



# Learning to Teach Culture in the L2 Methods Course

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## Abstract

Prospective second language (L2) teachers need to learn how to teach culture along with language skills. With the introduction of the professional standards, culture has become more of a focus in the teaching profession. This study examines how pre-service L2 teacher are prepared to teach culture by examining methods course syllabi. Using constant comparative methodology, ten methods course syllabi were analyzed. This data source was triangulated with course calendars, programs of study, and course and associated websites, to find out how much time and assignments/assessments were devoted to the teaching of culture. Results indicate that an indirect approach to the teaching of culture is prevalent. Changes in the way course instructors approach the methods course are suggested to enable new L2 teachers to be better prepared to teach culture in the L2 classroom.

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## 1 Introduction

Teacher education programs are charged with preparing second language (L2) teachers in all aspects of language teaching (Schulz, Lalande II, Dykstra-Pruim, Zimmer-Lowe, & James, 2005; Vélez-Rendón, 2006). Too often the linguistic elements of L2 teaching overshadow the area of culture even in teacher preparation programs (Byrd, Hlas, Watzke, & Montes Valencia, 2011). Because of this lack of prominence in the teacher education program, L2 teachers often struggle to identify cultural resources and instructional strategies for culture. However, with the introduction of the “Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (hereafter, Standards; (Standards, 2006) in the United States (US) and the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) in Europe, the teaching of culture in L2 classrooms has been re-envisioned. The US Standards, created by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), list five areas of language teaching: communication, communities, cultures, connections, and comparisons. The latter three areas give culture prominence in the L2 classroom. The CEFR describe what language learners need for effective communication and break them down into four general competences, namely: knowledge, skills, existential competence, and ability to learn (Council of Europe, 2001). Each competence emphasizes the importance of culture in the context in which the language occurs. This new focus on culture in the various areas of language learning has created a need for better preparation of the new generation of L2 teachers to teach culture in ways not examined before.

This study examines L2 methods course syllabus. Syllabus in this study refers to the document that describes various aspects of a course (Kousha & Thelwall, 2008). The methods course was chosen because it is the course in which teacher candidates systematically encounter a significant body of knowledge about learning and teaching in a subject-specific environment (Dhonau, McAl-

pine, & Shrum, 2010). Gutierrez Almarza (1996) points out that knowledge gleaned during L2-specific teacher education courses manifests itself while teaching later. Teacher candidates are exposed to culture in relation to their target language in other courses or in the target culture itself, but learning (or experiencing) a culture does not guarantee knowledge of how to teach that culture in the classroom. Knowledge about culture falls into Shulman's (1987) category of subject matter knowledge (SMK), which is comprehension of the subject as a content area specialist. Knowing how to teach culture is part of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), and is the understanding of how to make SMK comprehensible and relevant to students (Grossman, 1990). Courses in pedagogy are vital in bridging this knowledge gap (Hlas & Hildebrandt, 2010). Further, Pufahl, Rhodes and Christian (2001) suggest that teacher candidate education that integrates academic and experiential learning with pedagogical courses is an effective combination found in countries around the world, such as Morocco, the Netherlands and Finland. In order to see how this aspect of L2 teaching is potentially developed, ten syllabi were examined from L2 methods courses from various colleges and universities around the US.

## **2 Review of related literature**

For decades, L2 scholars have debated how to implement the teaching of culture into the classroom (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1984, 2001; Jarvis, 1977; Met, 2004; Stern, 1983). Schulz et al. (2005) point out that the issue is still lightly studied and that the precise nature of how to instruct teacher candidates about how to teach culture has not been examined closely. The lack of knowledge in this area led to the development of the present study.

### **2.1 Defining culture**

A major obstacle to the teaching of culture is the L2 profession's inability to define the term (Abrams, Byrd, Moehring, & Boovy, 2006). Culture is multifaceted and the specific area, such as sociology or anthropology, where researchers or educators look for a definition, will often determine what they find. Brooks' (1968, p. 210) seminal article on teaching culture in L2 classrooms takes a logical approach to defining culture as: (a) biological growth, (b) personal refinement, (c) literature and fine arts, (d) patterns for living, and (e) the sum total of a way of life. Brooks (1968) suggests that "patterns for living" are the most significant for the L2 teaching profession. Similarly, Seelye (1993) defines culture as "a broad concept that embraces all aspects of human life" (p. 22). The Standards (2006, p. 51) defines culture as a sum of three areas (3Ps): practices (patterns of behavior), products (tangible and intangible creations of a society), and perspectives (underlying ideas, attitudes, and meanings that explain the former two). Regardless of the definition, Lafayette (1993) recommends that culture is a necessary part of L2 teacher knowledge.

### **2.2 Teaching culture**

As alluded to above, the L2 teaching profession has had many decades of experience in deciding how best to teach language, which included, to varying degrees, how to teach culture. From the Grammar-Translation Method, which often equated culture with literature, to the Audiolingual Method, where teachers depended upon habit formation in culture teaching, and to a plethora of methods that depended upon a "Four Fs approach: Food, Fashion, Festivals, and Folklore," teacher candidates were not allowed to integrate culture into meaningful communication (Fox & Diaz-Greenberg, 2006; Omaggio-Hadley, 2001). L2 teachers and teacher educators have tried to find the ideal method of teaching culture in the classroom. Some more recent methods of teaching culture address the need to look beyond the 4Fs and examine culture through exploration of stereotypes (Abrams, 2002) and even ethnography (Jackson, 2006). The idea of moving past the learning of cultural "facts" has researcher and practitioners from around the world still looking for how best to integrate culture and language. The literature provides some examples discussing L2 teaching and the inclusion of culture in China (Dai, 2011), Turkey (Arslan & Arslan, 2012; Cakir, 2006), Vi-

etnam (Ho, 2009), and Canada (Schuetze, 2008), as well as Europe (Fox & Diaz-Greenberg, 2006) and the US (Drewelow, 2013). In the current world of L2 teaching, the number of methods and ideas for teaching culture can sometimes seem overwhelming for teachers and definitely needs to be addressed early in teacher candidates' education to help optimize its integration into the L2 classroom.

### 2.3 *Syllabus analysis research*

The course syllabus is a vital instrument for communication between the instructor and the student. The syllabus provides information that ranges from assessment to the course's time schedule to resources that are available to the students (Johnson, 2006). As a research tool, Hess and Kelly (2007) point out that syllabi cannot describe the tone of the classroom, but they do provide a blueprint that reveals structure and design. Most of syllabus analysis research has been conducted in the area of education. The documents provide a window that allows for the description of what is happening in the curriculum. Identifying what occurs in academic curricula is the first step in implementing change.

Broadly, technology in various settings has been a main focus of syllabus analysis research. Collier, Weinburgh and Rivera (2004) examined how well teacher candidates are prepared to use technology in the work place. The researchers examined syllabi over a period of four semesters in order to learn about instructors' beliefs about and implementation of technology throughout the program. Using constant comparative methodology, the researchers found that the syllabi indicated that the faculty emphasized technology in their education and related courses, incorporating it in various ways. Further findings suggest that courses require students to use more technology as their time in the program increases and that students are expected to perform more hands-on technology work as courses progress. Kousha and Thelwall (2008) investigated syllabi found online to determine if these syllabi and their reading lists constituted a new data source for investigating the impact of academic publications. They identified 70,700 articles from an unspecified number of syllabi that used Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) journals dealing with a range of subject categories from chemistry to political science, but excluding education. Kousha and Thelwall (2008) searched the Internet, implementing a number of different search-engine queries, attempting to find the article titles in syllabi posted on the web. Their findings suggest that online syllabi citations are "useful sources of evidence about the educational value of some social science research" (Kousha & Thelwall, 2008, p. 2066). Further, the authors propose that scholars could use syllabus citations as an additional gauge of the impact of their work. Finally, the researchers found that current social science research in the various sub-disciplines is useful in teaching that sub-discipline.

Outside of technology, Hess and Kelly (2007) looked at 210 syllabi from 31 principal-preparation programs. The researchers focused on how potential future principals were being prepared to meet the challenges and responsibilities inherent in the current era of accountability. Hess and Kelly (2007) used a detailed coding system that allowed them to examine various topics, such as "managing personnel" and "external leadership" and when the topics were covered in the syllabi. Their findings suggest that little time is devoted to teaching principal candidates to address the needs of accountability, school improvement, personnel management, and empirical research. Based on their findings, the researchers conclude that these programs are not well-matched to the current environment in which the principal candidates will find themselves.

Grosse (1993) conducted the largest analysis of methods course syllabi in L2 teaching. She looked at 157 methods course syllabi from 144 colleges and universities in the US. Her descriptive study examined what was the status quo of the methods course for L2 teachers. Her findings suggest that five major features are found in the syllabi: (a) theories of language learning, (b) methodology, (c) instructional materials, (d) curriculum development, and (e) assessment (Grosse, 1993, p. 304). She also reported that significant strengths of foreign language education include: pride and professionalism, reflective analysis, belief in teacher as decision maker, creativity, and consensus concerning the knowledge base (Grosse, 1993, p. 310). Finally, she determined that areas needing

further development include: (a) technology, (b) greater linkage between elementary and secondary schools and universities, and (c) requiring less emphasis on traditional exams. Wilbur (2007) looked at 32 L2 methods course syllabi and interviewed ten course instructors with a focus on how teacher candidates are prepared to teach their languages. Like Grosse (1993), Wilbur (2007) looked at various aspects of the syllabus, such as linking theory to practice, the Standards, reflection in teaching and teacher fluency. She concluded that the teacher candidates are being exposed to a wide variety of teaching methods and to the Standards, but not in a manner that will promote personal reflection or equip them with the pedagogical content knowledge necessary to teach their future students. Grosse's (1993) and Wilbur's (2007) studies examined content of the methods course syllabus in general, providing a broad perspective of its content, whereas the present study is an examination of methods course syllabi to examine how one aspect of L2 teaching, namely the teaching of culture, is treated.

### 3 The study

The present study investigated the L2 methods course syllabus to see how teacher candidates are prepared to teach culture. I examined ten methods course syllabi to answer the following research question and sub-questions: How are teacher candidates prepared to teach culture? (a) How much time on cultural instruction is identified? (b) What assignments, including assessments, contribute to this preparation? To answer the questions, I focused on: (a) course time, (b) readings (both required and recommended), (c) assignments and assessments, and (d) the course calendar.

#### 3.1 *Research design and data collection*

Qualitative research methods fit the nature of the present study well in that they reveal how the component parts of a phenomenon work together and allow for the descriptive nature of the study (Merriam, 1998). I used a framework of grounded theory, which assumes an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data, where the end result is a theory that emerges from, or is "grounded" in, the data (Merriam, 1998, p. 17). This is a descriptive study that focuses on the developing knowledge base of L2 teacher candidates and on one of the tools that lead to the learning of this group. Using constant comparative methodology, I triangulated the following data sources: L2 methods course syllabi, methods course calendars, programs of study, course related websites and other course designated online resources.

I located methods course online, using several different research engine inquiries. The most effective search phrases were "foreign language methods course syllabus," "world language methods course syllabus," and "second language methods course syllabus." Many false matches (articles or presentation about methods courses or syllabi) were obtained with each search and discarded. For each syllabus found, I conducted a second search, locating the program descriptors for the major or minor at each of the universities, in order to verify that each syllabus was, indeed, a part of the assigned program of study that will lead to teacher certification<sup>1</sup>. Finally, ten syllabi were identified and they represented colleges and universities located in the US: Illinois (2), Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, New Jersey, Texas, Virginia (2), and Washington, D.C. Three of the syllabi (P2, P5, P10) were designated by instructors as secondary methods courses. One (P7) indicated that it was preparing K-12 teacher candidates and the remaining six (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9) provided no designation at all. Further, four (P1, P2, P7, P10) of the syllabi were from 2012, four (P3, P4, P5, P9) from 2011, one (P8) from 2010, and one (P6) from 2009.

Each data source was analyzed five times. The first analysis gleaned general information in connection to the research questions. The second analysis focused on the time allotted to the study of culture, particularly as was manifested in the course calendar. The third analysis looked for assignments/assessments in the data set. After the fourth analysis, the assignments/assessments were examined by themselves and two main categories emerged from the data. With the categories identified, I re-analyzed all data sources for common and discrepant themes. I extracted information

from artifacts related to each category, which formed a convenient document that allowed insight into the patterns as the categories manifested themselves.

#### 4 Results

The first sub-question in this study examined how much time identified in the methods course syllabi can be related to culture teaching (see Table 1). Due to variations in class meeting times, the time spent on teaching culture was calculated as a percentage of the total class time. The average time spent on the teaching of culture was determined by dividing the number of class sessions (in hours) dedicated to the teaching of culture, according to the course calendar, by the total number of hours in the course for the entire term. Since the data did not indicate how much of an individual class session focused on the topic, I counted the full class session time.

Based on the figures in Table 1, the mean time spent on teaching culture in this data set is 13.81% of the total class time, but with a standard deviation of 11.36.

Half of the courses dedicate less than 10% of total class time to the study of how to teach culture. Another three out of ten syllabi indicate between 10% and 20% of class time for the study of how to teach culture. The remaining two syllabi dedicate over 20.1% of time to the study of culture with P2 allowing for 40% and P9 giving 30.7% of course time to the study of the topic.

**Table 1. Course time and time spent on culture**

Course	Number of days/week course meets	Number of weeks course meets	Percentage of total class time dedicated to the teaching of culture
P1	2	15	6.6
P2	1	15	40.0
P3	2	13	11.7
P4	3	12	13.3
P5	3	15	4.8
P6	1	15	6.0
P7	2	15	6.0
P8	1	15	6.0
P9	1	13	30.7
P10	1	15	13.0
			Mean = 13.81
			SD = 11.36

The second sub-question looks at what assignments, including assessments, are included in the preparation of teacher candidates to teach culture. I searched the syllabi and course calendars for specific instances of expressions, such as culture, cultural and so on. I looked at these in the context of the document to distinguish between occurrences of L2 culture and other types of culture, like “school culture.” I also read through each document to look for other cases of culture teaching that did not appear with the initial search. Nine distinct assignments/assessments were identified in the data set. Table 2 shows the assignments/assessments in each category and their frequency.

**Table 2. Categories and frequency of assignments/assessments**

Direct		Indirect	
<i>Assignments/assessments</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Assignments/assessments</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Lesson Plans	1	Readings	6
Videos	2	Writing	4
Thematic unit	2	Portfolios	3
		Presentations	1

## 4.1 *Direct*

Assignments/assessments in this category directly mention culture as teaching goal. They show, rather than tell, or allow the teacher candidate to show how to teach culture often in a context that also teaches language skills. In the current data set, only three distinct assignments/assessments were identified in this area: lesson planning, watching videos, and thematic units.

### 4.1.1 *Lesson planning*

The instructor for P2 requires students to develop lesson plans using a format known as the PACE Model, which is defined as: P-presentation of meaningful language, A-attention, C-co-construct and explanation, and E-extension activity. She also provides a template for the structure of the assignment and two examples of the model, both of which include direct manifestations of culture and how to incorporate it into the lesson with the following components which emphasize the teaching of culture. Both examples use authentic texts (Hispanic music) upon which the entire lesson is based. The following excerpt from the syllabus exemplifies how the teaching of culture is integrated into a grammar lesson by the author providing a culturally rich context as seen in these specific lesson plan areas:

**Skills Targeted:**

Listening, Speaking, Culture

**Targeted Standards:**

2.1 Practices of the culture,

2.2 Products of the culture

**I. Objectives**

1.2/2.2 Students listen to and transcribe words from a song by a popular Mexican singer,

2.1 Students will describe romantic notions in Mexican and American cultures

[...]

**III. Procedures**

A. Presentation:

1. Teacher shows magazine photos and posters of Luis Miguel with his music playing in the background,

2. As a class, discuss Luis Miguel and who he is,

3. Students will listen to the song, *El día que me quieras* (The day that you will love me)

[...]

D. Extension:

1. Students will answer the question, “How will the world change when you fall in love?” by giving 5 examples in Spanish;

2. Divide groups by sex and students compare and choose most popular answers;

3. As a class, list examples on the board under two headings: boys and girls;

4. Compare similarities and differences and discuss “Who is more romantic?”

**IV. Cultural Information:**

Luis Miguel and pop culture.

As well, the methods class students are provided with a second, less extensive example of how to incorporate culture into a PACE Model lesson plan with part four (cultural information) also listing popular Hispanic music as a goal.

By seeing these areas highlight the use of culture, the students are shown how to integrate directly cultural aspects of the language to support its development.

### 4.1.2 *Videos*

P2 and P7 require students to watch videos that connect culture to teaching, which provides the opportunity for teacher candidates to be shown, not told how to teach culture. Both instructors use the Annenberg Learner Series, an online teacher development resource with the goal to “advance excellence in teaching and learning” (Annenberg Learner, 2013, para. 1). The series consists of eight “workshops” and a variety of related resources that contain a video presentation and ancillary materials, such as pre-, during-, and post-viewing activities.

During Weeks 2 and 6, the instructor of P2 uses Video 20 (“Sports in Action”) and Video 1 (“Meaningful Interpretation”) respectively, as the basis for discussion topics. “Sports in Action” shows how a high school German teacher connects teaching vocabulary with the common cultural phenomenon of soccer and the 2002 Olympics. Similarly, “Meaningful Interpretation” links culturally authentic texts with the practice of reading and interpreting what the text means.

P7’s instructor requires students to “[w]atch [workshops] 4, 5, 7 and 8 at <http://learner.org/workshops/tfl/>.” Two of the four videos directly deal with culture teaching. Workshop 5 is entitled “Rooted in Culture” and provides students with a practical discussion with visual supports of how to integrate culture teaching into the L2 classroom by practicing K-12 teachers. Workshop 8, “Engaging in Communities,” helps prepare teacher candidates to teach their students how to interact culturally and linguistically with native speakers in the communities where they are found.

### 4.1.3 *Thematic units*

Thematic units allow teachers to develop a coherent curriculum around a significant idea or theme to promote student learning (Kucer, Silva, & Delgado-Larocco, 1995). P6 has an assignment entitled “Standards & Content Based World Language Thematic Unit Plan.” The instructions for this assignment read:

This content-based thematic unit will be designed around the ACTFL National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (Five Cs) and Understanding by Design principles. All five goal areas of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning must be addressed in this unit.

As stated above, three of the five ACTFL Standards deal with culture in some manner. While students are preparing this unit, which the professor suggests “deserves to have your thoughtful reflection and research for several weeks prior to you actually writing the unit,” they have many opportunities to consider how to teach culture in relation to the topic of the unit as a whole.

## 4.2 *Indirect*

In these assignments/assessments, the teaching of culture is dealt with in a peripheral manner. It is not a specific goal of the assignment/assessment or the teacher candidate learns passively about the topic. In this area, the teaching of culture was handled twice as often, including: readings, writings, portfolios, and presentations.

### 4.2.1 *Readings*

In the present data set, 70 unique required readings are found. Of these, 11 are identified as full-length books and the other 59 were articles, chapters or online readings. It must be noted that P4 contained 51 readings with two full-length books and 49 articles, chapters and/or online readings. Of the 70 unique readings, only nine different readings were identified as being connected to the teaching of culture in some manner. Because the majority of the readings do not address how to teach culture directly, readings were placed in this category.

Seven (P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10) of the ten courses require Shrum and Glisan (2010), a popular textbook for L2 method teaching (Arnold, 2013; Byrd, 2007; Wilbur, 2007). Chapter Five of

this text deals with the teaching of culture while the other chapters throughout the text provide examples of culture teaching, such as using authentic texts in the L2 curriculum. However, of the seven syllabi, two (P6, P9) skip Chapter Five. The other full-length text that emphasizes the teaching of culture is Omaggio-Hadley (2001). This text is used by P3 and P10 in its entirety, while P4 requires four extensive excerpts. Omaggio-Hadley (2001) deals with the teaching of culture throughout the book, but dedicates no specific chapter to it.

Most of the articles related to the teaching of culture are, understandably, found in P4. P4's course instructor has articles listed for almost every class session with five articles connected to culture teaching. P4's first culture teaching related article discusses differences in rhetorical strategies between Chinese and English (Laio & Chen, 2009). The students are also required to read Altstaedter and Jones (2009), which reports on inquiry-based teaching as a practical method of approaching the teaching of culture in the L2 classroom. Similarly, another required article, Bueno (2009), approaches the teaching of culture by allowing students to use film to promote trans-cultural competence. The final two articles promote writing as a way to teach culture in the L2 classroom. Elola and Oskoz (2008) recommend the use of blogs to increase L2 students' intercultural competence, while Schuetze's (2008) study examines the benefits of an asynchronous project between students in two countries, which help to develop intercultural communicative competence.

P1 uses articles specific to the method course students' major language, German, French or Spanish, as an assignment. The articles for German (Maxim, 2002) and French (Chapelle, 2009) each deal with culture in some respect. The article required for Spanish teaching majors does not have a cultural component.

## 4.2.2 *Writings*

### 4.2.2.1 *Reflective writing*

In the present data set, readings often have a writing assignment component connected to them, mainly as a critique of or reaction to the reading. Writing about the content of the articles can be an effective assignment, as writing is a powerful tool for pre- and in-service teachers (Mateva, Vitanova, & Tashevska, 2013; Spalding & Wilson, 2002).

The instructor of P1 lists an "Article Summary & Critique Project" as an assignment for his students. The assignment reads "This project consists of providing a summary and critique of the article." In P4, the writing assignment reads "Students will maintain a journal on all required readings. Entries will contain synopses and personal reaction to readings." The articles listed for P1 and P4 in the above section were written about in this manner. Finally, P3 has students write two reaction papers based on two of the significant journals for L2 teaching and learning: *Foreign Language Annals* and *The Modern Language Journal*. The instructor does not specify the parameters for the article, so it is possible that the students would choose one or both article(s) on culture teaching. In either instance, students are potentially exposed to information regarding the teaching of culture, but not directly shown how to do it.

### 4.2.2.2 *Research paper*

The instructor of P10 requires graduate students to write a research paper about "Standards-based Foreign Language Assessment and Instruction." They are instructed: "After reading on the general topic area, write a research question that narrows the topic to a more specific focus that might interest you." Because culture is included in the L2 Standards, it is feasible that a student could choose the teaching of culture as the main topic or part of the topic of their paper. However, due to the open nature of the assignment, it is viewed as an indirect approach to learning to teach culture. Further, this project is required only of the graduate students in P10's course. No similar assignment is required of the undergraduate students.



### 4.2.3 *Portfolios*

P5, P6 and P8 require students to maintain a portfolio for various reasons. Portfolios are process-oriented projects that allow students to delve into a topic in depth (Abrams, 2002). The portfolio for P5 is a general assignment required of all teaching majors. Students choose a standard that they wish to address and select three to four benchmarks related to the standard. After this initial choice, which may or may not include a culture teaching component, the students are to develop a portfolio addressing these components: (a) Setting clear instructional goals, (b) Designing coherent instruction, (c) Assessing student learning – evaluation, and (d) Demonstrating knowledge of resources.

P6's assignment has the students' portfolios "organized by the INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment Support Consortium) Standards, each of which is aligned to ACTFL Standards." P8 starts the semester by having students put together a three ring binder or electronic equivalent to organize materials into four sections, the third being "the Communication and Cultures standards." Each of these assignments has students potentially engaging in culture teaching related learning. Since they are connected to the Standards, the teaching of culture is not being accomplished directly, but students are led to focus on the topic.

### 4.2.4 *Presentations*

The teacher candidates in P4's method class are required to give presentations during the course. As part of the course requirements, the syllabus reads:

Students will give presentations on how to teach vocabulary building, reading for comprehension, syntax error correction, grammar structures, and geographical or cultural information.

A second assignment is listed as:

Students will demonstrate teaching vocabulary building, reading for comprehension, syntax error correction, grammar structures, and geographical or cultural information.

These two assignments are connected and seem identical with no further elaboration given to justify any difference. Later, in the course calendar, the instructor of the course indicates that two weeks are set aside for the presentations during Classes 17 and 18. Because the instructor gives several options for the presentations and uses the conjunction "or," the students have the opportunity, but are not required, to include culture as the main focus or part of their presentation during these class periods.

## 5 **Discussion**

The goal of the general research question was to find out how L2 classroom teacher candidates were prepared to teach culture in their future classrooms as indicated by the methods course in their pre-professional preparation. Examination of the methods course syllabus showed that the content provided potential theory and practical activities that could potentially develop approaches to teaching of culture. However, the results also suggest that some areas of improvement can be made to optimize this area of L2 teaching.

The first sub-question examined the amount of time devoted in the methods course to the topic of how to teach culture. The mean time spent on the teaching of culture during the methods course in this data set is 13.81% of total class time, but the standard deviation is 11.36, which suggests a great amount of variance in the time dedicated to how to teach culture.

Five of the courses dedicate less than 10% of total class time to the study of how to teach culture. Half of the course instructors devote less than 10% of total class time to how to teach culture, which should be deeply troubling to the profession. Such a small percentage suggests that the teaching of culture is still being viewed as the "other" area of L2 learning and may prepare teacher candidates for the changing dynamic of the L2 classroom (Tedick, 2009). In all cases, how to teach

culture is accomplished within the first three weeks of the course. Few course instructors follow up on the basic information provided at this time. One of the topics most frequently combined with the teaching of culture in these methods courses is the Standards. Wilbur (2007) suggests that depending upon the Standards is problematic and students are not exposed to how they are to accomplish the goal. Byram et al. (2002) likewise suggest that practical guidance is needed for the practical implementation of the CEFR.

In contrast to a frontloaded approach of how to teach culture as was common among some instructors, the subject matter is taught throughout the semester in the two courses that dedicated the majority of time to the issue. This type of repetition allows the teacher candidates to potentially become more familiar with the content (here, the teaching of culture) and the context (how to use it in the classroom) (Fahim, 2011).

The data set contained nine distinct assignments which either approached the topic directly or indirectly. The ratio of direct to indirect assignments/assessments is four to thirteen, which supports the idea that Wilbur (2007) posits that our L2 teacher candidates are not being shown how to teach culture. Only having experienced a passive approach on how to teach culture, they may have problems implementing the same into their own classroom (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2003). More explicit directions and guidance need to be provided to the methods course students to help move the teaching of culture from a “sideline experience” to a main focus of the course (Wilbur, 2007, p. 90).

Much can be learned from the manner in which the direct assignments/assessments are presented in this data set. Besides the fact that the teaching of culture is directly listed as goal of the assignment/assessment, examples are given, which will allow students discover how the teaching of culture is not only potentially done in L2 classroom, but also how to integrate the skill with the other language skills (Freeman & Freeman, 2011). These instructors do not depend solely upon the Standards, but rather they use them as a base upon which skills can be developed to learn how to teach culture. They allow their students to pay attention to culture as an important part of teaching L2s. Based on an information-processing model (Martinez, 2010), attention is the act of holding information in the working memory, which allows for the learner (here, L2 teacher candidates) to think about it, and, by extension, described by the model, move the information to the long-term memory. The instructors in the data set seem to be following this idea by allowing students to create assignments that help them focus on how to teach culture and think about it for later usage.

The number of assignments/assessments found in the indirect category is not only much greater than that found in the direct category, but can also provide teachers educators some important insights. Readings, which are generally considered a rich source of learning (Parkes & Harris, 2002), were infrequent or absent in many of the syllabi. Seven of the syllabi required only one culture teaching related reading, which will not allow teacher candidates to explore the multidimensional aspects of culture (Allen, 1985; Crawford & McLaren, 2003).

For the assignments/assessments that occurred more often, such as writing and portfolios, the lack of direction is important to consider, which supports similar findings by Wilbur (2007), whose study found that methods course instructors depended too much on the Standards for direction for teacher candidates. Byrd (2010) also suggests that teacher candidates need to have direction in assignments to focus their learning; otherwise they miss important opportunities to develop skills in PCK. Cooper (2004) posits that teacher candidates found hands-on, practical assignments most helpful in their development. The data here suggest that instructors are still handling methods of how to teach culture without much consideration to practicality.

## 6 Limitations

A study like this one, where only ten syllabi were examined, looks at certain themes and patterns that may lead to the generation of theories which can be used to guide further research. It is not able to generalize to all L2 methods courses. As written documents, syllabi do not allow clarification on specific areas of the data. No instructors or teacher candidates were interviewed for this study. Therefore, no indication of deviation from the syllabus as written for various reasons can be

ascertained. Finally, the quality of instruction by the course instructor is not evident. The syllabus cannot tell how well the material is addressed by the instructor.

## 7 Conclusion

The above analysis suggests that the content of the L2 methods course is not at the same level of professional requirements in the area of preparing teacher candidates to teach culture. Both the Standards in the US and CEFR in Europe have been in place for a number of years and are having an influence on what occurs in L2 teacher preparation (Dhonau et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2002; Mateva et al., 2013; Phillips & Abbott, 2011). Studies by Wilbur (2007) and Byrd et al. (2011) suggest that there is still a disconnect between the methods course instructors' understanding of such guidelines and demonstrating what to do with the knowledge they provide. The Standards and CEFR are descriptive in nature and supply a solid foundation upon which to build teaching skills, but teacher candidates must be shown how to use that foundation effectively (Cooper, 2004). The findings of this study suggest not only an increase in time on how to teach culture, but also a distribution of materials on how to teach culture more evenly throughout the term.

The study also indicates that the methods course instructors need to provide more direct assignments/assessments to meet the needs of the teacher candidates, as they shift from SMK to PCK. Galman (2009) recommends that candidates making shifts in their knowledge need to be able to do so in a controlled, structured environment in order to optimize the experience. By providing assignments/assessments that require them to address how to teach culture in a methods course, they will more likely do so successfully with the help of a knowledgeable instructor.

Finally, methods course instructors need to move towards intercultural communication goals, where teacher candidates prepare their future students to "interact with people (of the target culture) as complex human beings" (Byram et al., 2002, p. 5). Both the Standards and CEFR support the idea that such interactions are unique to L2 learners through the empowerment of the language skills, which give learners a unique perspective about the deeper levels of culture (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Approaches that allow teacher candidates to interact and co-construct knowledge about how to teach culture (Hlas & Conroy, 2010) or reflect directly about how to apply their knowledge of culture to the teaching situation (Fox & Diaz-Greenberg, 2006; Mateva et al., 2013) would be two possible approaches to accomplish this goal. Such a shift in the approach in how to teach culture can mirror methods teacher candidates' use in their own classrooms later. This world is one that has shrinking borders, where students want to learn not just the language, but the culture as well (Hall & Davis, 1995). It is requisite that L2 methods course instructors examine their own teaching methods to show the upcoming generation how this important aspect of L2 study can be best accomplished.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Each state dictates the requirements for teacher certification, but, as van Houten (2009) and Phillips and Abbott (2011) point out, all states depend upon content specific professional standards for guidance. In the area of world languages, ACTFL is the organization that provides these standards (see ACTFL, 2002).

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