

**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE WITHOUT
INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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and
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**Presentation given at the
9th Annual ELT Conference
Bogotá, Colombia
September 14-16, 2006**

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Acknowledgement

Many thanks are due to the students of Intercultural Communication, 2nd semester 2005, of the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana* for their participation in the Subculture Project and their permission to reprint their experiences and findings here:

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ABSTRACT

Developing intercultural competence within the context of the foreign language learning experience can help students acquire the ability to understand and adapt to difference as well as the ability to be flexible and open when facing new experiences. Although commonly assumed to be dependent on an international experience or encounters with foreigners, these competences can be developed in the absence of either. It is important, however, to pay particular attention to the interplay between theory and practice in order to ensure greater possibilities of experiential learning. By building awareness and carrying out practical tasks at the same time, students are able to grasp the need for intercultural competence in today's world and classroom as well, and can also have numerous opportunities to learn from intercultural encounters. This presentation shares one experience, the "Subculture Adaptation Project" carried out in a university-level Intercultural Communication course in Bogotá, Colombia, where students were able to combine theory with experiential learning as they studied their own adaptation process to a local subculture. The presentation also outlines several specific ways in which intercultural competence can be developed within the foreign language classroom, but without the need for contact with foreigners or travel to an English-speaking country.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of intercultural communication, and more specifically intercultural competence, has become more frequently incorporated in contexts of foreign language learning since its inclusion in the general competences of the *Common European Framework* (Council of Europe, 2001). Still, many treatments of intercultural competence are based on the concept of culture in its regional or ethnic dimension, and imply an international experience or focus in order to develop knowledge or competence in this area. More recently, however, culture and intercultural communication are being approached as the construction of different discourses or realities on an interpersonal or inter-group level (Palfreyman, 2005). The “assumptive world of the individual” (Barna, 1998) is a highly significant, although subjective, perspective of reality; and it is common for individuals to routinely encounter difference in their perspectives of the same event. Differences according to age, gender, profession, religious affiliation, and organizational or family membership are common, and we could argue that distinct perspectives of reality, values and patterns of behavior are constructed within these groups, much in the way they are in different cultures according to an ethnic dimension. Achieving effective communication between members of different groups, not only ethnic or regional groups, is a challenge for living in today’s diverse communities. Many authors (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) consider the role of culture in interpersonal communication much in the way that it has long been considered for intercultural communication in the traditional sense.

According to this perspective, the development of intercultural competence among foreign language learners can, but does not necessarily imply a visit to or focus upon a foreign culture or country. There are many opportunities to develop our learners’ abilities to adapt to and accept difference within their own culture, and to become more flexible and open when confronted with new experiences. This session is designed to raise participants’ awareness of what culture and intercultural competence is, and to share an exercise intended to develop precisely that competence within the students’ everyday encounters. After discussing the

dimensions of culture and intercultural competence, the session will review some basic theoretical frameworks used to address the development of intercultural competence and the adaptation process to a new culture.

The main focus of the presentation is the sharing of the Subculture Adaptation Project, which was carried out in an Intercultural Communication course at the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana*. Students in this project were asked to identify a subculture that they wished to join, or to which they needed to adapt. Results of this project show that students relied heavily on theories of culture and intercultural communication, but that they were able, through experiential learning, to develop strategies of their own to face obstacles in the adaptation process, including stereotyping and generalization, miscommunication and loss of face, confusion and anxiety. General conclusions of the project will be shared, as well as applications for the development of intercultural competence more specifically in the context of foreign language learning from which most of the conference participants come. The session should be of interest to any language teaching professional interested in developing intercultural competence, but whose students lack international experience or access to foreign cultures.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Perspectives about intercultural competence and ideas about how to achieve it are rooted in one's underlying conception of culture. It is commonly thought that development of intercultural competence involves another country or must be accompanied by an international experience. This assumption is in part due to the fact that the traditional definition of culture is still very much in play in the literature and the field of intercultural communication. The traditional definition of culture, and perhaps the most common still remains some version of E.B. Tyler's famous 19th century statement that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [*sic*] as a member of society" (in Lustig & Koester, 1999, p. 28). These beliefs, norms and patterns of behavior are also considered to form a hidden superstructure that acts as a filter through which members of a group see things (Geertz, in Berthoin & Friedman, 2003). This group is usually considered according to an ethnic dimension, that is, as having a distinct national, regional or territorial affiliation, or at least a hereditary dimension since it is assumed that culture is learned and passed along over generations as well.

While it is still frequently widespread, and appeals to common sense as well, this traditional definition is accompanied today by other conceptualizations of culture that definitely impact the approach to intercultural communication and attempts at developing or studying intercultural competence. Today's concepts of culture include three important distinctions from the above. The first distinction is that culture can involve different domains, and is not an overriding set of norms applicable to all domains that most people inhabit on a daily basis. Second, culture can reside in both the individual and the group (Palfreyman, 2005; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Third, culture is not a fixed set of parameters, but instead it is fluid and emergent, and particularly influenced by the interaction process itself (Fairley, 2000). In this way, culture might not even be the appropriate term, but rather might relate more closely to what is known in post-structuralist theory as a **discourse** (Foucault, in Palfreyman, 2005; Carr 1999), which is "a way of

interpreting and describing the world that is constructed through language and that appears across different contexts” (Palfreyman, 2005, p. 213).

This new interpretation is highly relevant when attempting to explain and address the difficulties that many people have communicating across boundaries of identity with others of different groups, not just different ethnic groups, but also across boundaries of age, gender, class, organizational or professional affiliation, or even across boundaries of identity constructs such as hobbies, personalities, and subculture identification. Again, while much of the material on intercultural competence refers to culture in the traditional sense, and perceives intercultural communication as a problem of two different ethnic worldviews coming into contact, for our purposes it is relevant to draw on these latter considerations in order to address, as well, the communication problems most immediate and common in our setting.

Indeed, the subculture project and other ideas for the development of intercultural competence discussed later in this presentation will assume the following: First, that our students do not have easy access either to foreigners or to foreign culture. Second, that components of intercultural competence and awareness can be developed without necessarily presuming international encounters. And third, that our students could indeed benefit from increased intercultural awareness and communicative competence across cultural and other boundaries in order to help them have more productive and peaceful relationships in their daily interaction in today’s society.

PERSPECTIVES ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

There are a variety of frameworks for dealing with intercultural awareness and competence, as well as with the adaptation process to a new culture. Most of these frameworks and models presuppose one conceptualization or another of culture, as discussed above, and may be considered useful to our discussion. Nevertheless, it may also be useful to examine several of these frameworks here.

Traits, Competences and Behaviors

Most of the models for developing intercultural competence assume the need to possess or acquire specific traits, characteristics, skills or competences in order to be more successful at dealing with members of other cultures, or with other individuals as well. It is assumed that these items may be identified, and in some cases even taught, in order to increase an individual's competence. In general, this approach looks for indicators of higher levels of global awareness as well as relativity and include such traits as flexibility, openness, patience, empathy and tolerance for ambiguity. By competence, most agree that the concept includes aspects such as effectiveness as well as appropriateness (Lustig & Koester, 1999). These competences include the ability to establish interpersonal relationships, as well as the awareness of the implications of cultural differences. Other competences are the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately, the ability to adhere to norms and get help, and the ability to collaborate in order to accomplish something of mutual interest or need. An obvious, but often overlooked element also includes target language proficiency (Fantini, 2001).

Once this process has begun, however, the development of intercultural competence normally involves an on-going and lengthy process, occasionally even with plateaus and setbacks, and normally with no end to the process. Intercultural interactions are considered similar to interpersonal interactions, but with many more variables. We could imagine a continuum of interactions with intimates or strangers within one's own culture, interaction with people within a different subculture, interaction with others from other cultures in the home culture, and interaction with others in the host culture. Each stage on the continuum presents more and more variables that make interactions less and less predictable (Fantini, 2001).

Another approach is behavioral, which is not just what people think but what they do. This approach looks at specific communication behaviors during interactions. It also looks at both the appropriateness and effectiveness of interactions and includes such evidence as the

following: display of respect, orientation to knowledge, empathy, task role behavior or how to get something done, relational role behavior or how to relate to others, interaction management, and tolerance for ambiguity (Koester & Olebe, in Lustig & Koester, 1999).

Goals and Adaptation Development

Without a doubt, success at acquiring intercultural competence is linked to the purpose and goals of the interaction. For some, a goal might be to achieve native-like behavior; for others, it may be to gain acceptance in the host culture; and for still others, it might be just to survive (Bradford et al, 1998). Fantini's (2001) YOGA framework or "Your Objectives, Guidelines, and Assessment" allows participants to define their own objectives, guides them throughout the experience and also provides an assessment tool for use at various stages and at the end of the process. This framework is also unique in that it includes both the guest's (outsider) and host's (insider) perspectives. This clearly illustrates the view of competence mentioned above as being that which is not only effective behavior (from the guest's viewpoint) but also as appropriate behavior (from the host culture perspective). This model includes four dimensions: Educational Traveler, Sojourner, Professional, and Specialist (Fantini, 2001).

The Bhawuk and Triandis model of Intercultural Expertise Development (1996) accounts for the relationship between cultural knowledge, theoretical knowledge and experience in the development of intercultural competence. It includes four categories of expertise along a continuum: lay, novice, expert and advanced expert. Moving along the scale depends on the individual's level of theoretical knowledge and length of time in the host country. It is assumed that more training and theoretical knowledge of intercultural concepts, along with extended stay will enable the person to develop knowledge (and expertise) at the level of application (knowing how to apply theory to experience) and eventually will allow for automatic knowledge where an individual might know how to behave at the moment of interaction. This model is interesting because it correlates strongly with the experiences of students in the subculture project, described

later, where they were able to understand their experiences more deeply through their increasing contact with theoretical knowledge. This model is important as well because it stresses the limited developmental potential in pure experience, and attempts to explain why long-term residents of foreign countries often know how to behave but rarely know why certain behaviors or norms are preferred.

Avoiding and Dealing with Cross-cultural Misunderstanding

Some of the literature on adaptation is specifically interested in the analysis or prevention of cross-cultural misunderstandings. Although considered by some as an out-of-date piece of scholarship, Gordon's 1974 study of homestays in Bogotá, Colombia is quite useful for its challenges, even today, of typical folk wisdom surrounding intercultural encounters, especially in reference to those traits and characteristics thought to be important. Indeed, not only intercultural sojourners, but most people, including language students, do not normally consider themselves closed, difficult, arrogant or inflexible people. Yet most people routinely have mild to serious misunderstandings on an almost daily basis. The subjects in Gordon's study were all individuals who were highly motivated to live in Colombia and participate in their host families' lives. Still, as Gordon points out, "goodwill and intelligence are not enough" (Gordon, 1974, p. 3) to prevent unintended but serious misunderstandings capable of undermining not only a guest's ability to adapt well to a homestay, but also capable of generating and perpetuating cultural stereotypes on the part of both North Americans and Colombians. Gordon proposes a syllogistic analysis of the situations surrounding misunderstandings where the underlying cultural assumptions and patterns as well as situational premises are the source of many misunderstandings among people who actually have a strong intention to communicate well (Gordon, 1974).

Another interesting perspective on the source of misunderstandings relates to what is known as the "assumptive world of the individual," where one person's individual reality,

regardless of cultural background, may be quite distinct in relationship to another (Barnlund, 1998).

...people see the world through templates which force them to construe events in unique ways. These patterns or grids which we fit over the realities of the world are cut from our own experience and values, and they predispose us to certain interpretations. Industrialist and farmer do not see the “same” land; husband and wife do not plan for the “same” child; doctor and patient do not discuss the “same” disease; borrower and creditor do not negotiate the “same” mortgage; daughter and daughter-in-law do not react to the “same” mother.

The worlds people create for themselves are distinctive worlds, not the same worlds others occupy. They fashion from every incident whatever meanings fit their own private biases. These biases, taken together, constitute what has been called the “assumptive world of the individual.” The worlds people get inside their heads are the only worlds they know. And these symbolic worlds, not the real world, are what people talk about, argue about, laugh about, fight about.

Barnlund (1998, p. 41).

Later in the subculture project, we will examine this perspective more in detail as participants were given a specific assignment in reference to this concept. Students also found particularly helpful a collection of over-riding caveats, pointing out common errors in intercultural and even interpersonal communication. Barna (1998) points out six stumbling blocks to intercultural communication that may also be applied to communicating with others even inside the same culture. They are: Assumption of Similarities, Language Differences, Nonverbal Misinterpretations, Preconceptions and Stereotypes, Tendency to Evaluate and High Anxiety.

The preconceptions and stereotypes of others and the preference for similarity especially lead to the practice of “othering.” Othering refers to “the ways in which the discourse of a particular group defines other groups in opposition to itself: an Us and Them view that constructs an identity for the Other and, implicitly, for the Self” (Woodward, in Palfreyman, 2005). Othering can perpetuate generalizations and stereotypes and cause major barriers to successful communication.

Interactional Perspectives

Related to the newer views of culture mentioned earlier, there are also alternative perspectives of intercultural communication competence which perceive culture and intercultural encounters as more fluid and unpredictable in terms of creation, emergence and interaction. Hammer (in Fairley, 2000, p. 9) states “it is not the communication skill per se that contributes to the various adaptation and or effectiveness outcomes... Rather, it is the individual interactants’ judgments of self and other competence based upon the communication performances engaged...” Casmir (in Fairley, 2000) attempts to provide a model of intercultural communication that moves away from the unidirectional emphasis of previous models, proposing that the model should mirror the interactionality and participatory nature of real human encounters. He suggests that new cultures can emerge through intercultural interaction since individuals are actually more than the boundaries of cultural norms to which they may belong. This is particularly relevant when viewing subcultures since most individuals move fluidly from subculture to subculture throughout their daily routines, adapting, modifying and creating themselves in the process; and these qualities that enable this daily adaptation are precisely the same ones required when facing “foreign” or “new” cultures and subcultures.

This alternative view sees culture as linked to the concept of identity, and that cultural identities are emerging, modifiable and situational, negotiated during interactions, much in keeping with the not-only-ethnic, discourse-natured concept of culture outlined earlier. In this view, culture is actually emerging, dynamic, and created even within the contexts of interaction, subject to change. Competence in this context is not characterized by universal or general aptitudes (tolerance, respect, empathy) applicable to any and all situations, but rather dependent on the particular situation or context and one’s interaction with it. Intercultural communication is not just for divergent groups or contexts, but is actually characterized by the coming together through interaction and shared experience and the third culture that emerges from this interaction.

THE SUBCULTURE ADAPTATION PROJECT

In order to explore these frameworks and theories in a practical and experiential exercise, it may be interesting to document several findings from the “The Subculture Adaptation Project,” carried out with third-semester-university students enrolled in the undergraduate Bilingual Education program at the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana* in Bogotá, Colombia. The objective of the project was for each student to follow his or her personal process of adaptation to a new subculture. This paper assumes that a subculture can be defined as a slice of the host culture, a group to which one belongs in addition to belonging to the umbrella culture of, for example, Colombians or Bogotanos. Examples of subcultures include professions and families, each with their own rules and patterns of behavior, insider knowledge, discourses and beliefs. Other examples can include those chosen in this study: hip-hoppers, *Millionarios* or *Santa Fé* soccer team fan clubs, gym-goers, or members of classrooms or a particular group of friends or social circle. The rationale for the project was that much of the material from class and from readings on intercultural communication could be implemented without having to travel abroad. The goal was not necessarily that students adapt completely, but to carry out an attempt at the adaptation process and to learn from the experience.

In a previous course, Communication Theory, students were exposed to the concept of a subculture, and had spent an entire semester studying insider meaning within the subcultures they belonged to, for example, metal-heads, billiard players, Jehovah’s Witnesses, soccer teams, families, musical groups, salsa clubs, Dance-Dance-Revolutionaries, and more. Students were able to observe and analyze all aspects of insider meaning, including symbols and artifacts, use of space and environment, cultural patterns, values and beliefs, and verbal and non-verbal communication. They acquired tools and techniques such as ethnographic field notes, participant observation, use of informants, and they learned to analyze the observed phenomena according to general theories of meaning creation within groups. Two of the most important theoretical figures in the course included Edward T. Hall and Roland Barthes, and students used these frameworks in their analysis of cultural patterns, artifacts, symbols and space. The Intercultural

Communication course was an extension of this previous training and provided new theoretical concepts related to cultural variation, the adaptation process, and intercultural competence.

Task 1: Choose the Subculture

The subculture project was divided into four tasks. In the first task, students were asked to choose the subculture to which they wished to adapt and to explain the reasons for their choice. Personal motivations for the choice of subculture differed, but most expressed a real need and desire to adapt to the group. In three cases, students chose a new class with a new teacher who was a foreigner (North American and British). Other students related their choice to social needs and relationships with friends or boyfriends who belonged to different subcultures that the student felt the need to join: e.g. a different social circle, *Millionarios* and *Santa Fé* soccer team fan clubs, gym-goers.

Many students saw the subculture project as a way to confront their own preconceptions about the group and as a way to overcome difficulties that they might have experienced previously, or to deal with issues related to difference, miscommunication, misadaptation, and the existence of preconceptions, stereotypes and generalizations.

Angelica felt nervous about going to *El Campin* football stadium with the *Millionarios* fan club because of the widely publicized violence that had occurred there only a few months before. In spite of her prejudices and anxiety she decided to go in order to understand the subculture and test “all those taboos.”

Angela chose the “*World Deport*” gym where her best friend worked out even though she admitted that “I do not like to exercise and I have a bad preconception about people who go there. For me, these people are superficial and plastic. It means that they only want to look good and they do not care about knowledge.”

Milena chose her boyfriend’s social circle despite previous difficulties. “For me to make an integration with them has been hard because of many reasons. First, I feel unsure of my own

knowledge and personality in front of them. Second, my boyfriend's friends have another style of life. For instance, they have families and other kinds of experiences that I do not have, so their perspective is different from mine."

Jennifer chose her Research teacher, a North American. She shows that we not only need to adapt to different cultures, but to different people as well. "Besides adapting to my new research teacher, I have to share with people I have not worked with before."

Most voiced feelings of anxiety and anticipation about facing new situations and new people, nervousness about facing the new experience, but optimism about the project as a way to help them learn how to adapt to new situations. Some even presented a list of objectives, or a plan to mentally visualize how the project would develop.

Viviana wrote, "Based on my experience with my English teacher, who is an American, I am positive that I can learn much more through differences because they lead me to develop adaptation strategies."

Jennifer says, "Many times I have to tell my research teacher; 'Excuse me, could you please explain...?' It is embarrassing. But I will overcome misunderstandings and later on I will laugh with my classmates about the professor's jokes"

Milena comments, "When I was in my boyfriend's office, I felt a little nervous because there were people I did not know, so I was thinking, 'How do I have to behave here?'"

Angela: "I feel anxious because I know that it can be difficult for me since I have to do physical exercise. But, I also want to meet new people and ways of thinking."

Task 2: "The Assumptive World of the Individual"

This task made reference to a theoretical concept, the "assumptive world of the individual," which students had encountered in a reading by Barnlund (1998). This concept is relevant to the development of intercultural competence since it explores the existence of reality from within each individual rather than outside of our heads. This explains why two cultures,

groups, or even individuals can perceive “the same thing” from entirely different perspectives, a phenomenon that lies at the heart of many, if not most, intercultural or interpersonal misunderstandings. This concept is also important because it helps us move beyond the typical consideration of culture as something static and predictable by groups, comprised essentially of common beliefs and patterns of behavior. Rather, it helps us explore culture as something more flexible, emerging and variable, articulated in individual or group discourses.

Most students in this task related an incident that had taken place in their new subculture and then attempted to analyze and explain the basis for misunderstanding through the distance between their own perspective of the event vs. that of the member or members of the subculture.

Angelica writes, “When I saw the police woman in *El Campin*, (football stadium) I smiled like saying ‘Hi!’ but she thought that I had something strange because of my smile. I did it because I was quite nervous.” Angelica was given an extra-complete frisking and had her belt confiscated as a “reward” for her “polite” behavior.

Angela encountered what she considered “strange behavior” on her first visit to the gym. She writes, “The first time I was there I felt uncomfortable because people looked at me as an alien. After telling my friend how I felt, she told me that they always behave like that with new people... Usually we see, hear, smell and feel according to our own reality, rather than based on the insiders’ one....not everybody understands and interpret behaviors in the same way. Today I am conscious about it, and it is really helpful.”

Here we can see the emergence of strategies employed by the students as they attempted to investigate the “insider” meaning vs. their own understanding. They used participant observation, informants, sometimes multiple informants, sometimes asking the member of the subculture directly, reflection, class discussion and time as tools to understand the incident from another perspective.

Diana writes about her British teacher, “I do not like it when my teacher says ‘shut up.’ Some of my classmates say that it is a way to control, others interpret this expression as ‘*callese*

la jeta.' After asking my teacher about this phrase, I could understand that she just wants us not to talk among ourselves in order to lead us to ask her in case of any doubt."

Developing strategies such as having informants, and asking the person directly helped students to overcome prejudices. One student wrote, "We have learned that it is necessary to reflect on the 'WHY' before making judgments." Using informants to understand cultural patterns was another of the strategies that students achieved. In addition, informants were also helpful for those students who had hypothesis or prejudices since students could compare both insider and outsider perspectives. Diana looked for a third person point of view in order to be objective.

Viviana used a combination of direct questioning and comparison with her own cultural reference to interpret the following problem:

"Study all the new reading's vocabulary for the exam." When my English teacher asked me to do that, I thought he was crazy. This is impossible to achieve, and it doesn't make any sense. English 4 readings have 60% new words, and X's favorite phrase is, "I will ask this on the final test." So, in spite of my fear when I am in front of X, I decided to ask him what he means by "study all the new reading's vocabulary." His response was "I do not want you to memorize every single word, just use some of them in your writing. Also, I want you to focus on the main ideas of the readings, not just in new words. Don't worry about it." After our conversation, I asked myself why I was stressed about memorizing all the words. I concluded that it was because in my culture, students are supposed to learn many things by memory. After clarifying this misunderstanding, I realized how different our "assumptive world" was. He asked me something according with his own intentions and worldview, and I understood another thing due to my personal interpretation about it..

Viviana

Once students achieved the understanding from another perspective, it aided them in breaking down preconceptions, stereotypes and generalizations since it added a dimension of understanding and empathy.

Jennifer writes, "I like risks, or why do you think I am here in Colombia?" It was not funny for me, but it was for most of the class because they already know the kind of jokes that the

research teacher tells. For me he was a little rude. After asking one of my classmates what was so funny about that, I could see the situation from another perspective and could laugh too. Now I am becoming more open minded and respectful while adapting to my subculture.”

Vivian writes, “I had some prejudices about my English teacher. Last semester a friend of mine told me, ‘His speech is not easy to understand. He assigns a great amount of homework. Exams are difficult and they are the only grade along the semester. Also, he is not friendly at all.’ Fortunately, now I am aware of how harmful it is to keep those prejudices, so facing the situation is a good chance to get rid of them. The high degree of interaction I developed during classes and out of them helped me a lot to know and adapt to my English teacher.”

Task 3: Where am I on the Adaptation Scale?

In this task, students were asked to place themselves on the Bhawuk and Triandis' scale of intercultural expertise. This scale makes reference to the interplay between theoretical knowledge, culture-specific knowledge and experience, and their effect on the individual's adaptability to a foreign culture. (Bhawuk & Triandis, 1996). Most students placed themselves between the novice and expert stages, with some feeling that they were located more towards the novice stage and others more towards the expert. After placing themselves on the scale, they gave concrete evidence to support their decision.

Most students discussed the role of theoretical knowledge and its usefulness for helping them adapt to the new subculture. Key to reaching the “associative” stage of the scale and moving to be an “expert” is acquiring the ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical experience. This relationship does not become automatic where the person naturally knows how to behave until the “advanced expert” stage, but at the associative stage, the person at least is able to make the link between what he or she experiences and what intercultural theory might lend to that experience. In our case, it helped students analyze their experiences, although often after the fact.

When analyzing their ability to apply theory, students referred frequently to Edward T. Hall's discussion of cultural patterns (Hall, 1976, 1969, 1959) studied in the previous semester. It is interesting to note that students found his theoretical insights into cultural patterns useful even in the new class.

In most assessments, students mentioned that they had successfully adapted to the subculture enough to carry out basic interaction as part of the group without feeling they were too much of an outsider with no idea what to do. Most said that they felt fairly comfortable when being in the group, in social situations, knew when to laugh, could follow the social interaction and basically felt okay.

Jennifer writes, "I have applied in my research class what I have learned in Intercultural Communication class, so I can say that theory is helpful to face and understand differences. Taking into account my experiences in research class, I consider that my level of theoretical training is high because when I face new situations I analyze differences, common symbols, expressions, and so on; theory and experience must go together."

Milena explains, "Despite of the fact that I felt uncomfortable and anxious with my boyfriend's co-workers because of their age and knowledge, I am trying to adapt using the theory I have learned. During my process of adaptation there, once I talked with one of my boyfriend's friends and I realized that she was not as I thought. So, I am sure that theory leads me to be open-minded, and helps me a lot to get rid of generalizations."

The only exception was Angelica who did not feel that she had adequate knowledge about soccer or enough theoretical knowledge to apply to her experiences in *El Campín*. She still felt like a novice. She writes, "I do not know what theory I can apply when I am interacting with unfamiliar people or subcultures. When I was in *El Campín* watching a game, I felt tired so I sat down. As soon as I did, people looked at me in a bad way. Later my boyfriend explained that people there do not sit down until after the first 45 minutes of the game." In spite of his explanation, Angelica was upset because she considered that she had a right to sit down if she

was tired.

Most students felt that in spite of their progress, they still had many things to learn and continued to experience misunderstandings or continued to struggle with difficulty accepting members of the other subculture. Some students began wondering if there were limits to adaptation. Milena writes, “I met a man (in the group) with a sexist attitude. This... made me feel so uncomfortable and also caused me to make strong generalizations about him because according to my own perspective, this way to behave was disgusting and disrespectful...So, I could not avoid my own perception about his personality.”

Again, students pointed to a variety of tools, skills and strategies they had developed to understand members of the subculture and to read encounters and experiences through the eyes of theory. Most felt that the theory allowed them to be more aware of difference and aware in general. Strategies were used successfully to deal with miscommunications and to avoid “bumps.” Strategies included participant observation and analysis afterwards, speaking to informants, reflection, class discussion, and analysis. Frequently, time and more experience aided in the students’ ability to adapt and move up the scale.

Diana writes, “I am moving from the novice to the expert stage since I have developed some strategies like the identification of artifacts, symbols, cultural patterns, use of space, and power relationships. Noticing these variables is possible through out observation, field notes, participant observation, data analysis, reflection, having informants, asking the person directly and so on. Based on my experience, I consider that theory and practice are really helpful to understand unfamiliar situations and reach adaptation.”

Task 4: Final Conclusions

In the fourth and final task of the project, students were asked to write a report about the state of their adaptation to the subculture they had chosen. They were to give specific examples to

discuss the extent of adaptation, gauge the level of success of the adaptation, and specific reasons why they had or had not successfully adapted.

In this exercise, the degree of success depended greatly on how students defined adaptation, and to their own personal goals in terms of the extent to which they needed definitely to become a part of the subculture, or perhaps to simply understand it. Also, this personal objective of adaptation also had to do with the personal investment each individual had of belonging to the group, and to what extent.

In Milena's case, there were very high expectations as well as high stakes involved in her belonging to her boyfriend's social circle. Therefore, she continued, in spite of her successes, to have many unsure feelings about her adaptation, and she tended to become anxious each time there were difficulties in her complete adaptation. On the other hand, she did manage to find a friend among the group, and this ally enabled her to integrate herself more into the social circle and feel a greater sense of belonging. She also discovered that interaction with her boyfriend's group of friends was easier outside the office in "neutral" spaces like at soccer games since the topics of conversation were not about knowledge or money. "During the soccer game, I had the opportunity to talk with some of them about my studies without feeling anxious or ashamed...once, while I was waiting for my boyfriend in his office I met Y; it was nice because after our long conversation I could realize that my assumptions about her personality were wrong."

Clearly for the students there were different goals in terms of the levels of adaptation they had hoped to achieve. For some, it was just a matter of facing a new group of people and understanding them better, being able to deal with the anxiety of entry into a new group. As soon as these people felt that they knew the group better and could interact on a basic level, they felt that their adaptation had been complete.

In Jennifer's case, she felt that she had been successful adapting to the research class of the North American teacher. She stated that she had been able to learn the system and the rules

and was able to follow the class. In other words, she knew what she had to do to get along in the course and could follow the class sessions better, knew when to laugh at the teacher's jokes, and generally felt that she fit in fairly well in the class. She had also developed strategies to find out what she had to do. So, in relation to her goals and definition of what adaptation is, Jennifer felt she had been successful. "Adapting to my new class was kind of easy because sometimes my classmates helped me to understand and solve misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Also, I checked the website that the teacher had designed for clearing up doubts and read his class summaries. I consider that I have adapted to the class since I know the flow of the course, I understand more when my teacher speaks, and I feel much more comfortable because I am doing the right thing; I am not lost any more."

Viviana chose the same teacher but her view of adaptation was slightly different from Jennifer's. For Viviana, the preconceptions and generalizations she had about the teacher were the basis for her choosing that particular subculture because she instinctively knew that she should confront those preconceptions in order not to perpetuate the stereotyping of the teacher among her classmates. So, in her eyes, adaptation was not only to the structure and routines of the class, but to the teacher as a person who is new, different and unknown. In order to adapt to the subculture, to the course, she had to learn to adapt to the person and to confront her biases. Viviana was also able to develop the strategy of dialogue as a mechanism to clarify class questions with the teacher and also as an important vehicle to open the door for further communication with the teacher. It is through this dialogue that she got to know the teacher on the personal level and modified her preconceptions based on first hand experience rather than gossip. "Once I asked my teacher to clarify some rubrics and he told me, 'Don't worry about my strong suggestions. You got it!' Then I realized that the communication problem between us was not language or the class itself, rather it was because of biases. So, I began to talk with him after classes about him as a person since I wanted to face preconceptions. Currently, I consider that free of prejudices and assumptions, we are having a nice relationship."

It is important to note that all students who completed the project felt that they had been successful at their adaptation to the subculture although each clearly had a different notion regarding what adaptation would entail and also regarding their own personal goals in the project. It is also important to note that the students were able to make this adaptation through a combination of theory, experience and the development of specific skills and strategies. Students frequently mentioned the theories outlined above as a framework for understanding difference. They also resorted frequently to fieldworking skills they had learned in the previous semester as a way to observe and analyze culture. Perhaps more importantly, they independently developed strategies for understanding, coping with and analyzing what they saw. This way, they were able to develop and learn through the experiences in the subculture, even when these experiences were restricted to discreet “entries” into the subculture rather than constant exposure.

CULTURE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

This subculture project demonstrates that intercultural competence can, indeed, be acquired without international encounters. Still, there are applications of this work available to the general foreign language teacher, not only to the teacher of specialized intercultural communication courses. Here we will review briefly how culture is typically incorporated into the foreign language classroom and suggest some applications more specific to the development of intercultural competence, not just to the gaining of knowledge of the target language culture.

Typically, cultural instruction offered as part of foreign language courses involves orientation to the target culture through what is called **objective culture** (Bennett, 1998). Objective culture generally refers to the customs, political and social institutions, history etc. of the culture in question. While this content is more common in some programs and foreign language traditions than others, many teachers are familiar with this objective cultural knowledge included in textbooks or programs of study, or have received this type of instruction as students themselves. Information about important holidays, cuisine, major landmarks, political and

cultural institutions as well as basic history are often included in curricula as a way to give life and cultural orientation to language instruction.

Another way of looking at culture is what is referred to as **Big-C** culture (Bennett, 1998). Culture with a Big-C refers essentially to the fine arts, literature, music, dance, film, etc. It is also common to find foreign language textbooks and curricula at times devoted to information about famous authors, musical genres and musicians, artists etc. as a way of encouraging students' interest in the foreign language. In addition to information about target language Culture (Big C), many teachers and programs also embrace general cultural development as an important contribution to students' overall growth. It is common, especially in the school setting, to find programs or instructors who include cultural activities as part of the educational experience (music, film, literature, dance, art, etc.).

In reference to intercultural competence, the *Common European Framework* (Council of Europe, 2001) distinguishes between intercultural awareness and intercultural know-how. Whereas intercultural awareness refers generally to the learner's awareness of him or herself as a member of a global community, intercultural skills and know-how refer more to the individual's way of dealing with cultural differences. Indeed, many individuals' only formal exposure to intercultural issues arises through the foreign language classroom. Bennett (1998) advocates the need for knowledge of what he terms **subjective culture** as well, which includes the beliefs, values, assumptions and patterns of a culture. Indeed, with overseas travel becoming more and more common, many teachers and students also have had the opportunity to visit or live in countries where the target language is spoken, or may even be native speaker teachers. Subjective cultural knowledge is now easier to come by through direct experience or even through cultural notes or orientation included in textbooks and programs. Issues such as communication styles, rituals of politeness and respect, celebrations and other customs are more and more commonly found in textbooks, and can be incorporated into foreign language

classrooms easily as a way to increase students' awareness of differences in the target language culture.

Even without explicit guidance by a program or textbook, since language itself is the medium through which subjective culture is constructed, language instruction per se is filled with opportunities for intercultural-awareness building for teachers with more training, knowledge or interest in these areas. In some cases, textbooks are pointing out more and more the necessity to pay attention to sociocultural and sociopragmatic conventions in language so that students not only sound more native-like, but actually are able to achieve basic social etiquette and to adhere to cultural norms in the foreign language.

In relation to the know-how part of intercultural competence, there are several arguments for not stopping at the level of knowledge and awareness, especially if one is interested in building students' actual competence in intercultural situations. Some argue not only for this knowledge and information, but also for the need for general intercultural theory (Bennett, 1998). This theoretical knowledge is seen as necessary along with experiential training in order to prepare people not only for understanding why different patterns exist, but also to help lay the foundation for possible adaptation to a new culture (Bhawuk & Triandis, 1996). However, in the foreign language classroom, one may wonder how general intercultural theory could be made accessible, interesting and relevant to students' lives. Strong rationale exists, however, to work with culture from a different perspective involving not only the world "out there," but also the variation of worlds within our immediate setting. Indeed, the need to facilitate our students' approach to, consideration of, and interaction with others is not only appropriate, but necessary, especially in light of recent developments in foreign language teaching.

In terms of building students' actual exposure to intercultural situations and developing in small ways students' intercultural competence, the foreign language classroom today often serves as a microcosm of outside society where group identities converge in an ever more hybrid world, and where misunderstanding is common. Especially in classrooms and programs advocating

more engagement of learners on a personal level and more meaningful and interactive experiences, some teachers find that students encounter difficulty interacting and communicating with others. It is common to find “othering” behaviors among students towards their peers that seriously affect the success of the communicative classroom. Other practitioners are trying to move towards increased autonomy and independence for learners, peer-learning, cooperative learning and other alternative forms of structuring the learning experience. Many of these changes are met with suspicion, preconceptions and rejection by our learners because they imply new ways of being and doing in the classroom, new patterns and rules of behavior, not to mention new and different beliefs and concepts as to what a classroom, and more specifically a language classroom, is supposed to be. It is possible and necessary, given these challenges, to devote specific attention to developing students’ competence to adapt to and work with others, as well as to adapt to the new learning experience per se. Below, we will discuss some ways that students can be helped to develop the ability to deal with difference, adapt to and work with others despite different identities, interests, preferences and backgrounds, and to face anxiety regarding new experiences.

APPLICATIONS FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Earlier it was argued that foreign language students possess a distinct need for intercultural competence, even though they may not plan to travel to a foreign country. Today’s culturally hybrid world and classroom need individuals with increased awareness of the different ways of being and perceiving. Students need to be open and prepared for new experiences, to be trained in self-reflection and to be flexible enough to adapt to and work with others. There are several ways that these skills can be developed within the actual foreign language learning experience. In fact, for today’s foreign language classroom, where interaction and autonomy are advocated, these skills are necessary immediately for coping with this new and different classroom experience. There are concrete ways that teachers can help develop students’

awareness of the multiplicity of perspectives and the need for openness when facing new ideas, opinions and experiences. In addition to raising awareness, teachers can also structure the classroom experience in specific ways that encourage students' exploration and appreciation of multiple perspectives. There are also specific language items that can and should be made available to students in order to aid them in the use of language that fosters more inclusive, open attitudes and relationships in the classroom.

Interaction activities in the foreign language classroom

Today's classrooms aim to enable students to interact effectively in English. The learning context for this interaction is the classroom itself, and the interlocutors are all the members of the class, not only the teacher. More meaningful and authentic interactions are being advocated, and authentic tasks are now common in textbooks as well. These interaction tasks suppose that students will share information, ideas, opinions and personal reflections as well. Since affect, motivation and emotions are highly relevant in students' feeling comfortable speaking English, it follows that peer interactions need to be comfortable, supportive spaces in which students can express themselves. Too often, however, we find the simple exchange of interests and hobbies fraught with othering, stereotyping and rejection. Students are routinely distanced and ostracized for having interests or hobbies different from those of their classmates, even though this diversity is a natural part of being an individual.

Multiple perspectives are a matter of course when interacting with others, and learning to be open toward and to deal with different ideas and opinions is necessary for interactive classroom activities to really work. Interaction activities in class should be organized that invite a diversity of opinion and interests; and students' awareness should be built as to the need to celebrate a variety of interests and activities in the classroom. Indeed, there are many typical classroom activities that ask students to compare personal and family information, interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes, favorite movies and music, places to go, etc. Too many times, these

activities are limited to the recitation of “my information” and then “your information” without much explicit exploration of the extent to which the class members share the same information or whether there may be more of a multiplicity of perspectives, and why this might be. In many cases, students even repeat what other classmates say for lack of vocabulary to describe their own situation, but also for fear of being ostracized by classmates for being different. The following structuring sequence would be important to take into account in order to maximize sharing potential and to prepare students for real interaction and appreciation of difference:

Preparation:

Students need sufficient time to prepare and reflect on what they would like to share. This preparation should be done individually since it affirms each student’s identity and empowers each one to make an independent decision about what to share. Even in topics that may not seem to necessitate much preparation (“a very important person,” “my hobbies and interests,” “my favorite TV show”), students benefit from individual time where they can affirm their own identity and make independent decisions, not just repeating what everyone else has already said. It would be important also, even at beginning levels, to ask students to prepare the reasons why these things may be important to him or her. This preparation time allows for greater involvement in the information to be shared and helps students move away from interaction as an artificial classroom construct, and more towards interaction as an authentic engagement of negotiated meaning with classmates.

Before Pairs: Expectations about Interaction

Students generally expect pair activities in class to be recitations of canned phrases and ideas. They do not instinctively expect real interaction to take place in the context of what for them is artificial language practice. It is usually necessary to make the expectations of classroom interaction explicit for students. Teachers should look for short, easy phrases to convey this idea

as well as tips for making interaction more authentic and meaningful (e.g. “Look at your partner,” “Make eye contact,” “Listen to your partner.”).

Students should also be given concrete tasks to give this interaction a communicative goal. These tasks should anticipate the presence of both similarity and difference so that students will automatically be required to think in these terms. It is fruitful to ask students to not only practice the language while sharing information, but to share background reasons mentioned above, and also to reflect on why they think the information is similar or different. This task requires students to go beyond the surface appearance of their classmates to reach realizations about them as people that might work towards building greater empathy.

Language in Pairs and Groups:

In addition to different expectations about interaction, students are often at a loss as to how to achieve more involvement through language. At times, conversation models in textbooks contain involvement strategies such as “Oh really?” “How about you?” “That’s great.” “Me too.” By using the conversation models effectively, students can easily and naturally have more affirming, inclusive exchanges. It might be important, however, to make the effect of these phrases more explicit for students, to help them actually understand how these phrases make the conversation more pleasant, a place where commonalities are being stressed vs. differences.

For pair work, teachers may want to choose one or two of the above or similar phrases. These phrases can be put on the board or passed out to students to put in front of them on their desks while they do the pair work. Students can be reminded to include these phrases in their pair work in order to make the other person feel that they are interested and listening.

While in Pairs and Groups:

During the sharing stage teachers should monitor for verbal and non-verbal language that is inclusive or exclusive. Students often need extended training in seating arrangements (facing each other) in order to facilitate positive interactions.

It is crucial that a variety of perspectives be encouraged, and that the sharing portion of the interaction be emphasized. It is important to have multiple sharing opportunities, even where students interact with a variety of partners in order to ensure that multiple perspectives on the same issue are brought to light.

Sharing the Conclusions: Things in Common, Appreciation of Difference

As stated before, interactive activities should have concrete tasks as their communicative goal. This is especially important as students are being trained to be more open, tolerant and in techniques of inclusive, affirming conversation styles. Later when they are well trained, activities can be more loosely structured since students more automatically know what to do.

Many interactive activities end when the pair work is over. Pairs and groups might be asked to report, but there is usually no step beyond this. Ending activities in this way makes it difficult for students to evaluate their performance during the speaking activity, and also fails to engage students in the multiplicity of possible perspectives.

Questions like the following encourage reflection on the activity and point the way for students to explicitly contemplate other opinions.

- How did you feel talking to your classmates?
- Did you find out anything you didn't know about your classmates?
- Does anyone have the same interests as you? Who? Do you like the same thing for the same reason? For different reasons?
- Does anyone have different interests from yours? Did you learn the reasons for their interests?
- Did you find out about something new you want to try? (watch, listen to, see, think about)? What? Why?

Structures like the ones above can be accomplished at even the most basic levels of the foreign language classroom. Allowing space and respect for differences in simple things like

interests, hobbies and preferences lays the foundation for the future exchange of opinions on weightier social topics and identity constructs inside and outside the classroom.

Autonomy and Independence Training

In classrooms advocating more autonomy and independence for learners, where students may be involved in training on learning strategies and study skills, it may be important to discuss the need to be open to new experiences and ways of learning. Most students continue to come to the foreign language classroom with the expectation that learning means sitting at a desk, looking at the board, filling out an exercise book and listening to the teacher. Many language classrooms today, however, are structured in such a way as to encourage precisely the opposite of these activities: more active behaviors on the part of students and more responsibility on their part for the learning process. This shift in responsibilities, however, is not automatic, and does not come easily to students. It may be necessary to engage in prolonged conversations with students in order to raise awareness and challenge deep-seated attitudes and expectations about the learning process. It is also necessary to train students explicitly for them to be able to assume their new responsibilities. A great part of learner training involves this confrontation with expectations, beliefs and attitudes regarding the learning process, and the development of students' openness towards new experiences. Students who are aided in developing a higher level of adaptability, independence and flexibility will more likely be able to face new situations in the future.

Some steps are crucial to increasing students' awareness and skills at being more autonomous:

Principles:

The basic principles of autonomous learning must be made clear to students in simple language from the beginning of the process. These "rules of the game" serve as a basis for raising students' awareness about the reality of the learning process and they can be re-visited on

a daily basis to help students grasp their new role. In addition to naming the assumptions, it is crucial that teachers provide the argument or rationale upon which each one is based. Here are but a few:

- Learning is faster and more effective when students are motivated and have acquired special skills;
- Active students learn better: homework, preparation before class, review after class, active participation in class;
- Students who take risks learn more quickly: Don't be afraid of making mistakes, Ask when you have a question;
- Students learn better who can help themselves. Try it yourself first before you ask.

Structure:

The learning experience must be structured in coherence with these principles. If students encounter the principles daily as part of their classroom experience, then the results will speak for themselves. Students will begin to become more open to new experiences and will be able to take additional steps to become even more independent in the future.

- Include learner training as an integral part of the classroom experience;
- Train students explicitly on active study habits: how to use the textbook and other materials, vocabulary techniques, dictionaries, etc.;
- Follow up on self-study activities done outside of class. Evaluate how well these techniques are working for students. Make adjustments;
- Focus not only on content, but on learning strategies that will help students be more successful. Make skill-based activities (listening, reading, grammar, writing) more about how to work with those skills, not only about the content of the task;
- Structure learner training in the same step-by-step fashion as language instruction. Students need multiple exposures and a lot of practice to internalize these habits;
- Pay attention when working with technology. Most students who have difficulty at the beginning are suffering from technophobia of one type or another;
- Address students' fears and anxieties about new experiences directly. Most students require a prolonged process in order to become more independent, and this process includes stages of discomfort, rejection, anxiety and prejudice. Their fears and anxiety represent deep-seated cultural expectations about what learning is and are related to their inner-most self-conceptualizations.

Working Effectively with Others

Perhaps one of the most obvious and important necessities in terms of developing intercultural competence is acquiring the ability to adapt to and work with others. This ability is also of utmost importance in today's foreign language classroom, where activities and tasks

suppose that students should not only share information, but should also use this information in order to collaborate on group tasks and projects. Too many times, teachers allow students to perpetuate divisions in the classroom by assuming that students' reluctance to work with others is a natural but insurmountable obstacle. Such behaviors and attitudes of rejection, stereotyping and othering do not bode well for the collaborative classroom, and even less so for a society built on cooperation rather than competition. Teachers might not understand that, again, building awareness and structuring activities to train students to collaborate are necessary prerequisites for such activities to be successful.

Awareness:

As discussed above, students will need to understand the principles underlying collaborative learning as well as the benefits of working in this fashion. Teachers will have to enlist students' agreement to participate according to the rules of cooperative learning and may even need to subordinate the goals of particular language tasks to the goals of students' training in cooperative methods of work. Here are some characteristics of cooperative learning:

- Assignment of roles;
- Listening and considering all points of view;
- Group decision-making, negotiation and compromise;
- Group processes, responsibilities and outcomes, not a collage of individual work.

Structuring:

Experienced teachers know that telling students to "get into groups" does not necessarily ensure a group learning experience. These tasks and activities require detailed structuring in order to achieve both content and training objectives, with training objectives sometimes even overriding content objectives, especially with students who are not yet experienced in cooperative learning techniques.

The following ideas might help structure group activities and collaborative projects better:

- Begin structuring the activity prior to grouping. Some individual or seat work preparation is usually needed so that individuals, especially intrapersonal or shy students come to the group prepared to participate and do not allow the natural group leaders to overpower them;
- It is usually difficult to clarify tasks while or directly after groups are being formed. Make the initial group task clear before assigning the groups, or write it on the board or pass it around on paper to be referred to before, during and after groups are formed;
- Chunk tasks into much smaller pieces so that groups have concrete steps to complete; Too many instructions or vague instructions with no steps cause groups to revert to more typical patterns where stronger or more extroverted students control the group;
- It is also interesting to assign specific roles to individuals in the group. This also facilitates group dynamics since spontaneous roles are repressed (again, strong students taking over). It is interesting to give students roles typical of their personalities, and also interesting to give students new roles (group leader, rule, time keeper or moderator, scribe, reporter);
- Leave plenty of time for sharing results of group work.

Language:

Students can be specifically trained in language that encourages others' opinions in order to facilitate group work and interaction activities. Expressions to show involvement and interest in others should be incorporated into group activities, and students can even be evaluated explicitly on how well they listen to others, cooperate, show interest, and encourage everyone's participation.

It is often necessary to guide students towards more inclusive expressions like, "That's a good idea," "Why don't we...", "Let's try...", or "What if we ...," instead of limiting expressions like "I disagree," or "In my opinion," in order to facilitate this working interaction on group projects. In fact, much of the effort on the part of teachers and students in these collaborative tasks needs to be focused on the actual management of the group work rather than on the outcome only. The ability to negotiate, conciliate, compromise, and reach and follow agreements is key in determining not only the quality of the product, but also the integrity of each participant's role in the process.

CONCLUSION

In the settings discussed in this presentation, it is possible to help students improve their ability to understand and adapt to difference, as well as to help them enhance their openness and flexibility when faced with new experiences and situations. This process is not automatic, however, and it is not enough to simply recognize or communicate to students the importance of these abilities in today's society. It is important to combine theoretical awareness along with structured experiences in order for students to be able to develop these competences. It is well worth taking to heart Raymond Gordon's assertion that "goodwill and intelligence are not enough" (1974, p. 3). Stating the need for tolerance and understanding is not enough for students to acquire these highly desirable traits. They need to understand which behaviors might demonstrate these traits, and they also need plenty of practice and exposure to situations where they will need to exercise them.

Intercultural competence is a concept that might not receive much attention in the realm of foreign language learning and teaching. Nevertheless, most educators would likely agree that the skills and abilities it includes are indeed sorely needed in today's society. The foreign language classroom affords clear and necessary possibilities to help students develop these competences and this awareness, and it is a most appropriate place in which to help students prepare for future, daily encounters with others. It is not necessary to leave one's home country in order to begin to develop theoretical or experiential knowledge and competence in intercultural communication. Rather our daily interactions offer a clear and appropriate context in which to improve our ability to understand, approach and work with others.

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APPENDIX 1
PERMISSION FORM

I _____ hereby give permission to Josephine Ann Taylor and Viviana Morales Henao to reprint my work related to “The Subculture Project” for purposes of their presentation in the 9th Annual ELT Conference in Bogotá, Colombia.

Signature

APPENDIX 2

TASKS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PROJECTS

SUBCULTURE PROJECT

Subculture project: Task 1

Choose the subculture you wish to use for the first course project. Write a brief (1-page) explanation of why you have chosen the particular subculture, and describing the degree of interaction you will be able to have with that subculture. If you wish to use a subculture which you only have limited interaction with, please propose a way to work with the deadlines outlined by the course.

Subculture Project: Task 2

Complete the following task based on fieldwork in your subculture.

Kelly (in Barnlund, 1998) argues that individuals and cultures create and use different templates, patterns or grids to see the world, that things we assume are common are not, in fact, the same for everyone, even the child is not the same child according to the different interpretations by the husband or wife. Barnlund goes on to argue that the worlds people create for themselves are distinct, not the same, and that they constitute the "assumptive world of the individual." It is the only world they know, and these symbolic worlds, not the real world are what people talk about, etc.

In the subculture you are studying, demonstrate these different worlds. Choose several aspects to compare, for example, ideas, facts, artifacts, people. Analyze to what extent the subculture's perception or interpretation of that aspect is the same or different as your own. Explain how the two perceptions differ. For example, explain the meaning in your subculture and then the meaning according to the perception of the subculture you are studying.

Submit a 1-2 page report about your findings.

Subculture Project: Task 3

For the following task, please refer to Bhawuk and Triandis' chart of intercultural expertise. Use the information in the article to place yourself on the chart in reference to the subculture you are working on.

Use concrete evidence from your experience in your subculture (and from your theoretical training in our courses) to explain why you placed yourself where you did on the chart. For example, what degree of theoretical training do you think you have? How have you applied that theoretical knowledge in the subculture experience? What level of experience do you have in the new subculture? How has this growing experience helped you to be able to adapt into the culture?

Write up your ideas in 1-2 pages.

Subculture Project: Task 4

Please write a report about the state of your adaptation to the subculture you have chosen. Give specific examples to discuss the extent of your adaptation into this subculture. Do you feel that you have, indeed, been successful in your adaptation? Discuss the specific reasons why you have or have not successfully adapted.

Your report should be 2-3 pages long, and you should prepare a short 5-10 minute oral report for class.

USA PROJECT

USA Project: Task 1

From your contact with people from the U.S. so far, and your reading, please explore some of the cultural patterns, assumptions and values you have encountered in theory and practice.

How can you see the values and assumptions reflected in patterns of behavior by Americans? How do you perceive differences between yourself, or your own culture, and the Americans you have experienced?

USA Project: Task 2

For this task, you will study about one area of cultural variation in the U.S.

Please sign up with me for one of the chapters in the following book. You must sign up first for the chapter so that not everyone chooses the same one. This book is available in the mini-library next to my office:

Genzel, R. B. & Cummings, M. G. (1994). *Culturally speaking*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

You should also consult the book that Olga gave each of you, *IF YOU WANT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES*, since this book also has cultural information.

In this task, you should use the chapter you have chosen to present a written and brief oral report about a particular set of cultural patterns or variations. You will present your information to your classmates. Your written report should be 1-2 pages long. Please post it in the Conferencing Topic, so everyone can share the information.

USA Project: Task 3

The written report for this task should explore the interview you conducted with the teacher who sojourned in the U.S. Feel free to explore whatever aspects are most relevant, based on the interview you conducted (adaptation, cultural patterns, re-entry, etc.)

In your written report, describe and attempt to interpret or analyze the person's experience, given your knowledge of the concepts and research about intercultural communication. Apply the theory to the person's experience.

Do not transcribe the entire interview. Use only the segments from the interview that are useful to illustrate your points. Please submit the tape from the interview to me. I would also like to see a copy of the interview questions you prepared.

To learn more about re-entry, read the following:

Martin, J. N. & Harrell, T. (1996). Reentry Training for Intercultural Sojourners. In Landis, D. & Bhagat, R. S. (Eds.). *Handbook of Intercultural Training*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. pp. 307-326.

USA Project: Task 4

For your final task and the completion of this project, please try to sum up you and your classmates' research on US culture in order to respond to the following:

How much do you feel you have been able to learn about US cultural patterns? What resources are available to you, and which have you used in order to learn about this culture?

Do you feel that the resources available and the research you and your classmates have done is sufficient to prepare you for travel to the US? If yes, please explain why.

If no, please explain what other training or resources you consider necessary in order to carry out an appropriate pre-departure training to the US or any foreign country.