

## COLOMBIA'S CARIBBEAN CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS FOR RUSSIAN CAMPERS: AN EXPERIENCE IN INTERCULTURALITY<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper reports an ethnographic study which purpose was to inquire on cultural awareness raising as new cultural representations were taught to engage in learning a group of teenagers taking English at a summer camp in Siberia, Russia. The need to promote intercultural awareness seemed essential since their behavior and ways of thinking were disengaged from the game of learning. The authors implemented Cooperative Learning (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994 and 2008) to facilitate the dialog about the participants' culture and the teacher's. The data gathered indicates that due to culture teaching there were gains in awareness on cultural diversity; by stepping outside their boundaries, the campers moved away from ethnocentric attitudes and realized about the meaning that peoples assign to traditions, an indication of gain in intercultural awareness.

**Key Words:** Cooperative Learning, cultural representations, diversity, English, foreign language, intercultural awareness raising, adolescents.

### REPRESENTACIONES CULTURALES DEL CARIBE COLOMBIANO: UNA EXPERIENCIA DE INTERCULTURALIDAD CON JÓVENES DE UN CAMPAMENTO RUSO

### Resumen

Este artículo reporta un estudio etnográfico cuyo objetivo fue el de indagar el sentido del desarrollo de la conciencia cultural al enseñar nuevas representaciones culturales para motivar a un grupo de jóvenes que tomaba clases de inglés en un campamento de verano en Siberia, Rusia. La necesidad de promover la conciencia intercultural parecía esencial dado que su comportamiento y formas de pensar y actuar estaban desligados del aprendizaje en general. Los autores implementaron el Aprendizaje Cooperativo (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994 y 2008) para facilitar el diálogo sobre la cultura de los participantes y la de la docente. La información reunida indica que por la enseñanza de la cultura los campistas adquirieron conciencia sobre la diversidad cultural. Al salir de sus propias barreras, dejaron de lado actitudes etnocéntricas y valoraron el sentido que los pueblos le dan a las tradiciones, indicador de avance en conciencia intercultural.

**Palabras Clave:** Aprendizaje cooperativo, conciencia intercultural, diversidad, jóvenes, inglés, lenguas extranjeras, representaciones culturales, adolescentes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Viviana, a pre-service teacher spent two summers teaching in a language immersion camp; her internship served as the subject of inquiry on Interculturality. As counselor, she realized that student did not display attention, or interest for what was taught. Their level of engagement to learn about languages and cultures was low. The authors of this article agree with Kourova, A. & Modianos, D. (2013: 62) who establish that:

“The educational goals of teaching culture include the acquisition of a wider world-view and learning to be open, accepting, and caring citizens of the world community. Encouraging positive attitudes and understanding of other people that could ultimately lead to tolerance, the overcoming of stereotypes, and the reduction of prejudice and ego centrality are other educational goals”.

For three months in two separate summer seasons, Viviana worked as a counselor in a camp located in the Siberian surroundings of Krasnoyarsk city, Russian Federation. Campers were upper-income Russian who participated in campfires, sports, competitions, hiking, swimming, and who also took two hours of English lessons daily. The inquiry aimed at understanding the apparent cultural disengagement of the seven participants (boys and girls ages 13-16). Since Viviana lived full time with the campers, and had the opportunity to gather evidence of their cultural disengagement, ethnography was chosen as the research method. As Merriam (1998) argues Ethnography focuses on culture and social regularities of everyday life.

For the pedagogical intervention Cooperative Learning (CL) offered a classroom management and a structure of tasks that had potential to address disengagement. The literature on CL (Olsen, R., and S. Kagan. 1992; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994, 2008) suggests that it may help learners gain socio-cultural and personal skills since they develop cognition and shape behaviors and attitudes working cooperatively.

The issue that Campers claimed that Russian language and culture were predominant and sufficient

so they did not need to learn about any other moved us to begin an inquiry. In the data taken from the admission interviews, two reasons for their apparent disengagement were identified: one contextual, attributable to parental influence, and another socio-personal. First, in the interviews, adolescents said that their parents had regularly advised them not to bother with English; but instead study subjects such as mathematics or science for they were more useful for their professional lives. Second, most campers claimed they were not interested in other languages or cultures, because they were able to cope well with the Russian language and culture they own. In classes, campers also expressed views that indicated distance to what they deemed foreign.

Then we paid attention to the literature on Intercultural Awareness (ICA), defined by Baker (2012: 23) as a “conscious understanding of the role culturally-based communicative forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in communication”. The field notes and observations, which were backed up by video recording of several classes, concentrated on establishing the participants’ frames of reference. The data analysis section brings several examples of the interactions around cultural topics.

We followed Moran (2011: 17) who argues that: “culture is adaptive, changing and integrated; then the point is to understand clearly how different cultures would work in our society.” It was assumed that if campers acknowledged intercultural diversity, later their actions and behaviors would display their ability to deal with varied multicultural populations, and make it part of their citizenship. This is supported by Ember (1973: 17) who claims that: “It is only when we compare ourselves with people in other societies that we become aware of cultural differences and similarities.”-

The topics of Colombia Caribbean region were incorporated to propitiate a sense of cultural awareness. The English syllabus at the camp was modified to include considerations of the region,

of transportation, flora and fauna, food, dance, costumes, and handcrafts. The assimilation of these topics showed that not only the campers but the teacher understood and acknowledged how people live their cultural practices, and how they perceive others as they become open to talking with individuals and group members of varied social communities. As stated by Moran (2011) Culture teaching gives the capacity and ability to enter other groups and communicate effectively, establishing and maintaining better relationships.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The ethnographic study had three constructs. First, *The Cultural Experience* that relates to making attempts to promote cultural diversity. Second, *Culture Teaching* that relates to culture understanding whilst enhancing language competence; and third *Intercultural Awareness* that focuses on the gains learners can make.

#### The cultural experience

The concept of *Cultural Experience* derives from Moran (2001: 24) who defines it as “the evolving way of 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 on the world, and set within specific social contexts.” A cultural experience becomes significant provided participants reflect on it and incorporate them to their thinking and acting.

Likewise, *Moran’s Cultural Knowings Framework* (2001: 15) offers a description of four cores to keep in mind: “*knowing about, knowing how, knowing why and knowing oneself*.” Firstly, *Knowing About* refers to being aware of the cultural meanings constructed in a community. Secondly *Knowing How* advocates for an appropriate and respectful behavior towards other communities during a cultural experience. Thirdly, *Knowing Why* has to do with some practices that are carried out to help understand the basis and meanings within each culture. Finally, *Moran’s Knowing Oneself* constitutes a means to comprehending, adapting to, or integrating into another culture. The framework

guided the decisions on the content and on the delivery of teaching at the camp.

The study considered language as a dimension of the inquiry on culture. For Moran (2001: 39) “The language we use to learn a culture is the language of the classroom, where culture is the topic and language the means to comprehend, analyze, and respond to it.” Subsequently, in order for the acknowledgement of any culture to be successful, the *Language to Learn a Culture Framework* by Moran (2001: 39) develops a functional view of language, stating four language instances humans go through when learning and expressing their ideas about any culture: “Participation, Description, Interpretation and Response.” These ideas serve as inspiration to teach campers interactively, to propose tasks that propitiated the exchange of views among learners and the reaction to thought-provoking topics.

The literature illustrates the relation culture-language. Sapargul and Sartor (2010: 26) taught English literary texts to Turkish students, putting together English-speaking cultures and Turkish cultures. Their conclusions indicate that students are inspired by cultural connection and differentiation, to communicate ideas, and to apply their critical thinking skills inside and outside the classroom. This case signals that this knowledge transcended classroom boundaries as students were appealed by the work on language, and felt like talking about it out of class. Their results also established that students are able to go beyond classroom learning, and do self-discovery of cultural knowledge.

Another study by Viáfara and Ariza (2015) found embryonic development in intercultural competence in an experience of a brief contact of Colombian pre-service teachers with another culture. Participants became aware of cultural patterns in their sojourn abroad; they identified and respected cultural divergences, and they showed tolerance. These findings relate closely to our study.

#### Culture teaching

The second construct of our study concerns culture teaching. The report by Berg (2010) addresses the

lack of interest about cultural characteristics in some EFL classes, and emphasizes on the needs for exploring culture more in order to expand learning perspectives. Similarly, Kramersch (2001: 205) contends that: "understanding a foreign culture requires putting that culture in relation to one's own." Accordingly, language learning should incorporate aspects of socio-cultural life for students to reflect upon. Addressing cultural features crosses disciplinary boundaries; in words of Moran (2001: 15) "promotes the *knowings* and allows the triad culture-language-teaching to happen."

Moreover, Barrera and Cantor (2007) give a perspective to the study of culture. They conducted a study with ten tenth graders for involving them with aspects of Colombian culture related to their daily lives. This is anchored in Kramersch (2001: 47) who explains that: "In the foreign language class, culture is created and enacted through the dialogue between students, and between teacher and students so that, through this dialogue, participants not only replicate a given context of culture, but because it takes place in a foreign language, it also has the potential of shaping a new culture."

By the same token, Lustig and Koester (1999: 59) argue that "the intercultural competence occurs when large cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competitively." Having intercultural competence in the agenda of a course includes understanding appropriate behaviors in the other's culture by means of knowledge and respect. This is a factor that fits with what Taylor (2007: 67) considers as the teaching of intercultural competence, that can be carried out by "a smooth transition between one's own culture and that of others, by acquiring objective knowledge about the target language as well as expertise and the ability to achieve appropriate behaviors in that culture." Sometimes the gains in intercultural competence are subtle and thus difficult to assess. This should not discourage its teaching.

In this regard, teaching and reflecting about cultural topics in the EFL class makes part of a transformative view, since there is no traditional diffusion of

culture as Kramersch (2001: 205) mentions "Traditional thought in foreign language education has limited the teaching of culture to the transmission of information about the people of the target country, and about their general attitudes and world views." The teaching of culture, which is experiential and that promotes debate, has potential to transform individuals and groups.

As it will be discussed later our study suggests that in teaching, cultural encounters allow a more fluid conversation from the acknowledgement of other cultures with their beliefs, features, and lifestyles. The acceptance and acknowledgement of the distinctiveness of each culture helps adolescents identify diverse contexts and open doors for socio-personal contacts. As mentioned by Jandt (2000: 145) "becoming a competent intercultural communicator involves learning and appreciating the uniqueness of other people and cultures."

### **Intercultural awareness**

The third construct holds that cultural and linguistic connections make learning and teaching meaningful. A study by Robinson (2011) proposes awakening curiosity to promote cultural diversity. He developed his research with ten participants from the English Department of a university. They had different English language proficiency levels and Robinson implemented the Content-Based Approach in three steps: *From novice to rock star*; *Behind the scenes*; and *Performing tasks and activities*. These workshops followed a schema for students to get to understand the evolution of Rock and Roll throughout time, depending on the cultures where it was rooted. Robinson concluded that by understanding the transition of Rock and Roll in different nations, participants were able to identify the changes, and discuss implications relevant for the Rock and Roll history in other cultures.

The study by Cross (2011) displays the insights and outcomes that Japanese students with high English proficiency had. They worked with a *Joint Activity system model* in listening to analyze the social-cultural-historical features of participants. Data gathered from journals, interviews, and infor-

mal dialogues allowed the researcher to analyze the learners' history, beliefs, and patterns of interaction as well as pair work. Results provided evidence that this metacognitive instruction with the Joint Activity system provides learners the chance to work together to find better ways to listen; and helps significantly to have learners discuss about and become sensitive to other cultures.

Similarly, becoming interculturally aware refers to the insights people in a learning community have about their acknowledgment and interaction with cultures. In connection with this, Lustig and Koester (1999: 59) highlight that intercultural competent communication is "interaction perceived as effective", which means that competence, is determined by the users, making people's perceptions more important than measurable chunks, and analyzing intercultural competence from different viewpoints.

Intercultural awareness enriches people, making them more *intercompetent* as they share knowledge with their fellows. For Rogers and Steinfatt (1999: 221) "one of the most important skills for cultural competence is the ability to suspend our assumptions about what is "right"." Besides, intercultural awareness makes reference to the acknowledgement of cultural diversity, and as claimed by Rogers and Steinfatt (1999: 221), to the degree an "individual is able to communicate with individuals who are culturally dissimilar." This involves the display of values, and of behaviors that show a respectful attitude towards their peers, allowing them to become more interculturally competent. Lustig and Koester (1999: 329) support the above by stating: "the display of respect increases judgment towards intercultural competence."

Another area of inquiry is *awareness of others' feelings and thoughts*. In words of Berg (2010: 197) "the starting point of intercultural competence is awareness." This premise of empathy in intercultural competence is described by Lustig and Koester (1999: 331) as "the capacity of behaving as if one understands the world as others do." The ethnographic study with Russian campers tries to establish this competence in terms of understanding culturally diverse practices.

A feature in intercultural competence is incorporating general knowledge about the culture in interaction, because this provides a better understanding of its behaviors, feelings and thoughts. Lustig and Koester (1999: 347) highlight that "interculturally competent communicators integrate a wide array of cultural-general knowledge into behavioral repertoires, and they are able to apply that knowledge to the specific cultures with which they interact." Likewise, if there is more awareness of the cultural basis, participants' behaviors become likely to acknowledge diversity as part of the world dynamics. Similarly, Lustig and Koester (1999: 347) state the behavior of intercultural competent people as the ability to "respond emotionally and behaviorally with a wide range of choices in order to act appropriately and effectively within the constraints of each situation."

Finally, Aktuna (2005) argues for cultural foci instead of language instruction, as a means to master a worldview beyond the English language. Her study with a group of fifteen pre-service teachers aimed at increasing cultural awareness for the sake of helping them communicate more interculturally with others as they acquired this knowledge in the English language classes they were attending. Results of this study concluded that concentrating on intercultural communication facilitates language apprehension, and it encourages socialization and discussion on issues across cultures, so that they become socio-cultural teachers with high awareness of cultural diversity, and of intercultural communication.

As Kramsch (2004: 229) argues "Through dialogue and the search for each other's understanding, each person tries to see the world through the other's eyes without losing sight of him or herself." This contributed to widening their opinions about the world and cultures, so that they become later able to apply what learnt outside the academic context. In the Russian camp, the syllabus focused on cultural aspects, and language was developed around them.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The authors used ethnography to document the campers' beliefs, behaviors, products, practices,

interaction and attitude towards another culture that may account for their disengagement in learning. The transcriptions and the discussion in the data analysis section displays the progress in intercultural awareness made by the participants. For Freeman (1998: 156), ethnography “focuses on the culture and social regularities of everyday life characterized by a rich, thick description, which must present a socio-cultural interpretation of the data.” Ethnography also allowed us to give an account of learning as it unfolds and varies over time, leading potentially to insights into cultural patterns in an attempt to understand a context and the interactions in the language immersion program. The intense contact of the teacher and the campers in the immersion camp was instrumental in gathering quality ethnographic data.

There were about seventy campers ranging six to sixteen years of age divided into three groups. The first group of children aged five to eight, and the second aged nine to twelve. The third had ten teenagers aged 13-16. The target population was two boys and five girls with high English proficiency. The camp authorities and the seven adolescents gave their consent to participate in the study and to be videotaped.

As an intern in the linguistic Summer camp Viviana played several roles: English tutor, teacher in cultures, dancing, music and sports. She also created a speaking club, assisted in the organization of leisure activities and events, and in the second summer she designed the syllabus. The camp allowed close and intense contact with the participants. Viviana regularly engaged in informal conversations with the children. She collected information through participant observation, defined by Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) as the process of enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the participants in the natural setting through observing and taking part in those activities.

Classes were conducted seven days a week for nine weeks each season. The focus of the class observations was on what participants did in the follow-up discussions on culture topics. 105 video clips of the classes observed, served to compare the data with

the field notes, and with the teacher's journal as a means to knowing, analyzing and understanding the campers' views and insights towards another culture. The video-recordings registered the participants' opinions, attitudes, behaviors, as well as the teacher's role in class. This gave a picture of the atmosphere and of the factors involved in the lessons. Due to limitations of space this reports presents key excerpts of video-recordings of some of the classes.

In addition, we conducted 13 recorded-interviews of about thirty minutes each, from *Person-to-Person Encounters* defined by Merriam (1998: 71) as “conversations in which one person elicits information from another”. The purpose was to hold unstructured informal interviews with more flexible and open-ended questions, resembling more an informal conversation. In this manner, campers provided more useful and rich information, by explaining freely their thoughts, ideas and opinions about the topics discussed in class.

Another technique to collect information was *Journals* in the sense proposed by Freeman, (1998: 93) “regular dated accounts of teaching/learning plans, activities and classroom occurrences, including personal philosophies, feelings, reactions, observations and explanations.” At the end of each class, Viviana wrote down the events and opinions, the atmosphere, the learners' attitudes, behaviors, and any the factors that could have influenced the lesson development. In addition, there were notes on her role as a teacher.

### **PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION**

In the pedagogical innovation the concept of *knowing oneself* became central to promote awareness and open-mindedness to diversity. This study attempts to support the integration of culture in the syllabus, to help learners to recognize themselves and acknowledge others' culture and diversity. Viviana took advantage of her foreignness to build rapport with the teenagers, teaching them other life styles, products and perspectives. Paraphrasing Kramsch (2001) Viviana searched for points of contact between cultures that could transform cultural barriers into cultural bridges.

As a teacher, Viviana became more aware of cultural diversity, she reflected on the cultures in contact, and she felt she required more knowledge from the cultural patterns of living, acting, reacting, seeing, and explaining the world. The topics in chart 1 on Colombian Caribbean region, and the contrast with the participants' Russian culture constituted the backbone of the English program at the camp:

**Chart 1.**

*Topics discussed*

No.	Topics in the syllabus
1	Introduction to Colombia and its Caribbean region
2	The cities of Barranquilla, Santa Marta and Cartagena
3	San Andrés and Providencia Islands
4	Typical food
5	Transportation
6	Natural parks, flora and fauna
7	Dances and traditional dancing costumes
8	Musical instruments and handicrafts

Covering each topic took about two weeks and it was developed with Cooperative Learning Tasks such as brainstorming, Think-Pair-Share, Round Robin, and Round Table. As Rogers and Steinfatt (1999: 225) claim "intercultural communication training must be highly experiential in order for it to increase intercultural competence." Activities included: individual and group photo display sessions, brief power point presentations, and videos related to the carnival celebration in Barranquilla. Campers also listened to, and in groups, prepared music and dance. Props included traditional costumes: typical dresses, skirts, hats and shoes, hand-made bracelets and collars, carnival paraphernalia such as Marimonda masks, - La Marimonda, which are hooded figures with long noses, floppy ears and bright trousers and vests: wooden-made bull, tiger and parrots, whistles, flutes and maracas (rattles). Additionally, the teacher offered explanations and promoted discussion, for example on the government plans for building new roads, for organizing the public transportation system,

and for promoting the use of bicycles. Same was done with food for which the teacher pointed that people from the central region of Colombia may also find Caribbean dishes unusual.

Cooperative Learning (CL) guided the instructional design, bearing in mind what Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1994: 192) argue: "Cooperative Learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially constructed exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others." In the camp, adolescents worked together to accomplish shared goals and maximize their own and other's learning, escorting better learning processes that do not label them as "best" or "worst", but promote the same purposes of intercultural awareness and EFL learning. CL fosters cooperation rather than competition (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec, 1994 and 2008). In order to develop CL, classes followed these steps:

1. A Power Point of 4-9 slides to present a cultural topic with pictures.
2. Cooperative groups looked up and presented information on Colombia contrasting it with their own culture.
3. Campers reflected, commented in pairs and then shared or asked questions.
4. Viviana posed a question for teenagers to think about it individually. Later, by pairs they talk about the issues and responded to the question. Then, students proceeded to talk to the rest of the class to offer their insights on cultural features. This CL technique is called Think-Pair-Share.
5. Learners prepared in group and occasionally performed dances or made handicrafts.
6. Videos related to topics served as subject of discussion.
7. The use of realia consisted in: traditional costumes: carnival props like masks, wooden

animals, musical instruments, hand-made bracelets and collars.

The implementation of CL in this study, emphasized learning from one another, putting into practice Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1976) that strives for meaningful teaching and learning processes based on the integration of everybody's pieces of knowledge, which help out ideas and concepts assemble in order to expand them and construct a broader knowledge. CL fitted the project aim of promoting intercultural awareness because in the CL tasks, learners developed a positive-dependent learning style, so that they worked on their language learning with their classmates' contributions.

Regarding the CL theory of learning, social interaction in learning is essential, standing for a different view of language that changes the traditional magisterial teaching methods. In so doing, the central premise of the CL approach as argued by Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994: 193) "is that learners develop communicative competence in a language by conversing in socially or pedagogically structured situations." This leads to the awakening of a more meaningful learning style, since Russian teenagers enriched their knowledge by interacting with classmates.

Another aspect from CL is that as mentioned by Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994: 194) "it seeks for the development of learners' critical thinking skills." As a result, apart from setting up practices for EFL learning, there is also a space to help students become more acquainted with social issue, and explore their thoughts in those situations. That is why culture is the central core to work, since teenagers exchanged opinions, ideas and thoughts about both: language and culture.

## FINDINGS

This section answers the question of this study: *What could a Russian teenage community inform us about becoming culturally aware?* The data gathered suggests categories that display how campers represent their opinions, ideas and thoughts about another culture. It indicates the transition partici-

pants had from the stage 1. *Stereotyping cultures* to stage 2. *Comparing cultures*, and moved to stage 3. *Acknowledging cultures*. A fourth category arose: *The teacher's realization*, which displays Viviana's learning and understanding obtained in the process, which comes from her journal. Below the reader will find the data samples that illustrate the adolescents' most representative comments transcribed from some of the videos recorded.

### Stage 1. Stereotyping cultures

The data displays conceptions about the behaviors of people from other cultures as teenagers worked on topic 4.4: *Colombia's indigenous group from Sierra Nevada*. In the video recording #10, teenagers saw photographs and watched a video about Arhuacos. Then, they answered the question: *What is your impression about Arhuacos, based on the video and pictures?*

*Video-recording # 16: June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 1:** "Arhuacos are strange and mystic"...  
 "They are very Indians..." (laughing loudly)...  
 "They were very crazy (laughing) because they live in these huts and look how they sleep."...  
 "They look like animals."... "They are not city people."

In terms of topic 14: Traditional Costumes worn for special carnivals, parades or dances. The campers' main reaction was that they look clumsy, unusual and too extravagant.

*Video-recording # 20: July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 2** said: "Sometimes costumes in festivals look like cheap or something cheap just for extravagant people, because a lot of decorations in their dresses are not good."

Topic No. 6, as expected, indicated that campers had not encountered anything like Caribbean food. They saw pictures of *butifarra* (a sausage made of raw pork and spices), *bollo* (a fritter made of flour and seasonings), *arepa de huevo* (a fritter with a flat egg inside) which they

found odd because of their aspect, preparation or ingredients:

*Video-recording # 25: July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 6:** “It’s not tasty... Colombian food is very strange for Russian people I think, and in Colombia there are so many exotic dishes.”

As part of topic 14, teenagers saw two videos of Barranquilla Carnival, and they deemed the celebration extravagant and eccentric. At first, they found difficult to understand the rationale of the carnival, of the dances, of the parades with decorated carts, or the four days of intense festivities in this celebration of Spanish and African roots. .

*Video-recording # 35: July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 4:** “The dance is very strange and funny... I don’t understand why these people see this carnival... I don’t like this music and I don’t like how people dance... They are so strange.”

Lewis (2006) put the above in perspective: “People of different cultures share basic concepts but view them from different angles and perspectives, leading them to behave in a manner which we may consider irrational or even in direct contradiction of what we hold sacred. We should nevertheless be optimistic about cultural diversity. The behavior of people of different cultures is not something willy-nilly. There exist clear trends, sequences and traditions.” (xvi).

The class discussion provided a frame for exploring another culture. With the CL tasks, the teenagers developed some sense of the carnival in connection with the harvest, and with religious, social and cultural aspects.

## Stage 2. Comparing cultures

The topics and the CL used enabled campers to begin to grasp the cultural differences and similarities, by comparison and contrast. As Kramsch (2001) affirms, the understanding of a foreign

culture requires putting that culture in relation to one’s own. For example, first, about topic 6: food and recipes, adolescents started to make connections between their Russian traditional dishes and the ones prepared in Colombian Caribbean culture. Thus, learners found out that one of them **перошки** (piroshky) resembles to Hayaca (a dish of meet mixed with **raisins, olives** or other ingredients, and wrapped in cornmeal dough, folded within **plantain leaves**, tied with strings, and boiled):

*Video-recording # 26: July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 1:** “I think Hayaca is like **перошки** (piroshky)... mmm... It’s Russian food: A pie with carrots, onions and eggs and other things.”

Second, during the discussion on topic 7: Transportation, teenagers were impressed, and means such as the motorcycle, bicycle and Transmetro were considered different by the students.

*Video-recording # 24: July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 4:** “These buses look like very new and in our city they are very old and dirty. Also, it is very interesting that you have one road just for bicycles. It doesn’t happen here.”

Third, based on the discussion of flora, students showed their surprise as they saw the variety of flowers displayed in the pictures, and expressed their like for them. Likewise, their comparisons were directed to the type of flowers growing in Krasnoyarsk:

*Video-recording # 50: August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 6:** “Your flower Cayena looks like ours, but they are of another color, sometimes pink. They grow only in “**дача**” (house) not in the city.”

Finally, with the class topic on animals, teenagers were asked to say whether they liked any in particular or not. In here, they expressed their like for animals such as flamingos and parrots because they claimed they are amazing

animals and Colombia has a lot of them in comparison to Russia.

*Video-recording # 34: July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 2:** “In the zoo, we have parrots too, and they are different. Ours are called “aport” (Arro) but we called them “apar” (arra).”

Thus, cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication make reference to respecting cultures, taking advantage to learn and enrich one's general knowledge. This is what Damen (1987: 141) regards as “uncovering and understanding one's own culturally conditioned behavior and thinking; involving not only perceptions but recognition of similarities and differences among cultures, but also recognizing the givens of the native culture.”

The category *comparing culture*, also applies to Viviana for she also learned from the participants' culture and language. In preparing and in teaching she enriched her knowledge of the world.

### **Stage 3. Acknowledging cultures**

This last category came about after several sessions of intensive work with teenagers. They reduced their tendency to express assumptions and stereotypes that get in the way of understanding diversity. Therefore, this category presents examples of the way in which Russian adolescents' comments along the classes were more respectful towards Colombian Caribbean Culture, and displayed progress towards gaining intercultural awareness. In regards to the Arhuacos previously discussed, teenagers reflected upon their costumes and traditions as part of their heritage, and that is why they are to preserve their culture as they do:

*Video-recording # 19: June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 1:** “These Arhuacos may seem different, but that's the point. We are different but at the same time we are the same.”

In terms of the traditional costumes worn for Barranquilla's carnival, parades or any other celebration, adolescents became more defe-

rential in the sense that they understood the difference of styles:

*Video-recording # 22: July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 4:** “These costumes are good for Latino dances, like the ones in Colombia... They are just different from the ones in Russia because it's another country.”

In regards to food, once students did not want to eat it, and thought it was disgusting, they started to respect this food as part of different recipes and likes:

*Video-recording # 29: July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011.*

**Participant 6:** “I don't like this food because I think all new it is strange; but I think for Colombian people it is good and I respect that.”

Recalling Barranquilla's Carnival, teenagers did not accept people's behavior, neither the costumes, and did not seem to respect the fundamentals of its creation or its practice, their opinions later started to display awareness of it, as well as understanding of a different type of carnival:

*Video-recording # 38: July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011.*

**Participant 4:** “I think it is very interesting this carnival in Colombia... but it is just different for us.”

Discussing transportation, adolescents were impressed by the type of transportation that exists in the Caribbean region. Additionally, in further comments they liked the means of transportation used as well as its organization:

*Video-recording # 26: July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 1:** “I like that in buses are very colorful, and buses can ride on one road and there is also one road for bicycles.”

Another aspect of discussion was the flora. Herein, campers displayed their respect and their like for the flowers based on the fact they are different from the ones they normally see:

*Video-recording # 31: July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

**Participant 2:** “I like all flowers because the colors are very beautiful, especially blue. It is very interesting to know about them because I didn’t know *frailejón* grows existed, neither that it exists in cold places... That’s very interesting and special.”

By teaching Colombia’s Caribbean cultural representations, Russian teenagers informed they gained confidence in their own culture and became respectful towards other cultures. Adolescents’ constant comparisons and contrasts with Russian and Caribbean culture helped them see commonalities and differences, making them register their own culture and acknowledge cultural diversity, welcoming multiculturalism to increase learning.

As Kramsch states (2001) through dialogue and the search for each other’s understanding, each person tries to see the world through the other’s eyes without losing sight of him or herself. This principle is applied to the campers in the sense that through group and individual discussions about culture, they helped themselves from their classmates’ knowledge in order to understand the dynamics of the cultures, hence they began a process of cultural acknowledgment.

For Damen (1987: 141) that cross-cultural communication is “the face that moves a culture learner across the acculturation continuum from a stage of no-understanding of a new culture to near total understanding.” Hence, campers seem to have achieved some understanding of the Caribbean region.

Closing the sessions, adolescents were asked about their insights on the work developed, and their thought about Colombia’s Caribbean region. All of them talked about their awareness and their gains in intercultural awareness. These are the opinions of some teenagers:

*Video-recording # 65: June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012.*

**Participant 2:** “Colombia is very interesting and special country. I learned many things and

specially that there are very interesting plants and animals different from Russia.”

**Participant 1:** “Colombia is not very Russian... It’s very interesting country... For me Colombia is very funny and amazing, the food of Colombia... the clothes... We live in not so warm region as Colombia and we could learn a lot about it.”

**Participant 5:** “Colombia is a very interesting country I had no idea about. I really want to go to Colombia because it has very hot climate and there are interesting flowers and interesting animals.

**Participant 6:** “Colombia is a lot different from Russia. You can’t see these animals in zoo, and I think is very warm and you don’t have winter. I like all seasons, and I like snow, and Colombia is a very beautiful place I didn’t know.”

**Participant 7:** “Now I think Colombia is a very beautiful country and it has many interesting things, also I think it is really interesting country for everything.”

Results in immersion experiences like the Russian camp made a contribution to changes in the perception and assessment of other cultures; findings that coincide with those of Pieski (2011):

“The theoretical basis for this study is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS; Bennett, 1986, 1993). This study explored the development of intercultural competence of six pre-service educators through immersion experiences in unfamiliar milieu. This mixed methods study used data from the Intercultural Development Inventory, (Hammer & Bennett, 2007, 2009), a measure of intercultural sensitivity grounded in the DMIS, as a pretest, post-test and post-test, application form, pre-and post-test experience questionnaires, interviews and journals to ascertain development. Findings from this study demonstrate that pre-serviced educators can benefit from developmentally effective

immersion experiences. Several participants experienced a small gain in intercultural sensitivity as measured by the IDI after a regression upon re-entry. Intensive appropriate sequenced intercultural preparation prior, during, and after the immersion experience could enhance the impact of the experience on the intercultural competence development as measured by the IDI (p. ii and iii).

The evidence in the literature suggest that teaching culture provides a foundation to teens that need to have rewarding experiences. It displays the participants' culture and take them to another culture. Echoing Lustig and Koester (1999) it is affirmed that campers focused their attention on the premise that in becoming interculturally competent, they have typically had extensive intercultural communication experiences, and they have learned to alternate patterns of thinking and behaving. The introduction of Caribbean culture helped campers live a meaningful cultural experience that triggered the understanding of cultures.

### Teacher Realization

This last category came about from the teacher's journal. Viviana kept a record of what she was learning about Russia, their places, peoples and cultures, as she taught. She learned, for example that *Курорт* (Kurart) was a place in Russia where you could generally go for summer vacations and enjoy the sea; very much like what Colombians do in the Caribbean. Talking about Castillo de San Felipe, campers compared it with the Russian *Мариинский дворец* (Mariinsky Palace). Viviana checked the web and understood the resemblance and later reconfirmed the teenagers' point of view when she visited Saint Petersburg and saw the castle they talked about.

As for costumes, teenagers were interested in the traditional shoes *alpargatas*. The fact that they could see them and touch them, allowed them to make a close comparison with *лапти* (lapti). Once again Viviana browsed the web and understood the similarities. Same happened with Russian food;

explaining how Ayaca is made, campers compared it with *peroshky* (*перошки*) similar in ingredients and preparation. This was corroborated with the information Viviana found in the web, and with her experience preparing *piroshky* at the camp.

Implementing cultural topics within the EFL class with Russian teenagers made the syllabi of the summer and linguistic camp change, since the experience with Caribbean culture made Russian camp team members see the usefulness of including cultural topics not only in classes but in the camp activities in general. As a consequence, Russian campers changed the syllabi structure for their next summer, including cultural topics for further seasons.

### CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of the cultural representations of a region for engaging a group of teenagers taking English at a summer camp in Siberia, Russia, made an impact on the program. The study addressed the question: What could a Russian teenage community inform us about becoming culturally aware? The response being that awareness helps learners become acquainted with cultural features as they contribute with their insights. This allows meaningful cultural and language understanding; given that their co-construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1976) gave them confidence. This fact puts forward a view of communication that promotes a higher cultural acknowledgment. For Roger (1999: 221) "becoming interculturally aware is the degree to which an individual is able to exchange cultural information effectively and appropriately, with individuals who are culturally dissimilar."

On one hand, teenagers realized foreign language learning serves the purpose of communicating with other cultures, thus breaking down barriers. On the other hand, the camp staff realized the usefulness of including culture as a key element, and incorporated it to the syllabus. The ethnographic study enriched the teacher and the staff's pedagogical practices. It showed ways of exploring EFL that aids understanding others' cultural prac-

tices, affirming that the world is constructed and enriched by cultural differences.

The findings coincide with the study conducted by Yanjun Wang and Quynh Le (2014) at an Australian university.

“The combined results from the study indicated that intercultural awareness, as a key element in foreign language teaching and learning was highly valued from various perspectives by the participants within this study. That is to say, its significant role, particularly in the field of language and culture, was recognised by the teaching staff and the students from this university. Their understanding of intercultural awareness has certainly enhanced participants’ language teaching and learning. This is consistent with the findings reported in several studies (Roberts, 1992; Robinson, 1978)”.

In addition, Cooperative Language (CL) proved to contribute to communicating in the target language. It also involved participants in the cultural experience, and acknowledged their roles as group members. It also helped build rapport among participants, allowing them to express themselves more confidently. When food was tasted, when dances were performed, and when crafts were made within a CL structure, the factual knowledge about culture presented by the teacher and by the participants became affective and behavioral as well.

As far as the camp syllabi goes, the implication of this study made the camp organizers think about exploring other cultures in further seasons. Thus, since 2011, the camp has included the teaching of cultural topics. French culture was included in the camp and for example, fashion design made part of the experience. Italian display of culture closed with a food and taste exhibit, while Japanese brought origami, an afternoon-tea party, and a sushi dinner. The authors feel that the inquiry carried out and shared with the camp staff opened the windows to other cultures.

Finally, in terms of the pedagogical implications for teacher professional development, this study allowed Viviana, as head of department at a school,

to propose and be in charge of the subject *Cultural Studies*. From Pre-School to 11<sup>th</sup> grade, students survey cultures from around the world, study their history, government, traditions, folklore, and art among other characteristics. This reaffirms that in the experiential learning of another language, culture allows students to learn more about themselves and the other’s world.

Further study is needed on good practices for Intercultural Awareness Raising informed by theory. It would be worth conducting a longitudinal study with, for example foreign language majors. Similarly, replicating the study with a larger sample may provide insights into the stability of the results.

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