promoting discussion and critical dialogue in the TL around works of art, says Kern, “[gives] students the chance to make connections between grammar, discourse, and meaning, between language and content, between language and culture, and between another culture and their own—in short, [makes] them aware of the webs, rather than strands, of meaning in human communication” (p. 380). Incorporating visual art into the language classroom, therefore, creates a complex linguistic and cultural environment that increases the students’ literacy levels in the FL by providing the basis for descriptions, narrations, and interpretations at a more sophisticated level of comprehension and production in the target language (Seidel et al., 2009).

Second, in FL classes, images can be effective “point[s] of entry into a web of other texts and images whose analysis starts to sensitize students to and socialize them into the broader cultural narratives” (Barnes-Karol & Broner, 2010, p. 428) of the TC. Integrating a visual dimension into the FL classroom engages students in new aesthetic, historical, political, and cultural dimensions of understanding and appreciation for the TC (Hancock Martin, 2006; Ortuño, 1994). The cross-disciplinary learning environment that results aligns well with the ACTFL’s Connections Standard and with the MLA’s proposal that FL study be situated in “historical, geographical, and cross-cultural frames within the context of humanistic learning” (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007, p. 4). Critical reflection on a TC’s art (including the products, practices, perspectives, values, and beliefs represented in that work), and comparison of that art with artwork from the students’ own culture, present students with novel opportunities to reframe their perspectives and interpretations of (a) the human experience behind the creation of works of art, and (b) the concept of beauty and aesthetic experience in the TC.

Third, art provokes emotional reactions in observers, from empathy to conflict. Activities based on art objects can be meaningful tools that allow teachers to guide students through a process of interpretation by comparing what is represented in the work of art with the emotions that they prompt in the viewer. Students’ reactions to colors, forms, facial expressions, family, male/female roles, and community scenes can produce a basis for respectful discussion and analysis of the TC *vis-à-vis* the students’ own culture(s).

Finally, and for all of the above reasons, working with art is particularly relevant for developing symbolic competence, defined by Kramersch (2006) as the ability to manipulate the symbolic systems and forms of the TC beyond exchange of information (communicative competence). In order to achieve symbolic competence, Kramersch suggests we nurture students’ “embodied experiences,

emotional resonances, and moral imaginings” through the development of three facets of ability: “the production of complexity, the tolerance to ambiguity, and an appreciation of form as meaning” (2006, p. 251). Art, therefore, can contribute in important ways to the development of symbolic competence in FL classes, by actively engaging students in exercises of careful observation and elaborate linguistic description, of historical and aesthetic critical analysis, and of collective dialogue around learners’ emotional reactions to a certain work of art. Moreover, when these activities incorporate the three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational; ACTFL, 2012, p. 7), they can sensitize students to different perspectives of the world and of themselves, to new forms of cultural and aesthetic expression, and to understandings that are otherwise difficult to access.

From a pedagogical standpoint, visual art is especially valuable when integrated with object-based teaching methods—that is, when we use art as a specific object to stimulate and generate a creative exchange of ideas and reflections. This can be accomplished through Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), described by Yenawine (2013) as follows: “[S]tudents comment on what they see, they talk themselves into understandings of complex subject matter. The process gives them an extended chance to express their ideas, necessary for language development” (p. 38). Object-based teaching actively engages learners by drawing and building upon their prior knowledge, experiences, and ideas in multiple ways, from the visual to the kinesthetic, in order to construct meaningful, multisensory interactions and reflections. Object-based learning stimulates complexity of language, broadens the cultural narrative through cross-disciplinary learning, and creates new symbolic competence about the target language and culture.

With this pedagogical philosophy in mind, the present project stepped outside the traditional classroom to consider the use of art museums as educational venues. Art museums offer a perfect crossroads for the convergence of humanities content, communicative competence, and multiliteracies analysis. When students engage with visual objects at the museum, and in the TL, the environment itself becomes an integral part of the pedagogical experience, with the goal of encouraging depth and sophistication in language performance. The change of venue enhances the students’ capacity to integrate new concepts and worldviews that will ultimately become part of their personal life and cultural background.

Teaching in the Art Museum

The projected benefits of teaching in the museum, as identified at the outset of this project, are threefold: the “decompartmentalization” of students’ knowledge; use of language for communication in an authentic and real-life setting; and experimentation with shifting perspectives, as initiated by switching languages.

First, by bringing students into the museum and making art come alive, we break down conventional categories of learning and provide novel learning experiences that foster creative individual and collective learning possibilities. Advocating for aesthetic education, Greene (2001) exhorts teachers to create “moments at which human beings (freed to feel, to know, and to imagine) suddenly understand their own lives in relation to all that surrounds them. Both young people, old people are constantly prevented from doing this. Their lives, even the things they are taught, are broken into fragments, categorized, compartmentalized” (p. 7). Moreover, by using a language other than English, we provide students with a seamless blending of disciplines they might not have thought to relate.

When Greene states that “art is an incomplete being” (2001, p. 16), we are reminded of a similar claim, made by Alois Riegl of the Vienna School of Art in 1900, that art is “incomplete without the perceptual and emotional involvement of the viewer”—without the “beholder’s involvement” (Kandel, 2013, para. 12). By adopting the art museum as a new space for academic interaction, we surround our students with these arguably incomplete objects, which invite their involvement beyond the role of detached observer. Students must go beyond what they have been taught: they must reach within their acquired memory, use their brain as “a creativity machine, which obtains incomplete information from the outside world and completes it” (Kandel, 2013, para. 14). In other words, students in this environment will *teach themselves*. In Greene’s own words, “You can usher a child [in our case, a student] into a theater or museum, encourage, explain, tempt, support. But children must discover a sense of their own agency if the particular work of art is to come alive; they must make their own use of what has been taught [. . .] go beyond what they have been taught and begin teaching themselves” (Greene, 2001, p. 137). As one student, who came to the project as a seasoned museum-goer, confirmed:

When I visited [the museum for class] last week, I had a new kind of museum experience: one in which I listened to an audio program [in Italian] designed not to explain the significance of every single object, but rather to lead me through my own discovery of the exhibition. [. . .] This allowed me to have academic guidance during the visit while also being physically independent in the way I chose to examine the art and proceed through the gallery, leading to an experience that was both highly intellectually engaging and also an exercise in developing my own eye. (Email, October 3, 2014; cited with the permission of the student)

Although self-teaching in this sense is important, we considered it equally important for students to interact and discuss their interpretations with each other. Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee (2011) suggest in-museum teaching to stimulate open-ended conversations that will contribute to the “cycle of completion” from art to the individual, and then from the individual to the community. In this regard, and as we will see later in the methodology section, careful planning is key to successful

interactions. During the autonomous, discovery-based learning phase, the instructor should see herself as part of the group, as a companion, contributing all the while to the flow of discourse as the foundation for interpretation. In addition, the instructor can also create an inventory of the different interpretative viewpoints, which may later be used for comprehensive post-museum writing assignments and class discussions. Burnham and Kai-Kee consider the discussion during or after the museum lesson as “the foundation of understanding and interpretation” (2011, p. 60). “[W]hen we state in words what we see and understand,” they explain, “we create a common language for the exploration of the artwork. Our spoken words allow us to build upon each other’s thoughts and observations” (p. 61).

This notion of a “common language for the exploration of the artwork” leads us to the third benefit of teaching in the art museum: stimulating new responses or developing new perspectives through and within a new multisensorial mode of expression. Students learn to express their experiences in the language of the engaged museum-goer. These “direct perceptual experiences” create new memories expressed in a new language, and thus allow the “learner’s extended self” to emerge (Kramersch, 2009, p. 71). Through this individual learning experience, each student can, in turn, transfer new knowledge to classmates and even to instructors, via scaffolded conversations, thereby creating a cycle of new experiences and memories framed in the TL. “There is a sense in which coming in contact with a work is like meeting another human being. Meetings of this sort can never take place in a vacuum, in isolation from lived biography” (Greene, 2001, p. 16). In the end, the “beholder’s involvement” in the “completion” of the artwork is open-ended; nobody can predict what new meaning he/she will create or what interpretations or frames the group of interlocutors as a whole will generate. It is through the exchange of ideas and emotions resulting from direct interaction with a work of art that a creative community develops.

Furthermore, as studies on bilinguals show, the use of a different language can cause a concomitant shift in an individual’s response to her surroundings. Shwayder (2010), for example, found that a change in language affected participants’ opinions on a given topic. As one author of the project stated, “It’s like asking your friend if he likes ice cream in English, and then turning around and asking him again in French and getting a different answer” (para. 10). By overlaying the elements of physical space, art, and changing language, we are indeed experimenting with shifting perspectives. As Kramersch (1995) asserts, “learners have to be addressed not as deficient monoglossic enunciators, but as potentially heteroglossic narrators” (p. 90). Our goal is to open up spaces where students can find new and creative ways of expressing themselves in the TL by integrating new vocabulary and a formal register to express those perspectives. Our approach furthermore seeks to help students become “multilingual subjects” who use language not only as a “code but also a meaning-making system” that “constructs the historical sedimentation of meanings that we call our ‘selves’” (Kramersch, 2009, p. 2).

The Project *Language through the Visual Arts: An Interdisciplinary Partnership*

The goal of the present project was to foster students' translingual, transcultural, and symbolic competencies while also expanding their individual educational horizons through opportunities and experiences that would help them become informed global citizens of the new century (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007, p. 2; Wurr & Hellebrandt, 2007). The project had five concrete goals:

1. To provide an innovative methodological framework that integrates visual arts in all levels of the FL curriculum and makes effective use of visual arts, both in the museum space (actual artworks) and in the traditional classroom (digital images).
2. To raise students' awareness of other parts of the world—their local cultures and cultural narratives.
3. To develop students' cultural quotient and symbolic competence through active object-based learning experiences with art.
4. To expand TAs' conception of language teaching as they broaden their scope of materials and activities to work within the TL, in the classroom and at the museum.
5. To present students, teachers, and administrators with an integrated model of collaboration and partnership between language departments and university art museums, highlighting lesser-tapped resources that can enrich students' and instructors' cognitive and affective lives in creative and meaningful ways.

Participants (Students)

Students participating in this project were enrolled in regular Spanish (1st and 2nd semester) and Italian (4th semester) language courses. Table 1.1 summarizes the project participants: Spanish had a high enrollment for first- and second-semester classes both years (260 and 270 students, respectively) with 9 and 7 TAs participating in respective years, and 2 Research Assistants (RAs) per year. Italian had a much smaller enrollment, with 13 students, 2 TAs and 1 RA the first year, and 12 students and 1 TA the second year.

Table 1.1. Participants Per Year and Language Class

Academic Year	Spanish		Italian	
	TAs/RAs	Students (1st/2nd semester)	TAs/RAs	Students
2012–2013	9/2	260 (18 sections)	2/1	13
2013–2014	7/2	270 (19 sections)	1/0	12

Course Heads, Research Assistants,⁵ and Teaching Assistants

The authors of this chapter, respective course heads of the Spanish and Italian courses participating in the project, trained two sets of assistants for this project: (a) RAs, who worked specifically on reviewing theoretical and practical literature, designing activities, selecting artwork in collaboration with the museum personnel, and documenting and recording how students responded to activities within the museum setting for each of the languages; and (b) TAs, who collaborated with their respective course heads in weekly staff meetings to discuss how to choose the artwork for their classes and how to develop activities around such selection. In what follows, we summarize the work done in each project.

Museum Staff⁶

This project gave us the opportunity to work collaboratively with art educators and art curators at our institution. Throughout the project, close communication with museum staff was key. We met before the beginning of the semester to establish a dialogue about the goals of each course and how the collection could visualize course themes. This conversation invariably led to a more targeted conversation about specific works of art and how each selection could sustain object-based teaching and learning. Next, course heads, RAs, and museum personnel collaboratively designed learning activities to take place during the pre-, during- and post-visit phases. Finally, during completion of the course syllabus, museum personnel confirmed specific dates for the class visits to the museum and identified optimal times for guided orientation visits, in the target language when possible.⁷

Materials and Activities

Common Framework for Spanish and Italian

Though the activities developed in this project varied in language, level, modality, and cultural scope (Di Fabio & Parra, 2015),⁸ all of them were elaborated following a common framework designed to:

- Allow interdisciplinary teaching and learning;
- Facilitate one or more modes of communication;

⁵We wish to thank RAs David Yague Gonzalez, Celeste Moreno Palmero, Thenesoya Vidina Martín De la Nuez, Sarah Axelrod, and Patrizia Rodomonti Duggan for their contributions to this project.

⁶Particular thanks go to Kelsey McNiff, Akiko Yamagata, Jessica Martinez, Diana Loren, Maria Schaedler-Luera, Ray Williams, and Judy Murray for their collaboration and support of our work at the museum. They contributed invaluable ideas, guidance, time, and resources.

⁷Though it was preferable to have orientation tours conducted in the TL, the availability of this service depended on whether there were museum docents conversant in the TL and available on that specific day.

⁸For sample lessons, visit the project website at <http://lgs-art.fas.harvard.edu>.

- Promote transcultural awareness through a critical, reflective dialogue in which students' own identities were central to the learning process (Scarino, 2010, p. 324);
- Foster the possibility of constructing a personal narrative (proposed by Kramersch [2009] to be at the center of identity and subjectivity construction in FL learning).

Table 1.2 summarizes the levels of instruction, teaching settings where art was presented, modalities of the presentations, and kinds of activities.

General Lesson Plan: Aligning Activity Design with Museum Visits

The main preliminary task for the instructor was to select works of art that could serve as pivot points around which a rich set of activities could be developed. As will be described in subsequent sections, instructors in the two languages used different criteria for choosing art: the Spanish instructors opted for pieces by Latin American and Spanish artists that represented topics related to those cultures; the Italian instructors chose pieces that represented universal themes.

For both languages and at all levels of instruction, a series of pre-, during- and post-visit activities were designed to fully capitalize on the museum experience. The pre-museum activities (carried out in class before each visit) helped students to recall and internalize vocabulary and grammatical structures that would help them perform activities in a museum setting with ease. In general, the vocabulary

Table 1.2. Settings and Activities with Art in Spanish and Italian Classes

Language	Spanish	Italian
Level	Novice (1st and 2nd semester)	Intermediate/Advanced (4th semester)
Media presentation	Visual (Images, artifacts, installations)	Auditory (Audio descriptions)
Cultural scope	Culture-specific (Art from Latin America and Spain)	General cultural
Teaching setting	Classroom/Museum	Museum (Real and virtual)
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using works of art as springboards for various communicative tasks in class (Handouts). • Conducting research on different art schools and traditions (Presentations and homework). • Creating their own descriptions and interpretations of art at the museum and as homework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating written and recorded oral responses to audio prompts. • Developing creative narrative about specific artwork. • Discussing artwork to disentangle the cultural narrative behind it. • Scripting and recording descriptions of artworks that connect through an overarching theme and that other students listen to and interpret in the museum.

and grammar emphasized in these activities was designed to incorporate themes the students were studying (or had already studied) in the textbook and in class. The pre-visit activities also prepared students for the upcoming museum visit by suggesting relevant tasks or topics for the students to think about.

The in-museum activities are described in detail in the following sections; these activities were designed to maximize class time (normally 50 minutes) by presenting structured tasks related to specific artwork(s). Finally, post-museum activities included individual, group, or class assignments. As demonstrated in the following sections, these post-museum activities were designed to guide students in drawing connections between the artworks viewed at the museum and their personal lives and experiences.

Spanish at the Museum

The Spanish component of the project involved visits to two different university museums: a contemporary art museum, and an anthropology and ethnography museum. For the Spanish language classes, we chose a culture-specific approach that focused on Latin American, Latino, and Spanish art. Works were selected according to the following criteria:

- a) Representation of daily life or common activities.
- b) Connection to the textbook theme that was being studied at the time.
- c) Representation of scenes that inspired rich vocabulary and narrative descriptions.
- d) Ability to stimulate dialogue about similarities and differences with respect to students' native cultures.
- e) Variety in artists and artistic schools from Latin America, U.S. Latino culture, and Spain.

The decision to choose art depicting daily life was made in response to two specific pedagogical/curricular goals: first, it allowed for the integration of both “big C” and “little c” cultural components within a single work of art. Students were encouraged to reflect on how “high culture” is often concerned with the representation of daily activities on a more basic cultural level. Second, scenes of daily life events are more likely to make possible the teaching of TL pragmatics within the context of the TC. We concur with Arens’s (2010) statement that, “what we need to teach [. . .] is how individuals manage cultural knowledge within times, places, and communities, locally [. . .] Teaching culture as pragmatics thus necessarily implicates cross-cultural learning, as the learner has to move beyond a single national identity and into a global community” (p. 322).

The contemporary works of art chosen for the Spanish class visits were: one contemporary object (*Chair* by Doris Salcedo, Colombia, 1958), related to the theme of furniture in the house (Spanish first semester); and one painting

(*Man and Pipe* by Picasso, 1911), related to the theme of leisure time (Spanish second semester). The object chosen at the museum of archeology and ethnography was a pre-Colombian Mayan bust of the god of the corn, related to the theme of Mayan culture and food (students from both semesters visited this museum).

The pre-visit activities were presented in the classroom the day before the museum visit. First, a PowerPoint presentation was used to review the relevant themes (furniture, leisure activities, Mayan culture), and then students were guided through discussions designed to expand their vocabulary around the specific theme. For example, before the visit to view the battered Salcedo chair,⁹ a PowerPoint was built around the theme of chairs, showcasing the activities we can do in a chair, feelings we can have while sitting, the materials a chair can be made of, and conditions a chair could be in. Questions for subsequent class discussion included: *What kind of books do you like to read? Where do you like to read? Do you have a favorite chair for reading? What are the parts of a chair? What are chairs made of? In what conditions can a chair be? What emotions can we feel when we are in a chair?* To build on interpersonal skills, we formed small groups and asked students to ask each other the following questions: *Do you have a chair in your room? Can you describe it? What is the story of that chair?* The goal of this activity was to engage students in using vocabulary to describe and exchange information in preparation to see the Salcedo chair, with its unique characteristics, and to think about how objects in our daily lives have a function beyond practical usage that includes the affective meanings we might attach to them. The pre-visit activities also included a brief history of the museum to be visited. Presenting this information gave the opportunity to review vocabulary around location and give directions on how to arrive at the museum.

Finally, the pre-museum portion of the unit involved the distribution of a written guide, developed in Spanish by the course head and her team, on how to observe art.¹⁰ Students took the guide home and used it to prepare for the visit to the museum. This guide provided a framework for observing art as well as information on metalanguage and expressions the students could use to describe and analyze, in Spanish, the pieces we would observe the following day at the museum. Thanks to the pre-visit activities, students had the necessary vocabulary

⁹The Salcedo chair is made of steel but the artist has given the impression that it is made of different materials. For instance, the legs and part of the seat look like wood, while a corner of the seat looks like cardboard that has been damaged; the back of the chair are two polished steel pointy bars that don't touch each other and don't provide a sense of comfort. The analysis of these different nuances of materials and their physical conditions related to the pre-visit discussion questions about the functional and affective meanings of chairs in relation to different materials.

¹⁰These guides are available at the project website at <http://lgs-art.fas.harvard.edu>.

and grammatical structures to engage in a meaningful dialogue about the pieces of art they were observing.

At the museum, the students first observed the artwork in silence. The instructor then began asking questions to build a collective dialogue around the exhibit. For instance, in the case of Salcedo chair: *What do we see? What is the condition of the chair? What do we feel when we see this chair? What do you think the battered chair feels? What do you think happened to cause such damage to the chair?* This last question later expanded into an activity where students had to build a whole narrative (a story), from beginning to end, about what had happened to the chair. Observing the artwork and formulating initial ideas about what parts or the whole represented allowed students to hone their interpretive skills; simultaneously, exchanging ideas in the form of dialogue fostered their presentational and interpersonal skills. To illuminate Salcedo's choice in creating a battered chair as a work of art, the instructor concluded the in-museum activity with some bibliographic information about the artist, about Colombia's history of violence, and about what Salcedo was trying to represent and communicate with her chair, namely, the sense of loneliness, loss, and grief that marked and haunted Colombian lives through the years of internal war. By choosing a simple, domestic object as the center for her art, Salcedo aims to honor the daily lives of common people affected by the war. Her chair becomes a "witness" to the brutality and destruction of war and the fragility of family life. Salcedo's art highlights the possibility of relating a personal and affective perspective (embedded in a historical time) to a common object.

It was this last connection—the affective—to a common object that defined the post-visit activities, predominantly writing assignments based on the works of art viewed at the museum. For example, as a follow-up on the discussion of the Doris Salcedo chair, students were asked to compose a history for the most meaningful domestic object in their respective dorms. Specifically, students wrote about desks, beds, cell phones, windows, chairs, stoves, and divans, among other objects.

Next, they incorporated vocabulary and characters that enriched their descriptions in creative ways. For example, one student wrote about the stove in her family kitchen, using various adjectives—"relajante" (*relaxing*), "divertido" (*fun*), [platos] "tradicionales del sur de Asia" (*traditional south Asian [dishes]*), "nuevas" [recetas] (*new [recipes]*)—verbs in the present and imperfect, expressions like "creo que" (*I think*), "gustar" (*to like*), and "encantar" (*to love*), and she mentioned her mother as a central character of her narrative. Furthermore, she used the stove to create a rich description that evoked her deep connection with her mother and cultural background, and with her memories from childhood.

Another student wrote about windows, at his home and in his dorm. He described these windows beyond being mere objects on the wall. In this student's

description, the windows become a “portal” for deep thinking and reflection; an opening to see “cosas incontables” (*countless things*) of his own life—past, present, and future.

To some extent, these results reflect the scaffolding that we provided during the pre-activities, and the guidance and discussion that we generated in the museum around the Salcedo chair. The pre-activities provided the linguistic elements and resources (adjectives, verbs, and other expressions) to create in Spanish a detailed narrative around a daily life object. The museum activities (the analysis of the chair’s artistic and historical meaning) stimulated students’ critical thinking about how history and culture influence the creation of a piece of art and the narratives around it: a chair is not a mere object anymore, but the “witness” of a family story in a violent time. In similar ways, a kitchen stove is witness to the warm interactions between mother and daughter, and windows provide access to a young man’s deep reflections about his past, present, and future life. Through their compositions, these students went beyond the use of TL grammar and discourse: they appropriated a way of thinking about a domestic object and a model to express their new understanding in a creative, rich, and meaningful narrative in the TL.

Students that analyzed Picasso’s *Man with Pipe* provided a description and “cubist” interpretation of an object they used during their leisure time. The students’ written assignments for this task showed us that the visit to the museum and the scaffolded reflections around Picasso’s painting had provided them with novel opportunities to learn specific vocabulary around art and use it in their descriptions. For example, some students were able to incorporate vocabulary related to art like “sombrear” (*to shade*), “añadir profundidad” (*add depth*), “influencia” (*influence*), “monocromático” (*monochromatic*), “decoraciones” (*decorations*), “lunares” (*polka dots*), “cuadrículado” (*squares*), “garabatos” (*scribbles*), “interpretación” (*interpretation*), and “eclectica” (*eclectic*).

In describing his cubist interpretation of an ordinary object, one student wrote that his divan was “eclectico” [*sic*], and that in this way every person could see his or her own divan in the painting. With this comment, the student used his critical thinking and showed a broader understanding about the relation between art and the audience: art gives us the possibility of recognizing ourselves within what we observe. Therefore, appreciating art is a personal and active endeavor. As Kandel (2013) states, art is incomplete without the “beholder’s involvement” (p. 12).

Finally, the students in the class on Mayan culture participated in a collective art project where Mayan calendars and stelae were made and displayed for peers in our beginning-level courses.¹¹

¹¹Because of space constraints, we have not included the full description of this collective project. Suffice it to say that learning about the Maya culture and calendar gave students the opportunity to learn about a different writing system, a new way to conceptualize time and space in tune with circles of nature and the power of religious belief as daily life organizers.

Italian at the Museum

The Italian component of this project had as its premise the idea that new academic spaces could be created through language, both by having students use language outside the traditional classroom setting, and by encouraging them to explore spaces that they might otherwise miss during their four years of college—namely, in this case, the remarkable environment of the university art museum. An art museum’s silence is full of visual expression, but it is the visitor’s role (in this case, the student’s role) to translate that silence into an alternate verbal expression. In order to execute what Roman Jakobson calls intersemiotic translation or transmutation (Schulte & Biguenet, 1992, p. 145) and foster an aesthetic literacy, we worked to develop a pedagogy that was cognizant of and sustained objectives within a framework of symbolic competence, that is, the ability to interpret, negotiate, and express meaning through the sign systems offered by artworks.

Whereas the Spanish activities were created for beginning-level courses and necessarily focused more on descriptions and personal preferences in relation to the everyday activities depicted, the Italian unit was developed for a fourth-semester course. We could therefore count on the students’ proficiency levels being advanced enough to allow for more elaborate, analytical, and critical work in the TL, extending beyond personal impressions and experiences.

Rather than limit discussion to works about Italy or by Italian artists, we opened the field to any work of art in the museum that would blend in with the unit topic and language function. This is one of the ways that language study can be compelling—at higher levels, it moves beyond “survival” skills, and even beyond the limits of the TC. Language study, in this sense, is about using language in its most unfettered manner. Our objective therefore was to give the students the tools to speak about any work of art, in any setting, with a perspective changed and challenged by their use of a language other than their own native tongue. We were, in effect, putting to the test Octavio Paz’s idea that “each language is a view of the world” (Schulte & Biguenet, 1992, p. 153).

The two-year scope of the project afforded the opportunity to work up models of holistic language learning, with themes that embrace more than one culture, more than one learning space, and more than one informed perspective. We worked with the expertise of the professional museum curator and that of the educated visitor, and attempted to incorporate both the intent of the artist and the work itself as an organic medium of communication. These museum modules were an overlay of object-based collaborative learning and—just as importantly—object-based collaborative teaching.

We stressed to the participants in the Italian project that this was not just a language course, and certainly not an art history course taught in Italian. This was to be a holistic experience that blended, through an articulated methodology of arts integration, new perspectives on the use of language, visual art, physical

space, and overlapping disciplines. The overarching objective was authenticity in language use and an appreciation of the art museum as a readily accessible venue for such use.

To stimulate this connection between language and art—that is, to appreciate the potential of this interface as a stimulus for dialogue—we began with a type of museum orientation known as a “personal response tour.” Independently developed by Ray Williams, former director of education at the Harvard Art Museums, this activity is designed to offer a gallery experience that provides the context for small groups to explore personal responses to works of art and to deepen their sense of shared community. Describing the value of this activity, Williams (2010) writes, “Art has always been about Life, and many of our visitors are longing to reclaim that connection for themselves” (p. 98).

This activity was adapted to reflect the level of language proficiency of the students of Italian who participated in this project, already sophisticated enough to express personal and more complex views. First, we pre-selected groups of objects (which students identified by listening to audio recordings) and then we asked students to make connections between the works of art and personal experiences that related to course themes. For example, we asked students: *Which work of art most resonates with your life as a student? Which work of art has something to say about your life during a moment of transition or change? How do people react when faced with transition or with an unfamiliar custom?* By answering these questions, students enhanced the works of art with their own perceptual and emotional abstractions.

Beyond this initial orientation, the template we created for the project defined five topic-specific modules to coordinate with the textbook, each of which built on a progression of language functions, beginning with description and moving to narration, speculation, hypothesis, and abstraction. The pre-, during- and post-museum phases guided students through a logical unfolding of each module.

The lesson before the museum visit addressed the input phase of the task, building on language tools such as relevant vocabulary and structures. An extension of this phase was the use of a “*vademecum*,” or journal that “goes with” the students, intended primarily for weekly musings, both assigned and spontaneous, related to the textbook themes and individual museum observations. Taking this personal intellectual journal helped the student flesh out ideas, vocabulary, and images prior to the activity at the museum.

The art activity itself focused on the integration of interpretive skills and communicative tasks. Topics included “Order/Disorder and Student Life” (description), “Spirits of the Museum” (narration), “Dictionary of the Museum” (hypothesis), and “Walking/Observing” (speculation), and culminated in a capstone activity in which students created their own museum module based on a comprehensive theme of their own choosing (abstraction).

The template for each museum module combined interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes of communication, both oral and written. The activity began with a listening session in the museum (interpretive, audio), in which students used pre-recorded audio files to locate and identify relevant art pieces based on description alone. The audio files were recorded and placed on the course website by the research assistant or the classroom instructor; each student was asked to download the audio files onto a personal device (smartphone, tablet, etc.¹²), and bring the recording, along with appropriate headphones, for active listening in the museum. Small groups worked together to negotiate meaning; locate the object(s) being described in the audio; identify the title, artist, and year; and respond to questions posed in the recording (interpersonal, spoken). The activity audio ended with prompts for further exploration (interpretive audio and preparation for presentational mode). For example: *What objects do you see that might symbolize hope? Can you identify objects that represent the five senses? Take note of the works of art that are placed near this painting; how do they connect?*

Following the in-museum phase, students accessed an online recording portal¹³ populated with further prompts, both oral and written (interpretive), to which they prepared and submitted appropriate recorded responses (presentational, oral). These prompts walked the students through a series of interpretive steps, from identifying the works in question, to understanding the meaning as related to the topic on hand, to applying that meaning to their own experiences. Examples of prompts include: *How does your room compare with what you see in the painting? Why might you describe the artist as rebel? What ideals might you imagine him to have? How do these ideals compare to your own?*

The wrap-up phase of the activity encouraged each student to take the knowledge, understanding, and application work of the earlier phases and use that knowledge to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize that new learning into an essay or creative writing assignment designed to go beyond the personal and address more global concerns (presentational, written). Students undertook this activity individually, for the most part, although the option for small-group assignments was also made available. The resulting projects were then discussed in class in small groups or in plenum (presentational, oral). For example, in an essay entitled “The Foreigner, Who Am I?” one student reflected on images and messages in the work(s) of art as they apply to the self and beyond, and used this reflection to explore the sense of foreignness that one experiences when encountering a new environment and identity.

¹²Since this facet of technology is evolving and adaptive, it is expected that, with each iteration of the course, the specific technologies chosen could shift.

¹³For this project, we used LingT Language (<http://www.lingtlanguage.com>), but other portals may work just as well.

Findings

In this section, we present some quotes from students who participated in the project. These comments are one form of qualitative evidence of the benefits they gained from the project. Many students commented on the new dimension that visual arts, in general, and the museum visits in particular, brought to their language-learning experience. The comments were collected through a survey administered to students at the end of the first and second years of the project. The quotations are organized around two themes: *communicative modes* and *learning at the museum*.

Communicative Modes

Learning languages at the art museum opened up new methods for developing the three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational). Because of the visual nature of the activities in the Spanish classes, student comments tended to emphasize benefits involving the presentational and interpretive modes:

(SP) *Discussions among our class during which I found out different perspectives about how to look at those paintings.*

(SP) *Looking at cubism and seeing people's different interpretations was interesting.*

Italian students, on the other hand, highlighted the benefits of the auditory tasks and enhancement of the interpretive mode:

(IT) *Using the audio files was very helpful in improving my Italian listening skills and testing comprehension. I was also grateful for the chance to practice listening to another person speak Italian, so that my comprehension isn't limited to only those I talked with regularly in class.*

(IT) *[T]he audio recording really forced me to listen hard to comprehend, but it was very rewarding. It helped my analysis skills in another language (think critically).*

Students from both Spanish and Italian classes spoke about how the visit to the museum fostered their speaking/presentational skills:

(SP) *The entire museum was interesting but it was very rewarding being able to utilize Spanish in an actual environment.*

(IT) *[I]t made me more confident speaking in front of others. It was a good exercise because in order to describe the art I needed to delve into more sophisticated language in order to do it justice.*

Learning at the Museum

Students in both languages highlighted how the change in physical location (museum vs. classroom) impacted their learning experience. Overall, students

liked—and perceived themselves to benefit from—using their FL outside the classroom, as the following quotes show:

(SP) *It forced us to use Spanish for analyzing art and required us to respond to what we saw without the cues typically given in class.*

(SP) *I enjoyed getting out of the classroom to visit and see some relevant pieces of art. It was much more exciting than a grammar lesson.*

Of course, students had to use grammar to be able to communicate:

(SP) *The visit helped me with my listening comprehension. I also learned many new words and it was good practice with emotions and subjunctive tense.*

(IT) *The museum visits enhanced my language because I was forced to use [a] higher level of thinking and speaking. I was able to describe art with words other than “bello” and “interessante.”*

These quotes suggest that teaching language at the museum offered a positive grammar instruction experience that drew “students’ attention to a linguistic form[s] in real communicative context” (Katz & Blyth, 2007, p. 16). It is precisely the need to use a specific form in an authentic communicative situation that will motivate students to learn and internalize that form. Beyond grammar and vocabulary, the museum visits offered further opportunities for activating valuable knowledge. For example:

- Interdisciplinary experience

(IT) *Direct interaction of one academic discipline (Italian) with another (art)*

- Previous knowledge

(SP) *It allowed me to apply my previously learned skills to a new setting and situation*

- Connections between language and real objects. The aspect of the museum visit that students found to be the most useful, interesting, and rewarding was the possibility of working with real objects:

(SP) *I liked describing real objects in person, discussing about feelings towards these new objects. Hands on activities.*

(SP) *I enjoyed seeing the different works of art that I didn’t know were previously available.*

(IT) *At the museum, we could see the art in great detail, which we would not be able to do in the classroom. Because there was so much detail to describe about the art in the museum, we had to use much more rich and detailed vocabulary. Also it showed us that we are able to use, apply, and think about Italian in other places besides the classroom. We can use Italian anywhere!*

(IT) Some of the art resonated personally with some of my life experiences. Useful because it allowed me to further explore the subtle differences in the languages.

Students reacted positively to culture exposure through art. They liked the challenge of working with objects and paintings, noting that it provided them with a frame within which they could communicate their thoughts and perspectives in more complex ways. This possibility was highly motivational for students, and inspired their teachers to keep scaffolding students' proficiency and communicative skills practice in the TL.

Incorporating Art in Teacher Training

In addition to developing a model for embracing visual art in the teaching of FLs and cultures, this project also aimed to enrich teacher training—a crucial facet at the center of the professionalization of the field of FL teaching (Allen & Maxim, 2011).

Spanish and Italian TAs participating in the project found that the integration of art was useful for teaching both language and culture and provided ample opportunities for developing all three modes of communication. In a survey about their experiences, the teaching participants found arts integration to yield three other noteworthy benefits:

1. It broadened their repertoire of teaching materials and methodologies. Working with art inspired TAs “to put in practice [their] creativity in teaching”; they found that art could be easily incorporated into handouts, PowerPoints, and homework research projects.
2. It gave TAs a meaningful context within which to present and use both vocabulary and grammar. It also served as a springboard to scaffold meaningful conversations while integrating social, political, historical, and cultural content into their daily classes (Barnes-Karol & Broner, 2010).
3. It suggested to the TAs different ways in which they could scaffold students' oral and written competencies, helping them to depart from the descriptive to arrive at the analytical. TAs were also able to assess students' progress in the many facets of oral and written competency in a more comprehensive way. They learned to make rubrics for giving accurate and concrete feedback when evaluating students in both writing and speaking.

Working with art also had implications for the TAs' relationships and interactions with their students. The TAs found that art was a “wondrous icebreaker” that made their interaction with the students more dynamic and “fun.” TAs became aware of the fact that even the more timid students had the potential to engage in more elaborated interactions in the target language. Working with

art allowed TAs to “catch the attention of students with a wide range of learning styles, such as the visual learners and the kinesthetic,” and to create a more collaborative learning space where students felt comfortable expressing their perspectives and interpretations while also learning from their peers. Discussions around art showed students that “there are no wrong answers or questions”—a realization that, in turn, made them feel more comfortable about communicating their ideas and taking risks.

TAs reported several benefits and advantages of teaching the TL at the museum; in particular, they noted that teaching in different contexts was a “fantastic opportunity to reduce foreign language anxiety.” After the visits to the museums, students’ attitudes in class were usually “more open and relaxed.” It was “extremely stimulating.” The TAs perceived that students enjoyed and appreciated being exposed to a different environment where they could use the TL in a meaningful way. Finally, TAs found that choosing and talking about a real object in a real setting “increased students’ motivation and eagerness to express new ideas, as well as their curiosity about the target culture.” More importantly, TAs noted that “if the topic/piece of art interests [students] they are more likely to write a great assignment.”

In sum, teaching with art allowed TAs to explore their own teaching abilities beyond their comfort zones and “re-evaluate” their teaching strategies. Some TAs reported that incorporating art into their classes allowed them to become more flexible when choosing pedagogical strategies, topics for class discussions, and teaching spaces.

On the other hand, TAs realized that working with art is more challenging—for both students and instructors!—than working with traditional images from the Internet, as it demands the use of analytic and critical thinking skills. TAs reported, thus, that the success of their work was not fortuitous but required the use of “well-prepared and sequenced” activities both when introducing art and when following up on the presentation of a specific work of art or visit to the museum. In this regard, the course head’s guidance was key in providing TAs with:

- An overarching theme within which to organize the work with art;
- Criteria for selecting the artworks to work with at the museum;
- Structuring the prompts and questions to activate students’ previous knowledge about the theme of the work of art;
- Transitions between prior-knowledge activities and the presentation of new vocabulary and grammatical structures related to the discussion of the work of art;
- Questions to encourage students to express their own perspectives and feelings about the work of art, and to scaffold the whole-group interaction;
- Follow-up activities, usually in the form of written assignments that allowed students to integrate and relate the discussion in class or in the museum to their own lives.

After participating in this project, most TAs also reported in the survey that they had begun to incorporate work with art into their other language classes. Moreover, they said they had been using their new skills in their own work with literary texts, considering literature as a work of art that must be animated by close readings, by an exchange of perspectives and abstractions, and by critical discussions.

Conclusions

The positive effects of the aesthetically oriented pedagogy piloted in this study are many. Over each semester of the project, we saw the benefits multiply and expand, as instructors, curators, and students collaborated to discover additional applications of this path to the development of multiliteracies. Repeated visits to the museum allowed students to deepen their familiarity with the new physical and intellectual space. Students gained a sense of ownership through the exchange of ideas, and that sense of ownership in turn validated individual interpretations and led to creative evaluation and synthesis, as well as other forms of higher-order thinking. The museum experience becomes a part of each student's intellectual fabric and, by extension, creates a point of reference for further musings, which the team hopes will endure beyond the classroom experience and even beyond the students' college years. While we do not wish to exaggerate the effects of this partnership between language classes and the art museum, we also should not underestimate its impact. Using the TL as a vehicle for discussing content beyond the classroom inevitably raises teacher and student awareness of content-based and language-integrated learning.

Ultimately, this project is about growing aware of, challenging, and in some cases, changing perspectives, both as one sees others and as one sees oneself. What do the students see and hear? Why? How are they expressing that experience? As Friedrich Schleiermacher wonders: can thoughts be one and the same in two languages (Schulte & Biguenet, 1992, p. 49), or by changing languages, will a different soul emerge, as Charlemagne might contend? In what ways does this experience enhance their overall cultural intelligence—their CQ? In our surveys, students consistently underscored that the experience of listening closely, identifying artworks, and then responding in a variety of media helped them look at and engage with art in new ways. Hopefully, as Maxine Greene (2001) states, we have led them through doorways they might not otherwise have crossed (p. 44), and in doing so, helped to de-compartmentalize their approach to academic and lifelong learning. Perhaps, also, the experience helped them develop a different view of the world and the means to express that view.

In the end, the inclusion of visual arts in the Spanish and Italian language curricula proved to be fruitful for all participants—students, instructors, and course heads—involved in the teaching/learning process. We close, however, by highlighting two significant challenges posed by the project, which must be taken into consideration in future iterations:

1. The mindful coordination of all members of the project, including: course heads and research assistants, who worked directly with the museum education director to select works and create the model template for future activities; the course head, who wrote the syllabus and strategically integrated the activities to coordinate with the textbook unit; the classroom instructors, who integrated the activities into the course and partnered with the museums once the template had been set; and, of course, the students, whose participation and production reflected the learning goals of the course;
2. Helping museum personnel understand what this intercultural foreign language project was all about. While museum educators present collections and artworks to students of all ages on a regular basis, our project was atypical, in that it involved an extensive, integrated engagement with the museum for the purpose of translingual and transcultural competence. It opened up new possibilities for animating the museum spaces and collections, but it also required some recalibration of administrative and curatorial attitudes, and in some cases, even those of the security guards (!) to fully understand the scope, seriousness, and depth of our project.

Byram (2010) suggests that “a reappraisal of purposes with respect to the cultural dimension of FL teaching will lead to richer, more complex outcomes” (p. 317). Our hope is that this chapter will contribute to the reappraisal of art and art museums as an invaluable physical and symbolic crossroads where students can discover and develop their own voices in the FLs they learn. As they exercise their language skills, students also flex their critical thinking muscles in new ways, outside the literal “box” of the classroom and within an authentic learning and communication space. Art comes to life through the students’ unique, meaningful exchanges, as do students’ voices, as they grow as agents moving between cultures.

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