Integrating Technology into Language Teaching: from Cultura to Facebook

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"It doesn't matter what we cover, it matters what you discover"

(Victor Weisskopf)

"Si fanno dei corsi su quello che si cerca e non su quello che si sa"

(Gilles Deleuze)

Projects:

- Cultura exchange in 2009

- Facebook exchange in 2015

Rationale:

- Intercultural reflection through written virtual exchanges

- Students' interest in the target culture

Are they really interested in culture?
What aspects of the target culture?

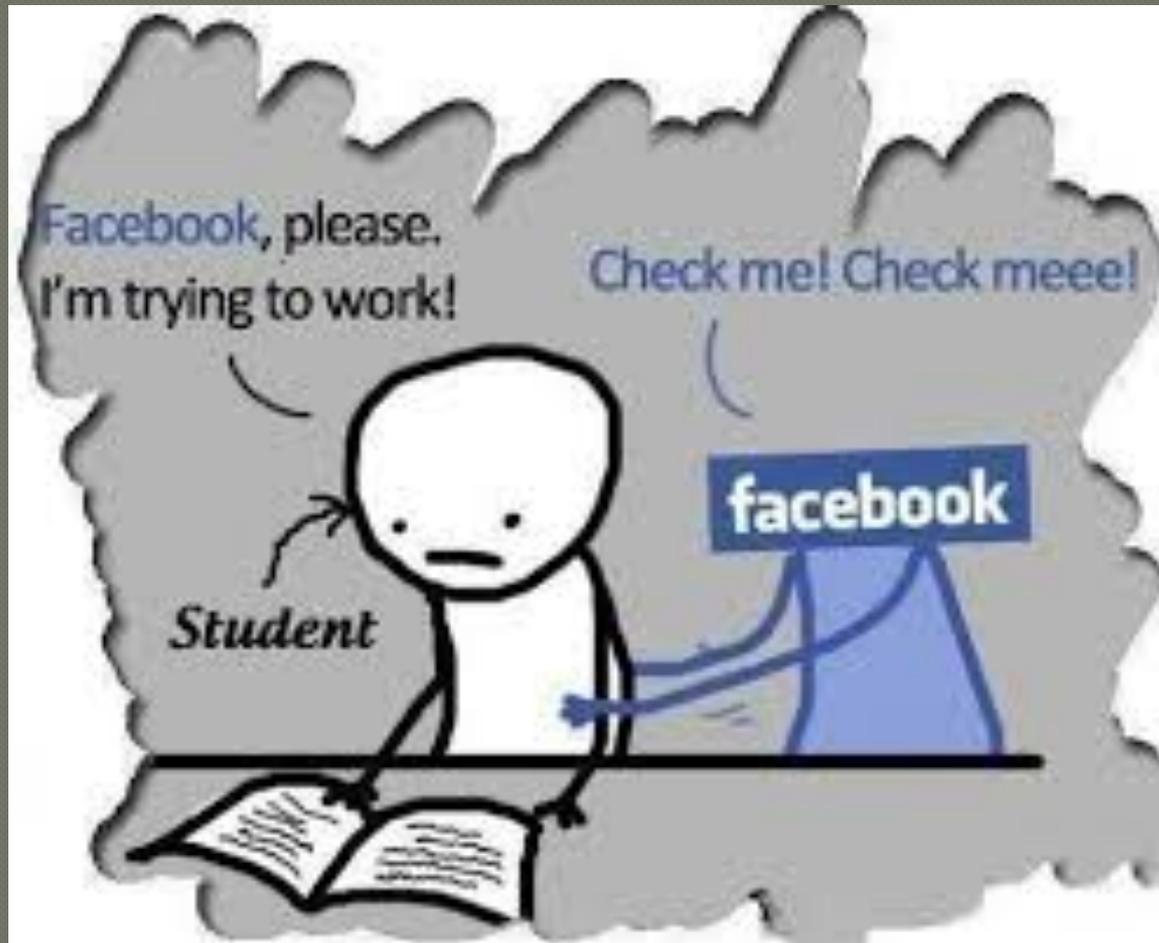Perspectives, behavioral practices, products?
'C' or 'c'?

Differences between the two projects

Cultura:
- MIT exchange site
- U of C first-year students (third quarter) and Italian high school students from *Liceo Classico G.M. Dettori*
- Exchange in L1
- Required

Facebook:
- Closed group
- U of C second-year students (third quarter) and Italian high school students from *Istituto Roberto Rossellini*
- Exchange in Italian
- Not required (no credits!!!)

Scambio di idee Chicago-Roma

https://www.facebook.com/groups/chicagoroma/

Time frame: April 25th – May 31st 2015

Number of exchanges: 174

Average of 8 exchanges per entry (highest: 17 comments per entry)

Topics chosen by the American students:

- Politics in Italy and the US
- Soccer and favorite team
- Country music vs. Soap opera
- Italian slang
- Photo exchange
- Use of technologies (cell phones in the library)
- Death of BB King
- Films

Topics chosen by the Italian students:

- Vegan/vegetarian diet
- Vacations/free time activities
- Public transportation inefficiency
- Italian music + singers in the US
- Lake Michigan
- Daily routine in Italy and US
- Unemployment
- Contemporary art
- Interest in studying Italian
- Literature
- Italian cinema + famous Italian actors in the US
- Public vs. private schools + testing
- End of the year and summer plans

Topics in common

Films
Sport (soccer)
Music

Students' feedback

The Facebook project definitely enhanced my knowledge of the Italian language. What the project provided was a framework in which I could use my Italian to write and communicate with native speakers with a very low affective barrier. I knew that I was not being 'judged' on the grammaticality of my messages, for example, and that my audience were sympathetic listeners. It enhanced my language competency most at the level of sentence construction.

It was very enlightening to get the perspective of Italian students on topics that we had previously discussed in class and also new topics. So, I think the page definitely enhanced my understanding of Italian culture and cultural differences.

It's very helpful to see conversational Italian in written form, without having to keep up with the speed it would be at if it were spoken. Specific slang words are a little confusing since they're regional, but overall very helpful. Also, it's nice to feel welcomed by Italians, and to see how friendly they are.

I'm guessing that their talkativeness and confidence in beginning conversations isn't random, but a part of Italian culture.

I thought it was a great way to encourage us to practice out of class, and it was nice to speak to other students who were in the same boat on the language-learning front.

Cultura

https://cultura.mit.edu

Word association
Sentence completion
Situation reaction

Cultura Exchanges

2009 Spring University of Chicago Liceo Classico – Ginnasio Statale "G.M. Dettori"

Word Association

- United States / Stati Uniti d'America
- Equality / Uguaglianza
- Ambition / Ambizione
- Immigration / Immigrazione
- Friends / Amici
- Money / Soldi
- Suburbs / Periferia
- Freedom / Libertà
- Work / Lavoro
- Taxes / Tasse
- Religion / Religione
- Democracy / Democrazia
- Individualism / Individualismo
- Success / Successo
- Government / Governo
- University / Università
- Famiy / Famiglia
- Italy / Italia

Individualism

amazing, liberating

existentialism, unique, strive

Good, Rare, Myself

independence, creativity, self reliance

liberalism

lonely, originality

Personality, humor, freedom

unique, separate

Individualismo

egocentrismo, convinzione

egoismo,chiusura

egoismo,egocentrismo

egoismo,responsabilità,egocentrismo

giusto , chi fa da se fa per tre , sfruttabile

ignorare, egoismo

Discussion

It's incredibly interesting the different meanings this word carries in each language. In America, individualism has a positive connotation, indicating uniqueness and independence. In Italy, it has a pejorative undertone, emphasizing an egotistical nature. This might be due to an association between uniqueness and drawing attention to oneself or attempting to differentiate oneself from the rest of a group or society (…).

Sì, questa differenza è molto evidente e secondo me rispecchia anche varie differenza tra le nostre nazioni. In America la connotazione, come hai giustamente fatto notare, positiva di questa parole ci porta a considerarla come una virtù. Da noi sembra più che metta in evidenza l'estraneazione di un individuo da un gruppo e il suo ostinarsi a voler fare tutto da solo (…).

You see a student sitting next to you copy during an exam.

Cover my paper so as to not let him see my answers.

cover my test with my arm or move it to a different part of the desk.

Go up to the professor and whisper to him/her that the other student is cheating.

i shake my head and move on cause I've got a test to finish.

I would not say anything, but be content knowing that they do not really know what's going on in the class.

I would tell the professor.

I would think that they were doing something bad, but do nothing

nothing

Vedi che uno studente seduto accanto a te copia durante l'esame.

"hai proprio voglia di farci bocciare tutti e due?"

lo faccio copiare ma gli costera' un favore al prossimo esame

Peggio per lui: imbrogliando rimarrà un ignorante a vita.

penso che non sia giusto nei confronti degli altri e invito lo studente a essere onesto.

penso che sia una vera ingiustizia ma stò zitto

Se non lo conosco cerco di non farlo copiare, specie se cerca di farlo senza il mio consenso. Comunque penso che nella vita non andrà poi molto avanti. Probabilmente passerà questo esame, ma il prossimo?

Discussion

È interessante notare come siano diverse le nostre risposte. Tra noi italiani nessuno riferirebbe il fatto al prof: se qualcuno lo facesse sarebbe visto come un "traditore".

I think there is a perception here that the professor is responsible for the integrity of his/her class. Most professors want to have a reputation for offering challenging, thought-provoking classes, and that reputation is ruined if people know students are tacitly permitted to cheat.

Rationale

In our global world, our students will increasingly find themselves working for transnational companies. They need to learn how to interact and communicate across cultures. Language teachers , who teach both language and culture, are particularly well-positioned to play a key role in helping students understand another culture. However, more often than not, language classes tend to focus on developing students' linguistic skills, and limited time is spent developing their understanding of the "foreign" culture. *Cultura* is an attempt to make culture the core of the language class.

Outcome

Positive attitude towards target culture

Asynchronous learning

Meaningful exchange with target community

Authentic communication

Norwegian Commercial

Recordings with Voice Board

https://cultura.mit.edu/what-is-cultura

Schenker, T. "The Effects of a Virtual Exchange on Students' Interest in Learning About Culture", FLA, Vol. 46, 2013.

Back, M. "Using Facebook Data to Analyze Learner Interaction During Study Abroad", FLA, Vol. 46, 2013.

Byram, K. "Using the Concept of Perspective to Integrate Cultural, Communicative, and Form-Focused Language Instruction", FLA, Vol. 44, 2011.

Closed Group on fb

https://www.facebook.com/help/162866443847527/