

Chapter 6

“Our Nationality or the Groups We Belong to Don’t Define Us”: Language Teachers’ Understandings of Identity, Multilingualism and Interculturality in Colombia



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Abstract Colombia is a multilingual and pluriethnic country, although this was only officially recognized in the Constitution of 1991. In this context, interculturality has been associated with Indigenous peoples and with foreign international languages. However, there is little connection between these two visions within pedagogical practice or in most educational scenarios. This chapter focuses on a study carried out in a Colombian university with in-service teachers of foreign languages, particularly English. The objective was to provide the participants with opportunities to reflect on their teaching practice and the role of the intercultural dimension within it, leading to the creation of didactic sequences they considered appropriate to promote intercultural sensitivity in their own contexts. An action research methodology was used and the data, consisting of student reflections and materials, were analysed using a thematic content approach. The results evidenced two main themes: reflection on the participants’ identities and the questioning of stereotypes, and the use of observation as a basis for action and integration. It is concluded that understanding the complex relationships between languages, interculturality and identities is possible if those involved become aware of their own preconceptions about the other in the process of understanding themselves and others from a critical point of view.

6.1 Introduction

Over the centuries, there have been multiple linguistic and cultural influences, which have shaped Colombia as a multilingual and pluricultural country. Historically, this is the result of the mixture (*mestizaje*) of three different cultures and races—Indigenous peoples, Europeans, particularly Spanish, and Africans, originally brought to the

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country as slaves. However, this was only officially recognised for the first time by the Political Constitution of 1991 (Article 7) when Indigenous languages were awarded co-official status with Spanish, in the territories where they are spoken. Today there are around 69 separate Indigenous languages in existence, two Creoles, Colombian Sign Language, Romani and immigrant languages, such as Arabic and Japanese. According to Landaburu (2005), there are 13 different Indigenous language families in Colombia. Some of these languages are Kogi, belonging to the Chibcha family, Inga, belonging to the Quechua family and Achagua, belonging to the Arawak family. More recently, foreign languages, such as English, French, Italian and Mandarin, are taught and learnt in the education system. Despite all this linguistic diversity, Spanish continues to be the dominant language, spoken by the majority of the population as a first language, and is used in government and mainstream education.

In Colombia, interculturality has been traditionally conceived as the ways in which the Indigenous communities interact with other cultures, rather than the relationship of foreign or international languages and cultures with national cultures (Hamel, 2008). The Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) maintains separate offices for matters relating to Indigenous languages (Ethnoeducation) and foreign or international languages (Bilingual Colombia Programme). However, recently the government has increasingly recognised interculturality as an emergent issue in language and education policy in general. According to Decree 804, Article 2 (1995) which regulates Ethnoeducation, interculturality is understood as “the capacity to know one’s own culture and other cultures which interact and enrich each other in a dynamic and reciprocal fashion, contributing to construct a co-existence in equality of conditions and mutual respect in social reality”. In relation to foreign languages, MEN (2006) sees interculturality as relating to the “respecting of the value of one’s own world as well as developing respect for other cultures...valuing of plurality and differences in the immediate surroundings as well as in globalized settings” (p. 8).¹

With respect to developments in foreign language education, in 2004, MEN created “The National Bilingual Programme”, aimed at offering all school students the possibility of reaching a B1 level of proficiency in English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) by the end of their studies. The declared objective was:

to have citizens who are capable of communicating in English, in order to be able to insert the country within processes of universal communication, within the global economy and cultural openness, through [the adopting of] internationally comparable standards. (MEN, 2006, 6)

In spite of a brief reference to “cultural openness”, the emphasis was mainly on the improvement of English language proficiency within a vision of competitiveness and global development, a neoliberal vision which has been criticised by Usma Wilches (2009) and Bonilla Carvajal and Tejada-Sánchez (2016), amongst others, as reductionist, concerned with the instrumentalisation of language learning. This coincides with what Despagne (2015) found in her study on the teaching of English

¹ All translations from Spanish are by the authors.

and the relation with modernity in Puebla, Mexico. The researcher argues that “as English is associated with the discourse of modernity, power and global knowledge, this is used as a synonym of superiority” (p. 76).

Although there are other international languages, such as French, German, Italian and Hebrew, taught and learnt in Colombian schools, there is a strong focus on English as an important source of symbolic capital which will help students and school and university graduates gain access to “greater and better work opportunities” (MEN, 2006: 9). In one of the official documents produced by MEN (2006) relating to the National Bilingual Programme, there is a justification of how learning a foreign language will help students’ personal development, in the following terms:

it will diminish ethnocentrism and allow people to appreciate and respect the value of their own world, as well as developing respect for other cultures. The learning of a foreign language increases the respect and valuing of plurality and differences, in the immediate context as well as in globalised settings (p. 8).

There is thus a recognition here of an intercultural perspective in language teaching and learning, even though the term itself is not used in this extract. However, that being said, there has not been much movement towards incorporating an intercultural dimension in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Colombian schools and universities, up to now. The emphasis has traditionally been on the development of linguistic proficiency, rather than a concern to understand and legitimise linguistic and cultural pluralism.

For this reason, at the School of Education at Universidad de los Andes, a prestigious private university in Bogotá (Colombia), we decided to carry out a study among students of the Emphasis in Bilingualism in the Master’s in Education (M.Ed.) programme in 2017. This initiative aimed at providing in-service foreign language teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice and the role of the intercultural dimension within it and to help their own students to become more interculturally sensitive. This study derives from a larger research project aimed at including the intercultural dimension explicitly in the foreign language classroom (Gamboa Diaz et al., 2019). It included a series of activities where the students were asked to reflect upon these notions and their own preconceptions, particularly in relation to stereotypes and identities, in order to deconstruct and reconstruct their teaching profiles and practices.

In this chapter, we first introduce some of the key theoretical notions on which we based our study, and then, we discuss the methodology we used. We go on to present a selection of the findings of the project, and after that, we consider some of the wider implications for education from a global perspective.

6.2 Theoretical Framing: Multilingualism, Identity and Interculturality in Education—Latin-American Perspectives

According to UNESCO, education is a vital area for promoting the understanding of interculturality and helping to generate the skills necessary for living in the culturally diverse and globalised world of the twenty-first century, arguing that, “Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations” (2006, p. 37).

Even though the importance of interculturality is widely acknowledged by organisations such as UNESCO, the way it has been operationalised in Latin America differs greatly from how it has been implemented in many other parts of the world. According to Walsh (2010), this is a significant notion in Latin America, as it refers to the struggle of the Indigenous communities. This struggle becomes evident today within an epistemic, ontological, academic and social movement that intends to counterbalance the influence of modernity in the region (Escobar, 2014), which views globalisation as a universalising and homogenising outcome, and within which Latin-American countries have been insistently conceived as *developing* territories that aspire to, one day, mirror their European colonisers’ infrastructure, thinking, culture, etc.

As such, Walsh (2010) describes three different perspectives of interculturality: a *relational* vision which implies mere cultural interchange, a *functional* view, which acknowledges differences within the purpose of inclusion, and a *critical* perspective which highlights the asymmetric power relations exercised by larger structures of society, within which cultural and racial status plays a key role. Within this triad, *otherness* has been conceived differently: in the first two perspectives, the other is represented as anything that lies outside hegemonic and dominant practices. However, in the third, the focus is not on the other as an outlier, but rather on the understanding that difference and diversity—and the labelling of that other—are practices built within a hierarchical, racialized and dominant social structure. This last perspective refers to emerging actions and processes in Latin America that aim for respect, legitimacy, symmetry, equity and equality (Walsh, 2007).

As such, Walsh (2010) considers that interculturality in Latin America is essentially related to a pedagogical endeavour concerned with making visible these inequitable relations which have developed since colonial times and which have become normalised in the life of countries in the region. In this sense, interculturality is concerned with constructing a dialogue between different ontologies, visions, understandings and practices in order to create societies which are more just (Ministerio de Educación del Perú, 2005).

6.2.1 *Intercultural Sensitivity*

In the case of language education, there has been increasing recognition that developing linguistic competence for language teachers is important, but not sufficient. Kramsch (1993) was one of the first researchers to claim that while many approaches to language teaching have focused on linguistic features of language teaching and learning, the connections between discourse and culture have been insufficiently explored. In 2009, she argued that the inclusion of the intercultural dimension should be taken as a revitalization and renovation of language teaching and learning from a critical and reflexive position.

In Colombia, a growing interest in the intercultural dimension is shown by an increasing amount of scholarly work and research. This demonstrates that critical reflection is necessary especially in educational settings in order to acknowledge epistemic possibilities which differ from the dominant models of understanding culture (Granados-Beltran, 2016). In his analysis of 34 articles in six peer-reviewed journals, Álvarez-Valencia (2014) concludes that an intercultural turn in the language teaching practices in Colombia is still in its infancy. The great majority of the articles, which he classified as data-based, theory-based and pedagogical experiences, focused on dominant perspectives of English and English-speaking countries. His findings indicated that teachers are gradually moving away from the grammar-centred approach towards the inclusion of social issues such as intercultural communication, cultural representations and identity. Although the author predicts that developing intercultural understanding will gain more interest within the coming years in Colombia, he wonders how this approach will be materialised within Colombia’s multicultural and multilingual reality.

A study which confirms this emerging stage is that conducted by Prieto Galindo and Salamanca Molano (2015) which showed that English teachers in a public (state) school in Bogotá were more concerned about the accountability of linguistic competence, which focused on teaching grammar and giving their students exercises from the national curriculum textbook, than in trying to develop intercultural understanding. Furthermore, in a recent research project also carried out in state schools in Bogotá by Peña Dix (2018) on English language teachers’ attitudes to culture and interculturality, the researcher found that “teachers feel positively disposed to intercultural competence English language teaching (IELT), but their approaches to culture are mainly essentialist and nationalist, based on communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches” (p. 2). An example of this essentializing tendency is when one of the English teachers said in an interview with the researcher, “Culture is people’s identity, their traditions, their intellectual heritage, beliefs, values, arts, gastronomy, and other aspects” (p. 137). Another teacher participant focused on the notion of culture as national differentiation saying, “Culture is the habits we have, the way we are, how we act; it is not the same to be a Colombian or a Venezuelan, no matter how close we are because culture is what makes us different” (p. 138).

Findings from these studies confirm that interculturality is treated separately in the foreign language classroom in both the didactic and the conceptual dimensions. The didactic dimension has been reviewed in relation to materials (Rico-Troncoso, 2012) and pedagogies, such as Álvarez-Valencia's (2016, in press) advocacy for multimodal approaches which seek to introduce semiotic practices into the L2 classroom as boosters of intercultural reflection. With respect to conceptualisation, Gamboa Diaz (2019) has foregrounded the idea of intercultural dimensions to characterize the vast range of notions embedded in language teaching practices and decision-making. She argues that these concepts arise from epistemological and practical issues in the field. In the case of Colombia, the notions that have been mostly adopted are those of intercultural competence, intercultural communicative competence and critical interculturality. In this study, we have chosen to refer to intercultural sensitivity as an emerging stage to approach intercultural reflection.

González López and Ramírez López (2016) make reference to Bennett's (1993, 2017) model of the development of intercultural sensitivity, which defines this notion as an affective, cognitive and behavioural change, moving from ethnocentric to ethnorelative positions in relation to the recognition and appreciation of cultural differences. The model includes a series of six stages which range from denial, through defence, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, to the integration of different cultural visions.

In the first two ethnocentric stages of Bennett's model, a person's understanding can move from a lack of distinction of cultural differences (denial) to distinguishing difference from the perspective of being either better or worse (defence). After that comes the minimisation stage, where differences are dismissed, instead of recognizing similarities. However, once a person learns to evaluate different cultural values and behaviours as they relate to each other, they may begin to move to the ethnorelative stages. Here, in the initial stage (acceptance), a person may recognize their own personal culture as being one among other equally valid options. This perspective then constitutes the basis for the next phase (adaptation), where there is recognition of the need to make cognitive and behavioural adjustments. The final stage, integration, is characterised by a multi-dimensional self-concept based on a multiplicity of worldviews.

The notion of models of intercultural competence (see Byram, 1997) and intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) has been criticised by scholars such as Hoff (2020) and Fielding (2020) as being problematic because of their limited and reductionist stance. However, we felt in our study that although, on one hand, the six stages proposed by Bennett could be seen as oversimplifying the complexities of the ongoing process of intercultural understanding, if they were not taken as taxative, but as a possible developmental sequence, this could illustrate tendencies in the growing awareness of intercultural sensitivity, rather than a set of rigid stages.

6.2.2 Identity

Kumaravadivelu (2012) has highlighted the importance of identity in a postmodern vision because it is linked to the recognition of the diversity and multiplicity of narratives about what people know and do. In the education sphere, Cummins et al. (2005) refer to the process of identity negotiation in multilingual classrooms, maintaining that “The process of identity negotiation is reciprocal. As teachers open up identity options for students, they also define their own identities” (p. 43).

In Colombia, Usma Wilches et al. (2018) have argued for the importance of incorporating a critical agenda into foreign language teacher education programmes, particularly with respect to issues such as student identities, the different cultural groups they belong to, their languages, their knowledge, their histories and experiences, in order to help them reflect on how their identities have been constructed and how these may influence their language teaching and their students’ learning. For their part, García León and García León (2014) recognise that languages are essential factors in processes of cultural understanding as they help us to appropriate the global as well as our individual worlds. Thus, identity is no longer seen as a fixed element, but as a hybrid entity, which is dynamic, performed and mediated by languages (Valencia, 2017).

Identity is a cross-sectional construct within Bennett’s model since it implies a developmental transformation of the self along its stages: in denial and defence, for example, identity is reinforced through a polarization where “us” implies a complex identity and “them” (the others) are perceived through a minimalisation of cultural difference, mostly influenced by the media (Bennett, 2017). In the adaptation and integration stages, identity is understood as a dynamic and intersectional construct that is at the heart of what diversity and hybridity are about.

According to the Ministry of Education in Peru (2005), teaching a language from an intercultural perspective implies looking reflexively at the identities which are represented in the classroom, particularly those of the idealized native speaker, in order to deconstruct stereotypes and establish more balanced relations with those who have different histories, cultural practices, knowledge and languages.

6.2.3 Multilingualism and Language Teaching and Learning

In 2015, while discussing multilingual practices in foreign language study, Kramsch and Huffmaster observed that the globalisation of communication involving the use of English as a lingua franca on the world stage has changed the expectations of foreign language students with regard to how they will be expected to use their languages in this scenario. Consequently, this has presented great challenges to teachers who are accustomed to teach from a monolingual and monocultural standpoint. These researchers maintained that, “*The national raison d’être of foreign language study, with its ideology of one national language = one national literature = one national*

culture no longer corresponds to the global reality of our times" (p. 134). This tendency to equate 'cultures' with 'nations' and the corresponding national stereotypes that result, positions culture as static and "leaves the learner primarily within his/her own cultural paradigm" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, pp. 19–20).

Kramsch and Huffmaster argue for "a pedagogy focussed on fluid relationships between different ways of meaning-making... [in which] we can raise students' awareness of the meaning-making processes at work in the construction of social and cultural experience—including the surreptitious use of stereotypes" (p. 134). According to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), an intercultural perspective in language education can be understood as "the lens through which the nature, purpose, and activity of language teaching and learning are viewed, and the focus which students develop through their language learning" (p. 6). These authors acknowledge that despite growing recognition of the fundamental importance of integrating intercultural capabilities within bi/multilingual language pedagogy, one of the challenges has been to move from this recognition to the development of practice.

Deardorff (2011), for her part, has focused her attention particularly on language teacher education to face these challenges and asks how far teachers are in fact interculturally conscious and how they can become more interculturally aware. She highlights particularly the following questions, "Are intercultural competence concepts infused throughout the teacher education curriculum? [...] what can be done to increase educators' own development in this area? How can the *process* of intercultural competence development be integrated into courses and programs?" (p. 46).

This chapter is based on part of a wider study carried out as a collaborative research project between Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia and Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, France (Gamboa Diaz et al., 2019). Here, we will be reporting on some of the findings from the Colombian context. In our research, we see multilingualism, interculturality and identity as interrelated aspects of the teaching and learning of languages. This is in line with the position of Álvarez-Valencia (in press), who characterizes language classrooms as intercultural spaces and highlights the interrelationship between the development of cultural repertoires and the shaping of identity. He argues that individuals develop affiliations and a sense of group cohesion that eventually contributes to identity shaping. Ultimately, they are simultaneously members of multiple cultural groups, which allows them to develop unique cultural repertoires rather than unitary repertoires associated with national cultures. However, as we have noted above, these connections are yet to be made by most language teachers in Colombia.

In our revision of the literature we found, along with Fielding (2020, p. 2) that, "*Different fields theorise the term 'intercultural' in many different ways*". Thus, Scarino and Liddicoat (2009) refer to "intercultural stance" as involving students developing understanding of their own "situatedness" in their own language and culture and the recognition of the same in others. Abdallah-Preteille (2006) for her part argues that cultural pluralism should be understood as a variety of cultural fragments rather than whole cultures. This relates to the notion of hybridity, or "in between-ness" (Bhabha, 1994), as a metaphor for language learning, involving the

notion of “moving between” two linguistic and cultural systems when learning an additional language. Thus, interculturality can be thought of as the exploration of different moments in these processes.

In our study we developed the following characterization of interculturality as,

the ability to explore, analyze similarities, differences or unexpected elements of another culture (individual) or develop (as far as possible) strategies of situational, communicational, relational adjustment, etc. It is about adopting a critical interactive perspective, understanding, and associating diversity with known and unknown people, in current and unexpected situations, as well as in multiple contexts (near and far). (Gamboa Diaz et al., 2019, pp. 21–22)

6.3 Methodology

6.3.1 *Research Questions*

The foreign language class can be studied as a place where intercultural experiences (both from everyday interactions as well as those associated with international contacts) can contribute knowledge and understanding which help to modify people’s attitudes, or, on the contrary, leave them intact, when they are faced with situations of otherness. In order to explore methodologies for including the teaching and learning of the intercultural dimension in processes of teacher education, we formulated the following research question to guide our study:

How was intercultural sensitivity projected by in-service foreign language teachers in their reflections and understandings, after the intercultural dimension was explicitly included in a teacher education programme?

6.3.2 *Action Research Perspective*

As previously mentioned, this study belongs to a larger interinstitutional project in which we conducted an action research (AR) cycle along with two other colleagues in France. The four of us developed a joint didactic sequence for intercultural reflection, which we carried out in both the Colombian and the French contexts. This didactic sequence followed the principles of AR, which we understand as a nonlinear, flexible and constantly inquiring procedure, which provides a meaningful way for teachers to critically reflect on and modify their classroom practices. As such, we followed Burns’ (2009) four stages: *Reflection*: the need to implement an explicit module on interculturality in the M.Ed. Program for in-service language teachers; *Planning*: we co-created a didactic sequence; *Acting*: we implemented this sequence and asked students to conduct their own version of it, and finally, *Observing*: we revised and analysed participants’ feedback of our sequence as well as their own proposals and implementations.

6.3.3 *Participants and Intervention*

The participants were 12 in-service language teachers (Spanish and English as Foreign languages), studying on the M.Ed. course at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, from January–May, 2017. They taught different levels: from primary to higher education in both the private and public sectors, and their ages ranged from late 20s to late 30s. They were enrolled on the course “Second Language Learning”, a 16-week, 3-h class, which took place once a week. It is worth noting that students were allowed to use their bilingual Spanish–English repertoire in this class.

Student-participants were told that a module on interculturality was going to be included. The didactic sequence we planned lasted three weeks, organised as follows:²

1. Participants received a list of readings (mandatory and optional) which they had to prepare for class discussions. Authors proposed had different backgrounds.
2. Class discussions with prompt questions, plenary sessions and activities were conducted.
3. Participants were guided towards a pedagogical reflection upon their own teaching views, their practice and their awareness of the role of the intercultural dimension in language education.
4. Participants were asked to identify a topic in their own teaching contexts related to interculturality and then to design and implement a didactic sequence based on the readings and discussions they had had and present a reflection about this. The aim was to challenge them to unpack, deconstruct and negotiate meanings about stereotypes, their preconceptions on what teaching about culture meant, their experiences and their attitudes and behaviours as language teachers.

Some of the topics selected by the students included: gender, regional differences in Colombia, urban and country life, college life in the USA and in Colombia, interculturality through art, institutional policies of inclusion and deaf and blind students and bullying. Thus, it can be seen that they went beyond the focus on national and international issues to highlight aspects they had identified as related to interculturality in encounters in their own contexts. As Álvarez Valencia (in press) argues, people usually develop a repertoire of cultural semiotic resources in relation to the different social groups where they participate and create affiliations, so most encounters between individuals have the potential to become intercultural.

We conducted a thematic content analysis of the students’ reflections, presentations and materials, using the software for qualitative analysis, Atlas.ti 7.

² This didactic sequence evolved in one of our research products, which is a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in the online education platform Coursera. The MOOC is called *Understanding intercultural dimensions in everyday life*: <https://es.coursera.org/learn/interculturalidad>.

6.4 Findings and Discussion

We will now discuss some of the findings of our study, based on the sequences the students created to promote intercultural sensitivity in their own contexts as well as their reflections on their growing understandings of the concepts and of the issues involved. We will include data we consider most relevant to our discussion from some, though not all, of the 12 students who participated in the study. Then, we will focus our analysis on the reflections derived from two of these teachers (these will be referred to as Teacher 1 and Teacher 2).

Despite some students reporting that they were not allowed to develop their intercultural pedagogic sequences because this was not seen as relevant by the authorities in the institutions where they were teaching English, most managed to design and implement them, albeit in different settings.

Two main themes were constructed from this analysis, based on the way student-participants showed how they moved towards Bennet’s stages of acceptance, and adaptation and integration through their own pedagogic proposals. The first theme concerns the stage of acknowledging one’s own identity through *reflection and planning*, and the second theme involves the possibilities they engaged in to adapt and integrate through *action and observation*.

The central finding that emerged from the analysis of the pedagogic sequences that the participants created for the institutions where they worked was their growing understanding of issues concerning identity, diversity and multilingualism. One of them revealed that her reflection on the whole project had made her question herself, her reality and become more conscious of the identities she performed relating to the different languages she spoke and taught, saying:

The main responsibilities that I could reflect on are: Who am I when I speak this language?
How am I when I speak this language? and How do I feel when I teach this language?

Another related the changes she noticed in her identities to her experiences of feeling like the other while living in a foreign country, noting,

through the readings and the activities developed through the interculturality module in the class as well as this lesson, I reflected over my own process as a bilingual speaker and how my identity (or identities) changed after the experience of living abroad.

Both these participants recognised that they had reached a deeper level of consciousness of their own identities related to the languages and the discussions about interculturality as a result of the project. The first extract also highlights the affective nature of the relationship with the language used in teaching. This is in line with the findings of González López and Ramírez López (2016, p. 8) in their study on immigrants in the city of Cuenca, Spain, when they noted, “intercultural sensitivity... [is] considered as the affective dimension of intercultural communicative competence”.

A third participant, for his part, focused on his new understanding of the importance of each individual’s “unique configuration” (Grosjean, 1985) rather than stereotyped characterisations, saying,

my students emphasized in (sic) words like difference, other, accept, understand, adapt, learn, grow up. They recognize that each human being is unique and that our nationality or the groups we belong to don't define us.

This can be related to Bennett's (1993) model of intercultural sensitivity as well as Walsh's (2007) reconsideration of *otherness*, in that the order of the words in which the teacher refers to his students' awareness of their relationships to others in this example reflects changes from the ethnocentric to the ethnorelative stage, moving from denial, defence and minimization towards acceptance, adaptation and integration of different cultural visions.

We will now focus in more detail on the results of the individual pedagogic sequences and reflections of two of the participants. The first deals with an explicit focus on group stereotypes, and the second, on stereotypes of college life.

6.4.1 Theme 1. Acknowledging our identity through reflection and planning: group stereotypes. Discovering our prejudices (Teacher 1)

This teacher, who worked in a language institute, noted that "it is possible that, like me, many language teachers develop the technical abilities but rarely ask questions about language and culture and their role as teachers". Therefore, he decided to design his intercultural pedagogic sequence around the issue of national or group stereotypes. Participants were told to work individually with a worksheet entitled "Discovering our prejudices" in which they had to first identify their relationships with certain groups such as Colombians, Venezuelans, Americans and Foreigners, as well as categories such as African American, Indigenous and Caucasian people. Then, the students of Teacher 1 were asked whether they thought they had any stereotypes about these groups and whether these influenced their behaviour, and if so, how. After this, they discussed the definition of stereotypes with the other members of the group and reflected on the role of teachers in overcoming these.

After the implementation of the pedagogic sequence, the teacher observed that the participants felt that the activities had been useful as they had been able to reflect on their own stereotypes and agreed that it was a first step to be able to help students develop their intercultural sensitivity. He also acknowledged in his own case that

My training as an English teacher has been flooded with teaching techniques and influenced by the theories of Stephen Krashen... However, a new world was presented to me when the idea of interculturality was recently introduced. I conclude that I have been exposed to the psycholinguistic debates of the field but blind to the sociocultural approaches.

On the other hand, he realised that some of the participants struggled to see how they could apply these concepts in their classes and asked about the practical applications and mechanisms they could use to measure intercultural awareness, in line with the observation by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) about the gap between

a recognition of the need for an intercultural focus in language education to the development of this in practice. He concluded by observing the following in relation to his final course paper:

As the participants of the activity I led said, the discussions and reflections about interculturality should not be an isolated event, but an ongoing practice, and I evidenced that need by writing this document.

We will now turn to the second pedagogic sequence and reflections on the topic of college life in the USA and in Colombia.

6.4.2 Theme 2. Possibilities of integration through observation as a basis for action: College Life. A Proposal of English Teaching from within an Intercultural Perspective (Teacher 2)

Teacher 2 was interested in exteriorizing what was understood as stereotypes and prejudices about being a young adult in the USA. In particular, she wanted to identify the stereotypes present in American TV shows and movies about college students and their routines and to contrast these with the views of some American students themselves talking about their personal experiences of college life. Therefore, she asked a group of Colombian college students she was teaching to write what they knew about college life in the USA, before looking at a video of American students describing what a normal day in college was for them and then comparing their initial ideas with what they thought, after looking at the video. She wanted them to focus particularly on the question of whether they held stereotypes influenced by movies or TV shows.

When the Colombian students shared their initial ideas of what they thought of college life in the USA, Teacher 2 noted,

I was not surprised when they mentioned drugs, parties, sports, cheerleaders, fraternities and technology.

These were seen as common stereotypical activities promoted in US TV shows and movies. However, after watching the video, the students started identifying the differences between the video and their previous opinions. One said,

What Sara said is very different from what I think, maybe because she is in a small university.

Then, they began to observe certain similarities between American college students and themselves. Referring both to languages and sport, another acknowledged.

It’s very like what we do. We learn English, she Spanish. She rides horses, my sport is ping pong.

Finally, some of the students began to recognise that what they wrote in the first exercise was mediated by stereotypes. One said:

The interview can show us that we have a lot of stereotypes and it's hard to judge or say things about people without immersion in that culture.

Teacher 2 herself recognised that she had been impacted by the activities relating to the intercultural module and concluded her reflection acknowledging:

Professionally, I recognized that teaching languages in an instrumental way is a mistake as it does not consider all the other dimensions that come along with a linguistic code.

As we can see, both in the gradual deepening of the consciousness about identity and identities, as well as in the understandings of how a focus on interculturality can help language students and teachers identify different perceptions of the other, there is more evidence to support Bennett's (1993, 2017) model of intercultural sensitivity, particularly how students were helped to advance from the ethnocentric stage—minimization—to the ethnorelative perspective—acceptance of different cultural visions. For example, in the second extract, the student seems to highlight differences with how she thought, in relation to how Sara thought. However, in the third extract, there is a clear recognition of how both sports and languages constitute points of similarity and may be seen as acceptance of personal culture as one among other valid options (Bennett, 1993).

6.5 Implications for Education in a Global Sense

As Álvarez Valencia (in press) and Gamboa Diaz (2019) maintain, second/foreign language education needs to take a more complex and nuanced understanding of interculturality, in order to help language teachers and their learners make sense of the complex intercultural dynamics of language classrooms. It is no longer possible to refer to the “song and dance routines” understood as culture that Fishman criticized in 1977. In this respect, it is also important to remember the warning from Byram in 1997 to teachers and researchers against the danger of an over-simplification of intercultural competences, as this may lead to the trivialisation and the reduction of subtle understanding to generalisations and stereotypes. As Dervin and Gross (2016) demonstrate 25 years later, not much has changed. They acknowledge that “recipes” and ideological representations of the concept of interculturality are common and do not do justice to the complexity of self and the other.

There is thus a need to combat essentialising tendencies involving polar opposites and dichotomies which may lead to reification. After the experience of our study, we would maintain that understanding the complex relationships between languages, interculturality and identities is possible if administrators, teachers and students are

helped to come to grips with their own, often unconscious or subconscious, preconceptions in a process of gradual awareness and deepening understanding of both themselves and others from a critical point of view.

In Colombia, these understandings are particularly important in the present circumstances, after the signing of the peace agreement between the government and the FARC guerrillas in 2016. The ensuing peace and reconciliation process has brought into the open different visions and stereotypes of sectors of Colombian society among the left-wing guerrillas and the right-wing paramilitaries who have been involved in a fifty-year conflict in the country. In the light of these developments, several universities have implemented courses focusing on intercultural understanding and peace building, such as the Master’s in Peace Building programme at Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá and the postgraduate Diploma course in Justice, Victims and the Construction of Peace at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, among several other initiatives.

From an international perspective, we would like to emphasize the importance of publicising local studies in international scenarios. As Skutnabb-Kangas et al. (2009) have argued, it is important to share local research globally as this can lead to better theory and in turn result in action for more social justice and equality through education. The creation of deeper, more nuanced visions of identities of different groups through the development of intercultural sensitivity among students, teachers and administrators in language programmes is also important in trying to combat what has been identified as the “Latino Threat Narrative” (Chavez, 2013: 3ff), in other words, the notion that Latinos—as opposed to other immigrant groups in the USA—are less likely to engage culturally, linguistically and politically with non-Latinos. This leads to the stereotype that these groups tend to be much more traditional, much less educated, more prone to self-segregation and more frequently couriers of crime.

In 2013, García and Kleyn proposed three ways forward for language teacher education curricula in the twenty-first century. One of these has to do with co-constructing with teachers, spaces and opportunities to develop multilingualism based on social justice and equity, as well as social practice, which the authors see as connected to students’ worlds and identities. If, as we have evidenced in our study, understanding the relationships between language teaching and learning, interculturality and the construction of identity has been seen as a new development for language teachers in Colombia, there is an obvious need for both pre-service and in-service teacher education to face up to the challenge of incorporating a critical agenda into foreign language teacher education programmes, as Usma Wilches et al. (2018) have advocated. This is also in line with Kramsch and Huffmaster’s (2015) argument for teaching and learning processes which highlight fluid relationships between different ways of constructing social and cultural meanings and where “self-awareness goes hand in-hand with understanding others” (Fielding, this volume).

Finally, we would like to end with a quotation from Dervin (2016, p. 2) who highlights the importance of developing intercultural sensitivity among students in the following terms, “In a world where racism, different kinds of discrimination,

and injustice are on the rise, time spent at school should contribute effectively to prepare students to be real *interculturalists* who can question these phenomena and act critically, ethically, and responsively”. As a result of our study, we would like to add that we understand “real interculturalists” as people who are sensitive and understanding of cultural diversity, multilingualism and the interrelationships with different identity dimensions. In the words of one of the teacher participants in our study:

a successful teacher must be aware of their role in society, the reach they have, and the impact caused whether they decide to overcome stereotypes or not. Teachers have the ability [to] reinforce and perpetuate hatred or stimulate diversity and inspire students to create a better world.

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