Motivating Students' Foreign Language and Culture Acquisition Through Web-Based Inquiry

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Abstract: *According to the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, one of the ultimate goals of studying a foreign language is to better understand different cultures. To this end, we implemented a project in an undergraduate foreign language course that promoted a systematic inquiry-based approach to learning about the Hispanic culture. The purpose of the present study was to examine whether this project would increase students' ability perceptions and values related to the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture. Data from questionnaires and reflection essays demonstrated that students reported higher ability perceptions and values in the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture as a direct result of participating in the project. These findings suggest that this inquiry-based teaching approach is a viable way to incorporate the study of culture into a university foreign language course.*

Key words: *culture, foreign language instruction, motivation, technology-enhanced language learning, WebQuests*

Language: *relevant to all languages*

Introduction

Foreign language goals and standards have been developed by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (National Standards) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) with the purpose of providing a "broader, more complete rationale for foreign language education" (National Standards, 2006, p. 15). One of these goals is to incorporate the systematized study of culture into foreign language classes, because knowledge of the cultural contexts in which languages are spoken is essential to achieving true

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mastery of a foreign language (National Standards, 2006, p. 31). Unfortunately, examples of how this can be effectively accomplished in a university-level foreign language course are limited.

To address this need, we designed a Web-based inquiry project and a research study to examine: (1) how the inquiry project would affect students' ability perceptions and values related to the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture, and (2) the appropriateness of a specific WebQuest task design with undergraduate students who have a foreign language proficiency level of novice-low or novice-mid. The inquiry project was implemented in an undergraduate Spanish foreign language course and designed to motivate students to meet the ACTFL Cultures and Comparisons curricular goals through active learning and engagement. We chose to study students' ability perceptions and values because these two factors have been found to directly affect students' motivation and achievement (Eccles, 1992; Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998). The ability perceptions we studied were students' beliefs about their Spanish language skills and their Hispanic culture knowledge, whereas the values we examined were students' beliefs as to whether the Spanish language and Hispanic culture were interesting, important, and/or useful.

Foreign Language Standards

Curricular Goals

Learning a foreign language is a complex process that goes beyond acquiring grammar and vocabulary and being able to engage in oral and written communication. The National Standards and ACTFL have provided a framework for foreign language learning through the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (SFLL) that include five different, interconnected foreign language curricular goals: Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities (National Standards, 2006). These five goals carry an equal weight regarding their importance and provide a framework for foreign language instruction. The curricular goals portray foreign language learning as a complex process that involves the acquisition of linguistic features, as well as the development of the ability to engage in meaningful interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive communication (Communications); the development of cultural awareness (Cultures); and the development of higher order thinking skills that allow learners to compare and contrast the foreign language and culture to their own (Comparisons), connect what they learn in the foreign language class with other disciplines (Connections), and extend what they learn beyond the classroom into broader contexts (Communities; National Standards, 2006).

The Cultures and Comparisons Curricular Goals

One of the ultimate goals of studying a new language is to be able to learn about and understand different cultures and to better understand one's own language and culture within a global context. ACTFL and the National Standards (2006) have highlighted that "the exquisite connections between the culture that is lived and the language that is spoken can only be realized by those who possess knowledge of both" (p. 47). In addition, to be "better able to reflect on their first language and culture [learners need to have] experienced the second" (p. 57). Thus, the combination of knowledge about foreign cultures and the ability to engage in comparisons and contrasts with one's own is what will help learners acquire global perspectives and intercultural awareness.

The Cultures curricular goal incorporates the notion that cultures are to be thought of as consisting of products, practices, and perspectives. The first Cultures standard, 2.1, "focuses on the practices that are derived from the traditional ideas, attitudes, and values (*perspectives*) of a culture" (National Standards, 2006, p. 50; emphasis

in original). It is thus important that students be able to comprehend and reflect upon another culture's practices and perspectives as shapers of that culture's identity. The second Cultures standard, 2.2, "focuses on the *products* of the culture studied and on how they reflect the *perspectives* of that culture" (National Standards, 2006, p. 51; emphasis in original). Awareness of these products as symbolic carriers of cultural and historical meaning is essential to understand underlying cultural practices and perspectives, as well as to reflect upon similarities and differences with one's own culture.

The Comparisons goal consists of two standards, one related to language and the other to culture. The latter, 4.2, focuses on the impact of students' knowledge of another culture's products, practices, and perspectives on their ability to engage in a reflective process through which they "discover perspectives, practices, and products that are similar to and different from those in their own culture" (National Standards, 2006, p. 60). Therefore, the aim is to guide students through the process of developing the ability to engage in this comparison between the target culture (TC) and their own so that they can better understand both.

WebQuests and Culture

As specified in the SFLL, meeting the Cultures goal is an integral part of foreign language learning (National Standards, 2006). However, a traditional information-acquisition approach to learning about cultures in which "students learn information and facts about the target culture as provided by the teacher" (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 136) may not be the most appropriate approach to helping students meet the ACTFL Cultures goal because students will merely be *told* the information about the TC, without engaging in the actual construction of their own meanings about the TC. In contrast, a process-oriented constructivist approach that "provides learners with the experiences they need to approach, appreciate, and bond with people from other cultures" (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 136) is likely a more suitable approach because it exposes students to the culture in such a way that they can engage in active construction of their own understandings and reflection about the TC. This type of active construction should allow them to better develop intercultural competence.

Definition of WebQuests

One way to actively engage students in understanding and reflecting upon the TC is through the use of meaningful technology-enhanced tasks, such as WebQuests, which Dodge defined as "an inquiry-based activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet" (1995, ¶ 2). He further differentiated between short-term WebQuests, which extend through one to three class periods, and long-term WebQuests, which extend between one week and one month (Dodge, 1995, ¶ 3–4). In addition, he identified six critical attributes that a well-designed WebQuest should include: an introduction, a task, information sources, a description of the process, guidance on how the information should be organized, and a conclusion (Dodge, 1995, ¶ 5–6).

Design

Several researchers have highlighted the importance of WebQuest design (Dodge, 1995, 2001; Hassanien, 2006; Maddux & Cummnings, 2007; March, 2004a, 2004b, 2006). These researchers identified several issues to be taken into consideration by instructors and other WebQuest designers, who should ensure that WebQuests include the six critical attributes mentioned above (Dodge, 1995, 2001), are developmentally appropriate (Maddux & Cummnings, 2007), are motivating to students (Hassanien, 2006; March, 2004b), function as authentic scaffolding tasks (Dodge, 2001; March, 2004a, 2004b), include an organized

list of relevant sites to ensure meaningful use of potential Internet resources (Dodge, 2001; March, 2004a, 2006), promote higher order thinking (Dodge, 2001; March, 2004a), help systematize the use of Internet resources (March, 2006), and facilitate work in organized cooperative groups (Hassanien, 2006; March, 2004b, 2006).

Benefits and Limitations

Researchers have focused on highlighting the advantage of incorporating WebQuests into instruction in several disciplines, including business (Levi Altstaedter, Falasca, & Falasca, 2008), geography (Lara & Reparaz, 2007), science (Ikpeze & Boyd, 2007), biology (Carter, Evans, Kennedy, & Faulk, 2002; Gaskill, McNulty, & Brooks, 2006), communications (Oliver, 2008), social studies (MacGregor & Lou, 2005), gifted education (Schweizer & Kossow, 2007), teacher training (Richards, 2005; Zheng, Stucky, McAlack, Menchana, & Stoddart, 2005), research methods (Hassanien, 2006), English language teaching (Godwin-Jones, 2004; Luke, 2006; Sen & Neufeld, 2006), and Spanish as a foreign language (Falasca & Levi Altstaedter, 2008; Levi Altstaedter et al., 2008; Luke, 2006). These examples illustrate the versatility of WebQuests as systematized, inquiry-based tasks whose use transcends specific disciplines and fields and can easily be incorporated into instruction in diverse learning contexts.

Researchers have also identified key benefits of WebQuests, such as helping to systematize Internet inquiry-based learning (Godwin-Jones, 2004), enhancing students' motivation and engagement in class (Halat, 2008; Oliver, 2008; Sen & Neufeld, 2006), enhancing students' development of higher order thinking skills (Ikpeze & Boyd, 2007; Schweizer & Kossow, 2007), helping students to organize and apply the knowledge acquired (MacGregor & Lou, 2005), providing effective scaffolding in cooperative group learning (Lara & Reparaz, 2007; Sen & Neufeld, 2006), and fostering learner autonomy (Lara & Reparaz, 2007; Luke, 2006).

Other researchers have identified some drawbacks in the use of WebQuests. For instance, Sen and Neufeld (2006) found that students did not particularly enjoy working in groups and would have liked to have had the chance to work individually on the WebQuest task (p. 56). Luke (2006) reported that students found that the increased learner autonomy provided through inquiry-based instruction had negative effects on students' motivation. Some of these students specifically requested more traditional instruction, including a focus on grammar and vocabulary (pp. 79–80). Some students also became bored with the routine use of this instructional method and even felt it was a "waste of time" (Luke, 2006, pp. 80–81). These types of findings suggest that instructors and other WebQuest designers need to carefully design and implement WebQuest tasks to ensure that students will successfully complete the task and will be highly motivated to do so (Dodge, 1995, 2001; Hassanien, 2006; Jones, 2001–2002; Maddux & Cummnings, 2007; March, 2004a, 2004b, 2006).

Evaluation

One way to evaluate the impact of WebQuest instruction on students' motivation is to study their perceptions regarding this type of task. Hassanien (2006) examined the effectiveness of WebQuests as instructional tools in higher education by investigating students' perceptions related to the ease of using the WebQuest, the success of the learning experience, and the extent to which students interacted and were engaged. The results of that study indicated that students found the WebQuest stimulating, relevant, and useful (p. 241); found that the objectives and tasks were aligned with the expected outcomes (p. 241); and reported that the WebQuest enhanced their progress and knowledge.

Zheng et al. (2005) studied college students' perceptions of WebQuests to identify vital factors affecting WebQuest instruction. Among the key factors were the impact of WebQuests in providing opportunities to examine issues from various perspectives, proposing multiple approaches to problem solving, integrating background knowledge into problem solving, and applying techniques learned while completing the task to new problem-solving situations (e.g., constructivist problem solving, p. 46); the impact of WebQuests in helping students to adopt multiple perspectives and embrace differing viewpoints, promoting student interaction within collaborative groups, and helping students to develop interpersonal skills (e.g., social interaction, p. 46); and the impact of WebQuests in helping students to make connections between the task and its learning outcomes, enhancing comprehension and learning, and providing focused problem solving (i.e., scaffolded learning, p. 46).

The studies described above focused on the examination of students' perceptions of the impact of WebQuests from different perspectives. On the one hand, Zheng et al. (2005) examined students' perceptions with relation to the WebQuest task and its impact on fostering "constructivist problem solving, social interaction, and scaffolded learning" (p. 46). On the other hand, Hassanien (2006) focused on the examination of students' perceptions of the technical aspects of the WebQuest task (p. 242). It seems appropriate to examine students' perceptions of both aspects of the WebQuest to gain a deeper understanding on the impact of this type of task on student learning.

Expectancy-Value Model of Motivation

To understand students' motivations related to the ACTFL goals, we believed that the expectancy-value model of motivation would be particularly useful. The expectancy-value model of motivation (Eccles, Adler, & Meece, 1984; Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992) expands on the expectancy and value constructs initially developed by Tolman (1932), Lewin (1938), and Atkinson (1957, 1966). However, Eccles and her colleagues' model "focuses on the social psychological reasons for people's choices in achievement settings; thus, expectancy and value are defined as cognitive rather than purely motivational constructs" (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, p. 278). As such, their model predicts that student performance is directly affected by both expectancies and values.

Eccles and her colleagues have tested their model empirically and found that students' expectancy for success relates strongly to their performance on a task, whereas their values relate strongly to their intentions and choice of activities (Eccles, 1984a, 1984b; Eccles et al., 1983; Meece, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1990). Thus, the power of the model is derived from the fact that students' achievement and motivation (e.g., their choice to engage and persist in something) can be assessed by examining their beliefs about their ability perceptions and values. For instance, Meece et al. (1990) found that junior high school students' performance expectancies predicted subsequent grades, while their perceived importance of math predicted their future course enrollment intentions. In fact, students' beliefs about their abilities and expectancies have been shown to be stronger predictors of their future grades than their prior achievement (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Eccles and Wigfield (1995) have used factor analysis techniques to demonstrate empirically that achievement task value can be separated into at least three factors: intrinsic interest value, attainment value, and extrinsic utility value. Intrinsic interest value is defined as either the enjoyment experienced from performing an activity or the subjective interest an individual has in a subject. Individuals who have a high intrinsic interest value are more likely to engage in the task, persist longer, and be intrinsically motivated to perform the task

(Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). Attainment value is defined as the importance of doing well on a task. The extrinsic utility value of a task is the usefulness of the task in terms of an individual's future goals.

Method

Purpose and Design

To investigate how a process-oriented constructivist approach to teaching the TC can be incorporated into foreign language instruction, we designed a WebQuest task that promoted a systematic inquiry-based approach to the study of the TC through the completion of a series of tasks. We did so to expose students to a wide array of authentic Internet resources while systematizing the search and organization of the information necessary to complete the WebQuest task. The purpose of the study was to examine whether the WebQuest would increase students' ability perceptions and values related to the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture. Students' values related to the Hispanic culture are particularly important given the ACTFL Cultures and Comparisons curricular goals.

We used a mixed-methods design that included concurrent quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected through the use of questionnaires conducted near the end of the course. Qualitative data were collected through the analysis of students' reflection essays and the identification of emerging themes to further elucidate students' perceptions of the task and, thus, provide a measure of validation of the quantitative data.

Participants

The 14 undergraduate participants were enrolled in a Spanish course titled "Elementary Spanish" at a major university in the mid-Atlantic United States. All the students had some prior academic experience with the Spanish language, typically two levels of Spanish in high school and/or one course at the college level. Students' initial proficiency level, as measured with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, varied between novice-low and novice-mid, whereas their intended level of proficiency at the end of the course, as measured with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, was expected to be novice-high.

Procedure

Near the end of the course, students completed a WebQuest related to Argentina. The first author designed the WebQuest using Dreamweaver CS3, based on a previous WebQuest designed by another researcher (Falasca & Levi Altstaedter, 2008). The WebQuest design included all six WebQuest components or critical attributes: introduction, task, process, evaluation, conclusion, and resources (Dodge, 1995). In an attempt to avoid some of the pitfalls identified in previous research (Luke, 2006), the WebQuest task was implemented in a Spanish class where the instructor incorporated a blend of traditional and inquiry-based instruction with a specific focus on the development of language proficiency and culture acquisition, thus aiming to provide variety in the strategies and tasks planned, which could help prevent students from becoming bored in class, as reported by Luke (2006).

The introduction set the stage for the task. It included a learning scenario that situated students in an imaginary, yet realistic, trip to Argentina (see Appendix 1). The task consisted of three different subtasks: designing a brochure, creating a concept map, and writing a reflective essay (see Appendix 2). The process scaffolded the collaborative group organization by laying out the different tasks that needed to be completed and priming students for task assignment among group members (see Appendix 3). The researchers selected this specific strategy to avoid another pitfall of WebQuests identified by Sen and Neufeld (2006) and thus motivate students to work collaboratively on the task. The evaluation consisted of a detailed rubric that identified key characteristics of each of the WebQuest

subtasks (see Appendix 4). The conclusion incorporated a recap of what students learned during the process and the goals that they achieved (see Appendix 5). Finally, the resources component provided students with several Web sites they could visit to gather the information needed to learn more about the target culture and to complete the subtasks (see Appendix 6).

Before students engaged in the WebQuest task, the instructor showed the WebQuest in class and discussed each component with the students to make the task clear and avoid confusion. Students were given agency to form their own collaborative groups of three and to assign different subtasks to each group member. Students had one week to complete the WebQuest task outside of class and turn in their final products. After turning in their final products as specified in the WebQuest, students completed the three questionnaires described below.

Instruments

Students completed three questionnaires near the end of the course. Two of the questionnaires were adapted from existing questionnaires, and the third questionnaire assessed students' demographic information.

Foreign Language Expectancy-Value Questionnaire

We designed this questionnaire to measure the four constructs discussed previously in the expectancy-value model of motivation (Eccles et al., 1983), including ability perceptions, intrinsic interest value, extrinsic utility value, and attainment value. Although this model makes a theoretical distinction between expectancy beliefs and ability perceptions, Eccles and colleagues were unable to distinguish between these two constructs in their factor analytic studies (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995). As a result, we have chosen to use "ability perceptions" as a measure of expectancy in the present study because it was more logical to ask students about their abilities at the end of a course than their expectancies for a course that had already been completed.

To measure each of the four constructs, we created two, 7-point Likert-type items where one of the two items assessed students' perceptions related to the Spanish language and the other item measured students' perceptions about the Hispanic culture. The only exception was that four 7-point Likert scale items were used to assess students' ability perceptions specifically related to the Spanish language by asking students about their ability in reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar. We designed the items to be similar in format and content to those designed by Eccles and Wigfield (1995), because their items have been shown to have excellent face, convergent, and discriminant validity, as well as strong psychometric properties (Eccles et al., 1983; Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002). A complete list of the items used in the present study is provided in Table 1.

WebQuest Questionnaire

This questionnaire was adapted from a questionnaire by Hassanien (2006, p. 242) and measured the extent to which (1) the design of the WebQuest task was effective, and (2) students found the WebQuest enjoyable and interesting. Students were asked 10 questions about the WebQuest task design (Items 1 to 10 in Table 2) and five questions about their level of interest and enjoyment related to the WebQuest (Items 11 to 15 in Table 2). Students responded to all these items on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with the midpoint value of 4 labeled as neutral.

Reflective Essay

Students completed a reflective essay as part of the WebQuest project. Students were asked to synthesize the factual knowledge gained from the WebQuest, compare and contrast cultural traditions in Argentina and the United States, and reflect on the

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Mean Comparisons for the Expectancy and Value Items

As a result of participating in the WebQuest during this course:	*M (SD)*	*ta*	*df*	*P*
1. My Spanish reading skills are (a lot worse/better).	5.57 (1.02)	5.79	13	≤ .001
2. My Spanish writing skills are (a lot worse/better).	5.50 (.86)	6.57	13	≤ .001
3. My Spanish vocabulary is (a lot worse/better).	5.50 (1.02)	5.51	13	≤ .001
4. My Spanish grammar is (a lot worse/better).	5.57 (.94)	6.27	13	≤ .001
5. My knowledge of Hispanic culture is (a lot less/greater).	5.79 (.80)	8.33	13	≤ .001
6. I now find Spanish (a lot less/more interesting).	5.14 (.95)	4.51	13	≤ .001
7. I now find Hispanic cultures (a lot less/more interesting).	5.36 (.93)	5.47	13	≤ .001
8. I now believe that learning Spanish is (much less/more important than I thought before).	4.86 (.86)	3.71	13	≤ .01
9. I now believe that learning about Hispanic culture is (much less/more important than I thought before).	4.64 (.75)	3.23	13	≤ .01
10. I now believe that knowing Spanish is (much less/more useful than I thought before).	5.07 (1.00)	4.02	13	≤ .001
11. I now believe that knowing about the Hispanic culture is (much less/more useful than I thought before).	4.79 (.89)	3.29	13	≤ .01

impact of the knowledge and cultural understanding they gained from the WebQuest.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the quantitative data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 15.0 program. Descriptive statistics were computed for all of the questionnaire items. We conducted one-sample *t* tests for all the Likert-type items. We selected the scale value of 4 as the comparative mean for the one-sample *t* tests because this value indicated that there had been no change due to the WebQuest. That is, if the WebQuest had no effect on a student, he or she would have selected the value of 4 (labeled on the Likert-type scale as "the same as before").

Two independent raters who had no prior involvement in the Spanish course or

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics and Mean Comparisons for the WebQuest Questionnaire Items

Item	*M* (*SD*)	*t**	*df*	*p*
WebQuest task design				
1. I had the Spanish skills needed to complete the WebQuest.	5.57 (1.02)	8.63	13	≤ .001
2. I had the technical skills needed to complete the WebQuest.	5.86 (.77)	9.02	13	≤ .001
3. I frequently had technical difficulties when using the WebQuest (reverse-scored).	5.14 (1.66)	2.58	13	≤ .05
4. Overall, the layout of the WebQuest made it easy to use.	5.86 (.66)	10.48	13	≤ .001
5. The learning objectives of the WebQuest were easy to understand.	5.86 (.86)	8.04	13	≤ .001
6. The amount of work involved in the WebQuest was reasonable.	6.07 (.62)	12.59	13	≤ .001
7. The time allowed for each part of the WebQuest was reasonable.	6.07 (.73)	10.62	13	≤ .001
8. The WebQuest offered more updated content than printed materials alone (such as textbooks, handouts, etc.).	5.64 (.93)	6.62	13	≤ .001
9. The WebQuest offered more varied content than printed materials alone (such as textbooks, handouts, etc.).	5.79 (.89)	7.49	13	≤ .001
10. The WebQuest related to real-life situations.	5.29 (.91)	5.26	13	≤ .001
WebQuest interest/enjoyment				
11. I would recommend my WebQuest experience to other students.	5.07 (1.33)	3.02	13	≤ .01
12. I enjoyed doing the WebQuest.	5.00 (1.41)	2.65	13	≤ .05
13. I enjoyed working with my classmates during the WebQuest.	6.00 (.88)	8.53	13	≤ .001
14. If I were to take another Spanish class, I would like it to include a WebQuest.	5.36 (1.39)	3.65	13	≤ .01
15. The class was more interesting because of the WebQuest.	4.86 (1.51)	2.12	13	≤ .05

*The *t* test findings provided indicate the results of a comparison of the mean value with the value of 4.

the present research study read and coded students' reflective essays. The raters were asked to read the essays and identify whether or not they contained either of the two ACTFL goals: Cultures (cultural practices, cultural products, and cultural perspectives) and Comparisons (ability to compare and contrast the TC to one's own culture). The inter-rater agreement between the two raters was 88%. Disagreements between raters were settled by the first author.

Results

Foreign Language Expectancy-Value Questionnaire

By participating in the WebQuest, students reported statistically higher ability perceptions and values in the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture (see Table 1). As shown in Table 1, Items 1 to 4 measured students' ability perceptions in Spanish and Item 5 measured students' ability perceptions in the Hispanic culture. Items 6 and 7 measured students' intrinsic interest values, Items 8 and 9 measured attainment values, and Items 10 and 11 measured extrinsic utility values. The fact that students' perceptions in all these areas showed statistical improvements as a result of the WebQuest is encouraging and suggests that the WebQuest may be one way to improve students' perceptions in these areas.

WebQuest Questionnaire

The mean values for all the items on the questionnaire were statistically larger than the midpoint value of 4, indicating that, on average, students agreed with all the statements (see Table 2). Overall, students found that they had the Spanish and technical skills needed to complete the WebQuest (Items 1–3 in Table 2). This finding suggests that this type of assignment is appropriate for students at this level of Spanish understanding. These results are further supported by the fact that students found the layout easy to use, the objectives easy to understand, and the work involved and the time allowed to be reasonable (Items 4–7 in Table 2). Additional benefits were that students found that the WebQuest offered more updated and varied content than printed materials alone and that it related to real-life situations (Items 8–10 in Table 2). Items 11–15 in Table 2 indicate that students enjoyed working on the WebQuest and found it interesting.

Reflective Essay

In their reflective essay, almost all the students (13 of the 14 students) wrote about cultural products, including the gaucho (compared to the American cowboy), *fútbol* (compared to American football), tango (compared to American jazz), *asado* (compared to American barbecue), empanadas (compared to Appalachia's meat pies), official language, yerba mate, wine, mass communication, ethnic diversity, film, and theater. Half the students (7 of the 14) specifically focused on cultural practices, among which they mentioned the time when Argentineans eat dinner, the practice of going to cafes, farming practices, government organization, religious practices, the mate-drinking ceremony, the importance of sports, festivals held to celebrate cultural diversity across the country, holiday celebrations, and leisure-time activities, especially among the young adults. Seven of the 14 students specifically focused on cultural perspectives, among which they mentioned the European influences on Argentina's and America's cuisine; gender equality, as evidenced by Argentina's female president; importance of the nuclear family; and the idea of the gaucho as a symbol and constant reminder of bravery and honesty. Finally, regarding the Comparisons goal, all students compared and contrasted aspects of Argentinean and American cultures.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine (1) how the project would affect students' ability perceptions and values related to the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture, and (2) the appropriateness of a specific

WebQuest task design with undergraduate students who have a foreign language proficiency level of novice-low or novice-mid. Using the expectancy-value model of motivation as a framework (Eccles et al., 1983), we assessed students' ability perceptions and values related to both the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture. In addition, to determine which aspects of the WebQuest were effective, we assessed students' perceptions of the WebQuest task design and their interest in the WebQuest.

Ability Perceptions and Values Related to the Spanish Language and the Hispanic Culture

As a result of participating in the WebQuest, students reported that their Spanish reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar had improved. Similarly, students reported that their knowledge of Hispanic culture was greater than before the WebQuest. These increased ability perceptions are important because, according to expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983; Meece et al., 1990), students with higher ability perceptions should perform better on tasks related to the Spanish language and Hispanic culture in the future. It is important to note that we did not measure the actual knowledge and skills of students who participated in the WebQuest; however, we believe that students' ability perceptions should be good predictors of their future achievement based on prior research related to ability perceptions (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

A major impetus for conducting this study was to determine the effects of the WebQuest on students' values and appreciation of the Hispanic culture. Because researchers have claimed that the traditional information-acquisition approach to learning cultures may not be the best to teach about TCs (Shrum & Glisan, 2005), we adopted a process-oriented constructivist approach to convey interest in the importance of and the usefulness of the Hispanic culture to American students who are unfamiliar with it.

The results obtained from the scores on the Foreign Language Expectancy-Value Questionnaire indicated that a WebQuest is one instructional activity that instructors can implement to improve students' values of the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture. As a result of completing the WebQuest, students reported that they found the Spanish language and Hispanic culture to be more interesting, more important, and more useful. These findings are important because these values have been shown to be strongly related to students' future intentions and choices (Eccles et al., 1983; Meece et al., 1990; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). That is, students with higher values related to the Spanish language and Hispanic culture should be more likely to enroll in more classes related to the language and culture and should be more likely to seek out opportunities to engage with the language and culture.

We did not conduct statistical significance tests to assess whether there were differences between the mean values on the items reported in Table 1 because the small number of participants in the study would not provide the power necessary to achieve meaningful results. However, the highest mean value was found for Item 5, which measured how much the WebQuest changed students' knowledge of the Hispanic culture. We found this result encouraging because it indicated that the WebQuest was successful in teaching students about the Hispanic culture as well as the Spanish language. This is critical because knowledge of the cultural contexts in which languages are spoken is essential to achieving true mastery of a foreign language (National Standards, 2006, p. 31). Interestingly, however, the lowest mean value was found for Item 9, which measured how participating in the WebQuest changed students' beliefs about the importance of learning about the Hispanic culture. Although we do not know whether it was statistically lower than any of the other items in Table 1, we do know

that it was statistically higher than the value 4, indicating that participating in the WebQuest led students to view learning about the Hispanic culture as more important. Thus, overall, the WebQuest had a positive impact on students' ability perceptions and values regarding the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture.

Students' responses on the reflective essays were consistent with those reported on the Foreign Language Expectancy-Value Questionnaire in that students demonstrated how they met the two ACTFL goals through completing the WebQuest. For instance, in the following two responses, the students compared and contrasted the Argentinean culture to the U.S. culture (ACTFL Comparisons goal).

> Student 1: In today's world there is conflict and strife from one corner of the globe to the other. Many people attribute these conflicts to racism, which stems from the ignorance of one culture about another. I have to admit that I have been ignorant about much of the Spanish-speaking world until this [course]. In researching the country of Argentina, I gained a better understanding of the Spanish culture, and it was nothing like what I have pictured in my mind.

> Student 2: The WebQuest activity was an interesting one, in fact, it seemed to make Argentina less "foreign." By researching about the Argentinean culture, it put everything into context for me. I feel that Americans get used to thinking that they are the only people in the world . . . . This activity has made Argentinean culture less otherworldly, if you will. Sure, there are customs and whatnot that we don't have, but when you get down to it we share a lot in common.

Another student changed his perspective about how he viewed foreign cultures in general (ACTFL Comparisons goal):

> I now know that Argentina is in fact very similar to the U.S. in many respects. So what does this mean? All my life I have heard negative things about Spanish-speaking people, but that's not the case at all. I feel dumb for thinking that these people were so different from me. What we should all take away from this is that we should be educated about other cultures as much as possible so that we can see all the similarities and overlook our small differences and live a more fraternal life with the people of the world.

Finally, the way in which students addressed the ACTFL cultural practices and products standards is evident in this response: "I feel that the WebQuest project has allowed me to gain a better understanding of Argentina, its government, citizens, and culture."

In sum, data from both the questionnaires and the reflective essays provide evidence that the WebQuest was successful in helping students to meet the ACTFL Cultures and Comparisons curricular goals. As university instructors, we were a little surprised at how naïve some of the students' responses were with respect to different cultures. These responses have served as a reminder to us about the importance of engaging students in these types of activities. Moreover, it has strengthened our conviction in the usefulness of these types of activities in university foreign language courses.

WebQuest Task Design and Student Enjoyment

The second purpose of this study was to examine the appropriateness of a specific WebQuest task design with undergraduate students who have a foreign proficiency level of novice-low or novice-mid. Because of the positive responses on the task design section of the WebQuest Questionnaire, we believe that the WebQuest used for this project can be viewed as a baseline from which others could be designed. That is, we hope that this WebQuest will give other

instructors a concrete example as to what is reasonable to implement in an undergraduate course (with respect to skills and abilities needed, the amount of work involved, the amount of time allowed, etc.). Further, because students enjoyed working on the WebQuest, instructors could consider using such an activity as a means to motivate students during the course.

Similar to our rationale for the analysis of the data reported in Table 1, we did not conduct statistical significance tests to assess whether there were differences between the mean values on the items reported in Table 2. In a general examination of the mean values, students' highest perceptions regarding the WebQuest task were reported for the items related to the amount of work and time allowed for its completion. This indicates that the WebQuest task design was appropriate for students who have a foreign language proficiency level of novice-low or novice-mid. In contrast, the lowest mean value was reported for Item 15, which asked students whether they perceived the class as more interesting because of the WebQuest. This finding is difficult to interpret because it may be that the class was already very interesting and that the WebQuest did not make the course more interesting. Or, it may be that, because the WebQuest was relatively short and completed at the end of the semester, it did not have a major impact on how interesting it made the course. Nonetheless, students found that the WebQuest made the course more interesting.

Conclusion

A WebQuest task is a viable means to foster the adoption of a process-oriented constructivist approach to teaching cultures in a university foreign language course. We found that WebQuests can be an effective way to motivate students in a foreign language course by increasing their ability perceptions and values related to the Spanish language and Hispanic culture. These findings are important because students' ability perceptions and values have been found to directly affect students' motivation and achievement (Eccles, 1992; Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles et al., 1998). Further, WebQuests can be structured and implemented in a way that students find easy and enjoyable to use in a foreign language course. We believe that instructors should consider using similar types of WebQuests in courses to help their students meet the ACTFL Cultures and Comparisons curricular goals in a way that is motivating and interesting to students.

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APPENDIX 1

WebQuest Introduction

Introduction

Case Study: *You and a small group of friends have decided to take a trip to Argentina. You've read about the country in your Spanish textbooks and you feel that you have a basic understanding about Argentina and its culture. Yet, you and your friends decide to do some research to find out more about the country before you start making plans. You decide that the best approach will be to compile all the information you gather and organize it into a unique brochure and a concept map tailored to your specific needs and interests for easy access. Besides, you decide to use the brochure and concept map to motivate other friends to embark with you on this wonderful experience*!

Objectives: You will be able to:

1. Design a travel brochure with general information about Argentina
2. Compare and contrast facts about Argentina and the U.S.
3. Synthesize the information gathered and hypothesize on its impact on your knowledge and cultural understandings

APPENDIX 2

WebQuest Task

The Task

1. Design a brochure (in Spanish) that includes information about the following: factsheet (e.g., Independence Day, population, type of government, flag, official language, currency, geographic features), culture (family traditions, food, sports, music, etc.), and places to visit, among others.
2. Design a concept map (in Spanish) comparing and contrasting Argentinean and American cultural traditions.
3. Write a short reflective essay—2 pages long, double-spaced—(in English) addressing the following:

a) synthesis of factual knowledge gained
b) comparison and contrast of cultural traditions in Argentina and the United States (information can be taken from concept map)
c) reflection on the impact of knowledge and cultural understanding gained

APPENDIX 3

WebQuest Process

The Process

1. With your classmates, decide what each one will be in charge of researching:

a) Factsheet (e.g., Independence Day, population, type of government, flag, official language, currency, geographic features)
b) Culture (family traditions, food, sports, music, etc.)
c) Places to visit

2. Research the information and organize it according to which task it will help accomplish (brochure, concept map, and reflective essay).
3. Compile the information and create your own products (brochure, concept map).
4. Write your reflective essay.

APPENDIX 4

WebQuest Evaluation

Category	Beginning 1–2 points per item	Developing 3–6 points per item	Accomplished 7–8 points per item	Exemplary 9–10 points per item
Brochure	Brochure is in English	Brochure is in Spanish, but only includes some of the information required	Brochure is in Spanish and includes most of the information required	Brochure is in Spanish and includes all the information required (may include extra information too)
Concept Map	Concept map is in English and/or includes loose/uncompared information	Concept map is in Spanish and includes basic information that is compared across cultures; for the most part, there are no more than three words per concept	Concept map is in Spanish and includes varied information that is compared across cultures; there are no more than three words per concept	Concept map is in Spanish and includes varied, rich information that is compared across cultures; there are no more than three words per concept
Reflection	Reflection is less than two pages long and/or not double-spaced; it merely lists information gathered and fails to synthesize it; there is little comparison with student's own culture; there is no basic hypothesis on the impact of the task on student's knowledge and cultural understandings	Reflection meets the criteria for length and spacing; it merely lists information gathered and fails to synthesize it; there is little comparison with student's own culture; there is no basic hypothesis on the impact of the task on student's knowledge and cultural understandings	Reflection meets the criteria for length and spacing; it lists information gathered; there is an attempt to synthesize the information; there is comparison with student's own culture; it includes hypotheses on the impact of the task on student's knowledge and cultural understandings	Reflection meets the criteria for length and spacing; it lists information gathered, which is synthesized; there is rich comparison with student's own culture; it includes hypotheses on the impact of the task on student's knowledge and cultural understandings

APPENDIX 5

WebQuest Conclusion

Conclusion

You have undertaken an arduous but rewarding set of tasks. You have learned several facts about Argentina, such as its Independence Day, population, type of government, flag, official language, currency, geographic features, and culture (family traditions, food, sports, music, etc.). In addition, you have been able to synthesize the information gathered through the design and creation of several documents: a brochure, a concept map, and a reflection. You have also combined your skills and knowledge gained in other subjects (e.g., history, geography, English, civics, computer applications, among others) and successfully integrated them into your work. Finally, you have achieved a very important aspect of learning about other cultures: reflecting upon what was learned, and comparing and contrasting the foreign culture with one's own.

I hope that you enjoyed the process and that you gained valuable knowledge and skills that you can apply in your future endeavors.

APPENDIX 6

WebQuest Resources and Credits

Web Sites

1. FactSheet:
a) Secretaría de Turismo de la Nación: http://www.turismo.gov.ar/esp/menu.htm
b) Argentina Turística: http://www.argentinaturistica.com/datosargen.htm
c) Live Argentina: http://www.liveargentina.com/InformacionGeneral.htm
d) Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argentina
e) Food by Country: http://www.foodbycountry.com/Algeria-to-France/Argentina.html
f) Kwintessential: http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/country/argentina/food-and-drink.html
g) YouTube (national anthem): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HLK1Zryxmg

2. Travel:
a) Hoteles y reservas: http://www.hotelesyreservas.com/
b) Aerolíneas Argentinas: http://www.aerolineas.com.ar/home.asp
c) Asatej: http://www.asatej.com/ d) Play Argentina: http://www.playargentina.com/

3. Culture:
a) El Sur del Sur: http://www.surdelsur.com/identidad/index.html
b) Mi Buenos Aires Querido: http://www.mibsasquerido.com.ar/xArgentina3.htm
c) Latin American Network Information Center: http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/region/music/#argentina
d) Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Argentina
e) Argentour: http://www.argentour.com/en/argentina/argentina_people.php

4. Sports:
a) Argentour: http://www.argentour.com/en/argentina/sport_in_argentina.php
b) Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport_in_Argentina

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