

# A Case Study of a *Cultura*-inspired Project for the Teaching of Culture

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- I. Introduction
- II. Background
- III. The project
- IV. Discussion
- V. Conclusion

## **I. Introduction**

Recently, integrating the teaching of culture into second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) education has been emphasized, as many researchers and instructors have realized that culture and language are inseparable (Kramsch, 1993). According to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning, developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in the mid-1990s, culture has been incorporated in the “5Cs” – Cultures, Communication, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

Historically, language has generally been emphasized over culture in SL and FL classes due to the influence of generative linguistics in the late 1950s and 1960s (Chun, 2015). However, culture has since been elevated to hold equal status with the language component in the standards. As Byram (1997) suggested, the notion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been emphasized in the teaching of culture, in order to develop SL and FL students’ abilities “to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures” (Meyer, 1991: 139). In addition, the advent of technology has also enabled SL/FL

instructors to combine technology with more traditional pedagogical tools in teaching culture. Telecollaboration, or online intercultural exchange, has been developed to facilitate not only the use of the target language but also to develop ICC (Chun, 2015) using technology. Telecollaboration refers to projects having “involved the use of (text-based) online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in different countries to learn the others’ language and culture” (Dooly, 2008: 369).

One of the successful types of telecollaboration projects is *Cultura*, developed by French instructors at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1997. *Cultura* is a web-based intercultural exchange through which students complete interactive online tasks (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001). These online activities “are designed to lead students toward discovery, apperception, and reflection on similarities and differences between the cultures of their first language and the target language, with the ultimate goal of achieving deep understanding of difference in cultural attitudes, beliefs, communication styles, and world view” (Jiang, Wang, & Tschudi, 2014: 129). The original *Cultura* was developed for exchanges between students learning French in the United States and students learning English in France, through use of a forum (asynchronous communication mode). However, it has recently been expanded to other languages using different modes of technology in different learning contexts.

Inspired by *Cultura*, the main purpose of this paper is to propose a model of an online intercultural project by introducing the procedures and students’ responses in the project. By disseminating the procedures and pedagogically beneficial features analyzed in the students’ responses, the paper also aims to facilitate the adaptation of the project in different learning contexts with different tools and different learner

groups.

In order to find the pedagogical effects in the students' postings on Facebook, this paper focuses on the students' responses to three questions, which showed active engagement by the students: word-association ("Korea and USA"), sentence-completion ("What Korea needs most ..., What the U.S. needs most ..."), and reactions to a situation ("You see a mother in a supermarket slap her child. How and what would you do?").

This paper has three main components. The first component explains the background of *Cultura* and the process-driven approach for teaching culture. With this background in place, an actual case of a *Cultura*-inspired project implemented with three groups of Korean as a foreign language (KFL) students is presented, including specific procedures and students' responses. Finally, this paper discusses the pedagogically beneficial features of the project, based on observation of the students' responses and interactions on Facebook, in order to examine the practicality and pedagogical soundness of the project.

## **II. Background**

### **1. Cultura**

As *Cultura* "is first and foremost a pedagogical project" (Furstenberg & Levet, 2014: 3), the model has been adopted in various learning contexts with different learner groups. The original online exchange of *Cultura* was developed in 1997 as a web-based intercultural project between MIT students learning French and students at the Institut National des Telecommunications (INT) in Evry who were learning

English in France (Furstenberg et al., 2001). The definition of *Cultura* on its website (<http://cultura.mit.edu/>) states that it is “a Web-based, intercultural project situated in a language class that connects American students with other students in different countries”. It was originally created as an exchange between American and French students, but it has been adapted to schools in other countries, such as Germany, Italy, Mexico, Russia, and Spain, connecting students in these countries with US students.

The purpose of *Cultura* is “to develop foreign language students’ understanding of foreign cultural attitudes, concepts, beliefs, and ways of interaction and looking at the world” (Furstenberg et al., 2001: 1), by responding to several culture-related questions in the online forum (asynchronous mode of communication) in the students’ native languages. Three types of questionnaire were developed in the original *Cultura* project. The first set is a word-association questionnaire, where students are asked to write associations with words such as “freedom”, “family”, and “success”. The second set is sentence-completion, where students are asked to complete a sentence such as “A good student is someone who ...,” and “A good boss is someone who ...”. In the final set, students are asked to react to a hypothetical situation, such as “You see a student next to you cheating at an exam”. Each questionnaire was carefully designed by the instructors in order to reflect different areas of life, different kinds of relationships, and different locations, which allowed students to investigate these different aspects within the specific contexts (Furstenberg & Levet, 2014).

After their responses, the students were supposed to analyze and synthesize the other students’ opinions written in their native language or the target language. Thus, students can learn not only the target language and the culture but also develop analytical and synthetic

thinking skills. Moreover, the “*Cultura* project encourages students to explore both individual and socially constructed understandings of cultural phenomena, and it ties every insight to the culture that is language” (Bauer, de Benedette, Furstenberg, Levet, & Waryn, 2006: 58). In addition, on its website, *Cultura* provides information about the project, such as the methodology, a teacher’s guide, and archives, so that any instructor can adapt the project depending on their circumstances.

Regarding the effects of the *Cultura* project, Furstenberg et al. (2001) reported that MIT students learning French and INT students learning English could not only understand the cultural attitudes and viewpoints, but they could also learn the target language based on the students’ responses on the forum and in class discussion. In addition, Bauer et al. (2006) discussed how *Cultura* in Russian and Spanish were designed and conducted with the partner schools. They also demonstrated how they overcame the challenges and suggested future directions. Recently, some projects inspired by *Cultura* have been conducted in different contexts (see Chun, 2014, for more information). For example, Liaw and English (2014) designed and implemented a task-based telecollaboration between students of English as a Lingua Franca in France and Taiwan, using various types of computer-mediated exchanges. Another project, China–USA Business Café (CUBC) was run by Jiang, Wang, & Tschudi (2014) between students at the University of Hawaii and Tianjin Foreign Trade Vocational College for the development of the cultural aspects of communicative competence in Chinese. As with other projects, students in these projects had a chance to explore cultural differences, such as understanding different concepts of a word depending on cultural (as well as linguistic) development.

Despite the pedagogical benefits that *Cultura*-based tasks were

effective in developing, in terms of both linguistic and cultural competence, limitations have been reported, such as organizational challenges for coordinating academic calendars, different time zones, and infrastructure challenges, such as technology policies and technological difficulties (Chun, 2014).

## **2. Process-driven approach in teaching culture**

Culture can be taught either by a content-driven approach or by a process-driven approach (Byon, 2007). The content-driven approach is more traditional, with the instructor giving a lecture or explaining a cultural product and/or practice. The teacher, here, is the information provider. The process-driven approach is the opposite: the students are all participants of the cultural learning, and the instructor is not only the information provider but also the facilitator. With this method, students can build cultural knowledge using various self-discovery learning tasks and critical thinking. It is also effective in developing students' positive attitudes toward the target culture as well as increasing cross-cultural awareness (Abrams, 2002; Jogan, Herdia, & Augilera, 2001; Wright, 2000). In other words, a process-driven approach can foster students' ICC, since its five components are: attitudes (of curiosity and openness); knowledge (of social groups and their products and practices); skills of interpreting and relation; skills of discovery and interaction; and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). In addition, as *Cultura* projects encourage students' observation of the target culture and critical thinking by comparing and contrasting the two cultures, *Cultura* can be categorized in the process-driven approach.

Unfortunately, in the KFL context, most studies on teaching culture have adopted the content-driven approach, using literature (Cho, 2002;

Choi, 2001; Yuen, 2003), television commercials (Cheon & Kim, 2010; Lee, 2002) and Korean films (Choi, 2001). Even though these studies reported some positive effects, such as enhanced understanding of Korean culture, they were not concerned about developing ICC or intercultural awareness.

Regarding the process-driven approach, Byon (2007) used various activities to compare and contrast both Korean and American culture. For example, in “Cultural Behaviour Activity”, students were asked to come up with their own interpretations of the underlying values of American cultures from a list of typical cultural behaviours of Americans. In the “Media-comparison Activity”, students were asked to compare American cultural images projected in Korean media with Korean cultural images projected in American media. The ultimate goal of these activities was to raise first-year Korean KFL students’ metacognitive awareness of the two cultures. During one semester, while the students were participating in these activities bi-weekly, they not only gained a better understanding of their own culture, but they also learned the target culture, the Korean culture, with more open attitudes.

Another interesting study was done by Yoon and Yang (2012) regarding intercultural communication. In their study, three intercultural US-Korean dyads and 17 intracultural Korean-Korean dyads performed a mock business negotiation. The bi-cultural<sup>1</sup> Americans who were familiar with both the American culture and the Korean culture had similar gains to the Korean-Korean negotiators. In other words, raising students’ intercultural awareness helps students to perform well in

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1 ‘Bi-culturals’ are defined as people who have acquired the ways of thinking of two cultures and have profound experience in both (Benet-Martinez, V., Leu, J., Lee, F., & Morris, M. W., 2002).



global business contexts.

In a similar context, Kern, Lee, Aytug, & Brett (2012) investigated the negotiation conversations of 16 US-US, 15 Korean-Korean, and 15 US-Korean dyads in a two-party negotiation simulation. The two people in each pairing, a job candidate and a recruiter, had to negotiate an employment contract, and the researchers focused on the use of pronouns. Results indicated that the intercultural dyads (US-Korean dyads) generated higher economic outcomes by narrowing the social distance than the Korean or US intra-cultural dyads. Thus, intercultural awareness and understanding may lead to students having greater success in the globalized business world.

It seems evident that current teaching and learning trends in SL and FL emphasizes culture as an inevitable component, and culture cannot be taught separately. ICC is also emphasized more than ever in the current fast-growing interconnected world. Thus, as a way of telecollaboration, *Cultura* has been one of the most successful models in teaching both culture and language, with many pedagogical features such as task-based instruction, scaffolding, and dynamic learning (Furstenberg & Levet, 2014). However, as Chun (2014) stated, most projects were created for European languages and only a limited number of studies have reported on the difficulties and challenges of East Asian languages.

Therefore, this project was designed to fill the gap in the literature on teaching culture in SL and FL contexts. As a *Cultura*-inspired project, the present paper aims to explain how the original *Cultura* project was modified and applied to the KFL context. The paper will also present pedagogically beneficial features and teaching implications, by observing students' responses and interactions on Facebook, in order to inform instructors and researchers of KFL of its efficacy as a process-driven approach to teaching culture. As a case study, the

present paper focuses on students' responses to three tasks (word-association, sentence-completion, and reactions to a situation) and their overall feedback on the project.

### **III. The project**

#### **1. Participants**

KFL students who were enrolled in three different Korean classes at a large public university in the southwestern part of the US participated in the project: 18 students from 'First-Year Korean II (hereafter K1)', 25 students from 'Accelerated Second-Year Korean (hereafter K2)', and 11 students from 'Advanced Conversation in Korean (hereafter K3)'. The students were grouped based on a placement test<sup>2</sup>, developed by the university.

The K1 class was the next level following First-Year Korean I, which was offered to students who had no knowledge of the Korean language, and was designed for students wishing to acquire the basics of the Korean language. Thus, the K1 class comprised students wishing to expand on the basics in the First-Year Korean I, aiming to achieve the novice-high<sup>3</sup> level of proficiency in four skills of Korean language. The students in K1 were mostly American students who had finished the first level of Korean during the fall semester of the previous year. Two of them were heritage Koreans, but their proficiency level was novice-mid, so they took the K1 class with other American students.

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<sup>2</sup> The placement test consisted of two parts: reading and writing, and an interview for speaking and listening.

<sup>3</sup> Proficiency levels are based on ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012)

Therefore, the majority of students in the K1 class could be expected to represent American culture as native speakers of English.

The K2 class was the next level of the Accelerated First Year Korean class, which was only offered to heritage Korean students who had no experience of learning Korean in a school setting. Thus, students in K2 were aiming to achieve up to intermediate–mid level in four skills. The students in K2 had various backgrounds in terms of their duration of learning Korean and being exposed to Korean language and culture, and were expected to be ‘bi–culturals (Benet–Martinez et al., 2002)’ who could show knowledge and experience of both cultures in this project.

The K3 class was the highest level offered by the university, in which students aimed to achieve up to advanced–low level in four skills. In this class, seven students were native Koreans who had been born in Korea but had come to the US when they were middle and high school students. Four of these students were heritage Koreans who had taken all of the Korean courses offered by the university. Thus, like the students of the K2 class, students in the K3 class had mixed backgrounds in terms of learning Korean or being exposed to Korean language and culture, but in this project they were expected to play a role as native speakers of Korean.

## **2. Tool and rationale of the project**

The project is “*Cultura*–inspired” in two ways. First, while the project followed similar procedures and the same questions from the original *Cultura* project, it was designed for KFL students in the US. Even though the students were taking Korean classes at the same institution, their levels of Korean language proficiency and their cultural

backgrounds were different, representing an American group, a Korean–American group, and a Korean group. Second, the tool used for interaction in the project was Facebook, which was selected because of beneficial features reported in SL and FL studies: fostering positive attitudes from the class (Eren, 2012; Piriyaasilpa, 2010), promoting collaboration, creating a platform for authentic materials, increasing the engagement of the students, especially for the shy students (Terantino & Graf, 2011), and developing authentic language interaction and socio–pragmatic awareness with a high motivation and sense of belonging (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). As well, its familiarity to both the students and the instructor, and its easiness of use were considered in order to reduce the challenges frequently reported in other *Cultura*–based projects, such as technological difficulties (Chun, 2014).

The rationale of the project was that KFL students of various proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds in the U.S. could go beyond learning Korean and American cultures by sharing their ideas. It was believed this process could also increase critical thinking and analytic thinking skills by synthesizing others’ opinions, which are essential components of intercultural competence.

### **3. Procedures**

On the first day of the semester of the each class, I as the teacher/researcher, explained the project and collected details of the students’ Facebook accounts. There were only two students who did not have a Facebook account, but after they understood the purpose of the project, they each agreed to create an account. On the next day, I sent a ‘friend request’ to each student in the three classes. After they each accepted my ‘friend request’, I created four groups in my Facebook

account. I assigned three or four students from each class to a group, so that each group consisted of 13 or 14 students, who were a mix from all three classes.

The first task on Week 2<sup>4</sup> was a self-introduction, and the students were asked to write and post a short introduction about themselves in English. After that, six questions were assigned to the students bi-weekly. During the last week of the semester, students were asked to post their favorite question and the reason they liked it. In terms of the language that they used, students were asked to use their native language (either English or Korean) as in the original *Cultura* project. Students were also asked to make at least two comments after they read all of the responses from the group members, in order to enhance interaction. After each task, a summary of the responses was presented during the class, in order to increase the students' understanding of the target culture. When necessary, a lecture on cultural concepts or opinions raised was provided during class time.

Regarding the questions, students received six questions throughout the semester: two word-association, two sentence-completion, and two reactions-to-a-situation questions. All questions were adapted from the original *Cultura* project (refer to <http://cultura.mit.edu/cultura-exchanges-archive> for the original questions). The following are the specific questions:

- 1) Word Association I: School
- 2) Word Association II: Korea and the USA
- 3) Sentence Completion I: A good student is someone who is ...
- 4) Sentence Completion II: What Korea needs most ... and What the US needs most ...
- 5) Reactions to a Situation I: You are walking down the street in a big city. A stranger approaches you with a big smile. How and what would you

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<sup>4</sup> A semester consisted of 15 weeks.

do?

- 6) Reactions to a Situation II: You see a mother in a supermarket slap her child. How and what would you do?

The first two sets of questions were the word-association about “School” and “Korea and the USA”. Students were asked to post at least three words associated with “School” during Week 3, and to “Korea” and the USA during Week 5. Sentence-completion questions asked students to complete the sentence, “A good student is someone who is ...”, during Week 7 and to complete the other two sentences, “What Korea needs most ...” and “What the US needs most ...”, during Week 9. The final questions (reactions to a situation) were more comprehensive and comparative, aimed at exploring students’ opinions based on either Korean or American culture. In Week 11, students were asked to post a response to “How and what would you do if you met a stranger with a big smile while you were walking down the street in a big city”. The last task was done in Week 13, asking “How and what would you do if you saw a mother in a supermarket slapping her child.”

A small-scale pilot study had been conducted during the previous year, and the questions and the procedures were modified based on that pilot study.

Each question was presented in both Korean and English, and students were supposed to post their responses in their first language. Therefore, all students in the K1 class posted in English, and all students in the K3 class posted in Korean. In the K2 class, some students responded in English and others in Korean, depending on their perceptions regarding their first language.

A guideline was posted for every question in English and Korean on Facebook, emphasizing the time frame for each task. Grading was based on completion, so if they posted the answers on time, the students

received 10 percent of the total available credits.

#### 4. Selected students' responses

Based on initial data analysis, the three tasks were selected because the students engaged<sup>5</sup> more with those tasks than with the first task in each set. The three tasks chosen are: the second word-association about "Korea," and the "USA", the second sentence-completion on "What Korean needs most ...", and "What the US needs most ...", and the second task asking for a reaction to a hypothetical situation, "You see a mother in a supermarket slap her child. How and what would you do?". Based on the students' responses to the questions and their interactions using the "comment" function of Facebook, pedagogically sound features were examined in order to show the project's practicality and the pedagogical impact of the project in teaching culture in the KFL context.

##### 1) Facebook postings

According to the final survey, the most favorite question was Question 2 (28.8%), a word-association question, "Korea and USA" and students from the three classes had various responses. Some representative words or items were observed: *Galbi*, *Samsung*, and *Kimchi* for the Korean culture, and *football*, *Apple*, and *hamburger* for the American culture. As expected, some Korean background students in K3 posted Korean-specific items such as 정 [Jeong], 야근 [Yakun], and 뽕짝 [Ppongchak]. 'Jeong' stands for 'A fond feeling/mood that arises as one lives with another person or animal for a long time', or, 'a

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5 Engagement was measured by the number of comments and students' preferences of the question type in the final survey.

feeling of closeness towards a place where one has been living or making a living for a long time'. 'Yakun' means 'working overtime at night', and 'Ppongthak' is 'a slang term for a musical genre, teuroteu'. In order to understand these items, students needed to know the backgrounds relating to these items, so a lecture was given for American students (mostly K1 and K2 class students) whenever it was necessary. Students sometimes asked each other when they did not understand, by using Facebook's 'comment' feature. For example, a student from K1 asked the student from K3 who had posted *Ppongthak* about its meaning, and the K3 student then posted some video links so that the other students could understand what *Ppongthak* is.

All of the questions posted on comments were student-led, so they had an opportunity to share information about their own culture without the instructor's mediation. Moreover, the students' interaction supports ecological approaches espoused by van Lier (2004), by presenting 'affordance' (liking a video clip on Facebook) and 'scaffolding' (student-led learning).

Concerning the sentence-completion question, "What Korea needs most ... and What the US needs most ...", many students mentioned social problems such as *plastic surgery*, *sexism in the workplace*, *materialism*, and *better relations with North Korea* for the South Korea part. For the US part, *debt*, *health care*, and *educational system* were mentioned. Regarding the topic 'plastic surgery in Korea', many students posted their comments, for example:

*Sylvia Kim (K2): idk, I'm not 100% against plastic surgery ... if they really have a problem area hey go for it ... but since everyone gets it to look the same ... and they believe their ugly ... and then people don't hire ugly people ... it's this never-ending horrible cycle ...*



And one student made a link for a video clip regarding plastic surgery:

*David Hoang (K1): y'all probably have seen this, but sometimes it's not the best idea to get plastic surgery. <http://www.worldbrunch.com/.../china-plastic.../c0s10072/...> (Plastic Surgery Nation: Chinese Man Sues Wife For Being Ugly, Wins)*

In addition, students also made a lot of comments regarding the issue of reunification of Korea, for example:

*Jung Min Lee (K2): an ideal civilization, sure, but I don't think unification would be a very great idea with respect to our current circumstances. the likelihood that a communist and a republic nation to unite is basically next to none, whether they were once whole or not. just think about how the American government – a unified country – itself is split between its parties. can you imagine how much worse it would be with north and south Korea battling it out for who gets more power? nothing would get done and the entire government would be in a standstill; a giant filibuster of sorts. i think it's best to leave things at they are for now and it should be our prerogative to get Kim Jeong Un to come to his senses.*

Thus, the students were actively involved in exchanging their opinions regarding the social problems and issues of both countries, which they could not do during class. Moreover, by adding extra links for better understanding on Facebook, students could become information providers as well as being receivers.

With respect to children's discipline, Q6: "You see a mother in a supermarket slap her child ...", about 47% of the students responded that they would not say anything to the mother. However, they said that they would do something like call the manager or the police if she abused the child (around 43% of the students). Interestingly, about half of the heritage students (K2 class) responded that the child may

deserve it and the parents had a right to discipline their children, even in a public place. All of the Korean students in the K3 class who had spent their childhoods in Korea responded that they would just ignore the situation and that the child might deserve it. On the other hand, some American students who were from non-Asian families in the K1 class took the child's side. They said that the mother should stop it or they would call somebody else who could resolve the situation. However, some students who were from Vietnamese families said that they would ignore the situation because disciplining a child is the parents' responsibility. Thus, depending on their background culture, students sometimes saw the situation from a different perspective. It was a good topic to compare and contrast the American culture and the Korean culture (or Asian culture) regarding children's discipline. During classroom discussion, some Korean students and heritage Korean students confessed that they had a similar experience but they realized that it was hardly seen in America. In fact, the topic was also helpful to the Korean students or heritage Korean students to raise awareness of cultural differences as bi-culturals (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002).

## **2) Comments**

Regarding students' comments, some of students' responses, especially to Q2, received many comments from the other group members (Figure 1). Students could express not only their immediate reactions and responses to someone's responses but also express their opinions (based on their major) about an issue such as 'advertising in Korea'.



Clarissa, who was a Foreign Language Education major, asked what that meant (the third comment from Figure 1), and Isabel provided her thoughts regarding her original response (the fourth comment from Figure 1), ‘Positive messaging in advertising’. Thus, peer-learning and collaboration (Lee, 2009) by negotiation of meaning, which are all emphasized in socioculturalism, were observed.

In addition, some of the students who were reluctant to speak up in class made many comments on Facebook. For example, Rachel (Figure 2) was an American student who was taking the K3 class, where most students were from Korea. Because of that and her introverted personality, she was very reluctant to speak during the class. However, she made many comments on Facebook to other students' opinions.

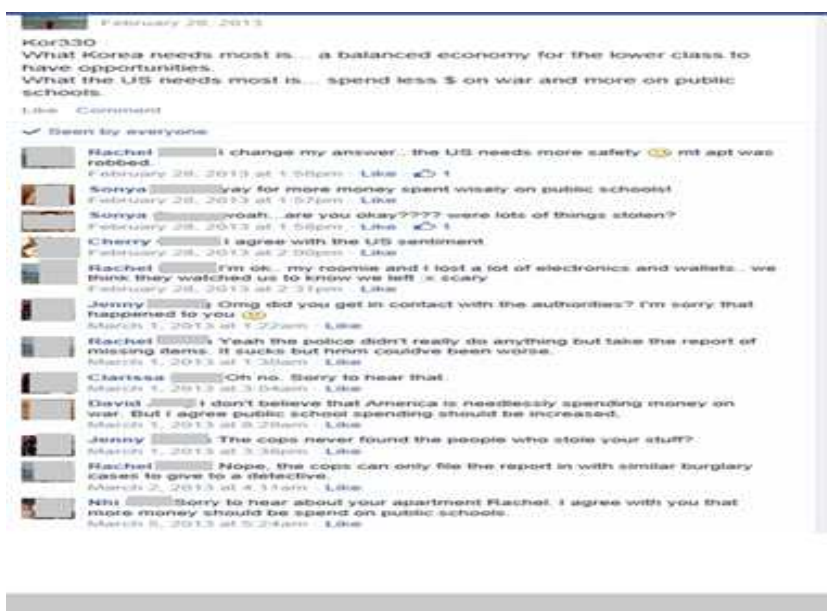


Figure 2. Rachel's comments<sup>7</sup>

Thus, as in other Web 2.0 technology-based communication, the project benefited some shy students by providing a relaxed environment (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Chen, 2009) where they could be more productive than they were during in-class activities (Terantino & Graf, 2011).

5. Students’ feedback to the project

During the last week of the semester, a survey was conducted to ask about students' attitudes towards the project and their favorite topics and questions. 90% of the students agreed with the statement, ‘I enjoyed the project’, and 95% of them chose ‘I could see how others thought about the topics’ as the main reason why they enjoyed the project. Table 1 reports the survey results for students' preferred topics and questions.

Table 1. Survey Results on Students' Favorite Topic and Question

Class	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
K1	0	5	1	5	2	2
K2	0	5	1	3	6	6
K3	1	3	1	1	2	1
Total <sup>8</sup> (%)	1(2.2%)	13(28.8%)	3(6.6%)	9(20%)	10(22.2%)	9(20%)

Overall, 42.2% of the students liked the reaction-to-a-situation questions (Q5 and Q6), 28.8% of them liked Q2, and 20% of them favored Q4, which allowed them to compare and contrast Korea and the

7 The whole script will be provided upon request.  
8 45 students out of 54 students participated on the survey.

US. The second word-association question (Q2), “Korea and USA”, was the students' favorite question, and what follows are some of the comments posted on the question:

*My favorite was #2 because it was cool to see new stuff about Korea that I had never heard of before. There's a lot of stuff I don't know about! (K1)*

*like #2 Korea/US Word association. I think it showed how we all view US and Korea from different perspectives because we all thought 3 different things when we associate US and Korea~ (K2)*

*저는 두번째, "2. word association: Korea, the USA"이 좋았습니다. 왜냐하면, 미국에서 자란 한국인으로서, 저와 같은 환경에서 자란 분들의 한국과 미국의 생각과 태도가 궁금했습니다. (K3)*

In terms of proficiency level and cultural background, Korean heritage students mostly liked the reaction-to-a-situation tasks (Q5 and Q6), whereas the other two groups preferred the second word-association question. The American student group also equally liked the second sentence-completion question (Q4) and Q2. Thus, as different learner groups preferred different types of questions, task types should be carefully considered in designing a project.

## VI. Discussion

The findings from the students' responses support some of recent theories in FL/SL education, such as sociocultural theories, ecological

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9 Translation: I liked the second question because as a Korean grown up in the US, I was curious about the opinions and attitudes toward Korea and the US of the students who had grown up in a situation similar to mine.

approaches (van Lier, 2004), and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). Regarding intercultural communicative competence, the findings of the project satisfy Byram's (1997) five elements (attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness), as the students showed great interest in other students' responses (from different cultural backgrounds), expressed and shared their own opinions showing knowledge of their own culture or being 'expert' in their culture, and showed understanding to another culture.

In addition, the survey results indicated that most students had positive experiences with the project and liked the comparative topics and questions, which satisfied the students' intrinsic motivation and curiosity about the other culture.

Moreover, the project elicited student-generated cultural concepts and topics. It did not present teacher-prepared topics, so the topics reflected what the students knew and wanted to know about Korean culture and American culture. It not only motivated students but also guided the teacher in terms of method and content with respect to both cultures. Furthermore, it generated negotiation among students, by creating an opportunity to converse using the 'Comment' function on Facebook. Like the example of *Ppongthak*, it also elicited student-led problem-solving activities, where students could become the information provider or content-generator for peer-learning (Lee & McLoughlin, 2007). This phenomenon is also related to the ecological perspective (van Lier, 2004) where students scaffold each other and use Facebook's interface or "affordance" for learning.

In addition, most students preferred the comparative topics such as Q 2 and Q 4, which allowed students to learn the other culture. In a way, for those Korean students who were familiar with both cultures, the

project provided an opportunity to revisit Korean culture and compare it to American culture.

Furthermore, the project provided a relaxed and anxiety-free environment (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008; Chen, 2009), so that introverted or shy students could participate more often than they did during classroom instruction (Terantino & Graf, 2011). For certain topics, especially social issues, students engaged actively, which would not have happened during classroom instruction. As Isabel (a senior majoring in Advertising) indicated, students also participated more eagerly when a topic was related to their majors or interests.

From the ecological perspective, Facebook was a very efficient tool because of its easy and free accessibility, not only for the students but also for the teacher/researcher. The interface enabled students to share their opinions by using 'Write Post' and 'Comment' functions. Because they were asynchronous functions, students could have access to and post their responses or comments without a time limitation. Sometimes students used 'Like' on other students' comments as a way of expressing their feelings, and I could trace the time when a student posted or made comments since this was automatically saved.

Some pedagogical tips for implementing the project can be suggested. Firstly, the privacy on Facebook of both the students and the instructor is important. It is suggested that the group should be created as 'closed', so that only group members can have access to the Facebook activity.

Secondly, keeping an effective number of students in a group is important. If there are too many students in a group, it is hard for the students to read all of the other students' responses and make comments because of the time involved. The less personal nature of a large group may also reduce the students' motivation. Thus, it is



recommended to have groups of about nine students, or three students from the three course levels, in a Facebook group. This also makes instructor control easier.

Thirdly, as other researchers have mentioned (Chun, 2014), it is better if the instructor can minimize his/her role. Giving the students freedom to interact is helpful, and too much interference from the instructor, especially if he or she is a native speaker from the target culture, may limit the students' concepts and images of the target culture. However, the instructor's role should not be ignored, because they are there to be the controller and problem-solver when necessary.

Fourthly, it is ideal if there is a time during the class to discuss the responses that students made. Some students mentioned that the lectures and discussions based on the responses were helpful for understanding both cultures. It is, however, sometimes hard to structure time for classroom discussion. In that case, using 'chat' on Facebook for an online discussion or for posting lecture notes or explanations about some key concepts and topics may be helpful.

Lastly, grading can be a problem. In this project, it was a completion-based activity, so students received 10 percent credit when they completed the activities on time. However, more practical grading methods should be developed in order to increase students' interest and attention.

As the survey results showed, most students enjoyed the project, and they especially liked the questions that allowed them to compare Korean and American culture (i.e., Q 2 and Q 4). Thus, adding more questions or using only those questions that allow students to directly compare the two cultures may motivate students to explore more about the two cultures. Furthermore, the students liked the reaction-to-a-situation questions, so these questions may also increase students' interest.

Visual or audio–visual materials, such as scenes from movies or plays that represent each culture, may help students to understand the other culture better (Bauer et al., 2006). Advertisements or pictures may also be more interesting than text–based questions. Thus, by utilizing affordances of Facebook, such as adding these materials via ‘Add Photo/Video’, function may enrich students’ interactions and participation.

## V. Conclusion

The teaching of culture is one of the most important parts of foreign language education, as it is a component of the 5Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities, ACTFL, 1996) of the National Standards in Foreign Language Education in the US. Moreover, its importance is growing, especially for Korean instruction, because of the vast differences between Korean and American culture, and the rapidly increasing number of KFL students. However, because of various restrictions, such as the class schedule, the teaching of culture often becomes peripheral in class (Bauer et al., 2006). In addition, instructors usually lecture on the culture section provided by the textbook, focusing more on practice and product.

Thus, as a way of developing students’ cultural awareness and their understanding of Korean culture and American culture, this project created a cultural discussion forum on Facebook, enabling students to exchange their thoughts and opinions about a variety of cultural topics. By mixing students with various backgrounds in terms of learning and exposure to Korean language and culture, the project created an environment that allowed different levels of KFL students to meet and share their ideas and opinions. There should be, of course, more close

analysis of the data, but based on the preliminary findings, several pedagogically sound aspects were observed, such as reducing anxiety, peer learning, shared knowledge/scaffolding, and student-led negotiation. Moreover, since the questions and the process can be modified, depending on the course objectives and schedule, instructors have flexibility to adapt the project to work in a variety of courses.

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## Appendix I

1. I enjoyed the Facebook project.
  - a. strongly agree b. agree c. so-so d. disagree e. strongly disagree
2. I enjoyed the project because...
  - a. it was done in Facebook.
  - b. I liked the topics.
  - c. I liked giving/receiving comments
  - d. I could see how others thought about the topics
3. What was your favorite topic?
  - a. Q 1 – Word Association I: 학교/School
  - b. Q 2 – Word Association II: 대한민국/Korea, 미국/ U.S.A.
  - c. Q 3 – Sentence Completion I: 좋은 학생이란.../A good student is someone ...
  - d. Q 4 – Sentence Completion II: 한국이 가장 필요한 것은.../What Korea needs most ... & 미국이 가장 필요한 것은.../What the US needs most ...
  - e. Q 5 – Reactions to Situation I: 여러분이 큰 도시에서 길을 걸어가고 있습니다. 낯선 사람이 크게 미소지으면서 여러분에게 다가옵니다./You are walking down the street in a big city. A stranger approaches you with a big smile. How and what would you do?
  - f. Q 6 – Reactions to Situation II: 슈퍼마켓에서 (자신의) 아이를 때리는 엄마를 본다. /You see a mother in a supermarket slap her child. How and what would you do?



## ABSTRACT

### A Case Study of a *Cultura*-inspired Project for the Teaching of Culture

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Due to heavy schedule and class constraints, the teaching of culture has often been neglected in foreign language classes. As well, students rarely have a chance to interact with other students with different levels of the same target language, even though they could provide useful support for each other. Thus, as a way of improving students' opportunities to learn the target culture and to interact with other students learning the same target language, a project was designed for developing cultural awareness in students of Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL). Inspired by *Cultura*, six culture-related questions were given to a group of KFL students via Facebook. As a group from three different class levels, students responded to the questions and shared their ideas/opinions with other students on Facebook. Most KFL students enjoyed the project, particularly with the 'compare and contrast' questions. Moreover, pedagogically beneficial features, such as peer learning and improved active engagement on the part of reserved students were observed.

**KEYWORDS** Teaching of culture, Intercultural communicative competence, Facebook, Korean as a foreign language (KFL), *Cultura*