A MEDIA-BASED APPROACH TO DEVELOPING ETHNOGRAPHIC SKILLS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Please note: To play the movies in this paper you need to have QuickTime™ installed; you may download the Quicktime™ Player, free of charge, from http://www.apple.com/quicktime /download. A fast Internet connection is recommended.

Future modern language teachers will be asked to use evolving information and communication technologies to meet new curricular objectives which call on students to foster intercultural sensitivity and tolerance rather than amass factual knowledge. To meet these challenges in their classrooms, these beginning instructors will be expected to use ethnographic research methods to interpret complex, multimodal media texts from the target language cultures. What are the technical and intellectual skills needed to carry out this type of research and how can teacher education programs ensure their graduates possess these skills when they enter the classrooms? To this aim, this article identifies four skills--thick observation, thick interpretation, thick comparison, and thick description--and proposes a media-based approach to achieve this goal. In this approach, students worked together in teams to create short digital movies based on their cultural interpretations of an object of their choice, such as coffee, cars or letters, and used a variety of media to reflect on their learning processes. To illustrate this process, this discussion is followed by a multimedia profile of the unique learning experiences of one participant, Klara, as she began to develop these skills.

Examples of final movies produced by students (please click on the image to play the movie). In these 30-second movies, students were asked to attempt to portray the cultural significance of an object of their choice.

Cars 'R Us	Fine Grind	We've Got Mail
(Team members: Paula, Corinne, Sylvie, Esther, Christina, Julia)	(Team members: Anne, Peter ,Layla, Heather, Agnes)	(Team members: Klara, Kim, Lesley, Nazlynn, Adele, Andrea)

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1. Introduction

The last ten years of research in second language acquisition have shown a radical shift in the way educators and researchers think about and approach issues of "culture" in the language classroom. New curricular guidelines that place an emphasis on developing intercultural understanding and tolerance, rather than grammatical competence, indicate that new generations of teachers entering the field throughout Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia, will be asked to guide their students to meet a series of curricular objectives which differ from those they aimed to meet in their own experiences as language students.

Furthermore, advances in information and communications technologies are currently transforming the face of modern (otherwise known as "foreign") language education. Instructional materials for modern languages were once limited to one-dimensional textbooks which often presented a static, unproblematic representation of the target language culture (Kramsch, 1988, 1989). Now the Internet can deliver multi-modal texts from the target language culture that include sound, image, text, and video. These texts, deemed "authentic" because they are intended for native speakers of the target language, are able to present a dynamic, multifaceted view of the target language culture with up-to-the-minute detail and accuracy. Several multimedia products, such as Berliner Sehen (Fendt & Crocker, 1996) and Cultura (Furstenberg, Lavet, English & Maillet, 2001), also provide students with dynamic, multimodal opportunities to engage in intercultural investigation.

Expectations to meet these new cultural objectives through the use of constantly evolving modern media resources present new challenges for modern language teachers. Many second language theorists encourage teachers to draw on qualitative research traditions from anthropology, sociology, and education to lead their students in an ethnographic study of the target language culture through its media texts. In recent years, several of these studies have highlighted the need to prepare language learners with the skills to carry out ethnographic studies (Barro, Jordan & Roberts, 1998: Fischer, 1996; Hellebrandt, 1996). Some studies have looked at second language teachers' notions of culture as manifested in their practice (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Moore, 1996). Other articles (Kramsch, 1993; Sercu, 1998) have explored the thinking processes of designers and facilitators of workshops that aim to prepare in-service teachers to explore cultural issues in their classrooms through the use of traditional authentic media texts. However, few theorists have seriously contemplated what skills language teachers require to use digital media texts and tools to carry out ethnographic research with their students, and whether new teachers are, indeed, prepared to assume their new role as "ethnographer" when they graduate from their teacher education programs.

This article begins to address this previously overlooked area. It first presents a three-year experimental, media-based project carried out in the context of a university teacher education course designed to assist secondary school modern language student teachers in developing many of the technical and intellectual skills needed to conduct critical ethnographic research. Next, it presents the rationale for this project by situating this project within the traditions of cultural inquiry, qualitative inquiry, and ethnographic research in educational practice in general and second language learning in particular. From these traditions, it proposes a set of useful ethnographic skills for modern language teachers. Finally, it presents a media-rich case study of one student teacher who participated in this study, Klara, to explore her thinking processes as she grappled with her evolving concepts of culture, text and method of inquiry to eventually develop these ethnographic skills.

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2. The Media-Based Approach and Tools

This project took place in the context of a modern language teacher education course the author designed, taught, and researched at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, entitled _Advanced Studies in Language Education: Integrating Language and Culture with Modern Media_. This course, taught in English and open to speakers of all languages, was designed to provide opportunities for student teachers to develop the necessary ethnographic skills to teach modern languages and their cultures in a multicultural society. As a general framework for the readings, lectures, discussions, and assignments, these questions guided the course: What is culture and why should we teach it? What can we use to teach culture? How should we use these materials? What is the student's role in learning about culture? What is the teacher's role in integrating language and culture?

Though the course content remained largely the same during the three years it was taught, new funding and partnerships in the last two years made it possible to incorporate a high-tech media component to the learning model. In this media component, students used emerging digital ethnographic research tools to assume a variety of research roles, such as qualitative researchers, video ethnographers, reflective practitioners and beta-testers of previously unreleased software (Beers & Goldman-Segall, 2001). This media component was inspired by Papert's (1980) "constructionist" educational philosophy and methodology which assumes learners are more actively engaged when working on a personally meaningful external artifact, whether it be a sandcastle or a computer program, which he calls an "object-to-think-with."

2.1 The media component

In the media-based approach, these student teachers from eight different language specialties - most with little or no experience with digital media - received initial instruction in filming techniques, video capturing and editing, and scanning. Next, working in design teams of 5-6 individuals, each group used an emerging, beta version digital movie-making tool, CineKit™ (Baecker, Rosenthal, Friedlander, Smith, & Cohen, 1996), to create a 30-second movie based on the cultural significance of a particular object, or artifact, of their choice such as coffee, cars, or letters. The student teachers filmed each other and were filmed as they worked on their movies and engaged in various forums, such as class lectures, class discussions on readings, and focus group meetings, to reflect on their learning processes.

After each day's class meeting, the author reviewed these video data and excerpted clips she determined to be thought-provoking or representative of the other student teachers' experiences. She then used an emerging beta version digital tool called WebConstellations™ (Goldman-Segall, 1997) to post these video excerpts as well as their finished movies. In this forum, the participants were able to view and comment on each other's reflections and creations, and to make connections to their own experiences as well as to key concepts presented in the course. The aim of this course was to create and study a culture for learning, which was enriched by the multilingual, multicultural backgrounds of the participants. It did not aim to make any generalizations based on the cultural backgrounds of the individuals.

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2.2 Digital tools

Hardware: To make their movies, students used VHS camcorders and tapes to film their subjects. They used Macintosh™ G3 computers with RCA video inputs to capture and edit their video and occasionally imported still images with an external Hewlett Packard™ scanner. Additional ethnographic data was collected with Sony™ digital video cameras and Sony™ mini digital video tapes.

Software: Formerly known as MAD, CineKit™ is a digital movie-making tool created by Baecker and his development team at the University of Toronto. It is an interactive system that runs on inexpensive personal computers and allows individuals without specific computer, film, or video backgrounds to create digital video motion pictures that could be transmitted over the Internet. CineKit™ supports the process by enhancing the author's ability to structure and modify a presentation and to visualize the ultimate result.

CineKit™ did this by allowing both top-down design and bottom-up creation with a hierarchical multimedia document representation; by supporting the flexible inclusion and combination of words, images, sounds, and video sequences; by providing a variety of movie representations and editors for these representations; and by providing real-time playback of the best approximation to the ultimate presentation that could be produced at any stage of the design process. CineKit™ movies were stored in digital formats that could be transmitted over the Internet and played back under typical World Wide Web browsers (Baecker et al., 1996). Though CineKit™ was never released to the public, a recent, stable version of this product is available at the time of this publication under the name of Expresto Creator™.

WebConstellations™ is a digital annotation and analysis tool created by Goldman-Segall in her research lab, MERLin (Multimedia Ethnographic Research Laboratory), in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia and built with Bitmovers Communications, Inc. It is the first server-side, web-based database system designed to enable a community of researchers to catalog, describe, and meaningfully organize multimedia data accessible on the Web. The underlying metaphor for WebConstellations™, like in Goldman-Segall's earlier tools, Learning Constellations™ (1989) and Constellations™ (1994), is stars and constellations. Researchers in dispersed locations can use this tool to access the same database and collaboratively analyze that set of data. Stars, which are individual pieces of digital data, and constellations, which are personally meaningful clusters of these stars, can be tagged with keywords. Users can engage in dialogue about particular stars and constellations using the annotation discussion system. WebConstellations™ was never released to the public, although a similar product is under development at the time of this publication with the intention to be released under the name of Orion™.

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3. Rationale

3.1 Traditions of cultural inquiry

There have traditionally been two ways of looking at "culture," as Claire Kramsch (1996) has noted. The first comes from the humanities and, using an historical approach, interprets the target language culture through its products and modes of representation, such as its art, literature, social institutions or artifacts. The second comes from the social sciences and, using an ethnographic approach, explores the processes inherent to the target language culture, such as the attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering that are shared by members of that community (p. 2).

Most modern language teachers have emerged from the humanities and have therefore been educated in the first tradition. Their university-level language classes were generally carried out in the same departments that housed literary studies and linguistics, and the language curriculum was geared towards preparing these students to eventually become proficient enough to appreciate the classic literary works of the target languages' cultures. Their university coursework has generally prepared them to take an historical approach to cultural research, based on the written tradition of the target language cultures' classic texts. Nevertheless, like the majority of their fellow students enrolled in these university language courses, these teachers were not destined to use their acquired language

skills as literary scholars of classic texts, but rather as specialists in deciphering the many different genres of authentic texts diffused in the target languages' popular cultures.

Unfortunately, the skills these modern language student teachers have learned as interpreters of literary texts are not always readily transferred to the interpretation of these authentic media texts. Certainly, most have had contact with some of the more traditional genres of communication, such as newspaper, radio, and television, in their prior language classes. Yet many researchers suspect that most classroom interpretations of these types of authentic texts have been limited to superficial readings of their lexicon, grammar and syntax, with little discussion of the cultural themes, patterns, and assumptions represented within (Beers, 2001; Kramsch, 1996; Moore, 1996).

When these students enter into the post-graduate schools of education to learn to teach modern languages, they discover that new curricular guidelines urge them to set aside the literary traditions of academic investigation into which they have been enculturated to adopt the ethnographic approaches to cultural study of the social sciences. It is not surprising, therefore, that many modern language student teachers initially resist performing deep, ethnographic, readings of the target language culture's authentic media texts and continue to read them at a superficial level, concentrating on the language structures they employ (Beers, 2001).

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Indeed, anthropologists have long been successful in using different types of visual media, similar to these authentic texts, to investigate the dynamic processes that characterize a society, but these researchers have been educated in the tradition of ethnographic, not literary, inquiry. Numerous studies call upon modern language teachers to engage their students in ethnographic, process-based, rather than historical, product-based, studies of the target language culture (Fischer, 1996; Hellebrandt, 1996; Kramsch, Cain & Murphy-Lejeune, 1996; Moore, 1996). Yet the need to prepare teachers with the skills necessary to carry out this type of investigation has been for the most part ignored.

3.1.1 Critical approaches to cultural study

Political, ideological, and technological changes in the current international landscape are creating new challenges and opportunities for the modern language educator and learner since boundaries that mark nation-state, identity, and genre are blurring. Increasing globalization has led to more cross-over between formerly isolated groups of people and greater diversity within local demographics. In this post-modern context, second language theorists are calling into question the traditional notions of "culture," which see it as a monolithic entity, by describing culture with terms such as "discourse, identity, hybridity, essentialism, power, difference, agency, resistance, and contestation" (Atkinson, 1999, p. 626).

To address these challenges, a group of internationally renowned educators who call themselves the "New London Group" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) has identified the need to reconsider the future of literacy teaching in the context of a rapidly changing world. They propose the term "multiliteracies," because it "engages with the multiplicity of communications channels and media" and with "the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 5).

Carmen Luke (2000), a language and literacy theorist and member of the New London Group, outlines three components inherent to critical literacy. It includes a meta-knowledge of diverse meaning systems and the socio-cultural contexts in which they are produced and embedded in everyday life; the mastery of the technical and analytic skills with which to negotiate those systems in diverse contexts; and, finally, the capacity to understand how these systems and skills operate in relations and interests of power within and across social institutions.

The critical literacy which Luke defines is difficult to develop even when reading the texts of one's own culture, in which one is versed in the common protocols of daily life and language. Presented with the texts of the target language culture, the task's difficulty is compounded.

3.2 Traditions of qualitative inquiry

   Qualitative research. The media-based approach described in this article is informed by the general assumptions that guide qualitative researchers in their inquiry. Qualitative researchers believe there is no such ideal as a single objective reality. Instead, multiple realities of any given phenomenon are socially constructed through individual and collective interpretations of the situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 14). Each individual constructs her own reading of the event as directed by her sense of self in relation to the other--the self being the sum total of the life experiences that have informed the paradigm in which she operates and the other being the entity which either confirms or contradicts this paradigm. The qualitative researcher's aim is to understand the event from the perspective of the participants, to uncover the qualities that contribute to re-constructing its meaning and significance.

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   Ethnographic studies. Ethnographic studies are prototypical examples of qualitative research in that the ethnographer integrates herself into a localized group of individuals, often taking on a participatory role in their activities. The ethnographer collects data in the form of field note observations, artifacts, interviews, conversations, and images and compiles them into a descriptive and interpretive account. The ethnographer acknowledges being an active element in the dynamic and ever evolving cultural phenomenon of inquiry, one who changes the social context merely by being there. The ethnographer also recognizes that the subjective lens through which the events are viewed will influence the findings and interpretations.

Critical ethnographic approaches to research in second language learning and teaching have enabled researchers to treat formal learning and teaching contexts as cultural constructs and thereby situate them within the larger social realities in which they operate. They have built upon movements in critical theory (Pennycook, 2000) to reveal the various social powers within a society which may inhibit its members from achieving success and enjoying the opportunities this success provides. In recent years, critical ethnographic studies on second language learners and teachers, such as the ones detailed below, have greatly informed the field.

For example, Canagarajah's (1993) ethnography of 22 Tamil students enrolled in a Sri Lankan mandatory English-for-general-purposes course revealed that these students both outwardly resisted the alienating discourses inscribed in a United States textbook and inwardly accepted them in order to pass the exams and fulfill a socio-economic necessity. By employing this two-pronged strategy, Canagarajah determined, these students unwittingly participated in their own domination.

In their ethnography of two writing programs in a United States university, Atkinson & Ramanathan (1995) described the contrasting cultural norms of academic writing and academic writing instruction. They compared the differing viewpoints between the two cultures and identified underlying beliefs and practices which might prevent non-native speaking undergraduates from advancing into the mainstream university academic program.

In a different study by these same ethnographers (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999), they examined four principles and practices of first-language-oriented composition which appeared to incorporate a U.S. mainstream ideology of individualism: voice, peer review, critical thinking and textual ownership. They argued these principles and practices may not correspond to the cultural approaches taken by

many second language students trying to enter mainstream writing programs and thus might hinder their successful incorporation.

In her ethnography on adult immigrant women learners of English in Canada, Norton (Norton Peirce 1995; Norton 2000) argued that issues of power between these language learners and their language learning context played a significant role in determining their success as language learners. Second language learning, she concluded, was successful when learners "invested" in their second language social identity. Norton (2000) uses the term identity

> "to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5).

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Successful investment allows learners to become subject of, and not just subject to, the dominant discourses in a society. To become subject of the discourse, the learners must be in a position of power that allows them to socially define themselves in the new culture. However, she cautions, learners will only make an investment if they think it will benefit them socially.

The majority of these critical ethnographies have examined the learner's relationship to the larger power structures within society. Duff & Uchida (1995), however, place their emphasis on the sociocultural identities of foreign language teachers of English in Japan. They studied the explicit discussions of culture and implicit modes of cultural transmission in their classes. They also explored the teachers' changing understandings about what constitutes culture and how they viewed themselves in terms of their various social and cultural roles. Some of the conclusions highlight the dynamic nature of an individual's identity as well as the implicit and explicit cultural practices of language teaching.

3.3 Digital video ethnography

The art educator and qualitative educational researcher Eisner (1998) criticizes early positivistic approaches to ethnographic research because they tried to eliminate the subjective self from its equation, thinking that objectivity made it possible to locate and isolate the reality of the world out there. Subjectivity was seen to weaken the validity of the findings, in that they might have said more about the beliefs of the person carrying out the study than about the truth itself.

Nonetheless, we are the sum total of our life experiences. Our wisdom is created by our contact with nature, its inhabitants and their artifacts. Qualitative inquiry acknowledges that the self is the instrument through which we experience the world around us. As such, this inquiry "is not only directed towards those aspects of the world "out there," it is also directed to objects and events that we are able to create" (Eisner, 1998, p. 21).

Digital video ethnography, a term coined by educational researcher and digital tool developer, Goldman-Segall (1990, 1995, 1996, 1998), is a qualitative research methodology which centers its processes of interpretation on those very objects and events we are able to create. It reconceptualizes and re-invents traditions of qualitative research within a post-modern framework, one in which authorship and identity are transitive in relation to the context of the event. Goldman-Segall's theories on what constitutes robust research in a socio-cultural site are inspired by the work of scholars from the areas of visual and cultural anthropology (see Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Mead, 1975), critical ethnography (see Lather, 1991; Tyler, 1986), semiotics (see Barthes, 1977), and filmmaking (see Davenport, Evans & Halliday, 1993; Leacock, 1973, 1986) and are embodied in her

digital ethnographic methods and data analysis tools (1990, 1997, 1998).

In her research method, Goldman-Segall encourages the participants in the study to take on new roles as digital ethnographers, thereby becoming both the researchers and researched, while investigating their chosen subject of inquiry. Together, they create a robust collective database of qualitative digital data, open to interpretation and re-interpretation by its many users. These participants use digital ethnographic tools, such as video camcorders, movie-making software and Goldman-Segall's digital video ethnographic analysis tools to build these robust collective data bases, or, as she also terms them, "platforms for multi-loguing" (1995).

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These digital video ethnographic tools exploit digital video's descriptive capacities and on-line digital networks' potential for perspective sharing and trading. Video is able to provide the "thick description" which Geertz (1973), a well known ethnographer, calls for in ethnographic fieldwork because it captures the subject of interest, along with its interactions with the environment, tools and the others (Goldman-Segall, 1998). In its digital format, the video can be scrutinized, analyzed, and catalogued down to its most minute detail (Goldman-Segall, 1989). With these data analysis tools, the digital video ethnographer can further contextualize her video with text, documents, fieldnotes, and other data in order to gain insights into what to shoot and to provide other users with layer upon layer of interpretation and significance (Goldman-Segall, 1996). As the data base grows, the digital video ethnographer can sort, annotate, and group this data into meaningful configurations based on her own interpretations while other users can simultaneously do the same. With the on-line tool used in this particular study, WebConstellations™, these users were able to work from removed sites, assuming the role of viewer or active participant, depending on the access they desired or were granted.

4. Ethnographic skills

Modern language teachers require a unique and complex set of ethnographic research skills to explore the target language cultures through their digital media texts, especially since they generally find themselves in a new, unexplored predicament which differs from that of the anthropologist. Whereas the anthropologist traditionally started from a context-and-experience-rich environment and imagined a text, the language teacher and learner start with a text and must imagine a context (Teraoka, 1989), drawing from previous experience, knowledge, or stereotypes about the target language culture.

Ethnography, which is both a qualitative method of investigation and a written text produced from this experience, is generally understood to be the study of "other" people and the social and cultural patterns that give meaning to their lives (Barro, Jordan & Roberts, 1998). With the aim of fostering intercultural sensitivity and tolerance, these methods are also being employed to carry out studies of self, in relation to the other. This awareness of self and other as gained in the research process is a significant step toward becoming multiliterate digital text designers and interpreters in one's own and the target language. Digital video ethnography can be especially effective in reflecting on this relationship. The constant role reversal that digital video ethnographers undergo, as they move between viewer and viewed, teacher and learner, subject and object of research, develops a certain flexibility of perspective which facilitates the study of self and other. This skill is valued in the second language learning process as it can lead to communicative and cultural competence (Byram & Morgan, 1994) and, ultimately, greater intercultural understanding (Byram & Morgan, 1994; Christie, 1990; Rorty, 1995).

When Geertz (1973) made his call for "thick description" of the cultural event in the ethnographic write-up, he significantly influenced the ways in which qualitative researchers were to carry out

ethnographic inquiry and report their findings. In the field of education in general, and second language learning and teaching in particular, many scholars have built on Geertz's notion in an attempt to identify the necessary skills for good ethnographic research. As a result, descriptors such as "thick interpretation" (Barro, Jordan & Roberts, 1998; Goldman-Segall, 1998) and "thick comparison" (Barro, Jordan & Roberts, 1998) have also been incorporated as ideals in ethnographic research.

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What follows is a discussion of what the author identifies as useful abilities for modern language student teachers to develop in order to carry out not only an ethnographic, but critical ethnographic, inquiry in their classrooms. In addition to the technical skills for collecting and organizing data in a variety of media, the ethnographer also requires the intellectual skills to determine what data selections are worthy of analysis and how they interact with the other data to inform the larger picture. These skills, many of which have already been identified in the literature, are based on the author's experience with the participants in this study.

Building on the scholarly discourse mentioned above, these abilities are organized into the following four categories: "thick observation," "thick interpretation," "thick comparison," and "thick description." In assigning these skills to neat categories, however, the author does not wish to imply that each can be learned or used independently. Rather, as will become apparent through Klara's learning processes,
the acquisition and use of these skills is a cyclical, interdependent process in which each activity informs the others, leading to new, deeper understandings of the phenomena.

4.1 Thick observation

For many modern language student teachers, the first step toward understanding the cultural events presented in the authentic media texts they are interpreting may be to recognize that a cultural event is indeed happening. Student teachers who hold a product-based concept of culture need to grapple with new critical concepts of culture and develop the skills to look beyond the superficial elements of the media text to notice the various cultural discourses it embodies.

To this aim, Eisner's (1998) notion of "connoisseurship," which comes from the Latin word, "to know," can be a useful ideal for student teachers to strive for in their inquiry. Eisner explains that an expert in any field, be it a radiologist studying an x-ray or a conductor directing an orchestra, is able to draw from personal experience to see certain qualities that other lay people do not notice. Only when these qualities are seen can they be appreciated; for when they are invisible they go unnoticed and no further reflection can take place. In an authentic digital media text, these qualities can be the linguistic and sensory elements, such as words, image, sound, movement and color, which contribute to the overall literary event. Luke (2000) argues the digital information environment has forced us to reconsider the qualifications we use to paint our profile of an expert. These days, an "understanding of the relations among ideas is as if not more important than mastery of the ideas themselves" (p. 73). The expert is no longer the one with the decontextualized facts, Luke says, she is the one who "sees and seeks the connection among related pieces of information" (p. 73).

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4.2 Thick interpretation

For Goldman-Segall (1998), thick interpretation occurs when individuals are given a forum, or platform in which to share their various "points of viewing" or personal connections to an event. As a participant in this forum learns the perspectives of others, his or her own perspective also changes in

relation. It is through the process of examining the relationships to the event, not necessarily the details of the event, that a thick interpretation is achieved. Similarly, the expert interpreter of the target language's authentic media texts not only sees the inherent qualities of the text, as Eisner explains, but also seeks how they, the interpreter included, interact to co-create meaning.

Inherent to this understanding of the text is an ability to recognize that dominant discourses exist within any given social institution and that these discourses have assumed their status through the various power structures at play (Carspecken, 1996; Norton, 2000; Pennycook, 2000). The critical ethnographer is not only able to recognize cultural symbols and patterns, but also realizes that they present different meanings for the various members of a culture, based on a particular context in place and time. In other words, a critical ethnographic interpretation "takes into account the cultural in the individual, and the individual in the cultural" (Atkinson, 1999, p. 654).

4.3 Thick comparison

In addition to the ability to perform thick observation and thick interpretation, the modern language student teacher also requires the skills to carry out an intellectual and experiential "thick comparison" (Barro, Jordan & Roberts, 1998) between his or her own and the target language cultures. This opportunity to travel between cultures as an ethnographer, rather than tourist, enables the student teacher to step outside of his or herself to critically reflect on the underlying assumptions that guide the interactions of the different cultures (Fischer, 1996). Ultimately, this process of drawing upon one's own lived experiences, or self, to understand the other can lead to greater empathy and intercultural sensitivity (Byram & Morgan, 1994).

However, this new understanding can not come from a comparison of products and practices motivated by a superficial product-based interpretation of culture. This comparison is more productive when guided by newer, post-modern interpretations of cultures, which recognize that they are comprised of a multiplicity of discourses (Gee, 1992; Kramsch & von Hoene, 1995). These discourses reflect the dynamic, individual perspectives, or "points-of-viewing" (Goldman-Segall, 1998) of the cultures' speakers.

4.4 Thick description

Geertz's notion of "thick description" for documenting cultural events takes on new significance in the context of digital media data and texts. The writing up process now requires more than the language of words and ability to use pen and paper. It also includes the language of digital media with its blurred genres and multimodal texts. To create and interpret these texts, modern language student teachers require technical skills, such as digital filming and editing. Furthermore, they require the intellectual abilities to select the individual excerpts, or "chunks" (Goldman-Segall, 1994; Goldman-Segall et al., 1998), of data that represent, though always partially, the whole. Through these selections, they are able to make abstract cultural concepts concrete in their digital media representations.

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In the following section, various types of media are incorporated into the writing up process to thickly describe the learning experiences of one participant in this study, Klara. Like most of the participants in this study, Klara possessed a rich multilingual, multicultural background which informed her cultural exploration. Nonetheless, Klara's background and language specialties were not the motivating factor in her selection for this article. Her story is profiled in these pages because she showed a deep engagement to the subject matter and articulately expressed her thinking processes in a variety of forums and media. The different types of data called upon to construct Klara's profile is color-coded to aid the reader in understanding its source. The reader is encouraged to consult the

following reader's guide for clarification:

Reader's Guide to Media Sources for Data
Final Movies: In these 30-second movies, students were asked to attempt to portray the cultural significance of an object of their choice. Klara's group chose to create a movie on letters.
WebConstellations: Comments posted via WebConstellations™ in response to the video "star," which is also included.
Chunks: Excerpts from the student's "chunks" from readings and their responses. Students were asked to select 2-3 chunks (quotations) they found intriguing, enlightening or worthy of criticism, and provide a short explanation of why they had chosen that particular chunk.
Lab and Classroom: Video footage taken during interactions in multimedia labs or classrooms in, or outside of, the Education Building at the University of British Columbia.
Focus Group Sessions: Video footage taken during Focus Group Sessions. Each student participated in one of five focus group sessions during which time they filmed themselves as they responded to a series of pre-established questions provided by the instructor to guide their reflective process.
Reflective Syntheses: Excerpts from the student's written reflective syntheses of an article. Students were asked to first summarize the main points of an article of their choice from the course readings and then comment on how these ideas related to their own personal experiences in their learning and teaching.

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5. Klara's story

This is Klara:
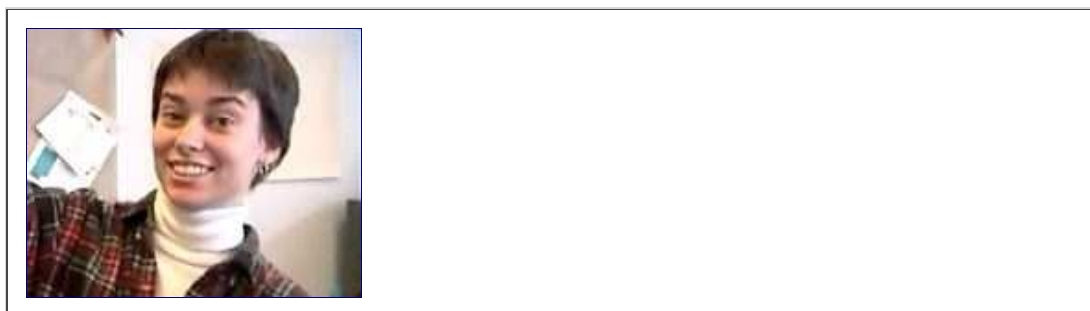
And this is Klara's movie, "We've Got Mail." To watch the movie, click on the image.

"Why send a letter when you can e-mail?"

Klara's Group Movie: "We've Got Mail."
Design Team: Lesley, Nazlynn, Adele, Klara, Andrea, Susan.

(In these 30-second movies, students were asked to attempt to portray the cultural significance of an object of their choice. Klara's group chose to create a movie on letters.)

Klara is a multilingual French and Spanish language specialist who identifies with the role of "ethnographer"--one who spends her life moving between cultures. Early in the study, Klara held a static, nationalistic notion of culture and believed that a person had a limited capacity for cultures, like rooms in a hotel. She feared that the more cultures she learned, the less she belonged to any of them. During the movie-making process, however, Klara honed her technical and intellectual ethnographic skills. She began to look for and identify the many cultural patterns and symbols in her own and her classmates' texts and came to appreciate the dynamic, interactive forces of culture(s).

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5.1 Klara's persona

Klara was born in the former Czechoslovakia where she spent most of the first half of her life. She then immigrated to Canada with her family and maintained a solid link to her past through her native language and family ties. Her bright eyes, expressive mannerisms and explosive smile engaged the viewer and provided an open window into her thinking processes. Klara constructed and performed her ideas as she spoke. Her eyes darted back and forth while she processed, they narrowed and traveled off to the right as she pondered a deeper thought and eventually they opened wide to indicate she had arrived at a final conclusion. Her words were accompanied by gestures and movements that captivated the viewer and narrated the sentiments she was evoking - she clutched her heart as she indicated that something came from inside, opened her arms to extend an idea globally, and punctuated her conclusions with a radiant smile.

Klara was multilingual, specializing in the teaching of French and Spanish as a second language. Her embodied communication had surely facilitated her interactions with the target language cultures' speakers and her learning of their languages. She enjoyed learning about different cultures and carried this enthusiasm over into her philosophy of teaching, as explained in the following written comment she made on a video excerpt from a focus group discussion posted on WebConstellations™. In this video excerpt, which can be played by clicking on the image, one of Klara's classmates, Anju, shared her response to the question: "What past experiences have you had learning about culture?"

WebConstellations™

Life-long culture learning
Klara on 6/18/99 at 1:41:57 PM (click on image)

Like Anju, I feel like I'm always learning about different cultures and I really enjoy that. Learning languages to me is a way of getting to know other people and their cultures.

> What use is language if you do not use it to communicate with people with whom you would not normally have contact? In our second language classrooms, students may not be able to have contact with people from the target culture until later, but if we teach them the target culture in an interesting way, with different points of view, they will get excited about that culture and will want to make contact with people from it. Isn't that our job? How can anyone get excited about a language from learning its grammar?
>
> (Comments posted via WebConstellations™ in response to the video "star," which is also included.)

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Klara identified her experiences with those of an ethnographer, moving between cultures, leaving one to immerse herself in an other. She made this point by selecting and commenting on this chunk from Fischer's (1996) article which examined the differences between tourists and explorers:

> **Chunk from Fischer, 1996, p. 74:** "Where, to a certain extent, ethnographers belong to two worlds, to their own and to the new, they almost invariably create some distance from their home culture through partial immersion in another culture."
>
> **Response from Klara:** I could identify with this idea because I feel like the more cultures I study and immerse myself in, the less I belong to any of them. I feel like the more you can identify with other cultures, the more you feel like an outsider in your "own" culture because you see things which they do not.
>
> (These are excerpts from the student's "chunks" from readings and their responses. Students were asked to select 2-3 chunks (quotations) they found intriguing, enlightening or worthy of criticism, and provide a short explanation of why they had chosen that particular chunk.)

During this project Klara honed her ethnographic research skills by becoming a perceptive participant observer of the computer culture in which she was immersed. She first examined and restructured her concept of culture and then appropriated the technical and intellectual skills to identify and research the symbols and patterns that marked the artifacts, or movies, and observations of her fellow researchers.

Early in this course, Klara believed that cultures were self contained entities, best left alone to thrive since they risked collapsing if presented with too many external influences:

"... people are not isolated any more so they can't develop their culture...it will be like Canada! Canada is, like, this global thing, right?"

Klara discusses the globalization of cultures.
Focus Group #4, June 7, 1999.

(This is a video capture made during Focus Group Sessions. Each student participated in one of five focus group sessions during which time they filmed themselves as they responded to a series of pre-established questions provided by the instructor to guide their reflective process.)

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Klara believed that cultures were to be protected and nurtured. Once an individual began to take on too many cultural identities she risked becoming confused as to her cultural identity, or worse, left without any. At one point in the focus group session, Klara recounted a painful memory of her return to former Czechoslovakia on a family visit after having spent years in her new country, Canada. Anxious to visit her childhood friend, with whom she had shared so many pleasant moments, Klara was stunned when her friend shut her out, refusing to see her. Clearly, Klara had abandoned her home culture, and proven herself unworthy of a welcome return.

Klara's heartbreak at not finding the Czechoslovakia she remembered could be attributed to the static notion she held of culture, along with, perhaps, a sense of nostalgia and longing for what once was. Her concept evolved to consider cultures as dynamic, moving entities in which relationships are structured and restructured based on changing circumstances, as demonstrated in this selection and response to Weber and Mitchell's (1996) article on the culture of student teaching:

> **Chunk from Weber & Mitchell, 1996, p. 302:** "Because cultures are rarely static, defining cultural boundaries is a rather arbitrary, difficult, and probably futile enterprise. Cultures interact, overlap, evolve, expand, disappear, re-emerge, change. To be human implies living within one or more cultures. Emanating from human interaction, culture is not only social, it is constituted and shaped by individuals who are in turn shaped by the culture or cultures in which they live."
>
> **Response from Klara:** I found this quote interesting because it presented a very dynamic view of culture. For this reason, it is difficult to teach effectively since it is hard to get a grasp of what it is. The reason everyone has such a different view of what culture is is probably because it is so dynamic and complex and because there is a constant interaction between the individual and the culture.
>
> (These are excerpts from the student's "chunks" from readings and their responses. Students were asked to select 2-3 chunks (quotations) they found intriguing, enlightening or worthy of criticism, and provide a short explanation of why they had chosen that particular chunk.)

Confronted with a new concept of culture in the classroom, Klara passed through a moment of

necessary confusion as she re-evaluated her teaching experience based on these prior conceptions:

"... this course has just confused me more and more as we go!"

Klara discusses how her concept of culture is changing.
Focus Group #4, June 7, 1999.

(This is a video capture made during Focus Group Sessions. Each student participated in one of five focus group sessions during which time they filmed themselves as they responded to a series of pre-established questions provided by the instructor to guide their reflective process.)

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Klara entered this course with reservations about her own technological abilities and also the merits of constructionist projects. She admitted that she had never liked "building things" when she was a student and was surprised to find the constructionist approach to be especially effective in making the abstract more explicit. In her reflective synthesis on Kafai and Resnick's (1996) article on constructionism, she commented:

Excerpt from Klara's Reflective Synthesis #3, on Kafai & Resnick, 1996:
When it came to my own learning in this course, I found I learned a great deal from the hands-on making of the movies. Apart from the great side benefit of learning how to use Internet and media technology, I found that through the process of making the movies, the ideas about culture which were up to that point abstract and unclear, became more concrete and real. As we made the movie, we would ask ourselves if we were portraying different views of culture, if we were presenting different layers in our movie, etc., which improved our movie and our understanding of the material presented in class and through the readings.

(Excerpt from the student's written reflective syntheses of an article. Students were asked to first summarize the main points of an article of their choice from the course readings and then comment on how these ideas related to their own personal experiences in their learning and teaching.)

This point was further iterated in an interview at the end of the course in which she also emphasized the importance of personal affect and attachment in her project:

"I was just so intimidated before we started doing it. I thought, 'We could never do that!"

Klara and Adele explain that constructionist projects first intimidated them.

Lab-time to comment via WebConstellations™.

(Video taken during classroom interactions in multimedia labs or classrooms in, or outside of, the Education Building at the University of British Columbia.)

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Having gone through this hands-on constructive process, Klara clearly had a keener understanding of the issues that informed her ethnographic investigations. Culture, for Klara, was an open, dynamic and interactive social construct which was more easily studied by seeking and seeing the many perspectives of its members and their interactions. On an article by Rorty (1995) which disucsses the use of texts in multicultural education, she commented:

Chunk from Rorty, 1995, p. 60: "…any viable culture is dynamically internally divided, encompassing radically distinct outlooks and insights."

Response from Klara: I liked this quote because it stresses the fact that a healthy, growing culture is one that has many divisions and different points of view and that is changing and developing. It means that we should not try to "pin" culture down in order to analyse it but to observe its many aspects and be open to contradictions and differences.

(These are excerpts from the student's "chunks" from readings and their responses. Students were asked to select 2-3 chunks (quotations) they found intriguing, enlightening or worthy of criticism, and provide a short explanation of why they had chosen that particular chunk.)

It is clear that Klara enjoyed being the subject of ethnographic research. When describing her own movie, she acknowledged her group capitalized on the efficiency of employing culturally loaded symbols to convey larger messages within the 30-second time constraint. She looked forward to learning the different interpretations her classmates were to construct of her movie, based on the perspective each one would bring to the reading:

"It's ... neat to read comments about the movie that we made. And how other people see different things."

Klara makes a relationship between symbols and interpretation.
Lab-time to comment via WebConstellations™.

(Video taken during classroom interactions in multimedia labs or classrooms in, or outside of, the Education Building at the University of British Columbia.)

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In the final stages of the movie-making and annotation process, Klara, unlike many of her fellow classmates, was not content to merely comment on her enjoyment of the individual products posted on WebConstellations™. She dug deep into the content of the movie to make her own ethnographic analyses:

WebConstellations™

Cars Are Us
Klara on 6/14/99 at 11:03:49 AM (click on image)

It was interesting that many people talked about the obvious use of cars, namely transportation. But other people picked up on the status symbol of cars. These people mentioned that their self-esteem improved when they had a nice car...I believe this is very typical in North America, especially amongst young people...but that's a stereotype. Good work! :)

(Comments posted via WebConstellations™ in response to the video "star," which is also included.)

Klara went beyond an interpretation of the movie itself, and performed a meta-ethnographic analysis on her classmates' comments on the movies. She searched for the different points of view presented in her classmates' comments, identified patterns and contradictions, and speculated on their motivations. It is clear in this video excerpt that Klara had appropriated the technical and intellectual skills to actively design and interpret digital media texts:

"I think they want to be individual. That's why they said, 'Oh, that's not me. I'm like this, I drink de-caf.' Or, 'I drink tea.'"

Klara demonstrates her ethnographic skills.
Lab-time to comment via WebConstellations™.

(Video taken during classroom interactions in multimedia labs or classrooms in, or outside of, the Education Building at the University of British Columbia.)

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6. Conclusion

This article has explored a media-based approach to assist secondary school modern language student teachers in developing the ethnographic research skills necessary to teach new concepts of culture in

their future courses. These prospective teachers will be asked to use evolving information and communication technologies to meet new curricular objectives which call on students to foster intercultural sensitivity and tolerance rather than amass factual knowledge. To meet these challenges in their classrooms, these beginning instructors will be expected to possess the technical and intellectual skills to interpret complex, multimodal media texts from the target language cultures.

As this article suggests, a media-based approach to learning about language, culture, method and text in a teacher education methodology course can be instrumental in creating an environment conducive to developing both the technical and the intellectual ethnographic skills these student teachers will need to succeed. The technical skills, which may range from a simple ability to navigate the Internet to more advanced competencies in web design and digital video editing, are perhaps more intimidating, but less problematic than the intellectual skills. The development of the intellectual skills, which include the ability to perform thick observation, thick interpretation, thick comparison and thick description, often oblige student teachers to re-examine deep rooted beliefs that have helped form the essence of their identities as learners and teachers. This is apparent in the multimedia case study presented earlier in this article, which thickly describes the unique learning experiences one student teacher, Klara, during this media-based project.

Though the "mastery" of these skills can be a life-long process for most individuals, this case study shows that, by the end of the course, Klara was clearly on her way toward developing the essentials. To summarize her process in relation to the skills outlined earlier, the first skill, thick observation, requires shedding oneself of prior static, product-based notions of culture for more post-modern, process-based ones that recognize the fluidity of one's identity in relation to the social context in which he or she interacts. Early in the project, Klara discussed culture in static, nationalistic terms. She appeared protective of the cultures with which she identified, not wanting to corrupt them with too many external influences. She found it fascinating, yet troubling, to travel between cultures as an ethnographer since she seemed to feel she was betraying her adopted and home cultures by learning about others. Later, however, she began to define "healthy" cultures as those that are dynamic and constantly changing. She came to see that just as her own multicultural, multilingual identity was fluid, so were those of the cultures she belonged to and studied. Her emerging skills at thick observation enabled her to see her classmates' individual and collective perspectives reflected in the qualities of their digital movie texts as well as in their comments.

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The second skill, thick interpretation, involves determining the relations between each of the elements the ethnographer has observed within the power structures of the larger cultural context. With this understanding, the skilled ethnographer is able to recognize and distinguish between patterns of behavior that are culturally motivated and others that are motivated by one's own unique experience or circumstance. As the course progressed, Klara showed her interest in looking behind her classmates' comments to try to understand their cultural and individual motivations for their interpretations. She was keenly aware of the intimate relationship between creator and interpreter of the digital movies, knowing they co-create meaning based on the perspectives from which each views the text. She commented that her group had used culturally loaded symbols in their movies and was interested in seeing what her classmates' interpretations would be of them, based on their own socially constructed perspectives. She also wanted to understand the motivations behind their comments on, for example, whether they drank coffee, since this admission implied, in her interpretation, membership in mainstream local culture.

The third skill, thick comparison, requires the ethnographer to examine aspects of his or her identity in relation to the home and target language cultures. This ability to step outside of one's being allows for

a deeper understanding of one's self in relation to the other. At the beginning of the course, however, this process made Klara feel more like a confused outsider than an enlightened insider. She found herself questioning certain core understandings, such as her previously held belief of what constituted culture, and this left her feeling uneasy. Later, however, she clearly enjoyed being the subject of inquiry and looked forward to other opportunities for self-reflection, such as in comparing her interpretations of the posted digital texts to those of her classmates.

The fourth skill, thick description, applies to the written account of the ethnography, in which the ethnographer has compiled selected observations and linked them with enough detail to constitute a representative, though partial, account of the cultural event. It is often in this writing, or creation phase, as was the case with Klara, that the three other skills coalesce to provide the ethnographer with deeper insight into the cultural event and his or her interpretation of it. Klara admitted being initially intimidated by the prospect of using the digital ethnographic methods and tools in the course. She did not have much experience with computers and had never liked project-based learning assignments in her youth. Nonetheless, it was in this thick description phase, when she and her design team created a movie based on their ethnographic observations and interpretations on letter writing, that she had her most rewarding discoveries about the course material and her personal capabilities. She asserted that it was in the writing up phase that she had developed the skills to thickly describe the cultural events

In terms of thick observation, she commented that the movie making process made her continually question whether her design team had incorporated a process-based, rather than product-based notion of culture. She wondered aloud if they had thickly interpreted their data by including enough levels of meaning in their film. As she made her movie, she and her teammates made a point to thickly compare their perspectives on their movie topic, letter writing, and how they differed based on cultural norms or individual particularities. She was also keenly aware of her own interpretation of the cultural references they had included in their movie and was curious to compare them to those of eventual viewers.

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It is possible to conclude, therefore, that this constructionist media-based approach helped Klara make abstract concepts from the course concrete. In the process, she began to develop the technical and intellectual ethnographic skills for second language teaching and learning in the context of today's dynamic and ever changing cultures.

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