

**IMPLEMENTING TASK BASED METHODOLOGY TO DEVELOP
CULTURAL AWARENESS AT A LANGUAGE INSTITUTE IN SANTIAGO DE
CALI**

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
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CALI
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To the Lord who made in me a mind to think and a soul to love him, to mama, and to all the ones who made this possible through their prayers and encouragement.

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0. ABSTRACT

This research deals with the concept of culture as an inherent part of language and how it can be developed in the language classroom in order to raise awareness of cultural aspects underlying language. The results here presented are the product of a work done with a group of kids at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano in Santiago de Cali during the period September 2007 - May 2008 by one of the graduate candidates from the Universidad del Valle's Foreign Languages Program. The purpose of the course was to adapt the core units proposed by the textbook to a series of tasks that would help learners develop both language skills and cultural understanding. Such outcomes are shared in this document for upcoming research.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language, Cultural awareness, Intercultural communicative competence, Task based learning, curriculum design, action research.

INTRODUCTION

The following report presents a qualitative action research project done at Universidad del Valle by one of the candidates for graduation from this University. The project took place during the period September 2007 - May 2008, divided into three phases of observation, planning, and application of the proposal. Such proposal arose from the need to adapt the contents of the textbook 'English Time 3' into a series of culturally focused tasks based on the model by Willis (1996) in order to increase knowledge and awareness of the home and target cultures in courses for children at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano in Cali.

In a general context, the study started as a quest about some of the issues that teachers worry the most about in early stages of practice: how much time should be spent in the study of cultural aspects in relation to teaching of language formal features? When do students start to beware of the aspects that make their culture different from the others? Is it necessary for learners to be in advanced levels of language proficiency in order to approach cultural topics in class development? What is the role of textbooks in a language classroom? How flexible can institutions be towards the adaptation of textbooks and materials? Based on these questions, the objectives for the research project were set. Meanwhile, the theories of Communicative Language Teaching, Task Based learning, Intercultural Communicative competence, cultural awareness, Action Research, and materials development became the core concepts for the research.

The research model for this project is referred to as Action Research, comprising three stages of exploration, planning and intervention; based on the model by Burns (1999). Hence, this report has been divided into two main sections. The first section comprises the Theoretical Framework that develops in depth the core concepts that outline the research. The second section presents the Action Research model subdivided into the three stages mentioned above applied with the specific group of learners at CCCA. Other elements of qualitative research were data collection that took place through journals, observations and surveys that were of high relevance to inform the study.

On the other hand, it is relevant to highlight that the approach of language teaching for this study is CLT, known broadly by its conception of language as a tool for communication. Within this approach, the methodology of Task Based Learning was best considered in order to develop the methods and techniques for language teaching. Although it is a methodology that has been in vogue over the past decade, being object of study to various authors, the model by Willis (1996) was preferred given the appropriateness and precision that it provides. Her task typology was used to adapt the topics in

the textbook into cultural lead tasks that were developed both in class and at home.

Finally, in this study culture plays the leading role in curriculum design and regarded as inherent to language in its own right. Although culture is not an aspect that is explicitly taught, opportunities are given in class to help learners realize that culture is intertwined with language. Nowadays, even official documents like the Common European Framework at a global level and, locally, the Colombian Standards for foreign language teaching also advocate the development of the intercultural competence in order to achieve proficiency of the target language.

Hopefully, the findings of this research presented at the end of the document will serve as a basis for upcoming studies in the field of TEFL or other subjects in Applied Linguistics.

JUSTIFICATION

Implementing new methodologies for language teaching requires both knowledge of theories and keenness to change the things that in practice do not work. As a teacher in practice at Centro Cultural Colombo Americano I realized that my own class was not a true reflection of a communicative approach since I was relying only on the textbook, repetition was privileged over language practice, learners lacked learning and study skills, and the speaking skill was present at a very low degree. As a result, students seemed not to take full advantage of the class because the contents in the textbook were not being adapted to their needs or interests.

Nowadays, the challenge for teachers goes beyond knowing the how and what of their subject but also identifying what context and conditions are given in order for learning to happen in the classroom. It is not enough with bringing all kinds of materials when they are not adapted to the class context, or with planning very dense lessons if there is no clear purpose or bond between them. Even if these resolutions seem difficult to achieve in reality, this project prompts instructors to reflect on their practice in accordance with the demands of the context, check for methods that work and discard the preconceived ideas that obstruct the desire to innovate and create.

Another aspect to take into account for effective teaching is to realize how different learners are over the years. Today, children are exposed daily to media and technology that broadens their understanding of the world. Most of these are presented in formats like TV shows, video games, films, e-mails, blogs, and music. All these data are usually made in English, which forces them to learn on their own new vocabulary or pronunciation. However, it is a shame that the English class does not meet these needs and becomes useless for their own purposes. When they come to class, they realize that most of the things studied are neither a reflection of their lives nor a tool to interact with the world out of the class context. Accordingly, through this research I aim to have teachers reflect upon adapting materials, especially textbooks, to the needs of the students and the objectives of the class. Moreover, I recall the idea of conceiving culture as part of language teaching and present it in a way that students can share their experiences in the learning context and grab elements from our teaching for their own life. This way, a bond is created between the students' environment and foreign language learning, fostering an interest towards different aspects of the target culture as well as valuing their own.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

GOAL

To help students develop a better understanding of the foreign culture and contrast it with their own by adapting the contents of a textbook-based course for children into task based instruction that emphasizes on cultural knowledge.

OBJECTIVES

- To promote students' search and discovery skills through inquiring in class about aspects they are familiar with but do not reflect on.
- To adapt the contents of the textbook 'English Time 3' into series of culturally focused tasks, based on Jane Willis' typology.
- To enhance students' learning skills and autonomous work through every class assignments and independent research.
- To develop aspects of cultural awareness of the Colombian and American culture that comprise knowledge about food, landscapes, music, buildings, natural parks, proverbs, housing, and currency.

2. PREVIOUS WORK IN THE AREA

Three previous studies were chosen as a reference point for this study in regard to the research design, theoretical framework, and methodological approach. The first literature review deals with the process of developing cultural awareness at a school in Manizales, the second one contributes in the field of Action Research, and the third one suggests the Inquiry method in order to approach different cultural aspects at a university level.

Despite the fact that Task Based Learning is a methodology that has been subject for numerous studies locally and globally, the literature review for TBL informed with many research done around the world and also in Colombia on this methodology. That is why, a specific study on TBL has not been mentioned in this section but readers can take a look at 'References' for authors like Willis (1996), Willis and Leaver (2004), Prahbu (1990), and Ellis (2003). At a local level, the 'Language y cultura' journal also publishes research on the field of TBL.

2.1 Cultural Contexts in the English Classroom¹

This study was held at Universidad de Caldas with an action-research group made up of ten candidates for a B.A. in Modern Languages with the support of some of the University faculty members with experience on educational research. The aim of the project was to generate a framework and procedural strategies to raise awareness of the culture of the coffee region culture. This framework was comprised of theories of meaningful learning, total language, sociolinguistic competence, and content-based learning. Moreover, elements of action-research were included such as case-study and data collection through journals, recordings, observations, and interviews.

¹ Original work published under the title: Contextos culturales en el aula de inglés (Quintero, 2006)

Over a period of two years (July 2003-July 2005), students worked on integrating the English language curriculum with the students' cultural knowledge in ten public schools of Manizales. At the beginning, a diagnosis was made in order to study the relationship between curricula and classes. It was found that, although the institutional documents paid lip service to the cultural component, the reality inside the classrooms showed the opposite: teachers were focusing their practice on grammar translation, repetition or drills, and use of photocopies. In spite of this, the institution was open to accept the project both to include more cultural aspects in language teaching and improve the role of English in the educational planning.

Lesson planning was carried out jointly by students and instructors of the University. The contents were defined in terms of linguistic and communicative goals according to each cultural topic such as location, means of transportation, and typical food in the coffee region. These topics gave students the opportunity to reflect on their cultural identity as well as recognizing the culture of the target language in interrelated scenarios or learning contexts.

Communicative skills were developed through this study, since it enhanced the ability to convey meaning, with the primary focus of understanding a cultural context and a secondary focus of developing accuracy. At Universidad de Caldas, this project prompted continuing research on intercultural learning where the target language is a means for creating ideas and understanding the world.

2.2 Exploring Children's Cultural Perceptions through Tasks Based on Films in an Afterschool Program

This project is a qualitative case study that took place at Fundación Santa María, a private school that aims to educate children living in low income neighborhoods in Bogotá. The researcher, Claudia P. Mejía was also a faculty member at Universidad Nacional de Colombia and was a pioneer in designing the after school English Program called Youth Leadership, adopted by the school since 2003 in order to provide students with high-quality foreign language classes.

Class work was based on movies that they watched with the aim of improving oral and listening skills through questions that students had to answer. After a while, classes became tiresome and predictable so a new focus was adopted: to analyze students' perceptions of culture in relation to the topics shown in the movies. A connection between school and life was established through dialogues that were held spontaneously in class and started to give children the opportunity to talk about their life experiences without worrying about accuracy or formal aspects of the language.

Three instruments were used in order to collect and display data: audio tape recordings during eight class sessions; conferences that were held as spontaneous conversations in Spanish; and field notes that the teacher-researcher took about everything that happened in class.

The theoretical framework for the research consisted of three concepts: Task Based Learning, culture, and critical literacy. Based on one movie, students did a series of tasks that showed their perceptions of their parents and family, community, and different countries. On the other hand, Critical Literacy tasks aided the process of validating students' voices. Thus, one of the main characteristics of this concept is that through discourse students are empowered to construct their own understanding of the world. Culture in this context was understood as the

social practices of everyday life including aspects relating to values and beliefs like disobedience, jealousy, adulthood, guilt, etc.

Task outcomes proved that students construct their own perspectives of the world influenced by products, beliefs, and interaction with members in their own community. In addition, these constructs of knowledge provide them with a framework with which they can examine other contexts where they find differences and similarities in relation to their own conceptions of the world.

1.3 Inquiring into Culture in our Foreign-Language Classrooms

This proposal arose from the need to use the questions that students bring to class as a way of ensuring that they learn and retain what they are interested in, instead of being 'fed' information brought by the teacher. The literature review developed in this study was based on the concept of curriculum as inquiry, based on John Dewey's philosophy that education begins with the curiosity of the learner. This study attempted to provide the teachers of The National University of Costa Rica (UNA) with an additional tool to include culture in their practicum.

Thus, the instructors of the English Major Program at UNA devoted some research to the process of inquiry that would lead teachers-in-training to think about the cultural features that determine everyday life and therefore have an ever-present influence on the learning that takes place in the classroom. In order to attain this purpose, every lesson or unit should start with a question asked by the teacher or a topic proposed by the students. This implies that the syllabus and evaluation become more flexible because they are being rebuilt every moment by a joint effort between teacher and students. In this sense, the role of the teacher is to establish environments or situations that have the most potential for a particular group of students and, based on that, negotiate the curriculum with them.

In order to achieve the expected results for the course, it is crucial that students play an active role in every unit. This suggests that they may dedicate extra class work searching information and bringing new ideas and questions to the classroom. This process allows students to put into practice three types of knowledge: *personal knowledge*—in order to share their personal experiences; *knowledge systems*—in order to choose ways in which to interpret the world; and *sign systems*—in order to access alternative ways to create and communicate meaning.

The authors claim that the curriculum as inquiry helps to overcome common difficulties that language teachers have. Firstly, the fact that most of the study takes place outside the class through research ensures that all the objectives of the course can be reached in the time set beforehand. Moreover, the class is mostly the students' responsibility and that gives the teacher the opportunity to build knowledge together with the students. And finally, instructors can stop struggling for finding a certain type of resource because the ways to collect information are not restricted and students have the freedom to choose what best fits the classroom needs.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The problem that gave place to this study was the adaption of textbooks to the purposes and needs of a given learning context. It is known among teachers that institutions set always the contents to be taught, confining teachers to do only what has been asked for. As a criticism to this issue, this study suggests that instructors can implement their own theories of language learning in order to adapt in a consequent way the contents and requirements of the institute they depend from. Such process of adaptation requires a clear view of language learning, resourcefulness, creativity to develop materials, implementation of new techniques and methods, and ability to integrate the own teaching perspective with the institution's with no harm to the students learning process.

Thus, the following theoretical framework presents the key concepts for the development and application of this research project. The core concepts in this study are the methodology of Task Based Learning for the purpose of curriculum design, class development and planning; and culture for the contents of the course. The research design for the project is Action Research, whose main representative is Burns (1999). The reference point for TBL has been taken from Willis (1996) and Ellis (2003). In order to establish a relationship between the communicative methodology of Task Based Learning with culture, the concept of intercultural communicative competence by Byram (1997) was coined into the framework. In the context of this study, culture has been conceived as the products, ideas, and behaviors that undermine language and the people that speak it. The behavioral view of culture has been approached in this framework but not taken into consideration for class planning due to the ambiguity that it brings when approaching the customs and variety of the people from Colombia and the United States.

3.1 Towards a definition of culture

The field of Anthropology devotes its attention to cultural studies, analyzing human behaviors and relationships. In language teaching, these concepts have also been looked at as the basis of cultural content that teachers consider when planning curricula for intercultural language learning.

To start with a definition of "culture", Omaggio (1993) cites Brooks, an author that brings an anthropological approach to the study of culture. He identifies "ten points around which culture study could be based: symbolism, value, authority, order, ceremony, love, honor, humor, beauty, and spirit" (p. 362). All of these represent not only the best but everything in human life. He also develops the idea of "Hearthstone culture", also known as "little-c" culture or culture BBV (beliefs, behavior, and values). This conception of culture encompasses everything that people learn to do, not just formal aspects like fine arts, politics and literature that are known as "big-C culture" confined to the elite.

Similarly, Peterson and Coltrane (2003) use a definition that covers a broad spectrum of human life, understanding the term as "*an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations*" (para. 1)

Robinson (1988) also presents four definitions of the term 'culture' commonly used among researchers. He categorizes these definitions into observable and non-observable phenomena. Everything related to behaviors and products is considered *observable phenomena* of culture, categories present in the following two definitions:

- Behaviorist definition: views culture as sets of behaviors (traditions, habits, and customs) that are shared and can be observed.

- Functional definition: it refers to culture as social phenomenon that is shared by a community of people. It presents the reasons or rules behind a particular event or behavior.

On the other hand, cognitive and symbolic definitions of culture are concerned with *non-observable phenomena* such as ideas and concepts:

- Cognitive definition: deals with the models for perceiving, relating, and interpreting things.
- Symbolic definition: conceives culture as the product of processing meaning of elements and events through symbols (pp. 7-13).

His statements are not only related to the term culture as separate from language teaching but also give a definition of *cultural understanding* as a route to present cultural content in the classroom and how learners conceive their own and target culture, claiming that "Cultural understanding is an ongoing process in which learners continually synthesize cultural inputs with their own past and present experience in order to create meaning" (ibid). With this statement, he establishes a link between the term culture and language learning, corresponding with Brown's (1980) affirmation that: "the acquisition of a second language is often the acquisition of a second culture" (p. 139).

In view of that, it is important for teachers to state clearly what the term 'culture' means to them in order to plan the topics which will be the object of study in the classroom. Gail Robinson quoted by Tomalin & Stempleski (1993), reports that when teachers are asked, 'What does culture mean to you?', the most common responses fall into three interrelated categories: products, ideas, and behaviors (ibid). A useful diagram to explain the elements of culture is:

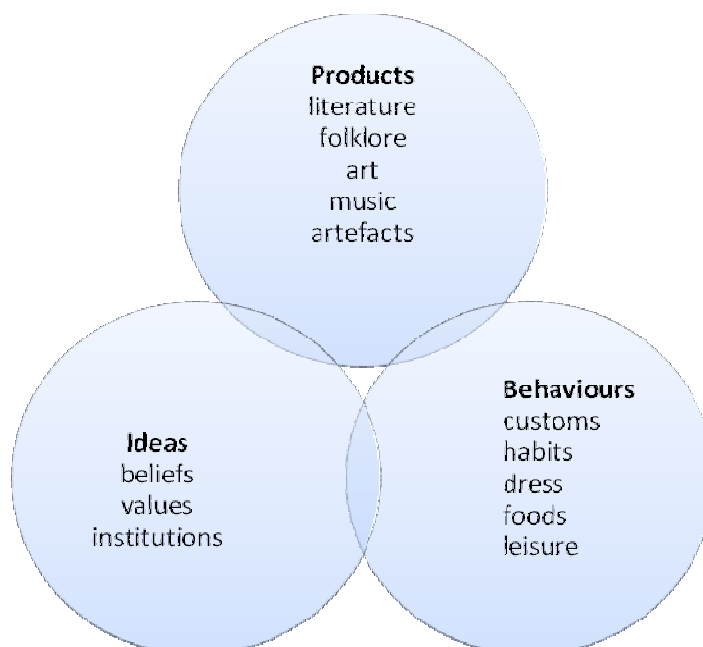


Figure 4. Elements of Culture

Tomalin, B. and Stempleski, S. (1993) *Cultural awareness*. Resource books for Teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

As a final consideration for this section, it is relevant to clarify that throughout this paper the concept of 'culture' will not be treated as phenomena that teachers 'teach' in the classroom. On the contrary, cultural awareness is the product of a process that learners follow after being introduced to and given the opportunity to analyze and relate the target culture to the native one. Likewise, Rodríguez (2003) argues that:

Teachers cannot teach the culture itself, but they can present language activities in which culture is discussed and structural goals are met. By providing elements of the target language, teachers highlight elements of the target culture while making students more aware of their own culture. As a result, students will be aware that

there is no such a thing as a better or stronger culture but every culture is different (p. 69).

Taking into consideration the literature review presented above, the concept of culture used in this research has to do more with having students approach and face the cultures they are dealing with through native and foreign languages. Thus, it will be expected to avoid the use of stereotypes about each country whenever possible, which would only lead to shallow conceptions of culture; instead, the aim is to have students inquiring and researching on their own so they can select relevant data that helps build bridges between the home and the target culture. More aspects of culture in relation to language learning such as *intercultural communicative competence* and *curriculum design* will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2 'Wh' questions for cultural instruction

3.2.1 Why should culture be taught?

There are a lot of reasons that explain why the study of culture is necessary and why teachers usually avoid it in curriculum design. Hernández, O. and Samacá, Y. (2006) state that there are three main reasons why teachers omit the cultural component in their classes:

- They claim not to have time for it.
- They believe that students will be exposed to it later
- They think that they do not possess enough knowledge about the cultures that speak the language they teach. (p. 42)

But these assumptions do not justify conceiving culture as a component apart from language teaching. As a matter of fact, the same authors evoke Seelye's (1976) arguments for why culture should be taught, trying to open a way to let teachers realize that culture is something not only feasible but necessary in the

curriculum: "an understanding of the way of life of foreign people is important to survive in a world of conflicting value systems, where the boundaries that formerly isolated and protected man from alien ideas have been eroded by advances in technology of communication..." (p. 12)

Regarding the relationship that exists between language instruction and culture, Hinkel (1999) quotes Kramsch as follows: "cultural awareness and the learning of a second culture can only aid the attaining of second language proficiency" (p. 6). She indicates that the teaching of culture implicitly or explicitly permeates the teaching of social interaction, and the spoken and the written language. In her view, second and foreign language learners necessarily become learners of the second culture because a language cannot be learned without an understanding of the cultural context in which it is used (Kramsch, 1993).

3.2.2 When can culture be taught?

Usually, cultural aspects in a curriculum are postponed for advanced levels or university courses. Sometimes, teachers underestimate children's knowledge and attitudes towards the world and think that they are not able to understand other values, history, or lifestyles. Even though the process of leading the learner to a level of cultural awareness can have its difficulties (mainly with young learners), teachers cannot forget that the study of any language is linked to the study of its culture(s)². Rodríguez (2003) cites Brumfit (1979) with this respect, affirming that "educators must bear in mind that they are not only teaching a language but they are also teaching a culture, and as a consequence language teaching is a form

² Usually, within a group of speakers of a language, there is more than one representative culture. For instance, all 'Latinos' are not the same, and their cultures are not under the same conditions, but they are all speakers of Spanish. As Liddicoat (2003) states: "Cultures vary with time, place, social group, age group, etc. The variability of culture does not mean that all the variants within a cultural group are considered equal within that group. Some cultural variants are privileged over others by the dominant cultural group. As with language, some cultural variants may be considered better than others."

of...cultural education" (p.67). Moreover, culture is something teachers deal with every day, without realizing how important it is (ibid).

Official sources also agree with this argument. The Council of Europe (2001) states that: "When considering suggestions for language course activities and materials, the desire to increase participants' cultural awareness is paramount" (p. 28) That is to say, the cultural component is always implied in language teaching and teachers use techniques to adapt the topics to the level and needs of the group of learners.

3.2.3 Where can culture be taught?

In a former section it was said that teachers omit the cultural component because they think learners will be exposed to it later. With this view, teachers tend to think that cultural awareness cannot take place in the context of the classroom because learners must be totally immersed in the target culture in order to understand it. To the contrary, Byram (1997) explains that apart from total immersion there are three locations for acquiring intercultural competence: the classroom, fieldwork, and independent learning. In respect to the classroom, the author states the following:

The traditional emphasis in cultural learning in the *classroom* has been on the acquisition of knowledge about another country and culture. In the worst case, this involves out of context facts with minimal relationship to the language learning focus at a given moment... Clearly the classroom has advantages. It provides the space for systematic and structured presentation of knowledge in prolongation of the better traditions of language teaching. In addition, it can offer the opportunity for acquisition of skills under the guidance of a teacher. Thirdly, the classroom can be the location for reflection on skills and knowledge acquisition beyond the classroom walls, and therefore for the acquisition of attitudes towards that which has been experienced. (p. 65)

When possible, teachers can plan outdoor activities in order to increase students' motivation, attitudes and development of skills. Fieldwork is one way students add knowledge to what has been acquired in the classroom. Therefore, *Fieldwork* clearly allows the development of all the skills in real time, particularly the skill of interaction. It allows learners to bring their knowledge of relationships to bear on specific situations, and to discover and interpret new data (p. 68).

Last but not least, Byram (1997) presents *Independent learning* as the classroom methodology that allows learners to acquire the underlying principles of the skills and knowledge they are taught, and gives them the means to generalize them to new experience. (p. 69) Students can make use of independent learning in fieldwork, for example, or through homework. This kind of work will enhance the act of 'inquiry', which consists on having students reflect upon and ask questions about what was learned and what is yet to be learned.

2.2.4- What culture should be taught?

As it was explained in section 2.1, there are two distinctions in the understanding of the term 'culture'. These are 'big C' and 'little c' culture. Some teachers tend to focus instruction in the analysis of history, geography, institutions, literature, art, and music which are mostly covered in the first category. On the other hand, for some instructors it is more important to emphasize the study of culturally-influenced behavior, which corresponds to the second kind (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Nevertheless, a positive balance can be achieved if care is taken when choosing the main themes that will be studied in the language classroom.

Omaggio (1993) quotes Galloway to illustrate the possible four approaches for cultural instruction:

1. The Frankenstein Approach: the selection of facts at random , without regard to their connection.

2. The 4-F Approach: the study of culture is confined to Folklore, fairs, food, and statistical facts.
3. The Tour Guide Approach: The identification of monuments, rivers, and cities.
4. The "By-the-way" Approach: Sporadic lectures or bits of behavior selected indiscriminately to emphasize sharp differences (p.360).

These approaches are just presented as a possible way of organization so teachers can select the appropriate cultural content in the classroom. This is why the Council of Europe (2001) states that, whether teachers assume one approach or another, "Careful consideration has to be given to the representation of the target culture and the choice of the social group or groups to be focused on" (p. 148)

2.2.5- **How should culture be taught?**

The 'how' encompasses approach, methods and techniques³; this is why it is one of the most important issues to bring to light in cultural instruction. Crawford-Lange and Lange (1984), cited by Omaggio (1993), propose that teachers may not have been adequately trained in the teaching of culture and, therefore, do not have strategies for integrating culture study with language, or for creating a viable framework for organizing instruction around cultural themes. The development of such a framework depends in part on one's own definition of *culture* (p. 360) Hence, there are two key factors in the 'how' of cultural instruction: the experience of teachers and their conceptions of the term 'culture'.

³ Richards and Rodgers (2001:244) offer an overview of the distinction between *approaches* and *methods*. The approach is a set of theories and beliefs about the nature of language, language learning, and a derived set of principles for teaching a language. None of them, however, leads to a specific set of representations and techniques to be used in teaching a language. A method, on the other hand, refers to a specific instructional design based on a particular theory of language and of language learning. It contains detailed specifications of content, roles of teachers and learners, and teaching procedures and techniques... Methods are learned through training.

An important view of the approach to teach culture is shared by the Council of Europe and authors such as Brown (1980) and Kramsch (1993). They state that the study of culture should lead students to a consciousness not only of the target culture but also be able to establish links between the home culture and others, and be planned through contextually-based problem solving activities. As it is quoted by Rodríguez (2003), Brown (1980) argues that "every time students do any exercise they can compare and contrast to their own culture to see what is accepted or not in the new one" (p. 68). Moreover, the Council of Europe (2001) encourages teachers to pay attention to how the cultural instruction is being given in the classroom: "... It is hoped that by learning the language, participants will also be encouraged to consider aspects of daily living which may be different to what they are familiar with. In this way, it is hoped to provoke participants' self-awareness and awareness of others, and to examine certain cultural aspects which may have been taken for granted. Activities and tasks should attempt to challenge pre-conceived stereotypes and stimulate enquiry, which it is hoped will lead to better mutual understanding." (p. 28)

3.3 Problems

Omaggio (1993) presents three major problems in cultural instruction. These difficulties may discourage educators from including cultural aspects in their lesson plans but they are highlighted in order to promote consciousness of what the constraints are and what can be done to overcome them.

- Time. The study of culture involves time that many teachers do not feel they can spare in an already overcrowded curriculum. Some instructors leave cultural instruction behind believing that students will be exposed to it later, once they have mastered the basic patterns of the language. The author says again that an approach that envisions the teaching of language and culture in a serial fashion misses the important point that the two are intertwined (p. 357-358).

- Lack of knowledge and materials. It is true that knowledge of the subject area is fundamental for teachers because they are in most cases the first or even the only resource in class. Yet, teachers must be aware that their role is not just to teach 'facts', but rather to enhance cultural understanding. "Their proper role is not to impart facts, but to help students attain the skills that are necessary to make sense out of the fact they themselves discover in their study of the target culture" (ibid). Another reason why teachers must care about this issue is because through the presentation of mere facts students are very liable to establish stereotypes that will bias cultural understanding. As Rodríguez (2003) states:

Teachers need to know what is common in two languages so that they will be able to talk about their differences. In other words, being able to understand one's own culture allows educators and apprentices to accept a new one, to compare and contrast, and to understand different views of life around the world... It is very common and easy to create stereotypes mainly when some educators build their conceptions based on the input they have and as a consequence they can have erroneous ideas. (p. 70)

The author also argues that some teachers rely too heavily on the information found on textbooks. Sometimes these resources have been designed with specific purposes and may need to be adapted to the group's needs and level. "Teachers should not continue believing in everything they read in a textbook. Teachers have to find out variations from place to place, from culture to culture." (ibid)

- Students' attitudes. In order to have learners reflect upon an idea or belief, they must have developed to a certain stage of self-awareness. This becomes a major constraint when teaching children. As Byram (1997) states, "the acquisition of attitudes and perspectives on otherness presupposes attainment of specific stages of psychological development, particularly in the domain of moral development." (p. 54).

Sometimes, depending on the background knowledge and experiences possessed by students, students may develop attitudes of rejection, mockery, underestimation of their own culture or praising of the target one, and so on. In such cases, teachers must be careful to choose topics that can really engage learners and choose the best ways to study and introduce them. Furthermore, teachers must be careful in judging students' performance and processes of cultural awareness, considering their age and context.

"In the case of young children of primary school age whose development cannot yet be expected to support the knowledge, skills and attitudes defined here, it would be inappropriate to judge them to be incompetent. It is necessary, rather, to examine the nature of the contact they might have with others, of their own age and older, from a different culture, and define the nature of intercultural communicative competence in those terms." (ibid)

3.4 Communicative competence

In his article about the Communicative Approach, Calvache (2003) quotes the conception of competence given by Bogoya (2000), relating it to assessment and not to performance: "A competence for assessment purposes is defined as the capacity to be able to do something in context. Competences are the ensemble of actions a student carries out in a particular context and that comply with the particular requirements of that context, they are also considered a potentiality or skill to approach a problem situation and explain it, control it or overcome it." (p. 14). Then, the author agrees that competence can only be observed and evaluated through the learner's performance in a given situation.

Communicative competence is related to the fact that students are able to convey meaning through language. Such negotiations take place during activities of describing, comparing, criticizing, arguing, proposing, creating, and problem-

solving. As a consequence, "Communicative competence may be defined as the ability to function in a truly communicative setting- that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors." (Savignon, 1983, p. 22)

Another definition of communicative competence comes from Brown (1994), cited by Willis & Leaver (2004):

[Communicative competence is] that aspect of our competence which enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts... [T]he knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactionally. (p. 4)

When language is used in communication, an important concept comes to mind: *functions of language*. Savignon (1983) claims that "function is the use to which language is put, the purpose of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes. A language function has to do with what is said as opposed to how something is said." (p. 13). Through this notion, he clarifies the argument of the communicative approach and the conception of language acquisition as proceeding from meaning to surface structure. That is not to say that linguistic or formal exercises are not useful. They are. But they are of most useful when they accompany or follow rather than precede communicative experiences, and they should be based on the needs generated by those experiences. (ibid)

The notion of competence gives teachers the clarity to plan lessons and develop teaching methods. Sometimes, instructors plan communication activities in disregard of the components of communicative competence, forgetting some aspects of language that are relevant for successful communication as competent learners. As Savignon (1983) affirms,

many 'communication activities' in language classrooms, though they provide useful practice in the manipulation of linguistic forms, are devoid of "social meaning" in the sense that they are not an accurate reflection of L2 culture. He adds that: "where successful interaction in an L2 culture is the goal... care must be taken to provide an authentic L2 cultural context for the interpretation of meaning. Where this care is absent, the goal of communicative competence is an allusion. (p. 25)

The former assumption introduces in this project the concept of 'Intercultural Communicative Competence'.

3.5 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

In recent years, the center of attention in 'communicative language teaching' has been communication as exchange of information and sending messages (Byram, 1987, p. 3). However, successful communication is not judged solely in terms of the efficiency of information exchange but it is focused on establishing and maintaining relationships (ibid). Through this vision, the 'intercultural' aspect of communicative competence has been refined. Currently, authors such as Van Ek and Michael Byram have devoted research to intercultural communication, and some of their insights are developed in this section.

The concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence involves other competences confined to the field of linguistics. These were initially formulated in six competences by Van Ek⁴ in his works for the Council of Europe. Later on, Byram (1997) refined them to three competences as follows:

- Linguistic competence: the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language.

⁴ Van Ek presents what he calls 'a framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives' cited by Byram (1997, p. 9)

- Sociolinguistic competence: the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor - whether native speaker or not – meanings which are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor.
- Discourse competence: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes. (p. 48)

Since the term *competence* has been broadly used in Foreign Language Teaching, it may lead to misunderstandings among different authors when it comes to the issues of assessment. That is why, in order to present a clear idea about the way to assess performance, Byram (ibid) proposes a holistic view of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that comprise all observable phenomena to be examined in intercultural competence; all of these confined to the term *savoir*. Each *savoir* is described through objectives that lead instructors to know how and what to evaluate. These skills are explained as follows:

Firstly, *savoir être* refers to the attitudes of curiosity and openness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. Then, *savoir* – itself- is the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction. Thirdly, *savoir comprendre* involves the skills of interpreting and relating a document or event from another culture to one's own culture. *Savoir apprendre/faire* is the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. Finally, *savoir s'engager* is related to the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures. The objectives of each *savoir* that will determine curriculum design for intercultural language learning will be clarified in section 2.8.

3.6 Intercultural language learning

In addition to the research carried out by the former authors, another term is generally used to refer to education focused on intercultural awareness. According to Liddicoat et al. (2003), intercultural language learning is a dynamic process that engages the learner in contributing to intercultural interaction, in finding personal ways of negotiating such interaction, and in reflecting on his/her own intercultural space and identity. Moreover, with the view of language as communication, “intercultural language learning develops in learners the procedural knowledge for recognizing, valuing, and responding to linguistic and cultural variability through processes of inferring, comparing, interpreting, discussing, and negotiating meaning in a non-judgmental manner.” (Intercultural Language Learning section, para. 3-4)

Intercultural language learning is based upon five general principles that have been applied to intercultural language learning and teaching. They guide students towards a better interaction in the target language and culture as well as providing teachers with a basis for curriculum design. These principles are presented by Liddicoat et al. (2003) but have been abridged to meet the needs and purposes of this study in Table 1.

General principle	Application in language learning	Elaboration
1. <u>Active construction</u>	Exploring language and culture through active engagement.	Learners use language purposefully in a range of tasks in which they discover and create meaning in interaction with the context of learning.
		Teachers give time for formulating questions, observing, discovering, discussing, and experimenting. Tasks that stimulate student interest and extend their thinking

		about language and culture
2. <u>Making connections</u>	Comparing, drawing connections, and building bridges between home and target language and culture	Learners combine learning of language and culture with learning across the curriculum
		Teachers provide scaffolding through interactive instruction, resources, and technologies. Tasks are planned upon students' background knowledge
3. <u>Social interaction</u>	Communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries	Learners see their own and others' cultures in a comparative light.
		Teachers promote social involvement for all learners through discussion and experimentation.
4. <u>Reflection</u>	Critical inquiry into linguistic and cultural differences and similarities.	Learners question stereotypes' reflect critically on language, knowing, and learning.
		Teachers create an intercultural space for engaging with other cultures without students abandoning their primary culture and provide clear and accurate feedback
5. <u>Responsibility</u>	Accepting responsibility for contributing to successful communication across languages and cultures and for developing an attitude of intercultural perspectives.	Learners are responsible for their own learning
		Teachers support the setting of personal goals.

Table 11. Principles for intercultural language learning

Note. Data have been adapted from Liddicoat (2003)

3.7 Cultural awareness

Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) define cultural awareness as "the term used to describe sensitivity to the impact of culturally-induced behavior on language use and communication." (p. 5). Cultural awareness encompasses three qualities that should be achieved when planning tasks or activities, namely:

- Awareness of one's own culturally-induced behavior
- Awareness of the culturally-induced behavior of others

- Ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint

Principles for intercultural learning are relevant to setting goals and planning tasks *before* instruction; levels of cultural awareness are key to determine the results that have been achieved *after* such practice. Obviously, teachers perceive success and failures of students' performance from the beginning but it is at the end of the process when they can judge learners' progress in regard to level of cultural awareness. Omaggio (1993) cites Galloway (1985) to present in Table 2 the four levels that comprise stages of cultural understanding.

Levels of cultural awareness			
Level	Data	Mode	Interpretation
I	Superficial stereotypes	Tourism text	Exotic, bizarre
II	Significant and subtle contrasts	Culture conflicts	Unbelievable, irrational
III	Significant and subtle contrasts	Intellectual analysis	Believable
IV	Awareness as insider	Cultural immersion	Believable from subjective familiarity

Table 12. Levels of cultural awareness

Note. Taken from Omaggio (1993, p. 372)

However, in most situations the level of achievement depends on the group of learners' performance. Hence, the same author points out that Level IV would be an ideal goal, but level III may be more achievable. In any case, the levels represent stages of understanding that can fluctuate quite a bit, and the resultant instability of these levels should be kept in mind by anyone wishing to derive a workable sequence of instruction from them" (ibid).

3.8 Designing a curriculum for intercultural language learning

According to Liddicoat et al. (2003), there are five points that teachers consider when designing curriculum for *Intercultural Language Learning*⁵: planning, teaching, resourcing, assessing, and evaluating. Even if this proposal does not entail a fixed curriculum design, it presents a framework both temporal and open to negotiation that can be renewed during the process. (p.12). The first three of these stages will be developed in this section.

3.8.1 Planning

Because individuals construct their personal culture according to their needs and opportunities, the planning step gives teachers a pause to ask some questions about the nature of learning and teaching: who are the learners? Who are the teachers? Who forms the wider community? What are the positions in relation to Intercultural language learning? At this stage, teachers set clear objectives to articulate later on with lesson planning.

- Goals, objectives and outcomes. Liddicoat et al. (2003) explains how the articulation of these three elements set coherence, precision, and transparency from the beginning through the end of the learning process. "Goals set out common directions for learning and provide a means for describing the scope of learning. Objectives are generally statements...more specific than goals" (section 3.5.1.1, para. 1)

Even if all of the objectives cannot be reached in some classroom settings, they provide instructors with a basis upon which other objectives can be set. Taking into consideration this research in relation to the savoirs presented in **section 2.5**,

⁵ The terms intercultural language learning as well as intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) will be used interchangeably; the difference remains on the focus of the authors. For each step, other authors are evoked in order to give a clearer picture of all the components to be taken into account when designing curricula for intercultural language learning.

objectives must be set regarding the development of *knowledge* (savoirs) and *skills* (savoir comprendre) since the age and background of the students do not provide a good basis to develop critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager) or strong changes in attitudes and behavior (savoir être).

Lastly, outcomes focus on the result of learning, that is, what students actually do and know in successfully accomplishing goals and objectives. (Liddicoat, loc cit).

3.8.2 Teaching

The rationale of teaching for intercultural language learning is based upon the understanding of "who learners are as individuals, with their own identities, their own needs, interests, personalities, motivations, prior leaning experiences, and aspirations" (Liddicoat et al., 2003, section 3.5.2.1). When instructors set this context, they can then proceed to create tasks that provide students with opportunities to think about their culture in relation to another culture. This process may be promoted through inquiry and research as independent work assisted by the instructor in the classroom. Thus, authors like Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) strongly advocate a task-oriented approach towards teaching culture in which students work together to interpret information within the context of the target culture in comparison with their own culture(s).

Other activities and teaching techniques have also been proposed for Intercultural Language Learning. Omaggio (1993) groups a number of teaching ideas that were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s but are still popular among teachers today. Their purpose is to sensitize students towards the commonalities and contrasts in the home and target culture (p. 394) .Some of those are:

- Culture capsules. These entail a short description of a native and a target-culture custom or fact accompanied by illustrative photos, slides, or realia.

The technique can be used with independent study, small groups or the full class. Possible follow-up activities for this include having students read aloud in class to students and/or teacher, perform role-plays based on the information in the capsule, or integrate the content of the capsule into language learning activities.

- Using proverbs. Proverbs are a significant part of everyday cultural expression. After being collected, they need to be categorized so that the concepts contained in them can be related accurately to seemingly similar concepts in the students' native language. "it is important to compare the target language proverbs to those found in the native language of the learner, not only to ascertain if similar values are extant across cultures, but also to avoid misinterpretation by the learner who may see a false resemblance to one found in the native language." (Omaggio, 1993, p.403)

Another possible activity, according to Rodriguez (2003), is "to ask students to select any topic they would like to talk about (music, clothing, food) and make comparisons and contrasts between the target and home cultures. Internet is a good source in order to get all kinds of information. Students can search and come with some ideas to the class or the teacher can do it by him/herself." (p. 71)

Through these activities teachers provide enough elements of the target culture to make students more aware of their own as they understand that there is no such thing as a better or stronger culture but every culture is different (ibid).

3.8.3 Resourcing

One of the main concerns when approaching cultural contents in the curriculum is lack of resources. Yet, any published or unpublished material could become useful if adapted purposefully in relation to the principles of intercultural language learning. As the Council of Europe (2000) states: "The material you find

may not seem to have an intercultural perspective to it, yet you may be able to create intercultural tasks from it. Often, something very specific to a certain environment can lead very well into comparisons and reflections...” (p. 29)

According to Liddicoat et al. (2003), authentic materials can be adapted only if the following aspects are taken considered:

- Authenticity of purpose. The resource needs to be intrinsically of interest or there needs to be an extrinsic purpose in order to engage learners
- Authenticity of task. What learners are asked to do is as authentic and important as the resource itself
- Authenticity of conditions. The conditions for language use need to reflect the conditions that determine the use of the resource in the real world.

These considerations of planning, teaching, and resourcing lead to Methodology issues that will be continued in next section with Task Based Learning.

3.9 Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Task based learning evolved as a branch of Communicative Language Teaching when, in 1987, Prahbu designed a Communicative Teaching Project in which sequences of tasks were used to give secondary school learners experience with English in use (Willis & Leaver, 2004, p. 8) Ever since, TBL has been providing teachers with the most important elements of language learning, creating opportunities where learners can interact with language being focused on meaning rather than form. Even governmental institutions like The Council of Europe (2000) suggests TBL as a methodology that enables the use of language as communication in real contexts: “In Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), learning is fostered through performing a series of activities as steps towards successful task

realisation. The focus is away from learning language items in a non-contextualised vacuum to using language as a vehicle for authentic, real-world needs.” (p. 22)

When understanding TBL and how it works, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term *task* itself. Ellis (2003, p. 9-10) gathers a number of definitions from which four have been taken and cited as follows:

- **Breen (1989)**

A task is ‘a structured plan for the provision of opportunities for the refinement of knowledge and capabilities entailed in a new language and its use during communication’. Breen specially states that a ‘task’ can be ‘a brief practice exercise or ‘a more complex workplan that requires spontaneous communication of meaning’.

- **Long (1985)**

A task is ‘a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters... In other words, ‘task’ can mean the hundred and one things people do in everyday life at work, at play, and in between. “Tasks” are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists.

- **Prabhu (1990)**

A task is ‘an activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allow teachers to control and regulate that process’.

- **Nunan (1989)**

A communicative task is "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able stand alone as a communicative act in its own right"

The definition of task by Willis (1996) is also relevant since her task cycle model has been adopted for this study: "*...tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.*" (p.23)

When designing a series of tasks, teachers must consider a number of aspects that make this sequence both communicative and approachable. Ellis (2003, p. 21) develops five design features of tasks presented in Table 3. This task framework starts by setting a goal that can be specified in terms of linguistic skills or the rhetorical mode (description, argument, etc.) the task is intended to elicit. The second and third features have been found to have an effect on task performance since both deal with the input data used for the task. The difference lies with the fact that number 2 makes explicit the kind of input data being used while 'conditions' clarify the way in which such data is presented. Thus, a task could have the same input but different conditions, and vice versa.

In respect to 'procedures', they are independent from both the input and the conditions of the task, and specifically concern the methodological options for implementing the task. Finally, Ellis suggests that an outcome can be predicted from the beginning and such feature is what makes the activity become a task. What is indeed difficult to predict is the 'processes that the task will elicit from students since it relies on the particular participants. Nevertheless, research has been done in this respect in order to identify in a more reliable way the kind of

language and cognitive processes that are likely to occur when input, conditions, and procedures are systematically varied.

Design feature	Description
1. Goal	The general purpose of the task, e.g. to practice the ability to describe objects concisely; to provide an opportunity for the use of relative clauses.
2. Input	The verbal or non-verbal information supplied by the task, e.g. pictures; a map; written text.
3. Conditions	The way in which the information is presented, e.g. split vs. shared information, or the way in which it is to be used, e.g. converging vs. diverging.
4. Procedures	The methodological procedures to be followed in performing the task, e.g. group vs. pair work; planning time vs. no planning time.
5. Predicted outcomes: Product	The 'product' that results from completing the task, e.g. a completed table; a route drawn in on a map; a list of differences between two pictures. The predicted product can be 'open' i.e. allow for several possibilities, or 'closed' i.e. allow only one correct solution.
Process	The linguistic and cognitive processes the task is hypothesized to generate.

Table 13. Design features of tasks

Note. Taken from Ellis (2003, p. 21)

3.9.1 A framework for Task-based learning

Research done by Willis (1996) has informed this paper in respect to the methodological procedures to be used to carry out tasks. Her model provides teachers with the opportunity to fit tasks into a whole cycle of teaching. The author envisions a 'task cycle' consisting of three broad phases that cover from beginning to end the needs for meaning-based activity, opportunities for language use, and focus on form that encourages accuracy; such phases are (1) pre-task, (2) task, and (3) language focus. This cycle is based upon the assumption that in order to

promote constant learning and improvement, tasks must be bonded in a series of phases instead of being isolated and done one after the other. (p. 40)

During the TBL process, the teacher is generally a 'facilitator', who sets up a context for tasks and ensures that students are being provided with the sufficient amount of exposure and use of language. Even if TBL puts stronger emphasis on learners doing things, the teacher still has the overall control and the power to stop everything if necessary. The teacher's roles also varies according to the aim of the different parts of the task cycle. E.g. at the end of the framework, teachers are more of a 'language guide' and 'encourager' due to the language-focus activities.

Next, Figure 2 provides a review of the Task cycle proposed by Willis (1996) and then explained in detail by the researcher.

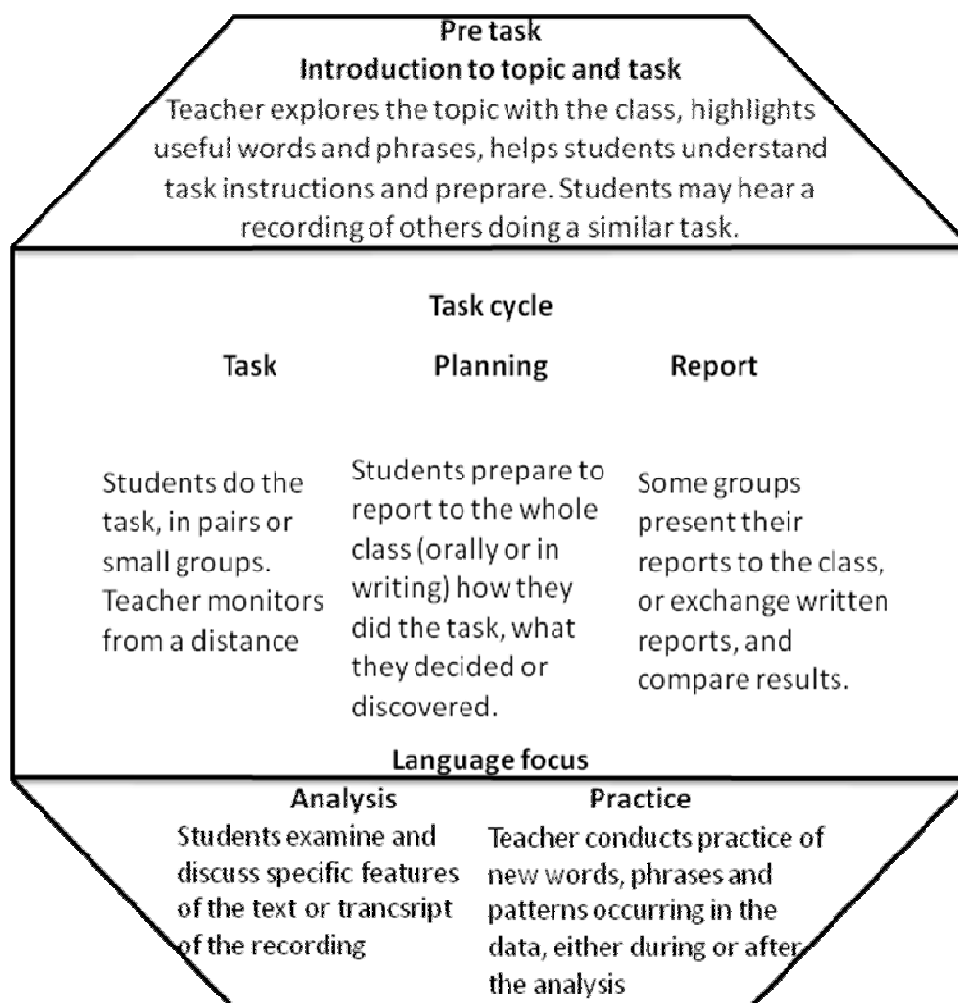


Figure 5. Components of the TBL framework

Note. Taken from Willis (1996, p. 37)

a. The pre-task phase

This first phase is used by the teacher to set up the topic, activate background knowledge, and provide students with the language they need to perform well in the task itself. This stage is usually the shortest one in the framework but its length may vary according to the material being used. According to Willis (1996, p. 41-46), within the pre-task phase the following steps need to be taken into consideration:

- Introducing the topic. Learners need to know the topic area of the task and clarify concepts regarding this topic.
- Identifying topic language. With the topic in mind students activate words and phrases that will be useful both during the task and outside the classroom. E.g. brainstorm words and write them on one side of the board as a resource that students can use any time during the cycle.
- Language activities. These activities involve learners, give them relevant exposure, and create interest in doing a task on the topic. Examples of such activities are: classifying words and phrases, odd one out, matching pictures to phrases, memory challenge, mind-maps, teacher recounting a similar experience, etc. More language can be pointed out during this phase.
- Giving task instructions. In this step the teacher ensures that learners understand what the task involves, what the goals are, and what outcome is required. This time is used to distribute roles and give specific guidelines. There are alternative ways to ensure that students understand these instructions: students read the instructions by themselves, teacher demonstrates the task with a good student, teacher shows fluent speakers doing the task, or teacher brings outcomes that previous students have achieved.
- Allowing preparation time. The more complex the task, and the more unfamiliar topic, the longer time should be allowed for students to get ready for the task.

b. The task cycle

The task cycle entails three components that can be adapted to different teaching situations (Willis, 1996, p. 53). At this point, the most active role is held by learners, who are monitored by the teacher throughout the process.

- Task stage. This stage provides learners with a vital opportunity to use language in order to achieve the goals of the task. This is the time when the instructor does not teach any longer; the role is the one of encourager, time keeper, and observer. The more distance teachers have from students during the task, the more they will feel free and independent to carry out the task. The task stage permits learners to make mistakes, be resourceful, create new communication tools, and develop fluency.
- Planning. It forms the central part of the task cycle. While the first stage is meaning-focused and seeks to develop fluency, the second and third stages create a need for accuracy in order to avoid the risk of learners achieving fluency at the expense of accuracy (ibid). In this stage, students get ready to present the rest of the class what the final product of the task was. Specific roles for each student in the group may be given in order to ensure that they are all working as a team and also specific purposes for listening must be clarified in order to have all teams paying attention to others during the report stage. The teacher's main role is that of language adviser to help students convey meaning in an accurate way.
- Report. The aim of the report stage is to draw learners' attention towards the need for accuracy. The main role of the teacher is that of chairperson, introducing the groups, giving feedback, calling on specific ideas, etc. Some ways to report the results of the tasks are through oral presentations, written presentations, or audio and video presentations. Depending on the level of the class, a report might last as 20-30 seconds or up to two minutes (ibid, p. 58). There may be naturally a lot of spelling or grammar mistakes that may

not be corrected immediately but written down and revised for the next phase, the language focus.

c. Language focus

Language focus is the last phase of the TBL framework and adds an opportunity for explicit language instruction. The purpose of this stage is to highlight specific language features from the texts or transcripts used earlier in the task cycle through analysis activities. (Willis, 1994, p. 101). These are not necessarily teacher-led, their aim is “to get students to identify and think about particular features of language form and language use... This will help them to recognize these features when they meet them again, both inside and outside class, and will lead to a deeper understanding of their meanings and use” (p. 102)

- **Analysis.** The first activities done during the language focus should consist of the analysis of particular language forms that raise the skills of the learners to perform accurately when the target language is used. They should not consist of decontextualized presentation of language items in isolation but rather involve learners in a study of the language forms that were actually used during the cycle. (ibid).
- **Practice.** Students consolidate and revise the forms used in the task-cycle that were studied with the analysis activities in the former stage. In this respect, Willis (1994, p. 110) states that the language items you are focusing on “will naturally occur again in future exposure, and, so long as learners recognize them, they will get another chance to think about and practice them then. This is the advantage of an exposure-rich classroom – common words, phrases, and patterns are continually recycled.” Some of these practice activities include repetition, listen and complete, unpacking

sentences, memory challenge, dictionary exercises, personal recordings, and computer games. For details about these activities, refer to Willis (1994, p. 110-113)

3.9.2 Varieties of tasks

In the second chapter of her book *A framework for Task-based learning*, Willis (1996, p. 26) proposes six types of tasks that help teachers generate a variety of procedures on any topic they select. The different types of tasks are:

- *Listing*. These tasks tend to generate a lot of talk as learners explain their ideas. The processes involved are (a) brainstorming and (b) fact-finding. Possible outcomes are a completed list or a draft mind map.
- *Ordering and sorting*. The main processes involved here are: (a) sequencing items, actions or events; (b) ranking items according to specified criteria; (c) categorizing or grouping items; (d) categorizing items in a different way.
- *Comparing*. Basically these tasks consist of comparing information in order to identify common points or differences. The processes followed are (a) matching, (b) finding similarities, and (c) finding differences.
- *Problem solving*. These tasks make demands upon learners' intellectual capacities. Although they are challenging, they can be engaging and viable to solve. Processes to solve such tasks involve (a) analyzing, (b) reasoning, and (c) decision making.
- *Sharing personal experiences*. As opposed to the former tasks, this type of task encourages learners to speak more freely about their own experiences with their classmates. These open tasks may be difficult to adapt in the classroom because they are close to casual not goal-oriented conversations.

They involve processes of (a) narrating, (b) describing, (c) and exploring and explaining attitudes, opinions, or reactions.

- *Creative tasks*. They are usually called projects and involve some creative work that can be later appreciated by an audience. These tasks tend to have more stages and even have elements of other types of tasks. Many times they require extra class research and work but can be done when students have improved their organizational skills and team-work.

3.9.3 Task Based and other Paradigms of Language Learning

The Paradigm of Presentation Practice and Produce (PPP) is very often confused with the features in Task Based Learning. The sequence followed in PPP aims to teach a specific language form –a grammatical structure- or the realization of a particular function or notion. According to Ellis (2006), this methodological procedure corresponds to a weak version of Communicative Language Teaching as opposed to Task Based Learning. (p, 29).

In traditional form-focused pedagogy, language is treated as an object and the students are required to act as 'learners' (ibid). On the contrary, TBL presents another perspective towards language and roles of teachers and learners. According to the same author, in Task-based pedagogy, language is treated as a tool for communicating and the teacher and students function primarily as 'language users'.

In regard to the contrast between the communicative approach and form-focused approaches⁶, Willis (1996) identifies the PPP paradigm for Language Teaching (Presentation-Practice-Produce) as a "behaviorist view of learning which rests on the principle that repetition helps to 'automate' responses and that practice makes perfect"(p.135). Taking into account the differences between PPP and TBL, I have summed up the author's words in Table 4:

⁶ Such as audio-lingual methods or natural approach. See **Richards and Rodgers** (2001)

	Theory of language	Theory of learning	Language use	Teacher's roles	Students' roles
PPP	-language as a system of forms	Analytic or deductive approach: rule → examples	accuracy → fluency Context has to be invented	-orchestrate the class -centre stage	-learners in 'practice mode' -responding or echoing teacher's utterances
TTBL	-language is a means of making meaning	Holistic or inductive approach: examples → rule	fluency → accuracy Language is first experienced and then analyzed.	-intervention when needed -reviewer -chairperson	-free language users

Table 14. Comparative chart between PPP and TBL features

Source. The author, based on information on TBL and PPP paradigms by Willis (1996, p. 133-137)

The PPP paradigm is totally opposite of what TBL prioritizes in the process of language learning. Even if PPP gives learners a chance to practice what they learned, it really promotes "using new forms rather than expressing their own meanings" (ibid) which suggests that this paradigm is not actually concerned with communication.

4. METHODOLOGY – IMPLEMENTING TASK BASED METHODOLOGY TO DEVELOP CULTURAL AWARENESS AT A LANGUAGE INSTITUTE IN SANTIAGO DE CALI

The next sections of this paper explain the research methodology used in this study and the results that emerged from it. A qualitative design with features from Action Research was used, divided into three phases and followed by continuous reflections on the data collected in the researcher's field journal. For the purpose of this research, a group of 15 kids from Centro Cultural Colombo Americano in Santiago de Cali was chosen; their task outcomes also helped inform the study.

Following the action research model by Burns (1999, p. 35), this study is presented in phases of interrelated experiences that translate into three major steps: exploring, planning and intervening. In Table 5, I present a chronological table that explains the time period and general features of each phase. The phase of intervention was also linked to the Practicum requirement in the undergraduate program of Foreign Languages at Universidad del Valle.

Phases	Period	General features
#1: Exploring and identifying problems	September – December 2007	• Observation of classes and students in order to understand their features and needs. • 5 entries in the journal of one hour of class work. • One survey application

#2: Planning	November 2007- January 2008	Adapting contents in the textbook to focus on cultural content and designing tasks.
#3: Intervention	January 26 – May 11 2008	14 sessions, 30 to 60 minute long interventions. - Instruments of data collection: field journal, observations, and task outcomes.

Table 15. Chronology of the research process

Source: the author.

4.1 Phase 1: exploring and identifying the problem

The first phase of the study was carried out from September to December of 2007 with a group of fifteen ten-year-old children, from Centro Cultural Colombo Americano in Santiago de Cali. This institution is one of the leading bi-national language centers in Colombia. The Institution's task has been teaching English to adults, children, and teens for about 50 years. Nowadays, CCCA's adult program has the ICONTEC certification and it is strengthening its programs through teacher training and events for English teachers, among them the ELT conference that takes place every year in the city of Cali and gathers teachers, researchers, and publishing houses from Colombia and overseas.

From the eight levels established for children's courses at the institution, this one corresponded to "kids 5", being the preamble to the intervention level, kids 6. Classes were held every Saturday morning from 9 to 12 AM. The group was quite heterogeneous in terms of language and study skills. In this phase, three data collection instruments were used: a field journal, class observations made by the Teaching Assistant, and one survey at the end of the course. In all, five observations of 2 hours each were made: one for the description of the building and major context, and four inside the classroom.

Through class observation and reflections in the diary, the following insights about the nature of the group were gained:

1. The variety and number of learners in class promoted a rich learning environment.
2. Only one boy went to a public school; the rest of the group attended private schools with a strong English component in the curriculum.
3. Girls' performance in the class was quite outstanding, as well as their commitment in doing homework and written tasks. Boys also loved participating in all activities proposed in class but preferred oral/listening activities and competitions as opposed to writing.
4. Half the class had experienced travel abroad and most of them had travelled around Colombia.
5. Students, in general, showed more interest in activities with innovation of materials and variety of tasks.
6. Both boys and girls were more engaged in the task when the purpose and expectations of the teacher were clearly stated at the beginning.
7. Although most of the class still lacked management of learning strategies and study skills, some of them started inferring rules from general examples and felt freer to inquire about what they were being taught.
8. Once they had been introduced to different kinds of materials and activities, students did not respond with the same promptness to the activities and homework proposed in the textbook.
9. There were some issues dealing with discipline and engagement in class. Students generally obeyed the Teaching Assistant better, given that the head teacher avoided scolding them or drawing their attention towards discipline. The following semester only the head teacher would be present, so this issue needed to be addressed.

During this phase, the researcher was in charge of the class but was accompanied by a Teaching Assistant that helped with developing materials, planning lessons, and classroom management. He was finishing his studies in engineering and had been taking English courses at the Institution. He had been an

assistant teacher for more than a year and enjoyed doing activities such as games and competitions. In class, he helped control students' behaviour when they did not want to listen to the teacher. Although he would not be part of the intervention process, his absence might affect the class environment in a positive or negative way.

The textbook used for class development and contents was English Time 3 (2002), by the Oxford University Press. This Publishing House offers textbooks at four different levels ; they were all used in the Children's Program at the Institution. Book number 3 was split between kids 5 and kids 6; which meant that for the intervention phase the second part of the book would be used. The textbook consisted of four components that focused on different features of language: *Conversation time*, where dialogues on a specific situation are presented; *word time*, to focus on vocabulary related to the topic; *practice time*, with drills to practice certain grammar structures; and *phonics time*, to help students recognize and produce different phonemes of the language.

In order to carry out the lessons, different materials were used such as CDs, posters, flashcards, videos, worksheets designed by the teacher, balls, newspaper, magazines, markers, Internet, and slips of paper. Listening material consisted mainly of conversations and listening exercises, plus some songs that were brought in by the teacher.

4.2 Phase 2: analyzing and planning

After analyzing the nature of the class and the issues observed in phase 1, the objectives for the course 'Kids 6' were revised in accordance with the objectives of the study:

- To promote skills of search and discovery through in-class inquiry about aspects of their own culture they are familiar with but do not reflect upon.

- To raise students' awareness towards cultural facts of Colombia and the United States, being able to establish relationships between them.
- To enhance learning skills and independent work.

These objectives had to coincide with the requirements of both the study and the Institution and would guide the study. Usually, at CCCA the objectives for each unit are set in terms of a function (factors in language that are necessary for communication to occur). On the contrary, TBL proposes that every task has a communicative purpose determined by the goal that has been set.

According to the pacing that is dictated by the institution, each lesson takes up to two sessions of three hours and teachers do a review at the end of every three lessons. From the 12 units in the textbook, only 6 are covered during the semester and the other 6 in the next course, which meant that they would study lessons 7 to 12 in 'Kids 6'. This timetable gave enough time to instructors to prepare their lessons and cover the contents successfully. However, the fact that classes at Colombo Americano meet only once a week sometimes confines teachers to do short exercises or drills and not to do tasks or projects to go beyond the topics proposed by the book.

Reviewing the class contents in light of the objectives of the study and the theory of Intercultural and Task Based Learning, the aspects for syllabus design and lesson planning had to be re-stated as it can be seen in the following table.

Aspect	Revisions
a. Cultural component:	None of the units have explicitly cultural in content. Hence, considering the topic for each unit, a cultural component needed to be added so the whole unit would revolve around that topic. e.g. Unit 2: in the State Park: Students will study about Nature Parks in the US and in Colombia.
b. Input - materials:	In order to give a taste of authenticity in the classroom, the CD provided by the textbook was not enough. Other input such as original songs, excerpts from movies, reading material, video, and Internet had to be used.

	This change also affected the way materials were used and presented in the classroom.
c. Objectives:	Instead of presenting objectives for every class in terms of functions, goals can be set regarding the communicative purpose of each task.
d. Tasks	The main change in the framework was the implementation of tasks. At the beginning, emphasis had to be made on TBL methodology in order to have students get used to it and break down the aim of short exercises and drills to practice language. Tasks also implied the use of different sources apart from the textbook and the promotion of group work rather than individual achievements.
e. Homework:	Since class time was so limited, tasks needed to be part of homework as well. Besides the basic homework students have, some creative tasks could be done at home and brought to class later to show the results. Working on cultural content also demanded a lot of extra class work on research and documentation.
f. Pacing:	Implementing TBL and focusing on Cultural awareness required more time. Some of the units may have taken about three sessions while others took two, as indicated in the Institution's schedule.
g. Evaluation:	On the one hand, the instructor had to consider the goals and learning outcomes in the institution. On the other hand, the outcomes of every task were considered as well, in order to fulfill the demands of the study and the requirements from the Institute.

Table 16. Aspects in Syllabus design

Source: the author.

Most of this review was done beforehand in order to create a framework on which the instructor would base the teaching process throughout the semester. However, during the development of the course, several changes were made as needs and interests emerged. Even if students were not aware of this fact, they were indeed the reason why the syllabus was being constantly revised and enriched.

Having considered the primary aspects of the Task Based framework proposed by Willis (1996) and the principles for Intercultural Language Teaching, the following methodology was proposed and carried out during the intervention phase.

4.3 Phase 3: intervention

As it is explained in the Theoretical Framework, this study was based upon two pivotal terms that dictate syllabus design. Firstly, in accordance with the Communicative approach, language is communication and learners use it to convey meaning in real-life communication tasks. Secondly, intercultural language learning offers the view of the classroom as a place where both the target and home cultures are shared. Consequently, the aim of the course was to provide students with opportunities to do tasks and experience language in use as well as finding enough sources and materials to draw students towards a comprehension of cultural facts that are conveyed in language.

The class gathered every Saturday morning at 9, in sessions of three hours. As the head teacher of the course 'Kids 6', the researcher tried to find a balance in class work between time spent in intervening for this study and the focus given to the course contents stated by the institution. Thus, for every session of three hours, thirty to sixty minutes were spent in tasks with a cultural focus but still highly related to the class contents.

An important step during this phase was also to analyze the information gathered and implement other instruments of data collection. Hence, task outcomes and observations by an expertise teacher informed the project with facts about teaching, learning, class contents, and methodology. Table 7 explains:

	Research journal	Observations	Task outcomes	Surveys

Description	Entries after class in order to reflect on the use of materials, task outcomes, students' participation, etc.	Carried out during the first phase of the study by the researcher. five observations by the thesis director.	Work that students handed in after every task. It comprised brochures, art, lists of words or things, posters, etc.	2 surveys applied by the end of each stage.
Analysis	Categorization of emergent data into labels like homework, methodology, materials, students' response, constraints, tasks, and evaluation.		Analyzed under the light of the task objectives. Not given scores but written and oral comments from teacher to student.	Compared and summarized in order to inform the research with the students' perceptions of the study.

Table 17 Data collection and analysis

Source: the author.

Finally, in this intervention phase, three aspects of syllabus design were key factors to determine the achievement of the objectives for the research. These are explained in detail in the following three subsections.

4.3.1 Implementing Task Based Learning

The Framework for Task Based Learning by Willis (1996) defined the class methodology for the intervention phase. Throughout the course, the researcher implemented TBL whether working on cultural topics or not.

As low intermediate students, the participants in this intervention were exposed to tasks that were both achievable and demanding. Difficult tasks would have a negative effect on their motivation while easy-to-do tasks would hinder them from making efforts and develop their skills as language learners. Their level and age also determined which stage of the cultural awareness levels they would be able to reach.

For each lesson, a task phase was planned including previous warm-up activities and, most of the time, some language focus at the end. Tasks were also classified according to the task typologies presented by Willis (1996, p. 26) and a goal that dealt with cultural aspects of language related to the topic.

a. Pre-task stage

Homework played an important role in the pre-task phase. Byram (1997, p. 69) explains that students can make use of independent learning in fieldwork or in homework. This kind of work enhanced the act of 'inquiry', which consists of having students reflect upon what was learned and ask questions about oncoming topics.

Assignments started as a means to overcome time constraints, since the three hours in class could not be entirely invested in cultural awareness tasks. They later became more relevant when they were assigned as tasks, usually from a pre-task stage. Three purposes of homework were that they provide students with elements to participate in class, contribute to the objective of promoting skills of inquiry and research, and shape the skills of independent learning.

Task assignments included: fact-finding, creative tasks, and listing vocabulary. Here, excerpts from the field journal provide evidence of what kinds of activities were used in the pre-task phase:

- We did a brainstorming activity about the names of these items.
- As a pre-task we checked together what they had found in their research.
- Students named different names of Colombian State Parks at random
- As a warm-up to the task, I planned a short activity with the homework they brought.

When the participants did not do their assignments, they lacked with information to interact in class and found themselves hindered from performing

successfully in the following activities. Tasks in this stage set up the context for the next one, the task cycle.

b. Task cycle

In *APPENDIX C1. Cultural awareness tasks for 'kids 6'*, tasks are organized according to topics given by the textbook. Hence, class contents were not modified but adapted to the research objectives.

Regarding the theory of 'savoirs'⁷ for Intercultural Language Learning by Byram (1997), the rationale for these tasks was to point out the knowledge that students need about institutions, places, people, music, or history that are intertwined in everyday life and define them as part of a community. Next, the process that was carried out in order to present the final tasks for each unit is explained in detail.

Unit 7 Items in a Drugstore. After proposing several related cultural topics that would be meaningful to the age of the participants, it was agreed upon with the thesis director that the first unit was going to be spent in getting learners used to the class methodology, without focusing on cultural content. During these two weeks, class contents were confined to the textbook but carried out with implementation of TBL.

The first task that students did was the creation of shampoo bottles with labels in English. An entry in the field journal from January 26th explains what the task consisted of:

I gave them cardboard and, step by step, they made the shampoo bottle in pairs. They took one hour in the process of handcrafting and labeling. For the information on the label, the students used data from the items that I had brought to class [realia] and used their dictionary to translate the information they wanted to include on the label.

⁷ Term in French coined by Byram (1997) that means 'knowledge'.

At the beginning, students seemed unfamiliar with the process of spending longer than usual on activities and then sharing the outcomes with the rest of the group. Still, these introductory tasks allowed the participants to see that the effort they put into doing class work could be proved through the products they created.

Unit 8 Nature. The proposal of this topic by the textbook allowed for a number of cultural awareness tasks related to knowledge about places and geography. Although the kind of tasks that were executed promoted a more 'tourism' kind of cultural aspect, they established a starting point of analysis that made students realize the richness of their country. Such was the relevance and importance of the tasks in this unit that in the *Diagnosis survey for cultural awareness*⁸, all of them identified Nature and geography as cultural knowledge that they studied during the course.

Emphasis was also placed upon the fact that behavior is an aspect of the cultural context as well. In this case, students listed actions of right and wrong behaviors in public places and designed a leaflet that can be read in *APPENDIX C3*.

Unit 9 Food and Condiments. The list of vocabulary presented in the textbook was not contextualized with regard to the age and experience of the participants. This added to the difficulty to extract cultural content from this topic. However, a series of tasks that involved both the students and the community in this research was proposed: the food festival. In *APPENDIX C4. FOOD FESTIVAL*, this project is explained in detail and describes listing and sharing experiences tasks that developed into a big project where parents, students, and teachers were involved.

⁸ Refer to *APPENDIX B2. Diagnosis survey for cultural awareness-answers*.

Unit 10 Public Buildings. Tasks of fact-finding and creativity were carried out in this unit. Through the textbook, students learned vocabulary about nouns of public buildings so, for the purpose of the research, the group of participants inquired and searched information about history, location, and names of monuments in the capital of the United States. In class Students watched a slide show designed by the researcher that introduced the topic and gave them the opportunity to share what they already knew about those places. Expressions like: “¡Ah sí! lo vi en Discovery” are quoted in the field journal. For details on this task refer to *APPENDIX C1. Cultural awareness tasks for 'kids 6'*.

Unit 11 Places at Home. A first proposal of focusing on family life style was made for this unit. The researcher looked for authentic materials, especially movies or video, that would illustrate this aspect of culture. However, after some reflections with the thesis director, we found that none of the materials offered an objective view of family life; instead, they were filled with assumptions or stereotypes that would have provided students with biased information. Besides, the age of the participants was not very convenient to make careful study of this subject. An entry in the field journal from April 26th reflects this issue:

Videos are a good source of information and I wish I could have used them more but it is quite difficult trying to get a movie that fits the class needs. For this unit, for example, I had planned to watch 'Matilda' but I gave up to this idea because of two reasons: firstly, we could have failed by judging families in the US and stereotyping their lifestyle (even if I think that what this movie shows is not completely wrong) on the other hand, making reflections about lifestyles is a topic that could be more accurate for teens who have developed enough reasoning skills. That is why I focused the cultural point on structure of houses and not structure of families.

Thus our new focus for cultural awareness consisted on talking about differences and similarities between housing in the United States and housing in Colombia regarding construction materials, extension of land, and places inside the house. A comparing task was developed and a sample of the outcome can be checked in *APPENDIX C3. TASK OUTCOMES*.

Unit 12 Daily Activities. The last unit covered vocabulary relating to daily activities. Not much could be extracted from this topic; consequently, we used the concept of *culture capsules* by Omaggio (1993, p. 394). As the author states, a culture capsule consists of short descriptions between a native and a target culture custom or fact accompanied by illustrative photos, slides, or realia. To make this possible, unit 12 was studied at a faster pace because vocabulary and structures were not as complex. Then, two new cultural subjects were introduced: songs and proverbs.

Songs- In class, we listened to songs that the participants were familiar with from a younger age and later the researcher shared with them old time songs that have been sung by kids in the United States such as *London Bridge*, *Oh Susanna* or *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. The final outcome for this task was to create a song book with songs and chants that they picked from a list with pictures related to the theme of the song. Refer to *APPENDIX C3. TASK OUTCOMES* in this document for a sample of this task.

Proverbs- The researcher emphasized recognizing the values that are conveyed in proverbs and sayings by inquiring in class about it. After that, we scrambled proverbs in Spanish that students translated in a literal way. Finally, they checked with the real ones in English to realize that although the proverb has the same meaning, the way that language plays with words differs from culture to culture. The final task in this series was to design a Dictionary of Proverbs and sayings where students picked five different proverbs and made a drawing of their meaning. Each proverb was both in English and Spanish creating a certain level of difficulty when drawing, as the field journal entry for the month of May will show:

For Sebastián, for instance, the difficulty was that he did not know exactly what to draw:

S. en español se dice... pero en inglés dice otra cosa. Entonces lo dibujo en inglés o en español?

T. Como lo entiendas mejor.

c. Language focus

Language focus tasks covered a range of activities that dealt with features of language used in the task cycle or proposed in the textbook. In the *practice time* of the book, several grammar structures were proposed. Nevertheless, they were not in every case related to the language that was used during the task cycle. As a result, these activities proposed by the textbook were used as practice for the *language focus* of the task even though were not analyzed in deep. The field journal says:

In order to have some practice on all the vocabulary and grammar required in the task, students worked on the 'practice' and 'word' part of the workbook.

Analysis activities were mostly carried out at an oral level, mostly through *sharing experiences* tasks. While speaking, the researcher noted several spelling, vocabulary or grammar mistakes that were then reported to students individually or with the whole group.

- The language focus I planned was taken from their own speech. As they made sentences with the information they had, I wrote some of them on the board. After the break, they wrote them in the notebook and the whole group, with my help, corrected the wrong ones. [March 1st]
- They came to the front of the classroom and reported while I wrote down the mistakes they made to tell them individually about them after that. [April 5th]

The practice for the language focus was done using elements from the textbook such as songs, conversations, and written drills. On January 26th in the unit for toiletries, the field journal reads:

The idea with the song was to have a more interactive and funny way to practice, let's say, the rule. So listening to and repeating the song several times would allow them to realize the use of the structure. Anyhow, we read together the song on page 59 and then they picked two items from the table. The students showed much interest in

keeping the items secretly in their bags and then saying phrases from the song such as: "I have some toothpaste in my bag", to which the rest of the group replied "true" or "false".

4.3.2 Contents

The organization of contents in the textbook at CCCA is based on a topical-functional syllabus. Each unit consists of a series of vocabulary and language forms relating to a specific topic in a given location: the park, the house, the school, the city, the mall, etc. In unit 3, for example, the location was the kitchen so vocabulary was related to food and language forms focusing on the structure "there is/are" were studied. In an ordinary course, one class may be spent working on vocabulary building and the next one on practicing language forms and phonics.

Revising the class pacing and the contents of the textbook, a table of contents for six units was planned to be carried out in the class period. At the beginning, a first draft of the table of contents was proposed⁹. This table contained traces of the one given by the Institution in relation to making functions explicit and adding learning strategies that would help learners to achieve the tasks. In this first attempt, possible tasks for the class were planned, including a range from listing tasks to sharing experiences tasks (Willis, 1996, p. 26). Based on this table, lesson planning for the first sessions was done.

Nevertheless, when the instructor started planning lessons based on this table of contents, it was found that some tasks were neither accurate for the level of the learners nor had a purpose of cultural awareness. As a result, theory was reviewed again and more research was done in order to enrich the cultural component of the class. At this point, references like Tomalin and Stempleski (1993); Omaggio (1993); Byram (1997), and Willis (1996) were the basis for

⁹ See APPENDIX A2. First proposal of class contents

reviewing the instructor's knowledge of tasks and objectives for Intercultural Language Learning.

4.3.3 Cultural component

As mentioned above, the organization by topics in the textbook led to the proposal of different cultural components that every theme could lead to. Section 2.1- Figure 1, p. 9 of this document shows the features that instructors think of when asked what culture means. In the light of this scheme, the textbook's contents were changed into cultural contents to fit the objectives of the study. Although not all the units were suitable to work on cultural awareness, most of them related to a topic that was familiar with students' lives and interests: habits, food, music, and folklore. See Figure 3.

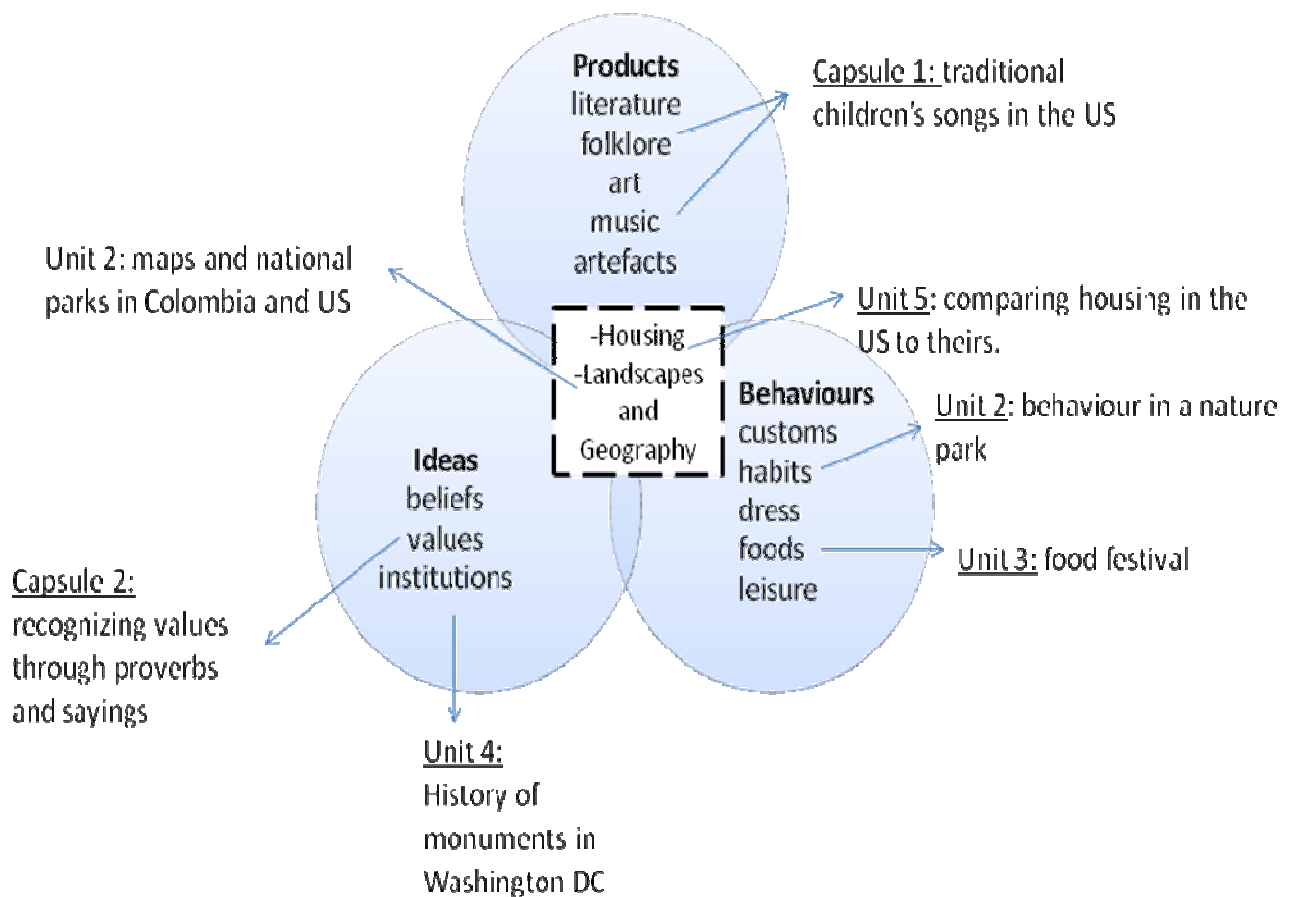


Figure 6. Cultural components for 'kids'

Source. Adapted from Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) and enriched with cultural awareness activities done in this study.

After reviewing the first proposal of contents in the light of authors like Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) and Omaggio (1993), there were more ideas to enrich the cultural component of the class: *culture capsules*. This new proposal let the instructor plan tasks that were focused on cultural awareness with disregard of whether the unit lent itself to this or not. In an entry from February 16th, this was recorded in the field journal as follows:

It's a shame that I don't have the right to change the contents and put a bit more emphasis on aspects of culture such as celebrations, lifestyle, art,

or places. I don't know how possible it is but I'm thinking of doing a kind of ten minute culture capsule at the end or at the beginning of the class with a task that, even if not related to the topic we're studying, draws students' attention toward cultural behavior and, thus, contributes to the purpose of this research.

Sometimes culture capsules may be referred to as just providing facts to be compared in the target and home culture. In this research, instead, culture capsules became a way to have students engaged for some minutes in inquiring about cultural topics and participating. The topics for the culture capsules were defined by the bibliography cited above, the teacher's personal observations of needs, and specific topics from books about American culture. The following entry is an excerpt from the journal that shows how the process of selecting topics happened during the research:

May

During the last days of April I went to the Colombo's library and found a book called 'The United States Miscellaneous', which had quite a lot of topics related to the culture of this country. I saw some that I could have taken into account like: National symbols, system of Education, Presidents, and jokes. It was too late to work on these but we still had time to do the last one and I decided to focus it on proverbs and sayings. Proverbs gather both social values and people's way of thinking and I thought it could be an interesting topic for them to learn and have fun with.

The main concern with culturally-focused topics was choosing the ones that would be more familiar to students' lives and experiences. Deep themes like politics, life styles, arts, history, or even slang would have been hard for eight year old students to comprehend. In order to avoid this, and taking into consideration previous observations, other topics were proposed. Firstly, the objectives or functions given by the institution had to be considered and then new cultural objectives for the same unit have to be proposed. The objectives first suggested led to a better understanding of what the purpose of the tasks were. Once objectives were clear, the next step was to select possible topics for tasks to work on with the class. The move from language functions to cultural objectives can be summarized in Table 7:

Unit	Functions given by textbook	Cultural objectives related to the unit
Unit 1: At the drugstore	Tell the price Identify items in a drugstore state the items that one has and that other students have	Know and get acquainted with US currency.
Unit 2: In the state park	give advice of do's and don'ts identify elements of nature say that something exists (there is/there are)	Inquire and sum up information about wildlife and natural parks in both countries. Be able to identify and locate some cities and states in a Colombia's and US's map
Unit 3: In the kitchen	express one's needs find solutions to a problem identify food and condiments ask about existing things	Write reports of Colombian and US food recipes and present them to the community
Unit 4: Downtown	ask about possession express gratitude identify public buildings say where someone was	Know about the history and features of famous monuments in the US
Unit 5: At home	Express lack of emotion make an invitation to have fun identify places at home ask where someone was	Describe and contrast housing in the US and Colombia. Recognize proverbs and sayings in both languages and establish the relationship between them.
Unit 6: Around the house	hold a telephone conversation identify daily activities express past activities	Be able to report about folk songs known by kids in the target language.

Table 18. Cultural objectives

Source: the autor.

Based on these objectives, the researcher planned tasks with a cultural focus for the course. By the end of the process, task outcomes reflected how far in cultural understanding students went.

According to Byram (1997), "the acquisition of attitudes and perspectives on otherness presupposes attainment of specific stages of psychological development, particularly in the domain of moral development." (p. 54). This argument explains

why levels III and IV of Table 2 by Omaggio (1993) presented above in section 2.5 and revised in Table 8 could not be attained. The participants needed more experience with language and a higher level of development in order to achieve levels of critical understanding of the culture.

Levels of Cultural Awareness			
Level	Data	Mode	Interpretation
I	Superficial stereotypes	Tourism text	Exotic, bizarre
II	Significant and subtle contrasts	Culture conflicts	Unbelievable, irrational

Table 19 Levels of cultural awareness

Note. Taken from Omaggio (1993, p. 372)

In the survey applied at the end of the intervention stage¹⁰, the answers of the participants reflect that the level of awareness that they were able to reach was more the one of tourist that still perceives the other as exotic or bizarre, yet moving towards contrasting ideas or facts rather than superficial stereotyping. An example of this is the answers given when they were asked what culture means to them. Table 9 resumes their answers in the light of table 8 by Omaggio (1993).

Level I	Significa comidas típicas y parques naturales Conocer lugares importantes y comer comida común
Level II	Cultura: la cultura es comidas típicas, lugares turísticos, reservas naturales. Lo del pasado que uno sigue haciendo como costumbre Para mí la cultura es como las costumbres de uno La cultura para mí significa las costumbres de las regiones, la comida, los lugares turísticos de cada región o país. Para mi cultura significa costumbres, arte, comidas típicas, su cocina, su vestuario, los lugares, etc. La forma de vivir, pensar, tener cosas tradicionales. Costumbres, tradiciones, religiones, etc
Level III	Cultura significa vivir en una sociedad, que tengamos las mismas costumbres, comida típica, la forma de comportarnos, las palabras que decimos y la geografía.

¹⁰ APPENDIX B2. Diagnosis survey for cultural awareness.

Table 20 Level of cultural awareness in 'kids 6'

Source: the author

The survey also suggests that the participants learned to differentiate the topics related to cultural understanding from the ones focused on the sole practice of language. From a list of nine themes that were studied in the intervention stage, most of the students disregarded the study of formal aspects of language or drills and asked which from the list were related to cultural knowledge:

- a. Rondas infantiles y música (6)
- b. ~~Aprender las formas del verbo to be~~ (1)
- c. Formas de comportamiento (7)
- d. Lugares turísticos (11)
- e. Frases célebres y refranes (5)
- f. ~~Conocer el pasado de los verbos regulares~~ (0)
- g. Comida típica (12)
- h. ~~Practicar en el workbook~~ (2)
- i. Reservas naturales y Geografía (13)

4.4 Evaluation

The Common European Framework states several types of assessment in order to promote evaluation that not only measures students' knowledge of language in a given moment but offer a holistic view of the process that they go through in each communicative task.

Evaluation of performance in this course was given based on learning attitudes and products as well as participation in class. However, this kind of evaluation counted only as a means to keep track of the achievement and progress of the participants but was not valid to report class results to the institution or parents. Feedback was given in meetings with parents and the regular grade reports were handed in. In addition, an open house was done at the end of the

course so that students could share their outcomes with parents and friends. Task outcomes have been attached to this document in *APPENDIX C3*.

4.5 Results

In this study, results are developed all along with the description of the research methodology. Nevertheless, in order to make them more specific, they are explained and categorized in the following list:

a. Contents

- Although not all the units were suitable to work on cultural awareness most of them related to a topic that was familiar with students' lives and interests: habits, food, music, and folklore.
- The research proved that teachers can always adapt contents or methodologies if they want to go further in their practice and it does not hinder them from fulfilling the institutionally stated program.

b. Methodology

- Data collection throughout the stages of research ensured a better organization of information that helped documenting the writing of the final report.
- Evaluation of performance in this course was given based on learning attitudes and products as well as participation in class.
- Learners with a rich environment were more permeable to interact and get adapted to new teaching methodologies.
- The process of inquiry in class provided opportunities for all the participants to ask, share, and do research about the aspects that they are unaware of.

c. Cultural awareness

- The level of awareness that they were able to reach was more the one of tourist that still perceives the other as exotic or bizarre, yet moving towards contrasting ideas or facts rather than superficial stereotyping.
- The participants learned to differentiate the topics related to cultural understanding from the ones focused on the sole practice of language.

d. Constraints

- Constraints in this research comprised: Time, mastering of knowledge, materials, institutional demands, and age of group. Since this is an important aspect, it is worth to be developed in a new subdivision.

4.5.1 Constraints

In the theoretical framework, there were mentioned different constraints that teachers in general share when approaching cultural topics in the classroom. Besides these constraints, some others were experienced in this research project, specifically related to this context. Below, the researcher presents the five major constraints observed during the application of the research:

a) Time. Due to the fact that classes were only carried out once a week, the aim of linking contents was sometimes affected. After having studied a topic in one class, students would come back eight days later to learn about something else that may not have had a link with the former topic. To address this concern, tasks assigned as homework either to emphasize something already studied in class or to build knowledge prior to the introduction of a topic in later classes. In this way, a bond was created from lesson to lesson throughout the course.

b) Mastery of knowledge. One of the major difficulties when preparing lessons was mastering knowledge on cultural topics. Mastery goes beyond knowing about facts and providing students with a lot of information, which is the reason that teachers give up in the attempt to approach cultural topics with their students. In order to counteract this problem, mastering of knowledge was shared between

both students and teachers. In this way the class, was a place for inquiring and sharing with the rest of the class what every individual knew about the topic. Because of this approach, more information could be used in class.

c) Materials. Cultural understanding is not the first and foremost aim of most textbooks for children. Therefore they need to be adapted to the needs and expectations of the class. Most of the contents in this textbook do not use real situations or authentic materials as their source of information. The contents of the textbook English Time 3 adopted by the Institution were modified for the purpose of this project since it was not possible to adopt a more suitable reference textbook just for this course. During this process, a lot of emphasis was put on planning tasks that would keep the topics proposed in the textbook but presented with true communicative purpose through real materials that would help to achieve the purpose of the course, which was cultural awareness.

d) Institutional demands. This influenced everything done in class from lesson planning to methodology. At the institution they have their own way of planning based on warm ups, follow ups, and wrap ups of topics. There are also fixed schedules that had to be modified for the research purpose. Evaluation within the context of this kind of methodology is set up differently than evaluation in task based approaches since they do not propose outcomes on which the results of students' efforts are shown.

e) Age of group. In order to reach a certain level of cultural awareness, the age of students is fundamental. Primarily, learners must reach a point of self awareness. They need to be conscious of their own country, culture, language, problems, history, etc. Eight year old students might not have developed to this stage yet, making the next process of understanding another culture even harder.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study represents the starting point for future research on the adaptation of class contents to focus on cultural content with young and adult learners. Taking into consideration results and constraints, the following conclusions can be made about this research process:

- Data collection throughout the stages of research ensured a better organization of information that helped with documentation in the writing of the final report. For this purpose, the field journal played an important role since it provided both description and analysis of every stage of the research. It was of high relevance to make note of explicit dates, actors, materials, conditions, etc. in the entries of the field journal in order to inform the research with facts to be analyzed in the light of the literature review.

- Mastery of knowledge was not a major constraint in the intervention process. Certainly, at the beginning, there was some fear that a lack of knowledge by the instructor would reinforce stereotypes or shallow understanding of the target language. However, the process of inquiry in class provided opportunities for all the participants to ask, share, and do research the areas that they are unaware of. This kind of approach to language teaching conceives knowledge as a construct that both teachers and students work on through inquiring in the classroom about the

unknown aspects of the topic and reinforcing outside the school context what has already been learned in class.

- Learners with a rich environment were more open to interact and adapt to new teaching methodologies. This statement does not imply that learners are required to have been abroad already or have a lot of instruction in the foreign language. It suggests that learners that were exposed throughout life to a series of experiences in different contexts were more at ease in adapting to a different learning methodology and enriching their knowledge about the target language.

- Two principles for cultural awareness can be inferred from the series of tasks done in the research project: (1) Cultural awareness is a skill that is developed to different degrees by the group of learners, influenced by the background of each participant and enriched by their interaction in class. (2) Culture is inherent to language and cannot be explicitly taught; instead, the instructor promotes opportunities for exploration of the home and target culture through communicative tasks.

- Constraints in this research project dealt more with contents and age of the participants. These can be solved if the proposal is implemented with a more mature audience and in a context where more flexibility is given to the choosing of cultural contents.

- This proposal, applied with more frequency in language classrooms will produce intercultural users of language that will see the process of learning another language as a means to understand another culture. Moreover, it ensures that learners will use language in situations outside the classroom that require more than knowledge of the formal aspects of language but rather knowledge about the commonalities, customs, relationships, and assumptions of the target culture.

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