PhD DISSERTATION SUMMARY

PhD Program in Language Pedagogy

Doctoral School of Education

Eötvös Loránd University

Collaborative learning for cultural growth in the training of foreign language teachers

at university: Focus on training teachers of Spanish in Hungary

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Budapest, 2017

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1 Introduction

The present complex case study intends to explore how collaborative learning contributes to cultural growth in the training of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language (FL) at university. Although literature on collaborative learning methods is very prominent at the school level. (Bosworth, 1994; Cabrera, Crissmann, Bernal, Nora, Terenzini & Pascarella, 2002; Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003; Greenfield, 2003; Marcum, 1994; Zhang & Dougherty, 2012) descriptive studies are still needed to shed light on the collaborative interactions that take place in higher education contexts and on the processes facilitated by collaboration in the training of FL teachers. This is why the present research seeks to increase understanding of the kind of collaborative partnerships appearing in different degree courses at university and their possible contributions to cultural growth.

The current doctoral research focuses on cultural growth because cultural aspects are particularly critical for FL education. It is understood that language learning cannot be divorced from the study of culture (Seelye, 1993). 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. Similarly, Damen (1987) affirms that "language learning implies and embraces culture learning" (p. 4). In other words, "a thorough understanding of the language can only be gained by understanding the cultural context which has produced it" (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994, p.11) and vice versa "language is [...] a necessary [...] means of viewing culture" (Godwin-Jones, 2013, p. 8).

The issue of cultural growth is also essential to the training of FL teachers because they as FL speakers require "an overall framework that integrates the study of culture, the study of language, and consideration of the relationship between the two" (Allen, 2004, p. 288). It means that FL teachers need to develop their cultural competence, as much as they are expected to have subject matter knowledge of the language they teach.

The interest on the cultural content of teacher training programs, originates also in the concern that culture learning in FL teacher education is often unconsciously associated with a certain set of long-established, and in some cases mandated, ideas that reinforce limited visions of culture. Hence, for the most part, essentialist views of culture are accepted and implemented with little or no critique of their implications for FL teachers. This is why the present investigation is highly committed to a necessary critical consideration of cultural content in FL teacher training programs and it is also engaged with the ever-increasing requirement addressed to teacher education to "include opportunities to investigate more fully the concept of culture as a dynamic, multifaceted, ideological and political construct" (Franson & Holliday, 2009, p. 44).

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Definitions of key terms

The terms *culture*, *cultural growth, intercultural competence* (IC) and *collaborative learning* are key concepts applied to the current research; therefore working definitions are presented below in order to achieve a common understanding of the notions that are used throughout this dissertation.

Culture is defined as a relative and changeable (Fox, 1999) set of patterns of behaviour, attitudes knowledge, practices and thinking (Hall, 1959) that characterise and distinguish members of a particular group. These patterns are socially constructed (Cuche, 2002), shared and employed by members in personalised and situated ways but they also change over time (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoint-Gaillard, & Philippou, 2014) and are influenced by various external factors. This conceptualisation intends to assemble the anthropological, psychological, sociological and intercultural views of culture. Besides, it also attempts to involve the historical, temporary, heterogeneous and inclusive nature of culture. In other words, defining culture in this way means that culture encompasses a system of developing and interdependent elements that influence individuals' actions and at the same time take into account individuals' disposition to personalise cultural resources in and through social interaction.

Additionally, the definition of culture has been explored from the point of view of its elements (Chao, 2011; Holló, 2008; Moran, 2001; *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century*, 1999). It is acknowledged that there is an extensive list of important elements (e.g., products, practices, behaviours, perspectives, skills, patterns, etc.) which highlights the vastness and complexity of culture as well as the unexplored resources offered to the instruction of culture in FL settings. However, this wide range of cultural elements also points out that it is hopeless to teach FL learners the totality of cultural categories and this is why, according to Holló and Lázár (2000), it is not sufficient to teach cultural facts, rather a deliberate effort is required to develop certain competences, such as intercultural competence (IC), that help students improve their abilities to learn, understand and adapt to new situations. IC is composed by four components: Attitudes, knowledge and understanding; skills and actions (Barrett et al., 2014). Thus it does not only relate to the enhancement of learners' skills of observation, interpretation, empathy, acceptance, tolerance, adaptability and comparison (Holló & Lázár, 2000), but it also has the potential to enhance students' personal and cultural growth.

Cultural growth is used in this dissertation to refer both to personal growth and cultural competence development. It does not take the form of a specific content in a syllabus; rather it is considered as an integral whole of personal, cultural and cognitive factors which can be developed through education and/or experience. This conceptualisation is explained by an interest in combining the two constructs (personal growth and cultural competence) to consider the individual in his or her wholeness. In other words cultural growth is not merely an increase in the knowledge about cultures, but a complex expansion in attitudes, skills and understandings pertaining to the person and applied in the field through actions.

Another pivotal term employed throughout this research is collaborative learning. This refers to a large variety of in-class and out-of-class educational approaches and personal lifestyles (Panitz, 1999) aiming at getting students to take responsibility and ownership for the processes of learning (Maltese, 1991) and to work with each other in knowledge communities (Oxford, 1997) toward the same goal, namely discovering, understanding or producing knowledge (Davidson & Major, 2014). According to this definition, collaborative learning holds the main goal of producing knowledge through a joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. Thus, "collaborative learning occurs when students and faculty work together to create knowledge […] It is a pedagogy that has at its centre the assumption that people make meaning together and that the process enriches and enlarges them" (Matthews, 1996, p. 101).

2.2 Previous studies on cultural growth in foreign language teacher training

Cultural growth in FL teacher training has been mostly reduced to expanding literary canons rather than linguistic/cultural competence (Wellmon, 2008). Indeed, most culture instruction at the undergraduate as well as the graduate level has been devoted to the study of literature, and cultural/intellectual history in terms of literature, philosophy, history, the arts and architecture in civilisation courses (Schulz & Ganz, 2010). Furthermore, the cultural component of undergraduate literature courses is "conventionally explored ad hoc and anecdotally with the purpose of understanding a specific work" (Schulz & Ganz, 2010, p. 189). It is also noted by Alvstad and Castro (2009), that the use of literature in FL classrooms tends to concentrate on cultural knowledge and on the historical perspectives of the text; reproducing the view of texts and culture as static elements. Besides, critical thinking and cultural competence development are seldom included as formal components of FL teacher training programs (Francomano, 2012).

On the other hand there are some scholars who think that cultural growth is getting some more attention in the curriculum of language studies (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1995; Andrews & Pohl, 2016; Kramsch, 1996; Kubota, 2003; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Scarino, 2010, 2014; Schulz, Lalande II, Dykstra-Pruim, Zimmer-Loew & James, 2005; Tang, 2006). For example, the recent experience reported by Andrews and Pohl (2016), involving 20 English teachers from Eastern Central Europe who participated in the Sharing One Language training, reveals the importance of language and culture courses in FL teacher education.

Other proposals have started to advocate the need for improving teacher preparation and developing in-service opportunities for practicing teachers with regards to the preparation in the area of culture. For instance, McVee's (2004) study has already initiated the process of helping teachers to consider aspects of culture through narratives. Her findings suggest that through educational experiences pre-service and in-service teachers explore and document their trajectory of cultural growth and learning. Tang's (2006) empirical study also emphasises the importance of developing FL teachers' cultural competence by extending their preparation into disciplinary fields such as history, philosophy, anthropology and psychology.

Certainly, the above-mentioned undertakings provide alternative lights in which to see cultural growth in teacher training. They also evidence improvements in FL teacher education with regards to the preparation of trainees in the area of culture. However, a closer analysis of the preceding initiatives lets appear a focus on acquiring information about cultural products and practices that reduce cultural growth to knowledge building. Although, this approach of culture learning does provide some basis for cultural growth; proper training on cultural competence development also needs to be included in FL teacher training programs.

2.3 Cultural content in foreign language teacher training

Regarding cultural content of FL teacher training programs, it is notable that the procedures to select "content for FL teaching has not changed much in terms of what country tends to be the source of most of the cultural elements" (Serrano, 2002, p. 123). For instance England, France, Germany and Spain continue to be the countries represented in cultural content selected for English, French, German and Spanish courses. As a result, cultural content presented in FL teacher training programs perpetuates essentialist views of culture as national culture and do not take into consideration diversity among populations.

Another problematic point of cultural content in FL teacher training is the tendency to follow exclusively textbook writers' perspective. An analysis of different FL textbooks, carried out by Sobkowiak (2015), reveals that culture is mostly presented in a fragmented, simplistic and unconnected way. Besides, topics related to culture often refer to entertainment, tourist attractions, food, and literature (Godwin-Jones, 2013; Lázár, 2003). Such a tourist-inspired perspective 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 and can stimulate more interest in them than abstract ones inviting students to analyse diverse beliefs and attitudes" (Sobkowiak, 2015, p. 804) about the target culture.

The study of culture has also been divided in several parts and as a result various frameworks, that break culture into fixed parts, have been used in FL teaching and learning. For example, the 'big C' and 'small c' division of cultural content (Phillips & Terry, 1999), the 3Ps (Products, Practices and Perspectives) proposed in the *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century* (1999). However, leading proponents of critical teaching of culture have also recommended the inclusion of other aspects of culture. Kubota's (2003) work proposes the framework of the four Ds (Descriptive, Diversity, Dynamic and Discursive) as a way to address concepts such as diaspora and hybridity and it emphasises the dynamic nature of cultures.

To sum up, former research on the study of cultural growth and cultural content in FL teacher training courses show that cultural content has been mostly dissected into several components and that cultural competence development is seldom overtly stated in the curriculum of FL teacher training programs at university. The thematic focus of cultural content and the shortcomings regarding teacher trainees' cultural growth also motivates the current research. It intends to identify cultural content perceived as useful by pre-service teachers of Spanish as well as further elements of culture emerging in the training of

teachers of Spanish. This may allow extending existing practices through the connection with collaborative learning in different university degree courses.

2.4 Collaborative learning in foreign language education

Previous research, carried out in FL educational settings, shows that collaborative learning has been developed in conjunction with areas such as language across the curriculum, psycholinguistics, learning through talking, negotiating the curriculum, etc. In general "these perspectives tend to focus on creating an environment that best helps an individual to develop mentally, emotionally, and socially through being an active participant, personally committed to learning within the context of a supportive learning community"(Davidson & Major, 2014, p. 20). In a somewhat similar manner, collaborative learning attempts to provide the conditions for students to work jointly on the same task to negotiate shared meanings that may challenge the subjective understandings of the participants or go beyond what they already know individually (Kumpulainen & Kaartinen, 2003). In that sense collaboration in FL education may be also analysed as a process that gradually enables students to develop a supportive community of peers.

It is out of the scope of this research to present the whole range of possibilities related to collaborative techniques and strategies. This is why; only two main structures for collaborative learning in FL teacher education are presented. The first strategy is collaborative reasoning (CR). It aims to promote intellectual and personal engagement following a peer-led, small group discussion approach (Clark, et al., 2003). In CR students read and study a text that let emerge multiple points of views. Through open participation, students support their positions, listen, evaluate and respond to one another's arguments. In short the students manage their own discussions and develop thoughtful opinions cooperatively.

The second collaborative structure guiding this investigation is telecollaboration. It is defined as "the use of online communication tools to bring together language learners in different countries for the development of collaborative project work and intercultural exchange" (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006, p. 1). In current educational contexts, the use of telecollaboration for FL and culture learning is more and more common. However, it is important to point out that telecollaboration in FL education entails a large number of possibilities of online exchanges. For instance, exchange with native speakers (NSs) of the target language, communication between virtual partners from different locations, work in closed platforms like Moodle or exchange in private environments such as e-Twinning or e-PALS. Besides, other popular tools like blogs, forums, Skype telephony or e-mails are also available and used.

E-mailing has been used to collaborate and it appears to be a suitable tool to develop various skills. For instance, Charron (2007) underlines that telecollaboration using web-mailing provides students with opportunities to set a purpose for their writing and learn about another culture. More recently O'Dowd (2015) indicates, in a research based study, that "the accounts which students receive from their partners […] tend to be of a subjective and personalised nature" (p. 196); and so he understands that telecollaboration provides a different kind of knowledge that is opposed to objective factual information. Similarly,

Yang and Chen (2014), in their action research study point out that knowledge about cultures can be developed through telecollaborative peer interaction because students not only develop cultural awareness of the cultures of their correspondents but also about their home culture.

Moreover, further research emphasises the development of IC as a fundamental outcome of this collaborative strategy (Gomez, 2010; Greenfield, 2003; Itakura, 2004; Lázár, 2015; Liaw, 1998, 2006; Liaw & Johnson, 2001; O'Dowd, 2003; Schenker, 2012; Yang & Chen, 2014). In particular, Lázár's (2015) research in a web collaboration project shows observable development in the learners' IC during the five months of the web collaboration project. Her conclusions reveal the usefulness of international telecollaboration both in terms of culture learning and IC development.

The literature reviewed above illustrates that collaborative learning is commonly applied in FL studies. Nonetheless, collaboration, as generally used, is almost restricted to the group of students participating in the classroom and overlooks other actors and interactions that are likely to be implicated in collaborative settings. The inclusion of further collaborative partners requires thorough attention. The present doctoral research intends to explore how collaboration facilitates cultural growth of teachers of Spanish as a FL based on collaborative interactions that comprise teachers, learners and outsiders.

Furthermore, given the fact that collaboration has been widely associated with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and that they may adopt various faces; it is crucial to continue exploring alternative instances and processes in which telecollaborative learning may be applied. This research attempts to examine various aspects of collaboration for cultural growth in order to study unexplored resources of telecollaboration in FL teacher training.

3 Research methods

This dissertation aims to answer the following main research question:

How does collaborative learning contribute to cultural growth in the training of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language at university?

In order to answer the main research question, the following sub-questions have been created:
1. What cultural content do pre-service teachers of Spanish as a foreign language perceive as useful for cultural understanding?
2. What types of collaborative interactions facilitate cultural growth in the training of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language in different university degree courses?
3. What elements of culture emerge through collaborative learning in the training of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language in different university degree courses?
4. How do the designers of training programs for teachers of Spanish as a foreign language see the role of collaborative learning for cultural growth in different university degree courses?

Data was gathered from Hungarian L1 teachers of Spanish enrolled in BA, MA and PhD Philology programs as well as from designers of teacher training programs.The investigation is made up of five small-scale projects. The contexts of the sub-projects are as follows:

Study 1: An interview study with nine Hungarian L1 pre-service teachers of Spanish enrolled in BA and MA Spanish Philology programs at a university in Budapest. The purpose of this study is to identify cultural content that is perceived as useful by teacher trainees of Spanish as a FL. The data collection took place in winter 2015 with the help of semi-structured interviews. This study aims to answer research question 1.

Study 2: An exploratory study involving three Hungarian L1 pre-service teachers of Spanish. They were enrolled in the 3rd year of their BA Spanish Philology program at a university in Budapest and exchanged e-mails with Spanish L1 speakers located in Colombia. The aim of this study is to understand the processes of telecollaboration for cultural growth among Hungarian L1 pre-service teachers of Spanish and Spanish L1 speakers. The data was collected over approximately 5 months, from September 2015 to January 2016. The research participants' e-mail messages, semi-structured interviews and the researcher's journal were used as instruments for data collection. This study informs research questions 2 and 3.

Study 3: A case study involving three in-service teachers of Spanish attending a World Literature course belonging to the Modern Latin-American literature PhD program at a university in Budapest. The study was intended to offer an in depth analysis of the purposes and instances in which collaborative learning was incorporated in classroom instructional practices. Data was collected during the autumn term of the academic year 2015-2016 using participant observations, audio recordings, researcher's journal and semi-structured interviews as instruments for data collection. This project contributes to answering research questions 2 and 3.

Study 4: A case study analyzing the tutor's roles in a World Literature course belonging to the Modern Latin-American literature PhD program at a university in Budapest. The main purpose of the study was to understand the tutor's roles in collaborative classroom processes in a PhD context from the perspective of the course participants. The study was conducted during the autumn term of 2015-2016. The instruments of study 3 were used to collect qualitative data; these include participant observations, audio recordings of lessons, semi-structured interviews and the tutor's 'pedagogical roadmap', i.e., course syllabus. This study intends to answer research questions 2 and 3.

Study 5: An interview study with three Hungarian tutors who design training programs for teachers of Spanish as a FL at a university in Budapest. The purpose of this study was to identify how they see the role of collaborative learning for cultural growth in different university degree courses. The data was gathered during the spring term of the academic year 2016-2017 with the help of semi-structured interviews. The findings of these interviews contribute to answering research question 4.

The gathered qualitative data was mainly analysed through interpretive content analyses. Besides, member checking and peer reviewing were also used to enrich and clarify certain aspects of the findings and the conclusions. The results emerging from the analysis phase are presented below and follow the order of the research questions.

4 Summary of the results and discussion

This chapter is divided into two sections. First the findings of the individual studies are examined and placed in context, then it is detailed how collaborative learning contributes to cultural growth in the training of teachers of Spanish as a FL.

4.1 The results of the studies in context

4.1.1 The views of pre-service teachers on useful content for cultural understanding

The first question queries about what cultural content pre-service teachers of Spanish as a FL perceive as useful for cultural understanding. The extracts illustrating the research participants' views suggest that they perceived culture beyond national culture because they included a wide diversity of visions of culture. For example, professional culture, gender-related culture, family culture and age-related culture. Contrary to the premise that the notion of culture remains unchallenged (Chavez, 2002, 2005; Drewelow, 2012), in study 1, the teacher trainees presented their own visions of culture and showed that they understand the notion culture informed by their personal experiences as competent users of Spanish. Hence, the results of this study suggest that individual experiences in FL learning influence, to some extent, the views about cultural content of the research participants.

The teacher trainees also perceived cultural practices, products and perspectives as useful cultural content for cultural understanding. Their utterances underline that the three elements are connected. In other words, whatever form of cultural product is justified by the underlying beliefs, values and perspectives of a given culture; and cultural practices presuppose the use of particular products, too. Few of the participating trainees mentioned IC as a useful cultural content for cultural understanding. The reduced attention to components of IC probably indicates that teacher trainees, as FL learners, do not have the necessary awareness of IC. Therefore students' awareness of IC must be raised by their trainers and their education programme. In fact, the teacher trainees' views do not reflect either awareness or any conscious learning due to formal instruction about important cultural content. Indeed, the participants gave an account of their personal experiences but do not mention any awareness-raising of cultural content in their studies.

According to the pre-service teachers' views, cultural content is also closely related to the idea of collaborating with others because in their case, collaboration was a necessary tool to get access to cultural content. This implies that collaborating with different partners may provide a large resource base for culture learning upon condition that participants make deliberate efforts to coordinate their actions and challenge their ideas toward the co-construction of knowledge.

Another remarkable aspect that emerged from the analysis of the results is the variety of collaborative partners for culture learning that was reported by the research participants. The teacher trainees do not only hinge on Spanish L1 speakers to obtain cultural content, they also draw on key informants since in most of the cases studying abroad was a matter of struggle. This opens the way for an extended range of effective

cultural informants going beyond the NS of the target language or the teacher, who are usually identified as the authorities of knowledge in culture learning and teaching.

4.1.2 Collaborative interactions that facilitate cultural growth in the training of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language

The second research question enquires into what types of collaborative interactions facilitate cultural growth in the training of teachers of Spanish as a FL in different university degree courses. Three main interactions emerged as favourable for cultural growth in studies 2, 3 and 4: Telecollaboration, CR and collaboration between the tutor and the in-service teachers. The three collaborative interactions involved participants personally in learning. In telecollaboration, the teacher trainees participated in genuine communication in which each participant contributed to the conversations and learnt from each other. Besides the research participants and the Colombian correspondents wrote texts collaboratively and provided cultural information about them. In CR, the research participants contributed to classroom discussion in a shared space using their own knowledge, background information and individual meaning. In collaboration between the tutor and the in-service teachers, the course participants were invited to contribute to classroom conversations through prolonged verbalisation of thoughts and personalised analysis.

The three collaborative associations also entailed reflective practice as a key practice. Reflective practice in telecollaboration was operationalised by reflecting mainly on vocabulary and on professional development. In CR, in-service teachers also reflected about professional development, and in collaboration between the tutor and the in-service teachers the research participants could reflect both on possible models of teaching based on the specific instructional practices of the tutor and they were also able to experience tutor's roles. This reflection aimed at involving the in-service teachers in their own professional development.

Furthermore in the three collaborative interactions, knowledge was constructed collectively, in the community, rather than individually. As a result, telecollaboration, CR and collaboration between the tutor and the in-service teachers let emerge a community in which the participants not only share their views but also advance in building new knowledge together. For instance, in CR, the participating teachers shaped a learning community that allowed "a gradual refinement of ambiguous [...] and partial meanings" (Roschelle, 1992, p. 237) by enrolling together in conversational interactions. In collaboration between the tutor and the in-service teachers the course participants learnt by co-constructing meanings as an alternative to learning simple facts. The in-service teachers formed groups in a dynamic they called 'the multifocal perspective'. This means that each participant contributed to the classroom discussion and felt responsible and accountable for building understanding about the topic at hand.

Additionally, collaboration in the three studies provided the research participants with opportunities to take control of their learning process and to realise their own power and roles within the community. For example, in collaboration between the tutor and the in-service teachers, the participants were allowed to dig deeper in their minds, identify key

aspects of the texts, choose topics, make decisions about what to discuss and finally produce original and alternative interpretations of texts. Sharing power was also exhibited when their roles were reversed in class. That is, the in-service teachers enacted the tutor's roles by taking initiatives such as answering questions from fellow students, checking their partners' contributions, delineating literary interpretations, finishing the other students' phrases, contesting comments or monitoring classroom discussions. This issue is especially important for collaborative interactions, since the roles of students and teachers fluctuate between sharing power and authority among classroom activities. This is a feature pointed out by Bruffee (1994), who postulates that collaborative learning has to do with the experience of authority that is "willingness to grant authority, willingness to take it on and exercise it" (p. 44).

4.1.3 Elements of culture in collaborative interactions

The third research question asks what elements of culture emerge through collaborative learning in the training of teachers of Spanish as a FL at university. To start with, for the research participants, culture came into view as part of nations like Hungary or Colombia (in the pre-service teachers' study) as well as France, Russia and Ireland (in the in-service teachers' study). This initial understanding of culture demonstrates that the tendency to separate cultures according to state borders is still widespread and persistent.

In addition to national culture, the participating teachers indicated that culture also showed up in relation to cultural products such as language varieties, literature and literary works like *Ulysses* or *Madame Bovary*. A further understanding of culture, reported by the research participants, has to do with cultural practices of particular communities that are not attached either to national categories like patterns of participation of the classroom community, ways of thinking of elderly people, ways of behaving in car renting offices. At first sight, linking cultural practices to specific groups of people seems easy to do; yet, it is an important achievement to succeed in recognizing that culture cannot only be explained by national affiliations.

A key feature of elements of culture in collaborative interactions is their relationship with components of IC. Some of the research participants thought about culture in terms of skills such as, interpreting cultural practices and explaining views. Likewise, the pre-service teachers in study 2 elaborated on awareness-raising about their correspondents' pre-conceptions and stereotypes about their home culture and the target culture. These elements of culture seem to deal with developing understandings and skills rather than collecting cultural knowledge, which reveal a close relationship with IC. In other words, elements of culture have the potential to encompass components of IC, too.

In addition, learning and personal environments should be taken into consideration as key factors that contribute in shaping the research participants' views of elements of culture. According to Baker (2009) the conceptualisations of culture fluctuate between global, national, local and individual orientations and therefore they could occur in third places that do not belong strictly to a defined culture. Consequently, it is essential to take into account personal theories and individual ideas of culture to understand how views of cultural elements are shaped. That is to say, course participants' contextual identities as

well as their target and native resources matter very much in how they see and interpret culture and its elements.

New, so far undiscussed, types of cultural elements were identified in the PhD course of study 3, since the patterns of classroom practices operated as a common cultural frame of reference for participation which was composed by three main patterns: freedom of expression and non-limited comments; tolerance of inquiry and nonthreatening disagreement; and multifocal perspective. These patterns give the impression that a new culture has been created because through collaborative conversations, the research participants did not simply replicate a given culture (i.e., the culture of the training setting or the native culture of their society) but they especially shape a new culture for the classroom. It is worth noting that classroom culture was not dictated by the tutor; it was neither a collection of instructions originated in the faculty which establish how to understand events in the classroom environment. Instead, classroom culture seemed to be a set of guidelines; it was about sharing the meaning of being a member of a community and agreeing on the main practices, goals and ideals during every day work.

4.1.4 The views of the designers of training programs on collaborative learning for cultural growth

The last research question queries about how the designers of teacher training programs of Spanish as a FL see the role of collaborative learning for cultural growth in different university degree courses. The opinions of the interviewed designers show that collaboration in classroom settings is defined in a fairly unified manner, namely as advanced group work where students with different backgrounds come together to construct something or find solutions to concrete problems.

The designers of teacher training programs perceived collaborative learning as a necessary tool to teach in current educational contexts. They considered collaboration as a necessity or even more a requirement for actual teaching, and for this reason they said that teacher trainees need formal training in collaboration.

In relation to cultural growth, the tutors considered collaborative learning a useful tool for enhancing cultural knowledge related to practices for verbal and non-verbal communication such as gestures, ways of expressing feelings, speech patterns as well as vocabulary associated to language varieties. According to the views of the tutors, collaboration helps students acquire cultural knowledge because the discovery of cultural content is mostly encouraged by discussing social issues and by contrasting the target culture with existent populations or with learners' home culture.

The tutors' views revealed that, in FL classrooms, collaborative learning allows the target language to become a 'necessary vehicle' for communication and therefore it enables the course participants to share their cultural values, practices and viewpoints. Hence, for them it seems that language plays an important role within collaborative encounters; as Barrett et al. (2014) claim, "competence in a language is crucial to understanding the cultural perspectives, beliefs and practices to which it is linked" (p. 24).

According to the tutors, cultural growth is also facilitated by collaborative learning because it entails a prolonged contact with a large array of collaborative peers working

together inside and beyond the classroom. For the tutors, contact with other people has to do with experiencing culture in the long-term through ongoing exposure, comparison, interpretation and analysis of the experience. While the experience of negotiating meaning and challenging personal understandings is not exclusive of collaborative approaches, what is salient for the interviewed tutors is that the experience is shared and made public to others. That is to say, participants can position themselves not only as simple interveners in collaborative structures but also as genuine proponents who open to review their initial understandings and are able, simultaneously, to make accessible to others their new explanations. In short, according to the tutors, it is plausible that collaboration contributes to cultural growth by providing teachers-in-training with opportunities to experience culture in a way that helps them to move comfortably between the perspectives of insider-participant in collaborative structures and outsider-proponent of new knowledge.

Collaboration was equally viewed by the designers of teacher training programs as a key action to develop IC. The tutors recognised that collaborative learning entails multiperspectivity and respect for people's differences as well as awareness of cultural affiliations and skills to adapt to situations. In fact, these elements of collaborative learning are mentioned as components of IC by Barrett et al., 2014 and by Byram, 1997; so it may be advocated that collaborating with others could be twofold, on the one hand it appears to be a valid action of IC and on the other hand it may contribute to develop components of IC, such as knowledge and understandings (e.g., awareness of other people's way of expressing or understanding the influence of one's own culture) as well as skills (e.g., discovering about others, interpreting and relating) or attitudes (e.g., being open to learning from different people) (Barrett et al., 2014, Byram, 1997).

4.2 The contributions of collaborative learning to cultural growth in the training of teachers of Spanish as a FL

In this section three sub-sections are proposed corresponding to each of the positive influences being examined. The contributions are presented in the following order: Collaborating to enhance culture learning, collaboration as means to expand the notions of culture and gaining a deep understanding of the professional culture of FL teachers through collaborative learning.

4.2.1 Collaborating to enhance culture learning

In light of the analysis of the results of the five studies, collaborative partnerships have the potential to facilitate the enhancement of culture learning of teachers of Spanish as a FL. The first explanation to this assertion is that collaboration involves participants in learning culture within a shared space. That is to say, cultural content is framed by and contextualised in the joint problem space in which participants interact. Thus culture learning is mostly constructed hand in hand with progresses in achieving a common goal.

The second reason that backs up collaboration for culture learning enhancement is that it enables participants to use language as a 'necessary vehicle' to convey and get access

to cultural content. The various structures of collaboration studied here, worked as genuine communicative situations in which each participant contributed and learnt from each other. The research participants identified a variety of collaborative partners who helped them both in learning the target language and in constructing collaborative associations that allow them to learn culture through social processes. As described by many in the literature, for example Godwin-Jones (2013), FL learning is one of the essential gateways to cultural understanding and a necessary tool for experiencing culture. Similarly, for the participating teachers culture learning was seamlessly intertwined with learning and using the target language.

The third reason that supports the utility of collaboration for culture learning is that both the target culture and home cultures of participants are given attention. Hence, in collaborative encounters, enhancing culture learning has to do with discovering and receiving information about other people's culture and it also has to do with making known oneself 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 partners.

Another reason that strengthens the views of culture enhancement through collaboration is that learning about culture is entangled with the establishment of interpersonal relationships. This does not only entail superficial friendship but a long-term contact with people to create deeper ties. Thus, setting up interpersonal relationships through collaboration encourages the disclosure of personal opinions and convictions with the view of looking afresh at them through reflective practice. This requires a process of observation, analysis, and collection of further evidence about various aspects pertaining to culture.

Even though establishing interpersonal relationships is not an exclusive feature of collaboration, what deserves to be mentioned here is that collaborative partnerships allow the research participants to enhance culture learning through experiential learning and personal involvement with others. Indeed, both cultures (C1 and C2) are incorporated but in addition, culture is learnt through a joint experience that goes beyond isolated cognitive processes. Rather collaboration with others promotes culture learning as a social meaning-making activity situated in social situations that are closely related with cognition and interpersonal relationships (Kumpulainen & Kaartinen, 2003). As already pointed out by O'Dowd (2015), effective collaboration is likely to be a long-term, complex activity which is frequently strongly related to day-to-day interaction.

A further reason, reinforcing collaboration for culture learning, originates in the inherent intercultural nature of collaboration (O' Dowd, 2015). In the studied contexts, cultural differences were perceived and made salient either by the situation or by the individuals. Additionally, collaborative encounters often drew in other languages and cultures different from the target language and cultures. Therefore, bearing in mind the intercultural dimension of collaboration, it can be inferred that culture learning may be enhanced in collaborative associations because they provide participants with opportunities to encounter a variety of partners with whom they are likely to collaborate and from whom they can gain an extended range of resources for culture learning.

Finally, it is important to point out that culture learning may be enriched through collaboration because it enables participants to make progress in various components of IC, too. To name a few: understanding other people's culture, increasing awareness about one's

own cultural affiliation, reducing stereotypes, interpreting, relating as well as translating information, respecting and valuing pluralism and decentring from one's own perspectives. This productive learning opportunity allows us getting a glimpse of the critical role of collaboration in the improvement of IC regardless of the subject matter.

4.2.2 Collaboration as a means to expand the notions of culture

Collaborative associations in the current doctoral research seem to facilitate the display of personal notions of culture. Indeed, the research participants reported views of culture based on their personal experiences and friendship with L1 speakers. Instead of taking into account external ideas independent from their individualities, the participants seem to favour their own life histories to root their conceptions of culture within collaborative encounters. This means that past and current experiences as well as participation in activities with collaborative principles may have a mediating role in shaping their conceptions of culture.

In collaborative partnerships, culture was not only illustrated at the surface level; that is culture as cultural facts related to nations such as Hungary and Colombia. Rather, culture was demonstrated in the participants' awareness about cultural products, practices and perspectives linked to specific communities that are not necessarily connected to national categories (e.g., family group and elderly people community). Interestingly, collaborating with others opened the way for the research participants to understand cultural elements (e.g., products, practices and perspectives) from their personal experiences. It occurred when the participating teachers employed their abilities in using the target language in meaningful situations where personal cultural contact was feasible and cultural learning was put into context.

Although, it is acknowledged that the concept of culture is extremely multifaceted and mostly dependent on personal assumptions of the self and the other, this research agrees with early empirical studies claiming that through collaboration participants could develop "more sensitive and complex views on culture" (Itakura, 2004, p. 49). In the case of the pre-service and the in-service teachers participating in this investigation, the construct of culture went beyond one of "the most common aspects of [cultural] essentialism [...] [that has] to do with separate cultures as physical territories" (Holliday, 2011, p. 4). In other words, the research participants succeed in defining culture outside from national categories by taking into account sub-cultures, peripheral communities and smaller groups of people. This may represent a probable way to put new energy in expanding the definition of culture towards a more multidimensional construct that comprises hidden and counter cultures. Cultures that are generally disconnected from the social and the academic network of learners and that are often absent from instructional materials since they are situated at the periphery and do not belong to dominant stances.

An evocative example may be the possibility to define culture from third places (Kramsch, 1993a, 2000). In the studies in context, the research participants succeeded in creating alternative standpoints or third places from which they regard culture. Third places helped the participants to understand culture from outside and take into consideration the realities collected beyond the confines of the native (C1) and target cultures (C2). In short,

a third place, using McKay's (2002) words, "involves crossing borders, both literally and figuratively" (p. 81).

Collaboration also promotes generating classroom communities; these appear as examples of promising extended views of culture. In fact, looking upon patterns of classroom communities as a possible cultural frame of reference entails per se a less static and homogenous approach to culture. The main reason supporting this claim is that each classroom community, by definition, is unique and possesses its own particular ways of doing, its own guidelines of behaviour (Nussbaum & Tusón, 1996) and it also depends on specific contextual realities. Therefore culture belonging to classrooms conveys views of heterogeneity and context-dependence. Correspondingly, classroom communities as genuine places to experience, to understand and to do something with culture promote intrinsically a non-conventional reading of the term culture, too. In other words, seeing classroom culture as a form of culture could be a way to address non-essentialist views of culture because it takes a distance from a dominant approach of culture characterised by fixed social and national categories.

Furthermore, it also prompts that members of classroom culture could step outside their traditional designated places as students and teachers. In the present doctoral research, collaboration between the research participants shaped a classroom culture where roles were reversed and sometimes blurred. For instance, the tutor challenged some of her conventional roles such as primary speaker or knowledge provider when she was contested by her students. The course participants, on the other hand, took the place of the tutor by acting as instructors who initiate discussions and comment on others' contributions.

4.2.3 Gaining a deep understanding of the professional culture of FL teachers through collaborative learning

Last but not least, it is significant to mention that collaborative learning contributes to cultural growth in the training of Spanish teachers at university because in the studies carried out it enabled the participating teachers to gain a deep understanding of the professional culture of teachers. The first argument in favour of this is that in the different collaborative partnerships, the research participants could reflect on their professional development. Future and practicing teachers as members of the classroom community get involved in reflective practice about their experience of undergoing professional culture. Reflection about teaching profession took diverse faces or features. From elaborated reflective processes to personal ways of analysing, like capturing teaching models critically, questioning instructional practices or joining together theoretical and experiential knowledge.

In other words, collaboration emerges as a suitable practice to understand teaching professional culture from the inside because teachers-in-training can experience 'real problems' as they develop professional skills in their own settings. Nonetheless, facing 'real problems' and being trained in 'authentic settings' do not mean that collaborative structures involve the fabrication of fictitious contexts where predetermined 'problematic' issues are placed. Rather collaboration, in the examined context, seems to emphasise that

professional culture is not composed of a unified group of rules and neither does it attempt to provide a clear-cut definition of teachers' professionalism.

The second reason that supports the idea of gaining a deep understanding of the professional culture of teachers through collaborative learning is that the research participants could also get access to the culture of the people whose profession they are being trained for. For example, in studies 4 and 5 the tutor provided the course participants with opportunities to decide on and distribute readings, to develop course materials, to present their thoughts and to give feedback to their classmates' oral reports. In other words, the participating teachers were able to enact some roles generally attributed to the tutor such as planner, checker or prompter. Moreover, collaborative associations enabled research participants to experience professional culture in their lives and settings. That is to say, teacher trainees as well as practicing teachers mostly shaped their visions of the teaching profession grounded in the social interactions inside the class and their insights coming from experiential learning.

In the examined contexts of this investigation, collaborative learning is not exclusively devoted to acculturating the in-service teachers to imitate and (re) produce standard instructional practices. Instead, collaboration is concerned with a process of socialisation of future and practicing teachers into classroom communities where their previously acquired resources are accepted and open to review, too. In short, collaboration comes out as a powerful tool to generate alternative and situated teaching practices that extend predominant instructional approaches. These findings underline the relevance of Byrnes' (2001) study concluding that "becoming a teacher should […] be regarded and practiced as a process of socialisation into a professional discourse community, […] a development of [...] [an] evolving identity [...] as teachers" (p.521).

The third reason for stating that collaborative learning contributes to a deep understanding of the teaching profession is because the participating teachers took particularly more empowered positions within the classroom community of practice (CoP). Actually students' empowerment was a concise and foundational objective of the tutor (studies 4 and 5). The tutor of the course intended to involve the in-service teachers in their own process of professional development. This is why she devised collaborative endeavours that provided the research participants with opportunities to take more control of the course and to realise their own positions and power within the classroom CoP.

5 Pedagogical implications

The findings of this research evidence that components of culture and their teaching cannot be described in neat patterns. The views of the teacher trainees, the cultural elements emerging in the collaborative interactions along with the views of the designers of FL teacher training programs showed a great variability in relation to the notions of culture and demonstrated that these notions are context-dependent and vary according to individuals. As a result, the inclusion of the cultural component in FL teacher training should be prompted by the need of a deep understanding of a particular community and even more by the desire to comprehend how individuals from that community conduct themselves, fulfil actions and use socio-cultural knowledge to manage local situations (Arens, 2010). In short, culture learning should happen together with FL learning and vice versa, FL teaching

should continue to include culture teaching, too. This underlines the relevance of Damen's (1987) claims stating that "one can learn the formal system of a language without much culture learning but one cannot learn much about a culture without knowledge of its language or languages" (p.222).

In this same vein and following Arens (2010), one may propose that culture teaching in FL teacher education should be centred on cultural identities and on the teaching of "pragmatic systems by means of which individuals negotiate individual identities and their membership (or exclusion) from its community" (p. 322). This perspective of culture teaching, though not sufficient, focuses on pragmatic accomplishments which are grounded in situation-based and socio-cultural necessities. As a result, the "new unit of teaching can no longer be the word, sentence, paragraph, icon or sign, […] instead our target for teaching and learning needs to be the field of action and agency of an individual within […] communities" (Arens, 2010, p. 322).

Similarly, it may be central to integrating not only diverse cultures into FL teaching but also to incorporating students' home culture in addition to the mainstream of cultural diversity. This may be a way to go beyond a mere presentation of Spanish-speaking countries, such as Spain, Mexico, or Argentina, and cover a wide range of other cultural contexts and their relationship, with the students' culture included. The option of giving voice to the students' home cultures (that are generally absent from instructional materials) is regarded as an opportunity to access particular discourses of personhood and communication. Mallén (2007) highlights that learners' experiences outside the classroom influence their thoughts and therefore learners may learn predominantly from personal contacts and situations in which their skills of discovery and interaction are called into contribution. Consequently, educators at all levels need to re-examine instructional content, approaches and assessments to ascertain that objectives in the areas of culture learning are met. Designers of FL teacher training programs may also want to review language programs to include cultural aspects of the students' home cultures.

Another key issue for FL teaching is the notion of students as multi-competent learners. The emphasis on individual experiences within collaborative interactions challenges the idea of a homogeneous FL learner whose main goal is to emulate a NS model. Instead, it calls for multifaceted learners fluctuating as much as their identities. The expanded view of learners as multi-competent individuals ought to open space for learners' L1 and C1 within the FL classroom. Moreover, learners' L1 and C1 are "no longer to be viewed negatively, as an impediment which teachers would naturally wish to avoid or remove, but positively as a *resource*" (accent in the original) (Widdowson, 2003, p. 152).

Even though the aim of this dissertation was not to identify a definite cause-and-effect relationship between collaborative learning and cultural growth, some of the findings give an indication of areas that may be helpful in understanding the role of collaboration in teacher educational programs. The teachers participating in this research highlighted friendship and personal involvement as key tools to access cultural content. Interaction and interpersonal relationships ought to be fostered in FL teacher training programs. The contact with various individuals and communities proves to be challenging for teachers-in-training, it provides them with opportunities to reveal and display their own identities and get access to various meanings. In this investigation meanings were inserted in specific communicative practices that represented cultural and pragmatic accomplishments of the C2 and C1. This could happen in other contexts as well. Therefore, cultural growth should

also entail contextualised and reflective practice of the target and home cultures of various participants.

Although telecollaboration was a 'first' as an experience in the studied context of teaching, similar projects could be incorporated in training programs. Actually, the results of this dissertation draw attention to the salience of extended collaborative partnerships for FL learning and teaching. Thus it is important to open space for students to collaborate in solving questions that expand their learning world and connect them to other questions, other students or teachers and alternative collaborative partners.

Though collaborative learning seems almost too easy to defend, its inclusion into FL teacher education would entail a high degree of planning because it needs to be modelled, explicitly planned and controlled throughout the whole process of training. It is acknowledged that for teacher trainees to benefit from collaboration, they should ease slowly into the process to eventually make extensive use of it in class. Collaboration, then, needs to be closely monitored and supported by well-defined guidelines, clear goals and chiefly by well-trained teacher trainers. Thus the inclusion of collaborative learning and culture teaching in FL teacher education does not only presuppose planning the activities and syllabi but also training the trainers. In fact, tutors play a crucial role within planned collaboration. Their support is important to create initiatives, and especially to plan activities to promote the development of a collaborative culture. This suggests that tutors should overtly recognise diversity, emotionality and subjectivity among their students and that they support collaborative and conversational inquiry, too. Supposing that the preceding implication finds its way into FL teacher training on a large scale and in the long term, future FL teachers would be much better equipped to integrate, if needed, the teaching of FL and culture in a collaborative fashion in their own classrooms, which in turn would lead to many more people than today becoming competent intercultural speakers and FL users.

By the same token, the outcomes of this dissertation could be valid for general FL teaching, too. Taking into account that FL teacher training should influence FL teaching, and FL teaching in turn should also have some effects on teacher education, what has been learnt about collaboration and cultural growth (particularly IC development), in the studied context is not only relevant for the teaching of Spanish as a FL. The outlined results could also inform and reinforce teaching and learning practices of other FLs as well. In addition they may be used to raise FL teachers' and teacher trainees' awareness of integrating cultural elements in language teaching and using collaborative techniques in teaching FLs.

The incorporation of collaborative approaches into FL teacher education also points to the need of renewed attention to professional collaboration. This may help moving teacher education in the direction of opening training programs towards establishing more space for collaboration among practicing teachers and also towards the development of team culture. The results of the present investigation emphasise the importance of local communities such as the 'Pestalozzi Fridays' meetings in Hungary (Lázár, 2016). The group meets once a month on a voluntary basis to share ideas and teaching experiences for professional development. In fact, the collaborative nature of this kind of learning community makes them important sites for innovation, reflection and community building in the teaching profession. This means that the most stimulating possibilities to take advantage of collaboration rest in the hands of teachers and not somewhere out there independent of themselves.

6 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Some limitations of the investigation and suggestions for further research also need to be pointed out. First of all, this complex case study was conducted within a population of Hungarian L1 teachers of Spanish with predominantly plurilingual and multicultural backgrounds. They were also involved also in extended encounters with people from distant locations with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore it is important to be aware of complexity and possible unrecognised identities among the multiplicity of research participants' 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 important to point out that the results about collaborative interactions illustrate, above all, successful experience. For instance, telecollaboration transcended superficial self-presentation and exchange (O'Dowd, 2016); CR and collaboration between the tutor and the in-service teachers intended to involve teachers in their own professional development. Therefore, forthcoming studies should focus on failed structures or stagnant interactions in order to provide deeper significance to the findings presented in the current dissertation.

Another issue to consider is that the courses that formed the context of this dissertation were not burdened by having to prepare the students for a language exam. Contrary to prevalent claims of language 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 with other aspects. 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.

Bearing in mind that one of the objectives of collaborative interactions was to provide teachers-in-training with experience that they could incorporate into their own teaching, effects should be studied in longer term, too. It would be useful to follow the participating teachers in further research to determine whether and how they apply collaborative models and techniques in their own classrooms. Likewise, a number of research participants indicated their appreciation for collaboration, therefore future research on the issue would require formal follow-up in order to support the outcomes, which is something that was outside the scope of the present doctoral research. It would also be constructive to note retrospective perceptions of positive and negative aspects of collaborative interactions by former students, too.

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