

The Host Country Culture in Second-Language Acquisition: A Case Study in an International School

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Abstract

This paper records how a group of high school second-language English learners in an international school studied their host country's cultural heritage. The school enrolls international and host country students and both groups of students participated in this study. They collaborated on a cultural project that involved using host country heritage as a way to develop language proficiency. During the process, students looked for commonalities among different cultures, inquired into the past, and developed both speaking and social skills. As they attempted to discover the intricacies of the local community and its culture, they had to use skills and strategies that increased the likelihood of successful interaction. Their academic engagement increased and at the same time, their intercultural sensitivity was increased.

Keywords

international schools, second-language learning, cultural heritage, interaction

Introduction

The growing number of international schools represents the response to the global mobility of a highly skilled workforce. As parents move to a new country to start a job, their children accompany them and are enrolled in international schools. In these educational institutions, students learn in a language that is often not the same as their home language. Although international schools may be very different in terms of educational programs or school ethos, the majority of them have in common a diverse student population that comes from different language and cultural contexts. To meet the needs of their students, certain practices are common. First, due to the different cultural contexts of their students, international schools endeavor to establish a welcoming atmosphere and develop intercultural awareness. Second, the language of instruction is, in most cases, different from the

language of the host country and from the home language of many students in the school. The majority of students are second- language learners, and they are at different stages of their second-language development. Including the elements of intercultural learning in second-language instruction creates situations in which students acquire and produce the target language as well as experience different cultures and that encourages them to develop intercultural awareness.

Developing intercultural awareness

The very nature of international schools requires students to develop intercultural awareness and understanding for others and by doing so, improve communication with peers coming from different contexts. Intercultural awareness is viewed as “the process of becoming more aware of and developing a better understanding of one's own culture and other

cultures” (Kourova, 2013, p. 80). The cultural background of learners will affect their values, lifestyle, beliefs, and notions of appropriate behavior. All participants in the communication process need to be aware that their views impact communication and need to be prepared to understand the views of students coming from different cultural, ethnic, and religious settings. Developing these understandings is possible “by being confronted with a foreign culture that an individual is prompted to reflect on his/her own culture and to realize that the other culture may be different but not wrong” (Jackson, 2005, p. 200). For that to happen it is necessary to have “the flexibility of mind which allows us to cross borders and accept differences” (Bredella, 2003, p. 38). The willingness to understand others encourages students to question and negotiate ideas, which enables them to effectively communicate with others.

Most international schools follow programs that focus not only on academic rigor but also on developing responsible citizens of the world. Allen indicates that “one of the most important roles of an international school is to encourage its privileged students to develop an appreciation of, respect for, and empathy towards their world” (2000, p. 138). To become interculturally sensitive, students need to develop “the feeling of empathy, the ability to change perspectives, to recognize (the reasons for) misunderstanding, and to find ways to overcome them” (Wandel, 2002, p. 74). To help students understand the world in which they live and to respond appropriately and show empathy, schools need to expose students to different cultures and to encourage them to explore the situations in a respectful manner. While engaged in exchange, participants create an intercultural space that can be defined as a “social context or cultural domain where people from different cultural groups meet,

communicate, and interact” (Secombe, 2016, p. 269). The opportunities for cultural exchange lead to intercultural learning and also encourage learners to care for others and contribute to their community.

Promoting intercultural awareness in a second-language classroom

Students whose home language is different than the language of instruction face a number of challenges as they attempt to adapt to their new environment. They have a dual task ahead of them: to learn the language and to learn in the same language that they do not yet comprehend (Halliday, 2004). The most urgent need of second-language learners is to develop everyday language to communicate with peers and teachers. Although most of them acquire basic spoken language relatively quickly, to communicate successfully, linguistic competence is not sufficient. A lack of intercultural understanding presents additional difficulty in intercultural exchanges involving participants from different cultural backgrounds who speak different languages. In these situations, some exchanges may be misunderstood and important parts of discourse are missed.

Preparing students of different language proficiency to respond appropriately in intercultural settings becomes an important educational goal. In the context of language acquisition, intercultural learning requires “exchange of knowledge and negotiation between groups of native speakers and non-native speakers as well as repeated contact between cultures” (Lomicka, 2009, p. 1227), and classrooms become places where intercultural dialogue needs to be promoted. Students learn language and culture through meaningful use and interaction (Kramasch, 1998), thus developing their thinking (see for example, Mercer & Littleton, 2007 and Mercer, 2008).

When students interact, they exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and are required to “question rather than passively accept the information they encounter” (Ko, 2013, p. 17). Since interaction impacts learning (Vygotsky, 1986), students will develop language skills as they exchange their perspectives and attempt to understand or explain cultural intricacies.

Language and culture are intertwined and many language-learning activities include cultural elements. This is especially the case in foreign language learning where students learn about the customs, traditions, and festivals celebrated in the country where the language is spoken. However, the situation is different in educational contexts that require one language of instruction. That is the case for second-language learners in international schools where language of instruction is not the same as the language of the host country. Students who acquire language of instruction in these contexts will not necessarily associate it with any specific culture. In a second-language classroom, intercultural learning is achieved through creating opportunities for students to learn both about the culture of their peers and “about the world's peoples, countries, and problems” (Caters, 2004, p. 31), which makes language learning not only studying the language system.

Although encouraging students to learn about local culture is “seen as an excellent resource for intercultural learning [...], it currently seems to be a resource which is underused” (Jackson 2005, p. 201). Developing a deeper understanding of host country culture and promoting connections with the local community is something Peterson (1987, p. 75) sees as vital and one of the “main advantages of international education.” Unfortunately, international schools are often isolated communities without many established contacts with the local community, not realizing that the

school is bound to be affected by the host culture. When that is the case, many educational opportunities are lost and students do not have the opportunity to authentically experience the culture of the country in which they live and to explore it in depth.

The Case Study

Context and participants

This small-scale case study was conducted during the implementation of Erasmus+ “VIA Culture: European Cultural Heritage for Vocabulary in Action” in 2019. Its aim was to record and investigate how discussing different aspects of cultural heritage can assist learners in developing academic vocabulary and critical thinking. It was carried out in one private PreK-12 college-preparatory international school in Serbia where English is the language of instruction. Since enrolled students have different language backgrounds, most of them take English language acquisition classes at some point of their schooling. The students who participated in this project were enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) English B course during the last two years of their secondary schooling. This course is designed for students who come to the program at the end of their secondary education and are not competent English language users. For that reason, English is taught as a foreign language in the course. Therefore, at the end of this course, students need to demonstrate proficiency in English.

The unit called “The Essence of Belgrade/Serbia” had been taught over a period of four weeks to ten Grade 12 students who agreed to participate in the project and signed consent forms. Four students were from Serbia (Student 7, 8, 9, and 10), representing the host country, and six students were from five other

countries (Student 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6): Two students were from China, and one each from Germany, Israel, Ukraine, and Italy.

Data

Data were collected from several sources: teacher observations during class activities, recorded discussions, presentations, peer-feedback sessions, the report that students had to write as their summative assessment task, and one semi-structured interview with students at the end of the unit that provided the teacher with feedback on learning.

The teacher kept a journal and wrote impressions after each class. Also, while students worked on their projects, the teacher observed their interaction, and after class, wrote comments in the journal.

During the interview, students were asked to consider what they had learned, to reflect on their new perspectives, and provide any comments about the type of learning activities. The interview, discussions, presentations, and peer feedback were audio recorded, which allowed the teacher to capture students' interaction. The recordings were selectively transcribed. All interaction took place in English and their comments are given verbatim.

The Unit: "The Essence of Belgrade/Serbia"

The unit "The Essence of Belgrade / Serbia" was designed as a lead-in part for the Erasmus+ project "Vocabulary in action" (VIA). Participation in the VIA project required teaching several lessons that would encourage students to explore the host country culture. As preparation for the designing material stage, the teacher extended the unit on "Culture" that was already in the Grade 12 syllabus. Since

intercultural awareness is an integral part of school curricula, it was not difficult to organize a unit in a way that would introduce the host country culture. It was anticipated that exploring the host country culture would provide the context in which students would focus on meaning rather than on language itself (see, for example, Freeman and Freeman, 2001). The unit presents an attempt to avoid emphasis on traditional costumes, celebrations, songs, and important people, and also to avoid stereotypes associated with Serbia. It was hoped that exploration of both visible and invisible aspects of Serbian culture would be beneficial for both the host country and international students. The host country students would improve their intercultural competence by sharing views, beliefs, and behaviors of their own community with students coming from different places. At the same time, the international students would reflect on their own culturally embedded beliefs by discussing those of their Serbian peers.

The unit combined language acquisition, intercultural awareness, and development of linguistic and social skills (for example, working in a team and negotiating). The learning objective was twofold. The first objective was of a linguistic nature, and it was increasing language proficiency and improving second-language communications skills by offering a topic that would put students in the position of either knowledgeable participants or inquirers. As students shared their perspectives, they were encouraged to look for academic vocabulary that would accurately reflect their observations. The second objective was to offer students an opportunity to reflect on their own culture and cultural identity. It was hoped that "The Essence of Belgrade / Serbia" unit would generate discussion, encourage students to think about aspects of culture that might be confusing and find explanations that were not initially obvious.

The process would eventually lead to intercultural understanding. Therefore, intercultural awareness became an explicit learning goal, but activities also promoted language learning since they required solid language competence and spoken language.

Design

The unit consisted of eight 45-minute lessons. The classwork for the unit had five segments: (1) compiling a pool of the host country cultural heritage assets, (2) reading and discussing literary texts about the Serbian mentality, thus investigating the host country culture; (3) obtaining more information on identified aspects of host country culture, (4) presenting findings orally, and in writing in the form of a report; and (5) giving feedback and receiving feedback from peers and the teacher.

During the initial phase of the project, students were introduced to the concept of tangible and intangible cultural assets. They were requested to think about assets in Belgrade and/or Serbia and to list those that they consider important. The next step was to provide information about them, and that was done through Google forms. Each student completed two or three forms. If chosen assets were tangible, they were instructed to give the location of those assets, provide a short description, and state the time period of their construction. If the assets were intangible, the students were instructed to explain what the assets are and to include the sources that they used. Their answers were used to form a pool of assets and to provide the teacher with choices of tangible and intangible assets to be included in the subsequent lessons. After the completion of the forms, there were 23 identified assets, 10 tangible and 13 intangible assets. The most chosen tangible assets were historical monuments. The intangible assets were Serbian

dishes, Cyrillic script, and national dances. The teacher chose the most-mentioned assets to be a starting point of future lessons. During the lessons, students were requested to look closely into the assets, research about them, and share information that they found.

A. Investigating the host country culture

After the pool of assets had been created, students were invited to share what they already knew about Serbia and how they felt about the country they lived in. The insights were sought from both groups of students. To provide students with additional insights and material for deeper exploration of the host country's culture, the teacher presented students with vignettes from "A Guide to the Serbian Mentality" by the Serbian author Momo Kapor. The author records his observations and interpretations of what makes up the essence of Serbians. The book is published in English and it consists of 64 short articles about life in Serbia that were originally published in newspaper columns. The following five vignettes were given to students to read: "A Country of Intimacy," "Legends of Belgrade," "The Belgrade Lifestyle," "Could you live here?," and "Jars of Sunshine." The texts were chosen because of their potential for raising local culture awareness as they presented cultural products and practices in a witty way. The students worked in pairs and each pair was assigned two vignettes. After reading the texts, students acquainted others with the content of the texts.

Next, students were asked to brainstorm the features of the Serbian mindset. To help them do that, the teacher suggested creating a poster that would use the "cultural iceberg" analogy to describe culture (Hall, 1976). According to this model, culture is seen as an iceberg. The part of the iceberg that is above the water represents visible aspects of culture. The

larger part of the iceberg is below the surface and represents aspects of culture that are not obvious but impact the visible ones. Students considered Belgrade's physical position, buildings, landscape, its heritage, and the significance of Belgrade to those who live in it. Students worked in two groups and discussed their ideas within them. After they felt they had included enough qualities in the iceberg, they were asked to display their posters to the whole group. Students were invited to provide feedback on the poster. That was the time when they tested their ideas, considered their peers' reactions, and decided what they may add or remove from the poster.

The final part of this phase was designing the billboard that would contain the essence of Serbia or Belgrade. The billboard could be designed on paper or electronically. The teacher chose to ask students to design the billboard as a cultural product because the format of a billboard required students' cultural insights to be conveyed in a succinct manner followed by a brief and clearly phrased short message. It was emphasized that the artistic expression would not be graded and that they needed to focus on developing ideas. They worked in groups and after the task was completed, the solution was presented to other groups.

B. Presentations

Each group was asked to present their billboard to the rest of the class and to explain why they included the particular message and the image. During the presentation, student performance was graded according to a rubric that considered student engagement, communicative effectiveness, vocabulary choices, and the use of grammar. After the presentation, classmates were asked to provide feedback by saying what they thought was

accurate, and which aspects might have been untrue or inappropriate to be included in the billboard. The discussion and feedback that followed presentations offered insights that most of the students included in the report.

C. Report writing

The summative assessment task was to write a report in which the thinking process would be recorded and explanations offered for the content of the billboard (the task clarification is included in the appendix). Students were instructed to include cultural terminology that practiced throughout the unit. They needed to explain how the group decided to portray the essence of Serbia/Belgrade and how they made decisions about what should be included on the billboard. They were also instructed to comment on the role division process and on their role in the team. Students' reports were used as one source for collecting data. The report was completed individually and assessed according to the rubric that considered both content and language. The following aspects were considered: how relevant and developed ideas are, the accuracy of the language students used, and if the text type and register were appropriate.

D. Semi-structured interview at the end of the unit

When the unit was completed, the students commented on the content of the unit and on the progress they made. They were asked about intercultural understandings they gained as a result of the unit and how they managed with academic demands of the summative assessment task.

Throughout the unit, students were constantly invited to go beyond observable behaviors and comparisons of different practices. They were encouraged to explore the

reasons for certain actions and to understand how culture drives behavior, hoping that understanding why certain cultural behaviors exist in the host country would prompt them to reflect on their own culture.

Results

Intercultural learning: "Above and below the surface"

After students designed the iceberg posters, they presented their findings to the other class members. The starting point was observable behavior not found in different cultures. It was evident that students were noticing local customs and traditions and comparing them with those in their own culture, finding some difficult to understand. For example, Student 1 found unusual and maybe even disturbing the way that Serbian people show affection.

In Belgrade, you can see people kissing in the street. In China, people do not kiss in public, or in front of their children or family (Student 1, transcribed classroom discussion).

Working in groups provided an opportunity for greater reflection on what was seen as inherently Serbian. The example was what a group of three students called "the cafe culture." As they identified and explained the phenomenon, they related it to a different attitude toward the concept of time. An international student described life as slow, and another attempted to provide a rationale for this kind of pace.

Student 3: Belgrade is slow. People stop to talk. There is no constant hurry. I don't really care about coffee, but I like it when you find time to sit down... and just chat.

Student 8: Maybe all Serbian people are not lazy, they only take time doing things. I learned that you never refuse a cup of coffee if you want to stay friends with someone (Transcribed classroom discussion).

In this exchange, the student also offered a more realistic picture of the perception of time. By examining the coffee-drinking habit, Student 3 expressed the appreciation of taking time to relax and socialize, while Student 8 attempted to confront the view of Serbian people "being lazy" and showed awareness of the value that host country culture attaches to it.

As students were explaining the items they included in their culture iceberg poster, many pointed out that some practices could be put in both "above" and "below" the surface. They also attempted to provide explanations for certain assets that were visible by connecting them to what is "below the surface."

Student 1: Welcoming is "floating" because it can be seen and could not sink... I cannot imagine anyone in Serbia being unwelcoming to newcomers. It is deep down in people but is also visible.

Student 2: "Big meals" are visible, but it was interesting to read that there is fear of being hungry that comes from the past. I think it is good to have both "big meals" and the "fear of hunger" because they go together.

Student 3: I put wars below the surface because they are history now, but still important in a creepy way.

Student 5: Someone put connections below the surface, but they should be above as well. You told me that when something has to be done, you think... who shall I contact? Something similar happens in my country... I kind of take it for granted.

Student 2: It is interesting how what is above the surface can be connected with something

below (Transcribed classroom discussion).

These comments are not only interesting observations, but they offer a valuable insight into the development of students' intercultural awareness. When examining local culture, the starting point was obvious and from there students would move to hidden aspects. Students found many differences on the surface level. They commented on aspects of culture that were perceived as different and unusual. These were all considered by foreigners as typical for Serbians. Below the surface, students were comparing their own culture and looking for causes for certain behaviors. For example, students identified the importance that is assigned to food in Serbia. As they went deeper, they were looking for connections and found one with the rooted fear of hunger. Hospitality was another identified as an inherently host-country culture quality. After examining beliefs, students concluded that the visible behaviors are connected with characteristics that could not be easily seen, even hidden, and that only when you scratch the surface level, can you understand people's actions. Offering explanations for certain practices showed how students were looking for connections and employing critical thinking skills. They used their knowledge to make sense of what they observed or experienced, or to try to account for some of its aspects, and to correct what they considered as misconceptions.

Examining beliefs and forming new understandings

Throughout discussions students considered either their own or another culture. They were in a position to question certain practices, compare and contrast them with those of their own culture, look for similarities and differences, and to challenge stereotypes.

In the following exchange, international students focused on traditionally and culturally assigned gender stereotypes, identified different gender roles in their culture, and wanted to explain how they are different from those in the host country.

Student 3: In Ukraine, it is usually a woman who stays at home and does the housework. I do not know why, but it has always been the case... not like here...

Student 1: In China, a man would usually give all the money to his wife and she would pay for everything... women control the finances of a house (Transcribed classroom discussion).

Both students offered critical observations. Student 3 could not explain why that was the case, and it seemed that he did not think much about it before. Student 1 offered the description of role division in her country, showing that she was aware of the different roles women have in her country.

As students considered stereotypes, they concluded that stereotypes impacted how the local community was perceived. Host-country students claimed that comments coming from their peers ranged from insightful to disturbing. One international student offered the following perspective: "People in Serbia are multitasking, easily distracted, maybe even lazy, good at producing and handling interruptions, often change plans, and are very relaxed about time." (Student 5, report-writing task). Host-country students did not have a similar perception of themselves. The following comment from a host-country student shows that it was not how he wanted to be perceived.

Student 8: It is not the way I like others to see us... but everyone has the right to see things differently. I may be upset, but I'd rather not go into explanations... I may say

something that is not right (Transcribed classroom discussion).

Although unhappy with his classmates' observations, this student was prepared to accept that people may have different views. He also attempted to understand how his feelings might affect communication with people who think differently.

There were topics that seemed to be sensitive for international students, but not for host country ones. Two of the aspects that were previously identified previously were corruption and the tendency to bend rules. When asked for a possible explanation of why rule-bending and rule-breaking are so widespread, international students were very careful not to offer an inappropriate remark. Although they perceived some cultural differences as unacceptable, they were reluctant to talk about them with their peers. On the other hand, the host-country students were passing their judgments freely.

Student 7: Maybe it is because of history. We were under other nations... we had so many strict rules that we had to follow or to be killed and maybe ... people got tired of that... and when they got free, they disobeyed, become lazy ...

Student 8: It is also interesting how things function... you always need to know someone... (Transcribed classroom discussion).

There was an attempt to explain that history affected the way people would experience their rights or disrespect rules. This exchange shows how international students wanted to be respectful, while host-country students recognized the same aspect as negative, yet they were open to talk about it.

One international student explained that some topics are not comfortable for her. She

explained that she found it disturbing when people talked to her about politics.

Student 1: I do not mind people talking, but do not judge... everyone has their opinion and we cannot control but do not pretend you are the expert... when you do not know much.

Student 8: People here like to have opinions about certain topics... But it is not always good... especially if you do not know enough, how can you know what to say to them (Transcribed classroom discussion).

There was definitely a cultural dilemma since the culture of Student 1 clashed with the people whom she encountered. Student 8 offered a better behavioral pattern. As the student pointed out, the less we know about what drives others and about their circumstances, the harder it becomes to communicate with them.

It is understandable that a student's culture has been the starting point for exploration and understanding of other cultures. Students' observations ranged from neutral statements and attempts to be respectful to expressing frustration. International students avoided talking about corruption probably because they did not consider it safe in their own culture. However, the topic was obviously not sensitive for local students, and their observations might have been observed as inappropriate in different cultural contexts. Inevitably, some intercultural exchanges may be disturbing, and as Student 8 pointed out, passing judgments is not the best course of action.

Students' reflections on learning

Throughout the unit, students learned new concepts, improved language skills, and communicated for authentic purposes. In the

beginning, the topic represented the safe ground, but through exploration of multiple perspectives, there ensued a dynamic process and through discussions and debates there were passionate expressions of different points of view. Linguistically speaking, students were given an opportunity to argue their views, which is one of the skills they will need for their further education.

Through the report it was evident that students expressed their concern that when attempting to create an interculturally appropriate billboard, they were restricted by the language. Namely, expressions that would appeal to Serbians when translated into English lost important nuances. Student 7 explained how he used the expression “All roads lead to Belgrade” because that was an expression that would be understood both by Serbians and by international visitors. Another student attempted to explain the features of his billboard, but concluded “That billboard may not be the easiest to understand... there is so much we put into it... only we can understand what we meant.” Both observations show that students were aware that different languages may express shared ideas in different ways, and that some ideas may not be easy to express through another language.

Although the assessment task encouraged students to think about the host country and explain what it is that defines host-country culture, it could be said that much was left unsaid in students’ assignments. Maybe the reason was that they focused on the academic aspects of the task and did not explore host culture in depth. However, their work shows their language development and willingness to engage.

Most students stated that they liked the exchange of opinions during group discussions.

One student pointed out that the explanations she received from her peers changed her views of the host country's culture. She also added that the experience was meaningful to her. Throughout the exchanges, host-country students were perceived as knowledgeable participants since they could explain all the aspects of their culture that others considered intriguing, unclear, or strange. Serbian students were confident when sharing their opinions. Some of them took the lead and offered explanations. Even the students that were usually quiet participated. One student explained that it was “interesting to hear what others think about us,” and to “maybe change some negative views.” On the other hand, international students brought their own cultures and while being exposed to that of the other, they compared them and asked clarifying questions. Both groups of students reflected on differences and similarities. At the same time students were reflecting about the process. When commenting on their group work, one student explained, “I would assume that we all equally contributed to the outcome of the project, but we all had different approaches and opinions.”

When asked to reflect on their learning throughout the unit, it was evident that students were developing new understandings as a result of interaction with students who have a different cultural background.

Student 8: We see that only when we meet people from other countries. As you grow up, your world becomes bigger and you meet people and by talking to them you learn who you are. When you are in your country, you only notice the things that people from your country do.

Student 2: What we do defines us more than where we are from (Transcribed feedback at the end of the unit).

They also appreciated working with students coming from different parts of the world. One student commented, “I am thankful that I have heard a lot of different opinions” (End of unit assessment task).

Conclusions

The goal of the unit “The Essence of Belgrade/Serbia” was to offer students opportunities to discover and compare their own cultural heritage with the local culture. The unit itself allowed the teacher to design challenging activities that would develop both linguistic and intercultural skills. Students conducted their research on cultural perspectives and at the same time developed their language proficiency. While working on the project, students practiced language structures, expanded vocabulary, and in that way, both were acquiring new language and learning about the culture of the country in which they live. The newly gained perspectives encouraged students to reflect on the characteristics of their own culture and to approach it from a new angle. Inquiring about the contexts of their peers and re-examining their own allowed promotion of tolerance and respect for others. Students were engaged in a reflective discussion about the host country's culture, and that gave them a reason to talk about their world views and created opportunities for those views to be changed. Activities required students both to be culturally sensitive and to use academic vocabulary in a meaningful way. Learning engagements thus became the forums for students to encounter “individuals who are different in important respects and who present one another with the experience of “otherness” (Alred, 2003, p. 16).

The combination of students who were both from the host country and from other countries stimulated students either to learn about the host country or to find out what non-

Serbian nationals thought about Serbian culture. The host-country students brought their knowledge about implicit cultural aspects, and international students formed an understanding of Serbian culture influenced by their previous experience. The international students were willing to gain cultural knowledge by asking questions. While discussing culture they would mention their experiences and try to interpret what happened to them or to find meaning in practices that seemed unexpected to them. Through participating in the activities, international students could understand some of the cultural characteristics of their peers and the host country students were challenged by questions and attempted to provide an explanation.

Developing intercultural awareness is an important aspect of the school ethos, however, the school still tends to be a closed community. Although intercultural learning was taking place and students were exploring culture throughout the unit, it is difficult to tell if the international students really encountered the host-country culture. They mostly observed cultural elements adopted by the population of affluent host-country nationals who attended the school. Despite the limited contacts that they have with the local culture, all students attempted to understand it and showed readiness not to assume that their own behaviors and beliefs are the only ones that are correct. Exploration of the local community has a huge potential in any context of international education and is hoped that the host country's culture will be used as a resource more often and that as a result of such experiences students will further develop intercultural awareness.

Appendix

Task clarification for the Report on the making of the billboard “The Essence of Serbia/Belgrade”

Please, make sure you include the following parts in your report:

I - Aim - write what your objective was. One sentence will be enough e.g. “My aim was to produce...”

II - Method

a) Background information about the task. Here you need to include the terminology that was used throughout the unit. You may want to include 3 Ps or to focus on different types of cultures. The conversations that you had during the group work will be a great starting point.

Please, make sure that in this section of your report, you cover the following questions:

- How did you decide to portray the “essence” of Serbia/Belgrade'?
- What discussions did you have in your group?
- How did you make decisions about what should be included on your billboard/commercial?
- How do your choices reflect the “essence” of Belgrade'?

b) The process

Here you need to explain how you completed the task. Please, make sure that in this section of your report, you cover the following questions:

- How many people were involved in creating billboard/commercial?

- How did you divide roles?
- Who took the lead?
- What was your role? Are you happy with your performance?

III) Evaluation

In the last section of your report, you need to reflect on the process. For example, you may be happy or unhappy about the billboard quality, planning, and collaboration. Or, you might be reflecting on your team's technical (in)competence. You will need to include both strengths and weaknesses.

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