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Teaching Culture in the Argentinian EFL Classroom: Beliefs, Practice and Challenges

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by

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Abstract

The need to address culture in EFL/ESL classrooms has been stressed by scholars in the SLA field for decades (see Kramsch, 1993, 2009, 2011; Byram, 1988; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). The original intention of working with culture in the English classes as a means to develop language proficiency –sociocultural competence– was expanded, and nowadays, the focus is on the role culture instruction has in developing empathy and respect for other ways of living and in promoting reflection about learners' own lifestyle –intercultural competence (Byram, 1988, 2008; Deardoff, 2006). This new focus on cultural instruction is reflected in national curriculums around the globe (Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015). However, in most cases, curricula do not offer clear guidance to teachers on how to address this relevant topic in their classrooms explicitly, which is the case of the Argentinian national guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages (*Ministerio de Educación de la República Argentina*, 2012) and the Buenos Aires Province curriculum (*Dirección General de Cultura y Educación de la Provincia de Buenos Aires*, 2011). Moreover, little is known about what Argentinian teachers know about culture instruction, the objectives they perceive as underlying the need to address it, and their actual practice tackling the topic. This case study seeks to fill this gap and collaborate to the EFL field by exploring Argentinian EFL Secondary School teachers' beliefs about culture and its teaching and the way they address it in their classrooms in Mar del Plata, Argentina, through the use of questionnaires, a follow-up interview, and written class artifacts and following a qualitative content analysis approach. The findings of this research

revealed a mismatch between theory and practice when it comes to culture instruction, and the challenges teachers often face when working with it. These findings are expected to inform current EFL teacher practices as well as future teacher preparation through a localized lens.

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter One

Introduction

With over a billion speakers who use it for international communication (Jenkins, 2015), English is the most widely spoken foreign language in the world. An invaluable resource for finance, medicine, and many other fields, the English language has found its way into the formal and informal education systems of countries worldwide, with guidelines as to how to teach it reflected on institutional syllabi and other governmental documents. But what it means to be a competent English speaker is a matter of much debate (Jenkins, 2015). In the past, to be able to understand it in written form and translate it was enough, but in the mid 20th century, scholars in the field (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972) expressed the need to also teach appropriacy and cultural cues in the foreign and second language classes, as understanding the context of use what just as important as understanding grammatical rules to develop proficiency. This new view of cultural knowledge as a competence within communicative competence sparked discussion on the teaching of culture in the EFL/ESL classroom.

To the original intention of addressing culture in the English classes as a means to develop language proficiency –sociocultural competence– was added the notion that learning about other cultures helps develop empathy and respect for other ways of living and promotes reflection about learners' own lifestyle –intercultural competence (Byram, 1988; Deardoff, 2006). In this way, culture instruction –through the means of foreign language teaching– served more than proficiency; it helped develop understanding between people of different backgrounds; an objective that

many nations sought as a way to promote coexistence within their multicultural

borders: "the goal of language teaching should now be to educate language learners to

become competent in communicating with both native and non-native speakers of the

target language, as well as to be critically reflective of their own culture (Byram,

2008; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, as cited in Nguyen, p. 165). With this increased

focus on the teaching of culture over the past decades (Byram, 2007, as cited in

Nguyen et al., 2016; Sercu, 2006) national curriculums around the globe have

included intercultural competence within their guidelines for the teaching of

languages (Feryok & Oranje, 2015; Salcedo & Sacchi, 2014). This is the case for the

curriculum design for secondary school, foreign languages section, in the Republic of

Argentina.

Argentina is a country in the southern cone of South America. It has over 45

million inhabitants, who, on average, have the highest proficiency of English in Latin

America (Friedrich, 2020). When referring to the status of English in Argentina, Porto

and associates (2016) describe it as the most widely taught foreign language in the

nation. In the 1990s, English as a foreign language became mandatory in the

Argentinian schooling system from the fourth grade onwards. The Argentinian

curriculum design for middle and high school (2012) states that one of the purposes of

studying a foreign language is that of raising awareness of other cultures, promoting

the education of citizens that respect linguistic and cultural differences [both within

and outside of Argentina], favoring attitudes that promote new ways of coexisting in a

world of sociocultural and linguistic diversity (*Ministerio de Educación de la

República Argentina*, 2012). This aligns with the aims in other official documents,

which also look at addressing differences within a nation's population or to encourage fraternity among countries (See Council of Europe, 2016 for an example).

National documents that guide foreign language instruction highlight the role the teaching of culture has in formal schooling, and in the case of Argentina, in the foreign languages class in particular. However, as is the case of many of federal documents (Feryok & Oranje, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2016), the Argentinian curriculum design does not provide teachers with enough information so as to know exactly what is meant by 'the teaching of culture,' which leaves the approach to teaching culture open to the interpretation of the instructors and school authorities, who may have different views on it, or may be unsure as to how to address it in the EFL classroom (Feryok & Oranje, 2015). Research has been done on the current practices related to the teaching of culture in the English classrooms in Argentina (Ferradas, 2007; Lopez Barrios & Villanueva de Debat, 2007; Moirano, 2012; Salcedo & Sacchi, 2014), however, to the best of my knowledge, teachers' beliefs and their practices in relation to culture in EFL classrooms have not been researched in this context. This gap in the literature has led me to carry out this case study so as to analyze the treatment of culture in EFL classrooms in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Such an understanding will inform current EFL teacher practices, as well as future teacher preparation, through a localized lens.

Statement of purpose and research questions

In spite of the long-discussed relevance of the role culture plays in the foreign/second language class (Kramsch, 2009; Moirano, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2016; Sercu, 2006), in practice, many teachers still associate teaching culture with providing

students with a series of cultural facts about target cultures (Nguyen et al., 2016, Salcedo & Sacchi, 2014) and the materials that they use either disregard culture altogether, or present it in dissatisfactory ways; examples of this are materials featuring limited representations of cultures –the USA and the UK being the most represented ones– or cultural knowledge presented as sets of facts that are not related to the students' contexts (Ferradas, 2007; Feryok & Oranje, 2015; Lopez Barrios & Villanueva de Debat, 2007; Moirano, 2012; Nguyen et. al, 2016; Salcedo & Sacchi, 2014). Kramsch (1993), one of the leading and most prolific researchers on the topic, has warned against viewing the teaching of a language and the teaching of culture as two separate matters, in what she referred to as the 'language versus culture' dichotomy. The researcher explained that "culture is often seen as mere information conveyed by the language, not as a feature of language itself; cultural awareness becomes an educational objective in itself, separate from language" (p. 8). However, viewing teaching culture in such a way would be a mistake, she says, as culture cannot be addressed as a separate skill; it underlies all other skills as an inseparable trait of using a language (Kramsch, 1993).

  In addition to the problems with understanding what is meant by culture and how it interacts with language, other controversies come into play when putting into practice cultural instruction. What teachers believe about intercultural competence; whether it can be taught, and how it can be taught, play a paramount role in real life classrooms (Nguyen et al., 2016; Salceco & Sacchi, 2014). In a study of a similar nature to this, Nguyen and colleagues (2016) explained how "[t]eacher beliefs and reflections are important in this context because they impact directly on teachers' attitudes to practice, professional development and students' learning outcomes"

(Timperley et al., 2007; Wong 2013, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 165). It is for this reason that I specifically sought to explore teachers' beliefs about the teaching of culture and how –or whether– what they believe is reflected in their classrooms. The following are the research questions guiding this study:

a) What do practicing EFL teachings in Mar del Plata, Argentina, believe about the teaching of culture in their classrooms?

b) How do high school teachers in Mar del Plata, Argentina represent culture in their EFL classes?

I seek to answer these questions while informed by current scholarship about intercultural competence (Byram, 2008) and third culture (Kramsch, 1993). While doing so, I aim to increase understanding on how Argentinian EFL teachers approach the teaching of culture in secondary schools in Mar del Plata, Argentina; which will prove useful to the teachers themselves, and to teacher educators. Policy makers can potentially benefit from this study too.

Positionality Statement

I first became interested in the topic of addressing culture within the foreign language classroom after being selected as a cultural ambassador in a Fulbright FLTA cultural exchange, cohort 2020-2021. My role as a Spanish TA for first and second year students in a small private college in Iowa, USA was to teach about Latin American, particularly Argentinian culture, as a way to broaden students' minds and help them understand people with different views. However, what I was teaching was hard for me to put into practice. Being my first time in the USA, I experienced severe culture shock, and I first struggled understanding American (Midwestern) values and

beliefs. As time passed, I realized how being exposed to new lifestyles opened my eyes to other ways of seeing the world, and even about new ways to see my own culture. I soon developed an intense curiosity for the relationship between empathy, acceptance, and coexistence of people with different backgrounds and the teaching of languages.

After teaching Spanish in Iowa, I came to Minnesota to pursue a Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. As a graduate student at MNSU I worked as a TA in a multilingual class, where I had students from all over the world. During this time at MNSU I continued to be exposed to a variety of cultures and my interest for intercultural competence development cemented. These experiences have shown me the relevance of working with culture in the formal schooling system; particularly in the EFL classroom, and they have prompted me to carry out the case study that resulted in this thesis.

Relevant to this thesis is the fact that I had already taught English as a foreign language in Argentina for years and knew that culture has a space in the curriculum which does not always translate into the class. I worked in Mar del Plata, Argentina, teaching English as a foreign language in similar institutions where this research was conducted. Moreover, I share educational background with most (if not all) of the participants, which may cause the participants and I to share some views on the role of teaching culture in the classroom. This is important because

> The positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes" (Foote & Bartell, 2011, as cited in Holmes,

2020, p. 3).

In this case, my connection with the context may have shaped how I tackled this work, as my knowledge of a possible difference between theoretical beliefs and actual practice when tackling culture steered me towards choosing to compare and contrast these two in my study. My being acquainted with the context may have also influenced participants' responses, who sometimes took for granted that I knew their context and assumed I felt the same way as they do in some of their responses.

Conclusion and Overview of Thesis

In this chapter, I have provided a brief overview of the reasons why many governments have included culture instructions in their foreign language syllabi and the challenges behind the teaching of culture in EFL classes. I have then presented the purpose I am after with this case study research, and the research questions I intend to address after carrying it out. Next, I include a brief explanation of the organization of this thesis to help readers navigate it.

Chapter Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized in five chapters. After the introductory chapter follows a literature review in which I seek to provide some clarity on ambiguous terms or new concepts that are relevant in this study. I will walk readers through the several definitions of the term "culture," a word that has proven problematic to explain but, in its many forms, guides the teaching of culture in EFL classes. Other concepts like intercultural competence and third culture, which will play a crucial role in the interpretation of this study, are also elucidated. Relevant background information on

Argentina is also part of the literature review, as the teaching of culture is a topic that has been previously explored in other places in the country. Moreover, as the focus of this study is on teachers' beliefs and practices, previous research on the topic is presented, which will guide the analysis of this case study and will enable readers to pinpoint the role culture is given in EFL instruction around the globe and the most common challenges teachers face when addressing it.

The third chapter provides details about the research approach followed, a case study, and makes a distinction between this and other qualitative approaches. The chapter explains the appropriateness of using a case study to delve into this topic, as culture will be analyzed in context so that the reasons behind the way it is approached can be observed and studied in detail in the hopes that it will be useful for teachers and policy makers alike. Then, a description of the participants and research context is offered, as the latter is relevant when making sense of data in this case study. My data-gathering methods, survey, semi-structured interview, and class artifacts are also explained. The third chapter also includes a discussion on the trustworthiness of this study and the ethical factors considered when carrying it out. Finally, I explain my data analysis process before introducing the following chapter.

The fourth chapter in this thesis revolves around my findings, which are thematically categorized and presented as they pertain to each research question. The themes regarding the first research question, teacher's beliefs about the teaching of culture, are the relevance of teaching culture and the purpose of teaching culture. The themes about the second research questions, how teachers represent culture in their classrooms, are a disconnect between theory and practice, and main challenges when teaching culture. A discussion follows, in which I make sense of the aforementioned

themes in the context of this study, and I compare findings with my previous literature review. The main focus of my discussion section is the importance of teaching culture and whether it translates to the classroom, the lack of explicit objectives, the broad conceptualizations of culture that teachers have, along with the difference between theory and practice in relation to culture teaching. I also discuss the development of intercultural competence, and culture treatment through Comprehensive Sexual Education.

A final chapter, Chapter 5, addresses the implications of this study and presents suggestions for future research. This case study reinforced the need for Argentinian EFL teachers to be provided with clearer guidelines on what the teaching of culture is, which should be part of the Curriculum Design for the Province of Buenos Aires. A clearer definition(s) of culture is needed, and explicit objectives would facilitate the tackling of this topic in the formal school system. Teacher educators, school authorities and policy makers may also want to focus on teacher collaboration, as teacher isolation was a major finding in this study. Moreover, the lack of materials indicated that teachers need to have more readily available materials to approach culture, which could be offered by education authorities and/or textbook writers. Other implications pertaining to textbooks is the need to include a wider variety of cultures in EFL materials.

Chapter Two

Literature review

Teachers understand culture in multiple ways, and many times, how they define it and how they address it in class do not match. The term entails so many concepts that numerous definitions within the education field have been given throughout the years. However, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) highlight "[t]here is a need in language teaching and learning to develop a more nuanced understanding of the nature of culture and the ways in which culture can be investigated in the language classroom" (p. 17). Research on the matter (Feryok & Oranje, 2015; Sercu, 2006) has found that this lack of clarity on what culture means and what curricula actually say about it has become an issue when explicitly addressing the topic in EFL/ESL classrooms. It is my intention to explore how EFL teachers in Mar del Plata, Argentina understand culture, what they believe about its teaching and how they represent culture teaching in their secondary school classrooms. To inform and guide my study, I have explored what researchers have written about culture in the context of language teaching.

Below, I provide a brief historical account of how the teaching of culture gained attention in the field, followed by a few definitions given by prominent scholars (Byram, 1988; Kramsch, 1993, 2009, 2011; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) in the matter that will feed discussion on the possible ways the term could be understood in the language classroom. Then, I include an overview of the third place and intercultural competence; concepts that are necessary to better understand how to develop intercultural speakers and successful foreign language users. After the

theoretical discussions on the term culture and cultural competence, I address the issue of identifying target cultures and languages in the EFL classroom. The role the teaching of culture has in national curriculums, teachers beliefs on the matter, and materials typically used in the EFL classroom are also discussed. The last part of this chapter is devoted to providing context about Argentina, the recent inclusion of comprehensive sexual education in its curriculum (its relation to culture is also explained) and how–or whether– it promotes the teaching of culture.

A Brief Historical Overview

During the first part of the 20th Century, the teaching of languages was mostly concerned with knowledge of language and grammar rules (Canale & Swain, 1980; Brown, 2014) and little to no attention was paid to the cultural context in which languages were to be used. In 1972, Hymes explored the relation between the linguistic and other communicative systems and offered a theory of what having competence in a language means. This theory divides knowledge (and ability) of a language into four areas, which Canale and Swain (1980) briefly summarize as "grammatical [...], psycholinguistic [...], sociocultural [...], and probabilistic [...] systems of competence" (p. 16). The third ability, context and appropriateness of use, which Hymes was among the first to openly discuss, will be a particular focus. In spite of these advances away from a focus on grammar in SLA, by 1980, the most widely used approach to teaching languages seen in languages material was still grammar based (Canale & Swain, 1980). Canale and Swain (1980) continued exploring what was meant by having communicative competence in a language and offered a theoretical framework which understood the term as composed of

grammatical, sociocultural, and strategic competence. The third notion, that of sociocultural competence, explicitly referred to the need to understand cultural rules to make meaning when using a second/foreign language. An implication for this is the need to address sociocultural aspects of foreign languages in the languages class. Since then, the teaching of culture has received more attention in the ESL/EFL fields, and the initial objective of teaching culture to aid language acquisition was expanded, as is shown in a document issued by the Council of Europe in 2016, which explicitly states that knowledge and critical understanding of different cultures is necessary to promote intercultural dialogue in culturally diverse societies as opposed to just aid language use. However, many professionals in the field continue seeing culture as mostly –or solely– aimed at aiding language acquisition, as was the case of several participants in this study. Moreover, tackling cultural aspects in the classroom continues to be an issue, and educational institutions and educators seem to disagree on what they understand by culture in itself and how to address it. Scholars in the field have defined the term in various ways. Following, I offer some of the most relevant definitions of culture which have informed this work.

Defining Culture

Defining the term culture has proved problematic. Several definitions have been provided by referents on the matter, many of whom have changed or enlarged their own understandings of culture throughout the years. Lack of a unified understanding of the term helps see not only how wide and encompassing the word "culture" can be, but it will later explain the lack of unity among English teachers

when it comes to addressing it in class, as was the case of the participants in this case study.

In 1988, Michael Byram referred to the three possible understandings of the term and explained that one of them is "the 'ideal,' in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain universal values" (p. 80). This definition would present culture as something to aspire; one associated with an evolved version of oneself. The second definition of culture is a common one in school curriculums and books: "culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded" (Byram, 1988, p. 80). In this second case, the culture of a certain group of people is seen as the collection of art and literature it has produced. This is the classical way of understanding learning and teaching, in which teachers seek to deposit knowledge into students' minds and expose them to art and literature of the world's (probably Western) canon was central to education. Byram's (1988) third definition is 'social': "a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior" (p. 80). Here, culture transcends the products of a society and permeates into its members' daily lives and the institutions that regulate and reproduce that society's norms. Years after presenting these various ways of understanding the concept, Byram chose one as guiding his work in a 2008 book: [culture makes reference to] "shared beliefs, values, and behaviors of a social group" (Byram, 2008, p. 60). This stands close to his last definition in 1988, but adds the idea of something that is shared, although it is not clear who shares it. This idea of culture as "shared" by various and ill-defined groups of people is repeated in subsequent definitions, and

was used by teachers in this study, who offered various ways of understanding the term, as well as various groups of people with which to associate the term.

Another notorious scholar in the matter is Claire Kramsh, who has changed the way she defined culture throughout the years until she reached the idea of a third culture, a concept that will be explained further ahead in this thesis. In relation to the term, in 1993 Kramsch defined culture as "membership in a national community with a common history, a common standard language and common imaginings" (Kramsch, 2011, p. 355). Culture is here associated with nations, and in many cases, a common territory members of the same cultural group inhabit. Years later, the author proposed that culture be understood as a "more portable notion that had to do with the construction of meaning and imagined communities" (Kramsch, 2011, p. 355), in a conception that seems to move beyond the nation-state and related to discourse communities and their shared meanings. However, the scholar then provided a definition that most closely resembles the third one given by Byram when in 2011 she proposed culture be seen as "associated with ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs, created and manipulated through the discourse of the media, the Internet, the marketing industry" (Kramsch, 2011, p. 355). The addition of the role media has in shaping and establishing culture is new, and it is an element that even later definitions lack.

Acknowledging that the multiplicity of ways in which culture has been understood has and continues to affect teaching, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) offer some understandings of the word while trying to get closer to a definition that will serve the development of intercultural competence, another concept that will be addressed later in this chapter. According to the authors (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), within the field of education culture has been understood in numerous ways:

1. As national attributes

2. As societal norms

3. As symbolic systems

4. As practices

Liddicoat and Scarino's first definition resembles the one provided by Kramsch in 2011, in which a culture is associated with a territory in which people with similar backgrounds live. This was the most common association among participants in this study too, who referred to whole countries –usually Inner circle ones (Kachru, 1992a; 1992b, see section below) – to refer to target cultures. Defining cultures in terms of countries is problematic as cultures are not homogenous within the borders of a nation-state, and many nations do not share a common territory either. This overly simplistic view on the term has led scholars to move to different ways of seeing culture. It is interesting to note, however, that this definition also encompasses culture as "high culture, that is, as the valued artifacts of a particular national group, such as art, literature, music, etc." (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 18). In this regard, this last explanation of the term by Liddicoat and Scarino resembles the second definition provided by Byram (1988). Even though it is widely accepted that an association between nation-states and culture is detrimental in that it makes the groups not represented in the national stereotypes invisible (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), as was seen in this study, teachers around the world still approach the teaching of culture in accordance to the latter definition (Feryok & Oranje, 2015). Following this view, cultural competence would be developed by gaining knowledge of the cultural canon of a country: "Culture is seen as residing primarily in the text itself, which is supported through the language of the text" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 19).

In the second view presented by the authors, culture as societal norms, culture is a way of behaving. This is also closely associated with the first definition, as behaviors would be attributed to all members of a certain group which is again seen as homogeneous. One of the problems with this classification is that this view draws a line between the learners and members of the "target culture," as it presents cultures as belonging to paradigms completely foreign to the culture(s) in the learners' classroom; it fails to address the much-needed search for common grounds that later models of intercultural competence addressed (Kramsch, 2009).

"Cultures as symbolic meaning" is related to cultures as shared meanings expressed in context, in a way that members of the same meaning-making system can understand each other. In the words of Liddicoat and Scarino (2013): "cultures can be understood as a system of shared meanings that make collective sense of experience, which allows for experience to be communicated and interpreted as being meaningful" (p. 20).

Cultures as practices can be seen as "symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" (Swidler, 1986, as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 21). Culture here is understood as a resource people draw on whenever they need to act in a particular context.

Some of the definitions provided above seem contradictory or contending with one another, but that is not how teachers should understand it. When teaching languages, these definitions are complementary, and it is necessary to see cultures in various ways when in the foreign languages classroom (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). In fact, as my data analysis has shown, teachers define culture in many ways, and

oftentimes, different artifacts and/or lessons by the same teacher address different aspects of the term. This, instead of being seen as lacking coherence, can be interpreted as working towards a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the term by presenting culture in the EFL classroom from a wide array of perspectives. The difficulty in defining the term probably mirrors the complexity of cultures in general, so the word cannot be explained in simplistic terms. An understanding of culture as static and stereotypical can be detrimental and will not allow learners to go beyond specific examples and situations seen in class towards a more flexible understanding that will allow learners to interact with speakers from other cultures and adapt to various contexts (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). It is for this reason that these multiple definitions should be seen as adding to one another, rather than competing against each other. However, as was stated at the beginning of this chapter, it is important that teachers learn about these definitions and the various ways to understand culture so that they can guide their work and have frameworks of reference when planning their classrooms.

After discussing some of the ways in which the term culture has been understood, this work will continue to refer to other concepts and ideas associated with the term. Next, a discussion on the idea of a possible third culture is offered, followed by a brief presentation of the skills needed for students to acquire intercultural competence.

A Third Culture

The concept of third culture was developed by Claire Kramsh as a way to resist the dichotomy of a home (C1) and a target culture (C2). In her 1993 book

Context and Culture in Language Teaching, the author and researcher states that the teaching of culture is more than just helping students bridge the gap between their C1 and the C2. Kramsch (1993) says that: "[t]he only way to start building a more complete and less partial understanding of both C1 and C2 is to develop a third perspective, that would enable learners to take both an insider's and an outsider's view on C1 and C2" (p. 210).

This third space, culture, or perspective, which Kramsch describes as a place rather than a process, involves "meaning-making that sees beyond the dualities of national languages (L1-L2) and national cultures (C1-C2)" (Kramsch, 2011, p. 355). Developing a third culture in the EFL classroom entails focusing on the relation between the home and target cultures, and on the ways the students and teachers appropriate the symbols from the target culture based on their own, "making an effort of translation from one perspective to the other, that manage[s] to keep both in the same field of vision" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 237).

Three main characteristics define the third culture of a language learner (Kramsch, 2009). The first characteristic is the 'popular culture,' in which learners use the meaning-making systems of others to make meanings of their own. "These systems acquired from others [are] such as grammars and vocabularies" (De Certeau, 1984, as cited in Kramsch, 2009, p. 238). A second characteristic is the 'critical culture,' as a third culture is not just gaining insights in the target cultures' practices, discourses and symbols, but being critical about them, "making connections to dominant attitudes and worldviews" (Kramsch, 1988, as cited in Kramsch, 2009, p. 238). As a third characteristic, culture in the class should have an 'ecological culture,' as "third culture methodology is highly context sensitive and adapted to the demands

of the environment" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 239). Focusing on third culture promotes

addressing the discourses in the class from a plethora of approaches to critically

decode signs and promote multiple interpretations (Kramsch, 2009). Even though

none of the participants in this study mentioned the term "third culture," one of them

explicitly stated that the classroom has a culture of its own. Moreover, focusing on

Kramsch's claim about the need to be critical when working with culture and to make

connections with the general context, several participants stated using culture as a

way to develop critical thinking skills in students by having them make connections

between their C1 and C2, and between culture and other relevant concepts, like

prejudice and imperialism.

Also relevant to the teaching of culture in the EFL classroom is the concept of

intercultural competence, which is closely related to that of a third culture. The

development of an intercultural perspective entails that students learn about their own

cultures and contexts (C1) and the target ones (C2) by finding a new perspective and

"move to a position in which their developing intercultural competence informs their

language choices in communication (Third Place)" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 244).

Intercultural competence then strives for a place of encounter between the different

cultures, but what it means to be interculturally competent is also hard to define

(Deardoff, 2006).

Intercultural Competence and the Intercultural Speaker

There seems to be little consensus on what the teaching of intercultural

competence really means, and teachers and higher education administrators seem to

offer a variety of definitions (Deardoff, 2006). In her 2006 study, Deardoff tried to

find a common definition by asking university administrators and specialists in the field, and found that not all of them agreed on what intercultural competence is, although she could delineate some common characteristics of an interculturally competent learner. When school administrators were asked to rank a series of definitions, the one with the most consensus was the definition based on Byram's (1997): [cultural competence entails] "[k]nowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997, as cited in Deardoff, 2006, p. 247). Contrary to the school administrators, the scholars that participated in the study voted for a different definition, which was offered by Deardoff herself: "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardoff, 2004, as cited in Deardoff, 2006, p. 248). After carefully analyzing the rankings provided by both school authorities and scholars, Deardoff noted that many aspects of the definitions referred to personal attributes, and others were much related to cultural awareness, but one element was agreed on by all participants, the "understanding of others' worldviews" (Deardoff, 2006, p. 248). Based on her findings, the author organized the desirable characteristics of an interculturally competent learner in two figures, a cycle one, focused on processes, and a pyramid one, which allows for degrees of competence. Below I describe the latter, since I consider it more relevant for the purposes of this study.

One of the models proposed by Deardoff (Deardoff, 2004, as cited in Deardoff, 2006), the pyramid model, is visually organized in levels which nourish one another but by no means are treated as steps, as learners can start developing their

intercultural competence starting from any of them. However, there is one prerequisite related to learners' attitudes: "the attitudes of openness, respect (valuing all cultures), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity) are viewed as fundamental to intercultural competence" (Deardoff, 2006, p. 255), which is presented by the researcher as the first step. The second step involves cultural comprehension, that is, "a deep understanding and knowledge of culture" (Deardoff, 2006, p. 255), which will work simultaneously with skills that will develop that cultural comprehension, such as the ability to listen, interpret, etc. The following step presents the desirable internal outcomes, which are adaptability, flexibility, empathy, and an ethnorelative view (as opposed to an ethnocentric one), and lastly, at the top of the pyramid, we find behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately as desirable external outcomes. The author followed Spitzberg's definitions to explain the concepts of effectiveness and appropriateness: "appropriateness is the avoidance of violating valued rules and effectiveness is the achievement of valued objectives" (Spitzberg, 1989, as cited in Deardoff, 2006, pp. 255-256).

In 1997, Byram explained his understanding of 'being intercultural' as an activity, and presented what he considered could be used as a guide for teachers to know what to develop when developing intercultural competence (Byram, 1997, as cited in Byram, 2008):

- Attitudes
- Knowledge
- skills of interpreting and relating
- skills of discovery and interaction
- critical cultural awareness/political education

To address the first bullet point, Byram talks about the need to prepare students to be open minded to other cultures and to the questioning of their own beliefs. When working with knowledge in reference to culture teaching, he means the products associated with other cultures, as well as the way members of those cultures interact. The skills of interpreting and relating are the necessary skills students need to read, listen, and make sense of documents or events that are product of or are embedded in another culture. The skills of discovery and interaction are about learners' autonomy in gaining more knowledge about others, and also, about being able to put into practice the skills acquired inside and outside the classroom in real-life interaction. The last statement revolves around being critical of one's own practices and those of others based on clear and explicit criteria (Byram, 2008).

It is important to note the desirable outcome in developing the skills mentioned above: "Learners who acquire ICC (intercultural communicative competence) are not imitators of native speakers of a language, but 'intercultural speakers' who have the ability to interact with people of other languages and cultures, in their own country or elsewhere" (Wagner & Byram, 2017, p. 2). The intercultural speaker enables communication between different cultures, and even helps others understand each other, becoming a mediator. This entails a "deep understanding of the relationships of languages and cultures" (Wagner & Byram, 2017, p. 2).

The idea of culture promoting students who can "understand[...] others' worldviews" (Deardoff, 2006, p. 248), and who can act as mediators between people of different backgrounds (Wagner & Byram, 2017) was one of the main objectives participants in this study saw behind the teaching of culture; eight of them referred to

the need to teach culture to broaden students' minds, and four directly said they sought to promote empathy.

The active role that an intercultural speaker has in society directly links the development of ICC to a broader understanding of education, the one connected with its political dimension (Wagner & Byram, 2017, p. 4). This is addressed in a new proposal (Byram, 2008) that combines culture teaching with citizenship classes, a proposal Byram referred to as Intercultural Citizenship (IC).

Intercultural Citizenship

Curriculum and international guidelines around the world prompt language teachers to address the teaching of culture on the grounds that it will increase understanding between nations and between groups within countries; it will develop students' empathy and make them open to diversity in its multiple forms. This objective aligns with a more general objective to education, one that is not instrumental–as the teaching of a language is– but that is about helping learners develop their humane sides and be better citizens. In general terms, this objective is shared with multiple classes students in the official schooling system have, namely, citizenship education. This overlap of objectives prompted Byram (2008) to propose the idea of intercultural citizenship, in which specific aims of both the citizenship and the foreign languages field meet. Wagner and Byram summarize what is involved in intercultural citizenship as follows (2017, pp. 3-4):

- Causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience, which includes activities of working with others to achieve an agreed end.

- Analysis and reflection on the experience and on the possibility of further social and/or political activity.

- Creating learning that is cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral change in the individual.

- A change in self-perception, in relation with people of different social groups.

Due to the fact that this take on culture teaching requires students to go beyond the classroom and into the field to work with members of other cultures– either abroad or with a different cultural group close to home– this is not feasible for many schools in Argentina and not the main focus of the curriculums nowadays, and will therefore not be the main idea followed in this research. Intercultural competence, however, will be.

So far, I have explained how difficult it can be to define the term culture, and several definitions of the term provided by scholars in the field. I have also made reference to other related terms or notions necessary to understand the relevance behind the teaching of culture. Next, I will refer to the groups of people the term is usually associated with, another aspect of its teaching that has created much discussion in the field.

The Problem of Identifying a Target Culture

To the already complex task of defining culture is added the problem of identifying target cultures to be addressed. Being the relation between culture and language so intimate, it may be expected to find target cultures associated with "standard" Englishes, and in turn, with the groups of people who speak those Englishes. In an attempt to categorize Englishes around the world, Kachru (1992a)

designed a taxonomy of concentric circles in which the countries in the center, the Inner Circle, are the ones that represent the "traditional cultural and linguistic bases" of English (p. 356). These cultures are "norm-providing" (Krachu, 1992b, p. 5), which means that they prescribe the rules for the use of English. Kachru also explains that "[a]mong these varieties, American and British Englishes [...] are considered more appropriate than the varieties used in Australia and New Zealand" (Kachru, 1992b, p. 5). In coincidence with the scholar, these were the most common target languages/cultures in the classrooms that were part of this research, either by teachers' choice or by being more featured in the textbooks used in their classes.

The following circle in Kachru's taxonomy is the Outer Circle, encompassing countries where English is used for formal and institutional purposes, like government and schooling, but where inhabitants usually use another language to communicate with one another. These countries have had colonial ties with Great Britain. Examples of Outer Circle countries are India, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Kachru classified these languages as norm-developing: "[a]mong the users of these varieties, there is confusion between linguistic norm and performance, but generally the localized norm has a well-established linguistic and cultural identity" (Kachru, 1992b, p. 5). In this case study, Outer Circle countries were mentioned by the participants in this study as an explicit attempt to expose students to other target cultures. One of the participants worked with Nigerian literature.

The third group, the Expanding Circle, refers to countries where English is a foreign language and which depend on Inner Circle varieties to provide the norm. Kachru explicitly refers to the US and the UK as the ones doing so: "The norms are essentially external (American or British)" (Kachru, 1992b, p. 5). Argentina belongs

to the Expanding circle, which explains the reliance on the USA and the UK for standards.

Countries in the expanding circle group were seldom mentioned in this study as the target cultures to address, with one mention of "Latin American" cultures being approached as an attempt to counteract how much students are exposed to foreign (mostly European/ white cultures). Argentinian culture was mentioned by most participants, who usually make reference to it after having dealt with other cultures in the classrooms. Participants explained they try to have students make connections between the main foreign cultural topic and common Argentinian practices as a way to generate empathy and teach how to value their own culture too. However, participants did not make reference to addressing expanding cultures as an objective in itself, but rather, as a point of comparison once students have already worked with an Inner/Outer circle one. It is important to note that there was some criticism to this model, and others were offered afterwards (Jenkins, 2015). One of the weak points in Kachru's classification is the fact that it is based on "geography and history" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 15). As the model refers to linguistic varieties in national terms (American English, Nigerian English, etc.), then in turn, it reinforces the association between cultures and countries, which is one of the most common ways to understand it (American culture, Nigerian culture, etc.).

Relevant to this study is also how it is believed the people in each circle interact with one another. In addition to classifying English speakers in the taxonomy explained above, Kachru made reference to fallacies in relation to English speakers, two of which are particularly important in the discussion about target languages and cultures in the Argentinian classroom. To begin with, Kacrhu (1992a) states that

believing that people in the Outer and Expanding circles are learning or use English to communicate with people in the Inner circles would be a mistake, since the former are more likely, or have a higher tendency, to use English when communicating with other non-natives than with American, British, Australian, etc (Kachru,1992a). This leads directly to the second fallacy, "[t]hat English is necessarily learned as a tool to understand and teach American or British cultural values, or what is generally termed Judeo-Chrsitian traditions" (Kachru, 1992a, p. 357). In a study to determine the purposes behind learning English in a group of MBA students in Argentina, Patricia Friedich (2003) states that students mostly believe this fallacy: "Besides acknowledging only American and British English in my study, when asked how their networks would expand learning English [...] [n]o answers suggested the possibility of interaction with other non-native speakers of English whose language they do not speak, and who might for that reason communicate in English with them" (Friedrich, 2003, p. 179). Even though students' beliefs were not part of the present case study, the difficulty in identifying a target culture and the multiplicity of needs students in the EFL classroom have come up in my data: "whenever I say I did culture, I don't refer to teaching about specific cultures. In general, I don't do that unless I want to highlight some specific aspects about the target culture, because then I will have to find what the target culture is, and that's more complicated" (p. 4).

More context on Argentina and the target languages most commonly followed will be provided in a section below.

The Teaching of Culture in Official Guidelines and National Curriculums

The need for the teaching of culture has been included in national curriculums for a few decades now, and a concept that used to be disregarded is now common in most formal schooling documents around the world (Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015). However, in most cases, curriculums offer differing understandings of what culture is (Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015), they never explain what intercultural competence is (as is the case for the New Zealand curriculum, Feryok & Orange, 2015), and fail to provide teachers with guidelines to address it in their classrooms (Feryok & Orange, 2015; Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015). This is also the case for the Argentinian curriculum.

When referring to the teaching of culture and its relation to language teaching, many curriculums see "language as a means to learn about culture" or as "a representation of a particular culture," (Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015, p. 677) and present foreign language learning as an opportunity to teach respect for other cultures and for one's own. However, in most cases, they lack objectives, or those are loosely defined, which leads to unclear teaching strategies that teachers can follow to address culture in their classrooms (Feryok & Orange, 2015; Lavrenteva & Orland-Barak, 2015). Feryok and Oranje (2015) noted the inclusion of the development of intercultural competence in the New Zealand 'Learning Languages' curriculum and explained that, to that date, teachers in the area seemed to lack understanding of what the curriculum was requiring because it did not have clear guidelines as to what was meant by intercultural competence or how to teach it. This matches my observations of the Argentinian curriculum.

On its part, the European Union has released a document titled Competences for Democratic Culture, which do not refer to intercultural competence, but express the need to develop competences that promote a "culture of democracy," many of which overlap with the objectives of the teaching of culture and the development of intercultural speakers. The document offers a model to develop citizens that can engage in a culturally diverse society and participate responsibly while treating other members equally (Council of Europe, 2016): "The aim is not to teach students what to think, but rather how to think, in order to navigate a world where not everyone holds their views, but we each have a duty to uphold the democratic principles which allow all cultures to co-exist" (p. 7). The Council presents twenty competences divided into skills, values, attitudes, and knowledge and critical understanding. Some of the competences in the model include: "openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices; knowledge and critical understanding of the world [...] cultures; valuing cultural diversity" (p. 35). The document does not offer specific guidelines but explicitly states the need to develop these competences in the classroom.

Even though the analysis of the Argentine curriculum and how teachers interpret it was not an objective in this case study, information on how it presents the teaching of culture is provided in a section below. This is relevant because teachers use the curriculum to base the design of their own syllabus, and thus, lack of clear guidance on the matter might result in problems with addressing culture. The findings in this study shows that, even though the majority of the participants claimed having cultural objectives for their classrooms, only one of them clearly referred to culture in her syllabus; the reference to culture was not drafted in the form of an objective, but

resembled the wording in the national curriculum. It may be claimed that clearer objectives in the national document might have resulted in cleared objectives in individual syllabi.

Teachers beliefs about the teaching of culture in the EFL classroom

Over the years, many studies have sought to understand what EFL teachers think about the teaching of culture and how they work with it in their classrooms. Below, I provide a brief account of the most common beliefs teachers hold about what culture is and the place it has in their classrooms.

In 2006, Lies Sercu carried out a study with foreign-language secondary-school teachers from Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Mexico, Poland, Spain and Sweden and found out that many teachers did not favor the teaching of culture in their classes, stating that it is not possible to teach culture. According to Sercu (2006), a group of participants believed that: "intercultural skills cannot be acquired at school, let alone in the foreign language classroom" (p. 66). The teachers thought that attempting to teach culture would render negative results: "intercultural competence teaching reinforces pupil's already existing stereotypes" (p. 66). This was matched by one of the participants in my study, who claimed that she has some issues with teaching culture, particularly English culture, as she sees the practice as associated with imperialism. In the case of Sercu's work, some participants did see the value in addressing culture in their classrooms, but in spite of that, "communicative conceptions of foreign language education can be said to constitute the core of teachers' views" (Sercu, 2006, p. 68). That is, the focus of the class remains on linguistic and communicative goals, whereas the teaching of culture is given a

peripheral role in the curriculum. This was reinforced in my findings, which revealed that many teachers either do not address culture, they see it as being at the service of language acquisition, or they claim they address it but still focus on language in actual practice.

Feryok and Oranje (2015) explained that "a number of studies have shown that teachers perceive various issues that prevent them from doing intercultural language teaching" (p. 548). Some of these issues are: the general belief that they are not sufficiently trained nor have the materials to do so (Díaz, 2013, Oranje, 2012, Sercu & St. John, 2007, as cited in Feryok & Oranje, 2015, p. 548); the idea that students should have a certain proficiency in the language to be exposed or discuss cultures associated with it (Sercu et al., 2005; Sercu & St. John, 2007, as cited in Feryok & Oranje, 2015, p. 548); general "lack of interest and motivation" (in the foreign culture and its teaching), (Sercu & St. John, 2007, as cited in Feryok & Oranje, 2015, p. 548), and lack of time within the yearly curriculum (Manjarrés, 2009, Oranje, 2012, Sercu et al., 2005, Sercu & St. John, 2007, as cited in Feryok and Oranje, 2015, p. 548). Instructors also noted that the teaching of culture is rarely included in assessment, and even if it is, it is "difficult to assess" (Díaz, 2013; Sercu et al., 2005; Sercu & St. John, 2007, as cited in Feryok & Oranje, 2015, p. 548). These claims also came up in my findings, with teachers mostly mentioning lack of time, or institutional constraints, as the main reason to not work with culture in class. Linguistic proficiency did not seem to be an issue among participants, as many stated that, if the issue they are discussing is relevant enough, they allow students to resort to their L1. However, age and maturity was mentioned as a barrier impeding the proper tackling of culture in their EFL classrooms.

In the same study by Feryok and Oranje (2015), the researchers worked with a language instructor who made reference and used the word "culture" several times in her class, but what she meant by it was unclear. They asked the participant what she understood by culture, and she said that "[culture] is everything. [...] it's language, it's food, it's clothing, it's the country, it's the environment, it's um - it's all surrounding really" (Feryok & Oranje, 2015, p. 553). The authors noted that, although the participant provided a broad definition that is most closely associated with Byram's second and third definitions, in practice, her approach to culture is most closely related to the second, most traditional view of it, in which it is related to the "recordings of human thought and experiences" (Byram, 1988, p. 80). Again, this matched my findings; all participants were able to provide some understanding of what culture is in the survey, but when asked again in the follow-up interview, at least three of them claimed that culture was too broad a term, and that it included everything to the point in which it is always present in the classroom. While this is supported by scholarship in the field (Kramsch, 1993), it raises the question of whether the fact that teaching language involves teaching culture at all times affects the frequency in which they do the latter explicitly.

A similar study was conducted in Vietnam, in which Nguyen and associates (2016) set out to analyze teachers' beliefs and actions in relation to the teaching of culture in a local university. They interviewed 15 EFL teachers, and found out that they all had "broad conceptualizations in mind when describing culture" (p. 169). The interviewees defined culture as mostly associated with customs and beliefs, which Byram would include within the third definition. Participants also revealed not devoting too much time to culture in their classrooms, for reasons similar to those

presented by Feryok and Oranje (2015) in their study in New Zealand. Some admitted that culture was part of 5-10% of their overall planning, and even when it was addressed, it was because the topic within the language unit explicitly referred to cultural aspects. In general, Nguyen and colleagues (2016) conclusions seem to be in line with previous research on the matter. However, one of the most striking findings was that their participants did not seem to consider the teaching of culture as important.

Teachers' beliefs about the teaching of culture in Argentina were explored in 2014 by Salcedo and Sacchi, who analyzed what teachers believe about their knowledge of other cultures, about the role of culture in foreign language education, and about their own pedagogical knowledge to tackle culture in their classrooms. Contrary to Nguyen et al. (2016) study, the participants in this research believed that teaching culture was just as relevant as teaching language in the classroom, which matches the claims made by my own participants in this case study. Salcedo and Saccchi's participants also initially stated they felt qualified to do so and that their materials allowed for the exploration of culture, which contradicts other studies carried out in Argentina about materials and culture teaching (Ferradas, 2007; Lopez Barrios & Villanueva de Debat, 2007; Moirano, 2012). What was interesting in this study is that teachers' claims were then further explored through individual interviews, and the participants interviewed admitted that "the content of the curriculum was a limiting factor because culture was not an integral part of it, only allowing for a sporadic exploration of cultures in the classroom (p. 86). They also said they sometimes struggle translating theoretical cultural knowledge into practical classroom activities. It is worth noting that this study was carried out before the latest

version of the *Núcleos de Aprendizaje Prioritarios*, the Federal Guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages, were released, and the context was not the province of Buenos Aires. However, my observations of the current curriculum match these claims. The participants in Salcedo and Sacchi's study also said there is not enough time during the year to address culture in depth, which matches other studies in the matter (Manjarrés, 2009, Oranje, 2012, Sercu et al., 2005, Sercu & St. John, 2007, as cited in Feryok and Oranje, 2015, p. 548). One of the most relevant findings of Salcedo and Sacchi's study is the fact that when they address culture, teachers mostly focus on cultural products like food and music, which further support the findings of this case study.

The underlying conceptions teachers have guide their practice in their classrooms, which is why uncovering them is necessary to understand and analyze EFL teachers' practices in the classroom. I have explained several beliefs and misconceptions that EFL teachers have when addressing culture, many of which were also found in my own data. Next, I discuss textbook content, as they are one of the biggest influences in the Argentinian curriculum.

EFL Textbooks and the Teaching of Culture

The materials often used in the EFL classroom need to be referred to as many teachers claim to use them as their main guidelines when planning their classes (Nguyen et al., 2016). In fact, when referring to Argentinian EFL classes, Banegas and Tavella assert that "coursebooks are still utilised as *scripts* in classrooms in a diversity of contexts" (Banegas & Tavella, 2021, p. 3). The authors explain that by script they mean that class books are used as the main guidelines organizing content

and teaching. Participants in a research about EFL teachers in Vietnam reported "to teach from textbooks, with assigned workloads normally in terms of units in the textbooks to be covered in the semester" (Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 171). However, in many cases, teachers themselves admit that textbooks need revising for more intercultural tasks (Sercu, 2006). Lack of cultural content and narrow focus on target cultures/languages were some of the pitfalls of textbooks as mentioned by the participants in this research.

In the study by Nguyen et al. (2016), two types of materials were the most commonly used by EFL teachers: commercial textbooks and compilations made by teachers but also based on different commercial textbooks. Teachers reported "to teach from textbooks, with assigned workloads normally in terms of units in the textbooks to be covered in the semester" (Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 171). Moreover, most of the participants were satisfied with the treatment of culture in textbooks, and the ones who were dissatisfied, largely relied on their own experiences or the internet to address the gap.

In terms of the use of materials and models to the teaching of English in general and of culture in particular, much of the materials used in the Argentinian EFL classes are based on textbooks that are largely produced abroad. Maersk Nielsen (2003) explains that as part of the Expanding Circle (Kachru, 1992a; 1992b) Argentina receives norms of English use from countries in the Inner Circle. The author also notes that the vast majority of EFL textbooks are made in the UK, although there is an expanding number of books edited in Argentina too (Maersk Nielsen, 2003). Studies pertaining to coursebooks in EFL Argentinian classrooms and their treatment of culture (Lopez Barrios & Villanueva de Debat, 2007; Moirano,

2012) have concluded that coursebooks usually need to be supplemented for the development of intercultural competence. In 2007, López Barrios and Villanueva de Debat analyzed coursebooks used in Argentina to see the dynamic in the treatment of the first and the target cultures. They analyzed three possible models for the treatment of culture, as materials should strive to make the learner reflect critically rather than simply make him or her consume unquestioned facts about a 'superior' culture to the detriment of the learners' source culture, which in our case is usually deemed to be inferior or subordinate to the target culture (López Barrios & Villanueva de Debat, 2007, par. 1).

Coursebooks were then classified depending on whether they introduced factual information about the target culture as completely separate from the home one, and without encouraging any type of critical analysis on the part of the student; whether they made comparisons and contrasted C1 and C2 but without much critical analysis, or they worked with a third model, in which "the materials promote a higher degree of cross cultural confrontation" (López Barrios & Villanueva de Debat, 2007. par. 9) and students are prompted to think critically about both their own and others' cultures. Even though it was possible to find isolated activities that treated culture as described in the third model, this was not the approach in the majority of them, as most of the books dealt with culture as described in models one and two.

Many of the texts present in the Argentinian EFL classroom, whether provided from coursebooks or other sources, present target cultures as completely separate from the students' realities: "Standing in the periphery, as if looking through a glass pane, they [students] learn about and long for the centre, a "first world" that is out of reach and expresses itself in English" (Ferradas, 2007, par. 4). In 2012, Carolina

Moirano explored the cultural content and its treatment in three mainstream EFL

coursebooks used in many Argentinian classrooms. She explained her interest in the

topic arose as she noticed the coursebooks she was using as an English teacher in

Argentina included very little on foreign or local cultures (Moirano, 2012). This

matches my own observations as an EFL instructor in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

Moirano (2012) also explains how, in order to be sold in as many contexts as possible,

English coursebooks usually deal with topics superficially: "The "one-size-fits-all"

philosophy underlying the global coursebook means that safe topics recur again and

again, resulting in coursebooks which are sanitized for commercial purposes" (Gray,

2002, as cited in Moirano, 2012).

In relation to this study, participants made explicit mention to how limited

textbooks usually are in terms of cultural content or target varieties. The data also

supports Banegas and Tavella's (2021) assertion that many times, textbooks function

as informal syllabi. Lack of time and knowledge resulted in participants claiming

finding it difficult to supplement textbooks, so if textbooks do not have enough

cultural content, their EFL classroom is impacted directly.

English Teaching in Argentina

In 2006, the newest education law made the instruction of a foreign language

at Argentinian school compulsory from fourth grade onwards, and the prestige of

English is such that in most cases, that is the language of choice. Public K-12

education depends on local provinces, which results in variations among provincial

curriculums, but as part of the 2006 Educational Law (ley 26.206), the national

government issued the *Núcleos de Aprendizaje Prioritarios* (*Ministerio de la*

República Argentina, 2012), a set of guidelines that establishes minimum requirements that need to be met by all provincial schooling systems. The *Núcleos de Aprendizaje* for the foreign languages state that the teaching of foreign languages (German, French, English, Italian, and Portuguese being the ones considered as foreign yet part of the official Argentinian schooling system), should follow an intercultural and plurilingual perspective, which is explained in the document as focusing on highlighting the relation between different languages and on plurality within languages and their associated cultures. This document "privilege[s] knowing about languages and language, and also, educating citizens that respect linguistic and cultural differences, favoring attitudes that promote new ways of being and existing in a world that is socio-culturally and linguistically diverse" (*Ministerio de la República Argentina*, 2012, p. 12). To support the statement of teaching a language as part of preparing students for a multicultural world, the guidelines provide five areas of work, the last one being devoted to intercultural reflection. This area presents objectives for the foreign languages classrooms such as the recognition of features of home culture and of various cultural particularities based on the encounter with other cultures. However, as its name indicates, the spirit of this document is to serve as a guideline, without practical examples of how the treatment of culture and the development of intercultural awareness can be carried out.

The Buenos Aires curriculum, the official document issued by the Ministry of Education of the province of Buenos Aires and the one that participants in this study have to follow, mirrors the objectives introduced in the aforementioned guidelines, but when referring to specific approaches to the teaching of English, there is no evidence or examples of practices for the development of intercultural competence.

The specific teaching objectives are related to the teaching of CLIL, which is understood, as clarified in the curriculum, as content specific to the area of study within each orientation of secondary education: "The final objective for the teaching of English in secondary school is that students can learn it, experiment with it, and use it for projects related to content based on other classes of their specific orientation" (Diseño Curricular para la Educación Secundaria 5to año: Inglés, 2011, p. 15). The curriculum provides examples of activities and what is meant by CLIL tasks, but interculturality is only mentioned in the objectives. The official document also provides links with information about the teaching of English; resources that are classified by topic, but culture is not one of them. Even though teachers' beliefs and knowledge of the national curriculum was not part of this study, EFL syllabi are based on these official guidelines, so it was expected to find references to culture as expressed in them. One of the most surprising findings was the lack of explicit cultural objectives in the participants' syllabi, the most common reason being the fact that teachers rarely design syllabi on their own, but while working with other teachers who do not always share values with them. The one participant that did mention culture in their syllabi following the wording of the Curriculum Design for the Province of Buenos Aires, did not have clear. actionable cultural objectives, which mirrors the lack of clarity in the official document.

Culture and Comprehensive Sexual Education in the Argentinian EFL curriculum

When analyzing the data, it became clear that many participants associated the teaching of culture to the dismantling of gender roles, which in the Argentinian

curriculum lies within the teaching of Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE). In 2006, the Argentinian congress passed Law 16.150, which established the need to address CSE across the curriculum–that is, in addition to being a specific class for high school students, sexual education should be part of all classes' curriculum and at all levels (*Congreso de la Nación Argentina*, 2006).

In this context, the law explains sexuality will be understood following the World Health Organization's definition, entity that explains sexuality is a broad term that includes social behavior and can be understood as:

"…a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors" (WHO, 2006a).

Considering that the law takes into account behaviors, roles, relationships, and social factors within its definition, then working with gender roles and the treatment of women, children, and other sexualities and identities in our daily lives lies within the realm of CSE, and thus, as stated by the Congress, should be addressed by all teachers.

After passing the law, the National Ministry of Education provided guidelines to help teachers include CSE topics within their curriculums: "According to the curriculum guidelines, comprehensive sexual education is envisaged as a space for

encounter among learners, adults, areas of knowledge, public policies, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions in a framework where human rights, respect, and the right to information from early education is central" (Banegas, 2021, p. 211).

The guidelines developed by the National Ministry of Education for addressing CSE at school explain the purpose behind them, three of which relate to this study:

- To offer opportunities to widen the cultural horizon from which each child develops their subjectivity, acknowledging their rights and responsibilities and respecting and acknowledging the rights and responsibilities of other people.

- To promote learning based on respect of diversity and the rejecting of any form of discrimination.

- To develop competences to enable the voicing of feelings, needs, emotions, problems, and conflict resolution through dialogue (p. 14).

The fact that CSE aims at "widen(ing) students' cultural horizon," and the rejection of discrimination is closely linked to the objectives of the teaching of culture in the classroom, so it is clear why several participants referred to CSE when talking about culture in their classes.

In the context of the EFL classroom, Argentina seems to lack unified guidelines as to how to address CSE in the foreign languages classroom. Banegas (2021) explains that a provincial Ministry of Education in the south of Argentina agreed with the teachers that CSE has a role in EFL following a content-based approach. Considering that the CLIL approach can be said to have four tenants: the teaching of content, of communication, of cognition, and of culture (Coyle et al.,

2010, as cited in Banegas, 2021), then the relation between culture and sexual education becomes even more evident. "In Argentina, language-driven CLIL is understood as a language teaching approach through which school curriculum topics such as comprehensive sexual education are learnt through English during English lessons" (Banegas, 2021, p. 212). However, the initiative taken by this Ministry of Education is not true for all provinces: "Even though in the update to the guidelines there is a chart with some suggestions to approach CSE in the EFL classroom, this is not enough to cover the highschool curriculum. At a national level, there are no instruments that offer ideas to approach CSE across curriculums and including the English classroom" (Megna & Mussi, 2022, p. 219).

Megna and Mussi (2022) offer some suggestions that may help Argentinian English teachers address CSE in their classrooms. One of the themes suggested is that of "respecting diversity," in which English teachers can address Argentinian holidays and compare them to those in other countries, and the roles that women and men have in each celebration (p. 222, my translation). Under the theme "exercising our rights," the authors state that presenting students with different literary genres written by women so that their literary canon widens is also part of this (p. 222). These are just a few examples in which the teaching of culture and of comprehensive sexual education are intertwined in the EFL classroom Argentina. It is worth noting, however, the implementation of Law 26150 has not been unified.

The topic of addressing comprehensive sexual education, particularly for the purpose of dismantling gender roles, was a repeated theme in the data; participants claimed having taken recent professional development courses in the matter, which they connected with the teaching of culture in their classes, used CSE classes as

examples of classes in which culture was explicitly taught, and even sent artifacts about CSE when asked for artifacts that reflected culture teaching. This was one of the most surprising findings, as whether they addressed CSE or not was not considered in the original research instruments, although it was later included in the semi-structured interview. When asked about the relation between the topic of this case study and CSE, participants said that the assigned roles that women and men have are social products, and thus, they claimed that every time they worked with CSE, they were tackling culture as well.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the most relevant literature in the matter of teaching culture, literature that guided as well as shed light on the findings of this case study. A historic overview of the role the teaching of culture plays in the EFL/ESL fields was provided, which helped understand the relevance of the matter under study and trace its origins. The several definitions of the term culture offered helped understand how participants view the term and enabled to contrast their beliefs to their practices in their classrooms. Other relevant concepts guiding the teaching of culture, such as third place, intercultural competence, and intercultural citizenship, also defined in this chapter, informed the analysis of the data. Literature on the problem of identifying target cultures explains one of the many difficulties teachers have to tackle when working with culture in their classrooms. The information on how culture is treated globally, its presence in national documents, and teachers' beliefs about it contextualized this study as well as helped anticipate possible findings. Information on Argentina and EFL textbooks were necessary to understand the particular context

of this case study, as well as current policies on the teaching of Comprehensive

Sexual Education in the country.

      The following chapter offers details on the methodology followed for this

study, and provides more contextual information that was relevant when carrying out

this research. Chapter four discusses the findings, which were thematically organized.

The relevance of these findings and their implications are discussed in chapter five.

Chapter Three

Method

The purpose of this study is to determine what EFL teachers in Argentinian secondary schools in Mar del Plata, Argentina, believe about culture teaching and how they address the teaching of culture in their classes. Understanding what beliefs are guiding teachers' treatment of cultural instruction will help educators better address this issue, and assess whether those beliefs align with their formal education on how to do it. Research on teachers' practice will also inform teachers and teacher educators on the need to emphasize this relevant topic–and skill, which could lead to potential changes in pre-service teachers' education. Moreover, as the teaching of culture is mandated by government curriculums but guidelines on how to approach it are scarce, this research aims to inform policy makers about the need to establish clearer guidelines that will facilitate drawing class objectives, steering teachers and teacher-educators. The research questions guiding this study are:

a) What do practicing EFL teachings in Mar del Plata, Argentina, believe about the teaching of culture in their classrooms?

b) How do high school teachers in Mar del Plata, Argentina represent culture in their EFL classes?

Following is a description of the chosen approach and the steps taken in this particular case study. The research context, information on participants recruitment and demographics, the research design and the methodologies followed are also provided. After that, I address this study's limitations and I detail the steps I followed to ensure an ethical procedure. After I explain the process of data analysis following a

qualitative content analysis approach, I conclude with a brief summary of the chapter.

Case study

As my goal is to understand how culture is treated inside EFL classrooms in a particular place, the approach chosen to better answer the questions in this research is a case study. A case study is a research approach usually used when the researcher wants to understand a particular event, group, situation, etc., in the context in which it takes place or exists (Thomas, 2014; Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). This means that the object of study is not analyzed in isolation but in relation to the many variables that affect it. This approach was considered the most suitable for this research as the objective is to gain knowledge on how a specific group of people –EFL Secondary School teachers in Mar del Plata– address a particular event –the teaching of culture– in their own classrooms. In addition, the case study approach is particularly useful when the researcher wants to understand the "*how* and *why* something might have happened or why it might be the case" (Thomas, 2016, p. 4, emphasis in the original), which is intimately related to the research questions mentioned in the previous section, both of which are trying to uncover processes and reasons for the teaching of culture in this particular context. Moreover, one of the purposes of the present study is to shed light on the effectiveness of current policies and teacher training in relation to the teaching of culture, and possibly, prompt change:

> The primary purpose [of a case study] is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action (Simons, 2009, p. 21)

Understanding what teachers do in their EFL Argentinian classrooms when tackling culture will provide valuable information to continue strengthening EFL teachers' practice and training.

In order to obtain a holistic view of the case, multiple data gathering methods are usually employed in this type of research (Thomas, 2016), which can be both qualitative and quantitative (Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2009, as cited in Paltridge & Phakiti). "In looking from *several* directions, a more rounded, richer, more balanced picture of our subject is developed – we get a three dimensional view" (Thomas, 2016, p. 5), which is necessary for the deep understanding of the matter under study. This research made use of three data gathering instruments to obtain a three dimensional understanding of the subject. First, an online survey was used, then a follow up interview with the participants that opted for one was carried out, and lastly, artifacts used in the EFL classes were collected. The reasons behind artifact choice and their implementation will be discussed further below.

Research Context

This research was carried out with participants who are currently teaching, or have recently taught (within 1 year) official[1] hours of EFL at secondary schools in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Schools in Argentina can be state-run, completely private, or a combination of the two: private schools that obtain different amounts of subsidy. These will be referred to as state-subsidized private schools. Mandatory education in Argentina after kindergarten comprises elementary and secondary school, each one

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[1] Hours that are mandated either by the school or by the government. Many schools offer additional optional English classes to supplement the mandatory ones. These optional lessons are outside the scope of this study.

lasting six years, making a total of twelve years of education between first grade elementary school and sixth year secondary school. All the participants in this study work in at least one grade of secondary school, but most teach in several and/or various sections of the same grade. Table 1, on the following page, offers information about the participants and the classes in which they work.

In Argentina, schools can have multiple sections for the same grade depending on the size of the school; for example, a sixth grade can have three sections, usually called 6to A, 6to B, 6to C (although there are other denominations), and only rarely do all sections have the same teacher. It is common for several teachers to have to plan together or just share a textbook and/or syllabus and work on different sections of the same grade using their own individual plans. This is the case for many of the participants. Although it is also common for teachers in the country to work at multiple schools at the same time, participants were asked to answer questions about one school in particular. However, it is not possible to know for sure whether the teachers followed the instructions and answered based on only one.

Participants

Participants in this study work at all three types of institutions: 5 teach at private schools, 4 at subsidized schools, and 3 at state-run schools. The majority of the participants have a BA; two have a Master's and one a PhD. The majority have been practicing teachers for between 5 and 9 years, with three participants having over twenty years of experience in the field. All of the participants in the study are women. This information is summarized in

Table 1

Participants information

Participant	Type of school	Years of experience	Highest education degree	Secondary School Year in which they work within the school	Students' levels of proficiency
P1	Private School	5-9 years	University BA	1st,2nd,3rd, 4th year	Elementary, Lower intermediate, Intermediate, Upper intermediate, Advanced
P2	Private School	5-9 years	University BA	5th,6thl	Intermediate
P3	State subsidized	5-9 years	University BA	1st,2nd,4thl,5th, 6th	Intermediate
P4	Private School	0-4 years	University BA	1st, 6th	Elementary, Lower intermediate, Upper intermediate

					Lower
P5	State-run	5-9 years	Master's	5th	intermediate
			University		Lower
P6	Private School	5-9 years	BA	2nd	intermediate
					Lower
			University		intermediate,
P7	Private School	Over 20 years	BA	1st, 5th	Advanced
	State		Not		
P8	subsidized	Over 20 years	Answered		Intermediate
	State		University		Lower
P9	subsidized	5-9 years	BA	2nd, 5th, 6th	intermediate
			University		Lower
P10	Private School	10-14 years	BA	6th	intermediate
	State		University		Lower
P11	subsidized	0-4 years	BA	1st,3rd,4th	intermediate
			University		
P12	State-run	10-14 years	BA	4th, 5th, 6th	Beginners

Method of Participant Selection

The focus of this study is on the teaching of culture in Mar del Plata high schools, so the requirements for the participants were that they currently work or have recently worked (within the past year) in secondary schools in Mar del Plata teaching

English as a Foreign Language as part of the mandatory Argentinian curriculum (as opposed to optional English workshops or other activities in English that some private schools offer). They also needed to have graduated or to be about to do so (in their last semester or having a few finals left). Requirements for participants were detailed in the consent letter as well as in the email requesting for participants that was sent to school authorities (**Appendix A**).

As I had worked in the context of the research and am acquainted with many teachers and school authorities, four schools I was in contact with were selected and an email was sent explaining the project and asking them to forward the email with the survey link (**Appendix B**) to their English teachers. This was decided in order to minimize pressure on teachers I may know and establish distance between researcher and participants. However, only one of the four schools answered back accepting to collaborate with the research, and so other institutions and platforms were used to recruit participants.

A similar email to the one sent to the schools was sent to the English department of the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, requesting them to forward it to the alumni they are in contact with. The department agreed and sent the same email (**Appendix A**) to their alumni. In addition, I shared the link to the survey on my personal social media and in Whatsapp groups I have with other English teachers.

Several English teachers responded, but eleven met the requirements of having finished their BAs, being practicing English teachers at a secondary school, and having finished the questionnaire. A twelfth participant who completed the questionnaire was considered as they were close to graduation and were a practicing teacher with years of experience in high school.

The email sent to the school authorities was in Spanish, as was the email sent out by the English department at UNMdP. This email included a link to a Qualtrics questionnaire which was completely in English (**Appendix B**). In order to get access to the questions, participants had to first consent to the conditions to participate. By the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they wanted to participate in a follow-up interview and if they were willing to share classroom artifacts, worksheets or syllabi for analysis. Five participants said they wanted to continue helping in this thesis research project, and provided personal information data to be contacted by me.

Method of Data Collection

The methods used to gather data for this case study were three: online survey, interview, and artifact collection. These methods were chosen due to their capacity to complement one another. The survey offered a wide array of data as it was sent to several prospective participants at once and it combined open ended questions with Likert scales that facilitated the quantification of the otherwise qualitative information. The interview permitted a more in depth view of the data from a purely qualitative lens. Finally, the artifacts functioned as a way into the teachers' classrooms and allowed me to double check claims made by the teachers in either the survey or the interview. These three methods are further explained below.

Questionnaires

As a first step to gather data for this case study, a questionnaire was developed (**Appendix B**). The questionnaire was designed based on the study of previous literature also focusing on teachers' beliefs and practices, and on my own knowledge

of teachers' practice. It contained demographic questions which I designed based on the information I considered relevant for this study, open-ended questions also based on the needs of the study and on previous literature, and Likert scales that were mostly designed following Graham and associates' own instruments in a research of similar nature (2014), although the original scales were modified to suit the purposes of this case study.

After consenting to participating in the questionnaire, teachers were asked to provide a definition of culture, as the way they understand it directly affects how and what they address in their classrooms. They were also asked about the reasons behind the teaching of culture and possible target cultures they consider when dealing with it in class. Two Likert scales were then offered in which teachers had to show levels of agreement with different statements regarding the topic, for example "I include cultural objectives in my syllabus," or "I feel prepared to teach culture in my classroom." These were designed based on the usual reasons teachers fail to work with culture as shown in the literature reviewed. The second Likert scale aimed at gaining knowledge of teachers' actual practices in their classroom, as it asked about the frequency in which they did what was presented in the statements. Some examples of these statements are: "I prepare lessons in which I address cultural topics explicitly" or "I work with Argentinian cultural topics in my EFL classroom." Again, it was previous research on the topic which led to the formulation of these statements, as many times, what teachers believe about culture and its teaching is not reflected on their own practice.

At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were asked whether they wanted to share artifacts for analysis with the researcher and/or wished to participate

in a follow-up interview. Those who answered 'yes' and provided contact information were later contacted by the researcher.

Interview

A semi-structured interview was chosen as a method to continue delving into the topics brought up in the questionnaire. The interview, although posing the challenge of being time-consuming, provided the opportunity to dig deeper into some of the respondents' answers, or ask questions that could not be included in the questionnaire for a matter of length. In terms of format, a semi-structured organization was chosen, as this mixed modality offered, on the one hand, the possibility to ask questions formulated in advance based on each participants previous answers to the survey, and on the other hand, the flexibility to inquire further on specific points or issues as they arise in participants' responses (Thomas, 2016).

Six people were interviewed in total and the interviews were semi-structured, as questions were prepared for each individual participant based on their previous answers, but spontaneous questions based on the participants' responses were also included. A common question was to give reasons behind the teachers' answers in the likert scales, for example: why do you (or do you not) feel prepared to teach culture in your classroom? and why do you say the materials used in your classrooms do (not) expose students to a variety of English speaking cultures?

The interviews were carried out and recorded using Zoom and lasted an average of half an hour. Each participant was asked in advance if they consented to being recorded, and were reminded that the recording would be transcribed, that the original video would only be seen by me but would be deleted after transcribed, and

that the transcription would not contain identifiers that could lead back to them. The videos were stored in my password-protected personal computer and transcribed using transcription software (otter.ai). The transcriptions were then manually checked by me and uploaded to my personal cloud, also password protected.

Artifact Collection

Teachers were asked to share artifacts to the researcher's personal email and were reminded of this possibility during the interview. Four teachers shared several documents each, making a total of twelve artifacts for analysis. Artifacts were used as examples of what working with culture means for teachers in practice, and as a way to obtain specific information about cultural topics they bring up in class and how. Among the ones collected, artifacts in this study included worksheets about songs and their lyrics, worksheets on videos about gender stereotypes, instructions about debates, and pre-reading lessons addressing literature. Because "documents can provide [...] specific details to corroborate information from other sources" (Thomas, 2016, p. 107), the artifacts can be used to have a more holistic vision of what teachers mean by teaching culture, and as a way to exemplify, corroborate or expand on their responses in the questionnaire and/or survey.

Trustworthiness of the study

Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to data gathering instruments, participants and time constraints. Being the focus of this research a contrast between theory and practice in terms of culture teaching in EFL classrooms, information on

teachers' practice had to be gathered. What teachers do in their classrooms was represented by their own retelling of classroom activities, which could reflect teachers' own perceptions rather than reality. Moreover, it is possible that the teachers answered based on what they wish they did. This limitation was considered and addressed by gathering artifacts as a more faithful reflection of what teachers do; however, future studies may opt to carry out in class observations to add to another perspective on teacher practices.

Another limitation concerns lack of diversity among the participants. The participants were a group of teachers who teach in diverse schools, but all following the regulations of the Buenos Aires province government and have similar backgrounds in terms of teacher preparation. The specificity of the context and the type of research followed means that its findings are not expected to be generalizable; they are, however, still of relevance for anyone involved in the field. Moreover, all of the participants are female. This was not purposefully done, although it might indicate the general distribution of roles and work in relation to gender in the EFL field in the country. A study with male participants might add new perspectives to the topic under study. In addition, due to the way participants were recruited, it is likely they were educated in the same university, which is not representative of all teachers in the city. In Mar del Plata there are currently several institutions that offer English Teaching training, and teachers in the city can come from anywhere else; however, as many participants were contacted through the National University of Mar del Plata, it is likely most of them are alumni. This entails a shared background which was not sought of when this research was designed.

In terms of numbers, only twelve participants met requirements to be part of the study, and although many more answered the survey, their responses could not be considered. Further research may want to draw on a bigger population to have a more complete understanding of this topic in this context. This limitation is related to time constraints: being part of a Master's degree requirements, the time span to gather data was limited. More available time could have resulted in more, and more diverse, people participating in the study.

Further limitations include familiarity between the participants and the researcher. Being from Mar del Plata myself, I have been in contact with several of the participants in other contexts; which might have affected their sense of anonymity when answering the survey. To increase the chances they are honest with their answers, I repeated many times the purpose of the interview –not to judge them on their teaching skills but to dig deeper on the teaching of culture in particular– and I stressed the fact that their information was going to be anonymized. However, the risk that they felt pressure by the closeness to the researcher persists.

Ethical Considerations

Several measures were taken to ensure that this study follows ethical considerations. To begin with, participants were recruited using an indirect method to avoid influencing acquaintances. Before accessing survey questions, the participants were shown a consent form in which they were explicitly told about the purpose of the research, their rights as participants, and other information that informed their decision.

As stated in the consent form, participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time without consequences, and could request more information about the study should they deem it necessary. The form also offered an estimate of time it would take them to complete the survey. After consenting, the survey allowed participants to go back and forth between questions so that they knew at all times the type of information that was going to be requested from them. They were given details about possible risks involved in participating, such as anxiety as a product of reflecting on their own practice. However, the study did not pose any risks more than those experienced in everyday life. The interview, which could potentially raise anxiety and worry, had a relaxed atmosphere and it was reiterated to participants that the objective of the study was not to judge their practice but to illuminate on the teaching of culture in their contexts.

Participants were also reminded of the anonymization of the data. Although the survey asked for their names when offering consent and when accepting to participate in the follow-up interview (their data was needed to be triangulated with the interview information and class artifacts) participants' names were not disclosed in the final draft of this research. Pseudonyms were used to replace names, and all information that could lead back to participants was removed. The original data containing personal information is stored in my personal cloud which is password protected.

Data Analysis

The data in this case study was analyzed following the principles of qualitative content analysis. The total of the data analyzed comprised answers to a survey from

twelve participants, the transcripts of six interviews, and twelve artifacts from four different participants. The data-gathering methods were requested one at a time; that is to say, only after the survey was over was I able to develop questions for the interview. The artifacts were sent as a last step. Patton (2002) explains that the distinction between data collection and data analysis is not clear-cut, as it is common for analysis to start before fieldwork is over. In this particular case, because some of the questions in the semi-structured interview depended on participants' replies to the survey, I first got acquainted with the survey answers to be able to pose questions for the semi-structured interview and thus, proceed gathering data.

Once the survey stage was complete, I downloaded the information from Qualtrics® in an Excel spreadsheet and carefully read it several times, which enabled me to identify patterns in the participants' responses, many of which were easily recognized because of the Likert scales. An example of this is the fact that four teachers said they "strongly agree" with the statement about having included cultural objectives in their classrooms, which is not what I could have predicted based on the literature, so I prepared questions to check where these objectives in fact were and how they were worded.

After meeting the participants through Zoom®, the videos of the interviews were transcribed using transcription software (otter.ai), and I manually checked each one, making sure that participants' replies were accurate and that they were written verbatim. This enabled me to get familiarized with the interviews.

Once I had collected all my data, I tackled my analysis following principles from qualitative content analysis, which involves "translating" the data into categories in a systematic manner (Schreier, 2012), which in turn, enabled me to reduce the data

so that I could address my two research questions. The categories used emerged from the data and the literature reviewed, and I checked them several times at different moments in time to ensure consistency in the categorization. In terms of the steps I took, I first proceeded to carefully organize my data in different folders in Google Drive. I made two copies of the survey to present it in two ways, based on each participant and based on each question, so that I could find thematic patterns within each response but still be able to compare the answers each participant had given. I also separated the demographic questions and the Likert scales from the open ended questions, as the latter provided rich qualitative data that needed to be categorized in a way that the Likert scale information did not.

I started by reading the survey answers and interview transcripts several times, at first only taking notes on the sides to start identifying patterns. Patton explains that "[d]eveloping some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis" (p. 463). The approach that I followed for this classification is both inductive and deductive. I initially tackled the data without preconceived categories, but it was soon clear that the way the survey had been organized already dictated a certain categorization of the replies. Yin (2014) highlights that as the data in case studies was gathered following certain propositions, it can be expected that "[t]he propositions would have shaped [the] data collection and therefore would have yielded analytical priorities" (p. 136). In spite of this, I was able to identify new themes while in this part of my analysis, like the relation between the teaching of culture and the tackling of comprehensive sexual education in the EFL classroom, which never appeared in the literature I reviewed. After this initial categorization, I went back to scholarship in the matter, which helped me follow a deductive approach,

where "the data is analyzed according to an existing framework" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). In this way, I could identify themes that had been mentioned in similar research or in the theoretical underpinning relevant to this case study.

Once I had an overall idea of the main themes in my data, I organized them in categories and I proceeded to make copies of each piece of data: the surveys in both forms and each transcript. I created folders with copies of the data based on each category. This was done to analyze each category in detail, without risking interference or code mixing from other categories. Within each categorized folder, I looked for subcategories and sub themes. Examples of these are culture seen as underlying ideology, discrepancies between teachers' theory of culture teaching and actual practice, and lack of teacher collaboration, to name but a few. The relationship between the categories was checked as a subsequent step. The findings that resulted from the analysis of the survey and interview were compared to the class artifacts as a way to check what teachers believe about culture and how they describe their classrooms against the actual artifacts they provide students with.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used for this case study. First, the research context and relevant information about the participants and their recruitment was provided. Then, I explained the methods of data collection; survey, interview, and artifact collection, in detail. I also addressed this study's limitations and its ethical considerations. I conclude with a discussion of the steps in the analysis of my data and an explanation of the methodological framework followed. The following chapter will present the main findings that resulted from this case study following qualitative

content analysis and a discussion of what these findings are before the subsequent

chapter delves into their implications.

Chapter Four

Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, I present the findings from the analysis of my data: a survey completed by twelve participants, follow-up interviews with six of them, and twelve classroom artifacts by four of the teacher participants. The findings aim at answering my two original research questions:

(1) What do teachers believe about the teaching of culture in their classrooms?

(2) How do teachers represent the teaching of culture in their classrooms?

First, I introduce the main themes that emerged from my data analysis as they pertain to each research question, which include valuing the teaching of culture, culture as underlying ideology, a disconnect between theory and practice in enacting culture, and the major challenges when addressing it. After the themes, I offer a discussion connecting the findings with each research question and with the reviewed scholarship on the matter.

Themes pertaining to question 1: What do teachers believe about the teaching of culture in their classroom?

Valuing the Teaching of Culture

A relevant issue widely discussed in former research has been whether teachers perceive culture as relevant. A study carried out in a different context (Nguyen et al., 2016) pointed at teachers not always seeing culture teaching as relevant in their classrooms, but research in Argentina suggested Argentine teachers do see the relevance of addressing the topic (Salcedo & Sacchi, 2014). I believe it

appropriate to start the presentation of findings by discussing what participants in the context of Mar del Plata, Argentina, believe about culture teaching.

Teachers' perceived relevance of the topic was gathered at various points in the data gathering process. On the one hand, participants were explicitly asked about their beliefs on culture teaching in the survey, and later on, in the follow up interview. Figure 1 presents teachers' responses to the prompt "I believe that addressing cultural topics in class is important" in a Likert scale.

Figure 1

Teachers' responses to "I believe addressing cultural topics in the classroom is important"
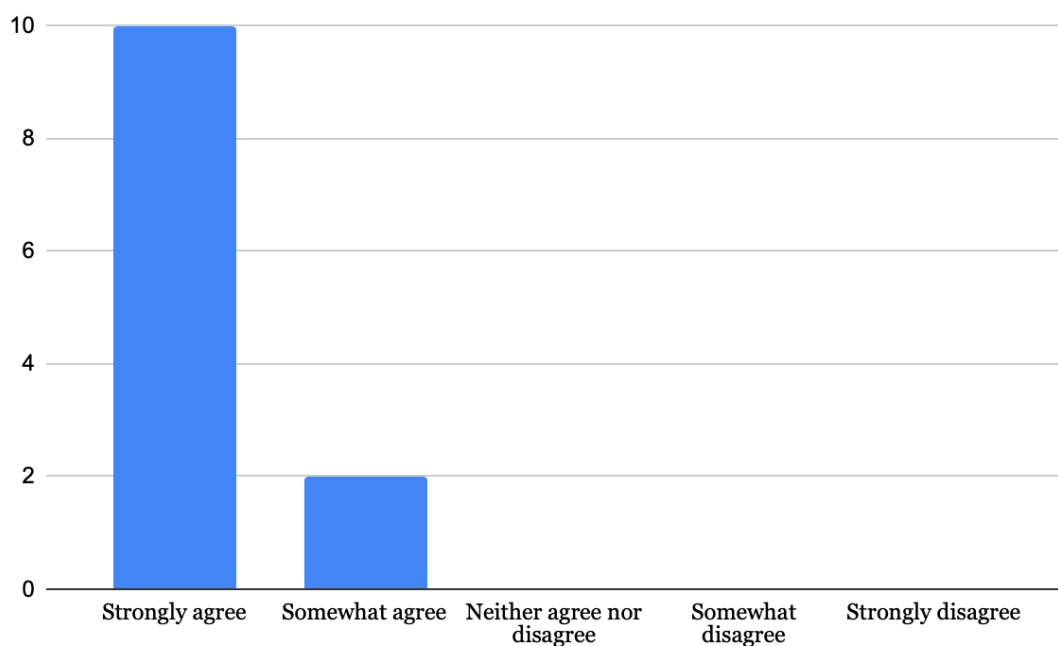
As Figure 1 shows, teachers overwhelmingly agreed with the importance of tackling culture in their classrooms, with ten people responding "strongly agree" to the statement, and two "somewhat agree." These statements were further confirmed while analyzing what teachers believe is the purpose of teaching culture.

The fact that all participants saw purpose behind the tackling of culture points at teachers seeing culture teaching as relevant in their practice. The category that was repeated the most was that of teaching culture to broaden students' minds, with eight participants stating this is their ultimate goal when addressing the topic in class. Four of them took this further and said that broadening the mind was necessary to attain their actual goal: developing empathy:

- "To make students aware of differences and similarities that coexist in society and to develop respect for these differences" (Participant 7)

- "I think it is aimed at broadening students' views of the world around them and, sometimes, at changing their attitudes towards different societies" (Participant 9)

The second most mentioned reason was that of cultural knowledge facilitating language acquisition. Five of the surveyed teachers claimed that learning about one's own culture is one of the objectives behind cultural instruction, which aligns with the Argentinian curriculum objectives:

- "The purpose is learning about different ways of living, interests, media, etc. and also being more aware of what makes one's own culture" (Participant 1).

- "The purpose is knowing different ways of living in order to improve or value our own way of living" (Participant 8)

In addition, two teachers claimed that teaching culture aims at developing students critical thinking skills:

- "I believe the purpose of working with culture in the English classroom is related to helping students develop critical thinking…" (Participant 5).

Figure 2

Categories for "purpose of teaching culture"
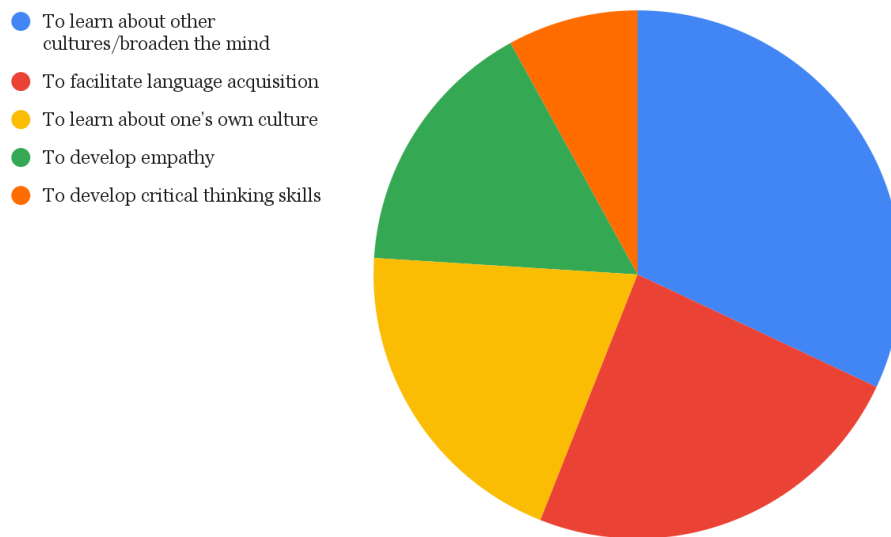
The fact that teachers connect teaching culture with the development of major skills that connect to ultimate goals in education shows that they understand the relevance of tackling this issue in class; however, this perceived relevance will be contended in the findings pertaining to Research Question 2. For the time being and continuing with the findings about teachers' beliefs, I will discuss the most common understanding participants have of the term 'culture,' as the definitions they follow have an impact on how they tackle it, or think they should tackle it, in class.

Culture as Underlying Ideology

In order to analyze how teachers approach the teaching of culture in their classes, it was necessary to determine what they understand by the term. The survey requested teachers to provide a definition of culture, which I then classified in categories that emerged from my literature review (Byram, 1988; Kramsch, 1993,

2009, 2011; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) and from the data itself. The main finding in relation to this is that most participants define culture as an underlying set of beliefs that establish and regulate social norms.

Figure 3

Theoretical definitions of culture as explained by the participants
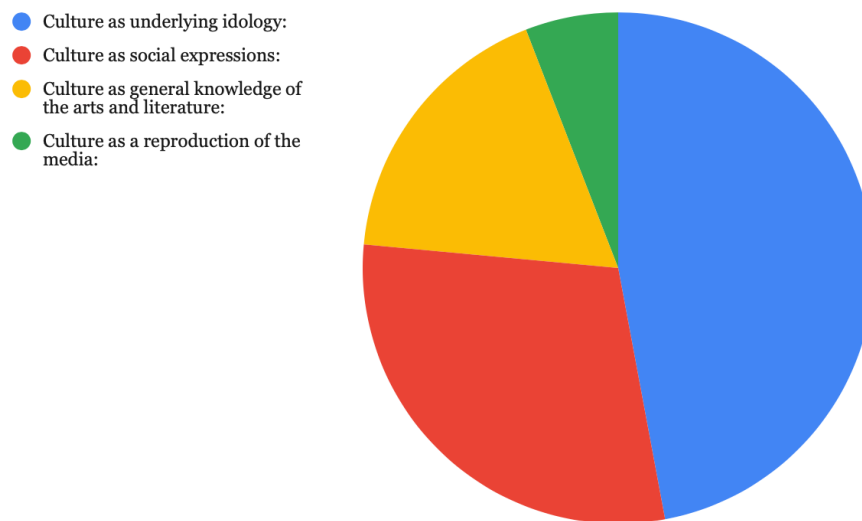
Most participants' answered that culture encompasses beliefs and ideas that members of a certain group share (eight out of twelve). Out of the twelve participants, four of them mentioned the word 'belief' in their question, and three used the word 'idea,' while the word 'values' appeared the same number of times. Participant 4 said: "It [culture] has to do with the system of beliefs, values and overall view world representation that are inherent to the language" (Participant 4).

Five participants included social expressions and behavior in their definitions of culture. Three participants used the term 'traditions' in their answer, and two of them, the word 'religion.' Other definitions referred to ways of clothing, rituals and

celebrations. This category is distinct from the previous one in that it involves a more visible or superficial way of seeing the term. Three participants also referred to the high arts and general knowledge of the history of a society, making use of words such as "music," "history," "art" and "knowledge." Only one participant made reference to media in their definition of culture, and associated it with the "the media content related to a specific group of people." (Participant 1).

Themes pertaining to question 2: How do Teachers represent culture in their classes?

Enacting Culture: A Disconnect Between Theory and Practice

A common theme in the literature in the field which was supported by my own findings was the difference between teachers' beliefs and practice (Nguyen et al., 2016; Salcedo & Sacchi, 2014; Sercu, 2006). In this case study, this disconnect was found in three main areas: the purposes teachers have when addressing culture, the lack of cultural objectives in spite of seeing culture as relevant, and the difference in how culture is defined and how it is enacted. To determine this, I contrasted the explicit answers teachers provided in the survey about importance, purpose, and definition of culture with the descriptions of the class they offered in the same survey, in the interviews, and with the artifacts sent.

Culture as a Means to Develop Language Proficiency

After comparing my data, I was able to determine that the most common purpose for teaching culture among my participants is facilitating language acquisition. In this, I included all activities with a focus on language and linguistic

development. The second most common purpose was the development of critical thinking skills. Most of the artifacts at some point asked students to think critically about an issue addressed in it. Four of the eight artifacts that aimed at developing critical thinking skills targeted challenging gender roles by asking students to think about the reasons for common gender associations in their culture and in other cultures. Half of the artifacts also referred to Argentinian culture at some point, and asked students to compare or contrast what they were learning about other cultures to their own. Teachers also seemed to encourage students' self expression and the sharing of opinions and usual practices with their classmates. Learning just to learn, that is, "to broaden students' mind" was the purpose of only three of the activities in the artifacts provided, and developing empathy, although mentioned several times when teachers were asked about the reasons behind the teaching of culture, was the actual purpose of only two activities.

Figure 4

The most common purposes for teaching culture as seen in artifacts and class descriptions
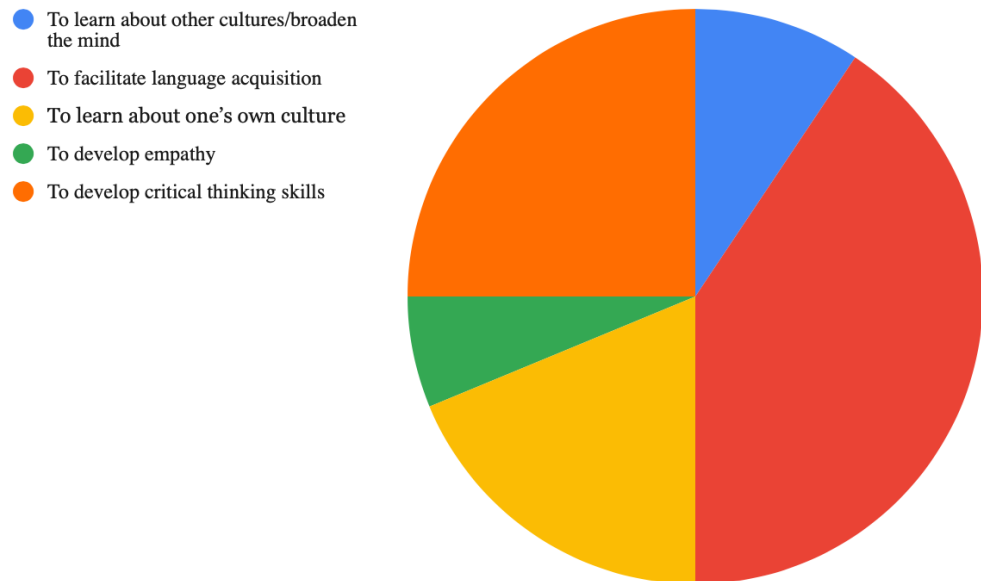
Lack of Cultural Objectives in Syllabi and Formal Planning

After being asked about their purposes for teaching culture, teachers were requested to refer to explicit cultural objectives in their planning. These also present contradictions between teachers' statements about their practice and their actual practice. To gather information about their practice, a Likert scale with the prompt "I have included cultural objectives in the planning of my classes" was provided (Figure 5). Participants also had to explain the frequency with which they address cultural topics in the classroom (Figure 6). It is worth noting that, although the vast majority of teachers agreed with culture being an important topic to tackle in class, only a portion of them included explicit objectives related to culture. Figures 5 and 6 show teachers' answers.

Figure 5

Answers to the prompt "I have included cultural objectives in the planning of my
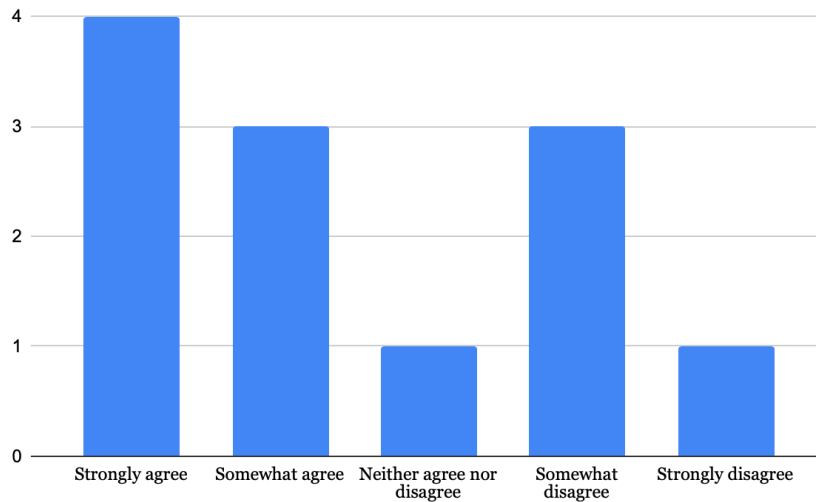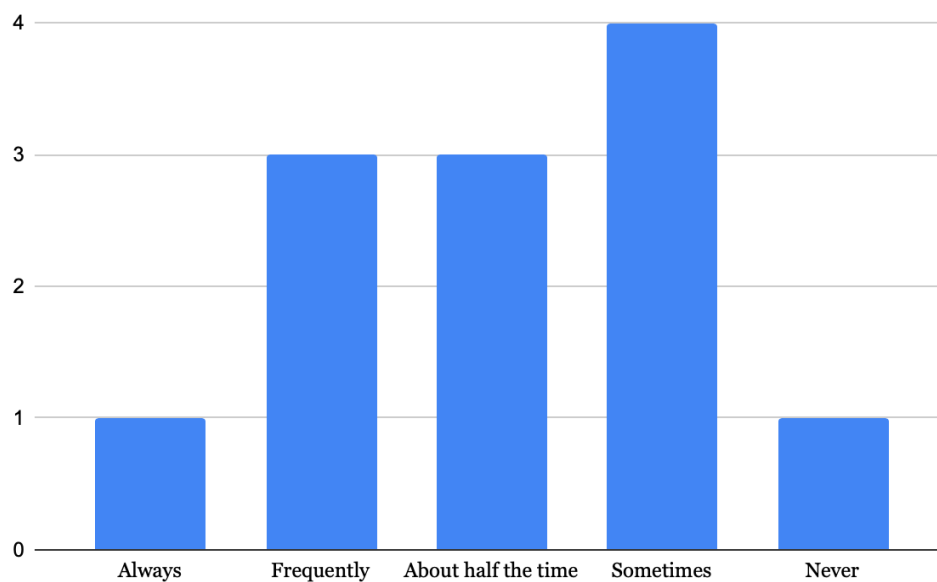
classes."

Figure 6

Answers to the prompt "I plan lessons that address cultural topics explicitly."

The inclusion of cultural objectives in the classroom was also addressed in the

follow up interview: teachers who responded "strongly agree" (2 participants out of

the ones interviewed) or "somewhat agree" (1 participant), were requested to explain

their objectives. Noticeably, in spite of their positive answer, only one of the participants claimed to have explicit cultural objectives in their syllabi. The other two referred to "personal" objectives, as they could not write explicit cultural objectives in the official syllabus because it was either shared with other teachers who did not share their view on the topic, or more alarmingly, because there was not syllabus for the English class, just a list of topics to be covered during the school year:

- "...what orientates or what guides my objectives are other things. Like I try to carry out projects, [through] which teach I don't know values or critical thinking, but I never pay attention to at least, English culture" (Participant 11)

- [About how often they work with culture in the classroom] "Not much, to be honest. [...] I need to follow, like a rigid schedule [the coursebook's table of contents] [....] I can be more flexible inside my classroom. But I need to follow some objectives, which I may be or not, I may agree with them or not." (Participant 6)

- "We don't write syllabuses. That's one thing. I do plan... like we have one but not in at [name of school] the syllabus is somehow premade. So I didn't include much there. But I did include some in my lesson plans" (Participant 2)

Two of the participants directly linked culture with sexual education, but again, the objectives for this were theirs, not shared in the syllabus she submitted to the school:

- "I have many objectives, you know that here in Argentina, there is a law for comprehensive sexuality education. And one of the axes is diversity.[....] So that's why when I say I have the objectives is like, I

want to have a gender perspective when I teach. And I think this is

intimately related to culture." (Participant 10)

- " I, I create the module and I write the plan of my of my classes, but

   it's not so. So well- thought, is like I am more flexible. But I do what I

   have my own objectives, personal objectives that I want my students to

   be critical on feminism, on gender violence" (Participant 11)

Participant three said she personally wrote objectives about culture, as that is what is

requested by the National Curriculum Design. In fact, the participant emphasized she

took the objectives from the official document. However, after analyzing her syllabus,

I found the section of the syllabus that refers to culture the most is "fundamentación,"

which could be translated as "rationale." The purpose of that section is to support the

teaching of English, highlighting the multiple benefits it has as presented in the

National Curriculum Design. Next are two excerpts from that section that show how

culture is seen within English teaching by the only participant who has anything

explicit about it in her syllabus:

- "Through language, we learn to act as members of a society; to adopt

   and respect its culture, which is why reflection upon linguistic acts

   will not be independent from linguistic production…" [...]

- "The need for cooperative work, mutual respect, respect for other

   peoples and cultures will be addressed, which will create

   opportunities for sharing."

These two quotes explain the importance of teaching English, but as is the case of the

National Curriculum, these words are not objectives nor actionable items that can

guide instructors. A subsequent section in the syllabus refers to objectives, which are

divided in specific and general, and are presented in the form of bullet points and amount to a total of eighteen, but none of them refer to culture.

Culture as social expressions and as knowledge of the arts

As seen in Figure 7, the category that was repeated the most was that of culture as social expressions and traditions. In fact, the most common topics about culture that teachers tackled as they described their lessons were food (5 participants) and clothing (3 participants). One participant also mentioned traditional celebrations. As explained in the previous section, this category focuses on an understanding of culture based on visible expressions of cultural traditions and/or customs, and not on the underlying beliefs that govern those visible actions, which was the most common way of understanding the term in theory.

Figure 7

Definitions of culture as seen in class descriptions and artifacts

The second most common way to understand culture was as general knowledge of the arts and literature. Examples of this are activities around music or historical events which do not explicitly address cultural elements. Reading comprehension worksheets about short stories with only a focus on language were also included here.

Culture as social norms was the third most common approach to culture: Three teachers addressed culture as an underlying ideology that governs behavior, and a total of five artifacts revolved around this view of the term. This was a surprising finding because working with underlying ideology requires teachers and students to dig deeper into visible practices; however, teachers in this study surmounted that obstacle working with comprehensive sexual education; the most common topics for artifacts working with underlying beliefs were gender or racial inequality: One of the artifacts aimed at working with gender tackled the issue of toys and gender stereotypes. The worksheet makes use of a short clip in which a girl receives a talking doll to play with and tries to use her by pretending she is an important spokesperson making a speech in front of others; however, the only phrases the doll produces are about cooking or about being innocent and clueless. The artifact then includes a series of activities to help students reflect on how problematic what the doll is saying can be and how that affects the girl in the video. Another artifact works with Chimamanda Adichie's video The Danger of a Single Story, in which Adichie talks about reading as a young Nigerian girl, and finding lack of representation in the characters in her stories. In the worksheet, students are prompted to analyze the message in Adichie's video by the use of critical thinking questions. They also have to relate the content of the video to their own lives, as they are requested to think about stories others have

about them or their own culture, and vice versa: fixed narratives students have about people they don't know. One of the activities explicitly asks students to "[f]ind examples that illustrate the danger of a single story in Argentina (new article, short video, documentary segment, song, etc.)".

As was mentioned before, in all cases the artifacts that sought to expose common behaviors throughout cultures focused on gender roles and inequality, which in Argentina lies within the teaching of Comprehensive Sexual Education. Even though this was surprising at first, the fact that CSE has been getting much attention in the country over the past years, especially after the passing of the law making it mandatory (*Congreso de la Nación Argentina*, 2016) explains why the teachers in this study focused on this. Moreover, the Argentinian law prompts all teachers to address it and not just the ones in charge of classes directly related to it, so English teachers are simply following the current education law that guides their practice. The EFL class is an especially good environment to address CSE as it enables focus on a variety of topics through the foreign language.

Challenges when teaching culture

A category that appeared repeatedly in the literature reviewed was how challenging the teaching of culture can be for many instructors. Challenges in culture teaching were thus directly addressed in the survey, and then in the follow up interview. Noteworthy to this study is the fact that when asked in the survey, most participants claimed not to have challenges. However, when asked again in the follow up interview, all participants mentioned some form of struggling. This may be

explained by the possibility to expand on their answers in a way that a survey, being written and time-consuming, may not have provided. Moreover, the fact that they did so while interacting with a fellow teacher could point at teachers opening up about struggles while in conversation with a peer.

In relation to the survey answers, the participants first responded to a Likert scale statement saying whether they find this topic easy to address or not, and whether they felt qualified to do so or not.The results from the Likert scale and the question in the survey are displayed in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Answers to the prompts "I find it easy to address cultural topics in the classroom" and "I feel qualified to talk about culture in my classroom"
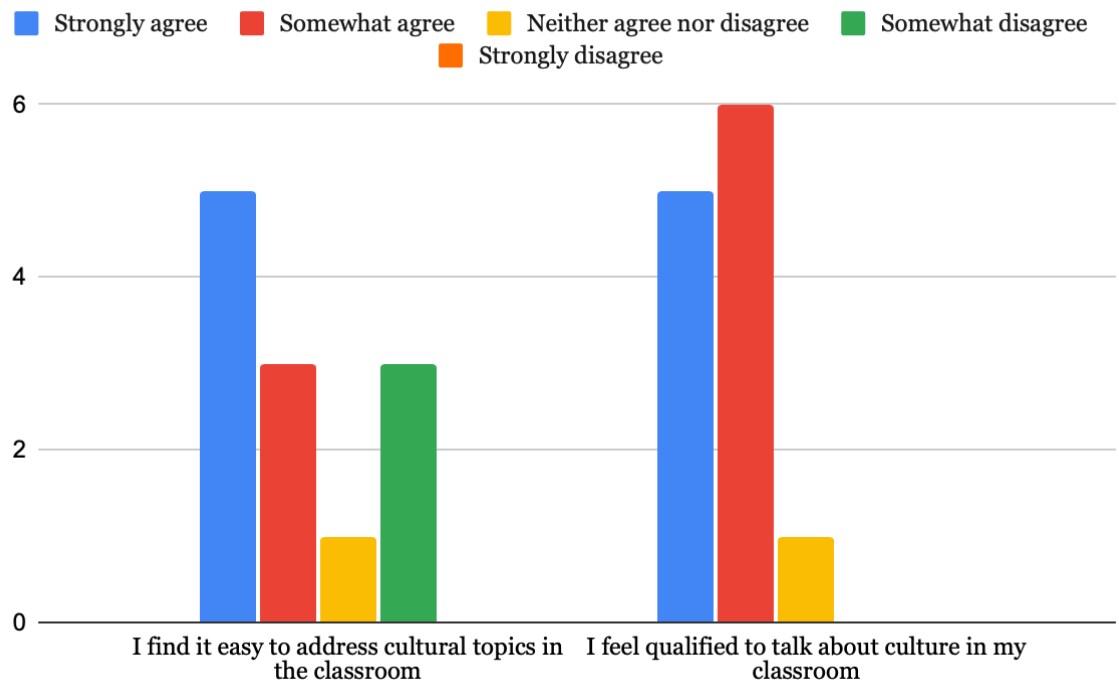
An open-ended question then explicitly requested them to explain the most common challenges they face when working with culture in their classrooms. Most

teachers replied they do not have major challenges when working with culture (5 participants); however, as stated before, this was contented in the follow-up interview. The main challenges participants face, which resulted from the open ended question in the survey and follow-up semi-structured interview are presented as sub themes below.

Insufficient Materials and Lack of Teacher Collaboration

In the survey, many teachers expressed they found their materials insufficient when it came to culture teaching, which was also addressed in one of the Likert Scales (Figure 9). However, I was surprised to find that some instructors are not allowed to work with topics that are not in the course books, as many times their content is used as a syllabus; or if they supplement the book, the amount of time they devote to these "other" activities needs to be limited, as school administrators and parents alike pressure for teachers to use the materials that the students were requested to acquire:

"And I tried to, I tried to bring texts, of course, that I had some limits, because they [the students] have to use the material. For example, here in secondary school, I have to use the material, the books that I, they are supposed to buy. And so sometimes it's limited. It's... I have limitations" (Participant 10).

This same participant explained that she needs to work with another teacher who is in charge of another section of the same class she teaches, and because they do not share approaches to culture or to teaching in general, they find it hard to design and include anything outside of the assigned course book.

"And those guides [the artifacts], I prepared the guides for the two courses here, because there are two courses for the same level. But I am not sure whether the

other teacher uses them or not. They are part of the material. I am the one who

prefers to work with projects and focus on culture. [...] When I write the plans, I

would include them explicitly. But she prepares them and says like, the last

word is hers."

This was replicated by another participant:

"The thing is that in all the, like, the syllabuses I have to make this year, I had to

work with others. So sometimes I don't share the same vision with others. So that

was something we couldn't agree on."

Figure 9

Answers to the prompts "The materials I use in the classroom offer enough instances

for students to work with culture" and "The materials I use in the classroom expose

students to a variety of English speaking Cultures"
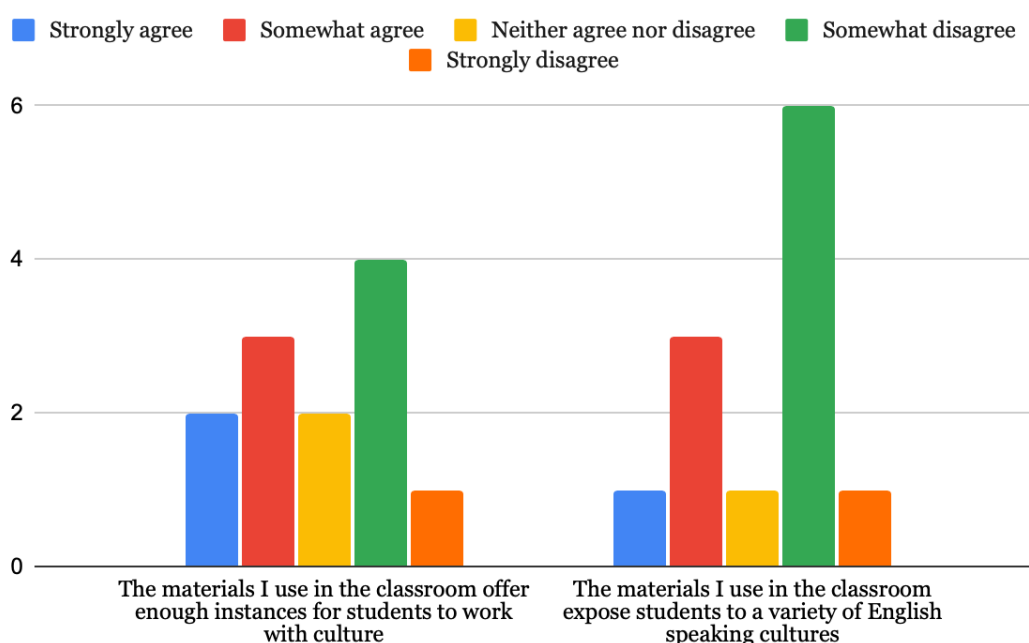
The fact that in many Argentinian high schools, several teachers are in charge

of sections of the same course/level, seems to have made it hard for individual

teachers to deviate too much from the assigned book, as the institution requires them to be doing more or less what the other teacher in the other section is doing too as a way to keep all sections of a class balanced. In addition, participants in the study struggled working collaboratively with other teachers, which resulted in syllabi avoiding topics not present in the selected coursebooks.

Broad Conceptualizations of Culture Affect Explicit Culture Teaching

While conducting the follow-up interview, I observed that participants, even after having provided a definition of culture, sometimes struggled pinpointing what the term refers to; this is supported by previous literature in the matter: "[teachers have a] broad conceptualizations in mind when describing culture" (Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 169). In relation to this case study, while talking about how often she works with culture, one of the participants said the following:

"I think that the thing is that when you tell me… when we say culture, what do you mean by culture? Because for me, culture is like the, the air, like the… from which everything happens, do you see what I mean?" (Participant 10)

One of them argued that, since language and culture cannot be separated, then she is teaching culture all the time, even if this is not explicit:

"I think it has to do with my, like, vision of what culture is, 'cause I agree with the statement that we are teaching culture whenever we're teaching a foreign language. So if I'm qualified to teach a language, of course, I'm qualified to teach culture, because I'm doing it even if I don't want to. Yeah, of course, sometimes, we can be more specific, and we can raise awareness about some cultural aspects. But when I… when I, whenever I say I did culture, I, I don't

refer to teaching about specific cultures. In general, I don't do that unless I

want to highlight some specific aspects about the target culture, because then I

will have to find what the target culture is. And that's more complicated"

(Participant 4).

Another of the participants referred to culture as "English culture" at various points

during the interview, and even though we were not talking about any culture in

particular, due to this repetition, I asked her to explain what she meant by "English

culture." This is what she answered:

"I don't know [what English culture is], because it's so broad. But I don't even

know how to describe it. The like, the typical traditional English culture that is

taught in the, in the textbooks is the culture from England. That is not even

true, because people who have lived in England, they claim that those things

aren't true. So I don't really know what the English culture is. Maybe like tea

and the queen? And I don't know. I don't know. Difficult question."

This lack of clarity as to what is meant by the term culture, which they were able to

define at a theoretical level but proved problematic when deciding what "counts" as

the teaching of culture at a practical level, seemed to hinder the teachers from

knowing exactly how to tackle culture, or even to pinpoint exactly when they were

doing so explicitly.

Students Having a Negative Appreciation of Their C1

An interesting challenge that came up in the interviews was that of negative

appreciations of home and target (in the form of Inner circle) cultures. Three

participants commented on the negative view that some students have of their own

culture, which they express whenever they work with "foreign cultures." A fourth participant admitted having a negative appreciation of English-speaking cultures herself (although this was reduced to the inner circle ones), because of their history of colonization and the subsequent effect of devaluation of students' own culture–similar to what the other teachers found their students say. To exemplify the first case, in which three teachers explained students sometimes say Argentina is not good enough compared to inner circle cultures, I have chosen a few excerpts which I provide below:

> "[...] sometimes kids here in Argentina, when they, most of them when they go to private schools, they have heard many, many times that Argentina is a country that sucks, and that we should aspire to be something else." (Participant 2)

> "They tend to value, like, America, more specifically American culture, much more than they value Argentinian." (Participant 4)

> "And so I, I tried to help them, like, reflect upon the wrong beliefs and attitudes to, to compare, yes, sometimes with Argentina to talk about Argentina, but there is always this idea that "Ah, son todos chorros" [everyone's a thief]. But their attitudes are so mean sometimes." (Participant 10)

In all cases teachers explained that creating critical thinking activities was their most common approach to tackle this, but at least one participant thought that teaching culture would not help address this:

> "Yes, I have my, my controversies relating this topic. For example, today–I have a very clear example of my position to culture. Today, my secondary students

asked me, "why couldn't we celebrate Halloween in the class?" And I hate Halloween. And I told them I hate it. I don't like that. I don't like it. I have never liked it. "But teacher, you are an English teacher. And it's a traditional and cultural thing." "Yeah, but I don't like it. I'm sorry." I prefer to, to work with other… I know that but it's because I'm having some issues with the English culture itself, with what imperialism and, and what those countries do to the rest of the world." (Participant 11)

In this last segment, it is clear that the teacher associated the teaching of culture with the teaching of inner circle cultures, and thus, thought that addressing the topic in class would result in comments as the ones highlighted by participants 2, 4, and 10 when referring to the negative attitude some students have towards Argentina.

As was shown in the section above, the target cultures teachers and classroom materials address are relevant to decide when and how to tackle culture in class. For this reason, another theme analyzed in the data was that of target cultures, section that I present next.

Target Cultures in the Argentinian EFL Classroom

Focus on the UK and the US Cultures

In the hope to find out the target cultures EFL teachers use as references when addressing the topic in their classes, participants were asked to provide examples of the target cultures they most commonly work with. To make these categories, I followed Kachru's (1992a; 1992b) taxonomy described in chapter 2:

- The 'inner circle,' in which the author includes countries where most speakers' mother tongue is English. These are the USA, the UK, Austrasia, South Africa.

- In a second category that Krachu called the "Outer circle,' are those countries whose speakers have another mother tongue in addition to English, but due to colonial ties to countries in the inner circle, they also have English as an official language. This category includes India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and others.

- A third category encompasses countries where English is a foreign language. This is the case for Argentina.

Krachu's categories were useful for my data analysis, but I decided to add one more sub category based on the information I found in my data. Because many books in Argentina are produced in the UK or in the USA, I decided to include this country and kingdom within their own category. It is also worth noting that teachers were asked about target cultures in general; they were not requested to provide countries. However, in this question, all respondents reported using a country or series of countries as target cultures. In sum, these are the categories respondents identified when referring to target cultures in their EFL classrooms (Figure 10).

Figure 10

Target cultures in the Argentinian EFL Classroom

The UK and the USA exclusively

The inner circle (including the US and the UK, but also Canada, New Zealand, etc.).

The expanding circle (Non English speaking countries like Latin American countries).

The outer circle (India, Pakistan, Nigeria, etc.).

In relation to the frequency in which students are exposed to a variety of cultures, most teachers say that only half the time culture is addressed, students work with a wide array of cultures: Five participants said students work with diverse cultures half the time culture is addressed, and three of them said only sometimes that is the case. Three teachers answered that this happens frequently. This was further supported by the artifacts and the description of classes. As an example of the overwhelming attention Inner Circle cultures get in the Argentinian EFL, I will describe a few artifacts. The ones working with literature revolved around British works and one about Chicano culture in the US; the ones about music, with American music. A few artifacts dealt with topics pertaining to the whole world, like gender stereotypes or the environment. Those could not be classified within Kachru's circles. Two of the artifacts sent also addressed Latin America, one through the environment and the other one, also mentioned above, through US literature. Other inner circle or outer circle cultures are mentioned, like Australia and Nigeria, but seven artifacts touch on Inner circle cultures at some point, making those target cultures the most

common ones observed in these class samples too and matching teachers' claims. It is worth noting that when teachers were asked what target cultures were most common in their classes, the question did not refer to the book but to their classes in general, including the materials they brought by themselves. The artifacts, however, were solely teachers' work; not one was a copy of a textbook. The important observation here is that even when teachers create their own materials, the focus continues to be on Inner Circle cultures, with Argentina playing a secondary role as the final point of comparison in post-reading/watching/listening activities which are usually aimed at having them use the target language in production tasks.

Discussion

This section focuses on the discussion of the themes presented in relation to the teaching of culture in EFL secondary classrooms in Mar del Plata, Argentina. The main points of attention will be the relevance teachers see in addressing culture in their classes and whether that appreciation is seen in their actual practice, the definitions of culture that guide teachers' practice in theory and the ones that actually do so in their classrooms, the different purposes for teaching culture, and the usual challenges they face when working with the topic.

The Importance of Teaching Culture and Whether it Translates to the Classroom

Discussing the relevance teachers give to the teaching of culture is a pertinent place to start the discussion of this case study findings. This particular topic has been explored in previous research, which reports contradictory findings. Nguyen et al. (2006) reported participants did not deem culture teaching as too important, whereas

Salcedo and Sacchi's (2013) participants agreed to the need to address culture in their EFL classrooms. In the case of this case study, the overwhelming majority of the participants believes that addressing cultural topics in the EFL classroom is important, with ten participants strongly agreeing to such a claim, and the other two, somewhat agreeing to it. However, the participants' strong belief in culture teaching is unevenly translated into their practice, which was also the case in Salcedo and Sacchi's research (2013). This was observed in this case study's participants' answers to the statement "I plan lessons that address cultural topics explicitly," where results were not so unanimous; three teachers said they sometimes do it, and one even admitted never doing it. Several factors may explain this difference, which will be discussed below.

Lack of Explicit Objectives

In spite of claiming that culture teaching is relevant, only four teachers strongly agreed to having explicit cultural objectives in their classes, three somewhat agree, one neither agrees or disagrees, and one completely disagrees with the claim. The fact that only one teacher said "completely disagree" points at teachers having cultural objectives in some form or another; however, the follow-up interview revealed that even those who had claimed to have objectives had not explicitly written them in their syllabi: participants have their "own, personal objectives" which many times are not reflected in the official documents they submit to the institution where they work. One of the most common explanations behind this was that instructors write their syllabi jointly with other teachers in charge of other sections of the same grade; that they do not always feel comfortable including these cultural objectives, or that it was the other teacher who had the final say about what is to be included there.

Another common explanation was that the syllabus was mostly a copy of the textbook's table of contents. In any of these two cases, the implication is that the teaching of culture is not seen as relevant in school syllabi. Only one of the participants explicitly mentioned culture in her syllabus, and even then, it was not in the form of actionable objectives but as a general explanation of its role in the classroom. This also points at the lack of clarity on the part of the Curriculum Design of the Province of Buenos Aires; the analyzed syllabus followed it and included the same ideas as in these guidelines, but just as in the official document, the syllabus lacked cultural objectives. Not having clear objectives undermines the relevance of teaching culture and makes it harder for teachers to decide what to address. This is further supported by the fact that teachers admitted that only sometimes do they address cultural topics in the classroom, even if they see the topic as relevant. Previous literature has addressed how lack of actionable goals in official documents regulating schools affects the teaching of culture in the EFL classroom (Feryok & Oranje, 2015), and the findings in this study suggest this is the case for teachers in Mar del Plata.

Broad Conceptualizations of Culture

The broad conceptualizations of the term culture that teachers have in mind may be another reason as to why culture is often not tackled explicitly. This finding aligns with Sercu's (2006), whose research pointed at teachers defining culture so broadly that they then struggled putting culture teaching into practice. A few participants in the follow-up interview referred to culture as being and encompassing everything, with one even comparing it to the air we breathe. This aligns with

Kramsch's (1997) claims not to see culture as separate from language; however, an implication of this board conceptualization is that teachers might think that as they tackle culture all the time, doing so explicitly does not deserve much attention. This can also be linked to the lack of specificity in the drawing of objectives and subsequent addressing of the topic in class.

Connected to teachers' difficulty with defining the term is the fact that one of the findings signals a disconnection between how teachers define it and the definitions they follow in practice. This is the topic of the following section.

Differences Between Belief and Practice - Definition of Culture

As can be noted in the thematic presentation of the findings, EFL teachers in Mar del Plata were asked to define culture and to provide examples of classes in which they addressed culture explicitly. Noticeable differences were found in the way teachers refer to culture at a theoretical level, and the actual notion they have when they are in their classrooms. As presented in Table 2, the most common way of seeing culture in theory is as a set of underlying beliefs and values that then guide everyday behavior and meaning-making. However, perhaps because identifying underlying values is harder to grasp–they are not as visible as traditions and customs presented as such– that was not the most common way of understanding culture in practice. As seen in examples of their lessons and in classroom artifacts, the most common way to tackle culture is through visible behaviors. Again, this matches Salcedo and Sacchi's study (2014). Examples of this were food, ways of dressing, and daily routines. This is related to the topics often dealt with in lower proficiency levels–routines and ways of clothing are common among the first years of EFL instruction in the Buenos Aires

province. However, the need for students to be proficient to really tackle culture was not a major challenge mentioned by the teachers.

Table 2

Definitions of culture in theory vs. practice

Definitions of culture	Number of participants that followed that definition	
	In theory	In practice
Culture as social norms: ideas, behaviors, values, beliefs	8	3
Culture as social expressions	5	8
Culture as general knowledge of the arts and literature	3	7
Culture as a reproduction of media	1	0

Many of the activities teachers present in their classrooms work with culture as a synonym of art and literature, as this was the second most common understanding of culture in practice. One of the interviewees mentioned that it is impossible to teach literature without addressing culture, and another said literature is "an easy way in."

In addition, in my experience working in this context, worksheets about music and lyrics are common among EFL classrooms in Mar del Plata, especially in secondary school, as the topic is close to the age of the students. However, as was mentioned before, the activities that were classified in this category are the ones that work exclusively with that–graphic art, literature, music–without an explicit focus on cultural aspects. Only three teachers worked with the underlying beliefs and ideologies of cultural groups, which is possibly due to a need for a deeper understanding on the part of the instructor of the target culture, something not all teachers have access to.

Differences Between Belief and Practice - Purposes of Culture Teaching

Perhaps the most striking finding was the difference between what teachers say is the ultimate purpose of teaching culture and the purposes they actually set for themselves in their classrooms as seen in their activities and artifacts (Table 3). The fact that teaching culture facilitates language acquisition was mentioned by several participants who focused on sociocultural competence and its role in developing language proficiency (Canale & Swain, 1980). However, many teachers (8) were able to go beyond the linguistic goal and refer to the role culture instruction has in broadening students' minds. In practice, most activities are mostly aimed at developing language and use culture as a means for that. In many cases, culture only served as content for regular drill-like activities. A category that remained mostly the same, with five teachers mentioning this purpose in theory and six pursuing that purpose in practice, was that of culture instruction as a way to learn about one's own culture. Many of the artifacts provided at some point or other asked students to refer

back to their own cultures, or to produce language in which they explained something about Argentina after working about that same topic but focusing on another culture. A third category that differed from teachers' theoretical responses was the goal of teaching culture as a way to develop critical thinking skills. Eight activities in total focused on that and asked students to reflect and make inferences, to read between the lines, understand irony, or reflect upon the underlying reasons for a certain behavior. After the goal of developing linguistic competence, this category was the most common in my data.

Table 3

Purposes of teaching culture in theory vs. in practice

Purposes of teaching culture	Number of activities representing each definition of culture	
	In theory	In practice
To broaden the mind	8	3
To facilitate language acquisition	6	13
To learn about one's own culture	5	6
To develop empathy	4	2
To develop critical	2	8

thinking skills

The Treatment of Argentinian Culture

One of the main goals of culture teaching is that students learn about their own cultures. When asked about the inclusion of Argentinian topics in their classrooms, half of the participants said they either always or often do so, with a high number of participants stating they sometimes address Argentina in their classrooms. However, when contrasted with the artifacts and the sample cultural lessons, students' first culture was used mostly as a topic to produce language after students have worked with a foreign culture. Moreover, the fact that one participant was adamant about how working with culture is related to imperialism practices –seeing only Inner circle cultures as the usually approached ones when in these classes– suggests that first cultures are rarely the main focus of the EFL classroom in the Mar del Plata context. Another participant stated she usually starts her culture classes with something catchy, something different, that's where foreign cultures come in. She explained students have a natural tendency to bring those foreign topics home and relate them to what they know, which reinforces the notion that it is foreign cultures the usual protagonists in culture classes.

Teachers seem to know that one of the purposes of teaching culture is to help students reflect upon their own practices and also, to become more open-minded to other ways of seeing the world. In addition, most teachers are critical about the lack of variety of target cultures featured in their textbooks. However, when I analyzed the class artifacts created by the teachers themselves, I was surprised to find that the most

common target cultures featured in them were also Inner Circle ones. This reinforces the idea that teachers associate the teaching of culture with Inner circle English speaking cultures –and the most 'prestigious' ones– and not necessarily with the teaching of any culture, understanding that broadening students' minds will be achieved through a variety of cultures, and not only the English speaking ones. Friedrich (2003) referred to the fallacy of believing that students are learning English only to communicate with Inner circle speakers –this fallacy seems to be repeated here, when it looks like the only focus of culture classes should be English speaking cultures.

One of the challenges mentioned by the participants in this study when tackling culture was the fact that sometimes students have a negative appreciation of their own culture and tend to idealize Inner Circle cultures. Lopez Barrios & Villanueva de Debat (2007) refer to the need to lead learners to be critical about other cultures rather than to passively receive information about foreign cultures which are usually presented as superior. This is further supported by the reviewed literature, as a characteristic of students' third culture is that they can be critical about cultures and make "connections to dominant attitudes and worldviews" (Kramsch, 1988, as cited in Kramsch, 2009, p. 238). In this case study, the development of critical skills through the use of culture was present, and in fact, it was the second most common purpose for teaching culture after language acquisition. However, as it was explained before, in most cases teachers started with foreign cultures and used Argentina's culture as a point of comparison to have students use the language with real communicative objectives.

The Development of Intercultural Competence

To discuss the development of intercultural competence in the EFL

Argentinian classroom, I will follow the characteristics that intercultural speakers

need to have as presented by Byram (1997, as cited in Deardoff, 2006). As stated by

the scholar, learners should have "[k]nowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to

interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values,

beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key

role" (p. 247).

Based on the lack of cultural objectives in the EFL class syllabus, the

treatment of culture in the classrooms seems to need more guided and explicit

attention among the classrooms that comprised this case study; however, most

participants claimed having cultural objectives in some form – some claimed they had

more objectives than the ones reflected in the official syllabus and referred to them as

"personal objectives", being the cultural ones were included in that group. This,

combined with the finding that most teachers at least sometimes prepare lessons in

which culture is addressed explicitly, points at some covering of the topic in the EFL

classroom, albeit it may be insufficient. Students are then exposed to others' point of

views and are prompted to acquire knowledge of others, although in many cases,

those others are mostly inner circle English speakers.

Byram (1997, as cited in Deardoff) also referred to the need of an intercultural

speaker to have knowledge of themselves; this is intimately related to the teaching of

C1 in the EFL classroom or the reflection of C1 practices. Argentina was mentioned

in the majority of the artifacts and sample classes, in which at least at the end of the

lesson, students had to make reference to their own cultures. Moreover, one participant claimed that students naturally do that, connect topics seen in class with their daily lives. However, it was observed that Argentina or other explaining circle cultures is rarely the main focus of cultural lessons. The approach teachers follow when working with Argentinian culture in their classrooms could be further explored, but findings in this case study were enough to determine that participants do refer to C1 in their cultural lessons.

Another characteristic of intercultural speakers is that of having "skills to interest and relate," (Byram, 1997, as cited in Deardoff, 2006) which I have included within the development of critical skills activities, the second main purpose in the activities working with culture. The valuing of other's beliefs was not so emphasized in the class as the teachers had claimed when explaining the purposes of treating culture in their classrooms; the relativization of oneself could also be included here. However, at least five activities in the artifacts sent aimed at broadening students' minds (a precursor of developing empathy), or aimed directly at developing empathy.

Linguistic competence is also a relevant trait among those of an intercultural speaker (Byram, 1997, as cited in Deardoff, 2006); and in this case, all the artifacts developed students' linguistic skills in some form. Furthermore, half of them had the development of linguistic competence as their general purpose.

Overall, it can be stated that teachers in Mar del Plata EFL classrooms attempt to develop intercultural competence, although in many cases, more attention needs to be paid to activities aiming at the development of empathy or to relativization of themselves.

Culture treatment through Comprehensive Sexual Education

One of the most unexpected findings was that teachers in this context relate the teaching of culture with Comprehension Sexual Education classes. As was discussed in the findings, four of the eight artifacts that aimed at developing critical thinking skills targeted challenging gender roles. The follow-up interviews revealed that at least two participants explicitly think about dismantling gender roles as a personal objective in their classrooms; and two others said they tackle Comprehensive Sexual Education whenever the topic is related to it or when issues arise in the classroom that need to be addressed by teaching CSE to the students. Out of the six interviewed teachers, four referred to CSE at some point. Tackling topics related to CSE was especially connected to the treatment of culture understood as underlying ideology, which was the main definition provided by teachers in theory. As already discussed, teachers did not follow this definition in their practice, which may be due to the difficulty to grasp underlying ideologies governing explicit behaviors; however, the participants in this study made use of CSE practice to tackle this "invisible" cultural beliefs and were thus able to work towards the development of an intercultural speaker following their main definitions of the term culture; an achievement which could have proven difficult without following CSE guidelines.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the main findings in this case study, which were presented based on the main themes that arose from the survey, interview, and classroom artifacts analysis and were organized as they responded to each research question. The major themes generated by the data were valuing the teaching of

culture, culture as underlying ideology, a disconnect between theory and practice in enacting culture, and major challenges when addressing it. A discussion of these findings in relation to the research questions guiding this case study was also presented. In the following chapter, I will address the educational implications that resulted from these findings, which relate to more clarity in official documents, better understanding of teachers' beliefs and whether they translate to their practice, and more emphasis on teacher collaboration.

Chapter Five

Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

This chapter aims at developing the implications drawn from the findings of the case study: Teaching culture in the Argentinian EFL classroom: Beliefs, practice, and challenges. The purpose of this study was to gain understanding about the beliefs EFL Secondary School teachers in Mar del Plata have about the teaching of culture, and how they represent culture in their classrooms. This study revealed that teachers see the teaching of culture as an important part of their work but lack explicit cultural objectives to tackle culture teaching. Participants also showed different understandings of culture in theory and in practice; being "underlying ideology" the most common definition in theory, but "social expressions" and "knowledge of the arts" the predominant definitions guiding practice. Other differences between belief and enactment were evident in the purposes participants had for teaching culture: the former were associated with broadening students' minds, while in practice teachers mostly did it to aid language acquisition. Other major findings were the many challenges teachers face when tackling culture in their classrooms. In this chapter of the thesis, I will address the implications for this case study, which explain the relevance of this research for the teachers, teacher preparation professionals, and the field in general. I will also provide ideas for future research that may continue helping gain understanding of the teaching of culture and how it is addressed in Argentina.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings for this study suggest that EFL secondary school teachers in Mar del Plata believe the teaching of culture is beneficial for students, but the way they address it in class is irregular. Participants' syllabi lacked cultural objectives that guided their practice in an organized and systematic manner which resulted in culture teaching following organic needs that arise in the classroom or based on teacher intuition. The teaching of culture is stressed in the Argentinian national guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages (*Núcleos de Aprendizaje Prioritarios*), but in spite of this, this case study showed that school authorities are not requiring teachers to explicitly address culture teaching in the syllabi they submit to the institutions. Several actors in the schooling system should address this issue: school authorities, policy makers, and pre-service teacher instructors. In relation to school authorities, teachers do not work in a vacuum, but are part of an institution, and if their workplace does not require them to include cultural objectives in the syllabus that will guide teacher practice, the EFL classroom will be negatively affected: teachers may overlook culture by focusing on other areas of interest in their class, or may diminish culture's relevance by addressing it sporadically and with little connection between the classes in which they do address it. In addition, the responsibility of requiring teachers to include cultural objectives should not only fall on schools but on the Buenos Aires Province government too; currently the expected syllabus based on the Buenos Aires Province Curriculum Design (2011) is mostly centered on developing skills for communicative competence and, more recently, with the tackling of Comprehensive Sexual Education (*Ley Nacional de Educación*, 2006), but in spite of the mentioning of cultural elements in the rationale, these are not expressed in

practical, actionable items that remind teachers and school administrators of the relevance of culture teaching. The need for more complete syllabi was further reinforced by some participants in the follow-up interview, who admitted their schools sometimes ask for a list of topics or the textbooks' table of contents as a syllabus, which is far from what the curriculum design for the province of Buenos Aires requires: a rationale for the teaching of English, with clear communicative objectives (curriculum design for general English education), language presented in context and a description the tasks that will enable contextualized teaching of English in addition to lexical, grammatical, and phonological items to focus on. A third group of actors involved in the promotion of the inclusion of explicit objectives are teacher educators. Stressing the relevance of teaching culture and having clear guidelines as to how to do so would ensure teachers include these objectives even if lacking guidance in official documents, and it would also ensure school authorities in the form of English teachers in hierarchical positions promote this issue too.

Other reasons behind the lack of clear objectives in the syllabus in addition to lack of institutional control were explored in this work, being lack of teacher collaboration a major factor involved. Participants explained that in most cases, they share syllabus design responsibilities with other teachers, who are in charge of a different section of the same grade they teach. The fact that the participants felt they could not discuss cultural topics with other colleagues points to a need for more teacher education in relation to cultural topics and general collaboration; even if most of the participants in this study deemed culture teaching as important, most of them did not think their colleagues did, which hindered discussion leading to more enriched syllabi. Teacher isolation can lead to lack of assertiveness and decisiveness when

planning, as "teachers may be afraid to share their experiences with other teachers for fear of being 'exposed'" (Farrell, 2007, p.120). However, when teachers work with peers, they can discover new classroom experiences or find support; they can compensate for each other's weaknesses and lean on each other's strengths (Farrell, 2017). Moreover, when referring to effective teacher development, Little states the need to engage teachers "with ideas, with materials, and with colleagues both in and out of teaching," (1993, p. 138) which stresses the role peers have in careers development. Teacher collaboration can be promoted in a variety of ways and it can be done by teacher educators, teachers themselves, by schools or governmental institutions. A formal way of doing so can be forming development groups with the aim of providing a safe space for teachers to share and reflect on their practices, as well as plan for development measures. Another way in which teachers can work towards improving their practice is by forming critical friendships; this entails forming an association with a fellow teacher in a space that focuses on professional teaching matters. In any case, teachers, institutions, and students will benefit from teachers working collaboratively, and findings in this study suggest promoting joined work should be addressed by all actors in the schooling system. Teacher collaboration should also be addressed during teacher preparation periods, so that teachers start their careers understanding the relevance of this practice and being open to working with peers.

One of the main findings of this case study was the disconnect between what teachers believe and what they actually do in their classrooms. This disconnection has been studied before in Argentinian contexts (Salcedo & Sacchi, 2014), and this case study adds to the scholarship supporting the need to aid teachers bridging the gap

between their beliefs and their practice. The three main discrepancies between theory and enactment in EFL Secondary School teachers in Mar del Plata were the way they defined culture and the understandings of the term followed in class and the purposes behind the teaching of culture. Teachers' beliefs influence the decisions they make in their classrooms (Farrell, 2007) but are difficult to access; moreover, many times, teachers are not aware of their own beliefs, which may make the task of aligning belief and practice even harder. For this reason, Farrell (2007) explains it is important to help teachers be aware of their beliefs as a first step to changing them. This can be facilitated by schools or by teacher development programs that instruct teachers of the need to self-evaluate their underlying beliefs that inform their practice. Safe spaces for guided reflection and critical evaluation of these beliefs, which, tied with the previous implication, could also be done between peers and in contexts of critical friendships and/or teacher collaboration groups, will help teachers address any differences between theory and practice in their classrooms. Teachers should also be taught to revise their beliefs while still in university, as being aware of what informs their practice will be useful for their general practice, not just the teaching of culture. Lists of questions to guide reflection, journal writing, and other ways to make beliefs explicit can be shared by teacher educators.

Other findings related to discrepancies between belief and practice and the need for clearer guidance on what teachers could do to address culture is the fact that teachers had broad conceptualizations of the word, which might make it difficult to translate into actual practice. Moreover, when teachers provided more specific definitions about culture, these differed from the views of culture mostly followed in their classroom artifacts: the most common understanding of the word at a theoretical

level had been as underlying ideology; however, the most common definition followed in their classrooms was that of culture as social expressions and traditions. In 2013, Liddicoat and Scarino claimed that "[t]here is a need in language teaching and learning to develop a more nuanced understanding of the nature of culture and the ways in which culture can be investigated in the language classroom" (p. 17). According to the findings in this case study, this need for a better understanding of what culture is remains unattended to today in Argentinian EFL classrooms. As was discussed in previous chapters in this thesis, the term culture is broad and can be understood in several ways, but teachers should be aware of these definitions so that they can guide their practice and ensure that what they do in their classrooms is what they intended to do in theory. A clearer definition or series of definitions that could be translated into the classroom should be provided in official documents so that teachers can follow it in a clearer manner.

In terms of the challenges teachers face when tackling culture, lack of materials and lack of variety of targeted cultures were some of the most mentioned. This is a task for textbook makers, who should also be aware of the fact that culture teaching does not necessarily have to be about Inner or Outer circles (although cultures in the second group continue to be under-respresented in the textbooks according to the participants in this case study). The Argentiniann state could also issue materials that teachers could use to complement their textbooks and that provide free access to relevant information and activities about various cultures, including Argentinian culture, in English. Teacher collaboration could further complement this; teachers could enrich their work by sharing materials created by peers and/or design

activities collaboratively, which are more likely to be diverse by the sheer fact that more than one person was involved in creating it.

One of the most surprising findings was the fact that even the artifacts created by teachers who had criticized their textbooks for lack of cultural representation mostly focused on Inner circle cultures too. This is related to another challenge mentioned by teachers: the fact that students sometimes have a negative appreciation of Argentinian culture. As mentioned before, this can be addressed by helping teachers gain a deeper understanding of their practice, which can be carried out while working with peers or by teacher development events organized by school authorities or policy makers. Moreover, the fact that Inner Circle countries continue to be the focus in artifacts created by teachers themselves reinforces the need for teacher educators to work with culture teaching before teachers go into service. The reason why teachers focused mostly on the UK and the US might be connected to Kachru's (1992) analysis about false ideas in the field, being one that Expanding circle learners are learning English to communicate with people in the Inner circle ones. Within Argentina, Friedrich (2003) studied how most learned buy into this fallacy, and expect to work mostly with the US or the UK English varieties and cultures. In addition to being aware of their beliefs, teachers need to be aware of students' beliefs as "students interpret (through their frame of reference) what teachers say by filtering the information through their preexisting beliefs, as this is the only way they can make sense of it (Farrell, 2007, p. 36). Helping teachers identify students' beliefs and ensuring teachers are equipped to tackle beliefs that are harmful or simply myths is a task for teacher-educators; EFL teachers need to be aware of the purpose behind the teaching of English in their contexts, and they should be able to work identifying

students' beliefs to dismantle the ones that can be detrimental for their education. Moreover, the fact that participants in this study stated how negatively some students perceive their first culture increased even more the need to work with culture in the EFL classroom, as working with C1 and exploring diverse cultures–not just Inner Circle ones– might lead to a revalorization of the first culture.

Suggestions for Future Studies

The suggestions for future research on the matter are related to the limitations drafted in chapter three. To begin with, one of the main limitations in this case study was the fact that

Teacher practice was mostly based on teachers' description of their practice and artifact evaluation. Further studies might want to use observations as an instrument to gather data on how teachers tackle cultural topics in class. Moreover, all participants in this case study were female, and they most likely shared educational backgrounds. A more diverse group of participants might provide a deeper understanding of how culture is treated in the EFL classrooms of the city of Mar del Plata. Lack of diversity in the participants was related to the limited time to gather information, which resulted in a limited number of participants meeting requirements and answering the survey. With more time, a similar study could not only increase their participant pool, but also be able to gather more artifacts to add to their data.

 gather more information about more participants.

A further suggestion to continue exploring the topic is related to the role culture teaching has in Teacher Training Programs. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, teacher education could work on training teachers to identify their own

beliefs and those of their students, to work collaboratively, and to feel more prepared to have explicit cultural objectives in their syllabi. Any study exploring how these topics are currently tackled in this context or in any other will continue to inform and contribute to the teaching of culture in EFL Secondary Schools in Argentina. Participants in this study mentioned they have worked with culture while in university; however, they struggled putting that knowledge into practice. An exploration of the gap between how pre-service teachers study the teaching of culture and how they actually address it while practicing might also add to the scholarship in the matter.

As was mentioned in the implications above, teachers should exercise working with a peer to balance their practice and continue improving their work. Research on the role professional development organizations have and how–or whether– they are helping teachers address this issue in their classrooms could benefit the field as well.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored what practicing EFL secondary school teachers in Argentina believe about the teaching of culture, how they put culture teaching into practice, and the main challenges they face when doing so. This case study findings suggest teachers see value in addressing culture, but that there is a disconnect between how they envision they do it in theory and to how they actually do it in practice. Other relevant findings were the major challenges posed by teaching culture in this context, such as lack of teacher collaboration, lack of materials, unclear and broad definitions of culture, to name a few. After having presented the main findings, this chapter was

devoted to the discussion of the implications of those findings and suggestions for

future studies.

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Appendix A

Email to school authorities

Estimada _____,

Mi nombre es Mercedes Sempé, profesora de Inglés egresada de la UNMdP, actualmente cursando un máster en enseñanza de inglés en la Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minnesota, EEUU. Escribo porque, como parte de mi tesis de máster, estoy haciendo una investigación sobre la enseñanza del inglés y la cultura en escuelas secundarias de Mar del Plata, para lo cual diseñé un cuestionario con preguntas sobre el tema para profesoras y profesoras de inglés. Mi intención con este email es pedir, si ustedes lo ven pertinente, que se reenvíe este mail al personal de inglés para que completen el cuestionario. Mi investigación está bajo la supervisión de mi supervisora, la Dra. Sarah Henderson Lee.

El cuestionario no lleva más de media hora en ser completado y hacerlo es opcional. Quienes puedan y lo desean, pueden también participar de una entrevista vía Zoom para ampliar algunas de sus respuestas, pero se puede completar este último sin necesidad de llevar a cabo la entrevista virtual. El siguiente enlace redirige al cuestionario y ofrece más información sobre las políticas a seguir durante la investigación:
https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1NQ8jTznVmzDGHs
Al participar en la investigación, además de contribuir con mi tesis estarían contribuyendo con la disciplina ya que se espera que la investigación arroje información sobre la enseñanza de inglés y de cultura en las aulas de Mar del Plata.

Desde ya, muchísimas gracias,

Atte.

Mercedes Sempé

Profesora de inglés, UNMdP
Estudiante de MA en TESOL, MNSU
IRBNet#1934518

Dear _____,

My name is Mercedes Sempé and I am English teacher and a Master´s student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am writing since, as part of the requirements for my Master´s thesis, I am researching the teaching of English and culture in secondary schools in Mar del Plata, Argentina. To this end, I have developed a questionnaire on the topic to be completed by English teachers. My intention in this email is to request, if you agree, that you send this message and questionnaire to the English teachers working at your institution so that they can answer my questions. My research is under the supervision of my advisor, Dr. Sarah Henderson Lee.

The questionnaire is optional and does not take more than half an hour to complete. The teachers who choose so may also participate in a follow-up interview through Zoom to delve deeper into some of their answers. However, it is possible to just answer the questionnaire without participating in the interview. The following link redirects to the questionnaire and offers more information about the policies that will be followed during the research:

https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1NQ8jTznVmzDGHs

By participating, teachers will not only be helping me with my thesis, but will contribute to the field, as the research is expected to shed light on the teaching of English and culture in the Mar del Plata classrooms.

I truly appreciate your help,

Best regards,

Mercedes Sempé
Graduate Student, MA TESOL, MNSU
IRBNet#1934518

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

My name is María Mercedes Sempé, and I am an MA student at Minnesota State University, Mankato, USA. As an English teacher at an Argentinian high school, you are invited to participate in a research study called First Culture, Target Culture, and Third Culture: A Case Study of Cultural Representations in the Argentinian EFL Classroom. This case study aims at exploring the treatment of culture and its representations in EFL high school classrooms with teachers in the city of Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete a half-an-hour-long questionnaire about the teaching of culture in your EFL classes. You may choose to also take part in a one-on-one interview through Zoom that will last no more than forty-five minutes, in which we will continue to delve into the topic of teaching culture, and you will be given the choice to present sample class artifacts about culture teaching. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you want to be interviewed, and if so, how to contact you to set that up. You will also be asked if you would like to share class artifacts. These artifacts may include, for example, lesson plans and/or activity worksheets and can be uploaded to a shared Google folder (link provided at the end of the survey). By participating, you will be giving me permission to use your questionnaire, interview, and artifacts to inform my research.

All data will be stored in my personal computer, which is password protected. Once they are transcribed, the recordings from the interviews will be deleted. Likewise, the answers to the questionnaires, transcriptions from the interview, and analysis of artifacts will be stored in my computer for three years and will be deleted afterwards. To keep your identity anonymous, all identifiers, that is, information that can lead back to you, will be removed or replaced with pseudonyms.

Participation in this study is voluntary and optional, and you may choose to withdraw from it at any point with no consequences. In case of withdrawal, you can contact the Faculty Researcher, Dr. Sarah Henderson Lee, at sarah.henderson-lee@mnsu.edu. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Participation does not provide benefits either, except for the ones obtained by the research adding to its field.

The risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life. You will be asked to reflect on your planning and the treatment of culture in your classes, which may cause anxiety or apprehension. It is worth noting, however, that the atmosphere in the interview is expected to be relaxed, and no judgment on the researcher's part will be done on the answers or artifact analysis.

For questions about the study, you can contact Dr. Sarah Henderson Lee by email at sarah.henderson-lee@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions about participation rights and research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of

the Institutional Review Board at (507) 389-1242. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato IT Solutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

By typing your name and completing your information below, you are indicating you are at least 18 years old, you have read the information above, and willingly agree to participate. If you consent, you will be directed to the start of the survey and will receive a copy of this consent form via email.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

María Mercedes Sempé

IRB number: 1934518

CONSENT FORM Your name

_____

CONSENT FORM E-mail:

_____

CONSENT FORM Date

_____

About your school This is the beginning of the survey. You will be asked to answer about the school that sent you the email with this survey. Please, just answer the questions as they relate to the one identified school.

Q6 City of the school you work at:

_____

Q7 Type of school:

◯ State-run (escuela pública) (1)

◯ State subsidized (privada subvencionada) (2)

○ Private (privada) (3)

Q8 How long have you been teaching?

○ 0-4 years (1)

○ 5-9 years (2)

○ 10-14 years (3)

○ 14-20 years (4)

○ Over 20 years (5)

Q9 What is your highest qualification?

○ Terciary (instituto terciario) (1)

○ University BA (título de grado) (2)

○ Master's (máster) (3)

○ Specialist (especialista) (4)

○ Doctoral (doctor/a) (5)

Q10 What class do you teach (at this institution)?

☐ 1st year secondary school (1)

☐ 2nd year secondary school (2)

☐   3rd year secondary school (3)

☐   4th year secondary school (4)

☐   5th year secondary school (5)

☐   6th year secondary school (6)

Q11 What is your students' English proficiency? (of the majority of your students)

☐   Beginners (1)

☐   Elementary (2)

☐   Lower intermediate (3)

☐   Intermediate (4)

☐   Upper intermediate (5)

☐   Advanced (6)

Q18 Please, provide any additional contextual details related to your students you teach at this institution and that you consider relevant.

_____

Q12 How would you define 'culture' in the context of teaching a foreign language?

_____

Q13 What do you think is the purpose of working with culture in your English classroom?

_____

Q14 What target cultures do you consider when teaching culture in your English classrooms and why?

_____

Q15 To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to culture in the EFL classroom?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I find it easy to address cultural topics in the classroom (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel qualified to talk about culture in my classroom (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I believe addressing cultural topics in the	○	○	○	○	○

classroom is important (3)					
I have included cultural objectives in the planning of my classes (4)	○	○	○	○	○
The materials I use in the classroom offer enough instances for students to work with culture (5)	○	○	○	○	○
The materials I use in the classroom expose students to a variety of English speaking cultures (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q16 In your EFL classroom, how often do you do the following?

	Always (1)	Frequently (2)	About half the time (3)	Sometimes (4)	Never (5)
I work with Argentinian cultural topics in my EFL classroom (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I plan lessons that address cultural topics explicitly (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I prepare activities for students to compare and contrast their own culture to a target one (3)	○	○	○	○	○
In my classroom, students are exposed to a variety of cultures around the world (4)	○	○	○	○	○

In my classroom, students are given the chance to offer their own opinions about a target culture (5)	○	○	○	○	○
When I work with media in the classroom, I address cultural aspects (6)	○	○	○	○	○
When I work with literature in the classroom, I address cultural aspects (7)	○	○	○	○	○

Q17 Please, share your most recent example of incorporating culture in the classroom. Try to describe the activities' objectives, instructions, and assessment (whether formal or informal).

_____

Q18 Have you experienced challenges when teaching culture? If so, please, describe them.

_____

Q19 What are your sources to get information about culture and its teaching?

_____

Q20 Have you participated in any professional development events related to the teaching of culture? if so, please, describe them.

_____

Q21 Would you like to participate in a follow-up interview? (It will not last more than 40 minutes and will take place through Zoom).

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q22 If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, please provide your preferred contact information.

_____

Q24 Would you like to share any class artifacts representing your teaching of culture? (activity worksheets, lesson plans, text book pages, Powerpoint presentations, etc.) If you answer yes, you can email me your artifacts to maria.sempe@mnsu.edu

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

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