Fostering Intercultural Competence in Teacher Education: A Tri-National Co-construction Dialogue Experience

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Abstract

This article analyzes, through an interpretive case study, the usefulness of an experiential learning strategy—intercultural co-construction dialogues—to help student teachers from three countries improve their IC competencies. The study was framed into an interpretative case study. The fifteen participants engaged in dialogical activities over a four-month period using digital telecollaboration technologies and generated written and oral data that were coded in a collaborative manner. The analysis was based on Byram's (2021) intercultural communicative competence (ICC) model. The study measured the participating students' engagement primarily in two components of the ICC: intercultural attitudes and critical cultural awareness. The discussion highlights students' growth in key elements of critical cultural awareness such as suspension of judgment, ethnorelative perspectives, and glocal sensibilities. It is concluded that the intercultural co-construction dialogue strategy fostered the appreciation of global and local cultural knowledge and promoted critical awareness of social settings, highlighting the need for intercultural models in teacher education to support culturally sustainable pedagogies.

Keywords: Intercultural competence, telecollaboration, initial teacher education, co-construction dialogues, cultural awareness, intercultural attitudes.

Fomento de la competencia intercultural en la formación docente: una experiencia de diálogo trinacional de co-construcción

Resumen

Este artículo analiza, mediante un estudio de caso interpretativo, la utilidad de una estrategia de aprendizaje experimental -los diálogos de coconstrucción intercultural- para ayudar a estudiantes de magisterio de tres países a mejorar sus competencias en CI. Los quince participantes ejecutaron durante cuatro meses actividades dialógicas a través de tecnologías digitales de telecolaboración y generaron datos escritos y verbales, los cuales se codificaron de forma colaborativa. El análisis se basó en el modelo de competencia comunicativa intercultural (CCI) de Byram (2021). El estudio determinó el compromiso de los estudiantes participantes principalmente en dos componentes de la CCI: actitudes interculturales y conciencia cultural crítica. La discusión destaca el crecimiento de los estudiantes en elementos claves de la conciencia cultural crítica como la suspensión del juicio, las perspectivas etnorrelativas y las sensibilidades glocales. Se concluye que la estrategia de diálogos de coconstrucción intercultural fomentó la apreciación del conocimiento cultural global y local, y promovió la conciencia crítica de los escenarios sociales, lo que resalta la necesidad de modelos de interculturalidad en la formación del profesorado para apoyar pedagogías culturalmente sostenibles.

Palabras clave: competencia intercultural, telecolaboración, formación inicial del profesorado, diálogos de coconstrucción, conciencia crítica intercultural, actitudes interculturales.

Promovendo a competência intercultural na formação de professores: uma experiência de diálogo de Co construção trinacional

Resumo

Este artigo analisa, por meio de um estudo de caso interpretativo, a utilidade de uma estratégia de aprendizagem experiencial — diálogos de Co construção intercultural — para ajudar professores estagiários de três países a melhorar suas competências em CI. Os quinze participantes realizaram atividades dialógicas ao longo de quatro meses usando tecnologias digitais de tele colaboração e geraram dados escritos e verbais, que foram codificados colaborativamente. A análise foi baseada no modelo de competência comunicativa intercultural (ICC) de Byram (2021). O estudo determinou o engajamento dos alunos participantes principalmente em dois componentes do ICC: atitudes interculturais e consciência cultural crítica. A discussão destaca o crescimento dos alunos em elementos-chave da consciência cultural crítica, como suspensão de julgamento, perspectivas etnorrelativas e sensibilidades glocais. Conclui-se que a estratégia de diálogo de Co construção intercultural fomentou a valorização do conhecimento cultural global e local e promoveu a consciência crítica dos contextos sociais, destacando a necessidade de modelos interculturais na formação de professores para apoiar pedagogias culturalmente sustentáveis.

Palavras-chave: competência intercultural, tele colaboração, formação inicial de professores, diálogos de Co construção, consciência crítica intercultural, atitudes interculturais.

Promotion de la compétence interculturelle dans la formation des enseignants : une expérience de dialogue trinational de co-construction

Résumé

Cet article analyse, par le biais d'une étude de cas interprétative, l'utilité d'une stratégie d'apprentissage expérimental, à savoir les dialogues de co-construction interculturelle, pour aider les enseignants en formation pédagogique de trois pays à améliorer leurs compétences en CI. Les quinze participants se sont engagés dans quatre mois d'activités dialogiques en utilisant des technologies numériques de télécollaboration et ont généré des données écrites et verbales, qui ont été codées de manière collaborative. L'analyse était basée sur le modèle de compétence communicative interculturelle de Byram (2021). L'étude a déterminé que les étudiants participants s'engageaient principalement dans deux composantes de la CCI: les attitudes interculturelles et la conscience culturelle critique. La discussion met en évidence la progression des étudiants dans les éléments clés de la CCI, tels que la suspension du jugement, les perspectives ethnorelationnelles et les sensibilités locales. Il est conclu que la stratégie des dialogues de coconstruction interculturelle a favorisé l'appréciation des connaissances culturelles globales et locales et a promu la conscience critique des environnements sociaux. Cette approche devrait être encouragée dans la formation des enseignants pour soutenir des pédagogies culturellement durables.

Mots-clés: compétence interculturelle, télé-collaboration, formation initiale des enseignants, dialogues de co-construction, conscience interculturelle critique, attitudes interculturelles.

Introduction

The development of intercultural competence (IC) is a common goal in classrooms in different educational settings, so scholars and teachers around the world have proposed and researched different ways to promote and assess this competence in students (Alonso & Fernández, 2015; Byram, 2021; Moller & Nugent, 2014; Reid, 2015). A well-known strategy for developing IC is experiential learning (Kolb, 2014), in which students learn through their experiences by doing and reflecting on them. Thus, a group of professors from three American universities (Colombia, Ecuador, and the United States) decided to develop an experiential learning activity called "Intercultural Co-Construction Dialogues" to promote intercultural understanding among student teachers.

Following the principles of experiential learning, which includes virtual or face-to-face simulations in which students are immersed in specific scenarios while maintaining their identity (Rojas-Barreto et al., 2023), we explored telecollaboration as a strategy for assessing students' intercultural competence (Alghasab & Álvarez-Ayure, 2021; Guerrero & Meadows, 2015). During the telecollaborative experience, participants engaged in asynchronous and synchronous discussions to reflect on specific elements within their cultures in relation to those of others. These experiences represented a journey for the student participants, allowing them to virtually engage in a foreign culture while contributing to the improvement of their IC (Üzüm et al., 2020).

For this article, we decided to focus on the data collected through the *intercultural co-construction dialogues* strategy regarding the two components of the intercultural competence model proposed by Byram (2009; 2021) that reflect the development of (a) attitudes and (b) critical intercultural awareness both within and outside of one's cultural context.

Literature Review

Our understanding of the construct of intercultural competence is based on existing research related to foreign language teaching. Nevertheless, given the population of our study, this notion extends beyond language education to other educational domains. We understand intercultural competence as a set of skills that enable an individual to navigate effectively in settings where the social practices at play are unfamiliar and uncertain. Put another way, one objective for successful foreign language teaching is to provide students with skills they will use to integrate themselves into new communities outside of the immediate classroom setting.

The notion of intercultural competence in foreign language teaching has evolved since its early use in the 1950s. In those times, scholars approached IC through a structuralist lens, defining competence in terms of culture-specific forms of knowledge that were explicitly nationalized (e.g., Chinese culture, Brazilian culture, etc.). However, in later decades, scholars took up a poststructuralist orientation to re-interpret intercultural competence differently. With poststructuralism, the details of a cultural community are

no longer predetermined. Instead, they are revealed as newcomers who participates in the social practices shared by the community. Consequently, the role of the foreign language teacher changes. Since teachers cannot predict cultural details in advance, they must train language students to participate in unfamiliar communities. Students must also learn to build a localized understanding of the cultural community from the micro-interactional ground up. Byram and Wagner (2018) capture this evolution well when they note that "competence *in* culture has come to replace knowledge *about* culture" (p. 140).

With this theoretical grounding in the concept of IC we rely on two conceptual frameworks to build our data collection and analysis approach for this study. First, we use the *Bennett Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (Bennett, 1993). This model outlines six stages of development that language students may experience while working to develop their intercultural competence. The model is divided into two parts: ethnocentric and ethnorelative postures. Each category contains three distinct stages. The ethnocentric stages are denial, defense, and minimization. The ethnorelative stages are acceptance, adaptation, and integration.

The stages begin with a posture of denial in which an individual can only view the world through their own lens, misinterpreting their own social practices as a baseline "normal" for all others. As individuals move through the stages resulting from intercultural encounters, they ideally reach the sixth and final stage: integration. In this stage, one has become a "citizen of the world," one who can easily navigate between and across cultural boundaries, showing great fluidity.

The second conceptual framework is Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Byram, 2009, 2021). The model draws on cultural studies and anthropology to establish five distinct components. Known as savoirs, the components are (1) cultural knowledge, (2) skills of discovery/analysis, (3) skills of relating/interpreting, (4) attitudes, and (5) critical cultural awareness. is associated with specific competencies. The fifth component, critical cultural awareness, serves as the culmination of the other four savoirs. A student who has mastered the first four *savoirs* should be able to operate at a level of critical cultural awareness. Critical cultural awareness is crucial in teaching intercultural competence in general education. Consequently, it is placed at the center of Byram's model, "which symbolizes its importance as an element that ensures that language teaching has an educational function" (Byram, 2009, p. 325). Byram (2021) presents the following objectives for this component: Identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures; make an evaluative analysis of documents and events that refers to an explicit perspective and criteria; and interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges following explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's own knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The ICC model has been highly influential, especially in the Western European context and in foreign language classrooms at the adult level (i.e., higher education).

The model aims to develop "intercultural citizens" (Byram 2011) —one who is "able to engage in intercultural communication, to think and act critically, and to negotiate the complexities of today's world" (Byram & Wagner, 2018, p. 140).

Successful research studies have detailed language students' growth towards IC in various learning contexts including language classrooms, informal learning settings, and study abroad experiences. This research has established that IC is a viable and achievable learning objective for language education programs, as shown in several projects (Byram et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2017). Such methodologies entail the crucial skills students need to decenter from their taken-for-granted and unquestioned world perspectives to see how others see the world and "how others see us."

Following Walinski's (2012) point of view, we believe that it is essential to analyze, in addition to intercultural attitudes, the knowledge, interpretive and relational skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness that individuals exemplify in their cultural interactions with others. In addition to this, authors such as Hartmann and Ditfurth (2007) and Vo (2018) have reaffirmed that it is essential to account for the degree of curiosity, openness, respect, disposition, practices, empathy, multiperspectivity, and skills that individuals experience during such cultural interactions.

With this confidence in mind, our study aims to extend what is known about how language education programs can promote advanced intercultural competencies in students. Our setting is complex—three national settings tied together through telecollaborative digital technologies.

Methodology

This case study took an interpretive approach since reality is socially constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and the resulting interactions are inherent in knowledge construction (Lincoln et al., 2011). Consequently, knowledge cannot be considered universal but particular and multiple (Creswell, 2013). Bearing in mind this positioning, this study is designed as a case study, focusing on particularities (student-teachers' intercultural competence), contextualization (three language teaching degrees in three countries: Colombia, Ecuador, and the United States) and interpretation (co-construction of intercultural competence) (Duff, 2008). The integration of these three elements constitutes a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2003), which emerged from the telecollaboration among future teachers from two different South American universities and one North American university. Additionally, analyzing how the three groups engage and co-construct meaning about their own and foreign cultures is beyond the control of the researchers; hence, the phenomenon is considered a specific case for investigation.

The selection of participants was based on the open call in the three undergraduate teacher education programs. Since the activities were developed outside of class, student-teacher volunteers were required to conduct the study. Once each researcher from the three universities had five participants, they organized the participant volunteers into

groups of three people to complete the activities proposed in the research project. Each participant group was comprised of one member from each national location: Colombia, Ecuador, and the United States.

The student participants in Ecuador and Colombia were training to become English language teachers, while those from North America were preparing to become primary school generalist teachers. At the start of the project, all participants consented to using and analyzing the information they would contribute during the study. Additionally, they were asked to assign themselves a pseudonym for the study (Table 1). The participating students were between the fifth and seventh semester of their undergraduate degrees and agreed to be available to meet synchronously with their classmates regularly during the four months of the project.

Table 1. Groups for the Synchronous Encounters

	Colombian Student Teachers	**Ecuadorian Student Teachers**	**North American Student Teachers**
Group 1	Onix 401	Joja	Pam Halpert
Group 2	Viki 19	Robbie	Lutory K
Group 3	Lara 20	Dani	Kels Con
Group 4	Ground Hog	Garyl	Magy G
Group 5	Artcu17	Blad Sabbath	Saida Deljanin

The activities to be completed consisted of five workshops designed with an intercultural approach that promoted participant reflection and dialogue (Table 2). Each workshop was developed over three weeks; in the first two weeks, the students developed the written workshop (readings, videos, writing), and during the third week, they were to schedule their synchronous meeting to discuss the workshop topic.

Table 2. Schedule for the Development of the Activities

Cycle and Themes	**Date**
Cycle 1: International Food	September, 2021
Cycle 2: English as an International Language	October, 2021
Cycle 3: Intersectionality	January, 2022
Cycle 4: Social Manners: Etiquette in Different Cultural Contexts	February, 2022
Cycle 5: Indigenous Knowledge	February, 2022

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Thus, the data for this study came from three collaborative strategies involving student participants from the three universities. First, as part of the workshop activities, students engaged in an asynchronous online forum (F) to discuss cultural topics and establish a foundation for dialogue. Second, they participated in synchronous conversation sessions using available technological tools, termed synchronous encounters (SE). Two researcher-designed questions guided these discussions, but the student-teacher participants determined the direction and duration. The conversations were recorded and later transcribed. Finally, participants wrote reflections and recorded them in a journal (J) within a digital LMS platform.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the coding analysis based on the components of Byram's model allowed the emergence of two categories: Intercultural Attitudes and Critical Cultural Awareness. In each category, some subcategories emerged to complement the findings and to show how the students developed intercultural competence to relate to people from other cultures and to position themselves in the process. The categories and subcategories are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Categories and Subcategories

Categories	Subcategories
Intercultural Attitudes	• Rejection towards the difference: ethnocentrism. • Cultural relativism, respect, and acceptance of otherness • Valuing their own culture and individual identity.
Critical Cultural Awareness	• Expressing a critical position on a cultural issue • Recognizing cultural diversity • Challenging stereotypes

Source: Byram (2021)

Intercultural Attitudes

Following Byram's (2021) perspective, intercultural attitudes relate to speakers' attitudes within a third space (Kramsch, 2020) during intercultural encounters. In these interactions, individuals may exhibit openness, curiosity, rejection, or suspension of judgment, among other responses. In the data analysis, four categories were derived from the codification and reduction process: (1) rejection towards difference: ethnocentrism; (2) cultural relativism, respect, and acceptance of otherness; and (3) valuing their individual cultural identity.

Rejection of Difference: Ethnocentrism. In this first subcategory related to intercultural attitudes, we found that, at the beginning of this research, the participants

showed a high degree of rejection towards some cultural situations that we presented to them, which they considered different and not normal. That is, they showed ethnocentric attitudes. Ethnocentrism is "an attitude by virtue of which a person or community considers its own culture as superior to others" (Altarejos & Moya, 2003, p. 26). Ethnocentrism is judging different cultural practices from their own culture, labeling such practices as "not normal." These ethnocentric attitudes are represented in the following examples taken from the implementation of Cycle 1, where participants were exposed to information about different food dishes around the world:

> **C4: Artcu17, J1:** The first thing that comes to my mind is why would a person want to eat something like that?

> **C4: Blad Sabbath, J1:** I find it disgusting. I've never liked insects because they're so small and slippery, and I think if I ate insects, they would feel crunchy, and I would feel their tiny legs on my tongue, and that just creeps me out.

> **C3: Lara, F1:** … I will never be willing to eat any of those.

Nevertheless, after a group discussion in the synchronous encounter, the students showed greater openness and intercultural awareness, recognizing that they judged the food negatively and from their own cultural customs rather than that of their peers.

> **C4: Artcu17, J1:** When I read names like cockroaches, worms, or brains, I couldn't help but feel a little disgusted. But I also think about how being familiar with a culture influences our thinking. What if it is delicious? I am kind of curious about it.

> **C4: Blad Sabbath, J1:** It makes me think about what we perceive as "normal" because food is just an example, but really everything we perceive as normal is just a product of the culture we were raised in. So, while I think these meals might be weird, other people see it as perfectly normal…and yes, I might taste it, why not.

In the previous excerpts, the participants suggest that exotic food is not very appealing to them but is considered normal in other cultures. They understand that these are respectable customs that are normal for others. In this sense, although they do not share these traditions, they are curios and enthusiastic to learn about these aspects of the foreign culture. Curiosity is a relevant attitude represented in Byram's model, which states that stimulating curiosity is a goal commonly addressed by experiential learning techniques in general education (Deardorff, 2009). In that line of thought, Barrett (2013) and Yu (2012) state that being open and curious about others' cultures represents one of the fundamental attitudes of interculturally competent individuals. This change of attitude led us to pose the following subcategory.

Cultural Relativism, Respect, and Acceptance of Otherness. This subcategory deals with attitudes of cultural relativism, respect, and acceptance of otherness. Cultural relativism or ethnorelativism implies that "one's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures" (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 425). The following excerpt illustrates

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situations in which participants show attitudes of respect and acceptance for difference, i.e., a willingness to relativize one's own values, beliefs, and behaviors rather than perceiving them as the only possible and naturally correct ones (Byram, 2021):

> **C2: Onix, SE1**: Yes, exactly, so the bottom line is, we have to learn to accept different perspectives and not judge.

> **C2: Joja, SE2:** I mean, because, in general, Muslim women dress like that because of their religion, and that is undeniable, nobody has to interfere with that. It's very important to incorporate everybody's cultural beliefs and religious beliefs.

> **C3: Lara 20, SE1:** We have to get used to the culture of others even if it means if we are not normally used to that or if it's strange for us.

As noted, students emphasize the relevance of accepting each other, their customs, worldviews, values, and beliefs, avoiding judgment and contempt. These ethno-normative visions were present in the various intercultural co-construction dialogues, in which, after discussing and analyzing the given situation, and as a conclusion, the participants emphasized the need to accept otherness.

Generally, the participants identify the differences in the situations and then express their appreciation for that relationship. Thus, discussions in the synchronous encounters focused not so much on individual qualities as on the relative relatedness shared by two things or a set of things. Likewise, attitudes of cultural relativism, shown in other instances, recognize that some of the characteristics of their cultures may be uncommon to individuals belonging to other communities:

> **C4: Artcu17, F4:** For me, the concept of social manners is a set of rules that dictate how our behavior must be considered "polite." I am very familiar with the etiquette rules present in Colombia, like not making noise while chewing or apologizing for practically everything, which are things that make us who we are. I have heard that there is something that is strange for most foreigners. In Colombia, we drink chocolate with cheese, and although it is normal for us, it is not for people who come from another place. However, for me, the most Colombian thing is that we are all "neighbors" (even if we are not, we call each other *vecino*), and we applaud when the plane lands.

> **C4: Blad Sabbath, F4:** Being a social construct, social manners can vary from culture to culture, and behavior that might seem normal for us could be seen as rude, inappropriate, or just weird from another culture's perspective. A custom from my country that I think people from the outside might seem odd and even rude is that you're almost always expected to bargain when you're buying something. It's not that we're stingy; it's just that we expect the seller to inflate the price a little because they also expect us to bargain, so it's sort of an unspoken rule. However, someone from the outside might seem rude to try to bargain (and they may end up paying more than what the product actually costs).

These examples suggest that participants recognized and valued cultural diversity and understood that local behaviors might seem unusual to those from different cultural backgrounds. This awareness extended beyond international contexts to include local and regional cultures, as illustrated below:

> **C4: Blad Sabbath, SE4:** Once, when I was 13, I was visiting some family in another city, and I was staying there. I remember we had just finished eating, and I rushed off to play with my PlayStation. And they were like, what are you doing? Come back here and talk to us. I was like, OK. I mean, we don't do that in my family because we talk while we're eating, but we don't see a reason to stay there once we're done eating. But I guess people tend to do that, like standing and chatting for a while.

For all of the above, participants emphasize the importance of learning about the specifics of other cultures, which would demonstrate a high level of interest, openness, and willingness to learn about unfamiliar things. This can be seen in the following excerpts of the participants:

> **C4: Saida, J4:** I believe it is proper manners to know the basic etiquette of another country. The country's people will realize how much time and effort you put into learning these little things, but it will mean the world to them.

> **C4: Artcu17, J4:** One cannot come to a new place to commit recklessness in the name of ignorance. In addition, I consider that the experience will be more meritorious if the locals see that you have taken the time to study their culture and traditions; approaching the cultures of others with respect, some knowledge, and curiosity is the best attitude for a person in the role of traveler, it can also avoid many problems when it comes to relating to new people.

Given the above and following Kumaravadivelu's (2008) perspective, it is not only important to be aware of the local or global cultural circumstances that surround us. Beyond that, it is necessary to transcend such binary position, the legacy of modernist thought, and reach what is considered as "the glocal," which is nothing else than the intersection between the "local" and the "global"; this to develop what this author also calls "global cultural awareness." This aligns with what Bennett (1993) suggested as the final stage of interculturality: developing empathy for other cultures.

Valuing Their Own Culture and Individual Identity. Closely connected to the previous subcategory, we found that appreciation for one's heritage and identity became prominent throughout the different cycles of the project. Intercultural awareness is about valuing a second culture and recognizing and appreciating one's own. We must be aware that we have a particular, changing, and complex identity that makes us unique and special. The participants' exchanges below clearly demonstrate how they are aware of their heritage, ancestors, values, and all that we can learn from them. Even Joja, when referring to Indigenous communities, goes further and mentions how Ecuadorians could help the Indigenous communities they have in their country:

C2: Onix, F5: I talked about ancestral knowledge in our epistemology course at my university. There, we spoke about indigenous knowledge and how it can often give us healthier and naturally friendly solutions.

C5: Joja, F5: Throughout the years, Ecuador's educational curriculum has changed so that inclusion and acceptance are part of our learning. Inclusion of people from any culture, community, or belief. Acceptance for them as part of our environment. We do talk about ancestral knowledge and how we can bring a better future for their communities. How can we bring social economics advantages, and how can we connect our lives to them?

Additionally, it is not only the recognition of our ancestral roots and cultural heritage but also our identity as speakers of the Spanish language, in the case of the Latin American participants, who emphasize the importance of being proud of their Latino identity. Even Sarah (a North American participant) noted how her Ecuadorian roots (from her father's family) led her to participate in the study to learn more about her Latin heritage.

Critical Cultural Awareness

Critical Cultural Awareness is the ability to evaluate critically –based on a systematic process and explicit criteria– the values, practices, and products present in one's own culture and other cultures and countries (Byram, 2021). By "explicit criteria," we refer to the intercultural speaker having a rational and explicit point of view from which to evaluate. This implies two arguments: first, that the intercultural speaker has a morality that is consciously reflected in perspectives and grounded in rationality, and second, that the development of intercultural competence is not only about having some attitudes, skills, and knowledge, but also about becoming intercultural speakers who take positions on crucial issues related to both their mother tongue and their foreign language. Critical cultural awareness was the central category with the highest amount of data in each cycle in our study, confirming the centrality of critical intercultural awareness in Byram's model. This component has the following subcategories: Demonstrating a critical stance on a cultural issue, recognizing cultural diversity, and challenging stereotypes and prejudices.

4.2.1 Expressing a Critical Position on Cultural Issues (Revealing Inequalities, Marginalization, and Injustices). As its name suggests, the subcategory "expressing a critical position on a cultural issue" refers to how the students displayed an unambiguously critical position regarding topics arising from the project activities they were involved in (e.g., journal entry, the forum, and the synchronous meeting). The student-teachers started their synchronous discussions with the topics given by the teacher-researchers in the cycles, but through such discussions, some other topics emerged; among these central themes, we find machismo, feminism, discrimination, xenophobia, racism, marginalization, injustice, etc.

Firstly, the topic of machismo is familiar in all cultures, including Latin America. The following excerpt is part of a conversation in which two participants are critical and

express their discontent with the way society gives certain advantages to men. For the participants, it is women who must take on responsibilities that belong to both men and women:

> **C2, Onix, F3:** I'm a girl in a community that is a male chauvinist. People think that girls are below men. Men have more opportunities to overcome problems, and they have fewer worries about pregnancy, maternity, and so on, things that only girls are caring about. For that reason, we, as girls, need to prepare ourselves more to be able to handle many tasks simultaneously.

Likewise, in the example below, Saida acknowledges that women are discriminated against in society and that this heteronormative condition is present in several societal institutions, including education. However, the participant suggests that education itself is crucial to disrupting this phenomenon:

> **C3, Saida, SE3:** I feel that women are discriminated against in many different ways, especially when they work in a male-dominated field. I also believe that teaching is more female-dominated, so men probably feel that they are outcasts, and they should not feel that way. There is always some gender norm that we believe we need to live up to. Since we are all studying education, we must be aware of how students might be discriminated against in the classroom.

Another theme that emerges from the various cycles is discrimination and xenophobia. A first representative example is a discussion among participants about the accent of actress Sofia Vergara and how the Colombian actress was mocked and criticized for her English pronunciation. In the following example, the participant mentions how her pronunciation has played an important role in her career but could be a double-edged sword:

> **C2, Onix SE2:** Maybe in 2003, she wanted to do the opposite and try to kind of normalize her accent, use her accent to be more accepted in different roles because it could be a double-edged sword for her. I mean, the fact that she has such a strong accent. Well, she will be pigeonholed in that she can only play the role of a Latina woman or a person who is Latina or something Latino.

An additional example of cultural discrimination and xenophobia refers to the way mainstream individuals view immigrants. We found the following excerpts in which the participants mention how Latinos are expected to perform jobs less desired by the nationals of the countries, a phenomenon that, for these participants, occurs in any country where immigrants arrive in search of better opportunities:

> **C2, Onix, SE2:** We go to be the labor force, the working class that they do not want to be, because the majority of people, well, from the United States or Canada or those places, they think that those jobs are not for them, that they didn't study for that. They go to university to create their own company and work for it, or to work for an important company, with an important position, with a good salary, but not to go to take care of children, for example.

Similarly, in the following excerpt, North American student Sarah mentions how discrimination is perceived not only towards different cultures but also towards different types of jobs:

> **C3, Sarah, J3:** I am a college student, so I work part-time at camps, afterschool programs, and in food service. Some people look down on some professions just because of their status. Some professions might not seem much to some, but others have trouble finding jobs, and those jobs could be provided for them or their family.

In the same way, we found the student participants insightfully described relationships of privilege and marginalization, sometimes speaking about their own lives and other times regarding themes exposed in the cycle activities. In their answers, participants referred to issues of social marginalization and clearly expressed their stance against such practices, as seen in Sarah's intervention below. What is more, in her journal, Kels first describes issues of social marginalization of which she is aware. Yet, she affirms her pride in her identity and appreciates how each contributes to her uniqueness as an individual:

> **C3, Kels, J3:** I think the identities that subject me to marginalization or discrimination are my Hispanic heritage and my gender. As a person of Ecuadorian, Colombian, and Venezuelan descent who lives in a community that Caucasians largely populate, I often feel like I stick out of my surrounding group and am looked down upon. Furthermore, being a girl often causes me to not be taken as seriously as my male counterparts. However, I am proud of who I am and grateful for all of my identity affiliations! (Kels Con J3)

> **C3, Sarah, SE3:** I work in this really rich white town and stuff like summer camp. And the kids are like copies of their parents. They are privileged. They are rude, they think they're just above everybody and their children. I cannot stand them, I hate to say that about kids.

All in all, many of the previous examples evidence a high degree of critical intercultural awareness since they address everyday issues that have become challenges in their social and academic context. This aligns with Álvarez Valencia and Wagner's (2021) concept of critical decolonial interculturality, which "has the potential to expand ICC by targeting sources of discrimination that impinge on communicative encounters, mainly epistemic, ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, age, linguistic, political, regional, and religious" (p.10).

Recognizing Cultural Diversity. Cultural diversity is recognized by accepting how very different people and society are, even if they belong to the same region or country (Citkin & Spielman, 2011). This subcategory was applied to instances where students recognize diversity and relationships of otherness when talking about their cultures.

Embracing diversity requires knowledge about some specific cultural groups. According to Baker (2012), knowledge is essential for developing an awareness of cultural diversity, differences, and relativity. Still, such knowledge "has to be combined with an awareness of cultural influences in intercultural communication as fluid, fragmented, hybrid, and emergent, with cultural groupings or boundaries less easily defined and referenced" (Baker, 2012, p. 66).

In this sense, in the following quote, the participant Artcu17 states that if one intends to be exposed to cultural contexts different from one's own, it is of utmost importance to know the particularities of each culture (whether local, regional, national, or international), since becoming familiar with the specificities of other cultures would demonstrate a high level of interest, openness, and willingness to learn about them:

> **C4, Artcu17, SE4:** One cannot come to a new place to commit recklessness in the name of ignorance. In addition, I consider the experience more meritorious if the natives see that you have studied their culture and traditions. To summarize what has been said, approaching the cultures of others with respect, some knowledge, and curiosity is the best attitude for a person in the role of traveler. It can also avoid many problems when it comes to relating to new people.

Likewise, participant Lara 20 expresses the general principle that diversity is everywhere and that social norms are conventionalized, and as such, all cultural norms should be respected. Daniela adds that diversity is not only identified in terms of national affiliations, cultures, and traditions but also in terms of gender, race, age, language, etc.

> **C1, Lara 20, SE1:** I would think that in all the other pictures it will be the same because if we don't know the manners of another country, then we will be impolite, rude, maybe it will be a problem.

> **C1, Daniela, F1:** Well, to be honest, the first thing that comes to mind is that the languages are very similar; for example, the same thing happens in Spanish. There are different accents and meanings; even the Spanish of Spain, Ecuador, and Colombia are not the same. There is a lot of cultural variation. I actually find it very interesting.

In the same vein, the students highlight the importance of promoting recognition and awareness of diversity in children and adolescents:

> **C5, Sarah, SE5:** when I was like a toddler, when I was just starting to talk, the first time I saw somebody with, like, black skin, I screamed at them. And then, when I was literally a year and a half old, I had no idea. I was like, mommy, why is this person's skin different? And I just my mom was mortified. I'd never seen anybody of color before because my town is all white. So, it is definitely very important to get that into the minds of younger children.

> **C5, Joja, F5:** It would make the difference if we teach students the diversity of the communities in our country actually to realize how important it is to have cultural

awareness, which means to learn and accept the ancestral knowledge that our countries definitely have.

Finally, related to the aforementioned, valuing diversity means being empathetic to what is different and accepting that one's own customs may also be different, strange, and "not normal" for others. This is illustrated in the following example in which the participant states that while he considers some customs of his country to be normal, this may be strange and awkward for foreigners:

> **C4, Blad Sabbath, SE4:** Simply put, social manners refer to a set of behaviors one is expected to display when interacting with other people. Being a social construct, these sets of manners can vary from culture to culture, and behavior that might seem normal for us could be seen as rude, inappropriate, or just weird from another culture's perspective. A custom from my country that I think people from the outside might seem odd and even rude is that you're almost always expected to bargain when you're buying something. It's not that we're stingy; it's just that we expect the seller to inflate the price a little because they also expect us to bargain, so it's sort of an unspoken rule. However, someone from the outside might seem rude to try to bargain (and they may end up paying more than what the product actually costs).

Challenging Stereotypes. In its simple form, stereotypes constitute surface-level knowledge of one social group held by another. Lebedko (2014) states that stereotypes are pervasive and vary typologically in social, cultural, national, territorial, political, or gendered terms, where the most dangerous and harmful are racial and ethnic.

In our study, participants demonstrated awareness of the existence of stereotypes about different cultures. However, what was most found in the discourse data were instances where students expressed feeling stereotyped as part of a culture and what they were expected to be by belonging to that culture in terms of physical and behavioral traits. The following excerpts illustrate the above:

> **C3, Lara 20, F3:** As a Colombian myself, I am qualified into so many stereotypes, which is not a good thing because we are related to drugs and prostitution just because we are from Colombia (Lara 20 F3).

> **C3, Sarah, SE3:** There's like such stereotypes for what you're supposed to look like with your ethnicity and your culture and everything. And if you don't fit that stereotype, people judge you or think you're lying. When I tell them, I'm a pretty big part of Ecuadorians, they're like, there's no way, that I lied about that, but, you know, people need to open their minds a little bit.

The results of this final category highlight the growth of critical intercultural awareness among participants, showing their progression towards becoming intercultural citizens. They critically engaged with issues like machismo, discrimination, and stereotypes, demonstrating "criticality" as Porto et al. (2018) defined—the ability to foster personal and social transformation through intercultural dialogue. This involves exploring, analyzing, and critically evaluating both one's own culture and that of others. Participants

recognized and empathized with cultural diversity and valued it, encompassing both international and local-regional cultural dynamics. Specifically, Latin American students expressed pride in their indigenous heritage, emphasizing the contributions of ancestral cultures, including traditional medicinal practices and environmental stewardship.

Conclusions

The primary objective of this paper was to provide a case study account of a strategy we called intercultural co-construction dialogues to promote students' development towards interculturality. The discourse data collected and analyzed show that, in implementing the strategy, the student-teacher participants most exercised the ICC components of *Intercultural Attitudes* and *Critical Cultural Awareness* in their dialogue activities together over four months. We now turn to conclusions and implications from the data analysis results in the previous section.

First, a resignification of what it means to be an interculturally competent individual was perceived in the data. Although at the beginning of the four-month project, the participants demonstrated traits such as immediate and closed judgments in the face of some of the situations discussed, the data show that as a result of their participation in the workshops and their regular interaction with their counterparts, the participants achieved a "suspension of judgment" and eventually came to finally demonstrate an understanding of the fact that all cultures have certain characteristic traits that are inherently valid for their contextual setting (even if we do not agree with or do not like them). These traits are directly connected to the existing diversity. It should be noted that talking about "closed judgments" does not imply a lack of interest or curiosity but an understanding or openness to certain cultural customs, such as eating strange food.

Regarding this same item, it can be affirmed that the participants not only developed a much more open perspective towards the knowledge and characteristics of cultures other than their own, but were also able to take a more critical stance towards social scenarios in which privileges and disadvantages are assigned according to one's identity. Given this, we can determine that the participants gradually moved from what is known as "an ethnocentric perspective" (i.e., analyzing everything and making judgments based on one's own culture) to what is also known as an "ethno-relativistic perspective," which involves assuming a much more open and understanding position regarding unfamiliar social scenarios.

Second, as previously mentioned, after the implementation of the workshops, participants showed a growing interest in 'glocal' aspects, that is, the intersection of global and local perspectives. This was especially evident after the cycle, which focused on ancestral knowledge. In this cycle, the students analyzed the dissemination of Western knowledge within their countries' formal educational system and were able to contrast it with knowledge from their social contexts. For example, some of them said that their grandparents had used lunar cycles for their crops. Still others highlighted the use of

medicinal plants native to their people to treat physical ailments. In this sense, we can affirm that the work carried out in the different cycles helped to value and strengthen their individual and social identities.

Likewise, in terms of describing the participants' positions on the cultural and intercultural aspects that emerged from the peer conversations, we found that during the telecollaboration process, participants in different geopolitical spaces demonstrated their different positions on their own and foreign cultural aspects. From this observation, we can conclude that the student participants experienced an evolution of their cultural identities, constituted by interactions with their peers from other countries. As the opportunities to interact with people from other countries increase, their understanding of each other as cultural beings expands, and their cultural identity and positioning changes.

The participants' data highlight the need to promote intercultural models in teacher training programs that foster a more critical perspective on interculturality. Future teachers need to understand that interculturality goes beyond the mere coexistence of individuals from different national cultures. There is a prevailing essentialist tendency to equate interculturality with mutual understanding between national cultures, often overlooking cultural diversity at the regional and local levels. Instead, it is crucial to explore how interculturality can enhance coexistence within one's own cultural territories. In this context, studying indigenous, Afro-American, and other minority epistemologies and cosmogonies becomes essential. This has been supported by national and international scholars such as Dervin (2016) and Álvarez Valencia and Wagner (2021), who state that the incorporation of decolonial, critical, and emancipatory lenses in intercultural frameworks, as well as the goal of exploring the identities and territories of individuals, can foster culturally sustainable pedagogies and a broader acceptance of diverse forms of "diversities."

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Ethical Implications

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