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Contents

The Invisible Learner: Unlocking the Heritage Language Treasure

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Sometimes a treasure is right in front of our eyes but there can be insurmountable obstacles placed in our path to obscure its view. Our students' heritage language competencies are one such treasure. This article will discuss the impact of heritage languages on student success and some small steps that every teacher can take to ensure that her students' talents and abilities are recognized, honored and enriched with or without specific heritage programs.

According to the US Census (Census 2000a), 28 percent of New York State's population speaks a language other than English in their homes. Only 3,500,000 live in New York City. The rest, 8,500,000 heritage speakers, are scattered across New York State. Our population averages 10 percentage points higher than the national average in number of people who speak a language other than English at home (Census 2000b). In spite of the overwhelming numbers of heritage speakers residing in New York State, the phrase "heritage language" is still not well known. This lack of awareness may have an impact in our classrooms but is understandable in light of the general national antipathy toward speakers of languages other than English in the United States. Even those of us who make it our business to promote languages other than English in our schools are sometimes unaware of how deep and damaging the attitudes engendered by this general hostility can be. However, with a little insight and understanding of the issues involved, the treasure locked in our classrooms, can be opened and shared.

There are many definitions of heritage language learners in the current literature. They fall into two basic categories. Some are based on a pre-existing proficiency in a language spoken in the home (Valdés, 2000, p.1) and others are based on sociolinguistic criteria such as "a particular family relevance to the learner" that Fishman puts forward (2001, p. 81). This article will use John Webb's vision that broadens the definition even further, and at the same time, suggests a more holistic pedagogical response. He explains that a heritage language learner is "...someone who has a personal, emotional connection to a language other than English. Somewhere in their personal history there is a link to that language that is important" (Webb, 2003). This definition acknowledges the power of language and culture to shape our thoughts and self-definition. It also asks educators to enter into a realm that we have never considered before—something we can neither measure nor quantify—how students' personal and emotional connections to their heritage impact on their success in school.

My own experience as a heritage learner is a good example. I cannot speak, read, write or understand Italian even though I grew up in a home where Italian was spoken by my mother and grandmother. The only time they used Italian was at 5:30 in the morning before everyone else was awake. Their main topic of discussion was matters concerning our extended family. My bedroom was off the kitchen where these conversations took place. My mother and grandmother thought that I was sleeping and couldn't understand what they were saying anyway. During these conversations I was usually able to understand the essence of what they were saying and was always far ahead of everyone else on family gossip. One morning, for example, my mother revealed that she was pregnant with her fourth child. She said it in Italian and I understood it. I also understood that I had a certain power having access to family secrets that no one knew I had. I have no measurable functional abilities in Italian, however, some of my most powerful childhood memories occurred in that language.

The ability to understand my mother and grandmother's conversations helped me in my foreign language classes even though I never studied Italian. Foreign language was my favorite subject. I was very comfortable with my teacher speaking in the target language and I easily recognized cognates of both English and Italian. I found that I often pronounced Spanish words as if they were Italian words and, because I had no problem with vowel sounds, I easily lost a 'gringa' accent.

Many language teachers know from experience that some of their students learn foreign languages easily because of a heritage background. In my Spanish as a foreign language classes in New York City, some of my non-Spanish speaking heritage students are my most successful learners[1]. They have many of the same characteristics that I had as a language learner. Moreover, for many of them, English is their second language and they are already experienced L2 learners. For other heritage students, however, the story is not always the same.

I was asked to take over a second semester Spanish class one spring. The teacher had had it. Most of the students were failing and she was sending as many as she could to the detention room. When I entered the room, the students weren't sure if I were the "big gun" sent in to tame them or just another teacher who would give up on them. There were serious behavior problems. Students spent most of their time "dissing" each other. When I listened to what they were saying, it mostly revolved around race and ethnicity. Most students were immigrants from many different countries. I did my best to ensure that instruction happened by assigning as much work as possible. From the very beginning, however, I noticed that I could conduct the entire class in Spanish without any complaints that my instructions were not understood or that "we don't know Spanish, Miss." I was also teaching a sixth semester Spanish class at the same time in which these complaints were frequent.

On Career Day, a professor from a Vermont college who had grown up in New York City and was herself an immigrant, came to speak to the class as someone who had "made it." She made some very derogatory remarks about people who live in public housing. Most of the students in the class lived in public housing. The students joined together and let the speaker know that her comments were unwelcome. This was the first moment that the students felt like they had something in common with each other. After the speaker left, I saw an opening to start a discussion about the "dissing" that students engaged in and how it reflected that same kind of prejudice that the speaker had displayed. I asked the students to consider that they needed to begin seeing each other as allies because they had many things in common.

A few days later, when I asked students to go up to the board to write out some class work, one student took more time than the rest. He was writing his name under his class work in Chinese characters. I praised him for sharing his characters with us. Almost immediately, the rest of the class that had work on the board, got up and wrote their names in Chinese, Urdu, Arabic, Bengali, Korean, and Russian. It finally dawned on me that these students, who had mostly failed Spanish up until now, were students whose first language did not use the Roman alphabet. I stopped at what individual students had written and asked them

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[1]My school has a program for Spanish heritage learners. Spanish, Chinese, Polish, Russian and Tagalog are the most spoken languages in my school.

about how much they knew about their language. Most said they only knew how to write their names. One student from a Polish family asked if she could write "I love you" in Polish instead of her name because she wanted to write something that would look different from English. My Haitian student also wrote a phrase he knew in Haitian Creole. What happened in that moment was that these students asked to be recognized for what they knew in other languages. Instead of being failing Spanish students, they emerged as children with complicated and diverse linguistic competencies.

From that point on, when I taught something in Spanish, we spent time discussing how the same concept was expressed in the languages present in the class. Some students were more expressive than others in their abilities to reflect on their own language. Only a few at a time would have something to say. Students also began expressing a desire to learn each other's languages.

I also modified instruction. The class was run mostly in Spanish, much the way entry level English as a Second Language classes are taught. We read short stories that were written in very modified Spanish and students wrote similar stories using their readings as models. I evaluated students based on their effort and completion of assigned work and did not use discrete grammar point tests. When students wrote using model paragraphs, they were quite successful not only using grammatical structures but also incorporating new vocabulary. (See Appendix for examples of student work.) My failing Spanish students started to use what they knew about language learning—they were already successful English language learners—to learn Spanish. By changing my approach, my students began taking an interest in their work. Unfortunately, the "dissing" continued, however, at a much reduced rate. The deeply ingrained stereotypes had created behaviors that were not easily changed.

While many communities in New York State claim not to have heritage learners among their students, Fishman (2001, pp. 81-96) documents how heritage languages have been, and continue to be, a part of the social interaction in North America since European languages began migrating here over three hundred years ago. The Census 2000 statistics also support his argument. The avoidance of recognizing and honoring heritage language competencies is part of the message of invisibility that students internalize within months of entering the school system.

Foreign language teachers can have a big impact on heritage learners' academic success. This does not mean that one has to take on the school board or the principal. It simply can mean identifying who our heritage students are and tailoring our instruction to include their instructional needs.

The volume, *Teaching Heritage Language Learners: Voices from the Classroom*, was the result of a three-year collaboration of several educators, administrators and students who wanted to investigate how schools and teacher preparation programs could tailor instruction to the needs of heritage learners. This work was jointly funded by Hunter College, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FISPE) and focused on Spanish-speaking and Haitian-Creole-speaking students. The team involved in this project learned that students and teachers were some of the best resources to guide teacher training and instruction of heritage students.

Applying that volume's "A Framework for Learning about Your Students" (Webb, 2000, pp. 47-54) and the concept of confidence in the learner and practitioner, the documentary film, *I Speak Arabic,* investigates the relationship of Arabic speakers in the United States to their language. The documentary also encourages parents, and community leaders to participate in the discussion. The filmmakers asked Arabic speakers, who are

generally a small minority in any setting, what would have helped them to maintain and enrich their proficiency in Arabic. Their responses fell into four main categories of recommendations. These recommendations are applicable to all heritage learners, not only Arabic speakers. The interviews quoted below appear in the film or are part of the raw footage that went into making the film.

Find Out What Languages Our Students Speak

Schools in New York State ask for and record home language information as part of their compliance with laws regulating services for immigrant children. This is the first time parents and students experience being "other" in the American school system. Parents often fear that if they report that a language other than English is spoken at home, their children will be relegated to a lifetime in ESL programs or, worse, Special Education (L. Farhat –personal communication - raw footage). These programs are helpful when they are appropriate to a student's needs but are very damaging to a student's self-esteem if the placement is based on stereotypes rather than a particular child's real needs. Majed Samarneh, president of the Arab American Council, reported that one of the services that his organization offered was to advocate with school districts on the behalf of Arab American students (personal communication – raw footage) In the 1970's, Arab American students were routinely placed in Special Education programs. The Arab American Council was able to educate and sensitize local school districts to the issues facing Arab immigrants and finds fewer problems today.

If home language information is not available to a teacher, she can find out which students have a heritage background from the students themselves. Students, however, might not be honest with their teacher until they understand her motives. Many heritage speakers have had very negative experiences when they reveal that they have a language or home life that isn't 100% American. Carmen Khair reports that she learned quite early that speaking Arabic was not "cool." What would have helped her was not only support for her heritage language but also some support to help her classmates understand that knowing a language other than English was desirable (Scalera, 2003).

Advocate for Programs that Help Heritage Speakers Enrich their Talents

Where there are small numbers of students in any particular language group a separate heritage program might be unreasonable. Heritage students in foreign language class, however, can be supported by their teacher's efforts to reflect on society's attitudes toward speakers of other languages. Most importantly, the teacher needs to show leadership in the classroom by showing appreciation for language skills and cultural knowledge that is ignored, and even disdained by many in our country. A small shift in this direction can mean that failing students may become more successful. All students will be helped by learning about, and showing respect for, the cultures they come in contact with every day, not just the sometimes "mythical" language and culture they are learning in their classes.

Special care, however, needs to be taken with heritage students who are in classes that teach their heritage language. A teacher who is unwilling to accept that her students may have some information that is equally as important as what the teacher presents will have a damaging effect on the student's self-esteem. I have interviewed many Spanish heritage speakers who report that a Spanish teacher was the worst teacher they ever had. With very little probing, tales of being told that their version of Spanish was not valid or appropriate emerge and usually are accompanied by some very strong emotions. Once again, recognizing what students know, asking for their contributions and support, helps

everyone. As teachers, we can learn more about the language and culture we are teaching, other students will learn to have respect for an actual speaker of the language, and heritage speakers will feel recognized and supported for the cultural knowledge and linguistic skills they bring to the class.

Teach a Curriculum that Reflects the Cultures of All our Students

The students in *I Speak Arabic* reported that their culture was underrepresented in their school's curriculum and daily life. Not only did this feel unfair to them because they are acutely aware of the role their culture plays in the world political arena, but also it ensured that their classmates also remained unaware of their culture's importance. Some schools limit their recognition of heritage cultures to a yearly "multicultural" festival. There are more substantial ways, however, to include a group's culture. Maher Saleh suggested that if Arabic were studied by non-Arab students it might just help people to understand each other a little bit more (Scalera, 2003). Amany Hajyassin recommended that community leaders or the students themselves should be allowed to present their culture, history and language from their own perspective (Scalera, 2003). This can be done in the foreign language class but should also be done in science, art, social studies, math and English classes. Foreign language teachers can be the catalyst for the inclusion of other cultures in a meaningful way into their school's culture.

Partner with Parents and Community Groups

If there is even a small number of students from a particular language group in a district, there will probably be an organization that will advocate for that group's needs or provide social or religious support. These organizations often have events that are open to the public. Our schools could help advertise these events and encourage staff and students to attend. The good will created by attending even one event is immeasurable. Leaders of these organizations also can be sought out to participate in school-based management committees and other consultative bodies in a district to ensure that their culture is represented and their children are treated fairly. Non-heritage members of the community also might find their lives somewhat enriched by this contact.

Conclusion

There seem to be two conflicting messages in this article. Heritage students have an advantage in foreign language classes and heritage students are at a disadvantage in foreign language classes. While these ideas may seem to be contradictory, they are not. In fact, both can be true at the same time. A hypothesis being put forward in this article is that heritage students who are treated with respect for their linguistic and cultural knowledge and taught in ways that tap into their special linguistic competencies will excel in a foreign language class while students whose heritage knowledge is ignored or disdained are less likely to be successful. One should also consider the impact of heritage languages that do not use the Roman alphabet in classes that teach romance languages even when those writing systems are virtually unknown to the students. Research could possibly shed some light on these issues. In the meantime, teachers should test these ideas in their own classrooms and reflect on, and write about the results.

John Webb's definition of a heritage learner is not a neat one. It does not lend itself to a paper and pencil check-off or a standardized assessment. These are the kinds of assessments teachers and administrators are driven to devise given the little time allotted to placement assessment. His vision requires other ways of getting to know our learners that resemble more of a process rather than a goal.

The theme for the 2004 Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Language is "Listening to Learners". It is setting the stage for a discussion about how we will get to know our students in the 21st Century. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning, the Modern Languages for Communication: New York State Syllabus and New York State Learning Standards for Languages other than English* can be adapted so that the content of our lessons can include, on a regular basis, our students lives and their cultural information rather than the lives of the fictitious people presented in our textbooks. Foreign language teachers are in a unique position. We have the most clues on our heritage language treasure map. We can lead the way among our faculties in creating a welcoming atmosphere for all children, especially heritage learners. This can only be done by honoring what our students bring to the learning environment and validating the real cultures that are part of our communities today.

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APPENDIX*

Jon y su bicicleta
por Lenny Podokshik

Jon es un niño. Jon tiene 19 años. Jon es pobre y él necesita una bicicleta pero no tiene dinero suficiente.

Jon es muy alto y tiene pelo moreno y ojos morenos. Jon no tiene una familia grande. La familia de Jon consiste de su mamá y su papá.

John tiene un amigo que se llama Dima. Dima tiene un trabajo para Jon. El trabajo está en la tienda de bicicletas. Jon está muy feliz. Él acepta el trabajo. Depués de un mes, el dueño de la tienda le da una bicicleta.

Jon está muy muy feliz. Él tiene lo que el quiere todo el tiempo.

El cuento de Arwa
por Saba Abdulla

Arwa tiene 16 años. No es muy alta. Está en el décimo grado. Arwa está frustrada porque tiene un examen en la escuela. Arwa tiene dos amigas que se llaman Sally y Ashley. No son muy altas.

Arwa no quiere tomar el examen. Sus amigas le dicen que ella puede cortar la clase para no tomar el examen. Ella decide cortar la clase con sus amigas.

Arwa y sus amigas salen de la escuela y caminan por las calles. La policía las ve. Las vuelven a la escuela. La escuela llama a los padres.

Arwa aprende una lección. Jamás presta atención a lo que dicen los amigos si no es correcto.

Jason el ladrón
por Chester Chung

Jason tiene muchos problemas con sus padres porque los padres no compran las cosas que él quiere. Él tiene muchos problemas con sus amigos también porque él nunca quiere hablar con ellos.

Todos los martes los padres no tienen que trabajar. Ellos le preguntan si él quiere desayunarse con ellos. Jason les dice que no. Le gusta quedarse en casa. La mamá tiene pelo largo y ojos azules y el papá tiene pelo corto y es alto. Jason es bajo pero es muy fuerte. Él quiere comprar muchas cosas pero él no tiene dinero. Él piensa robar el dinero de sus amigos cuando no le ponen atención.

Un día, sus padres vienen a la escuela porque los 'deans' le acusan de un robo. Él está suspendido. El próximo día, él se levanta y encuentra todas las cosas que él quiere. Su madre le dice, "Hijo, le tenemos una sorpresa."

Jason está tan contento que él empieza a llorar. Después de una semana, él no tiene problemas con sus padres. Él regresa a la escuela y pide disculpas de sus compañeros. Finalmente él les pregunta a sus amigos si ellos quieren reunirse algún día.

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* These stories are the result of the same assignment. Each student adapted part of Pobre Ana by Blaine Ray to tell a story they wanted to tell. They went through several drafts and revisions and the stories were published in a end of semester booklet as a final exam.

CALL FOR PAPERS
2004

The NYSAFLT Journal is YOUR journal. It is published for and by NYSAFLT, an association that consists of its members and needs the participation of each and every one of you. Contributions from our members helped to make the current issue what it is – which, I hope, is inspiring. Please keeping mind the theme for the remaining issue of Vol. 55. and plan on submitting something. WE ARE ALSO INTERESTED IN RECEIVING CONTRIBUTIONS OUTSIDE OF THE THEME. THOSE MAY TAKE A BIT LONGER TO APPEAR IN PRINT, BUT ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT.

1. "Interdisciplinary Teaching and Activities" Deadline for submission of papers: Sept. 15, 2004. Languages Other Than English are relevant to most areas of endeavor, but those outside the LOTE profession sometimes miss the importance of these Connections. Those of you who have developed interdisciplinary units, activities, and/or school-wide projects are encouraged to submit articles for this issue. We all need to benefit from your experience.

If you have never written for publication before, give it a try. If you submit the material at least a month early, I am willing to help you make the article journal ready if necessary. Our lower limit is two pages, typed, double-spaced. The upper limit is roughly twenty five pages typed, double-spaced, including references, charts, etc. We cannot publish photographs in the journal, however, a reasonable number of them, if absolutely necessary to conveying the content of the article can be placed on the NYSAFLT website and referenced in print. Copyrighted material should be avoided unless you have the original source and are willing to request permission from the publisher to use it. Please note, this is usually a time-consuming process and unfortunately it applies to pieces of authentic material such as advertising that appears in copyrighted publications (newspapers, magazines, etc.).

Articles submitted for publication must be typewritten, double-spaced, in gender neutral language. Electronic submission is preferred. Please email Microsoft Word or WordPerfect files as an attachment to the editor at nysafltbulletin@netscape.net.

This is YOUR journal. The editor hopes to hear from YOU.

Demystifying The Tower of Babel At Long Island City High School

Dr. Deborah M. Isom

According to the biblical story entitled "The Tower of Babel", all of the people on the earth at one time spoke the same language, so they decided to build a tower to heaven. The tower, they thought, would make them rich and famous. This angered God so he changed their one language into a multitude of languages. When the people could no longer communicate with each other, they scattered all over the world speaking different languages and The Tower of Babel was never completed.

When I returned to Prospect Heights High School on August 25th 2003, I found that the school had not only been "restructured" into new smaller schools, but that the foreign language department which I supervised was one of the 3 departments that had also been "phased out". Fortunately, I found out that there was a vacancy for an assistant principal of foreign languages at Long Island City High School, so based on seniority rights and the CSA contractual rules of excessing, I obtained the position.

Approximately 4,500 students attend Long Island City High School and every student studies at least one foreign language for 4 years. The students who attend Long Island City High School come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the foreign languages that are currently offered at the school are Spanish, French, Italian, Bengali, Greek, Chinese, and Latin. Mr. William C. Bassell, the principal of Long Island City High School, has always been an avid supporter and promoter of the study of foreign languages. He and my predecessor, Ms. Vivian Selenikas, have done some really unique things over the years to not only "reconstruct" The Tower of Babel, but to also demystify the belief that only selected groups of students should be encouraged to study a foreign language for 4 years in high school.

Over the years, because our resources were limited, my teachers, colleagues and I have always had "to paddle upstream" in order to create, maintain, and to promote exceptional foreign language programs in our inner-city high schools. We'd write grants and access local, national, and international resources to support, maintain, and enhance the foreign language programs at our schools. We were often challenged to perform "miraculous academic feats" and "creative wonders" with limited resources and support. In many ways it was like trying to prepare "gourmet" meals using only a hot plate stove; however, many of us have been and still are successful in our efforts. (see www.angelfire.com/amiga/workshop1/index.html)

In the original story, The Tower of Babel was never completed and the people who spoke different languages were scattered all over the earth. The foundation of The Tower of Babel is currently solid at Long Island City High School and I believe that with some innovations and creative enhancements from the current "multi-cultural" builders, The Tower of Babel will undoubtedly reach heaven, this time around.

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The King James Bible, Genesis 11: 1-9
www.angelfire.com/amiga/workshop1/index.html

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A Web Diagram to Introduce Students to Culture

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As teachers, we all realize the importance of incorporating culture into the curriculum. We have all used realia, authentic documents, video, pictures or slides from our travels to create stimulating, informative activities that infuse cultural information into the classroom.

I have found it very effective to start the year by using a web for a visual representation of "What makes up a culture?". My student population changes each year so some students have never taken Spanish, while others have had a year or two. Although students were allowed to participate in English or Spanish, the web was created in Spanish. I had volunteers write the Spanish for the English responses and elaborate on the web by drawing pictures for some of the vocabulary. Students were reminded about the

rules for brainstorming. Sometimes I mentioned a topic if the kids were stumped. Of course I made sure it was a topic from the curriculum! This allowed me to check the level of knowledge of my Spanish I Proficiency students, incorporate some creative and critical thinking skills while creating a curriculum map for the year! Below is the beginning of a curriculum map. Obviously you can continue to add categories and elaborate. I told my students that they could change the location of the categories. For example, Family Celebrations could have been put under Family instead of Celebrations. Quinceañera could be put under Religious or Family Celebrations. Creating the web involves the students in thinking about culture and gives them a feeling of ownership of what we will study throughout the year.
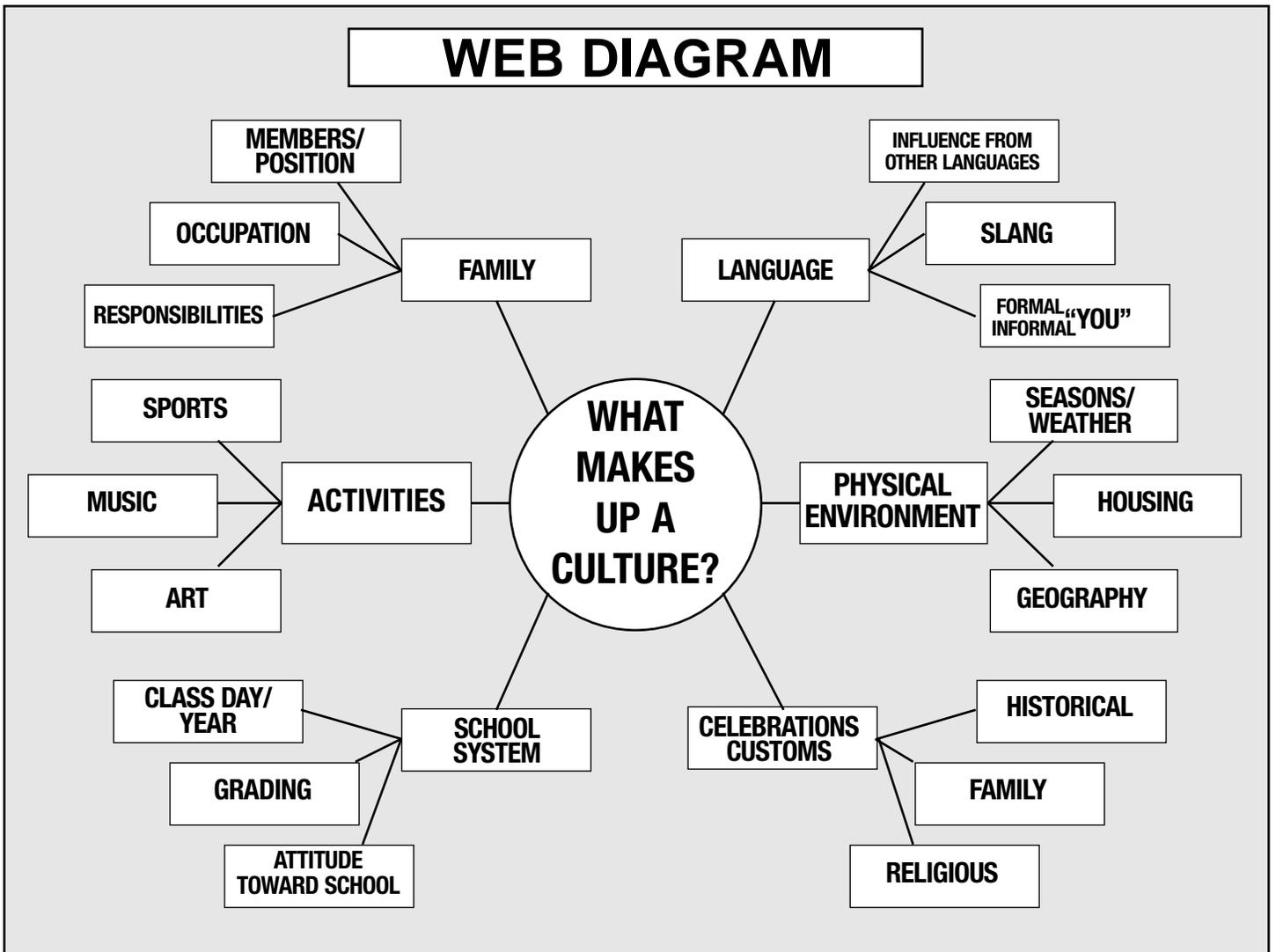
Examining Cultural Practices and Perspectives though the Coquí

Dorothy Rissel
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The national standards (ACTFL, 1996) urge teachers of Languages Other than English to teach culture though an approach that examines the products of a culture, its practices, and the perspectives associated with both in an effort to help students understand the relative nature of cultural perspectives. Attempting to see a culture as its members see it and to understand their perspectives is a difficult skill to develop. Below I will provide some suggestions as to how the famous Puerto Rican coquí can provide a context for studying cultural perspectives on the basis of products and practices and for including other of the "C's" of the standards.

To see the coquí as a product of the culture, one has only to look at the latest coquí collection on ebay (http://search.ebay.com/coqui). The results will vary from day to day, but it would be highly unusual not to find an assortment of everything from beach towels to small pins that include the coquí, often accompanied by the Puerto Rican flag. Students could make an inventory of the kinds of things that they find there, and begin to think about why there is such an array of items with the coquí on them that seem to be closely associated with Puerto Rico and its flag. A way to include another of the national standards would be to have students make "Comparisons." Is there any item of fauna that is likely to appear in similar objects in conjunction with the US flag?

Moving from the idea of "products" - lots of manufactured items bearing an image of the coquí, a naturally occurring type of fauna in Puerto Rico, - to "practices" - valuing the coquí for what it represents - students can begin to investigate what the coquí is (several websites are suggested in the appendix) and what it really sounds like. It's song is indeed unique and quite strong for a little tree frog that is smaller than its zoological name *eleutherodactylus* is long. I will never forget the first time I visited the Puerto Rican countryside. One morning at breakfast I asked my hosts what that bird was that sang so loudly at night. Amid their good-natured laughter, they replied that that was not a bird, but rather the famous coquí. To get an idea of the sound of the coquí, I suggest two websites. The first provides the individual songs of different species, (http://www.cnnet.clu.edu/procoqui/eng/species.html), the second an example of what the nighttime chorus of coquíes and their relatives sounds like in Arecibo (http://cxn.exploratorium.edu/arecibo_new.ram)[1] At this point, it could be appropriate to talk about sounds that remind students of different places. ("Comparisons" again) For example, I grew up in a rural area where the night sound of crickets in the summertime was very strong, and it really sort of lulled me to sleep. A childhood friend who lived on a busy street in the nearby city was annoyed by them just as the noise of traffic on her street kept me awake at night during my sleepovers at her house.

Another site, "¡Salven al Coquí Puertorriqueño!" (http://www.kongaloid.org/coqui/coquiesp.htm), provides an impassioned plea in Spanish ("Communication" at its authentic best) to help save the coquí, which is now on the list of endangered species (an opportunity for "Connections" with science), because "if there ever was a symbol of what Puerto Rico is, it must be the coquí". This is a site not to miss.

Strong emotional ties to the coquí in Puerto Rican culture have exited for centuries, dating back to the native peoples of the island, the Taínos. Numerous legends about the coquí and its origins have survived. Some say that the coquí was once a bird and because of some misfortune, lost its wings. Later, through the mercy of God, it acquired the ability to climb trees. Others say that the coquí was a disobedient child that was punished and turned into a frog, and therefore, its chant resembles a child whistling (http://www.angelfire.com/tx/FernandoBarreto/Coquiesp.html). One particular legend of Taíno origin, available in attractive book form (Mohr and Martorell, 1995), recounts the story of the god, Juracán, who, tired of the silence, starts a terrible storm that lasts a million years. Tired after creating all of that, he falls asleep and later awakens upon hearing the unidentifiable sound of co-quí, co-quí. He looks all over, and finally finds the little frog. Juracán laughs out loud with pleasure at the sight of the diminutive little frog with a giant voice, and then all of the other animals slowly start to sing, signaling the end of the terrible storms.

To develop a deeper understanding of what the coquí means to Puerto Ricans, students could interview classmates of Puerto Rican heritage and members of their families. (integrate "Communities"). I once tried a different approach open to those who may not have a Puerto Rican community nearby. I signed up for a email list, appropriately named "La lista coquí" whose purpose is to maintain contact among Puerto Ricans regardless of where they currently reside. Explaining who I was and why I was asking, I posted the question, " Qué simboliza el coquí para los puertorriqueños?" to the list. I continue to be grateful to the individuals who answered that question[2]. Their responses are provided in Appendix II. The underlined portions of the translations show recurring themes. Some of the more important ones are: 1) It is ubiquitous - it is everywhere, every night, as a child growing up (fond memories), on your patio and it is "part of the neighborhood"; 2) They have incredible abilities – to serenade lovers, to call the rain or a hurricane; 3) They can only survive in Puerto Rico, if taken away they die; 4) They are a symbol of "Puerto Ricanness", a national anthem, because they are small like the island of Puerto Rico, but achieve great things.

The affection for the coquí among Puerto Ricans and its attraction as a symbol of their native land is unmistakable. These are cultural perspectives that are undeniable. However, contrary to the common notion that the coquí lives only in Puerto Rico, it has managed to migrate to other places such as the U.S. Virgin Islands and the area surrounding New Orleans. In these places, they don't attract much attention because they blend into the already existing nightly chorus of anurans,[3] but they do not stir emotional reactions like they do in Puerto Rico. The event that provides the biggest contrast in cultural perspectives is the coquí's fairly recent arrival in Hawaii. Hawaii expends a lot of effort to preserve its unique natural flora and fauna. There is also no native population of anurans to disturb the nighttime peace. Hence, we see perspectives on the coquí that are diametrically opposed to those of Puerto Rico - (http://invasions.bio.utk.edu/invaders/coqui.html), and,

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[1] This can also be accessed by clicking on the link arrullo nocturno on the previous page.

[2] If you elect to use this approach, I would suggest that the teacher moderate the list and provide the responses to the students since your question will not be the only topic of discussion on the list.

[3] An order of amphibians that includes frogs, toads and tree frogs.

(http://www.hear.org/AlienSpeciesInHawaii/species/frogs/). Even the addresses for the URLs contain negative expressions like "invasions" and "alien species". Listen also to the coquí calls on the Hawaiian web sites' (http://www.hear.org/AlienSpeciesInHawaii/species/frogs/) frogcalls and have students compare the those calls with the ones on the Puerto Rican sites ("Comparisons"). What do these differences suggest?

With two so diametrically opposed views of the coquí, it is not surprising that the issue has reached the press and the internet. In Appendix I have provided links for one newspaper site and a discussion board where the debate goes on. This is certainly an area where the same "product" (if one can consider fauna as such) instills different culturally bound "practices" and "perspectives". Understanding this issue might help students approach more controversial contrasts in cultural perspectives more effectively.

References

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (1996). *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century . Yonkers,* NY: ACTFL.

Nicholasa Mohr y Antonio Martorell. (1995). La canción del coquí y otros cuentos de Puerto Rico. NY: Viking.

Appendix I
Useful URLS

1. ebay search for coquí
   http://search.ebay.com/coqui
2. General intro (in English)
   http://www.elboricua.com/coqui.html
   http://welcome.topuertorico.org/coqui.shtml
   http://www.vineland.org/history/pr_festival/coqui.htm
2. General description
   http://www.kongaloid.org/coqui/coquiesp.html
   Species in danger of extinction
   click on "arullo nocturno" for (see #3)
3. Individual coquí sounds
   http://www.cnnet.clu.edu/procoqui/eng/species.html
4. Nighttime chorus of Arecibo
   http://cxn.exploratorium.edu/arecibo_new.ram
5. As a national symbol and in legends
   http://www.puertoricanpower.net/coqui/
   http://www.angelfire.com/tx/FernandoBarreto/
   Coquiesp.html

THE COQUI IN HAWAII

Cultural viewpoints, the coquí in Hawai'i
   http://invasions.bio.utk.edu/invaders/coqui.html
   http://www.hear.org/AlienSpeciesInHawaii/
   species/frogs/
Coquí calls and the Hawaiian's description of them
   http://www.hear.org/AlienSpeciesInHawaii/
   species/frogs/ - frogcalls
The debate: Puerto Rico vs. Hawaii
   http://www.puertorico-herald.org/issues/2001/vol5n37/
   Frogs-en.shtml
   http://vote.sparklit.com/comments.spark?contentID
   =535456&page=0&action=viewTopic&commentID
   =all&pollID=535456

Appendix II

El simbolismo del coquí

Hola!!! Me llamo Guillermo y vivo en Naranjito...un pequeño pueblo en la parte norte-centro de la isla . Por aqui el coqui es como nuestro himno nacional, con la diferencia de que nuestro himno lo escuchamos muy pocas veces y al coqui lo escuchamos todas las noches...Es una pequeña ranita que solo se reproduce aqui en Puerto Rico...Si lo sacan de aqui se muere...	Hello My name is Guillermo and I live in Naranjito, a small village in the north central part of the island. Around here, the coquí is like our national anthem, with the exception that we rarely hear our national anthem, and we hear the coquí every night. It is a little frog that only thrives here in Puerto Rico. If it is taken away from here, it dies.
Buena suerte y un fraternal abrazo...Guillo	Good luck and a fraternal embrace ...Guillo
El coqui es simbolo de Puertorriqueñidad. Y fijate que lo escribo con letra mayuscula. Aunque hay varias especies de coqui, algunas en antillas vecinas a Puerto Rico, las denominadas eleuterodactylus portorricensis y eleuterodactylus coqui son endemicas nuestras. De esto te podra abundar mas nuestro compañero el xapo, pues tengo entendido son parientes cercanos.	The coquí is a symbol of Puertoricanness. And notice that I write it with a capital letter. Although there are various species of coquí, some in the neighboring Antilles, the ones named eleuterodactylus portorricensis and eleuterodactylus coquí endemic to Puerto Rico. To this I can add our companion the toad, I understand that they are close relatives.
El coqui simboliza mucho para nosotros los boricuas ya que es parte del vecindario.	El coquí symbolizes a lot for us Puerto Ricans given that he's part of the neighborhood
Me explico, cuando crecimos todos los dias por ell atardecer lo escuchaste.	Let me clarify, when we are growing up, everyday in the late afternoon you heard him
Durante el dia si viene lluvia comienzan a cantar por cientos y se dice que pueden llamar la lluvia o el huracan.'	During the day if ran is coming they start to sing by the hundreds y it is said that they can make it rain or call a hurricane.

Es inteligente y puede pedirte agua porque cuando empiezas a regar el jardin el empieza a cantar.	It is intelligent and <u>can ask you for water</u> because when you begin to water the garden, it start to sing.
Al pasar el tiempo cuando te siente que te levantas, o que llegaste a regar por la tarde, el te canta para que no te olvides de cumplir tu proposito como humano que es el ayudar a los animales, las plantas y la madre tierra.	After a certain amount of time, when it senses you getting up or that you arrived to water in the afternoon, <u>he sings to you so you don't forget to meet with your duty as a human which is to helps the animals, the plants and the mother earth.</u>
Tambien reconoce parejas de enamorados cuando ellos hablan enel jardin de su hogar.	He also <u>recognizes lovers</u> when they talk in the garden of their home.
. Mientras estoy escribiendo se oye el cokí-cokí de estos sapitos frente a mi ventana en el balcón. Después de una lluvia se oyen más todavía. Viven sólo en PR y - me parece - algunas islas del Caribe, pero se asocian especialmente con PR. Es difícil o imposible a transplantar uno,nacen y viven en su niche. Vienen en diferentes colores y no son más grandesque una pulgada más o menos. Su voz es muy fuerte, casi parece imposible que venga de un cuerpo tan chico.	While I'm writing the co-quí, co-quí of these little frogs can be heard in front of my window on the balcony. After a rain you can hear even more. They only live in PR and , I think, some islands of the Caribbean, <u>But they are associated particularly with Puerto Rico. It is difficult or impossible to transplant one,</u> they are born an live in their niche. They come in different colors and aren't any bigger than an inch, more or less. <u>Their voice is very strong, it seems almost impossible that it comes from such a small body.</u>
Es el simbolo que aunque pequeño en tamaño como nuestra Isla logra grandes cosas.	<u>It is a symbol that although small in size like our island, it achieves grand things.</u>
Una de las cosas que podria decir del coqui es que es el mas puertorriqueno que cualquiera, pues es el unico que si se lleva a otropais se muere y es que cuentan que que el coqui no puede estar lejos de su terruno borincano,,,	One of the things that I could say about the coquí is <u>that it is the most Puerto Rican of all. It is the only one that if it is taken to another country, it dies, and they say that the coquí can't be far from its beloved homeland - Borinquen.</u>
Sin embargo yo y muchos que estamos fuera de PR no nos morimos como el coqui, por eso es que el coqui es el mas puertorriqueno de todos,,,	Never-the-less, I and many who are far from PR don't die like the coquí, that's why it is that the coquí is the most Puerto Rican of all.

Editor's Note

This issue has developed in an interesting way, not totally in the direction of our announced theme, "Culture in the LOTE Curriculum." I am very happy to have received the contributions that were submitted, and hope that you will find them useful as you end the current school year and think about the next. One pervasive trait that you will find in nearly all of the articles in this edition is that they contain links to some very useful websites. The URLs for these are printed in the hardcopy of the journal that has been mailed to you. We will make every effort to make them available on the NYSAFLT website (http://www.nysaflt.org) in interactive form.

The first two articles in this issue address culture in the LOTE classroom from the perspective of recognizing and accommodating the various cultures that can be represented there. Diana Scalera leads off recounting her personal experiences when asked to teach a Spanish class composed of heritage speakers of a variety of languages. She tells how she found success in recognizing the heritage languages of the students in her class and provides us with some general guidelines and useful resources that can help teachers create a learning environment more sensitive to heritage language learners.

The second article related to this theme was written by Deborah Isom of Long Island City High School. She talks about the situation at her school and directs us to some of the material that they have used to accommodate learners of various language backgrounds. Be sure to follow the link provided in her article. It will take you to a wealth of material for very diverse student populations.

The second two articles focus on teaching culture in the LOTE classroom. Vivian Mittlesteadt from the Middle College High School in Buffalo talks about using a web diagram early in the semester to help her students think about what culture is, practice their Spanish skills, use creative and critical thinking, and develop a sense of ownership toward their studies.

I have also included a contribution of my own which I hope will help teachers work with the notion of the culture-bound perspectives that effect they ways that members of different cultures may view the same thing. The suggested unit focuses on the "coquí", the well known and very popular symbol of Puerto Rico, as a unifying theme that can be used to treat the standards of "connections", "community" and "comparisons" as well as "culture" and "communication" while examining the perspectives of a contrast culture regarding the "coquí".

In the last article of this issue, Lucille Pallotta from Onondaga Community College offers an extensive discussion of the issue of whether or not foreign languages can be taught online. In her review, she suggests a variety of ways that computer technology can be used in communicative language teaching, going far beyond the use of websites – a practice with which many of us have become quite familiar.

I hope this issue reaches you as you begin a wonderful summer, and provides you with some useful ideas and insights.

Can Foreign Languages Be Effectively Taught or Learned Online?

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Since a primary function of language is social interaction, the prospect of effectively teaching and learning foreign languages in a non-synchronous, asocial online environment seemed improbable until recently. New developments in technology have made the computer a dynamic, interactive medium of communication, thereby motivating this study of the feasibility of online foreign language instruction.

The potential for teaching foreign languages online is obviously dependent on the objectives and strategies of current methodology. Today most pedagogical approaches to the teaching of foreign languages can be referred to as "proficiency-oriented," since they strive to promote the competent use of a particular language in practical, everyday situations common to natives of the target country. Accordingly, these methodologies stress teaching and learning a given language in "real-life" contexts. It is in this regard that online instruction provides an excellent learning environment in view of the easy access to foreign websites. Opportunities abound at the touch of a fingertip for immersion into a target culture: travel brochures, merchandise catalogs, oral commentary and video clips available on the websites of radio and television stations, etc.

A second common element of "proficiency-oriented" pedagogical approaches is their central position in the "affective-cognitive spectrum" of foreign language methodologies. Specifically, "proficiency-oriented" instruction emphasizes equally the development of all four language skills—the "affective" skills of speaking and listening as well as the "cognitive" skills of reading and writing. Of course, the development of each of these skills at any level presupposes a certain knowledge of vocabulary and mastery of grammatical structures. Vocabulary can be treated rather effectively in an online environment through interactive programs that facilitate the acquisition of new words introduced in meaningful contexts or in side-by-side foreign language/English equivalent lists. Matching exercises, memory games, crossword puzzles, etc., which reinforce vocabulary development, can similarly be created using script language such as JavaScript and Dynamic HTML that have been incorporated into web browsers. Grammar can be explained online with Word or PowerPoint documents saved as HTML and reinforced with self-correcting exercises such as those demonstrated by LeLoup and Ponterio in two articles published in *Language Learning and Technology*, an online journal[1]. Foreign language courses via the Web could also rely heavily on traditional textbooks, workbooks and reference manuals for vocabulary development and grammatical instruction.

Foreign language skill development in an online course is more complex in nature than the teaching or learning of vocabulary and grammar. The skill of speaking, for example, is twofold in nature since it involves both the ability to pronounce a language well and to express oneself with adequate fluency. With regard to pronunciation, tutorials with online capability can provide native speech models, automatic speech recognition/processing and corrective feedback. The latter is generally given through visual display mechanisms that specify phonetic errors and give directions for correction. Errors in prosody -- pitch, duration and amplitude -- are usually illustrated through charts or graphs comparing the student's production to that of a native speaker. A prototype of interactive pronunciation tutors featured in the Carnegie Mellon Fluency system is discussed at length by Maxine Eskenazi[2]. Speech recognition/processing technology is also reviewed by Farzad Ehsani and Eva Knodt in an article that appeared somewhat earlier in *Language Learning and Technology*[3].

In the traditional "brick and mortar" classroom, fluency in speaking a foreign language is acquired primarily through teacher/student or student/student interactive activities. By using instant textual messaging software such as Instant Relay Chat, online foreign language courses can simulate conversational practice in real-time chat rooms where students send and respond immediately to online written messages in formats reflective of colloquial speech. Authentic alternatives to instant textual messaging are available through computer-mediated audio communication facilitated by software such as AOL Instant Messenger and Windows Messenger that allow students to speak directly with the professor or with each other. With NetMeeting and Paltalk, students can actually see the person to whom they are speaking through videoconferencing. Ancillary media can be used to provide additional speaking practice and a means of assessment. Specifically, students can record oral presentations on audio or videocassettes that are submitted to the professor for evaluation, or the students and professor can converse periodically in the target language by phone.

Oral comprehension skills can be developed online through activities featuring imported sound or video files such as those featured in the online course CyberItalian[4]. Streaming audio/video formats such as QuickTime and RealAudio minimize the time needed to download these files or to access authentic radio or TV station broadcasts from target countries. Instructors can also create their own sound files using synchronized slide shows such as PowerPoint and Real Slide Show, audio authoring programs such as Sound Forge and Sound Edit 16, or video authoring programs such as iMovie[5]. Optimized formats and fonts are now available for the creation of online reading comprehension exercises through authoring programs such as ANNOTEXT and GALT or electronic book formats on software such as Microsoft Reader. In addition, reading comprehension activities can be facilitated with online reading aids such as glosses, dictionaries and grammars, as is the case in the CyberItalian course previously mentioned.

Computer-mediated written communication, especially if facilitated with online dictionaries and grammars, can provide unique and productive writing assignments. For example, students can engage in email exchanges with each other or native pen pals. In addition, Web-crossing can be used to create links from WebCT, Blackboard or other course management systems to web-based bulletin boards or threaded discussion forums[6]. As argued by Lamy and Goodfellow in "*Reflective Conversation" in the Virtual Language Classroom*, the asynchronous nature of such activities allows for the analytical reflection necessary for the development of writing skills[7]. Using a red font instead of a red pen, the instructor can even correct written exchanges via the Internet as well as other assignments submitted electronically.

The foregoing discussion points to the feasibility of online foreign language instruction/learning from a technological perspective. However, relatively few courses are presently being offered through this medium. This may be due to any number of reservations held by instructors, which stem from issues such as the following:

1. the belief that an on-line learning environment is not conducive to learning because it does not permit the "dynamics" of the traditional classroom setting;

2. the unwillingness or inability to devote the time needed to acquire computer skills and creating an online course;
3. the lack of technological and/or financial support from home institutions;
4. the greater risk of copyright violations compared to traditional classroom instruction;
5. the lack of confidence in the validity of online evaluations due largely to the greater risk of cheating.

In addition, before creating online courses, instructors must obtain certain information about their prospective students. Marketing research has to be conducted to ascertain whether there is sufficient interest in the projected online course among students who have the computer skills and equipment, as well as the motivation and self-discipline, necessary for success in an online learning environment. It would be difficult and costly for an instructor to obtain the needed information in lieu of an institutional office concerned with marketing research.

Given the disadvantages discussed above, one might assume that efforts to offer foreign language instruction online should be discouraged. However, this conclusion lacks validity in light of the primary objective of all online courses -- to reach an audience extending beyond the physical boundaries of a traditional high school or college campus that might otherwise be deprived of instruction. Indeed, the Internet can be a powerful medium in promoting the "democratization" of foreign language instruction.

[1] See Jean LeLoup and Robert Ponterio, "Interactive Language Exercises on the Web: An Exemplar," *Language Learning and Technology,* 3 (July 1999): 3-11 (http://llt.msu.edu/vol3num1/onthenet/index.html), and Jean LeLoup and Robert Ponterio, "Interactive and Multimedia Techniques in Online Language Lessons: A Sampler," *Language Learning and Technology,* 7 (September 2003): 4-17 (http://llt.msu.edu/vol3num1/onthenet/index.html).

[2] Ezkenazi, Maxine, "Using Automatic Speech Processing for Foreign Language Pronunciation Tutoring: Some Issues and a Prototype." *Language Learning and Technology*, 2 (January 1999): 62-76. (http://llt.msu.edu/vol2num2/article2/index.html)

[3] Ehsani, Farzad and Eva Knodt, "Speech Technology in Computer-Aided Language Learning: Strengths and Limitations of a New Call Paradigm." *Language Learning and Technology*, 2 (July 1998): 45-60. (http://llt.msu.edu/vol2num2/article2/index.html)

[4] See http://cyberitalian.com.

[5] In their article, "Interactive and Multimedia Techniques in Online Language Lessons: A Sampler," cited above, LeLoup and Ponterio comment on several online language learning activities created with recent Web audio and video technologies.

[6] Learning Management Systems (LSMs) can facilitate the creation of online foreign language courses. See Bob Godwin-Jones, "Tools for Distance Education: Towards Convergence and Integration," *Language Learning and Technology*, 7 (September 2003): 18-22. (http://llt.msu.edu/vol7num3/emerging/default.html)

[7] Lamy, Marie-Noëlle and Robin Goodfellow, "Reflective Conversation' in the Virtual Language Classroom." *Language Learning and Technology*, 2 (January 1999): 43-61 (http://llt.msu.edu/vol2num2/article2/index.html).