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Instagram for the Development of Foreign Language Students' Intercultural Competence

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INSTAGRAM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS’ INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

By

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To Giulio Regeni, tortured and murdered while conducting his doctoral research.
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ABSTRACT

The global diffusion of the Internet and the rise in affordable digital electronic devices has exponentially increased the access to culturally authentic materials (Hadley, 2001). Foreign language educators can take advantage of this wealth of resources to design activities that encourage students to explore a foreign culture online (Bush, 2007). For example, social media users often share snapshots of their daily life and discuss topics related to their home culture. This content can be used to provide students with a regular and frequent exposure to authentic and timely cultural information and to promote intercultural analysis and reflections.

The last two decades have seen a growing concern of the role intercultural competence plays in contemporary foreign language education. However, despite the rising awareness that “the study of another language is synonymous with the study of another culture” (Cutshall, 2012, p. 32), integrating cultures into instruction is still not a priority for many language instructors, especially because of the challenges the process may entail. This study aims to address this gap in practice and research by introducing a pedagogical sequence that foreign language instructors can use to design pedagogically-structured learning opportunities that guide students’ intercultural explorations and reflections for the development of intercultural competence. Specifically, the study presents the Insta-Inter unit, an Instagram-based instructional unit designed on this sequence, and explores how this unit helps foreign language students to develop intercultural competence through the development of cultural and intercultural awareness of cultural products, behavioral practices, and philosophical perspectives.

The study has an explanatory single-case study design where the collective experience of the class with the instructional activity represents one case. Participants are 18 students enrolled in one section of a third-level Italian language course at a large research university in the United States. Students used Instagram to explore posts shared by Italian users and to share with their classmates their cultural and intercultural observations. Moreover, students completed a set of individual reflective online assignments aimed at developing their knowledge and skills for the development of intercultural competence.

The general conclusion of this study is that using Instagram for intercultural explorations and reflections can help students to acquire knowledge and develop skills for the development of intercultural competence. Students engaged in the Instagram chat in a process of knowledge
sharing and knowledge building that helped them to develop skills of interpreting and relating and to acquire cultural knowledge of products and practices, especially of the most unfamiliar themes. By completing the individual reflective assignments, students also developed intercultural awareness of products and practices and used their developing skills of discovery to develop awareness and understanding of foreign perspectives. Even if students completed these assignments individually, they agreed on what the core perspectives of Italians are. Some students were also successful in establishing cross-cultural relationships and showed instances of intercultural awareness development of perspectives. Some other students, instead, were hardly able to advance from the surface culture of products and practices and to reflect on the significance that specific products and practices have in different cultures.

Students could benefit from more guidance and opportunities for feedback throughout the whole sequence of activities. While detailed instructions and the initial instructional support can help to scaffold students’ observations and analysis, they may not be sufficient to properly sustain the development of knowledge and intercultural competence in a process that becomes increasingly sophisticated. A continuous instructional support can facilitate the development of students’ autonomy for the development of intercultural competence.

The study also presents two individual student cases and an overview of students’ reactions to the Insta-Inter unit, which, in general, were positive. The study concludes by addressing its limitations and by discussing its implications for future research and practice.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The recent advances in information and communication technology, along with the increased opportunities for traveling, have multiplied the possibilities for learners to be in contact with native and non-native speakers of a foreign language (Baker, 2011; Sercu, 2010). In a world where many societies can be regarded as multicultural, learners have also the opportunity to interact in person, in their own country, with people from different cultures. These social changes, together with the increasing attention towards social interaction in the language acquisition process (Cook, 2008; Ellis, 2012), have contributed to integrating the study of another language with the study of another culture (Cutshall, 2012).

Despite the increased opportunities for intercultural contact, however, foreign language students do not usually have immediate access to living representations of the target language and culture, as opposed to second language students, who live in a language immersion context. Students of a foreign language come into contact with the target language and its cultures mainly through their instructor and through printed material and electronic media. While technology is commonly used in the foreign language classroom to convey information and to facilitate practice, it can also play an active role in transforming – or “technologizing” – both language and culture (Malinowski, 2013). Personal computers and other devices with Internet connectivity not only help foreign language learners to access and explore current and living representations of a foreign language and its cultures but also give them the opportunity to interact in first person with these cultures.

Digital media have been used to open a window to the culture of a foreign social group and to bring to the foreign language classroom new modes of participation and learning. Foreign language educators can take advantage of the affordability and widespread diffusion of computers and handheld devices to design activities that promote students’ online contact with a foreign social group. Particularly, they can take advantage of the content shared by worldwide social media users to provide students with a regular and frequent exposure to authentic and timely cultural information and to promote intercultural analysis.
This study presents an Instagram-based instructional unit designed to promote students’ intercultural explorations and reflections. The study aims to observe how this unit supports the development of foreign language students’ intercultural competence through the development of cultural and intercultural awareness of cultural products and practices and philosophical perspectives.

1.1 The Role of Culture in Foreign Language Education

Traditionally, culture has been approached as a monolithic entity composed of facts and figures, of works of literature and art that represent standardized national cultures – what is usually termed as “culture with a capital C” or “Big C” culture (Kramsch, 2013; Malinowski, 2013; Risager, 2013). In words of O’Dowd (2006), “such content has constituted the main part of Landeskunde, or Cultural Studies courses in many countries and has generally failed to make any real connection between a country's language and its culture” (p. 14). Although Cultural Studies have evolved over the years to include historical and sociological analyses of the foreign culture and to establish relationships with the culture of the learners (Kramer, 2000), the study of culture has often been approached in higher education as a different subject from language learning. The emergence of the communicative language teaching approach in the 1970s (Cook, 2008; Lee & Van Patten, 2003) contributed to increase the attention of foreign language instructors towards the connection between the target language and its cultures, especially for what concerns the individual and his or her lived social practices – termed as “culture with a small c” or “little c” culture.

Nowadays, it is common to bring to the classroom information about both the formal cultural expressions (“Big C” culture) and the everyday life situations of the community or communities where the target language is spoken (“little c” culture; American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, ACTFL, 2006). However, this cultural information, usually presented through textbooks and multimedia resources, only provides a partial, often too familiar, picture of the target community (Kramsch, 2013; Liaw, 2006; López Barrios, 2012). Culture is generally presented in the foreign language classroom in instructional segments that depict typical dimensions of the target culture (i.e., customs, habits, celebrations, traditions). Students usually approach this material from the practical perspective of someone who is visiting
a foreign country for the first time and who needs some basic vocabulary to survive and move around the city (Cook, 2008). The activities students complete are contingent on a specific situation and do not usually require their direct involvement with the foreign social group. This way, the study of a culture remains at the periphery of the communicative language teaching approach as a sort of framework for – and break from – the development of students’ linguistic and communicative competence (Furstenberg, 2010; Scarino, 2010; Sercu, 2010).

Most language teachers who follow the communicative language teaching approach may implicitly encourage their students to set aside their own linguistic and cultural identity with the goal to become “as similar to the native speaker as possible” (Cook, 2008, p. 172). Although commonly accepted, this goal is unrealistic and largely unattainable. Learners do not lose their capacity to function in the native language while they are learning a new language. On the contrary, they are working to become bilingual or plurilingual speakers and to function in and between two or more cultures. The goal of foreign language education, thus, should not be encouraging the learner to duplicate the skills of the native speaker with the goal to pass for one of them but helping him or her to become an intercultural speaker who is able to use two languages and to stand between two cultures without losing his or her linguistic and cultural identity (Byram, 1997).

1.2 Developing Students’ Intercultural Competence

To attain the goal of becoming intercultural speakers, foreign language students should abandon their typical role of tourist and assume the more active role of a sojourner (Byram, 1997). A sojourner does not limit his or her experience of the target culture to an external viewpoint, as someone who simply floats over cultures, much like tourists tend to do. A sojourner plunges in the foreign culture and gets to experience several aspects of it. A sojourner is open to question the values and practices of his or her own culture and to suspend disbelief and judgment about other cultures (Chun, 2011; Sercu, 2010). His or her experience is one of constant comparison of the similarities and differences between the native and the foreign culture, of what is compatible and what is of contrast.
The experience of the sojourner is potentially more valuable than that of the tourist, both for societies and for individuals […] Where the tourist remains essentially unchanged, the sojourner has the opportunity to learn and be educated, acquiring the capacity to critique and improve their own and others' conditions (Byram, 1997, p. 2).

Byram (1997) conceptualizes the qualities required of the sojourner as a set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that he or she acquires through experience and reflection and with the help of the instructor. He conceptualizes these qualities as five *savoirs* – a French word for the notions of knowledge, ability, and skill – and organizes them into a conceptual framework of intercultural competence (IC), which is at the heart of his comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The model promotes the simultaneous and integrated acquisition of communicative and intercultural competence and proposes the intercultural speaker, a competent foreign language user who can successfully communicate across cultures, as an attainable standard for the language learner.

Communicative and intercultural competencies are closely intertwined and their development should be fostered simultaneously in the foreign language classroom – for example, through telecollaborative exchanges, a set of structured online activities built around regular and frequent interactions between students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Notwithstanding, foreign language courses often present an imbalance; priority is usually given to the study of the language over the study of the culture. As a result, it is not uncommon that foreign language students become linguistically competent but they lack sufficient cultural and intercultural competence to properly communicate with native speakers. This is the case, for example, of advanced students whose previous courses focused almost exclusively on the study of the language. In this all-too-common case, it is advisable to give students the possibility to integrate their developing linguistic knowledge and skills with an opportunity to develop IC.

Pedagogically structured activities that foster the development of IC provide students with opportunities for intercultural contact and reflections without the need to interact with project partners, as, for example, in telecollaborative exchanges. Students get in contact with the foreign cultures through authentic material and enhance, in the process, their awareness and understanding of the other in relationships with themselves. The resources and tools used for these activities can be collected in one’s own country or abroad (i.e., books, magazines, realia) or
can be found on the Web. Because activities aimed at developing students’ IC are logistically less demanding than telecollaborative exchanges, they can be offered in many different educational contexts and settings.

1.3 Instagram for the Development of Students’ IC

The global diffusion of the Internet and the rise in affordable digital electronic devices has exponentially increased the access to culturally authentic materials (Hadley, 2001). Foreign language educators can take advantage of this wealth of resources to design activities that encourage students to explore a foreign culture online (Bush, 2007). Social media seem especially suited to encourage students’ contact with the target culture and to promote their cultural and intercultural reflections (i.e., Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Lomicka & Lord, 2012).

Social media users often share snapshots of their daily life and discuss topics related to their home culture. The strong visual component of this information can be harnessed to foster students’ visual literacy for the development of IC. Such tools as Flickr and Instagram, for example, provide an endless array of authentic, current, and varied images, most commonly pictures, that can be used in the foreign language classroom to explore products and practices of a foreign culture. The abundance of online images, thus, provides a means for students to approach a cultural phenomenon from different angles and to construct a clearer understanding of it (Bush, 2007). By analyzing these images and by comparing them to images from other cultures, including one’s own, students may develop critical thinking skills and broaden their global perspectives (Baker, 2015a).

Millions of users worldwide publish every day on Instagram images and videos, often in combination with text. The visual and textual elements of an Instagram post (i.e., images, videos, captions, and comments) are rich in cultural information that is current and timely. Although students may not always be able to understand the meaning of an image or the meaning of a word or expression, either because they do not know it or because they cannot understand how it is being used, the combination of words and visuals helps to enhance students’ understanding of both linguistic and cultural input (Plass & Jones, 2005). Because using social media is primarily a personal act, by using Instagram for intercultural explorations students may
also develop a degree of agency and choice that is similar to the one they have when they use it for personal purposes. The authentic and personal content shared by Instagram users and its predominant visual component, together with its potential for fostering learners’ autonomy for intercultural explorations and reflections, open up new and interesting possibilities for the development of students’ IC in foreign language education.

1.4 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

As mentioned above, Byram (1997) proposes “a comprehensive and practical model for integrating culture learning into the foreign language classroom” (O'Dowd, 2006, p. 97). Byram’s model is already a fully-functional instrument for the development of IC and ICC and, as such, has been used uncountable times to design learning activities and to guide research efforts. However, Byram only discusses “general principles” and uses “a high level of abstraction” while presenting his model (1997, p. 5). This study introduces a pedagogical sequence that builds over Byram’s framework of IC and is composed of several progressive and iterative steps that aim to direct students’ attention to specific cultural components and intercultural processes (Figure 2.2). To do so, the pedagogical sequence integrates the five factors that compose Byram’s framework of IC (i.e., attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, critical cultural awareness) with the three components of the National Standards’ cultural framework (i.e., products, practices, perspectives; 1996), and the concepts of cultural and intercultural awareness (CA and ICA).

The study presents an Instagram-based instructional unit designed on this pedagogical sequence. The Instagram for Intercultural Explorations and Reflections (InstaIntER, i.e., Insta-Inter) unit aims to foster the development of students’ IC through the development of CA and ICA of cultural products and practices, and philosophical perspectives. Specifically, the Insta-Inter unit requires students to use Instagram to explore posts from selected hashtags and users and to share their cultural and intercultural observations in the class group chat. Moreover, the unit presents a set of individual online assignments (four weekly worksheets and a final essay) aimed at fostering students’ cultural and intercultural reflections.

The main goal of the study is to explore how the Insta-Inter unit promotes the development of students’ IC. More specifically, the study aims to explore how completing the
unit helps students to develop CA and ICA of products, practices, and perspectives. For this purpose, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does the Insta-Inter unit allow foreign language students to engage in intercultural explorations and reflections?
2. How does the Insta-Inter unit help foreign language students to develop intercultural competence?

The explanatory nature of the study suggests using a qualitative approach to inquiry, which is in line with the mainly qualitative focus of the literature on the development of IC. More specifically, the study utilizes a case study approach to data collection and analysis. Although it is possible that the Insta-Inter unit promotes the development of students’ IC, it is beyond the purpose of this study to verify to what extent this development actually occurs. The findings of the study will be useful for language professionals interested in integrating the study of other cultures in the foreign language curriculum and in promoting the development of students’ IC.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study and a review of the literature on CA and ICA development of products, practices, and perspectives in foreign language education. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach used for data collection and data analysis and provides a detailed description of the Insta-Inter unit and the rationale behind it. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study describing how each activity of the instructional unit contributed to the development of one or more factors of the pedagogical sequence for the development of IC. Finally, chapter 5 discusses the results of the study and draws its conclusions, also addressing the limits of the study and its implications for future research and practice.
CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces the pedagogical sequence that guided the development of the Insta-Inter unit and summarizes the literature on the development of cultural and intercultural awareness of cultural products and practices, and philosophical perspectives in foreign language education. The review is divided into several subsections. It starts with a section focused on using realia and non-computer technology to foster students’ intercultural explorations and reflections. It follows with an overview of the role computer technology plays in education and an introduction to computer-assisted language learning (CALL), followed by a review of research on using computer technology and the Internet to promote intercultural contact. The chapter continues with a section on telecollaboration and its role in promoting intercultural interaction and the development of students’ intercultural competence. The following two sections introduce the concepts of social media and mobile social media and explain how social media and mobile devices have been used for the development of students’ intercultural competence. The final section discusses how visual literacy can promote the development of students’ cultural and intercultural awareness.

2.1 Designing a Pedagogical Sequence for the Development of Students’ IC

2.1.1 Byram’s Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a comprehensive model that promotes the concurrent and integrated development of students’ communicative and intercultural competence. The core component of the model is the framework of intercultural competence (IC). This framework is composed of five components, namely, attitudes (savoir être), knowledge (savoir), skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre), skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire), and critical cultural awareness/political education (savoir s’engager). Although presented as separate components, these five savoirs are interdependent and they all integrate communicative competence, which can be considered as a
sixth savoir, savoir communiquer (Sercu, 2010). The following is a brief description of each of these five components:

- **Attitudes (savoir être):** Attitudes towards people from other cultures, their cultural meanings and the behaviors and beliefs they exhibit. The intercultural learner should display attitudes of curiosity and openness; he or she should be ready to suspend disbelief and judgment on the other and be able to ‘decentre’ from his or her own behaviors and beliefs in order to relativize them.

- **Knowledge (savoir):** Knowledge of the interlocutor and the social group(s) to which he or she belongs; knowledge of its products and practices and how they relate to the products and practices of one’s own culture; knowledge of the general processes of individual and societal interaction.

- **Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre):** These skills draw upon the learner’s existing knowledge; it is the ability to interpret documents and events from another culture and to identify and explain relationships between cultures.

- **Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire):** The ability to find out new information about a foreign culture, either by one’s own or through social interaction, and to integrate this information with previous knowledge.

- **Critical cultural awareness/political education (savoir s’engager):** The ability to reflect upon one’s own behaviors and beliefs and how they influence one’s understanding of the beliefs and values of the foreign culture.

Byram’s model aims to promote the acquisition of IC and ICC in an educational context. Because of its educational dimension, the model also includes objectives for teaching, learning, and assessment; some are formulated as observable and measurable behaviors but most are complex objectives that are not always compatible with classroom work. The classroom is the place where students can further their knowledge (i.e., knowledge of products and practices of the target culture, knowledge of the processes of intercultural communication, knowledge of non-verbal behaviors and processes) and can improve their skills (i.e., skills of interpreting and relating). The instructor can overcome its logistic limitations with pedagogically structured learning opportunities that help to foster learner autonomy for the development of IC and ICC.
As Byram suggests, only if learners “become autonomous in their capacity for refining and increasing their knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p. 69), the educational experience of otherness becomes actual learning.

Byram’s model of ICC aims to develop learner autonomy through a critical and comparative method that provides learners with the means to analyze and to interpret documents and events in other cultures, to identify practices and to value assumptions, and to relate them to their own practices, beliefs, and social identities. The main goal of the model is to combine the development of students’ IC with the development of their linguistic competence in the foreign language (i.e., to develop learners’ ICC). While individuals who have developed IC have attitudes, knowledge, and skills that allow them to overcome cultural differences and to enjoy intercultural contact, they usually are not able to properly interact in the foreign language with people from another culture, as individuals with ICC do. Individuals with ICC, thus, are able to “deal with a wider range of situations of contact” than individuals with IC (Byram, 1997, p. 71). Although the development of students’ ICC should be one of the goals of contemporary foreign language education (Thorne, 2003), “decisions about which factors should be included in teaching aims cannot be made in the abstract but depend on circumstances and on the needs and opportunities of the learners involved” (Byram, 1997, p. 71).

Usually, foreign language courses focus almost exclusively on the study of the language; integrating cultures into instruction is still not a priority for many language instructors, especially because of the challenges the process may entail. Although students work to become linguistically competent, they often lack sufficient IC to properly interact with native speakers of the foreign language. Byram’s framework of IC can be used to integrate students’ developing linguistic abilities with an opportunity to develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills for the development of IC.

2.1.2 Integrating Byram’s Framework of IC with the National Standards’ Cultural Framework

When describing the factors involved in his model, Byram varyingly talks about the products, practices, behaviors, meanings, perspectives, beliefs, and values of a social group. Some of these concepts have a similar, almost interchangeable, meaning (i.e., practices and
behaviors, meanings and perspectives, beliefs and values) and can be easily reduced to the three main cultural components of the cultural framework proposed by the National Standards (1996), namely, products, practices, and perspectives. According to the National Standards, “the term ‘culture’ is generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products – both tangible and intangible – of a society” (1996, p. 40). Although Byram deliberately avoids providing a definition of culture, it can be useful to integrate this definition into Byram’s framework of IC to encourage foreign language instructors to use the framework to promote intercultural explorations, analysis, and reflections.

As Wesely (2012) points out, cultural products represent what people have; cultural practices, what people do; and philosophical perspectives, what people think or are. The presence of a cultural product within a culture “is required or justified by the underlying beliefs and values (perspectives) of that culture” (National Standards, 1996, p. 47). Cultural objects are used during cultural practices and may be tangible (i.e., a painting, a building, a pair of chopsticks) or intangible (i.e., a ritual, a dance, a system of education). Behavioral practices are “patterns of behavior accepted by a society and […] represent the knowledge of ‘what to do when and where’” (National Standards, 1996, p. 46); they are celebrations, customs, and linguistic uses that derive from the cultural perspectives of a culture. Philosophical perspectives are the meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas that represent a culture’s view of the world; they are the set of cultural constructs from which the products and practices of a cultural group derive.

Philosophical perspectives, thus, are at the top of an ideal triangle whose base is formed by cultural products and behavioral practices (Figure 2.1).

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1 Byram (1997) avoids using the term ‘culture’ to talk about the cohesive behavior of a social group, preferring instead to talk about its beliefs, meanings, and behaviors. He explains that, in the context of foreign language education, it is easy to link the shared meanings of a group to a specific language, with the risk of oversimplifying the diverse and fluid reality that characterizes any group of people into a single national culture, usually associated with the politically dominant elite group. Byram warns that, “we have to be aware of the dangers of presenting ‘a culture’ as if it were unchanging over time or as if there were only one set of beliefs, meanings and behaviours in any given country” (p. 39). To evade the misrepresentations typical of what is known as the ‘large culture’ approach, Byram prefers to use the expressions ‘other cultures’ and ‘social groups’.
This tripartite definition of culture can help to structure a sequence of activities aimed at developing students’ IC. Students should first become familiar with the products and practices of a foreign culture to be able to relate them (savoir comprendre, skills of interpreting and relating) to the products and practices of the culture(s) to which they belong – or any other culture (savoirs, knowledge). This knowledge can help them to find out the perspectives of the target group (savoir apprendre, skills of discovery), which, in turn, prepares them to evaluate how their own perspectives influence their view of the others (savoir s’engager, critical cultural awareness). However, this progressive approach to otherness is possible only if students are curious and open to the other and willing to relativize their own social identity (savoir être, attitudes). A set of activities that follows this sequence, thus, integrates the three components of the National Standards’ cultural framework into the five components of IC described by Byram².

Both Byram and the National Standards promote an iterative and contrastive approach for the development of students’ IC. The National Standards (1996) even include comparisons as one of the five “C” goal areas of foreign language education, namely, Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. According to the National Standards, a contrastive approach helps students to “develop insight into the nature of language and culture in order to interact with cultural competence” (National Standards, 2014, Comparisons goal area).

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² For activities aimed at developing IC, students are not necessarily required to interact with people from other cultures. Therefore, they may develop skills of discovery (savoir apprendre) but not skills of interaction (savoir faire). As mentioned above, Byram includes these two skills into the same component (savoir apprendre/faire, skills of discovery and interaction).
While exploring a specific document or event from another culture, students go through successive phases of acknowledgment and comparison that may help them to identify certain products and practices. If they relate these products and practices to similar products and practices of their own culture(s), they may also develop an awareness and understanding of the relationship between the two social groups. Similarly, students first have to become aware of and understand the perspectives of the other to be able to relate them to their own perspectives. These successive and iterative phases of acknowledgment and comparison help students to develop what is commonly known as cultural and intercultural awareness.

2.1.3 Cultural and Intercultural Awareness

The literature presents several definitions for cultural and intercultural awareness. At its most basic level, cultural awareness (CA) implies a degree of knowledge and understanding of another culture (Rantz & Horan, 2005). Byram (1989) conceives CA as the study of culture “carried out with comparative techniques using the learners' mother tongue” (p. 137) while Little (2012) defines it as personal engagement in understanding otherness (Little, 2012). CA teaching supports language learning by offering insights into the culture and civilization of the target community and by encouraging a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilizations (Byram, 1989). Activities designed to develop students’ CA aim to sharpen students’ observation, to encourage their critical thinking, and to increase their tolerance towards the other (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004).

Developing CA is a necessary step for the development of IC. Foreign language students, however, need also to reflect on and become familiar with their own culture if they want to be able to approach a foreign culture with intellectual detachment and objectivity (Straub, 1999, as quoted by Liaw, 2006). This competence, known as intercultural awareness (ICA), builds on CA and expands it through a more dynamic intercultural perspective (Baker, 2015b). ICA implies a comparison between two or more social groups and has been defined as the “knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 103). However, ICA is not just a cross-cultural comparison of cultural products and practices. ICA extends beyond the ‘surface culture’ of cultural products and practices to
encompass the ‘deep culture’ of philosophical perspectives from which products and practices are derived (Rantz & Horan, 2005). ICA develops over time and it refines through every intercultural encounter.

Chen and Sarosta (1998) describe three levels of ICA development. The first level is the most superficial. It is based on stereotypes developed from generic information and first impressions mediated by media, textbooks, and other people. Most students are at this level when they first approach a foreign language – and even after several months of study – or when they visit for the first time a foreign country. The second level of ICA implies an increased awareness of the distinctive traits of a foreign culture through direct or secondhand experience. This level is composed of two phases. In the first phase, individuals experience culture conflict situations that lead to an increased understanding of the foreign culture but also to possible feelings of disorientation and frustration. While this is a necessary step to acknowledge and accept differences in cultural traits, it may be detrimental to some individuals who may not be able to overcome the cultural shock. The next phase implies rational and intellectual analysis. During this phase, the individual begins to understand and to make sense of the perspectives of the foreign culture and to appreciate and accept them. His or her attitude usually becomes positive and leads to a higher level of intercultural understanding (third level of ICA). At this level, the individual compares and contrasts cultural traits and starts to approach the culture from an insider’s perspective. He or she develops empathy towards foreigners and is increasingly able to estimate their behaviors and attitudes.

ICA, thus, “implies a conceptual shift from a specific focus on the home culture and the target culture and the individuals in these specific cultures to an awareness of the greater complexity of cultures, and cultural and social identity more generally” (Rantz & Horan, 2005, p. 11). While exploring the relations between two or more social groups, individuals gain an inside view of the other culture (CA) in relation to their own culture (ICA). They also develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help them to place both cultures in context and to overcome their ethnocentrism in favor of an increased empathy towards other people and their worldview (IC). The processes of developing CA and ICA and of developing IC, thus, are deeply intertwined.
2.1.4 A Pedagogical Sequence for the Development of Students’ IC

The concepts of CA and ICA can integrate Byram’s framework of IC and the National Standards’ cultural ‘triangle’ in a pedagogical sequence that can help foreign language instructors to guide students step-by-step through the process of developing IC. By using and refining their skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre), students develop CA of the products and practices of that culture and are able to compare products and practices across cultures. This process helps them to develop ICA of related products and practices (knowledge, savoirs). While exploring and reflecting on a foreign culture, students also use their skills of discovery (savoir apprendre) to develop a first understanding of the philosophical perspectives of that culture (CA of perspectives). Again, the skills of interpreting and, most importantly, relating (savoir comprendre) help students to compare perspectives across cultures and to develop ICA of perspectives. If properly designed and implemented, thus, such a pedagogical sequence can help students to develop CA and ICA of products, practices, and perspectives or, in terms of Byram’s categories, critical cultural awareness (savoir s’engager). However, as outlined above, this progressive approach to critical cultural awareness is possible only if students have already developed or are in the process of developing attitudes of curiosity and openness to otherness (savoir être). According to Byram, students develop critical cultural awareness when they are able to identify, from observations and interactions, the concepts and values of a foreign culture and to relativize their own cultural stance to understand the perspective of a member of the target community. Thus, the development of critical cultural awareness is possible only in conjunction with the development of proper attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and coincides with the development of IC.

Figure 2.2 shows how Byram’s framework of IC can be integrated with the National Standards’ cultural ‘triangle’ (Figure 2.1) and the concepts of CA and ICA to promote the design of a pedagogical sequence for the development of students’ IC.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) The arrow for the skills of discovery in the home culture ‘triangle’ has a dashed line because, while the pedagogical sequence encourages students to reflect on their own beliefs and values, students may already be aware of some or many of them and do not have to actually discover them.
The Insta-Inter unit follows the steps of this sequence and presents several activities that aim to develop students’ attitudes, knowledge, and skills for the development of IC.

The following sections present an overview of the literature on the development of CA and ICA of cultural products and practices and philosophical perspectives in foreign language education.

### 2.2 Realia and Non-Computer Technology

Several publications present learning activities aimed at fostering the development of students’ cultural awareness (CA) of products, practices, and perspectives of the target social group (e.g., Cakir, 2006; Frank, 2013; Nault, 2006). Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) present a series of task-based activities that students complete in the target language in pairs and small groups. For example, they ask students to recognize cultural images and symbols embedded in songs and pictures; to work with authentic cultural products, such as news and poems; to examine patterns of everyday life (i.e., dating, shopping); and to explore information on cultural behaviors, patterns of communication, and values embedded in the foreign culture. Such
activities put students in contact with cultural products and practices and help them to extend their general knowledge and understanding of the culture they are studying.

However, only a few studies examine CA-raising activities in terms of students’ development. Ketchum (2006) presents a model of reading strategies that guide students through the process of analyzing the relationship between practices and perspectives of a foreign culture. Twenty students of French analyzed twice the same poem by a francophone African writer, before and after researching about the target culture and learning how to read the appropriate clues in a foreign text. While, during the first analysis, students focused primarily on the visible facts, i.e., the cultural practices represented in the text, six weeks later, they could increasingly relate these cultural practices to the underlying cultural perspectives of the author. Herron, Cole, Corrie, & Dubreil (1999) observed similar positive results for American students of French who watched instructional videos about everyday situations in the target culture. At the end of each chapter of the textbook, students (N=38) watched a 30-minute video and completed a post-video viewing test in class. The findings of the study suggest that students improved their knowledge of the products and practices of the foreign culture, especially for what concerns “little c” culture items – which is not surprising, as the videos contained more “little c” than “Big C” cultural information.

One common drawback of learning activities designed to raise CA is that they rarely put students in contact with the complex and dynamic realities of the target community. Students may be led to believe that there is only one neutral and objective perspective to approach a foreign culture, not one influenced by the eye of the observer (Rantz & Horan, 2005). If foreign language educators want to extend students’ general understanding of the complexity of cultures and if they want to help them navigate across languages, cultures, and socio-cultural varieties, they need to supplement culture-specific learning activities with activities that promote students’ awareness and understanding of the relationship between cultures.

A few studies present and examine activities aimed at developing intercultural awareness (ICA) in foreign language students. Zapata (2005) reports positive results in terms of students’ awareness of the relativity of their own culture and cultural standpoint. She conducted a one-semester study with a group of 17 American college students of Spanish who read and analyzed a short story set in Argentina. Students discussed their interpretations in groups and compared them with the written interpretations of a group of Argentinians. The analysis of their reflections
shows that the activity not only fostered students’ knowledge of the philosophical perspectives of the Argentinian native speakers but also helped them to deepen their awareness of their own culture. Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2005) observed a similar change in ICA for American university students (N=52) that engaged in a face-to-face intercultural exchange with foreign students of English (N=25). Students were required to meet in person, at least, five times during the semester and to talk about the challenges of balancing school, work, social life, and family life. A qualitative analysis of the American students’ journal entries, written reflective statements, and oral presentations showed that they modified their prejudices and prior assumptions about their partner’s culture, repositioned themselves in relation to others, gaining, in the process, a deeper understanding of themselves, their culture, and their intercultural relationships.

Piazzoli (2010) and Cunico (2005) used, respectively, participatory action research and drama to promote the development of ICA. Piazzoli designed and facilitated six process drama4 workshops in the target language in which 12 undergraduate American students read an excerpt of an Italian comedy and engaged in process drama. By exploring contemporary socio-cultural issues of the target community and by living a process of experience, reflection, and analysis, every student experienced one or more of the following phases of intercultural growth: Decentering from cultural codes, experiencing otherness, and enhancing ICA. Similarly, Cunico had her American students of Italian read a short play and complete tasks in everyday situations they would likely encounter while traveling abroad. Although she does not back up her conclusions with data, Cunico suggests that reading drama lets students approach a diversified and not stereotypical picture of Italian individuals while engaging with interactional dimensions of the language.

All these studies present activities that aim to develop students’ CA and ICA by putting them in contact either with native speakers or authentic, ‘analog’ material from the target culture (i.e., literary texts, realia). However, in an increasingly technologized and connected world, the opportunities for intercultural encounters have multiplied. Technology offers several ways to approach foreign people and information and to deliver cultural and intercultural lessons (Kramsch, A’Ness, & Lam, 2000; Liaw, 2006).

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4 Process drama is “a method of teaching and learning in which both the students and teacher work in role and participate in an imagined dramatic situation” (Flynn, 2016).
2.3 The Role of Technology in Education

Technology is used in education to provide instruction and to promote learning (Gagné, 1974; Hlynka, 2013). Every technology involved in the educational process is commonly defined as educational technology, “the study and ethical application of theory, research, and best practices to advance knowledge as well as mediate and improve learning and performance through the strategic design, management and implementation of learning and instructional processes and resources” (Definition and Terminology Committee of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, in press). Educational technology involves a broad variety of resources, modalities, and strategies for learning and support (Ross, Morrisson, & Lowther, 2010). From slide projection and silent films to broadcast radio, television, and programmed instruction, every new resource has followed a relatively regular pattern of early adoption, enthusiastic promotion, confinement to a supplementary role, and relative disuse (McDonald & Gibson, 2009; Molenda, 2008; Paquette, 2014; Reiser, 2012).

The emergence of microcomputers and personal computers and the rapid increase in connections to the Internet at the end of the last century dramatically changed the role of educational technology in education (Molenda, 2008). Technological processes and resources have now become an integral part of U.S. higher education (Bax, 2003; Chambers & Bax, 2006), with important implications for both learning and teaching. One of them is a new attention to the learner, who is increasingly placed at the center of the instruction and is called to take an active role in the learning process (Chung & Reigeluth, 1992; Reiser, 2001). Learners can now use computer technology to control the content, sequence, and pace of the instruction and to shape the learning environment according to their ability, self-management, and personal perspectives (Lowyck, 2014). Although these practices promote learner agency and autonomy (Benson, 2001; Little, 1995), learners still need instructional guidance to make the most out of technology-enhanced learning environments (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006; McLoughlin & Lee, 2010).

Each learning environment brings with it specific features, which are related to the technological resources used, the physical setting, and the background and experience of the actors involved (Stockwell & Tanaka-Ellis, 2012). Levy (2016) suggests not to tie a research
project to a specific technological resource but rather to analyze the affordances\(^5\) of several resources in order to identify the one(s) that will help ease the learning process and will result in greater and more meaningful learning (Felix, 2003). Given a specific setting (i.e., classroom, online course) and a specific set of learners, instructional designers and educators should select the tool that best meets the characteristics and pedagogical goals of the learning environment (Stockwell, 2012).

### 2.4 Computer-Assisted Language Learning

Educational technology can make a difference in foreign language teaching and learning (van Lier, 2003). The field of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) aims to explore how this difference can be positively harnessed in different contexts and for a broad range of learning opportunities (Levy, 2009; Levy, Hubbard, Stockwell, & Colpaert, 2015; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Several educational technologies have been used and studied in CALL throughout the last 30 years, ranging from mainframe and personal computers to laptop computers and mobile devices; from commercially produced software to an endless number of authoring software; from Web 2.0 technology to video games and virtual reality (Beatty, 2013; Hubbard, 2009; Levy, 1997; Salaberry, 2001). Educational technology has been used to foster the practice of specific aspects of grammar (e.g., Sun & Wang, 2003), vocabulary (e.g., Al-Seghayer, 2001; Chen & Chung, 2008), and pragmatics (e.g., Blattner, Dalola, & Lomicka, 2015; Blattner & Fiori, 2011); to provide opportunities to engage learners with authentic and comprehensible multimedia texts (e.g., Borghetti & Lertola, 2014); and to promote asynchronous and synchronous interaction among language learners and with native speakers (e.g., Kern, 1995; O’Dowd, 2003).

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\(^5\) In education, an affordance is conceived as “the relationship between the actor and the object, between learners and their environments, [...] between cognitive and social processes that lead to learning.” (Guth & Helm, 2012, p. 19). By adopting an affordance approach, researchers can focus on the behaviors that the technological resources afford and the outcomes they produce, rather than on the technology itself, which may soon become obsolete (Chun, Smith & Kern, 2016).
2.4.1 Using Computer Technology and the Internet for IC Development

The emergence and widespread adoption of computer technology in foreign language education have played an important role also in transforming the ways educators approach culture teaching and learning (Furstenberg, 2010). In a survey of Spanish language teachers conducted in 2006, Moore observed that videos were the most used technology for teaching culture, especially, commercially prepared videos, documentaries, cartoons, and movies. Video materials are potentially rich with cultural elements and can be used to promote the development of students’ intercultural competence (IC). For example, Borghetti and Lertola (2014) observed instances of autonomous CA and ICA development in foreign language students that completed a video subtitling task. The authors selected a seven-minute clip from an Italian comedy and asked 14 second-level Irish students of Italian to examine the linguistic and visual elements of the videos. Students conducted autonomous Internet searches to investigate as many cultural and intercultural elements they could and, when necessary, the instructor helped them in noticing any culturally specific element they missed. Then, students translated from Italian to English the dialogue transcript of the clip and used an open subtitling software to synchronize the text with the video. Besides observing the potential of intercultural subtitling for CA and ICA development, the study confirms the important role teachers play in selecting appropriate tools and encouraging students’ interaction and reflection (Borghetti, 2011).

During the last 20 years, foreign language educators have used the Internet to move beyond the textbook and to put students in contact with contemporary cultural products and practices and with authentic use of the target language in its situational and socio-cultural variations (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Levy, 2007). As Lafford (2009) points out, “this easy access to authentic target language materials in familiar formats has the potential to enhance student engagement with the target culture in ways that were not possible with the use of pre-Internet tools” (Lafford, 2009, p. 690). The adoption of Internet-based educational technologies in foreign language education, thus, opened new possibilities for developing students’ cultural and intercultural awareness (Comas-Quinn, Mardomingo, & Valentine, 2009).

For example, Dubreil, Herron, and Cole (2004) used authentic Francophone websites to foster cultural learning. They asked 48 third-semester American college students of French to complete Internet activities (N=8) based on a set of websites suggested by the textbook of the
course. Results show that students improved their French and francophone cultural knowledge over the course of the semester, especially for what concerns cultural products. Similarly, Osuna (2000) asked 23 advanced American students of Spanish to search the Web for relevant cultural sources on a cultural topic of their choice. Students explored written sources, images, maps, movies clips, and sound clips and discussed them with their classmates before composing an essay and presenting it to the class. Osuna observed that exploring cultural information on the Internet with the goal to create a written and oral presentation helped to foster students’ cultural knowledge and to increase their confidence in the knowledge acquired. Byon (2007) observed similar positive results for American students enrolled in a Korean culture class (N=27). At the beginning of the semester, students formulated a personal project hypothesis on a topic of their choice related to the Korean culture. Throughout the semester, they investigated the topic by themselves and they kept records of how their understanding of the Korean culture at large was changing and how their stereotypes were being reshaped. As a result of the portfolio project, students gained insights into the particular aspect of the Korean culture they researched and modified their stereotypical impressions.

All these studies present learning activities in which students explored the Web to increase their CA and ICA of products, practices, and perspectives. Another way to foster the development of students’ IC – and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) – is to promote the online interaction between students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

2.5 Telecollaboration

Sometimes termed as tandem learning, online intercultural exchange, or internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education (e.g., Belz & Thorne, 2006), telecollaboration is “the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work” (O’Dowd, 2012, p. 340). Telecollaborative exchanges provide students with the opportunity to communicate and collaborate with peers from other cultures within the supportive context of formal education. These activities aim to foster students’ awareness and understanding of a foreign culture, cross-
cultural comparisons, and the development of the linguistic and meta-communicative resources that facilitate student participation in intercultural dialogue (Thorne, 2006). Therefore, telecollaboration can be used to reach several and different learning goals, including the development of students’ IC and ICC.

Telecollaboration can happen asynchronously through text-based interactions (i.e., discussion board, email), synchronously through oral and text-based interactions (i.e., video conferencing tools, chat rooms), and through a combination of asynchronous and synchronous multimodal exchanges (i.e., social media, instant messaging applications). O’Dowd and Ware (2009) describe 12 different types of telecollaborative tasks and organize them into three categories, namely, information exchange, comparison and analysis, and collaboration and product creation. The activities in the ‘information exchange’ category help to foster the development of students’ CA; the activities in the ‘comparison and analysis’ category are best suited for developing students’ ICA and IC, and the activities in the ‘collaboration and product creation’ category help to foster the development of students’ ICC.

2.5.1 Telecollaborative Exchanges

One of the goals of telecollaborative activities is to foster the development of students’ IC. For example, Belz (2002) presents a semester-long exchange between a class of American university students of German and a class of German pre-service teachers. Students read and viewed different renditions of the same literary work and movie (e.g., the German fairy tale Aschenputtel and the Disney's animated adaptation Cinderella) and discussed, via email and chat and through a website created specifically for the course, such cultural constructs as racism, beauty, nudity, and family. Interestingly, results show that the students developed more awareness of the similarities and differences between the institutional interfaces and requirements than on the culturally contingent conceptualization of the cultural constructs they explored. Müller-Hartmann (2000) describes an email exchange between 20 groups of German and American or Canadian high school students that interacted in dyads and networks. During a period of three-to-four months, students read either a play or a novel in English and completed a set of collaborative activities. As a result of the activity, students gained in factual knowledge about each other’s cultures (CA), developed an awareness of the different cultural identities.
(ICA), and increased their skills in intercultural communication (ICC). Liaw (2006) also used printed text as a starting point for developing IC. She asked her Taiwanese students of English to read magazine articles about their native culture and to share with a class of American students – in a learning environment especially developed for the project – their reactions to the readings. The findings show that students demonstrated an interest in introducing one’s own culture to others and in knowing other people’s way of life. Further, students demonstrated the ability to change perspective and increased their knowledge about intercultural communication processes.

All these telecollaborative exchanges fall into the second of three models of telecollaborative exchanges described by O’Dowd (2012). The first telecollaboration model dates back to the first half of the twentieth century and involves the exchange by mail of class newspapers and other cultural artifacts between groups of students from different regions of the same country. The second model, the one of the studies mentioned above, coincides with the emergence and diffusion of the Internet (i.e., the mid-1990s) and involves the use of online communication tools to engage students in intercultural communicative activities with students from a different country. The third model is the most recent and involves the use of the social web to put students in contact with groups of foreign students and with other foreign users outside of an organized learning environment. Defined as Telecollaboration 2.0 (Guth & Helm, 2012), this last model uses Web 2.0 tools to promote a “less text-based and more multimodal form of communication” (O’Dowd, 2012, p. 354) in different settings and with a heterogeneous array of partners (i.e., voice-based chat rooms, Brandt & Jenks, 2011; public discussion forums, Hanna & De Nooy, 2003; virtual worlds, Jauregi, Canto, de Graaff, Koenraad, & Moonen 2011; blogs, Lee, 2009; massively multiplayer online games, Thorne, 2008).

2.5.2 Telecollaboration 2.0

The term Web 2.0 was coined to describe the evolution of the World Wide Web from a repository of information (Web 1.0) to a platform where content is created and modified in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Paquette, 2014; Thompson, 2007). Online users have now the ability to access, create, and share multimedia content and to connect with other users in online networks and communities.
The tools that enable these functions are “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Different and varied applications fall under this definition. Although several researchers have proposed a categorization scheme (among them, Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), no classification has been commonly adopted. Typically, Web 2.0 tools are grouped into the following categories: Blogs, collaborative editing sites, social networking sites, microblogging, media sharing sites, social bookmarking sites, virtual worlds, and social news. Despite the practicality of such a classification, the boundaries between categories are often blurred; it is very common that a tool shares the features of more than one category (i.e., Flickr is a media sharing tool with social networking features; LinkedIn is a social networking site with blogging functionalities).

A few studies investigate the potential of Web 2.0 technology to engage foreign language students in intercultural exchanges with foreign peers and other foreign Internet users. For example, Lee (2009) describes a telecollaborative exchange between two groups of American and Spanish undergraduate and graduate students (N=33) that used blogs and podcasts to create and react to cultural information, to discuss controversial issues, and to conduct ethnographic interviews. Students had an opportunity to explore the target language and culture through media produced by foreign peers; as a result, they enhanced their cross-cultural understanding and awareness of cultural products and practices. Hanna and De Nooy (2003) observed what happens when students virtually venture out of the classroom and interact with foreign online users in authentic settings. They present a case study in which four Anglophone students of French participated in an online discussion thread on the website of the French newspaper *Le Monde*. The results show that students had a more successful experience when they actively participated in the discussion board using their native language (English) than when they used the target language (French) without substantially contributing to the discussion. The study suggests that students learn the most about a specific online cultural practice when they actively take part of it.

Although using Web 2.0 tools for telecollaboration may be “less amenable to the needs associated with instructed language education” (Thorne, 2006, p. 9), these tools may encourage students to engage in intercultural learning in a personally relevant way. Educators can take
advantage of students’ existing online practices by inviting them to explore and interact with the wide variety of cultural resources on the Web using tools students are already familiar with (Guth & Helm, 2012). As social media are commonly used to seek out information and interact with others (Pew Research Center, 2016), they can be useful to access and explore current and living representations of the language and culture of a foreign social group.

2.6 Social Media

The terms social media and Web 2.0 tools can be used interchangeably. However, it is common to use “social media” to refer to a specific set of Web 2.0 tools that are commonly included in the categories of social networking sites (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn), microblogging (i.e., Twitter, Tumblr), and media sharing sites (i.e., Instagram, Pinterest). For this study, social media are defined as comprehensive online environments that integrate networking and communication features with content consumption, creation, and dissemination. Social media tools share some basic features: They allow users to create a profile and connect with other users within the system; they enable users to consume, create, and disseminate content; they provide opportunities for multimodal communication through several channels; and they provide some sort of notifications for the account’s activity. Some tools primarily have a social dimension while others put a strong emphasis on creating and sharing media.

Social media usage has increased in the last 10 years and it is now ubiquitous among American young adults (age 18 to 29, 90%) (Pew Research Center, 2015). Nearly nine-in-ten online young adults (88%) have a Facebook account, while six-in-ten use Instagram (59%) and more than a third use Twitter (36%), Pinterest (36%), and LinkedIn (34%) (Pew Research Center, 2016). The accessibility of social media and the role they play in learners’ lives have increasingly attracted the attention of educators, instructional designers, and researchers (Merchant, 2012). These tools provide a context for learner interaction and affinity around shared interests and enable learners to connect and engage in recurring meaningful interactions in a place where hierarchies are less structured (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Schroeder, Minocha, & Schneider, 2010). Yet, despite the popularity of these tools and their educational potential, social media research in foreign language education is still in its infancy (Golonka, Bowles, Frank, Richardson, & Freynik 2014; Lomicka & Lord, 2016).
2.6.1 Social Media for Cultural and Intercultural Learning

Social media are commonly used around the world as a window to everyday life and extraordinary events (i.e., the Arab spring uprising). Despite the potential of social media for putting students in contact with a foreign culture, they have been rarely used in foreign language education to promote cultural and intercultural learning. Borau, Ullrich, Feng, and Shen (2009), for example, used Twitter to foster a sense of CA and ICA in their higher education Chinese students. During seven weeks, students (N=98) posted in English several microblogging messages per week and read the incoming messages of their fellow classmates and other native speaker users. Lomicka and Lord (2012) also used Twitter to foster cultural learning in an intermediate French class. They put in contact 13 American students of French with 12 French students of English and asked them to tweet with each other, during nine weeks, both in the target language and in their native language. Although the main focus of the study is on the development of students’ online social presence and sense of community, the authors report positive results for perceived cultural learning among the American students; 92% agreed that they learned more about culture in that particular French class using Twitter than they had in past classes.

2.7 Mobile Social Media and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning

The emergence and rise in popularity of mobile devices with advanced mobile operating systems (i.e., smartphones, tablets) changed the way people access, approach, and use social media (Pew Research Center, 2015). The size and portability of these devices, combined with their affordability, have made them a pervasive presence in our lives (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Traxler, 2007), promoting the widespread diffusion of what has been termed as mobile social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Although most social media have been originally developed for Web browsers, mobile applications are becoming the primary medium to access them. Indeed, some of the platforms that have become popular worldwide in the last few years (i.e., Instagram, Snapchat) are native mobile apps; their websites are only a window to the app with very limited functionalities.
Smartphones ownership is especially high among young American adults (85%) and young adults with high education levels (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, despite the popularity of smartphones and other mobile devices, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) “remains on the fringes of foreign language instruction worldwide” (Burston, 2014b, p. 115). MALL activities only seldom exploit the advanced networking and communication possibilities afforded by contemporary technology and take advantage of the unprecedented amount of information and resources available online (Burston, 2014a; Godwin-Jones, 2011). Most of the studies on MALL, indeed, focus on vocabulary and grammar acquisition, usually through short and simple exercises that students complete in-between other learning activities (Burston, 2014a).

The literature on MALL for the development of IC, thus, is relatively sparse. Comas-Quinn, Mardomingo, and Valentine (2009), for example, used mobile devices in a study abroad setting and found positive results for CA development in their English students of Spanish (N=8) visiting the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela. Students used their own mobile phones, digital cameras, or MP3 recorders to capture on the spot interesting or “shocking” cultural products and practices and to share the content gathered through mobile blogging. Ducate and Lomicka (2013) had 39 American higher education students of French and German use an iPod Touch, both within and beyond the language classroom, to explore online resources in the target language and to complete individual and collaborative tasks. Students explored, in class and during their free time, apps and authentic websites, including social media, that exposed them to products, practices, and perspectives of the target culture.

2.8 Visual Literacy

The use of images in foreign language instruction has a long, documented, history (Bush, 2007). Several publications present activities that use images to help reach different learning goals (e.g., Goldstein, 2008; Wright, 1989). While research on visual literacy mostly focuses on variables related to language learning, such as the comprehension of text material and the learning of new vocabulary (e.g., Carpenter & Olson, 2012), a few publications promote the use of images for the development of IC. For example, The Council of Europe designed an educational tool that encourages students to engage critically with images from foreign cultures.
(Barrett, Byram, Ipgrave, & Seurrat, 2013). The main goal of the tool is to foster the development of students’ IC and their visual literacy skills through a sequence of reflective questions. This practice encourages students to approach critically the intercultural encounters that take place through images and to become more aware of their experience with otherness. In a similar way, Barnes-Karol and Broner (2010) present a sequence of activities that use images as springboards for students’ reflection on the philosophical perspectives of another culture and their relationships with the perspectives of their own culture. The authors propose to expose students to several authentic images, which they call products, so they can deepen their understanding of specific practices of the target social group and the philosophical perspectives that lie behind it. These activities integrate cultural analysis with increasingly more demanding linguistic tasks that encourage students to derive philosophical perspectives from the analysis of images and texts and to rethink the ways in which they perceive their own cultural perspectives.

2.9 Summary

The emergence and widespread diffusion of digital electronic devices and digital media have brought new opportunities for delivering cultural and intercultural lessons. Foreign language professionals have used several educational technologies to put students in contact with products and practices of the target culture and with native speakers of the target language. From computer software to Internet tools, from personal computer to mobile devices, several studies have examined instructional activities for the development of students’ IC. This study aims to contribute to the literature in this area by examining the educational potential of Instagram, a mobile social media app, for the development of students’ IC.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study presents an Instagram-based instructional unit (i.e., Insta-Inter unit) that follows a pedagogical sequence that integrates Byram’s framework of intercultural competence (IC, 1997) with the National Standards’ cultural framework (1996) and the concepts of cultural and intercultural awareness (CA and ICA). More specifically, this study aims to explore the pedagogical value of the Insta-Inter unit for the development of foreign language students’ IC. The research questions are: How does the Insta-Inter unit allow foreign language students to engage in intercultural explorations and reflections? How does the Insta-Inter unit help foreign language students to develop intercultural competence?

During four weeks, a group of American higher education students (N=18) used their smartphones to explore Instagram posts shared by Italian users and completed a set of online activities that encouraged their intercultural reflections. This research effort is especially interested in analyzing the potential of Instagram for the development of IC and the instances of cultural awareness (CA) and intercultural awareness (ICA) development of products, practices, and perspectives that may emerge from students’ intercultural explorations.

As the Insta-Inter unit is still at a formative stage of development, the study uses a qualitative approach to inquiry. Qualitative methods are in line with the mainly qualitative focus of the literature on IC development and allow to glean rich insights into the pedagogical value of the instructional unit and the students’ experience. This chapter introduces the selected research design and presents the Insta-Inter unit and the rationale behind it, as well as the researcher’s role in the study and the strategies used for data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Design

This study is looking for a greater understanding of the pedagogical value of an Instagram-based instructional unit for the development of students’ IC. The analysis of the process of awareness development is approached with qualitative inquiry looking for a deep explanation of students’ reactions to a foreign culture and their cultural and intercultural
reflections. The study utilizes a case study approach to data collection and analysis. Case study research is a qualitative approach that “involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2012, p. 73) with the goal of developing an in-depth understanding of the issue. In this study, the bounded system is an instructional event experienced by the students enrolled in a specific foreign language course (see Yin, 2009, for an explanation of the different forms of bounded system). It is an explanatory single-case study where the collective experience of the class with the instructional activity represents one case. The study has an embedded design, with multiple subunits of analysis that correspond to the students of the class. These subunits “can often add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case” (Yin, 2009, pp. 52-53). The class selected is an accessible, ordinary group of higher education students enrolled in a foreign language course in an American university. However, the results of the study are limited and not generalizable to other similar groups.

3.2 Sample

The participating students were enrolled in one section of a third-level Italian language course at a large research university in the United States. The class consisted of 20 students, 18 of whom participated in the study. One student did not provide consent and another student was excluded from the study because he did not complete any activities. Of the 18 participating students, 15 were females and three were males. Because Instagram only allows 15 users per chat, I created two group chats and randomly assigned 10 students to each group. The first group included eight participating students, six females and two males; both students who did not participate in the study were in this group. The second group included 10 students, nine females and one male. The sample is a nonprobability, convenience sample non-representative of the larger population of Italian language learners. Participation in the activity was mandatory for every student enrolled in the class while participation in the research was voluntary.
3.2.1 Rationale for Selecting the Sample

Studies on the development of students’ IC usually introduce a set of instructional activities and examine how these activities help to foster IC in one or two groups of students (e.g., Borghetti & Lertola, 2014, participants N=14; Ducate & Lomicka, 2013, N=39; Osuna, 2000, N=23; Piazzoli, 2010, N=12; Zapata, 2005, N=17). The great majority of MALL implementations also involves a limited number of participants (Burston, 2014b). Therefore, based on the literature and because of the depth of inquiry involved in case study research (Merriam, 1998), the participating students are from only one section of Italian language.

I designed the Insta-Inter unit for students who have already reached a novice level of proficiency in their speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills in the foreign language (ACTFL, 2012) but only have a superficial awareness and understanding of the cultures the language expresses. Thus, the unit is best suited for intermediate and advanced language courses that do not have a strong cultural component but mainly focus on the study of the language. The course selected for this study meets these requirements; it is the third of a three-semester sequence of courses that focus almost exclusively on the development of basic skills in speaking, writing, listening, and reading in Italian. The Italian language, as opposed to other foreign languages, was selected for two main reasons: (1) It is relatively easy to identify Instagram resources (i.e., hashtags, users) that focus exclusively on the cultures of the Italian peninsula, especially if compared with languages associated with more than one national culture (i.e., Spanish, French) and with world languages (i.e., English); (2) I am a native speaker of the language and, as such, I have a first-hand experience of the Italy and Italians that helped me guide and support students. Finally, I selected the specific section under analysis among the four third-level Italian courses offered during the semester because of the relatively high number of students enrolled and because I did not have any previous relationship with the students.

3.3 Role of the Researcher

When I conducted the study, I was a teaching assistant (TA) in the Italian language program where the course was offered. I was teaching too a third-level Italian course but not the one under investigation. By the time the project started, it was two years since I taught for the
last time a previous level of the Italian language, therefore, no student enrolled in the class was a former student of mine. As a TA, I was familiar with the curriculum of the Italian language program and with the cultural information covered in each of the three courses of the program.

I gained access to the participating students through the director of the basic Italian language program, my supervisor, and through the instructor of the course, one of my coworkers. I also had access to the Blackboard site for the course with instructor’s privileges. Therefore, I was able to upload and manage the documents related to the project and to download students’ assignments. I visited the class several times before and during the activity. Before the activity, I went to the class to collect students’ consent to participate in the study and to introduce the instructional unit. I also trained students or I made sure they knew how to use Instagram as required for the activities (Hubbard, 2013). As all the students had some previous experience using mobile social media, I did not have to train them extensively (McBride, 2009). During the training session, I also informed students of the goal of the instructional unit and briefly introduced the concepts of CA and ICA. I also introduced the National Standards’ cultural framework (2006) and explained the concepts of products, practices, and perspectives giving examples from Italian Instagram posts. Moreover, I trained students to analyze the visual and textual elements of a post in order to identify cultural products and practices and to infer the philosophical perspectives that lie behind them.

During the activity, I went to the class every Monday to briefly introduce the themes for the week and to troubleshoot any issue students were experiencing. Every morning, I posted in the group chat of the class the hashtag or hashtags for the day. Students explored them autonomously, along with the posts and stories from the Italian users they were following. During the week, students shared posts and wrote comments and questions in the class group chat. I occasionally participated in the group chat by replying to the students’ questions and, when appropriate, by integrating the information they shared with more information. When necessary, I also encouraged students to deepen their analysis and to guide their observations (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002).

6 Blackboard is an online proprietary learning environment system licensed to educational institutions to deliver online instruction and to support face-to-face instruction.
3.4 The Insta-Inter Unit

The Insta-Inter unit is a sequence of online activities that helps students to learn about the contemporary culture and everyday life of a foreign social group and to reflect on intercultural similarities and differences. Students explored on Instagram a set of selected hashtags and followed a set of Italian users (N=44) to explore their posts and stories\(^7\). Students also participated in a class group chat using the Instagram Direct feature\(^8\) and completed a set of online assignments. The activity took place in three phases: A pre-activity phase, the activity itself, and a post-activity phase.

3.4.1 Pre-Activity Phase

Before the activity started, students accessed on the Blackboard site for the class the information they needed to get started with the activities, including the list of Instagram users to follow (see Appendix B). Moreover, students accessed the following online documents:

- A questionnaire on their previous experiences with foreign language and culture learning and with using mobile social media for personal and academic purposes (see Appendix E).
- A worksheet where they listed, for each of the themes covered in the activity, the Italian products and practices they were already familiar with (see Appendix F).

Students completed these documents online; the deadline was the end of the Sunday before the activity started (11:59 pm).

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\(^7\) Instagram Stories lets users share photos and videos in a slideshow format that disappear after 24 hours. This way, users can share several snapshots of their daily life, not just the ones they want to keep on their profile.

\(^8\) Because the maximum number of members in an Instagram chat room is 15, I created two group chats and randomly assigned 10 students to each group.
3.4.2 Activities on Instagram

The activities on Instagram lasted four weeks. At the beginning of each week, students accessed on Blackboard a document with detailed instructions for the week and a list of the themes covered during the week (see Appendix D). Every day, I sent a message on the group chat with the instructions for the day and a set of hashtags for the students to explore. Students explored them and browsed their feed to see the posts and stories of the Italian users they were following. On, at least, four different days of the week, every student was required to share in the group chat a post that showed a cultural product or practice that particularly struck his or her attention. Students were also required to add a thoughtful comment to the post (i.e., I noticed that Italian men frequently hug each other, it seems to be a common thing) or a question about a product or a practice they did not fully understand (i.e., do Italians have dinner every day with their family?) Alternatively, students could post a comment or ask a question about one of the Instagram stories they observed. Students were required to share posts on the theme of the day, so they could integrate their own observations with the information shared by other students. Students could write their comments and questions in English, although they could use Italian if they preferred. I occasionally participated in the chat by replying to the students’ questions, by commenting and integrating the cultural information they posted, and by clarifying any doubt students may had.

At the end of each week, students accessed and completed an online assignment documenting their intercultural observations for the week; the deadline was the end of Tuesday (11:59 pm) of the following week. For each theme covered during the week, students listed the main similarities and differences between the Italian macro-culture and their own culture(s) and replied to a question that stimulated their reflections on the philosophical perspectives that lie behind the products and practices they observed online (see Appendix G).

3.4.3 Post-activity Phase

At the end of the unit, students wrote a short essay with their intercultural reflections on philosophical perspectives (see Appendix H) and completed two post-activity questionnaires: The first one was anonymous and included questions on students’ reactions to the activity (see
Appendix I); the second one was not anonymous and included questions on Instagram usage habits (see Appendix J). The deadline for completing the final essay and submitting the questionnaires was the first Thursday (11:59 pm) after the end of the Instagram activities.

### 3.4.4 Assessment

Completing the activities of the Insta-Inter unit was mandatory for every student enrolled in the class. Every week, students received a comprehensive grade on a 10-point grading scale for participating in the group chat and for completing the online assignment. They received one point per each day they posted on the group chat, up to four points a week. If one day they posted more than once, they received only one point for that day. Students earned the other six points by completing the weekly assignment. The sum of the four weekly grades counted an 8% of the final grade of the course. Students also received one percentage point for completing the pre-activity worksheet, one point for completing the pre-activity questionnaire, and one point for completing the two post-activity questionnaires. Moreover, students received a grade for writing the final essay. This grade counted a 2% of the final grade of the course, for a total of 13% for the activity. Students were assessed by the instructor of the course.

### 3.5 Rationale for the Insta-Inter Unit

#### 3.5.1 Duration of the Activities

Learning activities aimed at developing students’ IC greatly vary in length. They may last only a few weeks (e.g., Piazzoli, 2010), extend throughout a semester (e.g., Belz, 2002; Castañeda Usaquén, 2012; Cunico, 2005), or even last an entire academic year (e.g., O’Dowd, 2003). Usually, during these activities, students’ interactions with culture-based learning material and with foreign peers are distributed over time and happen only once or twice per week. The Insta-Inter unit, instead, required students to be in contact with the target culture (almost) daily. Because of this high frequency of participation and in order to keep students’ interest in the activity high (Fornara, in press), the activity lasted four weeks. As the cultural
content covered in the activity was not directly related to the syllabus of the course, the unit could start at any point in the semester.

3.5.2 Themes Covered

Every week, students focused on a different set of assigned themes related to daily living, what is commonly known as the “little c” culture of everyday life (Kramsch, 2013; Malinowski, 2013; Risager, 2013). I derived the themes from the themes listed, for different purposes, on the following documents: The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (dubbed ‘National Standards’, ACTFL, 2006), the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* (here dubbed ‘Can-Do Statements for IC’, ACTFL, draft), the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001), and the *Threshold 1990* (van Ek & Trim, 1990). The National Standards and the Can-Do Statements for IC present a series of cultural products and practices; the Threshold 1990 and, to a lesser extent, the CEFR present a list of themes and sub-themes that can be used to design foreign language activities, tasks, and material.

I created a list of all the themes mentioned in these documents and selected the ones that can likely be explored through online images and videos. Then, I explored Instagram to identify popular Italian hashtags that aggregate posts related to each of the themes selected. While exploring hashtags, I also identified Italian Instagram users who frequently posted about a specific theme (i.e., food, fashion, sport) or consistently posted about their daily life. Next, I divided the themes into four groups/weeks and prepared a list of hashtags for the students to explore.

I tested the viability of using Instagram for cultural explorations and reflections with a group of 22 third-level Italian language students, the same level as the students who participated later in the study. During four weeks, students explored posts from selected hashtags and Italian users (N=52) and shared in the class group chat posts about Italian products and practices. At the end of each week, students completed a weekly paper questionnaire on the similarities and differences between what they observed online and their home culture. While students identified similarities and differences for most of the themes, some themes resulted hard to observe on Instagram (i.e., public services, holidays), so I excluded them from the final list.
I used the information collected to reorganize the themes. For example, during the first week, students had to focus primarily on people’s physical appearance and how they commonly interact. However, during the same week, many students also identified and shared posts on cultural products and practices related to food, a “hot” topic on Instagram. Thus, I reorganized the themes to include an “eating and drinking” theme into the first week. Each of the four final groups of themes has loosely defined boundaries and covers aspects of the daily life that can be easily associated. Here is the complete list of the themes of the activity:

Week 1: The way people look and dress; common patterns of interaction and displays of affection; eating and drinking habits.
Week 2: Popular sports and social practices associated with sports; common recreational activities; common forms of entertainment.
Week 3: Common practices associated with work and the workplace; common practices associated with school and education; the layout of cities and towns.
Week 4: Products and practices that reveal a stereotyped or exaggerated view of a culture; how people relate to a different culture; how people use social media.

3.5.3 Rationale for Using Instagram

Instagram is freely available as a mobile app and on the Web (e.g., www.instagram.com). According to the Pew Research Center (2016), Instagram is the most used social media platform in the U.S. after Facebook: 32% of online adults (28% of all Americans) have an Instagram account, half of which uses it daily. The numbers rise among young adults (age 18-29), with 59% of active users. Instagram is popular also in Italy. With eight million users out of a population of nearly 60 million, Instagram is the third most popular social media platform, after Facebook and immediately after Google+ (Vincos, 2016). Besides its popularity, I selected Instagram for the following reasons:

- On Instagram, students can access and explore information about a foreign culture that is authentic, current, and timely. Instagram users usually share images and videos that they
have recently taken, usually in their own city, region, or country. In many cases, they also share the exact location where the picture or video was taken.

- Using Instagram helps overcome one of the critical obstacles to the curricular integration of mobile social media in education, i.e., operating system incompatibility (Burston, 2014b). Instagram can be accessed through every smartphone and mobile operating system.

- Most American college students have some previous experience using Instagram, so they do not need an extensive training on how to explore hashtags, follow users, browse posts, and look at Instagram stories.

- Many students have also some previous experience using the Instagram Direct feature or messaging in a group chat, so they do not need an extensive training on how to share posts and write messages on a group chat.

- It is common to follow strangers and explore new hashtags on Instagram, so students are already familiar with this kind of activities.

- Students can follow Italian users on Instagram without being reciprocated.

- A great number of Instagram accounts are public; Instagram users do not usually mind having a few new followers.

- A typical Instagram post consists of an image or a video plus a caption. The visual elements of a post might make its textual elements, usually written in the foreign language, more comprehensible for foreign language learners. Vice versa, the text of a post can help to interpret its visual elements.

- The Instagram Stories feature allows users to share multiple photos and videos, often embellished with a short text and emojis, in a slideshow format that lets students explore snapshots of daily life in the foreign culture.

- When students share an Instagram post on the group chat, it is possible to see the image or video directly on the chat without having to access an external link.

A further reason for using Instagram to explore the contemporary culture and everyday life in Italy was that many students who participated in the pilot study noticed that Italian Instagram users tend to post pictures and videos that present different aspects of their daily life, both positive and negative, and not only “the best version” of themselves, as many American
Instagram users seem to do. Instagram also offers the possibility to explore posts from a heterogeneous sample of users. Instagram users are distributed across all ages, especially if compared with the user base of Snapchat, a mobile messaging and media-sharing tool especially popular among teenagers and people in their early 20’s (Statista, 2015, 2016).

However, there are some potential drawbacks of using Instagram for academic purposes. Some students (N=3) used their personal Instagram account to participate in the group chat, thus exposing their personal username and profile. To obviate potential issues related to privacy, I invited students to set their accounts as private or to create a new account for the activity. By creating a new account, students were also able to see all the posts of the Italian users at once and not mixed with the posts of the other Instagram users they were following; students could easily switch between multiple accounts without signing in and off from the application. An additional potential issue concerns research. Instagram does not provide the option to download chats, like other mobile instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp do. Researchers have to manually collect these data for analysis.

3.5.4 Selection Criteria for Accounts and Hashtags

I personally selected the hashtags that students explored on Instagram and the Italian users they followed. I selected the Italian accounts according to the following criteria:

- The users were Italian people or organizations who lived and worked in Italy and had a public Instagram profile.
- The users posted frequently on Instagram, at least an average of three posts per week.
- Their posts mainly focused on one of the themes covered during the activity (i.e., food, fashion) or consistently showed cultural products and practices related to everyday life in Italy. I discarded the accounts that presented recurrently the same kind of images (i.e., selfies, cat pictures).
- Most of the pictures and videos they shared were taken by the user or a close acquaintance, with only a few aphorisms, memes, screenshots, and other images.
- Their posts were not advertising.
- Their posts could be explored and shared in an academic context.
I periodically revised the accounts selected. When necessary, I discarded some of them and integrated the list with other accounts (see Appendix B for the complete list of accounts selected for the activity). Although for privacy and logistic reasons I only strongly recommended students to follow all the Italian users (I did not make it a requirement), every student followed all the users indicated.

I selected the hashtags that students explored according to the following criteria:

- The hashtag aggregated posts related to one of the themes covered during the activity.
- The hashtag was in Italian and most of the posts that it aggregated were shared by Italians. I did not consider words and expressions that are common in different languages (i.e., #concerto, “concert” in Italian and Portuguese) or commonly used abroad (i.e., #pizza, #ciaobella, #dolcevita).
- The hashtag presented a varied set of images and videos; hashtags that presented recurrently the same kind of images were discarded (i.e., selfies, cat pictures).
- Most of the pictures and videos aggregated by the hashtag were taken by the user or a close acquaintance. However, I also considered hashtags that presented a few aphorisms, memes, screenshots, and other images.
- Several users used the hashtag every day. However, I also considered hashtags that were less used but focused on a specific theme (i.e., #soloinamerica, which focuses on American cultural products and practices that are peculiar in the eyes of an Italian).
- The vast majority of the pictures and videos aggregated by the hashtag were not advertising.
- The posts aggregated by the hashtag could be explored and shared in an academic context.

I identified beforehand several hashtags for each theme covered. Before sharing them in the group chat, I revised their content to check that they still fulfilled the criteria listed above (see Appendix A for a complete list of the hashtags used during the activity).
3.6 Data Sources and Data Collection

Despite the increasing number of publications on cultural and intercultural learning, no consensus has been reached on whether and how to formally assess students’ cultural and intercultural understanding in the context of language instruction (Schulz, 2007). As intercultural development always implies a development of the personality, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure a change in students’ intercultural proficiency (Sercu, 2010). In fact, while cultural knowledge can be assessed through multiple-choice or Likert-style testing, there are no empirically validated descriptors for intercultural competencies (Schneider and Lenz, 2001); indirect measures predominate in the literature, mainly through self-assessment (i.e., portfolios, journals) (Godwin-Jones, 2013). Self-assessment plays a central role in the European Language Portfolio, an instrument developed by the Council of Europe (2006) to support the development of learners’ intercultural awareness, and it is at the core of the paradigm for assessing intercultural capability (e.g., intercultural communicative competence) proposed by Scarino (2010).

It takes reflection to develop an understanding of the products and practices of a foreign culture and to internalize the perspectives associated with them. Similarly, reflection is needed to develop a depth of understanding of how a foreign culture relate to other cultures, including one’s own (National Standards, 1996). This kind of reflection normally occurs in one’s native language. While intercultural communication is the ultimate goal of foreign language instruction, learners do not need to be proficient speakers of the language to reflect on a foreign culture and compare it to other cultures (Byram, 1997; Drewelow, 2013; Furstenberg, et al., 2001; Lee, 2012; Schulz, 2007). For this study, students used their native language to share cultural discoveries, to make cross-cultural comparisons, to self-report their intercultural abilities, and to reflect on the cultures expressed through the foreign language.

This study uses the following sources for data collection:

- a pre-activity questionnaire;
- a pre-activity worksheet;
- a class group chat on Instagram;
- four weekly assignments;
• a post-activity essay;
• two different post-activity questionnaires;
• post-activity interviews.

The variety of sources helps to integrate the information missing from each source and to make triangulations of the evidence (Yin, 2009). Following, there is a detailed description of each data source.

3.6.1 Pre-Activity Questionnaire

Before starting the activities of the Insta-Inter unit, students completed an online questionnaire that I created on Qualtrics, a paid online survey software. The questionnaire is not anonymous and has two main sections (see Appendix E). The first section includes multiple-choice, short-answer, and open-ended questions on students’ previous language learning experiences and their experiences with the Italian culture. These questions are modeled on the first section of the European Language Portfolio (e.g., the Language Passport; Council of Europe, 2006), a self-assessment instrument that learners can use to record their language learning experiences and achievements. The second section of the questionnaire includes multiple-choice, short-answer, and open-ended questions on students’ previous experiences with using mobile social media for personal and academic purposes. I accessed students’ answers on a spreadsheet generated by Qualtrics.

3.6.2 Pre-Activity Worksheet

Students also completed a pre-activity online worksheet. For each of the themes covered in the unit, students listed Italian products and practices they were already familiar with and common stereotypes about the Italian culture (see Appendix G). Students accessed the worksheet on Blackboard and completed it using a word processing software (i.e., Microsoft Word). Then, they uploaded the document on Blackboard.
3.6.3 Group Chat

Students used the Instagram group chat to share posts that particularly struck their attention; they also wrote comments and questions related to the content of the posts and they described Instagram Stories shared by Italian users. I collected these messages by manually copying and pasting into a Google Docs document the text of the messages and the links to the posts.

3.6.4 Weekly Assignments

Students completed four weekly online assignments using a word processing software (see Appendix G). The four assignments were organized into two sections. In the first section, students listed, for each of the themes covered during the week, the similarities and differences between the other culture and their own culture. As “there is some evidence to show that a positive point of departure […] establishes a favorable mindset” towards the other culture (ACTFL, 2006, p. 49), the assignment asks, first, questions on the similarities and, then, on the differences between cultures. In the second section, students replied to a set of questions that encouraged their reflection on the cultural perspectives associated with the cultural products and practices explored during the week. Once completed each assignment, students uploaded it on Blackboard.

3.6.5 Post-Activity Essay

At the end of the unit, students wrote an essay reflecting on the philosophical perspectives that lie behind the cultural products and practices observed online and how they relate to the perspectives of their own culture. Students accessed the prompt for the essay on Blackboard (see Appendix H) and uploaded it as a Word document.
3.6.6 Post-Activity Questionnaires

At the end of the unit, students also completed two online questionnaires that I created on Qualtrics. The first questionnaire was anonymous and included multiple-choice and open-ended questions on students’ reactions to the activity (see Appendix I). The second questionnaire was not anonymous and included multiple-choice, short-answer, and open-ended questions on how students used Instagram to complete the activities of the Insta-Inter unit (see Appendix J). I accessed the answers from both questionnaires on automatically generated spreadsheets.

3.6.7 Post-Activity Interviews

Once students completed the activities of the unit and the questionnaires and uploaded the final essay, I conducted semi-structured interviews with selected students. I contacted eight students purposefully selected from those who participated more in the activity, those who participated less, and those who had an average frequency of participation. Four students agreed to be interviewed. The interviews followed an interview protocol with a set of open-ended questions and follow-up questions. The questions were organized into four thematic sections discussing different aspects of students’ intercultural explorations on Instagram (see Appendix K). Specifically, the questions aimed to elicit detailed information about the activity and how it helped to foster the development of students’ IC. Moreover, the questions gave space for exploring in detail the affordances of Instagram for intercultural learning. The interviews took place in a quiet room in the same building where the class was taught. I conducted the interviews in English and I recorded them using Audacity, a free audio editor and recorder software.

3.7 Activities of the Insta-Inter Unit in the Pedagogical Sequence

Each activity of the Insta-Inter unit helped students to acquire specific knowledge and to develop specific skills for the development of IC. The pre-activity worksheet helped students to activate their existing cultural knowledge of the themes covered in the activity. The daily explorations and reflections on Instagram helped them to acquire CA and, to a lesser extent, ICA
of products and practices and to develop and reinforce their skills of interpreting and relating. The first part of the weekly online assignments relied on students’ developing skills of interpreting and relating to encourage the acquisition of ICA of products and practices. The second part of the assignments helped students to activate their skills of discovery and to acquire CA of perspectives. The final essay relied again on students’ skills of interpreting and relating and helped them to acquire ICA of perspectives. Figure 3.1 helps to visually situate each activity in the pedagogical sequence:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 3.1 Overview of the activities in relation to the factors of the pedagogical sequence.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

I organized the data according to the different sources of data collection (i.e., one spreadsheet for each Instagram chat, one word processing file for each student and worksheet) and became familiar with those data by “reading, rereading, and reading through the data once
more” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 158). While reading the data, I started to separate the information into groups of similar instances that roughly corresponded to the different components of the theoretical framework used in this study (e.g., Byram’s framework of IC: Attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery, critical cultural awareness). This first analysis confirmed that the framework could be used to guide and organize the analysis of the data.

I conducted a data reduction process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013) by arranging, when possible, the data into predetermined categories that corresponded to the five factors of Byram’s model, all the possible combinations of the three components of the National Standards’ cultural framework and the concepts of CA and ICA (i.e., CA of products, ICA of practices, CA of perspectives), and categories related to the activities on Instagram (i.e., Instagram use, remembering to post). Then, I conducted a systematic coding process (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) to refine and integrate these categories with analyst-created typologies that helped to further focus the analysis (i.e., Attitudes: Curiosity and openness, ability to decenter). This process also helped to identify aggregations that emerged out of the data and that helped to interpret the factors involved in the process of IC development (i.e., incorrect assumption, regional differences, “I didn’t see”). Following, I conducted a second cycle of deductive analysis to test and affirm the authenticity and appropriateness of the first cycle of deductive and inductive analysis (Patton, 2002). Finally, I used basic statistics measures to report students’ replies to the questions of the questionnaires.

I approached these data examining the proposition that completing the sequence of activities influenced the development of students’ IC. However, I also constantly examined rival explanations that helped to better situate the interpretation of data (Yin, 2009; i.e., that students’ previous traveling experience to Italy played an important role in influencing their explorations and reflections). Chapter 4 presents the findings of the analysis following a theory-building structure (Yin, 2009) that helps to frame the non-linear process of IC development.
3.9 Trustworthiness and Privacy

3.9.1 Trustworthiness

I developed the research protocol to ensure trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I defined clear steps for data collection and data analysis to assure that the findings of the study can be replicated in similar contexts and with similar subjects. In order to assure truth value, I developed multiple data sources that helped to collect multiple forms of information, which were triangulated to validate the findings.

3.9.2 Privacy

There were no more than minimal risks or discomfort for participants, such as those associated with everyday life. The participating students decided whether to set their Instagram account public or private. However, I encouraged them to create a new Instagram account for the activity. When students preferred to use their personal account, I encouraged them to set it as private, so that the other students did not have access to the personal information they published. To further protect the participants, the information obtained during the course of the study will remain confidential. I am the only person who has and will have access to the raw data, which is stored on a password-protected computer. When I finished the data collection process, I removed all participants' identifiers and assigned them a fictitious name for analysis. When I completed data analysis, I deleted the Instagram group chats from my smartphone so the accounts of the participants will not be exposed, should other people gain access to the device.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This study introduces a pedagogical sequence that integrates Byram’s model of intercultural competence (IC) with the National Standards’ cultural framework and the concepts of cultural and intercultural awareness (CA and ICA). The goal of the sequence is to help foreign language instructors to design instructional units that guide students through the development of factual and relational cultural knowledge for the development of IC. The Insta-Inter unit presented in this study is designed to help students reach this goal. This chapter presents findings related to both research questions of the study:

1. How does the Insta-Inter unit allow foreign language students to engage in intercultural explorations and reflections?
2. How does the Insta-Inter unit help foreign language students to develop intercultural competence?

The first section of the chapter presents some background information on the participating students. Each of the following four sections presents one of the activities of the Insta-Inter unit (e.g., pre-activity worksheet, Instagram explorations and reflections, weekly online assignments, final essay) and describes how that activity helped students to develop specific knowledge and skills for the development of IC. The following section describes how the Insta-Inter unit helped students to develop attitudes for IC. The chapter follows with a presentation of two student cases; these cases help to enhance the insights into the experience of individual students and to gain an in-depth understanding of the potential of the Insta-Inter unit for the development of students’ IC. Finally, the chapter presents an overview of students’ reactions to the Insta-Inter unit.
4.1 Class Profile

Before starting the activities of the unit, students completed a pre-activity questionnaire with their background information. Table 4.1 summarizes this information by showing the names of the students (fictitious, in respect of their privacy), their respective group chat, their declared cultural identity, whether they had been to Italy and for how long, whether they already had an Instagram account, and whether they had experience using mobile devices and social media for academic purposes.

Table 4.1 Students’ background information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group chat</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Declared cultural identity</th>
<th>Been to Italy</th>
<th>Instagram user</th>
<th>Academic: Mobile</th>
<th>Academic: Social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>South Florida</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jalissa</td>
<td>North Florida</td>
<td>Born, age 0-3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rocco</td>
<td>South Florida</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amani</td>
<td>South Florida, Caribbean</td>
<td>2 days, tourism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Midwestern</td>
<td>4 months, study abroad</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>1 month, study abroad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>4 weeks, research</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>2 weeks, tourism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>1 week, tourism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kelsey</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>6 weeks, study abroad</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Natalia</td>
<td>Brazilian, American</td>
<td>4 months, study abroad</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>South Florida</td>
<td>1 week, tourism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1 Cultural Identity

Most students identified with American culture at large or with a specific regional American culture, such as Southern, Midwestern, or South Florida. Two students had a
bicentral identity; Natalia identified as Brazilian and American while Amani identified as American and Caribbean (from the West Indies).

4.1.2 Travel Experience in Italy

Only nine of the 18 students had been to Italy before and only five had spent four or more weeks in the country, studying abroad or doing research. Anne, Natalia, Kelsey, and Amy studied abroad in Florence. Anne spent her freshman year there, Natalia four months, Kelsey and Amy six weeks. Amber assisted an Italian professor in Florence for four weeks. Four more students visited Italy, from only two days to two weeks. Jalissa was born in Italy and spent there her first three years but never went back. The other eight students had never been to Italy. Most students who studied abroad reported limited opportunities for interaction and often felt isolated from the host culture: “I was with a group of American students all the time. [...] We were kind of isolated in our little Americanized bubble”. Similarly, the students who visited Italy only for a few days could get a personal glimpse of life in the country but their interactions with Italians were usually limited by their limited knowledge of the Italian language and by their role as tourists.

4.1.3 Learning About the Cultures of Italy

None of the participants studied Italian before college. For most students, the college classroom was their first contact with the Italian language and cultures. As outlined above, the courses of the basic Italian language program provide only limited opportunities for the study of culture. To integrate these opportunities, the Italian division organizes two weekly extracurricular activities to encourage students to interact in the foreign language and to expand their cultural knowledge. The first is a weekly conversation table led by the instructors of the Italian basic language program; the second is a screening of an Italian movie, in Italian with English subtitles. In the pre-activity questionnaire, students were asked whether they participated in these activities and what else they did to further their knowledge of Italy and its cultures. More than half of the students indicated that they watched Italian movies and interacted with Italian speakers, either in school or at home. Students also listened to Italian music and
engaged, to a lesser extent, in other activities, such as browsing Italian news websites and blogs. A few of them (N=4) also used social media to learn about “current lifestyle, makeup, and fashion trends in Italy” and to keep in touch with Italians they met while studying abroad.

4.1.4 Personal Use of Instagram

All but two students (N=16) already had an Instagram account and half of them accessed it regularly, even multiple times a day (N=9). It is interesting to note that while most students indicated that they regularly browsed their Instagram feed and posted pictures and comments, only three students usually browsed hashtags, the core activity of this project. On the other hand, most of the students (N=10) were already familiar with sending private messages on Instagram. As for the pilot study, every student in the class owned a smartphone and was able to use it to complete the Instagram portion of the activity – no accommodation was needed, i.e., moving the group chat to another instant messaging app with browser support.

4.1.5 Previous Experience with Using Mobile Devices and Social Media for Academic Purposes

Most students in the class had already used a mobile device to complete in-class activities and homework. Only three students did not report using a mobile device for educational purposes. All the other students had used a smartphone (N=13) or a tablet (N=5) either to complete online quizzes, to watch videos, to access translation apps, to do research for papers, to take notes, to access documents and textbooks, to complete online homework, or to access social media for class projects – or for a combination of these activities. A few students had also experience with using social media for educational purposes, especially Twitter (N=5) and Facebook (N=4). Only one student had briefly used Instagram in one of her classes but, having the option to use other social media outlets, she opted instead for Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook.
4.2 Pre-activity Worksheet: Collecting Information on Students’ Existing Knowledge of Italy and Italians

4.2.1 Completing the Worksheet

Before starting the intercultural explorations on Instagram, students completed an online worksheet with information, for each theme covered in the activity, on what they already knew about Italy and Italians. Students’ comments vary in length and depth. Sometimes, they wrote only a few words presenting some superficial information, “Sporting events, television, the cinema, the theatre, walking around town, and people watching are common forms of entertainment.” Some other times, students wrote more informed and articulated comments,

“In my opinion, Italians dress better than Americans. They are more put together. You will never see an Italian leave their house with socks, sandals, and athletic clothes. They wear skinny jeans, dress shirts, blazers, etc… Even people who are not rich dress well. Also, I find that Italian women wear less makeup than American women.”

This is especially true when students had personal experience of a specific topic,

“When I studied in Italy I found them to be so welcoming and warm!! Even though at first I did not speak a word of Italian, Italians were glad to see that I was trying. They appreciated the effort. In no time, I learned Italian because friendly salespeople and waiters were always willing to hold up a conversation with me, ask where I was from, etc… I thought that their interest in my culture was so nice. They always asked me questions and felt very friendly.”

Table 4.2 presents, for each theme, the number of students (out of 18) who completed the pre-activity worksheet and an example of what they wrote.
Table 4.2 Themes covered in the Insta-Inter unit, number of students who discussed each theme in the pre-activity worksheet, and examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way people look and dress</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Italians seem to dress a little more ‘fashion forward’ than Americans usually do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“Italians are very loving and affectionate. They kiss not only family but friends.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating and drinking habits</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“Food is an integral part of their social activities, along with coffee and wine.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular sports and social practices associated with sports</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“They play soccer and they don’t really play for schools but play after school for a league.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common recreational activities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Walking around the city is something I found that Italians enjoy in their free time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common forms of entertainment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Concerts, shows, sports, outside activities, shopping.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with work and the workplace</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Young people are typically not in high positions of power.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with school and education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“School is very different there. They take very difficult oral exams to graduate.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The layout of cities and towns</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“Many cities/towns have a plaza in the center.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products and practices that reveal a stereotyped or exaggerated view of a culture</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“A popular stereotype is that Italian men live with their mothers for a long time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How people relate to a different culture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“When I studied in Italy I found them to be so welcoming and warm!!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How people use social media</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“They don’t use it as commonly as Americans, but it is still used.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Students’ Existing Knowledge of Italy and Italians

Collecting information on students’ existing knowledge of Italy and Italians helped to situate and understand the process of IC development. Students’ knowledge greatly varies according to the theme. The only two themes every student commented on are eating and drinking habits and sports. For what concerns eating and drinking habits in Italy, some comments are stereotypes or overgeneralizations, “Coffee, pasta and pizza”, while others describe products and practices that one can easily learn in class or observe while visiting Italy, “Aperitivo is often taken prior to dinner”. The most accurate comments are from the students who lived in Italy, “I remember that Italians usually go to a café every morning to get coffee and something to eat. I remember seeing a ton of Italians eating their food standing at the counter which I thought was interesting”. However, these comments are not always free from the stereotypical and almost caricatural vision that some foreigners have of Italy, “Wine is also
necessary with dinner, and even lunch honestly because why not”. In some cases, even the students who have never been to Italy could describe with some degree of accuracy common products and practices associated with food, perhaps because they learned about the topic in a previous course. Students’ existing knowledge was far less varied for what concerns sports. Everyone indicated soccer as the number one sport in Italy and only a couple of students added a few words about cycling.

The majority of the students was also somehow familiar with patterns of interaction in Italy (N=17) and with the main characteristics of Italian cities and towns (N=12). For these themes, the difference between students who did and did not live in Italy is more evident. The comments of the students who lived in Italy are usually more accurate than the comments of the other students, which are, mostly, assumptions based on what they learned about Italy and what they already know about other European countries, “Europeans kiss on the cheek when they greet each other which I would assume Italians may do this as well”. ‘The way Italians look and dress’ is another fairly familiar topic (N=14) and a topic that students tend to stereotype. Regardless of whether they had been to Italy or not, they described Italians as commonly well-dressed and fashion-conscious, especially if compared to Americans, “Italians generally dress very well all of the time. They would not walk around in gym clothes as Americans do”. It is interesting to notice the level of details into which some students go. Barbara, for example, has never been to Italy and, according to her answers on the questionnaire, she learned about the Italian culture mostly through movies and videos. However, she seems to be familiar with common fashion trends in Italy, “I believe Italians […] commonly wear well fitted solid colored pieces without a lot of patterns or logos”. Similarly, Natalia, who spent four months in Italy and has a special interest in Italian fashion and music, goes into details when she points out that Italians “wear skinny jeans, dress shirts, blazers”.

The students have also some existing knowledge about the other themes covered in the activity. For what concerns school and education, their knowledge seems fairly superficial, when not imperfect, “School is very relaxed in Italy”, and influenced by their own experience as students, “Apparently taking a gap year between high school and college to travel is pretty common.”. Similarly, their descriptions of common recreational activities and forms of entertainment in Italy are mostly lists of activities that are popular worldwide, “Recreational activities for Italians include shopping, playing sports, and engaging in other outdoor activities”;

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and when they talk about how open Italians are towards other cultures they seem to apply to Italy
general and stereotypical traits of the Western societies, “I believe that urban Italians are very
forward thinking and open to other cultures but the older more traditional Italians want little to
do with other cultures.” Only a few students had some previous knowledge about practices
related to work and the workplace, probably influenced by the information on the textbook.
Finally, I may have involuntarily influenced students’ comments on social media habits in Italy.
When I visited the class for the first time, I showed some examples of Instagram posts shared by
Italians and made a quick comment on how Italians, in general, seem to use Instagram in a more
casual way that people from other countries, including the United States. Students’ comments
appear to repeat this information, “They use Instagram more casually than Americans.”

4.3 Instagram Explorations and Reflections: Developing Skills of Interpreting and Relating
and CA of Products and Practices of Italians

4.3.1 Using Instagram for Cultural Explorations and Cultural and Intercultural
Reflections

Students used Instagram to explore authentic and current Italian products and practices
and to share their cultural and intercultural interpretations and reflections. Every student in the
class could complete these tasks using the Instagram app, which has some exclusive features not
available through the website, including the chat. Only two students out of 18 did not have an
Instagram account before starting the activity; only three used their personal account to complete
the activity. Although these students could see the posts of the Italian users mixed with the posts
of other users, they were usually able to recognize the Italian posts, “I would know it's an Italian
user, first through their username and then the images. I don't know why but I would just know.”

4.3.1.1 Instagram for Cultural Explorations. The Insta-Inter unit lasted four weeks
and focused on twelve main themes (i.e., three themes per week, a new theme every other day
from Monday to Saturday) that I personally selected after consulting the literature and testing
their feasibility on Instagram. Every morning, I posted on the Instagram group chat a message
with the instructions for the day. A typical message included: A greeting, the theme of the day,
and a set of hashtags for students to explore, with the occasional explanation of words and concepts that students might not have known or struggled to understand (Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1 Example of a chat message with the instructions for the day.](image)

Students could start their daily explorations from one of the suggested hashtags or from their feed, browsing the posts of the Italian user they were following. Although every student followed all the Italian users that I suggested to follow, the thematic organization of the activities led students to explore more frequently the posts from the hashtags (59%) than the posts of the users, or to explore posts from both sources more or less evenly (35%): “I mostly looked at the hashtags. Every once in a while, I would just scroll through my feed, just to see the pictures. Like, when I was not doing anything.” The analysis of the videos taken during the interviews seems to confirm these data. When I asked students to replicate what they were usually doing on Instagram, everyone started from the chat; they looked for my last message and clicked on one of the hashtags that I shared. A hashtag homepage only presents thumbnails of the posts (Figure 4.2). Students usually scrolled down this page to look for relevant cultural information; they did
not follow my suggestion to open the first post of the hashtag and scroll down the page to also read the captions of the posts. Indeed, three out of four students (77%) indicated in the post-activity questionnaire that they read the captions only when a post struck their attention, “It’s the picture that you see first and when you go and explore the hashtag, you just see a whole bunch of pictures. And when the picture catches my eye, I read the caption.”

Figure 4.2 Example of a hashtag homepage on Instagram.

When students found an interesting post (Figure 4.3), they opened it and read its caption, in Italian or using the ‘See translation’ feature, which automatically translates the text from Italian to English, “First I was reading them in Italian and then translating them.” Some students found the captions useful to better understand the posts, “Italians write a lot in their captions, so it is important to read them for full context.” Some other students, instead, found most captions irrelevant and the number of hashtags on a typical Italian post overwhelming and detrimental to their understanding: “I wouldn't read the captions for all of them if the pictures were pretty self-
explanatory. Sometimes the captions were not related to the pictures”; “Scroll down through your feed of Italian users and you will see that almost every picture has a ton of hashtags.”

Figure 4.3 Example of an Instagram post.

4.3.1.2 Instagram for Cultural and Intercultural Reflections. When students found a post they considered meaningful, they shared it in the chat and started to type a comment. Students’ comments usually started with presenting the content of the post and, often, followed with a cultural or intercultural reflection (Figure 4.4). Sometimes, students built their comments on the messages of their classmates. When they had a doubt or wanted some more information about what they observed online, they also asked questions (N=25, out of 228 messages collectively sent), to me or to their classmates (Figure 4.5).
Figure 4.4 Examples of students’ messages on the chat: Reflections on Italian products and practices and cross-cultural comparisons.

Figure 4.5 Examples of students’ messages on the chat: Message built on previous messages and question to the researcher.
Students had to participate in the chat, at least, on four different days of the week to receive a full grade. While nobody shared more than one Instagram post per day and a comment, some days students posted a second or third message in reply to another message. Table 4.3 presents information on the number of days per week students posted on the chat, the weekly total of posts/day, and the total and the average of posts/day per student.

Table 4.3 Number of days per week in which students posted at least one message on the chat, weekly total of posts/day, and total and average of posts/day per student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jalissa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rocco</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amani</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kelsey</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Natalia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Mean 12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I designed the Insta-Inter unit to provide students with a regular contact with Italian products and practices and to help them to develop a regular habit of cultural and intercultural reflection. Although students were not required to post every day, they still had to access Instagram regularly to be able to complete the weekly online worksheets. When asked on the post-activity questionnaire how often they accessed Instagram, two students out of three replied that every day (24%) or almost every day (41%), usually once a day (77%), with two students
connecting even three or more times a day. However, the pattern of their messages on the chat follows a different distribution (Figure 4.6). Students posted consistently more from Monday to Thursday (the days of class) than on the other days. Because, students started to explore a new theme every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, they may have had less exposure to the themes that started on Friday (e.g., eating and drinking habits, common forms of entertainment, the layout of cities and towns, how people use social media). However, the findings related to cultural and intercultural awareness development presented below do not seem to confirm this assumption.

Figure 4.6 Distribution of chat messages over the week.

By sharing in the chat relevant posts and meaningful comments, students engaged in a process of knowledge building. For this process to be meaningful, students had to read each other messages. Almost two out of three students indicated in the post-activity questionnaire that they regularly read the messages in the group chat (53% always or almost always; 12% often), with only one student (out of the 17 that completed the questionnaire) indicating that he or she never read the chat. In general, students showed a positive attitude towards the opportunity to refer to previous comments and to use them to build their own message. Some students even accessed the group chat on their free time just to read the observations of their classmates, “I
would always read before what the people before me wrote. Sometimes, I just went in and read people things without even posting something.” However, some students considered the chat “less of a discussion and more of a presentation” and did not usually refer to what their classmates posted.

4.3.1.3 Using other Instagram Features. The Instagram portion of the unit takes advantage only of some features of the app; students were required to follow other profiles, browse hashtags, and share posts on the chat and, if they choose to do so, they could also interact with their classmates and me. However, some students also used other functionalities of the app, such as the related hashtags features and the Stories feature. For example, Natalia, who, by her admission, normally spends hours on Instagram, sometimes browsed hashtags suggested by the app and explored the profile of random Italian users tagged in random pictures, “I'm a stalker, an Instagram stalker”.

Only half class reported exploring the Stories of the Italian users they were following, but they did it only sometimes (47%). This is probably because the content of the Stories did not usually relate to the themes covered in the activity, as Amani explained, “I find the Stories useful, but they were like an additional thing.” Interestingly, some students – probably the ones who were more familiar with the app – also used the location feature to contextualize a post. It is the case, again, of Natalia, who used the location tag ‘Cortina’, a popular Italian winter destination, to interpret a picture of a group of people drinking in a bar as an after-ski activity, “Here I see a group of friends all dressed in dark colors and still look put-together, despite probably having spent the day skiing (location tagged as Cortina)?” It is also interesting to point out that no student interacted with Italian users, they just ‘hearted’ some of their posts – the Instagram equivalent of ‘liking’ a post, “I didn't comment because I am not confident in my Italian”.

4.3.2 Developing Skills of Interpreting and Relating

The Instagram activities presented above aim to foster students’ ability to find out information about the products and practices of a target social group – in this case, Italians in general – and to use this information to build up specific knowledge of that group (Figure 3.1).
Based on previous iterations of the activities, I knew that students had an existing understanding and literacy of social media and were able to use, or they could have quickly learned how to use, Instagram to complete the activities. What they needed to develop or refine, though, was their ability to extrapolate cultural information from the visual and textual elements of an Instagram post. For this reason, I run a training session before starting the project and I actively participated in the chat to support and guide students’ interpretations. For example, one of the hashtags that I suggested to explore while covering ‘Common practices associated with work and the workplace’ was #interrogazione (e.g., oral exam). Anticipating that not every student was aware of the significance of this word and the role it plays in the life of Italian high schoolers, I wrote a few lines explaining that oral exams are very common in high school in Italy. These examinations are administered in front of the whole class and are usually not scheduled; a student can be called at any time, any day. Without this information, the students would have probably not been able to fully understand many of the posts observed and to properly appreciate the similarities and differences between their experience as a student and the experiences of Italian students, “From what I've seen and heard about it, it definitely sounds like no joke. It seems a lot harder than what we have to do here in the US”. Similarly, I used the chat to integrate students’ observations with further information, “For Italian men it's not a big deal to hug or even kiss (on the cheek) another man”; to amend their interpretations when inaccurate or wrong: Student, “I don't know if tattoos and piercings are popular with Italians”, me, “Actually, tattoos and piercings have become very popular in Italy in the last few years”; and to reply to their questions: Student, “I never thought about bowling in Italy I just seems like such an American sport. Is it popular there?”, me, “Yes, bowling is pretty popular in Italy. It's probably not as popular as here but, definitely, it's a recreational activity Italians like to engage in”.

The chat is also a space where the students can build a shared understanding of the products and practices they observed and, together, establish relationships between what they observed and what is common in their home culture. For example, while exploring the hashtags for ‘Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection’, Amber noticed that “Italians seem to hang out in larger groups” than Americans. A few hours later, Amy shared a selfie of eight people eating in a restaurant and commented: “Like Amber mentioned, a lot of the pictures I saw were of large groups of friends going out to eat or to get drinks together”. This strikes her as “one main cultural difference” between the two cultures. Destiny went a step further and
interpreted the big tables of people she observed online as a way “to do a lot of socializing while getting drinks and/or food”. Students usually read each other’s messages and, sometimes, they build on each other (“we”) while interpreting and relating the information observed online: “I think this picture illustrates everything we have been talking about…”; “When exploring the hashtags associated with the workplace, we found…”; “Another difference we noticed…”.

By themselves or through my support and the support of their classmates, students were often able to appreciate the allusions and connotations present in the Instagram posts and to relate this information to information that holds similar significance in their home culture. The following chat message shows this process. Anne shared a picture of people walking under an arcade in Bologna and commented:

“I know this picture is more of the architecture but you can get a good look at what people dress like on an average day. The family on the left are all dressed in dark colors and the parents still look pretty fashionable, while the boy is a little more casual like most kids around the world are. You can also see the fancier coats worn by the woman and man in the background that are more fashionable than the usual coat that we Americans usually throw on over anything.”

Among all the posts under the hashtags and in her feed, Anne chose a picture whose main focus – the arcade – was not related to the theme of the day – how people look and dress. She did so to analyze some background information with the aim of understanding how people dress on an average day, not for a staged Instagram picture. She noticed the prevalence of dark colors and what she considered fancy coats; she interpreted this information as indicating that Italians dress “pretty fashionable”. Then, she compared the coats worn by the people in the picture with the coats that “we Americans” usually wear and concluded that the people in the picture – Italians – are overall more fashionable than them. Sometimes, students reversed this process and used their own experience as a starting point for comparisons, “Another thing that differs between Italian and American culture is how people present themselves. In America, especially in the younger population, it is very common to be out in public in gym clothes and sometimes even pajamas. This trend does not exist in Italian culture. They take a lot of pride in their appearance and are always looking their best when they are in public.”
Students’ previous knowledge and personal experiences, both in their home culture and in Italy, also played an important role in guiding their interpretations and comparisons. On the one hand, they helped them to select relevant information among the dozens of posts they browsed daily, which might not have always been meaningful or on topic. On the other hand, they might have had an adverse effect when students focused only on what they already knew – i.e., only on pasta dishes without noticing kebab sandwiches and sushi rolls – or on what was familiar – i.e., Kim was a former cheerleader and shared a post about cheerleading, a very uncommon sport in Italy.

Indeed, students often struggled to extrapolate relevant information from the images and captions they explored, and their cross-cultural comparisons were, sometimes, far from sophisticated. In several cases, they did notice a specific product or practice, but they failed to interpret it in its own context. For example, while browsing the hashtag for the University of Milan, Kim observed several pictures of the same historical building and courtyard. She could interpret these pieces of information in several ways, maybe focusing on the historical and symbolic value of a public university hosted in a Renaissance building. However, her only comment was: “It's so beautiful! I would love to sit on the grass and study.” Similarly, students sometimes failed to establish meaningful relationships between what they observed online and what they knew about their home culture. In the most extreme cases, their comments were as simple as “Food is definitely eaten on both sides” and “Italians dress better hands down”.

4.3.3 Developing CA of Products and Practices of Italians

The main goal of the activities on Instagram is to foster students’ CA of products and practices of Italians (Figure 3.1). While the instructions of the activity asked students to explore Instagram posts and to comment on products and practices of Italians, students, often, also engaged in cross-cultural comparisons with their home culture. The online worksheets that students completed at the end of each week specifically promoted this kind of comparisons for the development of students’ ICA of products and practices. Thus, although it is possible to find instances of ICA development already on the chat, these results will be discussed in the following section. Conversely, it is possible to find instances of CA development also in the
weekly online assignments and, to a reduced extent, in the final essays. For the sake of completeness, this section presents instances of CA development from all these sources.

Throughout the whole instructional unit, students discussed more or less equally cultural products and practices. Table 4.4 presents examples of CA of products and practices of Italians for each theme covered in the instructional unit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way Italians look and dress</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Almost everyone is wearing coats or jackets and long pants in this photo.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“I found a lot of posts of people dressing up for Easter, whether to go out with friends or celebrate with family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Scrolling through the hashtags I saw so many pictures of pets and it’s clear that a love for pets as part of a family is universal across cultures.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“Italians can be seen holding hands, hugging, and kissing not only their significant others but their family and friends as well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating and drinking habits</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“One thing I noticed was really popular in Italy was Nutella.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“Healthy eating in the workplace seems to be pretty common!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular sports and social practices associated with sports</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“I think this is a mascot for a team. I thought having mascots was an American thing but I guess not!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“So Italians do play basketball. I don't think it's as popular as soccer, volleyball, and rugby though.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common recreational activities</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Something learned from this picture (more specifically from the caption), music videos are also made in Italy. For some reason this surprised me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“This picture […] encapsulates all the posts I saw today of people out, enjoying the day and walking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common forms of entertainment</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“This video shows that #RapItaliano is a thing... which I was completely unaware of honestly.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“They listen to American songs (along with Italian songs of course) and read the Italian version of the same magazines.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with work and the workplace</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“This photo shows a woman in similar attire to that of an American woman's work clothes. It is professional.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“I noticed that many Italians go out to lunch instead of bringing it to their work and commonly go to a small cafe and eat a healthy lunch like this one while on break.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with school and education</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“In many pictures of the hashtag #inclasse, I noticed crucifixes above the blackboard.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“I looked through #liceoclassico, this image popped up. From what I understand, ancient Roman culture is being taught.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some themes seem to play a more important role in developing students’ awareness and understanding of products and practices of Italians while some others do not seem to particularly encourage students to look beyond what they already know. For example, most students could already identify some Italian food items and practices associated with food before starting the activities. In several cases, students’ existing knowledge (i.e., Italians eat pasta, Italians eat with the family) seems to direct and limit their observations and reflections. Although in some occasions, students did notice and reflect on new and peculiar products and practices, for this theme, students seem more willing to confirm their existing knowledge than to look for new information: “I guess italians really do love their coffee. I think there is some truth to that stereotype”.

Some other themes seem to encourage much more the development of students’ awareness and understanding of products and practices that are typically Italian. One of these is how people commonly look and dress. Both the students who lived in Italy for a time and the students who had never been there agreed, in the pre-activity worksheet, that Italians generally “care about their appearance” and that they “dress less casual” than Americans. However, the constant exposure to this topic and the peculiarity, in the eyes of some students, of what they were observing appeared to stimulate their observations and interpretations. Thus, a student
noticed that a young woman added “a lot of small details (like the rings)” on “very casual outfits” to “keep the overall look from being too plain”. Similarly, other students noticed that Italian men dress “in fitted clothing” and are, in general, “fashion forward and may even dress a bit feminine by American standards”. One interesting interpretation for this information is that “there are different social norms for Italian people” and that “what is expected of Italians in terms of what to wear and how to look, is different than what is expected” in America.

Other themes seem to stimulate students’ interest and curiosity. For example, while browsing the hashtags related to sport, students discovered that “Italians don't only play soccer. Other sports are valued as well” (i.e., basketball, volleyball, rugby, swimming, skiing, snowboarding). This is also due to the hashtags I selected, which expressly covered several sports in addition to soccer. Another theme that stimulated students’ interpretations and reflections is ‘Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection’. As for other topics, students frequently noticed and reflected on new information despite almost everyone had some existing knowledge on the topic. Thus, they were surprised to “see men being very affectionate towards each other” and to see people hanging out in big groups of friends. Emma, who had no existing knowledge of the theme, interpreted this information as that “Italians seem to show affection to everyone, like kisses and hugs, it doesn’t matter whether they are male or female.” Likewise, Lisa noticed that Italians “seem to be very affectionate with the people they love” but they do so “modestly”; her interpretation is that “the way they would hold/look at each other in the pictures showed much more love than what was initially led on.”

4.3.4 Missing Information and Misinterpretations

To conclude this section, it is important to mention that students developed CA also thanks to what they expected to see online but they did not see. Although it was not very frequent, students used their own cultural parameters to realize that something was missing from the posts of the Italian Instagram users. For example, they noticed that Italians do not have an equivalent of the “tailgating phenomenon” and that they do not seem to binge drinking alcohol as much as people from other cultures – or, at least, they tend to not celebrate it. This missing information helped students to better frame the target culture and to establish meaningful relationships with the home culture.
On the other hand, not every student always interpreted properly the content of the Instagram posts. In some cases, they did notice a product or a practice but jumped to wrong conclusions that might have interfered with the development of CA and ICA. It is the case of Brooke, who interpreted a picture of a private screening of a movie as if it was taken at a movie theater; her message included reflections on the difference in luxury between cinemas in America and in Italy. Similarly, Amani misinterpreted a picture of paper mache food sculptures in school as if it was common in Italy to engage students in such active learning experiences as cooking. Interestingly, it was another student who addressed the misunderstanding.

4.4 Weekly Online Assignments: Developing ICA of Products and Practices, Skills of Discovery, and CA of Perspectives

4.4.1 Completing the Weekly Online Assignments

Students explorations on Instagram lasted four weeks. At the end of each week, students completed an online worksheet that prompted their reflections on the three themes of the week. Every student completed the four worksheets but Robert, who only submitted three. Students could access the weekly worksheet at the beginning of each Saturday and had to submit it by the end of the following Tuesday. Thus, students had four full days (e.g., Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday) to complete and submit their work. While some students preferred to upload their documents over the weekend, most students usually waited until Monday or Tuesday.

Each worksheet has two sections. The first section asks students to describe, for each theme of the week, the main similarities and differences between foreign and domestic products and practices. This section invites students to use their interpretive and comparative abilities to engage in cross-cultural comparisons for the development of ICA of products and practices. The length and depth of their comments greatly varies but it is usually consistent. Some students consistently wrote short and superficial comments (Figure 4.7) while some others regularly engaged in deeper analysis and wrote richer comments (Figure 4.8).
Week 2

Your name: [ERASED]

*Please, read carefully the instructions*: The assignment has two parts. In the first part (1), focus on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. In the second part (2), focus only on the Italian culture.

1. For each of the following topics, describe the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture:

   a) Popular sports and social practices associated with sports.
   **Similarities**: Sports are a popular pastime in America and Italy.

   **Differences**: In Italy, soccer and basketball are some of the most popular sports, while in America, football and basketball are some of the most popular sports.

   b) Common recreational activities.
   **Similarities**: Bowling and playing with dogs in the park are very popular activities.

   **Differences**: I honestly didn’t see any significant differences.

Figure 4.7 Example of the first section of the weekly online assignments: Short and superficial comments.

The second section of each worksheet prompts students’ reflections on the perspectives of Italians by explaining how to identify a perspective and by asking a reflective question for each theme of the week. These questions aim to encourage students’ reflections on perspectives without asking directly about them. This way, students could reflect on perspectives in general without the obligation of associating one to a specific theme. Although some of their replies were not particularly articulated or showed little effort, students often strived to uncover and explain the beliefs and values of the Italian macro-culture. The following are two answers to the question, “What do the recreational activities Italians engage in say about them and the Italian culture?”:

“I would say they are a very laid back culture in that they don’t seem to be too picky about their recreational activities, as long as they are with friends.”

“Italians seem to value two things a lot; spending time with friends and spending time outdoors. Most posts having to do with recreational activities involved people being in
large groups of friends and mostly partaking in some outdoor activity such as sports, or hanging out in the park.”

Both students replied properly to the question. However, the first student merely mentioned a preference of Italians without identifying any perspective. The second student, instead, started her reply by successfully identifying two perspectives, e.g., Italians value spending time with friends, Italians value spending time outdoors.

Week 2

Your name: [ERASED]

*Please, read carefully the instructions*: The assignment has two parts. In the first part (1), focus on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. In the second part (2), focus only on the Italian culture.

1. For each of the following topics, describe the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture:

   **a)** Popular sports and social practices associated with sports.
   
   *Similarities*: Both countries consider volleyball more a women’s sport. Both in USA and Italy, sport viewing is a social activity. Both countries consider sports an important part of life, both participating and viewing.

   *Differences*: While sport watching is a social activity in both countries, I feel like in Italy, going to a bar to watch a game is less common. They probably prefer to watch the game at a friends house with a big group of friends and acquaintances.

   **b)** Common recreational activities.
   
   *Similarities*: Both cultures value friendship and social life is an important part of recreation. Both cultures like to go out and spend the night drinking, dancing, partying, meeting new people.

   *Differences*: Both cultures value friendship but I feel like Italians hang out in larger groups than do Americans. Based on what I saw in Instagram, it is common to gather at someone’s apartment with a large group of people – in the US, people prefer to go out rather than be in someone’s house, and they usually do so with a smaller group of people.

Figure 4.8 Example of the first section of the weekly online assignments: Rich comments.
4.4.2 Developing ICA of Products and Practices

Students’ ICA builds on their interpretations of the products and practices they observed online and on their ability to relate them to corresponding products and practices in their own culture. As mentioned before, students already engaged in cross-cultural comparisons and showed instances of ICA development in the group chat. However, it is the first section of the weekly online assignments that consistently promoted the development of students’ ICA of products and practices (Figure 3.1). The worksheets prompted students’ reflections on cross-cultural similarities and differences for each theme covered in the activity besides stereotypes – the analysis of the assignments and comments of the students from the pilot study suggested not to include a comparative section for this theme in the Week 4 worksheet. Table 4.5 presents examples of ICA of products and practices from both the worksheets and the group chats:

Table 4.5 Examples of ICA of products and practices for each theme covered in the Insta-Inter unit besides stereotypes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way Italians look and dress</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Women’s make-up has overall more coverage, but goes for a lighter look than American make-up that is trending towards dark colors and heavier lines.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“Italians seem to try to look nicer most of the time rather than just every once in a while, which is how most people here in the U.S. dress.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Italians seem to be more open to public display of affection with their significant other. There were a lot of pictures of couples kissing in public places.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“I can consider those sharing my culture to only be affectionate at certain moments, while Italians are constantly affectionate sharing kisses as greetings and hugging even strangers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating and drinking habits</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Italians like small pastries and a coffee for breakfast while we will usually go for something heavier like eggs and bacon with orange juice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“The frequency of eating with loved ones and around a table seems to be more frequent with Italians than Americans, who usually save that for some grand occasion and also eat on the go most of the time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular sports and social practices</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Alcohol is present at sporting events in both countries.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>associated with sports</td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“I think there seems to be a lot more equality of gender in Italian sports fans. In America, men still dominate most of the sport culture.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Factor</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common recreational activities</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“I wouldn't say that in Italy they have more parks in general than in America, but maybe more parks with playgrounds or jungle gyms for children to play on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“Ages for clubbing were very different. In America, once someone graduates college it is less normal for them to “go out” except to a bar, but from the Instagram posts it seemed there were Italians close to 30 who still enjoyed a night of dancing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common forms of entertainment</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Italians seem more interested in foreign films than most Americans even though the foreign films are usually dubbed into Italian from their native language.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“One difference between the two cultures is that Americans don’t really tend to watch foreign movies.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with work and</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“This photo shows a woman in similar attire to that of an American woman’s work clothes. It is professional.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the workplace</td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“The only difference I could see from the Instagram pictures is I believe commuting via metro is much more common in Italy than it is in the States. Most of us drive to work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with school</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“In America in public schools it is illegal to represent any religion specifically in the classroom where as in Italy the cross is displayed above the board.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and education</td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“Italians appear to have more school assemblies than America does, in one instance showing a school that’s allowing the auditorium to be used to show some alternative school work to everyone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The layout of cities and towns</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Italian streets can get pretty narrow and there are lots of areas that are pedestrian only, which is uncommon in America.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“Preservation efforts seem to have been made in both countries in order to keep older/historic buildings still accessible for the modern public.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How open Italians are towards other</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Americans tend to find interest in American based cartoons, super heroes etc. Italians find interest in American based cartoons and characters also instead of only Italian created characters.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultures</td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“The Italians embrace other languages much more than the people in my American newsfeed. Often they had hashtags in English and Italian where I’ve rarely seen an American do that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Italians use social media</td>
<td>Prod.</td>
<td>“Italians have more pictures of family members while Americans may have more pictures of themselves.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prac.</td>
<td>“The main difference I noticed is that Americans seem to use social media a little more seriously. I noticed that the photos Italians post on Instagram seem to be more authentic and in the moment instead of extremely posed and edited.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The observations on Instagram helped students to become aware of both intercultural similarities and differences. When it came to present or discuss products and practices that are similar in the two cultures, students’ comments were often thoughtful and on point. Sometimes,
students noticed in the Italian posts products and practices that are common also in their home culture, “Italian and American women look similar in hair styles and make up, for the most part; like having straight hair, wearing bold lipsticks and having long eye lashes.” Some other times, they tried to find a common denominator between what they observed online and what was familiar to them, “Like Italian le piazze, southern Florida has open-concept spaces that serve as the city-center where people come to shop and relax.” Some other times, yet, they seem surprised to find product and practices they thought were only ‘theirs’ and never associated to Italy and Italians, “I've never thought about the military being a part of Italian culture.” Finally, sometimes, their comparisons are just hasty and superficial, “Food is definitely eaten on both sides.”

Their reflections on cultural differences were usually equally on point but were often more articulated. Sometimes students simply compared products and practices, “The women wear less makeup than the U.S. but it is brighter, such a bright colored lipstick or black eyeliner. I find that American women focus more on makeup and less on their clothes– Italians do the opposite.” More often they go to greater depths in explaining how a similar product or practice differs in the two cultures,

“I see a lot of graduation pictures where individuals (both male and female) are wearing these wreaths of leaves it looks like? It seems like a traditional Italian "graduation cap". It probably symbolizes/represents something regarding the history of education in Italy.”

As for the similarities, there is also room also for shallow and trivial comparisons, “Italians and Americans use social media to post pictures of their friends and themselves.”

Social media is one of the themes that stimulated the most interesting comparisons, although, for this theme, it is not clear what the students’ references for their home culture are; most likely, peer Instagram users. Some students found that Italians and Americans used Instagram in a similar way; they “found similar jokes and memes, interactions between friends, and similar sentimental captions towards their loved ones”. However, there are some major differences. Apart from including foreign words and sentences in their captions (mostly English but also Spanish) and from profusely using hashtags (something that feels ‘retro’ to some students), Italian users “don't try to exclusively Instagram big events or special moments like we
tend to in the US”; they use Instagram in a more “casual and quotidian” way, “similar to the way Americans would use Snapchat”. Italians “don't always post really high quality or aesthetically pleasing pictures” but multiple pictures a day, sometimes even “multiple photos of the same object”. Some students appeared surprised by these differences and interpreted them as differences in priorities between the two cultures, “What is important to them is different than what is important to most Americans”.

Students’ reflections on common forms of entertainment are also worth mentioning. Besides some shallow comment on the similarities in entertainment between the two countries, “Both have movies, social media and music”, students also noticed some substantial differences. For example, they noticed that “Italian singers/famous people tend to be older than American famous people” and that “Italians seem more interested in foreign films than most Americans”. These comparisons, however small, stimulated students’ reflections on the values that underlie the Italian macro-culture and how they relate to their own values.

4.4.3 Developing Skills of Discovery

The Insta-Inter unit encourages students to start the process of IC development from their existing knowledge and to build upon the online observations to autonomously discover the perspectives that underlie the products and practices observed (Figure 3.1). Students did so without direct contact with Italian Instagram users but through the analysis of their posts. For example, students browsed every day several posts related to a specific theme, noticing what products Italians use and what practices they engage in. This information often stimulated students’ curiosity and encouraged them to reflect on what lies behind these products and practices, “I’ve seen numerous posts of Italians engaging in a wide array of sports, therefore I get the impression that they hold sports to a high standard as physical activity is key to health.” Moreover, the weekly worksheets were specifically designed to develop students’ ability to discover new information, with a set of reflective questions, i.e., “In your opinion, why do Italians eat and drink the way they do?”.

This process of discovery was generally autonomous and led students to acquire interpretative knowledge. However, students could also rely on short interactions with the researcher and on the messages of their classmates to integrate and guide their reflections and
discoveries. In some cases, students elicited information on products and practices they did not know or seemed peculiar to them. For instance, Jalissa shared a picture of an Ouija, a product that is rarely seen in an Italian household, wondering whether “spirits and superstitions” are “a big thing in Italy”. Students asked questions also when they lacked a piece of information that could help them to better understand and contextualize what they observed online. For example, Amy (and many other students) noticed that Netflix was very popular in Italy. Wondering whether watching Netflix follows the same general pattern in Italy as in her home culture, she asked, “Do Italians watch TV (and Netflix) as a social event or as a solo activity?”. I always tried to answer to the best of my knowledge, trying not to appear all-knowing, so that students could use this information to integrate their observations and reflections, “It's less than one year that Italians have access to Netflix and people seem to really like it. I would say that they watch it pretty much as Americans do, more as a solo activity or with their significant others.”

Finally, students took advantage of the information that other students shared on the chat to uncover philosophical perspectives. The following is a series of messages posted by three different students on the same day:

Amber: “From what I’ve seen, Italian women seem to wear bright red lipsticks the most. I think it’s interesting because Americans wear a large variety of colors and nudes or dark tones seem to be more popular here than in Italy.”
Natalia: “For me these girls exemplify typical Italian style- bright lipstick, simple makeup, brows, straightened hair. Italian women dress very sleek and they have a unique style... among a group you can almost always tell who is the Italian.”
Amy: “Like Natalia, I noticed that Italian women have a typical style too! When I studied abroad, I found it was easy to recognize Italian women because they always look so put together, even at the grocery store. I think it’s awesome that Italian women dress to impress on a daily basis. American women do too, but I think it’s more normal to see super casual outfits, like leggings and a tshirt, out in public in America. I didn’t see any Italian women wearing Nike shorts and tennis shoes, haha.”

Two more related messages followed without adding new information or deepening the analysis. While Amber started the thread focusing on the makeup of Italian women comparing it with
what is common in her own culture, Natalia built upon her personal experience in Italy to interpret this style as typically Italian. Amy, who had also been to Italy, integrated the previous messages with reflections on why Italian women dress the way they do – they “dress to impress” – and related this information to how women generally dress in her culture. These references to previous messages are a form of student-student interaction and might have had an influence on students’ reflections and discoveries. Destiny was in the same group chat as Amber, Natalia, and Amy; her reflections at the end of the week indicates that she took into account what her classmates discussed:

“I also noticed that people in Italy were more dressed up than Americans. Americans have a more casual, athletic sense of style. Italians were dressed up to go to the grocery store in some posts. This implies that Italians value physical appearance and beauty.”

4.4.4 Developing CA of Perspectives

During the unit, students used their cultural and intercultural knowledge and their skills to identify what lies behind the products and practices they observed online. They did it occasionally in the group chat, more frequently in the weekly online assignments (Figure 3.1), and, to a lesser extent, in the final essay. The following comments are an example from the online assignments. They are not particularly elaborate but show students’ ability to autonomously develop awareness and understanding of philosophical perspectives:

“I think that the recreational activities of Italians show how important family and friends are to them, since it seemed like a lot of Italians spend a lot of time with their friends and involve them in a lot of their activities.”

“I saw a lot of pictures in the classroom with a cross above the blackboard. I think this says that Italians are strong in their beliefs and value religion.”

Table 4.6 presents examples of CA of perspectives for each theme covered in the instructional unit:
Despite students discussed perspectives mostly on assignments shared only with the researcher, they seem to agree on what the core perspectives of Italians are. Whether they focused on one theme or the other, these are the ones that recurred more frequently:

- “Italians value relationships”: Students believe that Italians are very community-oriented and value spending time with people, whether they are family and friends or coworkers.
- Italians seem “open and honest with their feelings”: Students believe that Italians consider showing affection as a strength rather than a weakness.

- “Italians care about their health”: Students agree that Italian Instagram users seem to be very conscious of what they eat and of the importance of physical activity.

- “Italians are very accepting of other cultures”: Students interpret Italians fascination and familiarity with foreign products and practices as a sign of openness. However, they also believe that Italians “are very proud of their culture” and beliefs.

- Italians “care about their appearance” and “the opinions of others”: The many posts that show Italians well-dressed on almost every occasion suggested to students that Italians care about being always presentable and making a good impression.

- Italians value taking time off and enjoying life: Students reinforced this belief not only through the many posts that showed Italians engaging in recreational activities but also through the posts that showed a somehow relaxed work atmosphere.

I shared these perspectives with Italian acquaintances of different geographical origins and asked them whether they think these perspectives can be generally applied to Italians. Everyone replied affirmatively, with some doubts only for what concerns their openness towards other cultures. Indeed, there is no right or wrong answer and students’ perceptions of Italy and Italians may vary according to several factors, including previous knowledge, how much time they dedicated to the activity, which posts they analyzed, and how they interpreted the information. For example, both Amber and Brooke browsed the hashtags related to work and the workplace in Italy and actively participated in the group chat. However, their opinions about how Italians approach work are almost antithetical. Amber indicated that Italians “have a relaxed attitude about work”, while Brooke suggested that Italians are hard-working and “very proud” of what they do. Amber may have based her comment on posts that showed informal work habits, such as taking selfies, enjoying lunch-breaks out, and hanging out with coworkers. Brooke, instead, might have based her comment on more formal posts that presented an actual work situation. These differences in observations and interpretations were not surprising and may have guided the development of students’ awareness and understanding in one direction or another.
It is also worth mentioning that students were not always successful in identifying perspectives. The questions on the worksheets were open-ended and did not explicitly ask students to associate a perspective to a theme. Sometimes, students seemed to identify a perspective that underlies certain cultural products and practices, but they struggled to properly phrase their thinking. For example, the two comments that follow seem to imply that “Italians value relationships” but do not express this perspective clearly: “Sports represent social gatherings in Italian culture, as this is known to be important in that culture”; “The layout of Italian cities has created, over centuries, a very social culture”.

4.5 Final Essay: Developing Skills of Interpreting and Relating and ICA of Perspectives

4.5.1 Completing the Final Essay

To successfully complete the Insta-Inter unit, students had to write a short final essay (about 250 words) comparing and contrasting perspectives of Italians with perspectives that hold similar significance in their home culture (Figure 3.1). The assignment opened online on the last Saturday of the activities on Instagram and had a deadline of Thursday night of the following week, only two days after the deadline for the fourth weekly online assignment. I set a relatively short deadline to allow students to take full advantage of their recent explorations and reflections to critically approach and evaluate perspectives. Almost every participating student completed the assignment on time, with only a few students completing it slightly after the deadline. Examples of poor and good essays are presented below along with a discussion of ICA development of perspectives.

4.5.2 Developing Skills of Interpreting and Relating

The skills of interpreting and relating play again an important role in students’ ability to establish intercultural relationships, this time between philosophical perspectives (Figure 3.1). Students were not guided in comparing perspectives but only prompted by the instructions of the final essay. As for the weekly worksheets, they did not share their reflections with their classmates and they did not receive feedback. Thus, while the sequence of activities aims to
foster the development of knowledge and skills for the development of IC, students’ cultural and intercultural awareness and understanding of perspectives may not always be accurate.

4.5.3 Developing ICA of Perspectives

Some students already engaged in cross-cultural comparisons of perspectives in the weekly online assignments. However, the essay format gave them more space and opportunities to reflect on their cultural discoveries on Instagram and to establish relationships between the beliefs and values of different cultures. Thus, although it is possible to find instances of ICA development of perspectives in both the worksheets and the final essay – and, on a couple of occasions, even in the chat –, the final essay presents the largest number of instances and the most interesting observations. Table 4.7 presents instances of ICA development of perspectives per each theme covered in the instructional unit besides stereotypes.

While the final essay expressly prompted students to reflect on the perspectives of Italians and to compare them with corresponding perspectives of their home culture, not every student was equally successful in discussing them. Some students were hardly able to advance from the surface culture of products and practices and to reflect on the significance they have in different cultures. This unreflective, factual approach is particularly evident in Barbara’s final essay:

[…] What I have noticed over this time is that Americans and Italians are not very different from what I have gathered from Instagram pictures in a general sense. They try different foods, appreciate other cultures, go out with their friends, post selfies, play sports, make friends at work, etc. Though I have noticed that Italians tend to be more chic than Americans who tend to dress for comfort, depending on the state and city. Italians wear clean and well fitted clothing that is all very unique to their person while Americans tend to follow larger trends. Also after seeing many meals that Italians have posted they tend to eat much fresher and healthier foods than Americans do who have an obsession with fast food chains and frozen meals. It also appears that Italians cook far more often than Americans who commonly will use premade meals a few times a week. […]

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way Italians look and dress</td>
<td>“I believe Italians care about their appearance way more than Americans do, I think that is very valued in the Italian culture.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection</td>
<td>“Both Italians and Americans revolve around relationships. It is apparent that both cultures place an emphasis on creating loving and lasting relationships with family and friends.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating and drinking habits</td>
<td>“One thing I did find to be true was how much Italians value eating healthy. Americans definitely also value food, but Italians do it in a much healthier way.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular sports and social practices associated with sports</td>
<td>“I’ve seen numerous posts of Italians engaging in a wide array of sports, therefore I get the impression that they hold sports to a higher standard [than Americans] as physical activity is key to health.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common recreational activities</td>
<td>“Going to parks and plazas to walk around shows that Italians enjoy being relaxed and spending time with family rather than doing something more exciting and potentially stressful like Americans tend to do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common forms of entertainment</td>
<td>“Italian singers/famous people tend to be older than American famous people. That probably has something to do with how Italians view age versus how Americans view age. We see it as a bad thing while Italians see it as good and honorable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with work and the workplace</td>
<td>“I think that the practices associated with the workplace in Italy highlights that Italians put a large emphasis on their work, just like Americans do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common practices associated with school and education</td>
<td>“Both cultures very much value knowledge and wisdom; however, the way they go about education shows the integrity of the Italian education system. The idea of the interrogazione would terrify Americans, as we are taught how to study for a test on a set day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The layout of cities and towns</td>
<td>“I think the sheer beauty of the cities and towns give Italians a great appreciation of life and the ability to stop and look around instead of driving headlong into their careers and expectations like Americans do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How open Italians are towards other cultures</td>
<td>“Italians and Americans both seem interested in other cultures. In both my Italian class and regular Instagram accounts, there’s an overall willingness to explore other cultures.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Italians use social media</td>
<td>“Americans, as a whole, seem to post more pictures of themselves on their instagrmas, showing that they place a high value on physical appearance as a way of identifying themselves. […] But Italians seem to post more pictures of experiences or relationships, showing the emphasis that Italians place on the other people in their lives and what they do.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Her whole essay is a cross-cultural comparison of products and practices. She started with some similarities between Italians and Americans and continued with a list of differences for several themes. Barbara only focused on surface-level information and missed the opportunity to go beyond factual knowledge. Her case is not isolated. A few other essays focused mostly on contrasting products and practices, with the occasional comparison of perspectives.
Another obstacle to developing a fair and detached ICA of perspectives is positive sentiments towards the other culture, a certain ideal vision that does not always correspond to reality. This is especially evident when the participating students compared what they identified as beliefs and values of Italians to the beliefs and values of their home culture. For example, Kim has never been to Italy and, from what she wrote in her final essay, it seems that she had developed a skewed vision of the country and its cultures:

The biggest difference I noticed were the different values the cultures had. For instance, Italians value relationships with family and friends much more than Americans do. Italians also value hard work, while Americans find the “easy way out” and try to do everything with as little work as possible. Both cultures very much value knowledge and wisdom; however, the way they go about education shows the integrity of the Italian education system. The idea of the interrogazione would terrify Americans, as we are taught how to study for a test on a set day. Learning for a test is not truly learning. It is purely memorization. One thing I did find to be true was how much Italians love their food. Americans definitely also value food, but Italians do it in a much healthier way. Their meals are slower and usually a social gathering, while Americans will often eat alone. This, again, shows the value of relationships in the Italian culture. With that, I found it interesting that Italians always seemed “dressed to impress.” Fare una bella figura is extremely important, while many Americans leave their house in sweat pants and overall look very sloppy. Again, this shows the value of relationships and making good connections. […] Overall, Americans seem to be a less refined, lazier version of the Italian culture.

In her opinion, Italians appear to be somehow superior to Americans for what concerns the importance they give to interpersonal relationships, hard work, education, healthy lifestyles, and other people’s opinion. While her reflections seem based on what she observed online, her one-way interpretations and comparisons were probably influenced by her positive attitude towards Italians and a seeming negative vision of her home culture. However, while one could easily question the value of Kim’s intercultural reflections, it is important to point out that she properly identified and contrasted philosophical perspectives. What it seems to be missing is
some help to overcome her positive predisposition and to assume a more distant, objective point of view.

Several other students integrated their cross-cultural comparisons of products and practices with reflections on perspectives. Natalia’s essay is a good example of how a student can use her knowledge and skills to autonomously interpret, discover, and contrast cultural information:

[...] Among all hashtags, I noticed the sense of family of friends an integral part of Italian culture. In all hashtags, from #BuonaDomenica to #Scuola, there were selfies taken with friends and family. I saw so many pictures of grandmothers and selfies with coworkers and classmates. Italian society seems to value elders more than they do in America. I don’t think that a teenage boy in America would post a picture with his grandmother. That would be viewed as uncool. American culture values youth and it’s reflected in Instagram. Not only elders, the group dynamic seems more prevalent in Italy. On Instagram, people post tons of selfies taken with their coworkers. They make friendships easily and seem like they enjoy the people they work with. In America, the work environment is less casual. People don’t want to make friends with their coworkers, they don’t hang out with them outside work hours. This stems from the aspect of Italian culture which really values group ties and bonds. Perhaps this is why there exists mafia in Italy? Groups seem to be more important. This aspect of Italian culture made me believe that American culture is more individualistic. [...] 

Natalia seems to follow all the steps in the sequence of activities. She browsed the suggested hashtags and noticed several selfies that included friends and family members, including grandmothers. Then, she contrasted this practice with similar practices in her culture, highlighting the differences between the two cultures (“I don’t think that a teenage boy in America would post a picture with his grandmother”). She used this information to reflect on a perspective of the target community (“Italian society seems to value elders”) and to contrast it with a corresponding perspective of her home culture (“American culture values youth”). Then, she repeated the process to highlight and emphasize once again the differences in values between
the two cultures – the “Italian culture”, which “really values group ties and bonds” versus the “American culture”, which is “more individualistic”.

4.6 Developing Attitudes for the Development of IC

The foundation of the process of IC development is in the attitudes of the learner (Figure 3.1). Without the proper attitudes (e.g., curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment, ability to decenter), students cannot develop skills and acquire knowledge for the development of IC. These attitudes are in contrast with attitudes that promote and reinforce preconceived ideas about the other and contribute to hinder mutual understanding (e.g., prejudice and stereotypes, positive sentiments). The following sections present information on students’ attitudes towards Italy and Italians that helps to better situate and understand the process of IC development.

4.6.1 Stereotypes and Positive Sentiments

The pre-activity worksheet asked students what stereotypes they knew about Italy. Many of the stereotypes students described are not exclusively about Italians but can also be associated with Italian Americans (e.g., being loud, gesturing while talking, being family-oriented and over-attached to the mother, eating pasta and pizza, drinking wine and coffee, being passionate and flirtatious). Other stereotypes appear less frequently on the worksheets and seem more properly ‘peninsular’ (e.g., playing soccer, riding Vespas, and eating Nutella).

Throughout the activity, students also shared positive impressions of Italy and its citizens. The positive sentiments they expressed can be more easily associated with the Italian peninsula than the stereotypes. For example, although a student had never been to Italy before, she described Italy as “one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen”. Similarly, Italians were depicted in the chat and in the weekly worksheets as “relaxed and fun”, very fashionable, and health conscious. After exploring a few hashtags about eating and drinking habits in Italy, a student even wondered if she had not seen Italians binge-drinking alcohol “because they have better lives” than Americans. These benevolent stances came from both the students who had already been to Italy and those who had not.
The analysis of the students’ messages on the chat and their comments on the worksheets and final essay shows that positive sentiments may influence students’ interpretations and reflections. In some cases, students appeared very enthusiastic about Italy and Italians. Some students even showed some form of resentment towards certain aspects of their home culture, “[The] American culture, especially on Instagram, has the tendency to be very vain and ‘Ooooh, look at me! Look at me!’”. However, students do not seem to apply a positive filter to everything they see. For example, Deborah’s attitude towards Italy and Italians is overall positive. In her worksheets, she described Italians as “open […] and welcoming” and as people who like to enjoy life. However, most of her messages and comments did not show a particularly positive attitude towards Italians. For example, when writing about common forms of entertainment in Italy, Deborah simply noticed that they are “very similar to America”. When she described the general differences between the two countries for what concerns school and education, she pointed out, with a certain degree of approval, that “the college culture of America is a lot stronger than in Italy”.

On the other hand, stereotypes seem to have a stronger influence on students’ observations and reflections. Stereotypes are unconscious and automatic and some students struggle to overcome them while conducting their intercultural explorations. For example, a student wrote on the pre-activity worksheet that “Italians are known for […] caring very much about their appearance”. Similarly, after one week of observations on Instagram, she wrote on the worksheet that “Italians value the opinions of others on their appearance”. Likewise, another student pointed out at the beginning of the activity that Italians usually have “pasta, pizza, Nutella, and strong coffee”. One week later, after exploring several hashtags and posts on Instagram, her description of what Italians usually eat and drink is not very different: “They eat a lot of pizza, pasta, and have a lot of fresh foods”.

4.6.2 Attitudes that Promote the Development of IC

If learners want to engage in successful intercultural interactions, it is important that they approach a foreign culture with attitudes of curiosity and openness. While several factors may influence the degree to which students are curious about and open to other cultures, this analysis only focuses on how students approached what they observed online. Some students were
“genuinely curious” about what they saw on Instagram and wondered what some of the products and practices they observed online mean for Italians. Sometimes their questions were just a way to express their mental elaborations but most of the times they were direct questions to the researcher and to their classmates:

“There is another tag for #pallavolomaschile [e.g., men’s volleyball], hinting that female is the default?”
““This post for me seemed interesting, mainly because of what the actual Instagram account says and what it appears to be showing. Which is ‘Scuola di Politiche.’ I'm genuinely curious if this is a special kind of class? Is it an actual school? Is it for high school students or college students?”

Some students were especially curious about practices that are unusual in their home culture. For example, many students noticed how close some Italians users seemed to be to their coworkers. Selfies at the office, people hugging each other, and nights out with peers and superiors seemed peculiar to many and something worth noticing.

However, not every student was always open to the novelty and to what is different. It is the case of Jalissa, who had never been to Italy and only had a limited previous knowledge of its cultures. During the first week, she noticed that Italian bars are usually crowded and that personal space is often reduced. After sharing a post of one of the Italian users she was following, a bar owner from Sicily who often posted pictures of the crowd at his venue, she commented, “If I walked into this place I would immediately turn around. Thats just too much social interaction for me haha”. This attitude, however, is not very common among the students, especially if compared with the many instances of openness towards new information that can be found on the chats and on the worksheets. For instance, students find interesting and surprising that swimming, skiing, and roller skating are popular sports in Italy and that some Italians use laurel wreaths as graduation caps.

Students seemed also open to products and practices that challenge their preconceived ideas and expectations. For example, some students believed that Italians are generally accepting of other cultures. However, while exploring the hashtag #soloinamerica (e.g., only in America), Brooke found out that not every Italian is open to eating spaghetti in a can, “This
picture shows that Italians are not always open to products that other cultures make.” The following message is also worth mentioning:

“In many pictures of the hashtag #inclasse, I noticed crucifixes above the blackboard. Is this a typical feature of Italian schools, even public ones? I went to a catholic high school and we also had crucifixes, but here in a public school […] we wouldn't have one. Maybe religion is so important to Italy that it is OK to have a crucifix in a public classroom?”

Here Natalia, a Brazilian born, points out a detail recurrent in many posts related to school and education, the crucifix. While the Catholic religion is not foreign to her home culture, her comments show openness towards the unusual and readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to the other.

This attitude is not rare among the students in the project. Several other comments show students’ readiness to suspend judgment, but there are exceptions. Jalissa, the same student who would have walked out from a crowded Italian bar, on several occasions, could not avoid using her own cultural filter to reflect on what she observed on Instagram. While talking about the informality of some of the posts in the workplace, she does not seem as open and curious as other classmates:

“Do Italians even work? It was hard to find any picture of a person in a uniform or looking like they were doing work. Everyone was eating… and everyone looked relaxed. They have hour long lunch breaks. That’s not common in America.”

On the same worksheet, she also commented that she did not understand why Italian universities do not have campuses and that “it sucks” that every undergraduate student in Italy has to write a dissertation. Other situational factors may have influenced her reflections during that week but, in general, she seems less able than other students to relativize her own experience during an intercultural encounter.

Students should also be able to distance themselves from the products, practices, and perspectives of their own culture to better comprehend them and to better appreciate alternative cultural viewpoints. The frequent, yet virtual, contact with a foreign culture and the almost daily
engagement in intercultural reflections appear to stimulate students’ ability to relativize their own meanings and behaviors and to look at them from the perspective of an outsider. The following example comes from a final essay and is a clear testimony to this attitude:

“In this activity, I primarily noticed that Italians are very open with their emotions and do not equate masculinity with feelings, much like Americans will do. In Italy, the masculine nature still allows for men to be honest and upfront about their feelings for each other, a stark contrast with American masculinity that cultivates an image of ‘manliness’ involving a total lack of emotional contact.”

Of course, this is only one of the many examples that help to uncover the process of decentering and developing intercultural understanding. It is interesting to note that even the students who seem more judgmental and less open towards the other are able, to a certain degree, to decenter from their own experience. Jalissa, for example, wrote in her final essay that the worth of Italians “comes from the people they surround themselves with. Americans are much different in this aspect. We focus on success and accomplishments. Our worth is determined by how much we have and people are only good if they are useful.”

Conversely, several comments appear to endorse ethnocentrism, especially for what concerns products and practices related to entertainment and recreation. For example, students “love that Italians have access to mainstream American culture” and that “they do the same family bonding things” the Americans do (e.g., playing bowling). For other students it is “good to know that Netflix is a universal thing”; they do not seem to worry about potential threats of cultural homologation nor to be especially curious about native forms of entertainment. However, while some of their cross-cultural reflections on these topics were not especially brilliant, “Both cultures like to watch movies, sports, and do shopping”, students also managed to go beyond what is familiar to them and to relate it to the context of the Italian users,

“Different forms of entertainment I saw on Instagram show that Italians consume a lot of entertainment not from their culture. They use a lot of American entertainment but are proud of everything that they produce themselves. Italian entertainment also seems to be
geared towards groups rather than individuals, showing how important human interaction is to Italians.”

4.7 Analysis of Individual Cases

This section presents two individual cases of students who participated in the study, Anne and Amani, and describes how the Insta-Inter unit helped them to develop IC.

4.7.1 Anne

“I was looking a little more to kind of confirm what I knew just from my experiences.”

Anne spent the first semester of her college freshman year in Italy. This study abroad experience had a strong influence on how she approached the activity. On Instagram, she was mostly looking to confirm what she learned during her stay in Florence, focusing on familiar products and practices and reflecting on perspectives she had already grasped. The analysis of her chat messages and online assignments reveals that there are some evident parallelisms between what she already knew about Italy and Italians (pre-activity worksheet) and what she discussed during the activity. For example, during the first week, she shared a couple of messages about how Italians look and dress, commenting, “Italians seem to try to look nicer most of the time rather than just every once in a while, which is how most people here in the U.S. dress.” This comment is not very different from what she wrote during the activity, “Italians seem to dress a little more ‘fashion forward’ than Americans usually do.” However, she did make the effort to look for revealing details in the posts, for example, when she described what passers-by were wearing while taking a walk on a normal weekday. The sum of existing knowledge and new information informed her cultural and intercultural reflections on perspectives. On the weekly online assignments and final essay, for example, she commented on the importance that Italians give to fare una bella figura, e.g., making a good impression. Then, she contrasted this typically Italian belief with the belief of her home culture that a good look makes people “appear better or more successful”.

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In the post-activity interview, Anne confirmed that she intended the activity as a way to draw parallels between what she already knew and what she was observing on Instagram. She did so not only through careful observations but also by asking questions on the chat every time she was curious about something or she needed more information to properly interpret a specific product or practice. For example, when she found a picture of people attending a soccer game, she wondered whether every team in Italy had such fervent supporters as the team from Florence, which she once saw playing. Later that week, she asked whether Italians watch dubbed versions of foreign movies or the original with subtitles. My reply, “All the foreign movies are dubbed”, helped her to complete the weekly online assignments and to develop ICA on the topic, “Italians seem more interested in foreign films than most Americans even though the foreign films are usually dubbed into Italian from their native language.”

In her opinion, the instructional unit meets its goal of encouraging students’ cultural and intercultural reflections and discoveries. While she recognized that other class activities can also help to reach this goal, she pointed out how Instagram allows students to observe a foreign culture through the eyes of a foreigner. She especially liked being able to see how individual people feel and live their life without the uncomfortable filter of her presence. In her opinion, these observations can help students to start to distance from their home culture and to reflect on their own beliefs and values, “It definitely makes me think a little more in depth about what American culture is about, what our perspectives are on everything you took for granted.”

Anne would like to go back to Italy. She explained that, next time, she would feel a little more prepared to live there and to interact with Italians, “because, you know, the first time I went there I knew absolutely nothing except pizza and pasta.”

4.7.2 Amani

“The favorite part was just being me as someone who is open to learning about other cultures, just seeing everything, whether it's reading the stories or looking at the pictures.”

Amani spent only two days in Italy during her high school senior trip in Europe. Although very brief, that experience encouraged her to approach the study of the Italian language and to declare Italian as her college minor. When she started the activities of the unit, Amani
had already some knowledge of how Italians live and feel, especially by watching movies and online videos. Her comments in the pre-activity worksheet went beyond the stereotypes and denote some familiarity with products, practices, and even perspectives of Italians, something that it is not always true for her classmates.

The Insta-Inter unit gave her the opportunity to delve deeper into the life and beliefs of Italians – and she gladly took it. While students had to post on four different days of the week to receive a full grade, she regularly posted five or six times, “Sometimes, it was like ‘I'm not sure if I posted four times’ but, sometimes, I honestly would just be like ‘OK, I find this interesting, I'll put it in’.” Her observations on the chat are usually rich in details. While she focused her analysis mostly on the pictures, she often read also the captions, in Italian on in translation using the ‘See translation’ feature. Her messages usually started with a description of the products and practices in the picture and followed with some cultural or intercultural reflection or with a reflection on the perspectives underlying the behaviors of the Italian users,

“Swimming didn't seem like a common sport to me, but Italians engaging in swimming reflects their value in health and longevity. Now I know that this is a more common sports practice to the point that young Italians engage in it at an early age.”

Her worksheets are equally rich, with comparisons that go beyond the description of factual information to include reflections on meanings and connotations in both the foreign culture and her home culture – or rather, cultures.

Amani is bi-cultural. Although she was born in South Florida, her parents are both from the Virgin Islands. She grew up in a Caribbean-American household, “like we live in South Florida but we still associate ourselves with the island.” Thus, her intercultural reflections mostly used this cultural identity, “my culture”, as a reference. However, sometimes she turned to her Southern Floridian (or American) identity to compare and contrast products and practices that are foreign to Caribbean-Americans, “Italians who live in areas that snow engage in snow sports like skiing, snowboarding, and riding jet skis. This is also common here in America for places that get snow!” In one occasion, she even included the three cultures in one intercultural reflection:
“Even on their worst days, Italians dress nicely. My assumption is that the common American tradition of ‘Casual Fridays’ does not exist in Italy. My culture works differently, we continue to dress professional, but not as stylish as most Italians.”

Amani’s attitudes, knowledge, and skills helped her to uncover Italian perspectives with a surprising regularity. Her replies to the questions on the weekly online assignments almost always included a reflection on perspectives, “Italians value dressing nicely regardless of their destination or the specific occasion. The importance of dress in Italian culture allows me to infer that Italians value the opinions of others on their appearance.” Similarly, her final essay is rich in intercultural reflections:

[...] Italians value things such as family/personal relationships, a strong work ethic, cultural awareness, health, and personal success. Caribbean-Americans value similar things as well. We hold personal success and work ethic to the utmost standard. With Italians, these values were seen in the importance of education (graduation photos) and pictures of young adults at work. However, Caribbean-Americans are less likely to venture outside of their culture simply because unknown territory is “dangerous” or “unusual”. Italians, on the other hand, take pride in their own culture, but can indulge in the practices and products of others without hesitation. Rather than miss an opportunity, they are not afraid to try something and comment on their experience. Italians also value health and the necessary physical steps to prolong longevity. They are a more adventurous people who like to think and act “outside the box”. This is pertaining to sports, other outdoor activities, trying new foods, etc. Caribbean-Americans stick to what they know. We value living a productive life even if one isn’t the healthiest. We’re a sedentary people who see doing adventurous things as dangerous or disadvantageous.

Amani’s ability to identify and contrasting cultural beliefs and values may be the result of her habit to look with a certain detachment at the cultures of both her household and her American surroundings. Amani seems to be approaching her bi-cultural identity already from a third place and this in-between cultural stance definitely prepared her to critically approach a
third culture. Her intercultural reflections and discoveries are, indeed, a clear sign of her ongoing development of IC.

### 4.8 Students’ Reactions and Suggestions for Improvement

#### 4.8.1 Students’ Reactions to the Insta-Inter Unit

The anonymous post-activity questionnaire asked students to rate on a five-point Likert scale a set of sentences related to the Insta-Inter unit. A total of 17 students (out of 18) completed the questionnaire. Table 4.8 presents a summary of the students’ responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I liked to use Instagram to explore the Italian culture of everyday life.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This activity helped me to learn a great deal about the Italian culture of everyday life.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This activity helped me to reflect about the beliefs and values of the Italian culture.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This activity helped to increase my awareness and understanding of the similarities and differences between my own culture and the Italian culture.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This activity helped me to reflect on my own culture.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The messages that my classmates and the researcher sent in the group chat helped me to learn more about the Italian culture.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this activity, I feel I am better prepared to navigate everyday life in Italy.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this activity, I feel I’ve become more open towards other cultures.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll continue following some of the Italian users I’ve been following on Instagram.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students seem to like the instructional unit. A few students commented that they really enjoyed it because “it was something I would've never done on my own and I feel like I learned a lot.” Most students felt that the unit helped them to learn about common products and practices
in Italy and to reflect on the perspectives of Italians, as well as their own. They especially liked
that Instagram allowed them to look “into the lives of people who live in a foreign country” and
to “be a part of their personal life without the tourist gap”. No student complained about using
Instagram in an educational setting, “I was already using my time to be on Instagram so it was
cool to learn something in the process.” However, they did recognize the limits of approaching a
foreign community through a social media filter, because Instagram “only gave us a selective
view of the lives of Italians, making their lives seem a little more polished than they may actually
be.” Most students felt that the instructional unit helped them become more open towards other
cultures and better prepared to navigate everyday life in Italy. Nevertheless, more than half class
does not seem inclined to continue on their own the intercultural explorations on Instagram.

The biggest logistical challenge that students found was to remember to post. Some
students overcame this obstacle by setting a daily reminder on their phone or setting the app to
send a notification every time that a fellow group member posted on the chat. Although they
usually received relatively few notifications a day (every group posted an average of 6.5
messages per day), some students found the notifications annoying, “The message notifications
stressed me out sometimes because I was always being notified.”

Finally, students liked the possibility to interact with a member of the target community
whenever they had a doubt or a question, as “it helped clear up confusion and better understand
the culture”. The following comment is especially interesting as it highlights the importance of
having someone who guides students’ intercultural observations and reflections without
imposing his or her own point of view:

“I liked that you monitored the chat, I think that kind of keeps people on track. I liked
that you said many times that you didn’t really know what was going on in the picture,
that you don’t know everything. You were very upfront if you didn’t know, that
definitely came across, as when you said, ‘I’ll ask my brother’. It came across that you
wanted to help us to understand and you weren’t like just ‘I always have the right
answer’. It was very helpful, it was really kind of guiding, it gave us a little more insight
into the culture that we might not otherwise had.”
4.8.2 Suggestions for Improvement

Students wrote in the post-activity questionnaire a few suggestions to improve the Insta-Inter unit. A few students suggested to reduce the number of required postings per week from four to three (or two) and to provide more opportunities for interaction and collaboration. Some students suggested dedicating “a portion of class to facilitate face to face discussion about culture rather than only through the Instagram messages”, especially because “we all shared very great concepts but we did not discuss them”. Students also suggested changing the requirements of the activities, maybe requiring posting in the chat only from Monday to Thursday (or Friday) and setting the deadline for the worksheets on Sunday night, “To me, that would've been less confusing and easier to remember.” Some students would have also liked to expand the Instagram observations “with readings and other material” to be able to access more information before posting in the chat. Finally, a student had “an intriguing idea for a new activity”, “Exploring hashtags got repetitive. Breaking each of those up and having to try to communicate with one of the users we follow in Italian would be extremely helpful in both learning the culture and the language.”

4.9 Summary

Students engaged in the Instagram chat in a process of knowledge sharing and knowledge building that helped them to develop skills of interpreting and relating and to acquire cultural knowledge of products and practices, especially of the most unfamiliar themes. By completing the individual reflective assignments, students also developed ICA of products and practices and used their developing skills of discovery to develop CA of foreign perspectives. Even if students completed these assignments individually, they agreed on what the core perspectives of Italians are. Some students were also successful in establishing cross-cultural relationships and showed instances of ICA development of perspectives. Some other students, instead, were hardly able to advance from the surface culture of products and practices and to reflect on the significance that specific products and practices have in different cultures. In general, students reacted positively to the Insta-Inter unit, although some of them found it challenging keeping up with the frequency of participation required.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion

This study introduces a pedagogical sequence that integrates Byram’s framework of intercultural competence (IC, 1997) with the National Standards’ cultural framework (1996) and the concepts of cultural and intercultural awareness (CA and ICA). The sequence can help foreign language instructors to design pedagogically-structured learning opportunities that guide students’ intercultural explorations and reflections for the development of IC. The study also presents the Insta-Inter unit, an Instagram-based instructional unit designed on this sequence. Students used Instagram to explore posts shared by Italian users and to share their cultural and intercultural observations with their classmates and me. Moreover, they completed a set of individual reflective online assignments aimed at developing their IC. The study analyzes how this unit helps foreign language students to develop IC through the development of CA and ICA of cultural products, behavioral practices, and philosophical perspectives.

The National Standards (1996) advise that foreign language students “need to have access to the richness of the cultures of the languages being studied”; in particular, they “need to learn about everyday life and social institutions, about contemporary and historical issues that are important in those cultures, about significant works of literature and art, and about cultural attitudes and priorities” (p. 27). These objectives are not very different from the type of knowledge that Byram (1997) suggests learners should acquire to become intercultural speakers (i.e., knowledge of events and significant individuals, political and economic factors, telecommunications, modes and means of travel, public and private organizations, myths, historic sites, regions and regional identities, education system, religious institutions, conventions and taboos, distinctions in social class, ethnicity, gender, profession, and religion). For the Insta-Inter unit, students focused specifically on the culture of everyday life in Italy as represented on Instagram. They did it autonomously, following instructions and resources that directed their attention to specific cultural components and intercultural processes. The declarative knowledge they acquired aims to integrate both their linguistic competence and their developing knowledge of the cultures of Italy (knowledge that also encompasses the notions of
formal cultural expressions learned in class) and has potential to become procedural knowledge in situations of intercultural contact. For this reason, the instructional unit is not meant to replace but supplement other educational practices that can prepare students to become interculturally competent speakers.

The general conclusion of this study is that using Instagram for intercultural explorations and reflections can help students to acquire knowledge and develop skills that lead to the development of IC. However, students’ ability to develop awareness and understanding of the relationship between foreign and familiar products, practices, and perspectives is influenced by their ability to extrapolate meaning from the information they find online and by their attitudes. Several factors may influence the success of students’ intercultural explorations and reflections but one condition seems to play a fundamental role for the development of IC, namely, the appropriate balance between instructional guidance and students’ autonomy.

Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) encourages students’ autonomy for cultural and intercultural learning. Similarly, the pedagogical sequence presented in this study provides a step-by-step approach to cultural and intercultural learning that students can follow autonomously if properly directed. One way to reach this goal is to provide students with instructional guidance, especially during the first stages of intercultural discovery and reflection (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). An important question is what kind of guidance and how much of it is desirable to foster students’ autonomy. The answer varies according to the context but should always consider, first, students’ preparedness to undertake the task.

The participating students had no previous experience with cultural explorations and intercultural reflections in an educational setting. However, they all had some existing, albeit often superficial, knowledge of Italian products and practices and could use this information as a starting point for interpreting what they saw online and relating it to products and practices of their home culture. According to Byram (1997), these abilities do not necessarily involve interaction with foreign interlocutors and can be exercised autonomously by the learner. Nevertheless, as O’Dowd (2006) points out, “such an understanding of culture and the related skills of interpreting and relating cannot be taken for granted in language learners and they should therefore receive explicit training and development by the teacher” (p. 127). With this suggestion and the suggestions of other CALL researchers in mind (Hubbard, 2013; Prichard, 2013), I went to the class to train students to extrapolate cultural information from the visual and
textual elements of an Instagram post and to infer perspectives from this information. Moreover, I selected a set of themes, hashtags, and users to guide students’ explorations and to allow them to easily navigate the vastness of cultural information available on Instagram. I also regularly monitored the chat, participating every time that students had a doubt or a question or were missing or misunderstanding some important information. The chat is also a good source of peer-to-peer support and guidance. Most students regularly read their classmates’ messages and, in many cases, they used this information to shape their cultural and intercultural reflections.

According to van Lier (1996), “Teaching […] at best can encourage and guide learning. The impetus for learning must come from the learners, who must want to learn” (p. 12). While students’ will to learn is key, the foundation of the process of IC development is in the attitudes of the learner. Students should be willing to relativize their own experience and be open to discovering alternative meanings, beliefs, and values if they want to become interculturally competent speakers. Such stances allow the learner to interpret new information about a foreign culture from a third place (Kramsch, 1993), a place that lies between one’s own ‘languaculture’ and the ‘languaculture’ of a foreign community (Agar, 1994). Byram (1997) describes this willingness to suspend belief about one’s own culture and to explore alternative cultural viewpoints as the ability to ‘decentre’. This ability, combined with attitudes of curiosity and openness, enables the learner to acquire new knowledge of a culture and “to discover alternative perspectives on products and practices in both the home and target cultures” (O’Dowd, 2006, p. 119).

Most students were “genuinely curious” about what they observed online and were open to integrate and challenge their existing knowledge of Italy and Italians. Some students were also able to critically approach the beliefs and values of their home culture and to establish relationships with the foreign beliefs and values they discovered, or at least they started the necessary process of distancing. Indeed, the Insta-Inter unit is designed to help students to progressively distance from their own cultural view and to assume a detached stance from both cultures (Kramsch, 1993). However, on several occasions, students were not able to overcome their ethnocentrism and resorted to their own cultural filter to approach and analyze the information they observed online. Because this is not uncommon, students would have probably benefited from an increased guidance from the researcher during the phase of explorations, especially in the form of comments and reflective questions.
The analysis of Anne’s and Amani’s cases, and of students’ production in general, suggests that students’ previous experience abroad does not play a decisive role in shaping their attitudes and in fostering their knowledge and IC. The students who lived in Italy for a few weeks or months, as Anne, had a first-hand experience of its everyday life and could describe with some degree of detail the products and practices they observed, especially when they were closely related to their personal experiences. However, this existing knowledge, seem to steer and narrow their cultural discoveries and intercultural reflections. On the other hand, the students who had never been to Italy or had been there only for a few days, as Amani, might have had less previous exposure to Italian products and practice but, overall, their comments were not dissimilar, for quality and quantity, from the comments of the other students. While they may not have had the same initial references as the other students, their cultural discoveries and intercultural reflections were less constrained by their personal experience.

Actually, students showed more instances of CA development for the themes they were less familiar with (i.e., the way people look and dress, dynamics of interaction, sports) than for other more familiar themes (i.e., eating and drinking habits). For those themes, students relied more on their own observations and on what their classmates shared in the chat than on their existing but limited cultural knowledge. These findings highlight once more the importance of assisting students during the first phases of cultural explorations to encourage them to look beyond what they expect to see and to help them to refine their ability to interpret and relate unfamiliar information.

I designed the activities on Instagram to stimulate knowledge sharing and knowledge building and the weekly online assignments to foster students’ autonomous discoveries and reflections. Students’ analyses are spontaneous on the former medium and prompted by instructions and reflective questions on the latter. While students’ production on the worksheets is the result of their individual reflections, these documents often present echoes of what was collectively shared and discussed in the chat. Therefore, it is not surprising that students’ cross-cultural comparisons of products and practices and their reflections on foreign perspectives are often analogous, even if they did not share this content with other students. However, on occasions, students also reached different or antithetical conclusions. For example, after browsing several posts, Bethany and Audrey had very different opinions on how Italians approach work and the workplace, i.e., Italians value hard work, Italians take work easy.Both
opinions are equally valid and reflect the heterogeneity of the content that students explored online, which, in turn, reflects the cultural heterogeneity within Italy.

While designing the Insta-Inter unit, I chose to give students autonomy for discovering and comparing perspectives. This instructional choice presents benefits but also drawbacks. The main reason for keeping students’ reflections private is to minimize, in words of Holliday (1999), “reductionist overgeneralization and otherization” of the Italian culture at large. Students did not have instruments and capabilities to identify different cultural groups within the ‘Italian culture’ and tended to use a ‘large’ culture paradigm to analyze what they observed online. Also prompted by the instructions of the activities, students talk in general about Italians and the Italian culture and not about, for example, northerners and southerners or people from Genoa and people from Naples, only to mention a few possible distinctions within the Italian national culture. Nevertheless, students’ reflections are based on the analysis of a set of individual posts and describe products and practices of individuals “who share the same native language” but may “belong to different cultures” within the Italian nation (National Standards, 1996, p. 41). Then, the development of students’ awareness and understanding of the perspectives of the ‘large’ Italian culture is influenced by the specificity of the posts they analyzed and by their ability to properly interpret the cultural information embedded. The risk of having students share their individual discoveries and reflections for what concerns philosophical perspectives is to add a further layer of generalization to the development of students’ IC, especially through the likely possibility that students seek a convergence on what are the most characteristics perspectives of Italians.

Nonetheless, students do need some sort of scaffolding for the development of CA and ICA of perspectives (O’Dowd, 2006). Because students did not receive any guidance or feedback while discovering perspectives, some of them struggled to identify or to properly formulate foreign perspectives, with negative consequences also on their ability to establish cross-cultural relationships. On the other hand, some students were successful in identifying perspectives and establishing relationships but their positive sentiments towards Italy and Italians negatively affected their development of IC.

O’Dowd (2006) highlights the fundamental role of the teacher in the process of IC and ICC development. One of the sections of his book presents a telecollaborative email exchange between two groups of German and American students. O’Dowd frequently asked his German
students to share their exchanges in class and, when necessary, he gave them feedback that helped them to approach critically the cultural information they received:

Unless Janette had been challenged by her teacher to look at the behaviour from a non-German cultural perspective, she would probably not have tried to find out more about the cultural context in which the information of her partner's mail was based. In other words, instead of trying to analyse the information and understand its significance from the point of view of someone from that culture, she would have simply chosen to react to the mail – by judging its content with her own cultural standards and principles. Instead, our in-class discussion seemed to have an effect on how she and others approached the analysis of mails (p. 128).

Without guidance, students “are often unable to analyse and interpret the data they receive from the target culture” (O’Dowd, 2006, p. 144). While this seems true also for some students in this study, it is important to note that every student was able to autonomously identify some foreign perspectives and, to a lesser extent, to establish cross-cultural relationships between perspectives.

These results suggest that the Insta-Inter unit can be used in foreign language education to foster the development of students’ IC. However, students could benefit from more guidance and opportunities for feedback throughout the whole sequence of activities. While detailed instructions can help to scaffold students’ observations and analysis, they may not be sufficient to properly sustain the development of knowledge and IC in a process that becomes increasingly sophisticated. Sometimes, students may need further guidance to look beyond familiar products and practices and to properly identify and interpret new information. A continuous instructional support can help students to focus and refine their cross-cultural comparisons of products and practices and to use this knowledge to identify and relate perspectives. At this stage, the instructor can only offer advice that guides students’ own reasoning, with occasional insights that help them to integrate their knowledge and to improve their skills for the development of IC. This support, however, seems necessary until students’ have reached a certain degree of autonomy for the development of IC. Some students in the project seem to have come close to reach this goal while some other students would have certainly benefited from further instructional guidance.
In any case, Instagram offers interesting possibilities for the development of students’ IC. Future research will help to overcome the flaws of the Insta-Inter unit and the limits of the study and will contribute to advance the understanding of how Instagram and other social media tools can help students to become interculturally competent speakers.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study suffers from several limitations, including a design limitation. Although the study presents a case that shares many characteristics with a typical North American foreign language classroom, a multiple-case design, or even just a two-case design, would have reduced possible bias or critiques related to its uniqueness and artifactual conditions (Yin, 2009). Another important limitation of the study is the duration of the activities and its impact on the development of students’ IC. While the Insta-Inter unit extends over almost six weeks, students’ explorations and interactions on Instagram only lasted four weeks. This relatively short exposure to the foreign culture may not have been sufficient for some students to properly acquire knowledge and develop skills for the development of IC. Moreover, the rapid succession of themes covered in the unit (a new theme every other day) may have hindered the possibility for students to delve deeper into each theme, with possible negative implications for the development of CA and ICA. Future studies should allow for more exposure to each theme and give students the opportunity to thoroughly reflect on its cultural and intercultural implications.

The results of the study may have also been influenced by students’ unfamiliarity with some of the themes covered in the instructional unit. For example, some students might not have been acquainted even in their home culture with some themes, such as sports and the workplace, and may have lacked the adequate existing knowledge to establish meaningful intercultural relationships. Future studies should include questions on students’ existing knowledge of the themes covered in the instructional unit also for what concerns their home culture. Finally, the development of students’ awareness and understanding of foreign products and practices might have been influenced by students’ ability to understand the textual elements of an Instagram post. Although students could always translate the captions using the ‘See translation’ feature, some students might have struggled to properly understand and interpret the meaning of a post. Researchers interested in replicating this study should also collect information on students’
reading abilities in the foreign language to be able to better explain how exploring social media posts can influence the development of students’ IC.

5.3 Implications for Instructional Design

This study explores how the Insta-Inter unit helps to promote the development of foreign language students’ IC. While most students showed some degree of IC development, the unit presents several limitations that should be considered, and possibly addressed, before implementing it. The first limitation resides in its contrastive approach. While both Byram (1997) and the National Standards (1996) promote a contrastive approach for the development of students’ IC, Guest (2002) identifies several “potentially adverse effects” (p. 154) associated with it. Levy (2007, pp. 107-108) summarizes these effects as follows:

1) Oversimplification of the richness and variety within cultures leading to "caricature" rather than a deeper understanding.
2) Reducing cultural understanding to discrete declarative propositions about a culture.
3) Binary logic failing to reflect complex realities.
4) Reducing a culture to monolithic, static categories.
5) Encouraging stereotypes, "used to exacerbate adversity, and not to encourage mutual respect."
6) Detailing differences can lead to withdrawal of interest in another culture.
7) Increasingly cultural boundaries are becoming blurred and intermingled.

Students’ comments in the chat and the online assignments often suffer from one or more of the first five problems listed above. The same nature of Instagram and the binary cultural approach embedded in the activities may encourage a superficial apprehension of foreign and familiar cultural phenomena, with the risk of promoting “over-generalisation, stereotyping, and a resulting inability even to ‘see’ characteristics that do not fit [students’] preconceptions” (Phillips, 2010, p. 50). Although problematic, however, “a contrastive approach is unavoidable” in foreign language education (Levy, 2007, p. 112) and can be used as a springboard for a deeper, more focused analysis.
A second limitation of the Insta-Inter unit resides in its ‘big’ culture approach. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) warn about the danger of limiting cultural observations to “the all-too-familiar stereotypical icons of the target culture” (p. 11) presented in guidebooks and instructional materials. One of the dangers of exploring Instagram posts of generic Italian users is, precisely, that students may interpret this information as related to “a fixed national culture, aligned to political entities, with widely shared national characteristics” (Godwin-Jones, 2013, p. 2). Guest (2002) suggests to “focus on the properties of individuals or character types rather than cultures at large” (p. 157) to avoid this ‘large’ national approach. Future practice and research, thus, should aim to break the monolithic image of a target culture and adopt a ‘small’ culture paradigm (Holliday, 1999) that allows students to approach the cultural reality and variety underlying a foreign language or a foreign country. For example, students could use Instagram to explore posts from different regional cultures within a country, to observe different cultural groups within a state, or to examine popular subcultures and their unique expressions.

A third limitation of the unit resides in the autonomy for intercultural explorations and reflections. From a pedagogical point of view, this study provides foreign language instructors with an instrument to design learning activities that encompass the study of all three components of the National Standards’ cultural ‘triangle’ and not only of products and practices, as is common in the language classroom (Cutshall, 2012). However, despite their effort to properly interpret and relate information from the source culture, students may not always be prepared to make appropriate judgments (Godwin-Jones, 2013), especially for what concerns philosophical perspectives. Furstenberg et al. (2001) advise of the importance of student interaction to negotiate the meaning of raw cultural data. Similarly, Levy (2007), following Guest (2002) advice, suggests taking advantage of “new technologies” to promote students’ direct engagement in “small scale interactive models/methods” (p. 112). While several digital media can serve this scope, Instagram seems especially suitable for both exploring information from a ‘small’ culture and interacting with people from that culture. Future practice and research should apply a pedagogy of multiliteracies to telecollaborative tasks (Helm & Guth, 2010) and observe how an Instagram-based instructional unit helps to foster the development of students’ ICC. For example, students could use Instagram to complete a set of tasks modeled on the *Cultura* project (Furstenberg et al., 2001) and to interact with their distant peers through comments and group messages.
Finally, there are limitations related to the development and implementation of the unit. The time required to prepare and run the activities can discourage other researchers and instructors from replicating the study. For instance, finding good hashtags and users may prove challenging for any language but it is especially challenging for languages associated with more than one national culture (i.e., Spanish, French) and for world languages (i.e., English). One solution is to look for hashtags that include words and expressions used exclusively within the target social group. For example, the hashtag #amore (e.g., love) cannot be used to show common displays of affection in Italy as it is used worldwide to aggregate romantic posts. Instead, instructors should look for more specific hashtags, such as #semplicementenoi (e.g., just us) or #ilmiosorriso (e.g., my smile). Hashtags are also ‘fragile’ as their content may quickly become unsuitable for the finalities of the activity (i.e., too many ads, posts out of topic). Although it may be time-consuming, it is important to always revise the hashtags before sharing them with students and, when necessary, substitute them with more appropriate hashtags. If finding good hashtags proves too complicated or time-consuming, it is recommendable to select several users to follow and to design activities that focus mainly on their posts and stories. Moreover, not every student may have access to a smartphone or may be able to regularly connect to the Internet. Foreign language instructors should consider providing technological and pedagogical alternatives to go beyond limitations of availability and accessibility that may affect students’ participation.

5.4 Conclusions

Foreign language educators can take advantage of the affordability and widespread diffusion of personal computers and mobile devices to design activities that require students to explore current and living representations of a foreign social group. Particularly, they can take advantage of the content shared by worldwide social media users to provide students with a regular exposure to cultural information that is authentic, current, and timely. Such information can help students to deepen their cultural and intercultural knowledge of products, practices, and perspectives and to develop intercultural competence. The appropriate balance between instructional guidance and students’ autonomy can encourage students to take responsibility for their own cultural and intercultural learning and empower them to become autonomous, life-long
learners. By facilitating students’ awareness and understanding of diverse cultural perspectives, foreign language instructors prepare them to become informed global citizens who can navigate a culturally diverse world.
APPENDIX A

THEMES AND HASHTAGS

• The way Italians look and dress: #semplicementenoi, #bellagente
• Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection: #amicibelli, #amicemie, #ilmiosorriso, #sempreinsieme, #imieinonni
• Eating and drinking habits: #italyfoodporn, #cucinando, #pranzoitaliano, #beviamo, #colazionealbar, #pranzodelladomenica, #aperitivando
• Popular sports and social practices associated with sports: #serieatim, #allostadio, #pallacanestro, #pallavolo, #italrugby, #campionatiitaliani #campionatoregionale, #campetto
• Common recreational activities: #alparco, #seratealternative, #settimanabianca, #giovedisera, #aspasso, #gitafuoriporta
• Common forms of entertainment: #musicaitaliana, #rockitaliano, #salaprove, #cantautori, #cinemaitaliano, #alcinema, #italia1
• Common practices associated with work and the workplace: #allavoro, #vitadaufficio, #vitadapendolari, #lavoratori, #colleghipazzi, #pausapranzo
• Common practices associated with school and education: #inclasse, #liceoclassico, #interrogazione, #universita, #vitadauniversitari, #unimi
• The layout of cities and towns: #piazzeitaliane, #vicoli, #passeggiandoperroma, #centrostorico, #milanonasosta
• Products and practices that reveal a stereotyped or exaggerated view of the Italian culture: #onlyinitaly, #thisisitaly, #soitalian, #buonappetito, #domenicainfamiglia, #al completo
• How open Italians are towards other cultures: #statiunitidamerica, #soloinamerica, #soloanewyork, #netflixitalia, #mcdonalditalia, #supereroi
• How Italians use social media: [no hashtag needed]
## APPENDIX B

### ITALIAN INSTAGRAM USERS

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vinc.m https://www.instagram.com/vinc.m/
zibbaofficial https://www.instagram.com/zibbaofficial/
APPENDIX C

PRESENTATION OF THE ACTIVITY

The goal of the activity is to learn about the contemporary culture and everyday life in Italy and to reflect on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. For this activity, you will use Instagram to explore posts, stories, and hashtags from Italian users and to participate in a class group chat using the Instagram Direct feature. While you will be able to explore Instagram posts and hashtags using both the Instagram mobile app and website (www.instagram.com), you will need a smartphone to participate in the group chat.

The activity will last four weeks. You will be in daily contact with different aspects of the Italian culture. However, every week you will focus on a different set of assigned topics:

- **Week 1:** The way people look and dress; common patterns of interaction and displays of affection; eating and drinking habits.
- **Week 2:** Popular sports and social practices associated with sports; common recreational activities; common forms of entertainment.
- **Week 3:** Common practices associated with work and the workplace; common practices associated with school and education; the layout of cities and towns.
- **Week 4:** Products and practices that reveal a stereotyped or exaggerated view of a culture; how people relate to a different culture; how people use social media.

Every week, you will share in the group chat posts that struck your attention and will write comments and questions about the Italian culture. At the end of each week, you will complete an online assignment documenting your cultural and intercultural observations for the week.

**Getting Started**

If you don’t have an Instagram account yet, download the mobile app from the Apple, Android, or Windows store or access the Instagram website (www.instagram.com) and create a new account. For this activity, you are required to follow a set of Italian users; you can find their usernames and the links to their profile on the attached Excel file. Alternatively, you can access the Instagram profile of the researcher and follow all the users he’s following (https://www.instagram.com/fabrizio.fornara/) – it’s the fastest way. If you already have an Instagram account, you are encouraged to create a new account so you will be able to see all the posts of the Italian users at once and not mixed with the posts of the other Instagram users you are following. You will be able to easily switch between multiple Instagram accounts on your phone. Follow these instructions to learn how to do it:
https://help.instagram.com/1696686240613595. Please, note that you are not required to follow your classmates or the researcher.

Another requirement of the activity is to share Italian Instagram posts on the class group chat on Instagram. If you are not already familiar with the Instagram Direct feature, here you can find some useful instructions that will get you started: https://help.instagram.com/400205900081854. The researcher will add you to the group chat. In order to do so, he needs the username of the account you will use for the activity. Please, share it with him by completing this two-question survey: https://goo.gl/forms/kE2PfYcJLYIoNxy83.

**The Activity**

Every day, (1) you will browse your Instagram feed to explore new posts and stories from the Italian users you are following – make sure to spend a few moments to look carefully at each image and story and to read each caption; and (2) you will explore the hashtag or hashtags of the day the researcher will post every morning on the Instagram group chat – please, make sure to access the group chat every day to see which topic and hashtag(s) you will be focusing on that day. When exploring the hashtags, make sure to analyze carefully each post. If you want, you can also follow other Italian Instagram users and explore other hashtags besides the ones indicated by the researcher but you are not required to. Usually, you will explore a different topic every two days and all the topics again on the last day of the week.

Every week, share on the group chat, on at least four different days, an Instagram post that particularly struck your attention. The image or video you share should focus on cultural products and practices related to the topic of the day. Every time you share an Instagram post, add also a thoughtful comment on the image or on the video – i.e., “I noticed that Italian men frequently hug each other, it seems to be a common thing.” – or ask a question about cultural behaviors and attitudes you do not fully understand – i.e., “Do Italians have dinner every day with their family?” If you want, you can also add a comment or ask a question about an Instagram story. If you do so, please, remember to add the username of the person who shared the story. You can write your comments and questions either in Italian or in English. The researcher will also participate in the chat by replying to your questions, by discussing and integrating the cultural information you post, and by clarifying any doubt you may have. If you want, you can also reply to the researcher’s and your classmates’ messages.

Please, note that every week you need to participate in the group chat on, at least, four different days in order to receive a full grade. If, for example, you participate twice during the same day, you will receive only one point for that day, not two.

**Weekly Assignment**

From each Friday, you will be able to access in this folder a link to the weekly online assignment – the deadline to complete it is the end of Tuesday (11:59 pm) of the following week.
For this assignment, you will list, for each of the topics covered during the week, the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. Also, you will reflect on the meanings and values associated with the Italian products and practices that you observed. For more information on this assignment, look at the instructions that the researcher will publish every Monday on this folder.

Your weekly participation on Instagram Direct and the online assignment will be graded as follows:

- Instagram group chat: 4 points (1 point per day for sharing an Instagram post and adding a comment/question or for commenting or asking a question about a story; 0.5 points per day for only sharing an Instagram post or for only posting a comment or a question)
- Online assignment: 6 points (see the weekly rubrics)
APPENDIX D

WEEKLY INSTRUCTIONS

Week 1

This week you will focus mainly on the following topics:

1. The way people look and dress;
2. common patterns of interaction and displays of affection;
3. eating and drinking habits.

Activity

Every day, (1) you will browse your Instagram feed to explore new posts and stories from the Italian users you are following – make sure to spend a few moments to look carefully at each image and story and to read each caption; and (2) you will explore the hashtag or hashtags of the day the researcher will post every morning on the Instagram group chat – please, make sure to access the group chat every day to see which topic and hashtag(s) you will be focusing on that day. When exploring the hashtags, make sure to analyze carefully each post.

Every week, share on the group chat, on at least four different days, an Instagram post that particularly struck your attention. The image or video you share should focus on cultural products and practices related to the topic of the day. Every time you share an Instagram post, add also a thoughtful comment on the image or on the video or ask a question about cultural behaviors and attitudes you do not fully understand. If you want, you can also add a comment or ask a question about an Instagram story. If you do so, please, remember to add the username of the person who shared the story. You can write your comments and questions either in Italian or in English.

Assessment

Please, note that every week you need to participate in the group chat on, at least, four different days in order to receive a full grade. If, for example, you participate twice during the same day, you will receive only one point for that day, not two. From this Saturday, you will be able to complete the weekly online assignment; the deadline is the end of Tuesday of next week (i.e., Tuesday at 11:59 pm). Your weekly participation on Instagram Direct and the online assignment will be graded as follows:

- Instagram group chat: 4 points (1 point per day for sharing an Instagram post and adding a comment/question or for commenting or asking a question about a story; 0.5 points per day for only sharing an Instagram post or for only posting a comment or a question)
• Online assignment: 6 points (1 point per each completed subsection – see the rubrics below)

Rubrics for the online assignment:

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</table>

**Week 2**

This week you will focus mainly on the following topics:

1. Popular sports and social practices associated with sports;
2. common recreational activities;
3. common forms of entertainment.

**Activity**

Every day, (1) you will browse your Instagram feed to explore new posts and stories from the Italian users you are following – make sure to spend a few moments to look carefully at each image and story and to read each caption; and (2) you will explore the hashtag or hashtags of the day the researcher will post every morning on the Instagram group chat – please, make sure to access the group chat every day to see which topic and hashtag(s) you will be focusing on that day. When exploring the hashtags, make sure to analyze carefully each post.

Every week, share on the group chat, on at least four different days, an Instagram post that particularly struck your attention. The image or video you share should focus on cultural products and practices related to the topic of the day. Every time you share an Instagram post, add also a thoughtful comment on the image or on the video or ask a question about cultural behaviors and attitudes you do not fully understand. If you want, you can also add a comment or ask a question about an Instagram story. If you do so, please, remember to add the username of the person who shared the story. You can write your comments and questions either in Italian or in English.
Assessment
Please, note that every week you need to participate in the group chat on, at least, four different days in order to receive a full grade. If, for example, you participate twice during the same day, you will receive only one point for that day, not two. From this Saturday, you will be able to complete the weekly online assignment; the deadline is the end of Tuesday of next week (i.e., Tuesday at 11:59 pm). Your weekly participation on Instagram Direct and the online assignment will be graded as follows:

- Instagram group chat: 4 points (1 point per day for sharing an Instagram post and adding a comment/question or for commenting or asking a question about a story; 0.5 points per day for only sharing an Instagram post or for only posting a comment or a question)
- Online assignment: 6 points (1 point per each completed subsection – see the rubrics below)

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Week 3

This week you will focus mainly on the following topics:

1. Common practices associated with work and the workplace;
2. Common practices associated with school and education;
3. The layout of cities and towns.

Activity
Every day, (1) you will browse your Instagram feed to explore new posts and stories from the Italian users you are following – make sure to spend a few moments to look carefully at each image and story and to read each caption; and (2) you will explore the hashtag or hashtags of the day the researcher will post every morning on the Instagram group chat – please, make sure to
access the group chat every day to see which topic and hashtag(s) you will be focusing on that day. When exploring the hashtags, make sure to analyze carefully each post.

Every week, share on the group chat, on at least four different days, an Instagram post that particularly struck your attention. The image or video you share should focus on cultural products and practices related to the topic of the day. Every time you share an Instagram post, add also a thoughtful comment on the image or on the video or ask a question about cultural behaviors and attitudes you do not fully understand. If you want, you can also add a comment or ask a question about an Instagram story. If you do so, please, remember to add the username of the person who shared the story. You can write your comments and questions either in Italian or in English.

Assessment
Please, note that every week you need to participate in the group chat on, at least, four different days in order to receive a full grade. If, for example, you participate twice during the same day, you will receive only one point for that day, not two. From this Saturday, you will be able to complete the weekly online assignment; the deadline is the end of Tuesday of next week (i.e., Tuesday at 11:59 pm). Your weekly participation on Instagram Direct and the online assignment will be graded as follows:

- Instagram group chat: 4 points (1 point per day for sharing an Instagram post and adding a comment/question or for commenting or asking a question about a story; 0.5 points per day for only sharing an Instagram post or for only posting a comment or a question)
- Online assignment: 6 points (1 point per each completed subsection – see the rubrics below)

Rubrics for the online assignment:

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Week 4

This week you will focus mainly on the following topics:

1. Products and practices that reveal a stereotyped or exaggerated view of a culture;
2. how people relate to a different culture;
3. how people use social media.

Activity
Every day, (1) you will browse your Instagram feed to explore new posts and stories from the Italian users you are following – make sure to spend a few moments to look carefully at each image and story and to read each caption; and (2) you will explore the hashtag or hashtags of the day the researcher will post every morning on the Instagram group chat – please, make sure to access the group chat every day to see which topic and hashtag(s) you will be focusing on that day. When exploring the hashtags, make sure to analyze carefully each post.

Every week, share on the group chat, on at least four different days, an Instagram post that particularly struck your attention. The image or video you share should focus on cultural products and practices related to the topic of the day. Every time you share an Instagram post, add also a thoughtful comment on the image or on the video or ask a question about cultural behaviors and attitudes you do not fully understand. If you want, you can also add a comment or ask a question about an Instagram story. If you do so, please, remember to add the username of the person who shared the story. You can write your comments and questions either in Italian or in English.

Assessment
Please, note that every week you need to participate in the group chat on, at least, four different days in order to receive a full grade. If, for example, you participate twice during the same day, you will receive only one point for that day, not two. From this Saturday, you will be able to complete the weekly online assignment; the deadline is the end of Tuesday of next week (i.e., Tuesday at 11:59 pm). Your weekly participation on Instagram Direct and the online assignment will be graded as follows:

- Instagram group chat: 4 points (1 point per day for sharing an Instagram post and adding a comment/question or for commenting or asking a question about a story; 0.5 points per day for only sharing an Instagram post or for only posting a comment or a question)
- Online assignment: 6 points (1 point per each completed subsection – see the rubrics below)
Rubrics for the online assignment:

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APPENDIX E

PRE-ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Your name: __________________
Which culture do you identify with? ________________________________

Please, answer the following questions on your previous experiences with the Italian language and culture and with using mobile social media for personal and academic purposes.

1. Which foreign languages do you know?
   a. Italian
   b. Spanish
   c. Other

[If Italian is selected] Which is your level of proficiency for each of the following skills?

   Reading: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Listening: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Writing: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Speaking: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___

[If Spanish is selected] Which is your level of proficiency for each of the following skills?

   Reading: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Listening: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Writing: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Speaking: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___

[If Other is selected] Which is your level of proficiency for each of the following skills?

   Reading: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Listening: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Writing: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
   Speaking: Beginner ___, Intermediate ___, Advanced ___, Bilingual ___
2. How did you learn the foreign language(s) you know (i.e., in high school, in college, at home, living abroad, by yourself, informally)? Please, explain briefly.
   
   a. Italian:  
   b. Spanish:  
   c. Other:  

3. Have you ever visited Italy? Yes ___, No ___  
   [If Yes is selected] What was the reason for your travel (i.e., tourism, visit family, study abroad)? Please, explain briefly.  
   [If Yes is selected] How long did you stay in Italy?  
   [If Yes is selected] While you were in Italy, what did you use your Italian for? Please, explain briefly.  

4. Have you ever communicated with an Italian speaker (besides your instructor)? Yes __, No __  
   [If Yes is selected] In which contexts did you communicate with an Italian speaker? Please, explain briefly.  
   [If Yes is selected] Which language did you use?  

5. Which sources have contributed/are contributing to your knowledge of the Italian culture? Select all the options that apply:  
   Italians (besides instructors) ___, People from countries other than Italy (besides instructors) ___, Italian movies ___, Italian TV series ___, Movies and series from countries other than Italy ___, (Online) videos ___, Music ___, Online social networks ___, Italian websites and apps ___, Italian blogs ___, (Online) newspapers ___, (Online) magazines ___, Books ___, Comics ___, Other: ___  

6. Please, add a brief description of these sources and how they helped/are helping you to learn about the Italian culture.  

7. Do you already have an Instagram account? Yes ___, No ___  
   [If Yes is selected] How often are you on Instagram?  
   Every day ___, Most days ___, A few days a week ___, Once a week or less ___  
   [If Every day or Most days is selected] How often are you on Instagram daily?
Multiple times a day ___, Once or twice a day ___

[If Yes is selected] What do you use Instagram for? Select all the options that apply.

Posting pictures and images ___, Posting videos ___, Browsing my feed ___, Browsing hashtags ___, Interacting with friends publicly (i.e., comments, mentions) ___, Interacting with friends privately (i.e., direct messages) ___, Other ___

8. Do you follow/Are you friend with any Italian user on social media? Yes ___, No ___

[If Yes is selected] Please, indicate on which social media you follow/are friend with Italian users:

Facebook ___, Twitter ___, Instagram ___, Snapchat ___, YouTube ___, Other: ___

[If Yes is selected] Which type of Italian users do you follow/are you friend with? Please, explain briefly.

9. Have you ever used an online social network for academic purposes (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)? Yes ___, No ___

[If Yes is selected] Which online social network did you use?

Facebook ___, Twitter ___, Instagram ___, Other: ________

[If Yes is selected] What did you use it for? Please, explain briefly.

10. Have you ever used a mobile device for academic purposes? For this questionnaire, mobile devices are smartphones, tablets, and every other portable device besides laptops. Yes ___, No ___

[If Yes is selected] Which device did you use? Smartphone ___, Tablet ___, Other ___

[If Yes is selected] What do/did you use it for? Please, explain briefly.
APPENDIX F

PRE-ACTIVITY WORKSHEET

Your name: __________________

1. For each of the following themes, describe what you already know about the Italian culture of everyday life. If you are not familiar with one or more of these themes, you can leave your answer blank.

The way Italians look and dress:

Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection:

Eating and drinking habits:

Popular sports and social practices associated with sports:

Common recreational activities:

Common forms of entertainment:

Common practices associated with work and the workplace:

Common practices associated with school and education:

The layout of Italian cities and towns:

Products and practices that reveal a stereotyped or exaggerated view of the Italian culture:
How open Italians are towards other cultures:

How Italians use social media:

2. Which stereotypes do you know about the Italian culture? Please, describe them.
APPENDIX G

WEEKLY ONLINE ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1

Your name:

*Please, read carefully the instructions*: The assignment has two parts. In the first part (1), focus on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. In the second part (2), focus only on the Italian culture.

1. For each of the following topics, describe the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture:

   a) The way people look and dress.
   *Similarities:*

   *Differences:*

   b) Common patterns of interaction and displays of affection.
   *Similarities:*

   *Differences:*

   c) Eating and drinking habits.
   *Similarities:*

   *Differences:*

2. This week you observed on Instagram a number of products (e.g., foods, clothes, buildings, music) and practices (e.g., eating, playing, hugging) of the Italian culture. Now, reflect on the beliefs and values of the Italian culture that are behind these products and practices.
Here is an example. If you look at American Instagram posts, you may observe some products that purport to prolong youth and vitality (e.g., healthy snacks, cosmetics). You may also observe practices aimed at prolonging youth and health (e.g., running, eating healthy). By exploring such posts, you can infer that youth is highly valued in the United States – this is a believe/value of the American culture.

Now, try to do the same reasoning for the Italian culture and answer the following questions:

a) In your opinion, why do Italians commonly look and dress the way they do?

b) What do the patterns of interaction and displays of affection that you observed on Instagram say about Italians and the Italian culture?

c) In your opinion, why do Italians eat and drink the way they do?

3. (Optional) Did you start to follow any new Italian user this week? Did you explore any new hashtag, besides the ones indicated by your instructor? Please, list them.

Week 2

Your name:

*Please, read carefully the instructions*: The assignment has two parts. In the first part (1), focus on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. In the second part (2), focus only on the Italian culture.

1. For each of the following topics, describe the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture:

a) Popular sports and social practices associated with sports.

Similarities:
Differences:

b) Common recreational activities.

Similarities:

Differences:

c) Common forms of entertainment.

Similarities:

Differences:

2. This week you observed on Instagram a number of products (e.g., foods, clothes, buildings, music) and practices (e.g., eating, playing, hugging) of the Italian culture. Now, reflect on the beliefs and values of the Italian culture that are behind these products and practices.

Here is an example. If you look at American Instagram posts, you may observe some products that purport to prolong youth and vitality (e.g., healthy snacks, cosmetics). You may also observe practices aimed at prolonging youth and health (e.g., running, eating healthy). By exploring such posts, you can infer that youth is highly valued in the United States – this is a believe/value of the American culture.

Now, try to do the same reasoning for the Italian culture and answer the following questions:

a) In your opinion, what is the role of sports in Italian culture?

b) What do the recreational activities Italians engage in say about them and the Italian culture?

c) What do the forms of entertainment that you observed on Instagram say about Italians and the Italian culture?
3. (Optional) Did you start to follow any new Italian user this week? Did you explore any new hashtag, besides the ones indicated by your instructor? Please, list them.

**Week 3**

Your name:

*Please, read carefully the instructions*: The assignment has two parts. In the first part (1), focus on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. In the second part (2), focus only on the Italian culture.

1. For each of the following topics, describe the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture:

   a) Common practices associated with work and the workplace.

   **Similarities:**

   **Differences:**

   b) Common practices associated with school and education.

   **Similarities:**

   **Differences:**

   c) The layout of cities and towns.

   **Similarities:**

   **Differences:**

2. This week you observed on Instagram a number of products (e.g., foods, clothes, buildings, music) and practices (e.g., eating, playing, hugging) of the Italian culture. Now, reflect on the **beliefs and values** of the Italian culture that are behind these products and practices.
Here is an example. If you look at American Instagram posts, you may observe some *products* that purport to prolong youth and vitality (e.g., healthy snacks, cosmetics). You may also observe *practices* aimed at prolonging youth and health (e.g., running, eating healthy). By exploring such posts, you can infer that *youth is highly valued in the United States* – this is a believe/value of the American culture.

Now, try to do the same reasoning for the **Italian culture** and answer the following questions:

a) What do the practices associated with work and the workplace that you observed on Instagram say about Italians and the Italian culture?

b) What do the practices associated with school and education that you observed on Instagram say about Italians and the Italian culture?

c) In your opinion, how does the layout of cities and towns affect the life of Italians and, in general, the Italian culture?

3. (Optional) Did you start to follow any new Italian user this week? Did you explore any new hashtag, besides the ones indicated by your instructor? Please, list them.

**Week 4**

**Your name:**

*Please, read carefully the instructions*: The assignment has two parts. In the first part (1), focus on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture. In the second part (2), focus only on the Italian culture.

1. For each of the following topics, describe the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture:

a) How people relate to a different culture.

*Similarities:*
Differences:

b) How people use social media.

Similarities:

Differences:

2. This week you observed on Instagram a number of products (e.g., foods, clothes, buildings, music) and practices (e.g., eating, playing, hugging) of the Italian culture. Now, reflect on the beliefs and values of the Italian culture that are behind these products and practices.

   Here is an example. If you look at American Instagram posts, you may observe some products that purport to prolong youth and vitality (e.g., healthy snacks, cosmetics). You may also observe practices aimed at prolonging youth and health (e.g., running, eating healthy). By exploring such posts, you can infer that youth is highly valued in the United States – this is a believe/value of the American culture.

   Now, try to do the same reasoning for the Italian culture and answer the following questions:

a) In your opinion, how accurate are the stereotypes that people have about Italy? How do they reflect the contemporary Italian culture?

b) In your opinion, how open are Italians towards other cultures?

c) What do Italians’ social media habits say about them and the Italian culture?

3. (Optional) Did you start to follow any new Italian user this week? Did you explore any new hashtag, besides the ones indicated by your instructor? Please, list them.
APPENDIX H

POST-ACTIVITY ESSAY

Your name:

During the last four weeks, you explored on Instagram products (e.g., foods, clothes, sports, music) and practices (e.g., eating, playing, hugging) of the Italian culture. At the end of every week, you also reflected on the beliefs and values of the Italian culture. While reflecting on the beliefs and values of the Italian culture, you probably have already started to reflect on how they relate to the beliefs and values of your own culture. Now, take a moment to put these thoughts on paper and write a short essay on the similarities and differences between your own culture and the Italian culture for what concerns beliefs and values. (Around 250 words)
APPENDIX I

POST-ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE (1)

This questionnaire is anonymous. Please, answer the following questions on the activity Italian Culture on Instagram.

1. For each of the following sentences, select the option that best applies:

a. I liked to use Instagram to explore the Italian culture of everyday life.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

b. This activity helped me to learn a great deal about the Italian culture of everyday life.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

c. This activity helped me to reflect about the beliefs and values of the Italian culture.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

d. This activity helped to increase my awareness and understanding of the similarities and differences between my own culture and the Italian culture.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

e. This activity helped me to reflect on my own culture.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

f. The messages that my classmates and the researcher sent in the group chat helped me to learn more about the Italian culture.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

g. As a result of this activity, I feel I am better prepared to navigate everyday life in Italy.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

h. As a result of this activity, I feel I’ve become more open towards other cultures.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

i. I’ll continue following some of the Italian users I’ve been following on Instagram.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

2. What did you like the most about the activity?

3. What did you like the least about the activity?

4. How would you change/improve the activity? – All the activity, not only the Instagram portion but also participating in the group chat, completing the weekly worksheets, etc.

5. Do you have any other comment about the activity?
APPENDIX J

POST-ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRE (2)

Your name: __________________

Please, answer the following questions on your Instagram usage habits during the activity.

1. Which device did you usually use to explore Instagram posts and hashtags? Select all the options that apply:

   Smartphone ___, Laptop ___, Tablet ___, Other: ___

2. How often did you explore Italian posts on Instagram – either from the hashtags or from the users you were following?

   Every day ___, Almost every day ___, A few days a week ___, Once a week ___, Almost never or never ___

   [If Every day, Almost every day, or A few days a week is selected] Usually, how often in a day did you explore Italian posts on Instagram?

   Three or more times ___, Twice ___, Once ___

3. At the beginning of the activity, I asked you to follow 40+ Italian Instagram users. How many users did you actually follow?

   All of them ___, Most of them ___, Just a few ___, None ___

   [If Just a few or None is selected] Please, explain why you followed only a few Italian users or none.

4. Which posts did you explore more frequently for the activity?

   The posts from the hashtags ___, The posts of the Italian users I was following ___, Posts from both sources, more or less evenly ___

5. When you explored the posts from the hashtags, what did you usually do?

   I looked only at images and videos, I didn’t read the captions of the posts ___
I read the captions only of the posts that struck my attention ___
I read the captions of many posts ___
I read the captions of almost every post ___

[If any of the previous options is selected] Do you have any comment?

6. When you explored the posts of the Italian users you were following, what did you usually do?

I looked only at the images and videos, I didn’t read the captions of the posts ___
I read the captions only of the posts that struck my attention ___
I read the captions of many posts ___
I read the captions of almost every post ___

[If any of the previous options is selected] Do you have any comment?

7. How did you usually select an Instagram post to share in the group chat?

I usually shared one of the first posts I found ___
I usually looked at several posts before selecting a post to share ___
Other: __________

8. Which type of Instagram posts did you usually share?

Most of the posts I shared showed a product or a practice of the Italian culture that is similar in my own culture ___
Most of the posts I shared showed a product or a practice of the Italian culture that is different from my own culture ___
I shared both kinds of posts more or less evenly ___

[If any of the previous options is selected] Do you have any comment?

9. Did you read the messages that your classmates and the researcher sent in the Instagram group chat?

Always or almost always ___, Often ___, Only sometimes ___, Almost never or never ___, Only the messages sent by the researcher ___

10. If you already had an Instagram account, did you create a new account for the activity?

Yes, I created a new account ___
No, I used my personal account ___
I didn't have an Instagram account ___

11. How often did you explore the stories published by the Italian users you were following?

Every day ___, Almost every day ___, Only sometimes ___, Almost never or never ___

[If any of the previous options is selected] Do you have any comment about the Stories?

12. Did any of the Italian users that you followed follow you back? Yes ___, No ___

[If Yes or No is selected] Do you have any comment?

13. Did you interact with any Italian user on Instagram (i.e., ‘heart’, comment, mention, private message)? Yes ___, No ___

[If Yes is selected] Please, explain briefly – for privacy reasons, you can skip this question, if you prefer.

14. Do you have any comment?
APPENDIX K

POST-ACTIVITY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Activity
• Did the activity help you to learn more about the Italian culture?
• What did you like the most about the activity?
• What did you like the least about the activity?
• How would you change/improve the activity?

Cultural Awareness
• What do you think are the most important things you learned about the Italian culture?
• Which product or practice of the Italian culture particularly struck your attention?
• On Instagram, you observed products and practices of the Italian culture – simply put, what Italians have and what they do. Did the activity help you to reflect also about the perspectives of the Italian culture – simply put, its beliefs and values? If yes, how?
• What did you understand about Italians and the Italian culture?

Intercultural awareness
• Did the activity encourage you to think critically about your own culture? How?
• What do you think are the main similarities and the main differences between your own culture and the Italian culture?
• Is there any aspect of your own culture that you think you can understand better after exploring the Italian culture on Instagram?
• Do you think the activity helped you to overcome the stereotypes you might had about Italy and Italians?
• Do you think the activity helped you to become more open towards other people and other cultures?
• Do you feel that you are better prepared now to travel to Italy and/or to interact with Italians?

Instagram
• How useful do you think that Instagram is to explore and understand a foreign culture?
• What did you usually do on Instagram?
• Which features of Instagram did you find most useful to learn about the Italian culture? (i.e., hashtags, images, videos, stories)
• Which elements of posts and stories helped you to understand better products and practices of the Italian culture? (i.e., images, videos, captions, a combination of them)
• Did you usually read the messages that your classmates and the researcher posted on the Instagram group chat? Do you think they helped you to learn more about the Italian culture?
• Which themes do you think can be more easily explored on Instagram?
• Do you have any other comment?
APPENDIX L

IRB APPROVAL MEMO

Office of the Vice President for Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 03/07/2017

To: Fabrizio Fornara ****@***.***

Address: [Erased]

Dept.: EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND LEARNING SYSTEM

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

Instagram for Cultural and Intercultural Awareness Development in Foreign Language Education

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 03/05/2018, you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Vanessa Dennen <*******@***.***>, Advisor
HSC No. 2017.20416
APPENDIX M

CONSENT FORM

Dear Student,

My name is Fabrizio Fornara, I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at Florida State University; I am conducting a research study to explore the pedagogical value of mobile social media, specifically Instagram, for the development of foreign language students’ cultural and intercultural awareness.

Participation on the study involves completing a set of assignments and exploring sources from the target culture on Instagram, according to the instructions given by your instructor. The collection of the assignments will be done via Blackboard and Instagram Direct. Upon collecting data from you, all identifiers (e.g., your name, Instagram username) will be immediately removed. Only me, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data, which will be stored on a password-protected computer in a locked place. All data will be coded by me, as a researcher, and then discarded.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty; it will not affect your grade in this class. Your instructor will not know whether you have chosen to participate. Information obtained during the course of the study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

There are no more than minimal risks or discomfort such as those associated with everyday life if you agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions concerning this research study, please contact me at ****@**.***.***. This study is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Vanessa Dennen, professor of Instructional Systems and Learning Technologies at FSU. You can contact her at ********@***.*** or by phone at (***) ***.****.

Sincerely,

Fabrizio Fornara

I give my consent to participate in the above study.

(printed name) ________________________________

(signature) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

FSU Human Subjects Committee approved on 03/06/16. Void 04/19/16. HSC # 2016 20416
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fabrizio Fornara works for the Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Florida State University. He has a Ph.D. in Instructional Systems and Learning Technologies and more than ten years of teaching experience at the college level. His research focuses on the development of foreign language students’ intercultural competence, social media for teaching and learning, and the intersection between critical pedagogy and educational technology.