Students' versus teachers' views on culture learning in the language class:

A case study from an Australian tertiary Spanish programme

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the opinions and understandings of "Hispanic Cultures" by students and teachers in a Spanish language programme at an Australian University. It examined how teachers of this programme perceived and taught "Hispanic Cultures" in their classroom, how students experienced cultural learning and ultimately what they understood as "Hispanic Cultures". In particular, it looked in-depth at how the students of a Spanish programme were constructing their own concept of "Hispanic Cultures". Four classes participated in this study with a total of 63 students and three teachers: the Elementary Spanish class and their teacher, the Intermediate Spanish class and their teacher and two Advanced Spanish classes and their teacher.

The main research approach used in this one-semester study was qualitative and a combination of qualitative and quantitative data was collected in the form of student questionnaires, classroom observations, and student and teacher interviews as data-collection tools. The outcome of the study provided information on the current usage of cultural input resources in the Spanish classroom. It also provided insights on the students' understanding of "Hispanic Cultures" and how the students were obtaining most of their cultural knowledge of "Hispanic Cultures". It also touched on what can be done to inject more "Hispanic Cultures" into the classroom, especially resources related to "small c" culture. It was discovered that the majority of the students found the most useful cultural input resources outside the classroom. However, it was also was seen that all students found that story-telling, either by themselves, classmates or their teachers was one of the most enjoyable and important approaches used to develop and build cultural awareness. The study found that, overall, the students' understanding of the term " Hispanic Cultures" was linked to "small c" culture, whereas the teachers understanding of "Hispanic Cultures" was more often related to "Capital C" culture.

Introduction

Since the early 1960s, the recognition of the importance of culture in foreign language acquisition has grown, and there is now more attention being paid to the role of culture in the foreign language classroom (Stern 1992). For the past few decades the "cultural revolution", as labelled by Lafayette (1978), has continued to influence and benefit both foreign language teachers and students by encouraging the expansion of cultural studies in the foreign language classroom (Lalande 1988).

Prior to the 1960s, the study of language was not linked to communication but to the study of the literature of the target language. At the time, the primary goal of language study was the acquisition of foreign language skills to aid the understanding of great literary works (Flewelling 1994: 132). This type of culture was often referred to as "Capital C" culture, as it dealt with the study of the arts, philosophy and of course the literature itself of the people associated with the target culture (Flewelling 1994: 132). However, since the 1960s, educators have begun concerning themselves more with the communicative aspects of language (Lessard-Clouson 1992). This established a need to gain a better understanding of the people of the target culture being learnt, making a transfer from "Capital C" culture to what is referred to as "small c" culture or the study of people's values, beliefs and daily rituals in general (Flewelling 1994: 132).

The concepts of *cultural authenticity* and *cultural competence* have also been important in the second language and culture learning context. *Cultural authenticity* refers to the type of cultural resources used in the classroom (e.g. a restaurant menu in the target language) and whether these resources are used in a manner that helps the students to develop cultural knowledge (Kramsch 2000). However, *cultural competence* refers to behaving in accordance with the social conventions of a given speech community (Kramsch 2000: 181).

In the early 1990s, much of the emphasis in foreign language instruction was put on the acquisition of the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Culture was often an overlooked and even a forgotten part of the language class (Byram *et al* 1991; Lessard-Clouston 1992). Evans and González (1993: 26) pointed out that one of the major concerns of foreign language teachers in the 1990s was to find ways in which to promote better cross-cultural understanding while continuing to develop linguistic skills in the foreign language classroom.

According to Flewelling (1994: 134), language and culture are inseparable; when learning a second language, cultural acquisition is something that happens simultaneously to linguistic acquisition. He advocated that culture should be taught in the second language class as it can broaden students' horizons and help students to understand and appreciate the target culture, while helping them to gain a better understanding of their own culture and reduce ethnocentric attitudes that they may have towards their own culture. It can also work well in increasing the students' interest in the target language and perhaps even improve their skills in that target language (Flewelling 1994: 134).

The research work by Fioritto (2000) and Simpson (1997) encouraged more teachers and institutions to incorporate culture into their foreign and second language classes. They did so by pointing out aspects they had observed in the foreign language/culture teaching classroom that could be improved or changed, while discussing the importance of foreign culture acquisition. Moreover, Libben & Lidner (1996) and Stern (1992) analysed the ways in which culture could be taught by the teacher during class time. They mentioned some of the reasons that can influence the lack of cultural input in the classroom, such as the lack of authentic resources and disagreements between teaching staff about what aspects of the target culture to teach.

Another of the factors that seem to contribute to the low levels of culture teaching in some foreign language classrooms is the uncertainty and inconsistency between what different teachers believe is more culturally relevant to the students' needs, making it hard to develop a curriculum for the cultural component of the class (Simpson 1997; Stern 1992). The cause of this problem is in many cases the obvious lack of cultural resources available for use in the classroom (Stern 1992). Carr (1999) argues that language teachers have no 'real tools for teaching culture' and this is because of the lack of a workable model to understand the nature of culture and its relation to language. Kramsch (2000) also comments that, although the integration of both language and culture concepts in the classroom is important, both terms are also somewhat confusing for second language teachers. More recently, the term Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) has been gaining recognition in the area of second language teaching (Lo Bianco *et al* 1999). Liddicoat (1997) points out that, in Australia, cultural understanding was included as the eighth key competency and cultural element included in the curriculum statements and profiles for Languages and English as a Second Language (Australian Education Foundation 1994).

In 2003, a survey of over 400 secondary school teachers from countries all over Europe, including Poland, England and Spain, was conducted to determine what second language teachers thought of teaching culture in their second language classrooms. Although the results of this survey naturally showed some variations (due to different curricula adopted by the teachers from different countries in Europe), they provided interesting new evidence on how teachers approach intercultural learning. All the teachers surveyed agreed that they would like to promote the acquisition of intercultural skills through their teaching, and that they would like to teach intercultural competence through their foreign language teaching (Wadham-Smith 2003). This shows that teachers are willing to incorporate the teaching of different cultures into their second language classrooms. However, it is still unclear how they can achieve this objective effectively. This remains an issue for many language teachers and an area that applied linguists are still exploring.

The understanding of what culture is and of the ways in which it is related to learning a language has changed considerably over the years. In this study, "Culture" is understood as an aspect or feature that originated or can be associated with life in a country, including its language. This term can refer to aspects in relation to both "small c" and "Capital C" culture.

Now, more than ever, language teachers need the help of the learners to understand and recognise the issues involved in teaching different cultures (Liddicoat 1997: 55). It is the language students who are experiencing the different curriculum and resources used in the classroom, and it is they who can directly demonstrate how the resources used affect the cultural knowledge they are (or are not) ultimately gaining. However, we know very little about what students think about learning culture and how they experience it in the language classroom. What we do know is that language learning should also focus on learning culture.

The Study

The main aim of the study conducted was to discover what students and teachers understand by "culture" in the Spanish learning context. There are 20 countries in the world that share the official language of Spanish. These are: Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, The Dominican Republic, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela. Each one has a very unique culture even though they countries share the use of Spanish as the official language of their country. The term "Hispanic Cultures" will be used in this article to refer to the concept of cultures of the Hispanic world.

The study also looked into how students went about acquiring "Hispanic Cultures" and how teachers went about teaching them. In particular, the study analysed how the students of a Spanish studies programme in Australia were constructing their own concept of "Hispanic Cultures". The study investigated the following six questions:

1. What do the participating students undertaking the Spanish programme understand by the term "Hispanic Cultures"?

2. What do the participating teachers of the Spanish programme understand by the term "Hispanic Cultures"?

3. Does the students' concept of Hispanic Cultures change at all throughout one semester of studying a language course in this Spanish programme?

4. What are the teachers' opinions regarding the integration of the notion of "Hispanic Cultures" in their classes?

5. What sources of cultural input were used in the Spanish programme observed?

6. What learning resources have the greatest influence on the construction of the student's concept of "Hispanic Cultures"?

The Research Methodology

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data was collected. However, the main research approach used in this study was qualitative, due to its empirical nature (Sarantakos 1998). Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to analyse the qualitative data collected from class observations, student questionnaires, student interviews and teacher interviews (Miles & Huberman 1994). In addition, quantitative data analysis procedures were used to analyse the data collected from the questionnaires. A Likert scale rated the students' opinions in the student questionnaires used in the study (Sarantakos 1998). The data collection was conducted for the Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced levels three times during the semester.

The Participants

Four classes participated in the study: Elementary Spanish with 17 students and their teacher; Intermediate Spanish with 20 students and their teacher; and two Advanced Spanish classes (one class was Spanish and Technology and the other was Spanish for Professional Purposes) with a total of 26 students and their teacher.

Of the 63 students who participated in this study, 49 were females and 14 males. The age of 54 students ranged between 17 and 24 years. The age of the other nine students ranged between 25 and 55 and over. The majority of the students were from an English-speaking linguistic background. However, six students were from a Hispanic linguistic background, five of whom were in the third-year group. Fourteen of the students were from other linguistic backgrounds (Italian, Norwegian, French, Swedish and Japanese). Forty-three students were from an Anglo-Saxon background, eight students from an Asian cultural background and seven from a Hispanic cultural background. Five students were from other cultural backgrounds. Each student completed three questionnaires, one at the beginning of the semester, one in the middle and one at the end. In addition, they were also interviewed twice during the semester, once at the beginning and once at the end.

The three teachers of the courses that were targeted for this study were also interviewed for this research. Two were male teachers and one a female teacher. Two were from Hispanic cultural backgrounds and one from an Anglo-Saxon background. The two teachers who came from Hispanic cultural backgrounds had Spanish as their first language, whereas the other teacher had English as the first language. All the teachers were interviewed at the end of the semester.

All the teachers described their teaching approach in different ways. The First-year teacher described his method of teaching as communicational/interactive. The Second-year teacher claimed to be using the "Natural Approach", an approach described by the teacher as promoting production emerging naturally from comprehension to production. The third-year teacher used a teaching approach described as "content-based and project-based", as it involved the students in real life projects and activities and was conducted fully in the target language.

The Findings

1. Students' understanding of "Hispanic Cultures"

According to all the student questionnaires, the terms most used by students to describe "Hispanic Cultures" were "Traditions" (31%), followed by "Ways of Life" (30%) and "Beliefs" (25%) of people from the Hispanic world. However, there were many other different understandings of "Hispanic Cultures" amongst all the students who responded to the questionnaires and interviews. This demonstrated the many different cultural needs and expectations amongst students learning a second language. This may also indicate that there is a variety of cultural learning styles among the students that shape the cultural acquisition of learners in different ways. The understandings and perceptions of what the students believe "Hispanic Cultures" to be may play a very important part in how the students learn about culture. Terms such as "Traditions" and "Daily Rituals" were popular among some students, while a variety of different terms, such as "Mannerisms" and "An Energy", were also mentioned by students. Overall, this showed the distinctiveness in the students' perceptions of culture in the Spanish learning context and the different terminology they used to describe "Hispanic Cultures".

The most popular terms that were used by the students to describe their understanding of the term "Hispanic Cultures" have been illustrated in Table 1. There are many similarities between the students' understandings at all year levels, but some of the terms were used exclusively by a particular year level or were mentioned only in the interviews or only in the questionnaires, not in both. Three definitions that fell into this category were: "Social structures", a term used by the first and second-year students only in the questionnaires; "Food and Drink", a term mentioned by the First and Second-year students mostly in the interviews; and the term "Customs", only mentioned by the Third-year students. This distinction of terms could be due to a number of factors: the students' knowledge of the language; the fact that some may have travelled, and even the students' lifestyles.

Table 1: Terms used to describe "Hispanic Cultures"

Most popular terms used by students in all year levels to describe the term "Hispanic Cultures" n=63	Percentage of responses from 1st year students		Percentage of responses from 2nd year students		Percentage of responses from 3rd year students		Percentage of responses from all year students	
Grouped into:	Ques. n=17	In. n=8	Quest. n=20	In. n=8	Quest. n=26	In. n=8	Quest. n=63	In. n=24
Traditions	24%	13%	35%	50%	34%	25%	31%	29%
Daily Rituals/ Way of life	53%	50%	30%	63%	15%	25%	30%	46%
Beliefs and Values	36%	38%	20%	25%	31%	0	25%	20%
Language	12%	38%	20%	13%	27%	38%	19%	29%
Customs	0	0	0	0	27%	0	17%	0
Background of people	24%	0	25%	13%	0	0	14%	4%
Food & Drink	0	25%	0	0	4%	25%	2%	16%
Social Structure	12%	0	30%	0	0	0	11%	0

The majority of the students' concept of "Hispanic Cultures" could be classified under the "small c" culture category, rather than the "Capital C" culture category, that is, their terms could be connected to living experiences and emotions associated with life and people. Most students related culture to something "experiential" or dealing with everyday life and people. This may mean that the students' understanding of culture is very much acquired by experiences with activities or aspects of a society or community, which can be felt with the senses or experienced in real life. This could be because they are willing to communicate with the target society and be part of it. Therefore, acquiring "small c" culture becomes relevant in this integration process.

2. Teachers' understanding of "Hispanic Cultures"

All teachers of the Spanish programme believed that "Hispanic Cultures" was a term very difficult to explain and, although each teacher had a different understanding, most overlapped in the main aspects, and fell into the three groups "Traditions", " Customs" and " Language". One of the teachers stated: *"When I think of something like culture or Hispanic Cultures in this case, I immediately think of the history and traditions and things such as the literature of these particular places."* (TI 2Yr)

Overall, the teachers' understandings of "Hispanic Cultures" incorporated "Capital C" elements into their definitions. They mentioned "Literature", "History" and "The Arts" as a part of their definitions. These terms were not mentioned by the students, with the exception of the term "History" (mentioned by a minority of students from the advanced class). Two out of three of the teachers were from Hispanic countries and all of them had been immersed in Hispanic societies for some years. They had all had contact with Hispanic people and cultures in authentic situations (from going to a museum in Spain to catching a bus in Argentina), therefore it could be said that the "small c" elements did not seem as relevant to them when defining "Hispanic Cultures". They had explored through their living in Hispanic countries "small c" elements that the majority of students in all year levels had never experienced.

The most popular terms mentioned by the all the students and the teachers to describe the term "Hispanic Cultures" are shown in Table 2. This shows the contrast between the teachers' and students' responses and how the teachers' responses are more inclined to relate to "Capital C" culture.

Table 2: Terms used by students and teachers when describing their understanding of "Hispanic Cultures"

Terms used by teachers/students to describe "Hispanic Cultures" Grouped into:	Percentage of students who used the term in questionnaires n=63	Percentage of students who used the term in interviews n=24	Percentage of teachers who used the term in interviews n=3
Daily Rituals/ Way of Life	30%	46%	0%
Language	20%	29%	66%
Traditions	31%	29%	66%
Beliefs/Values	25%	21%	0%
Customs	18%	0%	66%

3. Does the students' understanding of "Hispanic Cultures" change at all throughout the semester?

The second and third questionnaires given to students included the question: "Has your understanding of the term 'Hispanic Cultures' changed since the beginning of semester?" This question was added to see whether the students believed their knowledge of "Hispanic Cultures" had changed throughout the semester and, if so, how this knowledge was changing.

Before documenting the student responses to this question, it is important to mention that the short timeframe in which this study was carried out may have affected the ability to respond thoroughly to this question, as significant changes in the students' concept of " Hispanic Cultures" may only be more noticeable over a longer period of time. The students' responses indicated that their Hispanic cultural knowledge did not increase greatly over one semester. In the student questionnaires, there were no significant alterations reported regarding the change to, or growth of, Hispanic cultural knowledge for any of the students in the First, Second and Third years of the programme. This response could also mean that many students simply did not believe that the cultural input resources that they were exposed to in the classroom were enough to make a significant impact on their cultural knowledge and acquisition.

The questionnaires indicated that the majority of students from the First and Third-year levels believed that their understanding of "Hispanic Cultures" had not changed. However, the answers gathered in the interviews were more positive than those in the questionnaires, although they still supported the overall conclusion that only very few students believed that their Hispanic cultural knowledge had changed and even though they provided limited details on how it had changed in the course of the semester.

In the interviews, it was mostly the Second and Third-year students who believed that their Hispanic cultural knowledge had grown "a little bit" due to their participation in the Spanish programme. Many agreed that they had learnt "a little bit" about "Hispanic Cultures" from the Spanish programme and some from both year levels added that they had learnt more about "Hispanic Cultures" by doing their own research outside the class at times as preparation for class learning tasks. This outside study demonstrated that these students' linguistic ability was at a level that enabled them to conduct such study independently. As one student commented, *"I think that the Spanish class had definitely broadened my cultural knowledge of the Hispanic world, but there's also been a lot of things that I've done on my own, that I've gone out and researched"*. (SI 3Yr).

The linguistic ability of the students, or lack thereof, could explain why the First-year students' responses were distinct from those gathered from the Second and Third-year students. Of all the First-year students interviewed, the majority agreed that, whilst culture is an important aspect of learning a second language, the linguistic side was the most important for their needs. In response to this question one First- year student stated, *"Yes. Maybe not in my class, but it is important to learn (about culture)."* (SI 1Yr).

Table 3 demonstrates the percentage of students from all year levels and their responses to this question. As can be seen, the answers differed reasonably between the questionnaires and interviews only and in the interview the term "A little bit" was used to answer the question "Has your understanding of the term "Hispanic Cultures" changed since the beginning of semester?"

Table 3: Changes to the students' understanding of the term "Hispanic Cultures"

	Responses	1st Year Q=17 I=8	2nd Year Q=20 I=8	3rd Year Q=26 I=8	All students Q=63 I=24
2nd Questionnaire	Yes	30%	7%	35%	26%
	No	69%	93%	65%	74%
3rd Questionnaire	Yes	12.5%	29%	27%	26%
	No	87.5%	70.5%	72%	74%
Student	Yes	0	50%	37.5%	29.1%
	No	87.5%	25%	37.5%	54.2%
Interviews	A little bit	12.5%	25%	25%	21%

4. Teachers' opinions about the incorporation of Hispanic Cultural input in their classes

The teacher of the First-year class acknowledged that he had not used many cultural input resources in the classroom because the linguistic aspects of the language were the focus of most of the teaching material he used. He pointed out that even if in theory he was to add resources that he considered to provide cultural input for his class, it would still be the students' own decision as to whether that item was perceived as cultural input or not. He added that the textbook he used in class, *Dos Mundos* (Terrell *et al* 1998), and the overhead transparencies that came as part of the book did contain some cultural input. An example can be seen in the form of "Hispanic Person Profiles" in different chapters of the book and this enabled the students to read about Hispanic people and their lives. In this way, the teacher of this course relied heavily on the textbook to present any cultural input to the students.

The Second-year teacher responded that he tried to incorporate as many different cultural input resources into the class as time permitted, but admitted that time restrictions were sometimes a problem. Although he acknowledged the importance of cultural input resources, he also believed that the students needed to learn about the linguistic aspects of Spanish and that these sometimes took a lot longer to teach, meaning that there was little time for any other cultural material to be used. He did try, however, to include cultural input resources such as videos, novels, music, pictures and photos, as well as authentic stories about Hispanic people, either selected by him or told by students in the classroom.

The Third-year teacher believed that the importance of cultural input resources and the acquisition of culture in the second language classroom were very high. This teacher tried as often as possible to incorporate resources such as the Internet, student presentations and authentic videos as cultural input resources in the classroom. The courses taught by this teacher involved content and project-based language learning, for which the teacher encouraged students to move outside the classroom to gather cultural input resources from different sources. Activities such as browsing the library or internet and speaking to a native speaker were encouraged to help students gain a more complete and authentic picture of "Hispanic Cultures".

5. Cultural input used in the Spanish programme observed

In the observations, it was found that a variety of cultural input resources were used in the Second and Third-year classes and that very few cultural input resources were used in the First-year class. The number of cultural input resources available to the students in each year level seemed to increase as the students' linguistic proficiency improved, therefore there were more cultural input resources made available to students in the Third-year level than in the Second-year level, and more in the Second-year level than in the First-year level.

The classroom observations indicated that in the First-year class the cultural input made available to students came from two sources,

the teacher and the textbook. The teacher occasionally discussed several cultural aspects that may exist in different countries (some based on his experience), and he also used the core textbook *Dos Mundos* that had short sections about different "Hispanic Cultures", such as the "Hispanic Person Profiles" found in most chapters of the book. All classroom observations conducted in the First-year classroom showed that any cultural input that was incorporated was directly related to the concept of "small c" culture.

In the Second-year classes there were several cultural input resources made available, along with the use of the core textbook *Dos Mundos*. The teachers' cultural input, television and music, were all used in the classroom. All of the resources used were well adapted to the linguistic proficiency level of the students and could not have been included at the First-year level. Although there were more cultural input resources integrated into the Second-year class, it was interesting to see that peers in the classroom played an important role as cultural input providers. They brought cultural knowledge into the class by discussing their travel to Hispanic countries with their classmates. The Second-year observations indicated that there was no "Capital C" cultural input present in the classroom, only "small c" cultural input.

In the Third-year classes (Spanish and Technology, and Spanish for Professional Purposes), it was observed that comparatively there were more cultural input resources integrated into the class through the teacher and by the activities undertaken by the students. This was due to the teaching approach used in this class, which was project and content-based. This was shown especially in the Spanish and Technology class, where the teacher did not play a major part in choosing what cultural input the students were being exposed to. The Internet, an important resource for this class's activities through the use of Email and Hispanic websites (such as Hispanic newspapers on the Internet), was seen to be the students' main resource for cultural knowledge.

According to the Third-year students, the oral presentations that they gave in the class were most beneficial for learning about "Hispanic Cultures". These oral presentations encouraged students to take a more active role in their cultural learning since they covered a wide variety of topics, from facts about individual Hispanic countries to more controversial issues being discussed in these countries at present.

In the Spanish and Technology Class, the students selected and shared with the other students in their class the cultural knowledge they had acquired, like, for example, the geography, history and population of a Hispanic country in order to promote a debate.

In the Spanish for Professional Purposes class, the students also presented topics to the class in the form of oral presentations that dealt with different aspects of "Hispanic Cultures". The main assessment task for this course was job seeking in a Spanish-speaking context. The students were exposed to authentic material, such as Hispanic job advertisements, job applications and videos of Hispanic people undertaking job interviews. The resources made available to students in this class enriched the students' learning of "Hispanic Cultures" and added cultural input to the class.

In the Third-year class there was some indication of "Capital C" cultural input since students were observed during one class accessing websites with historical information about Hispanic countries. This website delved into the areas of the fine arts and literature and exposed the students to a rich source of "Capital C" culture.

6. Resources influencing the construction of the students' concept of "Hispanic Cultures"

According to the majority of students, the most influential cultural input resources were found outside the classroom. Overall, at First, Second and Third-year levels, the most influential resources, according to the student questionnaires and interviews, were "Latin Fiestas", "Music", "Hispanic Friends" and "Television". These particular resources can be traced back to the students' understanding of "Hispanic Cultures", wherein the most popular terms used to describe "Hispanic Cultures" also came from the "small c" category. The influence of these resources on students may show that they want to learn culture by associating with people who reflect their own lifestyles. In short, it shows that the students want *to feel* the culture.

The other two resources found influential by students were "Teaching Staff" and "Classroom Activities". "The teacher" was found to be quite influential by all students; in particular by the students in Second-year, who said in their interviews that their teacher was an influential resource because he encouraged them to tell stories about his own experiences in different countries and also told stories of his personal experiences. While the Second-year students found the teacher influential, the Third-year students stated in their interviews that presentations researched and delivered by students in the class on controversial topics affecting the Hispanic world significantly influenced their construction of the notion of "Hispanic Cultures". The influence of these two resources on the students may be an indication of how people, and the interaction with people, play an important part in their learning of "Hispanic Cultures".

The least influential resources according to the student questionnaires (mainly Third-year students) were "Internet Chat", " E-mail", " Newspapers on the Internet" and "Hispanic Dance". For students not in the Third-year "Spanish and Technology" class, the first three of these resources were resources found only outside the classroom. Interestingly, the Third-year students undertaking this course still found that in general these particular resources were not very influential in their construction of Hispanic cultural knowledge. Again, this may indicate that face to face interaction with Hispanic people, or people who speak Spanish, where students can put a face to a name, may have more influence on students than text-based communication-assisted technology.

It should also be mentioned that the most influential resources for the students were not only to be found outside the classroom, but were also clearly activities enjoyed by the students. As a second year student pointed out, *"I've learnt some cultural things in class and since I've started learning Spanish, I've had an interest in learning more things... so, I've gone out of my way in my space (and) time to learn different things."* (SI 2Yr).

The resources that most influenced the students' construction of the concept of "Hispanic Cultures" can be seen in Table 4. The data resulting from this particular question was gathered using a Likert scale, since it allowed the students to pick the most influential responses and rank them from one (the least influential) to five (the most influential).

Table 4: Resources influencing the construction of the students' concept of

"Hispanic Cultures"

Cultural Input Resource	Percentage of 1st year students who chose this resource (in 4-5 range)			Percentage of 2nd year students who chose this resource (in 4-5 range)			Percentage of 3rd year students who chose this resource (in 4-5 range)		
	1st Ques	2nd Ques	3rd Ques	1st Ques	2nd Ques	3rd Ques	1st Ques	2nd Ques	3rd Ques
Latin Fiestas	47%	54%	38%	45%	35%	42%	50%	50%	39%
Hispanic Friends	25%	53%	75%	50%	42%	47%	57%	65%	55%
Music	47%	53%	50%	55%	43%	30%	69%	60%	39%
Teaching Staff	12%	46%	38%	45%	54%	64%	31%	45%	44%
Class Activities	---------	46%	50%	--------	57%	59%	---------	40%	39%
Television	24%	39%	50%	35%	28%	53%	31%	35%	12%

Conclusion

The study conducted has found that the students' understanding and knowledge of "Hispanic Cultures" did not change greatly during the semester of this research, and indicates that in general many students seek their own sources of "Hispanic Cultures" outside the language classroom. This could be due to several reasons: firstly, because their understanding of the term "Hispanic Cultures" is more related to "small c" culture; secondly, the limitations of their language proficiency (especially in the case of First-year students) would make it difficult for these students to read authentic material available. The third reason is the lack of cultural input, appropriate to their concept of culture, incorporated into the classroom. Although a teacher may believe that he or she is providing cultural input in class, the students' assessment of "Hispanic Cultures" may vary depending on their concept or understanding of "Hispanic Cultures".

The students' understanding of the term "Hispanic Cultures" was linked to that of "small c" culture, as discussed by Flewelling (1994). The students related their understanding of the term "Hispanic Culture" more to daily life and lifestyle, while in contrast, the teachers of the Spanish programme, although showing similar understandings to those of the students, added terms more often related to "Capital C" culture. This may be due to the fact that because all the teachers had lived in Hispanic countries and two of them were from Hispanic cultural backgrounds. These teachers may have been so familiar with Hispanic daily life and lifestyles that they did not deem these elements as important parts of "Hispanic Culture". On the other hand, the students, who were not familiar with these elements, considered they were crucial characteristics of "Hispanic Cultures".

This study has shown that, overall, the students did not believe that their understanding of "Hispanic Cultures" had increased considerably throughout the semester. However, the author acknowledges that the timeframe of the study is in fact one of its major limitations. A longer study could have possibly discovered more about the students.

The results from the interviews and questionnaires differed slightly. The results were more positive in the interviews, perhaps because they were face-to-face interviews and the students could elaborate on their responses. The responses did show that the majority did not believe that a significant impact had been made on their Hispanic cultural acquisition throughout the semester.

The teacher interviews showed that the teachers of the Spanish programme had different opinions about the incorporation of cultural resources in their classrooms. Although they all agreed that it was crucial to integrate the learning of culture into the target language class, all each showed a different approach when doing so, as the classroom observations showed.

In the case of the First-year teacher the focus of the teaching was on language learning and the acquisition of language skills. The Second-year teacher tried to incorporate as much culturally authentic material as possible, ranging from television programmes to restaurant menus. In this class the teacher attempted to add as much cultural input as possible, but found that time restrictions were often a problem. The Third-year teacher placed very high importance on the use of cultural input resources in the classroom, and also encouraged students to use resources outside the classroom, such as the Internet.

The classroom observations showed that the number of cultural input resources used in the classroom increased as the students' year level did and this confirmed that more cultural input resources were used with those students who had a better understanding of the Spanish language.

In the First-year class there were very little cultural input resources used, but more were used in the Second-year class. The Third-year students were more in control of the cultural input resources that they were using in the classroom. These differences were due not only to the students' language proficiency, but also to the teaching methods adopted in each class and the teachers' views on the incorporation of cultural resources in the language classroom, as well as to time constraints.

Finally, the student interviews and surveys show that, for the majority of students, the most influential cultural input resources were found outside the classroom. These resources were providing input related to the "small c" concept of culture, such as "Latin Fiestas", "Music", "Friends" and "Television". Inside the classroom, however, it was discovered that students found that story-telling (performed either by themselves, by their classmates or by their teachers) to be one of the most enjoyable and important approaches used to develop and build cultural awareness. The concept of story-telling, perhaps one of the simplest ways to share cultural knowledge with students in the classroom, was mentioned on several occasions, especially by Second and Third-year students.

Overall, this research project has found that cultural learning and acquisition in the second language classroom relate to the learners' needs and experiences, and that the concept of culture for these students relates to the "small c" culture. This issue needs to be researched further in order to provide more information on how closer integration of culture and language in the second language classroom may be achieved from the early stages of language learning.

This study has found that there may be different cultural learning styles, as students may respond differently to different sources of cultural input. As was seen in the data analysed, the students who participated in this study had many different perceptions of culture and distinct understandings of what constituted "Hispanic Cultures", as well as what helped them to acquire cultural knowledge. If the different cultural learning styles are identified and explored, then it may be possible to offer more adequate cultural input resources in the classroom to promote cultural acquisition. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted in order to establish the different cultural learning styles of students.

Other empirical studies like this one should be conducted not only in the context of Spanish, but should be also extended to other language learning programmes in Australia and overseas. This would provide additional information on students' views and experiences in relation to culture learning and allow for comparative studies into the impact of teaching on cultural learning.

A major limitation of this study is that data collected over the period of one semester only was examined. The author recommends that a longitudinal study be conducted, since it would be useful if further studies using the research approach described here explored the changes in the notion of "Hispanic Cultures" that students may experience as a result of their Spanish learning experiences.

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