

The relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters and professional identity of English Language Teachers: A narrative multiple case study before, during, and after a short-term sojourn abroad

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Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación

October 2024

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Doctorado Interinstitucional en Educación

Doctoral Dissertation

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October 2024

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Education

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I dedicate this Dissertation to the loving memory of my mother, María Concepción (Concha), whose sacrifices and endurance showed me how to persist in my academic journeys. Her unconditional love will always guide me, and this work is a tribute to the extraordinary woman she was.

Acknowledgements

I express profound gratitude to my advisor, Dr. José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia, for his steadfast support, insightful guidance, and invaluable feedback. His expertise and encouragement were essential in shaping and concluding this doctoral dissertation. I extend my eternal gratitude and admiration for his invaluable contributions and patience.

I thank my dissertation committee members, Professors Gary Barkhuizen, Bertha Ramos Holguín, and Orlando Chaves Varón, for their thorough review, constructive feedback, and valuable suggestions that significantly enhanced the quality of this dissertation.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the participants of this research study. Their willingness to contribute time, narratives, and experiences has been invaluable, and their cooperation has played a vital role in advancing the understanding of the subject matter.

I want to thank Dr. Gary Barkhuizen for the opportunity to spend those beautiful weeks at the University of Auckland, for opening his home to me, and for his mentorship. Studying under his guidance has influenced the direction and outcomes of my research. Having such an eminent academic as a mentor and friend has been a privilege.

I express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to Professors María Eugenia Guapacha and Orlando Chavez for providing constructive feedback and scholarly insights that significantly contributed to refining the design of this dissertation. Their generosity in hosting me in New Zealand, the enlightening trips to showcase Auckland, the delightful international dishes they invited me to savor, and the countless hours devoted to reviewing my drafts indicate their benevolence and ability to forge genuine friendships.

I am grateful to Mr. Alveiro Valencia, Juan Carlos Martinez, Katherine Agudelo, Luisa Ramirez, Geraldine Calvache, María Fernanda Giraldo, and all YMCA Colombia members for

their continuous support and opportunities afforded in the ICCP-SW&T program. Their contributions have greatly enhanced my understanding of the impact of summer camps on participants.

I extend my gratitude to all my close friends. Our conversations serve as a constant source of creativity for examining the nature of human nature. I appreciate their encouragement to keep trying, constant support, and the bond of trust and companionship they share with me.

I am profoundly grateful to Brenda, Oscar, and Nicolás for their unwavering support, encouragement, and companionship throughout this journey. Their hospitality, providing me lodging and meals during my doctoral meetings, epitomized their enduring care and intimate friendship.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to Diana Marcela and Paulo Andrés for their presence in my life and encouragement to keep studying despite adversities and moments of hopelessness. The sacrifices they have made and the support they have given me in pursuing my academic goals are the seeds that sprout in this dissertation.

Abstract

This dissertation explored the influence of intercultural interactions and encounters on the professional identity development of English Language Teachers (ELTs) during short-term sojourns in U.S. summer camps. The study drew on a qualitative narrative inquiry with a multiple-case study design. The research questions were structured around post-structuralism views of identity and aimed to uncover the influence of intercultural encounters on ELTs before, during, and after their summer camp experiences. The study included ten participants who shared their stories of interactions with people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The primary objectives of the study were to describe the various types of intercultural encounters that the participants experienced, identify the facilitators and challenges in their learning, explain the impact of these encounters on the participants' perceptions and beliefs, and examine how these encounters contributed to the development of their professional identities. The main findings suggest that intercultural interactions and encounters became identity catalyzers that activated the participants' exploration and construction of their individual and professional identities as language teachers. The study sheds light on the embedded, symbolic, performative, embodied, multilayered, intersectional, intersubjective, and contingent nature of identity. It contributes to understanding the potential of short-term sojourns in transforming future language educators' identities.

Keywords: intercultural encounters, professional identity development, short-term sojourns, narrative inquiry, English Language Teachers (ELT)

Resumen

Esta tesis exploró la influencia de las interacciones y encuentros interculturales en el desarrollo de la identidad profesional de los profesores de inglés durante estancias breves en campamentos de verano estadounidenses. El estudio se basó en una investigación narrativa cualitativa con un diseño de estudio de casos múltiples. Las preguntas de la investigación se estructuraron en torno a visiones postestructuralistas de la identidad y pretendían descubrir la influencia de los encuentros interculturales en los profesores de inglés antes, durante y después de sus experiencias en campamentos de verano. El estudio incluyó a diez participantes que compartieron sus historias de interacciones con personas de diversos orígenes culturales y étnicos. Los objetivos principales del estudio fueron describir los distintos tipos de encuentros interculturales que experimentaron los participantes, identificar los facilitadores y los retos en su aprendizaje, explicar el impacto de estos encuentros en las percepciones y creencias de los participantes y examinar cómo estos encuentros contribuyeron al desarrollo de sus identidades profesionales. Las principales conclusiones sugieren que las interacciones y encuentros interculturales se convirtieron en catalizadores de la identidad que activaron la exploración y construcción por parte de los participantes de sus identidades individuales y profesionales como profesores de idiomas. El estudio arroja luz sobre la naturaleza arraigada, simbólica, performativa, encarnada, multicapa, interseccional, intersubjetiva y contingente de la identidad. Contribuye a comprender el potencial de las estancias breves para transformar a los futuros profesores de idiomas.

Palabras clave: encuentros interculturales, desarrollo de la identidad profesional, estancias breves, investigación narrativa, Profesores de lengua inglesa

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1. Introduction

Intercultural interactions and encounters are crucial in shaping individuals' perspectives on life and their identities. The significance of such circumstances cannot be underestimated in English language teaching, where intercultural communication competence is central. This dissertation delves into the nuanced interplay between intercultural experiences and the professional identity development of English Language Teachers (ELTs), particularly during short-term sojourns at summer camps in the United States (the U.S.). This exploration is grounded in the understanding proposed by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) that contemporary work environments, characterized by increased intercultural and linguistic diversity, significantly expand the range of identity choices available to individuals.

The contextualized links between intercultural interactions and encounters and identity are complex. One element that complicates intercultural interactions is proficiency in the language of communication, particularly in workplaces where sojourners are forced to use the dominant language. English is the authoritative language of the U.S.; thus, it is a marker of Americans' national identity. Apart from the spaces (Benson, 2021) where Latinos interact in Spanish at camp for specific tasks (the kitchen, for example), English language is not negotiable; what is negotiable is the identities of interactants.

Short-term sojourners are expected to use English in intercultural interactions at the workplace to communicate with native speakers, perform their duties, and, by extension, develop their camp identity. Often, sojourners struggle to understand and use English, delaying the construction of their camp identity. As they improve their English and adapt to camp routines, they become accepted, and their new identities are acknowledged. (Pavlenko & Blackledge,

2004). Although English proficiency becomes symbolic capital, developing a summer camp identity does not necessarily equate to adopting an American identity.

Camps are established social structures where identity is negotiated through intercultural interactions and encounters. According to Darvin and Sun (2024), "During intercultural encounters, speakers negotiate their material and symbolic resources to position themselves in specific ways" (p. 13). At camp, intercultural relations are asymmetrical, and native speakers or non-native fluent speakers hold power, making the negotiation of identity a dynamic process influenced by linguistic and practical competencies. As sojourners navigate these interactions, they adapt their identities to align with the prevailing social dynamics and hierarchies, further shaping their sense of self within the camp community. (Darvin & Sun, 2024).

Summer camps in the U.S. offer college students from around the world the opportunity to work, experience life in the U.S., practice English in real-world settings, and enhance their intercultural competencies. U.S. summer camps are a lucrative industry deeply ingrained in American culture, attended by millions annually. Part of their profit is represented by the human capital ingrained in thousands of international college students who also profit from the experience of discovering their professional identities.

The camp industry entered Colombia through recruiting agencies that have promoted the idea that sojourning at summer camps in the U.S. is an ideal scenario for college students to culturally and professionally advance. YMCA Colombia is a leading nonprofit organization that has trained and sent more than 3.000 college students abroad for summer camp work since 1991, primarily modern language students. The participants' aim has always been to enhance their English language proficiency and increase their intercultural competence. At the University of Cauca, the initiative started in 1995, involving more than 700 students since then, with

approximately 200 hailing from the university's modern language teacher education program (Acosta-Acosta, 2024).

Some of the benefits of participation include evolving into globally minded young adults, understanding the world from both local and global perspectives, and becoming more adaptable individuals capable of handling new and stressful environments. Former participants have also acknowledged heightened cultural awareness, recognizing the value of interactions with people from different cultures (Acosta-Acosta, 2024).

From a post-structuralist perspective, the world is experiencing significant transformations as forces compel individuals to reconsider and often abandon their cultural practices and ways of being. For ELTs, sojourning abroad provides an opportunity to explore and develop new identities through engagement with diverse global communities. Language students choose work-abroad programs because they offer an affordable way to travel, especially when studying abroad is challenging to arrange. The common rationale for participating in summer programs is a tangible opportunity to travel overseas. It is widely accepted that young people gain significant benefits from intercultural experiences abroad. Additionally, the belief that direct contact with native speakers in an English-speaking country is the most effective way to improve English proficiency remains prevalent.

According to Torres-Casierra (2021), language teachers are attracted by study and work opportunities overseas as it is the natural step in their career process. She argued, "Many enroll in postgraduate studies whereas work options can include short summer immersion courses, fixed-term contracts as au pairs and as language teaching fellows" (Torres-Casierra, 2021, p. 122). In Torres-Casierra's (2021) analysis, Colombian language teachers' pursuit of professional growth is intricately tied to their interest in international experience. The availability of overseas

study and work opportunities, including postgraduate programs and short-term engagements, underscores the language teachers commitment to seeking enhanced professional development and exposure to diverse international contexts." Torres-Casierra (2021) found that language teachers' migrant and non-native speaker identities in their workplace "may become visible through the undertaking of day-to-day activities, teaching practice, and communication" (p. 124). This is similar to sojourners at summer camps whose identities are negotiated through intercultural interactions and everyday duties.

Ospina and Medina (2020) reported that international visiting faculty gained cross-cultural awareness through interacting with Americans and other teachers and became more flexible when coping with cultural differences. They also acknowledged that working in the U.S. made them more rational in teaching and learning, more reflexive, and better teachers as they improved their English and became more independent.

Thus, working abroad enhances individuals' professional skills and language proficiency, prompting deeper introspection into their teaching practices and intercultural perceptions. The language teachers' experience working in a foreign country can lead to a transformation of their identity. They adapt to new environments and evolve professionally and personally through self-reflection and intercultural interactions and encounters.

Short-term sojourns abroad provide a rich source of academic research, particularly concerning the influence of these experiences on individuals' personal and professional identity development within the study-abroad field. Jackson (2014a), for example, argued that young people who travel or study abroad, becoming visible minorities for the first time, heighten awareness of multiple dimensions of their identities and those of others (p. 44). Similarly, Barkhuizen (2017a) posited that participants in study abroad programs necessarily interact in

unfamiliar environments, showcasing their identities, negotiating them, and experiencing significant changes. This visible link between being abroad and heightening identity awareness prompts the idea that ELTs' interactions and encounters while abroad correlate with their professional identity.

Besides the wealth of literature study abroad research, several scholars have explored aspects of language teachers working abroad (Appleton et al., 2006; Çelik, 2017a; Çelik, 2017b; Hrycak, 2015; Johnson, 2020; Mažeikienė & Loher, 2008; Serbes, 2017). In this context, Boross De Levay (2013) delved into studying self and teachers' work in international schools. Serbes (2017) and Çelik (2017a) highlighted the importance of working abroad to increase professional skills and gain additional competencies such as learning foreign languages, appreciating new cultures, and improving living standards.

Publications about Colombian ELTs' work abroad are scant. Nevertheless, the contributions of Viáfara and Ariza (2015) emerge as pioneering and substantive, offering valuable perspectives that enrich our understanding of the subject. Their work about Colombians' cultural agency and traveling abroad indicated that students of English as a foreign language who participated in programs abroad immersed themselves in intercultural settings. However, limited opportunities to interact hindered the development of their intercultural competence. Although not focused on identity issues, the study found that negative stereotypes of Latinos prompted sojourners to strengthen their national identity. Viáfara and Ariza (2015) pointed out that the most salient benefits for participants were heightened cultural and intercultural awareness, appreciation of differences between host and home countries, and identity changes as cultural beings.

The literature reveals a gap in research regarding work-abroad experiences for ELTs, in contrast to the extensive focus on study-abroad publications. Specifically, more scholarly attention needs to be given to how work-abroad opportunities enhance intercultural awareness and influence professional identity development. More research is needed to explore the relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters during work-abroad sojourns and ELTs' professional identity development. In the same line of thought, research methodologies within narrative inquiry have generally studied single individual cases. So, scholarship has yet to involve mixed multiple case studies consistently designed to establish connections between individuals' narratives to unveil a deep understanding of potential connections and patterns between group cases.

Addressing the gap in the literature is crucial for a more nuanced understanding of how work-abroad sojourns at summer camps impact individuals. The lack of literature about undergraduate students who sojourn abroad to work and its relationship with identity development opens different avenues of exploration. One line of inquiry is how Language Student-Teachers (LSTs) who live abroad for a short period develop an understanding of their relation to the workplace and their communities' linguistic and communication practices. LSTs construct these relationships from the moment they start preparing for their work-abroad sojourn, their time spent at camps, and their identities after returning home. LSTs also comprehend the effects of these experiences after some or several years have passed since their work abroad sojourn. Additionally, LSTs correlate their intercultural interactions and encounters with their identities.

One contribution of research about work abroad lies in the possibility to understand the ways sojourns and professional identity construction impact participants. If sojourners who

traveled abroad to work at summer camps are given opportunities to share their stories, their experiences may be preserved. If they tell their stories, they will benefit from understanding what they lived; their goals, plans, and expectations could be deliberately preserved. The sojourners may realize plausible achievements such as a global mindset, flexible and adaptable personality, and intercultural awareness.

Research about how LSTs experience their sojourn contributions to bridge existing knowledge gaps, facilitating a more thorough understanding of the impact of employment in summer camps, students' intercultural development and identity construction. This study is relevant as it examined the influence of intercultural interactions and encounters on the professional identity development of ELTs before, during, and after their sojourn at a summer camp in the U.S. The qualitative narrative inquiry framed within a multiple case study design involved 10 participants who were divided into two groups based on the timing of their overseas experiences: one assigned to the 1999-2000 cohort and the other to the 2010-2016 cohort, reflecting a 10-year gap between the two cohorts. This research approach was fitting to respond to the research questions. Narrative inquiry allowed participants and me to make sense of their lives and understand the connections between life accounts, particularly interactions. This narrative inquiry collected stories about the intercultural encounters participants lived with people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Amidst this backdrop, the central inquiry of this dissertation emerges:

1.1 Questions

1.1.1 Main question

What role did intercultural interactions and encounters play on the professional identity of English language teachers before, during, and after a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?

1.1.2 Sub-questions

What intercultural interactions and encounters did the participants have before, during, and after their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?

What factors facilitated and challenged the participants' intercultural learning before, during, and after their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?

What did artifacts collected during their short-term sojourn tell us about students' personal and intercultural development?

How did intercultural interactions and encounters at a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S. contribute to the participants' professional identity development?

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objective

To understand the influence of intercultural interactions and encounters on the professional identity of English Language Teachers before, during, and after a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

To describe the types of intercultural interactions and encounters that the participants had before, during, and after their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.

To identify the factors that facilitated and challenged the participants' learning before, during, and after their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.

To determine what the participants' artifacts collected during their short-term sojourn tell us about their personal and intercultural development.

To examine how intercultural interactions and encounters at a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S. contribute to the participants' professional identity development.

This dissertation develops as follows. First, I lay out the theoretical dimensions of the research and the previous literature that informs the work on sojourning and its connections with identity research. The next chapter is concerned with the methodology employed for this study. It includes a thorough discussion of the type of study, participants, data collection techniques, and data analysis. The third chapter presents the research findings, focusing on the three key themes that connect the participants' experiences before, during, and after the sojourn. This chapter discusses the main themes that emerged from the findings, highlighting key elements from the poststructural lens adopted. The final chapter summarizes the main findings of this project and brings together the lessons from the case studies. Following the conclusion, I discuss the implications of the findings for future research.

2. Literature review

This literature review thoroughly explains identity as a critical construct of our time. It also aims to establish a link between identity and the primary subjects of study in this research, namely intercultural interactions and encounters and work abroad. The parameters of this literature review are anchored in the acceptance of a world that is constantly changing and progressing. This fact marks a moment when, more than ever, people are in a persistent search for identification, shifting among categories, moving across community borders, and recognizing similarities and differences (Hammack, 2015). In this scenario, identity is the social realization of the self. The framework set here aligns with identity as an integral part of individuals that is socially, discursively, and contextually developed through interaction. Language is also the vehicle that conveys individuals' internal world and cognition. Accordingly, narratives are assumed to be stories people tell about their own lived or imagined experiences, and narrative inquiry is the qualitative research approach that enables researchers to study situated stories that individuals tell about their life experiences.

2.1 The Self and Identity

Vignoles (2011) observed that much of the research on identity lacks affiliation with any specific theoretical background; its methods are diverse but inconsistent, and some studies need a more precise level of analysis. Despite the number of publications, identity studies do not exhibit a common thread that connects a consistent line of thought regarding the self and identity as a subject of study. Multiple disciplines have studied the connection between these two concepts. Philosophical perspectives of identity emphasize memory, meaning, and relationality, stressing the sameness and difference dichotomy of the identity concept (Hammack, 2015). These aspects

influenced the theories of William James and George Herbert Mead, which were pivotal to contemporary identity theory.

In the field of psychology, Hammack (2015) posited that identity is the "interior world of perception or cognition [and self, the] exterior world of social meaning" (p. 12). This implies that identity is a complex construct shaped by personal experiences and societal influences. It is not solely defined by one's thoughts and feelings (the interior world) but also by the social context and meanings attributed to oneself by others (the exterior world). Likewise, identity formation is crucial to personality development. Marcia et al. (1993) expressed that "identity formation involves a synthesis of childhood skills, beliefs, and identifications into a more or less coherent, unique whole that provides the young adult with both a sense of continuity with the past and a direction for the future" (p. 3). Marcia also acknowledged the continuum of identity and the influences of the previous stage into the following.

Individuals widely accept the unconscious idea that they grow to be who they are; that is, they possess a stable self. Building on this notion, Hammack (2015) clarified the difference between self and identity. For him, identity involves the twofold properties of uniformity and distinction that link the inner and outer world. Self refers to the introspective look at oneself; that is, awareness of what is inside one's mind. Overall, the sociological view regards identity as something resulting from the person's interaction with their society (e.g., designation by name, role assigned by society, norms to abide by). An underlying theoretical assumption is that identity is not static; it can be constructed and developed over time. This dualism may also conclude that the individual self and society occupy opposing and often antagonistic positions. In this sense, Simmel's (1903) words illustrate that people carry on their backs what he considers to be a modern form of conflict: "The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the

individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life" (p. 1). In this case, what is clear is that individuals are not autonomous beings, as social forces and histories of societies are more vital to controlling and ruling individuals' identities through discourse. This relationship between the individual and society gives rise to social identities.

2.2 Social Identity

Social identity is the connection a person establishes between their thoughts and their membership in a given social group. Hammack (2015) claimed that, based on the theories of Tajfel (1978, 1981, 1982) and Tajfel and Turner (2004), social identity first reinforces a positive image of the self. The world comprises social categories such as nationality, race, ethnicity, or small-scale community groups (such as summer camps). Second, the link to a given group influences behavior. Moreover, the "mere experience of belonging" would be enough to take action in favor or against others. For example, due to this linkage, some individuals resolve problems or contribute to specific causes differently, even assuming aggressiveness. A third idea is that if individuals identify with social groups, they are likely to change their roles within social contexts (Hammack, 2015).

The effect of social identity comes from society. It gets into the individual's mind (cognitive processes) to reflect changes within the same society or towards the benefit of that given societal group. Summer camp sojourners may experience shifts in their identities as they engage with and identify with the camp community, which may, in turn, impact their professional identities, particularly if their camp experiences inform their career aspirations or

skills development. Due to their involvement in the summer camp community, they are expected to slightly change their roles within the social contexts of their hometowns as they return to the country. For example, they may be more resourceful in their teaching practices.

Brewer and Yuki (2007) viewed social identity as a conceptual bridge, a link between the individual, the self, and the social groups and their structures. Suppose we accept the idea that human beings are social by nature and that living in groups is part of the history and roots of people. In that case, we must agree that social groups greatly influence individuals' inner beings. Brewer and Yuki (2007) asserted that adaptation to the environment is essential in the evolution of human beings. However, it is not only the physical adaptation to the environment but also the evolution of human psychology that adapts to the requirements of the social structures of society. The authors stated, "The capacity for social identification—considering the self as part of a larger social unit—is one feature of human psychology that regulates and maintains the essential relationship between individuals and their social groups" (p. 307). In this sense, people establish the idea of adaptability; however, culture defines and regulates identification for the individual, while in foreign contexts, other factors, such as the attitude of others towards the foreign person, come into play.

2.3 Post-Structuralism and Identity in Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition has traditionally adopted a psychological (cognitive) approach to identity, focusing primarily on internal processes such as memory, attention, and linguistic ability in relation to the self. This approach often views identity as a fixed characteristic that individuals bring to the language learning process, independent of external factors like social context, interaction, or cultural influences. One example of this is the L2

Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009), which is deeply connected to the concept of identity in SLA. The model describes the impact of the learner's Ideal L2 Self (the personal, future-oriented vision of success), the Ought-to L2 Self (external obligations and expectations), and the L2 Learning Experience (the learner's present learning context) on the language learning process. The model emphasizes that language learning motivation goes beyond internal or external goals. Instead, it proposes that it should include how learners see themselves and how they want to shape their future identity about the language they are acquiring. Despite the contributions of the field of SLA to understanding learners' identity development, it falls short of account for several factors that play a role in identity development. This led us to adopt a poststructural perspective of identity in this study.

Post-structuralism critiques ideas that identity is fixed, stable, and determined by essential qualities or inherent characteristics. It argues that identity is fluid, fragmented, and socially constructed through language, culture, and power relations. Several scholars in this line of thought discuss these principles (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2014). First, identities are constructed through language, discourse, and power dynamics (Block, 2007; Miyahara, 2010), Norton, 1995; Norton, 2014). Second, identities are fluid and fragmented. Individuals may have multiple, overlapping identities that shift and change depending on the context and social interactions (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). Third, identities are formed through language, how individuals are positioned within various discourses or systems of meaning, and the objects surrounding the spaces they inhabit. In this regard, Canagarajah and Minakova (2023) contended that objects may affect or shape the functional arrangement “of other objects in a given environment, demonstrating its agency” (p. 186). Thus, in the case of this particular study, artifacts collected by participants indexed their identities. The artifacts helped configure the

participants' identities as camp counselors or camp staff through self-recognition or recognition by other individuals within the camp. Fourth, power structures influence how identities are constructed and maintained, with specific identities being privileged or marginalized. Fifth, fixed notions of identity are destabilized as individuals and groups have the potential to resist and subvert dominant discourses (Miyahara, 2010). A last feature of a post-structural view of identity is that it is intersectional. This means that identity is multilayered and shaped by the interconnection of several social categories.

In a post-structuralist view of identity, the term "fluid" refers to the idea that identities are not fixed or stable but are constantly in flux, evolving and changing over time and in different contexts. The relationship between the characteristics of being fluid and ELTs' identities can be expressed by considering the main characteristics or reasons language teachers' identities are seen as fluid from a post-structuralist perspective.

Post-structuralism recognizes that individuals possess multiple, overlapping identities that may be contradictory or shifting. These identities are not predetermined but are constructed through social, cultural, and discursive practices. It is a fact that LSTs arrived in the U.S. with several identities except for their camp identity. So, as they work at camps, they interculturally interact with camp people and encounter the camp as an entity. As camp staff, LSTs set aside their college student identities to allow the camp identity to emerge and stand out.

Post-structuralism emphasizes that identity is not inherent or innate but enacted or performed through repeated actions and interactions. Individuals continually "do" identity through their behaviors, speech, and relationships, and these performances can vary depending on the social context. Camp life is repetitive. Staff go over the tasks again every day, constantly

repeating procedures, language, and interactions. Staff perform their camp identity as they sojourn.

Post-structural scholars pose that identities are fragmented (Block, 2010; Norton, 2000); they lack a unified or coherent essence. Depending on the situation, different aspects of identity may come to the forefront or recede, and individuals may experience tensions or contradictions between various aspects of their identity. (Block, 2007). Participants said they eventually struggled with English, camp duties, and relationships. In those moments, their camp identities broke apart into fragments, and they hid as shy kids. They also appeared unknown as other identities overlapped or came to the front to sustain the LSTs so they did not faint. Paraphrasing Benson (2021), the participants transitioned from an at-home environment to a work-abroad environment that eventually became a language learning environment that enhanced their identity.

Post-structuralists also suggest that identity is contingent upon social and historical contexts, power dynamics, and discursive formations. A particular identity category can vary significantly depending on the cultural and institutional context in which it is situated. The summer camp is a social entity that exercises its power as a living entity—the dynamics of their work and the historical moments people bring to camp mold international staff's identities.

Another central tenet of a poststructural view of identity is its intersectionality. Collins and Bilge (2016) describe intersectionality in this way:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social

inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (p. 1)

Factors such as social status, gender and sex, ethnoracial identity, sexual orientation, and political views, among other social identifications, impinge on the way individuals perform their identities daily. Whether in a classroom or in a summer camp, individuals perform any identity affiliation on the basis of the interactional circumstances and needs. From this entanglement of identity affiliations emerge the different positionalities of interlocutors. As described by Merriam et al. (2001), positionality is “determined by where one stands in relation to the ‘other’”. The meanings we make come from the distinct webs of identities available to us and that we decide to adopt and perform. As Langenhove and Harré (1999) showed, we position others as embodying certain identity affiliation (interactive positioning) while adopting a reflexive positioning, that is, our positionality.

2.4 Work Abroad, Sojourn, and Identity

Work abroad is the involvement in employment activities in a foreign country, encompassing short or long-term contracts. It involves gaining international experience, fostering professional agency, developing intercultural immersion, or seeking financial opportunities. Depending on the work abroad host country and the candidate's nationality, a visa may be required to get a job contract.

The *summer work and travel* and *camp counselor* programs provide work-abroad opportunities for college students. Colombian undergraduates seeking to work at a summer camp must be granted a J-1 visa to work in the U.S. As they arrive in the U.S., they are classified as nonresident aliens because they have legally entered the U.S. but are not citizens. Furthermore, they have the right to stay in the country for the length of the program, which is generally a 10-week contract plus a 30-day grace period after completing the exchange program. The same legal status emphasizes that as foreigners, international camp employees must leave the country after they finish the program without prejudice to their immigration records.

Sojourning refers to the act of staying overseas for a short period in a location that is not one's permanent residence. Accordingly, a *sojourner* is a person who voluntarily lives abroad for a short, fixed period, assumes a specific role within the community they will live in, and is aware of the compulsion to leave the host country upon completing the enterprise for which they have traveled. Consequently, *work abroad sojourns* refer to short periods spent in foreign countries for employment purposes. In the case of the summer camps in the U.S., a sojourn may last at least ten weeks for international staff.

Dilemmas concerning identity and work abroad sojourns are situated within the discourse context of intercultural interactions and encounters. Individuals' identities emerge through these interactions, shaping their positioning within society. Contemporary societies are characterized by a sense of universality, driven by the increased accessibility of long-distance trips and the emergence of virtual environments that transcend traditional geographic boundaries. In addition, people accept the idea that we live in a globalized world where time and cultural diversity are redefined concepts. In this sense, globalization is psychologically influential in several identity issues (Arnett, 2002). However, regardless of the movements individuals undertake from country

to country or crossing borders in search of other alternatives to survive or live better, humans only sometimes become equal to the population of the given culture, as some people fear. Indeed, mutual visits or cultural exchanges (sometimes with the sole purpose of mutual understanding) transform cultures. However, the world comprises more than one homogeneous global culture since gaps still exist in many fields. Living conditions (shelter, food, clothing, etc.), establishment in rural or urban areas, access to technology, and lifestyle between rich and poor, to name a few, mark significant differences among people (Arnett, 2002).

Scholars have studied theoretical constructs such as identity, study abroad, and sojourns. Two most outstanding are Barkhuizen (2013a, 2013b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) and Jackson (2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014b, 2015). Barkhuizen has studied language teachers' identities, the development of multilingual identity, and study abroad, among other areas of inquiry. Barkhuizen (2017a) affirmed that studying abroad shapes identity in many ways, especially when the sojourn has the purpose of using and learning an additional language. Despite the focus being on working abroad here, Barkhuizen's findings about the role of an additional language are essential to this study, as the use of English at camp becomes essential for positioning participants within the discursive community. For Barkhuizen (2017a), identity is multiple, dynamic, and transformative, core principles of the post-structuralist conception of identity. Another vital contribution of Barkhuizen (2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b) is that the context is essential for shaping and constructing identities.

On the other hand, Jackson (2015, 2017) suggested that researchers should study the assessment that participants could eventually do about their pre-sojourn, sojourn, and post-sojourn. Jackson (2017) questioned the benefits of sojourns about language and intercultural learning. She claimed the sole sojourn differs from the magic formula for developing

intercultural competence. Jackson (2015) also stated that participants have to be more interested in international matters when they get ready to work in international places.

Other scholars have explored different aspects of language teachers working abroad (Appleton et al., 2006; Çelik, 2017a; Çelik, 2017b; Hrycak, 2015; Johnson, 2020; Mažeikienė & Loher, 2008; Serbes, 2017; Wu, 2011) but they did not relate these topics with identity, except for Boross De Levay (2013), who undertook the study of self and teachers working in international schools. Referring to international teacher recruitment, Appleton et al. (2006) found that more than the individuals, it is the hosting institutions that gain or benefit from having international teachers in their institutions. Contrary to this, the institutions that see the departure of their teachers replace them with others without missing them as much as they would expect.

In turn, Çelik (2017a) investigated the challenges teachers face when working abroad, stating that even if they benefit from the experience as they “learn foreign languages, recognize new cultures, develop teaching skills, and earn more” (p. 191), The host country imposes certain norms and cultural values on them, forcing their acceptance. In the same line of analysis, Çelik (2017b) asserted that language teachers professionally develop as they improve their teaching methods, appreciate other cultures, and learn how to influence students’ learning. Likewise, Hrycak (2015) investigated what he calls the “internationally nomadic workforce” (p. 29) in international schools, comparing the views of teachers who are overseas to those who remain in the country (UK) and pointing out that teachers are aware of the opportunities they have to work abroad.

In his dissertation, Johnson (2020) addressed the influence of culture on professional learning communities established in international schools. He observed that teachers’ cultures influence the cooperation structure within the institution. The intercultural environment created

by the presence of teachers from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities became an obstacle to the practical advancement of the communities. In like manner, Mažeikienė and Loher (2008) investigated a comprehensive model integrating different competencies, such as subject (pedagogical) competence, methodical competence, and generic competencies, with Byram's intercultural competence model. In their study, they claimed that working abroad (or with people from abroad) increases the chances for teachers to gain broader international competencies. Likewise, Serbes (2017) stated that teachers would prefer to work overseas for some reasons. He maintained that social and professional development, language and culture learning, and better life standards are the most salient advantages.

Working abroad is an experience that could benefit the personal and professional development of language teachers who sojourn. Students preparing to become ELTs can anticipate gaining definite advantages, including language improvement, intercultural awareness, and a global mindset. No institution of higher education or formal schooling within the country or abroad explicitly teaches how to achieve the benefits of working abroad. It is a task that has to be undertaken by those concerned.

Viáfara and Ariza (2015) revealed the influence of overseas experiences on the intercultural competence development of 50 student teachers from two public Colombian universities. Asserting the need for increased attention to investigating Latin-American college students who travel abroad to work or study, they explored the impact of sojourns on students' education. They conducted a qualitative, descriptive case study that focused on mono-cultural participants' growth to become intercultural mediators after they have lived sojourns in the U.S. The programs through which participants enrolled to travel to the U.S. were Au Pair, Work Abroad, and Teaching Assistantship. The authors used an online survey and a semi-structured

interview to collect the data. The study's results allowed the researchers to identify two principal dimensions: "the elements affecting intercultural development and the levels of interculturality participants revealed" (Viáfara & Ariza, 2015, p. 129). The authors referred to national identity and its relation to stereotyping. They also referred to participants' shaping their identities as a consequence of the experiences they lived abroad. However, they did not explore identity matters.

A review of Colombia's most influential journals focusing on language education research, bilingual education, and language teaching and learning advancements suggests that investigations on identity, study abroad experiences, and sojourning represent a nascent field in the country. The publications available offer noteworthy contributions to examining local demographics and national contexts. Some conceptualize and locate identity within the field of English as a Foreign Language.

Gómez (2012) studied students' construction of identities as foreign language learners during classroom interactions. From a post-structuralist perspective, Ortiz (2017) examined how young adults construct their identities as English language learners. Guerrero Moya et al. (2016) developed an action research project searching for intercultural communicative competence through students' narratives. The authors supported the view that identity is socially constructed and eventually can become an instrument of group acceptance. Díaz Benavides (2013) studied how pre-service teachers construct their identities, emphasizing that they build identity within discourse communities. Thus, the school serves as an excellent setting for teachers to portray their identities. Torres-Rocha (2017) focused on language teachers and the influence policies may have on their identities. The authors recognized that foreign language teachers' personal and social identities are shaped by their membership in social groups.

The birth of identity studies within the language teaching and learning field in Colombia traces back to the beginnings of the 21st century with Hernández and Samacá (2006) and Mejía (2006). Hernández and Samacá (2006) explored the importance of national and foreign cultural issues in language teaching, assuming that culture is an element that leaves a mark on people's identities. They considered social identity as a tool to define the individual's roles and categories within society. In contrast, cultural identity is something individuals can be aware of as far as they accept the existence of other cultures. On the other hand, Mejía (2006) referred to identity, establishing two main areas of analysis: national identity and bilingual school identities. The author asserted that individuals' understanding of themselves is mediated by what others think. Thus, the cultures that bilinguals inhabit resemble mirrors that reflect different instances of their identities since those discursive communities shape their identities.

If an individual's sense of identity is challenged, they may experience confusion or a sense of displacement, leading to feelings of not belonging anywhere. Hernández and Samacá (2006) and Mejía (2006) suggested that culture significantly influences individuals' identity, which is a defining aspect of their being, evident even in the accent they get when speaking a foreign language. Furthermore, educational institutions, both for students and teachers, can serve as environments fostering a culture that extends beyond the confines of the school and impacts national identity.

Quintero and Guerrero (2013) posited that teachers are social beings who view themselves from their perspectives and the perspectives of others. The authors argued that a teacher's identity is a matter of methodology and content, a framework for their practices. Within this framework, school teachers construct their identity through their image and role in the institutional setting where their research takes place. Quintero and Guerrero's (2013) findings

indicated that teachers may experience oscillating identities, a swaying occurrence between having power and being powerless.

Díaz Benavides (2013) observed that identity is a social phenomenon developed through interaction. Consequently, teachers' professional environments and interactions with colleagues shape teachers' identities. The classroom where they engage in their professional practices serves as the primary context for the emergence of student-teacher identities. As a result, the nature of the environment influences the development of a teacher's identity. Furthermore, the language spoken within the educational institution plays a significant role in identity formation, as experiences and interactions are structured and negotiated through discourse, as highlighted by Norton (as cited in Díaz Benavides, 2013, p. 39).

Fajardo Castañeda and Miranda Montenegro (2015) noted the relationships language teachers establish with their students and their work institution. Majoring in foreign languages may not be an early decision; during the practicum, many pre-service teachers discover if they genuinely want to develop a professional career as language teachers. The idea of global professional identity introduced by Guerrero Nieto and Meadows (2015) suggested that training programs be oriented towards local and global settings so that teachers can deal with the challenges they face in their profession. Critical pedagogy should be a component of the preparation of language teachers so they can develop their global professional identity (Guerrero Nieto & Meadows, 2015). From another perspective, Carreño Bolívar (2018) claimed that people have to understand national identity and strengthen the value local cultures have on the exercise of the profession.

Torres-Cepeda and Ramos-Holguín (2019) sought to analyze "what student-teacher narratives unveiled about the construction of their identity as language learners and the

connections made with being future in-service teachers" (p. 6). The authors pointed out that educators influence student-teachers' identities as learners. By establishing a relationship between discourse and identity, they maintained that the interactional environment is mediated by discourses through which identity is taught. Similarly, Torres-Rocha (2019) reflected on the pillars of "globally-minded EFL teacher professional identity." He stated that if teachers build a "global professional identity," they will understand that teaching has to do with local and global contexts; they will challenge the powers that impose colonialist policies and specific harmful standards and become teachers who foster transculturation. Language educators carry their identities with them, and during their professional exercises, these identities are constantly reconstructed. (Singh & Richards, 2006; Abednia, 2012).

In conclusion, the literature on identity in Colombia suggests that while scholars have engaged with this topic, it has not been extensively researched. Identity has been examined from various perspectives, shedding light on aspects that offer insight into teachers' inner selves, experiences, beliefs, and, notably, their cognitive processes.

2.5 Intercultural Interactions and Discursive Communities

This study adopts a discursive perspective on culture, drawing on the insights of scholars such as Kramsch (1998, 2009), Street (1993), Scollon and Scollon (2001), Hua (2016), Kramsch and Hua (2016), and Byram (2021). In their work "Language and Culture in ELT," Kramsch and Hua (2016) elaborated on three key insights from a discursive perspective for understanding culture and intercultural communication. Firstly, culture is viewed as an action or a verb, emphasizing the importance of examining how people engage in discourse within their communities (Street, 1993). Secondly, this perspective recognizes multiple discursive systems'

convergence, intersection, and conflict, reflecting the complex interplay of identities expressed through discourse. Thirdly, intercultural communication is a social interaction where people navigate their identities and external factors, such as the structure of society, power distribution among citizens, and local and global constraints. Consequently, intercultural communication competence is essential for navigating misunderstandings, requiring individuals to see the world from others' perspectives.

Central to the concept of intercultural competence is the proposal of Byram (2021), who lays out a model that, although not necessarily discursive, draws on interaction as a pivotal component of intercultural communicative competence. For the author, communication involves a process of negotiation of meanings that feeds from four broad dimensions: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, and intercultural. He focuses on this last component, which comprises cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. From these domains, he proposes different components of intercultural communicative competence described as *savoirs* (knowledge), *savoir être* (attitudes of openness and curiosity), and various skills, such as *savoir comprendre* (interpreting and relating skills), *savoir apprendre/faire* (discovery and interaction skills), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness/political education). Accordingly, the presence or absence of these components can significantly impact in intercultural interactions.

As stated above, interactions play a fundamental role, encompassing not only human interactions per se but also the sources and consequences of those interactions. Within the confines of identity theory, interactions gain relevance. They must be understood from different perspectives, explaining the multiplicity of discourse systems and their complexity due to people's identities. Interaction "has to be viewed as taking place among identities rather than among persons and centering on the meanings of the behaviors rather than the behaviors

themselves" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. xii). It is generally assumed that researchers within the identity field study the patterns of interaction among humans. However, the truth is that the agents are the actors who interact. Burke and Stets (2009) asserted that the difference between a person and an agent is fundamental since an identity functions as an agent. Hence, if people have many identities (say, brother, father, or uncle), each of these identities is an agent. If a person's identity, say his identity as a brother, is engaged in a discussion with his mother, it is the particular identity of these people that engage in interaction; that is, the agents representing those particular identities. Recall, though, that identities are constructed through participation in discourse contexts. When individuals enter a particular discourse community, they face the idea that they could bring the agent (the particular identity) and redefine it through interaction or construct and co-construct this new identity.

As the discursive perspective suggests, the cultural context plays a vital role in interaction. The self emerges through social interaction in specific contexts where individuals know their roles within discourse communities. If the society in which the participant (the self) has social encounters is familiar to this individual, the self can have control to a given extent. Burke and Stets (2009) thoughtfully explained that "being part of a culture, one comes to learn the concepts, the categories and classifications, and the meanings and expressions that are used by others in the culture to understand the world" (p. 21). In intercultural encounters, human beings may find their identities conflicting in interaction as they may experience a rift and unfamiliarity with new cultural contexts. The community members share meanings through discourse as they assign meanings to environmental aspects, shaping behavior and interaction.

Again, if the self is rooted in a named and classified world, it learns how things are classified and named and, more importantly, how to behave and interact within the borderlines of

those meanings. It is not just the capacity to name things in a culture; it requires the profound ability to recognize and understand the different positions in the social structure, such as doctor, patient, customer, or clerk, which are continually reshaped in each particular discourse context (Burke & Stets, 2009). Once again, if a person moves with all their identities to a different complex of cultural norms and meanings, some of these identities remain backstage. However, some others will have to show up and find a position to be able to act. Nonetheless, the adaptation of brought meanings has to work hand in hand with already-established meanings to adjust to social circumstances without losing the features of the identities that have been previously named. If a new identity has to be brought into play, this agent could eventually be a new being never named before (at least for the person), or it could result from the amalgamation of different "pieces" or meanings from other identities.

3. Research Design

“Narratives are identities” (Slay & Smith, 2011, p. 5).

This research, framed within a qualitative paradigm, constituted a narrative inquiry employing a multiple case study design. The data collection methods included a survey **with demographic questions asking for factual information**, a narrative interview (comprising two sessions), and an analysis of artifacts (e.g., pictures, objects, souvenirs). Bolen and Adams (2017) posited that "Narratives are the stories we tell about ourselves, others, and society" (p. 619). Baldwin (2017) further characterized narrative as "a linear, realistic, mimetic, internally coherent, self-consistent, emplotted account of events and experience" (p. 537). Echoing this sentiment, Horsdal (2017) articulated that "A narrative is a symbolic representation of a time span. A narrative unfolds in time and covers a time span, a course of experienced (or imagined) time, and with its demarcations of beginnings and endings, a space of time" (p. 261). For Goodson et al. (2010), "Narratives are stories with an organizing principle by which the contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed and articulated" (p. 11). Following these constructs, **I define narratives** as accounts individuals share regarding their lived or imagined experiences, expressed through a sequence of events typically organized chronologically, exhibiting internal structure with a plot intersecting dimensions such as who, where, when, and what (see Franzosi, 1998; Smit, 2017; Barkhuizen, 2017a).

Human beings accrue experiences throughout their lives that can be narrated to others. When these experiences are recounted, they transform into stories and narratives. According to Barkhuizen (2016b), “narratives become part of narrative inquiry when they are examined for research purposes or generated to report the findings of an inquiry” (p. 4). Therefore, based on the contributions of Barkhuizen (2016b, 2017a), Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), Webster and

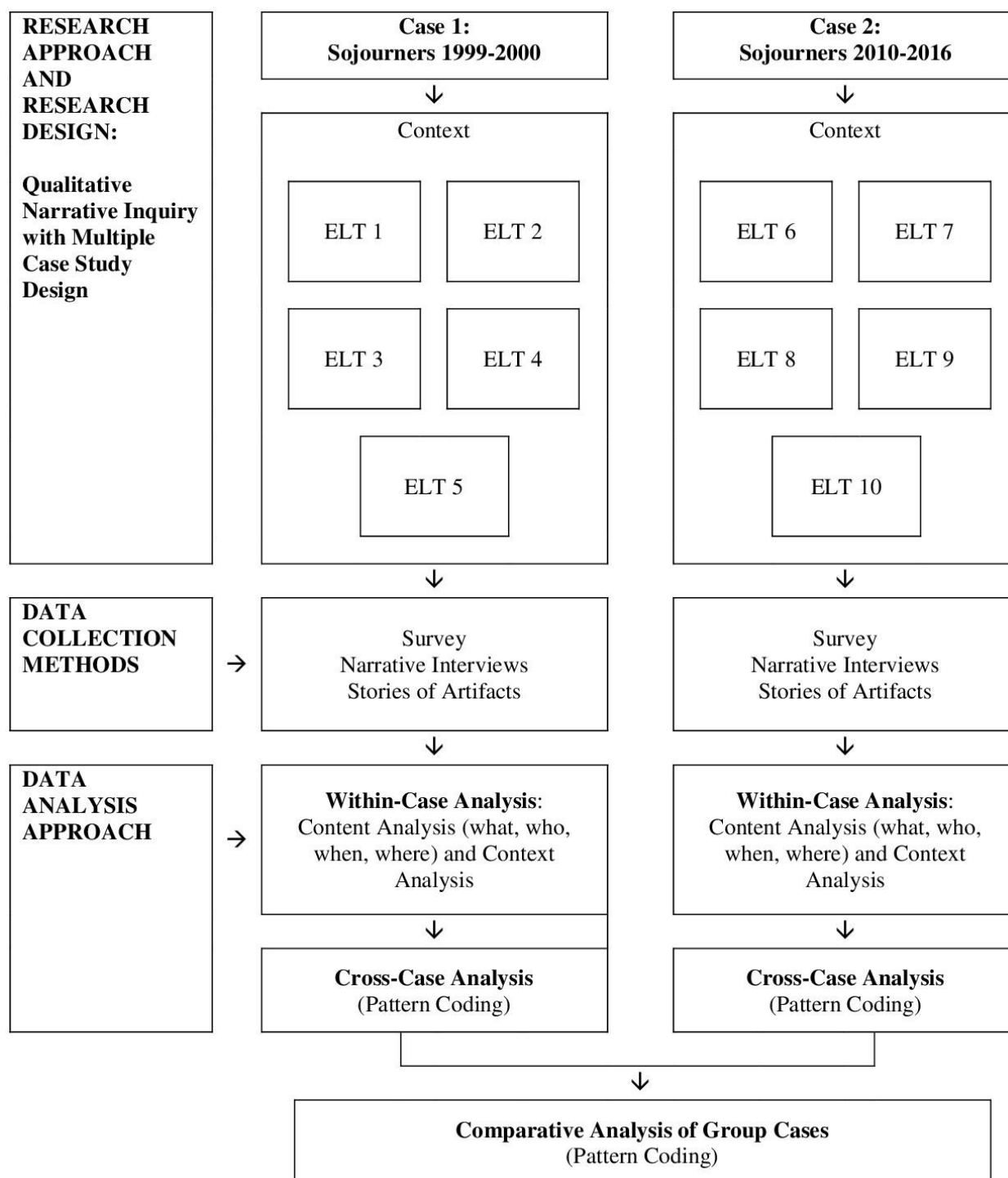
Mertova (2007), Kitchen et al. (2011), Barkhuizen et al. (2014), Kim (2016), Clandinin et al. (2006), and Huang (2018), I conceptualize narrative inquiry as a qualitative research approach allowing researchers to study situated stories individuals tell about their life experiences, the meanings and feelings they ascribe to those experiences, and the way they perceive the world. By doing this, narrative inquiry provides a deeper understanding of narrators' personal experiences, inner selves, and their roles as social beings.

Studies addressing identity within narrative inquiry are based on the notion that narratives of individuals can confirm the power of language and discourse to unveil their multiple identities. For instance, Hammack (2015) asserted that "the defining feature of identity is the formation of a personal narrative" (p. 21). In other words, we use narratives to make sense of ourselves and our worlds. As we go through events and experiences, we construct a life story that is a continuous construction and reconstruction of our identities (Bruner, 1986; Cohler, 1982; Freeman, 1984; Hammack, 2015; McAdams, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988; among others). Thus, through narratives, participants in this study transformed the sequence of events comprising the intercultural interactions and encounters they lived before, during, and after the short-term sojourn in the U.S. into discourse. The discourse-formed narratives allowed me to study the participants' stories (Slay & Smith, 2011). Hence, narratives served as a means to understand the influence of intercultural interactions and encounters on the professional identity of English Language Teachers (ELTs) at camp and other discourse communities before traveling abroad, during the short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S., and after their return to Colombia (Barkhuizen 2016a, 2016b, 2017a; Benson et al., 2013)

This study followed the principles of a multiple-case study design (See Figure 1). A case study is a research inquiry "in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often

Figure 1

Research Design: Qualitative Narrative Inquiry with a Multiple Case Study Design



(Based on Yin, 2018; Barkhuizen, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b; Miles et al., 2014)

a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 51). Terziovski (2007) indicated that “Multiple case study designs offer the advantage of more information over single case study designs” (p. 13). The linkage between narrative inquiry and a multiple case study design implies that the stories of a few sojourners who had worked at summer camps in the U.S. were considered individual cases subject to their analysis. Today, these sojourners are all ELTs who were modern language students at the University of Cauca when they traveled to work abroad. Their narratives were individually studied (*within-case analysis*) to understand the relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters and their professional identity. They were considered individual cases because they happened to coincide in the same college, undergraduate program, and summer camp program. This *within-case analysis* involved an in-depth examination and analysis of data collected within a single case or unit of analysis. It allowed me to explore this phenomenon’s intricacies, nuances, and dynamics within its specific setting.

Simultaneously, each case was associated with others that sojourned in the same year or close years (and were available to participate in this research), predicting shared commonalities to be considered a group case. Hence, the groups were labeled as *Group Case 1*, sojourners from 1999-2000; *Group Case 2*, sojourners from 2010-2016. Thus, a *cross-case analysis* of each group case was carried out to find connections between the individuals’ narratives. In this regard, “Cross-case analysis is a research method that facilitates the comparison of commonalities and difference in the events, activities, and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies” (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008, p. 2). Finally, a *comparative analysis of group cases* was conducted to understand possible connections and emerging patterns between the two group cases (see Figure 1). This *comparative analysis of group cases* allowed me to systematically

review and synthesize the findings from the group cases studied, examining similarities, differences, and patterns within and between the group cases. This design enhanced the research's robustness and aligned with multiple-case study designs (Herriott & Firestone, 1983; Yin, 2018). The following paragraph explains the rationale for placing the sojourners into these two groups as case studies.

3.1 Context and Participants

3.1.1 The Context (Community)

The study was conducted at the University of Cauca, a state-funded university created in 1827. The university is a cultural project with a crucial and permanent commitment to the social development of its people through critical, responsible, and creative education. It aims to educate individuals with ethical integrity and professional relevance, committed to the community's welfare in harmonic relation with the environment. The University of Cauca, accredited institutionally, is the most important higher education institution in Popayan, the Department of Cauca, and the southwest of Colombia. It boasts two campuses, one in Santander de Quilichao and the other in Popayan, the largest and main campus. The university is responsible for educating the region's people by offering various undergraduate and graduate programs. Consequently, the University of Cauca has nine (9) schools, 48 undergraduate programs, and 111 graduate programs (46 specializations, 55 master's, and ten doctoral programs). As of the beginning of 2019, the University of Cauca had 15,740 undergraduate and 1,677 graduate students (Universidad del Cauca, 2019).

The University of Cauca has established alliances with national and international universities, nonprofit organizations, and other academic and scientific institutions. One such

institution is YMCA Colombia. For over 25 years, the University of Cauca has maintained an interinstitutional agreement with YMCA Colombia. The main objective is to promote programs that empower college students to develop leadership skills and exercise their professional agency. One of its prominent projects is the summer camp program in the U.S., offering a work-abroad opportunity to travel, meet people from different places and cultures, and strengthen their worldviews. Throughout the program's existence at the University of Cauca, over 600 college students have traveled to work at U.S. summer camps, including this study participants (Acosta-Acosta, 2024).

3.1.2 The Participants

The participants in this study were ten (10) English Language Teachers who pursued their bachelor's degree at the University of Cauca and participated in the summer camp program in the U.S. between 1999 and 2016. The participants were individual cases worthy of investigation. However, they were not singled out. They were grouped to form two cases based on the year of sojourn at summer camp and presumable significant changes experienced by the summer camp program in the second decade of the 21st century. Thus, the participants were placed a priori as follows: five (5) participants were selected and assigned to *Group Case 1*, including those who worked abroad as part of the summer camp program from 1999 to 2000. Another five (5) participants were selected and assigned to *Group Case 2*, comprising those who worked abroad between 2010 and 2016. To preserve their identity, a pseudonym, chosen from the most popular given names for males and females, published by the National Civil Registry of Colombia (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, 2020), was assigned to each participant. The demographic information of the participants is outlined in Table 1.

The participants' ages ranged from 30 to 48, with an average age of 39.3. The average age of participants from Group 1 was 45.8, while the average age of Group 2 was 32.8. The difference in age between the two cases was 13. Seven participants were born in the department of Cauca, two in the department of Valle del Cauca, and one in the department of Quindío. Six participants (three from each group) expressed that they were Catholic, one Christian, one Buddhist, one to a mix of different religions, and one mentioned that he did not belong to any religion.

The earliest participants traveled abroad to participate in the summer camp program in 1999, and the latest in 2016. They all went to the U.S. to work in their summer camp and returned to Colombia after the sojourn that lasted between 10 and 12 weeks.

Some participants participated in other sojourning experiences in the U.S. and France after they graduated, and then they returned to Colombia. After a few years, five out of ten participants decided to move to live abroad and make their lives in different countries. Five participants live abroad (in the U.S. and Europe), and the other five live in Colombia (only one in Popayán). Three participants from Group 1 have lived abroad for an average of 21.7 years; two from Group 2 have lived abroad for an average of 7 years.

Nine of these ELTs studied on the campus of the University of Cauca, in the city of Popayán, and one on the campus of Santander de Quilichao. Six participants mentioned that they had attained a master's level in language teaching, one had attained a doctoral level, and three had not completed their graduate studies. In general, the study participants have an average teaching experience of 15.5 years. Group 1 participants have an average teaching experience of 21.2 years, while Group 2 participants have an average teaching experience of 9.8 years. Luciana

exhibits the most years of experience, with 26; the participant with the least years of experience is Emiliano, with 7.

The criteria for selecting participants were mainly two: one, being an alumnus of the Modern Languages Program at the University of Cauca; two, being a former participant of the Summer Camp Program run by YMCA Colombia. I invited more than 20 candidates to join the study through Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, or email. I provided details of the research project to the candidates who willingly agreed to participate. They were informed that the formal process would commence with electronically signing an *Informed Consent* sent to their emails promptly (see Appendix A). The consent was written considering the university's informed consent guidelines and revised and approved by the doctoral committee. The consent was sent to the participants to ensure they understood the purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and their rights. Once they felt comfortable with the information provided, they signed it and returned it to me. It was explained that, following this, they would complete a survey (see Appendix B), participate in a narrative interview, first meeting (See Appendix C), generate stories of artifacts (pictures, objects, clothes) in written or audio-recorded form (See Appendix D), and attend another narrative interview, second meeting (See Appendix E).

The participants were grouped based on their first year of participation in the summer camp program. Several factors supported the decision to divide the participants into these groups. First, the training offered by YMCA Colombia for participants to work at a summer

Table 1*Participants' Demographics*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Place of Birth	Place of Residence ¹	Time Lived ²	Ethnic Group	Religion	Post-Grade	Years of Exp. ³	Year of Part. ⁴	Grp ⁵
Luciana	Female	46	Cauca	Abroad	22	White	Buddhists	Master	26	1999	1
Isabella	Female	43	Valle	Colombia	14	Afro-Colombian	Catholic	Doctor	21	2000	1
Mariana	Female	46	Cauca	Abroad	22	Mestizo	Mix of religions	Master	13	1999	1
Gabriela	Female	48	Cauca	Colombia	48	Mestizo	Catholic	None	25	1999	1
Mariangel	Female	46	Cauca	Abroad	21	Other	Catholic	Master	21	1999	1
Santiago	Male	31	Quindío	Abroad	7	Mestizo	None	Master	14	2014	2
Salomé	Female	33	Valle	Abroad	7	Mestizo	Catholic	None	8	2012	2
Antonella	Female	30	Cauca	Colombia	30	Indigenous	Catholic	None	8	2016	2
Emmanuel	Male	36	Cauca	Colombia	10	Mestizo	Christian	Master	12	2010	2
Emiliano	Male	34	Cauca	Colombia	18	Indigenous	Catholic	Master	7	2012	2

1. Current place of residence. 2. Time the participant has lived in their current place of residence. 3. Years of experience as a language teacher. 4. Year of participation in the summer camp program. 5. Group in which the participant was placed in the study.

Note. The information in the table was taken from the survey (Appendix B).

camp before their departure to the U.S. has been improved over the years, providing participants with gradually more tools to succeed at camp. Second, U.S. camps have increasingly emphasized the internationalization of their programs by recruiting international staff. This shift has compelled camps to make their international participants more visible and promote their policies to parents and associates, allowing them to appreciate the presence of international participants. Third, college students' participation in the summer camp program has gradually increased, showing a change in the international mobility movements of students.

3.2 Locus of Enunciation

Regarding my positionality, as an individual who has lived abroad and experienced short- and long-term sojourns, I comprehend the significance of residing in foreign countries, engaging in intercultural encounters, and being mindful of my own identities. I acknowledge that my background, experiences within and outside the country, and roles as a professor at the University of Cauca positively influence my perspective. I may have positively impacted some study participants, encouraging them to embark on their sojourns abroad. I recognize that I taught most participants while pursuing the bachelor's degree in Modern Languages at the University of Cauca and have maintained contact with them since their graduation. Therefore, I accept that our academic relationship could have influenced their decision to participate in the research project. However, I did not pressure them to join the study, as we do not share any working or social relations that would allow me to influence their participation inappropriately. Finally, my credentials and career trajectory, which are well-known to the participants, assure that their involvement in the study will contribute to understanding the impact of working abroad. To mitigate bias, I had the participants review their narratives to ensure they accurately

represent their experiences and prevent any unintentional misrepresentation that could compromise the study's trustworthiness.

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

This study employed the following data collection methods: a survey, narrative interviews, and stories of artifacts (e.g., pictures and objects). The data collection process commenced with the administration of the survey. (See Appendix B). The information gleaned from this survey served as the foundation for understanding participants' backgrounds and other characteristics, enabling me to draw inferences about the group. Following the survey, the first meeting for the narrative interview was conducted. (See Appendix C). Subsequently, participants were tasked with selecting two artifacts from their sojourning experience (e.g., photos, objects, souvenirs) and recounting the stories associated with these items. (See Appendix D). Participants chose to either audio record or write these stories, a task completed before the second meeting of the narrative interview. Finally, the second meeting for the narrative interview was conducted. (See Appendix E). Through these instruments, I collected the narratives about the participants' experiences before, during their sojourn in the U.S., and after their return to Colombia.

3.3.1 Survey

A survey (See Appendix B) is an instrument that seeks to gather basic information about the study participants (e.g., opinions, experiences, knowledge, or attitudes) using different types of **demographic questions** (Leedy & Ormrod, 2020). This information serves to understand their background and characteristics and make inferences about the group. The survey consists of questions organized into different sections addressing the research topic. Given that this was a narrative inquiry with a multiple-case study design, the survey allowed me to identify tendencies

and patterns within the case groups and characterize the population by cross-referencing their background and experiences. Most participants were abroad or in a city different from their hometown, so the survey was administered online during the first week of data collection. Utilizing an online form ensured easy access for participants and efficient data collection. The survey comprised fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions, some open-ended questions requiring specific detailed information, and a section involving a statement inventory marked using a provided scale. The survey was divided into the following sections: General Information (name, date of birth, gender, place of birth, ethnicity); Education (undergraduate and graduate studies, specific language courses taken); Work experience (language teaching experience, work experience institution); Languages (spoken languages, places where English is used, frequency of use of English, people with whom English is used); Travel abroad (countries visited, purpose of trips, length of trips); and Feelings about Social Groups. (See Appendix B).

3.3.2 Narrative Interviews

Narrative interviews (See Appendix C) constituted the core of the data collection methods in this study. They served as the instrument for eliciting and collecting stories about participants' life experiences. In Narayan and George's (2012) terms, a narrative interview transcends the question-answer scheme of other interview types. During narrative interviews, the researcher guides participants to think narratively, encouraging them to convert their experiences into stories, incorporating essential narrative dimensions of who, where, when, and what (Barkhuizen, 2017a, 2017b, 2016a). Interviewers must become adept listeners to participants' narratives, allowing them to tell their stories without interruption. An excellent narrative inquirer sympathetically listens, withholding questions to enable participants to shape their stories in their own way (Narayan & George, 2012). This characteristic requires the interviewer to understand

that the power of narrative interviews lies with the participants, who possess stories to tell. The capacity of the interviewer to value the stories the participants wish to tell is crucial, granting interviewees a leading role. Thus, the researcher must permit participants to guide the interviews at their own pace (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016).

Following the phases of narrative interviews proposed by Kim (2016), this study's narrative interviews were divided into two meetings: the first meeting was the narration phase. (See Appendix C). During this initial meeting, participants were asked to recount their stories about intercultural encounters before traveling abroad, during their sojourn in the U.S. (both at camp and elsewhere), and after returning to Colombia. Initially, short questions were posed inviting participants to narrate full stories (e.g., Please, tell me the story of/when...). Subsequently, encouragement was given by expressing interest and using non-verbal attention signs. I encouraged participants to share whole stories. The second meeting (See Appendix E), or the conversation phase (see Kim, 2016), occurred after carefully listening and analyzing narratives from the first meeting. I took notes about the stories or ideas I wished to explore or clarify. Like the semi-structured interview, this phase allowed in-depth questioning to address topics not covered in the initial narrative phase. This phase involved crafting narratives requiring more elaboration, guiding participants to derive meaning and establishing communication between the interviewee and me. The narratives collected in the first meeting became interview data in this phase.

3.3.3 Stories of Artifacts

An artifact is an "object (such as a tool or ornament) showing human workmanship or modification as distinguished from a natural object" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Artifacts serve as sources for understanding the history of people. According to Lubar and Kendrick (2000), the

context in which objects are presented influences our perceptions of them and the significance we attribute to them. In the context of summer camps, these organizations generate various items or artifacts that connect people with the camp and contribute to the camp's history. Common camp artifacts include souvenirs (t-shirts, baseball caps, mugs, key chains, and the like) sold to the public or given to staff. Other artifacts, such as candles, ceramics, jewelry, masks, and baskets, are created during craft sessions and creative arts. Individuals working at a summer camp can acquire these souvenirs, preserving a connection to the camp and creating memories of their time there. Another artifact that reflects moments at summer camps is photographs. Participants take pictures to preserve memories, assigning meaning to these photos that help them understand their work abroad experiences. Artifacts, when personal, hold stories—essentially, the history of individuals' lives. Artifacts also connect individuals with other people and moments lived; they can convey various meanings and even reflect changes in participants (Lubar & Kendrick, 2000).

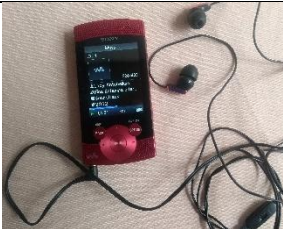
Given that artifacts "frame the way we act in the world, as well as the way we think about the world" (Miller, 1987; Lubar & Kendrick, 2000, p. 1), the purpose of this data collection instrument was to invite participants to share a few artifacts they possess (or possessed after finishing the sojourn). Participants were asked to reflect on these artifacts, placing them in time and space and elucidating the stories these artifacts hold. The analysis of artifacts aimed to determine whether participants' stories could link events, places, and people, enabling me to discern their connection with professional identity development. (See Appendix D).

Understanding the role of the artifact at the moment of purchase or obtaining was crucial for capturing the intercultural encounters experienced and the moment the participant was living. As Lubar and Kendrick (2000) asserted, meanings in artifacts are constructed not just in their

history but also in the thoughts and conversations surrounding the objects. During artifact analysis, a dedicated interaction with participants was scheduled to explore interpretations, meanings assigned, and the stories told. Personal possessions are intrinsically linked to individuals' histories. As noted by Lubar and Kendrick (2000), "Artifacts can show us another kind of history, another way of approaching the past" (para. 1). Table 2 presents summarized information about the artifacts, including a picture or a generic image of each artifact, its type, material, and how the participant obtained it.

Table 2

Participants' Artifacts Collected

No.	Pseudonym	Group	Picture	Description
1	Gabriela	1		Personal technology device Walkman Metal and plastic Personal purchase
2	Isabella	1		Handmade craft Keychain ¹ Metal, plastic, and thread Handmade item, gift from staff member
3	Luciana	1		Handmade craft Photo album ² Wood, paper, plastic Handmade item

¹ The picture was changed to avoid the identification of the participant's name.

² The participant could not locate a picture of her artifact since she resides abroad and lacks access to her belongings, so she supplied this generic image.

4 Mariana 1



Distinctive camp garment
Sweater
Cotton-polyester blend
Clothing provided by camp

5 Mariangel 1



Personal technology device
CD player
Metal and plastic
Personal purchase

6 Antonella 2



Staff image
Portrait
Wood and paper
Gift from staff member

7 Emiliano 2



Daily-use container
Mug
Pottery
Item acquired

8 Emmanuel 2



Decorative item
Frog Mask
Plastic
Gift from staff member

9 Salomé 2



Distinctive camp garment
Sweater
Cotton-polyester blend
Personal purchase

10

Santiago

2



Handmade craft
Dreamcatcher
Feathers, thread, and wool
Handmade item

Note: Participants' stories of artifacts

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative data analysis, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), is “a process that requires sequential steps to be followed, from the specific to the general, and involving multiple levels of analysis” (p. 268). It involves exploring and discerning overarching patterns, interrelations, and fundamental themes and categories. Additionally, it involves in-depth examination and articulation of findings, contributing to the construction of grounded theory (Marshall et al., 2022). Since qualitative data analysis follows sequential steps from specific to general and involves exploration to discern patterns and themes, the phases of analytic procedures proposed by Marshall et al. (2022) were adapted to guide the data analysis of this research. The stages followed include,

3.4.1 Organizing the Data

The first instrument that was analyzed was the survey. Since most of the questions were closed, descriptive statistics were drawn and qualitative responses were aggregate. In general, most data coming from the survey was used to design a profile of the participants, as can be seen in the section above. Regarding the interviews, first, the recordings were transcribed, edited, and cleaned to guarantee data management. Then, several independent digital folders were created for each group with five different folders: the elements of the stages (before, during, and after the sojourn in the U.S.), stories of artifacts, and overall reflections about the experience abroad.

Concerning the audio recordings and images of the participant's artifacts, two folders were created for each group case with individual subfolders for each participant that contained the image of the artifact and its narrative. The data were reviewed and well organized, revising the accuracy and completeness of file names. Of course, the organization of the data was not a one-time task; on the contrary, it was a continuous and permanent task.

3.4.2 Immersion in the Data

Immersing myself in the data was an intimate involvement with them. After organizing the data, I developed a warm friendship, a close association, and a familiarity with them. I made sense of the participants' narratives by reading the data several times, frequently going through them, taking notes, and asking questions. Through repeated engagement and examination of the data, I developed a deep understanding and connection with the participants' narratives, facilitating the process of making sense of the data.

3.4.3 Coding the Data and Generating Case Summaries and Categories and Themes

This stage aimed at conducting an integrated analysis of the case studies. The concept of 'analysis' is situated within the epistemological framework established by Miles et al. (2014). They asserted that "coding is deep reflection about and, thus, deep analysis and interpretation of the data's meanings" (p. 79). Thus, when I use the term coding in this study, I imply that it is analysis; a thorough examination and interpretation of data. To do this, I found patterns through coding the data that in turn, allowed me to generate themes or categories. The process started with within-case analyses. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), within-case analysis is a stage in which "each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself" (p. 234).

Therefore, each participant of the study was treated as a single case and thus, the within-case analysis consisted in studying specific details, patterns, and relationships of their narratives.

3.4.3.1 Within-Case Analysis

Step one involved carefully reading and analyzing each participant's narratives. This analysis was done line by line, sentence by sentence, to identify explicit stories that could account for the sojourn stages.

Step two included scrutinizing each narrative and the notes taken from step one to identify connections among main and sub-aspects. This process involved retelling the participants' stories to understand and comprehend their intercultural interactions and encounters and the influences on their professional identities. At this point, the analysis of form was used to identify linguistic patterns and features, determining their effect on the narratives and the meaning they conveyed.

Step three encompassed triangulating each participant's narratives. The instruments generated narratives that surfaced during the narrative interviews. This step aimed to establish how and where the intersecting dimensions and the foci met and how they evoked the participants' life stories throughout the narratives. To address the triangulation of each participant's narratives and ensure a comprehensive and robust analysis, the narratives were compared and contrasted, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and discrepancies within and across individual narratives. The narratives, the responses from the survey, and the stories of artifacts were the data sources employed to enhance the depth of the analysis. Additionally, I engaged in a collaborative analysis with the dissertation director to review and discuss the narratives to validate findings and address potential biases. Analyzing the intersecting themes in

participants' narratives allowed me to understand how these elements aligned or differed, ensuring the findings were individually reflective and contextually robust.

Step four comprised the analysis results from the previous steps and led me to the last step—the scales of context. This step was inspired by Barkhuizen's (2017a) claim for identifying the contexts in which narratives occur. For this study, identifying the context was crucial, as participants established intercultural interactions and encounters at camp that facilitated the construction of new identities.

3.4.3.2 Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case analysis included pattern coding that enabled me to establish relationships among individual cases and extract the essence of the collected stories (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016). A code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). Coding, as a fundamental stage of data analysis, requires a profound interpretation of data (Miles et al., 2014) and serves as the basis for establishing or identifying patterns, as well as for "categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). Secondly, a pattern is a regularity, a predictably repeated characteristic, element, or idea present in nature, in a manufactured design, and people's discourse. The importance of patterns for this study lies in their utility for me to identify similar discourse elements reflecting concurrences within the data. Essentially, coding "leads you from the data to the idea and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137). The assignment of codes to data became the moment to establish patterns to illustrate the understanding of the stories as told by the participants.

3.4.3.3 Comparative Analysis of Group Cases

In the comparative analysis of group cases, the findings from the two groups were compared and consolidated. This process involved returning to the individual cases to verify consistencies among the participants' narratives and revisiting the cross-case analysis to confirm the steadiness of the narratives of both groups. I employed pattern coding suggested by Saldaña (2016), to identify similarly coded data, discern relationships among the group cases, and distill the essence of the collected narratives. Each code served as a succinct representation of significant attributes within the data, facilitating the recognition of recurring themes and patterns (Saldaña, 2016). Patterns were instrumental in uncovering similarities and concurrences across the group cases. By systematically assigning codes to the data and identifying patterns, shared experiences and perspectives within each group were reached. Indeed, this comparative analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of the stories as conveyed by the participants, illuminating both commonalities and distinctions between the groups.

The comparative analysis of group cases offered several insights that enriched the qualitative data analysis and the study. First, common patterns and trends within each group were identified by comparing and contrasting the narratives. These patterns shed light on shared experiences and identities specific to each group. Second, group dynamics at play were understood by examining similarities and differences. The comparative analysis helped elucidate the factors influencing group cohesion, communication patterns, and decision-making processes. Third, comparative analysis allowed for the validation of findings across the groups. Consistent patterns observed across different groups lent credibility to the research findings and enhanced the robustness of the study. Fourth, contrasting the narratives of both groups enabled the exploration of variability within the dataset. Finally, the comparative analysis revealed unique

insights specific to the whole group as a significant case study offering valuable contributions to the literature on intercultural interactions and encounters and professional identity.

3.4.3.4 Offering Interpretations through Analytic Memos

The research followed an interpretive process aimed at integrating the findings. This phase infused identified themes, patterns, and categories with significance and coherence. Additionally, it established connections in line with the goal of constructing a coherent and captivating narrative. I meticulously made sense of the findings by writing memos that posed questions or insight that would enrich the understanding of the themes found. In summary, through analytic memos I assigned meaning to the findings, analyzed the results, provided reasons, reached conclusions, derived insights, drew implications, explored significance, and organized the data (Patton, 2014; Marshall et al., 2022).

3.4.3.5 Searching for Alternative Understandings

This phase was an essential step in the qualitative data analysis as I critically looked at the analysis, searching for biased interpretations. I was careful not to fall in love with the narratives and interpretations nor deviate the analysis from the participants' stories and views of events. Considering the concept of theoretical sufficiency (Dey, 1999; Marshall et al., 2022), I closely observed how to adequately describe and develop the emerging categories in constant for a conceptual depth. Additionally, this stage implied going back to the literature review and my theoretical framework to establish how the general literature could illuminate or help me reach a deeper understanding of the findings.

3.4.3.6 Writing the Report or other Format for Presenting the Study

Writing the study report was the final phase of the qualitative research process. This phase involved presenting the study's findings in a comprehensive manuscript. After organizing the results, interpreting the data, discussing the implications, and determining the details of communicating the research findings, the process ended with writing the current study report. Disseminating the research outcomes is crucial to contributing to the scholarly literature and the researcher's professional development.

3.4.3.7 Worthiness of Confidence

This study adhered to the trustworthiness or worthiness of confidence suggested by several authors to specify the quality of qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Golafshani, 2003). Considering this study is a qualitative narrative inquiry, I adopted Barkhuizen's (2022) thesis that "narrative inquiry functions as a research method to explore the meaning that language teachers and learners make about their experiences" (p. 2). As Barkhuizen acknowledges, his perspective is based on Barkhuizen (2011), Barkhuizen (2016), and Barkhuizen & Consoli (2021), among others. The principal premise is that researchers do their best to dig into the participants' experiences and the meanings they make of their experiences and be crucial for the inquiry (Barkhuizen, 2022). Therefore, by aligning with Barkhuizen's framework and adhering to established criteria for trustworthiness, this study ensures methodological rigor and enhances the credibility of the findings through a well-grounded and theoretically informed approach. As presented above, the main instrument of this study was a narrative interview. It was a complex instrument as I had to guide the participants to go beyond the question-answer paradigm (Narayan & George, 2012), incorporate the dimension of who, where, when, and what (Barkhuizen, 2017a, 2017b, 2016a), and empower the participants to

become the leaders of their narrative process (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016). This rigorous approach ensured the adherence to these authors' frameworks and adhesion of the highest standards of methodological precision, thereby enhancing the robustness and validity of the research outcomes. Finally, since the study was original in many ways, the instruments were not adopted from previous studies or instruments. However, the dissertation director, an expert in language teaching, revised all the instruments. I also piloted the instruments with former participants of the summer camp program who were available to help and whose profiles were similar to the current participants'. During my internship at the University of Auckland, Dr. Gary Barkhuizen from the same university, Dr. Orlando Chavez, and Dr. Maria Eugenia Guapacha, both from Universidad del Valle, contributed to the construction of the research design and the instruments.

Thus, in addition to the careful design of the instruments and the strictness in the collection of data, validity was reached as the narratives told by the participants were based on the best of their knowledge and facts about what they experienced during intercultural encounters before, during the sojourn abroad, and after their return to Colombia. Participants expressed honest and informed opinions when telling their stories during narrative interviews and analyzing artifacts, avoiding responses or comments intended to please me (Young, 2016). All the participants saw me as a colleague with whom academic and personal meetings could be held.

Similarly, one must be aware that when individuals tell or retell past events, they may reinterpret the events that "may be altered by memory effects or by emotions attached to the event" (Spencer-Oatey & Harsch, 2016, p. 235). That is why creating a safe and friendly environment for the participants to tell their stories contributed to determining the accuracy of

the data. Now, the study's validity was maximized, and thus, the reliability of the study was consistent. Since reliability is concerned with the stability and consistency of data, it must be stated that similar data collection instruments and similar methods have been applied by other researchers (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017a, 2017b). Thus, this study's narratives and data analysis yielded similar results in exploring the participants' identities as they lived short-term sojourns. Therefore, in the pursuit of stability and consistency in data and data analysis, triangulation emerged as the method to strengthen the study by combining different data collection instruments, such as narrative interviews, the survey, and the analysis of artifacts. Using multiple sources to recall past events of participants reduced bias, and the evidence was more substantial and profound.

The data from the interviews and artifact stories were coded using OpenCode 4.03. Appendix F (Illustration of codification process: from text to codes and categories) provides a sample of the coding process, organized into five columns: line number, text, code, synthesis, and final category. The software automatically generated line numbers upon importing the data from Word. The data segments were then carefully read and re-read to interpret their meanings, during which codes were assigned. The synthesis involved summarizing these codes into expressions or phrases that captured the core ideas. Finally, after linking the codes to form a cohesive synthesis, representative names were assigned to each concept to form categories that could reflect the overarching themes.

4. Findings

This chapter unfolds the culmination of extensive research endeavors, illuminating the nexus between intercultural interactions and encounters and the professional identity of English Language Teachers (ELTs). Through a comprehensive analysis of the qualitative data gathered, patterns, nuances, and complexities are discerned, portraying the dynamic relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters and the professional identity construction of ELTs. As the findings unfold, a deeper understanding emerges, highlighting the role of work abroad sojourns in shaping and refining the professional identity of English language educators.

Considering this is a multiple-case study design, each participant's narrative was thoroughly examined in isolation to glean unique insights into their experiences (*Within-Case Analysis*). Subsequently, participants' narratives were categorized into their respective groups (1999-2000 or 2010-2016), laying the foundation for a comprehensive *Cross-Case Analysis*. The attention in this stage was oriented toward discerning connecting threads that could shape group identities. The insights from the cross-case analysis allowed me to build a broader *comparative analysis of group cases* to delve deeper into emerging patterns across the two group cases. Through meticulous examination of similarities between the cases, the analysis culminated in a *comparative analysis of group cases* that encapsulated the collective experiences of both groups. This process was a solid argument for collating the narratives and presenting a comprised group.

In the following section, the results of the study are presented. I have opted to report the findings by focusing on the research questions or by combining questions that can be addressed based on the nature of the data obtained.

The following table displays the research question and the category(ies) that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 3*Questions, categories, and subcategories*

No.	Questions	Category	Subcategory
1.	What intercultural interactions and encounters did the participants have BEFORE their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S? What factors facilitated and challenged the participants' intercultural learning BEFORE their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?	<i>Seeing through others' eyes</i> <i>The sum of its parts: different ways to the same end</i>	
2.	What intercultural interactions and encounters did the participants have DURING their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S? What factors facilitated and challenged the participants' intercultural learning DURING their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?	<i>The elusive, unattainable English language</i> <i>International airport, a maze of uncertainties</i> <i>The intercultural guardian angel</i> <i>Camp life, new identity</i>	▪ From fogs of confusion to Physical and Mental Fatigue. ▪ Speaking like a book. ▪ Learnings from adversities. ▪ Identity crisis: Blame on grammar and accent. ▪ Camp training: welcoming new challenges. ▪ Camp Training: Nurturing Intercultural Connections. ▪ A break from the drudgery.
3.	What intercultural interactions and encounters did the participants have AFTER their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?	<i>The new rock star shining around</i> <i>Getting back home and college campus</i> <i>Nothing compares to here and there</i>	

	What factors facilitated and challenged the participants' intercultural learning AFTER their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?	<i>Interculturality: looking the outside, neglecting the inside</i>	
4.	What did artifacts collected during their short-term sojourn tell us about students' personal and intercultural development?	<i>Artifacts as Milestones: Uncovering Personal Development Narratives</i> <i>Narratives of personal and professional transformation; concluding reflection</i> <i>Artifacts: Revealing intercultural connections</i> <i>Linking possessions to cultural backgrounds</i> <i>Cultural roots: Exploring foundational elements</i>	▪ Personal growth and achievements: Transformative journeys. ▪ Identity symbols: Markers of belonging. ▪ Beyond possession of artifacts. ▪ Language development.
5.	How did intercultural interactions and encounters at a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S. contribute to the participants' professional identity development?	<i>Tangible marks of transformation: I improved my English; therefore, I changed</i> <i>Camp comes to class: Exploring the power of play</i>	

4.1 BEFORE Sojourning in a Summer Camp in the U.S.: Interactions and Encounters

This section addresses two research questions. The first one regarding the English Language Teachers (ELT) intercultural interactions and encounters they had before their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S., and the second one concerning the factors that

facilitated or challenged the intercultural learnings they gained from those interactions and encounters. The analysis presented here shows a structured and sequential approach to understanding the intercultural aspects of the ELTs' experiences before the summer camp and how they relate to their professional identity. The participants will sometimes be referred to as Language Student-Teachers (LSTs) to emphasize the dual role of being both a student and a teacher-in-training, particularly in the context of their educational experiences. At other times, they will be called English Language Teachers (ELTs) to emphasize that they narrated their experiences after getting a degree in modern languages.

An unexpected finding that the reader will meet is the similarities of the voices of both group cases (groups 1 and 2). After conducting the analysis across participants within each case, one aspect that stood out was the similarity between the experiences of both group cases. This led me to think that the least repetitive way of presenting the data was by combining the evidence from both group cases while highlighting differences when they existed. The following paragraphs will present the categories that constitute the narratives and arguments of the *before* stage of their sojourn of both group cases.

4.1.1 Seeing through Others' Eyes

The *seeing through others' eyes* category refers to one of the main learnings that intercultural interactions and encounters generated in the participants before the sojourning experience. It comprised individuals' willingness to understand and value others' perspectives and their capacity to adopt different viewpoints and gain insights from what others knew or had lived. This category also portrays empathetic individuals who understood and were aware of the experiences and feelings of others by appreciating and respecting their viewpoints. People who

commonly adopt other people's ways of doing and thinking as their own are individuals open to learnings that enrich their lives. Participants who see the world from their own and others' opinions/experiences encourage themselves to have a broader understanding of situations by acknowledging the subjective nature of perception and interpretation.

Two groups of individuals influenced and motivated the LSTs before their sojourn abroad: the faculty of the bachelor program and the college students who had already participated in the summer camp program. This dual influence from faculty and fellow students was decisive in shaping the LSTs' expectations, enthusiasm, and readiness for their international experience. At the same time, conversations and engagements with these groups became the first intercultural interactions the participants had before their sojourn abroad. The language teachers in the bachelor program were native speakers of English who taught the language and got LSTs closer to their own culture. They exhibited different professional identities within the academic context, such as ambassadors of their own cultures and intercultural speakers able to compare and understand different cultures. The participants who had previously lived short-term sojourns in the U.S. had been in contact with new cultures, and their profiles were more international than those of their classmates who had not traveled yet. Improving their English empowered them to communicate confidently with people from different cultures.

Firstly, the presence of faculty in the bachelor's program who were from abroad or had had academic experiences overseas broadened the LSTs' perspectives as they learned that exposure to diverse cultural contexts was essential for their professional development. All the participants from Group 1 recognized the importance of having committed teachers open to sharing their viewpoints. This stance aligns with one of Byram's (2021) intercultural

(communicative) competence dimensions: attitude. When the LSTs interacted with the faculty members, they showed positive appreciation for what their teachers had to say.

Byram (2021) asserted that the attitudes which are preconditions for successful intercultural interactions have to be "attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs, values and behaviours" (p. 45). The participants from both groups manifested those attitudes. They recognized the importance of teachers who made them understand that participating in the program was essential for developing their professional and personal identities. Gabriela summarized the LSTs' feelings about their teachers and their contributions to their professional development. She said,

I appreciate very much what I received from my teachers. They had planted that little thorn in me: "Hey, this English has to improve; yes, I can do it." Just by listening to them, one would say, as a student, "Hey, I want to speak that rich [perfect] English like my professor." So yes, those experiences also influenced me to take that step. (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Recalling the leading role of one of their teachers from college, LSTs described her as a friendly, empathetic leader who became the window through which they could see the world they had imagined. Isabella, for example, commented that this teacher "told us what it was like in the U.S., and so we wanted to travel" (02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1).

All the participants from Group 1 recognized the advice their teachers would give them in their classes and private conversations. Luciana narrated that,

My mom had talked to [some teachers] who were very committed to helping us escape that shell we were in. They knew that getting out was important to get that intercultural touch. They would tell us, "You can go overseas and live an immersion in the language." They were those people who were always supporting us and encouraging us to go; they knew everything was going to be okay. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Group 2 participants were also advised by their teachers. Their viewpoints motivated them to participate in the summer program. For example, Emmanuel recalled what happened at that moment:

Then I remember Professor Maria [name changed] talking about the program and saying, 'This is a chance for leaders, a chance for people who want to step out of their comfort zones, and an opportunity to travel to the United States.' Her enthusiasm really got me excited and motivated me to start the process. (01/06/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Secondly, other students with prior work abroad experiences gained valuable insights into the practical aspects of living in a foreign country. They had been in contact with people from different cultures and had seen places the LSTs wanted to visit. It could be more relevant if the information came from a family member who had also been through it. Emiliano recalled that his first introduction to summer camps came from his sister, who had also studied foreign languages and participated in the summer camp program. He said: "I always heard about it at home. Listening to her talk about her experiences and what she went through made me feel like I had my first real glimpse of what these camps are all about" (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Luciana described her classmates this way:

The students who had returned, my classmates, were among our main influences. They were like heroes to me because I was planning to leave like them. They were role models. "What a thrill! How nice!" They sang the songs in perfect English. They showed enthusiasm when they told us about their experiences and all the cultural differences [they had encountered]. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

In a similar fashion, Santiago commented that,

Another factor reinforcing the sense of being in the right program is the opportunity to meet students from advanced semesters during the first-year orientation. This meeting is particularly valuable as these students share their experiences about the summer camp program. Their stories often serve as inspiration, motivating new students to participate. (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2)

In a like manner, Salomé reinforced the idea that those college students who had already traveled were outstanding and unmatched individuals. She said,

When I heard people say, 'Oh, I was in France,' or 'I was in the United States,' I thought of them as having achieved something special. I would see them as legends; nothing could compare to them. I wanted to travel too. I saw it as a valuable experience and sought out a similar opportunity, which I found with the YMCA. (02/02/2021, interview 1, group 2)

It was common ground among participants from both groups to recognize that the experience living at summer camps had changed the college students who were witnesses of the benefits and motivators for others to go abroad. The former summer camp participants had

improved their English, learned about other cultures, and experienced important everyday entrenchments. They had become referents with whom other college students wanted to converse and spend time.

They had witnessed what it was like to sojourn in a summer camp and had returned full of experiences. They had changed in many ways, and it was something the LSTs appreciated. Luciana graciously described the former participants this way: "The truth is that when a person goes abroad, they get a glow; it is as if they had discovered something in themselves. They had that" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). Similarly, Antonella described what she and her classmates lived and what they did to prepare for their experience. She told,

One of my classmates, Pedro [name changed], was the first in our group to travel. We were all excited for him when he left. It was a big deal for us because we were so close-knit. We said, 'Let's wait and see what he has to say about it.' When he came back, he was completely transformed. I remember thinking, 'Wow, it would be amazing to have that experience too.' (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2)

In a like manner, Isabella narrated that there were already three cohorts before hers that had traveled. They were also their motivators. She expressed her admiration by saying, "And that was like the model. There were guys there who you'd look at and say, "Wow, they traveled, how they've changed, everything they know, I want to be like them" (02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1). Similarly, Gabriela recalled not participating in the first year she heard about the program because she was unsure about the program's benefits. She waited for some of her classmates to travel and return to hear from them directly. Gabriela described: "We went to the second talk. Listening and seeing Andrés [name changed] like that was wonderful. I said I have to go. If that's

the effect it has, I have to go" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1). Then, she applied, went abroad, returned, and became the motivator for other prospective sojourners. Gabriela concluded,

It was taking a risk and taking that first step because I had seen what my classmates had achieved. I knew I could do it. That was the greatest motivation: to learn that this regular English could be improved. And the best way to do it was to be in the context where English was spoken because it helped you improve. (Gabriela, 01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1)

As illustrated, the category *seeing through others' eyes* highlights a transformative experience for college students who sojourned in summer camps abroad. Their experiences had a profound impact, not only on the individuals who partook but also on their peers who witnessed their transformation. The participants became role models, inspiring others to pursue similar opportunities. The exposure to such experiences could ignite a desire for growth and exploration, leading to a collective drive towards personal and academic advancement.

In conclusion, both Group 1 and Group 2 participants recalled strikingly similar attitudes and experiences regarding the transformative power of intercultural interactions and encounters before their sojourns. Both groups, guided by their interactions with faculty and peers, were eager to embrace diverse perspectives, showcasing empathy and openness. The encouragement and insights of their teachers and classmates not only inspired them to seek opportunities abroad but also fostered a sense of community and shared ambition. As they navigated their paths, they drew motivation from the experiences of those who had come before them, reinforcing the idea that personal growth and cultural understanding are deeply interconnected. The narratives of

both groups underscored the collective influence of mentorship and peer encouragement, inspiring others to see through others' eyes in their sojourning of discoveries.

4.1.2 The sum of its Parts: Different Ways to the Same End

In search for discovering the intercultural interactions and encounters the ELTs had before their sojourn and the intercultural learnings these interactions facilitated, the participants' narratives unveiled that, in one way or another, the participants from both groups had all been in contact with the American culture. They had different experiences, including formal English classes, informal learning during the summer camp program training, and national and international trips, amongst other things. These diverse learning experiences gave the participants a broader understanding of language use and contributed to their holistic professional development. Through exposure to different teaching methods in their classes and the practice of activities during their preparation before working abroad, the participants gained knowledge about American culture and some of the camp activities required to accomplish their assignments.

In the college program of modern languages, the English classes were consciously oriented toward American culture. Furthermore, even if the summer training program was informal, it was also oriented toward the target culture, which made knowledge acquisition possible. The theory of intercultural communicative competence recognizes knowledge as a dimension that individuals incorporate to interact with people from their own or another culture. See, for example, Byram (2021) and Berardo and Deardorff (2012) for more details about intercultural competence models.

The knowledge gained through different formal and informal academic processes, including other cultural elements acquired through socialization processes in various contexts during their lives, guided the language students to a process of identity development. Apart from their identity as LSTs, they gradually started to get closer to their summer camp identities as they learned the intricacies of their future position at camp. In this respect, Byram (2021) attested that the socialization process takes individuals to acquire knowledge "of the social groups to which they gain membership, and of other social groups with which they have contact" (p. 46). Undeniably, all the participants experienced particular links to American culture and summer camps; some of their efforts resulted in affiliation with them.

Three participants from Group 1 and five from Group 2 affirmed that they attended several meetings and gatherings in which they became acquainted with the way of life in the summer camps and some of the landmarks of the iconic cities of the U.S. The fact that the training program prepared the participants to work at summer camps was intentionally directed towards fostering awareness of intercultural elements. It empowered them to be ready for their experience abroad. Isabella described part of the training this way:

They also taught us camp activities, outdoor games, and team-building exercises. That was very helpful to me. We had that kind of training and we also had talks about what to expect. They told us a lot about life in the U.S. and how to look after children. They recommended us, for example, never to be alone with a camper. They instructed us about sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and all the important terminology. (02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1)

The comprehensive training provided to most participants during the summer camp training sessions focused on practical aspects such as camp activities and childcare. It emphasized crucial elements of intercultural awareness and safety measures. Similarly, Luciana highlighted what they did before the trip:

We did camps where they taught us about rafting, climbing mountains, and river activities. We did a course with the Red Cross. We also had a conversation group to loosen up the language and practice English. All of those things were part of the training. Many of those things were required from the participants at camps. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

To sum up, the training program for participants preparing to work at summer camps was intended to raise awareness of intercultural elements and educate participants about life customs in the U.S. By learning about the camps' expectations of staff work, the participants did their best to acquire the proper preparation to ensure the safety and well-being of international staff and campers. In addition, the language practice in the conversation clubs demonstrated that the people in charge of training LSTs were concerned about their interactions during the camp experience. That does not mean these practices were enough for the participants to succeed during intercultural interactions at camp.

Another source of intercultural interactions and encounters included direct conversations with camp supervisors and access to American pop culture. Once the candidates were accepted to participate in the summer camp program, they were contacted by camp personnel to attend interviews. Sometimes, the interviews were short and straightforward, and others were longer and detailed. Then, the camp people decided if the candidates had the required profile. The

means to connect with American culture included music, magazines, and other resources. Music, for example, has been a constant in language learners' efforts to get closer to pop stars and improve their language. Luciana recalled her connection with American music and culture. She expressed, "My older brother had a collection of songs in English; they were magazines, and I was obsessed with them. I had another uncle who also liked English songs. So, I always had that influence" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). She also expressed her passion for English and the paths she took to reach her goals. She put it this way:

Since I was little, I thought [English] was a lovely language when I listened to songs, saw movies, and heard people talking. So that shaped me. I started studying English, finished the program at the institute [private language center], and began my career [at college].
(01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Luciana highlighted her formal English courses, noting a passion that began in childhood. Influenced by English-language media, she followed a structured path from a private language center to college, driven by her appreciation for the language and its culture. Similarly, Santiago shared that his environment had a strong impact on him beyond just his family. He explained, "What fueled my enthusiasm was the American culture that was all around me every day. I wanted to experience and see what I had seen in movies, images, and media—things that portrayed American pop culture" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Salomé was also influenced by American culture. She recalled watching TV shows and commercials that showcased American homes and products like vacuum cleaners. Salomé would think, "Oh, I want to see an American house; I want to know what it's like to live there. I was curious about what the people there thought" (02/02/2021, interview 1, group 2).

The case of Mariana was unique as she had the opportunity to travel to different places in the country and abroad. She said that,

I had already traveled because I had belonged to a dance group since I was fifteen. Then, with the dance group, we went to Cuba and traveled to many places in Colombia for a long time. So, there was a lot of local travel, which I liked. (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 1)

In brief, the participants' narratives underlined that their intercultural interactions were facilitated through various means. The exposure to popular culture via media, formal education given in college, and active participation in cultural activities were sources of intercultural encounters and interactions that helped them build knowledge, attitudes, and expectations about their future intercultural interactions and encounters in their summer camps. These initial encounters and interactions contributed to their professional identity, although participants did not seem to acknowledge it with clarity. One example of this vague mental representation of the American culture was clearly presented by Emmanuel who attested that he traveled without a cultural perspective of the place he was going to visit. He stated, "I traveled to the United States without a clear understanding or context of New York or American culture. I embarked on the trip without a cultural perspective or foundational knowledge beyond the musicals I had seen" (01/06/2021, interview 1, group 2).

In this category, Group 1 and Group 2 participants demonstrated notable similarities in their interactions with American culture before their sojourns. Each group engaged in various forms of cultural exposure—through formal English classes, summer camp training, and travel experiences—that enriched their language understanding and facilitated professional

development. The intentional focus on American culture in their education and training reflects a shared commitment to fostering intercultural awareness. Additionally, both groups drew inspiration from popular culture, using it to enhance their enthusiasm for upcoming experiences. What is striking is how their diverse pathways, each rich and complex in its own right, converged in their mutual goal of personal and professional growth through intercultural interactions.

4.2 DURING the Short-Term Sojourn in a Summer Camp in the U.S.

A central question guided the data analysis in this section: What intercultural interactions did the participants have during their short-term sojourn in a U.S. summer camp? In answering this, a related question was addressed concerning how these interactions influenced the participants' intercultural learning and what factors either facilitated or challenged intercultural learning. Upon arriving at their camps, participants experienced intercultural interactions in all their contexts, becoming aware of cultural differences—some anticipated, others unexpected. They carefully observed behaviors and settings, constantly comparing the two cultures. This section analyzes these interactions, the factors that facilitated or hindered their intercultural learning, and how the participants' identities were constructed or transformed. It will touch on aspects such as communication barriers, cultural differences, social dynamics within the camp, individual attitudes, and the role of facilitators in guiding intercultural interactions. These aspects enlightened the richness and complexity of intercultural experiences within the context of a short-term sojourn at a summer camp in the U.S. and contributed to a deeper understanding of the participants' identities.

The categories obtained from the data reflect intercultural encounters the participants experienced with entities such as commercial and landmark buildings and the English language. The categories *The elusive, unattainable English language*, *International airport, a maze of uncertainties*, and *Camp life, new identity* show the process of moving from the comforts of their culture to other strange and sometimes hostile scenarios. Concerning the participants' intercultural interactions with people from different cultures, the category *the intercultural guardian angel* vividly describes how certain people magically protected the sojourners at a certain moment during their trips, at the airport, and at the summer camp.

The sojourners departed from their home country knowing that their stay abroad was a short sojourn and that during their stay in the U.S., they had to work and play a particular role within the summer camp that, in turn, would become their community, their social space. They also knew they had to return to their country after finishing the contract that enabled them to work in the host country. The awareness of these facts thrust participants to plan to improve their English competencies and get the most from intercultural interactions and encounters. They knew those elements would contribute to having a prolific stay. Notably, the participants knew they were temporarily moving away from their homes and starting a journey among strangers; they knew this stay would transform them and return changed.

The short-term sojourn began with timid, non-personal, casual communication exchanges at the national airport, then during the international flight, and finally at the immigration control checkpoint. Once the sojourners were admitted into the U.S. for the first time, they experienced a mix of excitement, relief, curiosity, wonder, nervousness, and overwhelming fear. Those were feelings all the participants from both groups experienced. Nevertheless, the participants recalled that their arrival was memorable not only because of the point they had reached but also because

they were making their dream come true. Then, all the sojourners faced two main intercultural encounters: on the one hand, the use of the English language; on the other hand, the airport as a social entity. The following are the categories that emerged from these significant moments.

4.2.1 The Elusive, Unattainable English Language

The elusive, unattainable English language is a category dedicated to exploring the participants' challenges in understanding and expressing themselves effectively in English. Nine participants reported significant difficulty comprehending native speakers and articulating their thoughts clearly as they landed at the airport and moved to their camps. This category aims to delve into the root causes of these challenges, examine the learnings derived from these problems, and explore the participants' identity construction.

The participants' experiences reveal a notable shift characterized by confusion and exhaustion. Many compared communication to making one's way through thick fog, where words seemed unclear and hard to grasp. This not only hindered their understanding but also led to mental fatigue, as seen in Emiliano's encounters with rapid English conversations. He recalled, "They started talking to me in English, and honestly, it threw me off" (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2). The interplay of linguistic barriers and performance pressure fostered a cycle of anxiety that shaped their identities as learners. However, rather than seeing these challenges solely as setbacks, participants showed a strong determination to overcome them, recognizing them as essential opportunities for adaptation and growth in their language journey.

4.2.1.1 From fogs of confusion to Physical and Mental Fatigue

Sojourners frequently complain about the difficulties they find in understanding native speakers of English during the first days and even weeks after they arrive. It is easy to predict

that linguistic factors hinder understanding English, including but not limited to different accents and dialects, speed of speech, idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, vocabulary, and pronunciation. In addition, psychological aspects, including the fear of making mistakes and of being judged or excluded by others, contributed to the inability to express themselves in English during their first days of stay. An example to introduce this category in a broader way can be taken from the words stated by Emiliano, who commented:

It was the first time I heard it [English] in that context, and I was like, 'Wait, what did they just say?' It's weird—your brain sort of freezes up, and you end up replying not because you really understand but because you're just guessing what they might be asking. (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2)

In the previous quote we can observe how Emiliano recalls his shock, 'your brain freezes up', at not being able to process the language he was hearing. This is an experience that is commonly narrated by travelers who for the first time interact with native speakers. Several problems arose when the participants discovered they could not speak the language or understand the others, or the others could not understand or were reluctant to understand them. Inability to understand could lead LSTs to have problems to do their work and make them feel tired. Antonella, for example, ended up this way:

I locked myself in; I couldn't take it anymore. I swear I couldn't take it anymore. I exploded and started crying. I exploded from all that and said, "I don't know, I, what the fuck did I come here for? Why did I come here for this? No, this is too hard. They don't even understand me in English; they speak, and I don't understand anything."
(01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Participants felt scared of people and places and afraid of speaking and interacting with others. Luciana said: "Two girls arrived there and took me to the camp. But I was afraid. Imagine this: people you have never seen pick you up, you speak, but they don't understand what you say, and so they ignore you" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). The participants also felt physically worn out when communicating in English. For example, Luciana said she felt this way: "It's very exhausting to speak for 24 hours in a language you've never spoken, to be understood, and to process all the information you must, plus to take into account all the grammar rules the language has" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). Mariana also expressed that her body was tired from her efforts to communicate in English. She said, "The language, Pablo, was very hard. I remember being tired, physically exhausted from trying to understand English all day because I didn't know what was going on" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 1). Other participants from both groups expressed similar feelings about the shock they experienced when they wanted to communicate in English in the U.S. For example, Emiliano from group 2 shared his experience when trying to communicate in English:

I was very anxious about having to speak in English, which led to significant mental fatigue. This anxiety caused me to retreat into listening mode rather than actively expressing my ideas. As a result, I found myself listening more and speaking less, affecting my communication ability. While I could understand the structures and grasp the ideas, speaking remained a major challenge for me. It was exhausting. (01/14/2021, interview 1).

Effective communication in a foreign language requires considerable cognitive effort, encompassing linguistic skills and mental agility to process information and adhere to grammatical rules. As participants navigated their early experiences at camp, they began to

recognize that sustained interactions in English, particularly during their first days and weeks, often resulted in significant mental fatigue and exhaustion. This realization underscores their profound challenges in adapting to a new linguistic environment, highlighting the interplay between language learning and the emotional toll it can take on sojourners.

4.2.1.2 Speaking like a Book

The participants commented that they had followed language learning processes throughout their lives but had not been exposed to consistent acquisition periods, or at least to opportunities to use the language in spontaneous speaking practices where LSTs speak freely without predetermined guidelines or structures. According to Krashen (1982), learning a language in an academic setting is quite different than acquiring it in natural settings. The methodology of the courses taken by the students is outside the scope of this study. However, it can be questioned if it facilitated or fostered the participants' acquisition of English. Contrary to acquisition processes, learning tends to be more formal, centered on rules and structures, and distanced from authentic materials that enable students to be prepared to interact with native speakers of English in their natural environment. Thus, that would be one reasonable reason to explain other difficulties the participants faced at the moment of contact with native speakers.

Mariangel summarized in a brilliant manner how someone who has learned the language sounds. She related,

I was already waiting for the [connecting] flight, and that's when everything started because most of the passengers were Americans. Then, I began to listen to English since I was talking to the lady [who gave me water]. I heard many times the question, "What? What?" That's when the frustration started. You think you speak English until you get

here [the U.S.]. But I said, "Why don't they understand me if I'm telling them everything right?" Now, looking back, we came here [to the U.S.] speaking like a book. We speak English like a book. English is a textbook, the words we use. All the vocabulary we have learned has been very academic. It is academic English. So, arriving and trying to speak with someone who uses English every day in a more conversational way does not work for us; it doesn't happen. That was my shock. (01/19/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Mariangel highlights the disparity between academic English, learned from textbooks, and the conversational English used by native speakers. This learning generates Mariangel to face an emotional shock and a sense of frustration. But it was not only her; eight participants directly or indirectly accepted that their English was based on structures and fixed syntax patterns. For example, Antonella expressed that the methods used by her teacher were rigid. It made her not to be able to communicate at camp. She said, "It was very difficult for me because the language was presented in a very robotic and systematized manner. I wished it had been introduced in a way that made me think that I wanted to engage with it" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Another way of expressing that the sojourners arrived in the U.S. with a very grammatical English without the ability to use it communicatively was shared by Luciana. When the LSTs discovered they could not communicate in English, they tried to find answers to what they lived before arriving in the U.S. Those were the moments when some participants questioned what they learned in college. For example, Luciana complained,

The starry star. That was terrible. I said, "What did I learn?" Nothing! I swear, it doesn't do you any good, nothing at all. Your confidence, your dreams, everything goes down a siphon. The moment I came in, no one was there for me; I said, "This is real life; this is

not a classroom. I had much difficulty talking to that man at the airport, the first man I talked with. That's where it all came down to me. I said, "I don't know anything". And when I arrived there, I tried to talk to the driver: noooo, that man ignored me, those women were mean. I swear, they are not there to teach you; it's real life, it's everyday life, it's knowing the slang, it's speaking fast, it's saying the right words, it's pronouncing well. Nothing! It doesn't do you any good. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Luciana expressed her frustrations and pointed out exactly what several sojourners feel when they try to speak English. She discovered that one thing is what students learn in a classroom; something completely different is what they need in authentic contexts. The struggles participants face first take place at the airports. Luciana called herself "The Starry Star" because of her frustration. This correlates to what she thought about her English. Before the sojourn, Luciana thought her English was very good. However, as soon as she arrived at the airport and camp, she discovered she was not the star she thought she was.

Similarly, Luciana underwent dismissive and indifferent behavior from the American camp counselors, causing her to feel marginalized and overlooked. The counselors' dismissal could fragment her identity, making her question her worth and significance at camp. She said,

With the American counselors, it was rough; it was hard; in that environment, they don't have patience with you. If you start telling them something, they go like, "Never mind, never mind, it's okay." They ignore you and leave. There is no interaction when you can't communicate with them. Sometimes, you didn't know what they were doing, and you would say, "Where do we have to go?" And they would say, "I don't know. Never mind." They'd leave you stranded, and you'd say, "What do I have to do?" Nobody would tell

you again; they'd leave you stranded. And you didn't know what was going on.

(01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Similarly, Emiliano described what he lived when he was trying to express himself and answer the **staff's questions**. The professional identity of Emiliano showed nuances of meaning that confronted him with a reality he could not eclipse. In his narrative, Emiliano commented,

So, they ask you, "Well, where do you come from? What do you do? What is interesting to do in your country? So, I had to think about how to answer. I had to process them. And it cost me a lot. So, it was a process of saying, I am suffering because I don't have the ideas. I can't express my ideas as I would like to. That was the strongest suffering because I had all the structures in mind. I knew how to say it but in a very basic way. Still, I also knew it was not expressed as it should be. (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2)

It could be inferred that Emiliano saw language teachers as professionals with linguistic and communication proficiency. That was the same way he saw himself because he recognized that he possessed structural knowledge of language even though he acknowledged his difficulty expressing himself. The data showed that Emiliano's narrative was consistent: He knew the language's grammar but had no conversational experience to put it into practice.

Both Group 1 and Group 2 participants shared frustrations rooted in their reliance on academic English, which lacked the spontaneity needed for real-life conversations. Many felt that their formal education emphasized rules over authentic communication, leading to emotional shocks when interacting with native speakers. Mariangel, Luciana, and Emiliano expressed similar struggles to convey their thoughts and faced dismissive reactions from those they encountered. Despite their differing backgrounds, both groups confronted the challenges of

moving from structured learning to dynamic speaking. This common journey of self-discovery and identity questioning in intercultural communication was a significant part of their experiences.

4.2.1.3 Learnings from Adversities

It is self-evident that the participants lived moments of confusion and exclusion. However, their character and determination empowered them to devise strategies to overcome difficulties and fit into a community where they had to spend the whole summer. In such a manner that they had to be able to communicate with certainties, they expressed details of negative communication instances and the actions they tried, consciously or unconsciously.

Luciana commented this: "I knew I had to adapt; I knew I had to change how I spoke and approached them" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). She was aware of that because she had seen the consequences of her interaction difficulties. For example, she claimed, "You can't make a joke; you can't be yourself. If they misunderstand you, then they make fun of you. Then, you don't say anything anymore. Interaction is completely difficult. Everything is blocked" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1).

Luciana's experience highlights a profound lesson that can be applied to all the participants: adversity can be a stimulus for learning and growth. After facing challenges, participants recognized the need to adapt their communication styles. This realization accentuates the transformative potential inherent in overcoming obstacles. Adversities can serve as valuable teachings, imparting essential lessons that contribute to personal development and resilience. This same unfavorable situation was suffered by Emmanuel, who found himself been

the target of people was manners are not a reflect of politeness absence. He told the following story:

I got to Penn Station and decided to grab breakfast at one of those cafes by the bus bays. When I went to order, the lady was super rude because I didn't know how to do it right. In uni, we practiced ordering food, but no one ever mistreated us in those role plays. So I told her I wanted scrambled eggs, bread, and orange juice. She snapped at me, saying, 'This isn't table service.' I had to get my stuff and sit back down, eating my plastic-tasting eggs while getting scolded. But hey, I figured it's all part of the experience—not everyone is going to be polite. (01/06/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Luciana's and Emmanuel's experiences highlighted a crucial lesson: Adversity often sparks personal growth and resilience. These difficulties forced them to confront and adapt to uncomfortable situations, revealing that such adversities are not just obstacles but opportunities for learning, self-improvement, and a deeper understanding of the world. What Luciana faced during the first weeks in the U.S. can be summarized by what she said.

I had to start all over again because I had many "misconceptions" about the English language. English is something else. It is not learning a language by repeating dialogues that no one ever has. Now I admire myself, but I cried tears of blood, that was very hard. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

The participants' reflections about how they had been taught English significantly questioned their language education program. A great deal of how English should be taught and the kinds of activities and materials to use were well cemented. Nevertheless, their first experiences at the summer camp made them question how adequate their preparation training

was. However, their feelings of frustration did not prevent them from looking for solutions. The following narratives illustrate the problems they faced and the decisions they made. Isabella told the story of a moment when she could not understand one of the campers and how determined she was. She said,

Once, one of the kids said something to me, but I didn't understand. So, I would ask him, "Can you please repeat? until he said, "Whatever!" I felt so bad because he wanted to tell me something and I didn't understand. And I was like, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand." He got tired of repeating it to me like three times. I was like traumatized. I said, "I need to speak perfect English for the kids." (02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1)

This excerpt from Isabella's narrative highlighted the emotional impact of a communication breakdown. Despite making efforts to understand what a child was saying, Isabella faced frustration and embarrassment when the child became impatient and dismissed her attempts. This incident motivated her to strive for improved English proficiency to better connect with the children. Isabella's reflection connects to most of the participants' learnings about the importance of effective communication in building relationships and developing intercultural competencies.

Similarly, Mariana faced a misunderstanding when the staff addressed her to say hello. She narrated this:

But the English level was tough for me. They [staff] would ask me, "How are you doing?" And I would say, "What am I doing? I'm working." And I didn't understand that they were asking me how I was doing? "Why are they asking me "how are you doing? Why are you asking me what I am doing if you are looking at what I am doing?" We had

a newsletter at the end of the summer where everybody would leave messages to staff.

Then, they would print it and give it to each counselor. I still have mine. I still keep it. I had friends who wrote, "You didn't speak English at all." Yeah, I had a lot of problems with English. (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 1)

From her experience, she learned that she had to get closer to those who could teach her better English. Thus, Mariana observed, "I always tried to look for people who were not Latino, not because I didn't like them, but because I knew it was a way to survive and to learn because I knew I had to learn English" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 1). Nevertheless, it was not only looking for people to help but also accepting the opportunities created by the camp. Gabriela, for instance, was lucky because she found some help from the summer camp to improve her English. She commented that a volunteer teacher used to teach English classes to international staff once a week. The evening activities were from seven to nine, and after that, the internationals would stay there and take the class from nine to ten. She noted,

A lot of times, when the Teacher had a day off, we would go out with him. He would ask, "Well, who's off today? I'm going to go to such and such a place. Because he was an English teacher, he was very good at reading your needs as a student. I took a lot of notes, but it was things that I was picking up on questions that came up. Many times, the next day, I would ask him, "Teacher, yesterday you said this; what did you mean?" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Another cultural misunderstanding is making friends and understanding what a friend can be. As Salome got ready for her trip to the U.S., she thought she was starting a lasting camp friendship. But once she got there, she realized things weren't as she expected. She said:

There was this girl who texted me before camp, saying she couldn't wait to see me and that it was going to be fun. I even brought her a gift because I thought we'd be great friends. But when I got to camp, she wasn't nice at all. That really threw me off.

(02/02/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Salome's experience underscores a common cultural misunderstanding about friendship. She expected a deep connection based on pre-camp enthusiasm, but the reality at camp was quite different. This highlights how assumptions about friendship can vary significantly across cultures and situations, leading to unexpected disappointments when expectations are not met.

Overcoming these difficulties can be a powerful learning experience, teaching us to adapt our expectations and approach to building genuine connections in diverse environments.

Both Group 1 and Group 2 participants shared significant experiences of confusion and exclusion that ultimately spurred their personal growth and adaptation. Despite facing language barriers and cultural misunderstandings, they displayed resilience and determination to improve their communication skills. Luciana and Emmanuel emphasized how adversities served as valuable lessons, teaching them to adjust their approaches to interactions. Similarly, Isabella, Mariana, and Gabriela actively sought strategies to overcome challenges, whether through seeking help or adapting their social circles. This collective journey illustrates how shared difficulties can foster a deeper understanding of language and culture, transforming obstacles into opportunities for growth and connection.

4.2.1.4 Identity Crisis: Blame on Grammar and Accent

When the sojourners cannot express themselves, their identities are confronted and get into crisis. They struggle to show themselves consistently. A new individual tries to show their

necessities and emotions, but this new person is forced to remain quiet as her words are not enough to express what they want to communicate. So, there is a person backstage in the intercultural interaction (the one who left the home country) and a new one in the actual interaction fighting to express themselves but expressing what they are not. At the same time, the person who came into the new country cannot show up since the new context and language strongly pressure them to remain quiet. It was the first time all the participants had been abroad, and thus, they had never faced interactions in an English-speaking country. Mariangel, from group 1, recalls the internal battles she went through:

I felt I was not being understood. My accent was very strong. We understood each other well when we talked among internationals because we all had an accent. But with the Americans, it was too fast, and there was a lot of colloquial vocabulary and many ways of saying things in their State. I was nervous all the time. So, with that level of anxiety trying to understand everything, you lose a lot of things from yourself. Now I understand where I was, but it was frustrating to try to express emotions or feelings. You try to always be yourself, to make a joke; that doesn't work. Everybody looks at you like weird, "I didn't know what they were saying. That was so weird!" (01/19/2021, [interview 1](#))

From Mariangel's narrative, it was inferred that apart from the identity problems of being unable to show her real self, she missed the speakers she was used to interacting with, like other international camp counselors. In this case, her strong accent played a favorable role when other interactants also had an accent. She was aware that her accent was part of her identity. Her narrative underlined her frustration for not being able to present the persona she felt she was. It showed how language and cultural differences affected the sojourner's sense of self and social integration. Going back to what Mariangel expressed regarding the "before" stage of her sojourn

abroad, it could be established that the struggles she experienced during the first days of her stay in the U.S. were consistent with her English competencies but not with her own perception of the language mastering. Before the trip, Mariangel was sure her English was good enough for her to succeed at camp. So, her confidence worked against her language efficiency at camp.

In contrast, Salomé, from group 2, was placed in a position where she held power, but the language impeded her from fully carrying out her responsibilities. She said the following:

I was a camp counselor. Besides that, I was named the main counselor. I was in charge of other counselors because I was the oldest. I was 21 years old. The others were 17-year-old American trainees who always went to the summer camp. They wanted to be counselors. So, they went for training. Two of them were under my responsibility, but imagine, I didn't have the language yet; I felt bad for not being able to give the order I wanted to give. And they, obviously, were American, and they spoke perfect English. So, the campers were much more with them than with me. So, I began to feel that the girls made the difference; I was the main counselor, but they didn't see me as the main counselor, and I felt bad for that. I was like, "I just couldn't give orders; I didn't feel I could interact with them. (02/02/2021, interview 1)

From her narrative, it can be inferred that Salomé's identity as a camp counselor was challenged by her actual language proficiency. **Her role as a main camp counselor parallels her leadership responsibilities as a language teacher.** She expressed that she could not give orders to the trainee counselors and that they did not see her as the main counselor. Comparing her narratives with those she had previously narrated, it was found that even though she was confident with her English before the sojourn, she was not prepared to face environments where

she was required to speak English in a leading role and with the level of fluency of a native speaker.

The obstacles described in the previous lines moved the participants to experience the transformation of their identities and the construction of new ones as international sojourners and camp staff. Some elements of their identity could be traced in narratives such as this one by Luciana, in which she commented that "people started to let me in at the end, but not very much. It was very strict; it's too strict if you don't know the everyday language or you don't even know what's going on. People take you for burlesque" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1).

Luciana underwent a process of identity construction as an international sojourner and camp staff member, influenced by the obstacles and challenges she faced in the camp environment. Her mention of people "letting her in" suggests that she felt excluded within the camp community at one point in her sojourn. It is a fact that this exclusion stemmed from linguistic barriers and a lack of familiarity with the everyday language and cultural norms of the camp environment. She probably struggled for acceptance and integration as she was very young and wanted to be accepted. Taken for "burlesque" could have made her feel a discrepancy between her self-perception and how others perceived her, leading to identity negotiation and self-definition. Luciana's narrative highlights the transformative impact of the camp experience on her identity as she navigated the complexities of belonging, acceptance, and cultural adaptation in a new and unfamiliar environment.

In a different line of thought but keeping the same argument of identity construction at camp, Isabella shared that at the beginning of her experience,

I was very receptive but hardly spoke, although I was not aware of that. I became aware because one day, they asked me to lead an activity. When I started to lead, I uncovered that side of me. The chief camp leaders were two ladies who were like... "but you speak English." I never forgot that expression. Until then, I had not realized I was in silent mode; I was gaining information. Of course, I had some knowledge and things to say. However, I did not know it was the right time to say it. It wasn't shyness, but I think they got the perception that I was shy or that I didn't know much English, and that was why I didn't speak. I was given the opportunity; it was my time to lead, and I started to speak normally. From that day on, I talked all the time. I had not realized the message I was sending. (02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Isabella underwent a process of identity construction within the camp environment led by language proficiency and self-expression. She assumed an attitude of receptiveness and hesitation at the same time, showing she was a cautious person. She probably behaved like that to save face and not put herself under scrutiny of her skills or language proficiency. Isabella had hidden her identity, maybe because she had been in a silent mode, as she described during her interview. Taking the role of leading an activity empowered her to show confidence and send the message that she was a leader that could be of great benefit to the camp community.

Antonella had prior experience working as a paramedic before joining the summer camp. This background was a foundation for her aspiration to develop a new identity as an effective camp counselor for individuals with disabilities. However, the camp's regulations and the campers' specific needs exceeded her expectations, and her challenges with communicating in English further hindered her ability to fulfill her role as a counselor. Thus, she struggled to accomplish her role and succeed. She told the following story:

In one week, I had three campers with different needs: one with autism, one with dementia, and one with Down syndrome. I was alone in a cabin far from the camp's main area. At 8 AM, it was time for their medicine, and by 8:30, I had to get them to breakfast. The walk was five minutes, but walking with them took over half an hour. On Monday, they were late getting up, so we missed breakfast. I ended up running late for everything and got reprimanded, but no one listened to my explanations. The language barrier was a huge issue—I couldn't understand their English, and they struggled with mine. By Wednesday, I was overwhelmed and broke down in tears. Luckily, one of the Scottish girls I'd befriended came over and offered support. Ironically, the Scottish girls had the strongest and most difficult accents to understand for me. (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Antonella's case revealed that expertise in one field does not always seamlessly translate into success in a different role, particularly when language barriers exist. Her difficulties with English communication were overwhelming and led to a crisis of identity, eventually causing her to collapse and seek support.

Group 1 and Group 2 participants shared a significant challenge in expressing their identities due to language barriers. Their narratives, though unique, all echo a shared experience of internal conflict. Mariangel and Salomé, despite their prior confidence in English, found themselves struggling to communicate effectively, leading to feelings of exclusion and frustration. Similarly, Luciana and Isabella illustrated the transformative nature of these challenges, ultimately fostering personal growth and adaptation as they navigated their new environments. Through adversity, both groups experienced a redefinition of their identities as they learned to reconcile their linguistic limitations with their roles as camp staff, revealing a

common thread of resilience and self-discovery. Their shared experience is a powerful reminder of the importance of empathy and understanding in multicultural environments.

4.2.2 International Airport, a Maze of Uncertainties

The category *International airport, a maze of uncertainties*, refers to the intercultural encounters the participants had with an entity that, in the U.S., is an intimidating megastructure that welcomes travelers. They are vast complexes with sizeable physical size, extensive facilities, multiple stores, shops, restaurants, and other commercial establishments. They are designed to house thousands of passengers and visitors simultaneously. Airports can become intimidating places for those who are unfamiliar with them, which was the case for the participants. The emergence of this category is intimately associated with the intercultural encounters in which English was spoken. The less one speaks, the more challenging it is to navigate the airport. The less one knows these places, the more difficult it is to understand their logic. However, it must be said that because nine out of ten participants had never landed at international airports like the ones in the U.S. that challenge the architecture of mega constructions, this category emerges as a novel experience that brought unique shocks to participants.

Moving through airports often presents a unique sensory experience, especially when traveling between countries with different languages and cultures. For many, transitioning from one environment to another can be disorienting, particularly when switching between languages. The following reflection vividly captures Emmanuel's experience, describing the sensory and cognitive adjustments required when encountering a new linguistic and cultural setting. He narrated the following story:

Each airport has a unique vibe shaped by its history. When people speak, my ears switch to a different sound channel—like switching from salsa to vallenato. So when I got off the plane, the English accents I heard felt like a whole new frequency. My brain had to shift from my usual Spanish to tune into this new language to make sense of things and navigate the situation. This transition was surprising and confusing; I had to pay extra attention and be highly alert to understand what people were saying. The airport felt alive, almost overwhelming with information, and my brain struggled to keep up. (01/06/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Three participants expressed that the airport was unfriendly and did not offer a safe environment or a welcome greeting. Luciana said,

But when I arrived in [the city airport], there was a problem. I got there okay. I got off the plane, and I sat there [in one of those waiting chairs], and I waited for someone to pick me up. Well, there was no one at the airport to pick me up. The night was approaching, and I was still sitting in that waiting room. At that moment, everything went down; I went into shock, forgot everything, and panicked. I just stayed like that and said, "I am far from home; I don't know anybody in an airport that is an intimidating place, an international airport. I have no idea what I have to do, how to take an air train, go on a bus, do this, do that; that it matters, that there's a world in the airport. When I realized it, it was like, "This is real life: I'm alone in this place, I have nobody; what am I going to do?" I swear I wanted to cry. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Luciana's experience of arriving at the airport and being left alone without anyone to pick her up showed the sense of isolation and vulnerability travelers can experience in such a large and

complex space. All the summer camp program participants expected to have a person who guided them throughout the airport to make them feel safer and more comfortable. Confusion about this matter hindered the normal transition from immigration to camp.

Participants from Group 2 also had similar experiences. For instance, Antonella went through something comparable to what Luciana experienced. The vast size of the airport did not allow her to stop and think. She was immediately astonished and stupefied. Antonella described that moment in the following way:

I got lost at the airport where I was supposed to meet the coordinator. I got lost because it was huge. I never imagined that an airport could be so big. I was like, "What is this? It's another world." I had never been in something so gigantic that I even had to take a train, and I was like, "No, what is this? This is a crazy, crazy thing." So, I got lost, and I swear I was about to cry when I first arrived. I was so scared, and I was like, "What am I doing here? I'm lost. How are they going to find me? What do I do now? Where will I find my suitcase? (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2)

The same perception of the airport as an overwhelming and disorienting place exacerbated Mariangel feelings of missing information that could be useful at arrival. She commented,

The arrival at the airport was super stressful. It wasn't easy because you can imagine your arrival, but you cannot imagine everything that might happen there. Plus, nobody told us those details. We didn't have that much training or guidance; we were the first guinea pigs. I was like, "Oh, why didn't they tell us this?" I didn't imagine the airports were so big; I didn't know everything that had to be done there. (01/19/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Arriving at an international airport, a new and unfamiliar environment, challenged Mariangel to start the process of identity construction. If Mariangel described a feeling of stress, she probably experienced anxiety and apprehension about the unknown, which took her to a sense of unease and discomfort. However, she turned the frustration into a learning opportunity, contributing to constructing her identity as she learned to cope with new and unfamiliar situations. Thus, the sojourners' experience in the U.S. was a process of ups and downs, discoveries, and anguish.

People harbor accumulated beliefs, values, norms, traditions, and experiences inherent to their culture. They assign meaning to all sorts of elements that make up their communities. They also build different kinds of artifacts and objects for different purposes. As they build them, they assign meanings and imprint their beliefs, values, norms, traditions, etc. on them. As objects, constructions, and artifacts get cultural meaning, they become entities charged with cultural baggage inherited from the culture they belong to. So, an entity exists with separate and distinct character and possesses either a tangible existence or a conceptual reality.

When individuals from other cultural backgrounds meet entities in the host country, as is the case of the sojourners traveling to work at summer camps in the U.S., they have intercultural encounters with those entities; they interact with the cultural baggage of a human group materialized in the entity. Then, when the participants of the research arrived in the U.S., they found themselves interacting with the airport as a cultural entity charged with the cultural baggage assigned by those who designed the airport, interpreting the culture of the city and country. It was then predictable that the participants would clash with this culturally unfamiliar entity. The success of the sojourners' integration into the new cultural environment depended on

their ability to understand, respect, and adapt to the cultural baggage of local entities while negotiating their own identity and values.

4.2.3 *The Intercultural Guardian Angel*

Seven out of ten participants found someone willing to help them at the airport or camp. They offered assistance and protection and guided sojourners confused or in need to find a way to see hope and tranquility. It is such the contribution of those helpers that the sojourners gave them spiritual powers and considered them messengers of gods, carrying out various tasks such as the ones already mentioned. The sojourners generally kept them and their actions forever in their memories and hearts. In some cases, sojourners approached people to find solutions to their problems; on other occasions, people saw a sign of need in the sojourners and tried to assist them. To illustrate, Salomé found her *intercultural guardian angel* in a man who worked as a taxi dispatcher. She was confused because she could not understand the camp director when she called her, so the man approached Salomé to help her, asking her if she needed something. Then, he called the camp director and explained where she was. He helped Salomé to meet with the camp director. Salomé was grateful to the man because he saved her in a moment of confusion and anxiety.

In group 1, for example, Luciana had just arrived at the airport and suddenly found herself abandoned by her camp. She was lost and did not know what to do. Her English was questioned, and the airport was confusing. Trying to solve the problems, Luciana approached a gentleman who had been passing by repeatedly. She said,

"Look, please help me, I have to get to this place." Thank goodness I was carrying a little book, and on the back was an emergency number. So, I told him to please help me call. I

didn't know how to call from a public phone; I didn't have coins; I didn't know what the coins were. I told him, "No, you talk; I can't talk." He called for me, talked to someone there, and explained what had happened. He told them that people from Bogotá didn't report that I was coming. So, they were not expecting me. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Moreover, Mariangel had a terrible moment at the airport because she momentarily lost her passport. The situation was stressful. In a state of panic, she searched desperately for her passport, fearing the consequences. When Mariangel was approaching a security guard for help, her name was called over the airport loudspeaker just as she began to speak. The guard directed her to where she had left her passport with her boarding pass. She was a helpful person who took her time to help the sojourner. Then, when she finally recovered her passport, she went to the waiting room, and sat down. She was drenched in sweat, feeling horrible. There, she met a nice American lady who tried to calm her down. She offered water to her and asked her questions to help her relax. Mariangel started talking to her and found a peaceful moment. She recalled that she "told her the place I was heading to. And she said, "Oh, that's nice." And she gave me a bottle of water because I think she saw me so dazed from all the running around" (01/19/2021, interview 1, group 1).

Luciana's narratives let us infer that she had the sensitivity to approach people and recognize her weaknesses and people's merits. For example, she contacted someone from her country to find consolation. They shared the same cultural background, and at the same time, he knew the American culture because he had been in the U.S. for some time and could understand Luciana's concerns. He was able to put into perspective the viewpoints from her culture and the

new culture. He was the shoulder to cry on. Luciana felt comfortable discussing private matters with a fellow compatriot. She said,

There was a staff lounge downstairs in the lodge where you could have your snacks. And there was a pay phone. I would always go down there, and I would stay there, and I would call a friend who was the only person I had here [in the U.S.], who lived in Washington. I would call him, and I would cry, and I would tell him, "This is terrible, I want to go home." And the campers hadn't arrived; it was just training. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

At the same time, Luciana made a friend at camp who became her support during her sojourn. She said,

For me, it was very significant the friendships I made that year. For me, she was a tremendous support. Diana [name changed] was an incredible support. She was an earnest woman; she took care of me. I think she had lived here [in the U.S.] as an exchange student for a year. So, her English was very English. She was from [African country]; very nice. She gave me advice; she was patient with me. She was a key factor at camp. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Participants from group 2, such as Santiago, had the opportunity to become members of a "camp cultural communitarianism" created with people from the same cultural background at camp. The community became the path to enter into the other culture and its cultural elements. The national (or Latino) identity here dominated the scene as it was strengthened to cope with transitioning to the new camp counselor or support staff identity. Santiago said he traveled from his country with a classmate who was also a participant. When they got to their camp, they found

that some other Colombians were already there. He said, "For us, it was our way of adapting. It was not that we were going to stay with the Colombians forever, but they were the bridge to this new thing we were living" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2). The people from Colombia created a closer, shared space that lightened the emotional charge and the pressure of using English.

Thus, the group of Colombians became a community, and each member contributed to becoming a guardian angel for the others whose interculturality resided in the understanding of the same language and cultural patterns. Santiago shared the following reflection: "You talked about those things more with the Colombians than asking someone else, in English, for example. There was that, not confidentiality but that innate understanding of judging a situation or a person from the Colombian perspective" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2).

The study participants came to understand that cultural identity significantly influences social dynamics and adaptation to new environments. As they formed bonds with others sharing similar cultural backgrounds, they found it easier to navigate the construction of camp identities. They recognized an innate and natural understanding of events, allowing them to judge situations and people's behavior from a Colombian perspective. Consequently, interactions within this newly formed community facilitated the exploration of the camp's dynamics.

As mentioned above, Latinos also shared a broader community united by the Spanish language. Borrowing Santiago's words, it was also a broader "camp cultural communitarianism." Accepting that they had distinguishing characteristics proper to their countries, they recognized that they were a natural force to make their way through the summer season at camp. So, the same idea of the "camp cultural communitarianism" was experienced by Salomé. She was sent to

sleep in a cabin with eight other girls when she arrived at her camp. It was a scout camp. The fact that the cabin did not have electricity and that the girls were from different cultural backgrounds and countries made her feel she wanted to return home. Fortunately for Salomé, there was a Mexican girl among them. So, Salomé expressed, "So I clung very much to the Mexican one because it was the closest thing I had" (02/02/2021, interview 1, group 2), recognizing that they shared the language and some cultural elements that could make them navigate the first days of camp life in a bearable manner.

Bringing together the ideas mentioned above, the *intercultural guardian angels* served as a bridge connecting sojourners with uncharted cultural backgrounds in the U.S. (the airport, for instance) and the summer camp. They enriched Santiago's concept of "camp cultural communitarianism" and eased the transition into a bearable sojourn abroad experience.

Participants from groups 1 and 2 experienced the profound impact of individuals who offered support during their transitions to a new cultural environment. Salomé and Luciana's encounters with helpful strangers at the airport exemplified the immediate relief that eased their anxieties. At the same time, Santiago's connection with fellow Colombians fostered a sense of community that facilitated adaptation to camp life. This shared reliance on personal connections and external support highlights a common theme: the essential role of cultural understanding and mutual aid in navigating the challenges of being sojourners in unfamiliar settings. Ultimately, these guardian figures and community bonds became pivotal in transforming their experiences, underscoring the importance of solidarity in intercultural contexts.

4.2.4 Camp Life, New Identity

The participants of this study traveled to the U.S. to work at a summer camp. Without a work contract, they would not have had the opportunity to be part of this exchange program. The participants knew their final destination was a camp where they had to hold the position of camp counselor or support staff. The main difference between these jobs is the contact they have with campers. While camp counselors have direct contact with campers by sharing their culture, leading activities, and taking care of them, support staff carry out different duties in kitchens, dining halls, rooms, etc., without direct contact with campers. (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). Eight participants worked as Camp Counselors, and one member of Group 1 and another from Group 2 worked as Support Staff.

In most cases, the international staff are given specific training at the beginning of the season according to the position they will hold during the summer. Summer camp administrators and supervisors consider the training they provide and the possible training received in the employees' home country enough for internationals to start their work.

At the same time, the camp functions as more than just a physical space or a congregation of individuals. It embodies a cohesive community with its own distinct identity and dynamics. As such, sojourners who arrive at the camp engage with its tangible elements, like buildings, facilities, artifacts, and activities, and its intangible aspects, such as its culture, values, interculturality, diversity, and inclusion. This holistic interaction allows participants to immerse themselves in the essence of the camp, forging connections with both the environment and the people within it. Moreover, through their interactions with the camp community, sojourners contribute to its ongoing evolution and vitality, shaping its collective identity and leaving an

imprint on its legacy. Concurrently, the sojourners construct their new identity by immersing in and interacting with the camp. Transcending the physical space becomes a transformative experience that fosters connection, growth, and a profound sense of belonging, giving birth to a new identity.

So, the international staff starts constructing a new identity that will be gradually exercised during their camp stay. In some cases (four out of ten participants), these camp identities constructed as participants engaged in their first summer camp lasted for years or are still one of their identities. Hence, the following lines describe the participants' lives at camp. They also depict the challenges and learnings they gained from their intercultural interactions and encounters. Their narratives show the identity construction processes they underwent.

4.2.4.1 Camp Training: Welcoming New Challenges

The training varied according to the camp and the position of participants. Some trainings were very general, while others were task-oriented. For example, Gabriela commented: "For the first time in my life, I painted walls. So yes, it was a very enriching job in every aspect. I learned that I could do things I had never done at home" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1).

Examining Gabriela's experiences before and during her time at the camp reveals a consistent theme. Despite the lack of appropriate preparation in her home country for camp duties, Gabriela encountered new tasks and responsibilities during her camp sojourn. This inconsistency between her training and the tasks assigned at camp suggests that participants like Gabriela were not always adequately prepared. Nevertheless, these camp challenges served as opportunities for personal growth and skill development during their camp experience.

As illustrated, in most cases, staff were assigned specific positions at camp (camp counselor or support staff) or a certain number of activities in a camp area (kitchen, laundry, for instance). For Santiago, that was not the case. It looked like there was not a specific assignment plan for him. He said that at first, "the basic routine was to get up, get the kids up, shower, eat breakfast, do the morning activities, eat lunch, do the afternoon activities, and do a fourth activity at the end of the day" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2). However, eventually, he became the go-to person. Therefore, Santiago recalled that he became the jack-of-all-trades, capable of handling anything. He observed,

As I arrived late, I was not a specialist in any activity either. I was told, "Santiago, go to Arts and Crafts today. Santiago, tomorrow, go to the lake. Santiago, this day goes to ropes." I was treated like a kid in the early days, a camper, because they were always looking for something for me to do, something to get trained in so I could use it to lead future activities with campers. In the beginning, it was mandatory for me to go through several activities. Sometimes, it was also a practical matter; they sent me because no one else was assigned to that. I had to fill the schedule with those activities no one else had. (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Santiago's narratives suggested that he possessed adaptability and versatility in his skill set.

Furthermore, his willingness to participate in diverse activities and explain them to children demonstrates a proactive attitude and eagerness to contribute to the camp's environment. These qualities align with expectations for effective language teachers, including communicating effectively, adapting teaching methods to different contexts, and engaging students in various activities to facilitate language learning.

However, the narratives indicated an inconsistency with the characteristics Santiago had expressed about himself and what he was eager to do at camp. According to him, he did not have any talent for dealing with children. However, his actions indicated he could lead children to several activities. Thus, Santiago solidified his identity as a keen learner and camp counselor, developing a new identity that exceeded expectations and molded his identity as a camp counselor.

In most cases, the training was hard, probably because the participants were not familiar with camp activities or the new roles they had to perform. Luciana recalled what she lived. She explained,

It was cold. The water was cold. There were mosquitoes. That was really hard. Even if you didn't understand what they were saying, you had to keep going because Americans are like that. And working with children is a huge responsibility. So, the training was really hard. They did the emergency procedure all the time. For example, you had finished doing that, were taking a shower, had already washed off all that mud, and then they sounded the bugle again. You had to do the training again. (...) The truth is that I cried. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

The training was physically and emotionally demanding; however, Luciana showed resilience to navigate the challenges. She recognized the importance of her responsibilities, showing that she was committed to her job and eager to adopt her new identity as a camp counselor. In addition, Luciana became close to a camp counselor who held a higher position at camp. She recalled, "One of the trainers was a wonderful person. She helped me a lot; she was very patient with me. She was very kind. I still have her as a friend. She was dear to me"

(01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). Thus, she was able to cope with her duties and make friends, which is a sign of intercultural competence development. Her friend was also an *intercultural guardian angel*.

Isabella described the type of training she attended. An important aspect of her training was how she was brought closer to the American culture. That was an essential step in Isabella's construction of her camp identity. She said,

When I arrived at the camp, we spent about a week just in training (the children had not yet arrived). We received training in *Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)* and *First Aid*, in case it was needed. We learned more about life in the U.S., including many terms related to legal issues of how to behave and what was expected of us. (02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Emiliano presented his training at camp as draining. He found himself overwhelmed by the intensity and sheer volume of information he had to process. What he expected to be an exciting opportunity quickly turned into a challenging experience that tested his limits. He told,

The camp had two weeks of training that were intense. The first week was all about reading up on laws and camp stuff—it felt like nonstop, heavy-duty classes that left me exhausted and sleepy. The second week was focused on simulating our schedules. It was also the lifeguard training week. Since I already knew how to swim, I figured that if I picked the lifeguard position, that would be the only task assigned; I'd be a lifeguard. I got picked and went through lifeguard training on top of the general camp training. It was a lot of information, especially since it was my first time at camp. I probably only

absorbed about 20 or 30% of it all. Overall, it threw new challenges that I hadn't anticipated. (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2)

The experiences shared by Group 1 and Group 2 participants during camp training revealed notable similarities in their challenges. Both groups encountered new and unexpected tasks that stretched their abilities and pushed them outside their comfort zones. For instance, Gabriela and Emiliano both found themselves overwhelmed by their training. Gabriela navigated unfamiliar responsibilities like painting walls, and Emiliano grappled with a demanding, exhausting training regimen. Furthermore, both groups demonstrated resilience in the face of these challenges. Luciana's commitment to her responsibilities and her ability to forge supportive relationships with more experienced counselors mirrors Santiago's adaptability as he embraced diverse roles and became the "jack-of-all-trades" at camp. Each participant, regardless of their initial doubts about their capabilities, ultimately grew through their experiences, developing new skills and identities as camp counselors. This development of new skills and identities is a clear indication of the impact of the camp training on the participants.

4.2.4.2 Camp Training: Nurturing Intercultural Connections

From a different perspective, the camp training and the first weeks were the opportunity to share the participants' culture and get to know the people who were going to work with them. In group 1, participants such as Gabriela met the camp owners during the first breakfast at camp. They were people interested in learning about the participants and their countries. It was a moment for Gabriela to show pride in being Colombian and to talk about the positive things about her country. She commented, "It was nice to meet people who were curious about Colombia. It was great to know that you can offer a different image of your country, that they

can see that Colombia is more than drugs and violence" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1). Furthermore, Gabriela recognized that her position at camp was an opportunity to show she was a hard-working woman. She said, "I was placed in housekeeping. It was a moment when I felt happy about being Colombian. For us, cleaning bathrooms wasn't challenging at all. You always find a way out" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1). Thus, Gabriela's willingness to engage in those conversations reflected a sense of confidence and empowerment in her identity as a Colombian individual. As she had the opportunity to share her views about her country, she learned about the American culture and the camp surroundings. She mentioned,

After that first week, they brought a man who, in straightforward, precise terms, spoke to us about the laws of the State [where the camp was located] and what the sanctions could be if we broke any of those laws. He also talked to us about worker's rights. Plus, he shared information about places we could visit. (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1)

In the same setting of unraveling the camp's social and cultural fabric, it must be reminded that campers are the core of camp life. The campers' profile depends on the camp type and purpose. The list of camp types is extensive, but some are more common, such as special needs, religious, or themed camps. The participants of this study had the opportunity to interact with campers who behaved accordingly.

For Luciana, the campers were flexible, did not judge the camp counselors, and did not correct the counselors' English. She said, "You feel that they love you, even if you speak with an accent" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). Besides, the counselors' roles position them to play different tasks with the campers. For example, Luciana narrated,

What happens is that they go and stay there; some stay for a week, others for two weeks; they sleep in the same cabin with you. Then you have them in the cabin; you are like their mother. In addition to being a nanny, you are a mom because if they wake up crying at night, want to go to the bathroom, or feel sick, you are there for them. You get attached to them. When the girls arrive, it is different; there is less pressure with the language. You feel that you changed; the environment is different with the girls. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Although Luciana had not worked as a nanny, she was able to adopt maternal responsibilities that nurtured her authentic camp counselor identity. She appreciated the campers' flexibility and acceptance and returned their attitude with great care as if they were her own children. Contrary to Luciana's full-time responsibility to take care of her children, Gabriela was a support staff with an additional responsibility as a Camp Counselor at night. She had responsibilities in different camp areas, but she had to meet the campers at certain moments and ensure she assumed her honorific responsibility. If Gabriela fulfilled her duties at camp, she would fit into the camp counselor identity assigned to her. Gabriela narrated her responsibilities at camp. She said,

My responsibility was to be with the girls of my cabin. I had to share with them, eat breakfast as a cabin, lunch as a cabin, and have dinner as a cabin. If I didn't see the kids during the day, I would see them at those main meal times. Those were the times for interaction with them, where they would ask, "So, what did you do today? What did you learn today?" You were also learning at the table by listening to them. (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Gabriela identified strongly with her role as a camp counselor. Her duties and the encounters during the meal times bonded her relationship with the kids as she listened to their experiences and learned from them. Her identity as a counselor who cared about the well-being and development of the campers under her care was a priority for her. Later in the interview, when Gabriela expressed her commitment to a language education that cares for the students, it was understood that she had this natural talent to teach. The camp served as a powerful motor that drove her professional career.

If, for some participants, the work with the campers was exhausting, even knowing that the girls did not have any condition, the work faced by Mariana was much more complex because she worked at a camp for people with special needs. Mariana liked serving and looking after her campers even though she had no training to assist people with disabilities. She asserted, "I always liked all that. I was happy to work with anyone. It was different to look after a 70-year-old than a 15-year-old, which mentally and physically posed different requisites" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 1). One of the arguments she used to justify her disposition was that she felt she could help others. She affirmed, "There's something very nice about a special needs camp, which is feeling needed. That satisfaction of being able to help" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 1). She could adapt to her camp and the challenges her position had.

Mariana possesses a strong sense of compassion, adaptability, and a desire to help others. This aspect of her identity was transferred to her position as a camp counselor. Mariana willingly took on the responsibilities of working at a camp for individuals with special needs, suggesting that constructing an identity associated with the camp was more a negotiation of what she was than building a new identity. Her capacity to give the best to others and to feel committed to their well-being was similar to Mariana's sense of appropriation. Mariana was consistent in her

narrative; in various interview sections, she stated she was a devoted person. Her success was reflected in the career she forged in her camp and her professional life.

The experiences of Group 2 participants do not differ from those of Group 1 in terms of nurturing intercultural relations. Santiago's experience at camp could be called "Little Colombia." as he discovered a significant presence of fellow Colombians working there, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of an immigration hub. He arrived at camp later than expected due to the delayed signing of his contract.

Santiago traveled with another classmate who was going to work in the same camp. They formed a partnership based on shared uncertainties and collective decision-making during their journey from Colombia to the camp. Santiago lacked the standard training camp staff typically received, leaving him unprepared to navigate camp life. Despite this initial disorientation, he was quickly certified through brief training sessions. The surprise and excitement of reconnecting with Colombian acquaintances or meeting new compatriots facilitated his adaptation to the new environment.

Although he initially felt lost, the support of other Latinos provided him with a sense of security in a bustling atmosphere filled with unfamiliar rituals. This experience presented both a challenge and an opportunity for Santiago to explore a space enriched by diverse traditions and cultures. It facilitated a sense of community among Colombians abroad, eager to express their cultural customs and manifestations. Santiago made the following reflection:

Many people tried to help us adjust to the camp. What did that mean for me? First, it eased my fear about communicating in an emergency. I knew I had a bunch of Latinos around me. When I was getting ready to travel to the U.S., I was worried about not being

able to communicate during an emergency. However, at camp, I realized I had this group of people to lean on. That helped a lot. Plus, they helped us organize and find our rhythm during those chaotic first days. There was so much to learn at once. The environment felt really noisy; everyone sang, which was strange yet fun. It was all pretty overwhelming. We didn't have a guide explaining all the rituals we were diving into. Instead, we just had fellow Colombians or others nearby in case something went wrong. For many things, you just had to figure it out on your own. (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Santiago's experience highlights how forming connections with fellow Latinos helped him navigate the challenges of camp life, easing his initial fears about communication and providing a sense of community amidst the chaos of new experiences.

The challenges of communicating in a second language can significantly impact one's ability to engage with others, especially in social settings. In the following narrative, Emiliano reflects on his struggle to express himself fully while interacting with peers at camp. Despite possessing the necessary language structures, he faced difficulty articulating their thoughts and ideas, leading to frustration. His experience highlights the importance of cultural exchange, as Emiliano recognized the value of sharing his cultural background while learning from others in an intercultural space. Emiliano related,

I knew I was trying to communicate in a different language and could not express myself fully. I was very conscious because I always thought about what something meant. That would happen to me when we were interacting, especially outside the context of training, in free time. So, they would ask me, "Well, where do you come from? What do you do? What's interesting to do in your country? So, I had to think about everything and process

it, which was hard for me. It was a process in which I suffered because I could not communicate. I had the ideas but could not express them as I wanted. That was the strongest suffering because I had all the language structures. I always thought about it. I knew how to say it, but maybe in a very basic way. I also knew that it was not expressed as it should be. But it was important to talk about my culture. In the evenings, it was the time to interact with people from other places and learn from them. (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Emiliano's experience revealed the frustration of ideas remaining unexpressed due to language barriers. Yet, it also emphasized the significance of cultural exchange. By sharing his background and engaging with peers, Emiliano managed the complexities of intercultural communication, highlighting both the struggles and enriching opportunities that arose in diverse environments.

Group 1 and Group 2 participants highlighted the importance of cultural exchange and community support in adapting to new environments. They went from embracing their roles as representatives of Colombian culture, engaging with campers and staff to foster understanding and connection, to finding strength and reassurance in their shared Latino identities, which helped them navigate the complexities of camp life and communication challenges. Both groups demonstrated how these intercultural interactions empowered them to express their identities and created a nurturing atmosphere that facilitated their integration into the camp community. This shared experience underscores the vital and indispensable role of cultural pride and support networks in enriching their sojourns abroad.

4.2.4.3 A Break from the Drudgery

Most participants recognized that the work at camp was exhausting, and it was hard for them because they had to be available 24/7 for almost any kind of duty. They commented that they found ways to take a break and be alone to rest from the pressure of social interactions. In group 1, Luciana expressed that "When I didn't have to teach, I had to be in the tower as a lifeguard. It gave me a break because I didn't have to be talking to others all the time" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). She knew that the construction of her new identity as a camp counselor caused her too much stress. She said, "At first, you are quiet and shy because you try to fit in, and you don't fit in. Their culture and customs are different. (...) Yes, it was very hard; it was tough and very stressful" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). In addition, Luciana recognized that she was not feeling confident with herself and put herself at risk of getting in trouble. For example, she once decided to go out of camp with a nurse who worked there. "I had the idea that she was able to understand me. I wouldn't stay at camp for the weekend because I was sick of everything. If I stayed there, I would end up combing a doll" [to end up doing something pointless or insignificant] (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). However, in the end, she did not know if that decision was worse than staying at camp. Luciana expressed,

Oh my God, she lived in a place where [certain ethnic groups] live in [city name]. I said, "They're going to rob me here; they're going to kill me." I swear. I was like, "How did I come here?" Moreover, she asked me to babysit her little boy in the basement. And I was like, "My God, I have to get out of here; God, let nothing happen to me." And on Sunday, she took me back to the camp. Then, I said, "Oh, I'll never go there again. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Luciana's experiences illustrated the physical and emotional toll of working as a camp counselor. They also pointed out what it means to adapt to new cultural environments without the necessary training and accompaniment. Identity construction in unfamiliar settings and interculturally interacting with people who do not offer absolute trust was a risk. Luciana's narrative anticipated a strong woman who has had the capacity to take advantage of adversities and harsh situations to shape her professional identity and thrive in a career abroad.

By and large, camp counselors can sometimes interact with campers who behave differently than the standard kids. [Santiago, from group 2](#), faced the challenges of two campers who taught him lifelong lessons and showed him ways of being he had never considered before. First, when he arrived at the camp, he was told that the camp was going to host some kids from Haiti. When those Haitian kids arrived, one of them who spoke the most English in the group was sent to Santiago's cabin. This young boy had a very different energy than the other kids, who were quicker to adapt to the camp. The kid was someone who did not know about respecting schedules and routines. For instance, he did not want to respect the lake swimming schedules. Besides, he wanted to eat when he wanted to eat. He wanted to get up when he wanted to get up. He did not realize that the camp had a routine exercise that had to be observed.

Contrary to what would be expected, Santiago agreed with him. He said, "His desires impacted me a lot. I wanted to complain so he could do what he wanted to do. Why don't they let him have fun if he's not having fun?" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2). The attitudes and perceptions of this camper were assumed to be teachings for Santiago, who expressed, "I learned from him, seeing him, and seeing him resist things. So, the contact with this child made me think, "Look, Santiago, could it be that you are not living your experience to the fullest?"

(01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2). The camper's presence at camp shocked Santiago because he seemed to have many insecurities.

Another child impacted Santiago on a personal level. He was an American boy whose peculiarity was a fascination for speaking all the time. He was not able to stop talking, even when it was nighttime. He spoke a lot to himself. He did not care if he was being listened to or not. Santiago said,

I haven't met a person who can be in constant dialogue. He talked about his fears; he made jokes about himself. It was a huge disaster. And he was a huge disaster for me; I think he was fine in his head. However, I didn't understand all he said. He had something in his way of talking; he was hilarious. I did not understand all his jokes. (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Well, it turns out that Santiago started to hate the camper; he did not talk to him because he could not deal with him. Since the camp director knew the camper was a problem, she would dedicate hours and hours of attention to him. That was his therapy. Santiago also believed the director knew he struggled with the camper. One day, she approached Santiago and asked him how he was dealing with the kid. Santiago responded, "No, horrible. I don't know what to do with him. I'm not sure if I am communicating well with him. I don't know how to help him" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2). Santiago thought the camp director knew he was not handling the situation appropriately. Then, Santiago narrated this,

She pulled out a drawing and said, "Look, he spent the whole day here with me, and I told him to draw his favorite thing about camp. The drawing was me. And the camper had even painted a bunch of little hearts. The point is that I was very heavy with him; I wasn't

rude, but I was very heavy because I didn't know what to do anymore. The director gave me the child's drawing. However, there were two days left for the kid to leave the camp, which was the worst thing for me since I was not going to have time to do something. I was totally disarmed because all that feeling of annoyance that I had of being unable to deal with the situation totally placated me. (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2)

To close, Santiago's words perfectly describe his reflections. He concluded,

Those two things had a particular impact on me because they brought me back to my reality; my reality of what I was in the camp and what I was doing because, in a way, I could identify more, as I said before, with the rebelliousness of the children than with the routine of the children. These two kids, finally, the weirder ones, were the ones that impressed me the most; the experience with the two of them shocked me the most. One represented a whole panorama of the world, and the other represented a much smaller one, but of something that I could not handle well or understand. But today, with what I experienced in the camp and how I handled it, I can't diagnose anything good or bad. I don't think I understood him. That's what I believe today. (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Understanding the nature of human nature is a complicated matter, particularly for young adults fighting to discover the world. In general, all the people present at camps are tangible cultural individuals that international staff see and address, like it or not. Santiago's experience is an example of how the encounter with diversity as an entity may have different effects. For him, it was an experience of confusion, ambivalence, and discovery regarding how to understand and treat two campers that exceeded his expectations beyond what behaviors he expected from the

kids he was assigned to. In the end, his most significant learning was understanding that along the way, we would meet people so diverse that perhaps we won't be able to comprehend their nature, but that seems to be fine as long as we understand that every person makes part of the larger palette of diversities. At the end of the interview, Santiago realized that those particular cases were similar to students he could probably find during his professional career as a language teacher, particularly because indirectly, without knowing, that camp experience was tracing the beginning of a career as a language teacher abroad, far from the culture he knew very well.

Santiago concluded:

Upon my return, I discovered the autonomy of the students, children, and younger ones. I found that they could control themselves and say, "I like this, I don't like this." Before, I felt that the job of an adult, any older person, or a teacher was to tell a child what they should want. That was the discourse. After camp, that was modulated much more because I understood: What does it matter if I want him to want something? What matters is that he wants what he wants. That tongue-twister resonated within me; that was the child's task to finally choose. (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2)

Group 1 and Group 2 participants reflected on the demanding nature of their camp roles and how they sought respite from the intense pressures of constant social interaction. They highlighted the emotional toll of adapting to a new environment, revealing how moments of solitude provided them with necessary breaks. They also faced challenges connecting with unique campers who pushed their boundaries, ultimately leading to valuable lessons about autonomy and understanding. Both groups illustrated that while the work was exhausting, their encounters—whether through personal reflection or the influence of others—became pivotal in

shaping their identities and perspectives, emphasizing the importance of navigating stress and embracing the learning opportunities that arise in intercultural settings.

Factors for Learning and Identity Reshaping: The analysis adopted allowed for aggregating individual narratives into the two cases (*Cross-Case Analysis*), finalized with the *comparative analysis of group cases*. By identifying commonalities across cases, the analysis integrated the diverse experiences of both groups into a cohesive narrative. Thus, the people, places, situations, and reflections interweaving in the narratives showed a consistent macro story of individuals belonging to two generations with a difference in age between the two cases of 13 years.

The intercultural interactions and encounters the participants experienced enormously impacted their learning and unlearning of practices common to the participants at different levels, including the linguistic and communicative realm. All the challenges and realizations at the social and more intimate level led the participants to develop intercultural awareness and engage in reflection that allowed them to grow within the new environment and community. First, the study participants faced challenges and frustrations as they tried to communicate at the international airport in the U.S. and during the first days of their arrival at camp. Despite most participants' confidence in their English before traveling, they realized that more than the academic English they had learned in their home country was needed to communicate effectively in everyday interactions in the U.S. The shock they experienced made them question their identity as language students and future teachers and find ways to improve their English. This fact suggested a more profound impact on their personal and professional identity construction as they grappled with the realities of language learning, usage, and adaptation in a new cultural context.

Second, the language difficulties were increased by the hostilities of the international airport as a cultural entity where sojourners had to navigate. The stress experienced at the airport unveiled the vulnerability and isolation that arose from being in a foreign environment without guidance or support. Negative experiences shaped the sojourners' perception of the U.S. and influenced their transition into camp life. Again, the participants used their frustrations to reevaluate their sense of self and place within the new cultural context. They knew they had to adapt their intercultural competencies to a more international citizen who knows the complexities of international trips.

Third, the sojourners discovered that they found individuals who offered guidance, assistance, and cultural insights that facilitated their adaptation to the camp environment or at least solved a temporary deadlock. It is self-evident that Americans and fellow camp staff members helped them bridge cultural differences and shape their new identities. Intercultural interactions with American citizens at the airport, streets, local places, and camps became opportunities for the sojourners to assess their identities and add new competencies to their intercultural awareness. Overall, it is evident that the contexts of intercultural encounters and interactions with different people facilitated the dynamic nature of identity construction in the long term.

Finally, as the sojourners assumed the role of camp counselors, adopting new responsibilities, roles, and behaviors within the camp community, their lives were transformed and changed manifestly. The participants moved from interactions with classmates and teachers back in their country to naturally occurring interactions with campers, staff, and other camp members in the U.S., which impacted their perceptions of themselves and their personal and professional identities.

4.3 AFTER the Short-Term Sojourn in a Summer Camp in the U.S.

The principal question in this section investigated the type of intercultural encounters and interactions the participants had after their short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S. A second inquiry complemented this question, asking about the learnings the participants gained due to these interactions. Thus, this sub-section presents an analysis comprising the experiences from the two cases analyzed (1999-2000 and 2010-2016) built up from the individual cases (Within-Case Analysis). The similarities identified during the Cross-Case Analysis justify the presentation of results in this *comparative analysis of group cases*. Themes and categories in the narratives were consistent across all participants.

When the sojourners participated in the summer camp program, they were LSTs, close to graduating and officially becoming ELTs. They traveled to the U.S. with high expectations to live experiences they had never had. Mainly, they were expectant to use the English they had learned in college (and previous courses) and to discover the cultures that gathered together in summer camps. Their professional identity as language teachers was under construction. At the time of departure to the U.S., they were naïve young people who thought their language teachers had shown what they needed to know about teaching and using the language. However, those individuals who traveled to sojourn abroad returned with great learnings and significant identity transformations. They got ready to interact and unveil the new world they had seen. It is not at all biased to say that at the end of their sojourn, their positive experiences in camp and the U.S. overshadowed their difficult times.

The categories *The new rock star shining around* and *Intercultural learnings: The architecture of professional identity* compose the narratives participants told about the way they saw themselves after they settled down in their home country after returning from the U.S.

4.3.1 The New Rock Star Shining Around

The new rock star shining around is a category that describes the participants as they returned to their hometown and interacted with acquaintances. It portrays prominent and influential figures who attracted attention and admiration in their homes and college. Their outstanding profiles in the modern languages program, like rock stars commanding attention on stage, implied that the participants received a positive social identity that enhanced their self-esteem identifying them with groups that hold high status, such as Americans. Simultaneously, the participants enhanced their social identity by portraying themselves as influential and admired individuals among their acquaintances. The participants adopted behaviors and attributes associated with being a "rock star" based on the admiration and attention they received from others, thereby reinforcing their perceived status.

As a consequence, the LSTs leveraged the social connections gained from the camp experience to enhance their social capital in their hometown. They gained access to opportunities as some of them accepted. **Combining the participants of the two group cases**, eight out of ten expressed that they were granted contracts to work as English instructors in the university's language center because of their participation in the summer camp. This new ELTs presented themselves as "rock stars" in the classes they taught, garnering admiration and attention from their students, enhancing their social status, and influencing their students.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986, 1991) theory, participants possessed cultural capital acquired during their camp experience, such as new skills, knowledge, or experiences, which they showcased upon their return. This cultural capital contributed to enhance their professional identity and the goodwill of the Department of Languages that claimed as its own their students' achievements.

The sojourners returned home with suitcases full of intercultural insights. They came back experiencing a whole range of feelings. They completed their job contract and fulfilled their duties successfully. For all the participants from both groups, the experience was positive. For some, however, it was more demanding and complex than they imagined before traveling abroad. Before returning, their tiredness pushed them to look for moments to rest and taste the flavors of the U.S. Consistent with their discourse, they spent a few days doing tourism and getting to know the U.S. landmarks they wanted to see. Those were the moments to experience life in the U.S., away from the summer camps.

Strong feelings harbored by participants accompanied their journey back home. So, returning to their cultural environment became an encounter that seemed strange to them. The participants said that they had arrived changed. So, to what extent were they changed (personally and professionally), and how did they reconfigure their professional practice and their identity as ELTs? Ultimately, the fact that the participants had changed and reconstructed their identities and constructed others made their daily objects and customs be seen with different eyes. It also made everyday things uncomfortable and annoying because they did not stop comparing them with the world they left in the U.S.

4.3.2 Getting Back Home and College Campus

Regarding their actual interactions, the participants were excited to meet parents, siblings, and relatives; it was a cause for rejoicing. The participants commented that meeting their parents and relatives, eating the homemade food that reflected their cultural heritage, and trying simple local things such as sodas and snacks were reasons to feel happy because they were back. They compared several elements of their home country and the U.S. Their interactions with parents and relatives focused on the good things they had learned and the wonders of their life abroad. The bad moments, challenges, and frustrations were masked. They recognized that the experience had been good enough for them to tell the positive.

On the other hand, returning to college classes presented challenges because the LSTs' lens through which they looked at their program had transformed their viewpoints of teaching, learning, and culture. On campus, they told their classmates and teachers about their experiences abroad.

Since the summer camp program was relatively new by 1999, its former participants were called to promote it and motivate college students to apply and tell stories about working at a summer camp and living a sojourn abroad. The participants commented that when they were considering the idea of participating in the summer camp program, they were fascinated by those who had traveled before them. The changes they had had in their personalities and language proficiency were noticeable.

After sojourning abroad, the study participants returned to motivate other students and show their identity transformation. Santiago confessed, "I came with that energy of having lived

something. I wanted to create the same, that little bubble of illusion for the people. I only told the cool things, the wonderful things, the things you liked" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2).

The impact they showed was so significant that their college students and some teachers looked at them as role models and examples for the newcomers. They were recognized as *the students who traveled to the U.S.* Santiago said, "When I returned to Popayán, the summer program was still more exclusive. So, I was the Rock star. I was the one who told stories. I was the one who sowed the seeds of hope to travel" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Emmanuel shared what he learned with school and college students. He confessed, "I came back much more fluent in English, more aware of my leadership abilities, and more confident in my own abilities. I knew that the experience had changed me. I came with a broader life perspective" (01/06/2021, interview 1, group 2). The camp experiences facilitated his personal growth and expanded his worldview. Therefore, the immersive experiences Emmanuel participated in fostered his linguistic, leadership, and personal development. In addition, Emmanuel's willingness to share his experiences and newfound skills with others demonstrated a sense of leadership. A commitment to continuous learning and personal development characterized his professional identity.

Subsequently, Mariana said that her role was "to motivate other people to live the summer camp experience because they were being trained and educated to become language teachers" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 1). From her view, the students pursuing degrees in modern languages had to go abroad. So, that was what she told her classmates. In doing so, she did not want to conflict with her teachers because she understood that the college classes and the camp experiences complemented each other. Mariana's role as a motivator suggested that she

viewed herself as a facilitator of transformative experiences for her peers. Additionally, her professional identity could be characterized as a language teacher who believes in the importance of experiential learning and holistic language education.

Isabella narrated that her return from the U.S. brought her an important recognition materialized in a contract to work at the university language center. She explained this:

My first work experience was in the translation unit [a university language center]. It was a great opportunity. I was given that contract because of the learning I had gained at the camp. There, I was able to improve my language level. I was always grateful for all that experience. (02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1)

Isabella's experience at the camp significantly enhanced her language skills, leading to a valuable opportunity in her professional life. Her recognition through a contract at the university language center underscores the direct impact of her camp training on her career development, highlighting the importance of immersive experiences in fostering language proficiency and professional growth.

Gabriela, in turn, brought two main reflections about language teaching after her first summer camp experience. On the one hand, she was sure that what teachers needed "was to get closer to the students for them to trust their teachers as human beings" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1). On the other hand, she pointed out that language teachers must show their knowledge, "no matter how simple or complex. Teachers must be able to appraise the magnitude of their responsibility when deciding to become teachers" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 1). Gabriela concluded that whether someone learns well or poorly depends on the teacher. The key is to be well prepared.

Emiliano emphasized some important issues. First, he commented that as a rock star who had been to the U.S., he used to tell the good and positive things about his experience; he highlighted the things that were different if both cultures were compared. He also talked about what he had learned. He pointed out that summer camp staff are "heroes because camp jobs are difficult for us. We are different from the typical immigrant who goes in search of other kinds of dreams or who goes to do different types of jobs. We have to pretend to be" (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2)

In addition, Emiliano reaffirmed that sojourners are ambassadors of their culture. He is convinced that summer camp sojourners deserve praise because "we end up doing [the camp job] well because we have the strength and the capacity to do it and finish it well and leave a good image" (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2).

In conclusion, the experiences shared by participants from both groups highlight a profound transformation upon returning home from summer camp. While both groups expressed excitement in reconnecting with family and sharing positive narratives about their time abroad, they also demonstrated a newfound perspective on teaching, culture, and personal development. Group 1 members, like Mariana and Isabella, embraced roles as motivators and role models, advocating for the importance of immersive experiences in language education. Meanwhile, Group 2 participants, including Santiago and Emiliano, took pride in their cultural ambassadorship and used their stories to inspire others. This journey enhanced their language skills and significantly contributed to their professional identity development. They became more confident and proactive as educators and cultural representatives, demonstrating the strength of their path to professional identity development. Together, these narratives illustrate a common thread: the participants gained valuable skills and insights and became advocates for the

transformative potential of cross-cultural experiences, thereby enriching their academic and professional communities.

4.3.3 Nothing Compares to Here and There

Mariangel's speech focused on the contrasts between the two cultures. She said that when she arrived in the U.S., she spoke of the good things about her country. Nevertheless, when she arrived in Colombia, she talked about the good things in the U.S. For example, what she first noticed when she arrived at the camp and interacted with the girls was the music because that was one of her passions. In her interactions when she returned to her country, she emphasized that she used to think that certain music and singers were for adults or young people but not for little elementary school girls. Then, Mariangel said, "So I always told the stories of the girls because those girls sang; they liked the same music that I liked when I was in college" (01/19/2021, interview 1, group 1).

She commented that she was confused about music and listeners in that sense. Mariangel reflected, "I would tell my friends the story that this little girl listens to everything we listen to. We think we are cool because we listen to this music, which is children's music over there" (01/19/2021, interview 1, group 1). However, she also talked about other differences related to food, stores, money exchange, highways, cars, and people's behavior. She assumed that her attitude was related to the culture shock she lived during two moments: one when Mariangel arrived in the U.S. and the other when she returned to Colombia. She said, "When one arrives in the U.S., one always tells what is better in one's country. It is always comparing what is better or worse. When one returns, it becomes the opposite; everything there was better" (01/19/2021, interview 1, group 1). Her cultural awareness shaped Mariangel's professional identity. Her

ability to bridge cultural differences between the two countries demonstrated her understanding of cultural relativism and her commitment to fostering intercultural understanding.

Antonella was the rock star for her students at school. Her stories motivated the kids a lot. She used to encourage them by showing herself to be an ordinary person like them. Then, Antonella narrated, "My experiences in the U.S. also attracted my students' attention. They would ask me: Oh, teacher, were you in the U.S.? What is it like? What did you do there? What are the children like there?" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2). At the same time, Antonella had grown and built a strong character to professionally and personally succeed. At moments, she has been branded a "weirdo." She acknowledged that even if people saw her as such, she had the ability to deal with difficult students, which was the result of her experience dealing with people with disabilities at camp. Antonella commented that when her colleagues [in her school] were in trouble and did not know how to control the students, they called her to help them. She expressed, "They call me telling me, hey Antonella, there I leave them, help me do some of those things that you use to do from your camp, from your stuff, that I don't know, the jumping jacks from your songs" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2). What gratified her is that the students liked her activities very much, and the teachers got a break. When that happened, she felt pretty enriched.

Finally, there emerged a common aspect among youngsters. Salomé wanted to shine by showing her attire brought from the U.S. She put it this way: "I felt I was three levels higher. I wanted to wear other kinds of clothes, other brands. I wanted a different style. I was different from the person who left in June" (02/02/2021, interview 1, group 2). Salomé interacted with her classmates and close friends since she wanted to be recognized and admired in that circle of social interactions. She made her classmates to notice her new clothes and accessories.

4.3.4 Interculturality: looking the outside, neglecting the inside

This subcategory emerged from the analysis of the survey data. It refers to how intercultural interactions often focus on external cultural differences while overlooking the importance of understanding one's cultural identity. This perspective aligns with the idea that true intercultural awareness requires recognizing and appreciating other cultures and a deep awareness of one's own cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions. This phenomenon was observed in LSTs' responses to a question in the initial survey. Including an item in the survey that allowed us to explore students' attitudes toward other cultural groups served to contrast students' perceptions of foreign and local cultural groups and, in this, inquire deeper into the impact of the sojourn experience.

The survey (see Appendix B) asked participants to rate their feelings towards Americans, British people, Argentineans, Mexicans, French, Afrocolombians, and Colombian Indigenous people on a scale of 1 to 5, focusing on empathy, tolerance, respect, flexibility, and openness to communication. This questionnaire was based on the works of Byram (2021), Hofstede (2001), and Deardorff (2006). The scale corresponds to the following frequency: 1 to 1.9 = Never, 2 to 2.9 = Rarely, 3 to 3.9 = Sometimes, 4 to 4.9 = Very Often, and 5 = Always. This scale reflects participants' overall feelings about the referenced groups.

The survey findings for Group 1 (see Table 4) indicated that participants rated their feelings of empathy, tolerance, respect, flexibility, and openness to communication towards Americans as 'Very Often,' with a mean score of 4.4. Except for flexibility, which was rated as 'Sometimes,' participants rated their feelings of empathy, tolerance, respect, and openness to communication towards Mexicans as 'Very Often,' with a mean score of 4.2. Similarly, except

for tolerance, which was rated as 'Sometimes,' participants rated their feelings of empathy, respect, flexibility, and openness to communication towards French people as 'very often,' with a mean score of 4.0.

Contrary to these constant feelings towards Americans, Mexicans, and French people, the survey findings for Group 1 (see Table 4) indicated that participants rated their feelings of respect, flexibility, and openness to communication towards British and Afrocolombians as 'sometimes,' with a mean score of 3.0, for both social groups. Feelings of empathy and tolerance were rated as 'rarely.' Participants rated their empathy, tolerance, respect, flexibility, and openness to communication towards Argentineans and Colombian Indigenous People as 'rarely,' with a mean score of 3.0.

Table 4

Group 1 participants' feelings about social groups

Social group	Empathy	Tolerance	Respect	Flexibility	Open*	Mean
Americans	4,2	4,2	4,8	4,4	4,4	4,4
British	2,4	2,6	3,8	3,4	3,0	3,0
Argentineans	3,0	2,8	4,0	1,8	2,6	2,8
Mexicans	4,4	4,4	4,8	3,6	4,0	4,2
French	4,2	3,4	4,4	4,2	4,0	4,0
Afrocolombian	2,0	2,4	3,8	3,6	3,0	3,0
CIP**	1,6	1,6	2,8	2,6	1,8	2,1
Mean	3,1	3,1	4,1	3,4	3,3	

**Open to Communication; **Colombian Indigenous People*

The survey findings suggest that Group 1 participants had very positive feelings toward Americans, Mexicans, and the French. These outcomes imply that they presumably understood and empathized with these groups' thoughts and feelings, embraced and resolved unfamiliar challenges, valued diverse customs and practices, adapted to avoid conflicts, and effectively communicated across cultural boundaries to create an inclusive and harmonious environment during intercultural interactions. The survey findings showed that Group 1 participants expressed lower levels (varying degrees) of intercultural competence towards Argentineans and Colombian Indigenous people. This indicates a hierarchy in their social attitudes, with Americans, Mexicans, and French at the top and Colombian Indigenous people at the bottom. (See Byram, 2021; Hofstede, 2001; Deardorff, 2006).

The survey findings for Group 2 (see Table 5) indicated that participants rated their feelings of tolerance, respect, flexibility, and openness to communication towards Americans and British as 'very often,' with a mean score of 4.2 and 4.0, respectively. Flexibility, however, was rated as 'Sometimes.' With varying levels of empathy, tolerance, respect, flexibility, and openness to communication, participants rated their feelings towards Argentineans, Mexicans, French, Afrocolombians, and Colombian Indigenous people as 'sometimes,' with a mean score of 3.5, 3.8, 3.2, 3.4, and 3.4., respectively.

Table 5

Group 2 participants' feelings about social groups

Social group	Empathy	Tolerance	Respect	Flexibility	Open*	Mean
Americans	3,8	4,2	4,2	4,2	4,6	4,2
British	3,0	4,0	4,4	4,0	4,4	4,0

Argentineans	3,4	3,6	4,0	2,4	4,2	3,5
Mexicans	3,8	3,6	3,8	3,4	4,2	3,8
French	3,0	3,2	3,4	2,6	3,8	3,2
Afrocolombian	3,2	3,0	4,0	3,2	3,4	3,4
CIP**	2,6	3,2	4,0	3,6	3,6	3,4
Mean	3,3	3,5	4,0	3,3	4,0	

**Open to Communication; **Colombian Indigenous People*

The findings indicate that Group 2 participants expressed positive feelings towards Americans and British people. Throughout their ratings of these social groups, Group 2 participants demonstrated an ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings, effectively address and adapt to unfamiliar challenges, appreciate diverse customs, and communicate across cultural boundaries to foster inclusivity and harmony. In contrast, their feelings towards Argentineans, Mexicans, French, Afrocolombians, and Colombian Indigenous people were less favorable or sympathetic.

Table 6

Comparison between Groups 1 and 2's feelings about social groups

Social group	Mean Group 1	Mean Group 2
Americans	4,4	4,2
British	3,0	4,0
Argentineans	2,8	3,5
Mexicans	4,2	3,8
French	4,0	3,2

Afrocolombian	3,0	3,4
CIP*	2,1	3,4

**Colombian Indigenous People*

When comparing Groups 1 and 2 (see Table 6), the survey findings indicated that both groups showed similar feelings towards Americans, with Group 1 scoring a mean of 4.4 and Group 2 scoring 4.2. When comparing the attitudes of Groups 1 and 2 towards Afro-Colombians, the survey findings indicated that Group 1 reported a mean score of 3.0. At the same time, Group 2 had a mean score of 3.4. In contrast, regarding attitudes towards Colombian Indigenous people, Group 1's mean score was 2.1, compared to Group 2's mean score of 3.4.

In analyzing Group 1's feelings towards Afro-Colombians and Colombian Indigenous people, it is insightful to reference their attitudes towards Americans. Thus, Group 1 reported a mean score of 4.4 for Americans, reflecting a strong positive sentiment. However, when it comes to Afro-Colombians, their mean score dropped to 3.0, indicating a notable decrease in positive feelings. This suggests that while Group 1 holds Americans in high regard, they may have less familiarity or empathy towards Afro-Colombians, which could reflect societal biases or limited exposure to Afro-Colombian culture. In stark contrast, Group 1's feelings towards Colombian Indigenous people were even lower, with a mean score of 2.1. This significant gap emphasizes that their positive sentiments towards Americans are not mirrored in their perceptions of Indigenous communities. The much lower score for Colombian Indigenous people may point to a lack of understanding or engagement with Indigenous cultures.

Overall, the data illustrated that Group 1 perceives Americans more favorably than both Afro-Colombians and Colombian Indigenous people. The discrepancies in these scores indicate a

potential hierarchy of cultural appreciation, where familiarity and societal narratives may influence their feelings towards different social groups.

When examining Group 2's feelings towards Afro-Colombians and Colombian Indigenous people, considering their sentiments towards Americans as a baseline, the following was found. Group 2 reported a mean score of 4.2 regarding Americans, indicating a positive attitude. In comparison, their feelings towards Afro-Colombians and Colombian Indigenous people were less favorable, with a mean score of 3.4 for both social groups. This suggests that while Group 2 holds Americans in high regard, they also express a relatively positive sentiment towards Afro-Colombians and Colombian Indigenous people, reflecting a moderate level of empathy and appreciation for these communities.

Overall, while Group 2 exhibits favorable sentiments towards both Afro-Colombians and Colombian Indigenous people, their feelings towards Americans remain higher. This suggests a nuanced relationship where Group 2 recognizes and appreciates Afro-Colombians to a degree similar to their feelings towards Indigenous people but still perceives Americans more positively, highlighting the influence of societal narratives and personal experiences on their perceptions of different cultural groups.

To conclude, the attitudes exhibited by Groups 1 and 2 revealed contrasting perspectives of Anglo-Euro-centered versus Latin Americanism. Group 1's sentiments reflected a more pronounced Anglo-Euro-centered view, as demonstrated by their significantly higher appreciation for Americans than Afro-Colombians and Colombian Indigenous people. This hierarchy suggests an ingrained bias towards Western ideals and cultures, which may stem from traditional narratives prioritizing Anglo-European influences. The participants' experiences at summer camp did not sufficiently challenge these biases, leading to a limited understanding and

appreciation of their diverse cultural landscape. This narrow understanding of interculturality, limited to a transnational view, was evident during the interviews, where participants mostly thought of interculturality as emerging from interacting with people from other countries.

In contrast, Group 2 appears less Anglo-Euro-centered, reflecting a growing awareness of and appreciation for diversity. This shift can be attributed to broader historical moments in Colombia and the world that have been emphasizing the importance of multiculturalism and inclusion. Group 2's more balanced feelings towards Afro-Colombians and Indigenous people suggest they are more open to recognizing and valuing different cultural identities. Their experiences may have been shaped by educational reforms and social movements in the last decade in Colombia that advocate for diversity, fostering a mindset that appreciates rather than diminishes local cultural groups such as indigenous communities, LGBTQBTQ+, and others.

Despite these differences, the sojourning experience for both groups did not effectively enhance their local intercultural attitudes or awareness. This lack of development can be linked to the colonial mindset that is ingrained in Colombian higher education system and that continues to influence students' perceptions (Álvarez Valencia & Valencia, 2023). The prevailing belief that Western cultures hold a superior position often overshadows the richness of local identities (Mignolo, 2012). As a result, even those who return from immersive experiences abroad may find themselves reinforcing existing biases rather than dismantling them.

The failure to cultivate a deeper understanding of local cultures during their time abroad illustrates how deeply rooted colonial narratives persist in shaping attitudes. This reflects a broader educational challenge where lingering perceptions of cultural hierarchy undermine the potential for transformative intercultural experiences. Moving forward, it is crucial for academic

programs to intentionally address these biases, fostering a more inclusive and equitable understanding of cultural diversity that genuinely values all local and global identities.

4.4 STORIES of Intercultural Artifacts

This section presents insights about the research question: What did artifacts collected during the participants' short-term sojourn reveal about their personal and intercultural development? The analysis is divided into two parts: the first emphasizes the students' interpersonal growth, while the second explores how these artifacts reflect their intercultural development. Initially, the rationale for collecting these artifacts is discussed. Although the thesis is structured around the stages of before, during, and after the sojourn, I chose to separate the section on artifacts. This decision stems from the fact that while most artifacts were acquired during the sojourn, their impact extended beyond that period, with lasting effects and evolving meanings after the participants returned home. Therefore, the significance of these objects transcends their original context, offering continued opportunities for reflection and contributing to the participants' ongoing identity and intercultural growth.

Year after year, college students travel abroad to work at summer camps, challenging themselves as they engage in intercultural interactions and encounters and explore new worlds. It is commonplace for people who travel abroad to gather or buy objects as souvenirs for relatives and friends or to keep for themselves. When sojourners work at a summer camp, they generally collect artifacts to keep as connections to their camp or as a memory of the time spent abroad. People create and collect artifacts, and when these objects become personal, they hold stories that reflect the history of their lives.

Artifacts are objects, such as tools, souvenirs, and photos, crafted or modified by human craft. They serve as sources for understanding the history of humanity. As Lubar and Kendrick

(2000) asserted, "Our perceptions of objects, and the meanings we derive from them, are shaped by the context in which they are shown" (para. 3). Linking the past with the present through artifacts is essential for human beings. The context and moment when artifacts are brought into the present can determine new interpretations and meanings.

As stated, ten ELTs participated in this study. Each submitted a narrative about an artifact they brought from the summer camp to their country. I provided participants with specific questions to structure their stories and ensure that all the narratives included the same relevant aspects for the study. While some participants expressed their stories in writing, others preferred to record their narratives orally. The artifacts included daily-use containers, decorative items, handmade crafts, personal technology devices, staff images, and distinctive garments from their summer camps. The items' nature determined the materials of the artifacts. They included cotton-polyester blend, feathers, metal, plastic, pottery, thread, wool, and wood. The origins of the artifacts were diverse. They included personal purchases, handmade items, clothing provided by camps, gifts from staff members, and items acquired by the participant from the camp or through purchases. (See Table 2).

The participants' motivations for keeping and taking the artifacts home were the meanings assigned to preserve their experiences at camp and the practical uses they found for the items. The reasons were categorized into four groups: emotional/sentimental, functional/utility, aesthetic/decorative, and personal achievement. The emotional/sentimental category reflected individuals' personal and subjective attachment to certain artifacts, turning them into cherished mementos that held significance beyond their physical utility or decorative aspects. For example, Gabriela expressed that her artifact (a Walkman) brought her joy on an emotional and sentimental level. She confessed, "I just loved it from the first moment I saw it and held it in my

hands. I thought it was perfect for my needs. The best way to enjoy my time while working" (02/21/2021, written narrative, group 1). In a similar vein, Mariana mentioned that her camp used to give a sweater to all the counselors. She recalled that "It has been with me for 22 years. Everywhere I go, it comes with me. It brings back good memories and makes me happy!" (03/12/2021, oral narrative, group 1).

The *functional/utility* category refers to artifacts that served a practical purpose or had a utilitarian function in the participants' daily lives. Unlike purely decorative or sentimental artifacts, items in the functional/utility category were selected or used based on their practical usefulness. In this regard, Emiliano said,

Well, at first, I grabbed it [a mug], thinking it was a cool thing, and now it's basically the only physical memory I've got from that camp. So, I still keep it, and yeah, it's hanging out in my kitchen as part of my mug collection, but I actually use it, not just for show. (01/30/2021, oral narrative, group 2)

The following is a story about an artifact self-made by Santiago: a dreamcatcher. When Santiago thinks about his camp, his self-made dreamcatcher comes to his mind to remind him of his camp responsibilities. As soon as he woke up at camp, the dreamcatcher was there to add an element of sophistication to his cabin and remind him that it was time to work, reinforcing the purpose of his presence there. Santiago mentioned that "The most enduring memory I have from camp is the sense of responsibility, especially the need to wake up early, 'cause, you know, if we weren't on time, there would be no breakfast for my campers" (01/28/2021, oral narrative, group 2).

At times, participants may share the personal items they receive at camp with others. Family members and camp staff, for instance, can borrow the artifacts. At other times, the

participants keep the items exclusively for themselves. Emiliano stated the following: "With whom do I use it? Well, I live with my mother. Owning the mug is not a big deal. It is just another mug among the others in the cupboard" (01/30/2021, oral narrative). Salomé also shared her perspective: "The souvenir was exclusively mine, and when I no longer wanted it, my mom took it" (03/12/2021, written narrative, group 2).

In contrast, Antonella (02/19/2021, oral narrative, group 2) described her artifact as something no one ever asks to borrow. However, it has become an artifact that captures visitors' attention when they visit her home. If they do not notice the portrait, she shows it to her friends and tells them about her experiences at camp in the U.S. In a different course, Gabriela demonstrated her generosity and selflessness by sharing her artifact with those who eventually needed it. She commented,

I used to share it with María [named changed], a girl from [A European country]. She didn't go out on the first day off; instead, she stayed in the camp because she was sick.

She enjoyed listening to music before going to bed (02/21/2021, written narrative, group 1).

In other cases, when camp staff have the opportunity to handcraft artifacts, they recognized a purpose for their creations. Such was the case with the item belonging to Santiago, who crafted it to give it for free. He expressed, "I don't have it because I gave it away. It just became a gift. Almost when I made it, I thought I would give it away. But well, that's kind of the backstory since I created it" (01/28/2021, oral narrative, group 2). It can be inferred that Santiago prioritized giving the handmade artifact over keeping it for himself. The intention to give away the artifact was present in the creation process, indicating a selfless and generous approach.

Presumably, for Santiago, the artifact's significance lay more in giving and the connections it fostered than in keeping it for personal possession.

Exploring intercultural artifacts revealed profound connections among participants who were engaged in short-term sojourns at U.S. summer camps. The artifacts are tangible links to the rich tapestry of experiences encountered during their camp activities. The diverse motivations for keeping and sharing these artifacts underscored the multifaceted nature of their impact, influencing participants' personal lives, identities, and even their relationships with others. The stories of intercultural artifacts contributed to understanding how artifacts became conduits for personal and professional growth, shedding light on the intricate interplay between tangible objects and the intangible facets of individuals' personal and intercultural development in cultural exchanges. The following lines describe the categories established about the participants' personal and intercultural developments.

4.4.1 Artifacts as Milestones: Uncovering Personal Development Narratives

The category *Artifacts as Milestones: Uncovering Personal Development Narratives* presents a rich tapestry of individual growth and achievements reflected in artifacts collected during the participants' experiences at summer camps. These artifacts served as tangible milestones, marking pivotal moments in the personal development of camp staff. These artifacts symbolized personal accomplishments and the transformative narratives woven into individuals' self-development journeys. The notion of artifacts as milestones aligns with the idea that tangible objects, imbued with personal significance, become markers of progress and self-discovery (Henkel, 2014). This category explores how artifacts represented physical items and meaningful steps in the participants' transformative narratives, shaping their identities and contributing to a

broader understanding of personal development within the unique context of summer camp experiences.

4.4.1.1 Personal Growth and Achievements: Transformative Journeys

Within the summer camp context, individuals attribute meanings to acquired artifacts, constructing narratives that recount the circumstances of acquisition and the characteristics imbued upon them. Over time, these meanings transform, contingent upon evolving circumstances and experiences. The artifacts' significance in this framework symbolizes personal growth and achievements, encapsulating individuals' development and cheerful mindsets. Personal growth and achievements synthesize individuals' development, accomplishments, and positive mindsets, closely intertwined with the participants' identities, reflecting their internal and external transformative journeys.

The construct of personal growth and achievements encompasses acceptance and inclusion, highlighting the importance of embracing oneself and others and promoting personal growth through understanding and respect. Luciana observed that at the end of the camp season, "Counselors and fellow workers typically showered you with presents and souvenirs, making you feel finally accepted and included in some way" (02/11/2021, written narrative, group 1). In this context, the souvenirs were tangible demonstrations of being embraced and welcomed into the camp community, creating a sense of belonging and acknowledgment. When people are accepted and included, they become members (no matter if they are temporal members) of the community and adopt new identities that can be associated with their professional or personal lives.

Similarly, Emmanuel commented, "I hope I can keep the mask as an artifact that reminds me of the opportunities I was given and how grateful I am for the connections I made and the

experiences I had" (03/23/2021, written narrative, group 2). In this instance, the artifact served as a tangible symbol, embodying gratitude for significant experiences. It reflected a sentimental attachment to the item, connecting it with personal growth and appreciation for the journey undertaken.

The personal growth and achievements theme also included the concept of gained appreciation, which signified a deeper understanding and acknowledgment of various aspects of life, leading to a more profound sense of gratitude and contentment. For example, Luciana shared that she cherished the person who gave her the artifact. She emphasized that even though she could not recall the gift-giver, she easily attributed meaning to the artifact within the given context. She explained, "She had the sensitivity to create this photo album for me. Although it was initially challenging to make friends at camp, people were invariably kind during the farewell parties. Surprisingly, you would discover that they liked you" (02/11/2021, written narrative, group 1). Thus, the participant underscored the transformative and inclusive nature of the camp experience and how it, in many cases, strengthened their identities.

Santiago expressed that the construction of his artifact signified a notable achievement. He stated, "The moment I did it and acquired it, the second I finished it, it became an achievement" (01/28/2021, oral narrative, group 2). He would talk to himself, recognizing the impressiveness of his achievement. Santiago thought it was "interesting that I managed to do this." His perspective underscores the active pursuit of goals and the fulfillment of personal objectives. Similarly, Antonella emphasized the importance of personal effort and achievement, highlighting a feeling of fulfillment stemming from one's pursuits. Antonella said,

It is like the memory and the affection I had for those people. It is one of those triumphs that one usually achieves in life. It has been one of my most significant accomplishments

to have been there, despite the many challenges I went through to be in that place at that moment. And yes, it has always been significant for my life and professional journey (02/19/2021, oral narrative, group 2).

Likewise, Gabriela emphasized her achievements, conveying a sense of fulfillment derived from her actions: "It was somewhat gratifying to realize that I had acquired the Walkman through my own efforts. For me, it signified the prospect of possessing something personally meaningful, a means to engage with music" (02/21/2021, written narrative, group 1). In her statement, the participant highlighted the personal significance of the CD player, emphasizing the connection between her efforts and the meaningful outcome, ultimately contributing to her satisfaction. In short, Gabriela referred to the achievement of economic independence and the possibility of buying something on her own. Together, these narratives highlighted the common theme of personal achievement and satisfaction from realizing one's goals.

4.4.1.2 Identity Symbols: Markers of Belonging

In a similar line of thought, individuals' unique and exclusive possession of items often involves decorative elements that contribute to the sense of exclusiveness. This idea exemplifies how camp staff assign personal meaning to their belongings, highlighting the importance of ownership and the exclusive nature of certain items within the camp community. A profound idea that can be derived is the potential for these items to serve as tangible markers of personal identity and inclusion within the camp community. These artifacts' exclusive ownership and decorative features may represent individual preferences and contribute to a common visual language that promotes a sense of community and camaraderie among camp staff.

The concept of identity is intricately woven into the possessions and values of the participants. As identity markers, personal artifacts transcend mere ownership; they denote the

participants' experiences, connections, and self-expression within the camp community. The formation of identity through personal artifacts is a dynamic process influenced by the camp environment. *Inferring from Marcia's (1966) postulates, it could be stated* that the summer camp setting can be seen as a context that enables individuals to explore and solidify their identities. Personal artifacts, as tangible manifestations of one's preferences and experiences, serve as external expressions of self-identity within this context.

4.4.1.3 Beyond Possession of Artifacts

The notion of identity can be associated with personal narratives. As individuals share stories about their artifacts, they actively construct and convey a narrative of their identity. The artifacts serve as storytelling devices, enabling camp staff to communicate their distinctive qualities, interests, and connections to the camp community. The concept of identity, therefore, extends beyond the physical possession of artifacts. It involves the multifaceted interplay of personal expression, shared experiences, and the communal narrative within the summer camp setting.

Isabella mentioned, "I think it's special too, because when my keys get lost, everyone knows those are my keys [if they find them], and they return them to me, at least the people who are around" (02/12/2021, oral narrative, group 1). Beyond its practical use, the keychain became a token of the participant's role at home. The fact that her family members recognize and return the keys reflects a shared understanding and respect for the artifact's significance to the owner. In this way, the keychain has practical value and serves as a social identifier.

Salomé commented: "When I first purchased and wore the sweater, I felt different. It wasn't something you could find in any store; it was exclusive to those who belonged to the camp" (03/12/2021, written narrative, group 2). Salomé suggested that wearing the camp sweater

went beyond mere clothing—it signified a sense of belonging and exclusivity within the camp community, contributing to a unique and distinct identity tied to the shared experience of being part of the camp.

The connection between Isabella's and Salomé's narratives lay in the idea that personal artifacts, such as a keychain or a camp sweater, transcended mere possessions—they served as symbols of identity and belonging that extended beyond the camp community. Both artifacts carried unique significance, fostering a sense of recognition and exclusivity among camp members and, eventually, other people who did not have any link to the camp. These artifacts served practical functions and contributed to a shared narrative and a sense of being part of something special within the camp environment. Indeed, they represented those identities constructed during the summer camp.

4.4.1.4 Language Development

Building upon this, when the participants worked at a summer camp, they were LSTs. Their identities as LSTs were under constant construction and objects of attention during their stay at camp. Thus, some of the artifacts were motivators of stories related to language learning. For Antonella, interacting with staff was an opportunity to make new friends and improve her language. She told this about her artifact (a portrait):

Well, around that portrait, there are many stories. Every time I look at it, as I mentioned earlier, each person or counselor evokes memories of every moment and experience I shared with them. There are some, for instance, girls from Scotland. The Scottish accent can be challenging to understand because of its strength. It was one of the first connections I formed. I remember asking them to speak slowly because I had difficulty understanding. (...) There were moments when I had to ask them to repeat or clarify,

saying, "Can you repeat that, please? I didn't quite understand, so sorry." It was a humorous experience; they taught me a great deal through these interactions (02/19/2021, oral narrative, group 2).

Antonella gained linguistic insights through the humorous challenges of understanding the Scottish accent. She experienced the transformative nature of communication, showcasing the profound learning could emerge from moments of cultural exchange and shared laughter. Antonella also reflected that she discovered that communication went beyond verbal expression to include aspects such as body language. She was able to connect with her workmates despite the challenges.

Gabriela recalled that her artifact evoked fond memories of when she endeavored to learn the lyrics of songs that she enjoyed listening to and singing.

During my work, my focus was not solely on the tasks at hand but on the potential gains from my efforts and the broader experience of being away from home, both personally and professionally. This object holds significant meaning for me, reminding me of my dedication and determination to enhance myself and capitalize on opportunities presented in the American environment. It symbolizes my earnest efforts to improve my English skills in an environment where exposure to Spanish could have been much higher (02/21/2021, written narrative, group 1).

Gabriela's narrative implied that her dedication to personal and professional growth during her time abroad was encapsulated in the meaningful object, emphasizing her value on the broader experience of self-improvement and cultural adaptation in the American environment.

4.4.2 Narratives of Personal and Professional Transformation: Concluding Reflection

The narratives woven through the artifacts collected during participants' summer camp experiences offered profound insights into the interconnected realms of personal and professional development. These tangible milestones became symbols of identity, belonging, and accomplishment, extending beyond their physical manifestations. The stories shared by the participants revealed a nuanced tapestry of emotions, challenges, and transformative journeys, reflecting the intricate process of self-discovery within the camp community. Personal growth and achievements emerged as a central theme, intricately linked with acceptance, inclusion, and gained appreciation. The artifacts served as markers of progress and vessels of shared narratives, fostering a sense of recognition and exclusivity among camp members. As individuals constructed their identities through these objects, the camp environment became a dynamic context for exploring, solidifying, and expressing one's sense of self. This category unveiled the rich and diverse landscape of personal and professional transformations that unfolded within the unique context of summer camp experiences, emphasizing the lasting impact of tangible artifacts in shaping the participants' understanding of themselves and their roles within the camp community.

4.4.3 Artifacts: Revealing Intercultural Connections

The category *Artifacts: revealing intercultural connections* scrutinizes personal items as mirrors, reflecting individuals' comprehension, appreciation, and engagement with diverse cultures within the summer camp milieu. The narratives provided by participants underscored cultural empathy and international awareness, showcasing a profound connection to and understanding of varied cultural perspectives. Delving into the tangible manifestations of cultural interactions and connections fostered by these keepsakes, this category explores how artifacts

carry cultural significance and serve as conduits for understanding the interplay between diverse cultural backgrounds within the camp context. The items collected by participants portrayed artifacts as meaningful remnants that transcended the temporal confines of the summer camp, contributing to a broader understanding of the intercultural dynamics at play within the camp community.

In this context, Pierre Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital provided a theoretical underpinning to the narratives shared by participants in this study. As Bourdieu (1986) articulated, material possessions accrued within specific contexts are imbued with symbolic significance, playing a crucial role in shaping social identities. Furthermore, acquiring these items is not merely a personal endeavor; instead, it involves an unconscious process of establishing connections with others, forming a collective identity, and fostering affiliations with various social groups.

4.4.4 Linking Possessions to Cultural Backgrounds

One central idea that emerged from the participants' narratives rooted in the connection of artifacts with their intercultural development is that of *Cultural Connections*. It refers to how the participants' possessions are linked to their cultural background, heritage, and new societal context. Personal artifacts often carry cultural significance that mirrors their owners' values, traditions, and identities. It suggests examining how personal items reflect an individual's comprehension, appreciation, and engagement with diverse cultures. It consists of two components: *cultural empathy* and *international awareness*.

Cultural empathy involves the participants' understanding of their own and other cultures' feelings, perspectives, and experiences. The significance attributed to the artifacts demonstrated a solid emotional connection to their cultural contexts within the camp. The artifacts symbolized

a deliberate effort to understand and embrace the cultural diversity surrounding them. On the other hand, the *international awareness* suggested how participants attributed a cross-cultural influence to the artifacts. They recognized the influence of American culture alongside their cultural backgrounds or geographical locations. Their travels were crucial in shaping participants' decisions about acquiring certain items and not others.

Gabriela expressed, "This journey has instilled in me an appreciation for understanding and respecting diverse cultures without passing judgment. Rather, it has fostered a readiness to make a positive impact in the lives of others when the opportunity arises" (02/21/2021, written narrative, group 1). Gabriela's chosen artifact (Walkman) served as an emblem of the transformative personal journey she experienced. It symbolized a series of impactful experiences that significantly shaped her perspective on other cultures. The profound significance embedded in Gabriela's narrative lay in the evolution of her attitudes toward cultural diversity. Her increased appreciation for diverse cultures suggested a genuine commitment to understanding and respecting the nuances and richness that different cultures bring to the collective human experience. Gabriela suggested a personal transformation characterized by heightened awareness, empathy, and proactive dedication to positively impacting the lives of others.

In turn, Salomé mentioned that "whenever I see the picture in which I am wearing [the sweater], I vividly recall the day I took it and the emotions I experienced; I felt very "international" (03/12/2021, written narrative, group 2). Salomé expressed that the artifact served as a powerful trigger for remembering the moment she wore the sweater and the emotions she cultures.

4.4.5 Cultural Roots: Exploring Foundational Elements

Another idea from the narratives is a celebrated camp experience that focuses on exploring and understanding the aspects of camp life that participants commemorate. The category *Cultural roots: Exploring foundational elements* delved into the positive and memorable aspects of the camp experience that have become personal stories. Instances marked by joy, achievement, camaraderie, and distinct traditions contributed to the participants' holistic positive perception of their engagement in summer camp activities. Antonella recalled a memorable moment from her camp. It reveals the responsibilities of being in charge of campers and how easily simple carelessness can escalate into a serious problem. She shared the following story:

During the initial week, we were tasked with looking after the campers. We headed to a lake, and extra caution was essential as we were dealing with individuals with special needs, including Down syndrome, autism, and various disabilities. Among them was a guy in a wheelchair, and we were supposed to secure it with something, like a rock, to prevent it from moving. Unfortunately, my friend Tiago from Brazil overlooked this crucial step. The little guy with Down syndrome took matters into his own hands and started maneuvering the wheelchair down a slope. The wheelchair gained momentum, and the guy ended up taking a plunge into the lake. Picture this: I'm gazing at the lake, witnessing the wheels churning in the water, and I'm like, "What on earth is happening?" I sprinted towards the lake without a clear memory of my initial reaction. I ended up diving while feeling a mix of amusement and concern for the camper, who seemed to be enjoying an unintended water escapade. After a bit of chaos, my fellow counselor and I

relocated the soggy camper to a safer spot. It was undeniably funny yet simultaneously quite impressive (02/19/2021, oral narrative, group 2).

The narrative suggests that the incident at the lake not only stressed the challenges faced by the camper in a wheelchair but also underlined the complexities and unexpected nature of the counselor's responsibilities in managing diverse situations. Working at a summer camp requires adaptability, quick thinking, and the ability to navigate unforeseen circumstances, adding layers of complexity to the camp counselor's role beyond routine expectations. It was also an opportunity for Antonella to experience diversity beyond ethnic or cultural differences; it signified an understanding of interacting with youngsters with different functional diversities.

The cultural roots suggested by the participants' narratives delve into the foundational elements and origins of a particular culture or cultural phenomenon. It explores the historical, social, and traditional underpinnings that shape and define a culture's identity. This concept is founded on customs, beliefs, and cultural practices that prompt participants to compare their cultural practices with those encountered at camp. Understanding cultural roots is crucial for appreciating human societies' richness and diversity and gaining insights into how cultural heritage continues to shape our world today, not to mention the value assigned to the artifacts. Emiliano recalled the story that invited him to reflect on the customs of his country. He detailed,

In that camp, I first tasted a different coffee than the one I tasted in Colombia, and it tasted, I don't know, different. There, they explained to me a little about how the coffee arrived. I also find this story of coffee interesting because the recommendations supervisors always gave in that camp were that the campers could not drink coffee. So, these glasses and the coffee were located in a different area, and only the counselors or the camp staff could access them (01/30/2021, oral narrative).

Emiliano's experience at the camp transcended the simple act of trying a different coffee; it unveiled a cultural divergence where the beverage became a symbol of separation, with exclusive access granted only to the camp staff. This narrative hinted at a nuanced social structure within the camp, shaping the camper-counselor dynamic and illustrating how seemingly ordinary elements, like a cup of coffee, could serve as gatekeepers to a unique and restricted experience. This contrasted with what happens in Colombia, where in several regions, coffee drinking is part of the daily experience of members of a family, including the youngest ones. Emiliano's narrative confirmed the finding in the after stage of the sojourn that was a constant for participants to compare both cultures, assigning values depending on where they were.

From this cultural root perspective, the artifacts collected by participants at summer camps served as catalysts, activating and encapsulating meaningful memories of places, people, and moments. This conceptualization aligns with research that emphasizes the role of artifacts in triggering memories and the influence of intercultural interactions on memory formation. Cultural memory studies explore how artifacts, along with collective experiences and interactions, help build and activate memories (Erll & Nünning, 2010), which is precisely the academic challenge for the participants of this study. In this sense, artifacts, as tangible representations of experiences, serve as memory triggers, evoking a sense of nostalgia and connection to specific moments within the camp environment. Research by Henkel (2014) on the "museum effect" suggested that objects can act as cues for memory recall, enhancing the retrieval of associated information. In the context of a summer camp, the artifacts collected by participants become mnemonic devices, triggering vivid recollections of the diverse cultural interactions and experiences shared.

Moreover, studies on intercultural interactions, emphasized the significant influence of cross-cultural engagement on memory and cognition (See, for example, Vescio et al., 2010). The artifacts, imbued with cultural significance, represent individual memories and contribute to a collective memory shared among camp participants. This concept aligns with the idea of "transactive memory systems," proposed by Wegner (1987), in which groups collectively encode, store, and retrieve information, fostering a shared understanding of their intercultural experiences. Emiliano narrated this:

What moments and places does it bring back to me? Well, the sharing. That takes me back to the enjoyable moments at the camp because those were the human moments—the times spent sharing with people and getting to know their stories. Even though we had some moments with the bosses, this mug always transports me to nighttime, when we finished work and had free time. It brings back memories of the long walks we had to take to get there and be able to share. We used to take those long walks because this camp was huge. We didn't mind the long walks because the reward was the happiness and excitement of reaching there to share. It reminds me of the wonderful people. I mean, that's what I find cool about this memory. It recalls my workmates, the other Counselors, and our shared moments. [It takes me back to] learning the language too—the first conversations that were so difficult to understand, the complicated ones (01/30/2021, oral narrative).

As discussed, this narrative suggests that the artifact evoked positive memories of Emiliano's experience at camp and symbolized the sharing of moments during nighttime activities. The participant's long walks suggest the physical and metaphorical journey he underwent to reach the shared space, emphasizing the value placed on intercultural encounters

and the relationships formed with workmates. The challenges of learning a new language were also greatly valued. Emiliano's reflections conveyed a deep sense of attachment and fondness for the memories associated with the mug and the moments it symbolizes. Overall, the participants' narratives provided collective memories demonstrating how they acted as vessels for cultural immersion and the shared essence of the camp experience.

In conclusion, narratives about artifacts sometimes reflected personal and intercultural developments. In those cases, the stories associated with the artifacts were set in camp activities and showed moments of intercultural encounters that impacted participants (principally international staff). At the same time, they led participants to build new identities and develop professional and personal constructs. In essence, the artifacts collected at a summer camp served as powerful triggers for significant memories, intertwining personal recollections with the broader narrative of intercultural interactions and shared moments. This contributes to a rich and enduring tapestry of camp experiences.

4.5 CONTRIBUTIONS of Intercultural Interactions and Encounters on the Professional Identity Development

This section answers the fourth research question: How did intercultural interactions and encounters at a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S. contribute to the participants' professional identity development? The responses are presented in categories that emerged from the data analysis, reflecting changes in the participants' identities at their personal and professional levels. When the participants mentioned *the experience* or *the program*, they explicitly referred to the sojourn abroad as a whole, including but not limited to the intercultural interactions and encounters they lived. During the interviews, the participants acknowledged that the experience transformed them significantly. They referred to the transformation experienced

at different levels, how they perceived themselves as they returned to their country, and their everyday routines of studies, work, and social interactions.

It has been previously explained that this is a multiple-case study design. Each participant's narrative was examined (*Within-Case Analysis*), and subsequently, they were categorized into their respective groups (1999-2000 or 2010-2016), carrying out the *Cross-Case Analysis*. After that, the cross-case analysis insights were the basis for building the *comparative analysis of group cases* to find emerging patterns across the two group cases.

The fact that the participants could complete the program meant that they succeeded. The narratives showed that none quit or were expelled from camp before the end date. Besides, the adversities and initial lack of a camp identity were not eternal obstacles to making the program accommodate the participants' needs. They adjusted to camp life and built an identity as camp counselors or support staff.

4.5.1 Tangible Marks of Transformation: I Improved my English; Therefore, I Changed

The category *tangible marks of transformation* refers to observable indicators of an evolution in the participants' professional and personal identities. These marks are concrete evidence of changes in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, skills, and achievements observed after the sojourn. For example, participants increased their confidence, developed greater cultural awareness, improved communication skills, and gained a broader perspective on global issues. These tangible changes provide clear evidence of how intercultural interactions and encounters during a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S. contributed to the participants' professional identity development.

Upon arriving at the camp without a proper command of English, they were rejected due to their difficulty communicating. Not knowing English, the participants felt marginalized. Initially, it was as if the sojourner had entered through the back door. Then came the improvement of English, and the doors were opened. The symbolism of opening the doors of the camp was the opening of the doors of the country, their culture, and the desired world, which was the promised land. A *well-spoken language* is a visa that entitles participants to enter the camp life, which, in this case, symbolizes the country. The participants of the study departed to the abroad experience as LSTs. They returned positioned as English Language Teachers (ELTs) because eight out of ten were given an opportunity to work as language teachers. Positioned as teachers, the ELTs' first aspect incorporated in their classes was their insistence on raising students' awareness of the importance of language immersion experiences abroad. As language teachers, these participants' position was unequivocal: the most effective way of learning English was to live total immersion in the context in which the language was spoken. Santiago used to tell his students, "If you want to learn English fast and you need it to be effective, go to an immersion course. Go and get into total immersion. Go where they're speaking English" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2). Santiago viewed language acquisition as more relevant than language learning based on memorization of grammar rules. He prioritized practical application and exposure to the language in its natural context. The realization of the language and the participants' enhanced views of language teaching and learning led them to reconstruct their identities.

Luciana, from group 1, was transformed because she improved her English. The experience transformed Luciana because it led her to see the reality of the English language. The reality of English was admitting that the language exists in a natural context and that people can

take ownership of it and improve their English. Her transformation was reflected in her learning about American culture and society and understanding its value system and schemes.

Camps are spaces that constitute a society to which their members come every year. Returner staff already have a brotherhood that is not easy to penetrate. Luciana stated, "At first, I felt rejected, I felt alienated, I felt that I didn't belong there, that I had made a mistake, that it had been a bad experience" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). At the end of the summer camp season and after several years, Luciana said she now considers it one of her best experiences. It taught her how to truly learn and master a language and what it means to fully integrate into a new culture with its values and behaviors. (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). She learned how to develop intercultural communication competencies.

Luciana learned that language students should find opportunities to go abroad and immerse themselves in the language and culture. She said, "Being immersed in the language is priceless. A teacher cannot recreate that in a classroom" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1, group 2). Consequently, she went beyond to adventure herself to rethink her teaching approach. To teach her classes, Lucina appointed communication activities to replace immersion opportunities. As such, classroom activities had to include activities that resembled what happens in natural native contexts. She was confident that "There must be communicative activities where the persons express themselves" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). Her approach implied that the teacher had to expose students to interactions from the beginning of the learning process. For her, "It doesn't matter that you know the grammar of any language backward and forwards if you don't know how to use it. If you don't know how to express yourself, you haven't done anything" (01/13/2021, interview 1, group 1). Her experiences empowered her to be confident and know what she had to teach.

Santiago was transformed because he improved his English. This was reflected in his ability to appropriate and establish a close relationship with English. The English language deficiencies and the lack of knowledge of camp life's social interrelationships were obstacles that became facilitators when they were overcome. Thus, the transformations were palpable for Santiago because he added new elements to enrich his identities: the experience of feeling linguistic and intercultural competent. In this sense, English was discovered in a variety of ways. Santiago said that the intercultural experiences of the summer program changed him as a person and professional. He returned with the certainty that he was a new English teacher capable of teaching at any level. Santiago said, "Ask me to teach any course you want at [the language center], and I'll vouch for it. That was what I had in my head. I'll vouch for any level. No problem" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2). It was evident that Santiago became an empowered young language teacher, confident in himself and his English. Despite his youth, the sojourn abroad and his improved English skills helped him position himself in the labor market. He went from being a young local undergraduate student to a global citizen who wanted to continue to know the world.

Another salient change Santiago evidenced was the certainty that teaching and learning English in his college classes was based on grammar and rules. He also learned that the students had to use those structures in real-life situations to use language proficiently. The absence of authentic practice without spontaneous use of the language could lead the students to have scripted dialogues or controlled drills that did not help very much to become fluent speakers. He pointed out, "Attending classes does not facilitate effective learning and the ability to use the language in context. So, I used to tell people, "Get into immersion, and you will learn well there." I returned with this view of the language" (01/04/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Antonella was transformed because she improved her English. Her systematic progress in her English opened doors to more confident, more certain intercultural interactions and helped her take ownership of the camp, make friends, and learn to interact with people from other cultures. The program transformed her into a more confident person with a more ecumenical outlook. Antonella says, "It changed my confidence a lot because before, I was very insecure about doing things, and after the program, I felt more capable of doing what I set out to do" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2). Antonella also reflected and posited that the center of the world was no longer her hometown or city of residence. To be able to settle anywhere in the world was to be ecumenical. She said, "In this small space that I am in, it is not only this that is real or what is part of me but there is much more to discover; there are many more things everywhere" (01/07/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Emiliano was transformed because he improved his English. His transformation was reflected in his new ability to take a clear political stance. For example, Emiliano commented that it is common for individuals to feel inferior or superior in intercultural interactions. This phenomenon has its roots in the historical processes of subjugation and domination that underdeveloped countries from the South have undergone. The same society and culture have reproduced patterns showing superior and inferior cultures. Traditionally, northern cultures have been dominant; therefore, they are supposedly more intelligent and evolved. Emiliano reflected on the cult of foreigners, especially those who meet the characteristics of the classic American stereotype. Emiliano described,

Here in our country, when we have not had interactions with people from other parts of the world, foreigners, especially those blond, blue-eyed who look like classic Americans,

are put on higher social levels. I don't know why people keep doing this. I suppose that there must be an explanation for why it happens. (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2)

He acknowledged though that he was not discriminated against in his camp. He was treated as one of them. Nor was nationality a reason to be left out. Emiliano recognized that "being there in their context and their country, they treated me the same, and I was just one more of them, and being Colombian did not make me less or more, nor did I earn less or more; they exploited me the same" (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Emiliano was grateful to his camp for what it gave him. Besides the opportunity he had to clarify his political stance, he highly valued the process of improving English. He recognized that it could not be compared to anything else. Based on his experiences at camp, Emiliano included particular emphasis on studying vowel and consonant sounds in his classes. Helping his students to develop good pronunciation became one of his main goals when teaching English. He explained, "I focus my classes on identifying sounds and how they are uttered. I do several repetition exercises of sounds that are very difficult for us when we study English, such as the R [ɾ/] and the L [ɫ/]" (01/14/2021, interview 1, group 2). It can be inferred that Emiliano believed that mastering pronunciation was fundamental for his students' English proficiency.

Mariangel was transformed because she became a cosmopolitan lifelong learner. The program transformed Mariangel, awakening her desire to explore the world and turning her into a woman eager for knowledge and challenges. She said, "You get there [home country] with more desire to continue. There is so much more to explore. You get hungrier to explore, learn, and do it again" (01/19/2021, interview 1, group). The experience expanded Mariangel's perspective and ignited a strong desire for continuous learning and exploration. She recognized that as a language teacher, she passed her newfound enthusiasm and hunger for knowledge into

her teaching practices. She also fostered dynamic and engaging learning practices toward language teaching.

According to her own account, Gabriela was transformed because she became a better person. Her participation in the summer program had a transformative effect on Gabriela, leading to improvements in her personal qualities and worldview. The program positively influenced Gabriela's personal growth and development. Indeed, Gabriela noted that the program shaped the participants as a new group of international LSTs because they had positively impacted society. She listed several former participants she knew as she had witnessed the summer program's evolution. For her, "The impact of the exchange program helps you to be a better person. It makes you responsible, punctual, tolerant. You learn to read a culture different from your own" (01/20/2021, interview 1, group 2).

It is plausible that the challenges the ELTs encountered in attempting to reduce their accent for effective communication in English when they were in the U.S. influenced their emphasis on appreciating precision and accuracy over other aspects of language production. Their professional identity as ELTs showed young professionals providing students with opportunities for active engagement and self-expression in language learning with accurate pronunciation and proper vocabulary usage. In their view, practical training and fluency skills development facilitate students' use of English in real-world situations, such as interactions with native speakers. Therefore, the ELTs identified themselves as language teachers who valued experiential learning and believed in the effectiveness of immersive language learning environments. Accordingly, as ELTs who prioritized the development of pronunciation skills in English language learning, it is possible to infer that all ELTs demonstrated a solid commitment to their students.

Finally, most participants recognized themselves as new individuals unafraid of risking living somewhere else, traveling abroad, taking more active roles as learners, and making mistakes when speaking English. Furthermore, the confidence and empowerment gained during their sojourn abroad carried them over into the classes they taught. Their conception of teaching English was situated from a perspective of communication in action. The cultural elements absent in their discourses before the trip spontaneously intertwined and emerged to be articulated from the game and other learning scenarios.

4.5.2 Camp Comes to Class: Exploring the Power of Play

ELTs knew that not all their students had the opportunity to travel abroad and get immersed in the culture. Therefore, they intentionally brought the camp life to their classes by singing songs, playing games, and using authentic language. They used the knowledge they had gained to transform their classes into environments to play and learn. This realization of the language showed the participants' new identities as ELTs with an international repertoire. Furthermore, the teachers' ability to incorporate camp activities into their teaching practices indicated a professional identity characterized by cultural competence and a global perspective. Despite constraints, this approach reflected a commitment to providing students with authentic language learning experiences.

It was previously mentioned that the LSTs were hired to teach when they returned from camp. Since her first class, Isabella used playful activities learned at camp. As a rule, she created an appropriate environment for the students to feel comfortable. She did her best to lower the emotional filter and prepare them to see English as something tangible to use for life. She affirmed, "I have never separated the games, the playfulness of learning a language. I owe that to

the camps. I still remember the activities. I adapt them to different contexts and levels"

(02/01/2021, interview 1, group 1).

Given that ELTs like Isabella utilized playful activities learned at camp to create an engaging and comfortable learning environment for students, it could be inferred that, for the ELTs, language learning is facilitated by incorporating playful elements into teaching practices. Additionally, their ability to adapt camp activities to different contexts and levels highlighted the importance of teachers' positioning in promoting effective language learning experiences. Specifically, teachers who drew on their own diverse experiences, such as those gained at camp, and actively positioned themselves as facilitators of interactive and engaging language learning environments contributed to students' language acquisition more than language learning.

Likewise, Salomé learned that camp songs were not exclusive to camps. She quickly incorporated them as part of the activities she could use to encourage her students' learning and motivation. Salomé described an activity she used to do when lining up her students to get into the classroom in a private school where she was an ELT after graduating from college. She said, "I used many songs for language learning. [The students] loved it when I sang Baby Shark to them. They really liked that kind of pedagogy. I brought that into my classes, and I liked that" (02/02/2021, interview 1, group 2).

Emmanuel also learned that experiential education allowed him to approach his classes more dynamically. He realized the significance of prioritizing leadership over content delivery. Additionally, he recognized the value of fostering creativity and innovation, as many activities from the summer camp could be effectively adapted to the educational settings of his school. Consequently, the camp served as a driving force for exploring alternative teaching methods and fostering diverse forms of learning in his classes. When he did his practicum, he was influenced

by the camp experience. His lesson plans were full of games. He said, "I used to take my fifth-grade students out of the classroom. I used to do the classes in the playground because I wanted to play camp games with them and teach them songs and everything else" (01/06/2021, interview 1, group 2).

The ELTs' learnings at camp and the opportunity to put different sorts of activities into practice during their professional practice contributed to constructing their professional identity. They contended that they could use many of the resources, learnings, and tools they acquired at camp in their professional and personal life. The ELTs compared their leading roles as camp counselors and language teachers, emphasizing that both roles demanded the individual to serve as examples for campers and students. Emmanuel, for example, concluded that coherence is a virtue of those who make the difference. He noted, "I became much more coherent. (...) I came back much humbler than I was before. My ego went down, and I understood that I had to make others shine if I wanted to shine" (01/06/2021, interview 1, group 2).

5. Discussion

This research is grounded in the philosophical and sociological perspectives of post-structuralism. The post-structuralist view helps explain the coherent observation of language teachers' identity formation within discursive settings abroad where intercultural interactions and encounters occurred. This discussion will examine themes that emerged as significant in the analysis, concerning the connection of the teachers' identity development and post-structuralist views and the impact of the sojourning experience in the ELTs' views of major constructs of their profession such as language and learning.

5.1 Summer Camps as Experiential and Emotional Designs

One of the findings that caught my attention in this study was the similarities between the two group cases. The difference in age between group 1 (average age 45.8) and group 2 (average age 32.8) was 13 years. The smallest gap between Group 1 and Group 2's participation was ten years, and the largest gap between the years of participation of Group 1 and Group 2 was 17 years. Considering these differences in age and epoch of participation, I did not expect participants to evoke similar experiences and emotions. However, the findings showed that the participants' narratives from both groups were similar, presenting common themes of struggles, adjustments, intercultural interaction and encounters, and transformative impact on participants' identities from their summer camp experiences. These findings raised important questions about how summer camps as living spaces contributed to these shared experiences and shaped the participants' narratives across different times and contexts. A theory of spaces as cultural determinants, theories of spatial design, and conceptual elements of master narratives can provide insight into how to approach this phenomenon.

A well-established construct in cultural geography, sociology, and anthropology that can help explain these particular outcomes acknowledges that spaces are imbued with cultural meanings that influence people's experiences. Spaces are more than physical locations; they are rich with cultural narratives, histories, and meanings that profoundly influence how individuals engage with them. As noted by Soja (1996), spaces are socially constructed and play a crucial role in shaping our perceptions and experiences. He highlighted the complex interplay between the physical, social, and symbolic dimensions of spaces, arguing that our understanding of space is deeply affected by its cultural context and the interactions held in it.

Furthermore, Cresswell (2004) maintained that places are infused with social meanings and cultural narratives that shape our experiences. In his view, places can evoke specific memories, emotions, and identities, influencing how individuals interact within those environments and transcending time and residents. According to Cresswell, space and place are distinct concepts, with relational meanings arising from interactions. People forge connections and ascribe meaning to the spaces they occupy. Initially, a space may be perceived as an area lacking significance. However, as individuals invest meaning into it, that space transforms into a place. This relationship is reciprocal, as both individuals and places become intertwined in various ways. People attach themselves to spaces, making them their places.

Thus, an explanation for these similar narratives from the groups may lie in the strong influence exerted by summer camps that transition from distant spaces to cherished places. Before the work-abroad experience, YMCA personnel provide sojourners with information about the summer camps as a general representation of a collective idea: an indeterminate space. At the same time, they tell the same story about the summer program's wonders and its benefits to participants. Based on this, sojourners form a mental representation of the summer camp they

will occupy, a space that has not yet been created. Approaching the sojourners' future workplaces serves as a tool to help them transition from imagined spaces to reality, from their cultural context to new forms of cultural realization. YMCA staff understand that the reality of the place being constructed may differ but not significantly, as sojourners have yet to engage with the camp as a space. Until they do, the space remains meaningless. However, as sojourners assign meaning to these empty summer camp spaces through their interactions and encounters, they transform them into places. In that process of living the spaces, meanings are invested and negotiated.

In alignment with this perspective, Seamon (2014) highlighted that people develop emotional bonds with certain spaces based on shared cultural practices and collective memories. These attachments can profoundly affect individuals' feelings of belonging and identity. Seamon argues that the meanings associated with places often arise from communal experiences, rituals, and the historical narratives tied to those spaces. This means that places are texts that carry discourses. In a broader sense, physical spaces can be understood as "texts" that communicate meaning and convey cultural narratives. Like written texts, spaces have structures, designs, and purposes that influence how people perceive and interact with them. In this sense, Cresswell and Merriman (2011) state that "places and landscapes are continually practised and performed through the movement and enfolding of a myriad of people and things" (p. 7). Texts have intentions and structures that index specific meanings and position readers in certain ways. They also elicit certain emotions or reactions from the readers. In this sense, camps are texts designed with certain purposes in mind. For instance, they have similar physical structures, perform similar activities, and involve participants in similar practices.

Therefore, from the Multimodal Discourse perspective, Kress and Van Leuven (2001) describe design as "the organization of what is to be articulated into a blueprint for production" (p. 50). For the authors, "designs are means to realize discourses" (p. 4) by combining several semiotic resources (material: artifacts, places, or symbolic: language) deliberately in order to frame representation and thus meaning-making. Summer camps are intentionally crafted environments that aim to create particular experiences and emotions to individuals. They are physical spaces that have been designed in ways that elicit joy, camaraderie, personal growth, and joy. The spatial arrangements, as well as the activities and underlying practices, contribute to memorable experiences that, as seen with the study participants, remain and impact their ways of thinking and overall identities. Designed environments such as camps significantly influence participants' experiences, emotions, and behaviors. Even though individuals arrive at these camps with distinct backgrounds and expectations, the physical space, the recurrent narratives, and the predesigned activities are engineered to elicit certain feelings—namely, enjoyment, language development, sense of community, and camaraderie—across all participants. They try to structure activities so that emotional responses are similar across participants.

The design of spaces and, in particular, the design of summer camps is linked to a discourse promoted inside and outside of summer camps. The YMCA camp world has created a shared narrative (a master narrative, in my view) common to camp staff and participants. This master narrative is a collective construction that is repeated among camp people. It also influences the experience in a particular manner, making it a narrative that new staff adapt and appropriate to their experiences at camp. So that the epistemological framework of master narratives can be extended and applied to narratives that YMCA people and summer camp participants share. Master narratives encompass shared narratives that can range from a society's

history to concepts about what it means to belong to a specific social category, class, or community, as it is the camp identity staff build while sojourning (Hammack, 2010; McLean & Syed, 2016; Hunt, 2024).

Master narratives shape culture by providing a framework we internalize and express to sustain a specific social order. Ideally, they define right and wrong concepts, guide behavior, and foster harmony. However, they can sometimes lead to cultural disputes and conflict. Master narratives influence our actions, from everyday customs to societal norms and values, affecting formal laws and informal practices. They serve as dominant discourses that reflect our collective identity and inform how we navigate the world (Hammack, 2009, 2010; McLean & Syed, 2016; Hunt, 2024). According to Hunt (2024), "Master narratives provide a storied language that we internalise and reproduce to maintain a particular social order" (p. 42). As stated in the concluding paragraph of the category, *Seeing through Others' Eyes*, "As they navigated their paths, they drew motivation from the experiences of those who had come before them, reinforcing the idea that personal growth and cultural understanding are deeply interconnected."

The spaces, as they are occupied by the sojourners, signify themselves and signify their occupants. In parallel, the occupants gradually resignify and adjust to a master narrative without losing their individual experiences. Simultaneously, the sojourners begin to leave an imprint that will only permeate the history of each camp over time. As this happens, spaces become places. On the one hand, being living entities and possessing histories and cultural memories, they symbolically await the sojourners with their narratives. Moreover, because of their two-dimensional influence, they reaffirm cultural and social facts established in their master narratives. The master narrative initially shared by YMCA staff overlays the sojourner's meaning assigned to the inhabited space (the camp) and its history.

In summary, despite differences in age and background, participants revealed strikingly similar stories shaped by their interactions within these environments. This suggests that summer camps serve not only as physical locations but also as rich cultural sites where collective memories and master narratives intertwine. As participants invest meaning into these spaces, they evolve into places imbued with significance, fostering a deep sense of belonging and identity. Ultimately, the interplay between individual experiences and shared narratives highlights the crucial role of summer camps in shaping personal and communal identities across time and context.

5.2 Examining ELTs' Professional Identity Construction: A Post-Structuralist View in Summer Camp Settings

Language Student-Teachers (LSTs) traveled to the U.S. to work at a summer camp, hoping to live an enriching experience or at least a stay that enabled them to improve their English. On the departure trip, the influence of the short-term sojourn at camp was unclear. However, on their return, and especially after several years of distancing from the sojourn in the U.S., those former LSTs valued the summer camp experience as particularly enriching on a personal and professional level. As stated by Benson (2021), “Language learning is part of the life of the world and it has a significant impact on lives, identities and social relations” (p. 11). The ELTs reflections, shared through their narratives, allowed me to reflect on some theoretical constructs about the influence of intercultural interactions and encounters on their professional identity construction when working in a summer camp in the U.S. during a short-term sojourn (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2002).

The first sojourn at a U.S. summer camp is intense and shocking. Several elements are at play: Most LSTs (international staff) struggle with the English language when they try to use it

to communicate. They find themselves trying to survive in an environment that is a living entity loaded with cultural baggage, whose social norms and cultural manifestations are unknown by the LSTs. The LSTs have to fulfill duties imposed by their jobs whose characteristics differ from what they are accustomed to in their country of origin. Besides, they get immersed in a country that presents challenges to understanding and dealing with issues such as power and socio-cultural norms (Xie & Huang, 2022).

Summer camps are discursive communities. In them, one can appreciate unique cultural elements, reflections, and representations of the American culture. Their cultural and intercultural elements are intertwined with their particular norms, and, in turn, their cultural particularities contribute to the maintenance of identity traits of the camp itself and the country. Furthermore, it is natural for individuals familiar with the dynamics of summer camps and proficient in English (predominantly native speakers) to possess advantages that translate into exerting power and control. Newcomers to camp will generally face disadvantages until they become acclimated to its dynamics or choose to disengage from their efforts to integrate. In this sense, Benson (2021) affirmed that language learning happens in specific environments where diverse resources are intentionally brought together. He claimed,

A setting [a space] is a place where language learners access and engage with language resources. Settings are assemblages of human and nonhuman, linguistic and non-linguistic resources, but learning in settings also involves a crucial engagement with space. Language learning does not take place in the undifferentiated space of the environment, but at specific sites at which resources are assembled for the purpose of language learning. (p. 102)

So, camps as living discursive entities constantly reconfigure their identities through the discourse camp people perform. They persistently configure their dynamics and the construction of their staff identities. Identities are the particular traits of their individuals and, at the same time, the identity traits of the camp. If staff and camp people construct their identities through discourse, the discourse generated is the language that characterizes the camp. (McKay & Wong, 1996).

It is stated and accepted that the participants construct their identity through discourse. How does the professional identity construction of LSTs occur at camp? Camps can be compared to schools and so, the dynamics of the camp teach several aspects that can be adapted and transferred to the school context. The following are some examples.

First, English serves as the primary language of communication at camps. Despite any initial deficiencies, LSTs tend to develop greater proficiency over time. How does this occur? Benson (2021) asserted that “Second languages are learned in language learning environments, or spaces in which mobile language-based assemblages meet and become available as resources for second language learning” (p. 91). In addition, they learn that when teaching English, they have to make sure their students understand about the effectiveness of language learning and teaching methods for students to use English in native contexts.

Second, campers are children who attend summer camps to learn new things and develop different skills. The summer camp is a metaphor for the school. Campers resemble students who go to schools to learn and develop lifelong skills. In essence, they are learners. Schools and summer camps provide environments where individuals can learn, grow, and develop a sense of identity and belonging. Both schools and summer camps are settings transformed into learning environments by participants to form meaningful connections, encounter new challenges, and

gain valuable life skills. The LSTs' professional identity might emerge as they assume teaching and leading roles at camp and other spaces.

Third, the activities performed at camp can be adapted to school class activities. "Day-to-day, second language learning typically involves comings and goings, movements from setting to setting, within geographically circumscribed areas and the spatial routines of everyday lives" (Benson, 2021, p. 102). In particular, outdoor activities have proven to be well-accepted options for English language teachers to innovate their teaching methods. Summer camps are language learning environments (aggregates of settings) as long as international staff and camp counselors whose English requires improvement are present. These settings last for the summer period, and when they close, they lose their characteristic of language-learning environments.

The ELTs' narratives showed that summer camps were sojourning spaces where the English language and the camp as an entity challenged the participants' identities. This aligns with post-structuralist views of identity construction (Bourdieu, 1991; Gal, 1989), as summer camps served as spaces where identities were continuously negotiated and shaped. Since second languages are rarely learned in a single location, we must consider how various spaces are configured for learning and how learners navigate these spaces over time. (Benson, 2021). These experiences disrupted or complicated any fixed notions of identity the participants may have held before they engaged with the camp environment. Considering Benson's (2021) ideas, the participants had to experience and manage the new world of a foreign country and the camp they worked for. These new settings became language learning environments.

Using the summer camp-school metaphor, camps are seen as discourse communities whose daily routines and rituals are normalized by those who know the system. The international staff's main task is to learn the camp norms and regulations to accommodate their behavior,

accepting that it is a context-dependent enterprise regulated by discourse. Post-structuralism emphasizes that communities are formed and sustained through discourse and the speakers' identities. Post-structuralism views identity as fluid and multifaceted, shaped by social and discursive practices. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Pavlenko, 2000). Individuals who normalize routines and rituals within camps may maintain stable identities or gradually construct them. For LSTs, it is a gradual process: engage in dialogues with former participants to gain insights and advice, observe the context and learn activities and dynamics, actively participate in camp activities, traditions, and responsibilities, normalize camp life, and finally, construct their summer camp identity. Thus, spaces like those found in summer camps are transformed into settings for language learning “at different timescales and under the pressure of flows of language-bearing assemblages and their use as resources for learning” (Benson, 2021, p. 104).

5.3 Intersectional Identity Transformation

The findings show that the LSTs were transformed at the professional level and across various other dimensions, including their personal beliefs about themselves, their own country, the foreign country, and their views and understanding of the cultural practices of the communities of both countries. Although the study aimed at honing on the participants' professional identity development, it was seen, as discussed in post-structuralist views of identity, that identities are intersectional (Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016), and thus, intercultural encounters index sexual, gender, class, culture, ethnic, linguistic, and other overlapping and interlinked identity categories (Álvarez Valencia, 2022). Hill-Collins and Bilge (2016) stated that "Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and human experiences [as social events that] are shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways" (p. 1). By looking at the experiences of both groups of sojourners,

we can see how their identities as students, their future professional and personality traits, and their national identifications were impacted by the myriad of experiences they faced.

Discussing the transformations they suffered at the professional level becomes a challenging task since the different identity affiliations of an individual are not separate and intersect and interact in various ways depending on the circumstance (Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016; Sloan et al., 2018) and context (Burke & Stets, 2009; Barkhuizen, 2016a, 2017a). In this sense, Álvarez Valencia (2022), for example, explained that an individual's identity comprises all the cultural semiotic resources they have developed and co-constructed through socialization processes. In turn, this repertoire of cultural semiotic resources takes the shape of particular identities embodied in an individual and enacted in intercultural encounters. All the participants of this study arrived in the U.S. with their unique repertoire of cultural semiotic resources or identities (linguistic, professional, ethnic, among others). Their identities engaged in intercultural negotiation with the cultural semiotic resources of the people, places, and cultural artifacts they met in the new context. The cultural semiotic resources that composed the participant's identities are not monolithic or static; cultural semiotic resources, as well as identities, need to be seen as "embedded, symbolic, performative, embodied, multilayered, intersectional, intersubjective, and contingent" (Álvarez Valencia, 2022, p. 182).

In their narratives, the participants described how the identities they embodied at certain points were embedded within the particular moments and spaces of their sojourning experience. They portrayed themselves in different ways, for example, as shy and observant at the beginning. Over time, they developed the confidence to engage with other camp community members, creating symbolic representations of themselves that they decided to keep or transform throughout their stay in the camp. They understood that how they portrayed themselves

constituted a performance of their identity positionality, which could increase their success or their feelings of inability to fit in. Transformative moments where the participants decided to perform their identity in a different way to challenge how they had been positioned are present in the narratives. One notable case is Emmanuel, who took the risk of singing a camp song in front of everyone, which caused the other camp counselors to reshape how they had positioned him not only as an individual but also as a speaker of English and camp counselor. Another outstanding case is Isabella, who led an activity by which she made the camp people realize that she could communicate in English and, thus, position her as one of them.

The different stories that the participants recalled evidence the 'performative, embodied, multilayered, intersectional, intersubjective, and contingent' nature of their identities and the cultural resources that they drew on in intercultural encounters. A central theme was their command of language and how it was associated with their competency to be camp counselors. At the same time, there was often a negotiation between two positionalities: the way they positioned themselves versus the way they perceived they were being positioned. The intersubjective nature of identity construction was discussed by Langenhove and Harré (1999) through their "positioning theory," which referred to the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts" (p. 17). In other words, in social interaction, an interlocutor positions another individual (interactive positioning) while at the same time, simultaneously performing a particular positionality or self-representation (reflexive positioning). The participants adopted several positions as language speakers, individuals with specific personalities, and foreigners from Colombia. The LSTs' participation in the new discourse community (Kramsch & Hua, 2016) of the campsite and their process of adaptation

and identity construction and reshaping is evoked in several studies that explore preservice teachers' identity development, showing that their professional, personal, and social identities are shaped by their membership in social groups (Díaz Benavides, 2013; Gómez, 2012; Torres-Rocha, 2017).

In their sojourning experience, the LSTs were able to successfully negotiate, in general, their intersecting and multilayered identity positionings at the social and internal levels. At the social level, they gained respect as camp counselors as they improved their command of language or showed more confidence. They could also grow within the community as they acquired the cultural practices proper of the campsite. They overcame fears and insecurities caused by several factors, such as their command of language and lack of cultural knowledge. The different growth instances the participants mentioned were contingent on specific moments in their stay at camp, the people they interacted with, and their sense of development. At the internal level, the experience challenged the participants' construction of their personalities and, in many cases, prompted them to explore aspects of themselves that they had not previously explored or believed were fixed, such as their personality features. One central identity dimension they reflected on was their preparation to become language teachers.

As shown in the findings, most participants questioned the training they had received in their programs. Given that most language education they received in their teaching education program adopted an academic register, being immersed in daily life interactions and casual language use initially generated insecurity and frustration in the participants. Although they first questioned the quality of education they had received, with time, they also acknowledged the importance and value of knowledge acquired in their teacher education programs. They understood that although language plays a central role in communication, there are cultural

components that can even contribute more significantly to an individual's sense of frustration when intercultural miscommunication and misunderstanding take place (Byram, 2021; Mauranen, 2006). As Byram (2021) posited, the linguistic dimension is only one of the several factors that intervene in intercultural communication; components such as openness, knowledge of the target culture, skills of discovery, and interaction are necessary competencies in intercultural encounters. The data showed that as LSTs grew in their knowledge of the cultural practices of the camps and the borders' sociocultural context, their linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competencies unfolded, and thus, they felt more confident to navigate daily life in the campsite and comply with their camp counseling responsibilities.

5.4 Reshaping Views of Learning, Language, and Communication

The sojourning experience prompted LSTs to question their beliefs about learning, language, and communication at both personal and professional levels. Just as identity is embedded, embodied, and intersectional, these concepts are also embedded (Thibault, 2017; Wei, 2018). The initial frustration the participants faced was related to their limitations in communication, leading them to perceive that the methods of language instruction they had been exposed to did not adequately reflect the reality of language use in authentic contexts. Likewise, this complaint was connected with the type of language register they had been socialized into, which featured a more academic register in the teacher education programs. In part, this complaint is valid. However, previous research has also shown that second/foreign language learners often overemphasize the role of language in communication. This means that they usually attribute to the linguistic system communicative failures, whereas in many cases, communication breakdown arises from a lack of cultural knowledge or other factors beyond the linguistic system (Álvarez Valencia & Michelson, 2023; Block, 2014; Leung, 2005).

Several scholars have discussed the tendency to believe that communication is limited to linguistic exchanges, hindering individuals' awareness of other modes of communication that take place in interaction (Álvarez Valencia & Michelson, 2023; Eisenchlas, 2009; Kress, 2010; Block, 2014). Álvarez Valencia (2016) has called this tendency verbocentrism, while Block (2006) has referred to it as the 'lingua bias'. Both authors, evoking Kress (2000, 2010), have advocated for a multimodal view of communication that acknowledges the full range of resources that take place in communication, such as gestures, spatiality, gaze, and other kinesic and paralinguistic elements, which are fundamentally cultural. It becomes evident from the participants' experiences that, rather than solely a matter of language competency, their insecurity, misunderstanding, and frustration stemmed from a lack of familiarity with the cultural practices of the camp and the broader sociocultural context. While they acknowledged improving their language proficiency during camp, their initial insecurity gradually dissipated, allowing them to demonstrate their linguistic competence.

To a great extent, this verbocentric views of language and communication are heavily ingrained in teacher education programs and the TESOL field, as discussed by Kress (2000) and more recently by Block (2014) and Álvarez Valencia and Michelson (2023). The latter authors, for example, examined the different models of communicative competence that have been historically proposed and concluded that, generally, the view of language and communication is reduced to linguistic exchanges. Except for Byram (2021), who explicitly acknowledged the intercultural dimensions, including factors such as nonverbal communication, most models of communicative competence overlook or superficially consider other modes of communication that contribute to meaning-making. This perspective, prevalent in applied linguistics, partially

explains the participants' tendency to overemphasize language as one of the significant challenges they faced during the sojourning experience.

This perspective on language and communication underwent a profound transformation, particularly evident upon the LSTs' return to Colombia. As described earlier, the participants' confidence in their communicative abilities exponentially increased, which is evident in their active participation in various campus activities where they replicated routines and practices learned during the summer camp. Their view of language and communication went from monolithic and somewhat static to an embodied and interactional encounter. Moreover, this impacted their view of learning a modern or foreign language. For them, the English language in this case, was learned in interaction with others in spaces that included the classroom but were not limited to it. Language, communication, and learning expanded beyond being a cognitive activity. Their perspectives match contemporary views of language learning and communication that see these processes as "multisensory, multimodal, emotional, neural, embodied, embedded, and distributed" (Álvarez Valencia, 2022, p. 178). The students' initiatives to carry out games and songs in different places on campus and their classes constituted genuine sources of language learning and opportunities to develop language as a result of interactions with the cultural practices of the L2. For them, singing, dancing, and playing activities provided multimodal, multisensory, and embodied experiences that went beyond the cognitive realm. By taking learning and communication outside of the limited walls of the classroom and adopting an interactive view of communication and learning (constructivist), where not only people but cultural artifacts contributed to learning, the participants saw learning as distributed (Thibault, 2017; Wei, 2018). This is a crucial realization since, through their sojourning experience, the

ELTs understood that learning is globally distributed and can be found in spaces like an airport and in experiences with people and objects.

The sojourning experience marked the LSTs' personal and professional selves. They not only reshaped or constructed new dimensions of their selves but also grew as future professionals challenging traditional views of language, communication, and learning. All of this shows that the sojourning experience helped them grow professionally. As Çelik (2017b) stated, language teachers develop professionally if they improve their teaching methods, appreciate other cultures, and learn how to influence students' learning.

6. Conclusion

This study intended to answer the question, what role did intercultural interactions and encounters play on the professional identity of English language teachers before, during, and after a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.? The participants had intercultural interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds at camp and in other settings. They were people of different ages who held different job positions and, thus, behaved accordingly. These intercultural interactions fostered the participants' adaptability and understanding of communication dynamics, enhancing their professional identities as language teachers who learned to be empathetic and culturally sensitive. The participants also experienced intercultural encounters with different living entities and artifacts substantially influencing their sojourn abroad. Large entities, such as international airports and summer camps, and small artifacts, such as distinctive camp garments, handmade crafts, and daily-use containers, contributed significantly to the participants' development of subtle understandings of cultural diversity, enriching their professional identities as language teachers with broader perspectives.

The central role intercultural interactions and encounters played on the professional identity of LSTs during their sojourn at a summer camp was that of identity catalyzers. During the first weeks of the sojourn, in most cases, when the participants tried to establish interactions and encounters, they found that interactions took much work to establish because they struggled to use English that fulfilled the expectations of speakers. These breakdowns impeded the rise of camp identity signs. Thus, the intercultural interactions and encounters, even if initially unsuccessful, served as catalysts that activated the participants' exploration and construction of their identities as camp staff and, by extension, their professional identities as language teachers. These interactions prompted them to reflect on the roles and communications they could not

maintain, their cultural backgrounds, language teaching philosophies, and perceptions of diversity. As they overcame the difficulties of dealing with the *elusive strangers*, they started to create a camp identity that was later transferred to their professional identities. This led to a deeper understanding and refinement of their beings and their roles at camps and schools in their home country.

The other two interrelated questions in the study were about the participants' intercultural interactions and encounters before, during, and after their short-term sojourn and the learnings they gained from them. Their most relevant intercultural encounters were with the elusive, unattainable English language and the intimidating, uncertain international airport. On the one hand, the participants were challenged to understand and express themselves effectively in English. The English they brought from their home country was insufficient for fluid, casual, natural, native-like conversations. From their difficulties, they learned that their classes in their bachelor program had to be revised and the methods updated so language learners could be prepared for interactions with native speakers in their cultural contexts. On the other hand, international airports became the icon of strange entities LSTs could face at every site they visited for the first time. Airports and other entities taught participants that they must be prepared to navigate alone in unknown places. Intercultural competence also involved learning the skills of discovery and interaction (Byram, 2008; 2021).

The most important intercultural interactions were held with people at camp, including staff from the U.S., international staff, and campers. The participants acknowledged that the interactions with U.S. staff were complex because their English was a wall they had to demolish to succeed in the camp experience. The purpose was not to climb over that obstacle because, if they did, they would always encounter similar barriers in their lives. The language teachers

learned that it was through immersive experiences that individuals could acquire linguistic competencies to improve their proficiency levels. The interactions with campers were an ups-and-down experience with kids that challenged the participants and taught them they were opposite poles regarding their attitude towards internationals' inability to communicate in English. Finally, international staff showed participants the best of their culture. The Spanish was the elixir to sweeten the bitterness of harsh times.

A final question that serves as a concluding idea was the contributions of intercultural interactions and encounters to the participants' professional identity development. Visible signs indicating shifts in both the participants' professional and personal identities were tattoos done in their minds. They were palpable evidence of transformations in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, competencies, and accomplishments noted after the sojourn. Participants observed enhanced confidence, heightened cultural sensitivity, refined communication abilities, and an expanded global perspective. These tangible transformations proved the impact of intercultural interactions and encounters during their short-term sojourn at a U.S. summer camp on their professional identity evolution. After all, most participants viewed themselves as transformed individuals, now more open to living in diverse locations, traveling internationally, embracing active learning roles, and being unafraid of language mistakes. This newfound confidence and empowerment from their overseas experience also influenced their teaching approach, shifting towards a communicative perspective. Cultural elements previously overlooked in their teaching discourse were organically integrated and became more pronounced through games and other learning contexts.

7. Limitations

Several limitations impacted the development of this study, including time and the data collection procedure and analysis. As it is common in conducting research, time typically becomes a limitation. Although the data for the study was collected in 2021, the completion of the data analysis took longer than expected in part due to how I distributed the time to carry out the different stages of the project. For example, one issue was that I spent more than expected transcribing the data. I produced three versions of the transcriptions with different levels of detail, one with closed transcription for linguistic analysis and two others with lesser detail. In the end, given that the type of analysis was narrative, the version with only the most general transcription was employed. This made me realize that the several months I used to generate the transcription could have been used more strategically. Personal matters also affected the time to conclude the study. Unfortunately, the analysis and writing lacked continuity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected my health at different levels.

Regarding the data collection, the participants' availability also impacted the data collection type. Although I was fortunate to keep the ten initial participants, many had limited time to meet due to their work and personal lives, especially those who lived abroad. Their contributions were invaluable to the study. Of the two interviews with the participants, more time was required during the second interview to inquire about details of their sojourning experience. At the methodological level, one reflection that comes up is the role of the interviewer in the narrative interviews. Although the protocol for the interview was very well planned, I allowed the participants to meander during the interview, which affected the quality of the narratives. I concluded that it is important to guide the development of the interview and focus on the questions that participants often left unanswered, as their insights are crucial to the study.

One of the final limitations I encountered was in the data analysis. Initially, I planned to use Barkhuizen's (2016a) narrative analysis model to examine the participants' stories. However, I had to adapt elements from the model as the narratives did not align with Barkhuizen's proposed structure. This adaptability and flexibility in the face of unexpected challenges reassured me of the research process's robustness. It also led me to conclude that to apply the model effectively, the researcher must guide the interviewees more and prompt them to complete their stories in ways that facilitate the model's application. This adaptability is a key strength of the research process, and it instills confidence in the methodology.

8. Implications and Further Research

This study yields different implications and ideas for further research. One main implication discussed in previous research is the impact of intercultural encounters on individuals. Allports (1954), in his Contact Theory, explained that contact with members of other cultural groups represents the most effective way to question stereotypes and prejudice. This, at the same time, contributes to developing intercultural competencies even if the contact happens within a short space of time (Hinner, 2010; Hogg & Abrams, 2006). The premises from previous research align with what was found in this study: a short period abroad enhances students' communicative and intercultural capabilities. This has implications for language programs, suggesting that more effort should be dedicated to providing opportunities for intercultural encounters between students and individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This can take different shapes, encompassing online interactions, travel abroad, field trips to other communities such as indigenous reservations, or interaction with members of other groups that represent particular identity affiliations determined by gender, sex, occupation, religious affiliation, etc.

The study reported here also shows that students face multiple linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and cultural challenges when they travel abroad. Even though YMCA Colombia provides initial training before sending the students to the camps, it is impossible to provide enough training on the different competencies they will need to succeed in their sojourning experience, including intercultural awareness. Although not all students will participate in a work abroad program, it is necessary to offer preparation for all kinds of intercultural encounters. More emphasis should be placed on the intercultural dimension in teacher education programs in terms of helping students develop intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Byram, 2021).

Teacher education programs could also use the students' experiences abroad to examine, for example, the teaching experiences they offer students and the conceptual grounds that inform the program. For example, the LSTs encountered mismatches between the conceptions of language, communication, and learning enacted in their programs and their experience at the campsite. Teacher education programs can use sojourners' insights to rethink their curriculum orientation.

Overall, this study offers insight into the identity development of prospective language teachers. It draws on their narratives to conclude that they improved their communicative and intercultural competencies. Further research could provide more empirical details about how much students' competencies grow, especially for prospective teachers, wherein research still needs to be conducted. Pre and post-test studies could establish with more accuracy the role of the sojourning experience in shaping students' language abilities. Further research could also explore students' pedagogical and didactic newly acquired strategies. According to the participants, their role as camp counselors provided a pedagogical experience they were extrapolating in their language classes. A study exploring which types of activities and strategies they employ could expand the understanding of the impact of the travel abroad experience. Finally, at the theoretical level, it could be inquired about how their beliefs about teaching, the language, their profession, and their national identity were impacted and how they manifest in their lives as students and teachers since many of them were already in the job market. Although this study provided a first glimpse into these dimensions, a more in-depth exploration would yield insights to confirm some of the current study's findings.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Informed Consent

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Yo, _____, identificado(a) con cédula de ciudadanía No. _____, expedida en _____, acepto participar en la investigación acerca de la relación entre los encuentros interculturales y el desarrollo de la identidad profesional de docentes de lenguas modernas de la Universidad del Cauca, del profesor Pablo Enrique Acosta Acosta, investigador principal.

Doy fe de que se me ha explicado que el objetivo general del estudio es comprender la influencia de los encuentros interculturales y el desarrollo de la identidad profesional de un grupo de docentes de lenguas modernas de la Universidad del Cauca, antes, durante y después de su participación en un programa de campamentos de verano en los Estados Unidos.

Tengo claro que, en términos generales, el procedimiento que seguiré como participante es el siguiente: una vez haya firmado el consentimiento informado, iniciaré el proceso contestando una encuesta socio-económica en línea que le permitirá al investigador tener información puntual acerca de mi formación académica, experiencia laboral, experiencias con el estudio y manejo del idioma Inglés, y de la forma como me relaciono con personas de mi grupo cultural y de otras culturas. Después de responder la encuesta, participaré en dos entrevistas en línea de aproximadamente una (1) hora, a través de una aplicación para video conferencias, en la que narraré mis experiencias, particularmente aquellas relacionadas con mis interacciones con personas pertenecientes a otras culturales diferentes a las mías, antes, durante y después de mi participación en el programa de campamentos de verano en Estados Unidos, que hace parte del convenio entre la Universidad del Cauca y la YMCA Colombia. Entre la primera y la segunda entrevista, realizaré unas tareas que el investigador ha denominado “análisis de artefactos” y que implicarán que yo analice, por ejemplo, fotografías, objetos, y/o eventos y que deberé presentar en videoclips, grabaciones en audio, y/o documentos escritos. Las entrevistas serán registradas en video y audio. De ser necesario, leeré las transcripciones que el investigador haga de mis narraciones y/o encuentros, en procura de ampliar conceptos o ideas o de reafirmar lo que haya dicho. Haré anotaciones en ellas o corregiré asuntos que considere no son fieles a lo que pienso o quería narrar. Entiendo y estoy de acuerdo que mi participación requerirá que yo dedique un tiempo aproximado entre 7 y 8 horas en total, distribuidas en un lapso de más o menos dos (2) meses, así: 1 hora para responder la encuesta demográfica, 3 horas máximo para atender las entrevistas narrativas, 3 horas para el análisis de los artefactos y 1 hora adicional en caso de que tenga que hacer revisiones o aclarar ideas expresadas en las entrevistas o los análisis.

Igualmente fui informado(a) y estoy de acuerdo que mi participación en esta investigación es estrictamente voluntaria y que fui invitado a participar en esta investigación porque me gradué del Programa de Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad del Cauca y porque participé en el programa de campamentos de verano en Estados Unidos durante mis estudios de pregrado en dicha universidad.

Fui informado(a) y estoy de acuerdo que tengo derecho a retirarme de esta investigación en cualquier momento y que mi retiro no generará ningún tipo de represalia que pudiera atentar contra mi reputación como egresado(a) de la Universidad del Cauca o mi buen nombre como docente de lenguas en cualquier parte del mundo. Se me aclaró que los beneficios que recibiré como participante en esta investigación serán muy importantes para mí como profesional y como ser humano porque siempre es relevante reflexionar sobre las experiencias vividas, las interacciones con otras personas y sobre la relación entre las cosas que se aprenden y lo que uno es o llega a ser. También recibiré como beneficio indirecto la satisfacción de contribuir en el fortalecimiento del Programa de Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad del Cauca y enriquecer los saberes universales acerca de la identidad de los docentes de lenguas modernas. Se me ha aclarado de la misma manera que de acuerdo con el diseño de la investigación y con las características del mismo estudio, no se conoce ni se anticipa que puedan presentarse efectos adversos o riesgos que atenten contra mí como participante del estudio. De todos modos, el investigador se compromete a minimizar al máximo los riesgos que puedan generarme efectos adversos o molestias. Yo entiendo que no es posible compensar con dinero u otro tipo de recurso, malestares que en un momento determinado pueda sentir como participante. Es claro para mí que dentro de los malestares más comunes que se dan al momento de realizar entrevistas o conversaciones en las que debo narrar hechos de mi vida, se pueden mencionar el estrés y la ansiedad. Tengo claro que me han dicho que toda la información que yo suministre y las respuestas que narre al

investigador acerca de mis vivencias, son de carácter confidencial; que el acceso a la información será reservado y restringido y no estará disponible para otros investigadores u otras instituciones; que los datos serán empleados por el investigador únicamente en publicaciones y eventos de carácter académico, nacional y/o internacional, a nombre del investigador de este proyecto; y que toda la información que se publique será de carácter anónimo, preservando mi nombre y mi identidad como participante. También se me ha garantizado que ninguno de los datos que se publique podrá ser asociado con mi nombre o mi identidad.

Con relación a la custodia de los datos, avalo que sólo el investigador tendrá copia de las respuestas de la encuesta socio-económica, de las grabaciones en audio y video de las entrevistas y de los documentos que yo entregue durante el proceso, producto de la realización de análisis de artefactos. Se me ha indicado que el equipo de trabajo de esta investigación podrá contar con el apoyo de asistentes de investigación que se encargarán de realizar las transcripciones de las entrevistas a partir de las grabaciones de audio o video realizadas por medio de grabadoras digitales y guardadas en archivos MP3/MP4, pero dichos asistentes no podrán conservar copias digitales de las entrevistas o charlas. En este mismo orden de ideas, el investigador se ha comprometido a usar los datos recolectados en esta investigación sólo para los propósitos y fines aquí descritos.

He sido informado(a) de que en caso de que tenga alguna duda o alguna pregunta, será necesario contactar al investigador principal de este proyecto, profesor Pablo Enrique Acosta Acosta, con quien entablaré comunicación a través de su correo electrónico peacosta@unicauca.edu.co y/o teléfono y WhatsApp 318-6374011. También he sido informado(a) de que si llegase a presentar algún asunto que no pueda resolver el investigador principal, yo podré contactar al Dr. José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia, cuyo correo electrónico es jose.aldemar.alvarez@correounivalle.edu.co y cuyo número telefónico y WhatsApp es 312-7319927, quien es el director de este proyecto de investigación.

Por lo anteriormente expresado, certifico que he leído cuidadosamente este consentimiento informado y he comprendido los procedimientos y detalles descritos en el mismo. Doy fe de que el investigador me ha explicado claramente de qué trata el estudio y ha contestado mis preguntas de manera clara y comprensible. Por lo tanto, certifico que voluntariamente acepto participar en este estudio. También certifico que he recibido copia de este consentimiento informado.

Nombre del participante:	_____	Nombre del investigador:	_____
Firma:	_____	Firma:	_____
Documento de Identidad:	_____	Documento de Identidad:	_____
Fecha:	_____		

Appendix B. Survey**The relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters and professional identity of English Language Teachers: A narrative multiple case study before, during, and after a short-term sojourn abroad**

Pablo E. Acosta Acosta
 Professor of Modern Languages Education
 University of Cauca – Popayán, Colombia

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of intercultural encounters on the professional identity of English Language Teachers before, during, and after a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the US. Please answer the following questions, to the best of your knowledge. If you do not wish to answer a question, please write three hyphens (---). When completed, please click on “submit” to send the survey.

Feel free to send me an email or a WhatsApp message in case you have any doubt or concern.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Gender: Male ____ Female ____ Other ____

Date of Birth: Month ____ Day ____ Year ____

Place of Birth:

City/Town _____ Department _____

Place you live now:

City/Town _____ Department _____

Time you have lived there: Years ____ Months ____

Time you (have) lived in Popayán: Years ____ Months ____

Ethnicity/Race (choose only one):

Afrocolombian ____ Indigenous ____ ROM (Gypsy) ____ Mestizo ____ White ____ Other ____

What was/is your religion?

Catholic ____ Christian ____ Protestant ____ Jewish ____ Muslim ____ Buddhists ____

Other ____ Which one? _____ None: ____

What is your marital status? Single ____ Married ____ Divorced ____ Widowed ____

Other ____ Which one? _____

2. EDUCATION

Did you study (or are you studying) another college degree program? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, which one? _____ What institution? _____

Have you ever studied a graduate study? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, which one(s)? _____

What level? Specialization, Master, PhD _____

Did you finish those studies? _____

Had you studied English before you studied your major in modern languages at college?

Yes ____ No ____

If yes, where? _____ Length of the courses: Years ____ Months ____

3. WORK EXPERIENCE

Do you have any language teaching experience? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, answer the following:

What language(s) have you taught? (You can choose more than one.)

English ____ French ____ Spanish ____ Other ____ Which one? _____

Please provide details about your teaching experience:

What kind of institutions have you worked for? (You can choose more than one.)

Language Center ____ Elementary School ____ Middle School ____ College ____

University ____ Other ____

Please provide details about those institutions:

For how long have you worked as a language teacher? Years ____ Months ____

What levels have you taught? (You can choose more than one.)

A1 ____ A2 ____ B1 ____ B2 ____ C1 ____ C2 ____

Do you have any other working experience? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, please provide details about that:

4. LANGUAGES

What languages do you speak?

English ____ French ____ Spanish ____ Other ____ Which one(s)? _____

How often do you speak those languages?

English _____

French _____

Spanish _____

Other _____

What kind of genres do you write?

Essays/Papers ____ Tales ____ Novels ____ Poems ____ Reports ____ Other ____

In what languages do you write?

English ____ French ____ Spanish ____ Other ____

What kind of genres do you read?

Essays/Papers ____ Tales ____ Novels ____ Poems ____ Reports ____ Other ____

In what languages do you read?

English ____ French ____ Spanish ____ Other ____

5. LIFE ABROAD**Apart from your first experience in the US (summer camp), have you ever been/lived abroad?**

Yes ____ No ____

If yes, answer the following:

What countries have you lived in?

What was the purpose of those trip(s)? (You can choose more than one.)

Work ____ Leisure ____ College/university Studies ____ Academic event attendance ____

Other

6. SOCIAL GROUPS

How do you feel about the social groups listed below in regards to the following characteristics? Mark with an X, 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Very Often), and 5 (Always).

Characteristics		Social Groups	1	2	3	4	5
E m p a t h e t i c	You are able to understand other people's thoughts and feelings and see and feel a situation through their eyes.	North Americans:					
		English (GB)					
		Argentineans:					
		Mexicans:					
		Afro-Colombians:					
		French:					
		CIC ³ :					

Characteristics		Social Groups	1	2	3	4	5
T o l e	You find the unexpected and unfamiliar an enjoyable challenge and want to help resolve possible problems in ways that appeal to as	North Americans:					
		English (GB)					
		Argentineans:					
		Mexicans:					

³ Colombian Indigenous Communities

r a n t	many other group members as possible.	Afro-Colombians:					
		French:					
		CIC:					

Characteristics		Social Groups	1	2	3	4	5
R e s p e c t f u l	You are ready to regard other people's values, customs and practices as worthwhile in their own right and not merely as different from the norm.	North Americans:					
		English (GB)					
		Argentineans:					
		Mexicans:					
		Afro-Colombians:					
		French:					
		CIC:					

Characteristics		Social Groups	1	2	3	4	5
F l e x i b l e	You adapt the way you work with others to avoid unnecessary conflicts. You tend to adopt other people's customs and courtesies where this is likely to be appreciated.	North Americans:					
		English (GB)					
		Argentineans:					
		Mexicans:					
		Afro-Colombians:					
		French:					
		CIC:					

Characteristics		Social Groups	1	2	3	4	5
O p e n t o C o m m u n i c a t e	You are alert to the many ways in which misunderstanding might arise through differences in speech, gestures, and body language.	North Americans:					
		English (GB)					
		Argentineans:					
		Mexicans:					
		Afro-Colombians:					
		French:					
		CIC:					

Empathetic	Tolerant	Respectful	Flexible	Open to Communication
You are able to understand other people's thoughts and feelings and see and feel a situation through their eyes.	You find the unexpected and unfamiliar an enjoyable challenge and want to help resolve possible problems in ways that appeal to as	You are ready to regard other people's values, customs and practices as worthwhile in their own right and not merely as different from the norm.	You adapt the way you work with others to avoid unnecessary conflicts. You tend to adopt other people's customs and courtesies where this	You are alert to many ways in which misunderstanding might arise through differences in speech, gestures, and body language.

	many other group members as possible.		is likely to be appreciated.		
--	---------------------------------------	--	------------------------------	--	--

North Americans: 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ **English:** 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___
Argentineans: 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ **Mexicans:** 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___
Afro-Colombians: 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ **French:** 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___
Colombian Indigenous Communities: 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___

Thank you for your cooperation.

Nombre del participante: _____

Documento de Identidad: _____

Firma: _____

Fecha: _____

Appendix C. Protocol of narrative interview, first meeting

The relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters and professional identity of English Language Teachers: A narrative multiple case study before, during, and after a short-term sojourn abroad
Pablo Enrique Acosta Acosta

Narrative interview, first meeting

Main question:

What role did intercultural interactions and encounters play on the professional identity of English language teachers before, during, and after a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.?

Dear Participant,

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of intercultural encounters on the professional identity of English Language Teachers before, during, and after a short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S. This is the first of two interviews. It will be divided into three sections, all around your participation in the summer camp. The first section covers your stories before your participation in the summer camp in the U.S. The second covers your life in the summer camp and the relationships you established and the encounters you had with people from other cultural backgrounds (ethnicities and countries). The third section is about what happened after the trip to the U.S. and how this experience influenced your decisions about work, life, etc. So that, thank you so much for accepting my invitation to be part of this study. Let's get started.

Please read the following question and think about the stories you can tell me to answer them. Your stories are the most important elements for me and my study. So, I would like to ask you to please tell me as much as you can about each one.

BEFORE traveling abroad

This is the "question" I have to have in mind:

Please, tell me your stories about the intercultural encounters you had before traveling abroad.

1. When did you go to the camp?
2. How did you feel about that trip at the time?
3. How did it happen?
4. What were your expectations with the opportunity to live this sojourn?
5. Did you have any concerns? Were you worried about anything?
6. How did you see yourself before traveling to the U.S. at that time?
7. What did you think was going to be challenging for you at camp and the U.S.? What did you expect was going to be challenging for you at camp and the U.S.?
8. We live in Popayán where we have contact with indigenous communities and afro communities; we also have contact with people from other countries. How had your relationship been with people from those communities?
9. How did you see your relation with those communities? What experiences had you had with them?
10. I imagine you also had contact with people from other countries. Did you have any? What expectations these contacts raised to you?
11. Did the experiences of interacting with these people from different cultural groups had any effect on you? Did they prepared you or had any impact on your attitude when you traveled abroad?

Other questions for Pablo to keep in mind.

- ... how prepared were you to travel to the U.S. Were you professionally, emotionally, academically, culturally prepared to live that experience?
- ... how was your life as a languages student before traveling to the U.S. to work in the summer camp?
- ... the stories about motivations, reasons, ideas you had to participate in the summer camp program.
- the ideas you had in regards to the American culture and other cultures you were going to share with at camp?
- the stories of contact/interactions you had had with people from different communities before the trip. Had you had encounters with foreign people from the U.S., France, etc.? How were those encounters?
- What relationship you think you could find between working at a summer camp and your career?

DURING the short-term sojourn in a summer camp in the U.S.

This is the “question” I have to have in mind:

Please, tell me your stories about the intercultural encounters you had during your sojourn in the U.S. (both at camp and out of it).

1. Had you traveled abroad before your trip to the U.S.?
2. Can you tell me the story when you traveled from Popayan to the U.S.?
3. What happened during the first days at camp?
4. Were there any changes afterwards?
5. Being at camp may be a life-changing experience. What was that experience during the sojourn that changed your life the most?
6. How did the education that you get at the University help you navigate this experience?
7. What were the most significant moments of the sojourn at camp?
8. Who did you interact with during the working hours, your spare time, out of camp?
9. What did you do when you went out with your friends?
10. What sort of (personal, academic, professional) abilities did you put in practice at camp?
11. What did you learn at camp?
12. What were the most challenging things you lived at camp?
13. How did you deal with those challenges?

AFTER your return to Colombia

This is the “question” I have to have in mind:

Please, tell me your stories about the intercultural encounters you had after your return to Colombia.

1. Okay, how long did you stay at camp and the U.S.
2. What happened when you were going to leave the camp?
3. Did you think that something was going to change when you return?
4. Do you recall any moment in which you used anything of what you learned in your sojourn for your classes at the university? What about the practicum or the classes you were teaching?
5. Do you remember any situation in which you behaved differently because of the experience of the summer camp?
6. Based on your experience of this sojourn, were there any changes in the way you looked at other cultural groups from Colombia or abroad? (conceptions/ideas of other groups)
7. After all of these years, if you look back when you came back, how did you evaluate that experience?
8. Did you go back to the U.S.? How was it different from the first trip?

9. How long has it been since you went to that summer camp? Well, after all of these years, how do you think that experience has impacted you (professionally, personally, etc.)? Tell me an example of that in your professional life.

Appendix D. Stories of artifacts' protocol

The relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters and professional identity of English Language Teachers: A narrative multiple case study before, during, and after a short-term sojourn abroad
Pablo Enrique Acosta Acosta

Stories of artifacts:

A souvenir from my first summer camp

Take (or look for) that souvenir you got from camp. It may be something you bought for you or an item you were given as a present. If you do not have it at hand, try to remember what it was and how it was. If possible, take a picture of it to attach to this reflection.

Then, please narrate the story or any story you remember about this souvenir.

You can use the following ideas to help you tell the story:

- What is the souvenir/item? How is it? What is its name?
- Who gave it you? When did you get it?
- What is it made of?
- Why did you keep it?
- Who did you share the souvenir with? Why?
- What stories does it bring to you?
- What moments, places, or people does it remind you of? Why?
- What meaning did it have for you when you got it? What meaning does it have today?

Finally, write or audio record the story or stories this souvenir brings to you, and please send it to me via email or WhatsApp.

Appendix E. Protocol of narrative interview, second meeting

The relationship between intercultural interactions and encounters and professional identity of English Language Teachers: A narrative multiple case study before, during, and after a short-term sojourn abroad
Pablo Enrique Acosta Acosta

Narrative interview, second meeting

Objectives:

1. To expand on some of the stories told or on new ones.
2. To fill in the gaps left in the first interview.
3. To try to find other artifact stories.

Untold stories:

What story did you not tell me about your summer camp experience in the U.S. that might be iconic of what you experienced?

Stories of artifacts:

Please try to remember a couple of other artifacts that are part of your camp stories, such as camp t-shirts, jackets, and souvenirs—something very special that you bought for yourself, your mom or siblings, or other loved ones.

Your identities:

Let us start with this statement: "We constantly learn as we live."

What were your learning intentions during the sojourn? What did you want to learn for yourself as a person and as a future English teacher?

What did you want to gain for your career, for your life?

Interactions:

During the first interview, you told me about your interactions with different people in the camp. What did these interactions teach you about your professional development?

What would have happened if you had not met them?

What would you have missed out on?

Affective, emotional relationships (the look at others):

Consider another premise: "Consciously or unconsciously, we look at the people around us (we have perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about them, especially about other ethnic groups)."

What was your view of different cultural/ethnic groups?

From the interactions you established in the camp with people from different places and cultures,

How did your views of people change?

When you returned to Colombia, what happened? Did your perception of them change?

Appendix F: Illustration of codification process: from text to codes and categories

Line	Text	Code	Synthesis	Final Category
1	What meaning did it have for you when you got it?			
2	What meaning does it have today?			
3	Luciana: "She had the sensitivity to create this photo album for me.	Gained appreciation	Personal growth and achievement	Personal growth and achievements: Transformative journeys
4	Although it was initially challenging to make friends at camp,			
5	people were invariably kind during the farewell parties.			
6	Surprisingly, you would discover that they liked you" (02/11/2021,			
7	written narrative, group 1).			
8	Counselors and fellow workers typically showered you with	Acceptance and inclusion	Personal growth and achievement	Personal growth and achievements: Transformative journeys
9	presents and souvenirs at the end of camp, making you feel			
10	finally accepted and included in some way			
11	"Isabella" (42 years old, group 1): ... It reminds me of X	Evocative symbol	Emotional connection and Memory	
12	(the city where the summer camp Y was located) because I			
13	vividly recall where I acquired it, the specific place I			
14	was in at that moment, and the reactions I experienced.			
15	... her name was Margaret, the one who gave it to me. As I	Gratitude	Emotional connection and Memory	
16	said before, she was my boss in the camp, but she was very			
17	special to me, so I still remember her because of that, and			
18	because of other nice things she did for me.			
19	Isabella: "I think it's special too, because when my keys get lost,	Exclusive possession	Ownership and Exclusivity	Beyond possession of artifacts
20	everyone knows those are my keys [if they find them], and they			

21	return them to me, at least the people who are around" (02/12/2021,			
22	oral narrative, group 1).			
23	Santiago: "The moment I did it and acquired it, the second I	Personal achievement	Personal growth and achievement	Personal growth and achievements: Transformative journeys
24	finished it, it became an achievement" (01/28/2021, oral narrative,			
25	group 2).			
26	I would talk to myself and say, 'Ah, that's cool. It's interesting	Personal achievement	Personal growth and achievement	Personal growth and achievements: Transformative journeys
27	that I managed to do this.'			
28	In the following days, it served as a decoration, and without	Decoration	Ownership and Exclusivity	
29	realizing it, it became a part of the camp landscape for me.			
30	And today, it serves as a gateway to memories, to the recollection	Gateway to memories	Emotional connection and Memory	
31	of waking up in the morning and seeing it as soon as I opened my			
32	eyes.			
33	Salomé: "When I first purchased and wore the sweater, I felt	Exclusiveness	Ownership and Exclusivity	Beyond possession of artifacts
34	different. It wasn't something you could find in any store; it was			
35	exclusive to those who belonged to the camp" (03/12/2021, written			
36	narrative, group 2).			
37	Now, the sweater serves as a cherished souvenir. However,	Cherished souvenir, International touch	Cultural connection, Emotional connection and memory	
38	whenever I see the picture in which I am wearing it, I vividly			
39	recall the day I took it and the emotions I experienced; I felt			
40	very "international".			
41	Antonella: It is like the memory and the affection I had for those	Gratitude	Emotional connection and memory	Personal growth and achievements: Transformative journeys
42	people. It is one of those triumphs that one usually achieves in life.			
43	It has been one of my most significant accomplishments to have			

44 been there, despite the many challenges I went through to be in that
 45 place at that moment. And yes, it has always been significant for
 46 my life and professional journey (02/19/2021, oral narrative, group
 47 2).

48 Emmanuel: "I hope I can keep the mask as an artifact that reminds
 49 me of the opportunities I was given and how grateful I am for the
 50 connections I made and the experiences I had" (03/23/2021, written
 51 narrative, group 2).

52 I chose the froggy mask since it represents the continuum of my
 53 pre-, during-, and post-experiences at camp, marking my initial
 54 encounter with this transformative journey.

55 Emiliano: Well, at first, I grabbed it [a mug], thinking it was a cool
 56 thing, and now it's basically the only physical memory I've got from
 57 that camp. So, I still keep it, and yeah, it's hanging out in my
 58 kitchen as part of my mug collection, but I actually use it, not just
 59 for show. (01/30/2021, oral narrative, group 2)

60 "Emiliano" (34 years old, group 2): It maintains its
 61 significance as a mug because that's what I use it for.

62 Gabriela: "It was somewhat gratifying to realize that I had acquired
 63 the Walkman through my own efforts. For me, it signified the
 64 prospect of possessing something personally meaningful, a means
 65 to engage with music" (02/21/2021, written narrative, group 1).

66 Gabriela: "I just loved it from the first moment I saw it and held it
 67 in my hands. I thought it was perfect for my needs. The best way to

Acceptance and
inclusion

Personal growth and
achievement

Personal growth and
achievements:
Transformative
journeys

Personal achievement

Personal growth and
achievement

Cherished souvenir

Emotional connection
and memory

Functional/utility

Cherished souvenir

Emotional connection
and memory

Personal achievement,
Self-attainment

Personal growth and
achievement

Personal growth and
achievements:
Transformative
journeys

Exclusiveness

Ownership and
Exclusivity

Emotional/sentimental

68	enjoy my time while working" (02/21/2021, written narrative,			
69	group 1).			
70	The device served as a tool to occupy my thoughts, enabling me	Coping mechanism,	Emotional connection	
71	to concentrate on the study of the English language rather than	Goals achieved	and memory, Personal	
72	being preoccupied with the emotional distress of my partner,		growth and	
73	who struggled to assimilate the positive aspects of our shared		achievement	
74	experience.			
75	This journey taught me that the quality of an experience is	Resilience mindset	Personal growth and	
76	heavily influenced by one's own perspective. Avoiding		achievement	
77	challenges and evading even the slightest problem impedes			
78	personal growth and the development of resilience.			
79	Presently, the significance of this artifact lies in the	Mindful contentment	Personal growth and	
80	joy derived from responsibly embracing my learning process		achievement	
81	in a more autonomous manner. I have acquired the ability to			
82	discern the positive aspects of situations, learning to			
83	appreciate and derive satisfaction from life's modest			
84	pleasures, including familial bonds and the comforts			
85	afforded to me.			
86	Moreover, this journey has instilled in me an appreciation	Cultural empathy	Cultural connection	Cultural empathy
87	for understanding and respecting diverse cultures without			
88	passing judgment. Rather, it has fostered a readiness to			
89	make a positive impact in the lives of others when the			
90	opportunity arises.			
91	“Mariangel” (45 years old, group 1): Each sighting of the	Personal achievement		

96	CD player triggers memories of my time at summer camp and		Personal growth and
93	the excitement of receiving my very first paycheck. It		achievement
94	takes me back to the day I purchased it during my initial		
95	visit to Target here in the States.		
96	This device holds a special place in my heart, representing a	Gateway to memories	Emotional connection
97	cherished period in college and carrying a trove of unforgettable		and memory
98	memories.		
