CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING:
A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis in
French
by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an empirical research documenting the development of a reflective approach to language and culture by four American undergraduate students enrolled in a third semester French class. University students in Liberal Arts are required to fulfill a language requirement of twelve to eighteen credits. The enhancement of foreign language study is currently very much linked to the globalization of the economy and the internationalization of the world. Commonly, culture has been conceived as a knowledge that can be acquired and distinctly separate from the language itself. However, current approaches have moved away from culture teaching as pre-established facts to a more dynamic model based on a dialogic process in which students have a reflective engagement. The objective is to teach language as culture and develop the students’ abilities to discover, observe, analyze, and remain critical toward another culture as well as their own culture(s). This ability to think analytically and critically is defined by Claire Kramsch (1993a) as the third place, where students learn and create new ways of meanings that are relevant to their lives.

To date, there is little empirical research to document the educational impact of foreign language learning in broadening the students’ way to perceive the world. Drawing from the theoretical paradigms of sociocultural theory, this research adopts a genetic approach to reflect the inquiry process that is language and culture learning. It investigates the extent to which these cultural dimensions of learning a foreign language are present in the classroom and the processes by which they develop. In line with activity theory, the study explores the activity of learning as situated, that is grounded in a social, historical and cultural context. It explores the contributions the learners bring to their own learning, highlighting the unique profile of each learning process. It examines the students’ agency and considers the culture learning as a personal growth.

The data were collected in a third-semester French language course, which corresponded to the students’ last semester of their language requirement. The research is descriptive and qualitative in nature, focusing on the participants’ perspectives. The outcomes derive from the analysis of a variety of sources of data (exchange emails, synchronous chat transcripts, essays, classroom assignments, etc), with an emphasis on the development of cultural awareness. Relying on four case studies, I tell the stories of Julie, Mary, Lucy, and David’s development.

The study is significant in various aspects. First, unlike research in second language acquisition, this study considers learning a foreign language a social practice that is dialogically constructed. Therefore, it is concerned with language use and the sociocultural dimensions of language learning. In addition, the study considers the language learner as a social being with agency. Thus, it illustrates the contributions students bring to their learning experience and explores the participants’ personal growth. Second, the research does not limit its investigation to the outcomes at the end of the semester. The study is an inquiry that explores, describes and understands the complex cultural dimensions of foreign language learning. Third, it focuses on an intermediate level of language proficiency. Indeed, most research on the learning of culture is done at the advanced level. Here, the development of cultural awareness does not assume proficiency in the language studied. Finally, the cross-cultural dialogue that exists in the class as well as the inquiry process that has taken place brings interesting research and pedagogical implications.
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‘I just want to pass, it’s only a requirement’, is a common rationale given by my undergraduate students for enrolling in a lower level class of French. A lack of interest in learning often accompanies this statement. Most students know the reasons for requiring the study of a language but many question its usefulness. As a newly arrived language instructor in the United States, I started to wonder what the official rationales for imposing a foreign language course requirement actually were. How is the curriculum designed to meet the objectives set by the universities? What significance do foreign languages have in the United States in general? Before introducing my study, I will present a historical perspective on language learning and teaching in the United States. I will investigate and discuss the official rationales for the study of a foreign language, as presented in American policy-related documents. In this manner I will offer a description of the economic and political context in which languages are promoted, taught and learned in the United States.

1.1. Why Learn a Foreign Language?

1.1.1. Historical Perspective

Although the United States does not have an official language, the question of language in the public arena has mostly been linked to the question of “nationhood” (Bernhardt, 1998, p. 43). A close look at the various official discourses provided as a justification for foreign language teaching will show a divergence of opinions and help us understand the political and economic context of foreign language education.
During the first half of the 20th century, given the movement to “Americanize” waves of recently arrived European immigrants, the focus of foreign language instruction was English as a second language (Bernhardt, 1998; Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). Bernhardt (1998) notes two major trends: one sought to promote unity by encouraging the teaching of English for personal empowerment and personal value (i.e. so new immigrants could feel at home); the second was driven by nationalism, encouraging new immigrants to assimilate by learning English in the interest of “national unity” (Bernhardt, 1998; Ferguson & Huebner, 1991; Ruiz, 1994). This debate still exists today: U.S English, English First and similar English only movements want the adoption of English as the official language whereas opponents see an English language constitutional amendment as discriminatory to speakers of other languages (Coulmas, 1994; Ruiz, 1994). Linguistic diversity is perceived by some as divisive (Phillips, 1990, p. 49).

Whereas in times of peace, monolingualism is unproblematic (Bernhardt, 1998, p. 49), the years during WWII and after were a turning point in the learning of foreign languages in the United States (Phillips, 1990). Change initially began with the armed forces’ expression of need for the development of oral skills in foreign languages to be able to communicate with their allies and feel at ease abroad. Intensive programs such as the Army Specialist Training Program (ASTP) were created. Soon after WWII, Americans became increasingly engaged in political and economic conflicts around the world. The lack of competency in foreign languages was viewed as a barrier to American progress abroad. Enhancing international relations and improving intercultural understanding were viewed as a way to avoid future wars (Lantolf & Sunderman, 2001). Cold War imperatives motivated additional focus on foreign language study. Consequently, President Eisenhower signed, in 1958, the National Defense Education Act, which devoted a large budget to foreign language education. The enhancement of national security was the rationale for supporting the learning of foreign languages. The justification was, therefore, political and military. The Act did not, however, enhance the public’s interest in learning foreign languages and the teaching of foreign languages received little attention (Bernhardt, 1998).
The 1970s witnessed not only the growth of the English-only movements but also an increase of the importance of TESOL (Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages). Acquiring English quickly was vital for Vietnam War refugees that were coming to the United States. For economic reasons and national unity, language acquisition had to be not only effective but also practical. This practical vision of language instruction created a division between foreign language and second language learning (Bernhard, 1998). In that period, the teaching and promotion of English gained prominence. Lantolf and Sunderman (2001) state that in the 1970s, “a substantial number of contributions to the Modern Language Journal expressed doubts about the merits of including foreign languages in the curriculum” (p. 6).

As Kramsch (1991) notes, foreign language education “bears the mark of American educational history” (p. 219). She states that compulsory mass education had to be practical in order to increase people’s opportunities in life. In addition, it had to “fulfill the tax payer’s needs for accountability in a free market society” (p. 219). With these utilitarian objectives, the teaching of foreign languages (i.e. literature and grammar-translation) was viewed as a luxury. Foreign language study was highly criticized for its elitism and detraction from the melting pot ideology (Kramsch, 1991). Historically, the general public had little interest in foreign language learning and foreign language instruction carried little weight in the general curriculum (Bernhardt, 1997; Ferguson & Huebner, 1991; Hamayan, 1986; Omaggio-Hadley, 2001). In fact, enrollment dropped dramatically after 1965 and throughout the 1970s, even though the number of high school and undergraduate students studying a foreign language had never been substantial (Hamayan, 1986; Omaggio-Hadley, 2001).

The lack of status and future prospects in foreign language study in the United States drew the attention of politicians whose concerns were linked to the economic and political situation (i.e. “national preparedness”). Kramsch (1991) notes that political setbacks in Iran and Afghanistan raised questions about the efficacy of American diplomacy (p. 220). Furthermore, American businesses were challenged internationally, notably with the “Japanese economic miracle” (Kramsch, 1991, p. 220). As a result, a
report on Institutional Language Policy was published in 1978. Two main issues were
raised: first, the lack of support on the part of administrators and policy makers, and
second, the failure of the foreign language profession to clearly articulate its goals.
According to the report’s authors (1978), there was a need for persons proficient in a
language (i.e. good proficiency level and ability to “communicate with speakers of other
languages in a variety of situations and for a variety of purposes”) and a need for
“educated persons who can understand, accept, and be enriched by an awareness of the
cultural differences among the peoples of the world” (p. 1). In other words, language
instruction had to be effective and ought to enhance cultural awareness.

In 1979, the President’s Commission on Foreign Language and International
Studies published its final report entitled Strength through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S.
Capability. For the Commission, the lack of foreign language skills was “a gross national
inadequacy” (p. 11). The report called for the reinstatement of foreign language study at
the high school and college levels. It also encouraged universities to internationalize
their curricula (Durham, 1980). Large funds were allocated at the federal, state and local
levels to promote foreign language study (Kramsch, 1993a). The United States wanted to
remain a leader on the international scene and keep its economic supremacy in the world
(Kramsch, 1991). Bernhardt (1998) points out that the President Commission’s report
states that “the purpose of language study is to acquire language in use, not some abstract
knowledge that does not relate to what one can do with it” (p. 54). According to the
report, what the nation needs are functional and oral language skills.

In the late 1970s early 1980s, foreign language study started to spark the interest
of policy-makers and decision-makers. American monolingualism was seen as a disease
(e.g. Marvin Schindler’s (1982) testimony in the U.S. House of Representatives). Lantolf
and Sunderman (2001) indicate that the report stimulated a period of optimism in the
field of foreign language instruction. Kramsch (1993a) notes the impact the President
Commission’s report had on foreign language instruction:

It has given throughout the 1980s a considerable booster to the teaching and learning of
foreign language across the country: at the same time, however, it has infused it with a
concept of challenge that stresses international competitiveness, problem-solving, and short-term action (p. 249).

Meanwhile language associations had gained importance in the political arena. The Joint National Committee for Languages was created in 1976 to provide a forum to discuss policies and make decisions. The Modern Language Association of America (MLA) was taking a powerful stance, playing an integral role in the establishment of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), dedicated to the teaching aspect of foreign languages (Handcock & Scebold, 2000, p. 2). Funds were allocated to create effective teaching methodology (Durham, 1980). The President Commission’s report promoted “effective communication” with a focus on “real-life phenomena”. In addition, the report called for a unifying principle for language learning goals and expectations, which led to the proficiency movement (see Chapter 2).

Bernhardt (1998) indicates that the framework of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines “provided an alternative conceptualization for language programs across the nation” (p. 54). The traditional content of foreign language courses, such as literature and grammar-translation, started to give way to “more practical and utilitarian reasons for the study of foreign languages and cultures” (Handcock & Scebold, 2000, p. 5). The refocus on practicality and useful language functions took language instruction farther and farther away from the literary curriculum that was still in place (Bernhardt, 1997, p. 14).

More and more, local, state and federal governments are involved in foreign language policies and planning. In her article Language Instruction in the United States: Policy and Planning, Phillips (1990) examines the states’ requirements for courses in foreign languages and for student enrollment (pp. 62-64). Phillips notes that through the school boards, the states have an influence on the amount and the content for foreign language instruction. In most of the states, the primary purpose for learning a foreign language is to serve the nation’s needs in commerce, diplomacy, defense and education (Kramsch, 1991; Phillips, 1990). In addition to academic learning outcomes (critical thinking, linguistic and cultural goals), Kramsch (1991) indicates that the states put forward other non-academic objectives such as ‘life adjustment”, “accessibility to all”, “career opportunities”, or “discovery of American diverse culture heritage”. At the
federal level, the movement to enhance the learning of a foreign language and international studies has also been embraced for the past decade. In 1993, “foreign language education became the seventh and final subject area to receive federal funding to develop national standards for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade” (National Standards, 1996, p. 12). In his annual Back-To-School Address (September 15, 1999), Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education at the time, emphasized the importance of learning a foreign language:

Let me suggest one other way to raise standards. I believe that in this new economy every high school student should be close to fluent in a foreign language when he or she graduates. We should begin teaching foreign languages in our elementary schools, and then in middle schools and high schools. English is a beautiful language and every American student must be a master of it. English is surely a world language. But learning a foreign language exposes young people to new cultures and new horizons and helps them understand English better.

By being exposed to “new cultures and new horizons” it is believed that the teaching of foreign languages will better prepare students to function “in this new economy”. The cultural dimension of foreign language learning is viewed as an important aspect of the language instruction. To enhance the students’ proficiency, Richard Riley even promotes the teaching of foreign languages at the elementary level.

More recently, the National Endowment for the Humanities and other non-governmental partners developed a discussion paper entitled Strengthening the U.S. Government’s Leadership in Promoting International Education (November 15, 2000). This paper also encourages the teaching of foreign languages and international education. In its introduction, it explains why international education is important:

To continue to compete successfully in the global economy, play a leadership role in the world, and enhance the national security, the United States must ensure that its citizens develop a broad understanding of the world, including other languages and cultures. America’s leadership also depends on building ties with those who will guide the political, cultural and economic development of their countries in the future. Our increasing engagement with other nations requires a greater awareness of cultural diversity and a recognition of shared values and challenges as well as the differences between nations and peoples. Expanding our horizons will promote deeper understanding of the cultural heritage and diversity that exist within our own country. (p. 2)
The same points are echoed in President Clinton’ and the President Bush’s speeches:

To continue to compete successfully in the global economy and to maintain our role as a world leader, the United States needs to ensure that its citizens develop a broad understanding of the world, proficiency in other languages, and knowledge of other cultures. America’s leadership also depends on building ties with those who will guide the political, cultural, and economic development of their countries in the future. A coherent and coordinated international education strategy will help us meet the twin challenges of preparing our citizens for a global environment while continuing to attract and educate future leaders from abroad. (William J. Clinton, April 19, 2000)

In today’s complex and rapidly changing global marketplace, our collective and individual prosperity rely increasingly on political, economic, and social cooperation that transcend traditional national and cultural barriers. We also recognize that trust, unity, and peace between nations are built on understanding, and that real understanding comes from communication. (George W. Bush, November 13, 2001)

For Hamayan (1986), “the consequences of a mostly monolingual American society undermine our [the United States’] economic, political and social well-being” (p. 2). She further highlights that: 1) from an economic standpoint, the United States is not “adequately prepared” for international businesses, 2) on the political level the American “linguistic incompetence poses a serious threat to our national security,” and 3) “a lack of exposure to foreign languages deprive U.S students of a well-rounded global education” (p. 2). Competency in foreign languages is perceived as the solution for the nation’s problems in diplomacy, commerce, defense and education. In addition, foreign language study is expected to help students understand American cultural diversity. Ruiz (1994) argues that language in the United States is “primarily a means- whether to political power, economic attainment, social prestige, or moral superiority- rather than a good itself” (p. 112).

The American view of language learning is utilitarian and functional. Foreign language education is not viewed as the development of the mind but as a tool to enhance American actions in the world and ultimately maintain world supremacy politically and economically (Kramsch, 1991, 1993a). The promotion of foreign languages is currently very much linked with the globalization of the world economy. Federal and state policies attempt to address the needs of businesses by preparing students for a global perspective of the world. Official documents highlight that “internationalizing” the universities
curricula is essential to prepare future generations. Block and Cameron (2002) point out that globalization has changed “the conditions under which language learning takes place” (p. 5). There is a tendency to treat languages as economic commodities. They further argue that the commodification of language “affects the choices made by institution (local, national, public and private) as they allocate resources for language education” (p. 5).

For national security reasons, to play a leadership role in the world, as well as to better understand American cultural diversity, policy-related documents conceive foreign language instruction as a way to trigger cultural awareness. These economic and political objectives are reflected in the Universities’ rationales for requiring a foreign language study.

1.1.2. University Language Requirement and Foreign Language Study

Considering the global scale of the world economy, as well as the interdependence of national economies, universities are pressured to respond to the political and economic interests of the United States by “internationalizing” their curricula. Most colleges or universities now require twelve to eighteen credits of language study for Liberal Arts undergraduate students. In order to raise admission standards, many colleges and universities also require the completion of two years of foreign language study at the high school level. Students may study the same language at the post–secondary level or study another language. It is informative to look at a few university rationales for requiring a foreign language study. I chose to focus only on the general education curricula.
a. Ohio State University:

In an increasingly interdependent world, the ability to understand and communicate across ethnic, cultural, ideological, and national boundaries should be a primary goal of education. Cultural mores and concepts are closely reflected in language, which can, therefore, provide one vital access to that understanding and lead to the potential of real communication. Linguistic differences are fully as important as linguistic similarities. Although full mastery of a second language requires much more than academic course work, elementary and intermediate study of language can reveal much about the patterns of thought and cultural principles of another people, as well as of your own.

Access to the literature and comparable artistic achievements of another culture enhances your consciousness of the creativity and aspirations of many others in a world wherein the dominance of a single mode of thought and expression should not be assumed. The careful study of a foreign language, including general attention to critical thinking, provides a desirable, practical, and often necessary resource for the personal and professional life of the individual and the community within and outside of national boundaries.

For students in the College of Arts and Sciences, the university requires the course work or proficiency of the fourth language course (four semesters). The university clearly indicates that “full mastery” of a second language is not to be expected after four semesters of language study. In the statement above, foreign language instruction is conceived as instrumental in increasing intercultural communicative competence and cultural awareness, in order to meet the demand of a global society. The objective is to allow university undergraduates to be able to communicate and function “within and outside national boundaries.” Because cultures are reflected in languages, the university assumes that learning a foreign language will “reveal much about the patterns of thought and cultural principles of another people.” In turn, reflection on linguistic and cultural diversity is hoped to improve the students’ critical thinking skills. The university views foreign language instruction as a practical “resource for personal and professional life”. Foreign language study is believed to prepare the university students for their future.

b. The University of Michigan:

Since its founding, the College has had a strong commitment to the teaching of languages; competence in languages has traditionally been a sign of a well educated person. Such experience is a means of access to the cultural and intellectual heritage of the world’s non-English-speaking majority (for those whose first language is English). The study of another language is also a way to gain a new reflective understanding of
language and communication systems. It is necessary that citizens of the modern world, an age of growing global interdependency, be able to communicate with and adjust to people from other cultures. The language requirement is a step toward that vital skill.

The university also requires four semesters of language study or the proficiency of that level. For the university, competence in a foreign language represents a valuable “linguistic capital” (Bourdieu, 1982) as “it is a sign of a well educated person.” It also opens the students to the non-English speaking world. As for the Ohio State University, the University of Michigan assumes that studying a foreign language will prepare students to function and compete successfully in the global economy.

c. The Pennsylvania State University:

The foreign language policy was established in order to provide undergraduates with a truly global and multicultural education and to equip them with the skills they need to function effectively in the world community.

The university requires the proficiency or the completion of three semesters of foreign language study. The University President states that the pressure came from external factors: CEOs urged the university to better prepare students for global understanding. Paradoxically, the Business School at PSU only recently implemented a foreign language requirement in August 1999. In the statement above, foreign language instruction is viewed as an economic commodity, which will allow students to function in a global society. “A truly global and multicultural education”, however, sets an unclear objective for the university.

The three universities rationales presented above remain vague with regard to the level of proficiency that is expected after three semesters. They also illustrate the clear effort that exists in the United States to internationalize the country’s curricula. A foreign language is required in order to develop new perspectives on cultural diversity and the students’ cultural awareness. Most of the documents presented thus far emphasize the cultural dimension of foreign language study. Unfortunately, there is a general assumption that learning a foreign language will automatically enhance cultural awareness and provide students with a broad understanding of the world. The means of
implementing such challenging criteria is left to the language educators. The complexity of the cultural dimension of language learning makes it difficult to arrive at unproblematic implementations of policy (see chapter 2). While the teaching of language relies on language theories, there is a lack of a theoretical framework for the teaching of culture (Kramsch, 1991). In the short time of exposure to a foreign language, should the language instruction teach basic language skills or contrastive cultural analysis? What is expected of students after twelve or eighteen credits of language requirement? To what extent will a foreign language requirement be of use to students? Kramsch (1991) argues that it is a fallacy to believe that an uneducated language learner will achieve the cultural goals presented above without additional education.

If the objective is indeed to improve the students’ cultural awareness, the learning of culture needs to move away from a mere transmission of cultural facts. A cross-cultural approach to language teaching seems appropriate since learning a culture is an inquiry and not an accumulation of knowledge. In three or four semesters, language instructors do not have the opportunity to teach students to speak the language fluently. Educators do not have the opportunity to teach all the languages students may need to know in the future. There are however, permanent values that can be gained from foreign language instruction, such as becoming aware of various reference frames or the ability to think critically. It is crucial for policy makers, administrators and educators to consider the role that foreign languages can play in preparing students for the future in a global world. To date, there is unfortunately little empirical research to document the educational impact of foreign language learning in this domain.

1.2. The Study

Providing students with a broad understanding of the world constitutes one of the main rationales for requiring the study of a foreign language at the university level. As noted above, one of the assumptions for requiring the study of a foreign language is that learning a foreign language will automatically develop the students’ cultural awareness
and expose them to new perspectives on cultural diversity. The assumption is problematic since mastering a foreign language does not guarantee an understanding of the culture from which it comes (Agar, 1994; Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993a). In this respect, the teaching of culture should be explicit in language instruction.

Claire Kramsch (1998) notes that second language acquisition has been “largely asocial and ahistorical” (p. 33). In foreign language classrooms, culture has commonly been conceived as a knowledge that can be acquired and the tendency is to teach culture as a “fifth skill”, distinctly separate from the language itself (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993a; 1995a; Savignon, 1997). Current approaches, however, have moved away from culture teaching as pre-established facts to a more dynamic model, reflecting the dynamic nature of culture (Byram, 1989; Byram, Morgan & colleagues, 1994; Kramsch, 1993a; Lange, 1999). These approaches view language learning as a dialogic process of socialization, in which students have a reflective engagement. The objective of cross-cultural education is to develop the students’ abilities to observe, discover, analyze and interpret the differences and similarities between (and within) their own culture(s) and the target culture(s) (Byram, 1989; Hall, 2002; Kramsch, 1993a; Lange, 1998; Zarate, 1986, 1991). The intercultural approach to language learning acknowledges the intricate relationship between language and culture. Thus, the study of a foreign language with its cultural dimensions allows the students to broaden the way they perceive the world, encourage critical thinking and enhance reflection. This analytical thinking ability is defined by Kramsch (1993a) as the “third place” where students learn and create new ways of meanings that are salient to their lives.

To date, there is little empirical research that explores the educational impact of foreign language learning in enhancing students’ cultural awareness. One research report conducted by Byram, Esarte-Sarries and Taylor (1991) is of particular interest. Relying on extensive data, the authors describe, explain and interpret the teaching of culture as it currently exists in the United Kingdom, at the secondary school level. The study of a foreign language is expected to modify the learners’ schemata. The authors study the relationships between learning a foreign language as a school subject and the students’
perceptions of the associated culture(s) as well as their attitudes toward the people of that culture. The researchers use a combination of data collection techniques: quantitative (e.g. attitude measures and questionnaires) and qualitative (e.g. informal interviews, classroom observations, etc.). Their research explores four different models of teaching and considers “in what ways the four different models of teaching (…) might be extending learners’ experience of their social world” (p. 374). The four teaching models emphasize the teaching of culture, without necessarily adopting the cross-cultural approach described above. The researchers demonstrate that the students’ learning is limited to “an acquisition of separate and largely de-contextualized information” without the modification of the students’ schemata (p. 380). Their research investigates not only the impact foreign language teaching may have on the learners’ view of the target culture but also “how the effect might be taking place” (p. 378). Although the study looks at the context in which learning takes place, it does not investigate the activity of learning as a process. Furthermore, the study does not explore what learning a foreign language entails for the individual learner but simply draws conclusions about the group. As the researchers conclude, further theoretical and empirical research needs to be conducted. Indeed, it seems essential to question and explore the impact intercultural education has on the individual student. What do the students gain from it? Does it meet the objectives set by the university?

My doctoral research investigates the extent to which the cultural dimensions of learning are present in classroom foreign language learning and the processes by which they develop. Hall (2002) notes:

In terms of learning, the goal of research is to lead us to an understanding of the conditions by which learners’ involvement in the various constellations of their language socialization practices- in and out of the classrooms- is shaped, and how their evolving participation affects their development as language users and language learners (p. 131).

The purpose of the investigation is to document the development of a reflective approach to language and culture by American undergraduate students enrolled in a third semester French class, that is, the last semester of their language requirement. The study will examine how students negotiate new cultural concepts and in what specific ways they are able to discover, observe, analyze, and remain critical toward another culture and their
own culture (s). Ultimately, the purpose of my doctoral research is to investigate the process in which students become aware of the various frames of reference one can use to view the world. To understand in what ways students are able to develop a reflective approach to language and culture, it is essential to document actual classroom practices. These practices will be interrogated as follow:

1. Which cultural concepts are presented in class and how are they presented?
2. How do students talk about culture and how does the students’ learning process unfold?
   a. How do they negotiate new cultural concepts?
   b. What changes occur over time in the way students use and talk about cultural constructs?
   c. Which mediational means are significant in effecting these changes (e.g. Dialogue with the instructor? Dialogue with their keypals? Access to texts or other sources of information?)?
3. Is there a third place for students? If so, how do students define their third place?

In the French language course I observed, the instructor adopted an intercultural approach to foreign language teaching. In other words, the focus of the class was the discussions and analysis of cultural themes such as “cultural differences”, “stereotypes”, “Franco-American relations” (see chapter 3). The students enrolled in the course were involved in an intercultural exchange with an English class in France via computer-mediated communication. The data collected include reflective journals written in English, archived email exchanges, synchronous chat transcripts from the inter-class communicative events, synchronous chat transcripts from class discussions, diagnostic questionnaires, interviews, class observations, and class assignments such as cultural essays (see chapter 3).

The data were collected throughout the semester and its analysis focuses on the development of cultural awareness. The research is descriptive and qualitative in nature, focusing on the participants’ perspectives. The outcomes derive from the analysis of a variety of sources. The analytic methodology for the study has two significant characteristics. First, because language and culture learning are complex and long-term, the study adopts a developmental (or “genetic”) methodology (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizing the history of learner’s perspectives and drawing on “multiple sources of
information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). From a Vygotskian perspective, language learning is a process that needs to be studied as such. Sociocultural theory offers ways to investigate developmental changes because it looks at the learning process as it unfolds. The research studies the activity of learning as it is carried out and in doing so, not only describes but also explains the learning process in its history. Secondly, the investigation attempts to achieve an ‘emic’ perspective. For activity theory, learning is a situated activity, grounded in a social, historical, cultural context. It is often assumed that the students’ goals for learning a foreign language are identical for all students (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). This research investigates what is unique and different in each participant’s learning. It explores what it means for learners to learn about another culture. The study offers a deep understanding of the potential of culture learning as a developmental process.

The study is significant in various aspects. First, unlike research in second language acquisition, this study considers learning a foreign language a social practice that is dialogically constructed. Therefore, it is concerned with language use and the sociocultural dimensions of language learning. In addition, the study considers the language learner as a social being with agency. Thus, it explores the participants’ personal growth. Second, the research does not limit its investigation to the outcomes at the end of the semester. The study is an inquiry that explores, describes and understands the complex cultural dimensions of foreign language learning. Third, it focuses on an intermediate level of language proficiency. Indeed, most research on the learning of culture is done at the advanced level. Here, the development of cultural awareness does not assume proficiency in the language studied. Finally, it explores the effect a language requirement may have on the learners’ development.
1.3. Culture

Defining culture is a very difficult task. In the field of foreign language instruction, the most common view of culture is a dichotomy between Culture (or high culture) and everyday culture (see chapter 2). This view is problematic because it does not take into consideration the constantly changing nature of culture. For this research, the definition derives from a cognitive anthropological perspective in which culture is viewed as an expression of meaning. I will rely on Geertz’ (1975) definition of culture:

[Culture is] an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in a symbolic form by means of which men (sic.) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitude towards life (p. 89).

The way one perceives the world is socially and culturally constructed via expressions of meaning, which are shared by a community. Shore’s (1996) collection of models offers a cognitive anthropological perspective on culture. For Shore, culture is “an extensive and heterogeneous collection of ‘models’, models that exist both as public artifacts ‘in the world’ and as cognitive constructs ‘in the mind’ of members of a community” (p. 44). He argues that the “important advantage of conceiving of culture as a stock of conventional models is that the very notion of models provides a bridge between the empiricist concept of culture as ‘objects’ and the cognitive concept of culture as form of knowledge (or, more pretentiously, as mental representations)” (p. 44).

He makes a distinction between conventional mental models and personal mental models. The conventional models are a community’s shared cognitive resources of meaning making. For example, the way people greet each other in the United States (e.g. a handshake or a hug) is a different cultural convention from the French way of greeting (a handshake or kisses). The conventions gradually emerge as social institutions and function as sociocultural constraints. He stresses that “to gain motivational force in a community, these models must be reinscribed in each generation in the minds of its members” (p. 47). These conventional models are internalized by the individual of a community and thus become personal cognitive resources. The personal mental models are idiosyncratic and are derived from personal experience. “They are not shared in their details by others [of a community]” (p. 47). For example, my personal model of a
computer is related to my use of a computer (i.e. writing papers, receiving and writing emails). For a computer expert, it may include the creation of software, programming or designing networks, playing, accounting, etc. The two mental models are dialectically interrelated as the personal mental models are shaped in specific ways through the internalization of the conventional models during socialization.

Language has a special role to play in the formation of concepts. Language and culture are intertwined as language reflects but also constructs culture. What happen when language learners are confronted with another lexicon? Cultural concepts are not universal and semantic categories do not overlap. As Lantolf (1999) points out “the entities designated by the same word in one culture are not necessarily the entities labeled by a corresponding word (assuming a corresponding word even exists) in another culture” (p. 8).

As mentioned, language learning is more than the mere acquisition of linguistic forms. It is about creating new meanings, i.e. organizing the world in a different way and creating new realities. The research presented here discusses the learners’ access to new cultural concepts and investigates how the learners use new cultural constructs in interaction. The objective of a holistic approach is to provide a more complete picture of the students’ learning process as it unfolds. From the data, I wish to explore what it means for the language learners to learn a foreign language and to learn about a foreign culture. Through this qualitative research, I hope to provide a discursive space on the role of language courses in the curriculum.

In the following chapter, I review the pertinent literature on the question. First, I discuss the lack of consideration of the cultural dimensions in mainstream second language acquisition, limiting the language learning to the acquisition of linguistic forms. Second, I describe in detail the cultural dimensions as conceived in the field of foreign language teaching, documenting the tendency to teach culture as a fifth skill (Kramsch, 1993a; Savignon, 1997). If culture is defined as an expression of meaning, then language cannot be separated from culture. I therefore present the intrinsic relationship between
language and culture in the third section and describe two theoretical models that argue for cross-cultural education. Finally, I define and explain the theoretical approach that I adopted for my study.

The third chapter presents a detailed description of the methodology used for the research informed by activity theory. In addition, I describe the context and the particularities of the learning environment. In the fourth chapter, I first explore the cultural concepts that were presented in class and examine how these concepts were presented to the students. I focus on the main themes of the semester, the September 11th Attacks, Cultural Differences and Stereotypes, and Food. I then turn to the four case studies and tell the stories of Julie, Mary, Lucy and David’s development. The last chapter discusses the results and the implications.

\[1\] Information on the Joint National Committee for Languages is available on line at: http://www.languagepolicy.org/. JNCL is now affiliated with The National Council for Languages and International Studies.

\[ii\] See chapter 2 for a discussion on the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996).


\[iv\] In that respect, the United States is in fact a peculiar example. Lambert (1994) notes: “We are, to my knowledge, unique among countries in that a large portion of our basic language instruction takes place at the college or university level” (p. 49).

\[v\] Information is available on line at: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/discussion_paper.html


\[viii\] Information retrieved February 15, 2002 from: http://www-afa.adm.ohio-state.edu/Bulletin/5web/5geccat.html#foreign.


\[xi\] It is not clear, in this document, which CEOs President Spanier referred to. The Pennsylvania State University has strategic alliances with various companies. In addition, many corporations actively recruit Penn State students as future employees.
In the introduction of *Redefining the Boundaries of Language Study*, Claire Kramsch (1995c) addresses a pertinent issue: “How is academic knowledge relevant to the outside world?” (p. xvi). To what extent is the language requirement, imposed by the universities to internationalize their curricula, useful? What significance do foreign languages have in students’ lives? As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is too often assumed that learning a foreign language will automatically enhance cultural awareness and broaden students’ view of the world (Byram, 1989; Durham, 1980; Kramsch, Cain & Murphy-Lejeune, 1996). Mastering a foreign language does not guarantee an understanding of a foreign culture nor does speaking a language imply that there is communication (Agar, 1994; Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993a; Lantolf, 1999; Vygotsky, 1986). As Agar (1994) highlights: “Differences happen within languages as well as across them” (p. 14). Consequently, students may have difficulties communicating in the foreign language they study, not because they have not acquired its linguistic system, but simply because their utterances may be socially unacceptable or non-idiomatic for example. Because communication is socially and culturally constructed, the meaning students convey in another language “depends on others who share an understanding of these symbols and who may or may not interpret them as [intended]” (Savignon, 1997, p. 14). As Savignon (1997) notes, communication is “a continuous process of expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning” (p. 14). It is therefore important to investigate what learning a foreign language entails.

This second chapter is divided into four parts. The first part will discuss the lack of the sociocultural considerations of language learning in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. In its quest for the universal truth, the field of language acquisition has
mostly been interested in scientific claims about how languages are learned (Breen 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf, 1996; Kramsch, 1998). SLA theories limit the learning of a foreign language in linguistic and psychological terms (Kramsch, 1998), thus separating language from people and conceiving the learner as a language processor.

Secondly, I will explore how culture has been conceived in foreign language teaching, describing selected teaching models in detail. The section will present the main pedagogical approaches to culture and underline the frequency with which culture is considered as another skill to acquire, distinctly separate from language (Kramsch, 1993a; Omaggio-Hadley, 2001; Savignon, 1997). This chapter will argue, however that language and culture cannot be separated because of their intrinsic relationship (Agar, 1994; Byram, 1989; Hall, 2002; Kramsch, 1993a). For Agar (1994) the notion of language and the notion of culture have to change. He claims that the term “languaculture” depicts more precisely the necessary tie between language and culture. He indicates that “culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture” (Agar, 1994, p. 28). Therefore, separating culture from language in foreign language instruction as well as in research is problematic. Learning about a foreign language entails a more complex phenomenon than a mere acquisition of linguistic forms.

The third part will discuss why language learning should be viewed and researched as a social practice, in which culture becomes the core of language teaching. A detailed description of two theoretical models will illustrate how cross-cultural learning can be enhanced in language instruction. In addition, investigating language learning as a social practice offers ways to explore the learning as a process, and regards the language learners as social beings with agency.

Finally, the last section of the chapter will describe the advantages that a sociocultural theory presents for research. By theorizing the relationship between language and culture, and by demonstrating how learning is a social activity, a sociocultural framework provides insightful perspectives on language learning. Through a historical and hermeneutic approach, it explores learning as a process. For Vygotsky
(1978, 1986) language and culture are intertwined, the way we conceptualize the world is socially and culturally constructed, and the formation of cognition is achieved through goal directed activity in which language plays a central mediating function. A close look at the activity of learning will deepen our understanding of the complex phenomenon that is learning.

2.1. Cultural Dimensions of Second Language Acquisition Research

Although the teaching of foreign languages takes place in language departments, approaches to language study usually derives from linguistics, English as a Second Language (ESL) and applied linguistics departments. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has mainly been influenced by linguistic or psychological theories (Huebner, 1998; Kramsch, 1998; Mitchell & Myles, 1998) where language and cognition of the individual are the main objects of study. For this reason, Claire Kramsch (1998) concludes that the SLA research has been “largely asocial and ahistorical” (p. 33) where individual differences as well as social and historical contexts of language learning become irrelevant or a side factor at best.

2.1.1. Constructs of the Learner in SLA Research

Recent critique and commentary within the SLA literature focuses upon the limited ways in which the language learner is constructed within approaches guided by nativist or universalist views of language, language development, and cognition (Breen 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf, 1996; Kinginger, 1997; Kramsch, 1998). This critique consists of two parallel but related arguments: The first concerns the “scientific” perspective in SLA research, which assumes “reason, rationality, the universal, idealism, objectivity and the search for the truth” (Lantolf, 1996, p. 715); the second looks at the learner’s interlanguage, assessed as being “deficient” from “the norm”.

Breen (1996) argues that SLA research has constructed the learner in specific ways. The emergence of SLA research is fairly recent and is very distinctive by its methodological approach (Huebner, 1998; Kramsch, 1998; Lantolf, 1996). First, SLA research creates a “universal model” of the learner (Cook, 2003). Indeed, in its quest for a universal truth, the goal of SLA research is to discover the “reality” of language acquisition (i.e., the truth) in an “objective” manner (Lantolf, 1996). Drawn by “physics envy” (Lantolf, 1996), SLA research limits itself “to what it views as experimentally and theoretically tenable” (Kramsch, 1998, p. 34). In other words, research adopts mainly a logico-scientific approach, based on the assumption that learning a foreign language is more or less the same for all learners. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) underscore that “the object of study of any (social) scientific enterprise is constructed by distilling out features considered to be irrelevant to the specific goal of the given scientific enterprise” (p. 141). As a result, learners’ differences are simply referred to as “variables”, where a couple of factors come into play in the language acquisition process: the cognitive factors (such as intelligence, motivation, language aptitude) or the affective factors (e.g., learning strategies or communicative strategies). The learners’ differences seem to be static and do not evolve along the language acquisition process (e.g., you are either motivated or not). Ellis (1997), for example, indicates that language aptitude and motivation influence only the “rate and level of L2 achievement” (p. 76) but not the learning process itself. He later mentions that language acquisition may be influenced by the deployment of learning strategies. However, SLA research has mainly described and quantified the learners’ individual differences without fully explaining how they may impact the acquisition process. In fact, it tends to view such individual differences as only having an indirect relationship with L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1994).

Furthermore, the language learner is viewed as an autonomous individual, “an information processor that receives input from caretakers, teachers and peers, processes the input into intake, and ultimately produces output of a measurable kind” (Kramsch, 2002, p. 1). The communicative objective of language use is not acknowledged (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Savignon, 1997). Therefore, the social and cultural dimensions of language are dismissed and considered irrelevant. Moreover, since the characteristics of
language learners ought to be universal, SLA overlooks the uniqueness of each learner, denying the social, cultural and historical elements of the language learning and the language learner. It leaves out the “particular and the local” (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 288). Ultimately, “the dominant core of current theories of SLA are for the most part defining a world of a-historical, decontextualized, and disembodied brains” (Thorne, 2000, p. 220)

What mainstream SLA is concerned with is the learner’s interlanguage. Interlanguage is considered to move “from very primitive and deviant versions of the L2, to progressively more elaborate and target-like versions” (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 10). SLA, very much influenced by the Chomskyan “ideal native speaker”, has in turn created an “idealized monolingual L2 linguistic norm” (Belz, 2002, p. 60), illustrating the monolingual orientation of SLA research. The language learner is expected to imitate the communicative skills of the native speaker. Consequently, the language learner is viewed as a “deficient communicator struggling to overcome underdeveloped L2 competence, striving to reach the ‘target’ competence of an idealized native speaker (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 295). The problems with the construct of the native speaker are numerous. First, the construct implies a birth privilege that no excellent L2 speaker can overcome. Second, it assumes the native speaker is a language expert and a linguistic authority. Native speakers, however, don’t always speak according to the rules. Third, it considers language as a standardized system, not as a social and cultural practice. The cultural dimension of language learning is simply not taken into account. Finally, it conceives the native speakers’ speech community as monolingual and homogeneous. In fact, monolingual communities are not the norm in the world and each individual has several social identities (e.g. a father, a coworker, a friend, etc) (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Scollon & Scollon, 2001). The native speaker is not only an “imaginary” (Kramsch, 1997) but also an ideological construct (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Valdés, 1998).


2.1.2. The Need for a Cultural Dimension in SLA Research

The notion of culture is problematic within SLA theories. First, SLA research does not view language learning as a social and cultural practice. The field’s primary endeavor is to investigate the language learner’s linguistic competence as it is believed to reveal the predetermined developmental stages of language acquisition. With the conduit metaphor adopted by many SLA theories, the very function of language (i.e. to communicate) is narrowed to a transfer of information from one’s brain to another (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Lantolf, 1996). Focusing on forms, in their formal aspects, SLA research leaves out the social and discursive aspects of communication.

Second, SLA research is based on the autonomous individual, denying his or her social and cultural dimensions. All language learners, conceptualized as computers, are more or less the same (Cook, 2003; Kramsch, 2002; Lantolf, 1996). Individual differences and the context in which language is learned become external factors, which only have an indirect link to language acquisition. The learner’s identity is taken for granted (Firth & Wagner, 1997). The learner as a member of a community, with a history and agency, is not the topic of investigation.

While this mainstream view has had a tremendous impact on the way research is conducted, language educators have critiqued certain of its basic assumptions on the ground that they limit the researcher’s view, excluding the social, cultural, and local dimensions of language learning. Furthermore, a view of the language learner as a deficient communicator masks learner’s own contributions to his or her learning. Kramsch (1997) stresses that the language learner has privileges that native speakers cannot claim:

Users of tongues other than their own can reveal unexpected ways of dealing with the cross-cultural clashes they encounter as they migrate between languages. Their appropriation of foreign languages enables them to construct linguistics and cultural identities in the interstices of national languages and on the margins of monolingual speakers’ territories. (p. 368)

For example, Belz (2002) presents a study where learners are encouraged to use multiple languages for a written assignment. She shows evidence that learners through their
multilingual texts “do not construe themselves in terms of what they don’t know; instead they showcase what is salient to them.” (p. 74). These researchers have called for another look at second language acquisition, where language learning is theorized as a social practice, where learners’ contributions are put to the fore, where the local and particular are valued (see section 2.3).

In the first chapter, the rationales for learning and teaching a foreign language in the United States were examined. As discussed, the objectives for teaching foreign languages have changed over the years. The first section of this second chapter highlights how SLA research conceives language as being separate from culture and language learning as a fragmentation into various skills. Since teaching methodologies are influenced not only by theory and research, but also by economic, political, social or intellectual stances (Kinginger, 1995; Kramsch, 1995c; Savignon, 1997), it is critical to also understand how culture has been identified in the domain of foreign language education.

2.2. The Cultural Dimensions of Foreign Language Teaching

Two major forces have shaped foreign language teaching in the United States. First, political and economic realities have pushed for a practical teaching of language (see chapter 1). Kramsch (1991) points out that for most western countries, education is conceived as an intellectual discipline whose purpose is to develop the mind. However, education in the United States has had different objectives since WWI. Its objectives are functional and utilitarian (e.g. prepare students for future employment). Viewed as a luxury, foreign language study has long been criticized for its elitism. Class enrollment was in steady decline until the 1970s. Secondly, the development of second language acquisition research has shaped the views of language acquisition and language learners as discussed above. Within this climate of influence from utilitarianism and scientific
research, the cultural dimensions in foreign language teaching have therefore greatly evolved over the years.

### 2.2.1. A Historical Perspective on the Teaching of Culture

The lack of consensus on the definition of culture in the foreign language education has resulted in what Shanahan terms: “cacophony” (Shanahan, 1998, p. 451). In the first part of the twentieth century, the focus of language learning is primarily on grammar-translation and literature. Culture revolves around literary masterpieces, though some attention is also given to “civilization” (Grittner, 1990; Kramsch, 1995a; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Shanahan, 1998). Culture finds its definition in the humanities: “It focuses on the way a social group represents itself and others through its material productions” (Kramsch, 1995a). Culture is referred to as “mankind’s highest intellectual attainments as embodied in fine arts and literature” (Lange, 1998, p. 3). Reserved for the elite, the teaching of languages is closely linked to “the big Culture” that corresponds to “the universal culture of the European educated elite.” (Kramsch, 1995a, p. 86).

The rise of social sciences, such as anthropology or sociology, allows for a broader definition of culture, which includes everyday practices such as beliefs, values, behavioral patterns, events, language, etc. (Kramsch, 1995a; Lange, 1998; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Shanahan, 1998). The social sciences aim to discover the laws that regulate social life. Their findings are based on observations and data collection for which the oral forms are as important as the written forms. Consequently, culture, in the field of foreign language, has often been defined as a dichotomy between high culture or Culture, and culture (everyday culture) or “the four Fs: food, fairs, folklore and statistical facts” (Kramsch, 1991, p. 218).

In the 1960s, the traditional teaching of foreign languages (i.e. literature and grammar translation) gives way to a “more practical and utilitarian” way to study languages (Handock & Scebold, 2000; Kramsch, 1991, 1995a, 1998; Omaggio Hadley,
Audiolingual methodology, based on behaviorism, is broadly adopted in second and foreign language classrooms. It divides the learning of a language into four distinct skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Audiolingual methodology believes in the formation of habits by repeated reinforcement of grammatical structures, in isolation (Lightbown & Spada, 1993; Mitchell & Myles, 1998). In addition to the teaching of linguistic forms, behaviorism advocates for a contrastive analytic approach in the teaching of culture. The cultural notes that supplement the pattern drills describe everyday life, comparing American culture to the “target” culture (Grittner, 1990). In the audiolingual methodology, culture is knowledge to be acquired. The touristic representation of the culture that prevails offers simplistic and stereotypical views (Van Kranenberg, 1998; Henze & Hauser, 1997).

In the late 1970s, language pedagogy is largely influenced by two phenomena: first, the “burgeoning field of applied linguistics” (Kramsch, 1998, p. 30) and second the national economic and political situation. As discussed previously, insights from applied linguistics contributed a view of language learning in which the cultural dimension is problematic. Perspectives from applied linguistics were understood to maximize learning and the effectiveness of communication rather than to offer increased understanding of cultural or social phenomena (Huebner, 1998, p. 59). The economic and political concerns of the late 1970s also promote “effective communication” with a focus on language skills, specifically oral skills, that corresponds to “real-life phenomena” (see chapter 1). With communicative competence, language teaching moves away from a sole grammatical interest to a functional and utilitarian objective. The goal of language teaching is to teach communicative skills (Durham, 1980; Kramsch, 1995a). It now focuses on various components of language ability: grammatical competence as well as the sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. This functionalist approach conceives culture as a social phenomenon (Van Kranenberg, 1998). For example, it implements pragmatic notions and highlights language varieties (e.g. registers, genres, etc). However, the teaching of culture is more implicit than explicit (Grittner, 1990). Furthermore, Kramsch (1995a) argues that the understanding of culture is in fact “predicated on a kind of universality based on shared human needs, easily expressed,
interpreted and negotiated through universal speech functions” (p. 88), as in the communication between vendors and consumers. This view leads to broad generalizations, as will be discussed below.

These economic, political, social and intellectual influences give way to the “proficiency movement” in the 1980s. Indeed, there is a need for some sort of consensus on defining goals and outcomes for language learning (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). For example, the President’s Commission report (1979) calls for a unifying principle and encourages the development of foreign language proficiency tests. In addition, Kramsch (1991) indicates that “the faith in tests and in the truth of test results reflected a scientific positivistic view of learning: (…) ultimate competence was composed of the accumulation of separate, discipline-specific skills, that were non-transferable to other areas of knowledge and could be tested by scientifically designed, standardized tests” (p. 219).

Based on the proficiency scale developed by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), with support from the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) published the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines in 1986. The objective is to “define and measure language ability in speaking, listening, reading, and writing” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 12). The guidelines describe language abilities hierarchically: novice, intermediate, advanced, superior. They define four criteria to assess the four language skills: global tasks/functions, context/content, accuracy and text type. These ought to measure “the overall communicative ability of the speaker” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p.12). Even though the interrelatedness of the four skills is pointed out in the document, language learning is nonetheless viewed as the acquisition of separate skills, believed to lead to communicative competence. The broader social and cultural aspects of language learning are given minor attention in the document. The speaker’s ability to communicate implies an ability to function in real-life contexts, in which the learner is expected to use cultural references or idioms but the guidelines do not assess the learner’s cultural proficiency. Manifestly, the main objective is to assess the linguistic acquisition
of a language learner, albeit in terms of “functions” and “content” in addition to “accuracy”.

The guidelines are clearly not designed to be a curriculum model nor a teaching methodology. They aim to describe goals for language proficiency. However, they influenced language programs and language materials (Bernhardt, 1998; Kramsch, 1991, 1993a; Savignon, 1997). Because language is divided into skills, it only becomes acceptable to discuss abstract ideas (or content) at the advanced level of language proficiency. “The language teacher has hence a lower academic status than the professor of literature or of civilization” (Kramsch, 1993a, p. 4). The gap that exists in foreign language departments, separating language teaching (i.e. the teaching of linguistic skills) from the teaching of literature and civilization has extensively been discussed in the literature (Bernhardt, 1997; Kern, 1995; Kinginger, 1997; Kramsch, 1993a, 1995c; Shanahan, 1997). The skill orientation of education assumes too often that foreign language instruction will lead to intercultural understanding. Unfortunately, culture remains a superficial aspect of foreign language learning, even though efforts to implement culture in the language curriculum have existed since the 1950s. Below are a few models to consider.

2.2.2. Theoretical Models and Teaching Strategies to Implement Culture in Foreign Language Education

Nostrand presents an “emergent” model for the teaching of culture (Lange, 1998, 1999; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Seelye, 1984). He exposes about thirty themes grouped into six categories: 1) The Culture; 2) The Society; 3) Conflicts; 4) The Ecology and Technology (e.g. physical resources, demographic control, etc); 5) the Individual; and 6) The Cross-Cultural Environment (or the attitude toward other cultures). Nostrand explains that a theme is “an emotionally, charged concern, which motivates or strongly influences the culture bearer’s conduct in a wide variety of situations” (Nostrand, 1974,
cited in Seelye, 1984, p. 42). He is interested in social patterns that represent the value system of a culture. In addition, Nostrand identifies eight skills or abilities that students should develop in the course of their language study (Seelye, 1984). Some of the abilities proposed are “to recognize a pattern in an instance of behavior” or “to select an approved attitude” (Seelye, 1984, p. 43). Through the exploration of themes that derive from the culture studied, students should gain an understanding of the human behavior of that culture as well as empathy toward the culture studied. Nostrand’s model, however, presents culture as a static phenomenon.

Lafayette (1978) offers strategies and techniques for teaching culture. His approach is based on cultural facts. He suggests thirteen cultural goals for instruction such as “recognize and/or interpret major geographical features of the target country (or countries)” or “recognize and/or interpret major aesthetic monuments of the target culture, including literature, and the arts” (p. 1). His model presents “high culture” as well as “everyday culture”. Among the thirteen goals, two are related to the learning process: “to evaluate the validity of generalizations about foreign cultures” and “to develop skills needed for research”, (p. 2). His strategies focus mostly on knowledge devoid of intellectual value (e.g. where is a monument located) and do not emphasize how language and culture are intertwined. It is unclear how his model leads to deep understanding of a particular culture.

Finally, Seelye (1984) describes a system for teaching culture, and provides seven instructional goals as a frame for the teaching of intercultural communication (Lange, 1999; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Seelye, 1984). The objective is for students to “develop the cultural understandings, attitudes and performance skills needed to function appropriately within a society of the target language and to communicate with the culture bearer” (Seelye, 1984, p. 49). The seven instructional goals are: 1) The Sense, or Functionality, of Culturally Conditioned Behavior (i.e. “the student should demonstrate an understanding that people act the way they do because they are using options the society allows for satisfying basic physical and psychological needs.” p. 49); 2) Interaction of Language and Social Variables (such as age, social class); 3) Conventional
Behavior in Common Situations; 4) Cultural Connotations of Words and Phrases; 5) Evaluating Statements about a Society; 6) Researching another Culture; and 7) Attitudes toward other Cultures. Attainment of these goals is believed to increase the students’ intercultural competence. Parallel to the instructional goals, he provides seven performance objectives further detailing what students should be able to do at the end of the course. In addition, he indicates strategies for instruction as well as ways to assess cultural competence. Seelye provides a guide for language teachers and encourages them to implement culture in language classes by offering concrete teaching strategies.

Cultural activities are more intertwined with language learning than in Lafayette’s model but remain activities that come as a supplement to the language instruction (i.e. the linguistic forms). In fact, he states: “While a convenient place to begin learning about the target culture is in our foreign language classes, culture must be taught systematically in addition to purely linguistic concerns” (p. 7- original italics). The model is based on the development of skills according to the students’ cognitive development and their level of proficiency. For Seelye, these cultural competencies skills can be measured quantitatively. The model is primarily interested in the outcomes (what students will be able to show), not so much in the learning process (i.e. the learner’s cognitive development), since it assumes that the cognitive development is predetermined.

In addition to these three models, ample examples on strategies for teaching culture are offered (see for examples, Lange, 1998; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Seelye, 1984). Often mentioned are the culture capsules, culture clusters, culture assimilators and mini-dramas, which ideally should be written and/or acted by students. A culture capsule contains a paragraph highlighting culture differences between say Americans and French people (for a French course). A culture cluster consists of three culture capsules, highlighting various aspects of the same topic. In addition, there is one 30-minute simulation that is supposed to integrate the information contained in the capsules. A culture assimilator describes a “critical incident” where miscommunication occurs between an American and a member of the target culture. The student is then asked to identify the correct response that explains the cause of the miscommunication (a multiple choice task). The goal of mini-dramas, based on cultural conflicts or
miscommunications, is to puzzle students and prepare them for intercultural contexts. Other strategies are interviewing “native informants” or completing a research on a topic. Lectures are also suggested as “the easiest way to impart information” (Lange, 1999, p. 14). Students are then tested on the transmitted information.

The models described above as well as the teaching strategies represent rich and important resources for teaching. Their main objective is to promote the teaching of “cultural competence” as they stress the importance of implementing culture in foreign language studies. However, even though most models clearly state that language and culture are intertwined, they primarily consider the teaching of culture as a task separate from learning the language (i.e. an add-on activity). In addition, many of the teaching strategies presented above such as the culture capsules and the clusters focus on cultural facts. They tend to convey misleading information and hardly lead to the understanding of other cultures (Lange, 1999). Unfortunately, the development of cross-cultural competence remains incidental (Lange, 1999; Kramsch, 1993a, 1993b, 1995a; Omaggio Hadley, 2001; Savignon, 1997).

Several factors can explain the current obstacles to teach culture. First, the definition of culture is problematic. Often viewed as a dichotomy between Culture and culture, the “target” culture is depicted as static, representing a homogeneous population (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993a, 1995a). In her article entitled The Privilege of the Nonnative Speaker, Kramsch (1997) argues that the linguistic authority of the native speaker “has been extended beyond grammar to include social behavior and cultural knowledge as well” (p. 362). She therefore states that the native speaker is viewed as “a canonically literate monolingual middle-class member of a largely fictional national community whose citizens share a belief in a common history and a common destiny, (…)” (p. 363). Indeed, the language instructor ought to ponder who and what represents “Frenchness” for example. The teaching of culture should in fact represent the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the culture studied (Sharpley Whiting, 2002). The second factor concerns common teachers’ view on instruction. Many language instructors conceive teaching as conveying information and fear lacking the “native speaker’s”
expertise. They believe they lack knowledge and are therefore uncomfortable teaching
culture. However, the objective should not be to transmit information or acquire cultural
facts but to provide students with ways to observe, explain, analyze, compare, contrast,
and evaluate other cultures (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993; Lange, 1999). Third,
stressing social and cultural differences goes against the equity dimension of the
education system in the United States (Kramsch, et al., 1996). Kramsch et al. (1996) add:
“Multiculturalism in education raises the spectre of a moral relativism that teachers do
not feel competent to deal with” (p. 100). Fourth, the conduit metaphor used in SLA
research views language as a mere conduit of information, devoid of social meaning
(Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1991; Kramsch et al., 1996; Savignon, 1997). The teaching of
language is therefore limited to the manipulation of linguistic forms, with no particular
intellectual value. As Henze and Hauser (1999) mention “culture [is] believed to exist
outside the person and to exert a strongly deterministic role in people’s lives” (p. 4).
Thus, culture is separated from language. Fifth, content learning is believed to be
approached only after “mastering” the basic grammar and vocabulary. Therefore,
learning about culture is often postponed to advanced level classes, increasing the gap
between language versus civilization/literature instruction in foreign language
departments (Bernhardt, 1997; Kinginger, 1995; Kramsch, 1993b, 1995b, 1995c;
Shanahan, 1997). Finally, the faith in quantitative assessment has often limited culture to
a list of facts, simplifying the culture studied (Kramsch, 1991; Shanahan, 1998; Lange,
1999). “Within this positivistic view of schooling, it is much easier to transmit stable
products of knowledge, sanctioned by authority, than variable processes of learning”
(Kramsch, et al., 1996).

The teaching of culture has thus continued to employ lists of cultural facts, often
presented in capsules in foreign language textbooks (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1988,
1993a, 1995a; Kramsch et al., 1996; Savignon, 1997). Therefore the tendency is to teach
culture as a fifth competence, distinctly separate from the language itself (Kramsch,
1993a; 1995a). The presentation of cultural material is questionable since it offers broad
and vague information and encourages students to “generalize unproblematically”
(Byram, 1989; Candlin, 1992; Kramsch, 1988; Lange, 1999). However, cultural facts are
easy to test: Either students learned the facts or they did not. The functional and utilitarian education system in the United States does not require analytical and critical skills to be developed at a lower level of proficiency (Kramsch, 1991; Shanahan, 1997). The models for the teaching of culture presented above stress the skill orientation of the American curricula. It is unclear how cultural awareness and the ability to understand other cultural frameworks can be obtained in such proficiency-oriented ways. As Shumway (1995) indicates: “The most difficult aspect of cultural studies is not learning facts, but learning new ways of seeing” (p. 252). Learning about other cultures is an inquiry. The work done on the teaching of culture, as discussed above, does not view language learning as a social practice and does not offer consequential change in the curriculum. However, a change of content to language instruction requires a change in the curriculum (Lange, 1999). Byram (1989, 1994), Kramsch, (1991, 1993) or Lange (1999) call for theoretical frameworks that highlight the interrelationship of language and culture. “Without frameworks to guide teaching and learning, classroom activities consist of the use of isolated worksheets and independent activities that have no coherent purpose” (Lange, 1999, p. 81). Such frameworks will be discussed later (see section 2.3.2).

2.2.3. National Standards: New Directions in Foreign Language Education

The ACTFL Proficiency guidelines, even though problematic, constitute an important step in reaching a consensus about language learning goals and expectations. This ambitious task led to the creation of the national standards. The political influences are undeniable as the Bush (Senior) and Clinton administrations encouraged the development of national standards for education. In the 1990s, federal funds helped the creation of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning. The authors underline that these standards are not a curriculum guide nor do they prescribe particular teaching methodologies. However, they do acknowledge that “the standards document is a political one, delineating the goals of the profession and making a case for institutional and instructional change in the way FL programs are conceived on the local, regional and
national levels” (Standards, 1996, p. 2). They hope to represent a guide for instruction and “strive to reinvent public education in the United States” (Lange, 1999, p. 63). Because it is a political document and because it guides the foreign language profession, it is critical to study the national standards as they are a reflection of foreign language education and hope to be a frame of reference for teachers. In addition, the standards influence materials development such as foreign language textbooks. Bragger and Rice (2000a) highlight “[textbooks] influence on teaching and learning is undeniable” (p. 108). Consequently, a close look at the standards, and specifically the section devoted to culture, will shed light on the role that culture plays within foreign language study in recent years.

In its philosophy statement, the national standards emphasize the importance of foreign languages in the curriculum and call for a more central role in education:

The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. (p. 1)

The standards’ objective is to describe the content it envisions for the study of foreign languages. The standards comprise “the essential skills and knowledge” that students should acquire through their foreign language education. The focus is on communication, defined as “knowing how, when, and why, to say what to whom.” (Standards, 1996, p. 11). In other words, the sociolinguistics and cultural aspects of a language are presented as being as important as grammar or vocabulary. They state that language study should not be divided into skills, therefore going beyond the mastering of linguistic forms. “Students should be given ample opportunities to explore, develop, and use communication strategies, learning strategies, critical thinking skills, and skills in technology, as well as the appropriate elements of the language system and culture” (Standards, 1996, p. 32). The standards put forward five objectives (or the 5Cs): communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities, which are interconnected components. Two to three standards are drawn for each objective. In addition, the document offers sample progress indicators for grades 4, 8 and 12. Finally,
The document provides standards for specific languages such as French, Spanish, Chinese, etc.

The document emphasizes how crucial it is for students to become aware of various cultural frameworks or perspectives and “to understand a different culture on its own terms” (p. 47). It indicates “through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understand of the cultures that use that language; in fact, students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs” (Standards, 1996, p. 31) (original italics). It further indicates that the true content of language study is in fact “the cultures expressed through that language” (p. 48). In the standards, “culture” generally includes the philosophical perspectives (meanings, attitudes, values, ideas), the behavioral practices (pattern of social interactions) and products (food, books, music, etc) (p. 47). The authors encourage language instructors to distance themselves from the dichotomy between Culture and culture. The two standards for culture are defined as follow:

**Cultures: Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures.**

*Standard 2.1:* Students demonstrate an understanding of the relation between the practices and perspectives of culture studied.
*Standard 2.2:* Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied (pp. 50-51).

The first objective highlights the relationship between practices of a particular culture and the implied perspectives that these practices represent. “It focuses on cultural practices that reflect the traditions, beliefs, and structures of societies” (p. 213). The second objective encourages students to observe products of a particular culture and analyze how these products reflect the underlying values, beliefs and traditions of that culture. The perspectives, practices, and products are viewed as closely related components. In addition to these two standards, a third promotes the comparison of the students’ own cultural framework with others:

*Standard 4.2:* Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

The standards encourage language educators to highlight similarities and differences of cultures, to consider cultures in their diversity (e.g. look at the francophone world and not
simply France), and to create opportunities for students to interact with members of other cultures (Standards, 1996, pp. 48-49). Moreover, they allow for the use of various documents such as newspaper articles or advertisement.

The standards for the learning of French also refer to the work done by the American Association of Teachers of French: *Acquiring Cross-Cultural Competence: Four Stages for Students of French* (Singerman, 1996). The AATF’s standards, whose framework can be used for the instruction of other languages, designate four stages of competence: elementary, basic intercultural skills, social competence, and socioprofessional capability. These four stages are based on proficiency levels. Cross-cultural competence is assessed according to 1) the students’ understanding of culture and 2) the students’ knowledge of French-speaking societies. The understanding of culture contains two broad categories: a) empathy toward other cultures and b) ability to observe and analyze a culture. There are five areas (France, North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and North Africa) and seven categories of cultural knowledge (communication in cultural context, the value system, social patterns and conventions, social institutions, geography and the environment, history, literature and the arts).

However, the standards remain a skill-oriented document where cultural information is at the core of the competence. Abstract and complex cultural concepts are only presented at a higher level of language proficiency. Lange (1999) notes “The AATF statement of competencies is highly complex, extremely prescriptive, and very difficult for the classroom teacher to use. It is not clear that the four stages of competence function on a continuum. And there is an over-reliance on knowledge in the Knowledge of French-Speaking Societies category” (p. 60).

The national standards and to some extent the AATF’s standards have given some new directions in the field of foreign language education. They provide ways for the consideration of the interdependence of language and culture and encourage culture learning. The national standards push language educators to go beyond cultural information. The language instructor is no longer a transmitter of information “but a coach who mentors learners toward the designated performance” (Lange, 1999, p. 86).
The national standards project is an ambitious one and it ought to be considered as an important step in K-12 foreign language education. In fact, Lange (1998) argues that language instructors at the university levels will also be forced to take into consideration the standards and understand how high school graduates are prepared to talk about culture. “Students will be and are already entering college and university programs with more clearly demonstrable abilities in culture learning than in previous generations, and they need to continue their learning in a seamless way.” (Lange, 1998, p. 8).

Even though the standards are flexible and useful, some aspects remain problematic. The standards are strongly skill oriented. In his analysis of the standards, Lange (1999) demonstrates that students’ performance is mainly based on uncomplicated performances. The focus is on less complicated cognitive skills, such as knowledge and comprehension of cultural concepts. Analyzing or synthesizing skills remain minor activities. To move away from the instruction of cultural facts toward a curriculum where language and culture are integrated, a different type of learning is required (Byram, 1989, Kramsch, 1991, 1993a; Lange, 1999). It is essential to draw attention to the way language and culture interact. What is at stake is not the notions of skills per se, but rather the lack of reflection and critical thinking (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1991, 1998). As Lange (1999) underscores that the challenge is “how do [language educators] bring language and culture learning together in the classroom to give the ‘language’ in ‘language learning’ the human and social reality that it deserves, as well as to give students an idea of how their own social reality has been shaped by language.” (p. 61). Considering language learning a social practice is to explore the personal growth of the individual when learning about another culture. Researchers in applied linguistics call for an alternative approach to research that would reflect the sociocultural dimensions of learning (see below). As mentioned previously, learning about another culture is an inquiry. It is therefore crucial to illustrate the complexity of the learning process. The next section will discuss what viewing language learning as a social practice entails for research and for language teaching.
2.3. Language Learning as a Social Practice

As discussed previously (Sections 2.1 and 2.2), second language acquisition research and in many instances the teaching of foreign languages are primarily interested in the acquisition of linguistic forms. In their definition, they do not fully recognize that language is a social and cultural construction. Language learning is viewed as independent of language use, thus the cultural dimensions of foreign language learning remain problematic.

The study presented here conceives language learning as a social practice. In other words, it is concerned with language use and the sociocultural dimensions of language learning, where learning a foreign language can be viewed as an apprenticeship into new discourse communities. Teaching foreign languages as a social practice is to focus on communication where language is the expression of meanings. Meanings are culturally and dialogically constructed. Foreign language learners are being initiated to the social and cultural meanings of the language studied. As Agar (1994) notes:

Language, in all its varieties, in all the ways it appears in everyday life, builds a world of meanings. When you run into different meanings, when you become aware of your own and work to build a bridge to the others, “culture” is what you’re up to. (p. 28).

Foreign language learning is a process, an inquiry and needs to move away from the sole transmission of cultural facts and grammatical structures. It implies learning how to mean in a different way. It entails a dialogic process of socialization, where students have a reflective engagement (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993a, Kinginger, Gourves-Hayward & Simpson, 1999; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2001). “In short, teaching language for communication needs to be redefined as the teaching of language as an explicit cultural practice in which learners’ native culture(s) and the culture(s) of those who speak the language are made visible, so that they can be identified, interpreted, and put in relation with one another” (Kramsch, 1995c, p. xxiv - original italics).

Investigating language learning as a social practice takes into consideration the sociocultural dimensions of language learning and use into practice (Kinginger, 1997). The researcher is interested in the learner’s personal growth and therefore explores the learner’ contributions to his or her learning (Breen, 2001). The language learner is a
social individual with an identity (identities), subjectivity and agency, all derived from
his or her history (Gillette, 1994; Kramsch, 2002; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton,
1995, 2001; Siegal, 1996). Learning is an activity that is socially co-constructed and is
non-linear (Kramsch, 2002). Consequently, learning experiences are different for each
learner (Gillette, 1994; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2000, 2001; Pierce Norton,
1995). Research needs to consider the social nature of language learning (Breen 2001;
Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kern, 1995; Kinginger, 1997). The context, in which learning
takes place cannot be taken for granted but needs to be fully integrated in the
investigation.

2.3.1. Languaculture

Language is much more than proper grammatical sentences and a good dictionary
(Agar, 1994; Byram, 1989; Kramsch 1993a; Savignon, 1997). The indexical meaning of
a word (i.e. the dictionary definition) has no social existence in and of itself (Bourdieu,
1982). What is interesting is how it is used, which is culturally embedded. “The way we
communicate with each other is constrained by culture (simply because it is a part of
culture), but it also reveals and sustains culture (Scriffrin, 1994, p. 139). Moreover, the
way one chooses to use language is a culturally constrained type of social behavior but
also a means to identify oneself to a specific speech communityvii by adopting a specific
variety of the language (e.g. the use of verlan in France, Doran, 2002). One can belong
to various social or cultural groups. For example, a lawyer, who is also a father and a
friend will adapt his language use according to his social identity at the time. Finally,
linguistic indicators may be used to reinforce differences in social classes or maintain a
power relationship (Bourdieu, 1982; Fairclough, 1989).

Language and culture are intertwined as language not only reflects culture but
also constructs it. The way one perceives the world is socially and culturally constructed
via expressions of meaning, which are shared by a community and negotiated among
people. “Language is the primary medium through which the members of a given
community perceive and understand the world” (Durham, 1980, p. 221). If cultures differ, it is through the very discourse they use (Agar, 1994; Bourdieu, 1982). Thus, mastering the linguistic forms of a foreign language does not guarantee communication. In *Intercultural communication*, Scollon and Scollon (2001) show that cultural differences impact intercultural communication. They note, for example, that Asians tend to smile when they feel difficulty or embarrassment in the discourse. Westerners tend to misinterpret the smile as “normal pleasure or agreement” (p. 156). The embarrassment and the sources of the difficulty are missed and therefore dismissed. Also, Gumperz (1982) looks at how contextualization cues can alter the meaning of a message. In his research on interethnic communication, he demonstrates how proficient speakers of English (British people versus Indian and Pakistani women) misinterpret each other’s intonation patterns, which leads to misunderstandings. He further argues that such misunderstanding can have devastating consequences, especially for members of a minority group and may ultimately contribute to the inequalities of power and status. As Cook (2003) notes, when a language is not shared, there is an apparent communication barrier. “With cultural conventions, however, the consequences may be less apparent but more damaging” (p. 53).

Agar (1994) claims that the notion of language has to change because people who speak the same language do not necessarily communicate. He further argues that the notion of culture also has to change because it is conceived as something people have and does not reflect the dynamic nature of culture. Culture is in fact constantly changing (Agar, 1994; Cook, 2003; Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993a, 1998; Lange, 1999). Agar explains that culture is “something that happens to people when they realize that their way of doing things isn’t natural law, that other ways are possible” (p. 27). Learning a foreign language is learning a different way to view the world. “Alternative languages carry with them a different theory of what reality in fact is” (p. 66). Cultural concepts are not universal ones and semantic categories do not overlap. They are grounded in culture. “The entities designated by the same word in one culture are not necessarily the entities labeled by a corresponding word (assuming a corresponding word even exists) in another culture” (Lantolf, 1999, p. 8). A few examples can illustrate this latter point. In French,
“maman” refers to either the speaker’s biological or adoptive mother. In siSwati, “make” can refer to a person’s biological (or adoptive) mother, stepmother(s), mother-in-law and your spouse’s stepmother(s). In addition, the person’s aunt is also called “mam’ncane” (junior mom) if she is younger than your parent, or “mam’khulu” (senior mom) if older. Another example is in designating colors. In siSwati, “hlata” refers to blue and green and is the word that is most commonly used. Therefore, the Swazi people usually do not feel the need to specify the color nuance (as English speakers only specify light green from dark green in specific contexts). Differentiating is however possible but long: “kulu hlata njenge sibhakabhaka” (as the sky) versus “kulu hlata njenge tjani” (as the grass). In these two examples, the differences are engraved in the language and quite obvious to the listener. At times, however, the differences may be blurrier. As the narratives will show, words that may look similar, such as “patriotism” and “patriotisme”, have in fact different historically constructed meaning.

To reflect the intrinsic relationship between language and culture, Agar (1994) uses the term “languaculture”. For Bakhtin (1986), culture and language actually trap one in his or her way to view the world. He argues that what is most interesting is when one crosses boundaries as stating here:

> In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (...). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures” (p. 7).

This is what Agar (1994) calls “rich points”. Through juxtapositions of cultures, questions are raised, “rich points” are discussed. “They happen when, suddenly, you don’t know what’s going on” (p. 106). They can happen to anyone, not simply language learners. If one chooses not to ignore them, they are rich because they raise questions. They lead to new awareness, new connections. Through rich points, “you’re building culture” (p. 107). They emerge through dialogue, via language.
Because language and culture are so related, it is essential to teach language as culture. A few theoretical frameworks have placed culture at the very core of language instruction and will now be discussed.

2.3.2. Teaching Languaculture

Acknowledging that culture should play an essential part of language education, in the past two decades researchers have been advocating a cross-cultural education where students are encouraged to become aware of various ways to see the world. Each theoretical model discussed below is grounded in different contexts and therefore varies in perspectives. Both, however, offer new avenues for integrating language and culture at the curriculum level, insisting that a change of content requires a change in the curriculum. In addition, the models conceive culture learning as a dynamic process that contributes to students’ personal development.

Byram’s (1989) work on the integration of a cultural dimension in language learning and teaching is extensive. His primary focus has been in the context of secondary schools in the United Kingdom. In addition, he has, along with colleagues, conducted research in several EU countries such as France, Germany, or Denmark. In fact, he is currently involved with the modern language division of the Council of Europe (Byram & Zarate, 1997; Byram & Planet, 2000). His model is designed to be adaptable in the EU education systems, where foreign languages are learned at a younger age than in the United States.

In his work, he highlights the need for a shift to a curriculum that stresses the interrelationship between language and culture. Demonstrating that language is “one of the principal carriers of meanings” (p. 43), language teaching involves, for Byram, the teaching of culture. He also argues that culture cannot be taken for granted but needs to be made explicit in the classroom. Relying on Geertz’ definition of culture, Byram states:
To teach foreign culture (…) is to introduce the pupils to new meaning systems and their associated symbols, to provide them with the opportunity to acquire new competences and to allow them to reflect upon their own cultural competence. (p.44).

For Byram, to limit the teaching of culture to a mere description of the behaviors, artifacts, and institutions (i.e. cultural information) is inadequate. He argues that students should describe and analyze the meanings of these behaviors, and artifacts. According to him, cultural studies offer interesting theoretical and practical dimensions. In essence, he offers a cross-disciplinary approach, drawing on fields such as psychology, sociology or anthropology. The objective is to develop students’ intercultural competence by integrating contrastive techniques of analysis. The idea is to provide avenues for students to 1) “decenter” from their own culture and make the familiar strange; 2) make the strange familiar by encouraging empathy toward another culture. Byram notes that empathy is more demanding than tolerance because “it requires understanding, an activity rather than a passive acceptance” (p. 89) (italics added). The task for language teachers is then “to shake and trouble the complacency of [their] pupils, to stimulate their curiosity, but also to encourage them to go beyond the dangerous stage of then perceiving the Nuer, the Tibetan or the Frenchman as curious, odd and perhaps disturbing (…)” (p. 88).

Byram strongly believes that the role of education is to enhance students’ development: “knowledge and experience of another culture have an educative purpose in individual’s personal development” (p. 44). He further states that to create empathy, “students need to undergo some genuine cognitive process of change” (p. 103). The learning is conscious, that is the students describe, analyze and reflect on cultural differences. Byram’s model of cultural studies is therefore a process, based on traditions of inquiry. The teacher is no longer expected to be the sole information holder. “Teachers become learners alongside their pupils, but superior in certain learning skills, and more important, in their understanding of the rationale of the process in which they are all engaged” (p. 46). Since any culture is too complex to be studied in its entirety, a selection of aspects of that culture is inevitable, “but this is not a disadvantage in curriculum development terms” (p. 97).
In his model, language is not only an object of study but also a medium of study. For language beginners, he suggests that the teaching of culture should be done through the learners’ own language. He stresses, however, that “it is necessary to create modifications in learners’ concepts and schemata by a process of further socialization and experiential learning in the foreign language, which itself embodies the foreign culture” (p. 137). He further indicates that the objective is “to develop pupils’ cultural competence from its existing stage, by changing it into an intercultural competence” (p. 137). His model is presented as a circle divided into four parts:

**Language Learning**: is skill oriented. The focus is to learn the FL by using the FL. He argues that communicative language teaching offers a very interesting approach since it stresses the use of “authentic” language in the classroom. He states that the communicative approach provides students with “immediate experience of the language” (p. 140).

**Language Awareness**: language learning should be enriched by an analysis of the social and cultural nature of the language (sociolinguistics). The language awareness aspect of learning draws attention to the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 (e.g. various ways to greet and different degrees of formality). The comparisons should be done in the learners’ first language.

**Cultural Awareness**: allow students to compare their culture to the C2 in their first language. Its focus is on the non-linguistic features of the cultures, i.e. “on the question of change from monocultural to intercultural competence” (p. 142). The teaching of cultural awareness relies on inquiry from an ethnographic perspective. In addition, the learners are informants. Byram argues that through descriptions, comparisons, and analysis learners can stand back from their own culture and ultimately acquire an intercultural competence. The focus of reflection is not only on the C2 but also on the C1.

**Cultural Experience**: this phase introduces another way of learning, through experience (e.g. exchange holidays, educational visits, etc). Byram stresses that the experience needs to be structured “in such a way that it gives learners insight into the culture from the native speaker’s viewpoint. This is not to say that students are expected to abandon their own viewpoint and lose their
identities. It is about understanding an insider’s perspective. Living abroad is not
a necessity, changing schemata can be achieved through classroom activities.

Byram indicates that his model is circular (not linear). The four components
presented above should be integrated at all levels, the emphasis may vary from beginners
to advanced levels. For example, in the first year of instruction, Byram suggests that
60% of the teaching time should be dedicated to language learning, 20% to language
awareness, 10% to cultural awareness and 10% to cultural experience. Slowly, the focus
should shift from language learning to cultural experience. There is mutual support
between the phases. For example, Byram argues that language awareness will have
beneficial effects on language learning. The learning experience of comparing the two
languages can be expanded to non-linguistic features of the culture (cultural awareness).

After an extensive empirical research, he explores his model further. Byram
(1997) proposes a model for Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which is
based on four aspects: “attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills
of discovery and interaction” (p. 33). He also argues for the development of the learners’
critical cultural awareness through reflection and in-depth analysis of cultures.

**Attitudes (savoir être):** refers to learners’ general disposition. He argues
that attitudes of curiosity and openness are needed. Students should be willing to
tolerate others’ meanings, beliefs and behaviors. In addition, they should be
willing to step back from their own culture and analyze it from the viewpoint of
others (i.e. the ability to “decentre”). By challenging the norms of primary
socialization, students may undergo a process of “tertiary socialization” (p. 34).
Finally, Byram stresses that such “savoir être” cannot occur without an analytical
and reflective approach to cultures.

**Knowledge (savoirs):** refers to 1) general knowledge of one’s own social
groups as well as of the other country (products and practices); 2) the way people
interact at the individual level and the societal level. The first type of knowledge
is linked to primary socialization: what you know about your social group as well
as your knowledge about the other group. Byram notes that usually, knowledge
about the “other” is often presented in contrast to the characteristics of one’s national group and is very often stereotypical. He then states that if a learner knows about the processes of interaction, “that awareness provides a basis for successful interaction” (p. 36).

Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): is the ability to interpret another culture, explain and relate it to one’s own.

Skills of discovering and interacting (savoir apprendre/ savoir faire): discovery is the ability to sort through similarities and differences across cultures, interpret and analyze their meanings. The skill to interact is the ability to use knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication.

Critical Cultural Awareness (savoir s’engager): is the ability to reflect and evaluate critically products and practices of one’s own culture as well as others’.

Byram stresses two points. First, that culture is not static but constantly changing. The dynamic nature of culture should therefore be pointed at. Second, the model is based on a reflective approach to culture. The aspects of ICC mentioned above need to be made explicit. In addition to test, ICC can also be assessed through portfolios (especially for aspects such as critical cultural awareness).

The model acknowledges that learning about a culture is an inquiry. It is a process of discovering practices and meanings that leads to the renegotiation of realities. Through out his publications, Byram acknowledges the psychological dimension of learning. However, his focus is not on the activity of learning but rather on the outcomes. It is an ambitious model nonetheless, that integrates the cultural dimension of language learning at the curriculum level. The reflective approach adopted is essential for enhancing learners’ critical skills. His model is concerned not only with the learner’s communicative skills but also with “the personal and social development of the learner as an individual” (p. 9). The model’s objective is to provide language educators with a framework to guide their teaching. Byram illustrates his model with concrete examples of implementations (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994). In fact, Byram’s latest model has been adopted by the European Council as a model for foreign language education in the EU. The model, however, is geared primarily for secondary education. Byram’s proposal is
grounded in the European situation: since the opening of borders, people from different cultures live more and more side by side. For this reason, he argues that intercultural competence needs to be enhanced.

Kramsch (1993a) argues that culture should be at the core of language instruction. In contrast to Byram, her model is primarily for language instruction at the university level in the United States. The author is concerned with the gap that exists between lower level of instruction that focuses mainly on language skills and upper level that introduces content. She calls for a change in the curriculum and notes that “the educational challenge is teaching language ‘as context’ within a dialogic pedagogy that makes context explicit, thus enabling text and context to interact dialectically in the classroom” (p. 13).

She argues that dialogue brings an awareness of subjectivity. Subjectivity can be studied through three spheres: “intersubjectivity”, “intertextuality”, and “interculturality”. The intersubjectivity among the learners brings to the fore the multiplicity of voices, the different learners’ histories. She suggests ways to take advantage of the classroom diversity to enhance learners’ awareness of the various possible meanings. To the same extent, intertextuality stresses the interaction between a text and the reader. In other words, the meaning of a text emerges from the interaction of the text and the reader. As a result, the learners are opened to different interpretations and perceptions of the text. The sphere of interculturality recognizes the subjectivity of one’s own culture and those of other cultures.

Like Byram, she offers avenues and concrete examples as to how teachers can use a dialogic pedagogy in their language classroom. She adopts a “philosophy of conflict” where language instructors should teach along the “cultural faultline.” She argues that the language classroom is a privileged site for cross-cultural dialogue. Through dialogue, learners can contrast their own voices with others and in turn become aware of the various ways of meaning and expressing one’s thoughts. Kramsch’s model provides a
true voice to the learner, who is not viewed as a “deficient communicator” but as a speaker in his own right (p. 28). He is an informant and an ethnographer. In addition, dialogic pedagogy sets new goals for the language teacher, who is no longer the sole information provider. “Culture, conceived here as ‘linguaculture’ emerges dynamically from actual, concrete exchanges between individuals in the classroom” (p. 30). For Kramsch, teaching a foreign culture is to make explicit the boundaries of the reference frames. The objective of language learning is not to acquire values of the target cultures but a dialogic process that explores “the boundaries created by language itself in the cultural dimension of reality” (p. 225). Not only is language learning about learning other linguistic forms, it is also about “learning how to ‘mean’ in a different way”, i.e. how to organize the world in a different way. Learning about culture is a dialogic process of socialization for which students have a reflective engagement. Therefore, it is essential to contrast C1 and C2 to understand that meaning is socially and culturally constructed.

She argues that cross-cultural education should develop a third perspective “that would enable learners to take both an insider’s and an outsider’s view on C1 and C2” (p. 210). To do so, she relies on multiple disciplines such as literature, sociology, anthropology, and so forth. To enhance cross-cultural understanding, her model offers a four-step framework that she describes as follow:\ix:

- “Reconstruct the context of production and reception of the text within the foreign culture (C2, C2’).
- Construct with the foreign learners their own context of reception, i.e. find an equivalent phenomenon in C1 and construct that C1 phenomenon with its own network of meanings (C1, C1’).
- Examine the way in which C1’ and C2’ contexts in part determine C1” and C2”, i.e. the way each culture views the other.
- Lay the ground for a dialogue that could lead to change.” (p. 210).

Kramsch (1997) argues that by becoming multicultural, language learners have privileges that native speakers do not have (see section 2.1). Therefore, language learning is about the learner’s personal growth. Kramsch (1993a) calls for a learning context that can facilitate the emergence of a “third place” where multiple discourses
would be enhanced. By being aware of the boundaries, the learner discovers that each culture is not as monolithic as once perceived. “Thus, we have to view the boundary not as an actual event, but rather as a state of mind, as a positioning of the learner at the intersection of multiple social roles and individual choices” (p. 234). The third place 
emerges from the dialogic process, where the learner can create meanings of his own, “that grow at the interstices between the cultures the learner grew up with and the cultures he or she is being introduced to” (p. 236). Learning is not a cumulative acquisition of knowledge but in Kramsch’s view it is dialectic. Students create new meanings that are relevant to their lives, without losing sight of their identity. For each learner, the third place “will be differently located, and will make different sense out at different times” (p. 257). Moreover, the third place is dynamic, constantly changing. It is a very interesting concept as it acknowledges the contributions brought by learners to their learning. As in Giroux’s critical pedagogy, it places students at the center of instruction. Kramsch’s pedagogical approach produces knowledge rather than transmits it. She offers a curriculum that acknowledges diversity and multiplicity where critical thinking can be enhanced, even at a lower level of foreign language instruction.

Language learners need to go beyond a sole acquisition of the linguistic forms. As Kinginger et al. (1999) indicate, teaching language as culture is possible when “instructional setting is organized accordingly” (p. 854). Therefore, a change of content requires a change in the curriculum. The two cross-cultural models described above emphasize that learning a culture is a process and not an accumulation of knowledge. They reflect the dynamic nature of culture. Through contrastive technique, the models encourage the students to become aware of various frames of reference. They develop the students’ abilities to observe, discover, analyze and interpret the differences and similarities between (and within) their own culture and the target culture (Arens, 1991; Byram, 1989, 1997; Kinginger, 1995; Kramsch, 1993a; Lange, 1998). They imply a reflection of the target culture(s) as well as of the learners’ native culture(s). They enhance the students’ critical thinking skills. Through dialogue, language instruction provides a place for students to develop new ways of meaning that are salient to their
lives. It not only takes into consideration their identity and social constructions but also their agency (i.e. how they contribute to their own learning).

2.3.3. Researching Language as a Social Practice

When language learning is reconceptualized as a social practice, research must follow suit and must focus on language use. Indeed, meaning does not reside in its linguistic form but emerges from dialogue. “Language meaning is located in the dialogic relationship between the historical and the present, between the social and the individual” (Hall, 2002, p. 12). The research methodology needs to account for the cultural and social dimensions of language learning. In the first section of this chapter, the limitations of the positivistic approach to language learning were discussed. In recent years, many researchers have called for a new approach to research and look for new ways to address language learning as a social phenomenon (Breen, 1996; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kinginger, 1997; Lantolf, 1996; McGroarty, 1998; Thorne, 2000). As Breen (1996) states, the context in which learning occurs impacts the learning process. For example, he claims that the classroom context brings “particular opportunities and specific constraints” (p. 84). He further argues that research that focus on the learning and use of language brings insightful perspective on language as a social and cultural construct and on the participation in the learning activity as a social action (Breen, 1996, p. 93). Because culture learning is an inquiry, a research methodology that will describe the process as it unfolds will offer holistic insights to the activity of learning.

If we consider language learning as a social practice, language learners are not language processors but “negotiators, principally of course of meanings, but also of pathways, of stance and of identities” (Candlin & Sarangi, 2002, p. xi). The research needs to consider learners as social human beings with human agency, actively engaged in how they construct their own learning (Breen, 1996, 2001; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2000). For example, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) show how human agency determines the students’ investment in their learning. They point out that some learners
choose to not fully participate in the community of practice for reasons that are linked to the learners’ histories. They recount Blender’s (1997) case study of Americans studying in Russia who express very negative and hostile attitudes towards Russia. The authors argue that “Blender represent a case of people resisting access to a community of practice by intentionally and aggressively remaining on the periphery” (p. 151). They point out that the American students did not feel the need to integrate since they were planning on going back home. In contrast, they report that a Russian-English bilingual found successful ways to participate in the American community of practice in which he lived even though he encountered resistance from the community. The bilingual immigrated to the United States at the age of thirteen. The authors indicate that the student “was risking his entire life if he could not find a way of accessing the new community” (p. 151). His need to integrate compelled him to be persistent in finding ways to negotiate access.

Norton’s (2001) research provides another example of how the learner’s agency impacts their approach to learning. She demonstrates how her two subjects’ non-participation (withdrawal from a language class) was very much linked to their histories (i.e. how they had imagined their community of practice). For example, Katarina was a teacher in Poland and hoped to meet “like-minded” professionals (i.e. teachers, doctors, etc). She left the ESL class after her teacher had discouraged her to take a computer class, which Katarina viewed as a way to deny access to her imagined community (i.e. the teacher positioned Katarina as an “immigrant” and dismissed her professional history). Norton interprets Katarina’s non-participation as “an act of resistance from a position of marginality” (p. 165). She indicates that each learner creates his or her own community of practice and in so doing create an “imagined identity” as a speaker of another language. She argues that the imagined communities orient learners’ investment in the learning. These examples demonstrate that it is essential to take into consideration the learner’s agency in language learning.

If learning another language is to mean in a different way, it is intrinsically linked to learners’ identities (Hall, 2002; McGroarty, 1998; Norton, 2000; Norton Pierce, 1995). For Norton (2000), identity is “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed over time and space, and how the person
understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). As individuals, language learners have social histories. Norton Pierce (1995) argues the learner’s investment in learning is linked to the learner’s identity. She takes the example of Martina who is a Canadian immigrant from Czechoslovakia and argues that Martina’s investment in English is structured “by an identity as a primary care giver of the family” (p. 21). It is important for Martina to learn English in order to take care of her family. Even though, she feels uncomfortable speaking English, she takes great risks and perseveres with speaking English. Norton underscores that Martina resists the “subject position immigrant woman in favor of the subject position mother” (p. 23). In so doing, Martina claims the right to speak. Identities are not static but are socially constructed and are subject to change over time. Language learning shapes learners’ identities in specific ways (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2000; Norton, 1995, 2000). Relying on autobiographies, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2000) examine how the adult learners of a second language reconstruct new identities while learning a second language. The authors analyze first-person narratives of late bilinguals who learned their second language as adults, after immigrating to the country. The acquisition of a new language corresponds to the formation of new meanings, which force the learners to reconstruct a sense of who they are (i.e. a “self”). The researchers demonstrate that “participation (…) is not just about taking part in new cultural settings; it is about a profound struggle to reconstruct a self” (p. 174). Norton’s (2000) study is another illustration of how immigrant women in Canada construct, through their interaction with the community of practice, their identities differently. Identities are dynamic and emerge from the dialogic context. Research needs to consider the individual factors as constantly renegotiated during the language learning process.

Sociocultural theory (SCT) proposes ways to investigate language learning as a process and to look at the learners’ development. It offers insightful perspectives on learning by exploring the history of human beings and by analyzing “the activities through which they transform their worlds and are in turn transformed by their worlds” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 144). Through a historical and hermeneutic approach, the theory not only describes but also explains complex phenomena. It is interested in what
is unique and different. In addition, it considers learners in a more holistic perspective than SLA, by exploring the historical and sociocultural dimensions of learning.

### 2.4. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory derives from the work of L.S. Vygotsky (1896-1934), a Russian psychologist and psycholinguist. SCT is a cognitive theory whose objective is to understand how the human mind is formed and how it functions. It differs from other cognitive theories in that it considers the social milieu as the driving force to cognitive development. In so doing, the theory links the social and the cognitive. Furthermore, Vygotsky does not view development as an evolutionary process (i.e. the stages of development are not predetermined, waiting for maturation) but as “revolutionary” processes where change plays an essential role. Influenced by Marx, he argues that the individual changes nature and in so doing transforms himself or herself (Vygotsky, 1978). For him, all phenomena must be studied in motion and in change as well as in their natural environment (not in experimental laboratories). As John-Steiner and Souberman (1978) indicate “[Vygostky’s] effort in charting developmental change is in part, to show the psychological implications of the fact that humans are active, vigorous participants in their own means by which they can competently affect their world and themselves” (p. 123).

#### 2.4.1. The Mediated Mind

The fundamental aspect of SCT is that human consciousness is mediated. Vygotsky defines human consciousness by all the higher mental functions, including logical memory, voluntary attention, conceptual thought, planning, perceptions, problem solving, learning, etc. He argues that human beings mediate their relation to the world through the use of physical and symbolic tools. Humans need to not only adapt to nature, but also control it. To fulfill such a need, they create tools that help them shape the world
according to their own motives and goals. These tools are culturally embedded because they are collaboratively created under specific historical and cultural conditions, as an aid to solve problems. By creating tools, humans establish new conditions for themselves, and ultimately change themselves. For example, the creation of computers provides ways for processing large amounts of data rapidly. It also gives rise to new activities, such as computer programming. In addition, it offers new ways to conceptualize the world: the computer metaphor used to describe the brain of the language learner was quite impossible a century ago.

In addition to physical tools (or technical tools), Vygotsky analyzes how symbolic tools or “psychological tools” mediate cognition. Symbolic tools are for example algebraic symbols, diagrams, and most importantly language. He claims that as mechanical tools help humans manipulate their environment; psychological tools “serve not only to control and organize the social world and to mediate the interpersonal activity but also to control and organize the psychological world and to mediate intrapersonal cognitive activity” (Ahmed, 1994, p. 158). Before being passed on to the next generation, tools are modified in order to serve needs of the communities and the individuals. For example, computers are much more practical and effective than say twenty years ago. Language is also constantly modified to serve human communicative and psychological needs.

To explain mediation, Lantolf (1994) provides the example of someone who tries to remember what to buy at the grocery store. The person can either memorize what to buy through repeated rehearsal or can mediate his or her activity by creating a shopping list (using a piece of paper and a pen). He notes that the two activities entail the use of language as a mediational tool. However, “in the first instance, the person establishes a more direct link between the items and their memory trace; while in the second case, the person creates an even more powerful auxiliary link by generating a shopping list, which greatly eases the mental strain of trying to imprint the items into one’s memory” (p. 418-419). The major difference between physical and psychological tools is the way they orient human behavior: physical tools are externally directed toward objects (material
world), whereas psychological tools are internally oriented toward subjects (the individuals), “aimed at mastering oneself” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55).

2.4.2. Genetic Approach

For Vygotsky, the only adequate approach for understanding and explaining how social and human activity is organized through co-constructed cultural artifacts (or tools) is to look at its formation over time. The approach is historical in nature (“genotypic”-Vygotsky, 1978, p. 62).

We need to understand its origin. It follows, then, that we need to concentrate not on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are established. (...) To study something historically means to study it in the process of change; that is the dialectical method’s basic demand. To encompass in research the process of a given thing’s development in all its phases and changes- from birth to death- fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for ‘it is only in movement that a body shows what it is.’ Thus, the historical study of behavior is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather form its very base. (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 64-65)

Vygotsky argues that several perspectives are needed to explain the general development of the mind. He stresses that various domains inform different types of development, “each governed by its unique set of explanatory principles” (Wertsch, 1985b, p. 41). He therefore proposes four genetic domains for understanding the formation of higher mental functions:

*Phylogenesis* is the investigation of how human mental functions came to be, distinguishing the human from other animals, such as apes. Vygotsky argues that labor and the emergence of speech are key in the distinction between humans and animals.

*Sociocultural history* looks at how the emergence and use of symbolic tools, which are constructed by human cultures (i.e. culturally embedded) in the course of their histories, change these cultures. It views mediation as an explanatory principle to analyze the development of decontextualization forms of mediational means. One example that is often used is calculation. Before the emergence of a numeric system, calculation is heavily dependent on the context, “that is, counting relies on the
perception of concrete objects and settings” (Wertsch, 1985b, p. 33). The emergence of a numeric system, however, allows for a decontextualized mediational means, where it becomes possible to abstractly talk about two or three without referring to a specific object (as in “one and one equals two”).

*Ontogenesis* discusses the social origins of higher mental functions (“the child’s cultural development” - Vygotsky, 1981b). A large amount of Vygotsky’s research focused on this particular domain. Vygotsky notes that the child’s development is not limited to this sole genetic domain, rather ontogenesis is part of a larger picture that encompasses several genetic domains. The ontogenetic approach looks at how children appropriate mediational means (mainly language) into their thinking. In other words, it explains how children gain control over complex mental functions. Vygotsky argues that language and thinking have social origins, that is to say the higher mental functions emerge from the collective life. He was careful, however, not to limit his approach to either psychological or sociological reductionism (Wertsch, 1985b). Rather, his approach links interpsychological with intrapsychological functions and suggests the mechanism by which culture becomes a part of a person’s nature through socialization (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981b). For Vygotsky, the child’s cultural development (i.e. the formation of consciousness) appears twice or on two planes. First, it occurs on an *intermental plane*, where higher functions of the human mind develop through interaction: “concepts and conceptual thinking are formed during the dialogic interactions that occur between children and adult (or older child) members of a culture” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 10). Children carry out a variety of culturally embedded tasks (e.g. play) with the guidance of other people (parent, older siblings, etc.). This guidance (or mediation) is done through the use of language. At the very early stage, the child is *object-regulated*. For example, in order to place the right geometrical form into the matching geometrical hole, the parent directs the child by telling him or her what to do and how to do it. The child, however, is not aware of the goal of the task (i.e. to match the geometrical forms). Over time, the child gain increased responsibility where he can carry out a task with linguistically mediated assistance; the child is *other-regulated*. For example, the parent gives the child strategies to complete a puzzle (look at the picture model and
look for the matching piece). The strategic thinking is exclusively done by the adult. Through appropriation of strategic functioning, the *intramental plane* is being formed and the child becomes *self-regulated*. The child is able to function independently of other’s guidance. Therefore, patterns that have been performed on the intermental plane are now performed on the intramental plane. “As children participate in these collaborative interactions, they appropriate for themselves the patterns of planning, attending, thinking, remembering, etc. that the culture through its representatives values” (Lantolf, 1994, p. 419). Ultimately, consciousness is the product of the society: “Culture is the product of social life and human social activity” (Vygotsky, 1981b, p. 164). Vygotsky (1981b) makes clear however that the internalization of higher mental functions (or “general law of cultural development”) is not a mere transfer from the intermental plane to the intramental plane; “internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions” (p. 163). The role of language in the development is crucial because of its mediating function through the development process.

*Microgenesis* looks at changes in mental functioning that occur over an extreme short amount of time (a semester, a few weeks or a few days). As Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995) stress, learning a foreign language “encompasses the dialectic interaction of two ways of creating meaning in the world (interpersonally and intrapersonally) (…)” (p. 110). To observe and explain the acquisition of a foreign language, a microgenetic analysis is often adopted. What language learning is about then is not the formation but rather the reformation (or reorganization) of mediational means. Lantolf and Pavlenko’s (2000) example mentioned above (section 2.3.3) demonstrate how learning a new language leads to the reformation of cognition, even of the “self”. The authors illustrate how, through the appropriation of another mediational mean (the foreign language), the bilinguals created “new ways to mean (i.e. make sense of their experiences and of who they [were]). Without this restructuring, these individuals would remain on the margins of the new community in which they reside (but not live)” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2000, p. 172). This doctoral research will look at how learning about language and culture leads to the reformation of concepts.
As it has just been discussed, by helping the child participates in goal-oriented activities, the adults construct the child’s world in specific ways, in accordance to their culture. The appropriation of tools (physical and psychological), shapes the way people think and act. Consequently, the way concepts are framed varies from one culture to another. For SCT, language plays a crucial role in the formation of thought. SCT is interested in what happens when learners are confronted to another lexicon? Do concepts overlap? If not, what types of changes does the learning of another language bring? By theorizing language and culture, SCT offers an interesting analytical framework for this research. It explains how language learners are shaped by their way of thinking and how learning about a new culture can lead to the reconceptualization and reformation of higher mental functions. From a Vygotskian perspective, learning is a process and needs to be observed as such. When, the reformation of concepts is completed, there is not much to observe. SCT provides ways to explain changes because it looks at the process as it unfolds.

Unlike what SLA assumes, learning a second language is, for Vygotsky, the opposite process of L1 acquisition. Indeed, children learn their first language in a non-reflective manner: they are not able to conjugate a verb if asked to do so but are able to use the verb in its proper conjugated forms when they communicate. By learning grammar at school, language becomes visible (an object of study). Vygotsky views schooling as gaining scientific knowledge. When our everyday concepts (e.g. the sun rises and sets) meet scientific concepts (e.g. the earth rotates on itself and around the sun), we are forced to reorganize our everyday concepts. Vygotsky argues that schooling is a crucial step in which the non-reflective becomes reflective. He considers this change a cognitive growth. Internalizing other cultural artifacts (L2) forces one to acknowledge his or her way of thinking and ultimately enhances his or her repertoire for thinking. Schooling is essential for Vygotsky because it provides access to development. Becoming aware (conscious awareness<sup>xiv</sup>) is a key step for development because it allows the individual to gain control over what s/he knows<sup>xv</sup>. Development is a dynamic process, it corresponds to revolutionary shifts: “development, as often happens, proceeds
here not in a circle but in a spiral, passing through the same point at each new revolution while advancing to a higher level” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 56).

For Vygotsky, the unit of analysis is the word (the linguistic sign) because it keeps the dialectic unity between speaking and thinking. “To break the dialectic unity between speech and thought is to forego any possibility of understanding human mental capacities, much in the same way, as Vygotsky observed, that independent analysis of oxygen and hydrogen fails to generate an explanation of water’s capacity to extinguish fire” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 7). Vygotsky distinguishes between the meaning of a word (i.e. a static definition as in what dictionaries provide) and the sense of a word (fluid and unstable as it emerges from particular ways people use words). For him, the sense is what matters. Vygostky’s unit of analysis has however been controversial among scholars. Wertsch (1985b) argues for tool mediated goal directed action as the unit of analysis because it respects the dynamic intermental and intramental organization and function of the mind. It provides explanatory principles for the activity. Rooted in the work of Vygotsky, the goal of activity theory, which is part of SCT, is to understand how mediated minds are formed and how they function.

2.4.3. Activity Theory

Vygotsky laid the foundations of activity theory but it came to be with the work of Leont’ev. For Vygotsky, mental human behavior comes from the integration of social and cultural artifacts into the human activity. In other words, cognition formation consists of gaining control of our cultural artifacts. As previously mentioned, internalization is not a mere copy of the activity that was carried out; the activity is transformed as the mediation becomes internal. Thus, human’s agency needs to be taken into consideration (see below). To understand the mind, Vygotsky and his colleagues argue that it needs to be studied through its history (i.e. through its formation process) and its activity (its function). Vygotsky insists that any analysis must be carried in its natural environment.
The theory considers humans as active beings, where humans bring change to their environment through the activity. Activity is not a passive action, but is motivated by a need: “There can be no activity without a motive” (Leont’ev, 1981b, p. 59). To explain activity theory, Leont’ev presents three levels:

The highest level is the activity. The activity emerges from a need, which can be biological (e.g. hunger) or cultural (e.g. participate in a new culture). The need only becomes a motive when it is directed toward a specific object. In other words, hunger only becomes a motive when people start to look for food or make a meal; participating in a new culture becomes a motive when for example, one decides to learn a foreign language. Motives are culturally constructed (e.g. being literate is more or less important depending on the culture). Culturally motivated activities include work, play, education, accumulation of wealth, etc.

The second level is the action, which is directed toward a goal. The action needs to be directed toward an object or it is devoid of meaning. It regulates the activity and can segment it into different subgoals. To participate in another culture, one needs to learn a language, plan to go abroad, which in turn may require the individual to obtain a job in order to save enough money, etc. In a sense these subgoals represent “anticipatory reflection” and allow one to compare and evaluate the activity before it is completed. It is important to note that any action can in fact imply various activities. For example, learning a foreign language may have different meaning (e.g. to participate in another culture, to pass a language requirement, or to become a diplomat). In addition the goal is not necessarily stable: “Individuals, as agents active in creating their world, can modify, postpone, or even abandon goals all together” (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 19).

The action is carried out under specific conditions. The third level is thus the level of operations, which establish the instrumental conditions through which an activity is carried out. The same goal can be achieved through different circumstances and conditions. You can learn a language by immersion or you can learn it by attending classes in your town.
Most of SLA research focuses primarily on what the individual is doing with the language, which does not offer an in-depth picture of the learning process. Activity theory, however, adopts a more holistic approach through the integration of several dimensions. Relying on Burke’s pentad, Wertsch (1998) claims that to understand human social and psychological behavior, five questions need to be answered: who (the individual), what the individual is doing, how the person is acting, where the person is acting, and why the person is acting that way (motive). In addition, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) argue that when also needs to be considered, since, as Coughlan and Duff’s (1994) research shows, tasks can be carried out in a different manner at two different points in time. Ultimately, looking at the activity as it is being carried out, offers ways to describe and explain the learning process, in its history.

From the perspective of activity theory, learning a foreign language is a more complex activity than learning linguistic forms. The activity of learning a language is situated, it is grounded in a social, historical, cultural context. The students’ motives to learn a foreign language depend on their histories, and motives are diverse: to fulfill a language requirement or to be proficient enough for a diplomatic position. Furthermore, motive is historically and socially constructed: the students’ motives to learn a language stress for example the prestige placed on learning a foreign language. Note, however, that the motive is not necessarily stable and may change over time. The activity of learning is also mediated by the conditions under which it is carried out. First, the learner is a social being whose behavior is socially and culturally constructed (e.g. he will behave according to s/he thinks constitute classroom learning). Second, the activity involves other individuals: the learner’s peers, the teacher, the community of practice, etc. It is often assumed that students’ goal to learn a language is identical for all students. Activity theory, however, provides ways to investigate what learning another language or learning another culture entails for individual students. It considers “the significance languages and language study have for the individuals in their lives as humans.” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 146). Because students have different histories, they have different motives to learn a language. Consequently, the quality of students’ engagement (i.e. their agency) in their learning is intimately linked to their motives. Lantolf and Pavlenko
(2001) stress that agency is not a property held by learners but “it is a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large” (p. 148). Through activity theory, it is possible to observe and explain how learners employ their agency. Researchers should not assume that students learn and develop in the same manner (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). The research presented here will therefore investigate what is unique and different in the participants’ learning. I will now turn to research and discuss the implications of activity theory for second language learning.

2.4.4. Activity Theory and Second Language Learning

In this section, I will present a few research projects that adopt activity theory to investigate language learning, to show how activity theory brings new insights for language development. This approach offers a more complex and nuanced picture than standard research practices, allowing the researcher to not only describe but also explain the various phenomena.

Coughlan & Duff’s (1994) article investigates a task-based performance from the activity theory perspective. Tasks are usually viewed as a constant in research (i.e. “scientifically controllable and measurable”, p. 174). Researchers use experimental tasks to elicit specific linguistic features (e.g. a set of pictures to elicit narratives and past tenses). The choice of a task depends on the research objective. The authors differentiate a task from an activity:

Unlike a task, an activity has no set of objectives in and of itself- rather participants have their own objectives, and act according to these and the researcher’s objectives, all of which are negotiated (either implicitly or explicitly) over the course of the interaction. (p. 175).

The task chosen is the description of a picture. The authors demonstrate that tasks are in fact quite variable. First, they conclude that different people react to the same task differently. For one student, the description task drifts to a dialogue between the subject and the interviewer. Another student interprets the task as “an exercise of visual acuity”, whereas a third one provides a context for the picture (for the participant, it takes place in
California where they are shooting a film). With their research, Coughlan and Duff underscore that learners are active agents who are able to direct the activities in specific ways, according to their own objectives (e.g. interact with the interviewer, make the task more interesting by bringing personal experience, etc). Second, they point out that the same student can react to the same task differently at different times, performing less fluently than the first time. The authors then question the constant nature of the task. The activity becomes unique for each learner because it emerges from the interaction between the speakers and the interviewer, the setting, the subjects’ motivations and histories. Therefore, it cannot be separated from its sociocultural context, from which it is co-constructed.

Gillette (1994) focuses on the learners’ agency in the activity of learning a foreign language. She investigates individual differences in L2 achievement, not based on quantifiable measurements but by elaborating a more complete picture of the learning process. She relies on multiple sources of data (language learning histories, language learning diaries, and class notes) to show that the learning outcomes is very much linked to the students’ motives. Not only does she analyze how students go about learning the language (diaries and class notes), she also provides, through their language learning histories, explanations as to what determine their strategic approach to language learning. To be more specific, learners’ language learning histories show that students’ motives to learn the language differ greatly: some wish to acquire as much French as possible whereas others simply need to fulfill a language requirement. Their motives are socially and historically constructed. The effective learners value languages and find learning a language “useful and desirable”. The less-effective learners, on the other hand, see no value in learning a foreign language and find the requirement “useless”. The author also indicates that the use value students ascribe to languages derives from students’ exposure to the world: the effective learners traveled extensively, which was not the case for the less-effective learners. In turn, students’ motives determine learners’ strategic approach to learning. The effective students’ degree of involvement is rather high: They complete homework days ahead and “profess a ‘learning by doing’ philosophy”. The ineffective students have a hard time motivating themselves, complete assignments at the last minute.
and limit their efforts to obtain an acceptable grade. Finally, she illustrates how effective students focus on functional activity, whereas ineffective students rely heavily on translation. In fact, strategies employed by ineffective students show that their objective is only to get by, not to learn the language. There is a clear lack of involvement in the learning activity. Consequently, learning a foreign language is intimately linked to students’ personal goal, to what they value. The motive, which is socially and historically constructed, helps to understand and explain success in L2 acquisition.

Parks’ (2000) research supports most of Gillette’s conclusions. The author explores the investment of three students in producing a short documentary-style video in English (ESL). The case study involves three students from Quebec, majoring in tourism. The three francophone participants, Annie, Julie and Stéphanie, highly value the learning of English. However, differences in the task completion emerge due to the value attached to classroom learning, task preference and attitude toward group work. Annie believes that learning English is important but she does not think she can learn from a classroom environment. For her, “true” L2 competence can only take place outside the class, with native speakers of English. She does not view the video project as a learning experience. Therefore, she deploys strategies to “get the job done.” For Julie, the video project is a means to present an image of herself as an English speaker as she would like to be seen. She greatly values the project and strongly believes it has great learning potentials. Her attitude toward the project is also reflected in the extensive effort she puts into creating the video. The last participant, Stéphanie, is an older French student. Like Julie, she has positive orientations toward the learning of English and the video project. However, she dislikes the group work that the project involves. Therefore, she deploys strategies to resist collaborative work. Parks concludes that to understand how participants engage in the activity “requires a foregrounding of personal histories and a consideration of the setting where [the activity] takes place” (p. 77). Annie’s negative orientation to classroom learning derives from her years spent in language classes from which she was unable to develop a sense of being able to speak English. However, her immersion experience in the western part of Canada gave her great confidence in her ability to communicate in English. Stéphanie’s strategies of resistance derive from her
past experience in France where schooling emphasizes individual work. She does not believe that she can learn from others. To conclude, Parks’ case study illustrates that the language learner is a complex social being. In addition, it stresses the complexity of the activity, taking into account that language learning is situated and derives from learners’ histories.

The last case study I would like to present is Lantolf and Genung’s (2002) analysis of a P.’s failed attempt to learn Chinese. The authors primarily focus on the notion of power that arises from the learning context and “appeared to conspire against her best efforts to learn the language” (p. 175). Indeed, the classroom activities are mainly controlled by the instructors and are mostly based on the completion of pattern drills. The way the class is conducted clashes with P.’s expectations. In addition, the student reports difficulties in coping with certain class practices such as greeting the instructors with “Good morning Old Master”. She indicates that the learning atmosphere in class is rather hostile. First, P. resists and challenges what she considers abusive power but then submits to it. In so doing, she is able to obtain an acceptable grade and fulfill her language requirement. The authors point out that she emerged “from the experience as a successful student, albeit not as a successful language learner” (p. 175). The authors argue that there is a change of motive, which arises from her desire to obtain her Ph.D. in linguistics. Her objective is no longer to converse and read Chinese but to fulfill the language requirement of the program. Her learning strategies are therefore to take on “the behavior of a dutiful and compliant student” (p. 189). The research highlights how ineffective learning is also socially embedded. It demonstrates the dynamic nature of motives and goals, which are reshaped according to “specific historical material circumstances” (p. 191). A motive is not a property possessed by the language learner. The authors conclude that communities and activities “are characterized by shifting motives, goals, and rule of behavior and they normally entail struggle and conflict, including contestation of power, how it is deployed and potentially challenged” (p. 193).
2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how SLA research omits the sociocultural dimensions of language learning. Distinctly separate from language, mainstream SLA conceives the cultural dimension of language and the social dimension of language learning irrelevant to the acquisition of a foreign language. The teaching of culture has also been problematic. Considered as a fifth skill, the teaching of culture is too often incidental. If the rationale of a language requirement is indeed to increase students’ cultural awareness, culture needs to be at the core of the language curriculum. The teaching of culture needs to be made explicit. In addition, it is essential to consider language as a social practice, to reflect the inextricable relationship of language and culture and shed light on the social dimensions of language learning. I described in detail two theoretical frameworks that propose a cross-cultural curriculum for language teaching. Learning is a complex phenomenon that is socially and culturally constructed. It needs to be explored through a holistic approach to describe and explain the activity of learning as it unfolds. I argued that sociocultural theory offers avenues to explore language learning that are particularly interesting. It views foreign language learning as a process that is mediated. Through activity theory, the researcher can provide an in-depth picture of the learning process. Since any activity is motivated, the theoretical framework examines the learners’ agencies and the contributions students bring to their learning. It regards the learner as a complex social being. It offers a voice to students. It is that particular voice that I choose to explore further in the next chapters.

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\[text{In his article entitled “Culture, culture and “culture” in Foreign Language Teaching”, Shanahan (1998) also offers an interesting definition of Culture: “the best that has been thought and said in the world” (p. 452).} \]

\[text{The communicative competence is defined as “the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning involving interaction between two or more persons belonging to the same (or different) community (communities), or between one person and a written or oral text”, and is composed of four components: grammatical, discourse, strategic and sociolinguistic (Savignon, 1997, p. 273 & p. 49).} \]

\[text{Cameron (2002) argues that “effective communication” often “involves promoting particular interactional norms, genres, and speech-styles across languages.” These particular genres and styles are imposed as the norm for what is “acceptable and desirable” in effective communication (p. 69). She demonstrates that on the surface, there are many languages but the push for effective communication neutralizes the potential cultural threat, calling for “unity in diversity”. She shows that “the ideal of ‘good’} \]
or ‘effective’ communication bears a non-coincidental resemblance to the preferred speech-habits of educated middle-class and predominantly white people brought up in the USA” (p. 70).

Kramsch (1991) indicates that in 1989 the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) suggested to add cultural proficiency (i.e. sociolinguistic skills of communication, areas of knowledge, and certain informed attitudes) to the ACTFL guidelines. However, cultural performance as defined by the AATF was based on the acquisition of cultural information (i.e. the knowledge of cultural facts such as “name political parties in France” or “identify a literary or a journalistic text”) rather than on the learner’s cultural understanding of the target culture (see discussion in Kramsch, 1991, pp. 229-230). See also the discussion on the AATF’s standards for cross-cultural competence (p. 18 in this chapter).

In fact, the United States does not have a national curriculum that articulates common goals and assessment in education.

Davis (1997) discusses the implementation of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning through its historical and political dimensions.

The speech community is defined by Spolsky (1998) as “a complex interlocking network of communication whose members share knowledge about and attitudes towards the language use patterns of others as well as themselves. There is no theoretical limitation on the location and size of a speech community, which is in practice defined by its sharing a set of language varieties (its repertoire) and a set of norms for using them.” (p. 25).

SiSwati is the national language of Swaziland, a variety of Zulu.

C1’ = C1 perception of self; C1” = C1 perception of others; C2’ = C2 perception of self; C2” = C2 perception of others (Kramsch, 1993, p. 210).

Vygotsky indicates that biological factors constitute the prerequisites for higher mental functions to emerge but highlights that it is “our cultural history and not our biology that endows us with uniquely human ways of thinking.” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 143).

Self-regulation does not correspond to the end of development (Engeström, 1999).

Culture here refers to higher mental functions.

Engeström (1999) notes that internalization remains the focus of research even though Vygotsky and his colleagues were interested in externalization (i.e. how children created artifacts to facilitate their performance).

Conscious awareness differs from awareness: Awareness is being aware that you are doing something, whereas conscious awareness is being aware of HOW something is done.

Development occurs even if children are not aware of what they are doing and how they are doing it. However, Vygotsky claims that the most powerful type of development is through conscious awareness because it leads to the most abstract ways of thinking.

For Engeström, Miettinen and Punamäki (1999), Wertsch’s unit of analysis, mediated action, is problematic. The authors argue that Wertsch distance himself from the ideas of historicity and more specifically from the collective nature of human activity. They further claim “Individuals act in collective practices, communities, and institutions. Such collective practices are not reducible to sums of individual action; they require theoretical conceptualization in their own right” (p. 11).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of a reflective approach to language and culture by four American undergraduate students enrolled in a third semester French class. The study explores the impact intercultural education has on the four participants, examining how students negotiate new cultural concepts and in what specific ways students are able to discover, observe, analyze, and remain critical toward another culture and their own culture(s). In order to understand the process in which students become aware (if so) of various reference frames, it is essential to document actual classroom practices. The research questions are:

1. Which cultural concepts are presented in class and how are they presented?
2. How do participants talk about culture and how does the students’ learning process unfold?
   a. How do they negotiate new cultural concepts?
   b. What changes occur over time in the way students use and talk about cultural constructs?
   c. Which mediational means are significant in effecting these changes (e.g. Dialogue with the instructor? Dialogues with their keypals? Access to texts or other sources of information?)?
3. Is there a third place for students? If so, how do students define their third place?

3.1. Genetic Inquiry

Davis (1995) explains that theory and method are interwoven in the way research is conducted: “Studies are both informed by and inform theory in the process of conceptualizing, analyzing and interpreting research” (p. 436). As argued in the previous chapter (see chapter 2), learning a foreign language is a complex process of
transformation that is grounded in a social, cultural and historical context. From a Vygotskyan perspective, development is revolutionary, that is, what needs to be investigated is the process of change, not the product of development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 64). Vygotsky (1978) insists that the only appropriate approach for understanding how social and human activity is organized is to look at its formation over time. Looking at the activity of learning as it is being carried out offers ways not only to describe but also to explain the learning process, in its history. Therefore, the study presented here adopts a developmental (genetic) methodology to shed light on the dynamic nature of the transformation process that is language learning (Lantolf & Genung, 2002).

As I pointed out previously, it is often assumed that the students’ learning goals are similar across students (i.e. to learn the language) because many research studies in the field of second language acquisition leave out the learners’ contributions to his or her development. However, learners have different histories and therefore have different motives to learn a language, which lead them to deploy various strategies to reach their goals. This research is interested in how the learner contributes to his or her own learning and documents what is unique about each participant’s development. The research, therefore, attempts to achieve an emic perspective.

The very nature of the research questions demands a qualitative design for several reasons. First, the study is an inquiry whose goal is to explore the complex cultural dimensions of foreign language learning, drawing on multiple sources of information. Second, the genetic approach investigates students’ developmental processes and the notion of change, emphasizing the history of the learning process. It is consequently essential to obtain detailed data over the course of a full semester. Third, this study will be primarily taking an emic perspective, providing a voice to the students and documenting what it means for them to learn about another culture. Using a variety of empirical materials (see below), qualitative research aims “to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Lazarton, 2003, p. 2).
3.1.1. The Case Study

The ultimate goal of this study is to provide an in-depth description of the students’ development. I rely on four case studies to describe in a holistic manner the individual’s learning process and to reflect on what is unique in each learner’s development.

According to Creswell (1998), “A case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context.” (p. 61). Defined in terms of the unit of analysis, a case study “focuses attention on a single entity, usually as it exists in its naturally occurring environment (Johnson, 1992, p. 75). “The purpose is to understand the complexity and dynamic nature of the particular entity” (Johnson, 1992, p. 84). As Yin (1994) indicates, the case study is “a comprehensive research strategy” (p. 14), which relies on multiple perspectives and sources of information that need to converge in a triangulation. Triangulation is a very important feature of qualitative research since it ensures research credibility (Davis, 1995).

To document the reflective approach to language and culture and explore the meanings of the learning experiences, I chose to study the cases of four participants, Julie, Mary, Lucy and David. The research focuses on the participants’ perspectives of their own learning. The outcome will derive from a variety of sources (see section 3.3.1), collected in the course of one semester (the third semester of their language requirement). This time frame derives from the institutional constraints at the university level.

Because any activity is socially and culturally grounded, it is absolutely essential to take into consideration the context in which the learning process takes place. For activity theory, any analysis of human activity must “be carried out in its natural environment, which encompasses natural and culturally constructed objects or artifacts, abstract objects or ideas, as well as the world of other human beings, that is, the sociocultural world” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 144). The activity of learning needs to be explained “as part of the active participation in the everyday world” (Lantolf &
3.2. The Context

3.2.1. The Curriculum

The study was conducted in a large research university in the northeast of the United States that requires three semesters (twelve credits) of language study: French 1, 2 and 3. The French course that I observed is the last semester of the requirement (i.e. French 3). Most students at the university choose to stop their language learning after the completion of their requirements. There is, therefore, a significant drop in the enrollment for the next levels (French 201- readings and conversation and French 202- reading and writing).

To be admitted to the university, the students are expected to have completed at least two years of language study at the post-secondary level. Students have the choice between continuing with the same language and starting a new language. Since there is no placement test for French, students’ level is determined by the number of years they have studied the language in high school. The students involved in the study either had previous language instruction at the university level or had completed three or four years of language study in high school.

3.2.2. The classroom design

The class observed for this study was designed according to Freinet pedagogy. Célestin Freinet (1896-1966) was a French pedagogue who founded the *Ecole Moderne* in the 1920s in order to move away from a traditional and quite authoritative way of teaching (Lee & Sivell, 2000; Meirieu, 2001). His philosophical and pedagogical choices
are strongly influenced by Marxism. The main objective of the Freinet pedagogy is to create meaning for the learners: “motiver en proposant des tâches capables de mobiliser l’intérêt et l’énergie des élèves” (Meirieu, 2001, p. 14). The Freinet pedagogy is not a methodology with specific techniques but a collaborative approach based on innovative ways of thinking and teaching. Freinet pedagogy may be used at all levels but its principles were first conceived for primary schools as Célestin Freinet was an elementary school teacher in rural France.

The core aspect of the *Ecole Moderne* is “a child-centered, social-activist education movement” (Lee & Sivell, 2000, p. 2). Education is not a mere acquisition of knowledge but an encouragement to develop the mind (Meirieu, 2001, p. 25). The teacher is “no longer a dispenser of knowledge to be passively ingested but a facilitator and guide, encouraging the students to become autonomous learners and at the same time to work cooperatively by assisting their classmates” (Lee & Sivell, 2000 p. 3). In Freinet pedagogy, the teacher and the students are part of a community where each member has responsibilities as well as rights. “As social beings, children -like adults- will find their greatest satisfaction through participation in the life of a community, which implies responsibilities as well as rights” (Lee & Sivell, 2000, p. 34). Therefore the class teaches students how to be responsible citizens. As stated in the class syllabus (see Appendix A), the instructor is not the sole person responsible for organizing class activities: “As part of your participation, you will be required to take roles or “jobs”(*responsabilités, métiers*) to facilitate our life as a community” (Appendix A). For example, each week, there is a new class President and one student is in charge of the music (each class period starts with a musical excerpt). If special activities are planned, the students are responsible for organizing the activity.

“Tools” or “*outils*” are resources or techniques available to teachers and students. They are crucial in Freinet pedagogy as they are the very sense of Freinet collaborative approach and offer encouragement and direction in the learning process (Lee & Sivell, 2000, p. 40). Lee and Sivell (2000) note that the objectives of the multifunctional tools are to:
• arouse interest in an activity (by raising the topic or by providing guidance on how to approach it);
• help guide research and concerted effort (for example, teachers using the Freinet approach have been creating a data base for pedagogical tools);
• help integration and extension, by practice or transfer to new applications (for example, students can write journals that are not a mere writing activity but become a published public document);
• enhance communication (for example: WWW publishing, weekly contacts with students’ keypals);
• organize and evaluate learning (individual and collective work);
• be used for manual work of various sorts;
• govern the classroom community; (p. 41)

As Lee and Sivell emphasize, these tools allow for inquiry-based learning to take place, creating a supportive environment for children to pursue their curiosity and their desire to discover the world:

With the necessary tools in place, inquiry based learning can be truly child-centered, promoting motivation, confidence, and thorough acquisition. Inquiry-based learning favors inductive, discovery-type education that validates pupils’ needs to explore and experiment at their own pace. Such learning requires a setting where pupils feel comfortable about their ability to work independently. (p. 42)

The most common format of inquiry-based learning is small research projects, which can be done collaboratively or individually. In this study for example, students from both sides of the Atlantic put together Raison d’être, a web magazine, which includes surveys (later studied in detail in class), reports, students’ film reviews, a collage depicting French stereotypes of Americans, excerpts from the students’ essays or journals, etc. The magazine illustrates the collaborative work that exists in the class and with the French class. Another characteristic of Freinet pedagogy is Le texte libre, also implemented in this class. It is an ongoing writing piece that is developed throughout the semester. In this study, le texte libre was an individual project for which each student chose his/her topic of interest (see section 3.3.1). In the next chapter, David and Mary’s last draft of their textes libres will be discussed. In Freinet pedagogy, le texte libre promotes free expression and communication.

According to Freinet pedagogy, learning should not be limited to the four walls of the classrooms. The approach attempts to create activities that are relevant to the outside community. In this study for example, the web magazine Raison d’être that is co-
constructed by the students brings the classroom to the outside world by publishing their work. The instructor also finds ways to include the outside community into the classroom, for example by inviting guests to discuss a topic.

Although students are held responsible for all these activities, there is no *laissez-faire*. The instructor plays a crucial role, as he/she is “definitely responsible for managing a carefully crafted classroom environment in which individual learners have the resources and the opportunities to thrive” (Lee & Sivell, 2000, p. 45). The instructor is also responsible for creating tools that will enhance students’ learning. Rejecting the static nature of motivation, Freinet considers motivation to be dynamic and socially constructed. According to him, students can be motivated and their motivation evolves throughout their learning experience. The teacher is a guide who should facilitate students’ autonomous learning and encourage motivation. To motivate a student is to allow him or her to be engaged in an activity (Meirieu, 2001).

La motivation va permettre à la personne de s’engager vraiment dans ce qu’elle fait et d’aller au bout de l’activité, de la recherche, c’est la mobilisation intérieure, produite par l’activité même, qui crée un enjeu suffisamment fort pour qu’elle existe y compris à postériori. Dynamique de la mobilisation qui est aussi dynamique de la réussite (Meirieu, 2001, p. 41).

### 3.2.3. The Classroom Setting

As noted above, the class I observed was specific in its pedagogical approach, and its content. First, in accordance to the Freinet approach, cooperation among students was very much encouraged. The class was designed as a community where each student was assigned responsibilities for the week. The learners were encouraged to take initiative such as preparing a presentation on a topic that was of particular interest to them (i.e. the presentations were encouraged but not required). The objective was to drive the students to be responsible for their learning and to give them the opportunity to enhance their experience. The learning process is individualized (students can explore and experiment at their own pace) but also cooperative (students are encouraged to work together and assist one another). To create a collaborative atmosphere in class, the class was divided into five *poles* corresponding to five different groups in the class. The groups remained
unchanged throughout the semester. Group work was valued and always at the core of the lesson plan. Usually the instructor provided material to talk about in groups, displayed vocabulary and questions to discuss on a transparency. Students were required to take notes and sometimes hand in group-work at the end of class. While students worked together, the instructor walked around the room, providing personalized assistance, vocabulary, and making sure students were on the right track.

Secondly, unlike other lower levels of French language courses, culture learning was at the core of the syllabus. The semester weeks were divided into cultural themes such as “Who are we?” , “Cultural differences”, “Americans viewed by the French”, “Franco-American relations”, (see syllabus in Appendix A for detailed schedule). In addition, the class was involved in an intercultural exchange with an English class in France via computer-mediated communication, telecollaboration. Each American student was assigned a French “keypal” with whom they communicated, in real-time during the Mondays netmeetings (NM) and via emails. The students were expected to discuss issues and topics related to the weekly cultural themes.

The class met four times a week for a period of fifty minutes, half of these sessions taking place in a computer lab. In the computer lab, the class was set in a semi-circle, where students’ computers were against the wall. The instructor was at her podium most of the time and on Mondays monitored the netmeetings with the instructor in France (coping with technical problems, shifting groups if students were absent, etc). For the last two days of the week, students met in a regular classroom on campus. Along the blackboard was the instructor’s desk on which she had her teaching materials and a tape recorder. The rest of the classroom was divided into five different circles (corresponding to the poles). A large space was left at the center of the classroom where the overhead projector was placed, leaving room for the instructor to move around. Each class period started with the class President’s announcements (“Bonjour, la classe commence, les annonces pour aujourd’hui sont…”). A student was assigned President for one week. A different student was responsible for choosing a song (in French) to be
played at the beginning of each class period. Below is a detailed description of how the week was generally organized.

On Mondays was scheduled the synchronous computer-mediated communication with the French class (i.e. the netmeetings). To converse with his or her keypal, the American student was required to prepare questions, incorporating information from the reading assignments. There were on average two students per computer on the American side and five to six students per chatrooms (two French students and their American keypals)\(^1\).

On Tuesdays, the class engaged in computer-mediated discussions in which American students talked about the weekly topic amongst themselves and compared their keypals’ responses. For these discussions, groups were divided differently from the previous day.

On the third day of the week, the main focus was on language. The instructor created activities related to the weekly themes that explicitly focused on particular discourse genres (such as “summary”, “debating”, “critical essays”). Specific linguistic features (e.g. passé composé or imparfait) were at times explained. Most quizzes also occurred on Wednesdays.

On the last day of the week, the class was expected to synthesize all the information learned that week and was introduced to the following week topic. In a brief lecture format during which students were encouraged to take notes, the instructor presented the main points of the issue (or theme) that was studied.

The class textbook, *Quant à moi…* (Bragger & Rice, 2000b, 2000c) was used as a homework book. Students were expected to work on their grammar on their own and come prepared to class. Little time was dedicated to explicit teaching of grammar. The instructor’s objective was to create an environment rich in opportunities and provide the tools necessary to enhance the students’ learning. Every time I observed the class, students were on task, struggling with difficult new cultural concepts and discussing their ideas in French. Chapter four provides an in-depth description of the main cultural
concepts that were presented and how these concepts were presented in class. It offers a holistic description of the class activities.

3.2.4. The Class Students

The choice of this particular French 3 course was motivated by the way the class was conducted, culture being at the core of the syllabus. I approached the instructor and asked for permission to observe her class. After obtaining the approval from the Office for Research Protection and getting permission from the students in the class, I was accepted as a researcher in the classroom.

The participants of this study were undergraduate students, studying in a rural area in the northeast of the United States. Participants were 18 years of age or older. There was no discrimination in the recruitment of participants on the basis of gender, race, religion or age. The students’ participation in the research was completely voluntary and their instructor had no knowledge of who agreed or refused to participate. Because participating in the study did not require more time than the regular scheduled class activities and the completion of homework assignments, the participants received no compensation. The class was composed of twenty-eight students. Sixteen of them volunteered to participate in this research, allowing me to use data from classroom observations, classroom assignments, and a diagnostic questionnaire that was designed by the instructor. Among these sixteen participants, eight volunteered to be interviewed at the end of the semester, for which they received one extra-credit (see the consent form and the interview guideline in Appendix B).

3.2.5. The Instructor

The study focuses on the students’ perspectives on their learning. However, the instructor, Magali, played a crucial role in the way the class was conducted and the
cultural concepts presented (see section 4.1). She was extremely dedicated to her teaching and her students. She spent an incredible amount of time looking for resources and tools for her students, coming with questions to guide class activities. In concordance with Freinet pedagogy, the instructor was not “the knowledge dispenser” but strived to be a guide who assisted the students in their learning process. In addition, she was constantly communicating with the English teacher in France to discuss the content and the organization of the netmeetings, designing the web magazine, coordinating class activities, etc. The preliminary work is essential for the class time to have as many resources as possible. As the participants emphasized during their interviews, the learning experience was challenging for them. The instructor tried to facilitate the students’ learning by providing an array of tools (e.g. various texts discussing different viewpoints, vocabulary, questions guiding their understanding and analytical analysis of the studied issue, etc) (see section 4.1).

3.2.6. The Participants

The study relies on the collection of various sources, offering a very large amount of data (see section 3.3.1). Because the essence of the case study is a holistic approach, the focus is on a few students among the sixteen participants that volunteered. I chose the participants among the people I interviewed for the following reasons: First, because these students provided the most extensive data. Second, interviewing the students allowed me to inquire about their learning development at the end of the semester. During the interview, the students had the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on statements they expressed in the course of the semester, describe and reflect on their own learning experiences (see interview outline, Appendix B). Therefore, the interviews provide triangulation and offer a clearer understanding of how the participants made sense of their learning.

After an in-depth examination of the eight students’ data, I chose to document the development of four students who represent four different voices from the class. I do not
consider these students to be representative of the class at large. In the next chapter, I will narrate the development of these four participants, describing in a holistic manner their learning process as it unfolds in the course of the semester. The four case studies represent the students’ learning experiences and bring to the fore the participants’ meanings. I chose the four students for the rich data they offered and the individuality of their voices. To respect the students’ confidentiality, all the names used in the narrative are pseudonyms. The only alterations I made to the data were to ensure the students’ confidentiality (i.e. I deleted any reference to a specific location that referred to the students’ lives, such as where they live).

3.2.6.1. Julie

Julie is a twenty-one years old American student from a rural area in the northeast of the United States. In addition to an already busy schedule, she has two part-time jobs. As her portfolio illustrates, Julie is a very dedicated student, who works hard. She is quiet and level-headed in class but is fairly opinionated. From the beginning she is eager to learn French and communicate with her keypal. She is highly motivated by the cultural focus of the class and is keen to learn about France. I chose Julie for the extensiveness and the richness of the data she offered. The email exchanges with her keypals are of particular interest as they represent a rich source of cultural information for Julie. The essays that she includes in her portfolio are also interesting as they document the reflective approach Julie adopts throughout the semester.

3.2.6.2. Mary

Mary is an eighteen years old American student, from a small town in the northeast of the United States. She is doing a double majoring in International Politics and French with a minor in business. Like Julie, Mary is a dedicated student who works very hard. Out of the four participants, she is the only one who has traveled to France. She is highly motivated to learn French and hopes to become fluent “at some point.” Like Julie, Mary’s data are very extensive, providing detailed classroom assignments and
long emails. From the very beginning of the semester, she stands out as a critical thinker who is not afraid to talk about her experiences or discuss her opinions. I was interested in looking at how her metareflection to language and culture evolve in the course of the semester.

3.2.6.3. Lucy

Lucy is a twenty years old American student from a small rural area in the northeast of the United States. She is very quiet in class. I was, at first, surprised she volunteered for the interview. She is nonetheless very conscientious student who is eager to be successful. She is the only student who admitted that she would not have taken the class if it had not been required. Languages were not of any particular interest to her and she admits not knowing anything about France at the beginning of the semester. The first examination of her data showed, however, that Lucy greatly valued communicating with a “real” French person, with whom she quickly became eager to build a friendship. I chose Lucy because I was interested in exploring the class communication with her keypal to see if it changed her interest in learning the language and learning about the culture.

3.2.6.4. David

David is a nineteen years old American student majoring in pre-med and training to become an Air Force officer. David has never been to France but lived abroad for an extensive time period. He is the only participant whose data are not very extensive (he lost many of his assignments and seemed negligent). His narrative is therefore shorter. Even though his data is not as extensive (i.e. compared to the other three participants’), the richness of David’s voice and data is important. Indeed, in the course of the semester, he shows a strong personality, not afraid to express his opinions and stand for what he believes in. His critical thinking skill is fairly developed and he admits during the interview loving to argue. Early in the semester, David deployed strategies of resistance to empathy toward another culture, challenging the instructor’s comments during class
for example. He is, however, very interested in learning about new cultures and hopes to live abroad in the future.

### 3.2.7. The Role of the Researcher

During the data collection, I adopted the role of a detached observer. During the class observation, I sat in the right corner of the classroom, close to the door. Next to me, was Julie’s group. I never walked around in the class. The only face to face interaction I had with the participants was during the interview at the end of the semester where I had the opportunity to talk with the participants about their learning experience and gain a better understanding of the meanings students brought to their learning. The day I obtained the students’ consent form, I expressed my willingness in helping them with French in any way possible, as long as it did not interfere with the instructor’s objectives and expectations (i.e. I was not willing to complete their homework assignments). No one asked for help. For the data analysis, I chose to narrate the four participants’ development, exploring the meanings the students bring to their learning experience. In doing so, I hope to offer them a voice and document the impact learning a foreign language has on their lives.

### 3.3. The Data

#### 3.3.1. Data Collection

Data for the study were collected in the fall, in a third-semester French class. As mentioned earlier, the data collection focused on the bounded system of the cultural dimensions - as opposed to the linguistic features - of foreign language learning. I approached the instructor the semester prior to when the research was conducted. She was very supportive of my project and assured me that I would be welcome in her classroom as long as the students agree to it and felt comfortable having someone
observing. Before the semester began, I had a few meetings with the instructor where she explained how she usually conducts her class. The only change to the syllabus that I suggested was the implementation of reflective cultural journals (which replaced the book reports she normally required). As the semester progressed, the instructor and I collaboratively chose the questions asked in the journal entries. The cultural journals were implemented in the syllabus as homework assignments (see below).

Once the semester began, Magali asked her students if they would be willing to accept a researcher in the class. No one had any objection. I, therefore, introduced myself to the class, explained my research and asked for students’ informed consents, which detailed full disclosure of my research interests (Yin, 1994) (see Appendix B). During the data collection, the instructor and I communicated every day. The instructor was very helpful in keeping me informed of what she had planned for the class. She rarely spoke about any particular students with me so her perspectives or reflection on specific students would not influence the way I looked at data.

The specific data gathered for this study are: a) diagnostic questionnaires; b) class observations; c) transcripts of netmeetings; d) chat-transcripts; e) emails exchanged with their keypals; f) reflective journals; g) class assignments; h) *textes libres*; i) interviews; j) portfolios and k) emails and readings provided by the instructor. Some of these data were collected throughout the semester (a-e and k), the rest were collected at the end of the semester from the students. For the students’ essays and other written class assignments, I rely on what each participant included in his or her portfolio.

a) **The diagnostic questionnaire:** This was a collaborative project between the instructor and me and was administered by the instructor in class so students had the opportunity to ask for clarification. It mainly consisted of open-ended questions about students’ personal information as well as a history of their French language study. In addition, the instructor decided to ask a few questions about their knowledge of French culture such as: “Name as many as you can: i) City/town from a French-speaking country; ii) Song/singer/band from a French-speaking country; iii) Film from a French-speaking country; etc”. This questionnaire provided some information about the students’ background. (Appendix C).
b) **Class observations:** This class was observed and audio-recorded eight times throughout the semester. In addition, the instructor recorded her class five times when I could not be present. The main objectives for these class observations are to understand i) how the class is conducted and ii) how the teaching of culture is implemented.

c) **Netmeetings transcripts:** Once a week students conversed about the weekly topic with their “key pals” via computer-mediated communication. There were from four to five students per chat room. Students were required to prepare in advance for the netmeeting sessions, i.e. complete the readings and prepare questions for their key pals. The transcripts shed light on how students learned about and negotiated new cultural concepts as well as how they talked about culture. The analysis of these transcripts over time document the students’ developmental process and whether there was change or not in the course of a semester.

d) **Chat transcripts:** via synchronous discussions, students from the class engaged in conversations or debates about the same topic and compared their key pals’ responses. Students were required to prepare their ideas before class. As for the netmeetings, there were from four to six students in each chat room. These transcripts were informative as to how students learned and negotiated new cultural concepts. The manner in which students talked about these concepts was analyzed. Once again, the analysis investigated the students’ developmental processes.

e) **Email-exchanges:** students were required to send one email to their keypals a week. The content was left to the students’ choice. These emails were included in their portfolios, which were handed in at the end of the semester. Again, these data helped in documenting the students’ developmental processes.

f) **Reflective journals:** students were required to write five journals (out of six) for which they were expected to answer a set of questions. The instructor and I collaboratively provided the questions (Appendix D). These journals allowed students to reflect on various cultural aspects they encountered in class or outside of class, thereby offering them a voice. These data documented the development of a reflective approach to language and culture.

g) **Class assignments:** assignments relevant to the topic of my dissertation were collected. In other words, I did not collect grammatical exercises or quizzes. However, throughout the semester, students were required to write individual essays as well as a few collective essays, which were both based on the weekly assigned topic. Analysis of these data shed light on students’ development of their analytical and critical thinking skills.
  
  • Cultural essays: In an essay format, students were required to discuss a topic chosen by the instructor (see syllabus, Appendix A). These essays
provided the students with an opportunity to synthesize and reflect on the
topic they had studied. The following is an example of an essay prompt:
“Discuss several aspects of the French-American relationship that gave
birth to stereotypes Americans have of the French. In your essay, give
examples for each point you want to make, presenting the situations from
a French and from an American perspective, then showing how a person
who’s not aware of the other culture’s patterns and language use will
‘create’ or ‘reinforce’ the stereotype”.

- Collective essays: in the same manner, students were required to choose a
topic in relation to the weekly theme and synthesize the main points that
were discussed. For example: “Les repas et la famille” (Meals and
family). These essays were written by groups of two.

h) Textes libres: These are individual texts written by each student on a topic of
their choice. Students had the opportunity to write an essay, a creative writing
piece or a story from their own life. In the course of the semester, students were
required to turn in three drafts of their paper. The first draft, which was a one-
page document, was edited but not graded; drafts 2 and 3 involved development
and or extensive revisions, and were graded by the instructor. When the texte
libre is included in the participants’ narratives, I chose their last draft.

i) Interviews: The interviews were conducted at the end of the semester. An
email was sent to ask for volunteers. Students who were interviewed received
extra-credit from the instructor. The interviews were audio-taped and lasted less
than an hour. Eight students volunteered. During the interviews, students had the
opportunity to give an overview of their learning in French 3 and to elaborate on
previous information they provided in their reflective journals. (see the interview
outline Appendix B)

j) Portfolios: Student-portfolios included self-evaluation forms (see Appendix E),
each draft of their texte libre, the emails to their key pal, each essay (the rough
drafts as well as the final draft), their participation forms, NM and some chat
transcripts, and the cultural journals. The data were more or less extensive
depending on the student.

k) Readings and related emails sent by the instructor: I gathered all the readings
that students were required to complete as well as the emails sent by the
instructor. The instructor often sent students emails to guide their readings or to
provide more information on specific topics (e.g. web sites that were relevant to
the weekly theme) (see section 4.1).
3.3.2. Data Organization

The data analysis brings order, structure and meaning to the extensive data collected. First, I organized the data according to themes, which derived from the weekly topics. I then studied how 1) the participants learned and talked about cultural topics and 2) how each participant created meaning by reflecting on these cultural concepts. To explore the students’ motives to learn the language and investigate how the participants made sense of their learning experience, I looked at patterns that emerged from the data.

In the following chapter (chapter 4), I will first provide an in-depth description of the learning context. I will discuss cultural concepts that were talked about in class and describe how these cultural concepts were presented in class. I will then turn to the four participants’ development by narrating Julie, Mary, Lucy and David’s learning experiences.

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1 “American students” refer to the students who are enrolled in the French 3 class that I observed. It does not refer to the students’ nationality but indicates that I am talking about the students who are in the United States, as opposed to the French students (i.e. the keypals in France).
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The case study presented here investigates the development of a reflective approach to language and culture. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the investigation relies on various sources of data to offer an in-depth picture of the participants’ development. In this chapter, I will describe the learning experiences of the four participants, Julie, Mary, Lucy and David. To understand in what ways the learners develop, I will investigate the classroom practices. I will explore how the learners negotiate new cultural concepts and the process in which they become aware of various reference frames one can use to view the world. The study is looking at the students’ own perspectives on their learning and attempts to draw each participant’s unique learning profile. Before I turn to the participants’ stories, I will describe the cultural concepts presented in class and explain how these concepts are studied.

4.1. Which Cultural Concepts Are Presented In Class And How Are They Presented?

From a Vygotskian perspective, human mental activity is essentially a mediated process, socially and culturally constructed. The context is therefore a crucial element of the learning because development occurs out of the social environment and is shaped by it (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). Thorne (2000) stresses that “the activity of foreign and second language learning occurs within material and social conditions which must be taken into account in the production of ecologically robust research” (p. 224). It is
therefore crucial to offer a detailed description of how the environment is constructed and how it constructs learning. The previous chapter gives insight on the classroom design and the classroom setting. In addition, the syllabus (Appendix A) provides a clear description of the weekly themes studied throughout the semester. This section focuses on two main aspects: 1) in what ways are cultural concepts presented? 2) how does the instructor guide her students’ development and engagement in their learning?

As discussed previously, Freinet’s pedagogical approach is an essential component of the way this class is organized. The approach is student-centered and the learners are constantly encouraged to take initiatives in their own learning (see section 3.2.2). The learning environment is cooperative as many of the class activities are performed in small groups. The students are offered several avenues to enhance their learning: class-discussions, netmeetings with their keypals, reading assignments and the instructor’s lectures.

The instructor, Magali, plays a key role in that she carefully crafts the class activities, endeavoring to bring language and culture beyond the classroom. The pedagogical aim is to provide the students with tools that will allow them to become independent learners. The instructor’s pedagogical approach is to apprentice the students into new discourse communities, help them become responsible and critical citizens (i.e. be more thoughtful and not simply acquire cultural facts). Magali also provides the means to enhance their learning. For example, she gives reading materials to be discussed in groups and offers a list of questions with vocabulary words to guide their reflection. In class, while students work in groups, she walks around offering personalized guidance.

Magali is a French native-speaker whose field of study is twentieth century civilization and pedagogy. She sets up an intercultural exchange via computer-mediated communication for her intermediate French class (i.e. French 3). She strongly believes that her role as an educator is to encourage her students to engage themselves in a reflective approach about culture and to enhance their analytical skills. Her objective is
not to simplify the issues at stake for her students but rather to teach along what Kramsch (1993a) calls “the cultural faultline”, in the “recognition of complexity and in the tolerance of ambiguity” (p. 2). Magali’s approach is intercultural in that she consistently compares and contrasts American culture (s) to the French. She highlights not only the differences between American and French cultures but also variations within the French culture itself. For Kramsch (1993a), educators should “replace the presentation/prescription of cultural facts and behaviors by the teaching of a process that applies itself to understanding foreignness or “otherness” (p. 206). Magali offers ways for the students to look at culture from various perspectives. As she explains the French perspective of the death penalty and violence to her students, she asserts:

“For me, it’s interesting to see how two countries look at the same problem. I hope you find it interesting but at the bare minimum you need to have the facts there. So you can understand where they [the French] come from. ” [Class observation, October 16th].

Her objective is to expand the students’ perspectives of an issue by providing new viewpoints to them. She encourages her students to look for facts (e.g. historical and sociological) to support their arguments and to move away from bipolar points of view (i.e. right or wrong). For example, toward the middle of the semester, she explains to me that she is teaching her students how to take part in a debate without feeling attacked personally.

“En fait, on a discute un petit peu aujourd'hui et il est apparu que certains croyaient que je voulais leur faire adopter le point de vue francais. J'ai dit que je voulais leur faire COMPRENDRE le point de vue francais, et qu'on travaille "le debat" (debating skills), donc que pour l'instant je voulais leur montrer comment prendre un argument et le retourner. […] Il est frequent d'avoir une classe presque entiere hostile pendant 2-3 voire 4 semaines. Il faut savoir le depasser, et apres tout va bien, ils cessent de se sentir personnellement impliques. je veille cependant a ce que les etudiants ne se sentent pas humilie ou malheureux, donc quand je vois qu'ils se "plissent" je leur envoie un email pour les rassurer un peu. Il n'empeche qu'il faut distinguer entre des opinions, et des choses fausses - par exemple, quand le senateur pro-OGM dit que sur sa ferme dans les annees 30 on faisait deja pousser des legumes transgeniques, c'est un mensonge pur et simple- la technique a seulement ete inventee il y a moins de 10 ans […] Je veux donc qu'ils puissent 1)distinguer entre fait et opinion 2) depasser une pensee binaire qui voit seulement vrai/faux, etc…” [Email, October 24th]

Teaching according to her is not a mere transmission of information but an apprenticeship into new ways of communicating. She, therefore, provides a myriad of
opportunities for social interaction, where meaning can emerge. There is not one
direction in which you learn, there is no end-point to reach; development is a dynamic
and negotiated process.

For the observed semester, the instructor’s primary focus is to talk about French
identity and to demonstrate that France is a diverse country. Her goal is to discuss what
makes diversity, to think about notions such as ethnic groups, native languages, skin
colors, regions, religion, and cuisine. Her intentions are also transparent in the way she
organizes her syllabus. For example, in the second week, her students examine diversity
within their French class, which they later compare to the diversity of their keypals’ class.
They also analyze whether their keypals are representative of French people in general.
Furthermore, toward the end of the semester, students study the various elements of the
French identity, such as regional cultures and gastronomic traditions. Finally, for their
last journal, students are required to reflect on a childrens’ story, written by Thierry
Lenain and entitled “Vive la France!” The small book is targeted to five to seven year
old children. The main character of the story is Lucien who little by little finds himself
alone at the end of recess after having rejected kids that were different from him
(differences in personalities, race, gender, etc.). Note that the students discuss the
beginning of the story together in class. The objective of this journal is to see how much
the students have learned and if they can interpret the story on their own. In other words,
the activity hopes to shed light on the students’ process of appropriation and on their
development. For example, it will allow the instructor to see if their images of France
have become more complex than at the beginning of the semester. Unfortunately, only a
few students turned in their last journal. Out of the four participants, Lucy is the only one
who completed the assignment but she left out many of the questions that relate to the
story.

In this section, I do not intend to depict how the instructor presents every cultural
concept. I will focus on three themes covered at length during the semester: The
September 11th Attacks, Cultural Differences and Stereotypes, and Food. Explaining how
these concepts were presented will help the readings of the narratives (see sections 4.2 to
4.5).
4.1.1. The September 11th Attacks:

This is a key moment in the semester because the attacks influence the way the instructor conducts her class. She changes themes for part of the semester and decides to focus on the tragedy, patriotism, the flag, religion, and fanaticism. In her opinion, it is crucial to talk about the attacks. In fact, she is surprised that some instructors refuse to talk about the bombings as if nothing had happened. Deciding to talk about the events was, for her, difficult at first because she did not know how to approach the topic.

“Mais que faire en tant que prof ? Pour moi, c’était clair qu’il fallait saisir la catastrophe pour ouvrir sur le monde et empecher que les etudiants se renferment sur eux-memes. Il fallait que cela serve a créer une sympathie communiaante avec la souffrance des autres et non pas a sublimer la souffrance americaine en une sorte de martyr indepassable qui ne supporte aucune comparaison et donc, coupe des autres en s’erigeant superieure. Comment eclairer la souffrance que l’on ressent a l’interieur sans la galvauder, comment, en tant que prof, créer un espace qui ouvre vers une resolution et une prise de conscience des sentiments multiples qui s’entrecroisent lors d’un tel evenement, plutot qu’un repli qui mene au rejet de l’autre ?” [Email, September 8th 2003]

In the statement above, she wishes that her students would open themselves to other cultures. In the context of the attacks, she is concerned that some students tend to lock themselves into one-dimensional perspective, ultimately rejecting difference (whatever that difference entails). In addition, as a foreigner she felt personally rejected by the reigning patriotic fervor. Through her teaching, she urges her students to be more interested in international affairs and grasp their complexity, in the multiplicity of perspectives.

The September 11th attacks represent an important theme in the semester. The events trigger serious class discussions as the students struggle to understand concepts such as patriotism or religion from the French perspective. In fact, the attacks and discussions about them change the way some of the students chose to portray their culture, country, and themselves. Some become wary of the images the world has of Americans. Gaining an outsider’s point of view is then perceived as essential. Others simply reject the French analysis of the attacks. Finally, the students’ motive to learn about culture possibly change (see narratives, sections 4.2 to 4.5). It is therefore crucial to explain how the attacks are discussed in class.
The day of the attacks, the class, which meets ten minutes after ten o’clock, is in the computer lab. When the teacher comes in, she is not yet aware of the bombing. Most students are still very confused as the instructor describes in her reactions below. Students are glued to their computers, attempting to obtain the latest information, and they watch the second tower collapsing live. The instructor becomes worried about a potential panic wave and does not believe that watching the news as they are unfolding is a good idea. She, therefore, asks her students to turn off their computers and concentrates on their first netmeeting, which occurred the day before. The netmeeting was overall extremely positive and students were very interested in learning about their keypals. She asks her students to write to their keypals. After class, the instructor writes her first reaction, which is posted on the web for the class in France to read.

“Tuesday September 11, 2001

Aujourd'hui, j'arrive en classe vers 9h55. Je passe dans le couloir, je dis "bonjour Melissa" et Melissa me regarde avec un visage hébété "madame, vous savez? un avion s'est écrasé dans la tour du World Trade Center".

Leurs téléphones portables sonnent. Dans la classe, la moitié des étudiants consultent leur e-mail, regardent la page de leurs corres'.. "vous avez entendu? vous savez?" C'est facile de voir qui sait, et qui ne sait pas. Ceux qui savent sont au bord des larmes ou ont un visage de statues, figés. On n'arrive pas à digérer les nouvelles. Ceux qui arrivent reçoivent des "tu as entendu?" et s'ils répondent "quoi?" on leur dit. Leur visage reste incrédule.

B. demande si on peut voir ce qui se dit à la télé. J'allume le podium, le projecteur. Je me lance dans les entrailles du podium....Tous les sites web sont saturés. J'annonce qu'on a quelques minutes pour digérer la nouvelle. Je discute avec David, notre président, qui doit "ouvrir" la classe et qui essaie de trouver quoi dire. Je ne trouve pas de chaîne de télé, je laisse tomber...mais je leur propose quelques minutes pour lire l'éditorial du Nouvel Obs, avec une photo. Ceux qui entrent, en retard, ouvrent de grands yeux "ils disent quoi, là????" Ils comprennent bien qu'il s'est passé quelque chose au World Trade Center.

A., notre musicienne demande si elle doit passer la musique quand même - je dis que oui, qu'ils lisent et qu'ils écoutent. Surtout, ne pas céder à la panique, ne pas laisser la classe s'effilocher. J'explique le mot "attentat" - en anglais, ça se dit "bombing", la même chose que pour "bombardement". Petit a petit, tout le monde est au courant. On rapproche les chaises à roulettes. Personne ne veut être tout seul devant son ordinateur. D. a trouve une source vidéo-web, et on voit la deuxième tour du World Trade Center s'écrouler en direct. C'est horrible. On sait qu'il y a là des milliers et des milliers de personnes. Des personnes qu'on connaît, peut-être. Pour juguler la panique, je dis "on fait cours". J'éteins le projecteur. Alors, on fait cours, on discute du NM qui était très positif, très intéressant, on remplit un tableau sur ce qu'on sait de votre classe, on oublie un peu. Ça se passe au calme.

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Je sors. Dans les allées, les gens pleurent ouvertement ou ont les yeux gonflés. Des étudiants ont fait des petits mausolées sous les arbres. Une cellule de crise est ouverte. Une collecte de sang pour les victimes de New York commence au centre des étudiants. Il y a tellement de volontaires qu'on fait appel à des étudiants infirmiers. Dans les cours de 11h15, c'est l'hystérie. Les étudiants pleurent. Ceux qui ont de la famille qui travaille à Manhattan sont partagés entre l'impossibilité de croire qu'ils sont morts, l'envie de savoir, et de ne pas savoir. Tout le monde est sous le choc. On n'arrive pas à y croire. On apprend qu'un avion s'est écrasé à Somerset. Somerset, c'est a côté. Pas loin. S'est écrasé sur quoi? sur qui? Le vol Boston-Los Angeles a détruit une tour. Quand votre famille habite dans l'une de ces villes ou dans l'autre, et qu'on enseigne, que tous les élèves pleurent, même les grands garçons à casquette, il faut être l'adulte, on oublie sa famille. De toute façon on ne peut contacter personne. Le téléphone ne marche plus. Seul l'Internet reste un lien entre les gens. Les profs, TAs, faculty, sont sous le choc aussi, mais il faut bien assumer. Des TAs, des étudiants de DEA ou de maîtrise, vont voir leurs conseillers. On se soutient un peu. Je m'inquiète des profs-faculty qui sont de la région, qui ont de la famille là, et qui deviennent assumer les grads *et* leurs classes. Je passe les voir ou je téléphone. C'est terrible.

Le professeur qui enseigne dans la salle après moi annonce "il n'y a pas cours, je vais chercher mes enfants, qu'on soit ensemble. Je rentre chez moi".. Un petit ami appelle et demande qu'une étudiante revienne chez eux tout de suite. Pour une fois, on est tous sortis de nos bureaux et on a mangé ensemble. Et on a parlé, d'autre chose. On ne risque rien, ici. Mais on a tous dans les yeux l'image de ces tours immenses qui s'écroulent dans des volutes noires, comme dans un mauvais film catastrophe que la télé nous présente de temps en temps. On se dit que tout le monde est mort. On ne comprend pas. On se demande "qui?" "pourquoi?" On n'analyse pas le symbolisme, les coupables, tout ça - je viens de mettre la radio française, et là on cherche à expliquer, on interviewe des gens de temps en temps, et des experts discutent. C'est impressionnant et en même temps, ça semble si loin.

Instructor

PS : the FR 3 behaved with dignity and restraint. They made me proud (and I told them today.)"

On Wednesday, September 12th, the students discuss the events of the previous day ("que s’est-il passé?") and describe their emotions about the tragedy. To help, the instructor provides ample vocabulary. Magali asks her students to write their reactions to the attacks, which are then posted on the class web page for the both sets of students (in France and the United States) to examine and analyze. As a consequence of the ensuing exchange, students gain various perspectives on the events (the keypals, the French and American mediaiv, etc.).
On Thursday, September 13th, the students talk about the bombings again from a myriad of perspectives. In the email below, the instructor depicts in detail how she presented cultural concepts such as patriotism and religious fanaticism:

“On Thursday, we covered all kinds of different perspectives upon the bombings. First, I mentioned fanaticism, and how in France there had been two immediate reactions (after feeling terrified and sad)
1) link to faith - because in France the Catholic church supported the monarchy, in order to establish a democracy, the French had to fight the Church. Therefore, many people associate religion with an oppressive force ready to push people to fanaticism.
2) announce and state clearly the difference between fanaticism and Islam. Because Islam is France’ #2’s religion, and French people find it (often) suspicious or that acts of racism can always be brought up easily in such circumstances the immediate response was to explain how Islam condemns suicide and how the fanaticism presented in the bombings is NOT part of Islam. For this reason, there were no attacks as we could see with shame happen in the State College community.
I mentioned how many French people are worried Americans will retaliate by causing a war, an act they consider close to fanaticism also: how the President's speech was ill-received, for instance, because it was so good (us) vs. evil (them), so polarized that it appeared primary. And fanaticism is a primary discourse, also.

Then I gave each group a translated copy of a song called "mourir pour des idees" by Georges Brassens (genre: chançon a texte) and we listened to it. The topic is "dying for an idea" and obviously it deals with fanaticism.
I asked the class to think about the concept of dying for an idea; if there aren't ideas worth dying for; in this case, which ones, and how do you decide; if so, are well fanatics or would-be fanatics?

We discussed how the French and Americans express patriotism differently - for instance, the French do not "believe in" the Army and when military service was compulsory for boys, most of them tried to get out of it (1/3 actually managed it.) People do not love their flag and would not have one on a pole by their house, or would not post it on buses like I've seen it on the [bus] system. If someone were to raise the flag, sing the national anthem (l'hymne national) and discuss how much they love the army, they'd probably be considered as fascists or at least as being very close to the National Front, a xenophobic party. Few people know more than a few stanzas of La Marseillaise - ask your KP [keypal], I doubt she knows more than that, and I doubt she knows any other "patriotic song" whereas on Wednesday evening the students who live near my house gathered together and sang for at least half an hour songs like "God bless America", "America the Beautiful", "the star spangled banner"...

Then I presented various points of view about the bombings. I then handed out a reading for Monday, that should be the base for our NM. (i.e., the NM is NOT about "what happened" but rather "how different people reacted, in France and in the US, and what can we learn about each other's culture from these reactions.) I asked the class to think about the difference between justice and revenge, and what it meant for our circumstances.

At the end, I read the column written by jean Marie Colombani, the senior press representative for Le Monde, France's reference newspaper. I read it in direct translation,
because it is (obviously) a high-level of French (mostly read by people with a graduate education). Its title was "We are all Americans." [...] [Email, September 14th]

As she admits, Magali, as any instructor, has her bias. What is important to note is how she guides students to adopt a reflective approach to the events. She provides various views on the attacks: students describe their own reactions, talk about the American media coverage, the instructor describes the French media coverage and translates Colombani’s editorial entitled “We are all Americans." To help her students understand the multiple perspectives, she also attempts to provide a historical perspective. For example, she explains why many French people perceive religion as oppressive. Finally, she gives a social context of the French reactions. For instance, she mentions that Islam is the second most practiced religion in France. Hence, political and religious Officials made clear the distinction between fundamentalism and Islam immediately after the attacks, stressing that Islam condemns suicide. The instructor tries to provide a variety of voices, looking at how French and American media, French and Americans, French and American students talk about the facts.

By contrasting various perspectives, Magali encourages each student not to limit his or her comments to only the first emotional reactions but to take distance and analyze the events. For example, to trigger thinking, she chooses a piece of popular culture “Mourir pour des idées” by Georges Brassens to make students think about fanaticism. Brassens was a French singer well known for his wit and provocative songs. The instructor confesses to choosing the text for its difficulty. In “Mourir pour des idées”, it is not clear if Brassens actually refers to religious fanaticism or political beliefs. He is against dying for an idea stressing that one may die for an idea that becomes trivial a day later. The students first read the translation of the song whose chorus goes as follow: “let us die for an idea, okay, but let’s take it slow”\textsuperscript{vi}. Magali then plays the song and asks students’ interpretations of it. Finally, students ponder if and when an idea is worth dying for. What is important for her is to make her students wonder, ask themselves questions and seek answers:

“Je me souviens de la chanson « mourir pour des idees » because it’s complex. Who could it refer to ? I didn’t say, when we studied it. In part because picking the song seemed important yet I didn’t really know how to use it. It seemed the right choice but
once again i was working at a reflex-level, I wasn’t reasoning as much as usual. I wanted them to think and to be left wondering, asking questions of themselves, seeking answers rather than taking them for granted and from the media. Did the song and the title refer to the fanatics who flew the planes into the buildings ? to GWBush and his plans for war against terror ? But is the song right, even ? Is figthing for an idea more noble or less noble than other forms of war ? Are ideas really just a pretext ? Aren’t there ideas worth fighting for ? At that time, I was confused, too. But I knew questions had to be part of the answer. I just wanted to leave the students with questions, because the TV seemed to play on sentiments and gut-reaction, and the president seemed to play on definite answers.”

[Email, September 8th 2003]

At the end of that Thursday, the instructor explains to her students that the French are not patriotic in the American sense of the word. For most French people displaying the flag is associated with either fascism or the Front National, a xenophobic, far right party (see discussion on the issue pp. 101-102). At the end of the class period, she hands out readings that students must prepare before their next class. The packet includes two articles from the daily newspaper Libération, one article from a weekly news magazine Le Nouvel Observateur and reactions to the attacks from adults and from kids in elementary school (see excerpts of the document below). One adult expresses his disgust at a French journalist’s lack of sympathy, others talk about the possibility of a third world war, wondering if Afghanistan will be eradicated from the map. The children also express some pertinent remarks on the events. Some talk about the disturbing images viewed on television, others point out that the images shown on the different channels are similar but journalists’ comments are very different. The oldest children (4 & 5th grades) find Bush’s conception of good and evil ludicrous. The youngest ones convince themselves that they are safe since the planes cannot go over the mountains, which are too high.

“Ce matin les enfants de CEvii ont parlé de ce qu'ils vayaient vu à la télé, devant des CP bien plus circonspects (…) Quentin, CE : " Les avions ne passeront pas, les montagnes sont trop hautes."
Dylan, CP : "De toute façon, ça n'arrivera pas chez nous, on a que des maisons toutes seules." (=pas d'immeubles, pas de tours.)

In a 4th/5th grade:
Ce matin, les enfants ont écrit et dessiné puis nous avons organisé un débat en classe. Les enfants sont graves et en même temps subjugués par les images. Difficiles pour certains de faire la part entre réalité et cinéma. Beaucoup ont parlé de ce qui "arrivera" chez nous. Certains pensent que nous n'aurons plus d'essence, que les magasins seront vides...
In a 4th-5th grade (CM)\textsuperscript{viii}
Mes CM2 ont trouvé idiot, débile (j’utilise leurs mots) l’allocution de Bush sur le
fameux combat du bien contre le mal, car comme m’a dit une élève qui peut se prétendre
représenter le bien ou le mal sur notre planète ? On a poursuivi les échanges autour de ce
que les pays colonialistes avaient pu faire dans le passé par rapport à des pays émergeants
, ils ont bien compris qu’il ne fallait pas tomber dans le piège trop facile de désigner une
culture, une religion comme bouc-émissaire, mais bien un système qui conduit des
individus à agir de la sorte pour être pris en compte.
J’ai essayé bien modestement de leur faire peser les conséquences d’un tel drame.
D’autres enfants ont été choqués par la vision de la chute des corps des immeubles (il est
vrai que cela a été montré en boucle, et cela n’apportait rien à l’horreur du drame ; il
faudrait quand même que les médias réfléchissent à l’impact à une heure de grande écoute
des images qu’ils diffusent même le témoignage du docteur avec sa caméra au point
n’apportait rien non plus).
D’autres enfants ont trouvé complètement ringard que NRJ arrête de diffuser de la
musique, comme m’a dit un garçon : "la vie continue"
j’ai essayé de bien leur montrer que devant un tel désastre humain il fallait depasser le
stade de l’émotion et bien d’analyser le pourquoi.

7th grade
Remarque intelligente de mes élèves ce matin: "On voit les mêmes images sur toutes les
chaînes toute la journée, mais ils ne disent pas la même chose".
Très bien observé. Alors nous avons parlé des médias, de l’info, de son traitement, de la
nécessité de bien réfléchir avant d’accuser, de la manipulation, de la loi du talion et même
du conditionnel, de son emploi, de son rôle etc.… toutes choses en rapport avec ce que
nous cherchons à mettre en place dans la classe et l’école.
Ils sont bien ces petits et tout à fait futés et pas si facile à manipuler.
Exciter les gens de la plus stupide façon ne servira en rien à améliorer la situation et les
journalistes feraient bien de se taire au lieu d’aligner des âneries les unes derrière les
autres, un peu de décence que diable.
"Et si l’on se révoltait contre les marchands d’armes????"
Dans notre école, cela n’a pas mobilisé les conversations des enfants ni en classe, ni à la
récré et si l’une de mes élèves n’en avait pas parlé, je n’aurais certes rien fait pour
provocer les remarques.” [Messages posted to the Freinet listserv, September 12,
2001]\textsuperscript{ix}

Throughout the weekend, the instructor continues, via email, to give students
many sources of information and more specifically links to interesting French articles.
None of these articles are required reading assignments but encourage students to inform
themselves if they wish. For example, on Friday, September 14\textsuperscript{th}, she sends her students
the link to \textit{Le Monde Diplomatique}\textsuperscript{x}. On the website of the weekly newspaper, journalists
and experts examine “American International Politics”, discuss “Islam and its relation to
western countries”, explore the situations in “Afghanistan”, in “Pakistan” and reflect on
“terrorism”. Finally, the instructor passes along an email of sympathy that a French class wrote to the French 3 class:

“A class of 8th graders in France who read our webpages (and maybe read my article in a French paper)” wrote to us personally. They had class this afternoon and wanted to do something. They decided to send our class a message of sympathy even though they do not know any of us because they feel so bad for what happened. Their teacher was very touched and she decided to send it to me so that I can transmit it to you all. They even say that, if any one of us feels bad and wants to "talk", we can email them and they’ll respond to us. I think this is indeed very touching on the part of kids who have never met any American let alone any one of us, to offer their comfort and sympathy in such a manner.

Bonjour à tous,

Aujourd'hui, nous sommes le 14 septembre. Nous sommes la classe de 5C du College [X]. Nous sommes tous informes de la catastrophe, et nous vous comprenons. Ce matin, nous avons tous fait 3 minutes de silence, par soutien. Si vous avez besoin d'aide morale, pour parler, on voulait juste vous dire que nous pensons enormement à vous. C'est pour cela que nous vous donnons notre adresse e mail au college :

[X@y.fr]
[All the students’ first names]”

[Email, September 14th]

Some of the articles she suggests are very difficult to read at a French 3 level. Her goal is to spark curiosity in her students. At the end of the week, the students have been exposed to a variety of voices and have plenty of sources for information. Their instructor attempts to offer a complex perspective on the events, reasoned with facts and historical contexts. By providing so many sources, Magali also encourages the students to take into consideration the differences of opinions, the diversity within a population (e.g. the French for example). She prompts her students to not only react to the tragedy but also analyze it. The instructor hopes that her students will gain a nuanced perspective, integrating and understanding the issue from various angles.

The reading assignment given on Thursday (see above, p. 96) aims to prepare the next netmeeting, which is dedicated to the attacks. Students are required to prepare eight to ten questions. The three main points of the netmeeting are 1) patriotism and its various forms in France and the US; 2) the role of religion, faith, fanaticism; 3) the different perspectives on the bombings. In an email she sends the day before the netmeeting, the
instructor gives clear directions of what is expected of them during their discussion with their keypals:

“Bonsoir a tous,

A reminder for tomorrow
1) NM begins promptly at 10.10. If you're there early, you can dial and talk with your KP [keypal] about anything.
2) the topic to discuss is related to the bombings (ie., NOT your week-end, etc.) the conversation must reflect reading and understanding of the readings; it must also use, as much as possible, words you've learned and used in your essay. (= as I've said on Thursday)
3) we will NOT cover "what happened" - by now, everyone knows. However, issues you might want to investigate (depending on your personal interests) -- once again, a recap from Thursday

* patriotism in France; perception of patriotism in the US; the role and perception of the flag
* religion; the role of religion in relation to patriotism/self identity, in France, in the US; how the religious reactions to the bombings are understood in France (can you explain them to your KPs?)
* good vs. evil, us vs. them, right vs. wrong, "we are America and that's why we'll win" = manicheism
* justice vs. revenge/retaliation
* the minutes of silence in France, in the US= perceptions, reasons
* what should the US do? what should France do?
* what do you think about issues raised in the readings (x,y,z..) -- I WANT TO SEE AT LEAST ONE QUESTION DIRECTLY ON THE READINGS (= as assigned as hw on Thursday :->)
* terrorism in France (ex: 86, 95, 97; Pays Basque and ETA, Corsica-la Corse..)
* the Army in France, how the French see the Army, how it's different from Americans, why
* Human rights, democracy
* perception of the US in the rest of the world, perceived responsibility of the American gov't/companies
* dying for ideas - are there ideas you'd be willing to die for? does that make you a fanatic? why/why not?
* islam and Arabs, as represented by the media in France and in the US, in relation to this tragedy
* fanatism and terrorism: French reaction to this catastrophe vs. other catastrophes of the same type (not in France)
* "this is the first world war of the 21st century", "this is an act of war" = war and terrorism (rhetorics, choice of words)
* "we will lead the world to victory" = perception of America through the president’s speeches (ie., what does the world think about being "led to victory" i.e., "led into war"?)
* what should the US do next? what should France do next?

Of course, feel free to investigate any other themes that picked your curiosity or that you want to investigate.
You will have 25 mn to do so.

A demain, Votre professeur,”

[Email, September 16th]
Noteworthy here is the instructor’s commitment to guiding her students in their learning. First, the instructor makes clear that the netmeetings should not simply be about chatting. She wants the session to be a platform to share opinions, to compare differences in perspectives and reason about a certain topic, as in here the bombings. During these netmeetings, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to analyze the readings and synthesize what they learned so far. As she states in her email, she requires at least one question directly related to the readings. The students are expected to choose a few topics that interest them among the long list of themes provided above. What they are not allowed to do is talk about a different topic (e.g. chat about their weekend activities). The netmeeting is not a mechanical exercise but an activity that requires the students’ full engagement. As the narratives will demonstrate, students value the netmeetings greatly and rich conversations come out of them. Crucial is how the students are now exposed to yet another perspective, their keypals’.

For the following day, the students’ assignment is to write an essay in which they are expected to a) analyze and synthesize the French articles assigned over the weekend and b) examine the discussion they had with their keypals. When possible, such essays are presented and studied at length in each participant’s narrative. Note, however, that students did not include all their essays in their portfolios.

Later in the semester, students’ third cultural journal is also dedicated to the media coverage of the attacks. In this journal, students have once again the opportunity to inquire about cultural differences and show how their analytical skills have developed. At the end of September, a whole section of the class web page is dedicated to the tragedy. The web page displays students’ various reactions and diversity of opinions.


- The instructor’s first reactions (see above)
- One French 3 student’s chronicle
- Reactions from the French 3 class
- Reactions from the class in France
- The Netmeeting reactions, which include differences of analysis between the United States and France, the flag issue, and other comments.
The main focus of those two weeks following the attacks was to study and analyze the events in depth. After those two weeks, the weekly theme moves on to the study of cultural differences (see below). However, the notion of patriotism comes up on several occasions throughout the semester, as many students in the class struggle with the French view on the topic. Some students cannot comprehend how a flag or patriotic songs can be associated with fascism, as it will be discussed in the narratives.

Most French people do not embrace their flag as some Americans do and are reluctant to display it in front of their home. Sport events are the only contexts where it is socially acceptable to hold a flag. Furthermore, most French usually don’t know any patriotic songs and are hardly able to sing their national anthem. Magali offers a historical perspective to explain the French view on the issue. She writes this email to just one student and does not write a similar email to the rest of the class. However, the historical perspective provided below has been explained in class.

“Bonjour,
Comments: Your cultural journal is getting better and better. You seem to have a better grasp of the complexity of the questions as we go on. It's excellent!
I do have a remark though:
Regarding the flag - up until the French Revolution (1789-1794) the country was the King (people were considered irrelevant) and thus the flag was the King's, not the people's. France identifies itself strongly with its revolution and the Republic (ie= democracy). It took another 100 years to impose democracy in France and it was a long, tiresome, bloody fight; up until the very end people didn't know whether democracy would win or not.
There were 17 regimes, and 6 major uprisings during that century. An example of this succession of fights for democracy is the 1831 uprising that is presented in Les Miserables. It's only in 1875 there was an election, a constitution, but the majority elected were royalists. Still, the blue-white-red flag was adopted along with July 14th (bastille day) for the National holiday and The white represents the King and purity. It is framed by blue (representing dignity, excellence, beauty) and red (representing power, wealth, rebellion, and the people - right to rebel is a fundamental right in France, even before right to property.)
Many things can't be the same in France and in the US, because France had to lose its innocent patriotic pride with World War One. People chanted like Americans do now, and behaved like Americans do now... and then there was World War One. In France, 1/4 of the men 18-45 were killed, and another half were disabled. Think of the men in your family, and now take every one and imagine him dead, or without an arm, or a leg. Every family lost someone and saw their sons, uncles, fathers come back horribly disfigured or disabled. They vowed that war would be the last one, and that young men would never again be led to slaughter against one another. Following the flag was forever associated with being slaughtered in a massive war. For that reason, the French were very loathe to fight in 1938 and 1939 (although they fought till the death when the moment came, in
1940, and managed to hold off the Germans for 6 weeks on a stretch of land that takes a few hours to cross nowadays. Obviously, they lost.)
Patriotism was also seen as indoctrination. It was even worse as the 30s progressed: many people claimed their flag represented their ‘race’ and asked others to assemble behind that flag to kill others. Following a flag was often a way to prove oneself superior and a pretext to attack others. Fascism tainted whatever innocence was left in European people's love for their flag.

In WW2, many French cities were bombed and entirely destroyed to the ground. So they cannot think of a country following its flag and showing such undiluted pride, and not think of war. In fact, one reason why our keypals are reluctant to engage in a war is because they know - from their life, their family, their surrounding - what war does to a person's life.

Americans don't really know because no war has been fought on their land in a long time (125 years.) It's very different to go and rescue a country far away - it does take enormous courage, and even more spirit and sacrifice than I can imagine - but the war just doesn't hit you with the same immediacy as it does when the war is fought on your homeland. What you felt when you saw the towers exploding, that's what life is like during a war EVERY DAY. It there were a war, it would mean seeing towers exploding and killing thousands of people everywhere, every day, not enough blood to save the wounded, too many wounded to take to the hospitals; it would mean hospitals bombed with the sick people in them (the American army did that by mistake in my town in 1945. My father was hiding in a hiding place my grandfather had dug under the chicken coop and that's why my family survived. Everyone who'd found refuge in or around the hospital was killed.) It means not recognizing your town, not being able to go to sleep because at any time you can be awoken by bombings, never knowing if your family's safe because anything could happen to them at any time and yet at the same time, having to go on. As a child, like all French children, I saw a movie called "Jeux interdits" (forbidden games) that takes place in 1940. It's in black and white and involves a 5 year old girl and a 10 year old boy. I showed a scene of that movie as part of a course I was teaching in the Spring of 1998 and I was wholly unprepared for the class response. The class was shocked, and stunned, and shouted. Now, remember, that's a movie that is shown to 8-11 year olds in France, and is NOT considered traumatic.

I planned on showing more clips from films, but I decided to change my plans because the students were so shaken. So imagine when you've had 12 years of history and seen many images of war - knowing that patriotism and war are associated - and knowing that probably you know someone who was involved in the resistance (grand parents, great uncles...) -- that explains why for the French you can't fly a flag next to your house. The images they associate are too horrible to contemplate. When a French person has a flag, either she's stupid, or insensitive. Or, frequently, he's a person associated with a xenophobic political group called the National Front that has connections in the US with the Christian Coalition and the Ku Klux Klan.

That is not an easy question, and your keypals do not know all of that. They just "react" like that - for almost a century it's been encoded into them.

A demain," [Email, September 24th]

Throughout the semester, she compels her students to think about the tragedy and its consequences. In the following months, she sends links to articles that depict the
complexity of the situation or envisage the consequences of decisions made by governments. At the very end of the semester, the instructor asks her students to a) discuss during a chat activity whether the French are patriotic, and b) express their views on patriotism in their last journal. Clearly, the main point of these two activities is to evaluate in what ways students develop.

In all the narratives, the attacks are mentioned as a recurrent theme, being such an important part of their program. In the next four sections, I will describe how each participant reacts to the attacks and how the participants reflect about them. The length of these data depends on the students and on what they included in their portfolios. I will demonstrate their development of their reflective approach on the topic.

The instructor attempts to provide a space where multiplicity can exist, allowing for an in-depth (as opposed to simplistic) view on a topic and driving her students to consider and think about issues, to not be satisfied with the comfortable. Students are consistently encouraged to analyze issues. They are pushed to compare what they learn from their readings - which is often more theoretical, focusing mostly on France or the French population at large - with what they gain from their discussions with their keypals. These comparisons and analysis are both done in groups (class discussions) and individually (essays or cultural journals). The students are offered many arenas to show their analytical skills and continue to do so as they explore various aspects of the French culture, further working on the notion of diversity in France.

4.1.2. Cultural Differences and Stereotypes

In the fourth week of the semester, students in the United States and in France are required to answer survey questions. The survey is called a “mental map” and consists of associating words with specific concepts. For example:

A. Complete each statement as you personally see fit:
   a. The toughest age is…because…
   b. Success is
B. Associate 1-3 words (verbs, adjectives, nouns..) to each of the following words. You can help yourself with this cue "When I hear _____, these images/ideas come to mind: ________ "
   a. Family
   b. Mc Donald’s
   c. Patriotism

Such activity highlights that semantic categories do not necessarily overlap across cultures, words meaning being socially and culturally constructed (Agar, 1994; Kramsch, 1993a; Lantolf 1999). For example, what “patriotisme” means for the French greatly differs from “patriotism” in an American sense of the word, as it has just been mentioned. Vygotsky (1978) argues that conscious awareness is critical for development to emerge. Learners need to become aware of the semiotic differences when considering cultural differences. As van Lier (2002) states, “signs are not objects out there, nor thoughts in here, but relationships between the person and the world, physical or social” (p. 151). Here, the mental map brings to the fore the various meanings of a concept and compels students to be aware of their own meaning as well as other meanings.

The students discuss the survey results on Thursday, September 20th. As a homework assignment, the students were asked to read and examine the results posted on the web. In class, the students are divided into groups of two. Each groups is in charge of an in depth examination of one word and must study what word associations the concept triggered. The instructor gives her students three questions to think about while studying the results:

1) What is the general impression when you read the results of a) your class? b) the French class. For example is it positive or negative? Is there general agreement or are there differences of opinion?  
2) Give a name to each category (one category per cell) and count the number of responses per category. 
3) What is the most important category for the French class? For your class? Is it different? Are there differences within each class?

The activity is conducted in French. On a transparency she provides a list of vocabulary words and expressions, giving the means to the students to discuss the survey results in French:

- 1/2= la moitié,
- 1/3= un tiers,
- 2/3= deux tiers,
• 1/4= un quart,
• 51%= la majorité,
• 80-95%=la quasi-totalité.
• 100%= tout le monde.

While the students work in groups, the instructor walks around the room, offers more French vocabulary and helps them express their ideas in French. She also assists them in the interpretation of the results. For the following netmeeting, students are required to further study the results, now picking four or five topics (i.e. concepts) of their interests. Based on their detailed analysis of the results, students then need to prepare six to eight questions to ask their keypals. Magali stresses that the questions should attempt to elicit what the results mean for their keypal (i.e. gain their keypal’s perspective on the survey), once again assisting her students’ reflection:

• Do the keypals agree with the overall picture?
• According to their keypals, is the overall picture representative of French people?

After the netmeeting, the American students compare their keypals’ perspectives on the survey. The comparison brings to the fore the differences of meanings as well as the common views within the French class. The objective of the week’s activities is to underline how language and culture are intertwined. In many instances, words associations are very different within and across cultures. The students gain ample opportunities to discuss what particular cultural concepts such as patriotism, family or religion entail for them. These activities highlight how such concepts are culturally and socially constructed.

The students continue to explore cultural differences by studying stereotypes. Their first assignment is to interview five people (preferably non-French speakers) and ask them:

• When you hear "France" what comes to mind?
• When you hear "French men" what comes to mind?
• When you hear "French women" what comes to mind?

For this homework, the instructor expects her students to combine their results in a French sentence for which she provides an example:
When they hear "France", people I interviewed think of a (adjective, adjective, adjective....) country with.... and where people are (adjectives). In particular, according to the people I interviewed, French men are men who (+verb) and who are (adjectives).... and French women who (+verb) and who are (adjectives).”  

[Email, September 26th].

For this activity, the teacher combines a grammatical exercise with a sociological one. The students are expected to review how to use adjectives in order to describe their results. In her directions, the teacher points to important aspects to take into consideration and the grammatical features to use. However, this activity is evidently not simply a pattern drill on grammar but rather an activity where content and language skills are embedded. By requesting the students to interview other people, the instructor also prompts them to gain information beyond the classroom boundaries. Therefore, the students are exposed to yet another set of voices.

On Thursday September 27th, the students write a collective essay in class on “portrait des Français et de la France”. The instructor’s goal is not only to have her students examine issues in detail but also to guide their learning, teach them to think critically and synthesize information learned to date (see the section on Guidance, section 4.1.4).

For the collective essay, she divides the blackboard as follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>France</th>
<th>Americans</th>
<th>French people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seen by the French</td>
<td>Seen by the Americans</td>
<td>Seen by the French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen by the French</td>
<td>Seen by the Americans</td>
<td>Seen by the Americans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In each cell, students synthesize stereotypes gathered in their interview assignment. They do not have time to complete the entire table in class but the students are required to do so for homework. During the class discussion, Magali once more stresses the importance of agreement (adjective agreement, verb agreement with the subject, etc). She tries to include grammatical points and vocabulary in the class activity, which is primarily
focused on cultural content. In other words, language and culture are not taught as separate skills.

Until the end of October, the students discuss “stereotypes”, “self-image”, “image of the other”, “Image of Americans”, “Image of the French”. For example, in the fourth netmeeting, the students talk about France and French people as seen by Americans. The fifth netmeeting is about the United States and Americans as seen by the French. The teacher is aware that stereotypical representations can be offending and warns her students in the email below. As she is trying to teach her students how to debate, she also provides them with hints on how the French can be perceived as aggressive in a debate. Finally, she encourages her students to challenge their keypals’ views and to force them to go further in their arguments:

“Bonjour,

Demain, nous allons discuter des stereotypes des Americains sur les Francais et sur la France.

As you might imagine, this is a delicate topic. It's very easy to be offensive. I want to prepare you for some reactions that can be expected.

1) Think of your own reactions: there was a lot of laughter. In their class on Friday, when they read our 'collective essay', they laughed a lot too. But why did you laugh? What was funny?

2) For French students of all ages, religion is definitely NOT a preoccupation. I don't think any of the TL actually goes to church/temple, and they don't understand that someone may become reticent in some situations because of moral beliefs.

3) For French people, debating is not 'seeking consensus' or an attempt at reconciling ideas and points of view, but a sort of competition where you must win or lose: people see themselves as detached from their arguments, as the worst insult would be to refuse engaging in debate (implying you believe the other person is not worth it or not smart enough to handle it). The ability to argue is thus crucial. You MUST try and follow up on every answer with another question based on that answer. It's the equivalent of "keeping the ball off the ground".

4) If you lived in France for a while, you would be appalled at the feedback French people get from America through the news, TV and movies. What we see of America comes through the very sitcoms you enjoy every day, and through the news (about every day.) It has now become a cliché that when a radio or TV speaker says "today in America....", something outlandish (by French standards) or horrible will follow. School massacres, street violence, weird lawsuits or actions, for example, are given widespread publicity, and it is not surprising that young French people who have never actually been to the US should get a distorted image of the reality. They almost think the country is full of weirdos, and do not realize that the occasional loony is surrounded by millions of perfectly normal people with perfectly normal lives, that not everyone in America packs an AK-47.
That is the reason why the [The French students] are going to [Name of the American university] (and why, hopefully, you can go to France for Spring Break); without the trip, they would miss part of the picture.

5) When two groups of young people communicate, whatever the esteem and respect they feel for each other, and the [French students] really LIKE their KPs [keypals], isolated incidents are bound to happen anyway. We had two last year, one of which was during the debate on stereotypes. That sort of happening should not interfere with our mutual relationships, but rather, hopefully, enrich them. There is always something to learn from incidents.

In short: you should be very well-prepared, with follow-up questions ready. Try to use the verbs, words, and structures you’ve learned. I want to see evidence of your going from learning the rules to actually applying them in conversation. Do not take everything your keypals tell you at face value, for instance, probe a little bit. Do not remain content with general words like 'long', 'fast', 'far', 'much'... what do those mean exactly? When 70% of people live within 25 miles of their family, for instance, living "close" to your relatives means something different than in a State you need 8 hour to cross. Try to think of their frame of mind. Expect that your keypals may get defensive thus aggressive. If something excessive happens, tell me, we'll correct it right away.

For this NM, focus on stereotypes held by Americans about French people and France as a country. Try and see how these stereotypes actually reflect American culture rather than or as much as French culture, i.e., what do these stereotype tell us about Americans?”

In this email, she asks her students to go beyond their first reactions and further analyze what stereotypes say about the French and about French culture in general. Furthermore, she encourages them to question the stereotypes the French students tell them about Americans and American culture. Finally, she attempts to teach them debating skills.

In their study of stereotypes, the students are also required to read a number of articles portraying American adjustment to life in France. Moreover, they also have their instructor’s lectures and analysis of some American stereotypes. Once again, the students are confronted with various stereotypes and analysis of such representations. Therefore, the students see the image of the United States and of France from multiple angles. The instructor consistently looks for avenues to trigger questions and challenge her students’ views. She forces them to not only react but also analyze what is at stake. In some ways, the French students also challenge the American students’ views. For example, as American students prepare a poster for their French keypals, entitled “We are [the name of the university]”, the French prepare a collage on “French stereotypes of
Americans” (see Appendix F). First, some pictures and words come as a surprise to the students. Second, the students do not always understand why words like “Kyoto” or “inequality” are part of the collage.

The collage triggers interesting discussions as the French images of Americans clashes at times with the image they have of themselves or of America (see the narratives). In a follow-up essay, the students synthesize their reactions to the collage by answering four questions:

1) The items in the picture are instantly recognized as American ones by French people. Do you recognize America in this collage?
2) What is missing?
3) Is it biased?
4) Are there elements that you personally resent because they are untrue and, in your opinion, do NOT represent America?

Many students’ reactions are then posted on their web site. In class, the instructor also talks about a few questions brought up in the students’ reactions and explains some of the French perspectives of the collage:

Instructor: Right now I would like to talk about the collage. Most of you have looked at the collage, do you have any question about that? Anything that you don’t really understand about what went there, you’re not quite sure why … A lot of people questioned the idea of hormones. Why did they take hormones? Does anyone knows? Any idea?

Ss1: ( )

Instructor: Hmm, exactly. Not hormones for people it’s for food given to animals. In Europe, it’s forbidden, illegal to give hormones to animals. However, in the United States it’s allowed. The reason is that the FDA considers it’s not bad for your health but it does ( ). So if you only eat hormones fed beef and hormones fed chicken ( ) puberty but it didn’t have any reverse effect on you, it’s not like you’re eating poison. However, the Europeans don’t want any chemical that is in their food, and especially the French. So the French refused the importation of hormones made beef and for that reason started the retaliations, economic war between France and the US. That is why hormones come to mind for the French when they think of the United States. So…that’s the idea… and actually something we’re going to start with... next week, we’re gonna discuss that because it has far implications not just an economic war.

Another question? Anything that you noticed from the collage? Did you notice the colors, what colors were represented? … Did you notice that it went from dark to the light? If you go from left to right, you go from dark to light! That’s their way of indicating that if you are-the elements on the left are considered to be very negative, in the middle they’re neutral, on the right side, they’re positive.
If you look from top to bottom, the top is serious issues. The more you go
towards the bottom, the more superficial it is, things that don’t matter as
much as what is on the top. So for instance they put the mayflower very high
and plastic surgery at the bottom so obviously they’re not of the same
importance for American culture.
Anyone knows why plastic surgery? Any idea?
Ss2 : Do they have it 
Instructor : Yeah they do
Ss3 : A lot of people do it 
Instructor : No, it’s for movie stars it’s not something that is considered normal for
people. Some of the reasons is that ( ) in California. I went to California and
every single magazine had advertisement not one but SEVERAL
advertisements for plastic surgery and because a lot of the images come from
Hollywood that people have in France, obviously they will have information
that is related to California not the United States as a whole. Another reason
is that they’re because (it is considered peers) among French people they
made a report about what ( ) on French TV and they talk about teenagers
that want to have plastic surgery, which sounds extremely.. outrageous to
French people...that a teenager would want a nose change or whatever
changed. That sounds extremely strange...so they concluded that appearance
is very important to Americans that they want to conform to a certain
standard of beauty and especially the girls who don’t follow that standard
then they are [raised] to taking steps necessary for it.
The steroids idea is the same and it’s for guys how it’s important to be
athletic and have muscles and it’s the same idea of appearance, there’s a
certain standard of what you should look like. At the same time it doesn’t
mean there’s no standard of appearance in France. In fact, there’s a very
VERY important standard that would apply to everyone in France that you
have look in a certain way. But it’s not something that you can do with
plastic surgery, it’s very cultural like what kind of clothes you’re supposed to
wear and how you’re supposed to look, how you’re supposed to walk, which
is very different from the way they do in the US. There’s more tolerance in
the US because people don’t actually look at you whereas in France the fact
that you’re in public means that you are exposing yourself to the public and
to their judgments. So from the moment you walk down the street you’re
judged for what you look like. That’s something extremely strange because if
you’re American it feels like everyone’s staring at you all the time. And if
you’re French [living] in the US it feels like you can just walk around and no
one pays attention to you regardless of how you look, which obviously is
something that is both positive and negative. French women who dress up
for instance feel really bad because no one pays them any compliment...no
one looks at them on the street, no one smiles, no one does anything when
they’re in the US. American women who are stared at constantly on the
streets may not take that as a compliment but may take that as aggression.
So obviously... ( ) both positive and negative it is not something that is good
or it’s bad but it affects how you perceive yourself.
So any other question … that you may have about their collage? Any other
problem? No? [Class Observation, October 11th]
Students’ homework is to prepare three questions on the collage. Magali also asks the students to think about questions such as “what do the words on the collage mean?”, “How are they ordered?”, “Would you have picked those if you were to make a portrait of America?”. There is obviously no right interpretation but the teacher drives her students to a) understand a French perspective and decode the French cultural references, b) to think about the images America projects to the world or more specifically to France. She also helps them read the collage (indicating the importance of colors and positions within the collage) and force them to realize that the French have, of course, distorted representations of Americans and of America. In other words, she offers a context, which facilitates the reading.

After their netmeeting on October 15th, the instructor realizes that the students in France and in the United States do not always know the facts, which makes the discussion difficult. Therefore, the day following their fifth netmeeting on the views the French have of Americans and of the United States, the instructor starts the class with a ten minutes presentation on death penalty, violence and the Kyoto treaty, reporting facts on these topics. For example, she explains that the death penalty does not exist in France and indicates that the United States is the only western country where the death penalty exists. She offers statistics on violence in the two countries stressing that guns are conceived as very dangerous objects in France. Finally, she provides a historical context on the Kyoto treaty underlining that the United States, responsible of 1/3 of the gas emission, refused to ratify the treaty after four years of negotiations.

Language shapes the way one looks at things (Agar, 1994; Lantolf, 1999). As Agar (1994) notes “two different languages aren’t just alternative ways to talk about the same reality. Alternative languages carry with them a different theory of what reality in fact is. A shift from one language to another is a shift between two different worlds, where speakers of each one think their version is ‘objective’, but they’re both wrong” (p. 66). The instructor looks for means to observe and analyze these “different worlds” and underscores how France and the United States look at issues in their own ways. As the data show, the instructor attempts to establish “a sphere of interculturality” (Kramsch,
1993a, p. 205). She consistently looks for ways to contrast the two cultures and compare opinions within each culture. Throughout the semester, she not only provides facts and in depth analysis but also guides her students to observing and examining the issues at large. In the following narratives, I will investigate how each participant observes, analyzes and reflects on the cultural differences and the stereotypes (see narratives). In the last part of the semester, the students continue to study the French culture through food.

4.1.3. Food:

For the second half of the semester, food becomes the main topic. This particular theme is divided into several segments. First, students talk about “globalization”, which they contrast to the resurgence of “regional traditions” in France. Second, students discuss the specialties of French cuisine in different areas of France as an example of the diversity that exists within French culture. For instance, “choucroute” is a typical Alsacian dish whereas “fondue” comes from Savoie, in the Alps. The differences can be explained by the geography of each region as well as its histories. The regional differences represent an important facet of the French identity. Third, the French and American classes discuss how holidays are celebrated in each culture.

At the end of the eighth week, the American students explore how the French view industrial farming. Note that genetically modified food or hormonal beef are today illegal in the European Union. Research is currently being conducted in order to assess the long-term effects of such products, which are perceived as “unnatural” in France, i.e. unhealthy. There is not only a concern for public health but also for the environment\textsuperscript{xv}. In his struggle, José Bové has become a symbol of the fight against globalization, as the head of the \textit{Confédération Paysanne}, one of the farmers’ unions. The point here is not to provide a detailed exposé on the issue but rather to depict how “globalization” (“\textit{mondialisation}”) is a serious matter and a political issue in France, which is discussed in Magali’s class. To understand the issues at stake, below is an article the instructor sends to her students. The original article by Marc Guillaume\textsuperscript{xvi} is in French but the
instructor translates it, to make sure her students are able to understand the essential points summarized in the article. Note that she sends this article, after introducing the topic in class (see pp. 106-109).xvii.

“Bonjour a tous,
I translated this text for you because it will be of great help for Monday's NM. (If you want it in French, to read side-by-side, ask me!) It is written by Marc Guillaume, an economics professor from an elite, conversative (and very pro-American) university. (I add this information so that you can have context - take this into account as you read, maybe think of what it could be from a liberal person, or from someone who's not especially keen on what the US stands for, not the people, but the system and way of life.) It should also help you understand the issues and the portrait you have to read for Monday, as a way to prepare good questions before Monday.

AGAINST Mc DO, AGAINST DALLAS
The battle that is currently waged against the globalization of taste takes root in our culture, it meets the issue of the French “cultural exception” (note:xviii: started in the 16th century with the Edict of Nantes that tolerated several religions, at a time when tolerance was a 'bad' word throughout Europe. Means “we are different, we go against the grain, and we're proud of it.” The protest by farmers during the festival of American cinema in Deauville is more than a symbol of the French ‘resistance to the WTO (World trade organization - in French, OMC). It demonstrates the depth of the link between culture and agriculture, that join together in what we call “the French exception”; but is increasingly becoming a European position.

Our agriculture is a highly successful field. It has used its strong traditions to become modern, to adapt, keeping France as the 2nd agricultural export country in the world. Therefore we should both follow our interests and respect the culture that roots our agriculture. We managed to avoid an industrial-type, geographically-concentrated surproduction, kept a certain balance across the territory for a measured relationship to our land, nature, animals, and generally speaking what is living. It is thus legitimate that our country, like Europe, attempts to adapt the rules of the world's trade to preserve the world's balance and allow for the reasoned evolution of cultures that are thousands of years old.

Like culture and agriculture, culture and traditional products find their roots in land and history. They can't be mixed together with rules of trade that have not taken them into account. Jack Lang (minister of culture) said it well twenty years ago: “culture and economics fight together.” I would concur, as long as you do not see; the sole economic dimension of cultural industries in this slogan, as long as you understand that economics is also ‘in itself’ a cultural order, a value that can become totalitarian in its ambitions. We must thus overcome the terms of the immediate conflict. First is the question of eating and food as habits. Americans have developed a great skill in industrializing food, especially through fast-food, in the same way the French have developed a particular skill in industrializing old products that are exportation favorites. One must recognize that Americans tend to prefer cliché-foods, normalized products (it is probably a cultural trait that may correspond to the wish of unifying a very diverse group of people through daily habits.) In fact, all countries have food clichés and comfort foods. But only American
food clichés have conquered the world. This success should entice all other countries to develop a competitive response rather than contempt for Mac Donald's hamburgers. This is especially true since American food clichés don't really fit in our food patterns, habits, and traditions, so they don't really threaten them. Most Americans reject as strongly as we do the fast food industry's excesses. Many Americans enjoy good quality food. In fact, when Mac Donald's decided to set up a new joint in a historical neighborhood of Paris, it was an American who lived there who led the internet campaign denouncing this goal and successfully kept it from disfiguring the area.

It wasn't random that the Rouergue (Larzac area) started this whole conflict against Mac Donald's. This region knows how to export. They know what the new WTO rules mean for their work and their way of life. Its inhabitants left France for Argentina in the early 1900s. Chased away from their 'desert' due to poverty, many exiled themselves to Paris and created most of the cafes and restaurants we enjoy nowadays, as part of the Aveyron's diaspora. The region then began to export its products: the famous roquefort, the riches of Aubrac (knives of Laguiole, cheese, high-quality meat.) People and especially farmers in this region are very aware of what globalization offers or threatens. They know the rules of international trade.

These very rules are at the origin of the current conflict. The issue of what people eat is serious and complex. I regret that the WTO authorized the US to retaliate against Europe's request for a delay in authorizing hormone-laced-beef and genetically modified foods (a delay meant to conduct scientific experiments about their safety which most Europeans consider dubious at best) through arbitrary measures against European products. That these measures target in particular roquefort, foie gras, and other French specialties seems a bit ridiculous. Beyond the economic conflict between the top two exporting countries (a legitimate but limited and temporary conflict!) the American measures appeared like utter contempt for products that symbolize France and its excellence.

It is my hope that this conflict will teach both our countries about cultural identities. I also hope that it will shed light upon the other cultural battles the French fight, such as movies, books, and national languages. It is easier to mock the French when they defend their movies, their literature, and their language, than when they defend the right to European agriculture's specificity. Americans think the French are just arrogant and biased, contemptuous for another culture that is more successful. Although I cannot deny that the French may at times appear so; this snobbery is greatly exaggerated. In addition, most people who defend the French cultural exception: throughout the world, Americans included - love; literature and quality movies; thus they respect both French and American literature, both French and American quality movies. But ask Americans who love their literature and their movies: they feel that those very things, too, are being threatened by the commercialization of cultural products that glamorize ignorance and violence, and look for the smallest common denominator.

What is at stake in that particular battle is much more important for our every day lives - both for Americans and for the French. Culture is the last lock of intelligent resistance to globalization as economic totalitarianism. Europeans resist a modification in their daily life patterns, in their way of eating because everything in their culture opposes what is proposed. But our very culture is being altered, normalized, and sanitized. Our very ability to defend ourselves is vanishing. And when those are gone, we all (French, Europeans, Americans) will read books that aren't literature, will watch sitcoms produced by the pound, will have lost the very taste for anything else.

We should have rules that allow for the coexistence of roquefort and Mac Donald's. Otherwise, we will enter a desert where each culture's history, territory, and traditions
will have vanished, replaced by a mcdonald's-like globalized culture.
[Email, October 19th]

On Thursday October 18th, the instructor introduces the topic of globalization to prepare her students to their next netmeeting. The email above is sent the next day. At the beginning of her message, she is careful to provide a context in which the article was written. She highlights that this article should not be read as an “anti-American” position. She expects her students to read this translated piece for the following Monday, in preparation for their sixth netmeeting. As she indicates at the beginning of her email, she hopes that reading a text in English will help students grasp the main issues of the article. She supplements this reading assignment with other French articles (see below). As will become clear in the narratives, the issues brought up here are very new to the students. Many never thought of genetically modified food or hormonal beef as controversial issues.

Since I was unable to observe the class that day, she explains in an email to me how she presented the topic in class:

“I presented a map of France and underscored the Larzac in relation to Millau, Montpellier, Paris. Then I told them a bit of the region's history: how they used to be part of an independent kingdom (and fought but lost to the Northern Armies from the French kingdom); then the protestants fighting the king's dragons who wanted to impose catholicism; then the Larzac as the prime area for the "insoumis" and "deserteurs" in the 60s and 70s, up to the "volarem viair al pais" (I didn't quote that because I wasn't sure of the real thing! I talked about occitanie...) and the protests against the military occupation of the plateau. I also told them the story of roquefort, "cheese of the king" since Charlemagne's era, that can only be made there, in these specific conditions. Then I asked them, what does it have to do with Mac Donald's and the image of the US in France? They were puzzled. So I explained about Jose Bove and we did an exercise using PC/Impft [Passé composé/Imparfait] telling of what had happened in 1999 (the dismantling of the Mc Do) and 2000 (the WTO/Seattle protests, where Jose Bove received a standing ovation by almost 3,000 people). it was a page-long text with appropriate verbs (démonter, protester...) to conjugate. ;-) I explained how J.Bove spent part of his childhood in the US because this is very important: the reference to the US is all over in these articles, and especially in the portrait that I gave you too. The idea was to have them think of the relationship between France and American for ideology and economy: traditions, culture, food, business. we brainstormed for a while for questions for Monday. in particular, i told them to try and figure out the logic - how do their keypals make sense of these events? how do they feel about them?
Some questions that were proposed were: do you think "mac Do" equals "malbouffe"? Do you think "hormone-fed cattle" is dangerous? What does Mc Donald's mean to you? Do you approve what Jose Bové did? Do you understand why he did it?

*they* sure can't understand what Mc Do has to do with anything. They understand Mc Do is an American brand, but they don't see the relationship to the WTO. For them, it has no logic whatsoever. they say that MacDonald's only means "quick lunch' and nothing else. So I asked them to try and think what it means in cultural terms. Their reaction was "Man, if he'd done that here, he'd have been in jail so quick he wouldn't 've had time to talk to any journalist", "why do the French eat at MacDonald's then?", "did his action make the sales at mc donald's go down?" and "What does Mac Do have to do with roquefort?"

They got a lot of vocabulary (AOC, roquefort, malbouffe, terroir, patrimoine, contestation, manif, boeuf aux hormones...) 

[...]

I think the lesson went well. I made the presentations entirely in French. It was a high-French content class, and i think their brains were a bit fried at the end, but it went allright. I was happy with how much they understood. After each section I discussed, I gave them 5 mn [minutes] to summarize in English and check with one another what they'd understood. They managed to make sense of it all. I was very happy. On Tuesday i'll show them the portrait of Jose Bové made for la cinquieme, and maybe "le charcutier de bayonne contre mac do", a piece of it at least.”

[Email, October 18th]

As often is the case, she begins her introduction to the class by providing a historical context of the region, underlining its tradition of protest. Note that the lesson is also dedicated to the use of the two past tenses, the passé composé and the imperfect. How to use these tenses appropriately is a difficult task for the students, as the distinction does not exist in English tenses. Obviously in the narrative that the instructor creates, she offers a communicative task where she informs her students of the important events to take into consideration while reviewing the usage of the past tenses. This is another example underlining that Magali’s class is not simply about learning a new linguistic system but content is essential. The text also allows the instructor to introduce vocabulary related to the topic. The students are expected to take notes and to reuse the vocabulary in their netmeetings and the emails they send to their keypals. The vocabulary words also help students in their reading of French texts.

In her lesson described above, she primarily focuses on the French perspective of the issue. She attempts to make her students understand how the French perceive the genetically modified food or hormonal beef. With her questions, she consistently guides her students in thinking about the issue and urges them to analyze it. She does not
necessary provide an answer but expects her students to inquire and think about a reply. She obviously encourages collaboration, as this work is done in class, i.e. students are discussing the issue together. In addition, the students are required to work with the French students and obtain their keypals’ perspectives on the topic.

To prepare for their sixth netmeeting entitled “Mondialisation et traditions- le MacDo”, students are assigned to read texts on globalization and José Bové\textsuperscript{xxi}. The questions they prepare for their keypals must be related to the readings and to the class discussions. The students’ discussions on the topic with the French students are described and explained in the participants’ narratives.

The next day, on Tuesday October 23\textsuperscript{rd}, the instructor shows her students three video excerpts: The first is the cartoon entitled “12 Tasks of Astérix\textsuperscript{xxii}” presented in English, the second is a television documentary on Aubrac\textsuperscript{xxiii} and the last is on José Bové\textsuperscript{xxiv}. In the assigned reading the students were given an article where José Bové is compared to Astérix in his fight for French farming traditions. Bové, like Astérix, has a long mustache.

Astérix is the hero of the comic strip by Goscinny. He is “the best warrior of the village” who, along with the fellow villagers, is fighting the Roman invaders relentlessly. The short excerpt shown in class is the beginning of the cartoon, where the main characters of the story are presented. There is also a scene where the Roman soldiers are very reluctant to fight the Gauls as one says: « you know what these Gauls will do to us, they’re simply not human ». Before the other excerpts, the instructor orientes her students by giving a context and a general idea of the contents. The other two excerpts are in French and the documentaries were broadcasted on the French channel Arte (i.e. they were done for French speakers and have no subtitles).

Instructor : Okay, après ça, vous allez voir AUTRE chose. Aubrac is where they have very famous cattle, very good quality beef. But because they live in the mountains they cannot be very productive […] The second sequence I just want you to really observe and look at every details. I don’t expect you to understand what the people say but really pay attention to every detail of the image. And the third sequence will be about
José Bové again and try to ( ) and see parallels between what you see in the images and what you just saw in the Astérix cartoon. Okay?

Some important words that you’ll hear. One of them is « le pays ». In most… books you will see « le pays » (meaning) « country », « the country » like « the United States is my country », « les Etats-Unis, c’est mon pays. » but for a lot of French people, ‘le pays’ is actually the region where they were born… or which they adopted. So when you will hear « le pays de José Bové », they don’t mean France they mean (specific) area. So I’ll give about two minutes to sort of talk to each other after the first sequence, second sequence and third sequence. Each sequence is about two or three minutes long. It’s really hard, it’s gonna be the first one you see a French video made for French people. […] [Class Observation, October 23rd]

The instructor plays the second excerpt, entitled “Les paysans dans l’ornière”, twice. It depicts the life of farmers in the mountainous Aubrac region. Aubrac is known for the quality of its meat. In the documentary, the farmer who is interviewed explains that farmers would not be able to survive without governmental subsidies, highlighting that the quality of the Aubrac type of beef would simply disappear. However, the reporter stresses that the consumer has made up his mind, he or she wants cheap beef and in abundance. The images show a gorgeous and very green landscape. The farm, however, is rather in poor conditions. In class, students talk in groups about the images and explain what they understood from the excerpt. Then, the instructor asks a few questions about the video and finally summarizes the main points, making sure her students grasp the general idea.

The last excerpt is entitled “Bové en campagne contre burger”. The documentary portrays José Bové as a central figure in the struggle against globalization, “a hero, the defender of European farmers”. The reporter explains that since the 1970s when inhabitants of Larzac and others demonstrated against the military expansion on the plateau, the region has become the stage for many political struggles. Farmers have formed a sheep rearing cooperative. Once abandoned, villages are coming back to life with the return of people to the area.

After watching this last excerpt, the students are expected to chat (computer mediated communication) about the issues raised in the videos. They are also required to
use the information from the assigned articles. While students are chatting, the instructor walks around the class assisting the students. She also helps them understand the French perspective. She stresses that Americans and the French have different ways of looking at food. For Americans, the sanitary factor is a priority. For example, non-pasteurized cheese is not legal in the United States. The French, on the other hand, demand “natural” products. They conceive products such as “hormonal beef” and “genetically modified food” as unhealthy.

In the following weeks, students continue to discuss food, reflecting on the role of food in society and the role of regional identity. For example, they study the various gastronomic specialties in France and analyze the relationships French people have with food (i.e. eating is not simply considered a nourishment but a social event). The class also organizes a French meal for which each student prepares a French dish. On the day of the meal, on November 8th, the instructor identifies each dish’ geographical origin on a map of France drawn on the board. She then classifies each dish per course. She explains that the yogurt cake is the first one learns to cook as a child in France. Finally, she describes what French people do when they eat. As the class notes below reveal, she offers rich social and historical descriptions:

“Instructor: Number one, people eat in courses. Number two, they speak about the food the eat.
So, if you were in France, you would probably have the ‘quiche lorraine’ or the ‘croque-monsieur’, then you would probably have the ‘poulet provençal’, then you would have the cheese with the ‘baguette’. You would actually have baguette with everything and then you would have desert. So we’re going to do that in this order so you should come and take some of the quiche and the croque-monsieur, either one or both if you want to try if you want to try both you should take a little piece of it.
Donc pour commencer … Et j’ai mis sur le transparent la façon dont vous pouvez parler de tout ça.
You serve by dish […]
First you serve one dish, everyone is done and has taken second, the second dish is brought and the third dish and the fourth and the fifth and so forth. That actually was not the case for a long time in France, it was just like in the US for a long time up until the early 19th century. And around that time that’s when euh that’s when cooking etiquette was euh stratified. That is up until then you had specific table manners that had been prepared and described, described in books that everyone needed to have if you were from proper society. So in the 16th century you started to have rules or etiquettes for how to eat. But they didn’t have specific ways of how to serve the food.
So once all the rules of politeness at the table made it through all the groups and classes across society, the upper level classes wanted to distinguish themselves so they invented new things and that was serving through courses while the peasants kept bringing the one meal MAIN dish on the table and that was it. So… that’s how it happened.

Also you should know that the term of « restaurant » comes from the French… it’s a French invention. The idea of having a place for you where someone else cooks for you and you sit down and they serve you. It’s it’s it comes from the word to restore, which in French is « restaurer ». And the idea would be that people went there, eat food that would be revigorating. Okay? « restaurer » means to « restore health ». And so that’s why these special place that was completely new because it was not segregated by gender, both men and women could go unlike ( ) where only men could go. It was not segregated by class or order either, that is both rich and poor people could go. And also it emphasized individualism because it offered a menu. Up until then, that’s the early 19th century, the way it worked that you went to the Inn, you sat down and you were served whatever the cook had prepared. So with the idea of the restaurant, people brought you/ [Laughter]..[a student dropped some food]

Student :  « not my day ! » [laughter]
Instructor : People brought you ..okay
People brought you a menu and you could actually say I want to eat this or I want to eat that. And actually to the point when you could choose the place ( ) on what they offered. That is they would put outside their house, today we serve this and if you wanted to you could go…so that’s how restaurants came to be. A very novel idea for that time. [long pause] Another novel idea was the café. So all these places sound very normal nowadays but when they were invented they sounded were very strange and very new but people took to them very fast. The café was, like the name said, the place where you went to drink coffee, which in French is ‘café’. The same word, you say ‘café’ and coffee in the same way ‘un café’. The idea was that coffee as well as hot coco, which was also served there helped make you smarter. It was because you know the caffeine. People couldn’t really understand what happened but people felt like hyper so they thought it meant that the coffee helped making you smarter […] So anyways, coffee was supposed to make you smarter … and that’s where a lot of phylosophical discussions took place regarding overthrowing the monarchy or changing the regime or just thinking about how the world could be better… and that was also something pretty new.. that is you have a place dedicated to discussion around food. And for as long as it’s been you know people have been gathering around tables … to talk at each other and eat at the table .. but from that time all the conversations moved from the salons where sometimes ( ). The salons were where the Nobles had to talk and those were also ( ) by women ( ) So it moved from the upper-class area that was restricted basically, you could only go in if you were invited to this free space…where people went and talk and had food and drinks…and could discuss everything. So the other conversation became important not just for (a poor people class) but for everyone in French society, which also explains why you (take) three or four hours in France…Because in between each dish like let’s say you bring your first course like in our case is the quiche okay?
people eat it and talk at the same time and say how good the food is and they remember every other quiche they ever had and they compare it to and then they talk about everything you can think of and then they take a [xx] and so forth. So people TALK, being able to TALK is very important. Having a conversation where you can bring up all of your interests, your knowledge of what’s going on in France, in movie’s, in books, in ( ) work that’s very important. Often you go two French families (when) they sit down and they have a big meal, what happens is that they start speaking ( ) and they speak very fast and all at the same time and you have no clue of what’s going on! Because (often times) French people have developed the ability to maintain two (or three) conversations at the same time. So you have people talking about different things and you have those things going around your head. So it’s very confusing..if you’re a foreign student. However, the time you get the hang of it it’s apparently the most exciting thing for a person who’s learning French because all of the sudden you understand an entirely new way of talking because all of the sudden you understand several conversations at once. And it’s not that you understand the language, it’s understanding how things move from one to the other and from person to person. And that’s something you can’t actually learn in class. You have to be there. That’s why young kids are kept at the table for a while. When they’re or twelve, they have to stay for a while until they’re about sixteen and at that time it’s an honor if you are sixteen (that you can stay at the table) and talk with everyone because it means that you MOVED up and that you’re able to do the same thing that everyone else do. So
Okay! Second course! You can go for a second!"

[Class Observation, November 8th]

She provides all this information while the students help themselves with the first course. In her explanation, she highlights what the activity of eating entails for the French. She attempts to socialize her students into a community of practice, underscorcing the eating conventions in France. Obviously, she does not expect her students to eat like the French but she is showing them how a meal is conducted in France. Note that some students hope to go to France and visit their keypals in the Spring. They would then be hosted by French families and knowing such conventions could come in handy. In her explanations, she asserts that eating is a social activity where carrying a conversation is very important. In her presentation, she also gives the history of how cafés and restaurants came about. She offers lengthy information on the topic, while guiding her students through French social conventions. For example, she draws a plate on the table indicating that the fork is placed on the left of the plate and the knife on the right. She shows that the bread is placed on the plate as there is no separate plate for the bread.
While the students eat the other courses of the meal, they watch French commercials for food products. All the commercials are in French and have no subtitles. She then asks her students to talk about the food they eat. For this activity, she provides a list of French vocabulary:

“Instructor: Okay, when you want to say to your friends that something is good, like yum, you say « miam-miam » and when you want to say « beuh, gross! » you say « beurk! » okay? « miam-miam et beurk! » but that’s with friends okay? When you’re in a real meal, when you’re with real people and you want to make a good impression you can say euh « non, merci je n’en veux plus » (to refuse a second serve of something). If you think that you’re not gonna like it but you can’t never refuse a dish in France. So if you think you’re not gonna like it you can say « juste pour goûter » that means you will just take a little bit and people are not gonna be offended if you don’t like it and if you really really don’t want something you can say « je me réserve pour la suite » ‘I’m keeping space in my stomach to eat more of the delicious things that you are offering afterwards.’ A very nice way to say ‘I don’t want it.’ If you’re not hungry, don’t say « je suis plein » which means « I’m drunk » [laughter] C’est « je n’ai plus faim » okay? ‘I’m full’ is not polite, you say ‘je n’ai plus faim’, I’m not hungry anymore. And ideally always say good things about what you’re eating.” [Class Observation, November 8th]

In addition to the instructor’s lectures, the students are required to read articles on each topic. The articles are often theoretical, providing an in depth explanation of French society at large. The students also have the opportunity to compare the information learned from their keypals. Discussions with the French students are very interesting for most the students, as they provide meaning to them, considering that the information is more at a personal level. For example, for their seventh netmeeting, the students are expected to inquire about the French eating habits (when do the French eat? What do meals at home represent for them? What do they eat? Are meals different on Sundays?, etc.). Most students claim to have learned tremendously from their keypals at the end of the semester.

Students are exposed to a myriad of voices, a multitude of sources about French culture. The instructor strives to present French culture(s) from various angles, expanding her students’ views on France and on the French. She also leads them to a reflective approach on language and culture. By the end of the semester, she expects the students to examine the symbols of food:
“Bonjour a tous,

Some students have asked what Monday's homework is. Obviously, you ought to read the two sheets I handed out on Thursday. The three questions they ask will be the basis for our discussion:

*what links can one establish between food/nourishment and civilization?
*What symbols are attached to food/nourishment?
*May meals be pleasure?

One good way to proceed is to try and answer these questions for yourself and/or return them (why would there be links between food and culture? what symbols do I attach to eating? Why wouldn't a meal be a pleasurable experience?) Grapple with strategies to come up with interesting answers rather than generalities. This preparation can be turned in for credit.

Then, basing yourself on the process you followed, choose some points you'd like to explore. Focus on areas that seem important to you or areas that you expect to be different. Don't be content with getting the facts - always always ask why/how, if necessary indicate how you interpret the answer and ask your KP if she sees things in the same way.

Attention!! You can't ask the exact three questions in your text to your keypals since they're too general and abstract.-) This NM will test your ability to be creative in French. Use your imagination and have your KP use theirs to figure out some answers. For instance: Ask them to associate certain foods with ideas (for instance, they said fondue=chalet, montagne, amis, ski, hiver or poisson= vendredi. Find other examples that seem relevant to you) and question everything: why? how did you get this idea? Ask them to tell stories about their daily life or their childhood or their favorite memories. Create little situations ("imagine that...." "what would you do if you were in a restaurant and.....? how would you react if suddenly .....? how do you interpret it if your friends...?)

You may want to look at one or two sentences, give your analysis of the sentence and ask your keypal what she thinks of when she reads it. For instance, how do you interpret "eating is an artform"? Does that seem true for France? for your keypals? For Americans as far as you know? For yourself? If food represents a civilization (a culture?) then what would represent the US? (Based on your first week collage, it'd be pizza and hamburgers. Do you agree? If not, why did you pick those representations of food for your posters?)

Think of the commercials I showed on Thursday: how can they help you understand the text?

If you need more questions, ask yourself: this text is part of the equivalent of "English 15" for French ("French 15.") it introduces the chapter on food and eating (other chapters include 'the sacred", "communities", "childhood", "the future"..) If this text were in an American textbook, would the textbook include food at all? would it introduce the idea of food in the same way? in other ways? in opposite ways? (it's likely there are elements of the three). Which ones? And why?

Based on your answers, construct questions that will help you understand the ideas contained in the text. Try to figure out what depends on a person's individual opinions and tastes, and what is part of the "French identity" (as much as this may exist.)

Don't forget Journal 5!

Bon week-end,”

[Email, November 10th]
These are very difficult questions and demand good analytical skills. What is essential for the instructor is that her students are engaged in deep critical thinking, as in comparing French and American cultures and thinking about the symbolic values of food. She pushes her students to not be content with simple facts but to analyze and consistently ask « why ». She is relying on several disciplines to provide a context, be it historical, sociological, etc. She also teaches her students to rely on facts and examples to support their arguments. By the end of the semester, she expects her students to show their ability to synthesize and analyze what they have learned thus far. As the narratives will highlight, however, the students are not necessarily engaged in such analytical thinking. Magali also encourages her students to be creative with French and to try to take risks. She also helps them become better writers in French and encourages them to sharpen their analytical skills by requiring essays, in which students are expected to synthesize information learned thus far.

Obviously, the instructor values critical thinking and wants her students to be critical thinkers. She gives them the tools to observe, analyze and remain critical toward another culture as well as their own. Her approach pushes her students to challenge their own views and compels them to consider other perspectives. Because some of the sources she provides (e.g. reading assignments) and the objectives she sets for her students are quite challenging, she offers a great deal of assistance to her students throughout the semester.

4.1.4. Guidance:

As shown by the activities presented above, the students have multitude platforms to discuss specific themes and are confronted to various perspectives. They also have ample opportunities to speak French and improve their ability to communicate. First, the netmeetings with their keypals and the emails they send to each other allow each student to participate and practice French often. Second, the students have the opportunity to talk to each other in class and via chats. Finally, the students are required throughout the
semesters to write essays and a *Texte Libre* (see section 3.3.1). For each writing piece, the students can improve by turning a second draft benefiting from the teacher’s feedback. As for the *Texte Libre*, the students can turn in four drafts. In addition, she exposes them to several genres such as personal messages, descriptions, narrations, or essays. On each draft, she offers extensive feedback on the content as well as on the language. She gives her students many idiomatic expressions and gives them hints on how to use the French language appropriately and accurately.

For example, in September she sends two emails asking her students to first review a list of verbs that students use often (e.g. parler (avec, de); discuter (avec, de); avoir, avoir +......ans (age); etre, etc.). Second, she gives them the tools to use idiomatic expressions with their keypals:

```
***you may want to print this or keep it within reach when you write to yourkeypal***

1) Always begin with the proper greetings
"salut" or "bonjour" or "cher/chere" + name

2) 'how are you' is NOT "comment es-tu" but "comment ca va?" or "ca va?" or "comment vas-tu?"
The proper follow-up to this question is "Moi, ca va" or "Moi"+ whatever you're feeling
"ca va mais je suis stressee", "ca va pas terrible" "je suis tres heureuse" "je suis super-content" "je suis malade"
You can develop ( because.. I have too much work, I have many exams, […]

I was happy to talk with you on Monday = j'etais content(e) de parler avec toi Lundi. Our
discussion on Monday was neat/cool/interesting (etc) = notre discussion de lundi etait
sympa/cool/interessante (if you want to emphasize, add 'trop' in front -sounds cool - or
'tres' - standard French - tres sympa, trop cool...)

I was especially interested by our discussion about... = ce qui m'a le plus interesse, c'est la
discussion de...I was surprised when you said that... = ce qui m'a le plus surpris, c'est
quand tu as dit...

3) Answer their questions
"pour repondre a tes questions," or "pour repondre a ton dernier message," + your answer
according to = selon
in my opinion = a mon avis ( or: selon moi)
regarding x, en ce qui concerne x... ("concerner" is a 'false friend' = it doesn't mean
'concern' but more 'to deal with')
I agree = je suis d'accord (avec toi)
i disagree = je ne suis pas d'accord (et toi)

If you have questions of your own
```
I have questions for you... = Moi aussi j'ai des questions pour toi
After our NM I have more questions = j'ai encore des questions après notre NM

What then? Most students in the class have no problem writing their 10 lines, but for those of you who struggle finding topics of conversation...
4) Talk about yourself and your life
As for me = en ce qui me concerne
it./the book/the film/the problem.. is about x = il s'agit de x (note, the subject is ALWAYS 'il' regardless of the subject in English)
you can talk about what you did that week or what you look forward to doing.
You can discuss what's going on [on campus], in our class, what you're learning in other classes that may be of interest to them, what's going on in the US

5) les reporters
Each class has a journalist who reports about what's going on. Their reports are posted on the webpage. You may want to read the chronicles (movies, books, current events..) posted by both classes and comment on them. show some interest for what's going on in France, it can't hurt. ;-) If necessary, check out http://www.ttc.org

Did you hear about...? = est-ce que tu as entendu parler de...?
What do you think about..? = que penses-tu de...?
Do you know..= est-ce que tu connais...?
give your opinion (and explain)
A mon avis......, parce que...
Selon moi......, parce que...

6) to 'link' your sentences in a story or a point and conclude
first = d'abord (NOT 'premier'!!! "premier" works only if you say 'the first person...")
then = alors
finally = enfin
to start with = pour commencer
As a conclusion = pour conclure

To finish your letter
You can use a combination of these various expressions
(standard French)
A bientot = talk to you later
Au revoir = good bye
ecris-moi vite! = write to me soon
j'attends ta reponse avec impatience = I look forward to your next letter

(casual, friendly)
Bon, je dois y aller = gotta go now
J'ai trop de travail alors je dois m'arrêter dommage = I have to stop now because I have other work to do (implied meaning: but I wish I could write to you more, too bad I can't with all the homework I have!)
A la prochaine! = talk to you soon
A lundi!= talk to you on monday
A+ = TTYL, see ya
Don't forget to sign your name! :-)  
You now have the tools to write perfect letters! :-)”  
[Email, September 30th]

Not only will this information help students articulate their ideas in French, it will also help them understand their keypals’ use of French. Many of the French students, for example, use “trop” (too) to stress an emotion. As it will be discussed in the participants’ narratives, most of the participants appropriate many of these expressions by the end of the semester and demonstrate accuracy in their use of French.

Throughout this chapter, I have made evident that language is fully embedded in the content of this class. Grammar is at times the focus of a lesson but is rarely an isolated skill to be studied. The instructor often finds ways to talk about the weekly theme, using specific linguistic features or vocabulary she wants to introduce. As previously mentioned, the students are required to review adjective agreements and the vocabulary of description while talking about stereotypes. While telling the story of José Bové’s attack of a Mc Donald’s restaurant, she reviews the use of the two past tenses. Even though most of her lectures are done in English, she supplements her presentations with useful vocabulary and ways for her students to express themselves.

In the course of the semesters, she offers personalized guidance to each of her students. First, while they work in groups, she answers individual questions and assists them in their tasks. Second, she provides detailed feedback on each written piece they submit. Third, she sends them emails to correct possible misunderstandings, to encourage them in their learning or to pinpoint recurrent mistakes they make. Below are few examples:

“Une petite remarque... :-)  
Si "my keypal told me" is "Mon corres' m'a dit", then it stands to reason that "my friend Jon visited me" and "He told me" = ???????  
me ami Jon a visite moi et il dit moi

Practical vocab:  
to be in love: etre amoureux (amoureuse)
to fall in love: tomber amoureux (amoureuse)
I ‘like” x = je trouve x mignon(ne) OU j’aime bien x
to go out with x= sortir avec x ;-)

[Email, November 4th]


Bon dimanche,” [Email, November 11th]

“I just wanted you to know that you are the only student (so far) who understood question 2 in the journal culturel 5. I was quite impressed by your answer because it is quite an abstract question - the most abstract the class has had this semester. It’s quite an accomplishment. I am very proud of you! I think you can be proud of yourself, too. In addition, I am personally very touched that you like the class so much. I just found some essays I’d corrected way back in September and I am amazed - I am just blown away by how much everyone in the class has learned between September and now. I read the September essays and I can’t believe they’re from the same persons as the essays you wrote last Tuesday. It’s really amazing how much depth each student has gained... this learning could have happened through grinding of teeth and pain (well, I am sure there was some of it - I do realize the readings were very difficult, for instance, but my general perspective is that one never knows how much one is able to do until one is challenged to do it, and you raised to the challenge :-) You not only learned a lot but actually enjoyed the experience. It counts a lot for me.

A demain,” [Email, November 12th]

Among the students I interviewed, many emphasized that the instructor’s feedback was very helpful and encouraging. As Magali states in the email above, she is very demanding and in the course of the semester has challenged her students in multiple ways. She also assists them in their development of analytical and critical thinking. Above all, she challenges their views, compelling them to look at issues from other angles. By providing multiple sources of information, she allows her students to look at a topic in its complexity. Furthermore, for each weekly theme, she relies on a series of articles. At the beginning of the semester, the articles are fairly easy to read or are in English. Toward the end of the semester, the students are subjected to “the intensive readings” for two weeks. During these two weeks, the reading assignments are longer and the texts are fairly complex (certainly not geared to an intermediate level). The texts she provides are written for French speakers. The instructor’s objective is to introduce her students to academic writings and prepare them for higher level of French. She also wishes that her students be acquainted to other registers of the French language, such as
academic writing. Finally, she wants to stimulate her students to become critical readers by being able to understand nuances and the implied references.

Because these readings are so difficult, she offers ample guidance as the email below shows. This is about an article from *Le Monde* portraying José Bové\(^{xxvi}\).

“Bonjour,
Le texte pour lundi est un texte difficile. Il vient du journal ‘le Monde’ (Dites a votre keypal ‘je dois lire un grand article du Monde comme devoirs pour Lundi’ they will be really impressed and/or will sympathize. Le Monde is the newspaper of reference in France, the paper read by intellectuals. College students who are on the snob side or just want to emulate great thinkers walk around carrying it under their arm. Just being seen with Le Monde means you're smart. :-0 Most college students read ‘Liberation’; if they read a national daily - the paper I most often use because its language level is easier for American classes. I chose it because it provides a good link between the different topics of ‘image of the US in france’, foods, and regions.)
Pour vous aider, j'ai fait un 'study-guide’. Il y a des questions pour vous aider a comprendre, et du vocabulaire.
Everyone should use the questions to understand the text better. If you want to, you can turn them in on Monday and receive extra-credit. […]Questions in English, answers in English for authentic, 'dense' documents.
Once again, remember: you must read the text and use it to question the issue/make sense of the issue. What is at stake? What is the logic to go on a Sunday afternoon of dismantling a mac Donald's restaurant being built? What makes this action (and his speaker) so popular? if you read something and it doesn't make sense (doesn't seem logical), you can also ask your KP to see if it makes sense to them.

1) Look at the picture on the first page: from looking at it, what do you know about the man? what object(s) do you notice? what do they evoke to you?

Read the paragraph in large, bold letters on page 2 first.

**COLUMN 1**

Skip paragraph 1

**VOCAB, paragraph 2**

paragraph 2, 1st sentence: if this Joseph, a hell of an evangelical shepherd with his good flock, was elected, it is because he won at the lottery of circumstances. (note: elected in the presbyterian sense rather than the political one, ie., 'chosen by God'.)<br>
si,... si..., si, = if x hadn't , if y hadn't.., if z hadn't..<br>
démonteur (made-up word)= dismantler

la confédération Paysanne = a farmer's union that broke off the main branch (FNSEA); that was affiliated with the conservative RPR (like President Chirac). “les confédérés” were the revolted Parisians who established the Commune in Paris in 1871.

faire un tabac = to receive a standing ovation

Seattle = where the latest WTO meeting took place

*The poor lonesome sheep-farmer* = a parallel to 'the poor lonesome cowboy', song sung by Lucky Luke, hero from a French cartoon representing the wild West.

2) what three circumstances helped Jose Bove to become famous?
Paragraph 3, VOCAB

ludion d’occasion, gueulard de hazard = note that the word rime and form alliterations in French= the occasional funny weirdo, the random whiner and shouter

Asterix = french cartoon character who represents French guys - he's a Gaul, sporting a big mustach, prompt to get mad, faithful in friendship, always cirtical, quite small but always ready to fight when his friends or his village are threatened, and he fights against the Romans who have invaded Gaul.

Lech Walesa = Polish factory worker and founder of Solidasnosc, a small union that fought the Soviet-Union-appointed communist dictator Jaruzelski (currently on trial) until they won (after many jail sentences and threats).

Nicoud = 1960s populist, demagogue workshop owner who refused taxes put upon small companies (and accessorily didn't like foreigners, their taste, and their products.)

[…][Email, October 20th]

The email she sends to her students is five pages long. As she indicates at the beginning of her message, Le Monde is a highly intellectual newspaper that uses very formal register. Journalists often refer to social or historical events, assuming their readers know these events (culture générale). The message above gives students the necessary tools to understand this complex article. Besides vocabulary, she clearly leads her students to a detailed understanding of the article. She expects her students to understand the issues discussed in the article and question the logic of the Bové’s movement (for example the dismantling of a fast food restaurant). She highlights parts where references are made to the United States. For instance, she asks her students to note the positive and negative references to the United States. At the end of the email, she expects her students to write a reaction piece to the article (one paragraph).

During the two weeks of intensive readings, students are required to read about three texts including the portrait of José Bové. The other two are: an excerpt from “Le Creuset français” and “Un homme de goût se met à table.” She sends similar emails for these two long and rather difficult articles. For the following week, students can choose to answer in writing questions on one of the three or write an essay on the strategies they use to complete the readings. Acknowledging the difficulty of such task, she sometimes offers extra-credit for students who complete their assignment in writing.

For their last assignment, the students need to submit their portfolios, in which they can reflect on the progression he or she has made in the course of the semester. She always attempts to place her students at the center of her teaching and provides ample
avenues to enhance their ability to communicate in French. The dialogic classroom activities encourage her students to be fully engaged in their learning. In her class, Magali does not expect her students to acquire cultural facts but rather to develop their reflective approach to language and culture. Far from simplifying the issues discussed, she consistently problematizes culture. For example, she shows them how signs are culturally and socially constructed making a concept such as patriotism conceived differently in France and in the United States. Throughout the semester, she not only teaches them French but also guides their learning. She, therefore, gives them means to bring what they learn beyond the language classroom.

Because this research considers learning as a social practice that is itself socially and culturally grounded, the next sections will look at how the four participants shape their own experiences in the class. Learning is a negotiated process in which the learner’s agency needs to be fully considered. As Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) argue “the view of L2 learners and users as agents interacting with other agents allows us to argue that the learning process will necessarily result in different outcome for different people” (p. 157). The four narratives will investigate how the students are learning about culture and how each of them develops in the course of a semester in particular ways.

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1 Questions of the sixth journal can be found in the Appendix D.
3 The information on the week of the attacks does not come from class observations but other sources such as detailed emails from the instructor and personal communications with her.
4 For example, the instructor suggests that the French students look at American reactions to the events posted on the PBS web page.
6 Magali’s translation.
7 CE (Cours élémentaires) corresponds to 2nd and 3rd grades; CP (Cours préparatoire) corresponds to the 1st grade. I am assuming that the instructor’s class gathers several levels (probably 1-3rd grades), which is common in French small villages.
8 CM (Cours moyens) corresponds to 4th (CM1) and 5th (CM2) grades.
9 These messages come from the Freinet listserv, archived at http://www.listes.cru.fr/wws/arc/freinet.
10 This article and related articles can be found at: http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/dossiers/wtc/
11 The daily newspaper Libération published the article the instructor wrote right after the attacks.
12 For their last journal, students are expected to answer three questions on patriotism: a) what was your definition of American patriotism in September? (values, beliefs, actions); b) back in September, what aspects of patriotism did you see (thought you saw) in France or French people?; c) Now, at the end of the
At least a paragraph about this idea of "patriotism". You can use some ideas discussed on Tuesday during the "chat". (see Appendix D)

The questions are given in French.

Such readings include excerpts from:


GM food in the European context, and research on GM food are discussed in *The Economist*. See for example:

- Far less scary than it used to be. (2003, July 26). *The Economist*.

Translation is in fact a form of interpretation of the text. However, I provided the sources of the original text. The point here is to shed light on how material and cultural concepts were presented to the students.

The note is provided by the instructor.

Larzac is the geographical area where José Bové now lives and farms.

The instructor relies on pattern drills once in a while to have her students review grammatical features of the language (e.g. how to conjugate a verb). These exercises are mostly oral activities where one student throws a ball to another as a way of taking the floor. They hardly last more than five minutes.

Some of these texts are:


Le monde paysan dans l’ornière. Broadcasted on the French channel Arte.

José Bové contre Burger. Broadcasted on the French channel Arte.

In the narratives, only the final draft of the participant’s essay is provided.


4.2.1. Biography:

Julie is a twenty-one years old American student, from a rural area in the Northeast. She is a junior, majoring in Speech Communications. She also has an educational background in business. Moreover, she is interested in cooking and is a certified pastry chef.

Before transferring to this university, she studied in a school by the Canadian border, thirty minutes away from Montreal. Julie has not traveled much outside the United-States, except for a few trips to Montreal:

“J'ai étudie a l'université située une demi heure de Montreal, si mes amis et moi sommes allés là de temps en temps. Nous sommes allés au musées, nous avons mangé au restaurants, et nous avons fait beaucoup des shopping.”  [Email, September 16th]

Julie is discreet about herself or her motive to learn French. She started to learn French in high school, which was located in a “very very small town”. Her French teacher conducted lessons via videoconferencing from another high school. Julie took French lessons for two years in high school and two semesters at this university, French 3 being her second semester. Although studying a foreign language is a requirement for her major, Julie claims that she would have taken French anyway, because she thought it was “a beautiful and romantic language” [NM1].

It is quite obvious from her dedication to this class and her engagement in class activities that she is eager to learn French:

“Je serai un bon Key pal parce que je travaillai dur se perfectionner en Français. J’espère étudier à parle correct si je n’ai pas l'air d’un idiot quand je parle en Français” she says in her first email to her keypal”  [Email, September 3rd].

As her portfolio indicates, Julie is a very serious student: it includes a myriad of homework assignments from her semester, the corrections of her essays and texte libre,
all of these being very neatly organized. While observing her French class, I noted that
Julie, who was often sitting next to me, participated actively in class and showed great
interest in learning French. In addition to her already busy university schedule, she holds
two part-time jobs: has a work-study job on campus and is selling wine at the mall.

4.2.2. Foreign Language Studies

Julie likes learning Romance languages in general and she considers learning
French an important part of her education. In her opinion, the study of a foreign language
is necessary to better prepare each student for the multicultural work place where he or
she is most likely to encounter cultures, perhaps even more so as a graduate with a
Bachelor’s degree than one with only a high school diploma. In her opinion, a college
degree assures a certain social status where it becomes financially possible to travel
abroad and consequently useful to know a foreign language. Finally, as a consequence of
the language requirement, students are exposed to other cultures through language
studies:

“People who are willing to educate themselves to the level of a college degree are more
than likely to get into businesses and fields that may require them to either work along
side people of different cultures or go to another country for international business
relations. Someone who takes four years out of their lives to get fully educated in their
chosen career is much more likely to deal with associates in Europe or Asia than
someone with a high school education. I think that these people are also more likely to
travel abroad on vacations with their families, wanting to see some of the places that they
learned about in school. They understand how necessary it is to have at least a grasp of a
language in order to survive in a foreign country, rather than wandering around until they
find someone who speaks English. The university takes this all into consideration in
requiring students to have at least some understanding of the language of their choice,
giving them that edge and knowledge that they need to thrive in a business environment,
survive when traveling, and appreciate the differences between the cultures.”

[Journal 1, August 22nd]

As I mentioned previously, Julie does not object to the language requirement,
rather she feels that languages should be made an important part of the curriculum. She
thinks languages are not highly valued in the curriculum, which is why insufficient time
is devoted to learning them:
“I think that learning a foreign language is an important part of my education, but not nearly as important as it could be. They’re not really presented as being valuable. All of the other core classes are stressed highly, and the language requirement becomes something that just have to do. […] I don’t think that learning a foreign language has nearly the value that it used to have. There are not nearly as many people who can speak fluently as there were twenty years ago, it seems. It’s not something that’s stressed, like Math or English. Most students will admit that the only reason that they take a language is because it’s required of them. It’s become a thing that we just have to learn, and people will immediately be turned off to things that they are forced to learn (Like Calculus).” [Journal 1, August 22nd]

In the same journal, she also blames the lack of interest in foreign languages on the presumptuous attitude of some Americans who find little need to learn foreign languages since English has become an international language:

“I think that there are also some stereotypical and prejudicial aspects involved. In most other cultures, English is something that's learned from a very young age as a fluent second language. So a lot of Americans take on the attitude that whatever foreigners they may encounter will probably be able to speak English anyway, so why should they bother. Then there is the idea that there are so many people that have immigrated to the US and then live clustered off in culturally segregated sections, never developing a really good grasp of English. Americans see these people not trying to learn their language, and then our laziness kicks in and says "Well, if they're not going to learn my language, then why should I learn theirs." It has become one of those things that we learn in school and are never really expected to like or use.” [Journal 1, August 22nd]

Besides the connection she makes between the language requirement and a better preparedness for a global job environment, she does not think French will be of much use in the future. This particular comment is a bit paradoxical considering part of her educational background is in business while she previously stated that “people who are willing to educate themselves to the level of a college degree are more than likely to get into businesses and fields that may require them to either work along side people of different cultures or go to another country for international business relations” [Journal 1, August 22nd]. It is possible, however, that coming from a rural area where the population is not very diverse, she is led to think so. Nonetheless, her comments below underscore that for “personal education”, her personal growth, learning foreign languages is important:

“I really enjoy the romantic languages, I love French, and would like to learn Italian, too. But for my personal education, they seem to be things that will come in really handy if I
ever manage to get out of the country, but not that useful otherwise. My educational background (Speech Communications, Business, Entrepreneurship, and Baking) it seems would have much more uses domestically than abroad, although I'm not really sure what I want to do yet. I really like putting forth the time and effort to learn languages, though. It's fun, and I'm glad it's required for me to do.”  

[Journal 1, August 22nd]

4.2.3. Language and Culture

According to Julie, it is crucial to learn about the culture(s) while you are learning a foreign language. She is very interested in learning about French people and considers it to be an essential part of her language learning:

When studying a language, do you think learning and discovering about culture is important? Why? Why not?

“Definitely. Learning to appreciate the little things that make people different makes it so much easier to understand where the words and expressions are coming from. Someone who has not studied American culture is going to be very confused when someone comes up to them and says, "Wasssssup!" Besides, what is the point of learning how to speak to someone from a different culture than yours if you're not going to take the time to see all the things that are different about that culture? It's like only doing a job halfway. What happens if you actually go over to that country to visit? You'd have no idea how to act, how to behave, or what they do every day.”  

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

Learning a foreign language is, for Julie, not only learning new linguistic forms but also a process of socialization into a different community or different communities. In fact, she considers focusing on just the linguistic forms of a language “doing a job halfway”. She continues to emphasize this particular idea at the end of the semester and draws from the discussions she had with her keypal:

“When we’re studying culture, we’re still looking at the language and the way they say things and the way that they form sentences. And then when we’re spending days specifically gearing toward grammar and endings, we’re putting it into context and we’re having a discussion about something using those endings, something cultural. So it’s always one and the same, it’s always putting them together. (…) If you only learn phrases and endings, it doesn’t give you the handy information: how do you use them, how do those people live.”  

[Interview]

As she explains above, learning a language is not simply learning a new system but more importantly how to use this new system. She, therefore, considers talking about
culture a crucial part of her language learning process. Comparing various cultures provides an opportunity to learn about the culture of the “other” and reflect on one’s own culture. For Julie, culture is an array of things that people can identify with and is linked to traditions:

“I think that culture is made up of all of the traditions that a group of people hold dear. This can include a wide range of things, from their language to their cuisine, to their clothing and their music. I suppose it’s a vast amount of social factors that people can identify with as being a part of who they are as a people (ex: As American as apple pie, as French as a baguette.) This can hold true when talking about countries, religions, nationalities, states, and towns. There are so many things that we do every day that are a part of our culture that we don’t even realize, but that someone foreign to us would find very odd. Culture is all of those little things that make us stand out as being unique and proud of who we are.” [Journal 2, September 3rd]

As her data show, Julie is very eager to learn about French culture and seems intrigued by cultural differences. During her interview, she comments: “Yeah, it’s fun. I like learning how other people … little basic things of life that other people have.” In her French class, she has the opportunity to discover “these little things of life” that fascinates her. She is not interested in a list of cultural facts but is curious about what makes a people unique, wishes to discover the different ways of life. Her view on culture shapes the way she inquires about culture, as the next parts will illustrate.

In this narrative the data is organized chronologically and according to the weekly themes studied in class. I will first present how she views and defines French and American cultures at the beginning of the semester. The five following themes are: The September 11th Attacks, Why Don’t the French display their Flag, Stereotypes, Religion, Food and Alcohol. The length of each section varies according to the data I was able to collect. Throughout Julie’s narrative, I will describe how Julie talk and think about these themes and will document new meanings that emerge from dialogue.
4.2.4. Cultural Development

4.2.4.1. French and American Cultures

During her interview, she admits not knowing much about French culture prior to taking this class:

“My mum was pretty big on French art, so we always had a lot of French art books and when we went - we went to a lot of museums and she taught me about Monet and Renoir and those certain people. I mean I knew what certain monuments were and what not but nothing really too extensive.” [Interview]

At the beginning of the semester, students were asked to provide their definitions of French culture. This is Julie’s:

“I really couldn't define French culture as well as someone who actually lives in it, but I see it as a culture full of traditions just as longstanding and rich as every other culture. I see a culture full of people who are very proud of who they are and the little things that make them different from the rest of the world. They have traditional meals, holidays, art, and really great movies that are very distinct to the French people. There are a lot of stereotypes about French people, but there must be just as many stereotypes about Americans being thrown about in their country, too. They are a country with a lot of pride in their past and their future, as they should be.” [Journal 2, September 3rd]

Julie’s image of the French stresses on their traditions and their pride in who they are, specifically in what distinguishes them from others. In her definition, Julie is careful in how she portrays the French, avoiding stereotypes that may blur one’s image of the country and its people. Moreover, she notes at the beginning of her paragraph that she does not feel knowledgeable enough to provide a good definition of French culture.

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter (section 4.1), there is a constant encouragement for students to reflect on French and American cultures. For example, the theme for the first week of the semester is: “Qui sommes-nous?” during which, students are expected to think about what it means to be an American and to post poems describing themselves on their web pages. This is Julie’s portrait:

“Je suis étudiante.
Studieuse, intelligente, amusante
J’allais en cours
Après, j’écoute beaucoup de musique
Unique, sérieuse, contente
Je suis étudiante
J’étais musicienne
Enthousiaste, Jazz, Impatiente
Dansant autour des champs de football
Chantant toute la journée
Vite ou lentement, toutes sortes de musique
J’étais musicienne

Je serai femme d'affaires
Heureuse, résultat, sans plaindre mes efforts
J’aurai une belle maison
J’irai danser tout le soir
Content, active, merveilleuse
Je serai femme d'affaires”

The instructor’s directions stated that the first stanza ought to be in the present tense, the second in the past and the last in the future. The poem reveals a little about Julie’s personality and probably allows her keypal to get an idea about who Julie is. The exchange allows the students to gain a personal perspective on the discussed topics (i.e. the keypals’ voices). In fact, an essential facet of Julie’s learning process is the friendship that is being built with her keypal. She is not only interested in learning about the French in general but also eager to learn about her keypal, Eglantine. I believe this facet plays a crucial part in Julie’s motivation to learn about culture, since she keeps asking her keypal’s views on weekly topics. Analyzing information from the readings, which she then compares to her keypal’s comments, Julie is able to consider a topic from multiple angles.

The theme of the second week was “nous et notre environnement”. For their second journal, students had to provide their definitions of American culture. This is Julie’s:

“American culture is a mixed bag of different cultures that have all blended together with a very independent, idealistic way of life. This country is comprised mostly of immigrants and their descendants, so there are tons of traditions, meals, etc from other countries that have been passed on through the generations. But at the same time there are those icons of our people that stand out from every other country that Americans hold near and dear, like baseball and fast food. People feel free to celebrate their heritage, wearing clothing distinctive to their native country, listening to different styles of music, etc. while living the cultural ideas of America from day to day (eating a cheeseburger on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington DC.)

I’d say the best representation of American culture would have to be baseball. It's been around for so many years as the American pastime, a sport that kids can play in their backyard on a summer day, full of heroes that children and adults have idolized from the
very beginning. If someone goes to a major league game in a stadium, there are traditions that are to be followed that one either knows intrinsically or doesn't. This can easily be seen the first time that someone goes to a game and the crowd starts to do "the wave". Everyone else just knows to do it, but to this newcomer, it's a wild new thing that is held precious in the baseball world (i.e. you wouldn't do the wave in your office.)”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

For Julie, the idea of a melting pot is at the core of the American culture. She also provides the historical context of her statement, explaining that “this country is comprised mostly of immigrants and their descendants” who brought their own traditions with them. Celebrating one’s own ancestral heritage does not make one any less of an American. American culture being a “mixed bag of different cultures that have blended together”, Americans are united as people, living “the cultural ideas of America from day to day”. They remain attached to their ancestral heritage and also celebrate things that are truly American (e.g. baseball, burgers). In her statement, she makes an interesting distinction between what America is and how it “idealistically” portrays itself with icons such as “baseball”, “fast food” or “eating a cheeseburger on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington DC”.

In the journal entry above, Julie does not use “we”, except in “our people”. Rather she takes the position of an observer using “people”, “this country” or “American culture”. In her baseball example, she draws her statement from personal observations at baseball stadiums, as if she, herself, was an “outsider”. She explains how baseball is a tradition, a sport very popular with kids. She also specifies what “someone” needs to do when attending a baseball game. Her approach to describing baseball is similar to “participant observation” that Agar (1994) defines as:

You don’t just stand around and watch like a parody of a lab technicians; you jump in and do everyday life with people to get a firsthand feel for how things go. At the same time, you keep a third eye at an altitude of several feet above the action and watch what’s going on in more distant way. (p. 92)

From the beginning of the semester, she is able to “keep a third eye”, to “decenter” (Byram, 1989) herself from her own culture. This outsider’s point of view is also present when she compares the French culture to the American:
“We are similar in the fact that we do a lot of daily things that are the same: we have a lot of the same jobs, similar cars, we listen to similar popular music, and eat a lot of the same foods. We both send our kids to school and take pride in our education, have really incredible museums and landmarks to showcase our histories, and sit back to watch tv at the end of a long day.

There are a lot of differences between our cultures, though. The French take a much more relaxed approach to life, not working as many hours as Americans do and having more vacation throughout the year. Also, there is still the idea of freshness in their meals: they go out and buy the fresh ingredients to bring home and make that night, instead of the American style of straight from the freezer to the microwave. I’ve heard that the French watch more television than Americans do, but I kinda doubt that one. In general, it seems to me that the French do more as a family than Americans do, too. They sit and have a meal together, go on more family vacations, and just do more things together. Americans are so busy with soccer practices, working late, and appointments, to spend that much time with their families.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

The only instances she uses “we” is when she underlines the similarities between the French and Americans. Here, she notes how family activities seem to play an essential role in the French daily life, an aspect that she did not mention in her definition of the French culture. She perceives the French as living a more “relaxed” life than Americans. Considering this comment was written at the beginning of the semester, this is an image of the French she had before taking her French 3 class.

Early in the semester, she is aware that even though the French and Americans may have many similar daily activities, these activities mean different things for each person. She gives the example of how, for the French, preparing a meal involves using fresh ingredients that you spend time cooking whereas Americans tend to use pre-cooked meals (“from the freezer to the microwave”). Obviously, these are generalizations, but noteworthy is Julie’s search for the various meanings of “daily activities.”

“Rich points” (Agar, 1994) are numerous in Julie’s data. For example, in the second journal, she reflects on the few cultural discussions they had in class. The information she learned came from the instructor, since the French keypals had not started school yet.

Do you have any comments on cultural discussions you had in class. Were you interested, surprised, fascinated, disturbed, disappointed, frustrated?

“We haven’t gotten into the nitty-gritty of our cultural discussions yet, but I have been fascinated by the things we’ve discussed so far. Like when we discussed which people
you kiss hello and which ones you shake hands with. I think we’ve all just seen people kiss hello in the movies for years, and never thought about which people you kiss and which ones you don’t. It all makes so much sense, though. I think that the distinction between people that you know really well and other people is a really neat show of respect that Americans certainly lack. Intrinsically, I don’t think you should talk to your professor the same way that you talk to your brother, but here in America, it’s pretty well one in the same.” [Journal 2, September 3rd]

In class, the instructor explained the intricacies of the French “hello kiss” conventions whose rules are very difficult to grasp. In this particular instance, the explanation of these rules allows her to better understand the social conventions represented in French movies and encourages her to reorganize her ideas of the French greeting conventions. This “rich point” also engages Julie to reflect on her own culture: she regrets that Americans don’t mark respect in the language and in greeting conventions as the French do. This particular example shows how her understanding of certain social conventions has evolved.

Talking about how some of her previous perceptions of the French have changed throughout the semester, Julie recalls this particular example during her interview:

“Julie: Like the first day of class we learned who you kiss and who you don’t kiss. Hélène: Hmm
Julie: I mean that’s something we should have learned in French 1 probably and we never did! And she just mentioned it in passing like you kiss these people and you don’t kiss these people! Wow! OK! Write that down!
Hélène: So who do you kiss and who do you not kiss?
Julie: I guess girls kiss girls, boys don’t kiss boys. You can kiss your parents but you don’t have to kiss your professor... I don’t know...It was first day of class so I don’t remember but it was really neat!” [Interview]

Her engagement in a reflective approach leads her to question her previous experiences in language classes. One could wonder why she would not question her current instructor as being wrong. Even though Kramsch (1997) argues that the notion of a native speaker is an “imaginary construct”, she also points out that “within the humanities native speakers of foreign tongues enjoy a de facto authority and prestige that the nonnative lacks.” (p. 359). In a similar way, Julie’s French 3 instructor being from France may have that much more “authority” on providing the “right” explanation of French culture in Julie’s eyes.
“The thing that frustrates me right now is that in my previous years in learning French, we were taught things incorrectly because the teachers thought it would be easier. I was in shock when Madame explained to us the difference between ‘visiter’ and ‘rendre visite’. We had never been told otherwise! Imagine how foolish we would look going up to someone in France and saying "J'ai aller visiter ma grandmere", because that's exactly the way we had been taught to say it in previous sections! And the inversions? We were never ever taught those, and that's the way that most people talk! I don't understand why we weren't just taught it all right the first time, but I'm highly enjoying learning it the proper way now.” [Journal 2, September 3rd]

The first days of class already represent a rich learning experience, which leaves Julie “in shock”, forcing her to reassess her previous experience and reorganize her knowledge of the French language and culture. She also realizes how simple expressions such as “rendre visite” as opposed to “visiter” may trigger embarrassing situations if misused.

As said previously, Julie’s data are full of “rich points” as she discovers and reflects on “little daily things that people do.” From contrasting the two cultures Julie changes her perspective of her own culture. Throughout the semester, she embraces the challenge. In order to understand the other’s perspective, she asks her keypal many questions on the discussed topics. Her tone is never judgmental. At some point during the semester, she also stresses her eagerness to explain her culture to the French keypals. In the following sections, several of Julie’s “rich points” will be explored and analyzed as her learning experience unfolds.

4.2.4.2. The September 11th Attacks

As mentioned in the previous section (section 4.1), the notion of patriotism and what the flag represents were at the center of class discussions for more than two weeks. On the day of the attacks, Julie writes to her keypal to reassure her that she and her family are fine:

“Je voudrais dire tu nous sommes ça va. Nous avons peur et état de choc, mais nous sommes ça va. L'accident d'avion en Pennsylvanie n'était pas aussi près de Penn State, mais tout c'est aussi près pour consolation. Tout le monde sont confondre, et tres ènerver.

Il n'y a pas les propos décrire la tragédie de cette catastrophe. à bientôt” [Email, September 11th]
Here she describes people's general reaction ("tout le monde sont confondre") and her personal fears. Julie is in shock and worried about her sister who lives in Washington, D.C. She is also concerned with the consequences of the tragedy.

She expresses her first reactions to the attacks in an essay, later posted on the class web page:

"La Tragédie

Julie feels “vulnerable” and thinks this event will change her forever: “je n'ai pas pense je serai sentir de même jamais.” The solidarity brought about by the tragedy ("la collecte de sang autour les États-Unis et l'appui d'autres pays, comprendre France") is important to Julie since the specific image of solidarity is one that often comes up in Julie’s data as an image of America that she wishes to project to the world.

Three days later, her keypal expresses her sympathy and her struggle to understand how such thing could have happened. She is obviously shocked herself:

“Hi Julie!

How are you? I'm fine, I hope too for you, your family and your friends. I learnt a news when I was in my "lycée" Paul héroult. It's my first cousin who said at me that two planes hits the twins towers, third plane crashes into Pentagon and fourth crashes in Pennsylvanie. At the beginning, I couldn't believe it! When I came back from my home, my father watched television and I saw a terrible news: a bombing took place in USA! All programs of the television french interrupted! I shocked by terrible and horrible pictures. All that happened quickly! I think there are no words to describe what happened! I thought it was as the movie "independance day".
On parle de cet attentat en histoire, anglais. Je ne comprends pas comment certains hommes peuvent vouloir tuer des milliers de personnes innocentes sans aucune raison valable. J'espère que ta soeur habitant à Washington DC va bien, ainsi que tous tes amis et ta famille. Je suis contente que des pays vous aident pour toutes sortes de choses : pour les collectes de sangs, les enquêtes...

Je te laisse, avec toute ma sympathie et mon soutien!

Bye bye’’

Eglantine

[Email, September 14th]

A week after the tragedy, students discuss the attacks during their second netmeeting. Below are Julie’s questions and concerns:

“Eglantine: Oui je vais bien, vous pouvez poser vos questions!

Julie & F.: Comment vont les affaires en France?

Eglantine: Nous avions été choqués par ce qui s'est passe aux USA! Tous les journaux télévisés parlent de la catastrophe!

Franck: Est-ce que tu as peur a voyager?

Eglantine: Non car je pense que la sécurité sera beaucoup plus renforcée dans les avions et dans les autre moyens de transports

Franck: C'est bien. Moi, je n'ai peur pas aussi.

Eglantine: Je voudrais savoir si les Américains ne sont pas devenus racistes envers les Musulmans?

Julie & F.: Quelque personnes ont racistes, et quelque personnes n'ont pas racistes.

Julie: What do you think of our President?

Eglantine: Comment envisager vous la suite?( Les solutions que votre gouvernement va trouver).

Eglantine: Aves vous compris ma question?

Franck: I am against war. Killing innocent people is not justifiable.

Julie: I don't want to go to war, but our country wants to get revenge on whoever did it.

Eglantine: I agree with you but what do you advise to your president about retalaitions?

Franck: Retaliation is only acceptable if the terrorists could be singled out from the general public.

Keypal: And what is your advice Julie?

Julie: I worry that we will destroy entire countries, and that the terrorist won't even be there anymore. We need to really think about all sorts of options before sending more innocent people to die.

Julie & F.: What would you do if you were an American?

Eglantine: If I was amrican I defense my country against terrorists and I think that my president will take a good decision for a land!”

[NM2, September 17th]

In this discussion, Julie and Franck try to obtain an understanding from an outsider’s point of view. To answer their question, “what would you do if you were American,” Eglantine is not taking the position of an American but rather explains what, as a French person, she would do if such event had occurred in her country. Julie’s tone is not as straightforward as Franck’s who condemns (“not justifiable”, “only acceptable”) the
potential killing of innocent people. Nonetheless, Julie is very concerned with possible retaliations from the United-States. She does not think that a war is the solution and is worried about the decisions the American government will make. Using the subject pronoun “I”, she distances herself from the American political decisions, but realizes that the latter plays a crucial part in how the world perceives Americans. In this exchange, Franck and Julie attempt to offer a voice different from the political one.

In Julie’s endeavor to get an outsider’s point of view, she asks about Eglantine’s opinion of the American President. She does not obtain an answer in this netmeeting discussion but does later on, in an email:

“Je pense qu’il est très déterminé a poursuivre les coupables. Je pense qu’il a raison parce que l’on ne peut pas laisser des kamikazes tuer des personnes innocentes, ce serait vraiment trop dégoutant.” [Email, September 21st].

Julie’s keypal is in fact fairly supportive of the President Bush’s decisions. Note how, for Julie, America seems to look for “revenge” (“get revenge on who ever did it”; NM2, see above), whereas her keypal is talking about bringing justice.

The same Monday, Julie also writes an essay on the attacks as she reflects on readings she was required to do as well as the discussion they had during the netmeeting (see section 4.1.1). Here again, she underlines the solidarity in the country:

“C'est bien voir le support et la sympathie de le peuple français. Eglantine dit elle est d'accord avec les décisions que Président Bush. Nous avons décidé que n'avons pas peur voyager en avion, ou dans les autre moyens de transports. Je pense que tout le monde en classe ont poser la question, "Porquoi est-ce que le français n'étalage pas le drapeau?" J'espère nous n'avons pas offenser quelqu'un. Il nous est difficile de comprend pourquoi habitants n'étalage pas le drapeau. C'est vrai particulièrement maintenant, quand tout l'américaines ont le rouge, blanche, et bleu partout.

J'ai lire "De la part des personnes... " et l'impression que le même comme l'américaines. Tout le monde sont sous le choc au sujet de la tragédie, et ils sont attrister que de nombreux morts de personnes innocent. Mais quelque ont parle de la 3ème guerre mondiale, et comment l'américaines voudrais rayer l'Afghanistan de la carte. Cela m'inquiète, parce que je pense qu'est-ce que nous ferions exactement. Eglantine, Franck, et moi avons d'accord avec l'idée c'est nécessaire pour l'americaines serions patienter si nous capture les peuple qui sont responsible, mais ne ferions pas du mal de autre personnes innocent.” [Essay, September 17th]
“De la part des personnes…” refers to French reactions on the attacks that her instructor gave before the netmeeting (see section 4.1.1). As Julie introduces her essay, she is touched by the support from abroad, from the French especially. At the end of September, her French keypal asks for Julie’s definition of “solidarity”. This is her reply: “I think that solidarity is standing beside someone and facing tasks together. Like our country coming together to help one another after the attacks. To form one solid unit, a team.” [Email, October 2nd]. Note that Julie identifies with this image of her country (“our country”), a state where people help each other to form “a solid unit, a team”.

In the document entitled “de la part des personnes…”, a few expressed concerns with American retaliations, concerns that Julie shares. In this essay, she expresses once more how she would prefer that the United States plan carefully before killing innocent people. She is worried about the image the United States projects and its possible abuse of power: “comment l’américains voudrais rayer l’Afghanistan de la carte.” She wants to distance herself from the “bully” image and is careful not to offend anyone: “J’espère nous n’avons pas offenser quelqu’un.” Later the same day, she writes to her instructor asking whether or not the French students were offended.

Understanding issues from the French perspectives or at least her keypal’s is important to Julie. In her data, she expresses how she would also like to share and explain her culture to the French keypals. In fact, she feels a bit frustrated at the end of September for not having talked about her culture as much as she would have liked to:

“We’ve been learning a lot about the cultural stereotypes of french people and asking them a lot of questions about the topic (such as the flag question), but they’re not really asking us those kinds of questions. I am really interested in knowing what sort of things about our culture they don’t understand, so that we can help them get a better grasp on our concepts. I guess I’m wondering what their opinions are of us in general, since we never really get an indication. Do they think we’re all snotty Americans with terrible French skills, or drunk college students, or that we're wasting our time with excessive education instead of getting into the workforce? I'm just curious.”

[Journal 3, September 23rd]

Interestingly, she is expecting negative images from the French view. Fascinating is Julie’s eagerness to learn not only about the French but also about how American culture
is viewed outside the United States. She is making this learning experience a personal one as it challenges her ways of seeing and thinking of her own culture.

Julie’s reactions show that it is critical to take into consideration the learning environment as it constructs learning itself. Not mentioning the context and not looking at learning as a culturally and socially constructed phenomenon denies Julie’s negotiation and engagement in her learning. Class discussions as well as discussions she has with her keypal provide Julie with an opportunity to reflect on her own culture, to distance herself from it and think critically about it. She becomes aware of the image America projects to the world and, often, attempts to provide another voice, as it will be discussed later on.

4.2.4.3 Why Don’t The French Display Their Flag?
Class discussions on the attacks led to an examination of patriotism and how Americans display the flag to show support of their country: “C'est vrai particuliètement maintenant, quand tout l'américaines ont le rouge, blanche, et bleu partout.” [Essay, September 17th]. The American students, involved in this research, struggled to comprehend why the French do not display their flag in front of their homes. This issue was briefly brought up at the end of Julie’s second netmeeting:

“Franck: Why don't many French people display the flag?
Eglantine: if I display the flag , my neighbours can think that i am for "Front national"
Julie & F.: Front national? Do you mean, anti-government?
Eglantine: What is anti government?
Julie & F I think your professor explained it to us.
Eglantine: Sorry I don't write speed . Goodbye Franck and Julie
Julie & F: Goodbye Eglantine, it was great talking to you again! :)

[Net-meeting, September 17th]

The far-right party, Front National (FN) embraces racist ideologies and rallies its followers around State symbols such as the flag. Julie’s keypal explains how displaying the French flag has therefore a strong negative connotation. In this discussion, there is a clear misunderstanding: Franck and Julie talk about “anti-government” groups, whereas Eglantine talks about a controversial, yet established political party. Julie and Franck are
looking for what they perceive to be an equivalent in their own culture (anti-government
groups) in order to relate to the French perspective and bridge the two cultures.

In the exchange above, the discussion ends quite abruptly but continues via email.
First Julie’s keypal explains a bit further what the Front National is:

“Monday we talked about "anti-government" and I said "front national": is a part who is
racer, they don't like foreigners, I don't know if the same thing that "anti-government". I
hope that Le Pen (it's a president of front national) will never be a president of France
because I hate him; For me, there isn't race, they don't exist!” Have you a part in USA
who look like “Front national”?”

Racism is a topic of great interest for Julie’s keypal as she is preparing a presentation on
the matter as part of her Baccalauréat exam. In the above email that Julie’s keypal does
not understand the concept of “anti-government” and is not sure whether the two groups
(the “Front National” and “anti-government groups”) are comparable. Julie, too, has
difficulty understanding what the FN is. Below is Julie’s reply three days later:

“Tu as demandé si le USA a un groupe pareil que le "Front National". Je ne sais pas,
mais nous avons les groups s'appelle "survivalists" qui préparent pour la 3ème guerre
mondiale avec les sacs de canons et vêtements camouflage sous leur lits. C’est une groupe
fanatique.”

Julie and her keypal’s frames of reference do not overlap, which lead to a lack of
understanding. Julie is aware of the potential differences between the two groups: the FN
and the “anti-government” groups but she does not know if they are comparable groups.
The anti-government group and the FN are in fact different phenomena: even though
Jean-Marie Le Pen, the President of the FN, has made quite frightful speeches and has
been supported by violent groups such as skin heads, his party does not prepare for a
third world war. Both students, however, attempt to understand what the other one
means.

The question of why the French don’t display their flag is pursued in class later
on, as the instructor provides a context for American students to better understand what
their French keypals meant, explaining how fascist some of the Front National’s ideas
are. Up to now, Julie has been struggling with the French perspective on what the flag
entails. With guidance from her instructor and after several class discussions on various
viewpoints, Julie gains an understanding of the differences. In fact, at the end of October, she cites the notion of patriotism as a difference between the French and Americans and is able to describe and explain the two perspectives:

“One difference is the idea of patriotism. Americans are clinging to their American flags in order to feel connected to the rest of the country, while French people would never think of hanging a flag or wearing a lapel pin with the flag on it because it would set them apart. This idea led to a discussion in class that spanned two days, and I think annoyed our keypals a little bit. In fact, when we mentioned la drapeau, they let out a sighing moan. It has been interesting to see their reactions to the way that things have been going since the attack, with the Anthrax attacks in the USA and such, too.”

[Journal 4, October 22nd]

In a way, the French view on the flag is completely opposite to the American view: In both cultures, the flag can be displayed but what it entails is different. In her statement above, Julie demonstrates a better understanding of the situation and accepts the different perspectives on the subject. She understands and can explain why the French tend to reject patriotism as it would “set them apart” from the rest of the society.

As mentioned at the beginning of this narrative, Julie adopts the position of an observer from the beginning of the semester. The discussions on cultural concepts have further allowed her to take distance from her own culture, question aspects of her culture that she would not have otherwise questioned before, and examine both the French and the American perspectives as her third journal shows. For this journal entry, students are expected to reflect on the September Attacks discussions and more specifically on the media coverage of the attacks. The journal gives students the opportunity to synthesize what they had learned.

You talked about the tragedy that occurred in the United States. If you had to present to a French person how the events have been covered these past days, what would you say? What would you need to explain?

“I suppose I would tell them about the 24 hour media coverage of all of the crash sites, as well as the government reactions to the attacks. I don't know if they would understand the amount of shows that were on that involved telling the stories of the people who died over and over again, such as Oprah dedicating a show to the stories of the people who called loved ones on their cell phones. They might think that it would be a cruel approach to the nation's grieving process, making viewers hear the stories over and over again. I definitely think that it was unnecessary to show the footage of the towers falling repeatedly. That image has been burned into all of our minds, and we did not need to watch it again and again. I would have to explain to that person that the media in America pride themselves on getting absolutely all of the angles on a story, so repeatedly
interviewing people with the same story or showing the same images is pretty commonplace.”

Were there differences of analysis between the United-States and France? Please explain.
“From what I’ve seen of the French analysis, they were immediately critical, trying to figure out what we had done wrong to cause or provoke such an attack. Americans took a no-fault approach, blaming it all on madmen and concentrating on their grief. It also seems that the French thought that President Bush was a bit cowardly for not immediately returning to Washington DC. While a lot of Americans also questioned this move, most attributed it to a question of his personal safety, and not a question of cowardice. Otherwise, both countries seemed to approach the situation the same way, concentrating on forming a united front against the terrorists.” [Journal 3, September 23rd]

Julie is able to not only distance herself from her own culture but also pinpoint aspects of American culture that may not be understood by the French. In her entry, she highlights how news coverage presents facts differently from one country to the next. In America, “getting absolutely all of the angles on a story, so repeatedly interviewing people with the same story or showing the same images is pretty commonplace.” She is critical of certain images that were, in her opinion, shown too many times. She also notes the strong critical stand taken by the French, but remains non-judgmental as she compares the French media coverage to the American one. She simply points out the different approaches taken from the two countries.

Note again how she ends her comments with a focus on solidarity, an image she wishes to identify with as she keeps calling attention to it. In fact, this is particularly striking in her fourth journal reactions:

“* I hate to say it, but the current generation lacks the willpower and the attention span to pay attention for long. They are spoiled and never had hard times. They don't know how to do without, as evidenced by our "plastic" society. Gimme now and to hell with tomorrow. Since it didn't happen directly to most of them, I think the WTC emotional charge will soon pass. It's a me-first attitude that I don't see having much resolve for a long haul.

a) in the Spring 2001, what would have been your reaction to this statement?
“* In the spring, I probably would not have taken offense to this comment. My generation has always been called slackers with tiny attention spans, so this wouldn't have been anything new. This could have been an article printed in any magazine about the Oklahoma City Bombing, or soldiers dying in the middle east, and no one would have noticed.”
b) thinking nowadays (late october 2001), how would you comment and analyze the statement? If there was any change in your understanding of the statement, what made the change come about?

But now, I can take offense to the comment. Despite the fact that my generation has been spoiled and not seen really hard times before, this is something that no other generation has experienced. This was a giant wake up call to my generation, because any one of us could have died in those attacks, or could die from Anthrax in our mail. It's our problem now. We all know someone who died or was never found. We were all touched by the events in some way. Just look at how many people on campus mobilized to give blood immediately after attacks, how many peace rallies have been organized, how many charity events have been put together since this happened. This isn't going to go away any time soon. We're all happy to be alive, and appreciating every single day for what it really is.

c) How do you think a French person would react to his statement?

A French person commenting on Americans of the current generation would probably agree with the statement. They see us as as the AOL, instant gratification generation, and so they would agree with the idea that this tragedy would be forgotten as soon as the new Playstation games come out."

[Journal 4, October 22nd]

As Julie wrote in her first reactions following the attacks, she feels “vulnerable” but views the bombings as a “giant wake up call”. She believes that people’s attitudes have changed. They now feel concerned about the situation and want to show solidarity to one another (blood donations, peace rallies, charity events). She stresses that the tragedy has brought people together. Above, she notes the critical opinion the French have of Americans but does not necessarily rejects. She just hopes that the attacks will also be a “wake up call” for the country (i.e. politically) as she states it in a chat with her American peers:

“Nous ne voudrais pas comprendons les autres pays. C’est stupide.
Il est bien a comprende autre pays
Parce que nous pense la culture American c’est le seulement culture important.
Oui, nous avons le “superpower” en reputation
Mais maintenant nous avons besoin d’assistance d’autre pays.”

[Chat, October 2\textsuperscript{nd}]ii

Julie’s motive to better understand the culture of others as well as her own culture from an outsider’s perspective is linked to the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks. She feels the need to understand how such hatred came about. In this particular context, she has the
opportunity to understand the French perspective, which in her opinion is extremely valuable as she states in her interview:

“…We must have spent two days trying to understand why they don’t put flags out…. Like everybody here has a flag outside their house and what not and they don’t do that and we were having a REALLY hard time trying to explain that…so we just had to think about it in a different way and break it down a little more and we spent the time on it and we got the time to figure it out and make sure it was explained…properly…And it was really good just keeping an open-mind and being ready for whatever they were gonna ask us.”

[Interview]

Julie underscores the necessity to move away from her frame of reference “to think in a different way”, which is not to say that she forgets about her own frame of reference. It is necessary for her to “properly” understand what the French associate with the flag. The detached approach she adopts in analyzing the issue allows her to gain another perspective on the notion of patriotism.

I have argued above that understanding the French perspective on the attacks is important for Julie. It is possible that in another context, Julie would have had the same eagerness to learn about French culture. She learns about the French critiques and becomes aware of what view people have of America. She believes her country needs to think about the image it projects outside the United States. The attacks encourage her to reorganize the way she views her country and the world. Such cognitive development sharpens her critical thinking and represents a personal growth that goes far beyond the classroom setting. I will now talk about a few topics that Julie discusses and will explore how a) she talks about these topics and b) how she thinks about them.

4.2.4.4. Stereotypes:

As explained previously, the students enrolled in the French 3 class are encouraged through out the semester to reflect on who they are and how they view each culture (see section 4.1.2). During the stereotypes discussions, Julie and her keypal are conscious of the altered images stereotypes represent. Reflecting on the ideas each
country has of each other lead to extensive discussions. A few of these exchanges are analyzed below.

**Rude French people**

“Franck & Julie: Porqoui est-ce que tu pense l'americans voient les personnes français sont impoli?

Eglantine: Je n'en ai aucune idée!

Keypal : Peut-être que vous croyez que nous sommes malpoli parce que nous sommes très impatients, et nous ne sourions que quand nous connaissons la personne en face

[...]  

Julie & F.: Oui, notre prof dit le francais ne sourire pas souven.

Keypal: quand on sourit, ça veut dire qu'on aime bien la personne en face, où qu'on veut faire connaissance.

Eglantine: Je souris parce que je suis contente ou bien j'ai eu une bonne nouvelle ou quand j'aime bien cette personne!”  

[NM4, October 1st]

In this discussion, French students attempt to provide an explanation for why the French are often perceived as being rude: “Peut-être que vous croyez que nous sommes malpoli parce que nous sommes très impatients, et nous ne sourions que quand nous connaissons la personne en face”. The stereotype of rude French people seems to come from the fact the French don’t smile as often as Americans. As reading assignments, students were expected to read from Polly Plat’s (1998) book (for the reference, see the endnotes in section 4.1). The first advice the author offers for Americans who come to Paris is: “don’t smile!” She further explains that for the French smiling at strangers is a sign of complicity: “For strangers to smile at each other in Paris, there has to be some kind of incident involving them both, and not just stumbling into someone’s stares” (p. 25). The smile example above forces students to consider occasions where they smile and explain why they smile, demonstrating how a simple smile may have a complete different meaning on the other side of the Atlantic, because smiling has social and cultural conventions.

**Fashion:**

“Eglantine: we have learn that you have more clothes than you. How many pants have you for example?

Julie: Women have much more clothes than men, I think. I only have 3 pants. I have a lot of skirts, though.
Franck: I don't know how many clothes I have but it isn't very many. I'm not too concerned with fashion. I have 6 pairs of pants.

Eglantine: Our teacher tells us that you have a lot of sweatshirts because you always change. Is it right?

Franck: Many people have clothes that they wear when they go out and then have clothes for when they are relaxing in their homes or with their friends.”

[NM4, October 1st]

Once again, questions compel American students to not only ponder about their daily habits but also theorize about them: “Women have much more clothes than men, I think”. The situation in which this conversation occurs is essential to consider. Talking to French students (as opposed to their American peers in a regular classroom) forces Julie and Franck to articulate and explain thoroughly their daily activities. If their American peers were having the same conversation among each other, as it is often the case in language classes, the level of reflection would not be the same because the students assume from the start that their peers live the same way. Students do not feel the need to explain anything or to study one’s own habits. Here the goal is different: since Julie and Franck want to learn more about the French, they are willing to share as much information as possible about their daily lives. They adopt an observer's point of view, analyze and almost bring a sociological perspective to their daily activities. As Franck’s last comment shows, American students as well as the French provide nuances from stereotypical representations.

French attitudes:
“Keypals: And why do you think that you French girls are "easy-lay"?
Franck: I didn't think that myself. However, many men from here think that it would be really cool to meet a French woman because they believe they are good lovers.

Keypals: And Julie what are your opinion about this?
Julie: I think that American women are much more old-fashioned and conservative. We expect men to make all of the moves. The men here see French women in tighter clothes and as more assertive or out-going, and they think that they are "easy-lay."

Julie: do you understand what I mean?
Keypals: Do you think that when we "do a kiss" to say "hello", it's snobs?
Julie & F.: no

[…]

Franck: I kiss my mom and some relatives all the time. They are all women though. I would never kiss my dad.
Julie: Kissing is not seen as something you do when you say hello to someone here. It is much too personal.” [NM4, October 1st]

In this section, French and American students attempt to analyze differences in the way the French and Americans behave, trying to explain why French women are stereotypically “easylay”. Julie views American women as being more conservative. She supports her arguments with her ideas of French fashion: “tighter clothes”. She also believes that in general, French women are “more assertive”. Unfortunately, she does not specify where these images come from. The discussion goes on to kissing: who do you kiss?, when is it appropriate? In this exchange, only the American perspective is mentioned. Note how Julie implicitly compares American conventions to the French ones she had learned at the beginning of the semester: “kissing is not seen as something you do when you say hello to someone here. It is much too personal.”

**Personal Space:**

“Keypals: in France we are always speaking very close. It's a mark of intimacy but a normal position too it not shocked
(it's not shocking)
Franck: I don't want to have someone breathing on me with bad breath. If someone is talking very close to us we are sometimes offended but it depends on the situation. (Sometimes you have to talk close together.)
Julie: I think that when someone is talking really close to a woman, we either feel threatened or that the speaker is flirting with us.
Keypals: Never in France, but it's right that a bad breath isn't very pleasant, but we support without saying it
Keypals: if we say it, it can very really offend the person
Julie & F.: That is why we offer the person a mint or some gum!! :)
Keypal: Yes :)!” [NM4, October 1st]

Here, students talk about the distance that is appropriate when talking to someone, which also depends on social conventions. Franck and Julie indicate once again on how Americans would react if someone spoke to them at a close range. According to Franck, people would be offended. For Julie, women would feel threatened. The French, on the other hand, would be offended if someone commented on their bad breath. In this short dialogue, students become aware that personal space and what is considered appropriate differs greatly between the two countries. Later in the semester, she highlights three cultural differences she views as being important ones: The first difference is the notion of patriotism (mentioned previously), the second is the importance of religion in France
and in America (discussed later) and the third is the amount of personal space that is appropriate when talking to someone:

“A third difference could be the amount of personal space that people give each other. We discussed it in class and during our netmeetings that in France people will get up very closely to you, pretty much in your face, and it is not seen as abnormal. Americans see this kind of behavior as extremely threatening and a cause for alarm. My keypal said that it was a much more casual thing over there, and that if someone wanted to talk to you that way, it would not be seen as a threat at all.” [Journal 4, October 22nd]

Analyzing the differences between the French and the American social conventions, she becomes aware that concepts are culturally and socially constructed. One can foresee Julie’s potential ability to adapt if someone spoke to her closely while she visits France.

Fast-food:

“Julie & F.: En classe, nous avons parlé sur MacDo et José Bové. Si les gens n’aiment pas MacDo, pourquoi est-ce que ils vont? 
Eglantine: si les gens n’aiment pas le Mc Do, ils n’y vont pas... car ce n’est pas trêè cher et très rapide et que c’est bon
Julie & F.: Qu’est-ce que tu pense sur Jose Bove?
Eglantine Je pense qu’il est gentil mais je ne suis pas d’accord... avec ses idées!
Julie & F: Est-ce que tu pense le monde devient McDominated?
Eglantine: Il y a de plus en plus de Mc Do en France... d’ailleurs un va se construire a Saint Jean de Maurienne!
Julie & F.: Est-ce que tu voudrais il là?
Eglantine: Je ne comprende pas la question?
Julie & F.: Tu voudrais le Macdo a Saint Jean de Maurienne? Est-ce que tu mangerais là?
Eglantine: Je trouve que c’est une bonne idée, car c’est pas trop loin de chez moi... J’irai peut-être!
Julie & F.: Est-ce que tu as vu les dessin animé d’Asterix?
Eglantine: english now
Julie: We read an article in Le Monde and Jose Bove was compared to Asterix. I have seen the cartoons, and I can see the comparison. (Jackie)
Eglantine: I have never seen cartoons Astérix. What is the comparison?
Julie & F.: He is a little man with a mustache that becomes a hero when the town is in trouble.
Julie & F.: Do you have questions for us? :)
Eglantine: Yes I have questions for you!
Julie & F.: ok! [Students then talk about a different topic]” [NM6, October 22nd]

The short exchange illustrates that Julie, as well as Franck, reflect on the reading assignments and class discussions. Talking with her keypal allows Julie to gain yet
another perspective on the issue of globalization since Julie’s keypal likes Mc Donald’s food and does not quite support José Bové’s ideas.

Discussions on stereotypes last for a couple of weeks. In class, students compare their keypals’ comments and examine the cultural similarities and differences. In an essay, Julie also reflects on the collage, the French students had made together:

“The Collage of America

Do you recognize America in this collage?
I recognize the images in the collage, but I don’t understand why some of the terms are there. I didn’t know what Kyoto was, and I still don’t really know. I don’t know why it says "myth", or what "ABM" means, and I don’t understand why President Bush is two-faced. Are they saying that all politicians are two-faced? Or just Republicans, or just him? Also, why did they bring up inequality? I thought that America was seen as the land of equality.

What is missing?
I think that the only real thing that is missing is the idea that America is a big melting pot of different cultures. It’s such a diverse place, where everyone is allowed to celebrate their own cultures and beliefs (hopefully) without persecution.

Is it biased?
it seems to be a little biased as far as the ideas that Hollywood puts out, like everyone getting plastic surgery and being on steroids. Otherwise, unfortunately most of the things they've brought up are right on the money. We are way too violent (and this is not to blame on Hollywood, although they personify it in the movies), we have a lot of people who are overweight, and everyone in the country seems to be obsessed with watching "Friends."

Are there elements that you personally resent because they are untrue and, in your opinion, do NOT represent America?
I would say that the idea of Evangelism isn't a fair representation of the US. I mean, sure we've got a lot of evangelists out there, but I don't think it's a fair representation of the religious sector of the American population. Most people practice whatever religion they choose quietly, without going on tv and soliciting money to do it. I have problems with the Kyoto thing, but that's mostly because I have never heard of it. I don't think most Americans have. Otherwise, they're ideas about Americans seem to be pretty correct.”

[Essay, October 11th]

I find Julie’s reactions particularly interesting as she is facing an image of America she is not used to or does not necessarily relate to. At this point in the semester, she has a hard time understanding where some of these images come from. In America,
the United-States is often portrayed as a land of equality. However, the French media most often emphasize the inequality aspect of the American society: ghettos, segregation, rich versus poor, etc. This surprises Julie and represents a “rich point” for her.

At the beginning of this narrative, I pointed out how Julie defines the American culture as a “melting-pot”. In the essay above, she notes how “melting pot” is absent from the French collage. She also implies that she sees America as the land of freedom where people are free “to celebrate their own cultures and beliefs (hopefully) without persecution.” Using “hopefully”, she notes a possible difference between her idea of America and reality.

A class survey reveals how 80% of the French 3 class had never heard of the Kyoto treaty prior to this class (50% in the French class). In class, the instructor offered a brief recap of the problem caused by the refusal of the United States to sign the Kyoto treaty (see section 4.1.2). For most of the French students the US should be the world’s example in global warming reduction. Looking at the collage, Julie does not understand why “Kyoto” is included. She does not believe it represents the country accurately. Finally, Julie rejects the image of evangelism as reflective of America. She does not think at this point in the semester that it represents the way people live their faith in her country. A section will be dedicated to “Religion” (see section 4.2.4.5).

This collage puts forward few positive representations of America. Julie understands some of them but remains surprised. She is not, however, offended and tries to understand where the images may come from. This picture of America differs greatly from her definition of the American culture. To help the students, the instructor offers some explanation about the collage in class. American students’ reactions are posted on the class web site, for the French students to read.

A few days later, students are required to sum up and analyze what they have learned from their discussions and debates on stereotypes. This is Julie’s essay:
“Les Stéréotypes que les Français ont sur les Américains

Je pense les stéréotypes les Français ont qu'on Américains disent plus vrai que nous voudrais a admettre. Le collage de les KP's a beaucoup des choses que l'américains identifient avec tous les jours. Nous savient notre pays est plien de gens obtiennent chirurgie esthé thique à l'âge tres tres jeune afin de ressemblent à les idees de quoi les medias appele "beau/belle.” Nous mettons les hormones dans notre animeaux et agents de conservation dans notre nourritures. Il y a beaucoup des "nourritures naturel" dans le épecerie, mais plus de personnes n'achetent pas parce-que ils pensent eux a de goûte mal.

Les nourritures naturel on plus cher, aussi. Quand une américain voit un boîte de "Grape-Nuts" cereales pour $5 ou un hamburger de McDo pour 59c, il choisit le hamburger. Ça c'est la raison que beaucoup des americains sont grossir. Nous avons un dicton au l'université s'appelle "Le premiere année dix" <Freshman ten>. Il rapporte à le fait que le moyen étudiant prendra dix poids dans son première année au l'université. C'est une idée accepte complètement, juste as prendre le poids apres tourne 40.

Tous les idées les KP's présentent sont choses qui nous ne peuvons pas disconviennent. Nous sommes glossir. Nous parlons sur le gand "melting-pot" ça c'est l'Etas Unis, et ensuite etablient une discrimination contre les personnes qui ont différent. Nous envoyons dix ou vignt pour cent de notre salaire au les ministres sur le téleviseur. Les dtudiantes dans le classe ne savent pas qu'est-ce que c'est le Kyoto, une façon tres importante tous le monde sauf le USA. Et la point c'est que nous sommes fier que notre comportement. Je pense nous avons besion de regarder a comment le monde voiennt l'americains, et questionnons si nous voudrias de continue être avons vu a cette façon. C'est embarrassant à réaliser que le monde voient nous comme ça.”

[Essay, October 15th]

Julie is fairly embarrassed by the collage: “Je pense les stéréotypes les Français ont qu'on Américains disent plus vrai que nous voudrais a admettre”. She does not like the way Americans are portrayed but yet does not reject it. She is surprised but acknowledges that these are images that also represent America. It compels Julie to look back at her ideas of her own culture and the American people. This is, to me, a “rich point” as Julie faces aspects of the American culture that are not necessarily positive. Note how Julie provides a context and an explanation on American attitudes: for example, she points out how, for Americans, prices are more important than the quality of food.

Julie is embarrassed that most students in her class, herself included, did not know about the Kyoto treaty, when it is considered an important issue for the rest of the world. This is an obvious change from her reactions to the collage. The change only occurs in a few days, but points out once more, how Julie is concerned with the image America projects: “Je pense nous avons besion de regarder a comment le monde voiennt
For Agar (1994), culture is not only something someone has, “it is something that happens to people when they realize that their way of doing things isn’t natural law, that other ways are possible.” (p. 27). Talking about stereotypes encourages Julie to not only think about certain aspects of the French culture but also better understand her own culture. At the end of October, she notes a few paradoxes in the French culture:

Do you see some paradoxes in French culture? Name two or three, and explain why these seem like paradoxes to you.

“One paradox seems to be that France is the fashion capital of the world, and yet our keypals say that they don't have very much clothing at all. Maybe it is just a difference between the younger people and adults, but it would seem that a country with so many people that are concerned with fashion (apparently) would have much more clothing. Another paradox could be the fact that they watch so many American television shows and movies, despite the fact that they don't like the stereotypical way that Hollywood portrays people (Americans or French). Is French entertainment really that dull? Why do the French have to turn to another country in order to have a laugh, even if it is at their own expense?”

[Journal 4, October 22nd]

Noteworthy is her ability to separate the stereotypical idea of France – the fashion capital – from a maybe more down to earth reality her keypal’s. As a result of class-discussions and conversations with her keypal, she also realizes how popular American TV shows are in France, which leads her to question the content of the French media. Here, Julie demonstrates a sharp sense of critical thinking.

At the end of October, students are required to study and sum up what they have learned. Below is Julie’s essay:

Essai- L’image d’etats-Unis

“L’impression des américains et de notre culture dus discussions en classe n’est pas tres suprenante. Les Français voient les américains comme d'autre pays : nous avons beaucoup de petit écarts de leur façons, mais en général nous sommes tres semblables. Les personnes françaises nous voient nous sommes gros, paresseus, et préoccuper avec l'allure comme les acteurs vont au téléviseur. Les gens français n’ont pas pensé ramasser un sac des hamburgers graisseux, des frites, et Coca-Cola après le travail pour leur enfants.
Nous avons perdu l'idée que prendrons un repas fait à la maison avec notre famille. C'est difficile pour les français, pour qui cuire une repas est naturel pour leur familles, tous les jours, du comprendre que les personnes mangent volontiers les nourritures don't nous ignorons la composition. Américains mangent du boeuf avec les hormones, beaucoup d'agents de conservation, et d'autre choses que les français ne mangent jamais.
C'est parce-que nous sommes paresseux,-aussi- La, plupart des repas que nous mangons sont fait dans le micro-onde. Nous voulons notre nourritures tres vite et tres facile. Les français pensent nous sommes préoccupé avec l'allure, aussi.

Les gens français veulent l'apparence belle, bien sur, mais ils ne sont pas allés pour la chirurgie estétique. Ils sont contents avec leur appariation singulière et n'ont pas besoin de paraître exactement commes les personnes à Hollywood. Je pense que le monde voit les américains plus superficiels que tout le monde. Nous sommes soucies simplement de choses differentes que les autre personnes. Jusqu'au jour de l'attaque, nous n'avons jamais nous préoccupé avec notre securité ou autre choses comme ça. Les choses superficiel sont les choses prédominantes qu'on fait ou parlé on. Peut-être maitentant, l'américains prendrons un example de les gens français et d'autre pays, et voyons le choses vraiment importante dans la vie.”  

[Essay, October 29th]

She fully embraces the French perspective as one that makes sense. She indicates that the French think Americans are concerned with their physical appearances and relates the stereotype to the image Hollywood projects (“les acteurs”). She, therefore, becomes quite critical of her own culture. Moreover, this is one rare instance where Julie uses “we”, when she talks about American culture. She considers the French view of Americans as representative of the perception the world has of the United States. At the end of her essay, she states that in her opinion most people in the world view Americans as a superficial. Once again, she questions the American attitude in general and hopes that it will change because of the September 11th attacks. For Julie, the attacks should be a “wake-up call” not only for her but also for her country mates. She believes that America has a lot to learn from other countries: “Peut-être maitentant, l'américains prendrons un example de les gens français et d'autre pays, et voyons le choses vraiment importante dans la vie.” The example above illustrate that working on stereotypes has changed Julie’s view of the world and even more specifically her view of her own country.

At the end of the semester I asked Julie in what ways stereotypes were discussed in class and if the various activities on the subject helped her understand where the stereotypes were coming from. This is her answer:

“Julie: We actually spent a whole day talking about. We spent tow days, we spent a day talking about American stereotypes of French people and French stereotypes of American people and we just came up with as many stupid things as we could and we wrote them all on the board and then we went through them: “everybody eat snails, everybody wears berets, everybody smokes cigarettes and have cigarette holders and Men are rude and all that stuff…we just had it ALL on the board and then…and we just did it the next
day with French stereotypes of Americans and our Keypals did it too and they had this whole list of stereotypes of Americans and it was really funny... to see. Wow! That’s so stupid! How can you think that about people? And she went through all of them and no this is wrong, this is why and this is not true either and here we go! And it was great!

Hélène: And euh.. Were you surprised by some of the stereotypes? From the French?
That the French had about Americans?

Julie: I was surprised but once they explained it I could see where they were coming from and why they would think such things. They think we’re fat or that we’re obsessed with plastic surgery and what not but when I look at American media and what they’re watching, you know Friends and what not, I could totally see where they were coming from. [...] 

Hélène: Do you think you’ve been able to understand better where they [the stereotypes] are coming from and why Americans have stereotypes about French people... but once you put it in one context, it makes sense almost. 

Julie: Yeah! Definitely, definitely! Like the issue about French people being rude...I mean we dealt with that for a couple of days. Everybody in America thinks that French people are rude...and then you just talk to them and understand why...because they don’t smile all the time because if you smile you look stupid.

Hélène: [laughter]

Julie: That’s what she told us, if you smile you look stupid...Okay

Hélène: Okay...so what did you keypal say about that?

Julie: Well we asked them why they thought we thought that....like why do you think we all think you’re rude. Well probably because of this and this and this! I’m like OH..OK..But euh..they just put it in a context for us. This is what we do and you guys don’t really do that..so that’s why you think we’re weird! And it made sense!” [Interview]

Discussions in class and with her keypal encourage Julie to reconsider her conceptions of her own culture and engage herself in a reflection about culture. Julie and her keypal learn about each other, analyzing situations instead of being judgmental. Previously, I pointed out how Julie is surprised by some stereotypes such as the United-States representing inequality or lacking interest in environmental issues. Discussions on stereotypes, however, provide a context and demonstrate how stereotypes are socially and culturally constructed. In these few weeks, Julie has also learned a lot about her own country and the image “foreigners” have of it. For this study, I am not interested in what cultural facts Julie has acquired since I do not believe such approach will reflect Julie’s learning process. What the data show is how engaged she is in her learning, choosing topics of her interest, examining aspects of the culture that are pertinent to her “personal
growth” and developing a sharp sense of critical thinking. As pointed out earlier in the narrative, the image America projects is an important issue for Julie. Surprised by many representations the French have on America and Americans, she is encouraged to realize that there are other ways of seeing and thinking about the world.

4.2.4.5. Religion

The topic is not a weekly theme but it has been brought up several times in the course of the semester. In their third netmeeting, students discussed cultural differences, reflecting mainly on a class survey. Julie’s keypal inquires about religion:

“Eglantine: When I read sondage I found that religion is very important for you more in French. What’s your point of view?

Franck: I always thought that the French people, in general, were a very religious people. I may have been under the wrong impression. Is this true?

Eglantine: No it is not a true because you be religious if you want. We mustn’t to go the church…Is the same thing in USA?

Julie & F.: Yes. People are religious if they want.

Are you religious?

Eglantine: No and you?

Julie: No

Franck: Yes

[…] [For ten minutes, they switch to the notion of “success” and what it means for each one of them. They then return to the topic of religion]

Eglantine: Is the religion is very important for American in general?

Because in France you ara free about religion

Franck: Yes. Although a lot of people pretend to be religious so they are not outcasted in society by others. I don’t like that.

Eglantine: I agree with you. It is not normal.

Julie & F.: Our class is over. It was nice talking to you again. We will e-mail you soon. Bye©

Eglantine: I am very happy to see and speak with you. Good bye.’”

[NM3, September 24th]

Neither Julie nor her keypal are very religious. In this exchange, Julie’s keypal tries to explain how, for the French, religion is a personal matter and how there is not much pressure to be religious. This is to be opposed to Franck’s view that people pretend to be religious to fit in their community “so they are not outcaste by others.” Julie does not provide much information on the topic. However, in her reactions to the collage, she
makes one comment on evangelism. As stressed above, she is very surprised that word “evangelism” is included in the collage and does not agree it represents America fairly:

“I would say that the idea of Evangelism isn’t a fair representation of the US. I mean, sure we've got a lot of evangelists out there, but I don't think it's a fair representation of the religious sector of the American population. Most people practice whatever religion they choose quietly, without going on tv and soliciting money to do it.”

[Essay, October 11th]

Julie believes that being religious is a personal matter and is not convinced that evangelism is too influential in American culture. Comparing her comments with her keypal’s, there does not seem to be a big difference in the way Americans and French are religious. A month later, however, she mentions religion as being one major difference between French and American culture:

“Another difference could be the importance of religion. When my keypal and I discussed religion, she described it as something that really wasn't that important, it was just who you are. Here in America, some people are obsessed with their religions. The French wouldn't think about sending their whole paycheck to some televangelist who happened to share the same religious opinions as they do.”

[Journal 4, October 22nd]

At the end of October, it is quite clear that her view on evangelism has seriously changed. She now thinks religion plays an essential role for “some people” and may be one facet of the American culture. This particular comment demonstrates how Julie’s idea of her own culture, her own country evolves in the course of the semester, with class discussions or with discussions with her keypal.

4.2.4.6. Food and Alcohol

As mentioned in section 4.1.3, the topic of food was discussed for a long period in various ways. I noted in the biography section that Julie is a certified pastry chef. She emphasizes her interest in food below:

“Je suis tres contente avec cette unite a des repas et des nourritures, parce-que j'aime cuisine!!! J'aime manger, j'aime cuis, j'aime la cuisson........j'aime tout sur cuisine! Je ne vouldrais pas penser combien d'argent je dépense à cuisine et à approvisionnement pour fait des cuisine. C'est terrible! J'etais toujours le personne qui preparait les repas pour ma famille, a les vacances surtout. Tout le monde sait quand je rends visite jamais lui sans une tarte ou les petits gateaux fait à la maison.”

[Email, November 7th]
She also works at a winery where she had the opportunity to taste French wine. Therefore, she is eager to learn about alcohol as well as food. The seventh netmeeting is dedicated to food in general. The transcript is rather long, so I have decided to select the most interesting sections. First, students discuss the importance of family meals and then Julie and Franck speak about the difficulty of having a balanced diet in college.

Family meals:
“Eglantine: Is it important for you to eat with your family?
Franck: Very. That's just the way my family works.
Julie: I love eating with my family, but it doesn't happen very often. It's really nice when it does.
Eglantine: I think that it is very important to eat with the family because it is the only time to speak together
Julie & Franck: Right. We agree with you. It's great to talk to your family over a warm plate of lasagna.
Eglantine: Is it important for you to know what you eat?
Julie: Yeah, I have to be careful of certain things in foods.
Eglantine: Like?
Julie: Nutrasweet? the fake sugar in lite sodas? it gives me migraines.
Julie: Also, I'm trying to eat healthier and watch my weight, so I like knowing what I'm eating.
Franck: I eat everything in sight!
Eglantine: What is Nutrasweet?
Julie: um... it's really called aspartane. Like Diet Coca-Cola? No sugar, imitation sugar.
Franck: I like the way the french stress the importance of eating as a family.
Eglantine: is it a priority for you to eat?
Julie: YES! I love food. I love to eat. Food is very important, for social bonding, or just nourishment.
Eglantine: what sort of priority do mealtimes have in your home?
Franck: A meal to me not only provides nourishment, it's almost a religious thing at my home. It keeps the family together when you eat together.
Julie: Mealtime is very important, because it is the one time during the day when everyone can catch up and talk about thier day. We're all so busy throughout the rest of the day.”       [NM 7, November 5th]

For Julie and Franck family meals are valued. The three of them stress how family meals play or should play a central role in families, as a unifier: “Mealtime is very important, because it is the one time during the day when everyone can catch up and talk about thier day.” In the example above, students not only answer Eglantine’s question but explain why family are important in their views. Once again, their keypal’s questions compel them to explain their culture thoroughly, forcing them to analyze it.
In addition, they describe life style at the university, explaining that eating proper meals remains difficult:

**Balanced meals:**

“Eglantine: Do you eat fruits or vegetables?
Franck: I eat a lot of them. However I eat a lot more meat than I should
Julie: I eat salads and stuff, but not as much fruits and veggies as I should.
Eglantine: what is "veggies"?
Julie: Vegetables (slang)

::)

Eglantine: Do you think you have balanced meals?
Franck: Now that I moved away from home to go to school I don't get to eat with the family as much but I still try anmd hget together with my roommates. I do sometimes. It's hard when you cook for yourself and you're very busy with school.

Julie: No, I don't really eat balanced meals. I wish I could, but I don't have a full kitchen because I live in the dorms, so preparing food has to be fast and easy. Lots of macaroni and cheese and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Eglantine: what did you eat yesterday?
Franck: I had a cheese omlet and popcorn for lunch, and macaroni and cheese with green beans and carrots for supper. and I finished it off with two beers.

Julie: I had a cheesesteak sandwich for lunch, and macaroni and cheese for dinner.

Eglantine: what's "green beans"?
Franck: legumes vert, haricot vert?
Eglantine: I understand i didn't remenber
Franck: Ok
Julie: do you have any other questions?
Eglantine: Yes,.Are meals differents on Sunday?
Julie & F.: uh oh. Class is over.
   We'll answer your question in our emails!
Eglantine: Good bye
Julie & F.: Au revoir! :)
Eglantine: Bisous a tous les deux”  [NM 7, November 5th]

In this dialogue, they reveal how eating is viewed as a nourishment in America. The quality of food is not a major concern since it is perceived as being convenient. For Franck and Julie, a balanced meal requires them to cook, which is hard to do in the dormitories where they live.

Two days later, Julie explains to her keypal why her meals on Sundays are similar to her weekly meals:

“Pour repondre a ton question, 'Est-ce que tu manges les repas differente à Dimanche?'.....non, je mange le meme chose toute la semaine parce- que je suis trop occupée pour fait les grand repas. Je n'ai pas de cuisine, aussi. Je mange quelque choses je prepare dans ma micro-onde, ou bien à les restaurants dans le centre d'étudiantes (le fast-food, mais il est bon. Pas de MacDo.)”  [Email, November 7th]
Because she is so busy, Julie never has time to cook a proper meal. The discussion on food and eating habits reveals certain differences between Julie and her keypal. Both of them, however, value family meals and balanced meals. The questions Eglantine asks about American culture and about vocabulary force Julie to engage herself in a reflection on her language and her culture. Such discussions are very interesting to Julie as they highlight the “little things” that make people different.

In class, students elaborate on these topics and compare keypals’ responses. Students are also required to complete readings on the same subjects. In an essay Franck and Julie wrote together, they reflect on “food and stereotypes”:

Les Stérotypes et nourritures


Nous sommes assez typique moins à l'égard de quelle est en la nourrittrre. Par example, le boeuf a utilise à MacDo en les Etats Unites a les hormones et les boeuf a utilisé à MacDo en France n'a pas les hormones parce que les gens de France ne voulent pas le mal boeuf.

Dans le texte, on dit que les américains en France est s'habiter les traditions que les repas français. C'est difficile pour nous comprendons manger un repas pour plusieurs des heures avec beaucoup des courses. C'est difficile aussi pour les américains a entendré projeter les nourritures pour dejeuner quand ils n'ont pas fini avec le petit dejeuner ! Les repas, en general, c'est plus important en France que en Etats- Unis.

Nous pensons notre correspondant est une adolescene typique. Sa mere prepare le dîner et quand elle est tres occupé elle mange les nourritures rapidement et facile. Elle aime le repas l'Italien, les lasagne particulièrement. Elle dit c'est tres importante a mangé avec son famille, parce-que ça c'est les temps seulement parler avec lui.

Les différences les plus importantes, à notre avis, sont nous avons les idées different qu'est-ce que c'est les nourritures bonne, comment a manger (ex : les repas longe avec la famille vs. les repas vite et seul), et comment nourriture se rattache à notre vie en general.

En conclusion, nous regardons nous avons plus des choses similaire que nous avons des choses different quand nous mangons. Mais, nous en d'accord les repas sont tres importante pour etre avec le famille.” [Essay, November 6th]

In this essay Julie and Franck synthesize what they have learned from discussions in class and with their keypal. They stress how meals should be quick and easy to make
in the United States whereas the French focus on the quality of their dish, taking time to prepare it. They also point out the difference is in how eating is conceived differently in the two cultures: “Les différences les plus importantes, à notre avis, sont nous avons les idées different qu’est-ce que c’est les nourritures bonne, comment a manger (ex : les repas longe avec la famille vs. les repas vite et seul), et comment nourriture se rattache à notre vie en general.” For the French, meals are viewed not only as an act of nourishment but also as a social activity. In addition, they note that American and French people may eat the same food, such as beef, but the way it is produced is essential for the French since they are very skeptical about hormonal beef.

I believe that this essay shows how Julie has developed a reflective approach to culture in general. By consistently comparing the French and American cultures, she demonstrates an ability to not only observe but also analyze the cultural similarities and differences between the two cultures. She develops her critical thinking skills by taking distance from her culture. She is able to “decenter” (Byram, 1989) from her everyday world, describing and explaining it thoroughly to her keypal. In the essay above, she distinguishes between the French in general and Eglantine in particular, illustrating her ability to be nuanced. She is eager to create meaning out of all the information she has gathered and demonstrates a sharp analytical approach to her learning of culture.

A day after writing this essay, she emails her keypal to explain that her class will have a French meal in class. She is disappointed that wine is not allowed:

“We are having a little French meal in our class tomorrow, so I will have to go to a friend's apartment tonight to bake some quiche lorraine. I don't really know what everyone else is bringing, but we're all disappointed that we cannot have wine with our meal! I work at a local winery at night now, so I am enjoying wine with nearly all of my meals. Our local Cabemets and Sherrys are nothing compared to the French varieties that I've tried, but they are not bad. We read an article about how Americans in France think it is odd that the French start planning their lunch at breakfast and their dinner at lunchtime, since most Americans decide very spontaneously what they want to eat and don't think about meals in between. I, on the other hand, do think about food all day and plan my meals in advance, so I did not think that it was odd at all.

Are there any traditional American foods that you are curious about? Our prof told us that you do not eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches (les sandwiches au beurre de cacahuètes et à la confiture). What other American foods would you eat, and what ones do you think are strange?”

[Email, November 7th]
Julie tells what she has learned about wine from working in her winery admits enjoying drinking wine with her meals. Here, Julie makes a clear distinction between what Americans usually do and her own habits, reaffirming her interest in food. She wonders about examples of traditional American food that other people may find strange, once again trying to get an outsider’s perspective. This is her keypal’s reply:

“[…J’ai remarqué que tout le monde (plus ou moins) aimait la cuisine italienne, par exemple: Raviolis, lasagnes (que j’adore), spaghetti… C’est une cuisine délicieuse! Les plats Américains auxquels je voudrais gouter sont: les sandwiches aux beurre de cacahuètes et a la confiture, le philly cheesesteaks, le pudding, stuffing…. Le plat qui m’intrigue le plus est le pudding, car vous le préparer logtemps a l’avance. Mais notre professeur d’anglais nous a dit que c’était très bon!!! Alors pourquoi pas essayer d’y gouter! !! Je pense que tu t’es posée des questions au sujet de la nourriture Francaise, alors n’hésite pas a me poser toutes sorte de questions, je suis a ton entière disposition!! ! Je vais te quitter avec quelques questions: What would you French food eat? What ones do you think are strange? […]” [Email, November 16th].

A few days later, Julie has the opportunity to ponder how holidays are celebrated in France as compared to the States. This netmeeting also puts forward differences between Julie and Franck’s ways of celebrating.

Holidays:
“”
Eglantine: Ca va, vous avez des questions?
Julie & F.: Oui….quelle sorte de cuisine est-ce que tu manges en "Le reveillon"?
Eglantine: Je mange du foie gras, gibier, légumes, poissons...
Eglantine: et pour finir la bûche de noel
Julie: Ah, j’ai fait la bûche de noel le dernier Christmas! yum yum!
Eglantine: Des grands repas de famille...
Je trouve aussi cela très bon....
Julie & F.: Est-ce que tu voyage au les maisons de ton famille, ou est-ce qu’ils voyage chez toi?
Eglantine: Je fete noel chez mes grands-parents...
c’est très familial (pour moi)
Julie & F.: QU’est-ce le signification de la "feve" dans le gateaux?
Eglantine: Je ne sais pas vraiment;
je suis désolée.
Julie & F.: Nous avons un tradition similaire, mais le faveur est dans un gateaux noce.
Eglantine: Oui en France c’est l’épiphanie....
Celui qui trouve la fève dans le gateau, est le roi ou la reine..
Julie & F.: ah, bon.
Eglantine: Oui je sais que cela puisse vous paraître étrange
Vous avez encore des questions?
Julie & F.: oui.........
Pour Noel, est-ce que tu donnes les cadeaux a ton amis et ton famille, ou juste ton famille?
Eglantine: Pour noel, j'offre des cadeaux a ma famille
Julie & F.: Quand est-ce que vous ouvriez les presents?
Eglantine: J'ouvre les cadeaux le matin de noel
English now!!!
Julie & F.: Do you have questions for us?
Eglantine: Yes it is about "thanksgiving"
What do you know about the history of thanksgiving?
Julie & F.: The pilgrims and the indians had a big feast to show thanks for the harvest and for being together.
They ate Corn, turkey, and lots of pie.
And in general, all sorts of food that was grown.
Eglantine: Can you "rate" TG (thanksgiving) compared to other "special" days?
Franck: it is #3, I rank each holiday according to how much I eat. Christmas #1, Easter #2, Thanksgiving #3. :)
Julie: It's important because the whole family gets together. Not as big as Noel, but bigger than July 4 or Easter.
Eglantine: What makes TG a "special day"?
Franck: Thanksgiving is a special day for my family because we all get together and celebrate. It is a time to give thanks for everything that we have.
Julie: We get together and show thanks for everyone still being alive and healthy, the successes of the year, and good fortunes.
Eglantine: What do you eat and drink?
Franck: On Thanksgiving my mother makes turkey, stuffing, gravy, cranberry sause, mashed potatoes, corn and other vegetables, bread, sweet potatoe pie, pumpkin pie, apple pie, and wine. Some of the relatives like to bring some other deserts too.
Eglantine: and you Julie?
Julie: I make most of those things, but also Lasagna (for my sister who doesn't like turkey), cornbread, blueberry pie, butternut squash, and cookies. We also have sweet potatoes with marshmallows in them. We drink wine and cider.
Eglantine: Do you have the feeling that it is a very English sort of meal?
Franck: I tend to think that since most of my family is of Italian descent. We usually eat Italian food when we get together but for Thanksgiving we eat food that is traditional to the holiday.
Julie: I guess it's sort of English. I don't know what else you could consider it. It's just a tradition that's been passed on forever.
Eglantine: Ok What happens on both sides of the meal (before/after)?
Franck: Before the meal the women crowd into the kitchen and the men go to the TV and watch football (Americain). When the meal is complete we all gather around the table. After the meal, we all stay at the table and tell stories about things that have happened throughout the year and some old stories to keep them alive. After we are done talking for a few hours we go home.
Eglantine: And you Julie?
Julie: Before: We catch up on what's been going on recently, and everyone helps prepare something for the meal. Afterwards, we all help with the dishes, and then have a glass of wine and some pie in front of the fireplace.
Eglantine: What else happens during TG day?
Julie: There's a parade on tv in the morning, and lots of football games during the day, sometimes we go outside and play in the leaves, too.

Eglantine: Do you really "give thanks"?

Franck: Usually we eat so much and drink so much that we take a nap in the afternoon and then wake up and eat more desert at dinner time.

Franck: We give thanks no differently than at any other family meal. We always say grace at our meals. It's more like just getting together for us since we do this anyway.

Julie: No, we don't. My family doesn't say "grace" at the table or anything. It is just understood that we're all thankful that we can be together.

Eglantine: Ok it's very family...

Julie & F.: Yes

Julie & F.: do you have any other questions about thanksgiving or Christmas or New Years for us?

Eglantine: What are the other "special" days or National Days?


Franck: Depending on what religion you follow will decide what holidays you celebrate but there are some national holidays that everyone celebrates.

Eglantine: What are especially holidays that you prefer?

Sorry: You prefer?

Julie: I prefer Valentines day, Christmas, and New Years

Eglantine: Why do you prefer them?

Franck: - I prefer Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving,

Eglantine: And the same questions for you?

Julie & F.: is class over?

Eglantine: Yes

Eglantine: Talk to you soon!!

Julie & F.: We'll answer your questions in our emails ok, C-YA later! :)

Eglantine: It was very interessant

Julie & F.: yes!

Eglantine: OK no problem Julie and Franck

Julie & F.: bye bye

Eglantine: Bye bye Big kisses

[NM 9, November 19th]

In this conversation, each participant brings a personal perspective on how they celebrate certain holidays: Christmas, the Epiphany or Thanksgiving. Christmas for Eglantine is before all a family holiday: “C’est tres familial pour moi”. Julie and Franck explain thoroughly what Thanks Giving mean to them, how they celebrate it. In fact, there are a few differences in Julie and Franck’s recounts. Not knowing what Thanksgiving really is, their keypal also ask several questions leading them to provide a historical context of the tradition. The fact that Julie and Franck are speaking to a person who does not know what Thanksgiving is crucial in the way the conversation unfolds. They try to be as clear as possible and give extensive details. In a regular class, most
students assume that everyone knows each holiday and hardly make an effort to explain what it is. Therefore, the context in which the learning takes place plays a crucial role in the learning process. Moreover, it is clear in this netmeeting that Julie and Franck have become articulate, their points are elaborate, detailed and straightforward. From the length of the netmeeting it can also be assumed that writing in French has become a much easier task.

Throughout the semester, students brought up the topic of alcohol on several occasions. At the end of September, Julie asks her keypal if drinking in France is as popular as it is in her university:

“Do college kids in France drink as much as Americans do? It seems as if that is the only thing that people do at [this university]- get drunk and act like fools. But they are funny to watch!”

[Email, September 24th]

This is her Eglantine’s reply:

"Do college kids in France drink as much as Americans do?”. there are no limits age to drink in France. For example, you can buy alcohol (when you are minor) in the supermarket, you pass in the checkout with no problem!! ! So you don't wait to be in a college to drink alcohol!! I hope that I answered at your questions, when you it wanted!”

[Email, September 29th]

Julie questions the drinking habits of some college students. Even though she thinks it is funny, she also regrets that this is all they seem to be doing and therefore wonders whether it is only an American issue. Judging from the reply, I don’t think that Eglantine fully understands the question, stressing that alcohol is not as restricted as it is in the United States such that even minors can buy alcohol in France.

A month later, they elaborate on the during a netmeeting:

“Eglantine: Do students often drink?
sorry: students often
Julie: Oh Yes. It is almost a sport at [this university]. A lot of students drink responsibly (in moderation) but a lot do not.
Eglantine: What age can you drink?
Franck: It is legal to drink when you are 21 but many people do before they are old enough. If they get caught by the police they can get into a lot of trouble.
Eglantine: Where is drinking allowed?
Julie & F.: It is not a problem to drink in the home before you are 21 if you are drinking with a meal because the police do not know.
Julie: You are allowed to drink in bars and in dance clubs, and in restaurants, but only if you are 21.
Eglantine: Do you know or have you ever played any drinking game?
Franck: You are not permitted to walk around in the streets with alcohol.
Yes there are many. Some of the more popular games include playing cards and ping pong balls.
Some people think that seeing who can drink the most is a game too but I think that's stupid.

Eglantine: What are the risks if you are caught drinking while under age?

Julie: If you are caught underage, you get a fine (over $100), they call your parents, you lose your driver's liscence, and you have to take a class on the rules concerning alcohol.
If it's not your first offense, you can get arrested, too.
The Police are very tough on underage drinking here.

Eglantine: Would you say that girls drink as much as boys,?

Franck: If you are 21 and you give alcohol to someone who is not 21 you get a very large fine. Yes, I would say that girls drink just as much as boys on the weekend.

Eglantine: Ok what is your opinion about it Julie?

Julie: I think that they drink just as much, but boys drink to impress other boys with how much they can drink, and girls drink because they want to impress the person who gives them the drink.

Eglantine: or is it a male activity?

Julie: Drinking a lot is very manly.
But getting drunk and vomiting is not.
Girls are expected to have a couple of drinks, but not get drunk because they get really stupid and loud.

Eglantine: Is drinking associated with food, like a good wine with good food or is it done independently?

Franck: It depends on the occasion. For example, on the holidays a good wine with the meal is important but if you are just having fun with your friends then it does not matter what you are eating.

Eglantine: And you Julie?

Julie: I think that wine is associated with food, but not beer or hard liquor. But you do have beer with a barbecue.

Eglantine: In France it is often that people drink wine in the meal...

Franck: In America many people drink soda, juice, milk, or water with thier meals. If you go out to a restaurant then you may buy an alcoholic drink but if you eat at home you probably would not.

Julie: Do you like to drink wine with your meal? A particular kind of wine?

Eglantine: No I hate wine I prefer champagne and beer and you?

Julie: I like wine, but I love champagne! I'm not very fond of beer, but I'm getting used to it because it is what my friends drink.

Franck: I like red wines but I usually don't like white wines. Beer is ok but I really liked mixed drinks.

[...]
[for a short time, students describe what type of alcohol they drink]

Julie: Are you allowed to drink mixed drinks or beer in your house, do you parents think it is ok to try these drinks, or are you only permitted to drink wine.?

Julie & F.: I think it's time to go. It was nice talking to you again.

Eglantine: My parents allowed to me to drink for the big occasions like christmas, ..
As you can see, the whole netmeeting is dedicated to drinking. Many issues are discussed, accentuating the differences between France and the United States. For example, Julie and Franck explain thoroughly alcohol regulations and consequences for under age drinking. Julie and Franck demonstrate a keen ability to think about and analyze their own culture: They examine how men and women drink for different reasons in college or how alcohol may be associated with food for holidays or on what occasions do people drink alcohol. They make observations of their own culture. They also offer their French keypal their personal perspectives.

The next day, Julie explains to her Eglantine her opinions of drinking. She believes that some students drink too much. She does not think alcohol should be conceived as “a naughty thing”:

“You asked a lot of questions about Americans and alcohol. I think that the children who grow up in families who let them have a glass of wine with dinner or a beer with their father have a much better attitude about alcohol than those who treat it as if it is a naughty thing. Those people drink a lot just because they think that they are not supposed to. I grew up being able to have alcohol with meals or a Jack Daniels and Coke after a long day at work, so the whole drinking scene is unappealing to me. You will be surprised how important it is for some people to drink when you come to visit in the spring.”

Throughout the semester, Julie expresses interest in learning “little basic things of life that other people have” and look different from her own culture. As I stated previously, her curiosity influences the way she talks about culture. In her interview, she stresses how “neat” these different basic things of life can be:

“Julie: Like I thought it was hilarious when my KP was talking about how gross peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are. [Laughter] because it is something that I eat everyday She’s like “wow, why would you eat that? That’s disgusting!” And then you look at something that they do.. like how they’re thinking about lunch at breakfast and dinner at lunch…it’s just neat it’s neat to see those little differences in people.

[...]

Hélène: What cultural aspects have interested you the most from this class?
Julie: um…I had a lot of fun with the food discussions because I love food.
Hélène: Do you cook?
Julie: Yeah! I am a certified pastry chef so I am obsessive about food. um like doing the French meal in class was fun and um talking with my KP about what they eat at the holidays and what they eat in general, that was really interesting… I mean we eat a lot of the same things but …Like again…my KP was grossed out about Pumpkin pie…
Hélène: Oh really?
Julie: “oh, it’s vegetable, why would you mash it up and eat it in a pie?” It’s neat, I really like that
Hélène: Yeah? And what surprised you about what French people eat?
Julie: Um…um… I was not really surprised about what they eat. It’s just interesting to see..um… like they don’t eat sandwiches very much or something…
Hélène: Really?
Julie: They keep picking at us ‘cause we seem to eat sandwiches at every meal.. Like on our survey, SANDWICHES “no Turkey and yogurt and beef!” [change of tune] SANDWICHES So.. I don’t know, nothing really surprised me about what they eat. It’s just interesting to see the differences.
Hélène: Yeah! Maybe it’s because they don’t live in a big city that they don’t eat sandwiches…
Julie: Yeah, I t could be. We’re just lazy I guess. [laughter]” [Interview]

In her interview, she reiterates her interest in learning the differences in eating or drinking habits between the two cultures. Talking about these differences allows Julie to wonder and make observations about on her own culture.

4.2.5. Conclusion

As this narrative shows, Julie’s development is extensive in the course of the semester: not only does she learn about French culture but also learns about her own culture. From the beginning of the semester, she is able to look at her own culture from an observer’s point of view. Toward the end of the semester however, she is considerably more “conscious” of others’ perception of America.

As mentioned earlier the context in which the learning takes place is important. Julie, in her portfolio, states that she learned tremendously from the netmeetings: “Our
keypals taught us sooo much through our questions and discussions.” [Portfolio].

Reacting to her peer’s comment during chat, Julie indicates that the friendship gained from the experience has helped the learning process: “Parce que nous avons connu nos KPs personalement. Il s ne sont pas simplement un bande de personnes en France.” [November 27th]. Finally, she stresses the same idea during her interview:

“Julie: It’s so different than any other French class or any class in general because she [the instructor] does so many activities and.. being connected to actual French people is really fascinating and .. I think it definitely makes the whole experience much more enjoyable…than just sitting and learning about grammar…you know endings and taking tests all the time!

Hélène: Do you think you’ve improved a lot ..and in what ways?

Julie: It’s it’s been much easier to retain the information I think in comparison to … book learning ‘cause we’re applying, we’re playing games…like when we had that meals, that was fun.” [Interview]

Building a relationship, even a friendship may have changed Julie’s motive to learn about culture. From the beginning of the semester, she is interested in learning about various aspects of the French culture. Speaking to a French student engages Julie in a reflective approach to language and culture. The telecollaboration enhances Julie’s interest in learning. In addition, the class discussions, reading assignments and guidance from the instructor assist Julie in her learning. During her interview, she elaborates on the way the class was conducted and explains how much she learned from it:

“We kept asking our Keypals different questions and they had a bit of difficulty trying to explain things so then [our instructor] took what they were saying and translate it a little more so we would understand it and then she explained it.” [Interview]

Throughout the semester, Julie’s instructor guides her students by providing historical or social contexts, lists of vocabulary, and expressions to use. She asks them questions to assist their thinking and ultimately their development. Julie finds the class extremely challenging, mainly because of the amount of work she needs to complete. She indicates in late October that she values greatly the use of authentic materials in class:

“I think that it's great that we're using real french texts in class in order to better our comprehension skills. It's really neat to read the texts and know that I'm actually understanding what is being discussed. I think that the texts should definitely be used more in the future, they're really helping. I don't think that we could get as far as we have been without the extra help of the vocab and questions, though. Having those definitely makes the reading seem less scary and overwhelming. I think it's also helped that the
texts haven't been really long. Keeping them on the short side makes the task of reading them seem much less daunting. I think that if we had longer texts to read, you would find less people in the class actually doing the readings at all. I'm really comfortable with what we're doing right now. They're a good size, with good help, and they're interesting!"

[Essay, October 29th]

She elaborates in her interview:

“Like some of the texts were really complicated. I know that for one..on José Bové, she did vocab. She handed sheets of vocabulary for almost every paragraph 'cause there were so many words in there that we did not understand! But she gave us those, she gave us questions.. um one of the other thing she did was gave us an article in French about something and then gave us an article in English about the same thing. Like it was not the same article but it was about the same subject. So if there was something we did not get did not understand in the French one, we could look at the American one and go “oh..okay”!”

[Interview]

She points out that the way her instructor has conducted the class has helped her feel comfortable: “she never ever makes you feel dumb if you don’t know what something means or don’t know how to say something” [Interview].

Throughout this narrative, I have investigated Julie’s approach to learning culture, documenting a few “rich points” she encountered. She undoubtedly developed, changing her ways to think about culture and language. As she points out in her interview, she views language and culture as being interwoven:

“When we’re studying culture, we’re still looking at the language and way they say things and the way that they form sentences. And then when we’re spending days specifically gearing toward grammar and endings, we’re putting it into context and we’re having a discussion about something using those endings, something cultural. So it’s always one and the same, it’s always putting them together.

[…] If you only learn phrases and endings, it doesn’t give you the handy information: how do you use them, how do those people live. So [culture] is very important you know (…).”

[Interview]

For Julie, learning a foreign language is learning how to express herself in a different way. She analyzes the way the French express themselves and what specific words entail in one culture compared to the next. I have shown in this narrative, how much reflection the notion of patriotism has brought up for example. After a few weeks, Julie is able to understand that patriotism is a cultural concept perceived differently in
France and in America. In fact, at the end of November she believes, along with some of her peers, that the French express their pride in their country differently:

“S1: Je pense que les francais sont patriots, mais il n’est pas comment le patriotisme des Americains

[…]

S2: Je pense que leur nourriture est une forme de leur patriotisme

S3: Les Francais ne sont pas patriotes que les Americains parce que ils ne chantent pas les chansons patriotes.

S1: A la debut de la semestre, je pensais que il est etrange qu’ils ne montrent la drapeau, mais maintenant, je comprends pourquoi

S3: [S2], bon point!

S2: merci 😊

Julie: moi aussi, je suis d’accord.

[…]

S1: je suis d’accord avec S2

mais le chansons ne sont pas un partie de son culture…

ca ne signifie pas qu’ils ne sont pas patriotes

S4: ils ressentent differement sur le patriotism que les americains

Julie: tous le monde connu les francais pour leur grande repas et patisseries

S4: je pense que le fierte des francais est plus dans leur histoire

S1: je suis d’accord avec S4

Les francais croient dans la liberte, egalite, et fraternite, c’est patriotique

Julie: oui, le base de la revolution francaise

[…]

Qu’est-ce que tu pense les kp’s penserent a les drapeaux partout quand ils arrivent aux Etats-Unis en Mars?” [Chat, November 27th]

Not only is she able to study the differences between the two cultures but she is also able to provide some explanations for these differences.

There is one other example that I find particularly striking. Talking about cultural differences, Julie’s keypal uses the word “ghetto”, implying a French meaning. The word “ghetto” in French refers to a way of segregating. It does not necessarily imply houses for poor communities. Therefore, in French you can say “rich ghettos” or “poor ghettos.” Eglantine’s use of “ghetto” causes confusion:

“Eglantine: In the USA, are there rich ghettos?

Julie & F.: No, we only call it a ghetto when it is the very poorest area. Rich people would never go there.

Eglantine: But I have seen this in the television, it's places who are only rich!

Julie & F.: We don't understand. Where are you seeing rich ghettos? in rich cities?
Eglantine: it's the place who live only rich...
   "where"
   I think that your class has ended; It's right?
Julie: I will think about it and try to explain it more in my email. I think I know
   what you mean. Yeah, we have to go.
Eglantine: Yes I hope I see you in two weeks because I have 15 days of holidays!
Julie & F.: Have fun!!!! we will talk to you soon!
Eglantine: Big kiss”

For Julie’s keypal, a “rich ghetto” is where only rich people live, where rich people
segregate themselves if you will. Julie and Franck are confused with what she means.
For them, a rich ghetto is simply an oxymoron. The same day, Julie sends her an email,
asking her to elaborate.

“Ce qui m’a le plus surpris, Cest quand tu dit les ghettos ont ou les personnes riches
habitant. Tu dit tu as vu ça en téléviseur? Il n'y a pas des riches dans les ghettos. C'est la
raison ils ont les ghettos...pourquoi les habitants ont plus pauvre que ils habitent dans les
maisons délabré. Peut-etre l'idée a les personnes dans le ghetto ont riche c’est parce-que
les ghettos sont dans grande villes, en particulier. L'autre gens dans le ville ont tres
riches, mais il y a le partie de la ville ou les plus pauvre habitent. Est-ce que tu
comprends-moi? C'est ça qu’est-ce que tu as veut dire dans le NetMeeting? Si non,
cherches à expliquer-moi avec un façon differente, et nous chercherons encore! :)

Here, Julie explains what “ghetto” means in English. She is not only confused but also
very frustrated. It is clear in this email how important it is for her to understand what her
keypal means in order to keep a good communication. She asks for clarification to her
teacher. The next day, she writes another email to Eglantine, explaining the
misunderstanding:

“I just wanted to write you a quick note about the discussion we were having. My prof
explained to me that when you said 'ghettos,' you meant the place where rich people all
live together away from everyone else in a little community. We call those 'gated
communities' here, because there is a gate with a security man that checks everyone who
wants to come in to their private community. So everything you were saying was right,
you may see them on television in shows about rich people in Califomia (like that show
from the 80's called "Melrose Place") or celebrities. Now I understand what you meant!”

In fact, she recalls this particular misunderstanding during her interview:

“Julie: I had some misunderstanding with my keypal that were really really
funny..like the difference between ghettos and gated communities
Hélène: Ghettos and what?
Julie: Do you know what gated communities are?
Hélène: no, I don’t...
Julie: A gated communities is where really rich people live and there’s like a gate with a security guy there...like something you’d see on TV from California or something. So my keypal thought the word for that was “ghettos”...and ghettos are like you know the really poor sections of the city. So she was asking me questions about the rich people in ghettos and I’m like “well they aren’t really rich people in ghettos..then she’s like “no, you don’t understand” So um...once we kept you know asking more and more questions I understood what she meant.” [Interview]

Through this exchange, Julie discovers that the word “ghetto” entails a different meaning in French. She is aware of the miscommunication problem and looks for tools that will help her understand the French meaning of the word. Through her participation in the structured activity of the class, she is able to find the answer to her question. The example illustrates her investment in learning French and demonstrates Julie’s development in her ability to negotiate meaning through dialogue.

The reflective journals as well as the portfolio provide a platform for the students to be engaged in their development. These two assignments offer Julie a way to enter into a critical dialogue with herself and with her instructor, as she reflects on the changes that occur in the course of the semester. By the end of October, she already sees how much she improved as she states in her fourth journal:

“Our NetMeetings have really come a long way, too. We are all much more comfortable with our French counterparts now, and it is much easier and faster to discuss the chosen topics. Our keypals have been asking us in depth questions pertaining to their research projects, and just their questions about American life in general. It has been very interesting to see what kind of concepts get mixed up in translation. For example: my Keypal and I had some confusion today about the difference between a ghetto and a gated community. It was just a problem in translation, but we were able to work it out.”

[Journal 4, October 22nd]

In her portfolio, she also assess how much she learned from the net-meetings:

“What did you learn through NMs? Be specific.
Vocabulary, ways of saying things: tons!
Grammatical points or structures: Basic sentence formation, forming tenses
Ideas: stereotypes, ideas on patriotism, food
Skills: being faster on my feet, better comprehension.” [portfolio]

In fact, a close look at her emails and the netmeetings transcripts clearly show how much she gains over the semester. First, the length of Julie’s emails and netmeetings increase tremendously, showing that she becomes more and more at ease...
with French. Second, she is able to better articulate her ideas at the end of the semester. Finally, what is also striking is the way she implements idiomatic expressions in her greetings. In September, she usually finishes her email with either “à bientôt” or “bye bye”. In October, she starts to use expressions such as “J’ai trop de travail alors je dois m’arrêter dommage….A Lundi!” or “Bon, je dois y aller. Ecris-moi vite!” By the end of the semester, she even uses a colloquial expression: “À la prochaine!”. In addition, she stresses, in her portfolio and during her interview, how much more comfortable she feels speaking French:

“Julie: Just from the first chat session to the last chat session….see how long it would take us to understand what they were saying and then write something back and now it’s so fast…

Hélène: Really?
Julie: Yeah! You can just look at it and know what they’re saying and it’s just really neat to actually know what is going on.

Hélène: It must be rewarding though…you’ve noticed how much progress you’ve made.
Julie: Yeah! It’s really great! It makes me feel really good.”

[Interview]

This narrative explored Julie’s development in the course of the semester and more specifically her development of a reflective approach to language and culture. Once more, the situation in which learning takes place is essential, as it socially and culturally constructs learning: the social interactions that take place in class, encourage Julie to reflect on her own culture as well as learning about her kepal’s culture. Because of the reading assignments and follow-up discussions in class, culture is discussed in multiple contexts. Julie becomes aware that her kepal’s comments are only representative of one facet of the French culture, as they may for example contradict analysis from scholar articles.

Vygotsky argues that for development to emerge, conscious awareness is critical. In other words, learners need to become aware of cultural differences and understand how cultural concepts are constructed differently to potentially reorganize the way they conceptualize the world. In this narrative, I have demonstrated how Julie draws from personal experiences and reflects on her daily habits. She often takes the position of an
observer, theorizing about daily activities and becomes more “conscious aware” of her own culture by contrasting her culture to the French. Kramsch (1993a) talks about “a sphere of “interculturality”, where “understanding a foreign culture requires putting that culture in relation with one’s own.” (p. 205). Julie’s thinking of her own learning process is also essential in regards to her cognitive development. As she clearly shows with her portfolio, she reflects on her improvement in French and discusses how much this class has allowed her to study cultural concepts in general. At the end of the interview, she stresses how disappointing she is, not to continue with French. Later I learned that she changed her schedule so she could continue on to the next level with Magali.

\[1\] Franck and Julie share the same keypal and write to her from the same computer during Mondays netmeetings. For the analysis, I mainly focus on Julie’s questions and comments. Franck, however, actively participates in the discussion and his contribution, therefore, cannot be ignored.

\[2\] Here, only Julie’s comments are transcribed.

\[3\] For this fourth netmeeting, there were four American students (two groups of two) and two French students, Eglantine and another student. Bits of the data were cut, whenever I did not have the students’ consent.

\[4\] Questions Julie was required to answer are in Italics.
Mary

4.3.1. Biography

Mary is an eighteen years old American student from a small town in the northeast of the United-States. She is a freshman, majoring in International Politics and French and minoring in business. She is not sure of what she would like to do in the future but is interested in diplomacy:

“Je ne suis pas sûr que je veux être, mais je crois que je voudrais travailler avec le gouvernement. Peut-être je serai une traducteur, mais je pourrais aussi être un officier du service étranger, comme une diplomate. Mais je ne veux pas être un ambassadeur parce que ils ont beaucoup de stress.” [Email, October 10th]

“I could do like international business stuff but I wouldn’t mind working in an embassy or maybe just being a translator if I … get proficient enough in French. I’d like to do that and maybe working in an embassy in like a French speaking country. I’m flexible and I have plenty of time so […] I thought that I’d like to keep my options opened so I can always change my mind and I figure if I have business that could take me to a lot of different fields.” [Interview]

She mentions her future plans in her self-portrait as well, describing herself as follow:

“Je suis une étudiante de [X] Université.
Anxieuse, excitée, et dynamique
Je trouverai des amis nouveau.
Je travaillerai doere.
Motivée, occupée, et fatiguée
Je suis une personne nouvelle.

J’étais une étudiante du lycée.
Jeune, active, et contente
J’ avais beaucoup d' amis.
J'ai habité au [X] pour dix-sept ans.
Comfortable, ennuyeuse, et desire
J’étais prete pour un changement.

Je serai une étudiante du monde.
Ambitieuse, prete, et naive
Je gagnerai mon diploma d'politique international.
Je visiterai tous les continents.
Vieille, expérimentée, et large
Je serai une voyageuse.” [Poem]
Mary is a very dedicated student whose portfolio includes many homework assignments, numerous emails Mary and her keypal, Marc, sent to each other, all the netmeeting and chat transcripts. Her portfolio is neatly organized and shows how diligent she is. In addition she is quite ambitious and she describes herself as an active person: “J’aime être active et je pense que je serai devenir membre du club du français, des chanteurs, ou des danseurs.” [Email, September 3rd]. Additionally, she likes traveling and hopes a future career in International Politics will give her the opportunity to do so. She traveled widely within the United States but regrets not having gone abroad very often. She plans to go to France with her French class in the Spring semester and maybe, while she is in Europe, take a short trip to Germany to see a friend. She also wants to go abroad during her junior year. She visited Montréal once and spent three weeks in Arles, France, in the summer of 2000 where she stayed in a French family.

She describes her trip to France as one of her best experience in her life. In fact, she even narrates her experience in France in her Texte libre and posts it on her web site:

“EXPERIENCES DE LA VIE ET LA LANGUE


J'ai rencontré aussi leur grand-mère. Elle m'aimait beaucoup parce qu'elle aimait pratiquer son anglais. Elle me parlait de la deuxième guerre mondiale et de comment les soldats américains étaient venus en France. Elle me disait où les soldats sont venus et qu'ils offraient des cadeaux comme du chocolat ou des cigarettes. Mais elle ne prenait pas les cadeaux parce que « si elle prenait un cadeau, elle s'en irait avec le soldat. » Elle était très intéressante et drôle. J'ai adoré déjeuner chez la grand-mère. La nourriture était très bonne et elle aimait toujours entendre ce que je pensais du repas.

Pendant que j'étais là, j'ai visité d'autres villes et des endroits touristiques avec ma famille d'accueil. J'ai visité les Baux où j'ai abîmé mes sandales parce que je ne savais
pas qu’ils étaient si rocheux. La mère travaillait à l’institution mentale où Van Gogh était resté et j’ai vu la chambre qui est sur un de ses tableaux. J’ai aussi vu le café de Arles qu’il a peinté « Le Café la Nuit. » Je suis allée à la plage au bord de la mer Méditerranée. Mon endroit favori que j’ai visité était un lac. Je ne suis pas contente que je ne peux pas me souvenir de son nom parce que je voudrais retourner là-bas. Le lac était très beau, très frais, et très clair. Il y avait une petite rivière qui se jetait dans le lac et le long de la rivière il y avait une petite chute d’eau. Je suis montée en haut de la chute d’eau et j’ai plongé de la chute d’eau dans la rivière. C’était super.

Après ma première semaine, je n’avais plus mal à la tête et j’ai commencé à apprendre plus de la langue. Un jour, pendant le diner, j’avais demandé ma mère d’accueil si je pouvais avoir plus de salade. Elle a dit « Oui, bien sur. » Ensuite elle a dit plus vite à son mari que j’aime la salade et j’ai dit « Oui, j’aime la salade. C’est très bon! » Elle était très surprise que j’ai compris. J’étais très heureuse.

Je crois que la chose la plus importante que j’ai appris là-bas a été mon accent. J’ai su que mon accent était meilleur quand je suis retournée aux États-Unis. Dans l’avion je m’étais assise près d’un homme français. Quand je me suis assise nous avons commencé notre conversation en français. Après quelque temps j’ai eu du mal à le comprendre. J’ai expliqué que je suis américaine et je lui ai demandé de parler doucement. Ensuite, il s’est écrié en anglais, « j’ai pensé que tu étais une fille française! » J’ai beaucoup d’histoires de mon voyage en France mais cette histoire est ma favorite.

Quand je suis rentrée, ma mère était impressionnée par ma nouvelle aptitude à parler français, surtout un jour quand elle a entendu que je discutais avec mon frère en anglais pendant que je parlais avec Constantin en français. Vers la fin de mon voyage j’avais appris beaucoup de français. Mais c’est très difficile de se souvenir de tout ce que j’ai appris. Néanmoins je continuerai à essayer. Je crois aussi que quand je retournerai en France je apprendrai plus et finalement parlerai couramment.”

Mary’s trip to France was overall a good and rewarding experience: “it was a good experience, I really liked doing it” [Interview]. She liked Provence as well as the food and her French improved greatly. At the end of her essay, she says her French skills improved so much that a French man even believed she was French. To her keypal, she indicates this is how she learned a lot of French: “Pendant l’été de 2000, j’ai habité avec une famille française pour troisième semaine à Arles. Il était là-bas que j’ai appris beaucoup de français mais j’aurai beaucoup apprendre.” [Email, September 3rd]. During the interview, she talks about her visit in Arles for about ten minutes and points out that being forced to speak French all the time helped her learn the language. Her stay in France was an extremely valuable experience.
4.3.2. Foreign Language Studies

Mary believes that learning a foreign language is “extremely valuable” in general but accentuates it is even more “beneficial” in her field of studies (i.e. international politics). She is not sure whether or not French is a requirement for her major but stresses during her interview that she likes other languages and cultures. French is the only foreign language she has studied so far, although she states in her conversation with me that she can understand Spanish: “Sometimes though I can understand some Spanish when I read it but that’s pretty much it… but that’s only because I’ve studied so much French… because it’s kinda similar” [Interview]. Mary studied French for five years before coming to this French 003 class. She chose to learn French because it is an official language of the United Nations:

“I think the reason I chose French was um.. we were watching the Olympics and I was like um French is like the second official language of the United Nations… I was like why not, I’ll take French.” [Interview]

During her interview, she depicts her high school teacher as being a horrible instructor and claims learning French mostly by herself:

“I had hah a HORRIBLE French teacher and I had her all four years up until then (up until her trip to France). […] She was never like she would say we are going to do this but then she would change it like we would do something else. Like she would never really set patterns and like whenever she would try to teach us something, she would cram it at the worse time. She would cram all the verb tenses in one day! And I was like… you can’t do that! Luckily- but then I did my own independent study in French …and she was my advisor but I never had to see her. I would just go and learn French for myself. That’s how I learned a LOT of my French. But it’s so hard to just read French and not practice it. So… and it’s so hard to remember all of it.” [Interview]

Uncertain about her French, she chose to enroll in French 3 instead of 201 (Intermediate French- Readings and Conversation). In the comment above, she is quite critical of her former French instructor but her bad experience did not change her view of French as a valuable aspect of her education.

In her Freshman seminar French culture is also discussed, because the course is about American novels whose plots take place in France. Moreover, on campus, she lives on the “international” floor where several foreign languages are spoken. Therefore, she has a few opportunities to practice her French:
“Mary: There are some German speakers and some Spanish speakers and my roommate is Korean. Yeah, it’s very diverse, but there are mostly French people on the floor, which I thought was interesting.

Hélène: By French people, do you mean people from France or people who speak French?

Mary: French people from France and they are also a lot of people who are taking French. [...] There are a lot of nationalities on the floor.

Hélène: That is neat

Mary: Yeah, I like it, I like living there.

Hélène: And do you talk to the people a lot and compare what they say with what you learn from class?

Mary: I talk to Elise a lot. She is French and we have breakfast like every other day together or coffee. She’s pretty cool, she’s awesome, she’s one of my good friends here.”

Throughout the semester, she emphasizes how essential it is for her to “really” learn French since she is preparing herself to work in diplomacy:

“Je crois que je serai un bon correspondant parce je veux apprendre vraiment le français. Je veux une carrière de la diplomatie. Alors, j’ai choisi étudier la langue du français parce que elle utilise dans beaucoup des pays et elle est une langue officielle des Nations Unies. Pendant que j’étudiais le français, je commençais à aimer la langue.”

[Email, September 3rd]

In her first journal, she explains her views on the foreign language requirement.

She asserts that learning a foreign language is valuable for any career path you undertake, because it is not simply about grammar but it is learning how the language is used; ultimately it is also about culture:

“The College of Liberal Arts has a language requirement for their degree programs. It is evident through this requirement that the university is concerned with increasing the students’ awareness of diversity among the students on campus and with those a student will be encountering at the workplace. However, how does learning a new language relate to increasing cultural awareness? When learning a new language, a student does not only learn basic grammar, but they learn the idioms and nuances of that language too. The dialect of a particular language is created by the culture of people that use it. A single language can have numerous dialects based on the area and culture where it is used. Therefore, by learning a new language, a student will learn more about the culture and how to communicate with people of that culture. This increases tolerance of other cultures by increasing understanding of their customs and courtesies. Learning tolerance and communication skills is valuable in any professional field and is therefore encouraged by the university through the language requirement.

I believe learning a foreign language is extremely valuable. Personally, I am interested in international politics and knowing a second language is obviously beneficial in this field of study. Nevertheless, learning a second language may be beneficial in any career. While learning a second language, a student may not only learn tolerance and
In Mary’s opinion, learning a foreign language increases tolerance for the culture you study as well as for other cultures. Moreover, it should improve communication skills. She believes that these two aspects (tolerance and communication) are valuable in any career field and she therefore understands why universities require foreign language studies.

In her first journal entry (see above), she shows an acute ability to analyze and talk about language issues. First, she explains that a language groups various dialects, highlighting that culture shapes the way one speaks: “The dialect of a particular language is created by the culture of people that use it. A single language can have numerous dialects based on the area and culture where it is used.” Second, she examines why languages are not valued in the United States:

“Learning a foreign language in the United States is not highly valued, even though it is an extremely diverse country. This is evident through the public school system. While it is proven that a second language is easier to learn at a young age, most schools do not teach foreign language classes until seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. In contrast, math and English are taught at the very beginning of a child’s education. Perhaps, the difference of value placed upon learning math or learning a foreign language is caused by the immediate and palpable benefits viewed by learning math. In schools located in areas where a foreign language is used everyday, prominently in urban areas, its value increases and is usually being taught to students at a younger age. However, in suburban and rural areas, the long term benefits learning a second language is not always evident and decreases in value.”

Here, she first points out how it is rather ironic that a diverse country like the United States would not value foreign languages despite the heritage of various cultures and languages of its people. She then indicates that the way the curriculum is conceived in the public system shows that foreign languages are not valued: “While it is proven that a second language is easier to learn at a young age, most schools do not teach foreign language classes until seventh, eighth, or ninth grade.” Being introduced so late in the curriculum, she does not think that foreign languages are a learning priority. Finally, she stresses the functional aspect of curriculum design. For example, she asserts that math may have “more immediate and palpable benefits”, which can explain why the subject is
introduced at a low level. She also indicates that a greater need to speak foreign
languages in urban areas compared to rural areas encourage such geographical areas to
introduce foreign languages before seventh grade.

Furthermore, during her interview, she complains about some students’ reluctance
to learn a foreign language:

“Mary: [...] In high school um…in high school especially… there were only two…
two or three people that were really interested in learning French in my
French class.
Most of the time if I um…they would just be like why are we doing this why
are we doing this? And I knew why we were doing it but it was
like…everybody was so negative…it kinda brought me down a little bit. I
don’t know I still like it.
Hélène: Why do you think they don’t care about learning about another culture?
Mary: (laug pause) umm what’s funny though is I think like now that they start to
learn about it so many people in the class DO like it which I thought was
really interesting. I think the reason they’re kind of they just don’t want to
learn and that’s why they’re resistant to it. They’re like why are we doing
this? And I think some people are required to do this I think that’s part of it.
I think frankly that everybody should try to learn another language but that’s
just my opinion. They’re like “we’re in America, why don’t we speak
English?” I am like…well you’re in French class soo why don’t you speak
French [laughter].you took this class ok? [laughter] But I don’t know… I am
not sure why.. like I had this discussion with some of my friends too like I
could never understand why they don’t do it. I think they kind of ignorant to
the fact that there are other cultures and they might see us the same
way…like why should I bother learning about the American culture?”
[Interview]

Majoring in International Politics, learning a foreign language is of a great significance
for her. Here, she distances herself from what she views as a typical American attitude
toward languages. She believes that people should be more interested in learning other
languages and learning about cultures and views students’ lack of interest as a sign of
ignorance: “I think they kind of ignorant to the fact that there are other cultures and they
might see us the same way.”
4.3.3. Language and Culture

In Mary’s view, learning a foreign language is ultimately learning about culture. According to her, learning a foreign language is learning how to use it, learning to communicate differently. In her second journal, she elaborates on this particular idea:

“I think learning about culture while studying a language is important because they are so closely related. How each culture communicates is related to their use of language. For example, in French there is the familiar \textit{tu} form for subject \textit{you} and the formal \textit{vous} form. The use of either form is determined by French mannerisms. In addition, a culture can be identified by their use of language. English and American English are very similar languages both contain differences that separate them and link them to their particular culture. Learning about a culture is, therefore, acutely relative to learning a language since culture influences language usage and language identifies culture.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

She views language and culture as being intertwined: “culture influences language usage and language identifies culture.” She asserts that the way one communicates is socially and culturally constructed, and in fact, provides a few examples to support her argument. First, she underlines the distinction in French between the formal second person pronoun \textit{vous} and the informal form \textit{tu}. She notes that such distinction does not exist in English. Second, she mentions the various dialects that exist in English, notably British English and American English. Each is associated with its own culture. Mary shows great analytical aptitude comparing the two dialects of English.

She goes on to study the way the French show respect and compares it to the American way:

“One aspect that I find interesting about French culture and language is the manner in which they speak to show respect, and the strict way they apply these rules. In American culture and language, rules of respect are not followed so strictly, and the language does not show a great change in form due to the situation. Respect, shown through the French language, is displayed when they greet each other and when they address each other. For example, when a child addresses an adult, they use the \textit{vous} form of the subject \textit{you}, and when they address a friend, they use the familiar form of \textit{tu}. Another example is when a child greets an adult they say, “Bonjour,” but when they address their friend they say, “Salut.” These displayed differences in respect is not evident in American English, for we use the same form of the subject \textit{you} in both situations, and we greet each other usually in the same way that we greet everyone else. The only exception in which Americans show respect is their use of slang, and the rules applying to the use of slang are also followed in French.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]
In the entry above, Mary demonstrates how language and culture are embedded within one another and provides several examples about the way the French show respect in how they communicate. In her comparison of French greeting conventions to American ones, she mostly notes differences in the way Americans and the French greet and address each other. The only possible similarity she points out may be in the way each culture uses slang. For Mary, learning a foreign language is about learning various rules of communication. For this reason, she asserts that language and culture cannot be separated.

She emphasizes this latter aspect in her definition of culture, underlining that the way people communicate is part of a culture. According to her, culture influences just about every aspect of life. In addition, she points out that a person’s culture is “influenced” by his or her family and the geographical area where this person lives:

“La culture influence presque chaque aspect de la vie. La culture du peuple est sa nourriture, ses vêtements, sa langue, son dialecte, et plus. La culture est aussi comment le peuple communique avec l’un l’autre. La culture de une persone influence par où la persone habite et qui sa famille est. La culture de une persone influence par tout qui les entoure, et beaucoup dont une persone fait influencer par sa culture.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

Her beliefs on the matter are actually reflected in some of her ways to approach culture. For example, at the beginning of the semester, students were required to answer some questions for a survey. In their third netmeeting, Mary and her keypal decide to elaborate on some themes such as what makes a beautiful house and what the concept of “family” entails:

“Mary: Qu’est-ce que tu penses fait une belle maison?
Marc: Je pense qu’une belle maison c’est une maison faites par soi-même pour sa famille.
[…]
J’aimerai habiter] ou j’habite en ce moment…
C’est à dire dans une region montagnose…
Mary: Moi, je préfère de la maison près de la plage.
Pourquoi?
Marc: La mer, j’ai tendance à m’en lasser.
[…]
Marc: What is for you family?
How do you see your family in the future?
Mary: People who are always there for you, love.
I see having a nice size family with a lot of love
Marc:  In your survey, you talk about religion…Do you see our family with religion?
Mary:  Yes, I am a somewhat religiouse person.
Marc:  In France, we don’t see in the majority religion in our future family…And neither friends as you said in your survey
Mary:  What do you think of religion?
Marc:  How do you see the society and….What rule you take in this society?
Mary:  that is a big question…
Marc:  I am catholic but not practicant
What do you think of society if you prefer?
Mary:  I think my role in society will be having a career and hopefully a family. For now, I am just a student, trying to learn all I can.

[...] Marc:  in the theme of top priority what do you said?
Mary:  I said my family and my close friends. They are important to me because I am important to them. We want each other to be happy. Nous devons partir
Marc:  But no one has talk about love as we?”

[NM3, September 24th]

In the exchange above, Mary and her keypal discuss what various concepts entail for each other. For example, they note that students in France do not associate religion with family, which is not necessarily the case with the American students, according to the survey results. The way they conceive a family may not be culturally specific (i.e. Mary does not necessarily project an American perspective nor is her keypal projecting a French perspective) but in this netmeeting Mary and Marc have the opportunity to compare their personal opinions with what each class had written. The discussion offers the two students ways to reflect on how similar words (“a house” or “une maison”; “family” or “famille”) may in fact entail something completely different in each culture or for each individual. In her journals, Mary often brings examples to demonstrate that language and culture are intertwined. In one of her last journals, she claims: “just by discussing topics in class in French, we are learning more of the French language.” [Journal 5, November 11th]. In the same journal, she also emphasizes:

“While learning about culture, you are not only learning more vocabulary but some of the idioms and nuances of the language too. For example, you would not say that you are full in France but would instead say that you have had enough to eat. Also the French have other specific etiquettes for refusing food.” [Journal 5, November 11th].
From the very beginning of the semester, she shows an ability to reflect and analyze language issues, demonstrating her analytical skills. In addition, her views on language and culture guide her approach to learning about culture. To explore Mary’s development in the course of the semester, I examine Mary’s general orientation to the course and investigate her approach to learning and reflecting about new cultural concepts. The data that I chose to focus on are organized by themes, which correspond to the weekly topics studied in this French 003 class. After examining Mary’s definitions of *French and American cultures*, I will investigate her reactions on *the September 11th attacks* and how she attempts to understand the tragedy from various perspectives. In fact, throughout the semester Mary shows great interest in approaching and comprehending what *views the French have of Americans*. Indeed, she orients many of her questions on this particular aspect (i.e. how the French view Americans), as will be explored in this narrative. The class activities allow Mary to inquire about her culture and more specifically to gain an outsider’s view of Americans. The last topics of this narrative are *Food and Alcohol* and finally *Religion*. The narrative will illustrates Mary’s investment in the class activities. Discussions in class and with her keypal, Marc, compel Mary to look at certain aspects of her culture in a different way.

**4.3.4. Cultural Development**

4.3.4.1. French and American Cultures:

In her definition of the American culture, she highlights the influence of other cultures:

“The American culture is defined by every culture. This country’s culture has been built upon by every culture that has entered this country since the time before the revolution. Even though subset cultures exist because of ethnicity or locality, there is a constant exchange of ideas so that a larger American culture exists. A prime representation of the American culture would be the means by which they communicate and exchange thoughts. The newspapers, radios, telephones, and televisions are all a part of daily American life and, therefore, a part of American culture.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

In her definition, she indicates the existence of subcultures within the American culture and explains that these “subset cultures” come about because of “ethnicity and locality”.

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She views the American culture above all as a “melting pot” of cultures, “this country’s culture has been built upon by every culture that has entered this country”. Moreover, she defines the American culture as being dynamic: “there is a constant exchange of ideas so that a larger American culture exists.” Once again, she underlines how the culture is to some extent characterized by the way people communicate. Mary chooses “the media” as a great representation of American culture.

For her definition of the French culture, she focuses on the French traditions and history:

“French culture is defined by their history, traditions, and location. France has long history that extremely rooted in their location. Their lives and traditions have been built around place where they have inhabited for so long. Although many new ideas and different cultures have entered the country, the French people have always remained their and so have their traditions. Even though through the years the French people have adapted to an ever increasingly global world, their location has remained the same. They associate the history and traditions to where they and their ancestors have lived for many years, and their culture is formed by where they live.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

She views the French culture as being very static and does not believe that the French integrate other cultures the way Americans do. She depicts the French as having a strong identity that apparently hardly changes: “Although many new ideas and different cultures have entered the country, the French people have always remained their and so have their traditions.” Mary believes that the French are very attached to their land, “their lives and traditions have been built around place where they have inhabited for so long.” In her definition, she states the influence location plays in the French culture. At the end of her entry, she points out that globalization may have modified French culture but if so, not to a great extent. She further elaborates on this idea later in her journal:

“The similarities and differences, found between the American culture and the French culture, are due to their development and history. The difference between the two cultures most obviously occurs because of their difference in language and location, but it also occurs because of their distinctly different histories. France is extremely old country with a lot of history that has formed many of their traditions. In contrast, America is a relatively new country, and their traditions are based on their past but on the traditions of other cultures. However, recently, similarities are increasing between the two cultures because of globalization. As communication and trade increase between the two countries, more ideas and cultural items are exchanged such as food and music. While these two cultures may accept new things from the other culture, differences will still occur due to their location and history.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]
Mary focuses mainly on the differences between American and French cultures, explaining that these differences are due to each country’s history and the way they each evolved. She accentuates France’s long history and traditions and asserts that the French culture is rather static whereas the American one is ever changing. She points out that due to globalization the two countries now share some goods (food and music for example) but stresses that France and the United States will always differ because of “their location and history.” Here, Mary diligently compares the two cultures and often tries to provide examples to support her assertions. She demonstrates her ability to observe and analyze.

After her first netmeeting with her keypal for instance, she explains why she does not believe that the class in France is representative of the French population:

“Je crois que la classe n’est pas représentative de la population de France. La classes de TL est plus petite. La classe est composé de toutes femmes mais un seul homme. Beaucoup de la classe vient de France. Cependant, je pense que mon corre s’est très intéressant et très sympa.” [Essay, September 11th]

She explains thoroughly in what aspects the French class cannot represent the French population at large. From the very beginning of the semester, Mary manifests the same analytical approach and diligence in the way she learns and talks about culture. I have just indicated how Mary perceives the French and the American cultures at the beginning of the semester. In the following sections, I will investigate how Mary learns and reacts about new cultural concepts.

4.3.4.2. The September 11th Attacks

At first, she is emotional, which is clear in the email she writes to her keypal:

“Cher Marc,
Aujourd’hui je suis encore frustré et j’ai encore peur. Je vais donner ma sange parce que c’est tout je peux faire maintenant. J’étais devenue fatigué de le parlé. Il ne me donne que la tristesse. J’espère que il y n’a pas beaucoup d’hystérie. J’espère aussi que notre président se révélera être un chef super. Merci pour ta compassion.

Au revoir,”

She is confused, sad and frustrated. She is in shock and is a bit concerned about what the President plans to do. Soon afterwards, she analyzes the situation from various perspectives and tries to make up her opinion on the decisions taken by the American government. The day of the attacks, she spent her day watching television, trying to be informed.

Although she is upset, she tries to hold on to a detached perspective in order to analyze and understand the situation. For example, during the netmeeting dedicated to the reactions on attacks, she observes, along with her keypal, differences between male and female reactions. She also wonders if Bin Laden is not simply a scapegoat. Below are excerpts from Mary’s second netmeeting:

“Mary: Pensez-vous qu’une tragédie comme celle-ci aux Etats-Unis peut se passer en France?

Keypals: oui c’est possible.

Melissa: Est-ce que vous pensez que l’Amérique devrait aller a la guerre?

Keypal 2: Je ne sais pas si la guerre est la meilleure solution

Mary: Est-ce que je peux demander le question prochaine?

Melissa & Andrew: je ne pense que cette est le meilleure solution (Melissa) mais [Andrew] pense que cette est la meilleure solution.

Marc: Oui

Keypal 2: Pourquoi la guerre résoudrait-elle tous les problèmes?

Mary: Nous sommes d'accord avec Melissa.

Marc: Je pense que les garçons sont...

Melissa: je ne sais pas, je destese la violence.

Marc: plus penché sur une idée de revanche que les filles.

Melissa: ça n'est pas la solution.

Keypal 2: je n'aime pas la violence non plu...

Et je pense qu'il doit y avoir d'autres solutions.

Mary: Qu'est-ce que vous pensez dont GW Bush a dit aprè l'attentat?

Marc: Je pense que c'est peut être un peu tôt pur déclencher une guerre au début du siècle...

Je crois que c'est dangereux si l'on... commence un début de siècle comme ça!”
In this brief exchange, the students share their opinions about a potential war. First, Mary only states briefly that she agrees with Melissa, without elaborating on her reasons. Her questions reflect her desire to remain detached to analyze the situation. She wonders if such attacks could happen in France and inquires about the French opinions on the speech of the American President. Mary’s questions reflect her endeavor to gain an outsider’s viewpoint. In the next excerpt, students discuss what could be a good solution.

“Keypals: What solution is the better for you?
Melissa: i really don't know. How can you stop someone who is willing to kill themselves and take others with him.
Keypals: Yes, it will be hard!
Melissa: its just sickening.
Mary: I'm not sure what the best solution is right now because we don't know the enemy
Keypals: It is too hard to stop those who heve done this
Melissa: i don't think there is any one enemy except ignorance and intolerance of other peoples customs.
Mary: we have an idea of who the enemy is but its hard to find the exact truth
Keypals: and until we are not sure it is Ben Laden the responsible, we can do anything
Melissa: i think the only real solution would be to try and gain appreciation for all nations and customs.
Marc: Yes I agree with you
Mary: yes
Melissa: most are my ideas (Melissa) [Andrew] DOESN'T ALWAYS AGREE WITH ME.
Mary: Do you have any other questions?
Keypals: Are there difference between girls and boys perceptions about the situation? What is [Andrew] opinion?
Mary: Not always, but it seems like boys what more of a response or action
Melissa: yes. i think that boys have a more revenge driven approach to this situyation, where the girls want to not retaliate with violence
Mary: But that's not always true
Keypal: In France, it is more or less the same thing...
Melissa: yes it is not the case with everyone.
Keypals: although boys are not all for violence
Mary: How do you think we should respond?
Andrew: I think that as long as Bin Laden is able to do these acts of war, he will continue to do so. That is why i think we should go to war. He has done 2 previous attacks on the United States a few years ago.
Keypals: We think that the governement should know more about the bombing before attack...
Melissa & Andrew: We think that the government knows more than they are letting the citizens know
Keypals: but we undersatnd that a lot of American, as French people are angry”

[NM2, September 17th]
In their search for a solution to the crisis, the students demonstrate their critical thinking skills by reflecting on the situation: “I'm not sure what the best solution is right now because we don't know the enemy.” They also analyze differences of reactions between males and females. They are careful not to be stereotypical. The dialogic platform that is the netmeeting offers avenues for the students to try to make sense of the situation. They compare and confront views and opinions from a French and American perspective. By the end of the netmeeting, they become critical of governments for holding information:

“Keypals: In France, there are doubts about the fact that Ben Laden is the responsible
What about you?
Mary: All I here about is Ben Laden, so I don't know if it could be anyone else
Melissa: i think that even if we get rid of Bin Lauden that there will still be others that will take his place and do the same thing
Mary: yes
He's obviously not working alone
Keypals: We think that Ben Laden is suspected because he has a lot of money...
and everybody knows him so it is easy to say it is him...
Melissa: There is so much brainwashing going on in other countries that are ignorant and intolerant of other peoples customs.-
Keypals: ...he has certainly a lot of relationship
so it is sure he does not work alone
Mary: of course but his money goes towards so many different places that he may not always know where its going
not that i'm saying i like Bin Lauden
Melissa: he even was trained in the United State CIA which is in itself sickening. he also made his billions in the US.
Keypals: we understand
It is like a boomerang for United State CIA
Mary: yes, I suppose that's one way of looking at it
Keypals: We think that if there is a war ....
it would be a nuclear war
M. & A.: thats what we think too
Keypals: and it could be dangerous for all the world because ....
Mary: I don't think it would start that way though
Melissa: thats why i don't want to go to war
Keypals: everybody knows the consequences ( for example : Hiroshima)
Melissa: no it wouldn't start that way but i think it will end that way
Marc: I don't want to go to war neither
Mary: I think there would be more use of biological and chemical weapons
Keypals: It would be dangerous too
there will be a lots of death
Mary: More than anything, there would be econimical warfare.
Keypals: we agree with you
Keypals: We would like to know how do you see a war
Mary: Any war is horrible
Keypals: because in France, we have a important past, with the two WW […]
Keypals: and we all have seen pictures of it and know how it was difficult and scaring
Mary: Yes, I want to ask you some more questions Mathieu, so we'll email you
tonight.
M. & A.: i see a war as destruction of innocent lives (Melissa). [Andrew] sees a war as
a means of protecting ones rights and beliefs.
Mary: I think war is never a way of solving anything
Keypals: We agree with Melissa , [Marc] agrees with [Andrew] in a way, i do not
Mary: we have to go
Bye       […]”               [NM2, September 17th]

They admit being very scared about the whole situation and the prospect of war is
even scarier for everyone except Andrew, who is the only student in this exchange that
believes a war is justifiable. Andrew does not voice his opinion often and only writes a
few times that he does not agree with the rest of the group. During this second
netmeeting, students in France and in the United States become critical of the rationales
for a war. Beside Andrew, they question Bin Laden’s full responsibility and assert that
getting rid of him won’t necessarily put an end to terrorism. Through their questions and
discussion, the students attempt to think about the situation from various angles. The
netmeeting is a platform where a variety of opinions can be expressed, opening for
debate. The conversation reveals the students’ attempt to reflect on the information they
obtained from the media. First they analyze what they know (Bin Laden’s wealth and his
training by the CIA for example). They then attempt to foresee the consequences of any
decisions. Mary, for example, complains that all one can hear about is Bin Laden: “we
have an idea of who the enemy is but its hard to find the exact truth.” She is concerned
that the media does not inform her accurately. She does not think war is the solution (“I
think war is never a way of solving anything”) and is alarmed with the government’s
intentions. Contrary to the French students and Melissa, Mary does not believe there
would be a nuclear war at first but is concerned about the negative consequences
nonetheless: “any war is horrible”. Through her questions and her comments, Mary
demonstrates her attempt to remain detached and adopt the position of an observer. She
also shows her interest in gaining an outsider’s point of view.

At the beginning of their discussion, she asks her keypal what he thinks of GW
Bush’s speech after the attacks. Since her keypal does not provide an answer in this
netmeeting, she asks her question again in an email:
“Qu’est-ce que tu pense de G.W. Bush? Je ne l’aime pas. J’ai peur de quel il dit. Il retentit vengeur et a désiré vivement faire la guerre. Qu’est-ce que tu penses des américains? Penses-tu que ils tous le meme?

C’est tous! Je ne peux pas pensé d’autre questions de l’attentat. As-tu des questions pour moi?” [Email, September 18th]

In her email, she elaborates on her opinions of the administration. She believes the President is too eager to go to war and seeks revenge. She is worried about what people may think of Americans and may be convinced that all Americans think the same way as Bush. This is her keypal’s reply:

“Dear Mary,

So first I will answer to your questions; personally I prefer democracy so I would prefer that Gore would be your President but I don't know exactly how the American government is constituted so It is difficult to me to answer you with good explications. Me too, I don't like what he say because, I think that he prepare his revenge without inform us and the consequences could be dramatic if he will declare the war to the Islam. Because we know what sort of war it could be. What do you think about the possible nuclear war that he could have between Islam and America? What do you think about people who want a war? Can you ask to them if you know some of them, how do they imagine their future?

About American people I think nothing in particular but since the last year I begin to see lot of difference between What the television shows (with American series) and what are really the major part of the American population.

En fait, l'année dernidre nous avons étudié par groupe, les stereotypes Américain. Je travaillais sur les séries Américaines, et en rencontrant de jeunes étudiants de [ton université] nous avons put conclure que la vie des Américains et largement différente de ce que nous montre la télévision. Donc non, je ne pense pas que chaque Américain est un mode de vie semblable aux personnages de Beverley Hills ou de Melrose Place.Je voulais te demander comment trouves tu les NetMeeting parce que toute la class adore ce genre de débats que nous faisons avec vous.Voilà je te souhaite une bonne fin de semaine ! ! !

Bye!!!” [Email, September 19th]

In his reply, Marc questions the democratic process of the American elections and agrees with Mary about the President. He is concerned the war will turn out to be a war against Islam. Unfortunately, Mary does not really react to her keypal’s comments but simply answers his questions. She repeats that she does not believe there will be a nuclear war soon but remains uncertain about the future:

“Je pense que une guerre nucléaire serait horrible et j’espère que il n'arrive jamais. Je croire que maintenant il n'arrive pas mais je ne suis pas sure de l'avenir. J'ai peur que beaucoup de personnes veulent une guerre. Mais ici, [à l’université X], je ne connais pas une personne qui veux la guerre.” [Email, September 23rd]
Considering that Andrew thought a war was justifiable during the netmeeting, Mary’s statement (“je ne connais pas une personne qui veut la guerre”) may be surprising. In fact, Mary tries to offer a voice that is different from the official voice (i.e. the American administration’s) and often stresses similarities between the French and the Americans.

After the netmeeting, Mary writes an essay summarizing the issues that were brought up in her second netmeeting and elaborates on some of them:

“Pendant cette conversation il y avait quatre Américains et deux français. Alors la conversation était difficile et je ne pouvais pas me faire mon opinion assez rapidement. Mais j’ai mieux compris ce que les Français pensent en général. Je voulais demander plus de questions en français mais nous avons commencé en retard. Je crois que la plupart des jeunes Français ont les mêmes idées que les jeunes Américains. Mais, mes corres et moi, nous n’avons que discuté de nos émotions générales. Nous avons discuté de la guerre et de la paix. Nous avons trouvé que les filles ont préféré la paix et les garçons ont préféré plus d’action. Mais je crois que nous tous ne voulions pas la guerre et nous avions tous peur. Nous pensons tous que Bin Laden est l’ennemi. Je pense que ce fait est intéressant parce que il est tout ce que nous entendons. Donc nous ne savons pas qui d’autre a participé. Je suppose Bin Laden est a part of this terrorist attack, but we hear of nothing else so how are we to know for sure. I think in general the conversation was interesting and we all learned more about each other’s point of views. I think, for the most part, we were very similar in our views. However, I wish I would have been able to ask more questions.”

[Essay, September 17th]

In her essay, she further questions how reliable the information is and wonders if Bin Laden is really the only one to blame. Moreover, she talks about gender differences mentioned in the netmeeting. Once again, Mary’s approach is to take an observer’s point of view, demonstrating her ability to think analytically. To some extent, she wonders about how people outside the United States perceive GW Bush and how they view Americans in general.

At the end of September, Mary examines American media coverage on the attacks. In her third journal entry, she remains non-judgmental but points at specific ways the American media chose to talk about the attacks:

“If I were to speak about the media coverage of the recent events to a French person, I would talk about how extensive the coverage was and how much attention it was paid.
During the first few days, almost everyone was glued to the television, waiting for every little bit of information that would give them a better understanding of the situation. Though the media itself did not know what to make of it. So they decided to turn to the public and ask everyone of the feelings on their event. It was more of way to sure feelings and come together as nation. Then, I would explain how even though much of the media spoke of war, much of what I heard in my immediate surroundings was about peace. Not everyone wanted war, but they did want a solution. This was also discussed by the media, and I would further explain how almost every feeling and fact of the event was very much covered by the media. However I'm not sure if I liked or disliked how the media covered it.”

[Journal 3, September 23rd]

She underscores how extensive the media coverage has been in the United Stated, explaining “every feeling and fact of the event was very much covered by the media.” She also indicates that the media’s coverage tried to show unity within the nation. Finally, she wonders why the media focus on the possible war whereas the people she knows are for peace.

In her definition of American culture, she stated that “a prime representation of the American culture would be the means by which they communicate and exchange thoughts. The newspapers, radios, telephones, and televisions are all a part of daily American life and, therefore, a part of American culture.” [Journal 2, September 3rd]. In the entry above, she attempts to provide another voice whenever she thinks it is necessary, as she does not completely agree with the way the media focus on war. From her journal, Mary’s main interest is in the way Americans talk about the attacks and aftermath. She only points to one difference with the French coverage of the attacks, noting the French’s lack of support for the war:

“I am not sure of the differences between the media coverage done by the United States and France immediately following the event. However, because of the readings in class, I can see some differences. The major difference was that France was more against going to war. They criticized the United States' want of war.”

[Journal 3, September 23rd]

Later in her journal, she expresses her surprise at how extensive the French coverage has been:

“I think it is interesting how France was so interested in the events occurring an ocean away from them. The United States' news made front page there. It seems like the reverse never happens. Rarely would I see the news of France appearing on the front page of the newspaper. They are not only interested in our politics but in our social society as well.
They listen to a lot of our music, while we have most often never heard any French music.”  

[Journal 3, September 23rd]

Here she discusses the American vision of the world compared to the French. She is surprised that the United States can be in the headlines for so long when France is rarely on the cover page of the American media. She makes the exact same point three weeks later in a chat with her classmates. According to Mary, it illustrates a general isolationist attitude in America, and regrets that French music is not popular in the United States. In all the discussion on the attacks, Mary shows a singularly detached perspective in which she looks for explanatory phenomena to comment on. She hardly describes her emotions and chooses to express a critical opinion. She demonstrates her ability to reflect on the information she gathered. She incorporates other views before forming an opinion and consistently distances herself from what she thinks is the common American position.

Along with reflecting on the attacks, the notion of patriotism is on many occasions discussed in class. However, it does not often come up as a topic in her data. Below are a few instances where Mary talks about the subject. For example, she asks her keypal what he thinks of patriotism at the end of September:

“Je crois aussi que le patriotisme est bon, mais il n'est que bon parfois. Pense-tu que le patriotisme est bon ou mauvais?”  

[Email, September 24th]

Unfortunately, she does not elaborate on what she means exactly, nor does she provide examples in when and how it is positive or negative. Below is her keypal reply:

“pour le patriotisme je suis un peu du même avis que toi; qu'il a ses avantages et ses défauts... Mais tu sais, en France le patriotisme est beaucoup plus “rare” qu'en France. Peu de gens sont patriotes.”  

[Email, September 26th]

In her comment below, Mary understands that the French find no particular pride in their flag and do not display it as often. Mary does not believe that the French are unpatriotic but she believes they are proud in other aspects of their culture (in their food for instance):

“Les Français n'ont pas la même fierté de leur drapeau comme les Americains. Les Americains exhibent leur drapeau alorsque les Français ne montrent pas de fierté pour leur drapeau. Mais ils montrent leur fierté par d'autres façons. Par example, les Français aiment leurs traditions et des français n'aiment pas l'idée de la mondialisation.”  

[Essay, October 27th]
Once again, Mary focuses on the French traditions and emphasizes how important they are for the French. She strongly believes that the French are proud of their culture but express their pride differently. She repeats her perceptions twice: once in a chat and the second time during her interview. In the chat, she states briefly that the French are patriotic but have different ways to demonstrate their pride: “à mon avis les français sont patriotes, mais ils sont patriotes différemment que les Américains” [Chat, November 27th].

She further explains her views in the interview:

“Hélène: I know that you talked a lot about patriotism in class, correct? How would you say how different is it? Or is it different?

Mary: YES, it is definitely different. [laughter] My family, um we’re definitely patriotic in some respects but I wouldn’t say that we’re extreme in any way. I thought it was funny how all of the sudden everybody was like oh America this America that after September 11th and it kinda like “what?” [making a face] it kind of [heurk] I don’t want to say it, luckily this is confidential, it kinda of disgusted me a little but euh that’s just my opinion but there are definitely differences between French and American people in their sense of patriotism.

I thought the whole flag thing was just VERY interesting how they don’t like regard their flag highly and I know that we do here like you can’t burn it and we always have these debates about our flag and I thought that was interesting but Yeah and how the … they take more pride in other things than we do like more proud in different regional things like their food and than we would like ‘cause we don’t really have a food and I mean if we do it’s the cheeseburger which…

Hélène: [laughter]

Mary: But it’s true that’s like American food, I’m like oh..yeah? oh like the hot dog. What is that? That’s just disgusting the whole hot dog.”

[Interview]

During her interview, she clearly disassociates herself from other Americans. She stresses coming from a patriotic family but also underlines that her family’s concept of it may differ from other American views. She also points out at the end that Americans cannot really take pride in their food since, according to her, they “don’t really have a food”. In this statement, Mary is quite critical of some American behaviors and takes distance from her own culture. She portrays herself as being closer to the French culture.

As mentioned previously, her views on the topic are not very extensive. She seems more interested in understanding how French people view Americans and in
discussing food. In the following section, I will document how Mary attempts to understand how the French view Americans on various topics (stereotypes, violence, etc.)

4.3.4.3. Views French People Have of Americans

Mary’s data mostly concentrates on American culture. The way the class is organized gives her the opportunity to reflect on her own culture and analyze various views. In the section above, I mentioned how Mary is interested in her keypal’s view of GW Bush: “Qu’est-ce que tu pense de G.W. Bush?” [Email, September 18th]. In the same email, she also asks him what he thinks of Americans: “Qu’est-ce que tu penses des américains? Penses-tu que ils tous le meme?” His reply discussed above (p. 17) underscores that stereotypes on American people are numerous and how American television series depict Americans differs greatly from reality.

Throughout the semester, Mary wonders what views the French have of Americans. Below are a few examples:

“Je pense que les américains croient dans l'individualité plus que les francais. Qu'est-ce que tu pense d'individualité? Quels droits sont plus important à toi? Je crois que l'individualité et la liberté sont très importants.” [Email, September 24th]

Here, she attempts to compare the French and American cultures through common values. She writes the two values that are important for her: individuality and freedom. She also considers that individuality is more important for Americans than for the French. In contrast, her keypal does not view individualism as necessarily positive. This is his reply:

“A propos de l'individualisme, je ne pense pas que ce soit une bonne chose pour l'avenir de notre société car chaque personnes risques de se refermer sur elle même. Pour moi les droits aux quelles je tiens le plus sont la liberté, sous toutes ses formes, et l'égalité entre tous les hommes aussi différents soient ils.” [Email, September 26th]

Incidently, Mary’s keypal uses two concepts from the French motto “liberty, equality and brotherhood”. Unfortunately he does not really elaborate on what he means exactly and Mary does not react to his comment in her data. Nonetheless, his views on
“individualism” clash with Mary’s as he is concerned that individualism may encourage citizens to be self-centered.

What is striking in Mary’s fourth netmeeting, is that she hardly discusses stereotypes on the French. Rather, she focuses her questions on how the French stereotype Americans. She draws most of her questions from her analysis of the collage the French students prepared:

“Mary: Pense-tu que beaucoup d'americains ont la chirurgie esthetique?
Marc: Je pense que comme en France les gens qui peuvent se permettre de faire de la Chirurgie....
    sont principalement des gens riches!
    En France ce n'est...
    pas très dispersés, à ma connaissances.
Mary: De quoi penses-tu les americains disutent chaque jour? Penses-tu les americains sont stupide?
Marc: Je ne sais pas du tout....
    je pense comme les français...
    du temps, si nous allons bien, de choses banales comme de choses plus sérieuse quand il est nécessaire.
    Je ne pense pas que les Américains sont stupides...
    car premièrement je ne suis jamais aller là bas donc je ne porte aucun jugement sur eux et...
    puis quand je discute avec vous je me rend compte que vous êtes très interessante...
    tout comme les français...
Mary: merci
Marc: Il ya des personnes stupides en France tout comme en Amérique je suppose!
    […]” [NM4, October 1°]

The collage compels Mary to think about American stereotypes that people may have. She is interested in knowing how Americans are perceived and if the French believe all Americans go to plastic surgery. In the exchange above, she also wonders if her keypal believes Americans are stupid. In class, students discussed various stereotypes they have on the French and talk about a few stereotypes that depict Americans. During this netmeeting, she attempts to get an image of Americans at a personal level, i.e. she tries to understand what views her keypal has of Americans.

Later in the netmeeting, she asks two more questions concerning French stereotypes of Americans:

“Mary: Pense-tu que les films americains depeignent les americains typiques?
Marc: […] beaucoup de films trompent...
Mary: certains français qui, pensent que ce sont une représentation de L'amérique or...
je ne pense pas que des films comme "MI 2" ou "Matrix" ou encore Le flic de beverly hills"!!
soient semblables à ce qui se passe...
Mary: in english now!
Marc: en Amérique.
Mary: ok!!

Marc: Do you think that American clothes are baggy and for fat people?
Mary: No I don't think that because it is fasion to wear this type of pants; I where this type of clothes and lot of young people!!
I think too...
that American don't wear only baggy...
It 's depend on what you like!!
Mary: yes, this is true.
yes.
Marc: The baggy..
is an image of some american singer as Eminem or Snoop doggy dog!
Mary: That's funny.”

Note that most of the stereotypes Mary inquires about are rather negative. Clearly, she is interested in what representations French people in general and her keypal in particular have of Americans. She first asks her keypal how much difference he thinks there is between what Hollywood projects and “reality”. She then wonders about baggy pants and how they are perceived across the Atlantic. The answers Mary’s keypal provides are nuanced and he tries not to generalize. Mary, on the other hand, hardly speaks her opinion on these subjects. In her study of stereotypes however, she emphasizes that most of the ideas Americans have of the French come from movies where the French are depicted as fashionable and romantic. She does not seem to really believe that herself.

As an assignment, students were required to ask five persons what stereotypes they had of France. Below, Mary decides to present the result of her short survey to her keypal.

“Mary: La Tour Eiffel et Pairs etaient les deux reponses que j'ai recues des personnes dans mon enquete ou je leur ai demande de me dire quelquechose de la France...
Est-ce que cette reponse te surprend?
Marc: non car lorsque les gens viennent en France...
ils vont à Paris car c'est la ville la plus connue de la France mais...
je ne pense pas que ce soient forcément une bonne représentation de la France et des Français...
Les parisiens sont très différent des français qui vivent ailleurs en général.

[...]  
Mary: Most Americans see French people as being very fashionable with expensive clothes.
Marc: In Paris it is in part right...because it is a town where people show off with her style!!
There is lot of money in Paris!!
That's why we are a bit different than some french who lives in Paris.”
[NM4, October 1st]

Many of the people Mary interviewed answered Paris and the Eiffel Tower. Her question encourages Marc to make a clear distinction between life in Paris and outside Paris. He also explains that most views of the French held by foreigners come from the Parisians since most tourists limit their visit to Paris. He stresses, however, that the French capital is not necessarily a good representation of France or the French as a whole. In this short excerpt he allows Mary to gain a different perspective of Paris and illustrates diversity within France.

Later in the netmeeting, she indicates that she does not think that “French people are that different from Americans” but acknowledges that some Americans think that the French and Americans are different. The discussions on stereotypes lead Mary to think about images American culture projects. She analyzes the views “outsiders” have of Americans. It becomes quite clear in her data that she is interested in understanding what her keypal thinks of Americans in general. The netmeetings for example, force Mary to think about certain aspects of her culture through the answers she needs to provide to her keypal: she describes her culture and attempts to explain why such differences may occur. The discussions with Marc provide a different perspective on whatever matter Mary and her keypal choose to talk about.

Another good example is the fifth netmeeting where they bring up the notion of violence and inequality in America:

“Mary: MOn père me veut avoir un revolver pour ma protection ou ma defense. Je ne sais pas si je veux un revolver ou pas. J'avais pratiqué utiliser des revolvers mais je n'aime pas l'idée de la violence qui vient avec les revolvers. Qu'est-ce que tu pense des revolvers?
Marc: Je pense que si le revolver te servira.......... si tu crois te sentir à l'abris. en ayant une arme tu devrais la prendre mais uniquement si tu as peur !!!
Mary: non, je n'ai pas peur. mais ....
Marc: C'est vrai que c'est un peu dangereux!!!!!!!
Mary: je pense que mon père a peur parce que je suis une fille mais...
Marc: je pense que je n'ai pas besoin un revolver.
Mary: Est ce que il ya beaucoup de violence ou de délinquance en Amérique?
Marc: Nous ne voyons pas beaucoup de violence... we think that a lot is portrayed on the news and on tv.
Marc: But do you think that there is more violence in America than in France?
Mary: I don't really know how common violence is in France. We do not see that much violence in everyday life.
Marc: that it is lot of people who think that it is dangerous to walk in the street without Gun or arms!
Mary: in the united states?
Marc: Yes; But....... I think that it is a project of the TV.
Mary: In some areas it is more dangerous than others.....such as inner city areas but it isn't dangerous here
Marc: Ok. Do you think that the arms freely avaible is good ?
Mary: Are guns freely available in France?
Marc: No at all!!!!!!!!
Mary: It would be hard to get a gun legally in France?
ok
Marc: Do you think that The arm freely avaible could arrange Violence Problems?
Mary: Yes but....we feel it is more the people with the guns that cause the problems instead of the guns itself
Marc: Yes I think that we can't resolve violence by violence!
[...] Marc: What do you think about inequality?
Do you think that there is inequality in America?
Mary: yes, but we feel that there is inequality everywhere.....because everyone isn't the same
Marc: Have you heard of The OJ Simpson case?
Mary: yes what have you heard about that case?
Marc: My teacher told me that... In this case, a man killed his wife and her "boyfriend".... But he never went in prison because his wife had a "Boyfriend"!!!
Mary: that's not the reason he didn't go to prison.....it was more complicated that that
*than that
Marc: Do you think that rich people have the same justice than poor people?
Mary: no we don't
Marc: Why?
Mary: we don't think its fair but that is how things work usually people with more money can afford better lawyers
Marc: I want to return on my first questions..It is about guns.
Mary: they also have enough money to keep appealing their case
ok
Marc: Do you know personne who wear arms at the school?
Mary: no never
not at our scools
schools
Marc: Are there lot of young people like you, who have guns with them?
Mary: no we don't have guns and we don't know anyone that carries a gun to school
[…]

[Email, October 15th]

At the beginning of the exchange above, Mary provides an American perspective on how weapons can be perceived. She does not believe guns are dangerous but rather people who have guns may be the problem. It is clear in the discussion above that Mary’s keypal, however, views America as being a fairly violent country. Marc believes “[having a gun] is dangerous” and inquires about the level of violence in the United States. He also asks questions about the inequalities in the United States. Mary admits that there is not really any equal justice, the rich being able to afford better lawyers and appeal the case more than once.

Their perceptions on violence differ. Marc is convinced that there is excessive violence in the United States. In an email, he wonders if Mary is not concerned about her future in America:

“Do you think that in 10 or 20 years, the violence will disappear if every body will have an arm with him? Doesn’t you fear an horrible future without justice but just with guns or arms? In fact I fear that the society could have problems if there will be again the arm freely available.”

[Email, October 18th]

For Mary, weapons are not so much of a concern and she does not believe it will lead to an unjust future:

“Pour repondre à tes questions, non, je n’ai pas peur d’avenir sans justice parce que des arms. D’abord je ne pense pas que les arms ne seront jamais disponible en toute liberté. Mais c’est juste mon avis. Et en avenir, je combattrai assurer que il y aura règlements sur des arms.”

[Email, October 21st]

During this exchange, Mary is compelled to realize that views on guns may differ greatly from what she is used to. From her comments, she believes that regulating guns is necessary but does not say they should be banned.
During her interview, she indicates being surprised by her keypal’s questions:

“One thing that surprised me is how he asked if euh we had guns ‘cause he just thought that we all had guns! [laughter] and I was like ‘no we don’t have guns. We’re not allowed to have guns on campus’ and he’s like ‘oh okay’. Because then I realized how our news is like how it’s so much violence like I KNEW it was like that before but it’s just. Like I watch it I’m like I just think it’s very [xx] on CNN, it’s just constant. They just keep talking about it. I just thought that was interesting.” [Interview]

In her comment, she makes clear that discussing with her keypal encourages her to look at her own culture differently. Stunned by her keypal’s comment, she tries to understand where such image of violence comes from. She then further studies how CNN constructs their reports and with a keen critical eye looks at the way information is projected.

Discussions with her keypal are essential in her learning process. Indeed, they allow Mary to first observe and analyze the American situation on a chosen topic, making her aware of potential differences between cultures. These discussions, along with class discussions and readings lead Mary to reflect on her own culture. In fact throughout the semester, she frequently asks about Americans and shows great interest in understanding the French views of Americans. For example, on October 16th, she asks her keypal if he believes Americans like money:

“Pense-tu que les américains aime l’argent juste parce que il est l’argent? Je pense qu’il peut apparaître que les américains sont superficiels. Je sais que des américains sont mais pas chaque américain. Je crois que je ne suis pas superficiel. Qu’est-ce que tu penses?” [Email, October 16th]

Her question pertains another negative image Americans may project. Note that she often asks questions to her keypal personally but does not really inquiry about what the French think, in his opinion. Her keypal provides a voice that is extremely valuable for Mary. In fact, in her fifth journal, she concedes having learned a great deal from her keypal:

“I think the best way we learn about French culture is by talking to our keypals. However, I think the second way is by reading the lecture notes and comparing them to what our keypals say. By doing this you can find two different conclusions. One is that the keypals answers will strongly agree with the point made by the lecture. The other is that the key pal will disagree with the point made in the lecture and show you how well-rounded the French are.” [Journal 5, November 11th]
On several occasions, she states that in her opinions, the French and Americans are not very different (see NM4 above). At the end of October though, she admits that there may be “more settle cultural differences than [she] thought”:

“Through the lectures and discussions we have had in class, I learned that there are more settle cultural differences than I thought. I have traveled to France and stayed with a French family there for three weeks. I knew of many differences then, but I am still learning more in our discussions. One issue that I did not know of was waste. I am even a little embarrassed that the French think that we are so wasteful. It is true though, we are very wasteful. I enjoy these discussions and lectures especially, however, because, even though I observed many differences, I was unsure of their meanings and could not always express them into words. Then, when I discuss these issues and cultural differences with my keypal, I learn so much more about our two cultures. However, I am not saying that Americans are completely different from the French. My keypal and I often feel the same way about certain issues.”

[Journal 4, October 21st]

In her journal, she asserts how much she knew from her trip to France. In the entry above, she points at one cultural difference she was not aware of before taking the class: the French and American perspectives on waste. In her comment, she explains that discussions on waste have obliged Mary to look at her notion of waste differently. Later in the same journal, she elaborates on the topic:

“One difference is the differing perspectives on waste. Most Americans are not overly concerned with waste since there appears to be a very abundant amount of resources currently available within the country. In France, however, there is not a lot of space and resources are more limited.”

[Journal 4, October 21st]

She is able to consider the various elements at stake in the French and American contexts, underscoring a difference in the amount of resources and space. Even though she claims to be embarrassed that Americans are viewed as “wasteful”, she understands why and how such reputation came about.

Mary remains convinced, however, that the similarities outweigh the differences between the French and Americans. She stresses that beside some cultural differences, the French and Americans are similar: “However, I am not saying that Americans are completely different from the French. My keypal and I often feel the same way about certain issues.” [Journal 4, October 21st]. In the same journal, she is asked to think about some paradoxes in the French culture. Interestingly, the first paradox she chooses exists, according to her, in the French and American cultures:
“I think it's interesting how both the French and American cultures criticize each other for ignorance and rudeness against the other. I believe that in reality the two cultures are very similar because of these perspectives. Both of these cultures have pride in their language and are sometimes unwilling to learn or understand another language. Yet, there are some individuals in each culture who enjoy learning another language and find other cultures interesting. There are people in both cultures that fall into any category along this spectrum.

The most specific and recent paradox we learned about in class has to do with McDonalds. While some French people oppose its existence in France, French people still eat there.” [Journal 4, October 21st]

In the first part of her comment, she stresses once again how in fact the French are very similar to Americans. She also accentuates that no generalization is completely accurate, since “There are people in both cultures that fall into any category along this spectrum.”

The second paradox she provides focuses on the French’s attitude toward fast food. The French tend to be very critical of fast foods but still go to these types of restaurants.

At the end of October, she writes an essay, looking at the French opinions on Americans:

“L’OPINION DES AMERICAINS PAR LE FRANCAIS

En classe nous avions appris récemment comment les Français voient les Américains négativement. Ils ne sont pas d'accord avec la peine mort et la chirurgie esthétique. En plus, les Français ne comprennent pas la question de la religion dans l'Etats-Unis. Les Français croient que la religion est très séparée du gouvernement- En fait, beaucoup de Français ne pratiquent pas de religion.

Pendant aux Etats-Unis ils ont entendu le président américain parle de Dieu à la télé. Les Français n'ont pas la même fierté de leur drapeau comme les Américains. Les Américains exhibent leur drapeau alorsque les Français ne montrent pas de fierté pour leur drapeau. Mais il montrent leur fierté par d'autres façons. Par exemple, les Français aiment leurs traditions et des français n'aiment pas l'idée de la mondialisation. José Bové avait inspiré un mouvement contre McDonalds et le boeuf américain. Mais des Français mangent au McDonalds néanmoins. Je crois que ces points de vue différents viennent de nos histoires. Mais bien que il y a points de vue différents, chaque pays ont intérêt dans l'un l'autre et sont disposé à travailler ensemble.” [Essay, October 27th]

In this essay, she gives a brief overview of what she has learned so far. First, she points out that some young French people, “des jeunes français”, appreciate parts of the American culture. However, she feels that the French have mostly negative opinions of Americans. She observes a few cultural differences and attempts to provide an
explanation. Once again, she shows her ability to analyze and think about various issues. For example, she comments on how the French are not very religious and that for them, religion is a very private matter (see section Religion, 4.3.2.5). She also reflects on the notion of patriotism and indicates that French have other ways to be proud in their country: they are very proud in their traditions. As she mentioned at the beginning of the semester, she believes that the French are very attached to their traditions and thinks that cultural differences between the French and Americans can be explained by their different histories. Note how at the end of her essay, she adopts a diplomatic tone, emphasizing the common aspects of the two cultures: “Mais bien que il y a points de vue différents, chaque pays ont intérêt dans l’un l’autre et sont dispose à travailler ensemble.”

What is interesting is that the class activities she is involved in provide a way for Mary to inquire about her culture and about how people from the “outside” view Americans before all. Throughout the semester, she keeps a detached perspective on her culture and at times attempts to gain a better understanding of the French culture as well. Interestingly however, she believes that living in France for three weeks has allowed her to know a lot about French culture. In fact, in her portfolio, she highlights that she already had some good ideas about the culture at the beginning of the semester:

“Look back at yourself as presented in the first journals: Is there anything you would never (or probably not) wrote now? Explain why/why not. No, I think I had some good ideas in the beginning of the year but I have learned more about the why and how behind them.” [Portfolio]

During her interview, she reiterates this point. During our conversation, I ask Mary if she was very familiar with French culture before enrolling to her French 3 class. This is her answer:

“Mary: I guess from learning when I was over there. I learned more there but … the thing was is that it’s hard to be objective when you weren’t told anything and you don’t have a lot to compare to. So I learned more about what I learned when I was there like why… like I noticed things but I never knew why it was like that. I thought that was cool. It’s like “yeah, that’s right” and then I knew why. I thought it was very interesting.

Hélène: So before you were observing different things when now you are more able to analyze them?

Mary: Yeah Exactly!

Hélène: Do you have any example?
Mary: Well there’s the smile thing.  

Mary: Well I learned that how the French don’t really smile at each other on the streets. It’s funny because I noticed that when I was in Arles [...] but I was never told that before I went over there. I just kinda of picked it up.” 

Hélène: When you are learning about culture, what was the most helpful? Do you understand the question?  

Mary: yeah, yeah! It’s hard  

Hélène: It doesn’t have to be one thing, it can be a combination of several things.  

Mary: It’s a definite combination because first of all because I went over there, I got some ideas and some differences. Then when I come here and euh first of all in Madame’s class I learn different things and then I go to my Freshman seminar, she just talks about the same things ironically at the same time. It makes sense I’m like Yeah! And then she explains it more and I understand it more and then I talk to Elise and like I can see it I can see how we interact like how it’s true so yeah.  

Hélène: Do you have a particular example like with the interaction with [Elise]  

Mary: It’s so hard cause it’s so many little things.  

Hélène: Yeah, that’s ok.” [Interview]

As I mentioned in her biography section, her trip to France is extremely valuable to her. She feels that she has learned so much from her experience abroad and noticed many aspects of the French culture. This class provides an explanation for cultural differences, allowing Mary to understand what the differences entail. In other words, it provides Mary with tools to observe and analyze various cultural situations. Such development continues to occur until the end of the semester.

4.3.4.4. Food and Alcohol

Toward the end of the semester, the class discusses food. First, students examine various perspectives on food and more specifically how the French perceive hormonal beef or genetically modified (GM) food. In another netmeeting, Mary and her keypal talk about their own eating habits and what the word “food” entails for each one of them. At the end of the semester, they describe how each one celebrates certain holydays. In this section, I will look at how Mary and her keypal talk about food and how they reflect about it. I will also point to the importance of context in the learning process.
In class, students talk about GM food and globalization. They also compare José Bové to Astérix, and discuss reading assignments on the topic. Below is Mary’s netmeeting on globalization and José Bové:

“Mary: nous devons lire un grand article du Monde et nous avons des questions sur José Bové.
Marc: Oui j'attend!!!!
Mary: okay, nos questions sont simples.
Aimes-tu McDo?
Marc: Oui mais je n'y mangerais pas tous les jours..
en général c'est une fois tout les mois.
donc relativement peu!!!
Mary: Est-ce qu'il y a un McDo près de votre maison?
Marc: Oui à un peu près à 15km
Mary: Penses-tu jamais de la question d'hormone où tu manges à McDo?
Marc: Si d'ailleur il y eut plusieurs problèmes à ce sujet....
mais ils seraient apparemment réglés.
Aimez vous Mc Do?
Mary: pas vraiment
Marc: Ok j'attend vos autres questions.
Mary: McDo a la nourriture de qualite basse
Qu'est-ce que tu pense de Jose Bove?
Marc: Il fait de la resistance comme Astérix!!
En fait il est contre...
toute globalisation.
Avez vous entendu parler de ce qui l'a fait à propos d'un Mc Do?
Mary: Nous ne sommes pas sure? Quoi?
Marc: Il avait déconstruit un Mc Do en construstion avec son équipe...
Il a eu 3 mois de prison dont 1 ferme!!!
Mary: oui, nous avons entendu ca.
Marc: C'est bien parce que il ne fait pas uniquement parler, il sait agir ms je ne suis
pas forcément....
Mary: Penses-tu de son mouvement?
Marc: D'accord avec lui!!
Sur certains points de vue comme le soja transgénique je suis d'accord mais
des fois c'est un peu à l'extrême!!
Mary: Alors, tu manges au McDo mais tu es d'accord avec Bose?
Marc: Par example sur Mc Do je ne suis pas d'accord avec lui!!
Mary: Pourquoi es-tu d'accord avec Bove?
Marc: Parce que l'on est pas sure de ce que peu faire les OGM à long terme....
par contre lesMc DO ont maintenant uniquement de viande Française!!
En fait...
en France il y a eu beaucoup de problèmes avec les OGM car des gens ont
été malades....
et mort.
Donc on se méfie maitenant un peu.

Mary: We didn't here of anyone dying?!
Marc: But they had!!
it's called ESBV
ESB

Have you had any questions?
Mary: What is your relationship between biotechnology, mad cow disease, and McDonalds?
Marc: I don't know what do you want to know?!
Can you explain a little please?
Mary: Why do you think American Hormones relate to the mad cow disease found in meat from Britain?
Then, how do these two things relate to McDonalds?
Marc: Because the cattle feed was done to the mad cow disease and we had problem with this meat for Mc Do!!!
I use OGM because I don't how i can said cattle feed!!
Do you understand me?
But I don't think that American meat was in relation with those problems.
It is only with Britain meat!
Mary: Ah, ok. So the meat served at McDonalds, that made people sick, was from Britain?
Marc: Yes thank you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Mary: So do you think hormone laced meat from America is similar to the bad meat from Britain?
Marc: I don't know exactly but I hope that it doesn't!!!
But I think that most people...
Mary: Well, we don't think it does!
Marc: think that it was the case!!!
Mary: Oh, okay!
Do a lot of people eat at McDonalds?
Marc: Do they feed cattle with hormones in the US?
Mary: yes
Marc: To make it bigger?
Mary: and nobody has died from that yet
Marc: and mke more money?
Mary: yes
its actually in order to advance puberty (the hormones)
Marc: I wouldn't feed my kids with growth hormones
Mary: I don't agree with it either, but you don't even think about it here. And its hard to find meat without hormones.
Do a lot of people eat at McDonalds in France?
Marc: Don't you fear bad consequences with this method?
Yes, but it is young people!!
Mary: We suppose, but...
Its hard to do something about it.
Marc: Yes I understand you!!!
Mary: ok, good!
Marc: Have you have any questions?
Mary: no, do you have any more?
Marc: Yes What do you eat in general in everyday life?
Mary: At the university, we generally eat plain food at the cafeteria. sometimes pizza, sometime Chinese, or deli sandwiches also salads
Marc: Do you go in some french restaurant or...
do you have already test french food?
Mary: There aren't a lot here, but there is one that is very expensive for students.
Marc: Do you liked it?
Mary: Yes, I have been in the South of France and I loved the food so much more than here.
     We have not eaten at the French restaurant here.
Marc   What is your favorite food?
Mary: I love so much food, that I can't decide.
Marc: Ok!! what American people think...
     about our food? Do they like or not?
     Because in France,...
     the American food is juged very different from our!!!!
Mary: yes, in general, we like your food. It's like a luxury because its very good and very expensive at restaurants typically.
Marc: OK thank you!!!!Bye I had to go!!!
Mary: bye!!”

In this exchange, students discuss what they think of Mc Donald’s and fast food. None of them likes fast food but Marc admits going there once in a while. From this dialogue, there is some miscommunication. Mary’s keypal confuses GM food with the causes of mad cow disease. What is interesting is to compare their views. Mary points out that hormonal beef is not thought of as an issue in the United States and there is not much choice for the consumer. She also states that in fact no one has died from it in America. Her keypal is concerned about long-term consequences and agrees with some of José Bové’s views. It becomes clear from his comments that forcing the growth of the animal and in the mean time making more money may put public health at risk. He does not believe crops should be genetically modified either.

To her keypal, Mary points out a French paradoxe. As I mentioned before, she believes that French critics of fast food is paradoxical since they still eat at Mac Donald’s from time to time. The class offers a myriad of voices for Mary, allowing her to make comparisons between her keypal’s comments and her readings for example. Moreover, the netmeeting forces students to inform themselves about issues in their own country, consequently learning about their own culture. For example, through dialogue Mary is forced to think about “meat” in a different way, even if she does not necessarily agree with the French view and sort of dismisses their fear (“nobody has died from that yet”). In her interview, she stresses how much she has learned about globalization from her French class:
“Hélène: What cultural aspects have interested you the most in class? If there is one..
Mary: hm… I think the food thing always interests me because I LOVE food.
Hélène: Do you cook?
Mary: Yes, yes I love to cook and I love food so that always interested me. And the whole beef thing and globalization. I thought that was really interesting cause I never like I noticed many little things about it like I don’t know it just kind of opened my eyes up to it and how it’s so big
Hélène: what is big?
Mary: Like the whole idea of Americans like the whole American like globalization like spreading in different countries, I had no idea like how big it was. I knew like when I was over there all of the French boys just listened to American music. When the French boy came over here, he bought all the blank 182 Cds that he could find because they didn’t sell them over in France
[…]
I was kinda of saddened by the fact that America is going over there and like I’m doing also a report on Paris for my Freshman seminar and I was disappointed like about how it said cafés are starting to close and like how they’re starting to decrease in number because of…American fastfood restaurants, which I think it’s sad because first of all I don’t like fastfood and I just think it’s sad that you get rid of these places that are nice and euh but that’s just me.
Some Americans would probably like THAT to go over to France and have a cheeseburger but I think that when I’m in France I would much rather have good food.
Hélène: […] So for that matter, were you interested in what José Bové had to say for example?
Mary: Yes.. cause.. At first I thought he was kinda of..I mean he is radical but I also understood why he was doing it. I was disappointed when we had the net-chat debate and I had to fight for globalization ‘cause I wanted to be on the other side of it.
Hélène: Oh!
Mary: so that was kinda of upsetting to me but I still tried to do my best but it was hard because I felt the opposite way. But I don’t know I just thought he had made some good points like this is how we’ve lived and I think it’s good like how they looked. I always thought it was interesting like the little shops and like going to the bakery and I always liked that stuff and I always wished that there were something like that [where I live].
[…]
Mary: I never knew what the hormones did and like I read that in the article Oh okay, I was like “Huh! Yeah, that is bad, what am I eating this beef?
[laughter]
That kinda of made me NOT want to have this beef then but..
Hélène: Yeah? Are you cautious about what you’re eating now?
Mary: Yeah, but it’s hard though when you go to the counters and you don’t have a choice.
It’s hard So… I I I but I am more conscious of that stuff now since we learned about that.”
[Interview]
Discussions in class and articles Mary read on globalization let her gain a more global understanding of the issue than before. In her definition of French culture (see French and American cultures section above), she noted that France was grounded in its long history and traditions and believed globalization has not modified French culture very much. Over the semester, she nuances her views on French culture and the influence of globalization. She claims: “it just kind of opened my eyes up to it.” At first, she thinks that globalization simply provides more access to different types of music or food. At the end of the semester, globalization for Mary implies a complex concept with a mixture of positive and negative aspects. During her interview, she asserts being “saddened” by some consequences (e.g. cafés being closed and replaced by fast food restaurants). Her understanding of globalization is less simplistic and obviously forces Mary to change her views. In fact, she even claims to be against “globalization” and much more “conscious” of the type of food she eats. Evidently, Mary shows a reflective engagement in her learning where inquiring about French culture compels her to organize the way she perceives the world differently.

A week later, the students compare eating habits in a netmeeting, reflecting on what “eating” or “mealtime” means to them. Both Americans and French have meals but what “meal” entails in each culture can be very different. In the first part of the netmeeting, Mary’s keypal lists what he ate the day before; “Hier j’ai mangé, à midi des pates à la suace bolognaise et le soir.. une salade composée avec une quiche Lorraine!!” Later he explains how his meals are distributed during the day. Below is an excerpt from their seventh netmeeting:

“Marc: Dans une journée...
    je fais mon petit déjeuner à la maison, mon déjeuner...
    au lycée (c'est beaucoup moins bon) et le soir pour mon dîner..
    il se passe à la maison!!

Mary: Donc, manges-tu avec ta famille plus que avec tes amis?

Marc: Oui puisque je ne fais qu'un seul repas par jour au lycée donc avec mes amis!!

Mary: preferes-tu manger avec ta famille ou avec tes amis?

Marc: Avec ma famille en général mais c'est aussi sympa avec les amis!!

You can continue if...
ok
you are other questions!!

Mary: yes i have lots of questions
Marc: Ok, i listen to you!!
Mary: what does mealtime mean to you?
Marc: Mealtime for me was different because.. at school it was 15min because we don't have lot of time but.. at home it was in general 30min!
Mary: that's not a lot of time
Marc: Yes but during the week my family and me are very busy..
Mary: do you have bigger meals on the weekend?
Marc: I have homework, my brother and my sister too so we eat quickly but.. on weekend it is 30min or one hour!!
Mary: if you want, you can ask your questions now and we will ask our questions in the email
Marc: It's depend..
No I can wait it is not important i write you later!!
You can continue if you want a little
Mary: ok
Marc: we eat longer meals, mostly 1 hour long
Mary: During you meals with your friends? At University?
Marc: yes, because our family isn't here
Mary: But what do you do during one our?
Marc: sit, eat, talk
Mary: especially if we go to a restaurant
Marc: then if we want to talk we go out of the cantine!! Ah only when we go to the restaurant?
Mary: when you eat with your family, do you talk a lot?
Marc: Yes but it can begin in the kitchen when we eat but it continue after when we drink coffee in the living room!!
Mary: ok
Marc: Do you know what I mean?
Mary: yes
Marc: do you have a lot of variety at your meals with fruit and vegetables
Mary: In general we have always meat and vegetables!! Fruit is only a dessert in general!!
Marc: do you have any questions for us now?
Mary: We like salad too before meat and vegetables!!
Marc: Yes
Mary: Are meals different on Sundays?
Marc: Or do you eat always the same things?
Mary: not here because we are always with our friends
Marc: Sunday too?
Mary: at home, i eat with my dad on Sundays (because my parents are divorce) yes, are families are too far away
Marc: When do you eat? Is regularity important?
Mary: its not very important, but the cafeteria is only open at certain times i wish the cafeteria was open later for dinner because it closes at 7pm
Marc: And do you eat between the cantines meals?
Mary: no
Marc: do you?
Marc: What do meals at home represent for you? (staying alive/meet the family/not much...)
Yes sometimes at 6h30 when i just came back from my school!!
Mary: staying alive and meeting with people
Marc: ok
Mary: seeing my family
Marc: How much vegetables and fruit do you eat?
Mary: i eat fruit in the morning, and vegetables at lunch and dinner (ang)
    nous devons partir maintenant
    au revoir
Marc: Do you insist on meat at every meal? Do you have fish too?
Mary: i'll email you the answer
Marc: ok!!!!!!!!! Bye!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Mary: ciao
Marc: I 'll write to you later!!
Ciao ragazze!!” [NM 7, November 5th]

Mary notes in one of her essay that her keypal is not the so-called “typical”
French student since his meals are quick. For him, the social aspect of a meal occurs
either before the meal (“in the kitchen”) or after the meal (“in the living room with
coffee”). At school, he does not have much time for lunch and is forced to eat his meal in
fifteen minutes because of a busy schedule. Mary on the other hand enjoys her meals,
which she takes with her friends. She usually spends an hour and tries to eat balanced
meals with fruits and vegetables. She also answers his last question in an email, saying
that she enjoys eating meat and sometime fish:
    “Pour repondre a ton question dernier du netmeeting, j'aime avoir la viande au dejeuner et
diner, et quelque fois j'ai du poisson. Est-ce que tu aime le poisson? J'aime le saumon et
le thon. J'aime beaucoup de fruits de mer.” [Email, November 11th]

Exposed to a variety of voices, Mary encounters differences of views and
diversity within the French culture. In an essay, she asserts being an atypical American
and indicates that her keypal is also atypical for a French. What they found out about
each other’s eating habits is different from the information she had from the readings.
The way the class is conceived gives Mary the opportunity to obtain information, observe
and analyze carefully, taking into consideration the complexity of the situation, as
opposed to a broad and simplistic generalization. It also gives Mary the tools to sharpen
her analytical skills as the essay below shows:
    “En général, les Américains n'ont pas beaucoup de priorité pour la nourriture et le
repas. Les familles aux Etats-Unis ne mangent pas toujours ensemble. Ils ont beaucoup
d'activités pendant plus de la journée. Ils ne prennent pas beaucoup de temps à table. Ils mangent aux restaurants fast-food. Ils mangent beaucoup de nourriture préparée et ne mangent pas beaucoup de nourriture sain.

Par-rapport aux Américains moyens, nous sommes plutôt atypiques. Nous qimons predre du temps au table. Nous mangeons ensemble avec nos familles or nos amis (à l'Université). Chez nous, nous faisons la cuisine et mangeons dans la maison. Nous ne mangeons pas qux restaurants fast-food.

Selon nos lectures, les Français pensent que la nourriture est plus importante. Ils aiment connaître d'où leur nourriture vient et aiment la nourriture pure. Ils prennent beaucoup de temps à table. Pendant le repas, ils discutent avec leurs familles. Ils font la cuisine plus que les Américains. L'heure de repas est plus importante et le déjeuner est le repas principal.

Notre correspondante est plutôt atypique. Il a dit qu'il mange très vite. La durée de ses repas est quinze d trente minutes. Il ne discutent pas beaucoup pendant le repas. Ils parlent plus après le repas ou avant le repas. Il mange à la cantine principalement.

Les différences les plus importantes, à notre avis, sont que les généralisations ne sont pas toujours vrai. Nous, qui sommes Américains, mangeons plus à table que notre correspondant. Nous prenons plus d'une heure pour manger.

En conclusion, nous et notre correspondante, sommes plutôt atypiques. On ne peut pas mettre les généralités sur tout le monde d cause de leur culture.”

[Essay, (the exact date does not appear on her essay) ]

In this essay, she is able to synthesize what she has learned and provides some generalizations about each culture. She compares these generalizations with more specific and personal examples from her own experience and her keypal’s experience. Doing so, she highlights how one should be very careful about generalizing cultures in general.

In her interview, she indicates that the differences she encountered at times were rather challenging as well as interesting:

“Mary: I thought it was funny how we would talk about José Bové a lot and but like I would talk to my keypal and he would be VERY different from us. Like how.. she commented on how the French took a very long time to eat their meal and stuff but I found that my KP had like 15 minute lunches and I spend more time at lunch than he does and like a half hour for dinner and I spend maybe an hour too at dinner so especially in my family like at home like when we all sat down for dinner my mother and I would not get off from the table for like pff two hours but euh he did differently and she said how hmm a lot of French students

Hélène: Are you talking about your professor now?
Mary: Yeah she said like a lot of the French students don’t have activities like sports and stuff outside of class but my KP plays basketball and hmm [Elise] played basketball too and she was in Scouts so she had other activities. I thought that was interesting how we would talk about these things but I would find out there’re some opposites but that’s there’s always people that aren’t normal so I understand that so but euh like It’s so hard to do this and like you learn about these things and then it’s the opposite but it’s only one person you’re not looking at [the whole] culture so I think that’s pretty much it, I don’t know.”

[Interview]

In terms of how much time Mary spends at the table, she is more typical of a French person than of an American. Once again, she dissociates herself a little from the image of a “typical” American. Her comment above demonstrates the opportunity she gains to observe a situation from a variety of angles, enhancing her observation and critical skills. She is able to draw from the various sources to make statements and form an opinion.

Comparing similarities and differences on food or alcohol continues for a couple of weeks. Her conception of culture, which remains unchanged throughout the semester, shapes her learning strategies and orients her questions. At the beginning of the narrative, I emphasized how for Mary language and culture go together. In her interview at the end of the semester, she still believes that learning about culture is an essential part of learning a foreign language simply because language and culture are intertwined:

“[…] While you’re learning the language, you’re learning the culture because of different like ways that people say things. To me, the way a culture says something reflects on how .. they ARE like hmm they don’t have a word for tuition so they had to make up a word for that so we could say that to them or hm…. just little things like …”

[Interview]

The way she conceives language and culture is in fact mirrored in the way she asks questions to her keypal. It is particularly stricking in the eighth netmeeting when Mary and her keypal define what “eating” implies for each of them. They also discuss what alcohol entails and compare habits:

“Mary: Penses-tu de la nourriture principalement pour se nourrir ou quelque chose autre? Comme pour plaisir?
Marc: Je pense que c'est avant tout un plaisir
[…]”

Marc: Je pense que pour moi c'est un plaisir mais pour d'autre comme en Afrique c'est une nécessité!!!
Mary: ok, nous n'avons pas des questions sur alcool. Donc vous pouvez demander vos questions.
[...]
Marc: I will begin to ask questions about drinking....Are you ready?
Mary: yes
Mary: : )
Keypals: Is drinking associated with food, like a good vine with good food, or is it done independently?
Mary: maybe with older people, but in general no, because we don't typically have wine with dinner
some older people at a restaurant
when they are having dinner
Keypals: Ok, at what age can you drink?
Mary: 21
Keypals: What are risks if you are caught drinking while under age?
Mary: [In France, the legal age is] 18 but you can drink before at 16
Keypals: I think, you can fined, and then you have to take classes
Mary: *you can be fined
Keypals: Where is drinking allowed?
Mary: for those over 21?
Keypals: yes
Mary: at a bar, restaurant, your home. ....
any place but not on the street
or at restaurants without a liquor license
Keypals: Do students often drink? what do they mostly drink?
Mary: yes, a good amount of students drink, mostly beer
some hard liquor
Keypals: Do you drink strong liquor like whisky?
Mary: yeah, sometimes. and rum, vodka, tequilla
Keypals: We too but you can buy alcohol so it is more easy than those who have under 21
Is drinking part of college life?
Mary: not for everyone, but maybe for most people
Keypals: Why is that so?
Mary: i'm not sure, maybe because our parents aren't here and its easily available
Keypals: Is it considered "cool" to get drunk? Have you already get drunk?
Mary: no, it's not always cool to get drunk....
I don't get drunk often.
Marc: I make party one time by week but I don't be drunk every times, I just drink a little!!
Mary: yeah, that's what i do ...
Keypals: OK, Do you know or have you ever played any drinking game?
Mary: yes
Keypal(s): Can you discribe it?
If you know some games?
Mary: well, there's one where you have two teams....
and you throw little balls at the other teams cups ....
if you make it in the cup the other team has to drink what is in the cup
There are a lot of card games too
Keypals: Yes we know this games , it is very funny we find!!
Mary: do you play this game a lot in France?
Keypals: Yes
Mary: Why do some people enjoy getting drunk?
Keypals: everyone, has their own opinion.
Mary: Is it a psychological condition or just plain fun, do you think?
Keypals: for some it may be a need to get drunk, but I think for most it's just to have fun.
Keypals: Yes we think that too!!
Mary: I think it's fun as long as I don't get sick
Keypals: Ok would you say that girls as much as boys, or is it a male activity?
Keypals: Can you just answer to this question please? I will continue on e-mail
Mary: I think guys can drink more, but a lot of girls drink tooo.
Keypals: Ok, a bientot
Keypals: Ok thanks and bye bye!!!"

[ NM 8, November 12th ]

In this conversation, Mary and her keypal examine what the concepts of eating or drinking are associated with. As indicated previously, she loves food and enjoys long meals. Her keypal too associates eating with pleasure. He enjoys eating even if his meals are taken much quicker. Further in the netmeeting, Mary explains generation differences regarding alcohol. She states that the older generation may associate alcohol with food but the younger generation does not in her opinion. She also describes what is legal or not legal in the United States. Drinking in America appears to be more controlled than in France since the legal age is higher and you cannot drink in the streets. Moreover, she touches on drinking problems faced by the student population, stressing that she, however, hardly gets drunk. Mary and her keypal have, once again, an opportunity to compare various habits and gain a better understanding of what drinking for example entails for each culture. Certain habits are not similar and the activity of “drinking” means something different in each culture as it is embedded in each country’s laws. The netmeetings provide a sphere where students have the opportunity to compare their own culture, their own habits with the “other” culture. They also compel students to consider and analyze in more details aspects of their own culture, as the next netmeeting demonstrates.
In the ninth netmeeting, students compare various holidays. Below is an excerpt on Thanksgiving and Christmas:

“Marc: Connaissez vous le sujet du jour? C'est thanksgiving!!

Marc: Avez vous des questions?

Mary: As-tu un vacances comme Thanksgiving?

Marc: J'ai pas compris ce que vous voulez dire!!
est ce que j'ai des vacances pour une fête c'est ça?

Mary: une fête

merci

Marc: Je n'ai pas compris votre question

Mary: Avez-vous (les français) une fete comme Thanksgiving aux Etats-Unis?

Marc: Non nous n'avons pas d'équivalent pour Thanksgiving!!!! C'est une fête

totalement inconnue en France

Mary: Qu'est-ce que tu penses que nous faisons pour Thanksgiving?

Marc: Je suppose que cette fête est célébrée lors d'un grand repas en famille où vous

allez mangé de la dinde!!

Mary: oui

Marc: Nous avons fais un peu de recherche avec notre professeur sur

Thanksgiving...
et nous connaissons un peu son histoire!!

Mary: okay

Nous allons demander des questions sur Noel.

Est-ce que tout le monde dans votre famille mange ensemble?

Marc: Oui bien sûr c'est une grande fête en France, surement la plus importante de

l'année!!

On se retrouve tous...
en famille et on fais un grand repas!!

Mary: Allez-vous à l'église au minuit ensemble?

Marc: non par contre c'est une chose que l'on ne voit pratiquement pas en France

contrairement en Amérique je crois!!

Personnellement je n'y vais pas.

Vous y allez vous ?

Mary: oui

mais pas toujours au minuit mais sur le 24 decembre

Marc: En France en fait ces messes existent..

mais c'est beaucoup moins populaire qu'en Amérique.

Dans mon village il y en a une.

Mary: Qu'est-ce que tu manges pour ton repas du Noel?

Marc: Pour noël je mange de la dinde aux marrons avec des pommes de terre en

plat principal, en entrée...
il y a souvent des escargots ou du saumon cela épênd....et pour le dessert en
général nous avons la traditionnelle bûche de noël!!

English now!!

Mary: Do you have any questions?

Marc: So I begin to ask my questions!

Mary: ok

Marc: Can you "rate"Thanksgiving compared to other "special" days?
Mary: Thanksgiving is a very important holiday here because families get together, but it is not as important as Christmas.

Marc: Ok, what makes Thanksgiving a "special" day? Is it because you are no gifts???

Mary: Well the history of Thanksgiving is about coming together between the native americans and the european immigrants to give thanks and we continue this tradition every year by getting together with our families. no gifts???

Marc: Do you have some gifts for Thanksgiving? or not and that why you prefer Christmas!!!!?

Mary: We don't give gifts for Thanksgiving....

Marc: Is it why you prefer Christmas?

Mary: it's not that we prefer Christmas....but it is a bigger celebration

Marc: What are the other "special "days , or National Days?

Mary: we do enjoy Christmas very much! 4th of July we have barbecues and watch fireworks. Easter families get together too.....but it is not a national holiday

Marc: Do they really "give thanks" for Thanksgiving?

Mary: we have a lot of "little" holidays too but those are not celebrated as much

Marc: do you

Mary: yes, we give thanks

Marc: What is The Thanksgiving meal itself?

Mary: We eat turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, gravy, corn, green beans.

For dessert pumpkin pie and apple pie

Marc: Do you have the felling that it is a very English sort of meal?

Mary: Yes, it is a very American meal.

Marc: how so?

Mary: These foods are traditional foods. We learned that these were the foods that people ate at the first Thanksgiving. Turkey and corn, are the most common for Thanksgiving.

Marc: What happens on both sides of the meal (before/after)?

Mary: The night before Thanksgiving I have a party with my family. After we eat we all watch American football.

Marc: What else happens during Thanksgiving day? You only watch a football game?

Mary: We eat all together and then relax and watch a football game. That's it!!

Marc: Very funny!!!!!!!!!!! Has the original religious meaning of the day been preserved?

Mary: It is a nice relaxing day to spend with your family.

Marc: yes I think too!!

Mary: There was no original realigious meaning behind this holiday...... besides getting together and giving thanks...... but we do give grace before our meal and give thanks for what we have..... like we think they did at the first thanksgiving...... but its not based on religion

Marc: What do you know exactly about the history of Thanksgiving?

Mary: After a group of english settlers first came to america, they went through some hard times....but the native americans (indians) helped them....and the
following fall after the harvest.....they all came together for a great feast and gave thanks together
we have to go now!!
bye
Marc:  Bye and thank you very much for all your answers!!
I'll write to you this week!!!! Bye, bye!!
Mary:  you're welcome!
bye” [NM 9, November 19th]

In this netmeeting, Mary’s keypal asks all sorts of questions about Thanksgiving traditions, focusing on the historical context. Mary explains exactly what it is, where the tradition comes from and how it is celebrated. For Mary, nowadays it is more of a familial celebration than a religious one. Mary’s keypal seems a bit surprised with the way Thanksgiving is celebrated: “very funny!!!!” Her keypal’s questions encourage Mary to think and describe in detail the tradition of Thanksgiving and Marc’s reactions oblige Mary to consider another view on Thanksgiving holiday and what it means for people in general. In her interview, she explains her keypal’s reaction:

“Mary: We were talking about Thanksgiving and we were describing all the stuff about thanksgiving and he wouldn’t understand something. She’s like “why doesn’t he get this?” I’m like [loud laughter] well we’re in America and he’s in France and he thought he was funny, and she’s like “it’s not funny it’s Thanksgiving” and I’m like well it’s kinda of funny to think about it, the whole holiday like it’s kinda weird like how this holiday we decide to be friendly with the Indians and then for the next like hundred years we were mean to them...so it’s kinda of conflicting in ideas but he doesn’t know about that, I just think I can understand.

Hélène: Do you think that now your Keypal understands better the thanksgiving concept, what it is and what it means?
Mary: Yeah, I think so. The thing is is that even here, like thanksgiving has different meanings for different people. What I found interesting is that people who don’t believe in God can all partake in like say oh that’s when we give thanks and make Grace. I’m like okay…but you don’t believe in God [laughter] Ok…that’s fine! BUT people celebrate Christmas too. I don’t know but I am a somewhat religious person.” [Interview]

Dialogically, Mary reconsiders the historical perspective of Thanksgiving and its paradox in terms of the relationship between Americans and Native Americans. She also stresses how Thanksgiving after all “has different meanings for different people.” Note how in the ninth netmeeting she indicates that Thanksgiving is not a religious holiday per se. In her interview, however, she expresses surprise at the fact that some people say Grace when they don’t believe in God.
4.3.4.5. Religion

Mary is “a somewhat a religious person”. When in the netmeeting she inquires about the way the French celebrate Christmas, she wonders if her keypal goes to midnight mass. For her keypal, Christmas is a large family meal when for Mary the religious aspect of it is more important. In fact, during her interview, she highlights being surprised by the fact that France is historically a catholic country but the French hardly go to church:

“Mary: What I thought was funny is how…like it’s a catholic country, like it’s catholic but my/ when I stayed over there they never went to church and [Elise] never goes to church and my keypal doesn’t go to church. I’m like ok.. ’cause I am catholic too and I was expecting to go to church when I was over there but we didn’t. But it was okay I mean I thought that was funny.

Hélène: So, would you say that the French are not very religious?

Mary: No, I mean I would say that they are not very religious like in general and my keypal was talking about this, I think that was one of our subjects How a lot of Americans go to church and like there are a lot of different religions while in France not so many do

Hélène: Yeah. Do you think that the French students had a hard time understanding, I mean I don’t know did you talk a lot about religion?

Mary: in class?

Hélène: Yeah in class or during your netmeetings.

Mary: Yeah because I was interested in it like I wanted to see whether he went to church or not. Basically I asked him, what religion are you? He said I guess I am catholic [laughter]

Oh..okay, I am like do you go to church?

He’s like no [laughter] but you know… but then I was talking about it to [Elise] more, she just thought it was funny how we all go to church a lot and she didn’t understand how we all do that. But euh we did talk about it in class one time about how it was the catholic church was kinda something about how it was euh..because it was with the King and so euh when euh it was with the Revolution

Yeah so that it’s kinda of like put a distance between the state and the King and and the Religion (correcting herself)

And that makes sense. See that’s another instance when I learned why. I liked that.”

[Interview]

Here, she recalls her experience in France, being surprised that the French don’t go to church. In the same way, the French (i.e. her friend Elise and her keypal) are astonished by American religious commitment. Once again, the class helps her understand why the French put distance with the Church and how for a French person, being Catholic does not necessarily imply going to mass.
4.3.5. Conclusion

Mary values learning foreign languages and is eager to learn about French culture. Her interests in International politics and in diplomacy guide her ways to approach culture: she is concerned with the image America projects abroad and she reflects on political situations (e.g. asks about her keypal’s opinion on the President; ponders on the consequences of globalization). Furthermore, she believes that language and culture are intertwined; “while you’re learning the language, you’re learning the culture because of different like ways that people say things. To me, the way a culture says something reflects on how .. they ARE like” [Interview]. For Mary, learning a foreign language is learning how to mean in a different way. Here she is apprenticed in new discourse communities. Not only does she inquire about vocabulary but she also reflects on French language. For example, Mary and her keypal compare what cultural concepts such as “family” or “eating” entail in each culture, for each one of them. Concepts are not universal phenomena but are socially and culturally grounded. The netmeetings for example present an environment in which Mary can communicate about various topics and ultimately create meaning. In her portfolio, Mary comments that the netmeetings “were a great tools in forcing [her] to use [her] French language.”

However, for Mary, learning French is not simply learning a new linguistic system, it is also learning how to use it: “While learning about culture, you are not only learning more vocabulary but some of the idioms and nuances of the language too.” [Journal 5, November 11th]. In her interview, she highlights for example how the French have several ways to refuse food when they are full:

“You have to be more polite in euh refusing food whereas here it’s like I don’t like that I don’t want it but euh to be polite if you’re sitting down with a family you have to be like ooh I’ll have a little or ohh maybe I can’t remember the exact ways to do it.” [Interview]

From her trip in France, she believes she has learned a lot about cultural differences between the French and American culture, but she is unable to explain them. This class offers a social and historical context for Mary to understand and analyze these cultural differences. Moreover, it compels her to reflect on her own culture, thinking about images her country projects abroad for example (stereotypes, globalization). From
the beginning of the semester, Mary demonstrates an acute ability to observe and analyze social or cultural issues, often times adopting an observer point of view. This class, however, provides Mary with tools that allow her to better observe and analyze than before and ultimately to sharpen her analytical skills. For Kramsch (1993a), teaching about a foreign culture is a dialogic process of socialization for which students have a reflective engagement. Mary’s reflective engagement is undeniable. As mentioned throughout the narrative, she has changed some of her ways to look at the world. For example on globalization, she perceived the complexity of the situation (i.e. her views on the topic are not as simplistic as they used to be and she gained information from various angles). Class discussions, readings, and the netmeetings offer a myriad of voices allowing Mary to understand a cultural topic from various angles, to examine her own culture and gain an outsider’s perspective. For example, in her French definition, she believes that the French identity is a strong one whereas the American culture is more of a melting pot of cultures. At the end of the semester, she acknowledges how there is more diversity within France than she thought previously. Also, she never thought of her country as being “wasteful”. In her interview, she indicates that it has changed the way she looks at the world and claims having learned about herself:

“I think I learned more about myself and what I think how things are supposed to be that I thought was funny. Hmm…like hmm how I am very euh independent and dependent on my car more and euh how I think of going to a party and … I don’t know just little things about how I think of the way I do things compare to how they would think I do things.”

[Interview]

By viewing the language learner as a social being, language learning is conceived as a practice that is socially constructed. This class offers Mary content that is relevant to her. She is fully engaged in the activities, bringing the language and culture beyond the language classroom, enabling Mary to become a more thoughtful and critical citizen. For example, she reflects on how media project violence in their report, understanding why her keypal thinks that all Americans have guns. She further elaborates on her “new” way to watch CNN:

“Because then I realized how our news is like how it’s so much violence like I knew it was like that before but it’s just. Like I watch it I’m like I just think it’s very [xx] on CNN, it’s just constant. They just keep talking about it. I just thought that was interesting. And how hmm…the after..after that happened how the government would talk about how they want to change things and so much somewhat taking away our civil rights. I
remember this one time this guy said “see that’s what we get for putting civil rights ahead of security” I’m like “yes that’s what we get but at least we have rights” I always thought that was a good thing and I don’t know I think because I’m looking at I don’t know different areas I just see more things like I see from outside the box. I think that’s what I’ve gained from being here and learning more things about different places.”

[Interview]

Thus, Mary’s example suggests that the study of a foreign language with its cultural dimensions can allow students to broaden the way they perceive the world, encourage critical thinking and enhance reflection.

1 At the end of her semester, she decided to switch her major in International Politics to a double major in French and International Politics. She kept her minor in business.

2 Textes libres are individual texts written throughout the semester by each student on a topic of their choice (see 3.3.1). In the course of the semester, students were required to turn in three drafts of their paper. Mary wrote five drafts.

3 Note however that Mary does not speak French with Elise. They communicate in English but my understanding is that they also talk about France and French culture.

4 The sections that are cut in the netmeeting corresponds to comments from a student whose consent I do not have.

5 There are many students in the chatroom. Marc is Mary’s keypal. Keypal 2 is Melissa and Andrew’s keypal. “Keypals” refers to Marc and Keypal 2.

6 Mary shares her computer with one of her classmates, whose consent I do not have. I deleted all the data that come directly from that student.

7 Here Marc confuses Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE or ESB in French) with GM food.

8 See note vi above.

9 Mary’s example is not quite accurate since there is a French equivalent for tuition, “droits d’inscription”. However, education is free in France unless you go to a private institution or to one of the Grandes Ecoles.

10 For this eighth netmeeting, several students are gathered in the same chatroom. Students have parallel conversations with their respective keypals. Therefore, I chose to only focus on the exchange between Mary and Marc, sometime keeping comments from another French student who is sharing Marc’s computer.

11 “She” here refers to another female student in Mary’s class.
Lucy

4.4.1. Biography

Lucy is a twenty years old American student, from a small town, in a rural area, about two hours away from the university. During the academic year, she lives off campus with a couple of roommates. She does not say much about herself besides that she has two older brothers, likes tennis, basketball and shopping. She seems rather shy and is quiet in class. At the university, Lucy is a junior, majoring in marketing. When her keypal, Elisabeth, asks Lucy what she would like to do in the future, she answers as follow:

“I want to work for a company doing marketing
I just want to make a lot of money”
[ NM1, September 10th ]

As an assignment, students were required to write their portrait. This is how she describes herself:

“Je suis une femme.
 heureuse, ambitieuse, et américaine
 J’aime jouer au tennis.
 Je voudrais manger la glace maintenant.
 gentille, agréable, et un peu timide
 Je suis [Lucy].

J’étais une sophomore.
 active, grande, et sportive
 J’aime la couleur violette.
 Je pense que le français est dur.
 naturelle, énergique, et moderne
 J’étais très timide dans l’école.

Je serai une junior cette année à la fac.
 jeune, belle, et intelligente
 Je peux obtenir un diplômé
 J’habite à [X]
 blanche, confortable, et fatiguée
 Je serai une professionnelle de la commercialisation.”
[Portrait]
For her first two years of college she studied at a branch campus. During her interview, she explains to me that “it is hard to get in here [main campus] as a Freshman”. She is in a controlled major where students need to maintain a 3.0 average GPA or higher. Lucy is eager to complete her degree in four years. In fact, she indicates that even though she would have liked to go abroad, she chose to finish her bachelor’s degree in four years:

“Hélène: Do you want to go abroad? Have you been abroad?
Lucy: No, I’d like to but I don’t think I will, I don’t think I will be able to.
Hélène: Yeah?
Lucy: I’d rather get out in four years and that would caught me another semester here.
Hélène: Oh yeah, that would put you behind and stuff?
Lucy: Yeah! […]”  

Lucy has never had the opportunity to go abroad. In her motive to learn French, she claims that she would like to visit France. In high school, Lucy studied Latin for four years, as she wanted to go to pre-med. She later changed her mind and chose marketing instead.

She completed her first two semesters of French at the branch campus. On several occasions she complains about the way class was conducted there because the main focus was the study of grammar:

“Hélène: In your previous classes, what kind of cultural activities did you do? Do you remember?
[...]
Lucy: In French 1 and 2, we didn’t all we did was grammar. We didn’t I mean a couple of days we played card games but it was all grammar, we didn’t do a lot.
Hélène: um even from the textbook you didn’t do a lot of the cultural activities?
Lucy: Well, there would be, sometimes there would be paragraphs on culture but it wasn’t it was like about the “bac” and stuff like that and it wasn’t really a lot of cultural stuff. I learned a lot this year, this semester.”  

She is therefore glad to learn more about culture this year. She describes her French 3 class as “all culture related” and shares her enthusiasm during the interview:

“I really liked talking to the keypals because you get first hand experience with other cultures. (…) I think it’s really neat ‘cause you get to actually talk to real French people, you know hand on a tape recorder or something like that. Through email I mean, knowing what they do like sometimes you don’t realize there’s people in other countries. And when you actually get to talk to them. Like in the United States if you’ve never been
out of the United States you forget that there’s other people in other countries. So it’s neat and you get to talk to someone, you know you learn so much.”

[Interview]

4.4.2. Foreign Language Studies

Lucy enjoys learning French but claims that it is very hard (see portrait above for example). Learning a foreign language is required for her major. She admits that if it had not been a requirement, she probably would not have taken the class.

“Hélène: Do you think you would have taken French if it hadn’t been a requirement?
Lucy: Probably not. I like it but… but it’s hard! Because it’s another language so…probably not. I mean if I would have needed more credits … maybe […]
Hélène: hmm. Euh…and do you regret it was a requirement?
Lucy: No. not at all. I liked I liked ( ), I thought that was neat. I liked it a lot.”

[Interview]

Even though, she claims liking French, she chooses not to continue with it after this semester, once her requirement is fulfilled.

In her opinion, the university imposes a requirement to increase students’ cultural awareness and to prepare them for the work place, i.e. ultimately to obtain “a decent job”:

“I believe that the university imposes a language requirement to help the students become more diversified and be more aware that the American culture is not the only culture that exists in the world. Also, by becoming familiar with another language, besides English, a student can be employed by a company that conducts business with foreign countries and this can be very valuable in attaining a decent job.”

[Journal 1, August 22nd]

She also regrets that foreign languages are not very much valued in the United States, especially considering the country’s diversity. She actually thinks foreign languages should be introduced earlier than in ninth grade:

“In my opinion, in the United States I do not think that learning a foreign language is considered anywhere near as valuable as learning Math or English. It was proven to us as early as first grade when and where we started to learn the basics of Math and English. It was not until ninth grade that a foreign language is introduced in my high school. Even though foreign languages should be regarded higher than they are because of the ever increasing diversity appearing in the United States, I think it will take some time before foreign languages are valued more importantly especially in high school classrooms.”

[Journal 1, August 22nd]
Lucy, however, values learning French for the two reasons she provides below:

"I personally feel that learning the french language has become very valuable to me. In my junior year of high school, I became very close friends with a foreign exchange student from France. Since then, he has invited me to travel to Paris to stay with him and his family. Besides himself, his family is not very proficient in English. Even though I might not be capable of carrying on an intense conversation in French, I will be able to greet the new people I meet and appear polite because I have learned some of the French greetings and mannerisms.

I believe that foreign languages are an important part of my education because until the day I retire, I will not know where I might end up working. Someday I might be working in France as a United States representative for a United States company for example, and then I will be very glad that I completed my foreign language requirement.”

[Journal 1, August 22nd]

Once again, her motive to learn French is to some extent related to her future career, as she may be asked to live abroad as a representative of an American company. Since she chose not to pursue her French studies, I am however assuming that she does not perceive foreign language learning as being essential for a future career. Nonetheless, she is “very excited” to learn about the French people and about French culture. As she states above, she has a good friend who is French that she met when she was a junior in high school. She hopes to visit him and his family in Paris some day, as she explains in the first email she sends to her keypal:

“Salut Keypals!

Je m'appelle Lucy. Je pense que notre classe entiere sera bonne keypals. Nous sommes Americains tres des amicaux, et je nous sais tout aime parler. Nous tres sont interesse dans apprentissage votre culture et comment est differer d'Amerique. Correspondant avec vous excitera tres pour moi. J'ai un tres bon ami en france et cette experience m'aidera a preparer quand je vais le visiter mon ami Alex et sa soeur dans Paris.”

[Email September 3rd]

Lucy is very pleased with the way her French 3 class is organized. She is interested in learning about culture and getting “to actually talk with real French people” [Interview]. Throughout the semester, she emphasizes how she enjoys talking to her keypal. As discussed later, it is clear that the discussions, via emails and netmeetings, are what she values the most in the class. In her portfolio, she writes:

“My first email was very non-personal and short. Once I found Elisabeth actually wanted to know about me, my life, my friends and what we do for fun, I was very excited to go into more depth and become personal.”

[Evaluations spécifiques, Portfolio].
In fact, as it will be demonstrated in this narrative, Lucy regards the exchange with Elizabeth as an opportunity for making a friendship. At the end of Lucy and Elizabeth’s first conversation, she expresses her enthusiasm about the netmeetings:

“This was fun, I can’t wait until next week
Elizabeth, I will email you tonight.” [NM1, September 10th]

In the emails she later writes, she provides more personal information about herself and underlines once more how much she enjoyed their first conversation:

“Bonjour Elisabeth!

J'ai joue le clarinet quand j'etais dans l'ecole aussi. J'aime aussi le tennis, le basketball, et l'est mieux shopping.

J'ai apprecie la conversation a vous aujourd'hui, mais il etait tres dur pour nous parler rapidement en francais. Nous n'avons pas etudie cette ete, et nous avons oublie beaucoup. Il sera facile prochain temps depus nous connaissions quel nous ferons.

J'espere que vous avez un weekend tres agreable. Je vous parlerai le lundi.
Je ne peux pas vous attendre ecrire.

Au revoir
Lucy” [Email, September 10th]

She is very eager to learn about Elisabeth’s life and about French culture in general. Two days later, in an essay, she writes her reactions to her first netmeeting as it was required for an assignment entitled “les TL en général et mon corres’ en particulier”:

“La Réunion du TL Pour la Première Fois

Sur le lundi, le 10 septembre, notre classe de francais 3 a bavardé en ligne avec la classe de TL pour la premiere fois. Tout le monde dans notre classe francaise a semblé apprecier cette activite. Nous avons tout appris de la culture et des vies personnel de notre keypals. A mon avis, la classe n’a pas semblé être très diverse. J’ai remarqué que quand nous avons demandé quel type de musique américaine ils apprécient, tout le monde a eu le même group préféré américain, The Red Hot Chili Peppers. Aussi, il a semble que beaucoup des keypals étaient de petites villes. Ils semblaient tous etre excités des sports, et en particulier faire du ski.

Quelques differences ont inclus que leurs ancêtres ont eu des origines differentes, et qu'ils ont aimé beaucoup de types differentes de nourriture.
Ma correspondante était très très amicale. Elle a eu le weekend a un recours de ski dans Chamonix. Elle a aussi une passion tres forte pour jouer la clarinette. Elle a été aux Etats-Unis, mais je n’ai pas pu lui demander où elle a été a. Elle serait bien préparée à venir aux Etats-Unis parce qu’elle parle anglais pour sept années. J'ai eu beaucoup d'amusement dans la conversation avec Elisabeth. J'ai beaucoup plus de questions à lui demander le lundi prochain quand nous faisons ceci encore ou dans un e-mail.”

This first netmeeting allows Lucy to learn more about her keypal. Once again, she indicates that she enjoyed the conversation they had and is looking forward to talk to her again in the following week. In the essay above, she shares her first observations of the French class and examines its characteristics. She does not believe the class in France is very diverse (they all like the same type of music and sports, they all come from small villages). She also notes some differences with the class in the United-States. At the end of her essay, she describes her keypal whom she finds already very nice (“très très amicable”).

Shortly after the September 11th attacks, Elisabeth sends two emails of support and sympathy to Lucy (see section 4.4.2. for further discussion on the attacks). Lucy is touched that the French keypals seem to care so much and believe that they may become good friends:

“I am also surprised to find that I think that my keypal and I are going to be good friends. I was very unsure about us talking to them, but it is starting to be very much fun.” [Journal 3, September 23rd]

Throughout the semester, Lucy states enjoying talking to her keypal and is mostly interested in getting to know her personally. The potential for friendship plays an important role in Lucy’s learning process. She becomes more and more interested in learning about her keypal’s way of life, about her lifestyle. A fact transparent in the way Lucy asks questions to her keypal. This is especially true at the beginning of the semester. For example, in the first emails she sends, Lucy narrates her weekend activities and inquires about French culture mainly at a personal level (i.e. gaining Elisabeth’s perspective). Both of them often comment on their netmeetings. Below are some examples of their discussions at the beginning of the semester:
“Bonjour Elisabeth!
Comment est-ce que votre nuit était? Il était très amusant pour vous voir sur le webcam. Il était drôle. Rien nouvel est arrivé dans New York. Ils pensent que cela il y a 6000 gens morts. cela est si triste. Il est calme sur le tele.
Est-ce que vous avez eu votre musique sur le samedi? Est-ce qu'il était amusant? Est-ce que vous allez au cinéma beaucoup? Mon boyfriend est monté me visiter sur le vendredi. Sur le Samedi je suis allé au jeu de football a mon école. La nuit de samedi je devais travailler de 5 du soir jusqu'à ce que 3 am. Je travaille dans un atelier de pizza. J'étais si fatigue. Sur le dimanche, tout j'ai fait étais des devoirs toute la jour.
J'ai quelques-uns questionnent que je n'ai pas reçu pour demander dans Netmeeting.
   1) Est-ce que vous etes prepare a partir la maison et allez au college?
   2) Est-ce qu'il est dur pour devinir adulte en France?
   3) Est-ce que vous trouvez que vous avez beaucoup plus de responsibilites maintenant que vous etes plus vieux?

Merci Elisabeth!!! Parle avec toi bientot!!!
Bonjor
Lucy”

In the email above, Lucy explains some of her activities and talks about her job in the pizzeria. She also inquires about her keypal’s idea of becoming an adult. Note that Lucy uses the formal addressee pronoun “vous” to Elisabeth, which she does until the end of October. Below is her Keypal’s answer:

“Bonjour Lucy!!
Comment ça va aujourd'hui? Je suis trop contente c'est bientôt le week-end!! Précisément dans 3h!! Ouaou!!!
Sinon j'ai trouvé que c'était génial de se voir sur la webcam. Dommage que l'image était un peu "fuzzy".
A Toulouse une usine qui produisait du nitrate d'amonium a explosé. Il y a eut 29 morts et 1100 blessés. On ne sait pas si c'est un attentat ou un accident. Tout ceci est très bizarre!! C'est encore un mystère...Cette semaine c'était moi le reporter, j'ai écrit l'article sur ce qui s'est passé.
J'ai musique tous les samedis après-midi et ça me saoule un peu, mais bon...

This week-end I want to go to the cinema but I don't know if I could and I don't know what there are like films. Which is the last film that you saw? And what film would you like to see?
You have a boyfriend!!! It's good!! I don't have a boyfriend in this moment!! Ouin!! Maybe soon...
In France normally, we can't work before 18 years old. So I don't work but I would like. You work in the pizzeria. Is it funny?
Now I answer to your questions:
I think that we are accustomed to leave home. When I go to school I leave my home at 6 a.m and I come back at 7 p.m. I see my parents just the evening and the week-end. Maybe you find that I am often with my family.
During my holidays I don't stay in house. I go with my friends. This summer I stay 1 month without see my family. But it is normal. When the next year I could leave my small country for my studies, it was very different for me but it's the life.
I find that it's very difficult to become an adult in the actual society. The life is difficult, we don't know what the future will be... I am afraid to become adult. I would like to stay a child but it's not possible. Now we begin to be responsible but I need to my parents and my little brother (I love him). We don't know much about the life. I have some questions for you:
How many times have you leave your home?
Do you think that you are responsible?
How you see the society?
Which is your dream?
What do you think about the death peine? (We have a work on it)
Merci Lucy!!
Ciao.
Elisabeth’

[Email September 28th]

The exchange that is taking place between the two classes (in France and in the United-States) leads Lucy to think about her culture and inquire about her keypal’s culture. On several occasions, they have the opportunity to discuss differences between the French and Americans but Lucy most often inquires about Elisabeth’s daily activities.

4.4.3. Language and Culture

In her biography, I noted how she disliked her first two semesters of French because the curriculum focused mainly on the study of grammar. For Lucy, learning about culture should be part of the foreign language study, as it “adds variety and interest to the class”. According to her, it also “helps the student understand the full spectrum of the language”.

“I strongly agree that in studying a language that learning and discovering culture are very important. It helps the student understand the full spectrum of the language. Also, if they learn the language proficiently enough and travel to the country, they will be more prepared with the knowledge they have learned, rather than just knowing how to speak the language.

I am very interested in learning more about the culture of France. I enjoyed learning the language so far, but it gets tedious and learning about culture adds variety and interest to the class. The day that we watched the advertisements was very interesting for me. Not only was it something different and out of the ordinary, i was very engaged in seeing the commercials from a different country. It was very surprising that I could understand some of the things they were saying. I have not been disappointed about anything that we have talked about or learned so far. I really really enjoy that we do not study grammar every single class.”
[Journal 2, September 4th]
Lucy does not consider language and culture to be intertwined (i.e. in her opinion, culture is not an essential component of the language study). She does, however, believe that culture nicely completes the study of language: “it adds variety and interest to the class.” For example, she finds watching French commercial entertaining. Unfortunately, she does not explain what was interesting in the commercials, beside that it was “different and out of the ordinary”. She also finds listening to the commercials rewarding as she can understand some parts of it. Finally, she reiterates her dislike for grammar and stresses her interest for culture at large.

As highlighted before, Lucy is looking forward to getting to know Elisabeth better and hopes to build a friendship with her. She enjoys the discussions with her keypal as the netmeetings and emails reveal. As shown by the data, she is less interested in reflecting on the cultural concepts she learns. In her interview she characterizes the homework essays as “a lot of work, busy work”. Consequently, some of her journal entries and some of her essays are rather brief and she unfortunately does not always elaborate on her ideas. In the following section, I will investigate the way Lucy learns and talks about cultural concepts. The data are divided by themes, which correspond to the weekly themes students studied in class (see syllabus). First, her definitions of French and American Cultures at the beginning of the semester will be examined. Second, how she talks about the September 11th Attacks will be explored. The narrative will then highlight how Lucy observes and analyzes Cultural Differences and Stereotypes. Finally, the semester ends on the study of Food and Alcohol. This study’s main objective is to explore how Lucy thinks about various cultural concepts and how her thinking evolves in the course of the semester.

At the beginning of the semester, Lucy defines culture as being “a certain person's or ethnic group's way of life.” [Journal 2, September 04th]. Her views on culture are, to some extent, mirrored in her approach to learning about culture. For example, she is very interested in learning about Elisabeth’s way of life.
4.4.4. Cultural Development

4.4.4.1. The French and American Cultures:

The first theme of the semester was “who are we?” Students enrolled in this French 3 class were therefore required to think about what American culture is. They also had an opportunity to create a collage, representing them as students of their university. Lucy does not believe American culture can be defined specifically since it depends on individual’s life style:

“I do not believe the American culture can be specifically defined. It really just depends on a person's lifestyle. An eighty-year old man has a very contrasting life to that of a twenty-year old college student. I think that a forty-year old person with a full-time job and a family with two or three kids would be the most representative of the American culture.”  [Journal 2, September 04th]

Out of the four participants I chose to talk about, she is the only student who does not portray American culture as a melting pot. In fact, the definition she provides differs greatly from the other participants, mostly highlighting differences of generations. At the end of the semester, I ask Lucy to explain in what ways “a forty year old person with a full-time job and a family with two or three kids” is the most representative of the American culture. In her opinion, this image is representative of an American family:

“Lucy: Like I think it’s my age like ( ) like I’m still at the age I still live with my parents and that’s what it seems like a home and my friends still live with their parents like that’s the best way I knew how to describe it. I don’t know like that’s just kind of like the American family…mum and dad
Hélène: For you it’s kind of typical of an American family?
Lucy: yeah, yeah.”  [Interview]

Lucy admits that her knowledge about French culture before taking this class is limited to a stereotypical view:

“Hélène: Do you think you had any knowledge about French culture prior to this class?
Lucy: Kind of like the stereotypes you know like you see Paris and you see the Eiffel Tower and that they say that French people are romantic and that kind of stuff but that’s about it.”  [Interview]

In fact, for her questionnaire on French culture students were asked to fill out at the beginning of the semester, Lucy only answered three questions out of the eleven. Consequently, Lucy is clearly reluctant to give her definition of French culture:
“I am not really sure how I would define French culture. It seems to be very similar to American culture. Manners and politeness seem to be very important to the French people. They have hobbies and do things for fun. Sports are important in their culture, especially the sport Americans call soccer.”

Lucy does not see much difference between American and French culture, except maybe for manners and politeness, which “seem to be important to the French people.” Her definition is rather brief and she acknowledges her lack of confidence answering the question. Later in the same journal, she asserts once more that the two cultures seem very similar:

“The cultures of the two countries seem similar. Families are important, as is job security, education and politics. Some differences include the form of government, and the fact that in France college students have their tuition paid for them, unlike in America where college students are responsible for their own education.”

It is interesting how Lucy at the beginning of the semester considers the French and American cultures as being mostly similar. Note, however that this class will focus on the cultural differences throughout the semester. This narrative will examine if Lucy’s views on French culture change in the course of the semester. If so, how do they change? It will also investigate in what ways these changes lead Lucy to look at her own culture in a different way.

4.4.4.2. The September 11th Attacks

Like most students, Lucy is very troubled and scared by the attacks. She seems confused and is concerned that her country will seek revenge. The day after the bombings, she writes to her keypal describing how she feels:

“Bonjour Elisabeth!!!!

Je sais que tout qui se passe dans l’Amerique est terrible. Il est tres tragique. Tout ensemble il y avait quatre avions qui se sont ecrases. Nous ne savons pas exactement que le criminel est, mais je suis sur que notre pays ne prendra pas cet. Ils sont hors pour la revanche. Je ne veux pas aller a la guerre, parce que beaucoup de mes amis devront aller. Cela serait tres triste. Aucun de ma famille travaillee dans le World Trade Center, mais mon pere a utilise pour avoir un bureau la dedans quand j’etais jeune, et j’ai utilise pour aller la-bas et rester avec lui. Il est tres triste que maintenant ces batiments sont alles et ils ne seront jamais la-bas encore.”
Lucy is in shock and very wary about a potential war. She is alarmed that some of her friends might be sent to fight. She explains her views on the topic during her second netmeeting with her keypal (see below). She is also distressed by the destruction of the Twin Towers and with everything that has happened since. Note how she calls her keypal “l’ami” at the end of her email.

Within a few days following the tragedy, Lucy’s keypal writes two emails reacting to the attacks. Below is an excerpt of Elisabeth’s first email:

“Bonjour Lucy
J’ai appris ce qui c’est passé aux aux Etats-Unis hier, c’est terrible!! C’est une horreur!!!! I am very, very worried for you and all the americans. I hope that you are fine. I want you to say me if it happen the others things. Last monday I found netmeeting great and funny.” [Email, September 12th]

In this email, Elisabeth only briefly reacts to the attacks, expressing her sympathy to Lucy and the American people. At the end of the email, she moves on to talk about herself and asks questions about Lucy’s hobbies and personal life. Two days later, Elisabeth writes a second email, describing the aftermath of the event in France.

“Hello Lucy!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
How were you ? In France it’s the evening (22.52 pm) and I go to my bed soon because I'm very tired. This night I watched tv programme about bombing. I'm totally terrified by what happened. A big tragedy for the world and especially for the americans. I remembered tuesday when I came back in my home around five o'clock after the school, my little brother watched TV and cried “Oh my god! Big bombing in U.S.A” - I didn't believe what I saw. I stood stunned in front of these horrible pictures. All days, TV, radios, newspapers talk about this bombing because it is catastrophic!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
I'm afraid and I heard lots of people say that it will be a long war against the terrorism. When we speak with my friends or with my family, we want just one thing that all stop!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We don't want a war. It would be terrible for the world!!!!!!!!!!

Parlons un peu d'autres choses, ça nous changera les idées. Ce week-end je vais faire du shopping with my mother et j’irais peut être aussi au cinéma. Mais bon comme on a déjà
In the email above, Elisabeth describes how the media coverage on the tragedy is also extensive in France “All days, TV, radios, newspapers talk about this bombing because it is catastrophic.” Regrettably, she does not talk about the content of the French media coverage. Like Lucy, Elisabeth is very worried about the possibility of a war and is “terrified” with what happened. She then tells Lucy about her weekend activities. Her email is friendly and ends on a more positive tone, stressing that she is looking forward to speaking with Lucy again. Lucy is very touched by her keypal’s emails and also surprised that the French care so much about the tragedy as I mentioned briefly above:

“I was actually surprised that our keypals have seemed to express so much concern towards us after the tradegy occured. I received two emails from my keypal Elisabeth right after the event happened. She was so worried and wanted to know if I had anyone that lived or worked there. I am also surprised to find that I think that my keypal and I are going to be good friends. I was very unsure about us talking to them, but it is starting to be very much fun.”

The week following the attacks, students have an opportunity to further explain and describe their reactions to the event. Here are excerpts from Lucy’s discussion:

“We [...]
Keypals: Alors on va parler de l'attentat
Lucy: Elisabeth, est-ce que voue pensez que ces evenements causeront une guerre?
Keypals: oui ms ns espérons pas sinon ça va faire très très mal!!!!!!!!!!!!
Lucy: oui, moi aussi
David: l'attentat était et est trés horrible...
Keypals: Posez vos questions
Lucy: est-ce que vou s avez parle beaucoup des evenements dans l'ecole?
Keypals: Nous avons pu le constater à la télé
Keypals: oui beaucoup beaucoup et on en parle encore
David: Nadine, Penses-tu à les decisions fait à President Bush
Lucy: oui, est-ce que la France a eu des problemes avec les terroristes recemment?
Keypals: Je sais pas pas trop
Keypals: Récemment je sais plus mais il y a eut des attentats à Paris assez souvent
Lucy: Est-ce que vous pensez que l'Amerique attire l'haine?
Keypals: non pourquoi on ne comprend pas trop la question
[...]
Keypals: Lucy t'es toujours ici?
Lucy: oui, mais je ne veux pas la guerre
Keypals: Moi non plus ça serait horrible. Que penses tu de ce qui s'est passé? (Lucy)
[...]
Lucy: I think everything that has happened is terrible. Also, I think that we will go
to war, and many will die.
[...]
Keypals: Lucy comment as tu ressentit cette attentat
[...]
Lucy: this news makes me very sad
[...]
Elisabeth: What will it happen? And what do you think of bush?
Lucy: I do not know if I trust Bush, I do not think he is very smart.
[...]
Keypals: What would you like to do to help your land
David: to serve it
Nadine: yes
Lucy: We have been donating blood and giving money, but there is not much we
can do.
Lucy: If we have a war, many of my freinds would go.
[...]
Elisabeth: It would be terrible if it will have war because i think it would be world war,
the third
David: what i meant to say was: War does not necessarily mean something like
WWII
Keypals: I have understand know
Lucy: Yes, I agree, and many intelligent people have said that the third world war
would be the last.
[...]
Lucy: I do not think that anyone wants to go to war.
Lucy: We want all the horrible events to stop happening.
Elisabeth: What do you think about solidarity beetween the Americans?
[...]
Keypals: For us patriotism is not very important
Keypals: we don't sing "la marseillaise " all the days like you
Lucy: our country is more important to us right now, more than ever before
Keypals: We understand
Lucy: almost everyone has a flag outside at their homes
Keypals: Can you explain me what is the patriotism for you Lucy
Lucy: patriotism is how you feel proud for your country
Lucy: i love my country, and i love to live in the united states
Keypals: We have not a flag outsideat their home
David: I feel that if you do not have great confidence in the ability of your country
then you should find a country in which you do, why live in something you
arent content and confident with, i feel its going against the grain.
Elisabeth: Ok i understand but in France we aren't "fan" of patriotism
Lucy: i have heard that before
Elisabeth, it is time to go
Lucy: i will write to you very soon
Lucy: have a good day
[...]
[NM2, September 17th]
Lucy is very saddened by the events and is extremely afraid. Lucy is also very concerned about a possible war. In fact, this is mainly what they talk about in this netmeeting. Both believe that a war would be tragic and could become a third world war. In her discussion, Lucy also mentions her lack of trust in the President. As she already pointed out in her first email, she thinks the President likes violence and is looking for revenge. She questions her government’s political decisions and once more indicates that she is worried about some of her friends that may be sent to war. With her questions, she attempts to gain an understanding from an outsider’s point of view: she first asks her keypal if she thinks there will be a war, inquires about terrorism in France and wonders if America attracts hatred. Elisabeth remains rather brief in her comments, focusing on how devastating a war would be. At the end of the netmeeting, Lucy explains that solidarity and patriotism have become important in the United States as a way to stand against terrorism. She does not seem surprised that the French are not very patriotic in the American sense of the word. Later in her data, Lucy does not talk much about the notion of patriotism, except when requested in a homework assignment. The second netmeeting is the last time Lucy and Elisabeth talk about the attacks.

At the end of September, Lucy examines the American media’s coverage of the tragedy in her third journal:

*You talked about the tragedy that occurred in the United States. If you had to present to a French person how the events have been covered these past days, what would you say? What would you need to explain?*

“In the days following the events, the United States heard nothing of any of the other news going on in our country. The news broadcasts about the attack were on the radio, on the television, and filled the newspapers. The newscasts on the television were so developed that they did not advertise throughout the whole day of the event, the following night, and the next day. They were extremely in depth. The would have a reporter or an expert talking or being interviewed, while at the same time, they would have facts scrolling across the bottom of the screen, and also at the same time they would have the latest news coming out right under the picture of the reporter and above the words that were scrolling at the bottom of the screen. The newspaper in [our county, in our State], printed a special edition Tuesday afternoon, which was very unique. This newspaper was so desired, that they printed more copies of that same special edition newspaper, the following week. America was so filled in with everything that happened. When my roommates and I did not go to our afternoon classes, we just sat with bulging, yet teary eyes and we watched the tragedy live.”
Were there differences of analysis between the U.S and France? Please explain.

“I do think that there were very many differences of analysis between the United States and France. France responded to the tragedy exactly like the Americans in the United States; they offered their greatest sympathy, while at the same time, they were completely horrified that something so terrible could ever happen. I think that most of the world was in shock as we were.” [Journal 3, September 23rd]

Note how Lucy mainly describes the extensive media coverage. She does not, however, attempt to pin point the specific details of the coverage typical of American culture, which may be difficult to grasp for French people. She explains how the TV viewer was bombarded with information as texts were scrolling at the top and the bottom of the screen while someone was talking on television. Lucy does not analyze the content of the coverage in the United States, simply highlights how many Americans turned to the media for information (they watch the news often and read newspapers, etc.). Moreover, she does not view differences between the French media coverage and the American one. Once again, she limits her journal entry to a description, indicating that the French were as “horrified” as the Americans and offered their sympathy to the American people.

At the end of the semester, she makes the same point accentuating that there were not many differences in the French and American media coverage. The only difference she stresses is that the coverage was more meaningful for Americans considering that the attacks happened in the United States:

“Hélène: I know that in class you talked a lot about the September 11th attacks. Do you think there were different things in the way they [the French] perceived the events and the way they analyzed it I guess.

Lucy: I think that they looked at it as the same as awful and horrible but I mean it’s different if it happens to them or if it happens to us. Like it happened to them like we’d know about it but we’d go on like the next day. I mean that’s probably the same day. It was just different because it was them I mean it was US and not them. But they were like thought it was horrible like they treated the same it was horrible like terrorists are horrible. I think that [we’ve been] pretty much the same but it was more meaningful for us ‘cause it was our country.

Hélène: I was wondering... was it helpful for you to talk about it and to talk about it with someone from another country?

Lucy: Yeah, yeah. Because you could it’s always good to talk about stuff and then you could explain like she wanted to know like she heard what happened but she didn’t know really how important the Twin Towers were and then New York City like the ( ) just base in the United States it’s where everything goes on. It was you know then you could talk about it and then explain it.” [Interview]
In her fourth journal, Lucy chooses to react to two quotes related to the attacks. She further explains her opinions on French and American views of the event:

“For each statement, answer the following questions:

a) in the Spring 2001, what would have been your reaction to this statement?
b) thinking nowadays (late october 2001), how would you comment and analyze the statement? If there was any change in your understanding of the statement, what made the change come about? c) what (positive or negative) characteristics or (positive or negative) values of American culture do you notice in the statement?
d) How do you think a French person would react to his statement?

*. Why is everyone freaking out? The country is doing everything it can to prevent more terrorists attacks. Obviously, it may not be successful, and more people, including me, could die. But I'm not going to spend every minute worrying about this. I'm going to live my life and enjoy it, because who knows when it will all end?
a) I would agree with this statement in Spring 2001, and not think much about it.
b) Today I would still agree with this statement but it would have a lot more meaning behind it. I might think a little harder about it, and it would remind me of everything that has happened lately.
c) I think this statement has some positive things in it, since we are being strong and trying to not let these events get us down.
d) A French person would most likely agree with the statement, but I am sure that they will not have the same affect because their country was not just recently tormented by terrorists.

*. I think that the media has done a good job and explaining the events that have been going on.
a) I would agree with this in Spring 2001, because then there weren't major events going on.
b) I still agree with this statement today. The broadcasting companies put off advertising for a few days. That was a huge loss of money to them. They have keep us up to date on everything that we are legally allowed to know about.
c) I think this statement is positive. Our media has done their best to keep us informed. Sometimes it was horrible to see the sites, but it helped in that it made our people mad and want to get revenge. We can't let terrorists get away with this.
d) A French person might respond by agreeing with this also. The French media covered the events in the United States very thoroughly also from what I understand from my keypal.”

[Journal 4, October 21st]

Here, Lucy chooses to focus on solidarity, underlining American attempts to “be strong and trying to not let these events get [Americans] down.” She also believes that the French would probably react in a very similar way. Commenting on the second quote, she asserts being satisfied with the way the American media covered the event. In her opinion, she was properly informed and is pleased with their decision to put off advertising. In her third point, there is a change of tone compared to the netmeeting. In her second netmeeting and in her first emails (see above), she was concerned with the
feeling of “revenge” expressed by the President and by some Americans. She now stresses that viewing difficult images was a necessary step to make people mad and feel revengeful because terrorists can’t “get away with this”. Finally, in her opinion, the French media talked about the attacks in similar ways and therefore believes the French would react in the same manner she has. Unlike Julie, she does not see the differences.

At the end of the semester a question on patriotism was asked for their last journal. Lucy emphasizes once more that the French were supportive and sympathetic. She also does not think that discussions in class on patriotism changed her views on the concept:

“In September (for reasons linked to the news as well as to images you had in your head about France) a theme that the class raised was "patriotism". I gave you various approaches to the topic throughout the semester. 

a) What was your definition of American patriotism in September? (values, beliefs, actions) 

Being proud of one's own country.

b) Back in September, what aspects of patriotism did you see (thought you saw) in France or French people? 

They were very supportive of Americans with the events of September 11th, and they were concerned with the explosion in Toulouse.

c) Now, at the end of the semester, have these definitions and images changed? Develop at least a paragraph about this idea of "patriotism". You can use some ideas discussed on Tuesday during the "chat".

I don't really think my definitions or images on patriotism have changed. Even though, the popularity of the American flag has died somewhat, most Americans are still very proud to live here, including myself.” [Journal 6, December 4th]

Her remarks are very brief showing that Lucy is not engaged in a reflective approach. She remains descriptive about what she observes, without elaborating or analyzing. She affirms being patriotic and believes that the “popularity of the American flag” has disappeared to some extent but stresses that she, as most Americans, remains very proud of her country. Note that in b), she does not really answer the question. She does not talk about the French perspective on patriotism, rather chooses to focus on the French solidarity.
In the data that I collected, she hardly refers to the French perspective on the attacks. During the interview, I ask Lucy if she believes that the French are patriotic.

This is her reply:

“Hélène: I know that in class you’ve talked a lot about the notion of patriotism
Lucy: uh-huh
Hélène: do you think it is different from here?
Lucy: Oh definitely. [My kepal] told me they don’t have a flag at their house, they
don’t they hardly ever sing their national anthem I mean at sporting events
here we sing it every time.
Hélène: Do you think that the French are patriotic?
Lucy: not really. I think that they’re proud of certain things like they’re proud of
their food, they’re proud of euh [...] their culture but I don’t think they’re
really that proud of their country well maybe they’re proud of their country
but they don’t seem to show it they don’t… Like WE’re proud of our country
we have our flag everywhere and there it’s not like that I don’t think
Hélène: Did that surprise you too?
Lucy: yeah it did yeah. I mean you think you see like the world cup soccer I mean I
mean one of my friends that lives in France sent me a magazine picture of the
streets. It was like a couple years ago when they won it and the streets were
just like full of people, it was crazy but then you say things like they’re so
proud of their country but they don’t apply and that kind of stuff”

[Interview]

For Lucy, the French may be proud in certain aspects of their culture, notably their food
but she does not think that they are patriotic. She does not conceive that “patriotism”
could be celebrated in other ways than singing the national anthem or displaying the flag.
She claims to be surprised about the French’s lack of patriotism. Unlike Julie and Mary,
discussions in class did not change her perspective on patriotism, nor did it change her
definition of it.

4.4.4.3. Cultural Differences and Stereotypes

4.4.4.3.1. Cultural Differences

By the end of September, students have the opportunity to discuss cultural differences.
They draw their questions from a survey, which was completed by the classes in France
and in the United States (see section 4.1.2). They examine the results and compare the
differences as the excerpts below show:
Elisabeth: OK. Tu sais ce que c’est le thème aujourd’hui ?
Lucy : oui, la majorité de votre a dit que l’âge le plus difficile est entre 13 et 17, est-ce que vous consent ?
la majorité
Elisabeth : Oui à cet âge on se pose beaucoup de questions. T’en pense quoi ?
Lucy : oui
Je consente
Elisabeth : Que penses tu de l’âge entre 0 et 8 ans ?
Lucy : Je pense que entre 0 et 8 ans facile
Elisabeth : Pourrais tu me dire pourquoi ?
Lucy : j’adore quand j’étais petite
Elisabeth : oui, moi aussi on vivait s’en seposer des questions, non ?
Lucy : je ne comprends pas
Elisabeth : On pensait qu’a s’amuser, à vivre et nos parentsns apprenanit tt
Lucy : oui, je consente
Elisabeth : Tandis que maintenant c’est à nous de ns débrouiller !!!!!
Quelles sont tes priorités dans la vie ?
Lucy : mom familie, mes amies, le college, mon chat
[...]
Et toi Elisabeth ?
Elisabeth : Mes priorités sont ma familie, mes amis. S’occuper de tous ceux que j’aime sans oublier de penser à moi
Lucy : oui
Elisabeth : Et quand on vous dit famile ça te fait penser à quoi ?
Lucy : l’amour, l’amusement, les activites
[...]
and you, what is family to you ?
Elisabeth : For me, when i heard family i think to my parents because i love them. They are all for me
Lucy : that is good
[...]
what do you think of mcdonalds
Elisabeth : Mc Donalds, do you like food ?
Lucy : Sometimes, it is very very unhealthy
I only eat it if i am too lazy to cook
Elisabeth : I go to Mc Donalds sometimes because my little brother love hamburger !!
Lucy : that is funny
Did you say your brother is 12 years old ?
Elisabeth : We laugh very much but I am not « fan » of hamburger !!! My brother is 12 years old
Lucy : Do you think that alcohol is bad ?
Elisabeth : I like alcohol, but it can be dangerous if you drink very much
Do you like it ?
Lucy : yes, but you are right, it can be very dangerous, my boyfriend was in a bad accident two months ago because of alcohol
Elisabeth : In France we can drink alcohol at 16 years old
Lucy : nice
Do you parents get mad if you drink ?
Elisabeth : is it a grave accident ?
My parents don’t want that i drink lots of but they accept that i drink
Lucy: it was bad, he was in the hospital, that is good that your parents accept that you drink, we have to be 21 here to drink, i have 11 months until I turn 21 my parents do not like that i drink at college
Elisabeth: my parents doesn’t want but in parties ok
[...]” [NM3, September 24th]

Here, Lucy and her keypal bring up a few cultural aspects to discuss. They start their conversation with personal questions such as what is the age they perceive as being the most difficult or what their priorities are in life. As you can notice, their answers are fairly similar. They also ponder about what family entails for each one of them. What they associate with the word “family” differs a bit. Lucy does not mention any family member but rather concentrates on the emotions (love, fun) whereas for her keypal, “family” is very much related to “parents”. Finally, Lucy and her keypal talk about McDonalds and alcohol. They both think McDonalds food is not healthy and avoid eating there. Lucy is pleasantly surprised that the legal drinking age is 16 years old in France (“nice”) and sounds eager to reach the American legal age (“I have 11 months until I turn 21”). They both believe that abusing alcohol can be dangerous. Lucy is interested in learning these concepts from a personal perspective and more specifically in knowing Elisabeth’s views on some issues. Note for example, how Lucy does not inquire what the French do in general but rather what her keypal’s habits and perceptions of a few cultural concepts are. She is not interested in knowing if her keypal is representative of the French population at large.

By asking each other many questions, Lucy gains an understanding of some cultural differences and above all is compelled to think about her own culture. The discussion on cultural differences continues in class. In groups, students in the United States compare results of the survey between the French and the American classes.

Below is an essay where Lucy summarizes what came up from the various discussions:

“Les sujets dont nous avons parlés, ce sont la famille, l'alcool, le McDonalds, et ce dont nous avons peur. Nous avons découvert que la famille est très importante, mais ils passent beaucoup de temps avec ses amis. Ils ont beaucoup d'amour pour leur parents et ils sont leur priorités. Aussi, nous avons parlé d'alcool. Ils pensent que l'alcool est dangereux, mais si on le boit avec modération, il n'est pas un problème. Ils peuvent, boire l'alcool quand ils ont 16 ans. Ses parents ne veulent pas leur enfants boire l'alcool, mais ils comprennent s'ils le font. Avec les repas, les parents boivent du vin et quelquefois les aperitifs. Ils n'aiment pas souvent McDonalds mais ils le mangent quelquefois. Beaucoup d'enfants ont peur d'avenir. Ils ont beaucoup de pression parce qu'ils doivent passer le bac.
pour assister l'universitaire. Le Bac est très difficile et ils passent environ 28 heures pour étudier chaque semaine. Souvent, quelqu'uns n'ont pas d'une idée à propos d'un façon pour obtenir les rêves.

Pour les Américains, nous aimons notre famille, mais nous passons beaucoup de temps avec nos amis, comme le français. Quelque fois les enfants Américains n'ont pas la respecte pour leurs parents, mais il n'est pas la majorité. Nous assistons [Université de X] ou on peut trouver l'alcool chaque fête, chaque soir dans la semaine. Nous savons que l'alcool est dangereux, mais il ne nous arrête pas. Rarement, nos parents boivent du vin avec les repas, mais quelquefois ils le boivent pour l'occasion spécialment. McDonalds est un icon Américain et la plupart l'aime. Beaucoup de personnes pensent qu’il est sain pour nos-mêmes. Nous n'offrons pas le même choix que le français. Quelqu'uns ont peur de ne trouver pas une poste après l’universitaire. Nous ne savons pas ce que l'avenir a pour nous.

Les similarités que nous découvrons, sont a propos d'avenir et de famille. Nous avons les différences sur les sujets d'alcool et un peu de McDonalds. Nous sommes étonnants que nous avons beaucoup de similarités parce que nous habitons sur les pays différents.”

[Essay, September 25th]

In her essay, Lucy takes a descriptive stand where she underlines the similarities and the differences of the results. Note how at the end of her essay, she is surprised to find so many similarities between the French and American students considering that they “live in different countries”, when at the beginning of the semester she did not think that the French and Americans were different. In her essay, she highlights that family is important for the French and American students. She also points that perceptions on alcohol differ, underlining that drinking wine may be more frequently done in France. Furthermore, she asserts that alcohol is frequently used and abused at the university, a point she did not discuss in her third netmeeting. Describing the French way of life, she stresses that students in France are pressured to work hard for the baccalauréat (the high school diploma), which French students need to pass in order to be able to attend university. In her essay, she simply sums up information she has gathered while studying cultural differences. She describes the similarities and the differences without trying to explain them. She does not specifically compare the class results to her keypal’s personal answers. She notes cultural points without reflecting on them.
School schedule

French school schedule actually astonishes Lucy as she talks about it quite often. At the end of the third netmeeting, Lucy realizes that it is late in France and is surprised that her keypal is still at school:

“[…]
Elisabeth: Have a good day! ! What is time in America?
Lucy: It is 11
What time is it in France?
Elisabeth: 5 pm
Lucy: Why are you in school?
Elisabeth: School stop at 5.30pm
Lucy: oh
Well have a good night☺”  

In her next email, she brings up this point again:

“Vous remercie beaucoup pour répondre à mes questions. Je ne peux pas croire que vous partez si et rentrez de bon matin si tardif. Je pars à 9:30 pour l'école et reçois la maison vers 2:30. Voici vos réponses: je pars la maison beaucoup. Aujourd'hui je suis allé à l'école trois temps différents.”  

Lucy’s schedule is more relaxed and allows her to go back home several times during the day. Lucy’s keypal sounds very jealous:

“Tu as de la chance de finir l'école à 2:30 p.m. Tu fais quoi alors l'après midi pendant "your freetime”? Nous on a cours toute la journée. Parfois c'est énervant quand même!”

So Lucy is quite surprised by some cultural aspects that they discuss in class. She mentions in her interview that she wishes she had talked more about Lucy’s life at school and what classes she takes. Lucy remains interested in learning what Elisabeth’s life is like. The two students rarely talk about broader concepts, there are only a few examples where Lucy and Elisabeth share their views on certain political issues as discussed below.

Death Penalty

Lucy’s keypal has to prepare a presentation on death penalty for her baccalauréat. Thus, she asks a few questions on that topic. The first question, Lucy’s keypal asks on September 28th in an email: “what do you think about death peine?” Lucy supports the death penalty for violent crimes as she explains to her keypal”:

“Je consens beaucoup avec la peine de mort. Si une personne tue un jour pour quelque chose stupide, ils méritent pour recevoir puni.”

[Email, October 1st]
Later, Elisabeth asks Lucy to elaborate and further explain her opinion on the topic:
“[…] I have questions for you:
I wish you explain to me how you feel death penalty and what do you think?
Can you write a small paragraph about it? It would be very nice because we do this topic in TPE.
Do you think that all criminals should be killed? Why?
Do you think that death penalty is a good solution? Why?
Which is the best punishment? Prison or death penalty? Why?
Je te remercie d'avance. Tes réponses nous aiderons beaucoup.”
[Email, October 12th]

This is Lucy’s reply:
“Je pense que la peine de mort est bonne parfois. Je ne veux pas un tres mauvais criminel qui marche les rues. Parfois la punition de seance dans la prison pour la vie pourrait etre mauvaise aussi. Je ne pense pas que tous criminels doivent etre tues. Si le crime n'est pas mauvais, alors ils doivent seulement passe du temps dans la prison. Je pense que la peine de mort est une bonne solution pour les tres mauvais criminels.”
[Email, October 15th]

In her short answer above, Lucy clearly states that she fully supports death penalty and is in no way questioning this type of punishment.

Lucy’s keypal does not share the same views on death penalty. She explains why in a follow up email:
“Thanks for your answers to my questions about the death penalty. We chose to study the inequalities and the injustices in the death penalty. We read that more Black people than white people executed. I will explain to you more in the next letter because now I have to eat with my family.”
[Email, October 22nd]

Lucy’s keypal is against death penalty because she believes it underscores the unfairness of the justice system but does not further explain what she means. Interestingly, in the exchanges transcribed above, Lucy and Elisabeth do not challenge each other’s views. Lucy does not attempt to gain a clear understanding of what her keypal means nor does she comment on her keypal’s views. Furthermore, she does not attempt to understand whether her keypal’s views are representative of the French views at large. Their conversation on the topic stops here and does not drive Lucy to look at the issue from a different angle. In her interview, Lucy mentions the death penalty as a topic that was discussed and indicates that her keypal was surprised that the death penalty existed in the United States:
“Hélène: You said that you and your keypal have talked a lot about huge variety of different topics, death penalty, Mc Donalds, poverty, social security, violence. What came up from these conversations?

Lucy: She hates violence and guns. She never touched a gun that kind of stuff. […] And the death penalty I think she says that they don’t have a death penalty and that she found it hard to believe that we .. we actually kill people ( ) crimes with lethal injection and that kind of stuff.

Hélène: Were you surprised by some of the discussions you had?

Lucy: Some of them like the violence and the politics like we have the same views on that but the death penalty I mean like I’m in favor of death penalty for violent crimes and she was like very surprised that I agree with it and that we we still have it.”

[Interview]

In the comment above, Lucy only stresses their difference of opinions without commenting on her keypal’s views. Lucy and her keypal simply exchange their views on the topic without elaborating on how the death penalty is perceived in the French or American culture at large. She respects Elisabeth’s views, without the will to look at the topic from a different perspective.

4.4.4.3.2. Images of Otherness

Prior to this class, Lucy’s knowledge about French people or French culture is limited to stereotypical views. Toward the beginning of October, students reflect on the views the French have of them (see collage, Appendix F) as well as the views they have of the French. They study stereotypes extensively as an image people project of other cultures. Students in France prepare a collage where they display French stereotypes of Americans. In the data collected however, Lucy does not comment nor does she react to the collage.

As an assignment she interviews five of her friends and inquire about their ideas of France or the French:

“Quand ils entend “France”, gens j’ai interviewé pense d’un beau, romantique pays avec le Eiffel, Paris, fromage, trains et où gens sont romantique. En particulier, selon les gens j’a interviewé, français hommes sont hommes qui sont feminin et qui sont robuste, gentil, chaud, sexy et français femmes qui a sombre cheveux, scarves et qui sont maigre et joli.”

[Essay, September 27th]

In the paragraph above, Lucy briefly lists the results of her investigation.
A week later, students further compare stereotypes during a netmeeting. In the fourth netmeeting, Lucy and her fellow students name what their stereotypes are:

“Melissa: Quand les Americans entendent "France" ils pensent sur le vin, la tour eiffel, le frommage,
Keypal: et quand ils entendent français, ils pensent quoi?
[...]
Melissa: On pense que L'arc de Triumph, la Cathedrale de Notre Dame, Paris, Lyons, Marseilles,
Keypal: et sur les français en tant que personnes? Quelle est votre image d'un français?
Lucy, si tu as des questions, n'hésite pas à me demander!
Melissa: notre image ou l'image par le ameicains en general?
Keypal: en général!
Il ne faut pas que vous soyez gênés pas vos idées, n'aillez pas peur de dire ce que vous pensez!
Lucy: intelligente, et moderne
Melissa: on pense que les francais sont intelligents, menchants, impolis, et ils font de l'exclusion.
Keypal: Qu'est ce que vous voulez dire pour Exclusion, impoli, moderne?
Melissa: I think that the image of modern or fashionable comes from Paris and the many modeling aspects of that city.
Keypal: Yes,I think that all what you said in "les français comme nous les imginons" comes from Paris or other big cities
Do you really think that French people are snobbish, stubborn and arrogant for the boys
Melissa: As for being impolite, i think that a lot of Americans have had bad experiences in France, most of which comes from misunderstandings.
Lucy: Sometimes they are stereotyped as arrogant, but we can not assume they are, if we have not met them
Melissa: Americans smile A LOT, and i guess that in france it is seen as if you smile your are either making fun of someone or stupid.
Keypal: I think there are not a lot of people as you describe them.
yes, you are right, but I think we smile a lot.
In France, we often smile when we are happy, we smile to someone when we like him or her, but we smile in the street, although we do not know people!
Melissa: If you were in an elevator with someone you didn't know would you smile at them and if so why?
Keypal: It depends. I would smile, if this person seems nice or if I am happy
Melissa: In America we smile at the person just to show that we are friendly and not harmful.
Keypal: Do you think we are harmful?
Lucy: No
Melissa: No
not at all..
its just that in America some people can be afriad due to some of the crimes that go on.
Keypal: Afraid if you don't smile?
Do you think that girls are hairy, easy lay....
Melissa: no just timid about someone who wouldn't smile.
Lucy: i have heard stereotypes about girls being hairy, but that is hard to believe now
Keypal: Yes, it is hard. This picture comes from after WWII but now, it has changed...
Melissa: We personally don't think that, we think it's something from the past that hasn't been updated
Lucy: most of us thought that that was how it used to be, but not anymore
Keypal: OK!
Melissa: People in America are very concerned about their looks and their appearance
Keypal: In France too
At school, it is necessary to be fashionable
Lucy: why?
Melissa: it was for us in high school but not as much in college
Keypal: I think it is because we often judge people by their appearances
Lucy: we do a lot
but we shouldn't
Melissa: Not everyone judges by appearance though.
Keypal: No, we shouldn't! I do not judge people by their appearance
Lucy: that is good
Keypal: because I think that clothes don't make the person
Melissa: We don't either
Melissa: that is true.
Lucy: no clothes do not make a person, the person makes the person
Keypal: I agree with you
Why do you say that France is the most romantic country?
Lucy: some Americans go to Paris for their honeymoon
Melissa: We see that in the movies France or Paris is the city of romance.
it is basically what we have been conditioned to think
Keypal: I think that in France, we would say that Venice is the most romantic city
Lucy: why?
Keypal: Because a lot of French people go to Venice for honeymoon
Melissa: What do you think of as romantic?
Keypal: like Roméo and Juliette
do you understand what I mean?
Melissa: Yes
[...]” [NM4, October 1st]

At the beginning of their conversation, American students list the stereotypes they have of France. They are mostly related to famous touristic places in Paris such as Notre Dame or l’Arc de Triomphe. They also qualify the French as being “intelligent, modern, mean and rude” but do not necessarily believe these stereotypes represent reality. The French keypal stresses that she does not recognize herself or French people in general in the images American students project. According to Melissa’s keypal, “there are not a lot of people as you describe them” and she argues that these representations come from Paris or any other big cities.
In their discussion, students have an opportunity to examine where the stereotypes come from and how representative they may be. For example, they argue that the French are viewed as “modern” because Paris is a city of fashion. They also believe that the image of the hairy woman is no longer representative of reality but may have been true during WWII. Moreover, brainstorming about stereotypes spurs the students to think about their own culture. The American students explain that French people are portrayed as rude because they don’t smile as much as Americans do. In the dialogue, Melissa incorporates information from her readings, where cultural differences between the French and Americans were described and explained. Students are compelled to observe and analyze their own culture in order to explain it to their keypals. They take an observer’s view and reason about their culture. They also reconsider stereotypes they may have of the French as they realize that they “have been conditioned to think [that way]”. For example, they “have been conditioned to think” that the French are romantic.

Note how Lucy is fairly quiet in this discussion and seems reluctant to give any negative images. For example, she admits that “they [the French] are stereotyped as arrogant but quickly adds “but we can not assume that they are if we have not met them.” Rather, she chooses to focus on the positive aspect. In fact, she believes that stereotypes are a source of tension and confusion, as she explains later in the semester:

“Les Stéréotypes
Les stéréotypes sont souvent une source de tension et confusion. Chaque culture, chaque pays, chaque religion, presque n'importe quoi dans le monde a été connu par les stéréotypes. Ils peuvent être bons ou mauvais. Souvent, ils ne sont pas vrais. Il est triste qu'ils puissent être méchant, faux, et ils peuvent être souvent une excuse pour le meurtre.

Beaucoup d’Américains pensent aux villes ou monuments en France quand nous nous sommes renseigné sur France. Quelques-uns sont la tour eiffel, la Cathédrale de Notre Dame, Paris, Lyons, et Marseilles. Nous pensons au fromage et vin aussi. Beaucoup d'Américains pensent que les femmes françaises ne se rasent pas. Mon keypal Elisabeth déclaré que ce stereotype vient après WWII, mais maintenant ce stéréotype a changé. Un stéréotype que les Américains croient est que Paris et France sont des endroits romantique. Mon keypal a dit que la plupart des gens français disent que Vénise est la ville la plus romantique vi.

Les stéréotypes sont d'habitude mauvaises. Ceci est seulement un pays, pense combien de stéréotypes sont dans le monde.”

[Essay, October 14th]
According to Lucy, most stereotypes are negative images of a culture or a religion. She stresses that these representations can have a very negative impact on a society at large since they can lead some people to murder. I am assuming that here she refers to murders related to xenophobia. In the core of her essay, she summarizes the main ideas that were discussed in the netmeeting. She mainly mentions a few stereotypes they discussed. Interestingly, she does not mention the differences in smiling conventions even though their discussion on the topic was somewhat long. She reiterates at the end that stereotypes are bad. By studying stereotypes, she is made to think of images one culture reflects. Unfortunately, she does not comment on them, nor does she explain what she has learned about her own culture from the discussions on stereotypes and cultural differences.

Through out her data, Lucy makes clear that she does not like conflict. When discussing the aftermath of September 11th, she is very concerned about the level of violence. In the conversation she has with her keypal on guns and violence, she accentuates her dislike for tension:

"Elisabeth: Ca te dirait de parler de la violence, des armes?
[...]
Elisabeth: Alors la violence, ready?
Lucy: oui
je deteste la violence, elle est triste
Elisabeth: Pour toi quand on dit violence c'est quoi?
Lucy: pour moi, il est l'haine, angerness, une excuse
Elisabeth: angerness??Tu peux expliquer en anglais si tu veux
Lucy: fache
tu comprendes?
Elisabeth: pas trop
Lucy: et toi, quelle est la violence?
violence?
Elisabeth: Je pense que la violence est une horreur, elle ne règle aucuns problèmes. La violence c'est la haine, le mal, la rage
Est ce que tu penses qu'elle est très présente aux USA?
Lucy: oui, trop, elle est partout aujourd'hui
Elisabeth: Je suis d'accord elle se trouve partout dans le monde. Mais on entend beaucoup dire qu'elle est plus élevée aux USA car la vente d'arme est libre. Qu'en penses tu?
Lucy: Je consens. Nous devons payer toujours des armes, et parfois nous avons besoin d'un permis.
Elisabeth: Que penses tu "the arms freely available"?
Es tu plutôt pour ou contre?"
Lucy: oui, je peux acheter des weapons, je souhaite il y a plus de règles, de que est-ce que vous avez besoin acheter des armes en france?

Elisabeth: En France nous ne pouvons pas acheter des "guns" comme ça, juste pour nous défendre. It's illegal. Je ne pense pas que d'avoir une arme avec toi soit une moyen sur de se défendre. Qu'en penses tu?

Lucy: Est-ce que nous avons besoin des armes pour nous defendre, mais nous avons besoin de faire attention qui peut avoir des armes. Je ne suis pas pour ou contre.

Elisabeth: OK. Je suis d'accord il faut faire attention aux personnes qui ont des armes.

Lucy: je suis d'accord

Elisabeth: English now. Are there lots of violence in you college and in your campus?

Lucy: no, not too much, but I think that there was more before the world trade center incident. I think people are more caring right now and in your school?

Elisabeth: in my college there aren't lots of violence but it's possible. I don't like see it. I hate that

Elisabeth: Do you know people who have guns?

Lucy: I know people who have guns to hunt, my father has guns that he uses to hunt, but besides that, my family nor my friends have guns. guns are very scary objects, i have never touched one

Elisabeth: OK. I don't know people who have guns. […]" [NM5, October 15th]

Both Lucy and her keypal are afraid of violence. Lucy defines violence as “hatred, anger and an excuse”. Her keypal shares similar views on the concept, underscoring that violence is simply horrible and certainly does not solve any problems. Lucy believes that violence is an issue in today society, “elle est partout aujourd'hui.” In their exchange, Lucy and her keypal compare the legal situations concerning guns, guns being freely available in the United States. In Elisabeth’s opinion, making guns legal increases crime. Lucy acknowledges that it is possible to buy guns and indicates that she would like more regulations on guns sales. She considers guns “scary objects” but does not, however, necessarily believe they should be banned, simply expressing her opinion on gun control.

The exchange leads Lucy to think about her culture and explain her views on a few cultural topics (see essay below). However, her keypal’s views have not made Lucy look at guns and crime differently. In her essay on the views the French have of Americains, she simply focuses on the differences and hardly mentions her keypal’s perspective. In fact, she mainly summarizes class discussions. This is what Lucy has to say:
“L’image de France et Amérique nous a étonné dans beaucoup des façons. Nous avons quelques façons où nous sommes similaires et n’avons pas beaucoup de façons différentes. Là-bas sont beaucoup de façons comparer et constraste les gens, langue, et croyances des deux pays.

Une différence majeure est des façons. Les Américains sont à l’heure et ceci est ce que nous appelons “professionnel.” Les Français pourraient faire attendre une personne pour montrer qu’ils désapprouvent d’idées ou montrer leur autorité. Pour les façons, les enfants françaises se sont comporté très bien, et beaucoup des gens français sont choqués quand ils voient comment les enfants américains agissent. Un autre est ce qu’un sourire signifie pour les Français gens et ce qu’il signifie pour les Américains. Pour un Américain, un sourire est simplement un bonjour sans mots, ou un signe d’amitié ou bienveillance. Ceci est stupide pour les Français. C’est un signe de stupidité.

Quand nous parlons des personnalités des cultures, ils sont aussi différents. Les américains sont souvent impatients, contrairement aux français qui semblent être plus patients. Les Américains aime faire des plans et les garder à la ligne. Les français n’aiment les pas plans et sont souvent organisés au hasard.

Les Américains font des travaux rapidement. Ils viennent travailler tôt, mange des déjeuners courts, finissent à la fin l’après-midi et rentrent à la maison. Les Français entrent au travail plus tard le matin et travail lent plus tard le soir. Ils prennent les pauses de déjeuner plus longues.

Cet essai a parlé seulement des différences entre les deux cultures. Je pense qu’il prendrait un autre essai de parler d’une partie des similiarités.

Lucy talks neither about images the French have of Americans nor those Americans have of the French. In her essay, she provides a list of cultural differences between the French and the American cultures without examples to support her statements, which she limits to broad generalizations. Consequently, her essay sounds rather stereotypical as she gives a list of cultural facts. She draws her assertions from class discussions, without referring to any of her keypal’s comments or treating the topics that they discussed.

There seem to be two separate activities that she does not connect: class discussions and assignments on one hand and conversations with her keypal on the other.

At the end of her essay, she emphasizes that there are also many similarities between the two cultures and believes that the similarities outweigh the differences:

In what ways are French people similar to American people? In what ways are they different? Name three differences that seem very important to you, and explain why they seem important.

French people are similiar to Americans in many ways. It seems that to the majority of the people of both countries, guns and violence are very scary things. Education is important to both. Social Security is important, but it is ran somewhat different. One
important difference is that guns are illegal to buy in France, that is opposite of America. Another major difference is that French students attend school all day. My keypal stated that she gets up at 6:30 am and gets home around 8 p.m. That is very different from the United States. A final difference is how college educations are treated. In France, students must take the BAC and if they get in their college is paid for. Americans, on the other hand, take SAT's which aren't quite as important, and they still pay for all or most of their education.”

[Journal 4, October 21]

Once more, she limits her remarks to a list of cultural differences and similarities. In her journal entry, she does not really show her analytical skills or a reflective approach to language and culture.

4.4.4.4. Food and Alcohol

The end of the semester is dedicated to discussing food and alcohol. Food is a topic Lucy enjoys greatly as she underscores in her interview:

“Hélène: What cultural aspects have interested you the most in that class?
Lucy: um.. the food was interesting… What kind of food they eat, like the cheese and the bread. I liked talking about that.”

[Interview]

Before their sixth netmeeting, students read articles on globalization and analyze its impact on the food industry. Then, American students talk about the issue with their keypal:

“Lucy: Elisabeth- Qu’est-ce que tu sais de Jose Bove?
Keypals: C’est le militant anti-mondialisation.
Lucy: D’accord, est-ce que vous êtes d’accord avec ses actions?
Keypals: Je suis pas fan de Mac Do mais je ne suis pas d’accord avec ses actions
Lucy: Elisabeth, est-ce que tu manges a Mac Do souvent?
Keypals: Pas trop souvent mais ça m’arrive avec des copains ou mon frère je pense que c’est dangereux.J’ai une amie qui connait quelqu’un qui a trouvé un os dans son Hubergger et c’était un os de souris.
Lucy: Qu’est-ce que tu manges d’habitude là-bas?
Keypals: hamburgers:Mc Baccon(I love it), chips, sundaes(Mc Flurry).. and my brother love Big Mac
Lucy: est-ce que t’a les chips a Mac Do en France?
Keypals: I mean you have chips at McDonalds in France?
Keypals: Yes of course

[...]

Keypals: ok! do you know the percentage of people who eat fast food in the USA?
Lucy: We do not have potato chips at McDonalds in the United States.
Keypals: You haven't chips in USA???? It is very strange!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Lucy: no, we have chips, but McDonalds does not sell them
Keypals: OK I think it very strange!!!!!!

Do women like cooking?
D. & S.: we are not sure about the actual percentage of people who eat is, but it is a lot of people a year
D. & S.: some do and some don't
men like cook too
men like to cook too
Keypals: like in France. Oh it's good that men like cooking!
[...]

Lucy: is McDonalds a cheap place for you to eat?
[...]
Keypals: No. I prefer to go to restaurant to eat french, indian, mexican... or I like eating what my mother makes
[...]
Keypals: Yes I'm very afraid about hormonals beef it is scary*
D. & S.: why?
Keypals: I think it is very dangerous for health
Lucy do you like french food?
D. & S.: how? specifically?
Lucy: Elisabeth, you like Mexican and Italian food?
Keypals: I don't understand can you explain to me what you want to say
D. & S.: In what way is it dangerous to your health...how do you think it will harm you?
Elisabeth: Yes I like eat differently but I find that french food is the best
Lucy: Did you say that you like Mexican food?
Elisabeth: Yes I like mexican food
Lucy: Do you worry about the beef in that?
Keypals: I can be ill
in that? Mexican beef? American beef? WITH HORMONALS
What is the famous dish in the USA
D. & S.: if it makes you ill, then why don't americans get sick from eating it?
Lucy: in
Lucy: in Mexican beef
Lucy: do you worry about hormones in Mexican beef?
Keypals: Yes I worry about beef in America and in Mexican
in a long time
Lucy: what do you think the hormones do to your body?
Elisabeth?
Keypals: Do you think there is a difference between the rich and the poor, as regards fast-food?
With hormonals your body become like someone who do body building, very big!!!!
You become a monster
D. & S.: yes. I don't think that many rich people eat fast food, but many do just because it is fast and it tastes good
That does not happen from eating homonal beef
Lucy: monster?????!?
D. & S.: that only happens if you take the hormones directly in forms like steroids
Keypals: Sorry are you not agree with me? What do you think?
D. & S.: you don't have to be sorry
Lucy: I think that hormones only make you big if you put them straight into your body with a needle or a pill
Keypals: Ok is it true that rich people are slimmer?
D. & S.: yes and no
there are some that are, and some that are not
Keypals: It's Elisabeth who is sorry for Lucy
Lucy: no need to be sorry
D. & S.: oh ok
[…]
Keypals: Lucy do you like french food?
Lucy: I have never had french food,
[…]
Lucy: Is it very different from America food?
Keypals: Would you like to taste?
[…]
Lucy: Yes, I would like to taste French food sometimes.
[…]
Keypals: Like in America we eat pizza, chips... But we have a special food with cheese, potatoes
It is very good like food!” [NM6, October 22nd]

In this netmeeting, Lucy and her keypal do not completely share the same opinions. Nonetheless, it never becomes a source of tension. Note that in their conversation on chips, there is a misunderstanding. Indeed, the keypals use the word “chips” in the Brtitsh English sense of the word, i.e French fries. Lucy, however, understands the word in its American English’s definition (potato chips). Interestingly, none of them realizes the miscommunication, but they simply stress how “strange” the phenomenon is. Lucy and the French students agree that fast food is generally unhealthy even if they eat at McDonalds once in a while. For the French students, it is a convenient place to meet friends and Elisabeth’s brother enjoys eating there. The French students also indicate that fast food is not necessarily cheap in France. Therefore, they prefer eating at other types of restaurants such as Indian, Mexican or French restaurants. Lucy, herself does not eat at McDonalds very often and admits to have never tried French food. She wonders how different it is from American food and is curious to try. Her keypal is encouraging her, claiming that “French food is the best”!
The netmeeting is meant to allow students to think about globalization and to consider a particular example (hormonal beef). It also enables the students to compare the different views and challenge each other’s perspectives on the topic. For half of their netmeeting, students talk about hormonal beef. American students attempt to understand what the French are afraid of and why they are so skeptical about hormonal beef in general. Note that contrary to what the students believe, hormonal beef not being legal in France, beef used at McDonalds is not imported from the United States (i.e. Mc Donald plant is located in the west of France). The French students claim to be very afraid of hormonal beef, believing it is a very scary thing and concerned that “it is very dangerous for health.” Challenging their view, Derrick and Sasha argue that if such were the case, Americans would be sick already. The French claim that such effects could appear in the long term. They also believe that the use of hormones would increase their muscle mass. Although Lucy does not often challenge her keypal’s views, in this netmeeting she briefly indicates her disagreement, highlighting that muscle mass can only increase if one injects the hormones directly to his or her body. This is one instance where Lucy openly disagrees with her keypal.

Lucy writes to her keypal the same day and claims that their netmeeting discussion was very interesting. She also asks her keypal to clarify a few points, which illustrates her interest in the topic:

“Bonjour Elisabeth!!! […] Notre discussion s’intéressait aujourd’hui. Il a fait plus dur pour parler avec quatre gens. […] En général, est-ce que la France est d’accord avec Jose Bove, ou est-ce qu’ils pensent qu’il a tort? J’ai été confondu des hormones. Est-ce que tu essayes de les éviter dans toute nourriture que vous mangez?” [Email, October 22nd]

Unfortunately, Lucy’s keypal does not reply to her particular questions and Lucy does not write any thoughts on hormonal beef.

A week later, the discussion on food becomes personal as they discuss eating habits. Below is an excerpt from the seventh netmeeting:

“ […]
Lucy: aujourd'hui le theme est nourriture
Elisabeth: […] As tu des questions?
Lucy: oui, qu'est-ce que tu as mange sur le dimanche?
Elisabeth: Alors hier... Je me suis levée tard et j’ai mangé des céréales aux fraises avec du lait pour le breakfast à 12h00. Le soir j’ai mangé du jambon avec des épinards et un gâteau de semoule aux pommes. C’est pas top comme repas mais bon ma mère n’avait pas trop cuisiné. Et toi? Y a des trucs que tu comprends pas?

Lucy: je mange les pancakes pour le petit déjeuner tardif, et je suis allé travailler, et après j’ai travaillé j’ai mangé une salade

[...]

Lucy: T’as pas beaucoup mangé. Combien faites vous de repas par jour?

Elisabeth: souvent je mange trois repas, mais a dimanche, je suis leve a onze heures et j’ai travaille depuis 5 heures

Elisabeth: Ok. Trois repas comme nous et parfois si on a fin on prend un goûter vers 4.00pm

Lucy: j’étais tres fatigue

Elisabeth: Grignotes tu entre les repas, manges tu dès que tu as fin?

Lucy: oui, je suis d'accord, j'aime les grignotes

Elisabeth: English now

Lucy: ok

Do you usually have meat at every meal?

Elisabeth: Do you think that is important to eat with your family?

Yes I have meat or fish at every meal.

Lucy: I think it is very important to eat with family. My brothers do not live at home, so I do not get to eat with them, only on holidays. I like to eat with my parents because I do not get to see them much while I am at college. I can not wait until Thanksgiving because I will get to eat with my whole family.

Elisabeth: I am agree with you. For French it is normal to eat with family all days. It is important because we speak about day, college, work, friends... and it is the only time where we are together.

Lucy: Yes, family time is so important.

Do you often have desserts with your meals?

Elisabeth: Yes all days like sundaes, cakes, fruits, "yogourth"(do you know?)

Lucy: Yes I understand

Elisabeth: And you?

Lucy: no, not usually, I have to cook for myself almost everyday, so I do not have time to make desserts

Elisabeth: Ok. Do you have meat at every meal?

Lucy: Sometimes, I eat a lot of salads, and soups, so sometimes I do not eat meat

I detest fish

My favorite meat is ham.

What is your favorite meat?

Elisabeth: I don't like very much meat but my mother wants that I eat meat. So.. but I prefer fish, I love it. I like chicken

Lucy: I like chicken also, my mom also tries to get me to eat meat

It must be a mom thing :)

Elisabeth: Do you have speciality in America?

Lucy: not really, we a lot many different foods. The american meal is a meat, a potato, and vegetable, but if you go to a baseball game everyone has hot dogs and french fries. On Sundays, we usually have a bigger dinner with a dessert sometimes.

Elisabeth: Bigger diner like???

Lucy: A nice ham, mashed or baked potatoes, vegetables, stuffing, breads
and we always eat at the table on sundays
What is it like eating lunch at school?
Elisabeth: ok. On sunday usually my mother cooks like raclette tartiflette(potatoes with hot cheese and meat), fondue(hot cheese with bread), choucroute, couscous... but sometimes we eat also lasagnes, pasta, pizza, chips with chicken and she makes cakes... I love it
[...]
Elisabeth: And you? What is it like eating lunch at school?
Lucy: I do not eat lunch at college, only the students who live in the dormitories, but in high school, lunch was strange too. Some of the food looked like it was still alive.
Elisabeth: Wher do you eat for lunch?
Lucy: I usually eat my apartment, or sometimes my friends and I eat downtown.
Elisabeth: Ok. I t is funny.
I would like to come back in my home to eat with my family
Lucy: Do you mean at lunch?
Elisabeth: yes at lunch but I can't
Lucy: You must stay at school?
   oh Elisabeth, it is time to go :( I will write to you today or tomorrow”
   [NM 7, November 5th]

In this netmeeting, Lucy does not inquire about what the French eating habits are but rather focuses on her keypal’s eating habits. The content of this netmeeting is interesting to her because it depicts Elisabeth’s way of life, what she likes eating, how many meals she has a day, etc. Elisabeth indicates that kids sometime take a snack at 4.00 pm in France. Elisabeth’s questions force Lucy to think about her own habits. She makes a distinction between her life in college and her family life. At her home, family dinners are very important. As her keypal, she values family time and clearly misses spending time with her parents. Sunday meals are larger for both of them. In college, she needs to cook for herself and does not have much time to do. For her, there is not really an American specialty and is only able to emphasize the tradition to eat hot dogs and French fries at baseball games. Note how the word “dessert” means something slightly different for Elisabeth. For Lucy it is limited to a cake, whereas for her keypal it can also be an ice cream, a fruit or a yogurt. Neither Lucy nor Elisabeth notices the difference of meaning.

A day later, students in the United States compare their findings and write an essay explaining whether or not they think that their eating habits are representative of American eating habits at large. In the same way, they are required to discuss whether
their keypals are representative of the French population. She writes this particular essay with two of her classmates.

“En general, les Americains d'habitude mangent trois repas un jour. Nous avons les gouters souvent pendant le jour. Nous ne mangeons pas la viande à chaque repas. Nous pensons que ce petit déjeuner est le repas le plus important du jour. Nous apprécions manger avec nos familles.


Selon nos lectures, les Français aiment une grande variété de la nourriture. Ils mangent beaucoup de la nourriture qui les Americains ne mangent pas. Ils souvent mangent avec leurs familles.

Notre correspondantes est assez typique. La keypal de Lucy, Elisabeth, aime manger avec sa famille. Elle n’aime pas manger au lycée. Elle m’a dit qui la nourriture est drôle. La keypal de P. et D., [...] dit elle mange avec sa frère et sa mère. Ils aiment la nourriture francaise.

Les differences le plus importantes, à notre avis, ils ont les poisson chaque jour. Ils ont la viande chaque repas. Ils ont un grand repas chaque dimanche à 12 heures.

En conclusion, les Americains et les Francais le deux aiment manger avec leurs familles. Ils pensent le temps avec famille est très important ! Le plus de familles ont un grand repas à le dimanche.”

[Essay, November 6th]

The way the class is organized allows students to gain several perspectives on a topic. The authors of the essay stress how important family is. They believe that their eating habits are representative of the country’s eating habits. In their opinions, the French keypals are also typical of the French population at large. In the middle of their essay, they indicate that French food is very different from American food but unfortunately do not specify how. Furthermore, they point to the fact that their keypals seem to eat more fish and meat than they do. In their essay, they simply summarize what they have learned from their discussions, comparing their findings with their readings.

By the end of the week, Lucy reflects on what she has learned on the topic so far:

“I have learned so much this year about French culture. I understand a lot more about the foods they eat. They loooooove cheese, they are passionate about no hormones in their beef, and they like desserts also. They are also very concerned with their social life. They have long dinners. […]
How does the topic of food exemplify the relationship between language and culture?
Give three examples of your idea(s).
I am not sure if I really understand this question.
I think the French seem to enjoy exquisite, unique food. They seem so sophisticated when it comes to food, like their language. They enjoy eating with loved ones and families.”

[Journal 5, November 11th]

Once again, she mainly underlines the French eating habits, describing what type of goods they like, without comparing French eating habits to American ones. She does not elaborate on what she means by “they are also very concerned with their social life.”

In the following netmeeting, Lucy and her keypal talk about the use and abuse of alcohol. At the beginning of the semester, the topic came up in their discussions (see section on the cultural differences). Then, Lucy expressed her surprise that the legal drinking age was sixteen in France. She also acknowledged that abusing alcohol could be dangerous. In this eighth netmeeting Lucy and her keypal share their opinions on drinking habits and compare what it entails for each one of them. Lucy is interested in her keypal’s way of life and wants to know what her parents allow her to do.

"Elisabeth: Pour toi quand on dit "boire" c'est quoi?
Lucy: boire est l'achool pour moi
a college, quand tu boire, est boire l'achol
Elisabeth: OK. Et tu aimes l'alcool? est ce que tu trouves ça "funny"?
Lucy: l'alcool
Elisabeth: alcool=funny pour toi?
Lucy: j'aime l'alcool quelquefois, beacoup de l'alchool est funny pour moi quelquefois
Elisabeth: Je pense la même chose que toi. Parfois c'est terrible mais trop....
Lucy: oui, je suis d'accord
Elisabeth: English now
Lucy: ok
Elisabeth: Do student often drink? What do they mostly drink?
Lucy: College students drink very very often. They mostly drink beer, but they drink a lot of liquor also.
Do students in your high school drink a lot?
Elisabeth: Have you a sort of game in your college with alcohol?
Lucy: There are many many games with alcohol, and they are dangerous, because the main point of them to get very drunk.
Elisabeth: In my school students don't drink, normally it is forbidden [...]
Elisabeth: Do you think that get drunk is cool?
Lucy: I do not like to get very drunk, because I get sick, and that is not fun, but I like to get somewhat drunk, cause it a social event, and it helps you to meet new people.
do you drink often?
Elisabeth: I don't drink often. When I have parties I drink or When my parents buy a good wine. For Christmas I usually drink lots of champagne with my cousin, it is a sort of game between him and me and we love that. Do you like wine and genepy? Genepy is famous!!!
Lucy: I like wine a lot. Every holiday we have fun with dinner...what is genepy?? I mean...we have wine with dinner.
Elisabeth: Genepy is a liquor, a good liquor!!! But we don't have it with all dinner just for a special dinner. At what age can you drink in America?
Lucy: We can drink at 21, I drink but I am only 20. What age can you drink in France?
I can not drink at bars, but my friends are 21, so they get alcohol and we drink at our apartments and at parties.
Elisabeth: In France we can drink at 16 but we drink before. We can also buy alcohol in supermarket. What sort of alcohol do you like drinking? When I do a party I go to buy alcohol with my friends who have the same age of me
Lucy: I like drinking liquor the most, because you can mix it with soda and it tastes really good. Beer is good, but I can not drink a lot of it, it makes you feel "fat".
Where do you have parties at??
Elisabeth: When I was in Deutschland I drunk lots of beer during four days. I was died!!! When I came back in my home my parents was very surprise but they don't find that terrible.
I don't understand your question
Lucy: Thats cool, where is Deutschland? I mean, when you go to parties, where are they at? Are they at your friends house?
Elisabeth: Deutschhanl was very great, funny. With my friends, we had a very very good time.
Lucy: Where is it?
Elisabeth: I do parties at my home, at my friends house, at a dancing...
Lucy: Do you parents know you have parties at your house?
Elisabeth: Where is it in Deutschland?
Lucy: No, where is Deutschland?
Elisabeth: Excuse me deutschland=germany
Lucy: OK, I understand now!
Elisabeth: When I do a party, my parents are agree and they trust of me
Lucy: Do they usually stay at home when you have parties there?
Elisabeth: Excuse me I wrote in german
Lucy: Do your parents stay home when you have parties?
Elisabeth: No but sometimes I do a party in the garage or summer out and they stay in home
It is not a problem they do their life and we do our life
Lucy: That sounds fun.
Elisabeth: My parents are tolerant because they trust of me
Lucy: My parents would not let me have parties, maybe small parties when I turn 21, but no parties now. If they go away, I can have a small party and not tell them about it. They trust me also, but I can get in trouble because I am not old enough.
It is time to go now.
[...]
[NM8, November 12th]
Lucy explains that she likes getting drunk a little because it helps her meet friends. She dislikes drinking to the point of getting sick. She is not yet old enough to drink legally but has opportunities to drink at parties in college. Her parents, however, do not allow her to drink except some wine at special occasions, which Lucy likes very much. In this netmeeting, she touches on drinking habits in college, explaining to her keypal that college students “drink very very often” with getting drunk as the sole point for some. She reiterates later that alcohol is considered to be a serious issue in colleges because drunk students are often involved in car accidents:


[Email, November 13th]

From their conversation, different meanings of “drinking” emerge. For Lucy, it is forbidden and she can only do so without her parents’ knowledge. For Elisabeth, however, drinking is not really an issue and her parents allow her to drink without concern that she might abuse alcohol. Drinking is not perceived as a “forbidden act”. In fact, Lucy is surprised that her keypals parents let her have parties at their house and emphasizes that that would never happen at her home. In this netmeeting, Lucy is exposed to another cultural difference.

Toward the end of the semester, they finish their discussions on food by explaining how they celebrate specific holydays. For example, Lucy’s keypal is eager to understand what Thanksgiving is. They also talk about Christmas:

“Lucy:  Est-ce que vous avez le thanksgiving?
Keypals:  non mais en fait on sait pas ce que c'est. Tu peux nous expliquer?
Lucy:  oui...
Keypals:  Vas y; on t’écoute
Lucy:  a Etas-Unis nous mangeons avec nos families grandes repas, et nous donnons merci et nous sommes reconnaissant pour toute nous avons
Keypals:  nous donnons merci? A qui?
On comprend pas trop
Lucy:  nous donner remercie pour les families, le nourriture, et bon sante nos saison noel commences a le thanksgiving
[...]
Keypals: Lucy, vous commencez noel tres tôt! Mais vous dites merci à qui?
Il y a pas un histoire de "pilgrims"?
Lucy:  non, le saison commences, mais noel est December 25 nous commencons le shopping pour noel
ou!
nous avons le thanksgiving parceque le pilgrims

Keypals: Maintenant shopping? D’accoord en fait vous mangez beaucoup tout le mois de
décembre?
Ils ont fait quoi le pilgrims?
Lucy: nous avons le noel fêtes avec beaucoup de nourriture (cookies)
Keypals: Turkey; no?
Lucy: oui, beaucoup de turkey

[...] 
Keypals: english now
Lucy: ok

the Pilgrims came to America from England
They started a colony in the United States.

Keypals: Ok Other questions?
Lucy: Do you have anything similar to Thanksgiving in France?
Keypals: No just noel
But we start to do shopping for christms now also
Lucy: Do you have some kind of national holiday to celebrate immigration.
Keypals: We don't celebrate immigration
Lucy: What does your family do for christmas?
Keypals: We celebrate easter, shrove tuesday
A big meal with all family
Lucy: What is "shrove tuesday"?
What do you eat?
Keypals: Do you receive gifts for thanksgiving, noel?
Lucy: Yes, we receive gifts for noel, but not for thanksgiving.
Keypals: We eat turkey, potatoes, oysters, a big big cake
Noel like us
Lucy: Do you celebrate two days of noel?
Keypals: Thanksgiving is it more important than noel?
Yes we celebrate noel the 24 and 25 december
Lucy: us too
Keypals: Do you open gifts the 24 evening or the 25 morning?
Lucy: Do you go to church on noel?
Keypals: No and you?
Lucy: Yes we go to church on the 24.
Keypals: Thanksgiving more important than noel?
Lucy: Some families just open gifts on Noel morning, but some people open gifts
on both days.
I think they are equally important, but I like noel more.
Keypals: But some people said that thanksgiving is more important for them
What do you do for noel?
Lucy: Do little children believe in Santa Clause?
Keypals: Yes all children
And I like to believe on it
Lucy: I open gifts in the morning and go to my cousins house for brunch and then
eat dinner at my grandma;s house.
Keypals: What is it brunch?
Lucy: It is both breakfast food and lunch food served in one meal.
What do you do for noel?
Keypals: You eat lots of!!!!!!!
Lucy: yeah, everyone gets fat during the holidays.
Keypals: For noel the 24 evening I go to my cousin and eat with my family
The 25 I come back in my home and my mother prepare a big dinner and we eat again with my family
Lucy: What do you on the 25?
Do you see family that you don't see often during noel?
Keypals: Yes but we like to spend time together
What do you eat for christmas?
Lucy: [...] Lucy's family eats ham, mashed potatoes and bread.
[...]
Keypals: What do you eat for thanksgiving?
Lucy: We eat turkey, stuffing, gravy, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, salad, baked apples, rolls, chestnuts, and greenbeans
That is the typical thanksgiving dinner.
Keypals: PUMKIN PIE??
We eat lots of food
Rolls??
Cranberry?
Lucy: It is pie stuffed with pumpkin with milk.
Rolls are bread.
Keypals: What's pumpkin??
Lucy: it's a big, orange vegetable.
time to go.
bye
[...]
[NM9, November 19th]

In this exchange, Lucy is asked to explain what Thanksgiving is. At first, she remains vague and does not give a detailed description of that holiday. She seems unable to explain what the holiday is and what it signifies for her. However, guided by the questions her keypals asks, she describes a typical Thanksgiving meal and provides some historical context of Thanksgiving. Surprisingly, she mainly talks about the pilgrims without mentioning the role of Native Americans. For her, Thanksgiving is a celebration for immigration to America. Note how she asks if the French have a similar holiday and if they celebrate immigration. Her keypal, unfortunately, simply replies “no” without further explaining why.

During this netmeeting, Lucy and her keypal also compare how Christmas is celebrated in France and the United States. Lucy is keenly interested in how her keypal celebrates Christmas, i.e. at a personal level. They both ask many questions about “the routine”, what people do during the holyday. She is eager to know about Elisabeth’s way of life as mentioned previously in this narrative. In fact, it is also very obvious from the
emails they send each other. They don’t talk much about the cultural themes discussed in class but their emails become a platform for friendly conversations. Both Lucy and her keypal detail their daily activities, their plans for the weekend and how much homework they have. They also mail each other cards.

4.4.5. Conclusion

At the beginning of the narrative I indicated that Lucy is interested in learning French but admits that she probably would not have taken it had not been required. In a sense, Lucy is a typical student in that she is before all interested in fulfilling a requirement. For Lucy, the exchange quickly becomes a wonderful opportunity to build a friendship with a French student, much less a reflective approach to language and culture. Her definition of culture influences her approach to the learning of culture. She is more eager to learn about Elisabeth’s life style than about French culture. Her definition of culture does not change much in the course of the semester. She defines culture as “someone’s life style” at the beginning of the semester and provides a similar definition at the end of the semester, taking into consideration, however, how a group of people “see[s] others”:

*Previously in the semester you were asked to define what culture is. How would you define culture now, at the end of the semester?*

“I still see culture as the way a group of people do things, what the believe in, and how they see others.” [Journal 6, December 4th]

From her data, Lucy clearly enjoys talking to her keypal. At the end of the semester she is sad she cannot communicate with her keypal anymore. They promise emailing each other nonetheless. Throughout her data, Lucy emphasizes that she learned a lot from Elisabeth. She reaffirms having gained a better understanding of French culture and highlights the benefits of the netmeeting discussions:

“The Netmeeting with our keypals was what helped me learn the most about the french culture. We were actually talking to real french people, and not just reading a textbook all the time. The emails helped just as much because I learned what my keypal does in her social life and with her family. The workbook did not help me learn anything about french culture.” [Journal 5, November 11th]
“I thoroughly enjoyed the NM. They added variety to the class, but in a fun way. I can say the for myself I learned the most about cultural from these meetings. I like the emails almost as much. I came in touch with Elisabeth's life and understood what a French high school student actually does.”

[Journal 6, December 4th]

Lucy is very happy to have had the opportunity to talk to “a real French person” besides her instructor. Also, in her interview, she shares her enthusiasm about being able to talk to French students:

“Hélène:  So, in your opinion, what helped you the most to learn about culture?
Lucy:  Definitely the keypals I think. I mean the teacher, she gives you lecture but she’s not like you can’t ask her, you can ask her questions but it’s a lot easier to ask your keypal. You can send an email with ten questions and she’s happy to write back. So I think that’s where I learned more things from them.”

[Interview]

I have explained Lucy’s primary interest is to learn about Elisabeth’s every day life, to get to know her as a friend. From Lucy’s data, it is clear that she and her keypal provide extensive descriptions of what they do, for example their eating habits or how they celebrate Christmas. Elisabeth’s school schedule also triggers an exchange of a few emails, Lucy being amazed by Elisabeth’s busy schedule.

She is not only learning about her keypal’s culture but Elisabeth’s questions induce Lucy to think of her own culture. Explaining her own culture to her keypal leads her to think of and analyze it, as she states in her interview:

Hélène:  Did Elisabeth learn a lot from you, I mean did she ask a lot of questions?
Lucy:  Oh yeah a LOT!

[…]
Hélène:  […] Through out the semester basically..do you think you’ve changed the way you perceive the world in general?
Lucy:  Maybe a little. I thought I found out that there’s sometimes when you’re here you just think that everybody’s like it’s the same as yours and everybody does the same things but everybody else is not AT ALL. It makes you think a lot about what you do and it makes you stop and think and like step back from everything when you’re describing how your life is like ‘cause you don’t think about it I mean you don’t someone doesn’t actually just sit and …wonder what you do. Like when she asks you know what you do as an American and then we have to sit and stop and think about it and like step out of the picture for a second and realize what you actually do everyday ‘cause someone wants to know! [laughter]

[Interview]
The way the class is organized as well as her conversations with her keypal via emails and the netmeetings cause Lucy to think of her way of life. By being confronted to another culture and by having to answer her keypal’s questions, she expands her view on the world in that she realizes that there are some people that do things differently. In the course of the semester, she becomes conscious of cultural differences, and in turn expands her views on reality. She is made to think about the American experience, such as Thanksgiving, in order to describe them to her keypal. She admits that in the discussion on Thanksgiving, it was difficult for her to explain the idea behind Thanksgiving:

“When we talked like they don’t have Thanksgiving and she just could not understand the concept. Like I said you know that’s when we give thanks and [that’s when we’re grateful] for what we have and she just could not understand. I don’t I tried to explain and then so we just started to talk about what we eat instead ‘cause that was hard to get her to understand.”

[Interview]

Lucy likes explaining her culture to her keypal and asserts that it makes her proud:

“Hélène: Did your keypals’ questions and comments help you reflect on your own culture?
Lucy: yeah definitely! It made me feel proud you know I go to this college and you know I’m close with my family and she’s very close with her family. We talk a lot about ( ) and that sort of stuff. It made me think about a lot of stuff.
Hélène: In what way are you proud? I’m not sure
Lucy: I’m proud to live here. Like you know I’m proud of (coming from a good) family, I’m in college and I’m making something with my life [laughter]”

[Interview]

However, her views on her own culture have not changed much throughout the semester, as she herself testifies: “My idea of the American culture has not changed, but I have thought about it a lot more since I have been answering questions about it.” [Journal 6, December 4th]. For example, this narrative demonstrates that her definition of patriotism was not different at the end of the semester. She does not consider that there may be a different definition of the concept for other cultures. Along the same line, when she discusses death penalty with her keypal, Lucy only acknowledges their differences of opinions, without challenging her keypal’s views or taking into consideration her keypal’s arguments for being against it. Another example is their discussion on hormonal beef. In her interview, she indicates that it was difficult to understand at first, “I didn’t
really ever paid attention like that doesn’t that stuff doesn’t bother me.” The cross-cultural approach to the class does not drive Lucy to create new meanings, new realities. What she develops throughout the semester is her awareness about her own culture. Indeed, she is more conscious of her own culture and has increased her ability to think about it.

Lucy’s conception of foreign language learning influences her engagement in her learning process. For her, culture completes but is not an essential part of her language learning process:

*How do you (personally) value the learning about culture(s)? Why?*

“I see learning other cultures as very interesting and entertaining. I do not think it is extremely important or something everyone has to do, but I really enjoyed it myself.”

[Journal 6, December 4th]

“Hélène: How would you rate the importance of learning about another culture as you learn a foreign language?
Lucy: I don’t know how important that is like you can always get through it without it, it’s just interesting. Like I don’t think it’s very important unless you plan on [marrying] a French relative or you plan on going to France. But it’s just neat it’s neat to learn it’s interesting.”

[Interview]

Lucy is interested in learning about culture as she finds the content “interesting” and “entertaining”. She also claims its entertaining feature is a motivation factor to learn the language and encourages her to communicate better:

“I think last I mean last two semesters in French 1 and 2 I mean I learned grammar but we never ( ) in class about it and now I am talking to French people and I’m writing essays like I never wrote a French paper in 1 or 2. We just had grammar lessons and tests and quizzes and that was it. And now I’ve learned so much this year like I like I forgot everything when I first came in because of the summer and it came right back to me and now I can actually speak it. Like once in a while like I tell my boyfriend stuff all the time [laughter] in French. […] When you learn the grammar and then you learn the culture and kinda put the grammar to use. You can always talk in French but then sometimes you don’t know what you’re talking about you’re just saying stuff. And we talked to someone who is French…that kind of makes learning the grammar worth it I think.”

[Interview]

In the course of the semester, Lucy improves her ability to communicate. She uses French more idiomatically and seems much more comfortable expressing herself in French. At the beginning of the semester, she often translates literally from English as in the sentence “Je fais vraiment bien, mais j’ai beaucoup de travail d’école pour faire”
[Email, September 10th]. Toward the end of the semester, she uses idiomatic expressions more frequently such as “à la prochaine!” or “à bientôt.” Moreover, the length of her emails and netmeetings increase as well, demonstrating Lucy is more at ease with French. Speaking with her keypal about culture allows Lucy to know her keypal better and to put her language skills into practice. She feels able to communicate in French. In her opinion, the netmeeting sessions with and emails to the French students make the exercise of learning French grammar worth it. What is important to note is Lucy’s sentiment that she has achieved and learned so much in her French class:


[Essay, November 26th]

Here, Lucy’s reflection on what she learned this semester is a list of the grammatical points she worked on and of the themes discussed in class and with her keypal. Similarly in her sixth journal, she lists aspects of the French culture she has learned:

“I have learned so much from Elisabeth about the French culture, from their food (which I always thought was normal or similar to Americans) to their Religions (which aren’t very important to them), also the rumors Americans have heard about the French such as the women dont shave and that kind of stuff.”

[Journal 6, December 4th]

In her essay above, she briefly indicates that students enrolled in her French 03 class had many reading assignments. In one of her journal, she reports having serious difficulties with the assigned readings, which become a source of frustration:

What question do you wish I’d asked you but didn't? Ask the question ("I wish you'd asked me..." or "I really want to discuss..."), then provide an answer.

“I wish you would have asked me the things we disliked the most about the class. That would be the readings. I definitely understand how they are directly related to the culture of France, they are just very hard to read and understand.”

[Journal 5, November 11th]

In her interview, she reiterates that the readings were very difficult and she ends up not completing the reading assignments:
“Lucy: The readings are hard like. There’s three of us that get together and we try to understand the readings and we have a lot of trouble with them.
Hélène: Oh yeah?
Lucy: Yeah: […] A lot of times we read stuff and we don’t even like we don’t talk about it in class and sometimes like actually most of the class stopped reading the readings toward the end of class.
Hélène: Oh really?
Lucy: Yeah we would ( ) the first paragraphs so we know what it’s about. Like sometimes we read packets but then won’t talk about them so …”

[Interview]

Lucy knows that the readings are assigned to help her understand the themes that are discussed weekly. The objective is to encourage a reflective engagement in students’ learning process. Because she finds the readings difficult, she hardly uses them as a source of information. Hence she demonstrates poor analytical skills in her essays or in her netmeetings.

Generally speaking, she is not driven by an intellectual pursuit where she is required to examine and analyze issues. As mentioned, Lucy is more interested in learning about her keypal’s way of life. In most of her essays, she before all summarizes information she gathered about a topic, without further analyzing what she observed. For example, when Lucy explains how the American media covered the attacks of September 11th, she does not analyze the content of the coverage but rather focuses on its format. She remains mostly descriptive in her explanations. She tends to give broad generalizations about the French, not always nuancing her keypal’s views with theoretical information (from class discussions or the instructor’s lecture). For example, in her essay on stereotypes, she mainly lists cultural differences between the two countries, without supporting her arguments with examples. Moreover, she hardly ever challenges her keypal’s opinions, even when they don’t agree. When Lucy and her keypal discussed death penalty, both explained their opinions without engaging themselves in a debate. It is possible however that Lucy does not feel very comfortable with a debate format. Interestingly, when I asked her what she learned from the class, her reply is similar to her November essay (see above) in that it is limited to a list of cultural facts:
Learning a language is a social and a cultural activity in which the learner’s contributions are essential. Lucy’s example illustrates yet another approach to learning. Cleary, Lucy directs her learning to what is interesting to her. In this class, she is first interested in fulfilling a language requirement and quickly becomes eager to be friend with her keypal. The ways she approaches culture are directly related to her motive. Most of Lucy’s questions are about Elisabeth’s life, trying to understand her way of life. She does not inquire much about France or the French people as a whole. Guided by her keypal’s questions, Lucy is drawn to think about her culture, observe and explain certain aspects of it. She compares it to her keypal’s. Incrementally she becomes “conscious aware” (Vygotsky, 1978) of some cultural differences. As she stresses in her interview, “when you’re here, you just think that everybody’s like it’s the same as yours and everybody does the same things but everybody else is not AT ALL.” However, this study shows that Lucy is not very engaged in a reflective approach to culture. She tends to consider culture as a fifth skill, a list of cultural facts to acquire. If she becomes aware of cultural differences between the French and Americans, she does not perceive cultural concepts as being socially and culturally constructed. In other words, her learning about culture has not forced her to look at her own culture differently, nor has it driven her to reorganize the way she looks at the world.
TL stands for Terminal Littéraire, which is the last year of high school. Students from this French class chose to major in Literature and Languages.

In this chatroom, there are two American students (Lucy and David) and two French students. In this narrative, I choose to focus on Lucy’s comments for the analysis of the data. For analysis of David’s comments, see David’s narrative.

I believe that there is a typo in Lucy’s data and that she meant “I don’t think that there were many differences of analysis.”

TPE is one of the oral exams Elisabeth has to take for her Baccalauréat.

On that Monday, Lucy’s keypal is sick. Therefore, Lucy works with another American student and her French student.

Lucy actually got the information from Melissa’s keypal since Lucy’s keypal, Elisabeth was sick that day.

Lucy and her keypal are in the chatroom with Derrick and Sasha (D. & S.) and their keypal. The two French students share the same computers and do not specify who speaks. I therefore indicated that they were in a group that I named “Keypals”. Here, I focus primarily on Lucy’s comments. All cuts in the transcript are indicated by bracket signs.

During this netmeeting, Lucy’s keypal shares her computer with another French student whose American keypal is sick.

I am doing well but I have a lot of schoolwork to do.
David

4.5.1. Biography

David is nineteen years old and the eldest son of a family of three. He has a brother who is seventeen and a sister who is fourteen. His mother is “a domestic engineer (housewife)” whereas his father is “a recent retired Military officer - (23 years in the air force)” - who now works as a program manager for a cellular phone software company. Because of his father’s military career, David only spent half of his life in the United-States.

He was born in Turkey, spent three years in Germany, another three in Italy and two in Egypt. When asked if he has traveled extensively, David’s answer is “OH YEAH…yeah… yeah!…. I’ve been pretty much everywhere.” While abroad, he would learn the national language of the country he lived in. When in Germany, he spoke German “with an Oma and Opa”. “German was my first [foreign] language” he said, even though he cannot speak this language anymore. In Egypt, he learned how to speak Arabic in third and fourth grade and “got pretty good with that because we had to use it everyday. We were the only Americans there really.” In Italy, he studied Italian and claimed to be “pretty fluent”: “I had a lot of Italian friends I hang out with.” His experience abroad plays an essential role in David’s history. To his keypal, Nadine, he very often mentions his life in Europe and his eagerness to go back there.

David is a sophomore, majoring in Pre-med. He is also enrolled in Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), training to be an officer. After he completes his studies, he plans to “be commissioned as a 1st Lieutenant in the United States Army.” He wants to be a military a doctor: “Je serai un dottore aider les soldats blesses.” He finds being a doctor very interesting and rewarding. His up bringing in a military family and training in ROTC play are important in his life and defines who he is. Along with playing the guitar, sports and hanging out with friends, “doing army stuff” [Netmeeting 1] is one of his hobbies. David is very patriotic and loves his country. His passion for the military is
also reflected in his appreciation of war movies such as “Behind Enemy Lines” or the TV
miniseries “Band of Brothers”:

“I did see a TV miniseries event on HBO though called "Band of Brothers" that was
incredible. It was done by Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg and it was about E (Easy)
Company of the 101st Airborne Division in WWII. It followed them from Paratrooper
school up and until after the war was over. Incredible, simply incredible. This company
was at the front line of everything from paratrooping behind the lines before D-Day, to
Operation Marketgarden in Arnhem and Eindhoven in the Netherlands, to holding the
front lines of Bastogne, all the to burschesgaden in southern Germany. It was like another
saving private ryan only deeper, better character outlines, it was just incredible, very fun
to watch, maybe they’ll make a french version of it because it was very popular here in
America.”  [Email, November 14].

David is a serious student who likes to learn. In many of his emails and during
the netmeetings, he often says how he likes to learn new things:

“I am a Pre-Med major taking French and Army ROTC and philosophy! Crazy! And next
semester I’ll be taking some art courses as well, I just like to learn stuff and I’m glad I
have the opportunity to do so.”  [Email, September³]

Even though he once described himself as “a procrastinator” to his keypal and claimed to
“barely work at all” during his interview, grades and ranks are extremely important to
him. He frequently mentions his biology exams during the netmeetings. For example, in
one email, he apologizes for not writing explaining how he has been very busy studying
for his exam in chemistry. He reports that his hard work was rewarded by the perfect
grade he received.

“Et d'ailleurs j’ai obtenu des 96 sur mon examen organique de chimie (les plus hauts
points hors de chacun qui les a pris, environ 500 personnes se montent), et ma moyenne
en chimie organique est la plus haute dans ma section (286 personnes), des 91 et la classe
que la moyenne est des 54, désolé, je juste a dû se vanter à ce sujet. Sur l'examen de
biologie j’ai fait également comme bon, j'ai obtenu des 91, vais je!”
[Email, November 14th³]

David is very proud of his achievement and being among the best is important to him.
He asked me for instance how much extra-credit the instructor was going to give him for
participating in this study: “I need all the points I can get!” he exclaimed. In an email he
wrote before Christmas, he mentions how he wishes to obtain a good Grade Point
Average (GPA): “un bon cadeau de Noël, qui serait gentil d'avoir cette année, un bon
semestre GPA, je prévoient bien, excepté un de mes classes, je pensent que je puis obtenir A dans le repos” [Email, December, 03rd].

4.5.2. Foreign Language Studies

David values studying foreign languages. He claims that “It could be, in fact, the second most key point in my education (next to getting into med-school).” During his interview he points out that he really likes learning languages and intends to continue with French, by registering for French 201 the subsequent class. In their first journal for the class, students were asked whether they value languages and if they thought foreign languages are an important part of their education. Here is what David had to say:

“The sole reason i joined the army was with the hope that i would be spending very little of my time in the United States. I grew up half of my life abroad and have a very strong desire to return to the abroad, be it Europe, Africa, or whereever. Thus, being abroad i desire to be involved deeply with the people and culture there, or else my tour(s) there would be for not. If i didnt get involved in the culture i would have might as well just spent a vacation there and been a tourist and not dedicate so much of my time to the military. But that is not how it is, therefore to get involved in the culture in a suficient and apt manner i must learn several languages and become proficient and languages learning and be aware the trends needed to do it […]” [Journal 1, September 3rd]

Because of his experience abroad, David values the importance of foreign languages at large and understands the advantages of knowing other languages. He thinks learning a foreign language provides a competitive edge in the job market. Therefore, learning a foreign language has a very functional objective in his view. Since he has traveled extensively and claims to speak a number of foreign languages; the foreign language requirement imposed by the university makes sense to David:

“In my opinion I believe the university imposes a language requirement simply because of the fact that there ARE other languages out there and they are VERY real and used often in a day to day basis. The University realizes that if the student is serious about his education then he/she wants to go out and do some great things with their education and great things more often than not entail working with, in, or around situations where other languages are used (i.e. business trips, working deals with foreign manufacturers, travel, employees with poor english skills, or in my case being sent to work in foreign countries). Therefore it is necessary to introduce students to language learning to set that basis of familiarity with the fact that english isnt understood by everyone. Even though the language they learn might not be the one they need, they are still familiar with the
David really enjoys learning different languages: “Plus i think learning languages is tres cool and one of the funnest things im doing here in college” [Journal 1]. This particular idea is repeated several times throughout the semester and during his interview: “I just like learning languages”. Many times, David stresses how fond he is of Europe. His main reason for choosing to study French is simply because he has never been to France: “made it to Britain, made it to Spain, skipped France. Everywhere else in Europe I’ve been to…” Throughout the semester, David expresses his appreciation for Europe and how he hopes to visit France with this class in the spring. In his first conversation with his keypal, he explains how he would like to live all over Europe:

“j’aime la France parce que j’aime tout de Europe, et je veux habiter tout a europe C’est la raison je suis en le militaire.
Je voudrais habiter en Italie, France, Ingleterre, Ireland, Germanie, tout a Europe.”

[NM 1, September 10th]

Furthermore, David has a clear idea of his career, which ultimately involves knowing languages: “Also the job i would like to pursue in the military requires a high level of language proficiency (an intelligence (preferably counter-intelligence) officer as a medical specilist). So you can see the great importance language learning plays for me.” To become fluent, he hopes to continue studying French after his third semester.

4.5.3. Language and Culture

David believes that culture is important but should not be introduced in the fist two semesters of foreign language teaching. He took the first semester of French (French 1) at the University and his second at the University of California, Berkeley over the summer. Unfortunately, he was very discouraged with French 1: “I hated that class”, “it was a bad class” as he recounted his experience during the interview. The problem for David was that French 1 concentrated on “culture” too much.
“I thought for French 1 I should be learning more language first...because you know.... I mean I was there for the language, I wasn’t there for the culture. I liked French 2 I took at Berkeley. I mean French 1 was really discouraging and I thought I’d stop French but I figured I might as well take French 2 at Berkeley. At Berkeley, we did not even touched on culture, we did nothing but language. The entire class was in French, the book was in French, you’re taught what you’re taught in French and stuff. Was really challenging, really demanding and it helped to really learn the language. I think you should learn language before you start learning the culture.” [Interview]

According to David, learning about culture is important but only at the second stage of the acquisition process; the main focus should at first be on language. In their second journal, students were asked if they thought learning and discovering about culture is important when studying a language? David’s answer is a straightforward no:

“At first, no. I believe it is necessary to first learn the language's grammer and vocabulary just so you have a strong backbone and because not everyone who learns a language goes off to the abroad to use and implement it. Many learn it as an extra ability to make their work environment more user friendly (ie the doctor who speaks spanish therefore opening a broader base of patients) and thus dont need culture to get what they need to do done. When one has a strong backbone of vocab and grammer this builds a level of confidence to further learn more about the language and the culture behind it. It is here that i believe learning about the culture of the language is necessary simply because they are now ready discover new things and ways of presenting that language while still having the inner confidence to pursue because of the fact that they have a wide box of vocab and grammatical understanding to help them through such discoveries. And here you have the students desiring to learn the language to use in the abroad sense (international affairs and business, travel) which actually requires contact with the culture itself. So i believe it is necessary eventually to get the whole idea of the language to study the culture from whence it came but only after first understanding the basics of the language.” [Journal 2, September 9th]

In his view, learning about culture is only useful if one plans to use the foreign language for his or her job. His conception of foreign language learning is before all utilitarian, believing that the primary focus should be the acquisition of skills (i.e. grammar and vocabulary). Culture learning is not essential in the learning of a foreign language and represents an “add-on” activity. At the end of the semester he elaborates on this idea:

“Yeah, just because...you know.... One, most people that sit for languages because they want to learn the language ...and...because that was what they’re expecting to get out of the course not really understanding the culture and two you can’t really understand the culture until you learn the language you know 'cause of a lot of things that has to do with culture is just language. It’s until like you really understand the language that you can start like (asserting) with the culture, read French articles, and watch French TV, and talk to French people with a better understanding.” [Interview]
4.5.4. Cultural Development

4.5.4.1. French Culture

At the very beginning of the semester he confesses in an email to his keypal: “I am very ignorant about French people and the like, as my Professor time and again points this out to me” [Email, September 7th]. He then adds: “What makes France “France” I am pretty curious to the answer to this.” In fact, he often expresses how excited he is to be in this class and how eager he is to learn about the French.

In early September, the class is asked to define French culture, before stereotypes were discussed. Next is David’s perception of the French then:

“I would define french culture as a very strong (i mean they have a cultural minister no?), very closed culture. They are very tightly knit on the inner circles and would help any and everyone in that circle but on the outer circles there is a titanium wall whose doors are guarded heavily by suspicion and predisposed ideals about others. They also take up the European ideal of the Cafe and rest. They are relaxed in their quant undisturbed circle and enjoy its fruits greatly. They are an old culture from which they can tap many resources to enjoy their lives.” [Journal 2, September 9th]

David points out how French culture is strong and old and how French people are “relaxed” (I believe he means that French life is not fast paced: he notes how French people spend time in cafés or take afternoon naps). David’s definition is not quite positive, the phrase “…titanium wall whose doors are guarded heavily by suspicion and predisposed ideals about others” vividly depicts his perception of close mindedness by the French. However, it is important to note that David starts his definition with “I would define” rather than “French culture is”, implying that this is only his definition and implicitly acknowledging that his definition may be flawed. In addition, this second journal was written five days before he emailed his keypal and admits not knowing too much about French culture (see above).

David feels that all the years spent in Europe gave him “some basic understanding of the European way of life” (September, 7th). He often compares what he has learned about France with his own European experience. By the second week of the semester, he is quite surprised at the differences. Reflecting on activities done in class, David underlines discussions on French culture as either having solidified what he thought of
the French or astonished him. He then points out some particularities of the French culture:

“Living in Europe for many years i came to understand what it that in European culture like rest in the afternoon and old ideals and customs being very normal. But somethings in France are very different than what i am used to. The "closed-offness" of many of its people was one shocker (being around italians seemed almost polar to this) that i was not used to but through learning i've come to understand why they are like that in many cases. Also, the music that is popular there: rap. That nearly blew me out of the water. I was accustomed to Techno and "Euro-Pop" being the predominant types of music listened to in Europe. These things further helped be distinguish France as a unique slice in the European pie and there is still so much more to learn that will do nothing more than help me in my learnings.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

Once again, he stresses out how eager he is to learn more about French culture. In this entry, David goes back to his idea that the French are “close-minded” people but he now seems to understand why the French appear that way. Discussions in class enabled him to reflect on past experiences and come up with better understandings of the French.

When asked to compare the French and American cultures, David concedes that there are some similarities between the two cultures beside the numerous differences:

“I think we are similar in the fact that we like to take time to be with others and just enjoy what is going on around us, but i feel strongly that the differences heavily out weigh our similarities. Americans heavily support integrating new cultures and ideals and adopting them to our own culture whereas the french are frozen to the alien and outside and wish nothing to do with it. We are a very active society and the french, because of strong family ties and hundreds of years of development, can relax much more and like to just sit much more often. Not so much like, because i believe every americans LIKES their breaks, its more that we do not have as much time simply because of the way we work and how our culture moves on a daily basis. So i believe we are more different than alike.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

Here again, David explains his statement. The isolationist French is a recurrent idea. David attempts to engage in a reflective approach as he relates the French attitude with some historical context: France “long history” and “its strong family ties”, which allowed the French to anchor their culture. For David, French culture appears to be static (or at least not as changing as the American one) and not very diverse, since the “French are frozen to the alien and outside.”
4.5.4.2 American Culture

As the purpose of this class is to develop a reflective approach to culture, students were asked, throughout the semester, to reflect on what it means to be American, what American culture is and so forth. Thus, at the very beginning of the semester, students provided their definition of the American culture. David’s definition is as follow:

“From the on looker one would define american culture in the barbeque (though american KNOW it to be incredibly much more diverse). People in collective enjoyment in something that is not exactly too extreme but simple. American are simple people, or at least desire to simplify their lives as much as possible. We are a hustle and a bustle culture that often skips breakfast in order to get the job done quickly and in the most efficient manner. We are a culture of opportunity that incorporates a melting pot of cultures that come together on the 4th of July to enjoy that hot dog, that rest and reprieve from the hectic life of an american on the job, and confort in each others collectivesness and diversity in relative and desired harmony as the fireworks go off.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

Here, David provides two images of the American culture: one from an outside observer’s point of view and second from an American’s. At the beginning of his definition, he assumes the outsider’s view by taking distance from this simplistic barbecue image, using “Americans” or “American people”. However, for David American culture is more complex and “Americans know it to be incredibly much more diverse”. When he compares the French culture with the American culture, he underlines the American’s ability to integrate new cultures and ideals, adopting them and making them their own. It is a “melting pot of cultures”. In addition, America is an “active society”, fast pace, a culture that is moving forward, “a culture of opportunity”. It is interesting to note how, by the 4th line, he includes himself in the definition and uses “we”. Even though the American culture is diverse, its people remain united at specific time such as the “4th of July”. His choice of the National day is neither random nor innocent, as later discussion will show.

When asked if foreign languages are valued in the United States in general, David’s answer points again to his utilitarian conception of a foreign language and reveals how for him, differences are an important part of what makes America, America:

Well i think that all depends on the situation and the place of the persons you are evaluating in the United States. Now, if you are in an urban area or in a situation of higher education (ie college) the necessity of learning a language is great and is a great value to those who do learn them. An extra language is a skill that can carry substantial
weight when looking for a good job in the city (especially coastal cities which carry alot of immigrants). So people press its importance heavily and it is thus seen as a necessary thing. But what is necessary isn't what is always done. The American populous is, in a general sense, lazy many times when it comes to needing to learn another language. They would rather force them to conform to their language or just let somebody else deal with it entirely (again pointing out the great value an extra language can hold for you when looking for a job). Also, in rural america, learning a language would be nice, but not exactly necessary simply because they do not come much into contact with foreign language. Therefore, it is not a necessity to get on better with your day to day life, it would be more of a hobby. In reference to schooling, the learning of other subjects are put ahead of foreign languages simply because of their wide use in most all situations, rural and urban, diploma and Ph.D., coastal and mainland. Schools put these ahead because they are a necessary base from which to branch out from. You need to understand the basics of everything in your culture before you and begin to understand the basis of other cultures. [Journal 1]

First, David explains how the importance of foreign languages differs depending on the situations and the people. Second, he elaborates on this idea, providing three different possible categories: a) the urban area or the higher education situation; b) the American populous and finally c) rural America. He then explains how other school subjects are more valued than others in the education system because they are useful, regardless of the social class, professions or the geographical situations. This is not to say that his views of America represent reality but he is aware that there are many social classes, many social, economic and geographical situations in the States, which makes it hard to generalize. He, therefore, provides a nuanced perspective on his country. In addition, the idea of a melting pot appears often in David’s reflection on what makes America. For example, he says, in his fourth journal (October, 21st) that “multiculturalism is one of the main things that makes and made the US what it is.” In contrast, his description of French culture rarely gets that specific. He mostly views the French as fairly homogeneous people, anchored in their history.

4.5.4.3. The September 11th Attacks

As most, David was affected by the events, as shown by the data, his tone-switch. Right after the attacks, his keypal, Nadine, writes him a sympathetic email expressing her
feelings and how worried she is for Americans. She also asks David how he is coping with it. This is David’s reply, three days after the attacks:

“Je suis comme ci comme ça.
Je était été mieux
Le incident est une tragédie... Je suis TRES furieux et tres triste... Je suis desole pour tout les familles que ils étaient dans la explosion. Je suis desole pour tout les persons piégent en les décombres. J’aime comment Le Etas Unis ont se ressemblé. Nous voulons la revandre et nous nous vengerons. Les terreur sont lâches. Ils "attacked" les innocent et ils payerent. Je prie pour tout les victims est les sovuetures. Le Etas Unis est plus fort, plus fort pour ce. Il est choses comme ce que revelear a moi comment sans défense et sans espoir avant Dieu...” [Email, September 14th]

David has mixed feelings about it: very sad on one hand and angry and disgusted on the other. He likes the solidarity the event triggered in the country and wants the United States to remain strong and revenge the victims. From the email, there is an implication that there are good guys “innocents” and “victims” and bad guys “terrorists” and “cowards” who need to pay for their evil act.

A week following the attacks, during the second netmeeting, French and American students had to reflect on the reactions and analysis of the tragedy. Once again, David expresses how horrible the attacks were: “l'attentat était et est trés horrible...”:

“David: l'attentat était et est trés horrible...
Keypals: Posez vos questions
[...]
David: Nadine, Penses-tu à les decisions fait à President Bush
Lucy: oui, est-ce que la France a eu des problemes avec les terroriste recemment?
Keypals: Je sais pas pas trop
Keypals: Récemment je sais plus mais il y a eut des attentats à Paris assez souvent
[...]
David: Oui, France avait eu plus attentat de les terreur
Keypals: beaucoup d'attentats mais pas aussi horrible que celui là
David: Comment les population de France se sentir aprés les attentat en France
Keypals: Lucy penses tu qu'une guerre soit possible?
David: Est similar à America?
Keypals: non pas pareil
David: no?
Keypals: après les attentat on se sent pas en sécurité
[...]
David: oui... Penses-tu que nous Americains soyons aller plus loin?
Keypals: oui je le pense
[...]
David: Pourquoi?
David: why do you think that americans went too far?

Keypals: je ne comprend pas ta question

David: d'accord

Keypals: si j'ai compris

David: oui... Penses-tu que nous Americains soyons aller plus loin?

Keypals: oui je le pense

David: Pourquoi tu le penses?

Keypals: Parce que il y a eu beaucoup de degats

David: D'accord!

David: Je ne veux pas un guerre... mais je pense que nous ferait quelquechose

David: je pense que nous prennions les terreur qui ont fait le attentat mais ce est

David: i think that we should get better intelligence (national security)

David: and i think that this is what is going to happen

Keypals: Yes Do you know somebody in NYC

David: no... but i have many friends in the pentagon

Lucy: My father used to work in the World Trade Center until 2 years ago.

David: my best friends' father works in Section 5... had the plane gone in strait then

he would have been hit

David: some of his staff members still have not reported in

David: also another friend of mines fathers office was hit directly but luckily he was

in a meeting on the other side at the time

Nadine: it is horrible

David: yeah it sucks....

David: yeah its all pretty crazy

Keypals: What would you like to do to help your land

David: to serve it

Nadine: yes

Lucy: We have been donating blood and giving money, but there is not much we

can do.

Lucy: If we have a war, many of my freinds would go.

David: when we say war i dont think it is the same thing as a war between two states

Elisabeth: Yes but you have participated. In France we can't do lots of things.

Nadine: What do you want to say

David: i think that the United States will go on an international crusade to squash

terrorism wherever it may rise up

David: what i meant to say was: War does not necessarily mean something like

WWII

Lucy: I do not think that anyone wants to go to war.

Lucy: We want all the horrible events to stop happening.
David: Myself especially does not want to go to war because i’d have to help fight it... […]"

[NM2, September 17th]

He first inquires about his keypal’s view on the attack: he’s wondering what she thinks of the President Bush’s decisions and if she believes that the United States went to far. Unfortunately, his keypal remains evasive in her answers but expresses her concern about a potential war. David, too, would rather not have to fight but he is willing to “serve” his country. He strongly believes that his country needs to retaliate and will “go on an international crusade and squash terrorism whenever it may rise up.” Later on, he explains that many of his friends work in the Pentagon, revealing that the attacks may have been a personal tragedy.

Until the end of September, the attacks were a recurrent theme in class. Via emails and class discussions, the instructor and the French students provided a myriad of materials depicting the French perspective on the attacks, which may have been perceived as provocative to David. Even though the French keypals were very supportive and sympathetic of their American fellows, David was clearly upset about the tragedy and the French attitude, mostly depicted in the media. As the semester progresses, more and more often, he compares the Americans to the French as two antagonistic entities. He becomes critical, even at times judgmental of the French whereas he remains positive toward Americans. His third journal expresses his feelings quite clearly. He first praises the American media for doing a good job covering the tragedy:

“I would say that i was very impressed about how they were presented these past few days. They showed accurately how the americans felt and in a very professional and objective matter, displayed what had been done and why and the reason that it was wrong. The media, for once, was in the right and was not stretching for a story, therefore it was clear cut and those that needed to know, knew. I feel that i might have to explain things such as why the media was portraying us as the victim, but in all incidence like this, the recieving end, the end with innocent blood, is always the victim so i figure that wouldnt be too hard…[…]

The US was seemingly invincible and then suddenly shot in its achilles heel. Therefore, the news presented in the United States was very patriotic so it could rally its people in its great time of need. We needed to focus on reconstruction and strength, not blame.”

[Journal 3, September 23rd]

When covering the attacks, he claims the American media were “accurate”, “professional”, “objective”, “in the right”. For David, patriotism was necessary, to “rally
its people”, “to focus on reconstruction and strength”. This is to be compared with

David’s opinion on the quality of French news coverage:

“The French, on the other hand, were critics as always. They weren’t exactly affected, and though they do know terrorism, terrorism of this kind and magnitude has been unheard of in western civilization. So I perceived a French reaction as like a sort of “I told you so” or “when you treat others like crap, bad things happen”. I mean they weren’t obtuse about it, but they trying to take that vengeful veal off our eyes so we could be wise on how to go about this incident properly without adding more to the suffering.”

[Journal 3, September 23rd]

The paragraph starts with a general statement about the French who are always criticizing. The French media focused on “blame” “adding more to the suffering”. David is not the only one in the class who complains about French criticism. From the tone of his notes, it is clear that Davis is upset about the French analysis, finds the French media disrespectful. David does not say that the French are wrong but he does point out that they had never been affected by an incident of such magnitude and implies that the French don’t really know what they are talking about. The clear opposition between us (the Americans) and them (the French) is very interesting, and becomes more and more frequent in David’s analysis of the French culture at large.

A chronological look at the data shows that David develops more resistance in understanding the French culture from a French perspective, especially for certain topics such as “faith” or “patriotism”. The objective of the class was not to create French citizens but rather to understand that the way one perceives the world is socially and culturally constructed and that cultural concepts are not universal. Yet, students’ particular histories may intersect with the investment of learning a foreign language. For David, there is a sense of right and wrong in the world. Along with that idea, he contrasts the French to the Americans as two different entities, at times implying that only one of them can be right.
4.5.4.4. Patriotism

As mentioned previously, “patriotism” is an important theme in this class. The instructor, on the other hand, tries to present a French perspective and explains to American students why the French are not very patriotic. She put it back to a historical context, referring to WWII and fascism (see section 4.1.1). In the second netmeetings, French students bring up the theme of patriotism:

“Elisabeth: What do you think about solidarity between the Americans?
David: you mean patriotism?
Keypals: For us patriotism is not very important
David: why? what replaces patriotism?
Keypals: we don't sing "la marseillaise " all the days like you
David: For America patriotism is what made our country
Lucy: our country is more important to us right now, more than ever before
Keypals: We understand
Lucy: almost everyone has a flag outside at their homes
Keypals: Can you explain me what is the patriotism for you Lucy
Lucy: patriotism is how you feel proud for your country
Lucy: i love my country, and i love to live in the united states
Keypals: We have not a flag outsideat their home
David: I feel that if you do not have great confidence in the ability of your country then you should find a country in which you do, why live in something you aren't content and confident with, i feel its going against the grain.
Elisabeth: Ok i understand but in France we aren't "fan" of patriotism”
[NM 2, September 17th]

Elisabeth, Lucy’s keypal, explains that singing the “national anthem” or ‘the flag” is not important in France. At the end, she also adds that being “patriotic” it is not something that is very respected: “we aren’t ‘fan’ of patriotism”\^\text{vi}. She does not say that she is not proud of her country, as David assumes. It seems, however, that for David something should replace “patriotism” since it is essential to be proud of your country and to express it. For him, patriotism defines the United States and is almost a must. Citizens should have faith in their country, no matter where they live. The concept of patriotism, as understood by the French, is something that deeply shocks David, as the excerpt shows below:

“Do you have any comments on cultural discussions you had in class since Journal 2? Were you interested, surprised, fascinated, disturbed, disappointed, frustrated (Be critical)? Please keep in mind that this is not an evaluation of the class. You are encouraged to keep notes of what you would like to mention in your journal. The entries should underline some reflection on what happened in class (not just a description).
There was only one thing that disturbed me (all else i kind of expected). The sense that the French have no sense of national pride or patriotism. I mean, to me that is just unfathomable. The entire US is based on patriotism, that is what makes us us. We are strong in our brotherhood and belief that an american is an american regardless, and we love our country and frequently celebrate how lucky we are to have all the freedoms that we do. You see this even more after this weeks incident... how lucky we are to be free. God Bless America.”

[Journal 3, September 23rd]

For David, being patriotic is a way of life. It is what defines the United States and Americans. It is clear from this paragraph that patriotism has a very specific significance for him and should be embraced: “God Bless America”. David does not even mention that some Americans may not agree with his views. He does not really conceive another way to be proud of your country. According to David, even though the United States is diverse, it is united in certain ways, for example, in national pride.

The French, in comparison have no sense of pride. Toward the end of the semester, the instructor asked students to comment on the notion of “patriotism”. This is David’s answer:

In September (for reasons linked to the news as well as to images you had in your head about France) a theme that the class raised was “patriotism”. I gave you various approaches to the topic throughout the semester.

a) what was your definition of American patriotism in September?

“Pride, that of the ultimate sort, that would drive one to die for, we love our freedom so much that we will protect it with our lives to maintain it and our present sense and lifestyle. We died to get it, we’re not gonna let it go without a fight.

b) Back in September, what aspects of patriotism did you see (thought you saw) in French or French people?

“None… really… I don’t see the French as patriotic now, even after talking about it with them, it seems nonexistent with them. Like they have no pride in things greater than them and are very much isolated in pride of themselves.

c) Now, at the end of the semester, have these definitions and images changed? Develop at least a paragraph about this idea of patriotism.

No patriotism has always been something very real to me. I was born into the military where patriotism is abound, it kinda grew on me. So I know what it is and can tell when people are sincere or just posers that say they are patriotic.”

[Journal 6, December 6th]

Because he grew up in a military family and he is training to be an officer, being patriotic is not only who he is but also defines America. He knows “what [patriotism] is and can tell when people are sincere or just posers that say they are patriotic.” His perception of it does not evolve in the course of the semester and David feels quite strongly about his sense of pride.
Once again, he compares the French to the American as being two antagonistic entities, “we” and “they” and finds the French lack of pride outrageous. At the very end of the semester, he elaborates on what he means:

“David: Yeah! I think they have no patriotism whatsoever.
Hélène: In France?
David: Yeah
Hélène: Why?
David: ‘cause they don’t really celebrate their country… I mean they are very strong critics of it, it seems that they don’t really have much faith. I mean… maybe maybe that’s not true but it’s the impression that I get from outwards…you know… Here in America, everybody is like gung ho about …you know America, about being an American… To me that’s what patriotism is. And I don’t really see that at all. They’re talking about their government, talking about being French… you know.
Hélène: These are the impressions that you had when you talked to your keypals?
David: Hmm
Like they said if what we do is patriotic … they say if you do that in France, it would be thought of as fascist.”

He does not provide much nuances in the way he opposes the two nationalities:

“Everybody” is gung ho about America in the States, whereas the French are critical of their country. I asked him directly, during the interview, if it could be possible that the French might simply have another way to be proud of their country. His answer was: “maybe maybe…it could be”. I don’t think, however, from the look on his face that he was convinced. For David, patriotism is a very clear concept with a clear definition.

There is a clear resistance in David’s approach to legitimize the French perspectives. At times, he can even sound judgmental or arrogant about it. David understands the French’s perspectives on certain topics but finds them sometimes ridiculous. For example, the French are quite suspicious of “unnatural” food that is food that has been genetically modified such as hormonal beef. This is what the French call “la malbouffe”.


4.5.4.5. Food

On globalization, students are asked to read, as homework assignments, a variety of articles on food production, José Bové and his campaign for the preservation of traditional food (see section 4.1.3). The instructor explains how the French are suspicious of GM food in general and perceived it as “unnatural”. David completely rejects the French argument, claiming that natural is not necessarily better, as nature is chaotic and imperfect. It becomes very important for David to prove his point. For example, the following Monday, he argues his points to his keypal during the sixth meeting:

“David: Pourquoi Les Français n'aimes pas le beouf avec les hormones?
Nadine: parce que c'est pas naturel
et parce que c'est peut être dangereux
parce que la viande n'est pas bonne
David: pourquoi et comment?
pourquoi le naturel mieux?
Nadine: je sais pas apparament, c'est pas bon pour la santé
le naturel cest meilleur
David: quand le naturel et chaotique pour commencer avec comment?
Nadine: le bois est miex que le plastique
mieux
je ne comprend pas
David: le bois est miex?
Nadine: que veux tu dire mieux
David: comment les boeuf naturel mieux?
Nadine: vouloir faire mieux que la nature pour gagner de l'argent est mauvais
David: Le bois faire la moitié du plastique de choses peut-il met-il en boîte?
Nadine: on ne sais pas quels seront les effets a long termes des hormones sur l'organisme
Nadine: que pense tu des ogm (gmo)
David: Pensez cela, nature ne devrait pas automatiquement signifier bon ou être étiqueté comme bon
Nadine: donne moi un exemple
David: mais les hormones sont normales... elles sont déjà présentes en boeuf et dans nous naturellement, vous devez comprendre comment elles fonctionnent avant que vous puissiez comprendre comment elles ne nous affecteront pas du tout si elles ont été déjà employées pour produire.
ok
Les virus et les bactéries sont normaux, non?
Nadine: t'as peut etre raison mais on a encore pas de preuve de ce que tu dis les virus sont pas bons
si les virus et les bacteries sont normaux pourquoi est-ce que vous pasteurisé tout
pasteurisez
english now
can you answer to my last question please
where are you
David: sorry hold on...
i was arguing with my teacher sorry
Nadine: ok so..
David: exactly!
we pasteurize because it makes our products better and more widely available
so why not use hormones to produce more beef?
so less people are without food and it is overall cheaper because there is more of it
Nadine: is there hormones in your hamburgers?
the hormones don't do everything
David: i mean, the hormones CANNOT affect you simply because the receptors for hormones in our cells are completely different and would not read the same. In fact, the receptors are so specific that molecules can have thousands of variations and shapes and sizes but the receptor will only accept one in that thousand.
what do you mean hormones dont do everything?
Nadine: it is not because there is more hormones than there is less poor people in the world
David: what?
i dont understand that sorry
Nadine: we don't know if there will be less poor people in the world with the hormones
David: but we do know that adding hormones produces more beef, thus more food to go around and if there is more food you can only say that there will be more available to reach those that have no food
Nadine: ok I understand
David cool cool coolio
Nadine: do you have another question
David: not really... do you?
Nadine: not really too but I will try,
David: i mean honestly i dont really care, if there is food on my plate chances are if you give me a half an hour its gonna disappear
Nadine: do you often go in Mac Donald
David: it could be flavoured dirt, as long as it tastes good and fills me up yeah sometimes
if i have the money”

For Nadine, hormonal beef is not natural, therefore not very healthy. Moreover, she does not believe that increasing production to make more money is a good thing: “vouloir faire mieux que la nature pour gagner de l’argent est mauvais”. Finally, she points out that the long-term side effects are so far unknown. David, however, does not believe that natural is necessarily better. He makes the claim in this netmeeting and also to his instructor that nature is often very chaotic and imperfect. In his opinion, hormonal beef is a good thing because it increases beef production and therefore makes beef more widely available and
cheaper. Through out this exchange, the notion of “good” and “bad” is loose to say the least. Finally, he admits that the quality of food is not an important issue for him.

He finds the French illogical and almost ludicrous in their fear. The following week, he says to his keypal that he will prove that the French are wrong:

“I’ll talk to you on Monday and prove to you why hormonal beef can be even better for your body than natural (remember, natural does not necessarily automatically mean better of best for you, natural more discriminate means chaos and imperfect if anything).”

[Email, at the end of October]

He keeps arguing with his instructor about this topic as well. As noted above, he interrupts his conversation with Nadine to argue with his instructor, on the same topic.

It becomes so important for him to prove his point that he decides to conduct an experiment and prove that hormonal beef is not unhealthy and will not cause cancer, ignoring other ailments that may be caused by the meat. Three weeks later, David explains the results to his instructor and his keypal:

“Oh yeah, one more thing i ment to tell you. I knew you (well not necessarily you, but alot of french people and people that oppose it) were so wrong about beef with hormones being bad for you in that they caused cancer. Well, i just had to prove it myself, so for my Bio lab i did an experiment with various substances to see which ones causes mutations that would lead to carcinegenic cells. Well i tested Caffeine, Tobacco, Sacchrine, Acradine Orange, BEEF with hormones, and Equal (another synthetic sugar). Of all of those, the beef was the only that did not have cancerous mutations (i could go into the mechanics of why but basically, it is the only one that didnt develop certain growth patterns that show genetic mutation and thus possibly leading to cancer [you can get mutations in cell and not get cancer, but if you have cancer you MUST have genetic mutation]). Acradine orange was highly carcinegous as was Tobacco (which just came our disgusting and did more than alter growth patterns, but alters the way the cell looked color wise and physically, just disgusting what it did, bleh and to think, people actually put that crap in their lungs...), and synthetic sugars and Caffeine also caused some mutation as well but not as grossely. So there you go, you can eat all the beef you want and not worry about getting sick.”

[Email, November, 14th]

During the interview, David admits that he likes arguing: “Oh YEAH! I LOVE debating...I love it. I get into arguments all the time … with all my friends… I just love like…you know….talk about things, learning things from people…it gets me…they may have good arguments too.” His goal to prove that the French are wrong becomes an important one. Even during the interview, he talks about his experiment and explains it to me, without me asking about it:
“Hélène: And euh what were the topics that you had to debate? Do you remember?
David: Hmm, we talked about… capital punishment hmm… beef with hormones… stuff like that
Hélène: Hmm
David: The beef with hormone was really interesting and I even went to my bio lab to conduct an experiment to test if it actually WAS bad.
Hélène: And?
David: It’s not! It does not do anything if it is of interest to you. It can’t cause any genetic disease at all. All it does…
Hélène: It can’t cause what? Genetic disease?
David: Yeah, it can’t cause cancer it can’t cause ( ) without mutate your genome… it does not affect you.
Just because…You know it makes sense too ‘cause you have hormones in your body all the time and it didn’t really do anything to you… you know… but
Hélène: So, are you saying that whatever you read in those articles was wrong?
David: Oh the articles did not really say anything [in sight of the truth that it was bad] just the general impression was that they did not like it because it was alien, chemical and not natural
Hélène: OK
David: And I was just saying natural does not mean it’s good..it does not mean it’s bad but doesn’t mean it’s good you know.. Just because you add a couple of chemicals that ARE natural themselves to make more products just to make it cheaper… you know it makes sense.”

The instructor’s objective in discussing globalization is to point out that the French have a different relation with their food than Americans. David, however, interprets the activity quite differently. Because there is a sense of right and wrong for him, he feels the need to prove that the French are purely wrong (implying that Americans are right). According to him, the French are entitled to their opinions but they rely on “wrong” facts. He has a very positivistic approach to culture as a quest for some universal truth.

4.5.4.6. Religion

This particular way to look at the world is reflected in the ways he talks about religion. From the very beginning, David expresses how faith is the most essential aspect of his life. In fact, he chooses to write about his faith for his poem and his texte libre[vii].
Je Crois Donc Je Suis

Je suis Homme
Gentile, Fait, Vivant
Marcheur de cette monde
Étranger à cet domaine
Perdu, Nécessiteux, Cherchant
Je suis Homme
J’étais Création
Rien, Poussière, Sans Vie
Sculpé de la Terre
Vie soufflée dans un vide
Pur, Sans Péché, Bon
J’étais Création
Je serai Savé
Percheur, Pardonné, Renouvelé
Soulevé au Dieu
Serant en joie,
Racheté, Intègre, Content
Je serai Savé

[poem]

Texte libre:

“Qu’est-il ce définit-il votre vie? Est-ce un but, une idée, une personne?
Habituellement il est différent pour beaucoup de gens. Mais pour moi, c’est une idée qui
est pensée en fonction par le plus grand groupe de personnes dans le monde. La chose la
plus important dans ma vie est ma foi. Ma foi que Jésus de Nazareth, le Christ est mon
savior saint, est le fils Dieu et la raison de pour laquelle mes péchés sont pardonnés et de
que je puis avoir la vie éternelle avec mon créateur. Je crois que ma foi est quelque peu
diffèrent que ce que beaucoup de gens qui s’appellent des chrétiens pensent. Pour moi, le
christianisme n’est pas une religion mais un rapport. Dieu est mon ami, ma console, et
féinalement celle à qui je dois à tout dans ma vie, le bon et le bon qu’il apporte hors du
mauvais.

Vous pouvez penser, si vous êtes déjà un chrétien, Oh, un autre phénomène de
Jésus, mais un regard à lui de cette façon : si vous parler de ce qui va arriver à votre âme
éternelle, il ne pense pas pour être sage plaisanter de m’à son sujet. Pour moi, il es
quelque chose très sérieuse. Je veux être 100% sûr que mon âme va aller au ciel. Il n’y a
aucune voie dans l’enfer que je voudrais qu’elle aille à l’alternative. Et la voie de
s’assurer de cela esr aimer mon Dieu avec tous mon cœur, âme, esprit et d’aimer chacun
comme je suis commandé de m’aimer et le cadeau de la vie acordé sur moi. Et si tout va
bien, par la pratique et la patience, je pourrai dépenser l’éternité avec mon sauveur.

Si vous n’êtes pas un chrétien, bien j’invite-vous à examiner au moins la réalité de
cet qu’est il. Ne comptez pas juste sur quelles personnes et l’église indiquent et
représentent, ou quelle histoire doit indiquer au sujet du christianisme, mais comptez sur
ce qu’il est vraiment. Puisque nous parlons de quelque chose de sérieux, ce qui arrive à
vous quand vous mourrez. Vous le devez au moins vous-même pour étudier, est-ce que
j’ai fait seulement il y a quelques mois, et l’évidence m’a changé pour toujours. Lee
Strobel, l’ancien éditeur et un journaliste investigateur pour la Chicago Tribune ont dit,
« après ma recherche et avoir pesé les faits devant moi, j’ai constaté qu’elle exigerait de
plus de foi sde mettre à jour mon athéisme que croire que jésus le Christ est seigneu,

For their poems, most students describe they personalities and present what they like to do. For David, however, faith defines who he is and is a serious matter. Faith for him is a “relationship” with God who is his “friend”, his “consolation”. In his poem and text, he mentions how essential it is to be saved: “I want to be a 100% sure that my soul will go to heaven.” For him, there is no alternative in hell. In addition, there is no ambiguity in the way he perceives life after death. What is important is to deserve the eternal life: “Et la façon de s’assurer de cela est d’aimer mon Dieu avec tout mon coeur, âme, et esprit et d’aimer chacun comme je suis commandé de m’aider et le cadeau de la vie accordé sur moi.” He does not impose his definition, but for him there is a way to conduct one’s life to deserve eternal life. This is clearly how he looks at faith.

Because his faith obviously defines who he is and is part of David’ history, it also shapes his ways of looking at the world. He is against capital punishment and abortion for religious reasons:

“Nadine: Are you for the death penalty? Why?
David: no i am not, because i dont support hte death of anyone unless they attack me and its on fair grounds
Nadine: it is good
David: plus i figure its a better penalty to make them live in suffering
Nadine: Would you want the death penalty to be abolished in the US?
David: itd be nice
it'd = it would
Nadine: What are the methods of capital punishment do you think are acceptable?
Lethal injection hanging, beheading bullet
David: none
i dont think any are acceptable
Nadine: gas chamber, electric chair or none at all
David: C. wants to bring back draw and quartering and the cruxifiction techniques
David: IM KIDDING, she didnt say that
i think none, so does C., for real though
Nadine: For you, abortion should be legal or illegal
David: illegal definitely
C. thinks legal though
Nadine: Why?
David: because regardless of how you twist it, it is still a human life you are killing a cell is life no?
Nadine: I think that a woman have the right to choose what she want to do with her baby
David: and those cells in you are all human no?
      no
      that does not work with me
      a woman has a right of HER body but no her babies
      C. agrees with you though
Nadine: if she is young I think like you
David: the baby's genome is unique and therefore not of the mother's same
Nadine: but after 20 I think that she can choose
David: therefore it is a separate entity
      we don't say the bacteria in your body are human no?
Nadine: In France it is legal what do you think about that
      are we going to say that baby's are as significant as bacterium? no, of course
      not, we can't, simply because even at the cellular level they are completely different
David: I think it should change” [Net-meeting 5, October 15th]

More than capital punishment, abortion is a very emotional issue for David. He strongly believes that no one has the right to “kill a cell” because ultimately you are killing life. He completely rejects and dismisses all the arguments for pro-choice.

In a following email to his keypal, he further explains how “delicate” the topic is for him:

“Pro-choice et pro-vie… bien c’est un sujet très délicat pour moi. Personnellement, je LE DÉTESTE avec un feu qui brûle dans moi davantage que toute autre chose dans le monde. Je pense qu’il est probablement l’un des seules choses hors de cela reçoit la haine de moi. Je ne suis pas une personne détestatante, mais la suspension est ainsi dégoût juste ce il le griffe hors de moi. Toutes les fois que je pense li des écoulements detristesse et d’une passion au-dessus de moi et je veux pleurer la chose qui est si en difficulté en notre monde. Je le pense despicable que nous détruisons l’unborn juste pour faire des extremists se réunir. Si notre mere venait chez vous et disait qu’elle avait considéré vous interrompre, que diriez-vous d’elle?” [Email, October “iii”]

This is obviously a very passionate topic for David. The words he chooses to depict what he feels are very harsh and bleak as “he HATES” the idea of abortion, “a fire that burns” him, a “despicable” behavior. In his perception of life and death, David is very consistent. In contrast, he finds the French keypals quite hypocritical, since most of them are pro-choice and against capital punishment. In a survey that the French and American students had to complete, 70% of the American students supported death penalty, whereas only 6% did in France. Moreover, for 100% of the French students, abortion should be legal when 60% of American students had the same opinion, and 6% of the
American students thought it should be illegal. David finds the French paradoxical on these two topics: “one thing I see is their capitol punishment and abortion views, no death vs. death. That in itself is hypocrisy.” [Journal 4, October, 21st]

For Agar (1994), there are two ways to learn about cultures. “One way is to figure out that the differences are the tip of the iceberg, the signal that two different systems are at work. Another way is to notice all the things that the other person lacks when compared to you, the so-called deficit theory approach.” (p.23). In some ways, David uses the “deficit theory approach” when he talks about culture. In late October, students were asked to react to Agar’s definition of “the deficit theory approach and answer four questions:

“Number-one types- American or any other- use the deficit theory. They’re the best, anything else is less than the best, and anyone who would call into question who they are when they’re already the best is a fool or a masochist or even, as they used to say in America before perestroika, a Communist.”

a) In the Spring 2001, what would have been your reaction to this statement?

b) Thinking nowadays (late October 2001), how would you comment and analyze the statement? If there was any change in your understanding of the statement, what made the change come about?

c) What (positive or negative) characteristics or (positive or negative) values of American culture do you notice in the statement?

d) How do you think a French person would react to his statement? David’s reply is quite interesting and very critical of this statement:

“In statement a), David implies that there is a quest for what is best for the individual, “because it is wrong to try to impose upon God given rights”. He is also very critical of the French. During the interview, I asked whether David was being provocative and sarcastic or if he meant it. He claimed that he was being half serious and half sarcastic. He clarified what he meant in his first statement: “You can’t say that we are the best of
the countries but you can say that what we’ve made of our country has become to best for the individual…you know…” He also pointed out that he put a lot of sarcasm in this paper, “just because there were a lot of dumb statements. I was so angry at them”.

4.5.5. Conclusion

The point of this study is to underline what it means for students to learn about another culture, to underscore how engage they are in their learning process. I find it interesting how some topics have for David some moral values and become very personal matters. It is in these situations that David is resistant to the “other” culture. Indeed, for other topics, such as eating habits, he is not confrontational. It is important to note that he is more sarcastic to his teacher or in what he writes for his assignments than with his keypal. Agar also underlines how culture has to do with who you are. The data presented so far has shown how David’s particular histories, his identity and to some extent the September 11\textsuperscript{th} attacks intersect and influence his approach to learning a foreign language.

This is not to say that David has not learned anything. He has of course as he clearly says so at the end of the semester. He expresses that he enjoyed the class and above all the netmeetings:

“I believe the NM's have helped me learn the most about the culture, because i am talking straight to a french person who IS french, not some prep school critic writing a generalized and polled article. The things i usually learn are stereotypes and getting rid of them typically. I gain this mainly from the NM's.” [Journal 5, December 3\textsuperscript{rd}]

He also learned how to articulate his ideas in a more complex and in a clearer way than at the beginning of the semester: “Again the NM's help the MOST in learning french simply because you are struggling to apply it in such an advanced demand that you cant help but learn the techniques about speaking French and greatly widen your vocab.”[Journal 5, December 3\textsuperscript{rd}]. According to him, this class has prepared him “excellently” to go to France in the Spring:
“it's giving me knowledge on how I should present myself and react towards the people without being snyde or rude or crossing some cultural barrier I wouldn’t ve known about. Also it preps me with what I should expect to eat and do while I am there. Basically getting ready for a good time without the hassle to settle in. Also is DOES help me with my french which is a plus.” [Journal 5, December 3rd]

He deeply appreciates learning from a French person of his age, discussing topics of his choice:

“David: we’re able to speak with French people all the time and directly ask questions on what they're thinking not having to deal with somebody’s… you know polls or some critics’ analyzation of their thing but actually get it from the actual source in that way and plus we are able to read a lot of other ( ) articles and that’s like the basic force…. And at the same time you’re using the French, which you’ve already learned and so… it’s just better reinforcement ‘cause now I am reapplying what I’ve already learned… in that way.

Hélène: So in your opinion, what helped you the most in the learning of culture?
David: Definitely talking to the keypals.
Hélène: Yeah ..OK…Because…
David: Oh, just because you can directly ask them questions. You read a little something about some things but that did not really give you a solid answer or whatever, would really tell you what was what in French culture. You could actually talk to them, figure out in just ( ) the way they talk, the way they carry themselves you know what the other person is like

Hélène : Is not only what they said but also the way they said it?
David: Yeah” [Interview]

In his emails or his netmeetings, he did not appropriate many of the idiomatic expressions his keypal used. When, it is crucial for him to make a point, he makes a great effort to articulate his ideas clearly.

Learning about culture has great value for David, even at the end of the semester. In fact, his reasons for learning a culture have not changed much since he still mentions his career:

“I personally put high value on it because I will be involved with cultures greatly when I go into my career fields. This class has better prepared me on how to come to learn cultures and better understand what it is that makes up a culture and what usually makes a culture different from others. It also give students world awareness and rids them f ignorance and hatred by maturing them to truths about other people and that they are different because of culture.” [Journal 6, December 6th]

Culture is for him separate from language, as he conceives culture as a list of facts: “what it is that makes a certain group of people categorized as different from others. This can
include language, food, lifestyle, and/or habits” [Journal 6]. In this class, students were encouraged to become aware of various frames of reference. From the data, David has been rejected some of these frames of reference as being the “wrong” frames as it is clear in his way to compare French and American cultures by late October:

“Well, we're both human. And i think both of us are in the now by ways of pop culture but i believe we are far more different than alike. For one, we are patriotic in a noticeable sense, they can say they are all they want, but until i can see some pride for you country i believe those to be empty words. If you love your country you show it or else what's the point. Another important difference is their saying they're diverse and equal, i mean, cmon, until you are no longer the only western state with a cultural minister you can use that argument against me. They say the US was not equal, phaa! We are by far one of the strongest countries in regards to equality. We have LAWS, enforced heavily, that make sure that we are all seen as equal in everything. One last difference is that our culture is relatively new and a conglomeration of many cultures and is ever changing nearly every 10 years. Theirs is one shaped by history and roots all the way back to Charlesmagne.” [Journal 4, October 10th]

The only common points are the fact that Americans as well as the French are human beings and both appreciate much culture. However the differences are outstanding.

In the entry above, his resistance to the French frame of reference is obvious in his ways to ridicule the way the French look at their own culture. Learning about French culture has not led David to look at his culture in a different way. In fact, he even says at the end of the semester that his perception of American culture has not evolved in the course of the semester:

Do you think that the way you perceive, understand the French culture and the American culture has evolved throughout the semester?

“American culture, no. I HAVE learned about it though what it is perceived as by other cultures. AS to French culture I have learned a lot like what their lifestyle is like. What their high school is like, nightlife is like, what foods they eat and why they like to eat them, like the way they do or do not like other folks. Also, about their language and how that has developed their culture.” [Journal 6].

David has been apprenticed into new discourse communities but has also rejected some of its values. Looking at learning a foreign language as a social practice is also acknowledging the students’ agency in orienting their learning: here his resistance to the culture of others. Because culture is also about who you are, learners personal histories and identities may affect the way they engage themselves in their language learning.
process and their cultural development. It is important to note that his engagement or his way to perceive the culture of other may evolve, when visiting France for example, as his motive may change.

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i The ROTC program gives an opportunity to men and women to become officers while completing a degree.

ii There is no specific date on the email but it was sent at the end of September.

iii Note that both definitions are really his: the first one is how David thinks the outside observer would perceive American culture. The second definition is the one he identifies with.

iv In this chatroom, there are two American students (Lucy and David) and two French students. In this narrative, I choose to focus on David’s comments for the analysis of the data. For analysis of Lucy’s comments, see Lucy’s narrative.

v In the transcript of this netmeeting, it is not clear when Nadine voices her opinion. She is included in “keypals”

vi “we aren’t ‘fan’ of patriotism”: I am assuming this assertion comes from the French expression “Je ne suis pas fan de”, i.e. “I am not a fanatic of”.

vii *Textes libres* are individual texts written by each student on a topic of their choice (see section 3.3.1)

viii There is no specific date on the email.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I will discuss the outcomes of my study. In the previous chapter, I described in detail the experiences of four participants, Julie, Mary, Lucy and David, attempting to shed light on the complexity of learning activity. Here, I will first explain how the activity of learning has been socially constructed throughout the semester. Then, I will discuss each individual’s development, that is, in examining the qualities of participation and of change over time, I will attempt to portray the outcome of this experience for each participant as an unfolding *process* of learning. Because each of these four participants comes to class with a different history and a particular motive to learn French, the learning outcome in each case should be expected to be unique.

The uniqueness of individual learning history is underscored both in contemporary sociocultural theory and in theoretical insights on the role of culture in the classroom. The activity of learning a foreign language is a complex phenomenon, more than mere acquisition of a linguistic system. For Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), “it is about developing, or failing to develop, new ways of mediating ourselves and our relationships to others and to ourselves” (p. 145). Kramsch (1993a) argues that by being in contact with another language and another culture, the learner creates meanings of his own according to his or her interest. In this chapter I will therefore return to the case studies of individual students in order to explore whether and to what extent it may in fact be claimed that these students developed new ways of mediating themselves and their relationships with others, including the intercultural stance implied by Kramsch’s interpretation of the “third place.”
5.1. The Social Construction of Learning

Because context constructs the learning in specific ways, it is essential to describe in detail the environment in which learning takes place. The class I observed was organized in accordance with Freinet’s pedagogy whose specificities need to be noted. For the pedagogue, the objective of education is to facilitate the development of the mind. To do so, Freinet believed that the students ought to be engaged in activities that are relevant to their lives. His pedagogy conceives learning as a process of inquiry rather than an acquisition of knowledge. Education is based on a collaborative approach where students are fully engaged in their learning (i.e. learning by doing). Together, the instructor and the student form a learning community in which they share responsibilities. Students work collaboratively in the completion of tasks. The instructor is a guide, a facilitator for their learning, not a knowledge dispenser. Learning tools are crucial in the Freinet approach as they provide direction for the learning activity. In other words, they mediate the students’ learning process. For Freinet, education should not be limited to the four walls of the classroom: bringing the classroom into the world and bringing the outside world into the classroom is of a particular importance. Indeed, such an approach is held to create relevance to the students’ lives by offering them motives to learn.

In accordance to Freinet’s pedagogy, Magali constructs a learning community where its members work collaboratively. The class is divided into groups of four or five students. For each class activity, members of each group work together to complete the task (e.g. together, they analyze the results of a survey or they discuss the main points of an article). At the end of the activity, each group shares its results and its analysis with the rest of the class. The instructor then synthesizes the results, either orally or on the blackboard. Computer lab activities are also collaborative. This is partly due to material constraints since there is on average one computer available for two students. Also, the class size in France being half the size of the American class, each student in France has two American keypals. On Mondays, the pairs of American students communicate to their common keypals, via the same computer. Either one student is in charge of the typing or each student types his or her own comments. On Tuesdays, students chat and work collaboratively in groups.
In addition, to contribute to the cooperative classroom environment and facilitate their lives in the community, the students have responsibilities (see syllabus, Appendix A). Each week, the class president gives announcements and organizes special activities. For example, while Mary was the class president, she was in charge of organizing the French meal. Her duty consisted of dividing the work and making sure that each student brought a dish. The class president announces the beginning and the end of the class as well. The students are also responsible for choosing a song (in French) to be played at the beginning of each class. They are expected to name the artist and identify the music genre. Finally, they contribute to the community’s web magazine, *Raison d’être*. The students are expected to write a chronicle or to be a reporter on a topic of their choice at some point during the semester.

In turn, the instructor’s responsibilities are quite extensive. Magali’s goal is to facilitate the students’ learning. First, she offers a series of tools for encouraging and directing the students in their learning. The tools allow for the inquiry-based learning to take place and the list below presents only a few.

- The telecollaboration with a French high school provides avenues for the students to explore French culture(s). By communicating with French keypals, they have ample opportunities to not only learn about their keypals’ culture but also describe and explain their own. The telecollaboration is the source of multiple activities that are meaningful to the students: discussions via the netmeetings, sharing of personal information and opinions via emails, co-constructing a collage to present their American university to the class in France, etc., are all tools meant to enhance the students’ learning. The goal of these activities is not simply to practice linguistic features of the French language but also to create meaning through dialogue (see below). In addition, the exchange gives a voice to the students as they are, for example, encouraged to express their views to their keypals. Through the telecollaboration, students have access to a community of practice, which may function as a socializing context. Telecollaboration brings the classroom to the outside world and the outside world into the classroom.
One of the instructor’s objectives is to engage her students in a reflective approach to culture and enhance their critical thinking. To mediate the students’ learning, she provides a myriad of sources for her students to observe, get informed, and analyze: websites, readings, lectures, class discussions, video excerpts, discussions with the keypals, surveys, etc. Through these multiple sources, the instructor strives to present issues from different angles. These tools are meant to expand the students’ view of the world, by presenting contrastive views.

The essays and the cultural journals help students to further develop their analytical and critical thinking skills. These two types of assignment are not a mere writing activity, but encourage students to reflect critically on issues and synthesize what they have learned. Moreover, they at times become public documents whenever excerpts are published in *Raison d’être*. In other words, the web magazine brings the classroom to the outside world.

In class, the instructor supplies students with vocabulary and idiomatic expressions to ease and enhance their communication in French. Language is in fact the primary tool since it mediates the students’ thinking.

The texte libre fulfills two purposes important to the Freinet approach. First, it encourages students to be engaged in individual research projects. The drafts that students are expected to submit help them in their research. Second, it promotes free expression and communication, which are essential in Freinet pedagogy because the students need to have a voice.

Magali’s second responsibility is to guide her students in their inquiry about the French culture(s) and their own culture(s). Each activity she designs has a set of questions to assist the students’ reflection. For example, to direct the students’ analysis of the mental map survey, Magali gives them three questions to think about (see section 4.1.2). Another example could be the detailed emails she sends the class to frame the content of each Monday netmeetings (see for example, section 4.1.1). In addition, she offers individualized help while students work in groups. For instance, she helps them express their ideas precisely. She gives very detailed feedback on the students’ essays or
texte libre. She also sends the students emails to encourage them or pinpoint recurrent mistakes in their work. (see section 4.1.4).

The use of tools and the way she frames her lessons guide the students in their inquiry, engaging students in a reflection about the French culture(s) as well as their own, and offering ways for the students to observe, discover, analyze and enhance their critical thinking. The intention is to introduce students to the social and cultural meaning of the language they study: Crossing cultural boundaries should allow for meanings to reveal their depths (Bakhtin, 1986), and for “rich points” to emerge (Agar, 1994).

The class design allows a cross-cultural dialogue from which new meanings can emerge. Via the netmeetings and the emails sent to their keypals, the students have opportunities to see that the way one perceives the world is in fact relative as it is constrained by one’s culture. The students also extensively study other sources of information such as newspaper articles, web sites, documentaries, etc. The class brings to the fore dissonant voices. For Kramsch (1993a), numerous discourses offer a rich learning environment because they allow the students to become aware of the various ways of meaning and expressing one’s thought. Through dialogue, the students are guided to understand the notion of “otherness”. The objective of the activities that are completed throughout the semester, using contrastive techniques, is to stress the semiotic differences within a culture and across cultures.

The way the class is designed has interesting pedagogical potentials. Vygotsky argues that becoming aware of various reference frames corresponds to a cognitive growth since it enhances the students’ repertoire for thinking by gaining control of what they know. Throughout the semester, a reflective approach of the inquiry is encouraged, which is not to say that all students demonstrate a reflective engagement in their learning and automatically develop (see Lucy for example). Adopting a cross-cultural approach to learning, the class offers opportunities for students to expand their view of the world by making cultural boundaries visible. The dialogic process as described here is intended to
allow for a third perspective to emerge, one where the students have opportunities to create new meanings that are salient to them and to their lives.

Finally, the activity of learning is also socially constructed through the existing rules that bind the students and the instructor to behave in certain ways. Some rules are explicit and are explained in detailed in the syllabus. For example, students are expected to take on responsibilities, participate actively in class, complete homework assignments on time, and so forth. Other rules are implicit. Through socialization to schooling when they were children, the students come to class with an understanding of their roles as students. The norms and conventions, which are culturally specific, frame what constitutes appropriate behavior in a classroom, such as raising one’s hand to answer a question. The students also have specific expectations of the instructor’s role and what they hope to gain from the class. As mentioned above, the atmosphere of this class is very collaborative. The students need to learn how to function in this specific learning environment (the responsibilities, working with the same partners, co-writing essays, etc.).

A difficulty the students encounter at the beginning of the semester relates to the teaching of culture. By contrasting the American culture to the French, the instructor attempts to make her students understand French viewpoints. When discussing issues (i.e. the weekly themes), she focuses on a French perspective and challenges the students’ viewpoints. The idea is to enable students to take insider’ and outsider’s views on not only the French culture but also their own culture. At first, the students feel that their culture is constantly being criticized. They are not at ease. Agar (1994) highlights that because culture has to do with who you are, entering another world changes who you are. What was once believed to be “the right” way, turns arbitrary. Loosing certainty is challenging or threatening, disconcerting at least. Magali indicates that some students are hostile at the beginning of the semester because they feel personally attacked (see section 4.1). She notes that her objectives are to 1) encourage the students to distinguish between an opinion and a fact and 2) avoid what Agar (1994) names “the deficit theory.
approach. She estimates that it takes students two to four weeks to learn how to function in her class.

The social environment in which the learning takes place shapes the students’ development, bringing “particular opportunities and specific constraints” (Breen, 1996, p. 85). Throughout the narratives explored in Chapter 4, the participants’ reflective approach to language and culture is explored in detail. I investigate how students talk about and use cultural constructs and I discuss changes that occurred in the course of the semester. The class in general and the telecollaboration in particular are not spaces for mere transmission of information. Throughout the semester, the participants constantly renegotiate how to relate to the world. The cognitive changes are very much linked to the participants’ identities as they “organize and reorganize a sense of who they are” (Norton, 2001, p. 166). In the following section, I will further investigate how Julie, Mary, Lucy and David make the learning of a foreign language relevant to their lives. Relying on a genetic approach, I explore the participants’ histories as they shed light on each individual’s investment in the learning. In light of sociocultural theory and specifically activity theory, I will demonstrate how the participants’ motives orient their engagement in activities in specific ways. I will investigate whether or not a third place emerges and if so I will explain how each participant defines his or her third place. I argue that learning is different for each participant. Thus, I will discuss what is unique and particular for each one of them.

5.2. The Participants’ Development

5.2.1. Julie

Julie begins the semester with a positive orientation to the French language. Even though a third semester of French study is required for her major, she stresses that she would have taken the class anyway. At first, her motive to learn French comes from her emotions toward the language: “I really enjoy the romantic languages, I love French, and
would like to learn Italian, too” (see section 4.2.2). She thinks French is a beautiful language. Because she finds the language romantic, she is drawn to learn how to speak it. Furthermore, she believes that learning a foreign language is important for her personal growth. She is not convinced, however, that she will ever use it, unless she “manage[s] to get out of the country.” Julie comes from a small rural town and has not traveled much outside the United States. While living by the Canadian border for a year, she visited Montréal a few times. Gillette (1994) argues that students’ motivation to learn a foreign language is linked to their exposure to the world. Julie, who portrays herself as person who has had limited experience of other cultures, is nonetheless highly motivated to learn French. She claims not to know much about French culture prior to taking this class: the work of a few French painters and a couple of monuments. She is conscious about her lack of knowledge and feels uncomfortable when she has to give her definition of the French culture (Section 4.2.4.1).

Her preconceived idea of what culture is orients her learning in specific ways. From the very beginning of the semester, she believes that people have various ways of conceiving the world. In her definition of culture, she shows her fascination with the “little things of life that make people different”:

“There are so many things that we do every day that are part of our culture that we don’t even realize, but that someone foreign to us would find very odd. Culture is all of those little things that make us stand out as being unique and proud of who we are.”

[Journal 2, September 3rd]

She acknowledges that even though the French and Americans may have similar daily activities, these activities mean different things for each culture (see 4.2.4.1). Her fascination with these “little” cultural differences orients her learning strategies. She takes the point of view of an observer from the very beginning of the semester and is able to hold on to a detached perspective throughout the semester. She embraces “rich points”, and ponders about them (idem). From the start, she observes the two cultures carefully, reflects on them and takes distance from her own culture. She is not interested in a list of facts but is eager to understand ways of being. She consistently looks for aspects of a culture that make people unique. The telecollaboration gives her
opportunities to think about her culture as well as the French culture in ways that she would not have had otherwise.

By the end of the semester, she claims having learned a great deal from her discussions with her keypal. She indicates that the friendship she gained from the experience was a motivating factor:

“Our keypals taught us sooo much through our questions and discussions.” [Portfolio]. “Being connected to actual French people is really fascinating and .. I think it definitely makes the whole experience much more enjoyable” [Interview]

From Eglantine, she obtains personal information (i.e. her keypal’s points of view). With the reading assignments and the follow-up class discussions, she understands that Eglantine’s perspectives are only one facet of the French culture. In addition, the essays and the cultural journals lead Julie to analyze further the cultural similarities and differences. The multiple discourses present in the class not only allow Julie to sharpen her critical thinking skills, but also enhance her interest in learning the language.

Early in the semester, she argues that cultural differences are reflected in the language, making culture and language “always one and the same” (section 4.2.3).

“Besides what is the point of learning how to speak to someone from a different culture than yours if you’re not going to take the time to see all the things that are different from that culture? It’s only doing a job halfway. (…) You have no idea how to act, how to behave, or what they do every day.” [Journal 2, September 3rd]

She is interested in learning how to use the language in order to gain some knowledge about the culture. Throughout the semester, she analyzes how the French express themselves and observes how their culture is reflected in their use of the language. For example, she first struggles to understand why the French are not patriotic and refuse to display their flag in front of their homes. By the end of the semester, she concludes that the French show their sense of national pride in a different manner, in their gastronomy for example. Her investment in her learning enables her to negotiate meanings through dialogue. When she does not comprehend a concept, she keeps asking questions until she understands the “other” point of view. She is quite persistent in her ways to look for an answer. One striking example is the energy she deploys to understand what her keypal
means by “rich ghettos” (section 4.2.5). Having access to French people (i.e. the keypals) represents a wonderful opportunity for her to learn how to use her French. She understands the language and the culture better than at the beginning of the semester. Furthermore, she becomes more and more at ease with French in the course of the semester. She even uses a few colloquial expressions in her emails to Eglantine.

From the beginning, Julie is interested in cultural differences. To gain a better understanding of these differences, she adopts the attitude of an observer. The dramatic events of September 11th, 2001 compel Julie to renegotiate her orientation. She considers the attacks “a wake up call” for not only herself but also for her country. She is not merely interested in knowing about the French and the French culture anymore. From that point on, she strives to gain the point of view of an outsider in order to understand how America is viewed from the outside. Her new orientation becomes a personal endeavor and a recurrent objective to achieve. She is eager to challenge her ways of seeing and thinking about her own culture. Using many mediational means that are made available to her (discussions with her keypals, readings, class discussions, the media), she becomes aware of the image America projects to the world.

Not always agreeing with that image, she often attempts to provide another voice. For example, after the attacks, she voices her disagreement with the administration’s decision to go to war. The image she wishes to identify with is that of solidarity the attacks brought up (see examples in section 4.2.4.3). Her comments during a chat session are quite representative of how she feels:

“Nous ne voudrais pas comprendons les autres pays. C’est stupide.
Il est bien a comprende autre pays
Parce que nous pense la culture American c’est le seulement culture important.
Oui, nous avons le “superpower” en reputation
Mais maintenant nous avons besoin d’assistance d’autre pays.”

[Chat, October 2nd]

By comparing and contrasting the two cultures, she is able to develop a sharp critical eye to her own culture. Furthermore, the “outsideness” becomes a powerful
approach in her ability to create new realities. To illustrate how Julie changes her views in the course of the semester, there are a few examples I would like to draw attention to.

First, she is able to pinpoint at the different approaches taken by the French and American media in the coverage of the attacks. For example, she explains that the American coverage tried to show all the angles of a story: “The media in America pride themselves in getting absolutely all of the angles on a story, so repeatedly interviewing people with the same story or showing the same images is pretty commonplace.” [Journal 4, October 22nd]. Comparing the two cultures has allowed Julie to distance herself from her culture in order to gain an outsider’s perspective.

Second, in her study of stereotypes, she is eager to learn, such that she is also willing to offer detailed information about her culture. She explains it thoroughly to her keypal. She not only ponders about her daily activities but also theorizes about them, almost adopting a sociological approach at times (see examples in section 4.2.4.4). Studying stereotypes forces her to reflect on her own culture. The collage is a strong example of her development. At first, the images she is confronted with clash with what she thinks of America. She is thus critical of the collage, pointing out biases and underlining aspects she does not understand. She is surprised that the “melting pot” notion is not included. She does not comprehend why words such as “inequality” or “Kyoto” are on the collage. In addition, she rejects the image of evangelism as being representative of America. A week later, she feels embarrassed by the collage, highlighting that there may be more truth to it than Americans would like to admit (see 4.2.4.4). She even concludes:

“Les étudiantes dans le classe ne savent pas qu'est-ce que c'est le Kyoto, une façon tres importante tous le monde sauf le USA. Et la point c'est que nous sommes fier que notre comportement. Je pense nous avons besion de regarder a comment le monde voient l'américains, et questionnons si nous voudrias de continue être avons vu a cette façon. C'est embarrasant à réaliser que le monde voient nous comme ça.” [Essay, October 15th]

She is embarrassed by the image the United States project. She thinks Americans should care about how they are viewed outside and should question what they do. She actually believes that her country has a lot to learn from other countries:
“Jusqu’au jour de l’attaque, nous n’avons jamais nous préoccupé avec notre sécurité ou autre choses comme ça. Les choses superficiel sont les choses prédominantes qu’on fait ou parlé on. Peut-être maintenant, l’américains prendrons un exemple de les gens français et d’autre pays, et voyons le choses vraiment importante dans la vie.”

[Essay, October 29th]

By constantly contrasting French and American cultures, Julie gains a nuanced perspective on the two cultures but more importantly, she discovers new awareness that changes her views and the way she looks at things. The way she conceives culture and what she is eager to discover determine her learning strategies. From her data, it is clear that her objective goes beyond obtaining a good grade. She is engaged in her learning and chooses questions and topics that are of particular interest to her “personal growth”, notably how the French perceive Americans. By asking many questions, by consistently observing and analyzing cultural differences, she engages herself in a reflection about culture that compels her to reorganize her conceptions of her own culture. The dialogic process allows her third place to emerge, at the interstice of the two cultures. She creates new meanings that are relevant to her life. The attacks were, for her, a “wake up call” and she strongly believes that the United States should consider how such hatred came about. The reflection part of her learning is crucial for her development because it is through reflection that she is able to change. Without in-depth analysis, Julie would limit her learning to the observations of cultural differences summarized to a list of cultural facts. Throughout the semester, she holds on to a detached perspective, gaining the point of view of an outsider. Her strategy enhances her critical thinking skills and by so doing expands her thinking repertoire. For Julie, the experience was such a rich one that she finally decides to continue with French.

5.2.2. Mary

Mary’s learning process is fairly similar to Julie’s. Like Julie, Mary does not simply take French class to fulfill an academic requirement. Since she plans to be a diplomat or a translator, her goal is to become fluent in French. She decided to study
French when she realized that it was one of the official languages of the United Nations. Learning a foreign language is very valuable for Mary. Her decision to live in an international dormitory, where many of her fellow residents are French speakers, reflects her motivation for learning French. She also has a French friend, Elise, an exchange-student at the university. Mary and Elise do not speak French to each other but compare their native cultures often. Overall, Mary is highly dedicated to her French studies and her negative experience in high school has not altered her motivation. Unlike Julie, she is convinced that she will use her French in the future. Throughout her data, she emphasizes how crucial it is for her to “really” learn the language:

“Je crois que je serai un bon correspondant parce je veux apprendre vraiment le français. Je veux une carrière de la diplomatie. Alors, j’ai choisi étudier la langue du français parce que elle utilise dans beaucoup des pays et elle est une langue officielle des Nations Unies. Pendant que j’étudiais le français, je commencais aimer la langue.”
[Email, September 3rd]

Her three-week stay in France has reinforced her desire to learn French. She considers her trip abroad her best experience in life. Her trip to France had such an important impact in her life that she chooses to narrate her experience in her texte libre. She indicates that her French improved tremendously while living there. She says that on her way back from France, a French man did not even notice she was American, which made her very proud of her achievement. She gained confidence in her spoken French. In addition, noticing many cultural differences during her stay, she considers her trip a rich cultural experience.

She is looking forward to the exchange with the French keypals. She is eager to practice her French as much as possible and enjoys talking about cultural differences. She claims to come to her French 3 class with some good knowledge of French culture in general, which she gained from her trip. By the end of the semester, she admits that her French class offered a historical and social context to the cultural differences she had noticed while she was there. In other words, the class provided Mary with tools to analyze and explain cultural differences.
Her general approach to the course is shaped by: 1) her goal to become fluent in French and 2) her view on what learning a foreign language entails. First, as noted in her narrative, Mary is a very diligent and dedicated student. She is engaged in the class activities and participates often. She asks many questions to her keypal and takes advantage of the opportunities to practice her French. Second, like Julie, she believes that language and culture are “closely related”. She states in her second journal: “Learning about a culture is, therefore, acutely relative to learning a language since culture influences language usage and language identifies culture” [Journal 2, September 3rd]. Throughout her data, she observes and analyzes how culture is reflected in the way people use their language. For example during the third netmeeting, Mary and her keypal discuss how concepts such as “family” or “religion” mean different things in each culture (see section 4.3.3). They also discuss how eating habits are conceived differently in American and French culture (see section 4.3.2.5). For Mary, learning a foreign language is learning how to communicate in a different way. In the course of the semester, she therefore dialogically negotiates new meanings, new realities. One striking example is her comments on patriotism. By contrasting the French and the American meanings of the concept, she is able to realize that other ways are possible to express pride in one’s country. In fact, she completely disassociates herself from the American attitude and takes distance from her own culture at the end of the semester: “I thought it was funny how all of the sudden everybody was like oh America this America that after September 11th and it kinda like “what?” [making a face] it kind of [heurk] I don’t want to say it, luckily this is confidential, it kinda of disgusted me a little but euh that’s just my opinion but there are definitely differences between French and American people in their sense of patriotism.” [Interview]

Early in the semester, she also reflects on how one shows respect to another in French language as opposed to American-English (section 4.3.3). These are only a few examples of how she reflects on language and culture. She has a keen ability to observe and analyze language and culture from the very beginning of the semester. She also draws on multiple examples to support her assertions. Her analytical approach helps her learn and reflect on cultural similarities and differences throughout the semester.
Fascinating is Mary’s interest in understanding how the French view Americans. Unlike Julie, her data do not show that her interest has been triggered by the September 11th attacks. Her eagerness to gain an outsider’s perception on her culture remains true throughout the semester and determines the questions she asks to her keypal. Below are a few examples to illustrate this point.

First, discussing the September 11th attacks with her keypal Marc, she wonders what the French think of the situation. She asks Marc what his opinion of G.W Bush is, what he thinks of Americans and if he believes they are all the same (section 4.3.4.2). She is concerned about the image the United States projects through its international policies. She does not think that it represents her country and often offers a different voice from the public voice. For example, she is critical of the decisions taken by the administration. She questions if Bin Laden is the only one to blame: “I suppose Bin Laden is a part of this terrorist attack, but we hear of nothing else so how are we to know for sure” [Essay, September 17th]. She regrets that the media coverage focuses on the war against Afghanistan, omitting to voice the opinions of Americans who are for peace. By adopting the point of view of an observer, she uses a critical eye to understand and explain the event and how it has been covered. She does not analyze the French media coverage as much but her readings help her look at her own culture with sharpened analytical skills. At the end of September, she criticizes the isolationist attitude of her country, disappointed that the United States shows no interest in other countries:

“The United States’ news made front page there. It seems like the reverse never happens. Rarely would I see the news of France appearing on the front page of the newspaper.” [Journal 3, September 23rd].

Second, her questions and analysis of stereotypes focus on how the French view the Americans (see section 4.3.2.3). She hardly talks about how Americans stereotype the French. She is interested in knowing the representations the French people Marc in particular, have of Americans. She ponders if the French believe Hollywood’s portrayal of the Americans. She asks Marc if he thinks Americans are stupid. She is concerned about the negative views people may have of the United States. She is keen to show that she is different from the “typical”
American. She insists that there is not much difference between the French and the Americans. She sees cultural differences between the nations but chooses to stress similarities. When she compares her eating habits to her keypal’s, she portrays herself as being more French than Marc (e.g. she takes long meals and does not eat in fast food restaurants). The image she wants to show of herself is that of a cultured person.

The class provides Mary with tools to develop her analytical skills. During the netmeetings, Marc’s questions make her describe her culture in detail and explain the cultural differences. The multiple voices she is exposed to (readings, the instructor’s lectures, her keypal, her friend Elise) force her to realize that one should be careful about generalizing cultures. She acknowledges that France may be more diverse than she had anticipated at the beginning of the semester. She also admits that talking about American culture with her keypal “opened-up [her] eyes” a bit.

The first example refers to the discussion on violence. Marc views the United States as a very violent country. He depicts a bleak future of America: “Doesn’t you fear an horrible future without justice but just with guns or arms?” (see section 4.3.2.3). Stunned by his remarks, she tries to understand where such an image comes from. She says “then I realized how our news is like how it’s so much violence like I knew it was like that before but it’s just. Like I watch it I’m like I just think it’s very ( ) on CNN, it’s just constant” (see 4.3.5). Therefore, her keypal’s comment has encouraged Mary to gain a sharper critical eye in her analysis of CNN’s reports.

The second example shows how much her views on globalization change from her French class. At the beginning of the semester, Mary does not believe that globalization may have any negative consequences for the world. Analyzing the topic from various angles, she nuances her views dramatically. She claims becoming conscious about the type of food she eats and acknowledges hormonal beef may actually be bad for one’s health (see 4.3.2.4). Realizing that fast food restaurants are replacing French cafés, she asserts being saddened by such negative consequences of globalization.
The examples above illustrate that Mary expands her ways to look at the world. Also, through dialogue with her keypal, she understands why the French view Americans as wasteful, and she is compelled to think of Thanksgiving in a different way. As was the case for Julie, the multiple discourses that are offered in her French class facilitate the emergence of Mary’s third place. Dialogically, she creates new meanings that are salient to her life. Mary’s agency is critical in her development. Indeed, she is able to view parts of her culture differently, by being fully engaged in a reflective approach to language and culture. I noted that from the beginning of the semester, she shows good analytical skills. The various class activities induce her to develop them further. From the telecollaboration experience, she gains an outsider’s view on her country and her culture. She shapes her learning in specific ways, by asking questions that interest her. In addition, the class allows her to construct and project an image of herself that is different from the stereotypical American. By the end of the semester, she admits having learned tremendously from the class. She has learned about herself and has broadened the way she perceives the world as her comment shows:

“I think because I’m looking at I don’t know different areas I just see more things like I see from outside the box. I think that’s what I’ve gained from being here and learning more things about different places.” [Interview]

5.2.3. Lucy

Lucy’s narrative illustrates yet another approach to learning. Lucy admits that she is at first simply fulfilling a language requirement. She indicates that if she needs to work abroad, the French she learned during her language requirement will come in handy. Since she chooses not to continue with French, she does not seem convinced that the ability to speak French will be of much use to her in the future. She does not think learning a foreign language is that valuable since she admits that she would not have taken the class if it had not been required.

Interacting with her keypal modifies her motive early in the semester. Of course, she is still fulfilling her language requirement and wants to pass the class with a good
grade. To secure a good grade in the class, she completes her homework assignments as required. Her true interest, however, becomes communicating with her keypal, Elisabeth. At the beginning of the semester, she indicates how “excited” she is to talk to “real French people” and to make a new friend. After the September 11th attacks, Elisabeth sends two emails of sympathy. Lucy and her keypal are both worried and frightened. Their connection reinforces Lucy’s desire to become friend with Elisabeth:

“I am also surprised to find that I think that my keypal and I are going to be good friends. I was very unsure about us talking to them, but it is starting to be very much fun.”  [Journal 3, September 23rd]

Her general approach to the class is not only determined by her motive but also by the way she conceives culture. She does not believe that learning about culture is essential for acquiring a language. According to Lucy, culture adds “variety” to grammar and vocabulary. Culture is “interesting”, “out of the ordinary”, “entertaining” (see 4.4.3). At the beginning of the semester, she defines culture as a way of life. Her learning strategies are directly linked to her motive and her idea of culture.

Lucy’s main objective is to get to know her keypal and understand her way of life. She is more eager to obtain information on her keypal’s life style than on the French culture per se. Lucy and Elisabeth describe their daily activities to each other, talk about weekend activities, discuss hobbies, etc. Later in the semester, Lucy inquires about French cultural concepts but most often at a personal level (i.e. Elisabeth’s perspective). She hardly asks questions about what the French do in general nor does she ponder if her keypal’s views and habits are representative of the French population at large. Throughout the semester, she emphasizes how she enjoys talking to her keypal. Lucy values greatly the emails and netmeetings and acknowledges they helped her learn the most about French culture: “I learned what my keypal does in her social life and with her family” (see excerpts from Journals 5 and 6, section 4.4.5).

The exchange that exists between the two classes offers Lucy opportunities to inquire about Elisabeth’s life but also leads her to think about her own culture. The discussions she had with the French students force her to observe and explain her culture
thoroughly. She becomes conscious of how she does things. Through dialogue, she gradually becomes aware of some cultural similarities and differences between the French and the Americans. In her essays and journals, she notes a few differences between the French and the Americans such as the school schedule, gun regulations, and compares the baccalauréat exam with the SAT’s. She also points to a few similarities: the importance of education, family and social security for the two countries. By the end of the semester, she is able to realize: “when you’re here, you just think that everybody’s like it’s the same as yours and everybody does the same things but everybody else is not AT ALL” [Interview].

Lucy considers culture to be a way of life that is what “people have” (Agar, 1994). She is not interested in a reflective approach to language and culture. She, therefore, remains superficial in her analysis of the cultural differences and similarities. For example, when she describes the American media coverage of the attacks, she simply refers to the extensiveness of the coverage without commenting on the content. Because of the way she perceives cultural concepts, the differences she acknowledges do not force her to look at her own culture differently. When Lucy and Elisabeth discuss the death penalty, Lucy notes their difference of opinion without trying to look at the issue from another perspective. She does not “decenter” from her own frame of reference. Unlike Julie or Mary, she does not believe French people are proud of their country. Due to a lack of reflection, she often limits her essays and journals to a list of cultural differences and similarities without attempting to interpret and explain. Essays and journals are meant to be reflective tools. Lucy draws most of her assertions from class discussions, summarizing the main ideas that were discussed. She hardly compares what she learned from class with her keypal’s comments. In fact, for Lucy, there are two types of activities, which are not connected: the homework assignments and class discussions on the one hand and the communications with her keypal on the other. She does not engage herself in the first type of activity. Of course, she is capable of reflecting and analyzing issues but Lucy is not driven by an intellectual pursuit. She finds the essays and the readings difficult and “busy work”. She confesses disliking the reading assignments and
says in the interview that she stopped completing the assignments in the middle of the semester. She is simply not interested in analyzing issues.

Noteworthy is Lucy’s sentiment to have learned and achieved so much in the course of the semester. She engages herself only in conversations with her keypal. “It’s fun”, she says. The exchange is therefore extremely valuable for Lucy. It makes her a better communicator. She does not rely on her English as much by the end of the semester. The length of her emails and netmeetings increases tremendously, illustrating that Lucy feels at ease with her French skills. At the end of the semester, she feels able to communicate in French. She even speaks French to her boyfriend at times. In the course of the semester, Lucy has gained control of what she knows. The cultural boundaries are now visible to her and she becomes aware of the way she does things. Unlike Julie and Mary, her lack of reflection and analysis does not allow her to create new meanings, new realities. She has shaped her learning according to what is salient to her life, i.e. building a friendship.

5.2.4. David

David’s learning approach is strikingly linked to his history and his identity. He comes from a military family who has lived in various countries for several years. He portrays himself as a well-rounded man, who has lived half of his life abroad and who speaks several languages. In addition, he has traveled extensively: “I’ve been pretty much everywhere.” Living in Germany and Italy for a few years, he believes he already has “some basic understanding of the European way of life”. His stay in Europe has had a great impact on him. He states on several occasions that he would like to go back to Europe. He claims that his desire to live abroad is the sole reason he joined the military (see section 5.4.1).

His motive to learn the language is closely related to his career plan. Because of his experience in foreign countries, David greatly values learning languages. He believes
that they are essential if one desires “to be involved deeply with the people and the culture there” [Journal 1, September 3rd]. He plans to be a military doctor. Like Mary, his goal is to become proficient enough to live and work abroad: “the job I would like to pursue in the military requires a high level of language proficiency” (idem). Furthermore, he finds learning languages “tres cool and one of the funnest things [he’s doing] here in college”. He has a clear idea of how language teaching should be structured. Like Lucy, he believes that language and culture are not related and thinks that culture should not be introduced at the beginner level. First, one needs to learn the grammar and vocabulary to “have a strong backbone.” Then the focus can be on culture, especially if a student plans to use his or her language skills abroad. Like Lucy, he perceives culture as what people have, which can be summarized in a list of cultural facts.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the instructor’s objective is to look at issues from various angles. In her cross-cultural approach, Magali encourages the students to step back from their own culture, questioning what they have held as “true” realities. By focusing on a French perspective, some students feel that the American culture is consistently being criticized and questioned. The instructor challenges her students’ way of looking at the world, their ways to think, and their ways to be. This approach to culture can be disconcerting for some students. In fact, David becomes very resistant to her approach fairly early in the semester, especially whenever it challenges his identity. The examples below illustrate his resistance to change.

Within two weeks of the semester, he chooses to compare Americans to the French as two antagonistic entities. His image of the French is rather negative: they are “closed”, “frozen to the alien and outside”, isolationist, unable to integrate new cultures, anchored (imprisoned) in their history. The American culture on the other hand is “a melting pot of cultures”, a “culture of opportunity” with “an active society”. In his way to compare the two cultures, he often implies that the American way of being is the right one. In his opinion, the differences between the two cultures clearly outweigh the similarities.
Because the discussions after the attacks challenge what he stands for, David chooses to hold on tenaciously to his version of himself. From that period on, there is a noticeable switch of tone in David’s data. As the semester progresses, he highlights the negative aspects of the French culture and underscores the positive in American culture. He adopts a bipolar perspective, believing that there is no relativity to talk about, but truth to discover. There is for him a sense of right and wrong in the world. His views are transparent when he talks about his faith, which he defines as a “relationship” with God. With no doubt, his faith largely defines who he is. In his view, there is one way to conduct one’s life in order to deserve eternal life (see section 4.5.4.6). Playing an important part in David’s life, faith shapes his view of the world. For example, he states as a fact that abortion and capital punishment are wrong, no matter what one’s opinion is: “regardless of how you twist it, it is still a human life that you are killing” (4.5.4.6).

Discussions on patriotism offer another example of David’s bipolar standpoint. He refuses to acknowledge that meanings are socially and culturally constructed. For him, there is absolutely no other way to show pride in one’s country. It is important to understand that patriotism is for David a way of life. Growing in a military family “where patriotism is abound” (sic), he claims knowing what it is: “I can tell when people are sincere or just posers that say that they are patriotic” [Journal 6, December 3rd]. He also believes that everyone should be proud of his or her country, which leads him to despise the French for not being patriotic.

The fourth example refers to his position on hormonal beef and GM food. He understands the French perspective but rejects their argument as being illegitimate. The point of the class discussions on the topic was to raise students’ awareness that such means of production are viewed as problematic for the French. The idea was to highlight that social and political issues are different in each country. Research is still being conducted and the negative or positive effects of hormonal beef or GM food are unclear. The debate is complicated but stresses that the French have a different relationship with their food than the
Americans do. The point was not to discover who was right. David, however, interprets the debate as an opportunity to prove that the French are wrong (implying that he is right). He engages in a “crusade” to scientifically prove that “hormonal beef can be even better for your body than natural”. By conducting an experiment in his biology lab, he strongly believes that he can achieve the objectiveness necessary to discover the truth. He presents his scientific results as true results, without questioning his methodological approach (the experiment lasted no more than two weeks).

David’s approach to learning culture highlights the importance of the students’ contributions to their own learning. Like Lucy, he has gained control over what he knows by becoming aware of the cultural boundaries. Unlike Lucy, however, he adopts a reflective approach to language and culture but refuses to reorganize his way of looking at the world. David would reject Bourdieu’s (1982) statement, “le monde est ma représentation” (p. 101), believing that there is a sense of right and wrong in the world. His beliefs and his history determine his learning strategies. In the course of the semester, David gains an understanding of the French perspectives on the issues that were discussed. He takes into consideration the French views in his endeavor to prove his point (i.e. that he is right). He acknowledges that people have different ways of life, different rituals, which are for him at the surface of the culture. People’s language, eating habits, life style make different cultures. When he discusses Christmas celebration with his keypal, he is willing to compare and contrast the cultural differences, without questioning the French traditions. The topic has no particular impact on his identity. David enjoys the intellectual challenge offered in the class since he continues with French by taking the next course with the same instructor. He enjoys talking to a “real French person”. Discounting the readings, he considers the French students as the “actual source” of information, giving him a “solid answer” to his questions. Talking to them also allow him to improve his French language skills. By the end of the semester, he states that the class has prepared him on “how to come to learn cultures and better understand what it is that makes up a culture and what usually makes a culture different from others” [Journal 6, December 6th]. He further indicates “it also give students world
awareness and rids them of ignorance and hatred by maturing them to truths about other people and that they are different because of culture” (idem).
5.3. Conclusion

Throughout the data collection, I met some constraints that I was unable to overcome. First, recording group work done in class would have further document the collaborative work that existed in this class. However, without everyone’s consent and to respect individual choice to participate or not in the research, I chose not to record these activities. Second, as part of the exchange program with the French high school, Mary and David spent two weeks in France the following semester. I believe that a follow-up interview after their trip to France would have been extremely enlightening. Would their way to perceive French and American cultures further evolve? Would their motive to learn French change? Would they modify their learning strategies after coming back? At first, I had not anticipated that possibility and therefore did not include it in the request for research consent. Finally, I hope to further analyze in later articles the linguistic aspects of their learning, using discourse analysis as an approach to analyze data.

As noted in chapter one, little empirical research documents the educational impact foreign language learning may have on students’ cultural awareness. The study presented here does highlight the development of a reflective approach to language and culture by four American undergraduate students, Julie, Mary, Lucy and David. Moreover, its qualitative and genetic approach illustrates how learning a foreign language is an intricate phenomenon where multiple factors interact. In so doing, it raises questions of several types that have implications for research, teaching and the curriculum. Below, I will point at the many issues this study has brought to light.

5.3.1. Implications For Research

By separating the cognitive matter from language use, mainstream SLA research has given too little attention to the social and cultural features of foreign language learning. As Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) point out, considering the relevance of another approach can bring new insights to the field of applied linguistics.
First, the genetic approach suggests the value of examining development as a complex, longitudinal process. In contrast to socio-psychological, information-processing and other approaches that attempt to separate the person from the context and conceive of that person as a conglomerate of distinct individual differences, sociocultural theory and the genetic approach focus precisely on the nature of this dynamic historical process, exploring changes and noting the circumstances under which these changes occur. Differentiated motives for learning are shown to influence how individuals orient to learning, negotiate meaning, and deploy learning strategies. A view of motive as dynamic allows the research to apprehend the influences of the challenges inherent in intercultural dialogue. Therefore, the theory offers a comprehensive approach that not only describes students’ development but also explains the process looking at the activity as it is carried out.

In so doing, the genetic approach underscores the unique profiles of the language learners and illustrates that the learners’ agency play a crucial role in their approach to learning. The four narratives document that the qualities of students’ learning experience are crucially dependent on the nature of students’ history of engagement with foreign language and with other cultures, and therefore on the qualities of their motives as they choose how to participate. Indeed, the qualitatively different profiles that were drawn in the narratives question the quest for a “universal model” by mainstream SLA research. Learning a foreign language is in fact, not the same for all learners as their learning outcomes are significantly different. Lucy, who could not identify any cultural differences at first, admits that the intercultural exchange has forced her to think of her culture and has made the boundaries of her reference frame visible. For Lucy, the exchange with her keypal is at first “just” another assignment but quickly becomes another way to make friends. For David, the exchange offers a platform to express his opinions, reaffirm his identity, and pursue his strategy of resistance in creating new meanings. The analytical learning strategies that Mary and Julie choose to adopt are in fact crucial in their development. They are not only able to identify and interpret the cultural boundaries but also dialogically create new meanings that are relevant to their lives. For example, Julie gains an outsider’s perspective of her own culture. The
intercultural dialogue reinforces Mary’s motive, allowing her to be socialized into a community of practice. By the end of the semester, they both have changed their way of looking at the world and in so doing have created new selves, illustrating that learning culture is a socially constructed inquiry that can change people.

Second, the holistic approach adopted here broadens the research perspective on classroom language learning, demonstrating that it does not simply correspond to the mere acquisition of linguistic forms. In fact, it shows the ways in which the sociocultural dimensions of language learning shape the activity of particular students in a particular context, describing and explaining how the learning process is constructed and constrained. The students, socialized in specific classroom practices, learn to work collaboratively in their discovery of culture. Relying on a variety of mediational means (the French and English languages, the readings, the lectures, and most effectively, the exchanges with the keypals, etc), they are guided toward a reflective approach to language and culture and apprenticed into new discourse communities. The English and French languages are not only the objects of study but also the media used to create meanings. The cross-cultural dialogue that exists in the class makes the learners’ culture(s) as well as the culture(s) of those who speak the studied language visible, allowing the learners to think about and analyze the French culture as well as their own culture. By gaining control over what they know, the participants constantly organize and reorganize how they make sense of the world and how they make sense of themselves as agents. The detailed description of the environment sheds light on the various factors that construct the activity of learning. The tools that are available to the students and the cross-cultural dialogue that exists in the class provide direction for the learning activity. Here, they are meant to encourage an intercultural stance suggested in the “third place” notion (Kramsch, 1993a).

The accounts of these sociocultural factors brings to the fore a relationship between teaching and learning. It documents the realities of the classroom life and makes this research relevant to language teachers. It also leads to realistic practices because this
research is interested in language use. I will now turn to the pedagogical implications that this study entails.

5.3.2. Implications For Teaching

It is important to keep in mind the particularities of the course I observed. Of special interest is the impact of the telecollaborative classroom upon the students’ motives as learners. By providing a new level of “dynamism and immediacy in the language classroom” (Kinginger, 1999, p. 862) the telecollaborative classroom is designed to enhance students’ access to learning resources and to emphasize the role of personal agency in the classroom. In other words, the telecollaborative classroom is assumed to broaden the discourse options of classroom learning through access to expert users of the language in question and through enhancement of students’ autonomous engagement in their own learning. For example, it broadens the audience to students’ analysis and offers a juxtaposition of dissonant voices (Kern, 2000). Kern (2000) even argues that emailing to “real” French people forces students to express themselves clearly.

There are nonetheless constraints to consider. First, the telecollaboration project is very difficult to set up. It is requires a robust collaboration between the instructors in France and in the United States: The teachers coordinate the content of the instruction despite the various curricular constraints, they constantly reflect and reorganize the class according to the students’ needs, they ensure that the students respect the objectives while communicating with their keypals, they cope with technological problems, and they organize two trips (one in the United States, one in France). Although the telecollaboration offers interesting opportunities and broader perspectives for language learners, its integration in the curriculum needs to be well thought of. Technology is a great pedagogical support to contact time but in no way can replace it. The cross-cultural dialogue is not limited to the exchange with the French class. The class activities in
contact time complete and enhance the exchange by guiding the learners toward a reflective approach to language and culture.

Second, the time and energy that goes into such courses cannot be underestimated. It requires the instructor to be organized and diligent. The numerous drafts that the students submit increase the grading. The research implied (readings assignments that will help the students’ understanding of the weekly theme) is extremely demanding. Moreover, the instructor must carefully craft a set of questions that will guide students in their inquiry without providing too much information. Indeed, the students learn to be increasingly autonomous and should gain ways to reflect critically on their own. The difficult task for the instructor is to offer guidance when necessary. The success of such course relies on the instructor’s investment and the time he or she can dedicate to the course. It also means that a heavy teaching load will not allow for such a pedagogical investment.

Third, the dissonant voices that the cross-cultural discourses bring to the fore can be challenging for the students and the instructor. The pedagogical approach adopted in this class embraces the “philosophy of conflict” advocated by Kramsch (1993a, p. 1), which differs greatly from a traditional view of language teaching. As demonstrated in this study, the teaching of culture challenges the students’ view points because it encourages them to renegotiate the way they relate to the world. The cross-cultural dialogue questions who they are, to a point that can be disconcerting or threatening. As did David, students may develop a strategy of resistance or become hostile to the teacher for example. Some instructors do not know how to manage the uneasy feeling that cultural discussions can bring and therefore tend to stress cultural similarities and “neutralize” cultural differences by simplifying issues. It is, however, the acknowledgement of complexity and ambiguity that provides a context in which new meaning can emerge. It is teaching language along the cultural faultline that remains essential.
The cross-cultural perspective also challenges the common view by teachers on instruction. The teacher’s role remains essential but does not limit itself to the transmission of information. It is to provide students with ways to observe and analyze cultural differences. Pedagogical activities are not designed to teach isolated grammatical items but are part of an inquiry that will encourage the students to become aware of the various frames of cultural references. The teacher is a guide who sheds light on the intricacies of cross-cultural learning and encourages the inquiry process. Therefore, instructors should not fear to lack the “native speaker’s” expertise. Indeed, students share responsibilities in their learning. In addition, the language studied is not only spoken to practice a particular grammatical point but becomes a tool to communicate and think. Finally, the learning outcomes cannot be prescribed in advance, since students develop in unique ways. Students should therefore get opportunities to demonstrate their individual and personal development. For example, portfolios will offer students more opportunities to underline their own development than standardized tests.

The teaching practices described in this study, particularly the telecollaboration while successful, are not meant to be a teaching model. Instructors can still achieve a multi-discursive environment by creating activities that contrast the culture of the language studied as well as the learners’ culture. While designing classroom activities, instructors should keep in mind that it is essential not only to observe the various frames of reference but also analyze them and reflect upon them. There is of course no syllabus kit to follow but the *conventional mental models* (see section 1.3) as defined by Shore (1996) can be an interesting starting point in highlighting the various cultural realities. Students should have opportunities to compare conventional models from their native culture with the models of the culture they study. For example, the book entitled *Les Français: Mentalités et Comportements* (Mauchamp, 2001) takes a sociological and historical approach to describe typical French conventional models such as “France, a secular state”, “the history of taste”, “the notion of privacy”, “the influence of the intellectuals in policy making”. In addition, there are multiple books focusing on cultural differences between French and Americans. Some of these books are available in
English and could be of particular interest to beginners. The other interesting feature is that it does not necessarily take a scientific approach to analyze these differences since the authors are relying heavily on their personal experiences (see notes, section 4.1).

Instructors can also rely on authentic materials: comparing various versions of the same movies (Kinginger et al., 1999; Kramsch, 1993a), studying the news using Internet websites (from the French and American perspectives). It would then be important to look at how the same fact is conveyed differently in various media. Finally, teachers can also complete the study of conventional models with a more historical perspective as in the study of the country’s Institutions. The objective for the design of a syllabus is to help apprehend the intricacies of cultural differences rather than acquiring cultural facts. However, gaining an understanding of the country’s history can only help in comprehending some cultural differences. Instructors can choose to limit their program to specific themes as long as it offers students ample opportunities to become aware of various frames of reference.

5.3.3. Implications For The Curriculum

If universities really want to respect their own policies about the language requirements, they need to rethink the investment they make. Teaching language as culture in the way it is documented here implies not only a change in the curriculum but also a change in the philosophy of language learning. The current focus on language skills in language lower level classes is problematic. There is no opportunity to be an “effective communicator” in three or four semesters. The vast majority of Americans that study languages are less likely to go beyond the elementary or intermediate level. As Durham (1980) notes, “it is highly probable that they eventually forget some or even much of what they have learned about the structure and the vocabulary of the foreign language” (p. 220). If indeed the universities’ objective is to develop the students’ cultural awareness and new perspectives on cultural diversity, then the curriculum needs to move away from its skill orientation. The learning process as described here cannot be standardized in any way. Imposing strict uniform standards is not realistic since as it was
described, the individual learning process is qualitatively different. Learning about culture is an inquiry and not an accumulation of knowledge that can be tested. However, portfolios, for example, offer opportunities for students to explore and demonstrate their own development. In this case, the language learner is not seen a deficient learner but as a speaker in his own right, with a true voice. Portfolios highlight the learners’ reflective engagement and the contributions they bring to their learning.

There are permanent values to be gained from foreign language instruction that teaches students to view realities in different ways or enhances their critical thinking skills. It is crucial to provide learners with opportunities to be actively engaged in their learning. The telecollaboration described above is a great worthwhile pedagogical support for a cross-cultural education and enhances the learners’ participation. As Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) note, “by changing the material circumstances (artifacts and the social relations) under which individuals operate, it is possible to help people move their learning and their development forward” (p. 157). It is essential to provide a multi-discursive context where learners can observe, discover, analyze, interpret and argue cultural differences and similarities. An intercultural dialogue can enhance the students’ critical skills and facilitate the emergence of a third place. Because learning is about personal growth (i.e. cognitive change), such environment allows students to create meanings that are significant to their lives. It produces knowledge that is relevant to the community and empowers the students as educated citizens.

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i For Agar (1994), people who use the deficit theory approach believe that “they’re the best, anything else is less than the best, and anyone who would call into question who they are when they’re already the best is a fool or a masochist or even, as they used to say in America before perestroika, a Communist” (p. 23).

ii In this section, all the mentioned pages that relate to the participants’ data refer to each participant’s narrative.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A:

CLASS SYLLABUS
Bienvenue en Français 3
Automne 2001

* All information that could betray the students’ confidentiality was deleted.

Welcome to French 3
French 3 is designed for those students who have studied French for 4 years in secondary school or for 2 semesters in college. As the course progresses, you will not only acquire new knowledge of the French language and francophone cultures, but you will also build upon that which you have already learned as a student of French. The aim of this course is to further your ability to survive in everyday and academic situations in the target language. You will also use word-processing programs, language software and the Internet to complete assignments. Since you already have a basic knowledge of the French language, this course will be conducted in French.

FR 3.
FR 3 covers the same material as the other FR 003 sections. However its approach, assignments, and program are different from the other sections. FR003 is actually one-half of a collaborative class; the other half is a class located in France. You will have one specific French partner (corres’) with whom you will work, communicate in real time, exchange e-mails, and discuss issues. Your work and your progress will be evaluated through a portfolio. This class will be followed by a special Intermediate Conversation class (Spring 2002), using the same format and the same approach. Students enrolled in both semesters will be given the opportunity to travel to France for Spring Break and spend a week with their French partner.

Required Texts and Materials
  *** Please note that the edition has changed. You are required to purchase the second edition.
- A 3.5” IBM-formatted computer diskette for work in the computer-equipped classrooms. (For French class only - To be brought every M and W.)
- A binder or neat folder to place your portfolio materials

Optional and/or Supplementary Materials
- Système D: The French Writing Assistant, Software Program. Heinle & Heinle (version 3.0, cross platform).
- A binder to place your course notes, readings, etc.
- A French-English/English-French dictionary, preferably not a pocket dictionary. They cost around $25 and are a worthwhile investment, especially for students who plan to take the conversation course in the Spring.
- A verb conjugation book. Bescherelle is the most reliable. Like a dictionary, this book is extremely useful to those who plan to continue beyond the basic Intermediate level. The Bescherelle costs around $15, but can be purchased for much less in used bookstores.

Resources
- Système-D with a bilingual dictionary and a spell checker is available in IBM and Mac public labs on campus. Additionally, Microsoft Word 2000 has a French spell checker, thesaurus, and
grammar checker. It is available in the IBM public labs on campus, and to PSU students (for free) at the MOC in Willard Building.

- Free tutoring services are available in [ X] during evening hours. You will be provided with more details later.

**Material Covered**

In French 003, you will cover the basic grammar content for Chapters 1-4 of *Quant à moi*. In addition, it will cover various issues related to American and French identity (Diversity and Divisions). University guidelines indicate that for every class hour, students should plan to devote at least two hours to homework and class preparation.

**Computer- Equipped Classroom**

Two class periods per week will be held in a special multi-media classroom. Since computers will be used extensively throughout the semester, these class periods will be devoted to two types of activities: 1) On Mondays, synchronous computer-mediated communication (direct discussion) with a class of French freshmen.

2) On Tuesdays, web-based activities, chat, and collaborative writing using *Système-D* and *Microsoft Word*. Although no previous computer experience is necessary, it is helpful to be familiar with Microsoft Word, E-mail, and the Internet. You MUST have a disk specifically for this class.

To log on to the computers, all students must get a Computer Access Account from the prior to coming to the computer-equipped classroom. In addition, FR3 students are free to use the computers in these classrooms when there are no formal classes meeting there. Language students are also encouraged to use the Language Resource Center to work on collaborative and individual projects. In the center, there are computers and facilities for scanning, audio/video editing, as well as language videos, tapes, and tutoring.

**Goals**

Students successfully completing French 3 will:

1. be able to form tentative hypotheses about the language and culture underlying the language based on global awareness and knowledge of contemporary societies where the language is spoken.

2. be able to communicate with persons generally unaccustomed to dealing with foreigners in survival and social situations. Students will be able to create phrases for many basic conversational needs related to their interests and specific situations, and to exhibit increasing flexibility in applying previously learned material to new situations.

3. be able to comprehend the gist of natural conversations and authentic communications, as well as longer stretches of connected discourse, and in particular those adapted to the learners' needs. Students will be able to follow and interpret a native speaker's normal conversation on familiar topics, with a few repetitions and restatements. In addition, students will be able to comprehend the gist of more formal discourse, such as lectures on familiar topics or topics of interest.

4. be able to read authentic texts of at least essay length, treating themes on a broadened range of topics related to the speakers' interests and daily needs. The texts selected for the course contain vocabulary and context that are familiar or can be deciphered with some glosses. Students will begin to utilize different reading strategies for different objectives with greater discernment in choosing those strategies.

5. be able to write correspondence and compositions on selected topics with varying rhetorical structures, such as personal messages, descriptions, narration (in past, present, and future) and short essays/papers with increasing accuracy of basic structures. Students, by the end of French 3, will exhibit greater control in sentence structure, paragraph coherence, and text organization.
Grading Summary

1 Texte Libre (3-4 drafts) 10%
NM's, chat 20%
Participation 20%
Correspondance (email) 10%
Interros (quiz) 10%
Individual and in-class essays 20%
Cultural Journals 10%

(Details on the following page. Read carefully!)

Texte Libre
A "texte libre" is a text on a topic freely chosen by yourself. It can be an essay on a topic of interest to you (e.g. "The Role of Computers in our Lives", "The Olympic Games", "My favorite TV show"), a creative writing piece (a poem, a fairy tale, a fiction piece..), a story from your own life…. You will write a first draft which will be edited but not graded; draft 2 and 3 will involve development and/or extensive revisions, and will be graded. Draft 4 will be the polished version and will receive your final grade. The first draft should be over 1 page in length, the final draft should be at least 2-3 pages. The Texte Libre drafts are turned in once on a date of your own choosing within the first month, on Oct. 3, and once between Fall break and Thanksgiving Break.

Net Meetings & Chats
♦ Every Monday, you and a partner will converse with your French correspondant (keypal) about the topic of the week (indicated in your syllabus.) You will have to read a short text about the topic and prepare questions. You will be graded on preparation, responsiveness, fluency, and effort/improvement. You can print your NM transcripts to help yourself with writing essays; in this case, place them in your portfolio.

♦ In order to develop your fluency of expression and skills in formal interaction, you will also engage in computer-mediated debates or discussions. You will have to prepare your ideas before class. You will be graded on preparation, appropriateness, cooperation, creativity/originality, and effort/improvement. These "chat" sessions can be printed and placed in your portfolio.

Participation & Attendance
Your class participation will be graded throughout the semester based on preparation for class, willingness to speak French, contribution to a cooperative classroom atmosphere, effort, and the quality and quantity of your participation in class discussions and group activities. Each participation grade will consist of two separate grades: you will grade yourself and the instructor will grade you. Although these grades will not necessarily be weighted equally, they will all figure into the final grade.

As part of your participation, you will be required to take roles or "jobs" (responsabilités, métiers) to facilitate our life as a community and improve your public speaking/communication skills in a low-stress context. More information about these short tasks will be presented to you later on. Because class participation is very important in this course, attendance is mandatory. You are required to be present for 57 of the 60 scheduled meetings, including two out-of-class films. An absence may be excused for a death in the family, a family emergency, sickness, injury, or surgery, if you present an appropriate written excuse to your instructor immediately following your absence. There are NO
**exceptions to this rule.** Absences may also be excused for the observance of a religious holiday. Student athletes should inform their instructors well in advance of any planned absences so that arrangements can be made for making up missed work.

**Any unexcused absence will affect your participation grade.** For clarity, the following are not considered excusable absences: sorority or fraternity events, traveling, concerts, sporting events, another class, taking or studying for an exam, meetings, oversleeping, or job interviews.

Please be aware that excessive tardiness counts as an absence.

**E-mail Correspondance**
The purpose of the Email letters is to help you develop skills in informal writing. You will have un correspondant-a keypal, a French student from our partner class, with whom you'll converse on Mondays and with whom you'll exchange weekly letters. Each letter will be worth 10 points and should be 8-10 lines in length (shorter letters carry half credit.) The content of a letter is entirely up to you but must be consistent with letter-writing.

**Quizzes**
You will have roughly ten short quizzes in the semester - about one per week (see syllabus). Quizzes will cover the week's basic grammar, vocabulary and cultural information. You can help your quiz grade by coming to your instructor's office hours during the week immediately following the return of your quiz. **Make-up quizzes will not be given**, unless written proof of illness or family emergency is provided. Each quiz you miss will result in a zero.

**Individual and in-class essays**
♦ Over the course of the semester, you will write 1 self-portrait and several short, individual essays based on the week’s NetMeeting and assigned topic.

♦ Over the course of the semester, you and a partner will write several pieces/essays based on the week’s NetMeeting and assigned topic.

**CULTURAL JOURNALS**
These journal entries aim at verifying your progress in analyzing French culture from various points of view and at developing your metalinguistic skills and critical thinking. The entries should be sent at specific dates to your professeur and to the visiting researcher; all entries should be saved and grouped together in one (MSW) document for your portfolio. They can be written in whichever language you choose.

**PORTFOLIO**
Your portfolio must include a self-evaluation form, each draft of your texte libre, your emails to your keypal, each essay (draft + corrections), your participation forms, NM/chat transcripts, and cultural journals. It should be presented in a binder or in a neat folder.

**Make-up policy**
Quizzes may not be made up. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to contact your instructor about missed assignments or activities. No work will be accepted late as a result of an absence. In the event that you must miss class, please make arrangements for someone to bring any assignments due to class or to your instructor's mailbox.
Special Accommodations
The University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity
In accordance with University Senate Policy, plagiarism, cheating, submitting work of another person (including information from the Internet) or work previously used without informing the instructor, tampering with the academic work of others and other forms of academic dishonesty may lead to lowered course grades, failure of the course or more severe measures depending on judgments of the gravity of the individual case. Please note that submitting work done by an electronic translator is considered academic dishonesty.

Grading Scale
- 95-100 = A
- 89.5-94.5 = A-
- 87.5-89.4 = B+
- 83.5-87.4 = B
- 79.5-83.4 = B-
- 77.5-79.4 = C+
- 69.5-77.4 = C
- 59.5-69.4 = D
- 59.4 and lower = F
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEVOIRS POUR</th>
<th>PROGRAMME DU JOUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mardi 21 août: pas de devoirs</td>
<td>Présentation du cours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Mercredi 22 août  
MP 6-13, 20, 22, 24 | Comment se présenter  
Descriptions simples: adjectifs; être, avoir, aimer, aller, etc. |
| Jeudi 23 août  
Rendre le journal 1  
To : instructor’s email  
Subject: FR3.18 journal 1  
Cc: my email | Utiliser Système-D pour écrire un essai: chasse au trésor |

**SEMAINE 1 : QUI SOMMES NOUS?**

| Lundi 27 août  
Préparation de l’analyse de pub | Journée de la pub (1) (petit test) |
| Mardi 28 août  
Préparer 6-10 questions à poser à un camarade de classe  
MP 68-72, 78-81 | Poser des questions (1)  
Interrogations avec “est-ce que”, l’inversion, pronoms interrogatifs |
| Mercredi 29 août  
**Mon portrait** (poème diamant, en français, tapé)  
Amener votre disquette de français (format IBM) | Comment faire une page web et poster |
| Jeudi 30 août  
MP 21, 23, 25,26  
Amener des journaux, photos, images… pour réaliser votre collage | « Nous sommes [name of university] !» - un collage pour nos correspondants  
**Quiz 1**: le présent, les adjectifs |

**SEMAINE 2 NOUS ET NOTRE ENVIRONNEMENT**

| Lundi 3 septembre :  
pas classe – c’est la fête du travail américaine (Labor Day)  
Envoyer la 1ère lettre à la classe des Keypals (KP): se présenter et indiquer pourquoi on sera un bon/unique corres’ 😊 | From : abc123@university.edu  
To: ecole@ecole.fr  
Subject: pour les TL, de X (votre prénom).  
Cc: to instructors in France and in America |
| Mardi 4 septembre  
**Journal 2** à envoyer  
MP 302 (#43) | Venir (de)  
La diversité de notre classe |
| Mercredi 5 septembre | **Essai en groupe**: un portrait de notre groupe |
| Jeudi 6 septembre  
Préparer des sujets à discuter avec son corres’  
Préparer 3-5 questions | Préparation du 1er NM  
**Quiz 2**: les questions |
# SEMAINE 3: SEMAINE DE L’ATTENTAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lundi 10 septembre</th>
<th>Rendre les « cartes mentales » (sur le site web)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NM 1</strong> avec nos correspondants: se présenter, présenter sa classe, son environnement</td>
<td>Poser des questions et avoir une conversation pour obtenir des informations sur son corres’ et sur la classe de son corres’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mardi 11 septembre</th>
<th>MP 32-34, 38-45 Lettre 2 à son corres’ (KP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description : la classe de nos correspondants, mon correspondant</td>
<td>Discussion : la classe des TL semble-t-elle représentative de la France en général ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mercredi 12 septembre</th>
<th>Lecture Essai : Les TL en général et mon corres’ en particulier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L’attentat <strong>Qu’est-ce qui s’est passé ?</strong> Vocabulaire, phrases de description et de sentiments</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jeudi 13 septembre</th>
<th>Essai : ma réaction à l’attentat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion : le patriotisme en France ; différences avec les analyses aux USA.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

# SEMAINE 4: DIFFERENCES CULTURELLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lundi 17 septembre</th>
<th>Lecture : copies sur les analyses des journalistes français</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NM2</strong> : Réactions et analyses sur l’attentat</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mardi 18 septembre</th>
<th>Essai4 : Analyse des articles français et du NM avec mon corres’ KP 3</th>
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<tr>
<th>Mercredi 19 septembre</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
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<tr>
<th>Jeudi 20 septembre</th>
<th>Lire les réponses des TL sur le site web et les classer (amener le tableau en classe)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparer avec les réponses de notre classe</td>
<td></td>
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### SEMAINE 5: IMAGES DE L’AUTRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lundi 24 septembre</th>
<th><strong>Essai optionnel en anglais : réaction au questionnaire</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Journal 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lire tous les résultats sur le site web (« getting to know one another ») et sélectionner 4-5 thèmes qui vous semblent intéressants</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Préparer 5-8 questions sur le thème discuté jeudi+ les 4-5 thèmes de votre choix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>NM3 Discussion de nos réponses</strong> Des différences culturelles?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mardi 25 septembre</td>
<td><strong>Remarque grammaticale : la comparaison</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Travail en classe : comparer les réponses de nos deux classe et analyser 1-2 thèmes du questionnaire</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercredi 26 septembre</td>
<td><strong>Synthèse: Différences Culturelles</strong> (révision : la description – adjectifs, propositions relatives, comparaisons.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Quiz 3: La description (synthèse)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeudi 27 septembre</td>
<td><strong>Enquête: Interviewer 5 personnes pour obtenir leurs idées sur la France ; les hommes français ; les femmes françaises</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Amener les résultats en classe</strong> Préparer la discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>L’image de la France aux Etats Unis</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SEMAINE 6: Images de soi, Images de l’autre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lundi 1 octobre</th>
<th><strong>NM4 Images de soi, images de l’autre</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture : sondage des TL</td>
<td>Préparer 8-10 questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardi 2 octobre</td>
<td><strong>Tchat: d’où viennent les stéréotypes? Qu’est-ce qu’ils révèlent sur nous (en tant que peuple, que culture?) Images des Américains et des Français sur les Américains et les USA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lettre 5</td>
<td>MP: 14-15, MC 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercredi 3 octobre</td>
<td><strong>Les questions d’informations (révision)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP 92-94 MP 87-88</td>
<td><strong>Quiz 4 Les questions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Texte Libre à rendre !</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeudi 4 octobre</td>
<td>XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pas de devoirs : c’est les vacances d’automne 😊</td>
<td></td>
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### SEMAINE 7 : VACANCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lundi 8 octobre</th>
<th>XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– pas de devoirs, pas de cours:</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
c’est les vacances d’automne 😊

| Mardi 9 octobre – pas de devoirs, pas de cours: c’est les vacances d’automne 😊 | XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX |
| Mercredi 10 octobre- pas de cours: c’est les vacances d’automne 😊 + Lettre 6 à votre KP (si vous avez oublié : répondez aux questions sous le collage des impressions que les Français ont des USA. | XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX |

Jeudi 11 octobre
**Essai** : Ce que j’ai appris sur ma culture grâce à l’étude des stéréotypes qu’on (Américains) a sur la France et les Français **OU** ce que j’ai appris sur ma culture grâce à cette unité **OU** ce que j’ai appris sur la façon dont les cultures fonctionnent quand elles sont mises en présence
MP 116-117, 119, 120 (II),121B

L’imparfait

SEMAINE 8: Les Américains vus par les Français

| Lundi 15 octobre
**Lecture** : « collage » des keypals
Préparer les thèmes donnés (voir email) you must be able to present your ideas about each topic on the collage. What do they mean? How are they ordered? Would you have picked those if you were to make a portrait of America?
Préparer 3-5 questions pour vos correspondants
MP 176-179, 233, 257-258 (vocabulaire utile)
MP 282 (to keep a discussion going) | ** NM5**
Les stéréotypes que les Français ont sur les Américains et les Etats Unis |
| Mardi 16 octobre
**Lectures** : photocopies données avant les vacances
**Lettre à son corès’ 7**
MP 282 (vocabulary to keep a discussion going – will be needed in the chat)
**Essai optionnel** : Discuss several aspects of the French-American relationship that gave birth to the stereotypes Americans have of the French. In your essay, give examples for each point you want to make, presenting it situations from a French and from an American perspective then showing how a person who’s not aware of the other culture’s patterns and language use will “create” or ‘reinforce” the stereotype. | Tchat : deux cultures et deux peuples en présence |
| Mercredi 17 octobre
MP 116-118, 119 (I), 121A, 132-133 (IX: 2 au choix) | Le passé composé: auxiliaires, participes passés (1) |
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<th>Journal 4</th>
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| **Jeudi 18 octobre** | **Préparation du NM6**<br>**Lecture : (photocopies)**  
**Utiliser le passé composé et l’imparfait dans une narration**  
**Quiz 5 : l’imparfait** |
| **Vendredi 19 octobre ou samedi 20 octobre** | **FILM REPORTE AU 9 NOVEMBRE** |

**SEMAINE 9: RELATIONS FRANCO-AMÉRICAINE**

| Lundi 22 octobre | **NM6**  
**Mondialisation et traditions (1) – le Mac Do**  
**Lecture (photocopies + MP 98-99 A+B)**  
**Préparer 5-8 questions basées sur la lecture et la discussion en classe** |
| --- | --- |
| Mardi 23 octobre | **Films : Astérix ; « les paysans dans l’ornière ; » « Bové contre Burger »**  
**Lecture : tracts de la confédération paysanne** |
| Mercredi 24 octobre | **Le passé composé: auxiliaires, participes passés (2)**  
**Quiz 6: le passé composé**  
**Lettre 8**  
**MP 116-118, 119, 121, 132-133** |
| Jeudi 25 octobre | **Depuis**  
**Discussion en classe**  
**Essai 8 : Perceptions de la présence américaine en France (basé sur NM6+ lectures)**  
**MP 146-151**  
**A la salle d’ordinateurs !** |

**SEMAINE 10: Eléments d’identité française**

| Lundi 29 octobre | NM (avec la classe de l’autre université US)  
**La tradition universaliste, la république et le « jardin imparfait » - discussion de la lecture**  
**lectures** |
| --- | --- |
| Mardi 30 octobre | **Discussion/essay en classe**  
**Fonction : débattre et argumenter**  
**Lecture : les différents peuples français** |
| Mercredi 31 octobre | NM (avec autre classe) : identité nationale, identité régionale  
**Journal 5** |
| Jeudi 1er novembre- Toussaint | **Alibi**  
**MP 134-135, 137-138**  
**Quiz 7 : passé composé ; imparfait** |

**SEMAINE 11 : DIVERSITE DES CULTURES**

| Lundi 5 novembre | **NM7**  
**Débat : Traditions régionales, nourriture, identité**  
**MP 194-196**  
**Lecture : « 90% des Français.. », « Rendre, au choix, les questions de lecture** |
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<td>Mardi 6 novembre</td>
<td>MP180-181 Essai/synthèse ou tchat : diversité ou divisions ?</td>
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<td>Mercredi 7 novembre</td>
<td>Lettre 9 MP 72-74, 76, MP 127-131 Quiz 8 : narration au passé</td>
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<td>Jeudi 8 novembre</td>
<td>Lectures : régions de France</td>
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<td>SEMAINE 12 : DIVERSITE DES REGIONS</td>
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<td>Lundi 12</td>
<td>Lecture <strong>NM8</strong> Traditions régionales et gastronomiques</td>
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<td>Mardi 13</td>
<td>Lettre 10 Discussion du film (<em>tchat en classe</em>)</td>
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<td>Jeudi 14</td>
<td>MP 168-171, 178-181 Le futur</td>
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<td>Vendredi 15</td>
<td>Lecture Essai Les régions ; le passé composé et l’imparfait Quiz 9: le futur</td>
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<td>SEMAINE 13: LA NOURRITURE DES FETES</td>
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<td>Lundi 19</td>
<td>Lecture <strong>NM 9</strong> Célébrations et repas de fêtes</td>
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<td>Journal 6 (prendre lectures pour préparer NM10) Essai Les régions ; le passé composé et l’imparfait</td>
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<td>SEMAINE 14: RELATIONS France-USA et Américains-Français</td>
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<td>Préparer 5-8 questions</td>
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<td>Essai optionnel &quot;Mon Thanksgiving autrefois, mon Thanksgiving cette année&quot; (15-20 lignes)</td>
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<td>[NM10]: discussion/polémique : les films, la musique, le MacDo….</td>
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APPENDIX B:

FORMS FOR BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH STUDY

Consent Form for Behavioral Research Study

Interview Outline
CONSENT FORM FOR BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH STUDY
The Pennsylvania State University

*NB: For this class, the reflective journals were incorporated in the syllabus and were therefore considered as homework assignments.

Title of Project: “The Cultural Dimensions in Foreign Language Classes.”
Researcher: Hélène Andrawiss, Department of French, 325 S. Burrowes Bldg.
Person in charge: Professor Tom Hale, Department of French, 325 S. Burrowes Building
Adviser: Dr. Celeste Kinginger, Department of French, 325 S. Burrowes Building

1. **This section provides an explanation of the study in which you will be participating:**
   A. Undergraduate students are commonly required to fulfill 12 to 18 credits of language requirement. The goal of this study is to examine, from researcher and student perspectives, if students enrolled in required foreign language courses (and more specifically in French 003 classes) develop cross-cultural communication. In other words, the goal of this research is to investigate if foreign language courses enhance cultural diversity and encourage cultural awareness. From the data, I wish to explore what it means for you to learn a foreign language and to learn about a foreign culture. By conducting this research, I hope to provide a link between teaching theories and pedagogy, and a reflection on the role of language courses in the curriculum.
   
   By participating in this research, you will have the opportunity 1) to discuss the issues and develop your analytical and critical skills, 2) to express your feelings regarding the teaching of culture in the language classrooms, 3) to get personal access to another French person (the researcher) who will be willing to dialogue with them, and 5) to receive the results of the study.
   
   Your participation will help future instructors to take into account the learners’ perspectives while learning about another culture.

   B. If you agree to take part in this research, classroom observations, scheduled classroom activities, homework assignments completed over the semester (Fall 2001) as well as a survey will be used as data for the research.
   
   You may also have the opportunity to be more involved in the research. The researcher may ask for volunteers to be interviewed and/or write reflexive journals. These data will allow you to reflect on various cultural aspects you have encountered in class or outside class and will allow the researcher to better understand the implementation of culture in foreign language classes from the students’ perspectives. Students who volunteer to write reflexive journals and/or to be interviewed, will receive extra-credits as compensations. Students who choose not to be more involved in the research will have the opportunity to earn extra-credits for a similar amount of work (e.g. students will have the opportunity to watch a French movie and write a one-page reaction paper).

   C. Your participation in this research will take the amount of time required for your regularly scheduled class activities and completion of your homework assignments. If you choose to be more involved in the research by writing reflexive journals and/or by being interviewed, your participation will take some extra time. Each journal should not take more than 2 hours to write and there will be a maximum of 5 journals over the semester (you may choose to write less than 5). There will be no more than two interviews. Each interview should not take more than one hour.

   D. There is no discomfort or risk by participating in this research.

   E. In return for your participation, you will receive the sincere thanks of the researcher, Hélène Andrawiss—a doctoral student in the Department of French of PSU. You will receive **no** extra credit, for your participation involving regularly scheduled participation during class meetings and completion of homework assignments.
F. If you choose to be more involved in the research by writing reflective journals and/or being interviewed, you will receive extra-credits as compensations (one extra credit per journal written, one extra-credit per interview). Students who choose not to be more involved in the research (i.e. you choose not write reflective journals and/or not to be interviewed) will have the opportunity to earn extra-credits for a similar amount of work (e.g. students will have the opportunity to watch a French movie and write a one-page reaction paper).

G. This study may involve the use of audio and/or visual tape recording for classroom observations and interviews. The researcher will make absolutely no reference to students who did not agree to participate in the research. Only the researcher, Hélène Andrawiss will have access to the tapes, which will be stored in a locked cabinet. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of her dissertation or in 2010, whichever comes first.

2. **This section describes your rights as a research participant**
   A. You may ask any questions about the research procedures and these questions will be answered. Further questions should be directed to Professor Tom Hale or Dr. Celeste Kinginger, whose addresses and telephone numbers are listed above.
   B. Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the researcher, Hélène Andrawiss will have access to your identity and to information that can be associated with your identity. The signed consent forms will be confidential data and will be stored in a locked cabinet. Only Hélène Andrawiss will know who agreed to participate. Your instructor will not know who agreed or refused to participate. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed. To make sure your participation is confidential, pseudonyms will be used in the reporting of data.
   C. Your participation is voluntary. You are free to stop participating in the research at any time or to decline to answer any specific questions without penalty.

3. **This section indicates that you are giving your informed consent to participate in the research:**
   
   **Participant:**
   I agree to participate in a scientific investigation of the Cultural Dimensions in Foreign Language Classes, as an authorized part of education and research program of the Pennsylvania State University.
   I allow the researcher, Hélène Andrawiss to use data only from source in from of which I wrote my initials:
   ______ Classroom observations. I understand that classroom observations may be video or audio taped and that only the researcher will have access to the tapes. I understand that I will receive no compensation for participating in this part of the data collection.
   ______ Classroom assignments. I understand that I will receive no compensation for participating in this part of the data collection.
   ______ Survey. I understand that I may leave the questionnaire blank or may decline to answer some specific questions. I understand that I will receive no compensation for participating in this part of the data collection.
   ______ Reflective Journals. I understand that there will be a maximum of 5 journals over the semester but that I may choose to write less than five. I understand that writing my initials does not commit me to write these reflexive journals. I understand that for participating I will receive one extra-credit for each written reflexive journal, and that I am entitled to no other compensation.
_____ Interviews. I understand that there will be a maximum of 2 interviews of one hour each. I understand that writing my initials does not commit me to the interview. **I understand that for participating I will receive one extra-credit for each interview, and that I am entitled to no other compensation.**

- I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedure. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described.
- To the best of my knowledge and belief, I have no physical or mental illness or difficulties that would increase the risk to me of participation in this study.
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying the researchers or the person in charge.
- I am 18 years old of age or older, and/or a full-time student of the Pennsylvania State University.
- I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________________________________________
Signature                                             Date

**Researcher**
I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed, and that we have answered questions from the participant above as fully as possible.

_________________________________________________________________________
Signature                                             Date
Explain the procedures for recording.

Students who volunteer to be interviewed can withdraw at any time (including during the interview) and students may decline to answer some specific questions. The interviews will be audio taped. Only the researcher, Hélène Andrawiss will have access to the tapes, which will be stored in a locked cabinet. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of Hélène Andrawiss’ dissertation or in 2010, whichever comes first. During the interviews, students will also have the opportunity to elaborate on previous information provided.

The interview is conducted in English.

Reminder: The researcher only interviews students who volunteered (as explained in students’ consent form and in Form B)

**Personal Background:**

1. What is your major?

2. How long have you been at Penn State?

3. Do you plan on studying abroad?
   a. If so, where?

   b. Do you plan on going to France for Spring Break? (The students’ instructor is organizing a trip to France during Spring Break).

   c. Would you like to?

4. Have you traveled a lot?

**Learning a Foreign Language:**

1. Have you studied other foreign languages? (If yes, which ones? At which grades?)

2. Do you like learning a Foreign Language? How do you value the learning of foreign languages in general?

3. What is your main motivation for learning French? (FL requirement, job, study abroad)?

4. Do you agree with the language requirement? Do you think it is a good thing that learning a FL is required? Why?

5. Why did you choose French? (as opposed to Spanish for example)

6. For how long have you been studying French? Where (At the university? High school?)

7. What kind of cultural activities did you do in your previous language classes (i.e. watch movies, read newspaper articles, cultural discussions, etc)?

8. How often were you exposed to cultural aspects in your previous classes? (once a day? Once a week?)

9. Did you have any knowledge about French culture prior to this class? Examples…
10. Do you enjoy learning about culture? Why?

**About French 3 class:**

1. If you had to describe and explain the types of activities you do in your current French class to someone who has never come to your class, what would you say?

2. In your opinion, what is the most challenging about this class? Why?

3. On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate the amount of exposure to cultural aspects in this foreign language class? Explain?

4. What cultural aspects have interested you the most in this class? Please explain

5. Are there some cultural aspects that you wished would have been covered more extensively?

6. Do you believe that some cultural aspects have received too much attention in this class? Explain.

7. What aspects of the class help you the most to learn about culture? *(Please note that I break down this question into three sub-questions for clarity)*

   a. What kind of things do you do, as part of the class, the homework, or on your own, to learn more about French culture? Distinguish between the required tasks and the other tasks.

   b. Do you learn more about culture from your instructor or from your keypals’ emails, through the readings, by yourself, etc.

   c. As a student, how do you negotiate new cultural concepts and how do you talk about culture?

      For example, I know that in class you have been discussing around the notion of patriotism, do you think this notion is different on each side of the Atlantic?

8. In your opinion, which approach was the most effective to learn about culture? Why?

9. In your opinion, how is your instructor guiding your learning process? What type of intervention is taking place in the language classroom?

10. Do the questions provided by your instructor guide you and help you through the readings in French?

11. By studying a foreign language, have you changed your perception of the world (i.e. do you look at things differently?)

   a. Do you think you understand French culture better? Do you think you have learned a lot about French people and French culture in general? Explain…
b. Do you think that class activities and the numerous conversations you had with your keypals have forced you to reflect more on your native language and your own culture?

12. Do you think you have increased your ability to think critically?

13. How do you think learning about culture and learning French work together in this class? Can you provide a few examples that would support your arguments?

14. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), how would you rate the importance of integrating culture in foreign language courses? Explain. How do you think the teaching of culture should be implemented?

Elaborate:

As I mentioned in my form B, this interview provides an opportunity for students who volunteer to elaborate on assignments and class activities they completed throughout the semester. In this section, I ask students to elaborate or clarify ideas they expressed, in their reflexive journals for example.
APPENDIX C:

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Diagnostic Questionnaire.

French 3 Background Questionnaire

1. NOM: ________________________________

2. Age: _____ (Entourez circle) first-year soph junior senior other:_____

3. E-mail: _____________________________

4. Téléphone: __________________________

5. Langue maternelle (language or languages spoken at home):____________

6. I definitively intend to take 201 (the conversation class) in the Spring ________________
   I may take 201 (the conversation class) in the Spring, depending on ________________
   I already know I cannot take 201 (the conversation class) in the Spring ________________

7. My academic major(s) is/are:
   __________________________________________________________________________

8. I signed up for French 3 because…

9. I decided to take this particular section because…

10. I chose French as a foreign language because…

11. I have spent time in a French speaking country…YES NO (please circle)
    Where? ________________ For how long? ________________
    Why (business, class trip, family vacation, language study..)?

12. I’ve studied French before in (check all that apply):
    _____ in Jr. high _____ in high school _____ at a university _____ on my own
    Highest level completed:_______

13. Are you planning to take other French classes? _____ Yes _____ No
    If yes, what course(s) would you consider taking? (circle)
    Freshman seminars, conversation; composition; Paris (in English), French cinema (in English),
    French and francophone cultures (in English); French literature (in English); French Culture and
    Civilization; Business Writing in French; French Press…
    Why or why not?
14. Do you plan on studying abroad? If so, where?

Do you plan on going to France for Spring Break?

15. Technology experience:
   Do you own a computer? _______ Yes ________No
   Do you use Email: at least once a week ___  at least once a day ___  irregularly ___
   Do you browse the web on a regular basis (at least once a week)?
   Do you have your own webpage?
   Can you design/edit a webpage?
   Do you participate in online-chatrooms/public fora?
   What programs do you know well/use frequently? ____ MS Word ____ NetMeeting
      ____Système-D ____ Netscape Communicator ____ Icq, IM ..... ____

16 Why did you choose to attend this university?

17 What magazines do you enjoy reading or/and what are your favorite TV shows or bands?

18 What is your all-time favorite book/film or the book/film that proved the most significant for you so far? Briefly explain why.

19 What are your favorite things to do in town?

20 **Additional Information you’d like to include about yourself, your French.....

21 Name as many as you can… if you do not know any, leave blank.

   City/town from a French-speaking country
   Song/singer/band from a French-speaking country
   Film from a French-speaking country
   Artist (painter, sculptor, dancer..) from a French-speaking country
   Actor/actress from a French-speaking country
   Actor from a French-speaking country
   Recent event that happened in a French-speaking country
   Writer or literary work from a French-speaking country
   Historical event that happened in a French-speaking country
   Politician, political group
   Monument or significant place
APPENDIX D:

REFLECTIVE JOURNALS
Journal 1:

1. In your opinion, why does the university impose a language requirement?

2. How do you value learning a foreign language? Do you think foreign languages are an important part of your education? Why? Why not?

3. In your opinion, how is the learning of a foreign language valued in the United States in general (maybe as opposed to Math or English)?

Journal 2

Bonjour!
Votre journal culturel 2 est à rendre le 4 septembre, par email. Vous pouvez répondre en français ou en anglais, à votre choix (par exemple si vous trouvez une question facile, répondez en français, et si vous la trouvez difficile, répondez en anglais...). Voici les questions:

1. Please provide your definition of culture (be as precise as possible; use your own words, do NOT copy from a dictionary!)

2. Now that you have defined what culture means for you in general,

   a. How would you define American culture? In your opinion, what would be most representative of the American culture?

   b. How would you define French culture?

   c. Can you think of similarities and differences between the two countries?

3. When studying a language, do you think learning and discovering about culture is important? Why? Why not?

4. Do you have any comments on cultural discussions you had in class. Were you interested, surprised, fascinated, disturbed, disappointed, frustrated?

You are expected to show your critical thinking skills, feel free to be negative or positive but always analytical.

Journal 3:

Voici les questions:

1. You talked about the tragedy that occurred in the United States. If you had to present to a French person how the events have been covered these past days, what would you say? What would you need to explain? Were there differences of analysis between the United-States and France? Please explain.
2. Do you have any comments on cultural discussions you had in class since Journal 2? Were you interested, surprised, fascinated, disturbed, disappointed, frustrated (Be critical)? Please keep in mind that this is not an evaluation of the class. You are encouraged to keep notes of what you would like to mention in your journal. The entries should underline some reflection on what happened in class (not just a description).

Journal 4

Bonjour a tous,

Voici les questions pour le journal 4. Vous pouvez écrire en français (même partiellement) ou en anglais. Chaque réponse doit être développée et indiquer une réflexion, analyse, et synthèse sur les thèmes que nous avons étudiés.

1. Please comment on cultural activities that you had in class (chat, in-class discussion, and/or NM with your keypals).

2. Do you see some paradoxes in French culture? Name two or three, and explain why these seem like paradoxes to you.

3. In what ways are French people similar to American people? In what ways are they different? Name three differences that seem very important to you, and explain why they seem important.

4. Read all the statements below made by Americans (politicians, scholars, students, etc) within the past year or so. Then choose 2 or 3 among them. For each statement, answer the following questions
   a) in the Spring 2001, what would have been your reaction to this statement?
   b) thinking nowadays (late October 2001), how would you comment and analyze the statement? If there was any change in your understanding of the statement, what made the change come about?
   c) what (positive or negative) characteristics or (positive or negative) values of American culture do you notice in the statement?
   d) How do you think a French person would react to his statement?
   (Copy the questions below each statement you chose and answer them. You can delete the others.)

* “Bilingualism and multiculturalism carry with them viruses that are deeply dangerous to the health of the United States.”

* Americans “use the deficit theory [approach]. They’re the best, anything else is less than the best, and anyone who would call into question who they are when they’re already the best is a fool or a masochist or even, as they used to say in American before perestroika, a Communist.”

* “… You cannot understand our world if you see through only one point of view. If you learn another culture then you gain a better perspective on the world around us.”

* “Throughout history, some things have become unique to American culture however. Some people think that baseball and apple pie are American culture. We also have holidays to celebrate our culture such as Memorial Day and the 4th of July. From another point of view, I consider
freedom to also be a part of American culture because freedom is what the United States is all about.”

* “I definitely think that it was unnecessary to show the footage of the towers falling repeatedly. That image has been burned into all of our minds, and we did not need to watch it again and again. I would have to explain to that person that the media in America pride themselves on getting absolutely all of the angles on a story, so repeatedly interviewing people with the same story or showing the same images is pretty commonplace”.

* “I hate to say it, but the current generation lacks the willpower and the attention span to pay attention for long. They are spoiled and never had hard times. They don't know how to do without, as evidenced by our "plastic" society. Gimme now and to hell with tomorrow. Since it didn't happen directly to most of them, I think the WTC emotional charge will soon pass. It's a me-first attitude that I don't see having much resolve for a long haul.

* “Why is everyone freaking out? The country is doing everything it can to prevent more terrorists attacks. Obviously, it may not be successful, and more people, including me, could die. But I'm not going to spend every minute worrying about this. I'm going to live my life and enjoy it, because who knows when it will all end?”

* “I think that the media has done a good job and explaining the events that have been going on.”

* “French people can feel sad and bad for the United States, but they were not the ones under attack, they were watching it on TV thousands of miles away.”

* “To go on playing an anthem that brags of bombs exploding and glorifies war, as the "Star Spangled Banner" does, seems worse than some of the things [that are] being banned from the airwaves.”

**Journal culturel 5**

_Bonjour,

Voici les questions du journal culturel 5.

Most of you are doing real progress in analysis and integrating all their ideas and knowledge. Overall I am very happy with how much progress you've made. However I want to remind some students that:

1) you can't skip questions ; if you find a question difficult, say so at the beginning, then try your best.

2) I grade how your thinking develops over the semester. 2 lines from August to November isn't 'development'!

3) you must show analysis (i.e. describe a phenomenon, then explain where it comes from in your opinion, explain why/how, link it to other phenomena..).

4) Your answers must express a substantiated opinion and demonstrate you have mastered the ideas discussed in class, in NMs, and in the readings. I do not grade you on the ideas you choose to discuss but on how well you discuss them, how supported your point is. Answering the question I asked is a basic step. :-)

Once again, feel free to answer in French or in English, entirely or partially, depending on how comfortable you feel doing this._
1. Please comment on cultural activities that you had in class (chat, in-class discussion, and/or NM with your keypals).

2. How does the topic of food exemplify the relationship between language and culture? Give three examples of your idea(s).

3. Learning in this class: think about how the class is structured, not just in terms of skills and knowledge.
   a. What aspects of the class help you the most to learn about culture? What kind of things do you do, as part of the class, the homework, or on your own, to learn more about French culture? Distinguish between the required tasks and the other tasks.
   b. What elements of "learning French" do you recognize during class activities? Which aspects of the class help you the most to learn French? You may want to describe a class day that sticks out in your mind and explain how you learned from it.
   c. What kind of things do you do, as part of the class, the homework, or on your own, to learn (get better at French)? Distinguish between the required tasks and the other tasks. What skill have you developed the most so far? What skill do you need to work on in order to reach "intermediate level"? [a skill would be writing, speaking, reading, listening]
   d. In what area do you think you've learned the most? In what area do you feel most confident? In what area would you like to work more? [an area would be content knowledge, critical thinking, general mastery of French...]
   e. How do you think learning about culture and learning French work together in this class? Can you provide a few examples, which would support your arguments?

4. What question do you wish I'd asked you but didn't? Ask the question ("I wish you'd asked me..." or "I really want to discuss..."), then provide an answer.

Journal 6:

1. Please comment on cultural activities that you had in class (chat, in-class discussion, and/or NM with your keypals).

2. Previously in the semester you were asked to define what culture is. How would you define culture now, at the end of the semester?

3. How do you (personally) value the learning about culture(s)? Why?

4. Do you think that the way you perceive, understand the French culture and the American culture has evolved throughout the semester? If so, explain in what ways your perceptions of the two cultures have evolved and support your arguments with examples if you can.
Note: you might want to first define what you mean by French culture/American culture so that it is clear to the reader then your evolution (with examples.)

5. In September (for reasons linked to the news as well as to images you had in your head about France) a theme that the class raised was "patriotism". I gave you various approaches to the topic throughout the semester.
   a) What was your definition of American patriotism in September? (values, beliefs, actions)
   b) Back in September, what aspects of patriotism did you see (thought you saw) in France or French people?
   c) Now, at the end of the semester, have these definitions and images changed? Develop at least a paragraph about this idea of "patriotism". You can use some ideas discussed on Tuesday during the "chat".

6. Questions sur “Vive la France! ”.
   a. Décrivez la première image (en français) Quel est l’élément le plus grand du dessin?
   b. Que remarquez-vous sur les enfants?
   c. Using your knowledge, explain how the artist composed the pictures, what ideas he does NOT want to convey and what ideas he DOES want to convey through that picture.
   d. Regardez la petite fille sur la deuxième image. Expliquez pourquoi l’artiste a choisi de dessiner cette petite fille. Qui est-elle? Où va-t-elle? Pourquoi est-ce important?
   e. Pendant le semestre, vous avez lu, discuté, ou écouté cette histoire. En utilisant vos notes précédentes, vos souvenirs, et le texte que vous possédez, présentez chacun des personnages et indiquez pourquoi ils ont été choisis par l’auteur pour figurer dans cette histoire.

- Lucien
- Khelifa
- Laô
- Manuel
- Anaïs, Judith, Karina
- Benjamin
- Loïc
- Matthieu
- Jérôme
f. Utilisez vos connaissances (background knowledge) pour expliquer pourquoi l’histoire se passe dans une école? A votre avis, que représente l’école pour les Français?

g. Pourquoi est-ce que l’histoire s’appelle «Vive la France?» Développez un paragraphe en français ou en anglais.

h. Qu’est-ce que ça signifie sur la façon dont la France/les Français se voient? Rattachez votre réponse aux discussions et lectures du semestre. Is this way of seeing themselves new? Why/why not?

i. Analyze the "moral" of the story. How did you perceive it at the beginning of the semester in relation to your own images of France/ French people/other themes developed? And now?

7. Those will be your last words of your cultural journal. What would you like to say as a conclusion to the semester and the journal?
APPENDIX E:

PORTFOLIO SELF-EVALUATION FORMS

Analyse du Portfolio
Evaluation Générale du Portfolio
Evaluations Spécifiques
Evaluation du Texte Libre
Evaluation des Netmeetings (NM)
ANALYSE DU PORTFOLIO DE____________________

Par:

1) ASPECT EXTERIEUR ET VISUEL
   Description:
   Pour que ce soit mieux, je te conseille....

2) LE CONTENU
   Qu'est-ce qui manque encore?
   Description:
   Mon document préféré, c'est .. (parce que)
   Le document qui m'a le plus impressionné(e), c'est .. (parce que..)
   Tu dois encore améliorer ce document (parce que...)
   A mon avis, tes points forts en français sont. . ..
   Je remarque que tu as le plus progressé en...

MON AVIS GENERAL EN CONCLUSION:
EVALUATION GENERALE DU PORTFOLIO

Please read the questions first.

1) What does one learn about you in this portfolio? (By looking at your portfolio, what do I know about you?)

2) Where did you improve most this semester? How did that happen? Does your portfolio show this?

3) How is an evaluation through a portfolio different from an evaluation through an exam in your opinion?


5) What was the document you had the most trouble with? If you had to do it again, how could you make it easier to do?

6) By doing what piece in your portfolio did you learn the most? Explain.

7) What is your strength in French? How does your portfolio demonstrate that? Does your portfolio show progress in that specific area? (why/why not)?

8) What is your major weakness in French? Does your portfolio show progress in that specific area? (why? why not? What do you plan to do to get better in this area (or what should you have done to become better in that area?)

9) Give your definition of "learning"

10) My conclusion about my work this semester in French 3.
EVALUATIONS SPECIFIQUES

CORRESPONDANCE
1) What did you learn from the correspondence (emails) with your keypal?

2) Please evaluate how, in your opinion, your emails have improved. Use specific emails as examples (first email, last emails, any turning point...? Vocabulary? Structures? Skills? Ways of thinking?)

JOURNAL CULTUREL
1) What purpose did the “Journal culturel” serve in the course?

2) Look back at yourself as presented in the first journals (August/September): Is there anything you would never (or probably not) write now? Explain why/why not.

3) How did your journals improve over the semester? Looking at the last 2 journals, what do you hope I would see you have learned over the semester (think in term of content but also skills –such as reading, writing- and critical thinking-analyzing, synthesizing, relating...)

AUTRE:
1) Why did you decide to include this element in your portfolio?

2) Evaluate your progress and learning as presented in this document
EVALUATION DU TEXTE LIBRE

1) My biggest difficulty in doing the *texte libre, version 1*, was...

   And I handled it by....

2) When I got my texte libre version 1 back, I... ...  

3) By doing my texte libre, I learned the following

   Important words, ways to say things

   Grammatical points and structures

   skills

4) When I look at my final version and I compare/contrast it with my first draft, I would say... ...

5) Other comments:
EVALUATION DES NM

1) Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of the semester (in the context of Netmeetings)

2) What skills and abilities do the II's require of you as a student? How do you transfer those skills into the "regular" classroom?

3) What questions are you the most proud of? Why?

4) Name 1-3 questions you consider pretty weak or which you wish you'd asked differently… then improve them.

5) What did you learn through NMs? Be specific.
   Vocabulary, ways of saying things
   Grammatical points or structures
   Ideas
   Skills
   Others

6) Was there a NM when you felt "ha-ha I got it!" or "Wow I can do that now"? Explain.

7) If you compare/contrast your first 2 NMs and the last 2-3 NMs, what do you notice? What may you want to underscore for me?

CONCLUSION about the NMs: ..
APPENDIX F:

THE COLLAGE: FRENCH STEREOTYPES OF AMERICANS
APPENDIX G:

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
.  (period) Falling intonation
?
 (question mark) Rising intonation
,
 (comma) Continuing intonation
-
 (hyphen) Marks an abrupt cut-off
…
 pause
[…]
 cut in the data
never
 (underlining) Stressed syllable or word
NEVER
 (all caps) Loud speech
[comment]
 comment from the researcher
( )
 Non-transcribable segment of talk
(word)
 (word or phrase in parentheses) Transcriptionist doubt.

Inspired from Research on Language and Social Interaction, cited in Hall (2000, p. 137)
VITA

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EDUCATION:

       The Pennsylvania State University.

1998  Diplôme d’Études Approfondies in Applied Linguistics, obtained with honors.
       Université de Paris X, Nanterre France.

1996  Maîtrise de Français Langue Etrangère, Masters equivalent obtained with honors.
       Université de Paris X, Nanterre France.

1994  Licence d’Études Anglo-Américaines et de Français Langue Etrangère, Bachelor equivalent.
       Université de Paris X, Nanterre France.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

           All levels.

2002-2003  Adjunct Faculty:
           •  Georgetown University: Advanced level.
           •  American University of Washington, DC: Intermediate level.

1998-2002  Graduate Instructor, The Pennsylvania State University
           All levels.

           •  Supervised and trained graduate student teaching assistants.
           •  Conducted weekly meetings.
           •  Coordinated exams, taught and developed pedagogical activities.

1997-1998  Instructor of French, Middlebury College
           French beginners, Civilization courses (20th Century)

1997-1998  Director of the French House and President of the French Club, Middlebury College, Vermont.
           •  Organized activities to promote French language on campus (dinners, cafes and conversations,
             French film series, games, etc).
           •  Organized and led a cultural trip to Montréal, Canada for 15 students.

1996  Intern at the National Office of the Alliance Française, Washington DC.

Summers  Co-Organizer and Chaperone for an Exchange Program between Calvert Hall College in USA and

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

Summers  Volunteer and Member of Association Jeunesse et Reconstruction.
1995  Administered anti-malaria drugs to children, participated in reforestation and constructed sanitation
       facilities for the Cultural Center of the village of Fimela, Senegal.

1994  Restored paved streets in the town of Chefchaoun, Morocco.