

# Fostering cultural competence awareness and dispositions to reach *thirdness* or *decentering* by engaging in intercultural dialogue

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## Abstract

The goals of this research were twofold. First, to measure changes in cultural awareness levels between two groups of students in their third semester of a Spanish class. The trained group formed by university students from the USA collaborated with another group of university students from Colombia using Skype. The second aim was to identify attitudes of *decentering* or *thirdness* in the trained group. This group met seven times during a 13-week semester to discuss a variety of cultural topics such as college life and daily routines. The control group addressed the same issues by examining them among members of the same class and answered a pre-and post-self-awareness questionnaire. Mixed factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) results showed a significant increase in interculturality scores in the trained group. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis of the video recordings, essays, and video chats from the trained group showed dispositions to *decentering* (*thirdness*) or to engage in an understanding process of the other (Kramsch, 1993). This group exhibited attitudes of curiosity and openness during the Skype sessions. Their essays were elaborate; the topics were varied, indicating the experience of productive social interactions. This group also avoided the use of essentialist or static cultural representations of the other in their narratives.

**Keywords:** Decentering, cultural competence awareness, intercultural dialogue.

## 1. Introduction

Telecollaboration partnerships are “collaborative approaches to learning where knowledge and understanding are constructed through interaction and negotiation” (O’Dowd, 2016, p. 292). Over the last two decades, these partnerships not only have become everyday experiences in language classrooms, but teachers have also created a diverse portfolio of these experiences. For instance, some educators have used the well-known e-pal in its purest form by inviting a guest speaker to connect with a group of language learners to explore cultural topics. Over the last 10 years, the field has also experienced growth in the amount of research on the effectiveness of these collaboration partnerships, mainly in the area of language learning. However, these studies mostly narrate experiences and measure language gains in one classroom. Few studies use control groups to measure interculturality levels. The following study seeks to add to this body of research by measuring changes in the cultural awareness levels of two groups of Spanish students in their third semester of a Spanish class.

Furthermore, this study explores the trained group potential for decentering. According to Gil (2016), the examination of decentering has mostly remained at a theoretical level. This empirical study will contribute to the scant body of research in this area. One group collaborated with a group of English learners during one semester, discussing a variety of cultural topics. The control group did not work with any Spanish speakers during that semester, and they addressed the same themes in the classroom.

The literature review cites research in the areas of interculturality, thirdness, and telecollaboration partnerships. In particular, it addresses those studies that have used intercultural dialogue as a tool to promote changes in the field of cultural awareness and cultural knowledge.

## 2. Conceptual framework

*The third place – decentering.* One of the main goals of language programs is to offer students the opportunity to develop a cultural understanding of the communities that speak the chosen target language. However, more often than not, this cultural understanding turns into individual pieces of information that promote stereotypical ideas about those communities. Therefore, cultural experiences in a language classroom result in the spread of clichéd ideas different from those formerly intended. Kramersch's (1993) term, *third place*, captures the essence of what language classrooms should foster when addressing cultural lessons. This term conceptualizes cultural classroom experiences as a process in the goal to understand the other, not as pieces of information that need to be remembered and memorized. Kramersch defines third place as an "interpersonal process to understand otherness" (Gil, 2016, p. 338). It is a process that entails the avoidance of simplifying cultural representations based on static ideas of the other. The third place allows for variability, flexibility, and changeability in the process to experience and get to know the other from different perspectives. This study uses the terms *third place* and *decentering* as synonyms that indicate a process.

To conceptualize Kramersch's idea of decenteredness within the context of pedagogy, Gil (2016) divides classroom cultural moments into two categories. On the one hand, a teacher can design lessons that emphasize static representations of a culture or what she calls "essentializing cultural episodes" (p. 341) (ECEs). Generalizations, such as Colombians wake up early and Colombians drink coffee, are common and the result of faulty cultural understanding. On the other hand, one can find lessons that facilitate experiences for students to reflect on their essentialist ideas of different cultures or what Gil calls "intercultural episodes" (p. 342) (IEs). The role of the teacher and their preparation are paramount because it is in their hands to design and initiate moments that ask students to reevaluate these assumptions. For instance, if a student concludes that "Colombians drink coffee," the teacher should ask if that statement is accurate and be ready to present solid arguments about the intake of coffee to build a precise understanding, one that shows versatility rather than a set of limited ideas of the other. Byram's (1997) model offers a guide to design pedagogical experiences that aim at the development of intercultural competence that helps the students to move beyond their position of understanding to that third place. His model has five *savoirs* (López-Rocha, 2016, p. 108): knowledge about cultural expressions of the other and oneself; attitudes of curiosity and openness to reconsider previously held ideas of the other; critical cultural awareness of the differences in values among the different cultures; skills to compare cultures from different perspectives without simplifying differences while emphasizing stereotypes; and abilities to discover new knowledge about the other (Byram et al., 2002). These *savoirs* are considered outcomes of intercultural competence. The current study will use this model to explain students' results in the area of intercultural awareness in the different post-meeting narratives.

Gil (2016) offers two orientations that help explain the cultural experiences in a language classroom. The first one is called an *essentialist cultural orientation*. This orientation is present in classrooms that describe culture as a product of simple and static representations of otherness. The cultural piece presented in textbooks is an example of this orientation. Teachers show this information as it appears in the book, and then the teachers ask students to memorize it for the next quiz. This orientation does not foster third place experiences.

On the contrary, these trivial descriptions help form stereotypical images of the other. The second is the *intercultural orientation*. In classrooms that foster this orientation the teacher, and the student are active participants in the co-construction of understanding the target and their own cultures. They engage in a dialogical process that welcomes opposing narratives of themselves and the other in their goal to create that third place of understanding. This orientation promotes discursive *fault lines*, i.e., to challenge areas of misunderstanding (Kramersch, 1993). Gil claims that it is in this process of addressing and resolving these areas of misunderstanding that one can foster experiences of decentering.

### **3. Telecollaboration partnerships**

O'Rourke (2007) divides telecollaboration partnerships into two models: e-tandem and intercultural collaboration. The e-tandem model refers to partnerships that are created with the purpose of creating opportunities to further language learners' linguistic and communicative skills in the target language. The learners create these opportunities that take place outside of formal language classes. "The role of the tutor in the e-tandem model is usually minimal," according to O'Dowd (2016, p. 293). The intercultural collaboration 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. This study used the intercultural collaboration model and designed three distinct stages to get the most out of the exchange. The first one was the preparation stage. Students created a set of possible questions and practiced the vocabulary related to the theme during several classes before the encounter. The second stage was fieldwork. During the meeting, students had to take notes and engage in conversations that would broaden their understanding of Colombian students and the completion of the required post-meeting tasks. The third stage was the completion of the post-meeting tasks. These tasks focused on the development of a deeper understanding of each other's cultures and the challenging of stereotypes through the use of intercultural dialogues. 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, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, an ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others" (p. 363).

Çiftçi and Savaş (2017) did a qualitative meta-synthesis report on papers published from 2010 to 2015 that researched intercultural gains through the use of telecollaboration. They identified emerging issues and classified them into five themes, and one of those themes was intercultural learning. They stated that most of the studies that addressed intercultural learning used Byram's (1997) inter-cultural competence (ICC) model to analyze their data. They found that the majority of the studies reported different levels of ICC gains. However, many of these studies used fact-based and information-seeking tasks that lacked critical interpretation. Some of these studies (Helm et al., 2012) also supported the idea that conflict among the participants help them increase intercultural awareness.

Schenker (2012) explored changes in a group of six American college students in their knowledge of the German culture and their own culture after participating in a six-week telecollaborative project with 16 German high school students. Their results showed that there was not a significant change in the American students' interest in learning about culture since these students exhibited these attitudes at the beginning of the email exchange. Schenker also used Byram's model to assess American students' ICC through the use of email messages. She found that the students exhibited all the ICC learning objectives from Byram's framework. Angelova and Zhao's (2014) study examined the development of cultural awareness through the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as Skype, email, and digital discussion boards, of two groups of 23 American and 26 Chinese college students, respectively. They found that both groups developed cross-cultural awareness of each other's countries and their own country. Dugartsyrenova and Sardegna (2018) researched the uses and opinions of 28 American, Canadian, Korean, Latvian, Taiwanese, and Russian pre-service teachers on the use of a voice-based CMC tool to raise intercultural awareness. Eleven of the 28 students highlighted the positive experience of learning about each other's culture from direct sources. They stressed the importance of having these experiences since they provided the opportunity to correct stereotypical ideas of each other's cultures. For instance, one of the students, Anna, mentioned how surprising it was to find out that her thoughts about people from Canada were utterly different from what she heard from her Canadian partner. Anna thought all Canadians loved the outdoors. However, her partner did not mention that activity as her favorite.

Most of the studies in the area of intercultural awareness growth in classrooms are generally qualitative or the gratuitous result from studies of other areas of focus, such as students' second language (L2) grammar development. This study offers a mixed data analysis approach to the

growth of intercultural awareness through the use of intercultural dialogue in a telecollaboration initiative. The main research questions of this study are the following:

1. Does the integration of an intercultural model of telecollaboration promote intercultural awareness?
2. What cultural orientation, if any, is reflected in the students' behaviors during the telecollaboration and in their responses to the different post-meeting tasks in their construction of a Colombian culture representation? Does the trained group show more dialogical tendencies than essentialist tendencies?

#### 4. Methods

##### 4.1. Participants and context

The 31 participants were college students in their 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of Spanish language study (see Table 1). Their Spanish class met three times for 60 minutes during the week for 13 weeks. Both groups used 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 are at the center of language learning experiences.

**Table 1.** Population

<b>N = 31</b>	<i>Trained Group</i> <i>n = 15</i>	<i>Control Group</i> <i>n = 16</i>
<b>Gender</b>	Female: 53% Male: 40% Nonbinary: 7%	Female: 69% Male: 31%
<b>Age</b>	Under 18: 7% 18–24: 87% 25+: 6%	18–24: 100%
<b>Race</b>	White: 40% Hispanic: 27% Black: 13% Asian: 13% Multiple: 7%	White: 55% Hispanic: 15% Black: 15% Multiple: 15%
<b>College Year</b>	Freshman: 54% Sophomore: 20% Senior: 26%	Freshman: 76% Sophomore: 15% Junior: 9%

##### 4.2. Treatment

The 15 participants from the experimental group met with 18 other college students from Colombia who were learning English. Both groups were at the intermediate or B1 proficiency level of English and Spanish, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These groups met six times during their class time. They spoke for 30 minutes in English and 30 minutes in Spanish. After each meeting, they had to complete a task in Spanish (see Appendix 2). Each task described a set of outcomes to be achieved, an example of three questions to address during the meeting, and a description of the post-task. Two assignments were in the form of written reports, and the final task was a video report. The main discussion topics were 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 theme of 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 he or she had learned, make a comparison, share it with the group using discussion boards, and react to three other member's reports by comparing their experiences in the classroom.

#### 4.3. Data collection and data analysis

The researcher collected data at different points in the semester. The table below describes the stages and tools used for data collection.

**Table 2.** Data collection tools

Time	Tool	Description	Question
At the beginning and end of the semester	Great Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (GVIMS) cultural competence self-assessment checklist	To measure changes in cultural competence awareness	Does the integration of an intercultural model of telecollaboration promote intercultural awareness?
During the semester	Recordings and field notes of students' six chat sessions with their Colombian peers	To gain insights into students' levels of intercultural communicative behaviors	What cultural orientation, if any, is reflected in the trained group's students' behaviors during the telecollaboration and from their answers to the different post-meeting tasks in their construction of a Colombian culture representation?
	Post-meeting written reports. There were three reports in total.	To explore students' levels of intercultural communication	

Before engaging in the telecollaboration project, the 31 participants answered a demographic data-gathering survey and an adapted version of the cultural competence self-assessment checklist developed by GVIMS at the beginning of the semester. "This tool was developed with funding from the Government of Canada and British Columbia and designed to explore individual cultural competence," according to Western (2017, p. 1). The researcher selected this tool since it reflected Byram's outcomes of intercultural competence, a set of multicultural statements based on attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills, and for its practicality and feasibility. The same students answered this cultural competence self-assessment at the end of the semester to measure cultural competence awareness growth. The researcher used a 4-point Likert scale to rate the students' answers to the 10 statements, 1= Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Fairly often, and 4 = Always. The higher the number, the more culturally competent one is or has become. All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). For each question, a 2 (control group and experimental group) x 2 (Test: pre-test and post-test) mixed factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed with a test as a repeated measure. The teacher with the telecollaboration agreement was designated as the trained group.

The researcher performed a qualitative analysis of both the post-meeting written reports and video reports, the field notes taken during the encounters, and the videotaping of the six meetings. This study used inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis and Byram's (1997) model as the framework to analyze their answers and interpret their interactions during the telecollaboration. The researcher followed Powell and Renner's (2003) qualitative data analysis protocol. First, the investigator and a second reader read and reread the different pieces in order to identify different themes. Both readers met several times to compare notes on each of the data sources independently. After comparing notes, the readers identified the most common topics and organized them by emergent categories. The researcher determined that most of those categories aligned with Byram's (1997) multicultural *savoirs*.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Survey

There was no change in scores from pre-test to post-test for the control group, but scores in the trained group increased significantly (see Figure 1). This ANOVA showed that the main effect of group was not significant,  $F(1,28) = 1.51, p = .229, \eta = .22$ . However, both the main effect of test,  $F(1,28) = 10.74, p = .003, \eta = .53$ , and the interaction were significant,  $F(1,28) = 6.66, p = .015, \eta = .44$ .



Figure 1. Overall pre-test and post-test results using a 4-point Likert scale. N = 31

Analyses were performed for each question due to missing data—this maximized sample sizes. The table below summarizes the significant findings. As expected, given the low power, few statistically substantial effects emerged, but many practically substantial results were in evidence. Interpretations of effects below are based on practical significance rather than statistical significance due to the sample size.

**Table 3.** Statistically ( $p < .05$ ) and Practically ( $\eta > .25$ ) Significant Effects for Each Statement

	Groups		Test		Interaction	
	$p < .05$	$\eta > .25$	$p < .05$	$\eta > .25$	$p < .05$	$\eta > .25$
<b>Question 1:</b> Value diversity	.001	.56	.001	.57	.007	.48
<b>Question 2:</b> Know myself				.32		
<b>Question 3:</b> Share my culture		.32	.001	.28	.037	.40
<b>Question 4:</b> Be aware of areas of discomfort				.28		.28
<b>Question 5:</b> Check my assumptions		.26		.35		



<b>Question 6:</b> Challenge my stereotypes			.007	.48	.016	.43
<b>Question 7:</b> Reflect on how my culture informs my judgments				.33		.26
<b>Question 8:</b> Accept ambiguity						
<b>Question 9:</b> Be curious	.022	.44				
<b>Question 10:</b> Aware of my privilege if I am white						.39

For statement 1, *I value diversity*, there was a significant main effect of the trained versus the control group,  $F(1, 28) = 13.11, p = .001, \eta = .56$ , a significant main effect of test,  $F(1, 28) = 13.20, p = .001, \eta = .57$ , and a significant interaction,  $F(1, 28) = 13.11, p = .007, \eta = .48$ . Scores were higher for the control group and the post-test overall. The interaction was that scores increased significantly for the trained group from pre-test to post-test, but scores did not change for the control group.

For statement 2, *I know myself*, the main effects of the trained versus the control group,  $F(1, 28) = 1.62, p = .213, \eta = .23$ , and the test,  $F(1, 28) = 3.13, p = .088, \eta = .32$ , were not statistically significant. The interaction also was not significant,  $F(1, 28) = 13.11, p = .007, \eta = .48$ . Note that the main effect of the test was practically significant (i.e., large effect size; post-test scores > pre-test scores) even though  $p$  was greater than .05.

For statement 3, *I share my culture*, the three effect sizes were moderate to large, but only the interaction was statistically significant: (a) main effect of group,  $F(1, 26) = 2.96, p = .097, \eta = .32$ , (b) main effect of test,  $F(1, 26) = 2.22, p = .001, \eta = .28$ , and (c) interaction,  $F(1, 26) = 4.83, p = .037, \eta = .40$ . Scores were higher for the trained group and the post-test overall. The nature of the interaction was that the control group's scores increased significantly from pre- to post-test, but the trained group's scores did not change.

For statement 4, *I am aware of areas of discomfort*, there were no statistically significant effects, but two effect sizes were of moderate size (i.e., >.25). Results were: (a) main effect of group,  $F(1, 28) = 1.08, p = .307, \eta = .19$ , (b) main effect of test,  $F(1, 28) = 2.32, p = .139, \eta = .28$ , and (c) interaction,  $F(1, 28) = 2.32, p = .139, \eta = .28$ . (Note: *It is very odd that the results for two effects match exactly, but that is correct.*) Scores were higher for the post-test than the pre-test, and the increase for the trained group was significant, but it was not significant for the control group.

Statement 5, *I check my assumptions*, The main effect of group was practically significant but not statistically significant,  $F(1, 28) = 2.096, p = .159, \eta = .26$ . The significant main effect of test also was practically significant but not statistically significant,  $F(1, 28) = 3.81, p = .061, \eta = .35$ . The interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 28) = 0.12, p = .733, \eta = .06$ . Scores were higher for the trained group and for the post-test overall.

For statement 6, *I challenge my stereotypes*, the main effect of group was not significant,  $F(1, 28) = 1.47, p = .235, \eta = .22$ , but the main effect of test,  $F(1, 28) = 8.60, p = .007, \eta = .48$ , and the interaction,  $F(1, 28) = 6.57, p = .016, \eta = .43$ , were statistically and practically significant. Scores were higher for the post-test than the pre-test. The pre- to post-test increase was significant for the trained group, but not for the control group.

For statement 7, *I reflect on how my culture informs my judgement*, the main effect of group was not significant,  $F(1, 26) = 0.12, p = .738, \eta = .06$ , but the main effect of test,  $F(1, 26) = 3.15, p = .088, \eta = .33$ , and the interaction,  $F(1, 26) = 1.90, p = .18, \eta = .26$ , were practically, but not statistically, significant. Post-test scores were higher than pre-test scores, and this increase was significant only for the trained group.

For statement 8, *I accept ambiguity*, there were no significant effects: (a) main effect of group,  $F(1, 25) = 0.78, p = .384, \eta = .17$ , (b) main effect of test,  $F(1, 25) = 1.59, p = .219, \eta = .24$ , and (c) interaction,  $F(1, 25) = 0.68, p = .417, \eta = .16$ .

For statement 9, *I am curious*, there was a significant main effect of group  $F(1, 25) = 5.97, p = .022, \eta = .44$ , but the main effect of test,  $F(1, 25) = 1.00, p = .326, \eta = .20$ , and the interaction,  $F(1, 25) = 0.17, p = .683, \eta = .08$ , were not significant. Scores were higher for the trained group.

For statement 10, *I am aware of my privilege if I am white*, the main effects of group,  $F(1, 19) = 0.41, p = .841, \eta = .04$ , and test,  $F(1, 19) = 0.38, p = .546, \eta = .14$ , were not significant, but the interaction was practically, but not statistically, significant,  $F(1, 19) = 3.41, p = .08, \eta = .39$ . Scores decreased for the control group, but increased for the trained group.

## 5.2. Video recordings and post-meeting reports

The students demonstrated two distinct orientations in their narrative and during the encounters: essentializing culture representations and dialogical encounters approaches. This distinction was evident in the language used in their narratives, in the number of details and amount of language used in their reports, and in the behaviors exhibited during the encounter.

Essentialist approaches. There were very few sentences, five in total, that made use of static representations of university students from Colombia and of short and generic descriptions of their international peers. For instance, Student #9 concluded that “the easiest way to make friends in Colombia is by being nice.” Student #16 described her peers in a two-sentence paragraph that included the peers’ names, where they were from, what they studied, and where they lived: “Carlos is from Cali. He studies at Javeriana University. He likes to run.” This information was reflected in all three of her written reports with three different people. Furthermore, these two students remained silent during the conversations. Their engagements were short, and they did the minimum required to complete the assignment.

Dialogic encounters. The majority of the students wrote more elaborate narratives that reflected a tendency to decenter and to engage in richer dialogical encounters. Some of the most common culturally aware behaviors among the 14 students during the telecollaboration sessions were those of curiosity, openness, and a disposition to engage in the various conversations as equals. For instance, American students, mostly, continued to converse in Spanish during the time allocated for this language during the class. Overall, the majority of the students showed high interactivity and engagement.

These students demonstrated the ability to acquire new knowledge of the Colombian culture and cultural practices in real-time communication and interactions (Byram, 1997) by asking questions beyond the ones they prepared in advanced, smiling, acknowledging understanding by saying the word “yes” as a token response or by affirmatively moving their heads to show interest and keep the communication going, and by maintaining eye contact. Alternatively, students were able to explain a significant knowledge of the social processes acquired during the interactions in the post-meeting reports. For instance, in the narrative about personal relationships in Colombia, Student #10 not only provided a general description of his peer, but he also talked about the peer’s family, what they usually did on the weekends, and what type of social media his peer used. He also discovered similar likes, such as their passion for tennis: “I told Carlos that I play singles and doubles.” Finally, he ended the paragraph by highlighting how much he enjoyed talking to a university student from another country.

Students also demonstrated their capacity for decentering when asked to comment on their classmates’ narratives in their classroom management system called Canvas. Student #14 compared his findings and his classmate’s findings and discovered that his peer’s routine was not that unusual. Furthermore, Student #14 showed the ability to acquire new knowledge without accentuating stereotypical ideas of the other. Notice how Student #14 did not conclude that all Colombians wake up early. On the contrary, he kept this information within the boundaries of



personal experience: "Great video! My partner, Santiago, also wakes up very early to attend classes at his college. It was surprising how early he woke up!"

In sum, one can classify the findings into two categories: behaviors and succinct narratives that exhibited an essentialist approach to the encounters with the other. These types of narratives expressed simplistic views and basic descriptions of Colombian students. The behaviors during the exchanges were those of silence and of not wanting to engage. On the other hand, the narratives of those with an intercultural orientation, that is, with a dialogic encounter orientation, were more elaborate and descriptive. Their descriptions were detailed, lacked generalization, and were personalized. Furthermore, they evidenced attitudes of curiosity, openness, and readiness during the encounters with their international peers.

## 6. Discussion

Overall, the survey results showed a significant change in the trained (experimental group) compared to the control group. The shift from a 3.1 to a 3.5 score shows a strong correlation between growth in self-awareness and cultural competence and their participation in the cultural exchange sessions. Furthermore, the comparison between the trained and the control groups shows growth in the areas of valuing diversity, awareness of areas of discomfort, influence of culture in their judgment, acceptance of ambiguity, challenging of stereotypes, and knowledge of privileges. The trained group showed attitudes of curiosity and skill in discovery by exploring diverse themes in the conversations with their international peers. This study showed significant changes in the development of intercultural skills, which supports Angelova and Zhao's (2014) and Dugartsyrenova and Sardegna's (2018) studies of the impact of intercultural dialogue in the development of cultural self-awareness.

The results per question show that the trained group experienced a meaningful growth in their intercultural skills in comparison with the control group in the areas of valuing diversity, being aware of areas of discomfort when dealing with cultural differences, being aware of assumptions about the other, and in their willingness to challenge stereotypes, being aware of how their cultural perspective influences their judgment about what is normal, and an awareness of their privilege of being white when working with a person of color. These results show that fostering intercultural dialogue has two effects. First, it has a positive impact on the development of cross-cultural attitudes (Byram, 1997). Second, these dialogues foster dispositions that are conducive to improve the students' capacity to decentering. As Gil noted: "It is necessary to have attitudes of openness and curiosity and, when opening up, the learner can start a movement of 'decentering'" (2016, p. 338).

Furthermore, these intercultural dialogues support the creation of an intercultural dimension where the others are perceived as individuals with their own identities rather than with static categorizations of these identities (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2013). According to Byram et al. (2002):

*...the "intercultural dimension" in language teaching aims to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity. (p. 9)*

The results show a ceiling effect in some areas. For instance, in Question #1, the control group was already exhibiting a strong disposition toward a favorable perception in the value of diversity at the beginning of the semester. However, the trained group experienced a significant change. Question #2 shows the same ceiling effect for both groups. Question #3 shows a ceiling effect for the treatment group. However, the control group experienced a significant growth, which could explain the positive impact of the teacher on the dispositions of students to share their culture.

The statistical results also support Byram's (1997) intercultural competence outcomes observed during the exchanges and in the students' written reports. The students exhibited a positive disposition toward diversity by attending every Skype session, by displaying high levels of

engagement during the encounter, and by expressing how valuable this experience was for them and a desire to visit the country. For instance, Student #3 revealed that she would love to visit Colombia and her newly made friend David.

The absence of essentializing culture representations of Colombian university students was reflected in the lack of stereotypical descriptions. The trained group also showed a significant change in being aware of areas of discomfort and white privilege.

After an inductive analysis of the qualitative data from the video observations and written reports, the researcher concludes that students showed minimal essentialist approaches in their answers to the tasks and during the conversations with their international peers. Even though the instructions for completing the tasks used generalizing language, their descriptions and comparisons were performed at the individual level. For instance, the Halloween report asked students to find out information about how Colombians celebrated Halloween. Their statements had language tailored to the unique experience:

Today I made a new friend, David. David studies at a university in Colombia. He takes classes on science because he wants to work at a hospital. David loves eating empanadas with lettuce and tomato. His favorite movie is Maze Runner, and during the summer, he likes to read books and spend time with friends. He also works. (Student #14)

The majority of the students exhibited an ability for decentering. This was shown by the absence of essentializing cultural representations in their reports and the presence of dialogic encounters or intercultural episodes; the use of elaborate paragraphs with full details about the conversations; the use of comparing by keeping these comparisons distinctive for each individual; mixing comparing sentences about themselves and about their peers; and demonstrating attitudes of curiosity and openness.

First, this group of students did not exhibit essentializing cultural representations in their reports. Most of their descriptions lacked simplistic depictions of their peers' culture. Their written essays described experiences at the individual level rather than generic descriptions of the culture. For instance, Student #1's essay about personal relationships reads:

*Carlos thinks that the place to make new friends is in high school. There, you meet people that share the same interests. I thought that it would be better to meet people out of the school. Carlos and his friends listen to music together. Carlos has a friend he does not like too much because this friend thinks that listening to music is boring. Carlos and his friends surprised me as well as my friends.*

The use of their peers' names and specific personal pronouns in their reports was widespread, which could indicate readiness to engage with the other "without seeking out the exotic of the profitable" (Schenker, 2012, p. 467) and without overgeneralizing. In this piece of an essay, Student #1 relativizes his perception of the best places to meet new people by acknowledging a position different from his own without trying to negate the validity of the peer's opinion. Of the 18 students, 15 paragraphs reflected this type of elaboration and mostly in the second report about Halloween and their video about their peers' daily routine. Student #6's report about Halloween states:

This Wednesday, I had the opportunity to talk with a new student from Colombia. His name is Fernando, and he studies architecture. It was interesting. Fernando is very different from Carlos, the other student from the first Skype meeting. They don't have the same interests. Fernando likes to practice MMA and boxing. He told me that he was not going to celebrate Halloween because he had to build some scaled models for his class. But, he said that Colombians celebrate and dress up. The kids ask for candy. We also talked about life in his city, Cali. He said it is a big city. It takes him two hours to go from north to the south side of the city.

Student #6 shows attitudes of self-awareness and co-construction of a third place by acknowledging previously held assumptions about other Colombian university students based on

his first encounter with Carlos. This attitude was similar to Anna's belief transformation about Canadians from Dugartsyrenova and Sardegna's (2018) study. Anna thought that Canadians loved the outdoors. However, when she had the opportunity to talk to a Canadian, she realized that her perception of a Canadian was not accurate.

Furthermore, Student #6's essay reflects the engagement in a dynamic conversation by the different topics that were addressed during the meeting. Both students talked about general likes and dislikes, the Halloween celebration, and challenges of living in Cali.

The different essays facilitated spaces for dialogical encounters that fostered dispositions for the development of interculturality. Some students were able to engage in discursive *fault lines*, such as Students #1 and #6, where they encountered narratives that would challenge their assumptions about better places to meet new people or by testing the formation of fixed attributes of a Colombian university student.

These essays also provided spaces for cultural comparisons that the literature cites as one critical skill that facilitate the co-construction of a third place (Byram, 1997; Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2018; Kramsch, 1993). The pieces reflected two different styles of making comparisons. Some students wrote two separate paragraphs. One paragraph was about their peer, and another was about themselves. For instance, Student #3 described Halloween celebrations from the peer's perspective by saying that "Ronald celebrates Halloween by dressing up, going to parties, and listening to music." Then, Student #3 continued describing what she typically does to celebrate Halloween and by accentuating similarities. For instance, she said, "I also wear costumes and go to parties on Halloween." This type of fragmenting or separating the information about each other was common among the students that did not show signs of engaging in dialogical encounters and used essentializing representations to describe cultural details. Student #13 also showed this separation of herself and her peers by talking about her international counterparts and omitting particulars about herself.

*Last week I talked to two Skype peers. Daniela is 18 years old, and Daniel is 21 years old. They asked me about Hallowe'en and I asked them about their daily routine. Both of them have short night routines and long morning routines. Both of them get dressed before getting breakfast. Both take showers in the morning and both have breakfast at the university.*

The most common style of making comparisons was by combining and contrasting the narrative of Halloween. Their essays show the ability of the students to position themselves close to the other as equals without isolating each other's narratives, but rather by combining them. For instance, Student #4's video about comparing daily routines stated:

*...Ana Maria likes to read, play with her pets, and exercise. She also sings. I like to play the piano and the organ. Her favorite movie is Diary of One Passion. Mine is The Avengers. Rice, beef, and salads are her favorite meals. Her favorite subjects are psychology and psychoanalysis. She said that she gets up at 4:30 a.m. because at Universidad Javeriana classes start at 7:00 a.m. I get up at 6:30, and then I leave for Rider. My classes start at 9:00 a.m. She uses cash instead of a credit card. I use a debit card more. Both of us like to go shopping for clothes and shirts.*

Student #14 embeds both routines in a way that exhibits a closer proximity between the two in a dialogical encounter. Student #14 is able to come closer to his peer without trying to achieve areas of commonality and respecting each other's individualized experiences.

Discursive fault lines were not common in the narratives of this group. There were only two examples in all the pieces evaluated in this study. One explanation for the lack of challenging statements of cultural representations is the lack of language proficiency. Since they had to write their reactions in Spanish, their language skills did not allow them to explore these differences at a deeper level.

## 7. Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. One is that the control and the trained groups had different teachers. It was not possible to control this variable, and the level of teacher influence in the ANOVA results was not measured. A second limitation is that the researcher was not able to gather qualitative data from the control group due to differences in the writing assignments. A third limitation was the lack of technology to have the ability to record the dialogues in English and Spanish, which could have provided more abundant data. Finally, the level of language proficiency could have impacted the levels of involvement during Skype sessions. Those with limited Spanish might not have been able to engage at the same level as others with a higher level. The different levels of proficiency could explain why the elaboration of the narratives was more straightforward than others. Future studies could focus on the correlation between different proficiency levels and the skills to decentering.

## 8. Conclusion

This study supports the impact of telecollaboration initiatives in the development of cultural competence awareness. The ANOVA results of the survey show that the trained group experienced meaningful growth in knowledge skills and cultural self-awareness compared with the control group. These results confirm the value in using intercultural dialogue to increase levels of self-awareness. The qualitative analysis revealed that the trained group exhibited skills for decentering and ability to reach a third place by their attitude to engage in dialogical encounters and by avoiding essentializing cultural episodes. Language classes must design pedagogical experiences that foster the students' capacity for decentering, even starting as soon as in the first year of language study. It is imperative that language classes provide spaces, so students engage in crossing discursive fault lines to help them develop a more diverse cultural understanding of the other.

Institutions of higher education must be invested in providing more opportunities for cultural exchanges to support their mission of creating a more welcoming environment for a diverse student population.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Survey.

Awareness	Statements	Never	Sometimes/ Occasionally	Fairly Often/ Pretty Well	Always/ Very Well
Value Diversity	I view human difference as positive and a cause for celebration.				
Know myself	I have a clear sense of my own ethnic, cultural, and racial identity.				
Share my culture	I am aware that in order to learn more about others I need to understand and be prepared to share my own culture.				
Be aware of areas of discomfort	I am aware of my discomfort when I encounter differences in race, color, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity.				
Check my assumptions	I am aware of the assumptions that I hold about people of cultures different from my own.				
Challenge my stereotypes	I am aware of my stereotypes as they arise and have				



	developed personal strategies for reducing the harm they cause.				
Reflect on how my culture informs my judgement	Perspective influences my judgement about what are “appropriate,” “normal,” or “superior” behaviors, values, and communication styles.				
Accept ambiguity	I accept that in cross-cultural situations there can be uncertainty and that uncertainty can make me anxious. It can also mean that I do not respond quickly and take the time needed to get more information.				
Be curious	I take any opportunity to put myself in places where I can learn about differences and create relationships.				
Aware of my privilege if I am white	If I am a white person working with an aboriginal person or a person of color, I understand that I will likely be perceived as a person with power and racial privilege, and that I may not be seen as “unbiased” or as an ally.				

### Objectives

- 1. Identify cultural practices related to the celebration of Halloween in Colombia.
- 2. Share information about the celebration of Halloween in the USA.
- 3. Compare both cultures.

### Preparation

**Questions**

- Bring a picture representative of the celebration and share it with your peer.
- When does Colombia celebrate Halloween?
- How do they celebrate it?
- What is appropriate and not appropriate during this celebration?
- Prepare 3 more questions.

### Composition

Make a comparison between cultures.

-How do people celebrate Halloween in Colombia?

-What are some of the commonalities and differences?

Figure A1. Example of a task.