



Preparing the ground for intercultural communicative competence through stereotypes

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Abstract

Intercultural Communicative Competence has become a recognized learning goal of language teaching. This article argues for a dedicated introductory pedagogical module that teaches students the preliminary cognitive and metacognitive skills that are necessary for them to successfully approach the study of ICC. The first part of this article analyzes established theories on ICC to identify these necessary foundational concepts and skills. The article then presents a practical teaching module that prepares the ground for the learning of ICC. The module is based on a deconstruction of cultural stereotypes as a means to help students reflect on what culture is and initiate a reflection on intercultural exchange.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communicative Competence, Internationalization, Intercultural Awareness, Stereotypes*

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Introduction

Today, language programs are at risk as the rising popularity of STEM disciplines increasingly threatens their reduction or cancellation. An equally formidable challenge is the improving precision and growing accessibility of novel translation technologies, of which AI services like ChatGPT are merely the most recent examples. In light of these existential challenges, the field of second language acquisition today requires the steady integration of a theoretical perspective such as Intercultural Communicative Competence, or ICC, to reinforce the significance and secure the future place of language programs in post-secondary education.²

While scholars have been theorizing ICC since at least the 1990s, its implementation in language curricula is still sporadic and unsystematic. This in spite of the fact that ICC promotes students' acquisition of extremely valuable skills for our contemporary globalized world. Namely, how to navigate new cultural spaces with respect for the other, the relativization of one's own positionality, the openness to new and foreign ideas as a possible resource of enrichment of the self.

This article understands ICC through Byram's theory as a set of abilities that foster students' awareness of the various social, cultural and political dimensions of the L2. I further elaborate on the theory of ICC

¹ Please note a typo in an earlier version of the APA citation in this document, which used the term *communicate* instead of *communicative*.

² In the field of Italian language and culture teaching, Janice Aski and April Weintritt recently called for the integration of ICC in Italian language classes as a response to falling enrollments in world languages (2020).

below. Within the context of an increasingly globalized world, ICC in this way advances a much-needed culture of diversity, inclusion and social justice that globalized pluralist societies require.³ ICC thus also becomes a necessary component of liberal arts education, forming what Byram and colleagues have recently termed ‘plurilingual-and-interculturally competent democratically active citizens’ (2023, p. 141).

The skills that ICC helps students develop are also transferable to our increasingly diverse and globally interconnected workplace. The healthcare, tourism, media, and international business sectors are but a few of those fields in which intercultural skills will be increasingly necessary. As Garret-Rucks (2016) aptly puts it, rethinking language teaching around ICC would thus help:

(1) explain to administrators, parents and students how world language study prepares learners to compete in an increasingly global market beyond the learner’s development of linguistic proficiency and (2) convince administrators of the value in and the need for world language study in order to support institutional internationalization efforts. (p. XIV).

While the need for ICC has thus been acknowledged, the exact means to best achieve this competence in the language classroom remain to be fully theorized. Especially the specific introductory work required to prepare students for the acquisition of ICC is oftentimes not fully recognized in scholarship, nor much attention paid to the framework of practical implementation that this preparation necessitates. Even though we have a series of lesson plans and case studies on which to base ICC-centered instruction in language classes, the importance of an introductory module has not yet been compellingly explored.⁴ This article therefore investigates theoretically what preparatory work is needed to lay the foundations of ICC in the language class, and on this basis proposes a practical set of exercises as illustration.

The proposed introductory module centers on the analysis and deconstruction of stereotypes. This facilitates the learning of the cognitive and metacognitive skills and categories necessary for students’ acquisition of intercultural communicative competence, thus allowing the first step towards *learning how to learn* ICC. Throughout the article, I intend metacognition to mean the ‘awareness of and reflections about one’s knowledge, experiences, emotions and learning in the contexts of language learning and teaching’ (Haukås, p.13).⁵ The suggested module thus empowers students to begin or continue learning about the new culture in a more conscious, active, and responsible way during—and importantly also *after* the conclusion of—our language classes.

The first section of this article reconstructs the theory behind ICC and the teaching of culture in language classes more broadly. The second section reviews the existing literature on this topic to prove the need for an introductory module that ‘prepares the ground’ for students’ effective learning of ICC. This section also explores the features and objectives that such activities should have and lays out how stereotypes can be used to further these pedagogical goals. Focusing on strengthening the metacognitive capabilities of students, these activities help students embark on their discovery of the target culture in a more aware and active way. The third section of the article describes a set of activities centered on stereotypes that instantiates the preparatory work just discussed. While the activities in this introductory module were designed for Italian language classes, they are easily adaptable to other languages and cultures.

³ Influential organizations such as ACTFL have recognized the need for intercultural competence in light of the internationalization of our language classroom. In 2014, for example, ACTFL’s Global Competence Position Statement asserted that ‘global competence [is] vital to successful interactions among diverse groups of people locally, nationally, and internationally.’

⁴ A welcome exception is the 5th edition (2022) of *Avanti*, a language textbook written by Janice Aski and Diane Musumeci.

⁵ Haukås is building on the well-known definition of metacognition, first introduced by Flavell in 1976, who defined it as: ‘The process that allows individuals to reflect on and evaluate their own cognitive processes and performance in different tasks, including knowledge about the task and strategies needed to successfully achieve it.’

Language and Culture in the Foreign Language Class

The term ‘culture’ is often used either as a synonym of so-called ‘high’ culture (e.g. the main artistic and philosophical texts produced in a specific context) or of ‘low’ or ‘everyday’ culture (e.g. popular art). However, following the definition given by the widely adopted ACTFL’s Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, this article sees culture more comprehensively as “the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products—both tangible and intangible—of a society”—what scholars commonly refer to as the 3 Ps (2006, p. 47).

Kramersch adds an important conceptual component to this interpretation of culture. For her, culture can be defined as: “the meaning that members of a social group give to the discursive practices they share in a given space and time and over the historical life of the group” (2013, p. 69). The scholar further explains that culture is connected to the ongoing societal conflict among various individuals over the dominance of symbolic interpretations. With this, we can thus identify two further important aspects of the 3 Ps, namely a) that culture is constantly co-constructed and potentially contested; and b) that culture changes over time because of this process. As further explored below, considering the 3 Ps as inherently plural and evolving is particularly important for the study of stereotypes. This is because, as we shall soon see, stereotypes exist as ever-changing and potentially conflictual perspectives that affect and are affected by practices and products—in line with how the 3 Ps model assigns to Perspectives a linking role between Products and Practices.

Teaching culture within the FL classroom is crucial, for, as Seelye puts it:

Learning a language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use. Knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system. Or even insight into when you should talk and when you should not (1993, p. 10).

However, empirical research that explores the state of the teaching practice of L2 languages reveals a problematic situation. Namely, that instructors find the inclusion of culture in language classes challenging (Phillips & Abbott, 2011); that culture consistently receives little time in language classes, and that it is sometimes by necessity postponed or skipped because of time constraints given the amount of language topics to cover (Fantini, 2011; Kahraman, 2016). A further difficulty encountered by instructors is that ‘teaching culture’ runs the risk of flattening and/or essentializing very complex realities. As Kramersch (2013) acknowledges:

Even though everyday cultural practices are as varied as a native speaker’s use of language in everyday life, the focus is on the typical, sometimes stereotypical, behaviors, foods, celebrations and customs of the dominant group or of that group of native speakers that is the most salient to foreign eyes. (p. 66)

As the following section demonstrates, re-envisioning the teaching of culture through the ICC lens is intended to prevent the trivialization of culture. It also equips students with essential knowledge and skills that remain valuable beyond the conclusion of their language studies.

The Theories of ICC

In the last three decades, ICC has risen as a burgeoning field of study. Building on earlier communicative and intercultural competence models, ICC fosters intercultural awareness by not conceiving of culture as a set of notions that can be taught as facts and acquired as a canon of knowledge by students. Rather, the focus is on a series of skills and attitudes that students should develop to enter into a productive exchange with the target culture. This entails developing students’ critical thinking, openness, and curiosity. As Witte (2014) puts it, “the acquisition of linguistic fluency is but part of the broader goal of acquiring intercultural competence which includes (meta-)cognitive, emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral dimensions” (p. 264).

It is important to distinguish between Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Communicative Competence, even though, as Moeller and Nugent (2014) note, “a precise definition of intercultural competence does not exist in the literature” (p. 4). According to Byram (1997), whereas IC refers to individuals’ “ability to interact in their own language with the people from another country and culture drawing upon their knowledge about intercultural communication, their attitudes of interest in otherness and their skills in interpreting, relating and discovering,” ICC entails people’s:

Ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language. . . . Their knowledge of another culture is linked to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately—sociolinguistic and discourse competence—and their awareness of the specific meanings, values and connotations of the language (p. 70-71).

While several scholars prominently contributed to the theoretical perspectives on ICC—such as Bennett (1993), Deardorff (2006), Balboni (2006), Garrett-Rucks (2014)—this article will follow the influential model created by Michael Byram in 1997. In his model, Byram systematized a series of competences, which he calls *savoirs*, that students need to achieve ICC. The first *savoir* is the knowledge of how social identities work; the second, *savoir comprendre*, relates to the interpretative skills needed to understand a text produced within a different cultural framework; *savoir apprendre/faire* refers to the ability of actively learning about a new culture and negotiating difference within the communication process itself; *savoir s’engager* concerns the ability of comparing one’s own culture to the foreign one and of critically evaluating both; finally, *savoir être* relates to the personal skills that one needs to possess and foster in order to acquire ICC, such as openness, curiosity and respect.

ICC thus also constitutes an opportunity for students to rethink their own positionality while learning about new ways of interpreting the world (Moeller & Nugent, 2014). The outcome of ICC is to transcend the *etic*, or “one’s own view of context and situation, an outsider’s view of the target” language and culture and learn how to employ an *emic* approach to intercultural engagement, which corresponds to “the view of context and situation held by host members” (Fantini, 2020, p. 57). The movement from the *etic* to the *emic* does not lead back to the starting point. This process, which corresponds to the intrinsic dynamic of ICC, produces instead access to a new *third* position, which is neither the starting position nor complete congruence with the target culture.

Preparing the Ground for ICC and the Role of Stereotypes

ICC theory clearly stresses the importance of having learners reflect on cultural identities within the intercultural framework in an active rather than passive way (Kramsch, 1993, 2009; Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2011). From a similar perspective, ACTFL’s (2015) World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages suggest that instructors should encourage students to reflect about language and culture using metacognitive learning strategies. As Byram (1997) notes:

In an educational framework which aims to develop critical cultural awareness, relativization of one’s own and valuing of others’ meanings, beliefs and behaviors does not happen without a reflective and analytical challenge to the ways in which they have been formed and the complex of social forces within which they are experienced. (p. 35).

While scholarship on ICC has produced several lesson plans and case studies on which to base ICC-centered instruction, the importance of a metacognitive introductory module has not yet been fully recognized.⁶ For example, there are no established methods that outline what kinds of cultural comparisons instructors should initially favor. Furthermore, no guidelines are established on what order or criteria should be used in presenting these reflections to our students.

⁶ Practical perspectives and activities are offered, for example, by Byram, Nichols, & Stevens (2001), Berardo & Deardorff (2012), and Jackson (2020). A useful online repository of intercultural activities is The Intercultural Learning Hub by Purdue University, accessible at <https://hubicl.org/>.

The first, metacognitive step of teaching ICC should consist of teaching students how they can begin to investigate culture.⁷ From this perspective, stereotypes and generalizations offer a prime access point to intercultural communicative competence. This is because our students already come to our L2 classes possessing some sort of opinion about the culture they are about to study. As Savignon and Sysoyev (2002) note: “By the time learners begin the study of a L2 context and its culture, they have already formed certain concepts, stereotypes, and expectations about L2 cultural realities.” (p. 510). This pre-existing knowledge can, if not confronted and improved upon, potentially harm or endanger the acquisition of ICC with respect to the C2.

An initial reflection on stereotypes allows instructors to challenge students’ previously held beliefs and assumptions about the C2, and to historically and socially contextualize them. In the process students may become wary of simplistic cultural representations they already have encountered or will come across after the language class is over.

Lastly, focusing on stereotypes has an important wider self-critical dimension. As Stockwell (2018) writes: “It is important that learners have the opportunity to examine their current cognitive stage . . . as well as if they have a strong sense of ethnocentrism.” (p. 17). By deconstructing their previously held assumptions through an analysis of stereotypes as part of their course objectives, instructors can teach students how to relativize their own positionality and transcend ethnocentric tendencies. It is for this reason that Byram et al. (2023) have recently proposed to see ICC as a necessary component of “education for democracy [that] is not focused only on national citizenship and identification with a nation or state, but also on a transnational perspective.” (p. 136). This, for them, gives rise to “plurilingual-and-interculturally competent democratically active citizens” ready to meet the world of tomorrow.

The Introductory Pedagogical Module: Learning How to Learn ICC

The previous section argued that the initial teaching of ICC should be based upon a pedagogical module that takes a metacognitive approach to the investigation of cultural stereotypes. According to Augoustinos and Reynolds (2001), stereotypes are meant to be: “Mental representations of social groups and their members which contain enough detail to allow us to know what group members are like without meeting them.” (p. 108).

With this definition, we can begin by asserting that: a) the content that stereotypes convey exists in the form of a mental representation. In other words, stereotypes do not occupy a purely informational dimension. Constitutive of stereotypes is also an *aesthetic* dimension which needs to be taken into account in order to fully understand how stereotypes work. Any deconstruction of a stereotype has to analyze *how* it represents the other beyond merely investigating its factual content. b) This definition of stereotypes also highlights the inadequacy of understanding them as either true or false *tout court*. Instead, because stereotypes can suggest group members’ characteristics without having met them, an implicit but important feature of stereotypes is that they gain traction the most in the absence of real social interaction.

Stereotypes can potentially replace actual communication between individual members of the respective groups. They are thus inherently partial and thrive in the absence of human interaction with the people they claim to describe. Consequently, teaching students how to analyze, deconstruct, contextualize, and eventually supplant stereotypes with a deeper knowledge about multiple aspects of a given culture already presents in itself several of the cognitive, metacognitive, and experiential operations that students need to master in order to acquire ICC.

In order to leverage cultural stereotypes towards preparing students for the acquisition of ICC, instructors can use a series of scaffolded activities around stereotypical representations of the culture(s) they teach.

⁷ The importance of this metacognitive step is also inspired by Byram and Kramsch, who wrote that one of our main goals today is to ‘to supplement the experience of talk with talking about talk, i.e., talking about how language is used to represent social and cultural realities’ (p. 33).

The module presented here is intended for an intermediate level class, but it can easily be adapted to elementary level classes by allowing students to perform some of the activities and the discussion in their L1 language. Even though it is widely agreed upon that language instruction should mostly be performed in the L2, using the L1 for this module at the outset of elementary classes is a small price to pay for the fundamental preparatory work that will make students better acquire ICC in the future.

The module should ideally take place over a short time span (e.g. three weeks) early on in the academic year. This pedagogical module revolves around a series of advertisements that display a wide variety of national stereotypes. The activities that comprise this module have three main learning objectives: 1) spot stereotypical representations on their own; 2) be wary of the cultural content they convey; 3) deconstruct their content.

Table 1. *Introducing Students to ICC through Stereotypes: The Pedagogical Module*

Step	Activity	Objective	Questions & Discussion Points
1 a	Cultural Stereotypes – Reflection	Understand and reflect on stereotypes associated with one's own culture	"What stereotypes are associated with your culture? Do these reflect your experience of the reality they claim to describe? Are there exceptions? Are there counter-stereotypes? Are there counter-facts?"
1 b	Group Analysis of Stereotypes	Analyze and discuss the accuracy and origins of these stereotypes.	"Why do you think these stereotypes persist? How do stereotypes further themselves in time? In what ways might they be based on reality or completely divergent? To what end?"
1 c	Plenary Discussion on Stereotype-Definition	Develop a theoretical understanding of stereotypes as mental representations.	"Why are stereotypes used so much? What purpose do stereotypes serve in society? Can you think of a moment when you realized your cultural perspective was just one of many? How did you respond? How can we teach people to avoid stereotypes when engaging with those who are different?"
2 a	Film Vocabulary Introduction & Commercial Analysis	Introduce basic film vocabulary and critically analyze a commercial for stereotypical content.	"Identify the stereotypes presented. Are they positive or negative? How do they influence the viewer's perception of the product and the cultures portrayed? Why are they incorporated in the narrative?"
2 b	Comparative Stereotype Analysis	Compare stereotypes in media with those from students' own cultures.	"How do the stereotypes in this commercial compare to those in your culture? What is the value associated with those stereotypes in your culture? And what similarities or differences do you observe?"
3 a	Counter-narrative Commercial Analysis	Analyze a commercial that presents counter-facts to common	"How does this commercial attempt to counteract stereotypes? What narrative is it trying to create instead? To what ends?"

stereotypes.

3 b	Counter narratives vs. Stereotype Discussion	Use other documents to contrast stereotypes, possibly with factual information.	"How do these real-world facts compare to the stereotypes we have examined? What does this reveal about the nature of stereotypes? And what does it reveal about the nature of culture and of the media?"
3 c	Textbook Stereotype Analysis	Critically evaluate the representation of culture in the course's language textbook.	"Identify and discuss any stereotypes within this drawing/activity/description present in our textbook. How might these influence your perceptions of the culture? What implicit values underpin them?"
4	Final Reflection on Culture	Discuss the definition of culture. Introduce the concept of and reflect on the 'third space'.	"How has your understanding of culture evolved through this module? What actions and attitudes can you take to ensure that your engagement with other cultures is open, respectful, and constructive?"

The pedagogical module starts with having students reflect on the major stereotypes associated with the town/country/culture they themselves come from and asks them to write these down. Students then share their reflections and analyze these stereotypes in groups. The main question to ask students is if they believe that the stereotypes they listed reflect the reality they have experienced growing up or not. Rather than simply denying any validity of stereotypes—see my analysis of stereotypes above—the instructor aims to make students reflect on the way in which stereotypes may intersect aspects of a given reality, and the cases in which they dramatically diverge from it. The conversation often concludes with a more conscious understanding that stereotypes, while at times based on historical and socioeconomic facts or factoids, are never applicable to a whole population, because they frequently enlarge and thus distort the possibly real but limited facts they are based upon.

On the basis of this discussion, students then reflect on what a stereotype is at a theoretical level. A mental map is created on the board or with apps such as Jamboard comprising key words coming from the students. Using this input, instructors should explain that stereotypes can be understood as mental representations. Then, instructors should guide the discussion around two questions: 1) Why are stereotypes used so much? 2) Why are they able to endure over time. This conversation, which students should do in groups before sharing their conclusions in plenum, usually revolves around humans' need to preventatively map the unknown in simple categories.⁸ This intended to develop Byram's first *savoir*, which focuses on the knowledge of the self and the other, and his *savoir être*, which fosters an attitude of openness towards the other.

The second phase of the module opens with an introduction to basic film vocabulary to allow students to

⁸ As Witte acknowledges: 'Stereotypes can also be seen in a much more positive light when one assumes them to have a functional role in structuring mental concepts, with the purpose of coping with the immense flood of stimuli individuals are bombarded with in everyday life. . . . Stereotypes can help to deal with uncertainties, to generalize from limited data, and to define self and others, albeit at the price of sometimes unfounded generalization, reduction, and accentuation' (2014, pp. 85-86).

subsequently conduct a reflection on a video commercial (i.e. shot, frame, character, soundtrack, etc.). The instructor then plays the first commercial.

For example, we selected a 2014 car commercial titled *The Italians Are Coming*, in which a small US village during the American revolution is suddenly invaded not by the English as expected, but by the Italians represented by cars of an Italian brand. Their arrival provokes women to shed their traditional clothes, espresso to replace cups of tea on the tables, the village pub to become a club, and a revolution of a non-specified sort to occur as we infer from the music (T-Rex's *Children of the Revolution*). The ad portrays Italian culture as a liberating force more in tune with life's bodily pleasures than the traditional American reality and the expected English culture. Students analyze not only the content but also the editing and the soundtrack, which ends in a cathartic chant at the end of the commercial. After writing down the stereotypical elements both about Italians and about the Americans and English found in the ad, students reflect on the connection between the stereotypes presented in the commercial and the product that the commercial is trying to sell.

It is at this point in the conversation that students can explore how stereotypes in commercials often work by creating simple dualisms. In the case of this advertisement, for example, Americans are shown within a colonial setting, sexually constrained, bound by rules, part of a work-centered society, and less socially active; Italians instead are represented as modern, bringing forth sexual freedom, transgressive of rules, part of a leisure driven society, and more socially connected.

Students are then asked to return to the stereotypes they wrote down about the place they themselves grew up in: do the stereotypes found in the Italian commercial(s) exist also for any segment of the population of the place they come from? In comparing the content and structure of the stereotypes they encountered in the commercial(s) to those existing about their culture or place of origin, students are led to make the leap from critically analyzing class materials to examining real life situations in the same way. Students will likely find that some of the traits contained in the commercial are also assigned stereotypically to other cultures they know. As such, these comparisons also serve to further relativize any particular content of the stereotypes contained in the commercial and to concentrate instead on the way these stereotypes present themselves aesthetically. This step fosters students' ability to interpret the cultural dimension of a given document and relating it to their own culture (Byram's *savoir comprendre*).

The choice of studying stereotypes via an analysis of commercials also allows the introduction of another important dimension of the longevity and persistence of cultural clichés into student debate: the economic aspect of stereotypes. Because of their recognizability, stereotypes make certain products stand for more than their immediate function and purpose. By attaching a product to a specific cultural content, the buyer is offered the illusion of partaking in the cultural identity it supposedly belongs to through its purchase. The instructor can here fruitfully initiate a discussion centered on the contemporary commodification of culture and the role of stereotypes within an increasingly homogenous globalized market. This reflection allows students to probe the complexity of cultural exchange as well as sensitizes them to the varied motivations that fuel cultural narratives.

The module continues with a new set of activities centering around a different kind of advertisement. This time, it is a commercial that was created by the Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico [Ministry of Economic Development], which seeks to present counter-facts as corrective to the main clichés about Italians. The ad is titled: *Italy: The Extraordinary Commonplace*, and presents 'objective' data that demonstrate Italy's productivity, innovation, and economic importance in the contemporary world.

With this commercial, instructors can present students with a counter-narrative to the previously established stereotypes about Italians. However, students of course once again confront a selective narrative that paints a one-dimensional picture of Italy, aseptic just like the laboratories the Ministry selected as settings for the clip.

To deconstruct the imagery in this video, instructors divide students into groups and assign each group a different scene with the task of describing: the protagonists; the settings in which they are seen working;

the relationship between the actions the characters are performing and the information appearing on screen. This close reading is intended to help students realize that the high tech, sleek, and polished images present a limited reality that brings Italy closer to an American clichéd imagery of professionalism and efficiency as seen in contemporary TV shows. Once again students tackle the issue of motive and reception: understanding who the Ministry is addressing through the commercial makes them transcend the limits of the stereotypical representation: Just like for the previous car commercial(s), this ad should not be read as fully representative of a social identity.

To bring this point home, in the fourth part of the module instructors introduce students to facts that contradict some of the representations in the Ministry's ad. Students read a short newspaper article on *la fuga dei cervelli* [the brain drain,] which is how journalists refer to the recent surge of emigration of young Italians in search of work and better life opportunities abroad. In a guided class discussion, students link the facts reported in the article back to the representations in the ministerial clip. This allows them to also compare the different forms of simplification—stereotype versus one-sided narrative, visual appeals and symbolism versus worded argument or cited sources—and reason through the intended emotive or cognitive effects on the viewer.

In the next part of the module, the instructor presents students with examples of how Italian culture is simplified or stereotyped by language textbooks, including examples taken from the one selected for their course, and encourages students to be aware of these occurrences in their own studies. These steps are intended to help students work on the relativization of their own culture (Byram's *savoir être*), while also starting to acquire the ability of critically evaluating the 3Ps from different perspectives (*savoir s'engager*).

The module ends with a final reflection that brings together the different earlier steps. Returning to the initial reflection students were asked to complete at the outset, the instructor asks students again about their definition of culture. In light of their analyses of the various commercials, students here normally converge on a definition that sees culture as comprising the various products, practices and perspectives engendered by a particular culture. On the basis of students' responses, instructors can introduce the ACTFL definition of culture mentioned above. Instructors can then highlight the variety of products, practices, and perspectives that students reported about their culture(s) of origin and remind students that they can expect a similar variety also in the C2 they are going to explore in the future.

In the last leg of the module, the instructor should also make students aware of their agency, and responsibility, in the exploration of the C2 culture. This last component of the module makes students directly aware of their own role and responsibilities vis-à-vis the skill set that they need to build up in order to navigate a new cultural context—and their own—in an engaged and open-minded manner. In taking the reflection to the self-aware meta-level, concluding the module in this way helps students access the position of empowerment and responsibility of the *third space*. As such, students acquire skills belonging to all four *savoirs* mentioned earlier, but especially the critical cultural awareness belonging to Byram's *savoir s'engager*.⁹

For this introductory module, assessment is of a formative kind and varies according to the class composition and wider social, cultural, and educational context. As Witte puts it: 'the assessment and evaluation of complex constructs such as intercultural competence, which involves the emotional, psychological, and identity-related domains of learners, is clearly highly dependent on the context in which they are used and on the subjects to which they are applied' (2014, p. 384). Assessment has to recognize that the students have just embarked on a much longer process: grades and the possibility of

⁹ As an introductory set of activities, this module excludes only Byram's *savoir apprendre/faire*, since this *savoir* involves real time interpersonal communication. However, instructors can have students use the knowledge they acquired from this module in conversations with native speakers taking place after the module, for example through apps like Talkabroad.

failure should thus not come into play, as this could discourage students from opening themselves fully to the intercultural experience. For example, instructors could have students analyze another authentic video that contains different cultural stereotypes from those previously discussed in class. Students could in this way be assessed on the ability to deconstruct, imagine counterfactuals, relate the themes encountered to one's own culture(s) of belonging, etc. Thanks to the module activities, students will now be able to conduct independent research on a specific stereotype and categorize it according to criteria previously presented by the instructor. These criteria for analysis include: 1) Oversimplification, 2) Generalization, 3) Unfounded negativity, 4) Exaggeration, and 5) Essentialization (e.g., focusing on an aspect of a community that may have existed in the past due to specific circumstances).

Given the importance of successfully introducing ICC, it seems beneficial that instructors teaching this module should be up to date with the latest literature in the field of ICC. They should also receive training in this module from a senior instructor, ideally by going through the module as students themselves. This would allow the instructor to better empathize with the students and more successfully guide them through of the module.

Conclusion

As shown at the outset of this analysis, today it is fundamental to rethink language education in an intercultural perspective. By developing ICC, students learn how to navigate a globalized reality as democratically aware citizens and acquire transferable skills that will determine their success in our increasingly multicultural workplaces. As such, the shift from language courses designed to simply develop language skills to language and ICC courses presents us with the opportunity of teaching key skills that can reframe the role of language (and culture) studies in post-secondary institutions and guarantee their enduring presence in the future.

I argued for the need to implement an introductory module in language and culture classes which lays the groundwork for the learning of ICC. In particular, I suggest that instructors use the analysis and deconstruction of stereotypes for this introductory module. In providing students with the metacognitive tools needed to be aware of their own approach to, understanding of, and interaction with the cultural knowledge they encounter in the classroom and beyond, this module readies learners for the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the journey on which they are about to embark (Witte, 2014).

After this introductory module to ICC, future cultural modules centering on homes, food, festivities, art, history, etc. can more easily become an exercise in overcoming simplistic views of the C2 culture. Like in an unending puzzle game, students will understand from early on the value of discovering new pieces of the cultural mosaic to ultimately find the spaces where to insert their own contribution.

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