Fostering cultural competence awareness by engaging in intercultural dialogue – a telecollaboration partnership

María Villalobos-Buehner[1]

Abstract. This study measured changes in cultural awareness levels between two groups of US students in their third semester of a Spanish class. One group (experimental group) collaborated via Skype with a group of English language learners from a Colombian university and the other group (control group) did not. The experimental group met seven times during the semester to discuss a variety of cultural topics such as health care and gastronomy. The control group addressed the same topics by examining them among members of the same class. Both groups answered a pre and post self-awareness questionnaire. Mixed factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) results showed significant differences between the two groups. There was no change in scores from pretest to posttest for the control group, but scores in the trained group increased significantly. Students from the treatment group show substantial gains in skills, knowledge, and awareness of themselves in their interactions with others in one semester.

Keywords: telecollaboration, intercultural dialogue, cultural competence, cultural awareness.

1. Introduction

Cultural competence awareness is the process of being cognizant of different perspectives, value systems, and internal biases while being open and accepting of those differences (Western Center, 2017). One way to support the development of cultural competence awareness is by promoting cultural exchanges since

1. Rider University, Lawrenceville, New Jersey, United States; mvillalobos@rider.edu; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5631-3706

How to cite this article: Villalobos-Buehner, M. (2019). Fostering cultural competence awareness by engaging in intercultural dialogue – a telecollaboration partnership. In F. Meunier, J. Van de Vyver, L. Bradley & S. Thouësny (Eds), *CALL and complexity – short papers from EUROCALL 2019* (pp. 379-384). Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.38.1040

© 2019 María Villalobos-Buehner (CC BY)

they provide opportunities to develop the skills necessary to negotiate cultural differences (O'Rourke, 2007).

Thanks to the development of telecommunication platforms, telecollaboration partnerships have become widespread in language classrooms. Telecollaboration partnerships are "collaborative approaches to learning where knowledge and understanding are constructed through interaction and negotiation" (O'Dowd, 2016, p. 292). During the last two decades, through these partnerships, teachers have created a diverse portfolio of these experiences. These include practices from well-known e-pal programs established around 1996 to simpler forms of inviting a guest-speaker to connect with a group of language learners to explore societal aspects of a culture. In the last ten years, the field has also experienced growth in the amount of research in the effectiveness of these collaboration partnerships mainly in the area of language learning (Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2018). O'Rourke (2007) divides telecollaboration partnerships into two models, e-tandem and intercultural collaboration.

This study used the intercultural collaboration model. This model emphasizes the integration of cultural and linguistic exchanges as part of the curriculum. The teachers are fully involved in the design of these experiences and create tasks that require their students to interact with their international partners to complete them. For instance, the e-pal partner became their first source of information when researching trends such as the use of social media. O'Dowd (2003) defines intercultural dialogue as "a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage" (p. 363).

Most of the studies in the area of intercultural awareness growth in classrooms are qualitative or are the result from other areas of focus such as students' L2 grammar development (Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2018). This study offers a mixed method analysis to the growth of intercultural awareness through the use of intercultural dialogues with the use of a telecollaboration initiative. The main questions of this study are as below.

- Does the integration of an intercultural model of telecollaboration promote intercultural awareness?

- To what extent do students exhibit intercultural self-awareness during the telecollaboration and in their answers to the different tasks?

2. Method

2.1. Participants and context

The participants were 31 American college students in their third semester of a Spanish course. These students were mostly first and second year students. The control group had 15 participants and the experimental group had 16 participants. Their Spanish class met three times for 60 minutes each week. Both classes had the same textbook and covered the same number of units and topics. Both teachers embraced communicative approaches to language teaching and believe that language learning and cultural understanding go hand in hand.

The 16 participants from the experimental group met with another 18 college students from Colombia who were learning English. Both groups were at the B1 proficiency level of English and Spanish according to the Common European Framework of References for languages (CEFR). These groups met six times during class time for 30 minutes in English and 30 minutes in Spanish. After each meeting, the American students had to complete a task in Spanish with the information they gathered during each session. The main discussion topics were these: Personal relationships, Halloween celebration, college students' daily routine, digital stress, and tourism. Before each encounter, students had to prepare a series of five questions about the main themes. The researcher provided a start-up question for each topic. For instance, the start-up question for the topic about relationships was *How would you want to spend a day with friends?* After the encounter, each student had to submit a written report about what they found out, make a comparison, share it with the group using digital discussion boards, and react to three other member's reports by drawing a conclusion on what they all discovered.

2.2. Data collection and data analysis

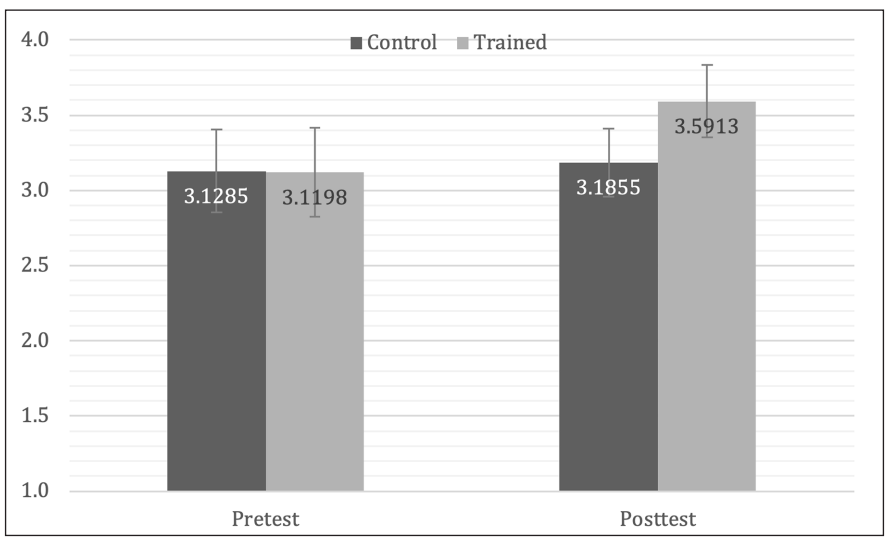
The researcher collected data at different points in the semester. The 31 participants answered a demographic data gathering survey and a brief version of the cultural competence self-assessment checklist developed by the Greater Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (Western Center, 2017) at the beginning of the semester. The same students answered the cultural competence self-assessment at the end of the semester to measure cultural competence awareness growth. The researcher did a qualitative analysis of both the post-meeting reports the students had to submit and the notes taken from the videotaping of the six

encounters. This study used inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis and used Byram's (1997) model as the framework to analyze their answers and interpret their interactions.

3. Results and discussion

The first question asked was whether the integration of an intercultural model of telecollaboration promoted intercultural awareness. According to the analyses performed using SPSS 26, the results show that the experimental group became more interculturally aware. For each question, a two (control group and experimental group) by two (pretest and posttest) mixed factorial ANOVA was performed with the use of the survey as a repeated-measure. Both the main effect of the test, $F(1,28)=10.74$, $p=.003$, $\eta=.53$, and the interaction were significant, $F(1,28)=6.66$, $p=.015$, $\eta=.44$. There was no change in scores from pretest to posttest for the control group, but scores in the experimental group increased significantly (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Pretest and posttest: survey results – 1=Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Fairly Often, and 4=Always



The statistical and practical scores of the experimental group in the areas of valuing diversity, how culture informs their judgment, willingness to share their culture, and openness significantly increased in the posttest in comparison with the control group. These are areas that demonstrate growth in cultural competence awareness.

The second question asked was to determine the extent to which students exhibited intercultural self-awareness during the telecollaboration and in their answers to the different tasks. After an inductive analysis of the qualitative data from the video observations and written reports, the researcher concluded that the emergent categories could be described using Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence. Some of the most common students' behaviors during the telecollaboration sessions were those of curiosity, openness, and a disposition to engage in the various conversations as equals. The experimental group largely remained conversing in Spanish during the time allocated for this task during the class. They demonstrated high interactivity and student engagement. These students demonstrated the ability to acquire new knowledge of Colombian culture and cultural practices in real-time communication and interaction by asking further questions beyond the ones they prepared in advance, and by smiling and maintaining eye contact. Alternatively, students were able to explain a significant amount of the social processes knowledge acquired during the interactions in the post meeting reports. One of the students' reactions to one of his peer's videos demonstrates this type of knowledge: "Great video! My partner, Santiago, also wakes up very early to attend classes at his college. It was surprising how early he woke up!" (Bob).

4. Conclusion

This study supports the impact of telecollaboration initiatives in the development of cultural competence awareness. The results of the study show an increase in cultural competence awareness in the group that participated in the telecollaboration sessions. They also demonstrated intercultural communicative behaviors such as those of curiosity, openness, and a disposition to engage in the various conversations as equals. These exchanges also invite students to become responsible participants of a pluralistic society.

References

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.

Dugartsyrenova, V. A., & Sardegna, V. G. (2018). Raising intercultural awareness through voice-based telecollaboration: perceptions, uses, and recommendations. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 13*(3), 205-220. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2018.1533017

O'Dowd, R. (2003). Understanding the "other side": intercultural learning in a Spanish-English e-mail exchange. *Language Learning & Technology, 7*(2), 118-144. http://llt.msu.edu/vol7num2/odowd/

O'Dowd, R. (2016). Emerging trends and new directions in telecollaborative learning. *Calico Journal, 33*(3), 291-310. https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v33i3.30747

O'Rourke, B. (2007). Models of telecollaboration (1): E(tandem). In R. O'Dowd (Ed.), *Online intercultural exchange: an introduction for foreign language teachers* (pp. 41-62). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847690104-005

Western Center. (2017). *Cultural competence self-assessment checklist*. Western Center for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. http://rapworkers.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/cultural-competence-selfassessment-checklist-1.pdf

Published by Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

© 2019 by Editors (collective work)
© 2019 by Authors (individual work)

CALL and complexity – short papers from EUROCALL 2019
Edited by Fanny Meunier, Julie Van de Vyver, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thouësny

Publication date: 2019/12/09

Rights: the whole volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives International (CC BY-NC-ND) licence; **individual articles may have a different licence**. Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online (https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2019.38.9782490057542) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book is believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover theme by © 2019 Frédéric Verolleman
Cover layout by © 2019 Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)

Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-2-490057-54-2 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-2-490057-55-9 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)
ISBN13: 978-2-490057-53-5 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2019.