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Integrating the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in language teacher education

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1. Introduction

The present paper aims at offering insights into the status of intercultural competence development in language teaching and language teacher education in Europe by presenting recent research results of studies analyzing the frequency of culture-related activities in language classes and exploring language teachers' beliefs about their role in the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and in the creation of a European identity and values. If we wish to ensure that intercultural competence development becomes an integral part of language teacher education, it is obviously important to establish what educational variables influence teachers' beliefs about their roles in this process. The final aim of this paper is to recommend action based on the findings and on our vision of the role of European language teachers in developing ICC and in promoting the creation of a European identity and values.

European countries require language teachers to have both academic and pedagogical qualifications and since the 1980s language education has been increasingly influenced by the intercultural dimension in Europe. Language education has a very important role as shown in the White Paper entitled *Towards the Learning Society* (1995), i.e. the basic document describing language teaching in the European Union. According to this document, aside from the obvious economic opportunity that language proficiency allows, other roles of language education include teaching and exploring a sense of belonging and identity and providing the key to knowing other people. Proficiency in languages helps to build up the feeling of being European with all its cultural wealth and diversity and of understanding between the citizens of Europe. Multilingualism is part and parcel of both European citizenship and the learning society. (European Commission, as cited in Byram, 2003, p. 7).

The *Common European Framework* (CEF, 2001) gives a detailed description of what competences language learners have to acquire in foreign languages during their school years. The development of an 'intercultural personality' involving both attitudes and awareness is presented as an important educational goal in its own right. Socio-cultural knowledge is described as knowledge of the society and culture of the community or communities in which a language is spoken. It deserves special attention, especially since unlike many other aspects of knowledge it is likely to lie outside the learner's previous experience and may easily be distorted by stereotypes.

Intercultural awareness is defined by the *Common European Framework* as "knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community.' [...] In addition to objective knowledge, intercultural

awareness covers an awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other, often in the form of national stereotypes” (2001, p. 103).

The guidelines provided by the educational policy division of the Council of Europe have been stressing that there is an urgent need for educational reforms to incorporate cultural and linguistic diversity as well as education for democratic citizenship in the curriculum (CEF, 1995, 2001). It is also stated that one of the aims of language teaching should be to ensure that all sections of the population should “achieve a wider and deeper understanding of the way of life and forms of thought of other peoples and of their cultural heritage” (CEF, page 3).

Our vision for language teacher education, shaped by work carried out at the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and by the influential *European Profile for Language Teacher Education* (Kelly and Grenfell, 2004) suggests that

- Trainee teachers are taught that they have a vital role to play in promoting positive social and cultural values.
- Trainee teachers are taught that teaching and learning foreign languages help promote social and cultural values such as respect for difference, active communication, a participatory attitude to society, and experience of a range of different cultures and lifestyles.
- These values are fostered through inclusive and context-sensitive classroom management strategies, a choice of teaching materials that reflects social diversity and cultural plurality...
- Trainee teachers are aware that their language teaching can influence their learners’ abilities to understand and respect others.
- Trainee teachers are taught how to convey that language learning has these benefits for learners beyond technical linguistic competence.
- Trainee teachers are taught that the concept of European citizenship corresponds to a set of shared values and beliefs in democracy, the rule of law, the free press and a shared cultural heritage (Kelly and Grenfell, 2004, pp. 39-42).

Following the definitions of the key terms used in the present paper, findings of quantitative and qualitative studies will be presented to establish the current status of intercultural competence development in language teacher education and to gain insights into teachers’ personal theories concerning the role they play in promoting intercultural understanding.

2. Definition of key terms

When speaking of teaching culture and developing intercultural communicative competence in teacher education and in language classes, it is essential to define what exactly is meant by these two expressions. Kramsch (1998) defines *culture* as a world view, i.e. “a common system of standards for

perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting” (p. 10). Bennett (1993) rightfully claims that “to avoid becoming a fluent fool, we need to understand more completely the cultural dimension of language. Language does serve as a tool for communication, but in addition, it is a ‘system of representation’ for perception and thinking” (p.16). Culture in language teaching as defined by Byram (1997), Kramsch (1998), and Bennett and Bennett (2004) among others suggests that the cultural elements to be included in language education cover much more than the traditional list of compulsory facts about the civilization of one or two of the target cultures. In addition, as opposed to earlier models of culture that tended to view this concept as a relatively static entity made up of accumulated, classifiable and therefore teachable facts, the more recent models mentioned above see culture as dynamic and variable within and across cultures.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in general terms is understood here as “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; also similarly to Byram, 1997, 2003; and Samovar and Porter, 1993 among others). According to Byram’s well-developed model (1997) intercultural communicative competence requires certain attitudes, knowledge and skills in addition to linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. The attitudes include curiosity and openness as well as readiness to see other cultures and the speaker’s own without being judgmental. The required knowledge is “of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction” (p. 51). Finally, the skills include skills of interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction as well as critical cultural awareness/political education.

Other terminology used in the present paper includes pre-service language teacher education, meaning 3 to 6 years of theoretical and practical instruction at the end of which one becomes a qualified language teacher at primary or secondary level. Training courses for in-service teachers, in other words practicing teachers in primary and secondary education, may benefit from exploring teachers’ personal theories, or in other words, teachers’ own beliefs and convictions about the aims, the expected content and the appropriate methodology of foreign language teaching (FLT) as demonstrated by the research results described below.

3. A brief review of European research studies on the role of ICC in language teaching and language teacher education

Before setting out to recommend changes in teacher education, it is vital to examine current practices that may need to be improved. In their review of empirical research and scholarship in the field of culture and language learning, Byram and Feng (2004) also call attention to the need to first investigate “what there is” as opposed to giving recommendations for “what there should be” (p. 150). Therefore, studies concerned with exploring the role of ICC development in teaching and teacher education will be reviewed in this section of the paper.

A qualitative study (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, Draghicescu, Issaias and Sabec, 2003) conducted within the framework of project 1.2.3 of the first medium-term program of activities of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) examined the views of teachers of English and French in ten European countries on the place of culture in language teaching. Participants in this survey included 47 English teachers and 15 French teachers from Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia. Although none of the respondents had studied intercultural communication in a systematic manner during their years of formal training, they all recognized the importance of intercultural competence and agreed on the need to include the theoretical and practical elements of intercultural studies in language teacher education programs (p. 35).

According to an informal survey conducted among the 25 teacher trainer participants of another ECML project entitled Intercultural Communicative Competence in Teacher Education (ICcinTE) concerning the status of ICC in English language teacher education, the following conclusions were drawn:

In 2005 in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia:

- Intercultural learning was not an integral part of the curricula in teaching foreign languages at the participating teacher educators' institutions.
- The development of ICC was not systematically and institutionally incorporated in the syllabus of language practice or methodology courses for future foreign language teachers at their universities.
- British (American, French, etc.) cultural studies were focusing on civilization (literature, history, politics, etc.)
- Cultural awareness and intercultural communication courses were at best elective courses at a few of the universities.
- Trainees only accidentally encountered traces of cultural awareness and intercultural communication training during their 5 years of undergraduate studies if they encountered them at all.

The participating teacher trainers from France, Germany, Russia and the UK painted slightly more positive pictures about the role of ICC in their countries, or at least at their own institutions.

As a follow-up to the above informal survey, a thorough document analysis was conducted to map out the current status of intercultural competence development in the seven university-based English teacher education programs in Hungary. The results revealed that in 2006 there were only two programs where trainees could not avoid learning about intercultural competence development, which meant approximately 30% of all student teachers. In the remaining five programs, trainees could graduate as English teachers without having heard about the intercultural dimension of language teaching, representing a sad 70% of all student teachers (Lázár, 2006).

In a recent and very significant volume summarizing the findings of a large-scale international empirical investigation on the role of intercultural communication in language teaching according to foreign language teachers' perceptions, Sercu and colleagues (2005) explored the following questions: (1) How do secondary school foreign language teachers' current professional self-concepts relate to the envisaged profile of the intercultural foreign language teacher? (2) To what extent is current language teaching practice directed towards intercultural competence? (3) What factors influence language teachers' willingness to incorporate the intercultural dimension into foreign language education?

This extensive study (Sercu et al, 2005) was conducted on a sample of 424 language teachers in seven countries in 2001. The main findings reveal that the great majority of teachers in Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Mexico, Poland, Portugal and Sweden regard themselves as being sufficiently familiar with the culture(s) of the foreign languages they teach despite the fact that teachers in Poland, Bulgaria and Mexico have fewer possibilities for travel and tourist contacts. Nevertheless, according to this study, the participating teachers' profile does not meet all expectations regarding the knowledge, skills and attitudes expected from a 'foreign language and intercultural competence teacher'. The objectives of foreign language teaching continue to be defined in linguistic terms by most teachers. The great majority of the respondents in Sercu's study focus primarily and almost exclusively on the acquisition of communicative competence in the foreign language. If and when they include culture in FLT, the activities they use primarily aim to enlarge learners' knowledge of the target culture, and not to encourage learners to search for information or to analyze this information critically. A very large number of the teachers claimed to be willing to integrate intercultural competence teaching in foreign language education, but the data also showed that this willingness is neither reflected in their teaching practice, nor in their definitions of the goals of foreign language education (pp. 13-20).

According to Sercu's evaluation of their findings the implications for teacher education are the following:

Understanding teachers' perceptions and the reasons why they embrace or reject intercultural competence teaching is crucial for teacher educators who want to design (international) teacher education programmes which can clarify and exemplify to foreign language teachers how they can promote the acquisition of intercultural competence in their classes. Our findings highlight important differences and commonalities in teachers' perceptions. Both national and international teacher education programmes can build on these commonalities and have teachers from different countries cooperate, knowing that they all share a common body of knowledge, skills and convictions. They can also exploit differences between teachers to enhance teachers' understanding of intercultural competence (pp. 18-19).

In a study on the impact of a renewed foreign language teaching methodology in Hungary (Nikolov, 2003), statistical data are presented and discussed in connection with the language proficiency of the population, the most popular foreign languages of primary and secondary school students, their future plans with languages as well as the frequency of a variety of activities in language lessons. On the basis of the data collected in an earlier study (Nikolov, 1999), the author concludes that the most frequent activities in the language classroom in the 1990s were translation, grammar practice, reading out aloud, copying from the blackboard and oral drills. The questionnaire study conducted in 2003 still found that the

most frequent tasks and activities language students had to do in class were translation, reading out aloud, grammar practice, and written tests.

Nikolov (2003) concludes that meaning and context are still shoved to the background despite the fact that the majority of teachers use communicative teaching materials usually filled with meaningful content in interesting contexts. However, teachers tend to tailor these new course books to their own teaching style by reading out, translating and grammatically analyzing the texts, skipping discussions about content, and avoiding creative but noisy practice activities and projects. Nikolov draws attention to the fact that the foreign language should not only be regarded as a target but also as a means to learn about the world.

4. Study on the frequency of culture-related activities in the EFL class in four countries (Lázár, 2007)

A questionnaire study (Lázár, 2007) supported by the ECML and the Council of Europe on the frequency of culture-related activities in the English language classroom in four European countries showed results that were in many ways similar to the studies described above. The statistical analysis of 393 questionnaires (see Appendix) filled in by English teachers in Estonia, Hungary, Iceland and Poland on the frequency of culture teaching in the EFL classroom aimed to explore how often and in what ways teachers incorporate culture-related activities in their EFL teaching. Follow-up interviews were conducted to gain deeper insight into the reasons behind teachers' reluctance to incorporate culture-related activities in their lessons.

The statistical analysis of the results revealed that activities that may lead to a better knowledge of the target cultures' civilization were only 'sometimes' or 'rarely' done by the great majority of the nearly 400 participating English teachers. Furthermore, concerning activities leading towards intercultural communicative competence as sampled in the second part of the questionnaire, the results were even more mixed. Aside from functions (*greetings* and *complaints*), activities in this section were even less popular with teachers. Only 18.1% of the teachers said they always made sure to discuss the issue of *appropriate conversation topics* with their groups of students. Only 15.6% and 17.9% of the teachers said they always discussed differences in *nonverbal communication* and *personal space* with their groups. The same lack of attention was found for *negative stereotypes* and *culture shock*, basic obstacles in the process of communication across cultures. This means that students of the remaining over 80% of the teachers are not very likely to learn anything about these issues from the teacher during their English lessons. As a result, they may end up learning about the importance of differences in meanings, values and beliefs, the difficulties of acculturation and the dangers of negative stereotyping through, perhaps unpleasant, personal experience if they learn about them at all.

When examining the factors that influence the frequency of culture-related activities in the English language classroom, a statistical analysis of the data revealed that both staying abroad (Diagrams 1a and

1b) and ICC training courses (Diagrams 2a and 2b) do make a significant difference in the frequency of culture-related activities. Furthermore, it can be concluded from the data that those respondents who had received some form of cultural awareness or intercultural communication training prior to the survey did nearly all of the activities significantly more often than those who had “only” lived abroad for a while.

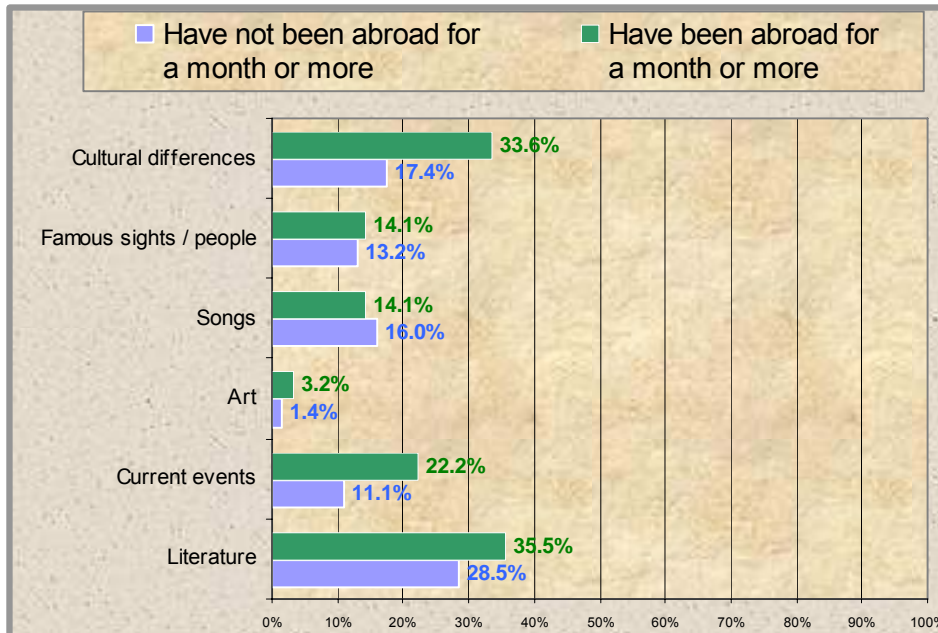


Diagram 1a Teachers who ‘often’ do the activities according to length of previous stay abroad

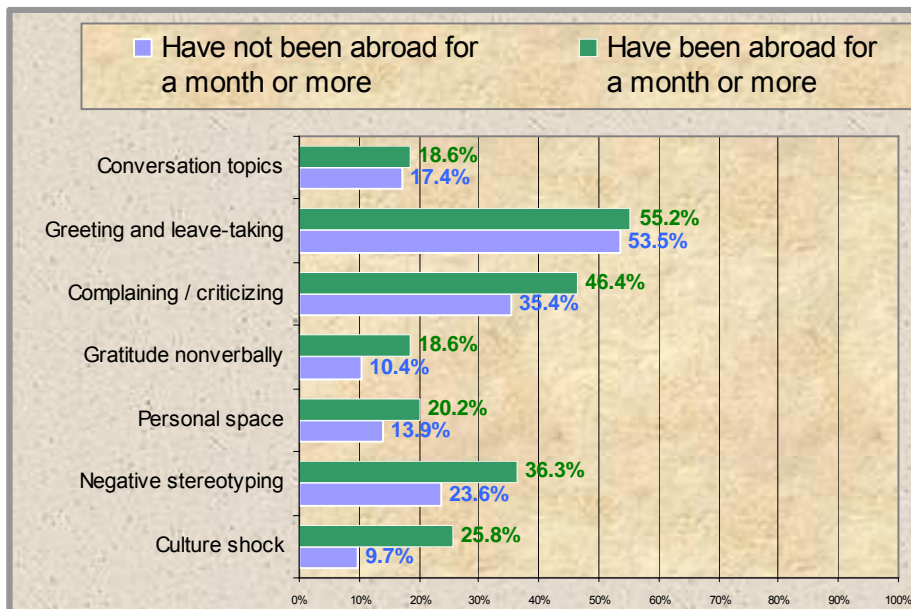


Diagram 1b Teachers who ‘always’ do the activities according to length of previous stay abroad

It is worth noting that there are over twice as many trained teachers who always discuss *differences in personal space* and the effects of *negative stereotyping* as teachers without any cultural awareness or intercultural communication training. Furthermore, three times as many trained teachers said they ‘always’ told their groups of students about *culture shock* as teachers with no previous cultural training. Interestingly, all these statistically significant differences are the results of training that perhaps only consisted of one workshop. In the original questionnaire the question eliciting information about the respondent’s former training in cultural awareness or intercultural communication provided four options to choose from: ‘no training,’ ‘one or two workshops,’ ‘a university course,’ and ‘other.’ In order for all the cells in the statistical analysis to contain more than five respondents, the author had to collapse categories. As a result, respondents now either fall into the category of ‘no training’ or into the category of ‘some cultural training.’ Furthermore, it was revealed only after all the questionnaires had been filled in and all the data had been processed that some of the teachers (especially in Estonia) might have considered the British or American cultural studies or civilization courses they had attended during their university studies as intercultural communication training. With this in mind, it is remarkable that despite the very broad category of ‘some cultural training,’ the differences in the frequencies of culture-related activities between those teachers who had received ‘some cultural training’ and those who had not are rather large.

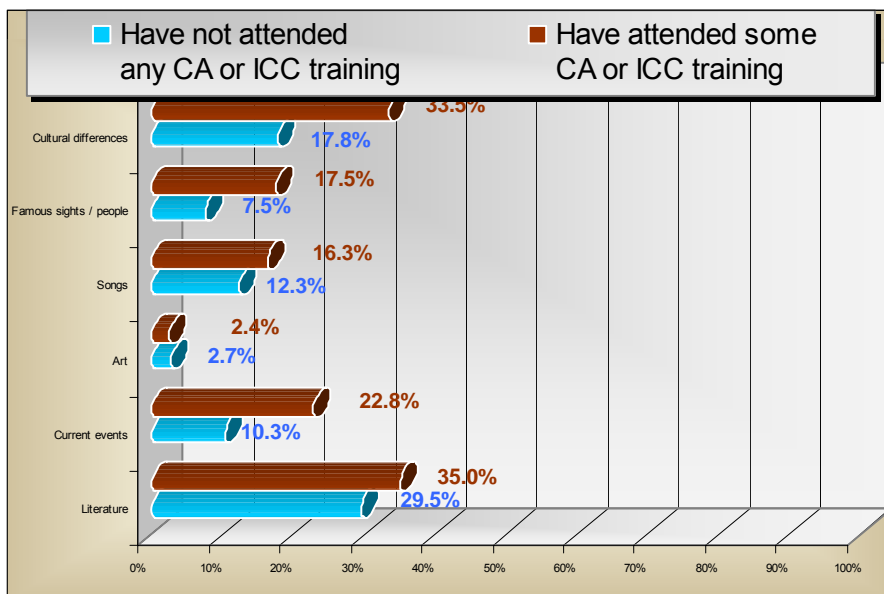


Diagram 2a Teachers who ‘often’ do the activities according to previous intercultural training

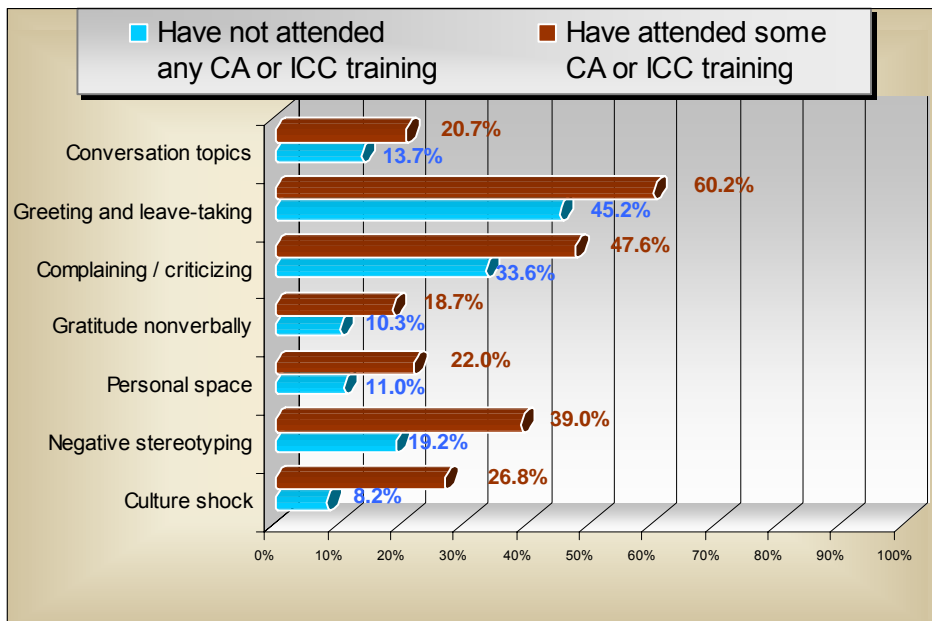


Diagram 2b Teachers who 'always' do the activities according to previous intercultural training

It seems that on average the participating 393 English teachers spend 48.2% of the cultural activities with a focus on Britain, 29.17% on North America, 14.16% on the students' home country, 4% on other countries and 3.84% on Australia (see Diagram 3 below). What does not come through from the answers to the questionnaire is what type of cultural content this means, why the ratio of countries is distributed as it is, and what role course books play in this distribution. Although the present questionnaire included questions on the course books used and asked for the teachers' evaluation of these books, the 393 respondents in the four examined countries seem to use so many different teaching materials that no statistically significant differences could be established among them. However, it can be noted here that regardless of the particular course book the teachers use in their teaching, only 9.5% of the respondents claimed that their course book helped them 'very much' in teaching civilization-related activities. Finally, the proportion of teachers who claimed that their course book helped them 'very much' in teaching little 'c' culture-related activities is even smaller (8.4%).

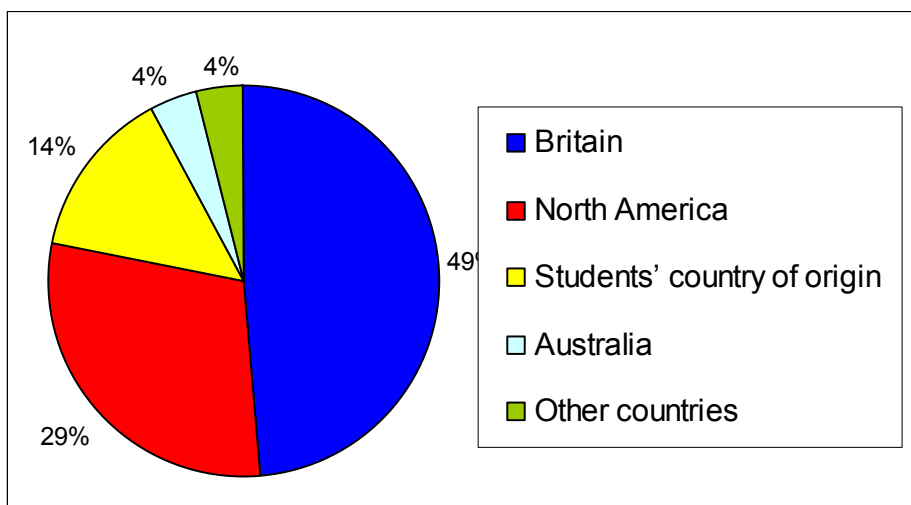


Diagram 3 Proportion of time spent talking about different countries during cultural activities

In order to better understand the possible reasons behind the results of the quantitative study, that is the low frequency of cultural elements incorporated in English lessons, the statistical analysis was complemented by case studies based on semi-structured interviews with five secondary school teachers of English. The initial interviews were followed by a short training session, and subsequently a follow-up discussion with each participant to learn more about the participating teachers' perception of culture in the language classroom and at the same time, to measure the effects of the training session. The interviews and the training session took place in Budapest.

The follow-up interviews with the five teachers gave further insight into the factors that may influence the attention paid to developing intercultural competence in the English classroom. We found that teachers usually integrate those rather few culture-related activities based on readings in the course book or short student presentations. Aside from the participating teachers' relatively poor repertoire of activities with a cultural focus, the difficulties they had when using (*"digesting"* and *"embedding"*) the ones they had learned at the training session, and their course books' apparent deficiencies, several other decisive obstacles were mentioned by the respondents. These include some of the participating teachers' lack of first-hand experience or knowledge of other cultures (*I haven't been to the US and I only spent a week in England so I don't know enough...*), and others' strong grammar orientation as well as their own and/or their school's exam-centeredness (*'First, we prepare them for the language exam, and then we can talk about Christmas traditions'*). Additional obstacles seemed to include some of the teachers' feelings of incompetence due to a lack of training in the given area (*'I have no idea how to teach this'*), younger teachers' preoccupation with discipline and motivation problems (*I don't want to try and break stereotypes because my students are very negative and they also misbehave all the time'*) and some teachers' reservations about whether developing intercultural competence was the task of the language teacher at

all (*'Intercultural communication is just another fashionable phrase in FLT, teaching these things is not the English teacher's task'*).

5. Trainee teachers' personal theories concerning the role ICC plays in the language classroom (Lázár, 2006)

As a follow-up to the questionnaire study and the interviews with teachers, case studies of pre-service English teachers aimed to explore and understand trainee teachers' personal theories about the role of teaching culture and developing intercultural competence in language teaching and to explore and analyze the factors that might have influenced the formation of the trainees' personal theories (Lázár, 2006).

The case studies are about six pre-service English teachers who come from a variety of backgrounds, have very different life experiences and substantially differing personalities. This is what makes them fall into six different cases. An important selection criterion that was consciously chosen is that three of them attended the author's 14-week elective course on the Methodology of Intercultural Communication Training at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in the fall of 2004, while the other three did not attend any cultural awareness or intercultural communication courses before or during the project. Since all of the trainees did their teaching practice in 2005 and 2006, their lessons could also be observed, discussed and analyzed. The lesson observations were followed by in-depth interviews in order to better understand the present state and the development of the trainees' personal theories about the cultural dimension of language teaching.

In this research project data collection followed a repeated measures design by using pre- and post-course questionnaires with the trainees who attended the intercultural communication course, and lesson observations and in-depth interviews with all of the six respondents. The aim of the in-depth interviews and lesson observations was to better understand the trainees' personal theories by also investigating real behavior in real classrooms as recommended by Nunan (1991, p. 260).

The aim of the in-depth interviews was to understand the participants' behavior better, to explore their thoughts, worries and personal theories regarding the cultural dimension of language teaching and to discover what influenced their beliefs. It was equally important to gain insight into the trainees' earlier life experiences to see what might have had an impact on the formation of their personal theories of teaching language and culture aside from their studies.

The Methodology of Intercultural Communication Training course (ICC course) is optional, and it can be taken by any fourth or fifth year English major who wants to obtain a teaching degree. The course is offered every second or third term. There is usually another course with a focus on the cultural dimension of language teaching offered by two other instructors every other term. This particular elective ICC course was held by the researcher. The aim of the ICC course is to cover the basics of the theory of intercultural communication training in language education and to give practical guidance in incorporating

a variety of culture-related activities in the language lesson with the final aim of enabling trainees to develop their future students' intercultural competence. The ICC course consists of 14 ninety-minute sessions. In the fall term of 2004 the number of trainees participating in the course was sixteen.

The data gained in this project were interpreted using alternative forms of analysis. According to Creswell (1994) the analysis has to be based on data reduction to discover patterns in the questionnaires, the transcription of the interviews, the observation notes and the researcher's diary (p.154). This is followed by the reporting and interpretation of the data that fall into the emerging categories or patterns. Preliminary analysis started in the data collection phase and also helped to refine the form and focus of the research instruments.

The case studies explored the following areas of possible influences on trainees' personal theories about developing intercultural competence in language classes:

- the trainees' background and personality,
- their previous exposure to foreign cultures,
- their primary and secondary school teachers,
- the university courses they had attended,
- the course on the methodology of developing intercultural competence that three of them had attended,
- their teaching experience,
- their personal theories about language teaching in general,
- any possible impact their participation in the research may have had.

The purpose of this research was to enter into the perspectives of six trainee teachers in order to discover what had shaped their personal theories of teaching culture through language. There must be many other ways to approach the collected data, and subjectivity is unavoidable when deciding which information and which accounts of experiences we find illuminating and which we ignore or leave behind unnoticed.

However, to assure the reader that the research is credible and reliable, and that the findings are valid and may be transferable, the following steps have been taken according to the principles of naturalistic investigations as summarized from the *TESOL Quarterly* Qualitative Research Guidelines and commented on by Lazaraton (2003): Data collection aimed at exploring emic perspectives, meaning the participating trainees' own perceptions and interpretations. The researcher aimed to explore what there is, to have the insider's perspective. The data collection meant a prolonged engagement with the participants to build trust and better understand their beliefs. Triangulation involved the use of multiple methods of inquiry and a variety of data sources. In addition, data analysis followed an on-going cyclical approach, and the emerging categories and concepts were informed and tested by each phase of the data collection procedure. In reporting the data, thick descriptions are provided in order to allow readers to determine whether the results of this research project may be transferable to other contexts.

To sum up the results, the examined ICC course primarily served a cultural awareness raising purpose. Perhaps not surprisingly, it became obvious that for many of the trainees this course appeared to have been the first time they have heard about the concept of intercultural communicative competence. Nevertheless, the post-course questionnaire and the interviews indicated that the impact on beliefs about the role of ICC in language teaching seemed quite powerful.

As for changes in their teaching practice, two of the three trainee teachers who attended the course on the methodology of developing ICC showed evidence of conscious efforts – if varying degrees of success in their implementation – to teach culture through language during their teaching practice as well. The three other trainees who had not attended any courses on cultural awareness or intercultural communication did not show any sign of intending to incorporate the intercultural dimension into their teaching during the observed lessons.

In what follows, the major findings of this case study project are presented as a list of items not because they are unconnected but because they represent many different conclusions that are intertwined and seem to resemble a spider web of pedagogic variables. This research obviously does not allow us to generalize, but it is important to note the following insights gained from the study of the personal theories of six pre-service English teachers. Many of the conclusions are illustrated by quotations taken from the interviews:

- The methodology course on the development of ICC proved to provide new information, new perspectives and new tools to the trainee teachers (*'Before taking this course I had never thought that there are other cultural issues that can be incorporated than differences in vocabulary and pronunciation between British and American English... or that it's okay to talk about a variety of other cultures, too. This course made me see language teaching in a new light, and I've already used the role-plays and simulation games I learnt there.'*)
- Travel broadens the mind but it does not necessarily raise trainees' cultural awareness, nor does it automatically make them competent intercultural speakers or teachers. Extensive intercultural contacts often – but not always – raise cultural awareness but do not usually give sufficient knowledge and tools to language teachers to develop intercultural communicative competence in the classroom. (*'I lived abroad for two years, and it wasn't easy to adjust but I never thought I should talk about these experiences to my students'*).
- The lack of first-hand experience in other cultures or with people from other cultures can make trainees feel incompetent in incorporating the cultural component into language teaching.
- Communicative language teaching methods can be used in schools – and they can be taught to trainees – based on culture-free or neutral content with the focus still largely resting on grammatical accuracy and without raising cultural awareness or developing intercultural communicative competence.

- Future English teachers consider the inclusion of the cultural dimension into the syllabus a significant amount of extra work at a time when they are novices in the field with many other difficulties to overcome.
- It is the course book that teachers use which decides largely what is in the syllabus and what is omitted. As a result, teaching materials with no cultural focus or with a very superficial one, will not promote cultural awareness raising and the development of intercultural communicative competence (*'If course books gave teachers a little more help in teaching culture, it would be a lot easier'*).
- Trainees who are used to the dominance of grammar and the perceived importance of passing language examinations may not be able to exploit culturally minded course books for other purposes than the development of linguistic competence.
- One or two sessions on the intercultural dimension of foreign language acquisition in compulsory methodology or elective specialization courses at university can sometimes raise the students' awareness of cultural differences and their importance in communication but they will not provide future language teachers with sufficient knowledge of and practical skills in methods that would help develop intercultural communicative competence in the foreign language classroom (*'It was completely new to me how many useful things you can teach through the language in English lessons'* but *'I'm still not always sure how culture can be incorporated without it being an artificial add-on to learning the language proper'*).
- A university course on the methodology of intercultural communication training has to assess the needs of the particular group of trainees carefully in order to build on their knowledge, their experiences of the cultural dimension of communication, and their existing personal theories about language learning and teaching.
- A course on the methodology of intercultural communication training has to balance cultural awareness raising, theoretical knowledge about intercultural communicative competence and practical skills development in teaching methods with many opportunities for trainees to talk about their own experiences, and to verbalize their reflections and possible reservations.
- Trainee teachers whose personal theories about language teaching in general dismiss or exclude the educational potential of language teaching for intercultural communication purposes may not accept the new roles teachers should play in order to develop intercultural communicative competence (*'The way I see it now, having completed the course, the teacher can weave the cultural dimension into practically any activity if he or she has the energy, and creativity... and of course the inclination to do so'*).
- Trainee teachers often leave the intercultural communication course believing that the development of intercultural communicative competence is for classes of mature students at an advanced level of proficiency even if the contrary was taught and demonstrated to them during the course (*'I still believe that kids have to mature first and learn the language well enough to be able*

to learn about culture'). Some of the input of a course on the methodology of intercultural communication training is sometimes completely lost and some of it is often reinterpreted by the teachers to fit their own beliefs about language teaching in general.

- Even culturally conscious and devoted novice teachers are often too pre-occupied by their own developing teacher personality to have the time and energy to incorporate the cultural dimension in language teaching, particularly if they do not get any support in this from the teaching materials they use and/or the more experienced colleagues they work with.
- Even trainees who choose to attend a course on the methodology of developing intercultural communicative competence often find the theoretical and practical input too concentrated within a very short period of time to be able to internalize it and use it in their teaching (*'This course was a true revelation for me but one semester was not enough. I feel we are chased through the methodology and pedagogy courses, which leaves us very little time to absorb things and to try them out'*).
- Attending only one course on the theory and practice of the role of intercultural communication in foreign language learning-and-teaching is not – in most cases – sufficient for educating teachers who will consciously and systematically incorporate the cultural dimension into language lessons as long as all the other input they receive during their studies plays down the importance of culture in foreign language acquisition.

The impact of the course on the Methodology of Intercultural Communication Training examined in this research seemed to serve an awareness raising function first and foremost. For many trainees this course appeared to have been the first time they heard about intercultural communicative competence as the final aim of foreign language acquisition. Although some of the input of the course was lost and some of it was reinterpreted, the theoretical knowledge and the practical teaching skills development the trainees were exposed to during the course seemed to influence their personal theories about teaching culture through language to a large extent. However, their actual practice of teaching – influenced by many other variables described above – did not necessarily change as a result of the training course they had attended.

5. Conclusions and recommendations for teacher education

In order to develop intercultural competence and help the creation of a European identity and values in language classes as also recommended by the *Common European Framework of Reference* (2001) and national curricula, teacher education programs have to change in many countries in Europe. How effective teacher training courses can be developed is an area worth exploring. However, very little effort is usually invested in finding out how trainees' practices and underlying principles actually change

following a training course (Freeman and Richards, 1993). What we know is that teacher education rarely produces the positive outcomes that trainers expect (Lamb, 1995) because the internal conflict between old and new ideas and beliefs seems to only gradually have practical effects (Freeman and Graves, 2004) as this also became obvious from the studies described above (Lázár, 2006; Lázár, 2007).

The implications of the results of the studies described in this paper seem to be that cultural awareness raising and the development of intercultural communicative competence have to be incorporated in teacher education courses as early as the first year of studies. If students do not only hear about the role of the cultural dimension in language acquisition once in one of their courses in the third year, then perhaps they would stand better chances at internalizing these ideas later on during their methodology courses and special seminars when they are exposed to more theoretical knowledge as well as more practical ideas for developing their teaching skills. As a result, they would be better equipped to absorb the knowledge, accept a new educational role, learn new methods, and eventually incorporate the cultural dimension and promotion of European values in language teaching systematically. This would not only allow them to develop their students' linguistic competence but at the same time to use the English language as a medium to educate students about important cultural facts (similarities and differences in values, beliefs, lifestyles, customs and communication styles), to develop skills of observation, interpretation and mediation as well as to promote openness, curiosity, adaptability and non-judgmental thinking instead of the currently very common culture-free or zero-content language lessons where grammar instruction still dominates. Therefore, on the basis of the findings, the following recommendations can be made:

- One or two lessons or lectures on intercultural communication are not sufficient in teacher education programs. Even a one-semester course may not be enough for trainees to absorb the knowledge and skills needed to become professional teachers of intercultural competence. There is a strong need to incorporate ICC into teacher education programs systematically.
- A university course on the methodology of developing intercultural competence has to assess the needs of the particular group of trainees carefully in order to build on their knowledge, their experiences of the cultural dimension of communication, and their existing personal theories about educating through language teaching.
- A course has to balance cultural awareness raising, theoretical knowledge about intercultural communicative competence and practical skills development in teaching methods with many opportunities for trainees to share their own experiences, and to verbalize their reflections and possible reservations in light of the new input.

- Trainees need to be exposed to a choice of teaching materials that reflect social diversity and cultural plurality and promote social and cultural values such as respect for difference, active communication, a participatory attitude to society and democratic citizenship.
- A one-semester course is especially not sufficient if most other courses that the trainees attend often neglect or belittle the role of the intercultural dimension in language teaching. For a beneficial multiplying effect, it is vital to train the trainers so they do not work against these changes in teacher education but instead help overcome the obstacles in the way of intercultural competence development and the creation of a European identity in language classes.

In this paper, the main emphasis was on presenting findings based on research conducted within the framework of two international research, development and training projects supported by the ECML. The potential for development increases significantly when such collaborative efforts are made by far-reaching networks of teacher educators from all over Europe. Currently, the extensive teacher and trainer training seminars and module series and the accompanying materials development that is carried out within the Pestalozzi Programme of the Council of Europe, for example, is also reaching a large target audience with an even larger multiplying effect to promote intercultural understanding, respect for difference, the rule of law, and democratic citizenship. In agreement with the recommendations put forward by Sercu and her colleagues (2005), we can claim that these projects give rich opportunities for teachers and teacher educators from different countries to cooperate in order to promote teachers' understanding of intercultural competence and to exemplify to foreign language teachers how they can develop intercultural competence in their classes. The ECML projects and their research results described in this paper, and the many other projects supported by the Council of Europe and the European Commission will hopefully enhance the systematic incorporation of the development of intercultural competence and the creation of European values into teacher education programs.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear English Teacher,

We are an international team supported by the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, the British Council and Ministries of Education. We are conducting research in several European countries to find out how much and what exactly language teachers teach their students about culture. We are interested in your experience at primary, secondary or tertiary level. The information you provide will be a very useful contribution to our research into the ways culture can be taught in language classes.

The questionnaire consists of three sections and it will take you about ten minutes to fill in all three. Should you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.

Please return the questionnaire to the address below.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Lázár Ildikó, Hungary

(Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, Poland; Rafn Kjartansson, Iceland; Liljana Skopinskaja, Estonia)

SECTION I

How often do you include activities based on the following in your English lessons?

1. discussions on cultural differences (social habits, values, lifestyles)

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
never	rarely	sometimes	often
	(perhaps once in or course)	(about three or four times in a course)	(every third class a term or more often)

2. videos or photos of famous sights and people

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
never	rarely	sometimes	often

3. songs with information on singer or band and explanations of lyrics

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
never	rarely	sometimes	often

4. art (eg. photos of sculptures and paintings)

never

rarely

sometimes

often

5. current events (either social or political issues)

never

rarely

sometimes

often

6. short stories, poems or any other literary work

never

rarely

sometimes

often

SECTION II

Please answer the following questions.

1. Do you discuss with your students the appropriate choices for conversation topics in the foreign language?

Never

Sometimes

Always

2. Do you tell your students that the rituals of greeting and leave-taking can be different in each culture?

Never

Sometimes

Always

3. Do you teach your students the appropriate ways of complaining and criticizing in the target language?

Never

Sometimes

Always

4. Do you teach your students how to express gratitude non-verbally in the target culture(s)?

Never

Sometimes

Always

5. Do you tell your students that personal space (e.g. how far you stand from people when you talk) varies in each culture?

Never

Sometimes

Always

6. Do you discuss the dangers of negative stereotyping (prejudices) with your students?

Never

Sometimes

Always

7. Do you tell your students about culture shock?

Never

Sometimes

Always

SECTION III

1. When you do the activities in sections I and II above, which country or countries do you mostly focus on? Please indicate in what proportions the following countries are treated in your language lessons.

Australia %
 Britain %
 United States %
 Students' country of origin %
 other countries % Please specify _____

2. Who do you teach English to? Please check the appropriate boxes in the columns below.

<u>Level:</u>		<u>Age group:</u>
(false) beginner <input type="checkbox"/>		10-14 <input type="checkbox"/>
lower-intermediate <input type="checkbox"/>		14-18 <input type="checkbox"/>
intermediate <input type="checkbox"/>		18-25 <input type="checkbox"/>
advanced <input type="checkbox"/>		adults <input type="checkbox"/>

3. Which course book(s) do you most frequently use?

a, _____ (title of first book)

Does this book help you teach the issues listed in section I above?			
not at all	very little	to some extent	very much
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Does this book help you teach the issues listed in section II above?			
not at all	very little	to some extent	very much
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

b, _____ (indicate another course book here if applicable)

Does this book help you teach the issues listed in section I above?			
not at all	very little	to some extent	very much
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Does this book help you teach the issues listed in section II above?			
not at all	very little	to some extent	very much
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How much do you think your students are aware of cultural differences?

not at all	very little	to some extent	very much
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Please answer the following questions about yourself.

a) Your age:

20-30 31-40 41-50 51 +

b) Your highest qualifications:

B.A, B. Ed. or equivalent

M.A, M.Ed. or equivalent

Ph.D.

other (please specify) _____

c) Sex:

female

male

d) Residence:

city

small town

village

other

country: _____

e) Mother tongue:

native speaker of English

non-native speaker of English

f) Have you ever lived in a foreign country for a month or more?

No

Yes

g) Have you attended a workshop or course on cultural awareness and/or intercultural communication?

No

One or two conference workshops

A course at university/college

Other Please specify _____

Thank you.



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