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Desarrollo de la Sensibilidad Intercultural a través de Investigaciones Grupales: una Propuesta de Innovación para 4º de ESO

Developing Intercultural Sensitivity through Group Investigations: an Innovative Proposal for 4th year of CSE

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly globalized world, English language learners are often asked to develop their cultural awareness competence so that they can become intercultural communicators and mediators. To achieve this goal, a series of cooperative learning tasks have been designed to be implemented in a 4th year of CSE English class. These tasks are group investigations that make use of authentic materials on different topics related to multiculturality. In most cases, personable and entertaining stories are presented so that students can feel emotionally connected to the content and develop a sense of empathy that will allow for significant learning and development of their intercultural sensitivity.

Key words: Cultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, cooperative learning, multiculturality, 4th CSE.

RESUMEN

En un mundo cada vez más globalizado, a menudo se pide a los estudiantes de inglés que desarrollen la competencia de conciencia y expresiones culturales para poder convertirse en comunicadores y mediadores interculturales en el futuro. Para lograr este objetivo, se han diseñado una serie de tareas de aprendizaje cooperativo para implementarse en una clase de inglés de 4º de ESO. Se trata de investigaciones en grupo que hacen uso de materiales auténticos sobre diferentes temas relacionados con la multiculturalidad. En la mayoría de los casos, se presentan historias amenas y entretenidas para que los alumnos se sientan emocionalmente conectados con el contenido y desarrollen un sentido de empatía que les permita un aprendizaje significativo y el desarrollo de su sensibilidad intercultural.

Palabras clave: Conciencia cultural, sensibilidad intercultural, aprendizaje cooperativo, multiculturalidad, 4º de ESO.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The law (Orden ECD/65/2015) establishes a competence-based education. One of the key competences that are highlighted, Cultural Awareness and Expression competence (CAE), seems to be very important in the context of a globalized world: the ability to use English is increasingly related to being able to communicate and becoming an intercultural speaker and not so much to having native-level proficiency. In Spain, in approximately 20 % of the marriages celebrated in 2020 and 2021 one of the spouses was a foreigner (INE, 2022). This is a clear indicator of the increasing multiculturality in Spanish society, a society where students live in and are expected to contribute to. However, students who are not familiar with cultural differences will have difficulty coping in this environment and will disregard diversity if they are not exposed to it or do not live in an environment where it is appreciated. Therefore, it is important that classrooms be a safe space where empathy, tolerance and appreciation for differences are fostered so that students can be enriched by them and grow as members of a multicultural society.

This project has been developed to enable them to better cope in an environment where cultural differences exist. In order to achieve this, a series of group investigation tasks have been designed with a focus on developing students' intercultural sensitivity and Cultural Awareness and Expression competence, among others. The tasks introduce research on cultural elements from countries from all over the world as the main activity, so that students can get to know cultures they might have never heard of, enhance their problem-solving skills, learn to think critically on various cultural topics and present their findings to their classmates.

These group investigations about intercultural topics can be implemented right away in the current system, specifically in a 4th year of Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE) class, given that the project includes a task for each of the modules of one of the official textbooks that are currently used in high schools in Logroño (La Rioja) for 4th year of CSE, titled *Advanced Think Ahead 4.*

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Globalization and Culture

We live in an increasingly globalizing world where cultural globalization and second language learning and teaching are related. Kumaravadivelu (2008) examines the impact of cultural globalization on language education and concludes that learners should develop a global cultural consciousness in order to move towards greater cultural understanding in a global society. For students, critical self-reflection on cultural elements will help them identify and understand what is good and bad about their own culture, as well as the good and bad things about other cultures. Understanding other cultures will allow them to understand their own culture better and vice versa, resulting in a complex process of cultural growth. In this process, English teachers have an important role and can influence the students' cultural growth, given that the use of English language as an international language has a great influence in the progress of globalization, as it is the prime mediator of the economic, political, cultural, and social relations and flows that constitute globalization (Block, 2010).

Regarding culture itself, even though it is one of the most studied concepts in human history, it is difficult to find a clear-cut definition or a consensus about what it really is. According to Geertz (1973), culture has a central function in society, maintaining order and providing individuals with psychological structures to guide various aspects of their life. It offers them a rationale for their behaviors, a prism through which to see it and a basis for identity formation, helping them develop a sense of solidarity with other members of their community. Culture acts like a road map to explore individual rights and responsibilities and might also nurture in people prejudices and stereotypes. It cannot be denied that it plays an overarching and overbearing role in the development of an individual. It can also be stated that cultures are interconnected, and cultural change is always happening. However, it is not something that happens instantly or before our eyes: it takes time. As Geertz stated, "culture moves rather like an octopus too- not all at once in a smoothly coordinated synergy of parts, a massive coaction of

the whole, but by disjointed movements of this part, then that, and now the other which somehow cumulate to directional change". (1973, p. 408)

2.2. Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Cultural Awareness and Expression Competence (CAE) is one of the key competences included in the legislation (Orden ECD/65, 2015). It is stated that CAE consists of "knowing, understanding, appreciating and valuing with a critical spirit, with an open and respectful attitude, the different cultural and artistic manifestations, using them as a source of personal enrichment and enjoyment and considering them as part of the wealth and heritage of peoples" (p. 7001). The development of this competence involves "personal attitudes and values of interest, recognition and respect for different artistic and cultural manifestations as well as valuing freedom of expression, the right to cultural diversity and dialogue between cultures and society" (p. 7001).

Research on the development of intercultural competence and the appreciation and integration of other cultures began decades ago. In 1981, Hoopes described intercultural learning as a spectrum and proposed an informal model based on categories: ethnocentrism; awareness; understanding; acceptance/respect; appreciation/valuing; selective adoption; assimilation-adaptation-biculturalism-multiculturalism. Bennett (1984) expanded on this idea and focused on the concept of intercultural sensitivity and cultural difference, specifically, the experience of difference to create a model called The Developmental Model:
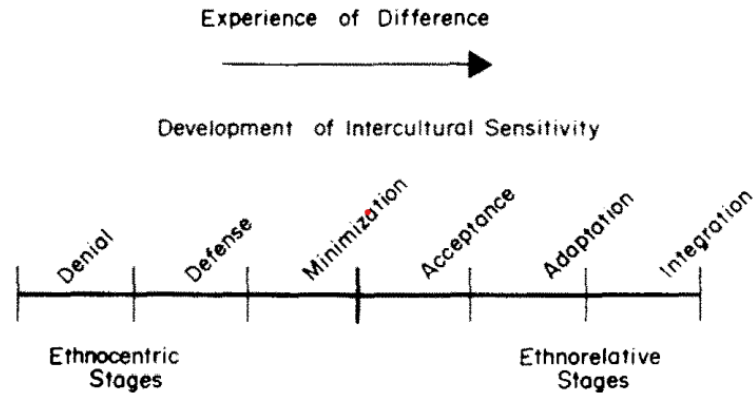
Figure 1. Bennett's Model for the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1984)

Bennett decided to create this sequence of stages, divided into two main categories: ethnocentric stages and ethnorelative stages, based on his experience in teaching and stated that it was used successfully to design curricula for workshops in intercultural communication. The model represented his real-life observations as an educator and the actual reported experiences of students and was used to diagnose their "level of intercultural sensitivity". Depending on the stage of the group or the individual, different developmental strategies were implemented (1986). In the following table, a summary of Bennett's Model for the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity is included, as well as descriptions for the diagnosis of each stage and developmental strategies that fit each part of the sequence. This table can be especially useful in a classroom setting to analyze and diagnose the stage of most of the students and design activities and tasks accordingly.

Ethnocentric Stages	Diagnosis	Developmental Strategies
1. Denial	The student does not perceive cultural differences. The student uses wide categories for perceiving differences, such as the assumption that Koreans, Chinese and Japanese are all the same. The student shows an immature response when confronted with difference (giggle, embarrassment).	Cultural awareness activities where cultural elements are exhibited and presented. They facilitate the simple recognition of difference and allow students to create new categories for cultural difference. Premature discussion of significant cultural differences should be avoided at this stage.
2. Defense	The student shows hostility towards another culture. An example can be found when one culture is targeted as "bad", while one's own culture is seen as the standard or goal for the entire world.	The goal is to increase cultural self-esteem through discussions on what is good about one's own culture, accompanied by discussions of good things about other cultures. It would be premature to emphasize that cultures are simply different, given that this idea requires a higher level of ethnorelativism to be understood.
3. Minimization	Students believe that cultural difference is mainly superficial, with statements such as "there are some things that are true everywhere". This implies that all cultures value similar logical processes and allows the students to preserve their ethnocentrism. They want to avoid facing the incompetence which might arise when confronting cultural unknowns.	A major conceptual shift is required, and students should acknowledge relativity. Simulations and reports of personal experiences are effective at this point. Small discussions with representatives of other cultures can provide more credibility for expression of cultural difference than the teacher.

Table 1. Bennett's Ethnocentric Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1984)

Ethnorelative Stages	Diagnosis	Developmental Strategies
4. Acceptance	Students recognize and explore differences. They are tolerant of ambiguity and willing to accept generalizations about cultural differences without demanding absolute answers. They want to learn about cultural differences instead of confirming stereotypes.	Stressing recognition and respect for differences in cultural elements, such as verbal behavior and communication styles (greeting rituals or body language, for example). Respect for differences must be established.
5. Adaptation	Students are able to shift their frame of reference. They will ask appropriate and empathetic questions.	Opportunities to interact with other-culture partners should be offered, such as multicultural group discussions. Activities should be related to real-life communication situations.
6. Integration	Students in this stage show a lack of strong cultural identification as well as high levels of Acceptance and Adaptation. An important factor is a sense of self as a dynamic process involving choice at every level of identity.	Activities belong to the area of ethics, given that students that have achieved this level and integrated difference might have trouble constructing an ethical system to guide their actions. Apart from this, skills of cultural mediation can be also developed at this stage.

Table 2. Bennett's Ethnorelative Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1984)

In 1994, Byram and Zarate proposed that the reference point for the foreign language learner should be the intercultural speaker, given that foreign language learners are individuals who bring their sociocultural identity as member of their native culture to their learning experience. Even if they achieve "native speaker fluency", they are still mediators between two cultures. This concept of "mediator" includes linguistic and cultural aspects and describes a process in which the learner becomes a dual-culture person by communicating in a foreign language (Steele, 1996). The intercultural speaker can manage communication and

interaction between people of different cultural identities and different languages, and he is also able to come out of himself and take another perspective. (Coperías, 2002)

2.3. Communicative Language Teaching for Learning Culture

Kierkebaek (2013) states that teachers must be conscious of the different factors that may influence teaching and learning culture: views on globalization and culture, the concept of culture itself, different teaching approaches, the teacher-student relationship and the creation of a supportive learning environment. For this project, a multimodal approach based on Task-Based Language Teaching and Cooperative Learning, where the teacher acts as a mediator or guide and the student is the main focus of the learning process was selected.

2.3.1. Task-based Language Teaching

In the 1960s, the roles of the institutions and individuals in society began to be questioned and reformulated in different parts of the world. In western Europe and the anglophone world, Legutke and Thomas (1991) discussed changes in approaches to education and moved towards "humanistic language teaching". This resulted in a new understanding of language and communication and discussions about education took place. The conception of language itself shifted from a focus on grammar and lexis to a focus on communicative competence, that is, language user competence was conceptualized in relation to the way a language was used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes and in relation to interactional skills necessary to communicate effectively and appropriately in that language (Block, 2010). Thus, Communicative Language Teaching has the objective of developing the ability of students and learners to use the foreign language in real communication. Brown and Yule (1983) state that the process of communication involves two purposes:

the interactional function, where language is used to establish contact, and the transactional function, where language is used to exchange information.

In 1984, Howatt stated that there are two versions of CLT: a weak version and a strong version. The weak version does not depart from traditional methods, but introduces new notions related to communication in real contexts. Some examples of this version of CLT can be found in the proposals for notional-functional syllabuses developed by Wilkins (1976) and Van Ek (1976). This parallels with the concept of Task-Supported Language Teaching, which provides communicative practice for language items that have been presented in a more traditional way. On the other hand, the strong version of CLT claims that "language is acquired through communication" and provides students with opportunities to experience how language is used in communication. Examples of this version of CLT can be found in Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach. Under this strong version of the Communicative Approach, Task-Based Language Teaching seeks to enable learners to learn a language by experiencing how it is used in communication (Ellis, 2003).

In recent years, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been transformed in different ways and is now a label for different language teaching practices. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) works on the task as a central and main component in the language classroom, as a means of activating the learner acquisition process (Shehadeh, 2005). Tasks have been defined in many ways. Nunan (2004) proposed that a task must include goals, input and procedures, as well as roles and settings.

Goals →   ← Teacher role

Input →   TASK   ← Learner role

Procedures →   ← Settings
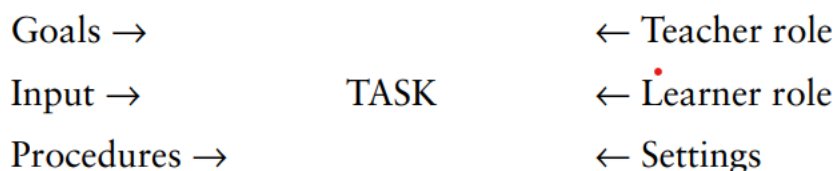
Figure 2. Nunan's Elements of the Task (Nunan, 2004)

For this project, some of these elements (e.g., goals and input) will be specific to each task. Others, like the teacher and learner roles, will remain the same. The teacher will act as a mediator or guide, while the student is the protagonist and responsible for their own learning. One of the most important dimensions of

communicative language teaching is the focus on learner performance. Tasks are seen as goal-directed pedagogical activities with a focus on meaning, during which participants choose and implement the linguistic resources they need as they work towards a clearly defined outcome. (Ellis, 2003)

By integrating project work (with TBLT) into content-based classrooms, vibrant learning environments that require active student involvement are created, stimulating higher level thinking skills, and giving students responsibility for their own learning (Stroller, 2002). The tasks in this project make use of authentic materials related to personable stories aimed to awaken students' empathy towards different cultures. Emotions are also an important factor in education and without emotion, solid memorization is difficult to achieve. Educating on the basis of empathy establishes a platform of relational dynamics with an aim to understand the other as well as oneself, an emergence of this emotion, which leads not only to put oneself in the place of the other, but rather to generate dialogical spaces, understanding, openness and reflection, dimensions that are fundamental in the teaching-learning process (Barría, 2016). This is especially relevant when teaching culture and developing intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication competence, given that, in order to appreciate different cultures, students must learn about them in a respectful and empathetic way.

2.3.2. Cooperative Learning and Group Investigation

Collaborative working covers a variety of ways that students can work together, including cooperative investigations which result in important, multifaceted learning and allow students to use their interpersonal and study skills to achieve specific learning goals. Group investigation was developed in 1960 by H. Thelen, based on his deep concern for fostering self-realization in students. It is a cooperative learning strategy in which students work in small groups to investigate a learning topic. Thelen (1960) foresaw the need to prepare students to work both independently and interdependently and aimed to stimulate the desire of students to engage in inquiry. The model provided students with

opportunities for decision making and problem solving through the investigation of real issues (Eby, 1998). Later, Kagan & Kagan (2009) described different types of cooperative learning dynamics, one of them being Group Investigation. According to Kagan & Kagan (2009), Group Investigation has four basic features:

- Investigation: the classroom becomes an inquiring community, and each student is an investigator.
- Interaction in small groups.
- Interpretation of the findings.
- Intrinsic motivation: students are motivated by their active role in the task.

Group activities offer opportunities for students to develop a sense of community and belonging, to take risks and to work together to achieve a common goal. The roles in the groups are interdependent and vital to the success of the group: if one member falters, the whole group suffers (Ransdell, 2003). Watson (1995) suggests that learners' motivation to complete their tasks improved when participating in cooperative learning groups. The reason might be that they perceive a reward (Behavior Learning Theory) or feelings of competence, value and self-efficacy (Cognitive Evaluation Theory). Cooperative learning offers opportunities for both and enticements for those who participate in the group endeavors (Ransdell, 2003).

3. GOALS

The main goal of this project for an innovative proposal is to help students develop their Intercultural Sensitivity and their Cultural Awareness and Expression Competence, which will help them become intercultural communicators in the future while expanding their horizons and learning about life and culture in other countries. For the design of the tasks, Kagan & Kagan's Group Investigation dynamic (Kagan & Kagan, 2009) was used as a basis and it was assumed that most of the students could be placed in ethnocentric stages, according to Bennett's model (Bennett, 1984). That is why, through the activities, specific cultural elements of a variety of countries are presented and not very complex or deep discussions about cultural differences will take place with the objective of increasing Intercultural Sensitivity. The selected topics, which are related to each of the Modules of the textbook in use, will allow students to create new, more specific categories for cultural differences and to increase their cultural self-esteem by recognizing good things about their own culture, as well as good and interesting things about other cultures. Apart from the main goal, the project also aims to help students develop their ability to work in groups and their problem-solving and research skills. They will have to use their linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge and resources in order to complete the different tasks while working collaboratively. Additionally, technology and ICTs are very present and necessary for the students to do the research so that they can complete the tasks.

To sum this up, the main objectives of this innovative proposal to develop Intercultural Sensitivity in students of 4th of CSE are:

1. To learn about different cultural elements (concerning transportation, lifestyle, food, architecture…) from other countries and compare them with one's own culture to see how they differ.
2. To get a glimpse of life outside one's own country, learn to create new, more specific categories of cultural differences and to value diversity.
3. To develop a sense of respect, empathy and tolerance towards the different stories that are presented and the different cultures that they research about.

4. To develop their problem-solving skills, as well as linguistic skills, in order to do a group investigation and organize the findings into an oral presentation in English with visual aid.

5. To learn how to work autonomously and collaboratively, and to use ICTs to maximize their learning experience.

These goals are to be achieved through a series of tasks that will be described in detail in the next section, Innovation Proposal. The different tasks are supposed to be done during the course year, and the long-term goal would be for students to become intercultural communicators, so that they can establish effective and respectful communication in English with people from different cultural backgrounds. Bearing this short-term and long-term goals in mind, in the next chapter the Innovation Proposal for the Development of Intercultural Sensitivity and Cultural Awareness Competence in 4th year of CSE Students through Group Investigations is presented.

4. INNOVATION PROPOSAL

In this chapter, the present innovation proposal is introduced and described in the form of a dissertation with different sections. A general justification for the project can be found, followed by specific details about the innovation proposal: the timing of the sessions is mentioned, as well as the hypothetic class or target group where the proposal could be implemented and the methodology to be followed. Regarding the legislation, specific details about key competences, contents and assessment criteria are explained. In the latter sections, original materials are attached with a detailed description of the sessions and activities for the tasks. At the end, the expected results for the project if it were to be implemented in the hypothetic target group are explained.

4.1. Justification

The present project for an innovation proposal aims to implement a series of six 3-session tasks throughout the school year in a 4th year of CSE English class for students from a public high school in La Rioja that uses the book *Advanced Think Ahead 4*. These 3-session tasks are called Student Researcher because the students take on the role of researchers on different topics to complete the tasks. The activities revolve around authentic materials and personable stories to introduce the different cultural topics and group investigations on cultural elements from a variety of countries that result in a final product: an oral presentation with visual aid that will show the findings of each group to their classmates. The common thread for all the activities, apart from the role of the students and the structure of the tasks, is culture. Students will get to empathize with authentic stories about people from other countries and learn about cultural elements from other parts of the world, expanding their horizons and becoming familiar with difference while learning to appreciate it. Most students have not had the opportunity to experience cultural difference first-hand or do not know much about it. That is the reason why a set of simple and entertaining cultural topics was selected so as not to give rise to deep discussions on cultural differences for

which most students would not be prepared, given their low intercultural sensitivity at this point in time. In order to help students develop their intercultural sensitivity and their respect for cultural difference, this project aims to provide them with some tools and knowledge from which to build their intercultural competence so that they can become efficient intercultural communicators one day.

The proposed tasks do not only delve into culturally diverse topics but require that the students put into good use their social and linguistic skills as well. Through the activities that make up the tasks, students will practice the four skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) that are the basis for the four blocks included in the CSE educational curriculum for English in La Rioja (BOR, 2015). The innovation proposal also focuses on a competence-based education with a special focus on Cultural Awareness and Expression Competence, even though the rest of the key competences are worked on. Regarding social skills, students are required to work collaboratively in group investigations to foster cooperation and autonomy to achieve a common goal, which is the final product of the task.

4.2. Contextualization and timing

This project has been developed to be implemented in a 4th year of CSE English class, specifically in a public high school located in Logroño (La Rioja) that uses *Advanced Think Ahead 4* for 4th year of CSE English classes. The topics of the tasks are related to the general topics of each of the modules in the textbook, but the project itself could be used independently from the textbook, as it includes very general topics that are usually seen during the school year in a 4th year of CSE English class. However, it would more coherent and cohesive to implement each task of the project as a 3-session ending activity to each module in the textbook. Therefore, the timing for each task would depend on the timing of each teacher. When a module is finished, three 50-minute sessions would be devoted to the Student Researcher task assigned to that module. In the following table, an overview of the different tasks can be seen. The first session would be devoted to introducing the topic with authentic materials, the second session is

for students to do their research in groups and the third session is when the different groups present their findings.

Module	Authentic Material	Specific topic	Task	Sessions
Module 1 – Game Changers	Video: Throwing a Dart at World Flags and Traveling Where it Lands https://youtu.be/y0jDIH_X0J4	Traveling; Transportation	Group Investigation on Unusual Modes of Transport	3
Module 2 – The Unexpected	Video: The Most Beautiful Building in the World https://youtu.be/eR8K-lCYVNk	Urban landscapes; Buildings	Group Investigation on World's Most Beautiful Buildings	3
Module 3 – The Way We Live	Audiobook: Lost and Found Cat. Kunkush's Story https://youtu.be/XR6IvBU9fUE + News video https://youtu.be/05K-YUezBKA	Immigration; Refugees	Group Investigation on Cultural Differences between Norway and Iraq	3
Module 4 – All in the Mind	Reading: Creepiest Mythical Creatures from Around the World https://gengo.com/language-and-culture/creepiest-mythical-creatures-from-around-the-world/	Fears; Phobias	Group Investigation on Famous Yokai from Japan	3
Module 5 – Mother Nature	Video: I Lived with Wolves for 72 hours https://youtu.be/H4jA_SN4hgg	Animals	Group Investigation on Endemic Animals	3
Module 6 – Trending Now	Video: Great Big Story - Wedding Dresses Around the World https://youtu.be/cNxTlByUezo	Fashion; Tradition	Group Investigation on Traditional Dresses	3

Table 3. Overview of the tasks.

The decision to select a 4ᵗʰ year of CSE class has been rooted in the fact that 16-year-old students have already developed deeper cognitive abilities and executive functions and are better equipped to work autonomously in projects such as group investigations, where they are the focus of the learning process and they need organization, planning, problem-solving and research skills. Apart from that, the educational curriculum in La Rioja states that students in this educational stage should be able to work with "sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects: social conventions, rules of courtesy and registers; customs, values, beliefs and attitudes; non-verbal language" (BOR, 2015, p. 12573).

4.3. Target group

The target group is a 4ᵗʰ year of CSE class made up of 24 students. Most of the students do not seem to be motivated or interested in English. They do not have problems following a fixed routine every class (that is, following the textbook), but a lack of motivation is clear. Less than 20 percent of the students actively participated in class and almost no one takes notes or does homework. Regarding the educational level of the students, they generally have a low level of English in comparison with other students their age. Often, students who are more proficient in English help those who struggle more. In relation to the students' behavior, except for a couple of students who would not stop talking, the class is able to progress smoothly and works well individually. However, activities that require group work or that introduce innovative tools often lead to chaos, as students seem to lose their focus when confronted with something that is not their usual routine.

Taking these characteristics of the students into consideration, a proposal based on authentic and entertaining materials and the active role of the student as the focus has been designed to increase motivation among the students. Regarding the chaos that often follows innovative tools or changes in the class, the project is made up of six innovative tasks that share the same structure and activities with different topics. This coherent set of similar cooperative learning culture activities that are scheduled to take place at a fixed time (the end of each

module) with fixed groups of students is designed to minimize the anxiety that comes with changes in the class dynamics. Students can get used to the new routine quickly, given that the structure and organization of every task is the same and the activities are also similar. The groups they are going to work in will be heterogeneous, given the different levels of the students, so that they can help each other when needed.

Regarding the cultural content, the group of students is not very familiar with multiculturality and can be placed under ethnocentric stages following Bennett's Model (1984). This is the reason why the content included in the project is not very complex or deep and the tasks are designed with the aim that students become familiar with cultural difference and start to develop a sense of empathy, respect and tolerance to different cultures.

4.4. Methodology

As it has been stated before, the 24 students are organized in six groups of four people. These are heterogeneous groups where students with a higher proficiency of English are put together with students with a lower level in case they need help. This is important in order to foster cooperation within the group, but it is not the focus of the task, given that apart from English skills, research skills and other non-linguistic abilities are equally important. The members of the groups are the same during the school year (unless serious problems arise) to facilitate students getting used to the new dynamic. Regarding the role of the student and the teacher, students are the focus of the learning process and have a very active role in the tasks, while the teacher acts as a guide, not a model.

The main teaching approaches the project is based on are Task-Based Language Teaching and Cooperative Learning, specifically group investigations. TBLT, as it has been described before, requires students to use the foreign language in a meaningful and communicative way to improve communicative competence and ultimately, to complete tasks that aid the significant learning of language and content. There are different types of tasks. In this innovative proposal, the type of task that is included is an open task that requires students

to research a specific topic and then present it to their classmates. There are six of these tasks to be completed during the school year at the end of each Module of the textbook. They are three-session long tasks and the three sessions are organized in a way that each session is mainly devoted to an activity that is a part of the task:

- Presentation – Introduction of the topic with authentic materials and personable stories. An explanation and discussion about the topic will take place, so that students can get familiar with it. The class is divided in groups that pick a specific topic and start working together.
- Research – Group Investigation.
- Final Product – Oral Presentation with visual aid.

The main elements of these tasks are the group investigations on cultural topics. Cooperative Learning and Group Investigation focus on students working in groups to achieve a common goal and it is said to increase students' significant learning at all levels (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1990). Sharan & Sharan (1992) outlined the different stages of group investigation that students will go through in order to complete the investigation successfully:

- Stage 1. Identifying the Topic and Organizing Pupils into Research Groups. After watching the introductory content, the teacher organizes the students into heterogeneous groups and shows them the Student Researcher Worksheet. Research Topics are included in the Student Researcher Worksheets and students are free to pick the topic they want from there. In these worksheets, a series of flags are shown, but the name of the country is not written anywhere. Thus, if they cannot recognize the country by their flag, students start their research by looking up the flags before selecting the topic.
- Stage 2. Planning the Learning Task. Group members determine subtopics for investigation and assign roles to each member.
- Stage 3. Carrying Out the Investigation. For this stage, multilateral communication is encouraged. Students can communicate with their teammates, with the teacher and with other groups in order to gather information, evaluate the data and reach conclusions.

- Stage 4. Preparing the Final Report of Final Product. Students decide on the content and format of their presentation. It has to be an oral presentation where all the members of the group participate and they should use a visual aid of their selection to help their exposition.

- Stage 5. Presenting the Final Product.

- Stage 6. Evaluation. An evaluation rubric can be used to assess each group's presentations. In this case, the teacher uses two evaluation rubrics, one for individual work and another one for the group performance evaluation. Students also receive the opportunity to give feedback through a peer evaluation worksheet.

To introduce the topic to the students in stage one, videos and readings will be used. For the research part of the task, as well as for the presentation of the final product, ICTs will be allowed, and students can use any resource they think will help them achieve the common goal. Thus, connexion to the internet will be needed. Ideally, the research part should take place somewhere the students have access to computers or tablets. If this is not possible, they can use their smartphones to do the research.

4.5. Key competences

In the second article of Real Decreto 1105 (2014), competence is defined as the "ability to apply in an integrated way the contents of each teaching and educational stage, in order to achieve the appropriate performance of activities and the effective resolution of complex problems" (p. 12368). Moreover, seven different key competences are established:

1. Competence in linguistic communication (CLC)
2. Competence in mathematics, science and technology (CMST)
3. Digital competence (DC)
4. Learning to learn (LTL)
5. Social and civic competence (SCC)
6. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (SIE)
7. Cultural awareness and expression (CAE)

These key competences are explained and divided into different aspects or components on the first appendix of Orden ECD/65 (2015). This project has been designed in order to develop six of the seven key competences mentioned above:

- **Competence in Linguistic Communication (CLC)** is related to communication "within given social practices in which the individual acts with other interlocutors and through texts in multiple modalities, formats and media using a multilingual repertoire, partial, but adjusted to the communicative experiences experienced throughout life" (p. 6991)

- **Digital Competence (DC)** is a competence that involves the "creative, critical and confident use of ICT to achieve goals related to work, employability, learning, leisure, inclusion and participation in society" (p. 6995).

- **Learning To Learn (LTL)** depends on "generating curiosity and the need to learn, on the students' feeling that they are protagonists of the learning process and outcome and, finally, on the achievement of the learning goals set and, thus, on the perception of self-efficacy" (p. 6997).

- **Social and Civic Competence (SCC)** is the "ability to use knowledge and attitudes about society to interpret social phenomena and problems in increasingly diversified contexts" (p. 6998).

- The competence of **Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship (SIE)**, in the sense of "choosing, planning and managing the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to achieve the intended objective" (p. 6999)

- **Cultural Awareness and Expression (CAE)** consists of "knowing, understanding, appreciating and valuing with a critical spirit, with an open and respectful attitude, the different cultural and artistic manifestations, using them as a source of personal enrichment and enjoyment and considering them as part of the wealth and heritage of people" (p. 7001). The development of this competence involves "personal attitudes and values of interest, recognition and respect for different artistic and cultural manifestations as well as valuing freedom

of expression, the right to cultural diversity and dialogue between cultures and society" (p. 7001).

4.6. Contents

The contents can be classified in two groups: topic content and second language (L2) content. The first one is made up of the different cultural topics that students will learn about through the tasks, while the second one is related to what is included in the legislation for students of English in 4th year of CSE. Regarding topic content, most of the content from the tasks is directly related to the vocabulary and grammar included in each module of the textbook. That way, students can review and put to practical use the knowledge acquired while studying the textbook.

4.6.1. Topic content

As it has been previously stated, topic content is related to each of the modules in the textbook: the general topic is the same in order to be able to implement this project in a cohesive and coherent way within the teaching process without disrupting the usual routine of the class. However, even though the general topic is very similar to that in the textbook, each group of students is assigned a specific subtopic directly related to a specific culture or country. This will be later explained in section 4.9. Materials.

Thus, the topic contents for this project are:

1. Module 1 Task: vocabulary on traveling, modes of transport, listing advantages and disadvantages of unusual modes of transport from different countries, describing countries.
2. Module 2 Task: vocabulary on architecture and buildings, describing beautiful buildings from different countries, making a short guide on the history and location of a place, describing countries.

3. Module 3 Task: vocabulary on immigration and refugees, describing cultural elements (food, clothes, language, music…) from two different countries and comparing them in order to better understand cultural difference.

4. Module 4 Task: vocabulary on fears, phobias, and creepy mythical creatures, describing traditional mythological creatures and superstitions.

5. Module 5 Task: vocabulary on animals, describing endemic animals and their countries.

6. Module 6 Task: vocabulary on fashion and traditional wedding dresses, describing traditional dresses from different countries, making a short guide on the history of the dresses, describing countries.

4.6.2. L2 content

The content from the legislation (Orden ECD/65, 2015) is presented, organized by blocks.

Block 1: Comprehension of oral texts

- Comprehension strategies: mobilization of prior information on type of task and topic; identification of textual type, adapting comprehension to it.
- Sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects: customs, values, beliefs and attitudes.
- Communicative functions: narration of past events, description of present states and situations.
- Syntactic-discursive structures: common oral vocabulary (reception) related to personal identification; environment; everyday activities; traveling; education; transportation; culture.

Block 2: Production of oral texts

- Strategies for producing oral texts: planning (adapting the text to the target audience, context and channel, applying the appropriate register and

discourse structure); execution (expressing the message clearly and coherently).

- Sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects: customs, values, beliefs, and attitudes.
- Communicative functions: description of physical and abstract qualities of people, objects, places, and activities.
- Syntactic-discursive structures: common oral vocabulary (production) related to personal identification; environment; everyday activities; traveling; education; transportation; culture.

Block 3: Comprehension of written texts

- Comprehension strategies: identification of textual type, adapting comprehension to it.
- Sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects: customs, values, beliefs and attitudes.
- Communicative functions: description of physical and abstract qualities of people, objects, places and activities. Offering information.

4.7. Assessment criteria

The following assessment criteria has been extracted from the legislation (Orden ECD/65, 2015) and is presented in blocks. Some learning standards are also included given that they provide a more specific criteria to assess students' performance and could be useful for the teacher.

Block 1: Comprehension of oral texts

Assessment criteria - Comprehension of oral texts.
- Identify main ideas, relevant information, and general implications of texts of a certain length, well organized and with linguistic structures of a certain complexity, in a variety of standard language and articulated at average or normal speed, dealing with cultural issues.
- Recognise common and more specialized oral lexis related to intercultural and migration issues.

Learning standards – Comprehension of oral texts.

- Understand the main points and relevant details in most radio and television programmes on specific topics (culture) when they are articulated relatively slowly and with a clear and standard pronunciation

Block 2: Production of oral texts.

Assessment criteria - Production of oral texts.

- Adapt oral text production to the required communicative functions the most appropriate discursive patterns for the communicative purpose
- Know, and be able to select and use, common and more specialized oral lexis related to one's own interests and needs in personal, public and academic contexts.

Learning standard - Production of oral texts

- Make well-structured presentations of a certain length on an academic topic clearly enough to be followed without difficulty and the main ideas are explained with reasonable accuracy.

Block 3: Comprehension of written texts.

Assessment Criteria - Comprehension of written texts

- Identify the essential information, salient points and important details in short, well-structured texts, written in informal or neutral register, dealing with every day or less familiar matters, topics of interest and containing commonly used structures and lexis, both general and more specific.

4.8. Assessment

To assess students' learning during this project, some rubrics[1] have been designed with specific performance criteria to fit the different stages of the tasks. The selected performance criteria are observable and measurable, and the

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[1] See Table 4. Rubric for Individual Evaluation (p. 28) and Table 5. Rubric for Group Evaluation (p. 29)

learning outcomes are well described. For the assessment of each student, two types of rubrics are used: one for individual work and another one for group performance when presenting their final product. The results obtained in these two rubrics will be combined and a final mark will be achieved. Apart from these two rubrics, a peer evaluation worksheet[2] has been designed in order to get feedback from the students about the project.

The decision to use rubrics as the main assessment tool has been rooted in the fact that the use of rubrics has many benefits. They contribute to student learning in many ways, as Wolf and Stevens (2007) state:

- Rubrics make the learning objectives clear. Students understand what the learning target is and know in advance the criteria for assessing their performance. This makes it easier for them to achieve the proposed goals.
- Rubrics also help teachers clarify their expectations and create learning environments that enable students to achieve the set outcomes.
- The assessment process is more accurate and fair. The teacher is more likely to be consistent in his or her judgement.

Even though rubrics seem to have many benefits, having one does not necessarily mean that the evaluation task is simple or clear-cut. They have to be properly designed in order to not diminish the learning process. Ideally, they should be developed for complex assignments and teachers should use their professional knowledge so that the rating process does not fall victim to personality variations (Wolf and Stevens, 2007).

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[2] See Figure 3. Worksheet for Peer Evaluation (p. 31)

4.8.1. Evaluating individual work

Individual Evaluation Rubric				
Category	**Excellent (4 p.)**	**Good (3 p.)**	**Fair (2 p.)**	**Needs to improve (1 p.)**
Contributions	Is always willing to help others. Always offers useful ideas.	Is willing to help others. Usually offers useful ideas.	Is not always cooperative. Sometimes offers useful ideas.	Seldom cooperative. Rarely offers useful ideas.
Teamwork	Always listens to and supports others. Leads the group.	Listens to and supports others. Does not cause problems.	Tries to listen and support others. Is sometimes distracted.	Rarely listens to others and causes distractions.
Focus on the Task	Always focused on what needs to be done. Self-directed and efficient.	Focuses on the task most of the time. Members count on this person.	Sometimes focuses on the task. Members must remind him/her to focus.	Does not focus. Lets others do the work.
Attitude	Always seems motivated to learn about the topic and is respectful towards cultural differences.	Often shows interest in the topic and is respectful towards cultural differences.	Shows some interest in the topic and is neutral towards cultural differences.	Does not show interest in the topic and is disrespectful towards cultural differences.
Individual Evaluation Points (out of 16):				

Table 4. Rubric for Individual Evaluation.

4.8.2. Evaluating group performance

Oral Presentation Performance – Group Evaluation Rubric				
Category	**Excellent (4 p.)**	**Good (3 p.)**	**Fair (2 p.)**	**Needs to improve (1 p.)**
Introduction and Conclusion	Introduces the group members and topic. Concludes with the main idea/findings of the research.	Introduces the group members and topic. Does not conclude with the main idea/findings of the research.	Does not introduce the group members or topic. Concludes with the main idea/findings of the research.	Does not introduce the group members and topic. Does not conclude with the main ideas/findings.
Organization	Speech is organized and structured. All group members participate equally in the presentation.	Speech is organized and structure is clear. All group members participate in the presentation, but not equally.	Speech is organized but structure is not clear. All members participate in the presentation, but not equally.	Speech is not organized and lacks structure. Some group members talk a lot, but other members do not participate.
Vocabulary	Uses a wide range of new vocabulary related to the topic and there is no repetition.	Uses quite a wide range of new vocabulary related to the topic and not a lot of repetition.	Uses some new vocabulary related to the topic.	Repeats words and does not use new vocabulary related to the topic.
Grammar	Uses a variety of grammatical expressions accurately without mistakes.	Uses a variety of grammatical expressions accurately with some mistakes.	Uses a few simple grammatical expressions without mistakes.	Uses a few simple grammatical expressions with mistakes.
Content	Shows a full understanding of the topic.	Shows a good understanding of the topic.	Shows a good understanding of parts of the topic.	Does not seem to understand the topic.
Materials	Uses high quality material directly related to their topic to support the speech in the right way.	Uses good quality material related to their topic to support the speech in the right way.	Uses material related to their topic but it is not high quality (or the other way around)	Does not use material related to their topic.
Oral Presentation Performance Points for the Group (out of 24):				

Table 5. Rubric for Group Evaluation.

The results of these two rubrics are to be combined (individual evaluation of the work and attitude in class + group evaluation of the final product) for the teacher to obtain a total mark out of 40 points for each student.

4.8.3. Peer evaluation

To get feedback from the students, a peer evaluation sheet has been designed to be handed out at the end of the task. The design of this worksheet is student-friendly and fun to make students more motivated to fill it in and engage. The peer evaluation sheet is divided into two parts: the first part, about group evaluation, where each student must rate their group's performance and their experience working as a team. They are also encouraged to write positive and negative feelings they might have regarding the project. The second part is a simple rubric where each member of the group must evaluate another member. It is important to have this individual accountability and to give the students the opportunity to report back to the teacher individual opinions and impressions about their group members. This feedback could help the teacher make changes in the groups or in the design of the tasks.

Figure 3. Worksheet for Peer Evaluation.

4.9. Materials

4.9.1. Authentic Materials

For the first part of the tasks, to introduce the topic to the students, a series of authentic materials in the form of several videos and one reading are used. All these materials show different authentic and personable stories related to each of the module's topic. In Table 3. Overview of the tasks (page 17 of this dissertation) links to these authentic materials can be found. Here, a few examples can be seen:

4. Baba Yaga (Russia)

In Slavic folklore, the *baba yaga* is portrayed as an old, skinny witch with dark magic and flies on a mortar instead of a broom. Also known as a forest spirit, she offers guidance to those who seek her help respectfully. Stories about *baba yaga* teach children about reverence to nature and its spirits. On the other hand, some people see her as an antagonist that kidnaps and enslaves those lost in the forest. Parents sometimes use her name to frighten their children from wandering far from home.

Figure 4. Excerpt from the introductory reading for Module 4: Fears and Phobias. Retrieved from https://gengo.com/language-and-culture/creepiest-mythical-creatures-from-around-the-world/
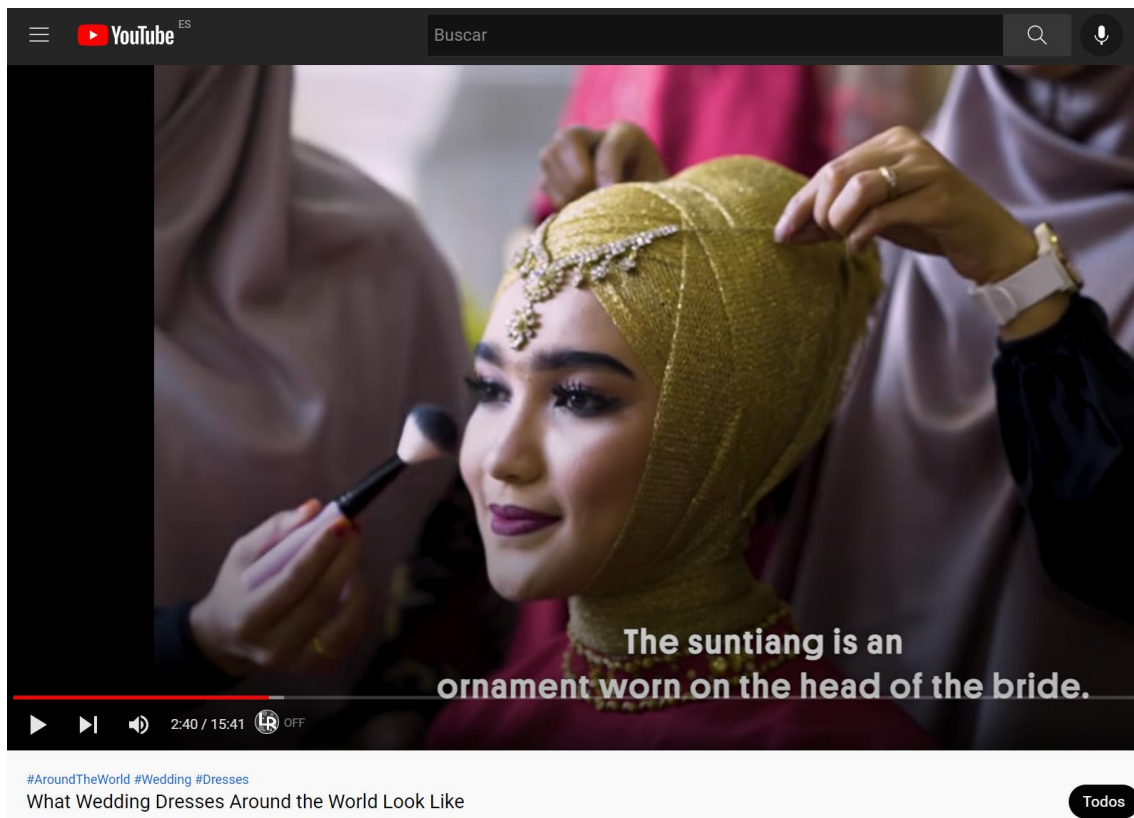
Figure 5. Image from the introductory video for Module 6: Fashion. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/cNxTlByUezo

4.9.2. Student Researcher Worksheets

For class, a series of original worksheets have been specifically designed for this project and would be shown to students during class to guide them through the different activities. Their design is student-friendly and shows clearly what the group investigations called Student Researcher tasks are about, while being colorful and entertaining. They include every part of the task and can be found attached, one for each module. They are the core of the project and show the different cultural topics and countries students can choose from to do their research. A wide variety of countries from all continents have been included to promote as many cultures as possible and to expand students' horizons and let them know about countries and cultures that they might have never heard about. The research starts from the time they see the countries' flags, because, as it has been stated previously, the countries' names are not written on the Student Researcher worksheets. Thus, before deciding on a topic for their group, they have to guess or look up which countries the flags are from.

In these worksheets, links to the authentic introductory materials are included, as well as prompt questions for the following discussions. Then, Research Topics are listed and each group picks one to do their research. The research of each group results in a final product which is an oral presentation with visual aid. In the worksheets, several guidelines for this presentation are included for students to structure their research and presentation accordingly.

Figure 6. Student Researcher Worksheet Module 1.

Figure 7. Student Researcher Worksheet Module 2.

Student Researcher
Module 3 – Cultural Differences

Introductory Video:
Audiobook: Lost and Found Cat
https://youtu.be/XR6IvBU9fUE

Discussion + Questions
Describe Kunkush's Family's Route?
Why did they flee their country?

🔍 Research Topics

ARCHITECTURE
ART
FOOD
MUSIC
RELIGION
CLOTHES
WEATHER
LANGUAGE

In groups

6 Groups of 4
1 group 1 topic
1 group 2 pairs

Presentation with visual aid

• Research and compare:

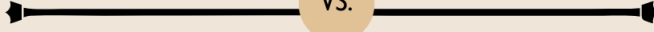1 PAIR   1 PAIR

| Food in Norway | VS. | Food in Iraq |

| Clothes in Norway | VS. | Clothes in Iraq |

| Religion in Norway | VS. | Religion in Iraq |

| Languages in Norway | VS. | Languages in Iraq |

| Weather in Norway | VS. | Weather in Iraq |

| Music in Norway | VS. | Music in Iraq |

Figure 8. Student Researcher Worksheet Module 3.

Student Researcher

Module 4 – Creepy Mythical Creatures

Introductory Reading:
Creepiest Mythical Creatures From Around the World https://gengo.com/language-and-culture/creepiest-mythical-creatures-from-around-the-world/

Discussion + Questions
Have you ever heard of these creatures?
Do you have creepy mythical creatures that are unique to your country?

In groups

6 Groups of 4
1 group 1 topic
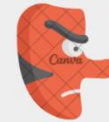
Research Topics
Famous Yokai from Japan
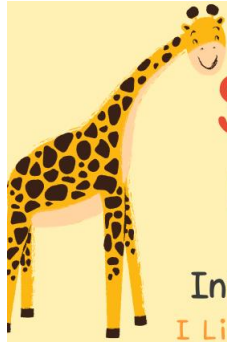
Kappa

Oni

Tengu

Kodama

Nekomata

Kitsune

Presentation with visual aid

- Introduce your group's yokai
- History, superstitions, where it lives.
- Can you find any content where it appears?

Figure 9. Student Researcher Worksheet Module 4.

Figure 10. Student Researcher Worksheet Module 5.

Student Researcher
Module 6 – Traditional Clothes

Introductory Video:
Wedding Dresses Around the World
https://youtu.be/cNxTlByUezo

Discussion + Questions
Name the countries that appear in the video
Rank their traditional wedding dresses
Are they similar to wedding dresses in your country?

In groups

6 Groups of 4
1 group 1 topic

🔍 Research Topics
Beautiful Traditional Dresses

Sari

Hanbok

Kimono

Karabela Dress

Kilts

Herero Dress

Presentation with visual aid

- Introduce your group's country
- Describe your group's traditional dress
- History, colours, style, where it's worn.
- Can you find any videos of people wearing it?

Figure 11. Student Researcher Worksheet Module 6.

4.10. Sessions

As it has been previously stated, the tasks are to be implemented at the end of each module and have a duration of three 50-minute sessions. They have a similar structure that is described in the following tables:

Session 1. Becoming familiar with the topic and the task.			
Time	**Activity**	**Objectives/Goals**	**Competences**
5'	Introducing the task using the worksheet	1, 2	CLC, DC, CAE
25'	Viewing of Introductory Material		
15'	Discussion on the topic		
5'	Dividing the class in groups.		

Table 6. Session 1.

Session 2. Research			
Time	**Activity**	**Objectives/Goals**	**Competences**
5'	Assigning Research Topics	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	CLC, DC, CAE, L2L, SIE, SCC
40'	Researching and organizing the groups' findings to be used in a brief oral presentation		
5'	Questions		

Table 7. Session 2.

Session 3. Final Products			
Time	**Activity**	**Objectives/Goals**	**Competences**
10'	Final preparations for the groups' presentations	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	CLC, DC, CAE, L2L, SIE, SCC
30'	Oral Presentations with visual aid (5' per group)		
10'	Final comments + Peer evaluation		

Table 8. Session 3.

5. EXPECTED RESULTS

The implementation of this innovative proposal in a 4th year of CSE English class aims to help students develop their intercultural sensitivity by exposing them to a wide range of cultural elements from many different cultures. Depending on their initial level of intercultural sensitivity, the results that students can achieve through this project differ. Students with a lower level of intercultural sensitivity are expected to at least acquire new categories to classify cultural differences when they face them and to become more tolerant to difference and learn to recognize it. Students that start the school year with a higher level of intercultural sensitivity will be able to acknowledge relativity and make a shift in their perspective towards ethnorelative stages. In general, students are expected acquire tools that are necessary to become intercultural communicators in the future.

Regarding the tasks themselves, students are expected to engage and have a higher motivation, given their active role and the use of technology and content in the form of Youtube videos, a platform that they frequently use and are familiar with. Engagement, emotion and motivation in students are very important because they translate into significant learning. The selection of authentic materials and relatable and entertaining stories as an introduction to the topics, as well as the role of the student as researcher are all intentional decisions that aim to increase curiosity and motivation so that they can learn about culture in a meaningful way.

Apart from learning culture, it is expected that students develop their social and problem-solving skills while working interdependently as part of a group. Other linguistic content and most of the competences that are included in the legislation and have been stated previously will be worked on too. Especially, their ability to research, organize and summarize their findings to give a structured oral presentation with visual aid in English will increase significantly, as well as their communicative competence. This is expected to be observed through the marks and results students obtain, collected in the rubrics. Their grade for each task should increase as the school year progresses and they

complete the different investigations, reaching their highest level of reflection towards cultural elements and developing efficient strategies to work efficiently and harmoniously as a group by the end of the year.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This innovative proposal is focused on increasing students' intercultural sensitivity while improving their English through authentic materials, group investigations and oral presentations. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of this project are listed below.

Even though the tasks are designed for each of the modules of a specific textbook, the selection of general topics that can be usually found in any English textbook, the structure of the project and the division in 3-sesssion tasks allows the teacher to implement it in their class whenever the timing allows it. Regular classes can carry on because the project only takes up three sessions per module, that is, less than one task per month. This will give teachers an opportunity to safely experiment with new methodologies and teaching techniques without it affecting the usual routine of the class.

Group investigations allow students to learn about cultural topics in an environment where they are the focus. Students learn more by doing than by listening and this dynamic is a good tool for teachers to implement more active-learning strategies to allow students to participate in the learning process as much as possible. This project focuses on interpersonal communication, the development of social skills and cooperative strategies to learn about different cultures, with the aim of giving students the tools that they will need to become intercultural communicators in the future. Even though students are expected to develop a wide range of competences and skills and achieve significant learning with this methodology, some students might prefer traditional lectures and even get the feeling that they learn more in a traditional class where they sit back and listen. Especially during the first tasks, if students are not familiar with the group investigation dynamic or with intercultural topics, feelings of frustration might arise when they face active learning and have to make a bigger effort and engage in deeper thinking processes to do the tasks. Active and significant learning is hard work, and this effort could be misinterpreted as a sign that they are not learning. A way to overcome this is to introduce the tasks as planned in this project, one 3-session task at the end of each module of the textbook, so that students view the tasks as fun, different activities to put into good use what they have learned and get a break from their textbook and their usual routine, instead of a change

that requires too much effort and is hard for them to cope with. Apart from this, the fact that all the tasks that have been designed are basically the same (only the topic changes) will help students get used to the new dynamic and way of learning faster and to get a feeling of self-efficacy as the school year progresses, because they will get more comfortable with the new way of learning and better at research and working in groups and this will translate into better results, which will hopefully let students know that they are actually learning significantly.

Regarding potential problems that could arise when trying to implement this project in a class, one of them is that the use of technology (computers preferably) is crucial for students to do the research. As they work in groups, it should not be too difficult to borrow a pair of computers or tablets per group, but not all schools have the resources. A possible way to overcome this problem would be to do the research part of the task in a computer classroom, if possible, or to allow students to use their smartphones, but the use of smartphones could lead to distractions.

All in all, the difficulties that have been mentioned previously have a plausible solution. Teachers ought to be flexible and adapt the proposal to their students and their context so that learners can make the most of their learning process. Even though difficulties might arise, the benefits of implementing this proposal outweigh them greatly. It is an opportunity for students to get out of their comfort zone and approach the learning process from a different perspective, one where they are the protagonists and responsible for their own learning. This active role will allow them to get a better understanding about cultural differences and reflect on different elements from cultures from all over the world. The group research dynamic will likely to involve difficulties and obstacles that they will have to learn to overcome as a group in order to achieve a common goal and the presentation of the results will give them an opportunity to play the role of topic experts and teachers. For the presentation to be successful they will need to have a good understanding of the topic they have researched. This goes far beyond simple memorization and results in deep and meaningful learning, something crucial in the developing of intercultural sensitivity, given that topics of multiculturality should not be learned superficially, but in an empathetic and meaningful way.

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