

The Window/Mirror Effect of Language Study

By Saybel Nunez

“To learn a language is to have one more window from which to look at the world” – Chinese Proverb

This ancient Chinese proverb suggests that a whole new world is available when someone learns a foreign language. Each language brings with it an opportunity to discover an entire new culture. A set of norms, perspectives, and points of view come alive and are accessible when you speak the new language. It is said that teaching languages requires teaching the culture of its speakers and that statement is very true.

At Saint David’s School, the Modern Language department understands how crucial this endeavor is. That is why language and culture are taught hand in hand in a variety of ways. This follows the suggested practice of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to introduce products, practices and perspectives throughout language instruction, not just on certain days or certain moments.

One way in which culture is taught at Saint David’s is through the significant events that take place in every grade. These include learning the Bate Bate chocolate song tradition in Pre-K, the performance of the Christmas Pageant in Spanish in Third Grade, inquiry into Days of the Dead at various grade levels, the Spanish Study Tour in Salamanca (Seventh Grade),

Students share their findings about Argentina.

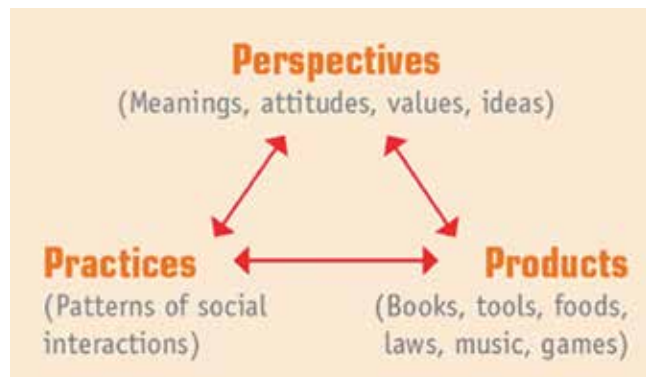




and visits from native speakers of target cultures in many classes. In fact, we are always looking to connect what the boys are learning to who can help them see it in a new way. These are some of the tangible ways in which culture is explicitly taught at Saint David’s.

The Modern Language department also bases its classes in products, practices, and perspectives (also known as 3P’s). The main idea behind the 3P’s is to help students acquire the target culture through the language. Products come with a pattern of behavior accepted by society, which are the practices. Those practices have a reason why, a set of values and beliefs that justify the product and the practice within the culture. The idea is that students experience these as a part of their regular studies.

The 3 P’s



This is why you may find fourth or fifth graders looking at schedules from actual schools all around Latin America (Products), finding out that school days there typically end at 1:00 p.m., to allow families to go home for lunch because lunch time is the most important meal of the day (Practice), and family time is highly valuable (Perspective).

A quick walk through any of the Modern Language classes in our school and you will discover first graders learning about clothing by examining uniforms across Latin America, second graders learning about the musical instrument called “cuatro” that is the basis of their Christmas Carol offering, fifth graders experimenting with the stress relief of having a Guatemalan “worry doll” to talk to, sixth graders tasting the delights of Peruvian Asian fusion food such as “Chaufa” rice, seventh graders getting in touch with their own American culture and learning more about Spain, as they prepare for the Salamanca trip. You will notice that eighth graders are able to understand legends from various Spanish speaking countries, and find Madame Rappaport sharing traditional Crêpes in her French classes.

All of this is accomplished through the lens of respect, which means seeing the other culture not as “better” or “worse” than one’s own, but rather, as different. Showing respect for the new culture means boys ask curious questions about it, they are willing to try on new and different perspectives, and they use appropriate expressions to communicate their impressions of what they are learning. Furthermore, when examining another’s culture, one comes to understand one’s self at a deeper level. What takes place



Eighth Grade parent Ms. Salgado visited the Seventh Grade class in December 2019 to talk about her homeland Argentina.



Worry dolls from Guatemala.



Boys in Madame Rappaport's French class enjoy traditional Crêpes.



Enjoying churros.

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then is a “windows and mirror” effect. The new culture serves as a window to look at the world in a new way, and also as a mirror to examine your own culture and understand the products, practices and perspectives of the culture you inhabit.

A Saint David’s boy understands that culture is part of language and that a whole new world awaits him when he

steps into his language class. A Saint David’s education provides that access from which to see this new world. The young man develops this virtue by showing up with an open mind to his modern language class. ■

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Recently, eighth graders presented the results of their research into areas of interest in the country of Chile. The boys are starting to make connections across cultures and discovering that we share and appreciate many of the same things. It is also important to note that learning from their peers inspires questions! Becoming global citizens starts with comparing what you know to what you don’t know, and being curious enough to ask for more.

“I learned that people in Chile listen to music in other languages, and that music transcends languages.”

- Laurencio G.

“There is a lot more street art in Chile. I wonder if they have museums there, too. The art on the streets looks beautiful.”

- Ryan S.

“The love of entertainment and of music is appreciated all over Chile, as people flock to theaters in large crowds, similar to events in the U.S.”

- Davis C.

“Music is an important part of their culture, just like in the U.S.”

- Alexander R.

“I learned that countries can bond over music. People in Festival Viña del Mar, perform in English and in Spanish, and still everybody enjoyed it.”

- James F.

Christmas pageant and Cuatro: Second graders perform “El Burrito Sabanero” while they learn about the Venezuelan musical instrument Cuatro.