



RESEARCH ARTICLES

Encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities for cultural competence development: A case study of learners of Spanish in Colombia

Encuentros con individuos periféricos y comunidades rurales para el desarrollo de competencias culturales: Un estudio de caso de estudiantes de español en Colombia

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Citation/ Para citar este Artículo: Llanes, J. (2018). Encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities for cultural competence development: A case study of learners of Spanish in Colombia. *Colomb. Appl. Linguistic. J.*, 20(2), pp. 230-247.

Received: 23-Feb.-2018 / **Accepted:** 09-Jul.-2018

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14483/22487085.13102>

Abstract

Cultural competence (Puren, 2013) has been considered a critical aspect for foreign language (FL) teaching and learning due to the wide range of cultural elements associated with the learning of FLs. Hence, this case study aims to describe and understand how encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities contribute to developing learners' cultural competence in a Spanish as a foreign language course. The participants were three learners who got involved with peripheral individuals and rural communities as part of a voluntary program included in the syllabi of their course. The current study provides an emic perspective following the research participants' views and was guided by the principles of qualitative research. Data were gathered from a variety of sources: An online questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, classroom observation field notes, and audiotaped social interactions. Content and interpretive analyses were carried out on the data. The findings support the importance of social action and experiential learning for cultural competence development. In addition, the outcomes suggest that the studied encounters not only provided learners with opportunities to enhance knowledge about cultures, but also helped them to encounter otherness and to expand understandings of professional cultures.

Keywords: cultural competence, experiential learning, otherness, peripheral individuals, Spanish as a foreign language

Resumen

La competencia cultural (Puren, 2013) ha sido considerada uno de los aspectos críticos en la enseñanza aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, debido a la amplia gama de elementos culturales asociados al aprendizaje de las lenguas. Por lo tanto, este estudio aspira describir y entender cómo los encuentros con individuos periféricos y comunidades rurales contribuyen al desarrollo de la competencia cultural de los estudiantes en una clase de español como lengua extranjera. Los sujetos de investigación fueron tres estudiantes que participaron en el programa de voluntariado incluido el sílabo del curso. El estudio se enmarca dentro de la perspectiva de los participantes y se orienta por los principios de la investigación cualitativa. Los datos se recolectaron a través de varias fuentes: Un cuestionario online, entrevistas

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semi-estructuradas, diarios de campo de observaciones de clase y grabaciones de interacciones sociales. Se efectuaron análisis interpretativo y de contenido. Los hallazgos resaltan la importancia de la acción social y el aprendizaje experiencial para el desarrollo de la competencia cultural. Además, los resultados sugieren que los encuentros estudiados no solamente ofrecen oportunidades para que los alumnos enriquezcan sus conocimientos culturales; sino que también los ayudan a entrar en contacto con la alteridad y ampliar el entendimiento de culturas ligadas a las profesiones.

Palabras clave: competencia cultural, individuos periféricos, aprendizaje experiencial y español como lengua extranjera (ELE).

Introduction

Cultural competence (Puren, 2013) has been considered a critical aspect for foreign language (FL) teaching and learning due to the wide range of cultural elements associated to the learning of FLs. As noted by many scholars such as Holme (2003), language and culture are to be learned in dynamic interaction, with one being essential to the full understanding of the other.

In addition, research on the cultural components of FL courses mostly reports proposals for improving instructional practices and describes instances for treating cultural competence typically from the view of language program directors (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Wellmon, 2008) and research experts (Allen, 2004). Notwithstanding the significance of outsiders' points of view, this begs for deeper scrutiny from the perspective of FL learners. Therefore, the current case study intends to follow an insider's perspective, guided by principles of qualitative research, with the purpose of giving an account of naturally occurring processes and individual practices on the development of cultural competence.

The possibility to investigate the development of cultural competence in Spanish language teaching and learning is also fuelled by appeals to include not only the linguistic features of language but also the social and cultural position of languages in the

world in the content of FL programs (Franson & Holliday, 2009). Moreover, problematizing cultural content in FL learning originates in the concern that culture learning is often unconsciously associated with a certain set of long established, and in some cases mandated, ideas that reinforce limited visions of culture. Therefore, the current study is highly committed to a necessary critical consideration of cultural content in FL programmes and it is intended to answer the following question: *How do encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities contribute to developing learners' cultural competence in a Spanish course?*

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Competence

In Gudykunst and Kim's (1984) words a culturally competent person is someone "whose cognitive, affective, and behavioural characteristics are not limited but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameter of only one culture" (p. 230). Thus, cultural competence may develop through encounters. As a result, in this paper, cultural competence is not merely an increase in knowledge of cultural aspects of languages. Most importantly, cultural competence entails a complex and individual expansion of understandings, attitudes, and skills in reading other cultures where previous and actual knowledge about cultures are applied.

Hence, cultural competence entails an integral whole of personal, cultural, and cognitive factors which can be developed through education and/or experience. This conceptualization suggests that cultural competence development is not purely the acquisition of cultural facts related to languages but also extended understandings, attitudes, and skills in reading other cultures through the lens of past and present experiences. In other words, historicity and complexity are underlined. Additionally, the proposed definition of cultural competence is not restricted to the simple capacity to interact, communicate, cooperate, or mediate among cultures or among situations of cultural conflict, but primarily, to give sense to the positions of others, in their own right.

With this, it is intended to embrace a wider range of individual actions that step outside the resolution of cultural conflicts and that recognize the complex, overlapping, shifting and variable nature of cultural realities (Holliday, 2011).

Peripheral Individuals

The notion of center and the periphery “traditionally relates to a regional or global inequality in affluence and power” (Holliday, 2009, p. 22). However, for the present paper, the center and the periphery are considered as “ideas rather than geographical locations” (Holliday, 2009, p. 23). Such ideas belong to specific individuals living in definite communities. Thus, ‘peripheral individuals’ refer to individuals who are usually disconnected from the social and the academic network of FL learners due to generational and/or power disparities. Their inclusion in language classes highlights the possibility to interact with various users of the target language in relevant contexts. In addition, giving voice to individuals who are generally absent from instructional materials is regarded as an opportunity to apply cultural approaches to FL teaching in which learners gather information from multiple sources and engage in social action. Thus, while attempting to enrich their cultural competence, learners mobilize their individual identities to build their own ideas about a target community.

Previous Studies on Cultural Competence in FL Teaching and Learning

Culture instruction in FL classrooms primarily studies literature, history, arts, and architecture in civilization courses (Schulz & Ganz, 2010); therefore, learners focus on fixed cultural entities and identities. Another widespread approach to cultural competence in FL presents topics related to entertainment, tourist attractions, and food. Such a tourist-inspired outlook of cultural content has been proposed by textbook editors and followed by practicing teachers on the basis of “that such popular topics are more appealing to the target audience [...] than abstract ones inviting students to analyze diverse beliefs and attitudes” (Sobkowiak, 2015, p. 804).

Specifically, in Spanish language teaching, cultural competence development has been linked to the use of authentic materials such as newspapers (Cruz & Sitman, 2000), songs (López-Toscano, 2013), and films (Guitart, 2014). Other approaches for cultural competence have incorporated sociocultural topics (Martínez, 2014) and interactions through telecollaboration (Saura, 2013). These examples illustrate that Spanish learning programs mainly focus on the comparison method, the discovery of culture through inquiry projects, interactions, and computer-mediated encounters.

Cultural Competence Development in Spanish Language Teaching in Colombia

According to Espejo, Florez, and Zambrano (2010), in Colombia the cultural component is a key element of Spanish learning programs. Diaz (2016), for example, documented that Colombian institutions see culture as a core concept because cultural issues frequently come first as barriers for successful communication. In Diaz’s (2016) state of the art of Spanish courses in Bogotá, she lists some theoretical frames that are used in the participating institutions; such as, the ‘big C’ and ‘small c’ division of cultural content, the analysis of sociocultural expressions, practices, representations, behaviors and ways of living and cultural misunderstandings (Diaz, 2016). Although segmentation of culture may represent a solution to the controversy of the meanings of culture, there is no clear information about how cultural competence is developed in Colombian Spanish language classrooms or how cultural issues are included in syllabi.

Another salient feature of the Colombian context for Spanish language teaching is that syllabi are designed on a student-centered basis (Diaz, 2016; Quintero, Avilés, & Suarez, 2014). This suggests that Colombian institutions consider learners’ needs in terms of professional or academic goals rather than cultural competence development. As a result, several scholars have proposed including Colombian cultural diversity (González, Jaramillo, Lombana, Montoya, Vallejo, Gómez & Álvarez, 2011) in order to give some visibility to regional experiences.

Methods

The present study is part of a two-year institutional investigation focusing on cultural competence development within the Foreign Language Department at a university in Bogotá. The study follows a qualitative research design guided by the spirit of open inquiry. The purpose of this case study is to describe and understand how encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities contribute to develop learners' cultural competence in a Spanish course. Therefore, a small number of subjects were involved because it concentrates on the views of the research participants.

Setting and Participants

The participants were three learners of Spanish—Caroline, Joel, and Kevin². Their ages ranged from 24 to 40 years old, they were Asian students enrolled in a scholarship for learning Spanish in Colombia. As part of their scholarship, the participants got involved in voluntary programs (social interaction with local people in libraries and senior homes located in surrounding areas of Bogotá) organized by the “Bienestar universitario” office.

Bearing in mind that the three learners participated in volunteering during their scholarship, course syllabi was designed by their teacher. The participants chose four voices of individuals that they considered to be absent from course supports and conventional social network. The negotiated voices (elderly people, foreign travelers, urban writers, and farmers) were integrated in the syllabi in the form of thematic projects. The project-oriented approach allows students to engage in problem-solving within meaningful and purposeful contexts of communication and interaction. Moreover, it encourages knowledge-building informed by practice, group, and field work (Appendix A provides an overview of the intended syllabus). I was the tutor of the course and I participated in the study as a participant-researcher with the purpose of gaining an insider's view of the issues being studied.

² All names are pseudonyms.

Instruments and Procedures of Data Collection

Data were gathered from a variety of sources including:

(1) An open-ended questionnaire was sent online using Google forms at the beginning of the course. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: The first section aimed to obtain demographic information. The second section was intended to identify strategies that students applied for culture learning and the third section attempted to document the participants' views about learning Spanish through encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities (see Appendix B for the online questionnaire).

(2) Audiotaped interviews were chosen in order to engage lengthily with respondents and foster a climate of trust (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The protocols of the semi-structured interviews were submitted to critical analysis through peer review with a research expert (Davis, 1992). Before conducting the interviews with the three participants, trial interviews were carried out. The research participants were interviewed in English at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of data gathering to provide a more comprehensive picture of their views (see Appendix C for the interview protocol).

(3) Classroom observation recorded in field notes was used to facilitate full participation and to achieve the emic perspective (Friedman, 2012). I adopted a participant-as-observer role because of the need to produce thick description of settings, participants, and interactions (Appendix D presents the number and the time of observations).

(4) Audiotaped social interactions provided me with access in a less obtrusive way to encounters between the research participants and peripheral individuals and rural communities. The researcher recorded four naturally occurring conversations in Spanish per participant. Time of recordings ranged from three to eight minutes. By capturing the exact words of conversations, it was possible to gather key phrases and terms that were special for the research participants. Before starting to record the

conversations, permissions, and informed consents were obtained from the three participants and their interlocutors. The audio-taped conversations were transcribed by the author. For space reasons, excerpts of oral interactions are presented in Spanish (Appendix E provides the transcription conventions applied).

Procedures of Data Analysis

Two rounds of content and interpretive analysis were conducted with the collected data. Prior to the coding and analysis phase, the transcripts were submitted to respondent feedback (Dörnyei, 2007); they made some comments about their experiences reflected in the interviews and their checking contributed to the uncovering of their perspectives. In the first round, I identified similar comments in questionnaires and interviews expressing the research participants' ideas about the benefits of encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities for cultural competence development. Then, I organized the comments into recurrent views and these views were categorized into themes based on the most salient comments. I also explored recurrent practices enacted by the research participants in the audio-taped conversations. In the second round of analysis, I concentrated on the perceived gains outlined by the participating learners. At the end, a process of sorting and grouping led to the development of the following three categories according to which the results are presented in the next section:

1. *Expanding knowledge of cultures*
2. *Encountering otherness*
3. *Enhancing understanding of professional cultures*

Results

The results emerged from the analysis of various social interactions and classroom sessions with the research participants. Thus, the results need to be understood as accounts of the participants' investment and experiences during encounters for

Spanish learning. Varied excerpts are quoted in order to illustrate the learners' points of view.

Expanding Knowledge About Cultures

The goal of this case study was not to establish fixed developmental patterns for cultural competence development. Nevertheless, the research participants' expanding knowledge about cultures took up three main phases. The first relates to knowledge about populations, in other words, the research participants concentrated on discovering information about other individuals, taking advantage of significant communicative language practice and use. The next extract from Joel's conversation exemplifies how he engaged in discovering information about the techniques used by a rural cook:

Joel: *la sopa es deliciosa, ¿por qué tanto sabor? ¿Cómo se preparan? ¿Le pones alguna cosa para más sabor?*

Cocinero rural 1: *eso tiene solo pollo...*

Joel: *¿Cuánto dura la sopa en su fuego? ¿Se demora?*

Cocinero rural 1: *de verdad depende del pollo, si es esta Viejo dura más, la carne es más dura.*

Joel: *¿otros ingredientes?*

Cocinero rural 1: *primero alista el tomate, la cebolla, la zanahoria, y la ahuyama. Al final se le echa la mazorca y la yuca que es lo más rápido.*

Joel: *¿Porque están tan suave? ((Sorpresa)) porque son tan suaves, yo creía que era muy duras, en el Mercado yo tomo los grandes, como los escoge usted?*

Cocinero rural 1: *la tierra y la semilla ...*

Joel: *a ... ¿semilla? De verdad... ¿cómo lo sabe?*

Cocinero rural 1: *eso se sabe... no más... al verlas... la yuca Sarabanera son las más buenas, pero esa que llama la piojosa es dura (Conversación 3, Joel & Cocinero rural 1).*

In the previous interaction, Joel actively formulated several questions such as, 'Why is it so tasty?' - 'How do you prepare it?' - 'How much time does the soup spend on the fire?' - 'why are

these manioc so soft? and *'How do you choose them?'* in order to get information about Colombian soups. The kind of information obtained, he labelled *'traditional knowledge linked to people.'* Hence, for him, getting access to the rural cook's practices about soups and manioc through active questioning helped him extend his knowledge about the rural cook.

The second phase indicated by research participants was the exchange between different cultures. During encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities, the research participants did not only obtain information about target communities, they were also eager to share with their interlocutors details about their native culture and so they appeared to be representative of a given culture. For example, Kevin indicated that he provided information about his country and native culture:

People here are very curious about where I come from and of course, they ask a lot of questions, so I have to think... How am I going to answer them and how am I going to make them want to come to Singapore, *it's like a kind of marketing. I have to provide them with many data...* It shows that they are curious, they want to know about your country and so I *tell them more about me, my city, my town, what to do there, what to see, it is like an "intercambio"* that just starts. (Kevin's Interview 2)

Kevin also defines the encounters as 'a kind of marketing' and afterwards he names it an 'intercambio' (exchange). Therefore, for Kevin, encountering peripheral individuals and rural communities not only enabled him to provide personal information, but also to exchange information related to him, his city, his town, etc. The following quotation from Joel's conversation shows how he exchanged cultural information that enriched the dialogue and maintained that interaction adding more details about his previous experiences and his new learnings:

Cocinero rural 1: Primero le tuerce el pescuezo al pollo luego lo pone con la cabeza pa' abajo.

Joel: En Vietnam, se corta la cabeza, pero en mi

país no, En China campo se tuerce también... en Australia se necesita un certificado de salud
Cocinero rural 1: sabe que aquí nos comemos hasta el pescuezo ...

Joel: yo sé, si, lo probé en Ubaté. En China, se come la sangre del pollo al wok (Conversación 3, Joel & Cocinero rural 1).

Benefiting from opportunities to converge differing and similar practices on killing chickens, Joel could share previously acquired ideas about the topic; he also specifies differences among cooking culture and practices between his own cultural practices and those in other geographical areas.

From the same quote, it is understood that Joel succeeded in disclosing his multiple cultural affiliations and this is linked to the third phase that seemed to be part of the process of expanding knowledge about cultures. The research participants' indicated acknowledgement of pluralism of cultures and memberships as another domain in which they extend their knowledge of cultures.

Encountering Otherness

Encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities favored experiencing otherness by being present and spending time together with people. In the following excerpt, Joel describes his process of experiential cultural learning:

The cultural thing was primarily about experience, *I was exposed to livelihoods of coffee farmers, their business, /?/ cooking culture in a family... it was nice to see their culture in cooking [...].* Maybe by being exposed to different words, different techniques, the interaction became different from university because -- it wasn't -- Well, my priority was not to learn Spanish, my priority was to *enjoy culture and to enjoy the experience*

[...]

It was a question of *spending time together* and actually *being present...* Being present at the moment, *experiencing...* But I didn't want to *use people just as tools for learning Spanish*, I didn't want to say like ok, I have to see the experience, so let's use this family and see how I can use it

just to learn Spanish... I wanted to *share culture*.
(Joel's interview 2)

Joel's words allow us to understand that he perceives culture learning as '*experiencing*,' as '*spending time together*,' and as '*being present*.' For him, culture learning was closely related to contact and personal involvement with various people such as '*coffee farmers*' or '*families*.' The repertoires of people were equally framed by specific moments like '*cooking*' where specific '*livelihoods*,' '*words*,' and '*techniques*' emerged. Furthermore, from Joel's point of view, these meetings allowed a '*sharing of culture*'; this is why he took a non-utilitarian stance for culture learning by stating that he '*didn't want to use people just as tools for learning Spanish*.'

Interestingly for this participant, cultural learning seems to contribute to a certain re-signification of language learning:

The *learning that comes from sharing*, comes when I need to *find words to convey my meanings*—that's what I learned with people... It's learning but it's not something I set out to do; *learning from experience* is very *fluid*, it's not formal or academic learning. (Joel's interview 2)

Joel's encounters with urban and rural cooks might help him to extend his understandings of language learning as a kind of '*non-academic learning*' grounded on '*people*' and '*experience*' and portrayed as '*very fluid*.' It is possible that, as a response to his previous experiences, he redefined language learning in relation to cultural learning.

In the next comment from Caroline, she underlines how experiencing culture and working together with others helped her to be exposed to otherness:

Pictures and movies aren't fair because you cannot experience. Here, with Colombians, *it's a whole package*... you can *deepen on culture*, you can see the place by yourself, like—*experience the culture*...
[...]
I faked until I made it... I tried conversations with people, I tried to make friends, Colombian

friends... at the end I *knew about Colombia from Colombians*, there was no like a media image (Caroline's interview 1).

In Kevin's expressions, developing cultural competence was also a question of understanding the target culture as an experience of culture, learning '*from people*,' communicating, or '*interacting with the locals*':

I learned about culture through *communication with the locals*... I *learned from the people* around me... In the seniors' home at Chia, [...] I learned about their background, their stories, why they're there. I'm very curious so I keep asking them a lot of questions... so this is how I got their information because when you're *interacting with the locals* that's when you know—ahhh! ((Surprise)) '*descubrimiento*' (Kevin's interview 1).

In sum, Joel, Caroline, and Kevin's responses illustrate that contact with peripheral individuals and rural communities was guided by interaction in which cultural phenomena was taught indirectly, informally, and implicitly. The three participants made it clear that working with the communities under scrutiny contributed first and foremost to experiencing otherness.

Enhancing Understanding of Professional Cultures

Interactions with peripheral individuals and rural communities engaged the research participants in experiencing otherness through significant communicative language practice and use. Joel exchanged primarily with urban chefs and rural cooks as well as farmers. Caroline interacted mainly with schoolteachers and librarians whereas Kevin asserted that he mostly encountered groups of students and elderly people. Therefore, it seems, they picked populations according to their professional interests.

It is essential to point out that the encounters in context enabled the research participants to reflect upon their own professional development. Examples from the participants' utterances evidenced the reflective process in which they engaged:

Bibliotecario 2: ¿tiene planes para después?

Caroline: yo enseño filipino, pero quiero ser traductor... Al principio quería traducir literatura al filipino, pero ahora que estoy aquí quiero traducir revistas del español al filipino porque hay mucha información de las filipinas que no conoces porque están en español. No sabemos de nuestras conexiones hispánicas porque los recursos están en español [...] quiero traducir eso... esa es mi nueva misión... hay también otros proyectos para traducir literatura filipina al español (Conversación 4, Caroline & bibliotecario 2).

Sujeto 3: Y usted va a usar el español en Singapur?

Kevin: soy profesor de matemática, ciencias y inglés, y también soy guía turístico. Por eso voy a usar el español cuando sea guía. La experiencia aquí me ayudo porque me doy cuenta que la gente entiende lo que estoy diciendo -- tengo más confianza y uso español... quiero saber más de la lengua, de la gente... como pasa el tiempo hablo más fácil de mi país y de los sitios turístico (Conversación 2, Kevin & sujeto 3).

Campesino café 2: ¿y qué piensa hacer después de Colombia?

Joel: para terminar el estudio, voy a tener tareas, ya sé que quiero escribir sobre lo que he experimentado, quiero escribir sobre lo que he vivido aquí con lo que me he conectado [...] con este programa me he fijado en aprender y en ver historia, estilos de vida y cultura.

[...] soy cocinero... y cambie como veo cocina... el programa me permite ver que estoy contento de mi trabajo, encontré como significado—no sabía que se puede trabajar con comida con sentido, que la comida puede tener significado, ahora sé que la comida tiene sentido. (Conversación 6, Joel & campesino café 2)

As illustrated in the previous quotations, the research participants grabbed the opportunity to devote extensively in conversations dealing with professions in areas such as literature, tourism, and cooking. Through reflective practice, the research participants extended their perspectives for professional future. Moreover, by reflecting upon professional development, the research participants not only disclosed their opinions but also behaved

as active partners who managed to discover and exchange points of views and practices.

Interestingly, the research participants indicated that they also accessed specific vocabulary and discourses associated to professions. For example, Joel explains that he learned about words used in day-to-day life in a kitchen:

I learned words that I use regularly [...] I learned words applicable to the kitchen context, for example: 'Detrás! Detrás!' [...] when you walk behind somebody, you say 'Detrás! Detrás!'... That is important in a kitchen for communication... because when you are working with hot things.... you need people to know where you are. (Joel's interview 2)

Finding opportunities to discuss professional topics outside classrooms resulted in situations where the participants enacted roles generally connected to their future profession. In some instances, the research participants shared their professional skills associated with their profession. For example, Joel could cook other cuisines, Caroline could train herself in comparing literary works, and Kevin could act as a tourist guide.

Encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities not only helped the research participants to find a fertile ground for enhancing their understanding of professional cultures, but it also favored the transfer of control to them. In other words, these social interactions let the research participants develop expertise in FL learning and, therefore, their performance in classroom sessions were also informed by the acquired professional skills. The participating learners took initiatives such as selecting classroom topics, asking questions, and taking on the role of genuine professionals during Spanish lessons. The next extract of an audio-taped classroom session illustrates this aspect:

Kevin: Bienvenidos a Singapur ((haciendo una venia))

Los compañeros: Gracias ((risas))

Kevin: ¿Alguna vez han visitado Singapur? ((Señalando a sus compañeros)) ¡Oh! ((sorpresa la profesora levantó la mano)) entonces...

profesora, ¿qué piensa? ¿te gusta?

Profesora: sí, es muy bonito

Kevin: Singapur es un país pequeño, pero tiene ciudades muy grandes. Es un país plano, no hay montañas. Singapur tiene 64 islas alrededor de la isla principal y está al sur de Malasia... Esta foto es de Singapur... ¿recuerda profesora?

Profesora: Fue hace mucho tiempo, pero me acuerdo perfectamente.

Kevin: El transporte público en Singapur es muy eficaz, hay varias paradas de bus y estaciones de metro. Hay cinco líneas de metro. Desde el centro de la ciudad puede visitar muchos museos, tiendas y restaurant a pie. Como en Santa Marta y Cartagena, el clima es caliente, la temperatura esta entre 24° y 34°. Tenemos una estación lluviosa y una seca, entonces necesita un sombrero y una sombrilla también. Esta foto es de la isla de Sentosa, ¿recuerda profesora?

Profesora: Fui hace 23 años.

Kevin: En esta foto se puede ver el acuario, World Sentosa y el Fuerte de Siloso... ¿recuerda profesora? ((Silencio)) ¡Debería recordar!... [Dirigiéndose de nuevo a la profesora]

Profesora: No recuerdo exactamente el nombre... me acuerdo de la una calle famosa... ((Silencio))

Kevin: ¡Vamos!... Debería recordarla... [Pregunta a sus compañeros] ¿Quién sabe el nombre de esta calle famosa?

Los compañeros: ¡Orchard road! ((Al unísono))

Kevin: Muy bien... en la isla hay diferentes tipos de comida y bellas playas, usted puede nadar en el mar, jugar volibol o solo caminar... Otra foto... ¿Saben que es?

Los compañeros: ¡Chinatown! ((Al unísono))

Kevin: ¡Buena respuesta! Esto es Chinatown donde usted puede comer la comida tradicional de china y ver la arquitectura... visita el templo budista... debe visitar Chinatown [Kevin muestra una diapositiva con otra foto]

The classmates: ¡Little India! ((Al unísono))

Kevin: Sí, es little India donde se ve la arquitectura india... mucho color [...] Bienvenidos a Singapur... Ahora... preguntas... facil... Primero, ((señalando al estudiante1)) ¿Cuál es la comida típica de Chinatown?

Estudiante 1: Arroz pollo

Kevin: ¡Excelente! ¡Arroz con pollo!... ¿Qué más?

... en Chinatown ((camina alrededor del salón)) el tiempo se termina!... la sopa de pollo!... segunda pregunta: En la isla de Sentosa, ¿Cuáles son las principales atracciones turísticas? ((Señalando al estudiante 3))

Estudiante 3: El acuario

Kevin: bien, el acuario

Estudiante 4: ¿En Sentosa? ((Duda)) ¿Los Universal studios?

Kevin: Universal studios, ok ... ¿Qué más? ... Fuerte de... ((esperando que los compañeros completen))

Estudiante 2: Fuerte de Siloso... ((Dudando))

Kevin: El fuerte de Siloso muy bien, muchas gracias ((se despide con una venia)).

In the preceding passage, Kevin positioned himself as a tourist guide and teacher. First, he provided general information about his country and tourist attractions. Later he concentrated in pointing at his classmates and asking questions to the whole class. Moreover, he assumed the role of fact-checker and authority roles by checking and repeating the answers of his classmates. For a while, Kevin took up some roles that are usually assigned to teachers and, as such, he was able to act as a teacher. Hence, Kevin's presentation resulted in a classroom situation in which his multiple memberships and skills arose. In a later interview, Kevin claimed that the analyzed encounters helped him to feel more prepared in the field of teaching and guiding:

Kevin: *I definitely enhanced professional skills from people, I feel like... I want to know more about guiding and teaching... For instance, based on what I've learned with people in Colombia, now I can compare learnings... What I gained at school... Well... ((hesitation)) I can say that what I learned from the people around me it's actually not really the same.*

Interviewer: Why? Could you explain?

Kevin: What I was taught at university was very formal, no practice, however interacting with people help me to realize that there're a lot of significance behind teaching, for example... The same when you are guiding, you have to think on the spot, to stand up and talk to groups of people, answer questions you have ever imagined... Now I trained myself in Spanish, I

know how I shall face it... You have to think fast and answer right away (AR – Kevin's interview 3).

Discussion

The analysis of the results reveals that, from the participants' perspective, developing cultural competence through encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities entails primarily progress in three main domains. First, enriching knowledge about cultures, second, encountering otherness, and third, expanding understanding of professional cultures.

According to the learners' views, extending knowledge about cultures connotes discovering and receiving information about other populations through active questioning. Interestingly, cultural knowledge embraces the participants' native culture, too, and also has to do with making oneself known by explicitly providing and conveying information about oneself and home culture. As indicated by O'Dowd (2003), the process of disclosing ourselves is facilitated by making our own cultural beliefs and values explicit for our peers.

Incorporating the research participants' native cultures also entails an increased awareness of varied cultural memberships. In other words, the research participants not only provide cultural facts about their national culture but also disclose other multiple cultural and professional affiliations. The preceding elements coincide with some of the features proposed by Gudykunst and Kim's (1984) definition of a culturally competent person.

While the experience of enriching components of cultural competence is not exclusive of the studied setting, what is outstanding for the context under scrutiny is that the participants could position themselves not only as simple interveners in social interaction but also as genuine proponents of information. Hence, it is plausible that encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities contributes to cultural competence development by providing FL learners with opportunities to experience culture in a way that helps them to move comfortably between the perspectives of

insider-participant and outsider-proponent of knowledge.

The second development exhibited in the participants' extracts is the possibility to encounter otherness. Indeed, according to the research participants, cultural competence development is intimately linked to the idea of encountering otherness because in their case, otherness was a necessary tool to get access to cultural content and practices. Encountering otherness (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard, & Philippou, 2014), in the participants' words, implies interaction with the locals, experience of culture, being present and spending time together with others. This outcome brings out the potentialities of the encounters for making cultural growing a participatory activity in which the discovery of otherness is encouraged.

From the finding above, it can be inferred that cultural knowledge may be constructed collectively rather than individually. This trait of cultural competence development underlines the relevance of MacGregor's (1992) ideas presenting knowledge as being "shaped, over time, by successive conversations" (p. 52). In addition, it gives support to socio-cultural approaches of FL learning that conceive cultural development as an opportunity to expand skills of doing something with and about culture with others (Scarino, 2014). Nonetheless, it must be admitted that factors such as the nature of encounters and interactions in which learners are involved (or whether or not the setting facilitates opportunities for participation) play a central role in growing culturally through voluntary programs.

The third domain in which the research participants insist is that cultural competence may be developed through encounters because they enabled them to expand their understandings of professional cultures. In fact, the three participants seemed to consider encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities an appropriate arena to develop reflective practice about their professional future. In other words, the research participants were provided with opportunities to get involved in professional practice that fosters growing of mastery and production of artefacts such as words, expressions, and *savoir-faire* connected to their professions.

This finding may be explained by the fact that participants' views on cultural competence development was deeply rooted in their very particular interests and aspirations for professional future. This highlights that cultural competence development does not appear unconnectedly from professional and social improvements. In short, cultural learning in any form is supported by progress in professional and social domains. Thus, it can be presumed that contextual identities as well as target and native resources matter very much, in how participants see cultural growing.

As a corollary, it is worth noting that, the research participants do not only hinge on their FL teacher to expand cultural competence; they mostly draw on outsiders and peripheral informants. This opens the way for an extended range of effective culture providers going beyond the teacher who is usually identified as the authority of knowledge for culture learning in FL classrooms. Bruffee (1994) is right when he explains that knowledge possesses a social-constructivist nature and as a social construct, it has the potential to challenge the traditional "hierarchical chain of authority" (p. 44). Hence, according to the results of the present study, the participants succeeded both in shifting the source of cultural knowledge from FL teachers towards peripheral individuals through social interaction.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to describe and underline how encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities contribute to developing learners' cultural competence in a Spanish course. In light of the analysis of the results, the encounters in context have the potential to facilitate the development of learners' cultural competence. The first explanation to this assertion is that the participants think they got involved in enhancing knowledge about cultures. Accordingly, the encounters under scrutiny not only helped the participants to discover information about other populations through active questioning, but they also encourage learners to explore, analyze, and compare issues related to diverse cultures including

their home culture. As a result, it is acknowledged that diverse aspects are at stake when talking about cultural competence development.

The second reason that backs up encounters for cultural competence development is that it enables participants to encounter otherness. The participants consider that they grew culturally through experiencing culture, interaction with locals, and spending time together with others. Indeed, the very nature of the encounters studied here appears to be purposeful and functional for the co-construction of cultural knowledge because the encounters were primarily participatory. This may indicate that cultural competence development tends to be an on-going and collective process rather than a linear individual path.

The third reason that strengthens the views of cultural competence development through encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities is that they allow participants to expand understandings of professional cultures. The research participants think they enhance understandings of their future profession through practice. Consequently, with the purpose of understanding professional cultures, the students start experiencing their future professions from the inside and thus get involved in reflective practice about their own professional improvement. This underlines that professional expectations are at the core of the development of views related to cultural competence development.

Some limitations of this case study and suggestions for further research also need to be pointed out. This study was conducted within a population of FL learners with predominantly plurilingual and multicultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is important to be aware of complexity and possible unrecognized identities among the learners' profiles. More "creative methodologies such as personal narratives, diaries, popular culture and media" (Holliday, 2011, p. xi) need to be employed in future studies in order to understand and be able to create an account of how complex the participants' cultural affiliations are and how this complexity reflects in the results. It is also crucial to underline that the results illustrate, above all,

successful experiences in voluntary programs. Therefore, forthcoming studies should focus on failed encounters or stagnant interactions to provide deeper significance to the findings presented in this paper.

Another issue to consider is that the course that formed the context of this study was not burdened by having to prepare the students for a language exam. Contrary to prevalent claims of FL teachers, the teaching of culture, in the studied context, was not a matter of time. Rather it was intertwined with language teaching and developed in an integrated way through critical approaches of teaching. However, future research may hold relevant findings on how the integration of language and culture teaching is possible in cases where the teachers are under the pressure of immediate aims, such as exam preparation.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study provide evidence that cultural competence is not limited to passive and fragmented learning about foreign cultures nor is it restricted to chronological studies of literature and cultural facts. Instead, cultural competence entails research participants experiencing culture and encountering otherness. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that encountering otherness outside the classroom in isolation, in most cases, is not sufficient to make sense of it. It is necessary to combine experiential learning with awareness-raising and fundamentally with intentionality. In other words, it is critical to open space for students to act and at the same time, it is vital to provide them with tools, knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to analyze and understand what they have experienced in the field.

Although the aim of this study was not to identify a definite cause-and-effect relationship between the studied encounters and cultural competence, some of the findings give an indication of areas that may be applied to other contexts of Spanish language teaching. For instance, it may be central to integrate not only diverse cultures into teaching but also to include students' home culture in addition to the mainstream of cultural diversity of Spanish-speaking

countries in order to cover a wide range of cultural contexts and their relationship with the students' culture.

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Appendix A

Applied Syllabi

Ciclo	Objetivos	Actividades	Herramientas
1. Memorias de viejos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitar el encuentro con los adultos mayores a través de la recolección de historias Relacionar las historias de los otros con las experiencias propias Enfatizar la importancia de la memoria para el crecimiento cultural y lingüístico Introducir la tradición oral latinoamericana Descubrir las principales características de la narración 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarización con adultos mayores que hablan de su infancia Localización y entrevista de adultos mayores Entrevista etnográfica Documentación y búsqueda de fuentes históricas Redacción y documentación de historias Grabación de historias Socialización de productos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serie documental animada: “el niño y los muertos” y “el miedo viene del cielo” Videos y testimonios de infancia Dispositivos para grabación audiovisual Redes sociales Grabaciones en Voxopop
2. La perspectiva del viajero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promover el encuentro con la perspectiva del viajero en relación a la noción de vivienda Discutir y reflexionar y acerca de diversas concepciones de vivienda Comparar diferentes tipos de viviendas según grupos sociales Describir y presentar diversas interpretaciones de la noción de vivienda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensibilización a estereotipos acerca de la vivienda Descripción de su propia vivienda Descubrimiento y análisis de ideas sobre viviendas a través de un viajero Búsqueda de fuentes para explicar las nociones de vivienda Socialización de nociones e interpretaciones de vivienda (exposición oral) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fotos y pinturas Videos: ‘Nueva Venecia’ y ‘la ciudad de las mujeres’ Documentos y fuentes bibliográficas
3. Letra urbana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intercambiar experiencias de textos leídos alrededor de la literatura urbana Identificar y analizar imágenes o historias comunes de vida urbana transcultural Establecer puntos de encuentro y desencuentro a partir de las historias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acercamiento a tres escritores (su vida, obra y experiencias) Identificación de diversas perspectivas del realismo en letras urbanas Análisis de imágenes de vida urbana identificada en una obra literaria Búsqueda de explicaciones históricas, sociales y contextuales Intercambio de correos de voz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poemas de Piedad Bonnett Relatos y novelas de Antonio García Ángel y Julio Cesar Londoño Programas para grabación de correos de voz (ex. Pure Voice y Audacity)
4. Los campesinos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entablar diálogos acerca de los conocimientos previos sobre instrumentos y prácticas musicales Facilitar el acercamiento a experiencias personales con un campesino raizal violinista Identificar y analizar actitudes y comportamiento de artistas Relacionar y comparar prácticas artísticas y patrones de identidad transcultural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identificación de ideas previas acerca de prácticas musicales Familiarización con experiencias de un campesino raizal violinista Identificación de actitudes y comportamiento de artistas en perspectiva transcultural. Conversación acerca de posibles patrones de identidad relacionados con prácticas musicales y artísticas Grabación y transcripción del video de una mesa redonda Análisis y retroalimentación de intervenciones y gestualidad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Video documental: ‘los violines caucanos’ Discusión en mesa redonda Dispositivos para grabación audiovisual

Appendix B

Online Questionnaire

Learners' views about rural communities and peripheral individuals

This survey is conducted within a research program of the Foreign languages and cultures department at Universidad de La Sabana to better understand how encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities contribute to develop learners' cultural competence in a Spanish as a foreign language course. The results of this survey will be used only for research purpose. Thank you very much for your help. This questionnaire is divided in three sections.

SECTION 1: YOUR PROFILE

Please read each question and choose the answer (tick ONE) that better describes your profile

1. **Gender:** Male Female
2. **Age range:** 18-25 26-40 41-65
3. **Nationality:**
4. **Which languages do you speak?**
5. **Years of Spanish language learning:**
1-3 months
4-6 months
7-9 months
More than a year
More than 2 years
6. **Level of qualification:**
Please choose the highest qualification you have:
High school
BA
Specialization
MA
PhD
Other
I don't have any academic qualification
7. **Have you ever lived abroad?**
Yes
No
8. **Reasons for having living abroad**
Tourism
Family visit
Language course
University studies
Internship
Work experience
9. **How long have you lived abroad?**
0-3 months
6 months-1 year
1-3years
3-6 years
More than 6 years

SECTION 2: CULTURE LEARNING

10. List some key topics for cultural learning
11. List some strategies that you apply to learn about cultures when you are learning foreign language:
12. Mention any experience that has been salient for your process of culture learning in Spanish language learning

SECTION 3: YOUR VIEWS ABOUT LEARNING SPANISH THROUGH ENCOUNTERS WITH PERIPHERAL INDIVIDUALS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

1. Describe how do you feel when encountering peripheral individuals and rural communities
2. Provide some examples of your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities
3. Give examples of any difficulty that you have experienced while encountering peripheral individuals and rural communities

Please feel free to add any comment about your process of learning Spanish or your stay in Colombia that may be helpful for the study

Do you agree to be interviewed in a forthcoming stage of the study?

Yes No E-mail:

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. What does culture mean to you?
2. Could you give some examples of culture?
3. What does culture mean in the context of learning Spanish as a FL?
4. Provide some examples of culture that you have experienced personally in learning Spanish as a FL.
5. Explain your motivations for encountering peripheral individuals and rural communities
6. How would you describe your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
7. How do you see your role in these encounters? Did you notice an evolution of your roles?
8. How would you describe your relationship with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
9. Mention any skill, knowledge or perspective about culture that is particularly useful for succeeding in your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities
10. What kind of cultural information is presented during your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities that contributed to Spanish language learning?
11. In your opinion what is a key element for encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
12. What difficulties have you experienced during your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
13. Mention or describe any area / content/ or information about culture that made you react to in your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
14. How do you see the way you react / behave during your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
15. What have you gained from these encounters? What are you taking away from these encounters?
 - a. In terms of cultural content, what have you gained from your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
 - b. In terms of language learning, what have you gained from your encounters with peripheral individuals and rural communities?
16. Has the experience of encountering peripheral individuals and rural communities added any ideas to your earlier views of Spanish language? / of learning Spanish? / of cultural learning?
17. Have you ever used any of the cultural gains coming from these encounters in your language learning? /In your Spanish lessons/ In your personal life? / In your professional context? If yes, why and what kind of information /knowledge have you used? / If not, why not?

Appendix D

Table of Number of Observations and the Time of Audio Recordings

Session number	Date of observation	Session time
1	September 2017	1:45
2		1:45
3		1:00
4	October 2017	1:23
5		1:40
6		1:00
7	November 2017	1:45
8		1:00
9		1:00
10	December 2017	1:45
11		1:45
12		1:45

Appendix E

Transcription Conventions Applied in the Dissertation

[...]	Text omitted
[text]	Paraphrase or author's note
<i>Italics</i>	Author's emphasis
(())	Comment on voice quality or paralinguistic features (e.g., laughter, gestures)
--	The speaker cut off the word or phrase
/?/	Undecipherable word or phrase
...	Pause