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AMERICAN CULTURE IN AN ENGLISH IMMERSION CLASS

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RESUMEN

El bilingüismo es un objetivo importante para la educación de hoy; las escuelas se centran en la enseñanza de idiomas con diferentes métodos o estrategias. Debido a esta percepción, este trabajo une la idea de un programa de inmersión en inglés con los elementos culturales de América como factor clave para lograr un aprendizaje significativo por parte de los estudiantes. Analizar la importancia de aprender un segundo idioma y cuáles son los principales precedentes de un modelo de inmersión, nos ayudará a desarrollar un adecuado programa de inmersión en inglés para suplir las necesidades de la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Bilingüismo, enseñanza de idiomas, programas de inmersión, cultura americana, aprendizaje significativo.

ABSTRACT

Bilingualism is an important goal for today's education; schools are focused on language teaching with different methods or approaches. Due to this perception, this report joins the idea of an immersion program in English with the culture elements from America as a key factor to get a meaningful learning by the students. Analyzing the importance of learning a second language and which the main precedents of an immersion model are, this will help us to develop an adequate English immersion program to supply society's needs.

KEY WORDS

Bilingualism, language teaching, immersion programs, American culture, meaningful learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, we live in a technological society where English is the language to communicate with the world. Global media and social networks have helped to bring this language in our daily lives. Through the years teaching a foreign language has become an essential part of education around the world, and English is now the most popular language to be included in the required subjects of many students due to this globalization.

One of the main questions to appear is how to help the students become motivated to learn and improve their language skills. This is an important goal to reach. Therefore, is essential to see a language, not as a subject to be taught, but as something which is alive, a window to the heart and soul of civilization.

The culture is an element that has to be integrated with the learning of a language. They go hand in hand, supporting each other. The habits, ways of thinking, manners, or different kinds of beliefs are all reflected in the language. This is one of the reasons why cultural values are something to keep in mind when each specific language is being taught. With the idea that language is something alive and helps to understand the world, culture has the same function. Moran, P (2001) says this:

An increase in cultural knowledge and understanding contributes to changes in attitudes. The more learners know about a culture and its people, the more likely they are to empathize, to see the world from another perspective and ultimately, to accept this perspective. (p. 109)

This report will focus on the American culture in an English immersion class, as a tool to motivate the students in order to get a better learning and understanding of the English language.

OBJECTIVES

MAIN OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this report is to present the English language as something real and useful making the language come alive through activities and cultural events so that the students receive a more meaningful learning. An immersion program will be the model for this approach.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- Analyzing the advantages of an English immersion program, from being English as a *lingua franca* to teach different subjects, adding cultural elements mainly from The United States of America, getting a greater knowledge and understanding of the cultural environment of the English.
- Studying the usefulness of a Teaching Intervention Plan that brings the culture to the class in order to enjoy the language and the new discoveries.
- Developing an open-minded point of view of students around the world, the foreign culture they learn, and their own culture.

JUSTIFICATION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

The selection of this topic comes from the personal experience in a Spanish Immersion School, North woods International School, in the USA, working as an assistant teacher for a full school year.

The School uses Spanish as the main language both to teach and to communicate with the students. A respectful and positive environment is created to help the students use the Spanish language throughout most of the whole school day, without fear of making mistakes. The culture of different Spanish speaking countries, including Spain, helps them to be motivated to learn. It encourages their curiosity about other places, seeing the language as a reality outside their own country and experience.

This approach of teaching a foreign language is different to other ways, and leads to the hope that they will have great language skills as they grow and in the future, helping them to better understand the world and its citizens, by being broad-minded on cultural issues. This theory is one of the main goals to achieve with this report.

1. LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAM

1.1 The importance and benefits of learning a second language at an early age

“*Bilingualism* is not a new term. Throughout history, human beings around the world have spoken more than one language” (Rodríguez, Carrasquillo, & Soon Lee, 2014, p.5). However, learning a second language has become an essential part of most people’s lives. Knowing a different language has been important throughout the years due to commercial transactions and political relations between countries. But not everybody has had the opportunity to learn a second language, apart from royalty or those of greater financial stability.

Luckily, the situation has changed around the world. English specifically has become a language par excellence in the world. Rodríguez et al. (2014) says this:

The political dominance of English as a world language has meant more pressure toward knowing English (...). The importance of knowledge of languages in addition to English in media, communications, economics, and trade is well established and will be even more important in the future for individuals as well as for governments, companies and other institutions and organizations. (p.8)

Currently the English language is accessible to most parts of the developed countries’ population. Therefore, in the last few years, schools have focused on teaching a second language as part of their curriculum.

The methods of teaching a foreign language have also been changed in order to improve students’ learning. Little by little, the age at which a student starts to learn a second language is

lower. Most schools have started this teaching at the age of three. The main reason to do this is to get a meaningful learning by developing the language's fluency and comprehension.

Different studies such as those conducted by Rodríguez et al. (2014) and Harley (1986) show that bilingualism helps children in their linguistic skills for both languages. Knowing different conceptions of words in more than one language can help them to get a better understanding of the world at an early age. Bilingualism also helps students to develop a creative and divergent way of thinking.

In early childhood, children's cognitive skills have not completely developed. Their brain capacity is still building through these years. This is one of the main reasons why it is beneficial to teach a second language while they are still learning their native language. They build their cognitive capacities through the new knowledge they are getting. In this understanding, it's easier to provoke a meaningful learning when the brain is developing than when it has completed one language.

1.2 Different language teaching methods

Through education's history, different methods have been used to teach a second language in the classroom. Different researches (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Brown, 2007) present a journey through language teaching history. Some of the most popular methods in the 20th century are the following:

- The Grammar Translation Method is a method which has its origins in the Latin language. It focuses more on the grammar of the language than the oral skills. Classes are taught mainly in the native tongue, and memorization is essential to the learning. Personally I think this method

is effective in order to learn new vocabulary, but it is not presenting the reality of the language. The students do not have the opportunity to experience the language as something real, and they are not able to communicate with the second language because the instruction language is their mother tongue.

_ The Direct Method uses the target language during the classroom instruction. The grammar is taught inductively, and the vocabulary is taught by demonstration through objects or pictures. This method can be applied for the theory that human beings don't learn their mother tongue's grammar in order to speak. People first learn how to speak and then grammar comes by induction. This method is similar to the one that will be presented in the next section, however the difference to be argued is that grammar needs to be taught at the same time while they are learning how to speak, not just by induction.

_ The Audiolingual Method pursues a positive reinforcement. There is a little use of the mother tongue and grammar and vocabulary are used in a context. Perfection in the grammar structures and pronunciation are the goals for this method, where repetition is the main tool to achieve it. However, being so focused on perfection by repetition is not an effective way for students to be able to communicate in the second language.

_ Suggestopedia uses music in the background to encourage students to produce their own work without any correction. This method uses positive reinforcement as well, and the students need to believe that it works. From personal experience, students need correction: they need to create their own work in a free way. This freedom is essential, but they also need correction to improve their production, being aware of their own mistakes and learning from them.

_ Silent way is a method that uses silence as the main tool to learn. Teachers stay silent trying to encourage the students' self correction. Teachers use gestures and body language to give the instructions. There are many resources used in facilitation of this method: pictures, charts, etc. However, from my point of view, teachers should be talking at class to help the students: they are there to provide examples in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Silent way wouldn't be the best option for students to learn a second language.

_ In the Total Physical Response method, students are called to use the target language with non-verbal actions and different specific instruction and routines. This method seems to be more effective with beginners because students need more complexity when a higher level is achieved.

The efficacy of these methods is a constant discussion between language experts around the world. Nowadays, there are still many discussions about the effectiveness of these methods, as experts try to find the ideal model of language teaching.

However, all of these methods have different teaching features related to grammar, oral skills and phonetics that can be extracted to develop one successful model of language teaching. In the next section, an immersion program is developed through the joining of different ideas from these methods. They will be joined together to achieve one main goal: a meaningful learning full of joy and satisfaction for the students.

1.3 Immersion program as a successful teaching model

Immersion programs were born in Canada, where the students would learn in both English and French at the school. “The term ‘immersion education’ was adopted in the 1960s to describe such programs in the context of English-speaking children being taught entirely through the medium of French in selected schools in Quebec” (Johnson, R & Swain, M, 1997, p.3).

According to different studies and articles like the Pacific Policy Research Center (2010), an immersion program is a way of teaching where the second language (L2) is used as a *lingua franca* in different subjects such as math, the sciences, or social studies which is called partial immersion or all subjects throughout the whole school day which is called total immersion.

One of the main objectives of immersion is developing the students’ language skills in both languages.

The immersion program is an excellent method for teaching a second language because the students live their school day with the language they are learning. They use the second language to communicate to another at class. “Learners learn best by actively using the language they are learning” (Nunan, 2004, p. 36). They can build their own knowledge by interacting actively in class. “Students develop much higher levels of second language proficiency than do non-immersion students studying the second language as a subject for about 40 minutes each day” (Lyster, 2007, p.22). This last concept is the normal situation in Spain, for most of the schools are not bilingual or with immersion programs. These students don’t have real contact with the language they are learning, and most of them will present difficulties in their oral and writing skills to express themselves in addition to the understanding and comprehension of the language. These difficulties can endure for their whole student life.

This practical use of the second language is essential for learning it. It is not only grammar contents, language is communication, interaction with others. The best way to learn how to speak another language is speaking it. That is one of the main reasons to advocate for an immersion program. Lyster (2007) says that:

Immersion and other content-based classrooms replicate conditions for sustained exposure and authentic communication more than most other types of second language classrooms insofar as the target language is used purposefully to study other subjects, thus providing, theoretically at least, classroom settings with optimal conditions for language learning. (p.23)

According to this idea, it could be said that second language instruction is most effective when it is taught in content areas where the language becomes necessary as a tool for discovery. The Immersion program stands up for this principle.

1.4 English immersion program's development: Hybrid methodological approach

This approach is based in a partial immersion program with some of the features of other language teaching methods that are effective in order to get a better achievement of the goals of learning English as a second language: it is not just one method but a mix of different techniques that come from other approaches that appeared in the last sections of the report.

1.4.1 Grammar and content

One of the dangers that an immersion program has to face is about learning contents versus learning the language itself through grammar issues, form or meaning. Lyster (2007) suggested that a successful immersion program has to treat both scopes together in order to get a meaningful learning in both language skills and content. Language and content go together in class, complementing to each other. “The goal of teachers throughout any type of content-based program is to enable students to comprehend content presented through the second language” (Lyster, 2007, p. 60).

Grammar issues need to be treated in an immersion class through the contents of whichever subject is being taught. Depending on the students' grade level, grammar would be taught in many ways: games, songs, lessons, etc. It is important set aside time to treat grammar issues, because it is a way to build the language in a correct way.

From my own experience, children learn better through games and different activities where they have to think and create their own patterns: they can learn by induction and experimentation, but it is important to explain the grammar when they have experimented with the language on their own. With the bases they have built, they have the basic knowledge that will need to be completed with the grammar. They need to understand why and when they can use different structures when they have a previous knowledge built by themselves. Grammar contents need to be adapted to the level of the students.

1.4.2 Creating an engaging classroom

When an immersion program is being taught and the contents are in the second language, the level of comprehension of this second language will be better than the production, but the production is also important. It has to be a balance between both concepts. However, when a language is being learned, the students' understanding is usually better than the production. That is one of the reasons to develop production skills as the students are speaking or writing in an immersion class in order to have a balanced learning.

In a class with these features, it's essential for the students to build their own patterns. They need to talk and express themselves in the second language. Interaction is the key to learning: "student production in the target language becomes increasingly important in content-based instruction as students interact with teachers, with peers and with the content itself" (Lyster, 2007, p 71). Teachers should create an optimal environment for the students, where they can feel secure to use the language with others; they need to feel they are the protagonists of their own learning.

If the students are motivated, they will enjoy themselves at class, and a meaningful learning will be provided. Lyster (2007), observed that when the students use the second language between themselves when it is not necessary or required to do it, they show the pride and satisfaction of knowing the language they are learning; they are enjoying the language. "Teachers observe that high expectations and students' self-motoring result in enthusiastic participation and noticeable progress in acquiring the second language" (Johnson & Swain, 1997, p. 257).

As students, they need to realize what the goals are for their learning: why they are studying and learning a second language, and what the connection is with their real life outside

of school. “Learners should be given opportunities to reflect on what they have learned and how well they are doing” (Nunan, 2004, p. 37). They also need to know that the language is alive, and it is useful to build bridges between different people and cultures.

1.4.3 Useful techniques to reinforce the immersion program

• How to use the second language

The second language in an immersion program should be used naturally. Lyster (2007) gives some techniques for teachers on how to use the second language at class:

- _ The second language has to be spoken in a normal rhythm, not too fast or too slow. The students need to see the language as something real, and the comprehension will be better if the language is spoken in this normal way.
- _ Body language is an useful tool to get a meaningful learning. With this technique students are able to learn by word association. However, body language may become an obstacle if it is used too much during the learning process or in the wrong way by giving ambiguous signals to the students.
- _ No translation can help the students build their own linguistic structures, using the language to explain the language. The explanation of the concepts work better than the translation, helping their comprehension and making them learn through the context.

• Music in order to learn a second language

Music is an important part of human race. It is an intrinsic language which stays with us throughout our lives. Music is essential for kids in their early childhood. It helps them to express

themselves with the world around them. There are so many ways for music to be used at class: to express feelings, to help students focus on their tasks, to help imagination and creativity, etc.

In an immersion class, the possibilities for use music are too many, it also helps with memorization of words and concepts. Through songs students are able to remember and understand different concepts and vocabulary of the second language. Different routines and lessons of the class can be taught through songs, and it helps to make a transition between both languages.

Music is also an important element of the culture of a country, and the specific applications at class will be given in the next sections.

• **Multiple Intelligences Theory**

This theory says that intelligence is not a single concept but it is composed by eight different intelligences: intrapersonal/introspective, interpersonal/social, logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, visual/spatial, musical/rhythmical, and naturalist.

In Education, this theory helps teachers to use their activities and materials in different ways in order to get the students to enjoy with their learning. This theory suggests that one person can learn the same thing in different ways, and some of these ways are easier than others. Williams & Menke (2010) suggest that:

Presenting content in a variety of ways affords learners the opportunity to interact with information in ways that match their particular style; by doing so, teachers are attending to the individual learning preferences and innate strengths of students (...). Multiple intelligences theory enables educators to understand how a learner might more easily

grasp a concept and consciously plan to present information in unique and complementary ways". (p. 68)

To develop an immersion program, it is important to keep this theory in mind, and present the different activities according to this main idea. Not everyone learns in the same way, and as teachers, it is necessary to provide an individualized teaching style in the classroom to make sure that every student is learning and every student feels comfortable by supplying their education needs.

• **Cooperative learning**

Promoting cooperative learning can be good for students' work in the class. It helps them to be open to the reality of society, learning how to solve problems as a group with different ideas and opinions. It also helps them to understand each other, being aware of their own skills as well. According to Williams et al (2010):

In cooperative learning students interact with one another in pairs and small groups in order to accomplish a task together. As a result, cooperative learning activity structures are a means of promoting both positive interdependence between students and individual accountability. (P. 72)

Learning a second language is different for each student. All students have different feedback and knowledge about the second language. Students can learn from each other by working together to get to the same goal.

2. CULTURE AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

2.1 Relation between language and culture

Culture is a difficult concept to define, it includes different elements of our world and society. According to Heusinkveld, (1997) culture is a complex concept to define, that encompasses almost anything humans have learned through their history, from values to patterns of daily life. Hinkel (1999) provides another definition for culture: "Culture is not static; it evolves as people conduct their daily lives. Nevertheless, culture also denotes a body of shared knowledge" (p.77). This knowledge refers to what the people need to know in order to make the things they make and act in the way they act: "culture can be seen as the framework of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that are used to interpret other people's actions, words, and patterns of thinking" (Hinkel, 1999, p.197). Language is part of culture, and some of these different elements from a culture appear in the language of that specific culture: language reflects part of a culture.

"Traditionally, culture and learning have been studied through separate disciplines. The methodological separation for the purpose of inquiry has contributed an artificial independence of these concepts" (Nemetz, 1985, p.7). However, to get to the goal of a meaningful learning through culture, it's necessary to join both concepts. To understand it better, Heusinkveld (1997) has a simile which is very accurate for how to describe the relationship between language and the culture: the world is a "big sea" where nobody can understand each other. There are big islands for all the speakers which are spread in the middle of this sea. One island is for English speakers; another is for the Spanish speakers; another for French speakers and the other islands for each of the other languages in the world. "When we study a language, we build a bridge to one of those

distant islands and gain access to the culture where the people who speak it work, play, laugh and love” (Heusinkveld, 1997, p.xxvi). The bridge is the language, grammar, structures and vocabulary. Continuing with this simile “the better we learn the language, the more effectively we can understand the new island, the new culture” (Heusinkveld, 1997, p.xxvi). That is the reason why we need to learn the language to understand the cultural values, and not just stand at the bridge without having a view of the island.

To speak a language with fluency, it is essential to understand it, and to understand a language, it is necessary to discover the context where that language is spoken.

2.2 Culture in an English immersion program

In the last section, the relation between the language and culture is presented. It is understood that both concepts are related, and it is essential to work with them in class as a whole. Teachers are the ones who have to present the reality of both concepts and make them attractive to the students in order to get a meaningful learning. Heusinkveld (1997) maintains that:

Teachers must create in both themselves and each student the conviction that the language is real and that it works. The same argument applies to integrating language and culture. Teachers must create their own positive cultural mindset, as well as that of their students. Culture will not become a reality in the foreign classroom until teachers become convinced that they are teaching more than form, that there is indeed a content to that which is being taught, a content that is not identified in term of grammatical descriptors. (p.127).

Teachers who love what they are teaching, will help their students love what they are learning, that's why teachers' attitude is really important in a class: they transmit their passions, dreams, points of view and almost their everything to their students.

From my own experience in an immersion class where the Spanish culture is taught through by different activities, students enjoy learning more about new countries and new things if the teacher has an attitude of love for that language and culture. Students also enjoy making comparisons between their own culture and the culture they are learning: "the basic values of a culture are an important point of comparison with the values of the culture of the learners" (Moran, 2001, p.16). Even more, the students can reflect about their own culture and be able to appreciate it more. They make questions because they are really interested in learning, and it's something normal to see that they want to find out about different countries with curiosity. Teachers need to facilitate opportunities to grow at class encouraging their students' interest; "we can help the students develop interest in who in the target culture did what, where, and when and why" (Heusinkveld, 1997, p.101).

According to this last quote, when the students develop a positive attitude with the target language and the target culture, it is easier to get a meaningful learning, and the language skills can be improved to higher levels.

In an immersion class, the culture is a key concept when a language is being taught. Language can help to teach the culture and the culture can help to learn the language. How can the language be used to teach a different culture? Teachers' imagination plays a big role in a class bringing together the culture and the language in a fun and productive way; it is necessary to think of projects that can join both concepts with an interesting perspective of the reality that

wants to be transmitted. As an example of this idea, different projects and activities will be given in the next sections. Morgan and Cain (2000) talk about the benefits of this model:

Language is used for real purposes; students are given responsibility for communicating with another country: they are asked to focus sharply on selecting information and presenting it in a form suitable for another culture; and metacognitive skills are developed when students are asked to reflect on their thought processes and handiwork.
(p.110)

According to this idea, when language is being used to learn a country's culture becomes necessary to use it in an appropriate way; by doing this students are encouraged to learn both to be able to communicate themselves well.

3. TEACHING INTERVENTION PLAN IN AMERICAN CULTURE FOR IMMERSION

English is a language which is spoken in many countries around the world. However some of these countries have different cultures and backgrounds. In this section, the teaching intervention plan will be focused on the United States of America.

It is essential to join culture and language at class, but to present both concepts as something real, it is better to choose one reality and one culture as the main cultural experience for the students. It is good to make references to different cultural scopes from more than one country where the English language is spoken, but to get a meaningful learning by the students, it is better to focus the attention on just one.

3.1 Introduction to American culture

America is a new country with great diversity of cultural heritages. People from different nations around the world went to America seeking a better life for themselves and their descendants; nowadays, people with different backgrounds live together in this country under the same flag.

According to Campbell & Kean (2012), American people are proud of their multicultural heritage, knowing their family's roots and honoring them by remembering. This is one of the reasons why America is a mix of cultures in one. Many of their traditions and main holidays come from other countries like Saint Patrick's Day (Ireland) or Cinco de Mayo (Mexico).

American people love privacy. It is common to have houses instead of apartments, where each family has their own space to live. They also focus their lives on home with their families more than Mediterranean countries like Spain, where the community is part of the culture.

The American culture has a strong Christian ethics heritage which is deep in their society; for instance Christian values are reflected in their work ethic: they are very responsible at work, and work is really important in their lives.

At last, American people are really patriot in everything they do. Their National Anthem sounds in every event or activity, where everybody has to stand up and take their hats off if they have. At schools students, teachers and staff have to pledge allegiance to the flag with their right hand over their heart. They also have some rules about their flag, some examples are: the flag never can touch the ground because it's disrespectful and when they're singing their national anthem if there is a flag there, they should be looking where the flag is while they're singing. Most of the people are proud of their country with a national feeling of unity and belonging.

3.2 Immersion programs: a personal perspective.

Immersion programs need to join the culture and content to the language learning in order to get a meaningful learning. I was following this idea as a teacher during a whole school year in Northwoods International School in La Crosse, WI, in The United States.

Northwoods is a public school which offers a good education for its students based on the partial immersion program in Spanish. Teachers at the school are seeking for a better model to teach the students in Spanish but also having a good level in every other subject. The school uses

Spanish teachers every year to get these goals and to encourage the program, because they provide a good feedback not just for the students but the teachers as well.

That was part of my job: I was there to support the program as another Spanish teacher, providing them not just grammar knowledge but the cultural perspective of my language: the students could feel more motivated to learn from me and the other interns from Spain because we came from another reality outside their country and it was attractive for their learning.

As a partial immersion program in Spanish, math, science and social studies were taught in Spanish every week. Teachers created an environment of peace and comfort for the students who could feel comfortable with the Spanish, talking and listening and doing their best to improve their own language skills: they were proud of their Spanish. The students start with the Spanish learning in Kindergarten, and they continue to 5th grade, last year in the elementary school.

As a Spanish teacher I was using Spanish with the students the whole day, trying to adapt the contents to the level of the students. Vocabulary contents were taught through games and songs and small conversations. The students were call to use the Spanish every time they could, using the positive reinforcement. At math, the different activities and games to learn math content had also Spanish grammar and vocabulary.

Content and grammar were used together in the activities they did at class, and cultural elements were presented day by day: they were learning about different parts of the world, not just Spanish countries.

Northwoods International has one international day every month when the schedule change and the classes learn different cultural elements about many countries through games and fun activities.

The students had their own times to read or to create their own works: it is a free environment to explore or interact with others, where the teacher is the main example for them, helping the with the contents and language but letting them being themselves at class, learning at their rhythm because learning at class is not just subjects and activities from a book: learn is exploring, interacting, living the learning itself.

3.3 Teaching Intervention Plan

The teaching intervention plan is based on my own personal experience in Northwoods where the culture, language and content are together in the activities they have at class.

With these activities and projects, students would appreciate the target culture and language, getting a meaningful learning and also useful skills to be able to communicate themselves with English speakers.

This plan is focused on activities and projects that set the American culture closer to the students. Present the reality of the country to the students would make easier to understand and learn from it: students can explore by opening the window to the country and culture they're learning.

In this section, different cultural topics will be presented with a small example about the use at class in general, the activities and projects will have to be adapted to the ages of the students. The contents are presented in different topics to highlight the importance of culture in order to teach a language and to make it easier for the students.

• **American food**

American people are known by their “fast food” and their alimentation habits: hot-dogs, hamburgers, pizza, butter or different kinds of candy are a few examples of their main diets. Also eating surrounds social events, where the dinner is the most important meal of the day.

American people go out for dinner or lunch a couple times in a week.

It's good to talk about these habits at class, making comparisons with the own alimentation habits and teaching about a healthy alimentation at the time.

To bring a real taste of American food into an immersion class, there are easy recipes like apple pie or American cookies to make together. Cooking at class is a wonderful experience for kids: they may learn how to work following instructions and different math content can be treated as well. It's a fun activity, where students can taste the fruits of their own work and also enjoy new food while they're learning about a new country. This activity matches with the idea of free environment class, where students can be exploring, participating and not just sitting and listening a lesson.

• **Most popular sports**

Sports in America are really important. They practice at school, middle and high school and university or colleges. They also have teams from universities who are well-known by the population without being professional players.

Kids practice at least one sport every week, and the weekend games are a social event for the parents and the children. Kids are encouraged by their families to practice and do their best at the games, and American people are really respectful with the opposite team and they teach the children to respect and enjoy everything they can. These values are deep in the society, and adults act in the same way when they're watching a game.

There are many sports in the USA but the most important three are baseball, American football and basketball. To talk about these three sports at class, presentations on PowerPoint are really useful, and also videos can be include to explain the features about the sports and provide visual information. Different math or science contents can be include with these sports joining a sport game at class (with art materials) with math problems as an example. The creativity and imagination of teachers would be a key factor to develop these ideas.

• **Music**

Music is part of the world's culture. We are surrounded by music since the beginning of time. Music is also a reflection of our way of thinking, desires, feelings or moods, therefore music from different cultures is different and full of shades, that's why music is also an essential element to understand the culture of a nation.

America, as a new nation, has developed country as their own traditional music: country music comes from other kind of music from European countries, especially Ireland; immigrant people who went to the States brought their music, and through the years was being developed into country music. Also, in America was born the blues which come from the black communities as spiritual songs or melancholy songs. The Gospel music comes from the black communities as well as worship songs. In addition to this kind of music, Jazz is another way of expression through music; in this case, more as dance music. Each of these kind of music were spread through The States and later to the world.

Using some of these songs at class could be a great tool with good results; singing in the target language helps with the pronunciation at the words providing a meaningful learning by the students; it also can help them to learn about different cultural things from America, due to music express about the culture with the lyrics of songs. From my own experience, for my American students, singing in Spanish was really good for them, they were improving almost without being aware of it, and also they wanted to know more about our music and music bands from Spain, so they were motivated to learn with curiosity, and they enjoyed singing in the language they were learning with pride of their work.

In addition to these ideas, nursery rhymes are another way to teach the little ones to sing on the target language about things they find interesting and easy for their level.

Literature

American literature is very varied. The classic ones are a good theme of study, like Mark Twain, Emily Dickinson, Edgar Allan Poe, or Washington Irving. However, many of these authors are not appropriated to emphasize their work for students of elementary school.

On the other hand, America has other children's authors who are really known by American population like Theodor Seuss Geisel, more known as Dr. Seuss. He was an American author who dedicated many of his works to kids.

Working with his tales and poetry would be a key issue to talk about values while they're having fun practicing either reading or listening. Reading books to the students while they are listening to the teacher is a good way to work in their concentration and to encourage their passion for reading.

In addition to these ideas, America celebrates the week of Dr. Seuss; every day of that week they dress at schools with different and specific clothes, because every day is making references to works of this author. On Monday, every kid and every teacher should wear a funny hat, on Tuesday they wear funny socks, on Wednesday they have to dress with crazy clothes and they call that day as Wacky Wednesday, on Thursday they wear rainbow colors where each grade has a color and finally on Friday it's Pajamas Day where everybody at school should go in Pajamas and also is the Reading Day, where the kids and teachers spend the whole day reading books by their own, together or doing activities related to literature.

The 'Dr. Seuss week' is also a good method to bring American culture at class, having fun and encouraging reading and literature.

• **Traditions and holidays**

America has many traditions and holidays, and most of them come from other countries because of the multicultural heritage they have. Work with these traditions could be a great way to bring the culture to the class, presenting them as something real and the students can also be motivated to learn more about it. These are some examples of different traditions and holidays to work with at class.

= Thanksgiving. This American holiday is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. The first Thanksgiving was celebrated by the Pilgrims in 1621 after their first harvest in America, the new world, but this celebration with a Christian origin it wasn't an official holiday since 1789. This celebration is one of the most important in America where American families have dinner together, and they give thanks not just for the food before them, but the family, the friends and the year they're living. The food is special on Thanksgiving and the meal has to include: mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, and turkey with stuffing, pumpkin pie and corn bread.

There are many activities to bring this tradition to an elementary class like songs or pictures, but to make it real, having a real "dinner" at class with the students and with some of the typical food would be a great example of how to live a tradition to learn more about it: the class would be an space to explore, enjoy and learn at the same time.

= Valentine's Day. This is another important holiday in the American culture. It is celebrated on February 14th as the day of love and friendship. People give love card to their family and

friends without being necessary to be in a relationship to enjoy it. At the school students create their own bags or boxes to receive chocolate, different kind of candy or cards by their friends.

This is an easy holiday to work with in a classroom. Creating their own boxes or bags could encourage their creative thinking and they would be practicing their English writing as well, and once again, living the holiday by themselves while they're having fun is the perfect way to join language and culture to get a meaningful learning.

= Christmas' Eve and Christmas' Day. Christmas is a really important season in America. Families are together for dinner in Christmas' Eve and Christmas' Day and they share presents. Christmas also is a very consumer season, where people start shopping in November, and everything has to be decorated.

American people have different traditions in Christmas that can be brought to a class like 'ugly sweater party'. Every kid can have an ugly sweater for a contest, where the winner is the one with the ugliest sweater of the class. It's a fun activity the students can enjoy where the English would be the main language in the party.

= Saint Patrick's Day. This Holiday is celebrated on March 17th. It comes from Ireland, where Saint Patrick is the catholic patron Saint of the city, but nowadays the celebration in America is really popular: everybody has to wear something green with accessories of clovers and leprechauns and the streets are decorated as well loosing that Christian meaning.

Wearing something green to the school on March 17th is an idea to celebrate Saint Patrick's Day with the immersion students. Different presentations and games related to clovers or leprechauns can be useful to support the learning; these games can also be about math or

sciences but with a new topic for that day, in this way language, culture and content would be joined together as a whole.

- Halloween. Halloween is celebrated on October 31st and it's one of the most popular celebrations in America. This holiday that the Irish immigrants brought to America, was a Celtic harvest tradition that was mixed with a catholic celebration on November 1st known as 'All Saint Day'. Nowadays, kids in America dress up and go to the houses to ask for candy with the famous 'trick or treat'. The houses are decorated as well, especially at the doors with pumpkins with faces or other kind of 'terror' accessories.

Working at class with this holiday is really easy: students can wear costumes during the whole school day, also in class they can eat the typical pumpkin pie while they are doing different activities of content. There are many songs and movies to support the idea of Halloween as well, and different workshops, the creativity and imagination of the teacher would be the best tool for it.

- Independence's Day. This is the biggest celebration in America. It is celebrated on July 4th as a federal holiday commemorating the Declaration of Independence on July 4th of 1776, when America was independent from England. Nowadays it's a big celebration, where people wear clothes and different accessories of their flag and the streets are decorated with flags and with the red and blue colors. There are big fireworks and music in every town and city of the United States, where the people show their patriotic feelings of pride for their country.

Talking about this national day at a class could be really productive. Students can make their own comparisons between each country while they're learning about new things and new

traditions, and it also is a good moment to explain something about the American history with different materials and resources like videos, presentations...

This teaching intervention plan includes some general ideas about American culture in an English immersion class; these activities would be adapted to the level and age of the students using English as the lingua franca. Culture can be treated in different ways, and this plan was just a general example about how to join language, culture and content: teacher participation and creativity would be essential to approach these concepts to the students in order to make them love their learning and the second language.

CONCLUSION

The history of language education has been changed through the years with different models and methods to get a real learning. In this report it is seen that immersion programs are a successful method to teach a second language: to begin with, the students are in contact with the target language more than forty minutes a day learning just grammar, so they have to learn how to use the language day by day in their daily tasks. Besides, they learn how to express their emotions, their needs or their knowledge in the second language, and that is the main goal to know a language: **to be able to communicate**. In addition to this theory, **immersion programs** would be one of the best ways to learn a second language, because the students learn listening and talking, making mistakes and learning through them just in a similar way that people learn their native tongue: students can live the language.

To provoke a meaningful learning is essential to provide a **cultural experience** for the students so they can see a different reality outside their own country. They can enjoy better the target language and the target culture through fun activities with cultural elements.

Following these theories, to teach about America to students, it is necessary to join concepts as culture and language, to do it is essential to bring the culture through real events and traditions, to help the students learn from a new perspective.

This program can be successful with the students because they would be motivated to learn and that's a key factor for their learning. Personally I could observe the success of a program with these features in America where the students were enjoying their learning, making use of their new discoveries.

To be able to develop this approach it is necessary to understand that the teacher's role is really important at class, as a guide and example for the students and also the teacher needs a loving attitude towards the target culture and the target language to be able to transmit that passion to the students, in order to help them grow and learn.

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