

# Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom: A Reflective Model

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes how ten in-service teachers currently studying in the Master's Program in Second Languages and Cultures at Universidad Nacional have undergone a four-month process which focused on their growth in multicultural competencies for cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness and understanding, and the development of techniques and activities to promote the learning of such values in their classes. The participants designed lesson plans that addressed cultural topics, provided and received peer feedback, conducted peer-teaching observations, put together a didactic unit for teaching culture, created a blog about their experiences, and reflected about ways to teach culture in their classes.

**Key words:** cultural awareness and understanding, techniques and strategies for teaching culture, cross-cultural communication

## Resumen

Este estudio se enfoca en el conocimiento y comprensión de diversas culturas y el desarrollo de técnicas y actividades que promuevan el aprendizaje de tales valores en el aula. El estudio se realizó por cuatro meses con diez profesores de inglés, quienes cursan la Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas de la Universidad Nacional. Los participantes diseñaron planeamientos que incorporan temas culturales, observaron lecciones, brindaron y recibieron aportes con sus colegas, plantearon una unidad didáctica para el aprendizaje de aspectos culturales, crearon un *blog* sobre sus experiencias y reflexionaron sobre técnicas de enseñanza de cultura en sus clases.

**Palabras claves:** conocimiento y comprensión de culturas, técnicas y estrategias para la enseñanza de la cultura, comunicación transcultural

## Introduction

Contemporary developments in the second language learning field have highlighted the imperative need to teach the culture of the target language in ELT majors for future educators to incorporate this component in their lessons. Moran (2001) defines culture as "... the evolving life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives [perceptions, beliefs, values and attitudes] on the world, and set within specific social contexts" (p. 24). The study of culture in the classroom aims at helping students achieve an integral understanding and mastery of such communicative system. Seelye (1984) states that cross-cultural communication is the ability to communicate with people from the foreign culture while understanding their emotions and thoughts and their cultural connotation (p. 23-25).

The fact that teaching culture is widely accepted has led many scholars to overlook transcendental issues that this paper intends to address. Firstly, Costa Rican language teachers acquire cultural knowledge in specialized college courses that focus on culture or oral communication; however, the culture-oriented objectives of the curricula in public schools are often overlooked by these teachers. Secondly, teachers' acknowledgement of language and culture interdependence does not necessarily mean their achievement of cultural understanding or the acquisition of tolerance and empathy towards other ethnic groups which, of course, are not limited to the ones that speak the target language. Thirdly, and most notably, the fact that teachers may recognize the connection between language and culture and also respect the traditions and beliefs of other groups does not mean that they have the training to teach those ideas to their students.

Second language educators need to develop their skills, attitudes and awareness in order to teach culture in an EFL/ESL classroom. The role of the traditional instructor has evolved to that of a more culturally responsive educator who constantly engages in reflective processes of understanding and sensibility. This qualitative improvement guides professors to foster affective traits that eventually will be transmitted to high school students in an effort to endorse beliefs that generate behaviors which will encourage respect and tolerance towards everyone regardless of their background. Indeed, this understanding of cultures will reinforce the nurturing of humanistic principles in society.

As Curtis (2009) claims, "Most of us became educators because we wanted to have a positive impact on the world, to help make things better." Nevertheless, good intentions sometimes do not suffice; therefore, an effort has to be made in order to facilitate the achievability of these noble goals a professional in this field embraces. Therefore, the implementation of the techniques developed in this project undeniably provides insights to accomplish both cognitive and affective goals. The researchers in this study suggest procedures that allow colleagues to do what Curtis points out to close his argument: "...in the case of language teachers, by enabling better communication between people from different places, using different languages and drawing on different cultures."

This study analyzes how ten in-service teachers currently studying in the Second Language Master's Program at Universidad Nacional have undergone a four-month process which focuses not only on their growth in multicultural competencies for cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness and cultural understanding but also on the development of skills and techniques to enhance the learning of such values in the courses they teach. In this process, the participants had the opportunity to design lesson plans that highlight culture issues, provide and receive peer feedback on their planning, conduct peer observations, create a didactic unit for teaching culture, write a blog about their experiences, share knowledge with visitors from other countries, and reflect on ways to teach culture in their classes.

### Review of Literature

In-service teachers need to discover culturally responsive pedagogies that they could use to teach the cultural component of a second language in their classrooms. In fact, EFL/ESL teachers need to “become multiculturally efficacious individuals who can move between two or more cultures” (Mitchell, 2009, p. 13). Similarly, Banks (1988) asserts that teachers who develop cross-cultural competence can improve their teaching abilities, attitudes and understandings in diverse cultural settings. Moreover, Cochran-Smith (1998, p. 45) states that “Teacher education programs must provide [...] future educators with authentic opportunities for critical examination of their own entrenched values, belief systems and cultural heritage.”

In order to teach students to become multi-culturally competent, educators need to develop their understanding of culture, cultural empathy and cross-cultural communication to be able to value cultural diversity. In fact, Acheson and Gall (2003) suggest that teachers need to have professional skills, knowledge, ethical judgments, reflective practice, commitment, professional values and responsibilities, among others, to develop professionalism. The excellence in education leads to progress and change which results when more educators “believe in and want to use new materials, new behaviors, new practices and new beliefs or understandings” (Cunningham and Cresco, 1993, p. 173).

Hence, teachers are in a position that requires developing cross-cultural competence to communicate effectively with people from a variety of backgrounds. According to Crawford-Lange and Lange (1987), achieving these skills requires going through the following process:

- Make the learning of culture a requirement
- Integrate language learning and culture learning
- Allow for the identification of a spectrum of proficiency levels
- Address the affective as well as the cognitive domains
- Consider culture as a variable rather than a static entity
- Provide students with the skill to reform perceptions of culture

- Provide students with the ability to interact successfully in novel cultural situations
- Exemplify that participants in the culture are the authors of the culture
- Relate to the native culture
- Relieve the teacher of the burden of being the cultural authority

These goals can be successfully accomplished by implementing innovative techniques for this matter. Seelye (1984) proposes effective culture-oriented activities such as culture capsules, culture clusters, culture assimilators as he explains their pedagogical value. Similar learning experiences are culturegrams, role-plays, critical incidents, field work, ethnographic research, surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observations, and the analysis of films, videos, literature, authentic materials and the like.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The participants in this study are ten Costa Rican English teachers, who were taking the course *Cultura y Lengua Meta* in the Master's Program in Second Languages and Cultures at Universidad Nacional in the first semester of 2010 (their first in the program). Seven are females whose ages (at the time of the study) ranged from 22 to 41 while the males' ages were 22, 23 and 38. Furthermore, the seven of them come from the Central Valley, except for participants 3, 5 and 9. They all have a Bachelor's Degree in English Teaching. At the time of the study, their positions were: one in pre-school, three in elementary school, three in high school, and three in adult education. Two of the participants had more than 10 years of experience while the rest had from 3 to 6. Finally, eight of them have visited a foreign country.

**Table 1**  
**Participants' personal information**

Participant #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Sex	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	M
Age	41	30	29	26	23	23	22	38	23	22
Years teaching	10	6	6	4	3	3	3	12	3	3
Travel abroad	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y

### Setting

The culture course constituted an inviting and cooperative learning environment suitable for dialogue and reflection for research, discussion and analysis of

cultural issues. Themes that emerged in classroom activities had the objective to increase cultural awareness, teach strategies to address diverse cultural issues, develop multicultural competence and communication, enhance professional performance and raise multicultural awareness. These educators were encouraged to analyze the factors that influence their cross-cultural knowledge, examine their perceptions and attitudes toward other cultures, record their progress or changes of attitudes, and engage in experiences to examine their personal beliefs, behaviors and overall understanding of culture. Finally, these professionals also implemented approaches to teaching culture like the ones suggested by Seelye (1984).

### **Instruments**

A questionnaire designed by the researchers was the first instrument used to collect data (See appendix #1). It was composed of three sections: 18 statements about cultural issues to be rated with a Likert scale of agreement (i.e. strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree), 14 rating questions about the subjects' behavior with three frequency options (i.e. always, sometimes, hardly ever), and 19 open questions about both beliefs and behaviors for the participants to elaborate on. Consequently, the inquiries focused on perceptions, attitudes, and conducts. In order to elicit straightforward, truthful answers, the respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous.

A technological tool served as the second instrument for the study. Each person was assigned to create a blog of his/her own; they were required to write a minimum of seven entries over a period of four months. In this task, they expressed their thoughts about topics related to culture and to their teaching practice. Therefore, they reflected on their course content and activities and commented on their professional experiences. The main purpose was to assess the participants' understanding of culture and their feelings about what they had learned and how they intended to apply it (See appendix #2 for the links to access the blogs).

The participants were then given guidelines for a mini peer project that consisted of five stages (See appendix #3). First, each person had to design a lesson plan for an eighty-minute class that addressed cultural understanding. Then, each teacher analyzed his/her peer's plan in order to provide feedback, so each plan could be revised. After that, each pair made the corresponding arrangements to conduct an observation of the peer's lesson about culture. Once again, the participants analyzed the task carried out and assess the goals accomplished and/or the aspects that can be improved in the future to reach them. Finally, the subjects wrote a blog entry reflecting on the experience and how it contributed to their students and their own growth; those thoughts were then shared in a class discussion, which was the mini project closing activity.

The last instrument was a closing questionnaire that was administered to the participants at the end of the four-month period (See appendix #4). It was divided into two sections: 12 rating questions about beliefs with a Likert scale of agreement, and seven open questions for the participants to elaborate on their responses. Unlike the opening questionnaire, which inquired about beliefs, attitudes and behaviors in relation to other cultures and culture itself, this instrument focused on the incorporation of the cultural component of the lessons the participants teach. The rating questions explored their opinions about the need, feasibility and significance of teaching culture, as well as the extent of the limitations to do so. Furthermore, while two of the open questions asked about beliefs regarding the language-learning process, four others dealt with their personal experience teaching culture; the remaining open inquiry "Do you agree with the proverb 'In Rome, do as Romans do'" was the only statement that appeared in both questionnaires. Finally, similar to the previous survey, this was anonymous.

## Procedure

During the first day of class in the course, the participants responded to the first questionnaire. Also, on that same date, they were assigned to create their blogs. These teachers then attended lessons once a week to engage in a repertoire of learning experiences designed by their professor to expand their knowledge about culture. Six weeks later, the peer project was assigned; they were given three weeks to design their lesson plan and revise it after receiving peer feedback and three more weeks to carry out the peer observations and elaborate on their reflections. On week fourteen, the projects were completed with a class discussion. The educators had three more weeks to apply in the lessons they teach what they had learned about incorporating the cultural component. Finally, on week seventeen, during the final day of class, they answered the closing questionnaire.

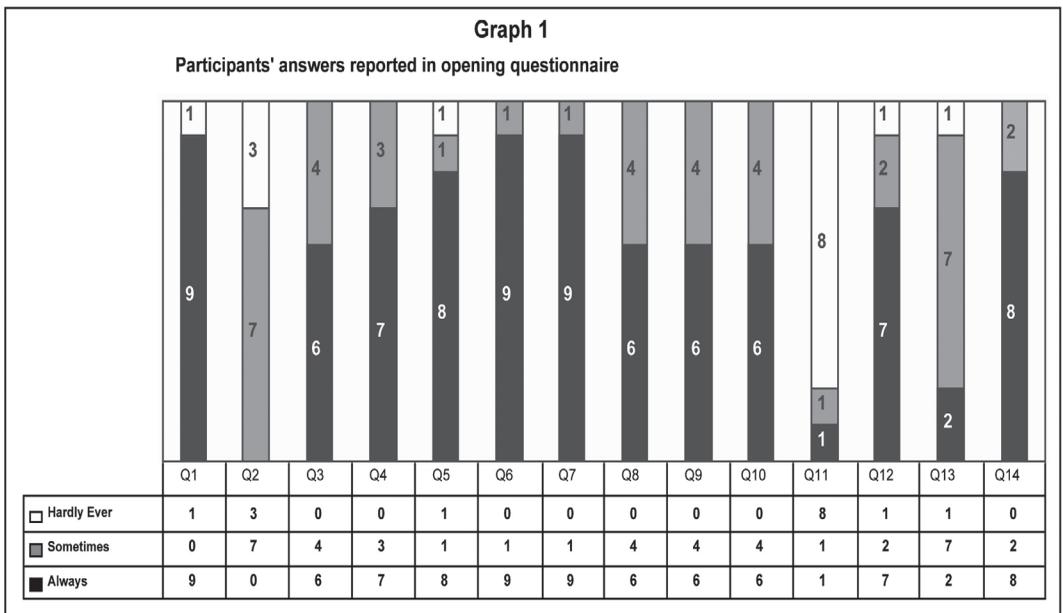
## Results and Analysis

As it was previously pointed out, the first task carried out by the participants was to answer a questionnaire about their behaviors, attitudes, opinions, and perceptions about culture in general and towards other cultures. As a starting point, it was crucial to determine how the subjects regarded the role of culture in language learning. Similarly, the researchers needed to detect any indication of animosity towards other cultures or ethnic groups. This analysis begins with the latter issue.

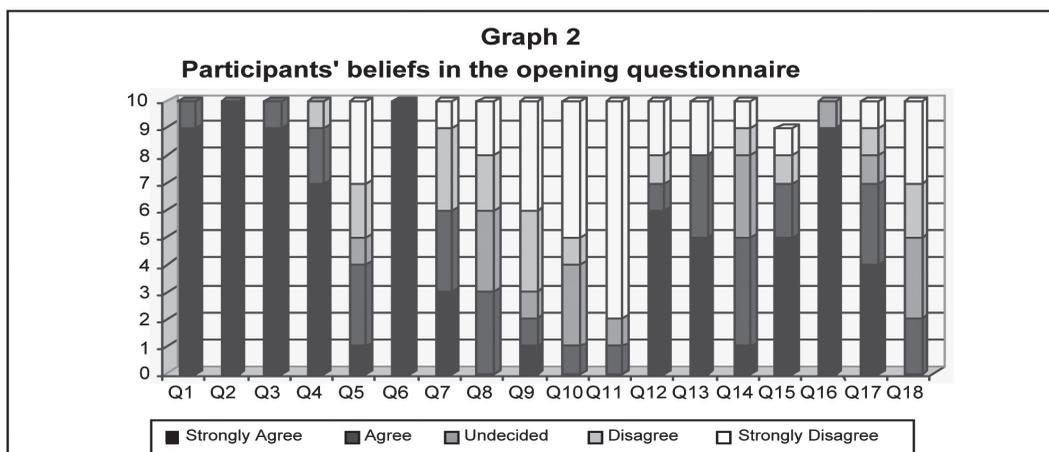
Fortunately, the participants expressed a high level of respect and tolerance towards different cultures. This was evident as 90% of them responded "always" to the statements "I like to meet people from other countries" and "I encourage others to respect other cultures;" the remaining 10% answered "sometimes" while no one selected the option "hardly ever." Furthermore, 80% of the group indicated that they hardly ever "segregate from people whose customs

I do not understand” (while 10% said “sometimes,” and 10%, “always”). However, when asked if they accepted people from any culture without any prejudice, 70% replied “always,” 20% said “sometimes,” and 10%, “hardly ever”. Even though these claims denote some constraints when it comes to cultural open-mindedness, luckily, such feelings indicate low levels of intolerance or bigotry. (See Graph 1 for more detailed information; the statements addressed above are # 6, 7, 11 and 12 respectively).

In relation to the role of the cultural component in language learning, the respondents indicated that language teachers need to be knowledgeable of the target culture and multi culturally competent. This was evident in their responses to four statements of agreement (1, 2, 3 & 6). As a matter of fact, all of them manifested strong agreement with ideas such as “The multicultural component should be part of every curriculum and course” (statement #6) and “Teachers can provide students with opportunities to help them understand the target culture and avoid stereotyping and sociotyping” (statement #2).



- Questions**
1. I listen to people in this country generalizing the personality of foreigners.
  2. I let people use racial slurs or tell inappropriate jokes about people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds.
  3. I communicate well with citizens from another country.
  4. I communicate easily with people from English speaking countries, including the USA.
  5. I communicate and share with friends who come from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds.
  6. I like to meet people from other countries.
  7. I encourage others to respect other cultures.
  8. I show my pride of my own heritage.
  9. Prejudice is the result of ignorance.
  10. I like to speak English with people from English speaking countries.
  11. I segregate from people whose customs I do not understand.
  12. I accept people from any culture without any prejudice
  13. When I meet people from other cultures, I avoid asking questions about touchy topics like religion, customs, values, or differences.
  14. I learn about other cultures to increase my understanding of differences and similarities.



#### Questions

1. Second language teachers should promote cultural encounters with individuals from different cultural background, so language learners become more familiar with some aspects related to communication patterns with the target culture or the second culture.
2. Teachers can provide students with opportunities to help them understand the target culture and avoid stereotyping and sociotyping.
3. EFL teachers should become informed and understand the target culture before they interact or teach their students about that second culture.
4. Teachers should pursue professional development through exposure to the target culture to become culturally proficient and knowledgeable to negotiate with their students.
5. Second language teachers need to have lived and become an insider in the target culture and accumulated the living experience of a culture in order to be able to help students experience it in the foreign culture.
6. The multicultural component should be part of every curriculum and course.
7. Any individual has the capacity experience, understand and possibly negotiate within another culture.
8. Costa Ricans are very tolerant and sensitive toward other cultures.
9. Costa Rican stereotypes are very beneficial for the country.
10. Foreigners have strange ways of behaving and communicating with Costa Ricans.
11. Foreigners should go home. We already have too many in this country.
12. Some cultures are more complex than others.
13. Culture really matters when it comes to "close" relationships.
14. Stereotypes are in some cases true sociotypes.
15. I would consider marry a foreigner or having one as a partner.
16. I choose my friends without considering their ethnic or cultural background/heritage
17. Dressing reflects the visual aspect of a culture.
18. Cross-cultural understanding cannot be achieved due to all the amount of differences among cultures.

Moreover, 90% of them also indicated strong agreement with opinions like "Second language teachers should promote cultural encounters with individuals from different cultural background, so language learners become more familiar with some aspects related to communication patterns with the target culture or the second culture" (statement #1) and "EFL teachers should become informed and understand the target culture before they interact or teach their students about that second culture" (statement #3); the remaining 10% also agreed but not strongly. Consequently, it can be established that the participants were fully aware that culture and language are inextricably connected, and that the teaching of the latter must presuppose the knowledge of the former as a principle. (Graph 2 shows a complete account of the opinions reported; the statements discussed above correspond to items 6, 2, 1, and 3 respectively. See appendix 1 to learn about the remaining inquiries).

Nevertheless, awareness of the premise above does not imply competence, or ability, to incorporate the cultural component in the classroom; in fact, it does not even guarantee that the language teachers possess sufficient and adequate knowledge of the target culture. That is, educators can understand the value of achieving expertise on the target culture; yet, these professionals may have had limited exposure to it due to many factors such as place of residence, access to technology, access to literature, and curricular deficiencies in their studies. Unfortunately, this is the reality of a large segment of language teachers in developing countries, and Costa Rica is no exception.

In order to deeply explore the participants' knowledge of the target and other foreign cultures, they were asked to name five customs they had learned from another culture. The answers provided intrigued the researchers to a great extent. The most surprising finding was not that only two out of ten respondents were able to give a rather satisfactory answer; it was not even the fact that, from the 50 manners expected to be cited, only a total of 33 (66%) was mentioned, or that just seven of those ideas indicated the corresponding culture (3 referred to US citizens, 1 to Argentinians, 1 to Jews, 1 to Muslims, 1 to Hindus). Actually, the most revealing discovery was that 40% percent of the subjects could cite only two or one customs. As a matter of fact, Participant 4 even wrote "I think I have not learned manners from another culture."

This sets the picture of the starting point of this study, which, as it was stated above, intends to facilitate the understanding and teaching of cultural empathy and awareness. It is indeed evident that a considerable gap between "acknowledging the importance of culture" and "knowledge of the target culture" was present in the group of subjects. Nevertheless, the intended goal was to overcome that gap; this was to be accomplished with the activities carried out in the course they were taking.

Three lessons in the course stood out thanks to the presence of four visitor teachers from other countries (two from Germany and two from USA). It was particularly enriching for the teachers to be able to discuss and reflect about culture with fellow educators from other countries. In these cultural encounters, they had the opportunity to expand their knowledge and understanding of other cultures. Their enthusiasm and delight were certainly evident in their questions to the guests and their comments in their blogs. For instance, after one of the cultural encounters, participant 8 posted the following on her blog:

That's incredible how you can learn new things in just two hours when you share with a foreign person... and that's what happened to me last week. I had the opportunity to share with Joanna, a woman from Texas, USA... I loved listening to Joanna in our class and we talked with her about Costa Rican culture too and we found similarities in infrastructure, weather, family ties and some other aspects. But there is something in which all of us agreed; we must value everyone's culture, and if we are not able to understand it, at least what we should do is to RESPECT. (<http://enrichingworldview.blogspot.com/>)

As the lessons continued, and the subjects were assigned the peer project, they also shared some insights about this task in their blogs. All the teachers reported that they grew professionally thanks to their peers, and that their students' learning about culture became more significant since the lessons incorporated more tasks and discussions about cultural encounters and experiences. As a matter of fact, participant 4 posted a very inspiring entry about her experience:

I felt very thankful after receiving [sic] my lesson plan feedback and I could realize that sharing our ideas can enrich the process in such a way that we all learn from it. After sharing [sic] my comments regarding to the lesson plan of my partner she took into account all my suggestions and changed her cognitive target for a culture-oriented target and she also omitted some of the linguistic skills and replaced them for culture skills and competences to develop in this challenging field of culture. That made me feels very useful and pleased, because she cares about her students' cultural abilities development. (<http://www.cultureraibow.blogspot.com/>)

The subjects' ongoing reflections suddenly became critical as this learning process moved forward. Many of them realized that they had been overlooking not only fundamental values such as tolerance and respect but also the target language culture in their lessons. For example, participant 5 posted a blog entry in which she elaborated on a self-critique. Such post states:

It is appalling [sic] how teachers do not know their students' perceptions about cultures and principally that one about the target culture of the language they are learning. I say this because that is what happened to me... I failed because I did not integrate culture when teaching English. Most classes were principally focused on developing the four language skills... and culture was almost totally apart. Consequently, I encourage teachers not to forget about teaching culture while teaching a language because, on the contrary, we are denying students to have a better perception of the world and making them unaware of what is happening in all around it. (<http://cultureabroadandinterestingtopic.blogspot.com/>)

Graph 3 shows the participants' beliefs about teaching culture in the closing questionnaire. As it was previously indicated, the inquiries in this questionnaire focused on the incorporation of the cultural component in the lesson plan. All the participants agreed (either strongly or not very strongly) with statements 1, 2, 3, 10 and 11, which respectively indicated: "Incorporating the cultural component in language course is essential," "If the curricula take for granted the cultural component or addresses it inappropriately, it is the teacher's responsibility to create learning experiences that promote cultural understanding," "If the textbook takes for granted the cultural component or addresses it inappropriately, it is the teacher's responsibility to create learning experiences that promote cultural understanding," "The culture-oriented activities in my lesson

contribute to the acquisition of all the language skills,” and “Understanding the culture(s) associated to the target language helps learners to understand other cultures that are not related to it.” Consequently, results are conclusive that the subjects consider that language educators have the responsibility to teach about the target-language culture, even when it may require to overcome constraints generated by unsuitable conditions (i.e. textbooks or the curricula).

Regarding the constraints, the participants were asked to indicate the main limitations that prevent the development of culture-oriented activities in class (the question did not provide options in order to elicit authentic answers). The responses signaled three major problems as 40% referred to “the textbooks”, 40% mentioned “lack of time”, and 30% stated “the curricula/programs”. Nevertheless, they also pointed out techniques to overcome those issues. For example, two simple ways to solve textbook deficiencies are to provide illustrative comments about culture along the lesson, and to modify certain activities in a way culture is not overlooked. In fact, such strategies should not demand extra time or require curriculum modifications.

Participants also believed that addressing culture is a task that needs to be performed in an integral way in every lesson. For instance, they all disagreed with the idea that “Addressing the cultural component in the warm-up activity should be enough to promote cultural understanding” (question 6). Furthermore, 80% strongly disagreed with the idea that they should abandon the culture-oriented activities if these seem to bother the students while the remaining 20% was undecided on that issue (question 7). Even though the researchers expected that all of them strongly disagreed with the idea, nobody indicated that giving up on promoting the cultural component could be a convenient solution for an unreceptive group, which is an encouraging result.

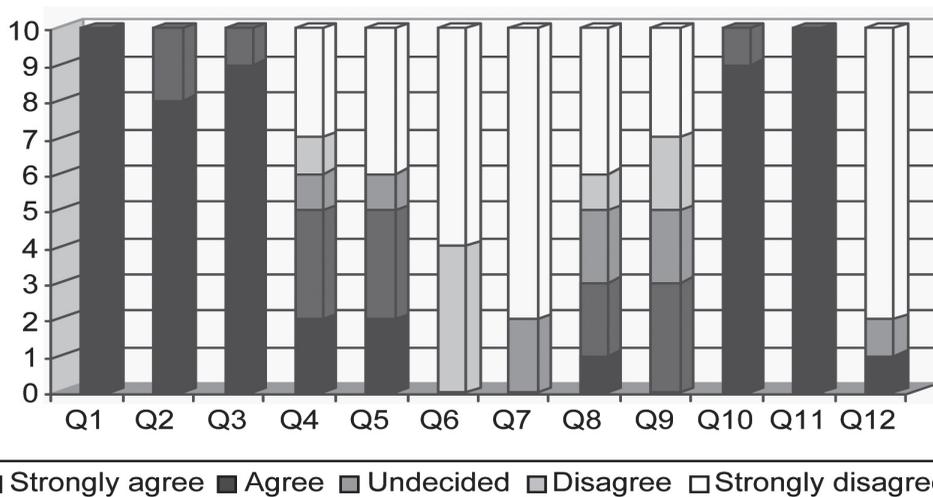
Teachers reported the following students’ positive reactions to the culture-oriented learning activities: Interest in learning about other cultures, curiosity, motivation, surprise or excitement about a culture or behavior, willingness to participate in multicultural tasks, and acceptance of the materials used. Moreover, the negative reactions included stereotypes, pre-judged opinions, dislike toward certain cultures, disagreement or disapproval towards certain attitudes or behaviors, and negative criticism. Also, the teachers manifested that the learning experiences that they carry out now, but they did not do it before taking the course included:

- Be aware of the cultural component in every lesson, no matter what the topic is.
- Talk about other cultures or even about our own culture.
- Learn and play games from different places.
- Ask students from other countries about their country.
- Bring into the picture the culture variable in every single topic we develop.
- Promote team [sic] work among preschoolers as a first attempt to accept [sic] other people’s [sic] differences.
- Bring them culture magazines like National Geographic and place them in the literature corner.

- Check out the books they have in the literature center and select the ones that are going to contribute with diverse cultural [sic] perspectives.
- Create my own activities incorporating culture.
- Use Internet resources as blogs or twitters to reflect on different cultures.
- Use blogs to share and reflect cultural experiences.
- Emphasize every piece of information related to the target culture in pre, while and post activities [sic].
- Bring artifacts (realia). It's difficult to get like items representing different cultures, but I get a picture of these items at least.

Graph 3

## Participants' beliefs in the closing questionnaire



## Questions

1. Incorporating the cultural component in language course is essential.
2. If the curricula take for granted the cultural component or addresses it inappropriately, it is the teacher's responsibility to create learning experiences that promote cultural understanding.
3. If the textbook takes for granted the cultural component or addresses it inappropriately, it is the teacher's responsibility to create learning experiences that promote cultural understanding.
4. Some lesson plans can be considered complete without a cultural component. It all depends on the language goals.
5. Incorporating a cultural component in a lesson plan requires considerable effort and extra work.
6. Addressing the cultural component in the warm-up activity should be enough to promote cultural understanding.
7. If the group seems to be bothered by the activities that promote cultural understanding, I should stop carrying them out.
8. The curricula are a limitation to accomplish culture-oriented objectives.
9. Textbooks are a limitation to accomplish culture-oriented objectives.
10. The culture-oriented activities in my lesson contribute to the acquisition of all the language skills.
11. Understanding the culture(s) associated to the target language helps learners to understand other cultures that are not related to it.
12. It is pointless to address in my lessons' activities aspects that deal with cultures that are not related to the target language.

First, the objective of this study was accomplished since the tasks implemented by the researchers indeed allowed the teachers to grow personally and professionally. This was evident in the closing questionnaire when the participants were asked to list the culture-oriented learning experiences they currently carry out in their lessons that they did not apply before this process started; in fact, they reported a total of 16 novel activities they now put into practice. Those strategies range from practical ideas such as bringing pictures, magazines and books into the classroom to more complex ones like incorporating the use of blogs and having the students do research.

Second, the feeling of personal growth was present in all these teachers as they clearly expressed it in their blogs. Posts about the new techniques they were learning were accompanied by sound reflections about their role in the society. For instance, participant 10 illustrates such feeling in the following entry:

In few weeks, I am about to finish my course on culture. It has been more than a great journey. It has enriched me as an EFL teacher. I can say that I have become a culture-based book designer and a totally aware activity planner... In brief, my teaching experience has evolved. I have learned about the most remote places in the world, from their underprivileged environments. I have also come to understand that one of the main roles a language teacher can brag about is that of promoting social changes. Every time culture is taught, we are contributing in making gaps among cultures smaller, and we are mainly influencing people see the whole picture that is blurred with stereotypes at time. It is a big responsibility but a rewarding one. (<http://enrichingteachingculturally.blogspot.com/>)

Third, the process the participants went through served a higher purpose than merely raising cultural awareness. As a matter of fact, it sensitized them about the significant and imperative need to be culturally responsive professionals who transmit values of understanding and tolerance to their students. This kind of education promotes ideals of cross-cultural empathy in a view of language teaching and learning that transcends the effective use of a communication system. As a result, the younger generations will be able to see themselves as citizens of the world, rather than of a country.

Fourth, educators have the means and capacity to find ways to get exposure to the target culture even when they have not traveled to other countries. As demonstrated in this paper, learning experiences such as conducting research, designing materials and lesson plans, observing colleagues, writing blogs and the like help teachers generate ideas to expand their horizons to be able to teach about other cultures. Similarly, the curricula, textbooks, and other materials should not be considered as limitations to incorporate the cultural component in the lesson plan as a repertoire of techniques, strategies and technological tools are available to the professionals in the field.

Finally, as everything people do is related to culture, it is not overly complex to refer to cultural issues in the development of a language lesson. Brief

illustrative comments can effectively incorporate the cultural component in the classroom. Values such as tolerance and respect for others (not only for the ones who come from a different ethnic group) should be fostered at all times in every course. Disapproval of other people's beliefs and behaviors must not lead to stereotypes, and language educators are in a special position to have the opportunity to transmit this type of ethic to the student body in an effort to promote open-mindedness.

### Notes

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  13. Culture really matters when it comes to “close” relationships.
  14. Stereotypes are in some cases true sociotypes.
  15. I would consider marry a foreigner or having one as a partner.
  16. I choose my friends without considering their ethnic or cultural background/ heritage
  17. Dressing reflects the visual aspect of a culture.
  18. Cross-cultural understanding cannot be achieved due to all the amount of differences among cultures.
- 

**Always   Sometimes   Hardly  
ever**

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1. I listen to people in this country generalizing the personality of foreigners.
2. I let people use racial slurs or tell inappropriate jokes about people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds.
3. I communicate well with citizens from another country.
4. I communicate easily with people from English speaking countries, including the USA.
5. I communicate and share with friends who come from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds.
6. I like to meet people from other countries.
7. I encourage others to respect other cultures.
8. I show my pride of my own heritage.
9. Prejudice is the result of ignorance.
10. I like to speak English with people from English speaking countries.

11. I segregate from people whose customs I do not understand.
  12. I accept people from any culture without any prejudice
  13. When I meet people from other cultures, I avoid asking questions about touchy topics like religion, customs, values, or differences.
  14. I learn about other cultures to increase my understanding of differences and similarities.
- 

## General questions

1. Can you name five manners you have learned from another culture?
2. What do you think about this expression: "In Rome do as Romans do"?
3. How do you get across cross-cultural communication? What strategies do you use?
4. How do you become knowledgeable about multicultural awareness issues?
5. When you talk to native speakers of English of another country, is communication interrupted by preconceived ideas of their culture?
6. How you approach toward touchy topics as religious and political issues from other countries?
7. Do young people behave differently from older people in your culture? Why?
8. What behavior means politeness in your culture?
9. What are you most proud about your culture?
10. How would you differentiate people from different cultures?
11. How would you deal with different spiritual beliefs?
12. What do you expect from people from another culture?
13. How do you cope with negative attitudes of other people from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds?
14. How would you prepare yourself before visiting another country? What resources would use to inform yourself about the country you are visiting?
15. When visiting another country, how would you react to a meal that is too odd for you? Would eat it?
16. How does body language interfere in oral communication?
17. What do you think about women's roles in different cultures?
18. What are the main differences between Costa Ricans and U.S citizens?

## Appendix 2 Participants' blogs

<http://antonetavargas.blogspot.com>

<http://culturalshirley.blogspot.com/>

<http://cultureabroadandinterestingtopic.blogspot.com/>

<http://cultureanduniverse.blogspot.com/>

<http://culturerrainbow.blogspot.com/>  
<http://dynamicculture.blogspot.com/>  
<http://enrichingteachingculturally.blogspot.com>  
<http://enrichingworldview.blogspot.com>  
<http://letscerebrate.blogspot.com>  
<http://spotsofculture.blogspot.com>

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Peer Project Guideline**

Universidad Nacional  
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras  
Maestría en Segundas Lenguas y Culturas  
LPE 702 Cultura y Lengua Meta  
Guidelines for peer task: Developing culture in the lesson

#### **Section A: Planning**

1. Select a classmate to work with: It has to be a person suitable for peer observation (you are going to visit each other's group). Remember to request permission to the corresponding authorities.
2. Develop a lesson plan (at least 80 minutes) in which you incorporate cultural understanding. Keep in mind that you are going to teach this lesson while your classmate observes it. Due: April 16<sup>th</sup>.
3. In class, you are going to analyze your classmate's lesson and give feedback. You need to work together in order to improve the components of the plan, especially the tasks that facilitate cultural understanding.
4. Taking into account your peer's feedback, write a revised version of the lesson plan.

#### **Section B: Teaching**

1. Schedule your lesson for a date in which your classmate can observe it. (In case your classmate can't make it, do not teach the lesson that date. Have a contingency lesson plan).
2. At the beginning of the lesson, introduce your classmate to the group.
3. At the end of the lesson, take 5 minutes to ask your students to fill out a short survey that will be designed by the professor.

#### **Section C: Observation**

1. The date of the observation, arrive 15 minutes before the lesson starts. (Remember that a late arrival is going to disrupt your peer's class).
2. Use the instrument given by the professor to conduct the observation. Take clear and complete notes of any relevant aspect for this task.
3. Your role is to be an observant, not a participant.



5 4 3 2 1

1. Incorporating the cultural component in language course is essential.
2. If the curricula take for granted the cultural component or addresses it inappropriately, it is the teacher's responsibility to create learning experiences that promote cultural understanding.
3. If the textbook takes for granted the cultural component or addresses it inappropriately, it is the teacher's responsibility to create learning experiences that promote cultural understanding.
4. Some lesson plans can be considered complete without a cultural component. It all depends on the language goals.
5. Incorporating a cultural component in a lesson plan requires considerable effort and extra work.
6. Addressing the cultural component in the warm-up activity should be enough to promote cultural understanding.
7. If the group seems to be bothered by the activities that promote cultural understanding, I should stop carrying them out.
8. The curricula are a limitation to accomplish culture-oriented objectives.
9. Textbooks are a limitation to accomplish culture-oriented objectives.
10. The culture-oriented activities in my lesson contribute to the acquisition of all the language skills.
11. Understanding the culture(s) associated to the target language helps learners to understand other cultures that are not related to it.
12. It is pointless to address in my lessons' activities aspects that deal with cultures that are not related to the target language.

### General questions

"In Rome, do as Romans do". Do you agree with this proverb?

Yes, why?

No, why?

Do you believe that second language instructors need to have lived in the target culture to be able to appropriately teach its culture?

Yes, why?

No, why?

Can your students improve their English if you develop culture-oriented learning experiences that focus on cultures that are neither the native one nor the target one?

Yes, why?

No, why?

Refer to the main limitations that prevent the development of culture-oriented learning experiences in the language lessons.

Limitation	How can you overcome it?
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Refer to the learning experiences (strategies/techniques/activities) that you now put into practice to teach culture in your lessons as it is indicated in the boxes.

Learning experiences that you carry out now, but <u>you did not carry out before</u> taking the <i>Culture and Target Language</i> course.	Learning experiences that you carry out <u>now and also did it before</u> taking the <i>Culture and Target Language</i> course.
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As you developed the culture-oriented learning experiences in your lessons, your students may have reacted in different ways. Please list all the students' reactions you can remember in the table below.

Positive reactions	Negative reactions	Neutral
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What kind of improvement do you still need to achieve in order to teach culture in your lessons?

Improvement	How can you achieve it?
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