Developing Intercultural Competencies: The Roles and Responsibilities of Native English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs)

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[Abstract] In the field of English Foreign Language (EFL) education, native English speakers frequently encounter many advantages that non-native English speakers do not. Consequently, the native English speakers have many responsibilities as they assume the role of native English-speaking Teachers (NESTs) to English Language Learners (ELLs). In this qualitative case study, the researcher explored the intricacies of the lives and classrooms of six NESTs in Costa Rica. The researcher intended to see the world through their eyes and share their stories by listening to the firsthand experiences of these teachers, reflecting on their motivations for living and teaching in Costa Rica, and examining how they connected with students. Through a thematic analysis of the interviews and instructional documents, three main themes emerged: a.) Teachers adapted to Costa Rican culture, b.) Teachers' advantages of learning Spanish for the TEFL classroom, and c.) Teachers improved their TEFL skills through intercultural understanding. The NESTs shared poignant anecdotes and observations that had shaped their teaching practices, and this information allowed the researcher to highlight some important areas of growth for the TEFL field. This study indicates that there is a need for administrators at both TEFL training programs and the institutions that hire EFL teachers to re-evaluate how they assist NESTs in developing intercultural competencies and critical pedagogies for the benefit of teachers and students alike.

[Keywords] intercultural competence, TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), NEST (Native English Speaking Teacher), Latin America

The field of teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) attracts many native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to move abroad. The NESTs leave their English-dominant speaking countries to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) in countries where English is not the dominant language, and where the way of life often differs from their home cultures and communities. In this qualitative case study, the researcher investigated how NESTs from the United States, Canada, and England adapted to life in Costa Rica, while developing their TEFL teaching skills. As they taught, the teachers learned Spanish both intentionally and unintentionally. The language and cultural center (LCC) where they taught offered free Spanish classes of which most of the teachers took advantage. While some teachers had strong Spanish speaking skills, even the teachers who proclaimed that they knew very little Spanish were able to pick up some Spanish words, phrases, and grammatical structures from their students and fellow teachers. This research study explores the ways that NESTs develop intercultural competencies through their time in a foreign country, and how studying Spanish contributed to their ability to adjust to their new life and teaching English.

Literature Review

Learning English from a native speaking teacher is widely promoted to students in the TEFL field. However, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) requires much more than simply being a native speaker (Snow & Campbell, 2017). As NESTs in the TEFL field relocate and teach their native language to ELLs, they must acclimate to a new way of life in a foreign country. Because the TEFL field often attracts travel-loving individuals, some international teachers stay in one country for a limited amount of time and move on to another country. Some of the NESTs invest time studying the language of their students through formal lessons, online language learning programs or conversational practice with local people. These notions of learning from people in the community are couched in the principles of sociocultural theory, which is the argument that humans learn through their social environment (Vygotsky, 1978). They are also framed by intercultural competence theories that align with foreign language education. Intercultural competence is "the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions" (Deardorff, 2006). It's not a fixed goal, but a lifelong developmental process of building such knowledge, skills and attitudes (Deardorff, 2015). As NESTs move to a new country from home countries with global and linguistic power and privilege, to countries that are often developing countries, the phenomenon must also be viewed from a critical pedagogical perspective.

Sociocultural Theory

According to sociocultural theory, largely credited to Lev Vygotsky (1978), artifacts such as language, symbols, and writing are created by cultural groups and passed along through generations. Humans use these artifacts to communicate with and make meaning of the world around them (Lantolf, 2002). ELLs learn languages through their specific social and cultural lens (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2000). As they learn an additional language, they develop a new personal voice in a different social context (Kramsch, 1993). This indicates that humans are socialized into their first language and culture as well as the additional languages they speak. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2000) also attested that social engagement facilitates the learning process for second language learners and significantly impacts how learners produce the language. Learning a new language is shaped by those with whom they practice the language.

TEFL teachers and their students enter the classroom with dynamic sociocultural identities and ideologies that are impacted by their educational experiences together (Kramsch, 2004). Teachers should provide students with the space to talk about their experiences with their first language and culture and the target language and culture. In that space, students and teachers are able to develop notions of interculturality and learn how languages and cultures are not fixed, but grow through interpersonal interactions (Kramsch, 1993). The many ways that they view, discuss, and represent such languages must be reviewed when students and teachers discuss social and cultural aspects of languages, particularly the target language. The target language and culture presented in textbooks might differ from that of the teacher's, and it is important to identify whose culture and language is promoted (Duff & Uchida, 1997). Teachers must be aware of the sociopolitical aspects of teaching English and how identities are impacted by this process (Kramsch, 2004).

Part of the identity developing process for TEFL teachers occurs through their own language learning journeys. TEFL teachers who are not already fluent in the first language of their students, may learn an additional language through the interactions with their students. They are students then, too, learning a language in a specific, socially situated context. Because all languages are social languages, learners of a given language learn the variety that is situated in a specific social context. The speakers must learn to navigate those contexts (Gee, 2004; Kramsch, 2004). TEFL teachers in Costa Rica learn ways to communicate in Costa Rican Spanish through the interactions they have with their students. As both teachers and students, they have a unique opportunity to build intercultural competence.

Intercultural Competence-building through Language Education

Learning Spanish helps NESTs relate to their students' experiences as language learners. Spencer (2009) found that studying her students' language helped her to be a better teacher. She taught English in four countries where English was not the dominant language and, in these countries, she also spent time as a language student learning the local language. These experiences taught her to view the classroom from the perspective of a student and understand their struggles and frustrations. She argued that it forced her to slow down her rate of speech, repeat herself many times, write more often on the board, and to be available to assist her students after class. Outside of the classroom, she also learned to monitor her judgements and thoughts about the host culture to avoid negative perspectives toward them. Spencer learned to move between her home culture and host culture to understand her students and be a better teacher (Spencer, 2009).

Costa Rica encourages its citizens to be fluent in English as well as Spanish to meet the demands of international trade and tourism (Aguilar-Sánchez, 2005; Hernández, 2008; Solano Campos, 2012). Costa Rica's Ministry of Public Education or MEP (Ministerio de Educación Pública) argued that it is essential for Costa Ricans to learn English because it is the second most spoken language in the world and is used as a lingua franca for communication with countries all over the world. Additionally, the MEP attested that English proficiency would help Costa Rican citizens acquire resources in technology, science, and the humanities, as well as build intercultural competence (MEP, 2016). As many countries hope for their citizens to build English language skills, they are also called to build intercultural competencies. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argued that intercultural competence involves:

- accepting that one's practices are influenced by the cultures in which one participates and so are those of one's interlocutors
- accepting that there is no one right way to do things
- valuing one's own culture and other cultures
- using language to explore culture
- finding personal ways of engaging in intercultural interaction
- using one's existing knowledge of cultures as a resource for learning about cultures
- finding a personal intercultural style and identity. (p. 23-24).

As NESTs are tasked with cultivating intercultural competence in their students, they too must have the attitude, skills, and knowledge to appropriately address intercultural interactions.

The teachers must have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to lead the English language classroom in the context that culture is not monolithic and many cultures are invited to the classroom (García Benito, 2009). Teaching culture is inherent in language education. Learning a new language is an intercultural experience for both teachers and students (Kramsch, 1993). Additionally, students' native language and culture need to be valued and a positive attitude must be applied to both native and target cultures (Agudelo, 2007). Using the local language to explore cultures and understand others is part of the NEST's practice to become an intercultural individual and teacher.

An intercultural person learns to move between the world from which they are familiar to the world outside their native culture that they encounter. This dynamic movement requires a development of one's sense of self, as well as an ability to establish and develop relationships with others in the community (Johnstone Young, & Sachdev, 2011). Speaking a second or additional language is a way that teachers can not only build relationships with the local community, but also with their students.

Critical Pedagogy in the TEFL Classroom

As Costa Rica promotes the use of critical pedagogy in their educational system (MEP, 2016), it is necessary to include a critical perspective to the study of EFL. One of the strongest advocates of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire (1999) argued that students are not passive recipients of knowledge and must be agents in their educational journey. Teachers must also be critical agents, taking reflective consideration into what they bring to the classroom, questioning the established systems of how disciplines are taught, and encouraging their students to question the world around them (Freire, 1999).

When applied to the TEFL field, incorporating a critical pedagogical lens means that teachers and students must examine who has power and privilege in various contexts and how those who are marginalized are impacted by unjust educational policies, norms and practices. Teaching English is a sociopolitical act that involves individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds which impact the power, relational, and cultural dynamics in the EFL classroom (Hall & Eggington, 2000). NESTs, who come from countries where a standard variety of English is dominant, must reflect on the way that their identity as native speakers from countries of power and privilege may impact their role in the EFL classroom and their students (Lee, Moss, & Coughlin, 2011).

In the TEFL field, two forms of English maintain dominance over other English varieties: Standard U.S. American English and Standard British English. These two varieties are often viewed (as they are named) as the standard and therefore, native speakers of these varieties are afforded more power and opportunities in the TEFL field (Solano Campos, 2012). Non-standard varieties of English are often not validated or discredited (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007). Therefore, NESTs who speak varieties of Standard English are called to critically reflect on their identities and roles in the TEFL field, as well as reflect on the ideologies they promote about English (Lee, Moss, & Coughlin, 2011). It is necessary to challenge the idea that NESTs have inherent English teaching skills simply due to their identity as a native speaker. Instead, they must be experts in the practice of teaching language and culture, who know how to interact appropriately with people of differing identities (Kramsch, 2004). They must also be aware of the unfair advantage they hold

over NNESTs in competition for TEFL jobs, who are often excluded by recruiters and administrators (Ruecker & Ives, 2014).

Correlating Spanish to English

Most TEFL classrooms discourage the language learners from speaking in their L1 (Macaro & Lee, 2013). Administrators and teachers desire for the students to receive the maximum exposure to the target language or second language (L2). The idea of maximum exposure indicates that students must spend as much time as they can listening to and speaking in the L2 to become proficient. However, many scholars and teachers affirm that using the L1 moderately can benefit the learner in the process of learning the L2 (Childs, 2016; Lems et al., 2017; Macaro & Lee, 2013; Moore 2013; Şener & Korkut, 2017; Yang, 2018). Teachers can give quick instructions in the first language to avoid confusion, save time or to manage the behavior of students (Macaro & Lee, 2013). Occasional use of the L1 can also reduce students' anxieties, keep them engaged and help explain abstract concepts (Şener & Korkut, 2017).

Scaffolding is a pedagogical method based in sociocultural theory in which teachers prepare lessons suited to the unique levels of their students to provide material that is not too difficult and not too easy. Teachers who speak their students' L1 can better scaffold the lessons, particularly for early learners by making connections between their L1 and their L2 (Lantolf, 2002). Comparing and contrasting Spanish to English (and vice versa) reveals similarities and differences between the two languages but can also explain how the first language and additional languages may interact with one another. For ELLs to speak correctly, they benefit from understanding which components of the L1 transfer to the L2 (Soltero, 2011).

When comparing Spanish to English, one may note similar grammar structures and nearly the same alphabet, except for the Spanish letter *ñ* (Lems et al., 2017). The two languages have many cognates which can either help facilitate the acquisition of the target language or impede it. Examples of cognates with similar meanings are *case/caso* and *information/información*. However, some cognates can confuse learners because they do not have the same meaning, but similar letters (Soltero, 2011). An example of such confusing cognates is *embarrassed/embarazado*; the latter means pregnant, not embarrassed. Teachers who have advanced levels of Spanish and English are aware of these potential pitfalls and helpful hints.

Communicating with and Relating to Students

Students who have positive interactions with native speakers of their L2, are often more motivated to learn that language (Cummins, 1979). In the TEFL classroom, the NEST often serves as a representative of their home culture and country. They must be aware of the current and historical relationship between their country of origin and the host country and local community, as well as perceptions of people from their home community. These relationships and perceptions can be positive or negative, and the intercultural teacher who is more informed of these relationships and perceptions can be prepared to meet all their students with varying attitudes and beliefs (Snow & Campbell, 2017).

Good teachers are called to have positive attitudes, be considerate of their students and develop meaningful interactions with them (Goulah, 2015, Ikeda, 2010). Ikeda (2010) argued that a teacher has a strong influence over the personal and academic development of a student and asserted that teachers, not the lectures or materials, were the ones who had the greatest impact on

the lives of the students. Language teachers guide their students in the process of learning the target language not just by delivering content, but through human connection (Ikeda, 2010). From the critical pedagogical perspective, Freire (2005) added that, "Education is an act of love, and therefore an act of courage" (p. 33). As they participate in this act of courageous love, they must be in dialogue with their students, inviting them to participate in curriculum development (Freire, 2005). Dialogic practices are, "nourished by love, humility, hope, faith and trust" (p. 40).

With this dialogic framework in mind, teachers enter a relationship with their students. They can assess how their students are feeling and what are their motivations and anxieties towards learning the L2 when they invest in such relationships (Farrell, 2014). Teachers who view their students as dynamic humans with varying emotional and relational needs serve as guides for their students rather than simply technicians in a perfunctory role (Casanave, 2012). Many students have anxieties towards learning a language and fear practicing the language in front of others. By developing professional relationships with their students, teachers become closer to their students and thus are better equipped to lower anxieties and fears (Farrell, 2014).

An important way for NESTs to develop these student-teacher relationships and to begin to understand their students' points of view is to learn the language of their host community. This not only enriches their own lives and ability to adapt to the host community, but also allows them the perspective of the language learner. Students are more likely to work hard when they connect well with teachers who understand them. As the NEST learns the language of their students, they too must learn to manage their fears and anxieties towards the language learning process. The tools they learn to use to address their frustrations, shame, and stress can be passed along to their language learning students (Snow & Campbell, 2017).

Methodology

This qualitative case study, conducted in Costa Rica at a private LCC utilized a qualitative research design. This is often used in educational research to understand and improve instructional practice (Merriam, 2009), and to investigate complex issues in a given phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The LCC employs only native speaking teachers and offers classes in Spanish, English, and often other languages such as Portuguese. Because the MEP promotes the use of English, many Costa Rican adults pay for private English classes for themselves and/or their children at institutions like the LCC in order to develop and strengthen English-speaking skills.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews of six NESTs and review of instructional documents such as teachers' lesson plans and classroom materials. Four female and two male NESTs participated, who came from the US, Canada, and the UK. The teachers had been in Costa Rica between nine months and three years, and each had spent two years or less teaching at the LCC. They shared that their levels of Spanish ranged from beginner to advanced. The researcher met with each teacher three times for 45-60 minute interviews over a two week period. The teachers also submitted some of their instructional materials (e.g., lesson plans, slide show presentations, and images from textbooks) and materials used from their TEFL training courses for document analysis.

Table 1
Demographics of NESTs

NEST name (pseudonym)	NEST age and gender	NEST time in Costa Rica	NEST Country of Origin
Veronica	27-year-old female	9 months	Canada
Timothy	26-year-old male	10 months	England
Robert	29-year-old male	2 years	United States
Maryanne	47-year-old female	17 months	United States
Calista	43-year-old female	14 months	United States
Caroline	35-year-old female	3 years	United States

The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions and the collected documents were coded and reviewed multiple times for categories. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) with data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that a thematic analysis explores the deeper meaning of the written word to find underlying meanings and ideologies. Many themes emerged from this analysis of the data, but three overall themes are presented here as the major findings that surfaced from the data. Those themes are, a.) Teachers adapted to Costa Rican culture, b.) Teachers' advantages of learning Spanish for the TEFL classroom, and c.) Teachers improved their TEFL skills through intercultural understanding.

Findings

The analysis of data collected from this research study shows that the NESTs' attitudes, behaviors, and their intentional efforts to develop intercultural competencies impacted their ability to transition to a new community, build relationships, and be better teachers for their students. Incorporated into these findings is a critical analysis of the NESTs ability to adapt and incorporate lessons learned into their teaching practice.

Theme One: Teachers Adapted to Costa Rican Culture

All the NESTs who participated in this study had spent three years or less in Costa Rica and five of the six teachers were novice teachers. As they began their teaching career or built on their previous teaching practice, they also learned to adapt to Costa Rican culture. Developing intercultural competence means that a person learns to mediate between their native culture and a new culture (Johnstone Young & Sachdev, 2011). Their processes of adapting to Costa Rica led to the NESTs' development of intercultural competencies, at varying levels. All of the teachers shared many positive experiences and a few negative experiences in regard to their transition to Costa Rica, but one expressed more resistance than the others towards the mediation between cultures, noting that it was hard for her to build relationships in the local community. Almost all

the NESTs spoke highly of Costa Rica and their experiences of Costa Rican culture, and they shared stories to illustrate the ways that they learned about Costa Rican culture. Some of the teachers demonstrated their growing knowledge of Costa Rican culture in the classroom documents they shared. Their lesson plans and assignments reflected an integration of Costa Rican culture and a desire to learn from their students by requiring them to share cultural practices, beliefs and norms. Additionally, the LCC provided the teachers opportunities to learn Spanish and Costa Rican cultural practices, such as dance and cooking classes. None of the teachers chose to participate in the cooking and dance classes, but all took Spanish classes at some point during their time at the LCC. Some of what they learned about living in and adapting to Costa Rica came from formal training from the LCC and the TEFL training courses they attended prior to teaching at the LCC.

One of the NESTs, Veronica shared that she learned a lot about Costa Rican customs from the TEFL course she took upon arrival in Costa Rica. All the NESTs received their TEFL certificates through face-to-face classes at a TEFL school in Costa Rica, except for Calista, who obtained her TEFL certificate from the US in an online format. The five NESTs who received those face-to-face classes in Costa Rica shared that the programs included modules on living and transitioning to Costa Rica. They taught the teachers how to adapt to Costa Rican culture, as well as how to handle the culture shock of moving to a new country. The TEFL schools taught the pre-service teachers about Costa Rican professionalism and what behavior is appropriate for a foreign teacher in a Costa Rican classroom. Not only did they teach the NESTs what to expect from Costa Rican students, but they also provided a support system for the NESTs as they simultaneously studied how to be TEFL teachers and appropriate guests to Costa Rica. Robert, Caroline, and Veronica in particular argued that the TEFL instructors at their schools made a concerted effort to relate to them and guide them through the challenges encountered when teaching in a new country.

Another way of building intercultural competence includes finding opportunities for intercultural interactions (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). The NESTs' interest in meeting their students outside of the LCC and getting to know them on a personal level is a way that they learned more about Costa Rica, while building intercultural competence. As mentioned previously, the NESTs were from Canada, the US and England. Their students were largely from Costa Rica, and a few students came from Nicaragua and Colombia. Through these relationships, they learned more about life in Latin America in general, life in Costa Rica in particular, and also how to interact with others from different national backgrounds. Their Costa Rican students and colleagues sometimes invited them to participate in Costa Rican traditions such as the Romería, an annual Costa Rican tradition and holiday celebrated by making a pilgrimage from homes all over the central valley region to the Basílica Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles in Cartago. This national Catholic holiday commemorates a time in the 1600s when a young girl was healed after seeing an apparition of Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth. Thousands of people in Costa Rica walk for many miles every August to ask Mary for a miracle and share stories of miraculous occurrences (Sharman, 2006). Some of the teachers spoke about this tradition.

All the teachers spoke about their students' varying religious beliefs and political values as part of their understanding of Costa Rican culture. Some of them reflected on the ways that their cultures, beliefs, and values shaped their understanding of intercultural relationships and interactions. Veronica walked with some of her Costa Rican colleagues and students in the Romeria and shared that it was a lovely experience that allowed her to connect with students.

Another NEST, Robert shared that he liked to talk with his students about this annual pilgrimage because it helped him see the dedication that particular students had to their faith, and he respected them for it.

While the NESTs learned to adapt to their host country through formal trainings, they also learned informally through relationships they built with the host community. Most of the NESTs cultivated friendships with Costa Ricans. Timothy and Caroline had romantic relationships with Costa Ricans and developed friendships with their neighbors and adult students. Veronica, Robert, and Maryanne attested to building friendships with their adult students, host families, and fellow church parishioners. Calista shared that she had difficulty connecting to Costa Ricans and shared that her low level of Spanish proficiency likely contributed to that struggle. Such connections with members of the local community help the NESTs learn informally about the local culture, (Arriaza & Wagner, 2012) as well as how they are expected to appropriately interact with others in intercultural spaces (Snow & Campbell, 2017). These skills and knowledge gained by local community members was manifested in the way the five NESTs talked about those relationships.

Caroline found that her relationships with her Costa Rican husband and with his family helped her better understand Costa Rica and her students. She shared that while she didn't always agree with her husband's viewpoints, she understood how he formed those beliefs based on his sociocultural background. This not only helped her understand and accept him and his family, but she transferred that understanding to her classroom. She was able to get closer to viewing the world from her students' position. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argued that building intercultural competence involves the acceptance that another person's way of living in the world and their way of viewing the world is shaped by their cultural upbringing. By contextualizing Costa Ricans' viewpoints within their social and cultural environments, Caroline was able to set aside differences of perspectives and build meaningful relationships, from which she unintentionally learned a lot about Costa Rica.

Analysis of the textbooks and lesson plans showed that the NESTs who followed the textbook closely included class time to compare students' home cultures with the teacher's home culture, as well as each other's cultures. In this way, teachers learned more about Latin American and Costa Rican cultures in their classrooms. For example, many of the teachers incorporated class discussion time about the Romeria in their lesson plans. Given the variety of national, cultural and religious backgrounds of the students, most students and teachers learned from one another and gained a broader understanding of attitudes, customs and beliefs through structured classroom activities and discussions.

Critical Reflection of NESTs' Adaptation to Costa Rican Culture

One component that seemed to be missing from their reflections and some of the TEFL certificate training materials were activities or modules to address the power and privileges between NESTs and their students, an interplay of sociocultural identities and a critique of the spread of English as a lingua franca throughout the world. While one of the TEFL certificate training textbooks identified the differences between Standard US American English and Standard British English, there was not a recognition of additional English varieties, attention to accent discrimination nor the roles that teacher and student identities play in the TEFL classroom, a necessary component of a critical pedagogy.

One of the most resounding components of the NESTs' transition to Costa Rica was the ability to form friendships and learn from local people. While some of the teachers acknowledged their identity as a guest to Costa Rica, none of them noted that they had responsibilities as guests in the community that warmly received them, nor a responsibility to speak Spanish. Calista seemed to have the most difficult time transitioning to Costa Rica and she often expressed frustration with meeting Costa Ricans. While that may not be strictly correlated, her difficulty to learn Spanish is indicative of a possible hurdle to assimilation to life in a new country. Unlike some of the other teachers, Calista did not acknowledge her identity as a native English speaker or role as a guest to the Costa Rican community. The ability to reflect on those identities helped other teachers shift their perspectives when faced with confusion or frustration in their daily encounters. When asked about their interactions with Costa Ricans, all of the NESTs expressed much gratitude towards their friends or students who in some way helped them learn about Costa Rica and/or Spanish. This ability to use the language to explore the culture of Costa Rica is a valuable way to build intercultural competence (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). It also helped the NESTs understand their students as people and as learners.

Theme Two: Teachers' Advantages of Learning Spanish for the TEFL classroom

The process of acclimating to a new culture involves learning ways to communicate with the people in the cultural group. For each of the six NESTs, this meant learning and strengthening their Spanish speaking skills in general and their Costa Rican communicative skills in particular. As previously noted, the social engagement between the language learner and speakers of the target language impacts the learner and the way that they use the language (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2000). Timothy, Caroline and Robert had high intermediate or advanced levels of Spanish at the time of the interview. Robert attested that his mother is Mexican and that he learned Spanish from her. Caroline and Timothy had strong Spanish speaking skills which they strengthened by having Costa Rican partners with whom they could speak Spanish. Veronica had an intermediate level of Spanish after having taken courses at her previous institution. Maryanne and Calista spoke frequently about their low Spanish speaking skills and desire to improve. Given these varying levels of Spanish proficiency, all of the teachers noted that their knowledge of Spanish influenced their teaching in some way.

Maryanne shared that by taking an introductory level Spanish class, she could understand the struggles her students experienced as language learners. Her difficulty in listening to and understanding Spanish led her to slow down her speech and the audio clips she shared in class. She understood from a firsthand perspective why her students expressed fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates. In response, Maryanne would give short presentations in Spanish to her class, showing them that she can make mistakes and laugh at herself. She claimed that this eased their tensions. Calista also shared that she understood how difficult it was for students to pay attention in class because most of her students came to class after working all day, or on their Saturdays off. Her struggles to learn Spanish and her memories of being a French student made her a more compassionate teacher. She empathized with her students' struggles and therefore gave extra time and attention to help them understand the language. These two teachers expressed sentiments like that of Spencer (2009) who found that studying her students' language led her to be more empathetic and patient as a teacher.

Even though Maryanne and Calista did not speak a lot of Spanish, they learned some words and grammatical structures from their students. For example, Maryanne shared that she knew that one states how old they are in Spanish by stating how many years they have. In Spanish one would say, *Tengo 25 años*, which directly translates to *I have 25 years*, which in English is stated as *I am 25 years old*." Maryanne quickly became aware of the common mistake that Spanish speaking ELLs say, *I have 25 years*, because of this Spanish grammatical structure. Another common phrase she heard among students was *all the days*, which they used when they wanted to express *every day*. To say, *every day* in Spanish one could say, *todos los días*, which directly translates to *all the days*. As she learned these Spanish phrases from one group of students and from her fellow teachers who were learning Spanish, she was able to transfer this knowledge of potential linguistic confusion to all her students. She shared that by learning just a little bit of Spanish she was able to assist her students by anticipating this mistake, understanding it, and teaching her students the differences between English and Spanish grammatical structures.

Caroline also attested to learning Spanish grammatical structures based on her students' mistakes in English class. She shared that when her students used the phrase, *take a decision* rather than *make a decision*, she realized that she could not directly translate that phrase from English to Spanish. The phrase *make a decision* in Spanish requires the verb *tomar* (to take) rather than *hacer* (to make). This realization helped Caroline avoid making that mistake in Spanish. Caroline argued that her advanced Spanish speaking skills helped her assist her students because she could see when they did not understand a concept. Because the LCC encouraged all teachers to speak exclusively in the target language, she would only use English to define new vocabulary words. However, there were times when after she explained a word in English, some of the students would write down their understanding of the explanation in Spanish in their notebooks. If she saw them write down a word that was not exactly the word she was defining, she could correct them and clarify. She was able to help them in this way because she was an advanced Spanish speaker.

Many of the teachers indicated that they used the Spanish they learned in their classrooms either implicitly or explicitly. Caroline learned a lot of Spanish from her husband, his family, and neighbors. She shared that her neighbors, who were close friends, did not speak English so she strengthened her Spanish speaking skills by spending time talking with them. Speaking and referencing the students' first language encourages students and paves the way for positive relationships between teachers and students (Childs, 2016). Caroline noted that her students expressed excitement knowing that she could speak their language and would use it outside of class to connect with her. She shared that they believed they could trust her because she spoke their language. Robert and Timothy similarly shared that the time they spent in social settings with native Spanish speakers helped improve their Spanish skills, which not only helped them survive in and adjust to Costa Rica, but also helped them in the classroom.

Timothy and Robert taught children's classes and found that their knowledge of Spanish was particularly advantageous in those classes because children were not only new to learning a language, but they were also just learning how to follow instructions and behave in a classroom. When students misbehaved, Timothy and Robert used short phrases in Spanish to call their attention and make sure that they understood why their behavior was unacceptable. This was necessary as it was difficult for them to capture the youth's attention or discipline them in English when they would become aggressive to other students. While this practice of explicitly using Spanish was discouraged at the LCC, it has been supported by scholars in the TEFL and bilingual

education fields (Childs, 2016; Lems et al., 2017; Macaro & Lee, 2013; Moore 2013; Şener & Korkut, 2017; Yang, 2018). Timothy and Robert used it to their advantage to address issues and to benefit the children in order to maintain a positive classroom environment.

Critical Reflection of NESTs' use of Spanish

Being a native English speaker from a country of power and privilege requires a reflection on the spread of English and the role that NESTs play in that spread (Lee, Moss, & Coughlin, 2011). Additionally, Freire's concept of solidarity, calls NESTs to learn at least some Spanish to relate to their students. Because Spanish was discouraged from being used in the TEFL classroom, and most of the NESTs were novice language teachers, most of the teachers did not express a positive disposition towards using Spanish in the TEFL classroom. Additionally, some of the NESTs who had a lower proficiency in Spanish were able to get around Costa Rica with the help of other English speakers and therefore did not identify a need to learn Spanish. They all acknowledged that learning Spanish would help them live and travel throughout their host country, but only Robert seemed to acknowledge the role of identity and critical consciousness in the linguistic journey. Since his mother was a native Spanish speaker, and he is fluent in Spanish, he spoke about the ways English and Spanish represented different identities within him. He also named Paulo Freire specifically when addressing the power of being literate and also of being able to communicate on a deeper level with students. Additionally, he stated that the spread of English has absorbed other languages. He felt that teachers and students could reciprocate feelings and students could explain themselves in their own language. In this manner, he gave a critical pedagogical analysis to the advantage of learning Spanish.

The intentional use of Spanish in the classroom was discouraged by the TEFL certificate programs, the LCC and some of the NESTs. This is one area of growth that should be addressed in the TEFL field so that NESTs understand the privilege of being a native English speaker for one, and the responsibility to learn Spanish in order to listen to their students' concerns in their native language. The ability to speak more than just English and especially some Spanish is one way that TEFL teachers can improve their pedagogy.

Theme Three: Teachers Improved their TEFL Skills through Intercultural Understanding

These six NESTs not only made efforts to acclimate to Costa Rica, but they also exhibited some growing knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes that indicated a development of intercultural competencies. The foreign language classroom is a space with the potential for intercultural growth for both the language learners and the teacher (Sehlaoui, 2001; Yang 2018). The target language and culture in the TEFL classroom is often that of the NEST and therefore, the teachers have a responsibility to be cognizant of the sociopolitical components of teaching their native language and culture. They must acknowledge and understand how students' and teachers' identities are impacted by these intercultural encounters in the TEFL classroom: an inherently intercultural space (Kramsch, 2004). While there were some instances when some of the NESTs expressed a lack of understanding or compassion for their students' beliefs and behaviors, they did so at such an infrequent rate, it demonstrates only the natural, nonlinear growth of intercultural competency development.

Some of the teachers demonstrated their ability to understand their students' identities and experiences as language learners due to their own efforts to learn an additional language. Timothy shared that his experience as a language learner helped him understand how his students would feel as they faced challenges learning English. His TEFL certificate course included a mini-lesson that was taught in Czech, and none of the NESTs in the training certification program knew that language. The lesson involved building basic language skills using only the target language and the students needed to respond to directives that were modeled by the instructor. This pedagogical process helped Timothy understand what his students experienced because they too are not given explanations in their target language; they must listen only to English as they learn.

Sometimes the NESTs disagreed with their students' opinions or were surprised by certain behaviors. Robert and Caroline in particular, however, expressed that they were conscious of the manner in which society, local culture and family shape one's perspectives, practices, and values. They demonstrated the notion posited by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) that one's practices and beliefs are largely shaped by one's local culture. The lesson plans that they shared exhibited an evolving knowledge of interacting with students as they presented culturally appropriate activities and an avoidance of taboo topics. At many points in our interviews the NESTs indicated that they knew Costa Rican culture was composed of many different cultural groups. Their students were not a monolithic group and were shaped by the cultures in which they were raised. Maryanne, Caroline, Robert, and Veronica acknowledged that while Costa Ricans are often very religious and the country is a Catholic state, their students identified as Catholic, Evangelical, Jehovah's Witness, belonged to a variety of Protestant denominations or were atheists. All of the teachers expressed an understanding that while the Catholic religion has a strong place in daily life in Costa Rica, not all Costa Ricans prescribe to the same beliefs and practices. These perspectives helped them see their students as the dynamic humans that they are and not as a predictable, unvarying group. These perspectives also supported Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) point that intercultural competence requires that one values other cultures.

Critical Reflection of NESTs' Role in the TEFL Classroom

The consciousness of valuing another's perspective and suspending judgment shows that the NESTs were developing the intercultural competencies to situate individuals' perspectives in their contextual place and time as well as understand nuance in cultural groups. Robert and Caroline both spoke about their privileges as US Americans and as guests in Costa Rica. Robert shared his belief that NESTs must be respectful and adaptive to Costa Rican cultural norms by arguing that he did not want to be like some of the NESTs he had seen. He described them as, "the ones that come through entitled and disrespect[ful] and... [do] not open [their] minds or hearts to this world that they're having this opportunity to get to live in. ...They expect this world to adapt to them rather than the other way around." His description of NESTs who expect the world to adapt to them rather than adapt to a new community exemplifies individuals that are likely in the beginning stages of the endless journey towards intercultural competency growth. While one never reaches a final stage of development in intercultural competence, closing off the mind and heart to a new culture and expecting people to bend to one's needs and desires indicates a lack of self-awareness and appreciation for difference. Robert, on the other hand, attributed every bit of his growth in Costa Rica to the people that have been a part of that journey.

Duff and Uchida (1997) found that students' and teachers' social identities are impacted by their experiences together in the TEFL classroom and therefore, NESTs must critically reflect on that dynamic. These NESTs expressed at least a nascent understanding of these dynamics in their intercultural classrooms and of their developing intercultural identities. Maryanne shared that until she moved to Costa Rica, she had not been aware of the advantages she had as a native English speaker. She learned that getting a well-paying job in Costa Rica often required proficiency in English and therefore, her students studied English to provide for themselves and their family. Solano Campos (2012) attested to this argument that English proficiency in Costa Rica allows citizens to earn more money. Maryanne found that improving their English-speaking skills was considered a *life-changer* for her students. Taking her privilege as a native English speaker into account, Maryanne wanted to assist her students reach their goals. As a result, she made extra efforts to put her students at ease by baking for them on test days and encouraging playfulness in the classroom. This was one of the ways she sought to engage with her students in the LCC, learn more about them, and build relationships with them.

It is part of the teacher's role to motivate their students (Henry & Thorsen, 2018). Students who are motivated by their teachers through relationships as well as academic support perform better. The NESTs at the LCC provided that support and motivation. Maryanne in particular, worked hard to engage her students by bringing fun activities to each class. As a testament to Farrell's (2014) argument that student- teacher relationships can help teachers reduce their students' worries and fears, Maryanne calmed her students' occupational anxieties when she made connections for them to some of the small businesses that worked with the LCC. She served as a networker who introduced the students to potential employers. Again, Maryanne showed that she understood her role as a teacher did not end after class was over. She viewed her efforts as *giving back* to all that she had received from Costa Rican friends and acquaintances as well as her students.

Implications

The findings of this qualitative study shed light on an important phenomenon for NESTs in the TEFL field based on a case study at an LCC in Costa Rica. Through interviews and review of instructional documents, the data analysis revealed common themes that indicated how NESTs adapt to a new culture and employ means to develop intercultural competence. For teachers to adapt to Costa Rica, they relied on students, the LCC and their own ability to adjust and acclimate. Guided by sociocultural theory and the principles of intercultural competency development through language learning, the study examined the perceptions and reflections of six NESTs about their experiences in Costa Rica. Their insights can aid new NESTs in the TEFL field. Interview data and teacher-provided materials revealed three themes: a.) Teachers adapted to Costa Rican culture, b.) Teachers' advantages of learning Spanish for the TEFL classroom, and c.) Teachers improved their TEFL skills through intercultural understanding. These above described findings highlight implications for improving the NESTs' practice and the instructional materials they use, designing relevant TEFL teacher preparation programs, and expanding training workshops to emphasize intercultural cultural competence development through language instruction and culturally-sensitive affective domain instructional strategies by the teachers and LCCs that hire teachers.

Implications for Teacher Preparation in TEFL Certificate Programs

The promotion of learning the local language can be encouraged and supported by the pre-service TEFL training program and the LCC that hires teachers. However, the NESTs themselves must understand the importance of learning the local language and be open to doing so. Continually practicing reflection on their intentions for traveling to a new country, teaching ELLs and being a guest or new citizen in a community outside their own requires dedication, an open attitude, and a curiosity to explore outside their own beliefs and values.

The formation of an EFL teacher requires the development of more than grammar and language knowledge, teaching skills, and instructional methods and strategies to teach and assess students' linguistic proficiency. The TEFL training programs for NESTs and all EFL teachers must also incorporate intercultural competency training. These trainings should include more than country-specific descriptions and cultural norms for their host countries. Creating modules that allow pre-service teachers to learn the local language would be one step to developing their intercultural competence. The TEFL training programs could also consider incorporating multiple examples of intercultural conflicts and guide pre-service teachers on how to address those conflicts. Many TEFL certificate programs are only a few weeks long and not all require practicum hours. Ensuring that teachers have real-life practice and grapple with interpersonal and intercultural problems will give them a stronger foundation for teaching in an intercultural setting.

Implications for Program Design of Language and Cultural Centers

There are many considerations that institutions like an LCC can consider when hiring and training new NESTs. Being critically conscious of the way that NESTs have more privilege during hiring processes and in EFL institutions, may remind administrators to be cautious of their biases. While all six of the NESTs seemed to buy into the notion that a NEST is a preferable teacher of English to non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), language and cultural centers should not exclude NNESTs from their teaching staff but learn to incorporate them for the advantages they serve students. A combination of NNESTs and NESTs creates a balance of ideas, perspectives, experiences, and talents that teaching teams need in order to support one another and students. While NESTs bring the advantage of a firsthand experience and decades long expertise with the target language, the NNESTs bring the advantage of learning the target language from the perspective of a non-native speaker, as well as potentially decades long expertise with the target language.

As teachers adapt to a new culture, it is highly beneficial, if not essential, to learn the local language. If an institution hires new teachers who are not proficient in the local dominant language, it would be appropriate to provide support to the teachers to develop at least basic or intermediate language skills. The NESTs in this study were fortunate to be able to receive free Spanish lessons from the LCC where they worked. However, that is not the case for all those who move to a new country. The institution may provide language classes or direct the teachers to institutions or individuals who can provide language instruction. LCCs need not consider the classes as an additional expenditure because the English teacher can teach free English classes in exchange for classes in the local language. However, it is important that the LCC encourages their teachers to do so for the benefit of themselves, the institutions and above all, the students.

The LCC can further assist the new teachers by introducing them to people and families in the local community through social gatherings or other intentional meetings. The intention to build intercultural relationships between new teachers and the local community can be beneficial to all parties, if approached with a critical pedagogical lens. Through these intercultural relationships, the teachers can join in community with individuals who know the area, the language, and the culture. The individuals or families who are open to meeting the foreign teacher can similarly grow in their understanding of others and in the practice of listening to the perspectives of those who come from different backgrounds. Even if the teacher and the individual or family do not speak the same language, over time they can learn from each other and make a lasting impact in each other's lives toward understanding people from different cultural backgrounds. The critical perspective is necessary in this endeavor as NESTs must be reminded of the privilege they may have as native speakers of English, and to be aware of the sociocultural and sociopolitical implications of their relationships with the local community. As Robert noted, the NESTs were guests in Costa Rica. As new teachers, particularly NESTs, they must be conscious of and continually reflect on the dynamics between themselves and the local community.

Implications for Instruction and Materials

The implications for the TEFL field include a deep self-reflection on behalf of NESTs, critiquing their role in the EFL classroom and their impact on the local community as a guest in a new country. NESTs who learn to adapt to their host countries rather than create conflict and assert superiority over the local community have a better chance of transitioning peacefully to the benefit of their host community. This should translate to lesson plans and assignments that respect and honor multiple cultural identities and to view students as founts of knowledge and experience. Assignments and activities should be constructed in a way that allows students to express those identities. Additionally, as teachers learn the local language, they can incorporate comparisons of the local language to English so that students can see differences and commonalities as well as avoid confusion with false cognates. It is the responsibility of the NESTs to get to know the cultural norms of their host community, try to learn the language, and invest in their students' lives so that their pedagogy and classroom materials exemplify intercultural competences. It is clear the development of intercultural competency skills is needed at every level of the language learning process and from every stakeholder in the TEFL field.

Conclusion

TEFL is a field of global education that is spreading quickly and with significant impact on ELLs around the world. Thus, the role and responsibilities of NESTs in the TEFL field must be critically examined. This qualitative case study with six NESTs in Costa Rica was conducted to explore the way that the NESTs develop intercultural competencies as they learn from their students, host community, and from the language learning process of studying Spanish. Through a thematic analysis of the interviews and teaching materials, it is apparent that learning Spanish helped the NESTs transition to life in Costa Rica and to understand their students as people and language learners. Some of the teachers, particularly those who had spent more time in Costa Rica engaging with the language, culture, and people, developed their role as critical teachers and expressed deeper understandings of their power and privilege in the TEFL classroom. The lessons

they shared illustrate important considerations for fellow NESTs, LCCs, TEFL training programs and the communities that welcome them into their space.

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