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Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence

An ECML project coordinated by Ildikó Lázár with Martina Huber-Kriegler, Denise Lussier, Gabriela S. Matei and Christiane Peck

L'articolo presenta le premesse, l'impostazione e i risultati più importanti del progetto ICCinTE (Intercultural Communication in Teacher Education), sviluppato presso il CELM (Centro europeo per le lingue moderne) di Graz. Tra le diverse manifestazioni legate a questo progetto, al centro il workshop tenuto a Graz, dodici incontri nazionali sulla formazione presentati in altrettante città europee, e la traduzione francese di "Mirrors and Windows" – un manuale interculturale pubblicato con il titolo "Sviluppo e valutazione della competenza comunicativa interculturale – guida per gli insegnanti di lingue e per i formatori di insegnanti" (Lazar et al., 2007). L'articolo presenta la guida, illustrandone gli scopi e gli obiettivi principali di ogni capitolo, citando esempi di compiti e attività volte a sostenere insegnanti e formatori nella preparazione e nello svolgimento di ateliers di comunicazione interculturale nei loro rispettivi contesti professionali.

Ildikó Lázár's article presents the background, rationale and the most important results of the Intercultural Communication in Teacher Education (ICCinTE) project of the ECML. The central workshop in Graz, the twelve National Training Events held in 12 European cities and the French adaptation of Mirrors and windows – an intercultural communication textbook led to the publication entitled Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence - A guide for language teachers and teacher educators (Lázár et al, 2007). The article presents this guide by describing the aims and objectives of each major chapter and by citing examples of tasks and activities to help teachers and teacher educators in planning and holding intercultural communication workshops in their own contexts.

The ICCinTE project

Despite the fact that according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001) one of the major aims of language teaching is to enable learners to successfully communicate with people coming from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the primary goal of language teacher training is still defined in linguistic terms by the majority of language teachers and teacher educators. In this article, I would like to present the results of project B1 (ICCinTE) of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), the primary aim of which was to make the incorporation of intercultural communication training easier and more systematic in language classes as well as in pre- or in-service foreign language methodology or intercultural communication courses and workshops.

Project B1 of the ECML's second medium-term program of activities was a follow-up to a previous long-term ECML project (1.2.3), the main objectives of which had been to con-

duct research on the role of culture in language teaching as well as to develop materials to help language teachers incorporate intercultural communication into language teaching. The former resulted in the publication of our research articles (Lázár, 2003), while the latter thread led to the appearance of an intercultural communication textbook entitled *Mirrors and windows* (Huber-Kriegler, Lázár and Strange, 2003). At a central workshop in Graz a year later, the ICCinTE team and the 26 participants of the new project decided to try out *Mirrors and windows* at National Training Events in 12 European cities and then to write a trainer's manual to assist teachers and trainers in planning and conducting their own intercultural communication workshops or courses, using *Mirrors and windows* or, in fact, any other coursebook.

At the intercultural communication workshops (National Training Events) that the ICCinTE team members co-facilitated with some of the participants in Prague, Riga, Budapest, Bratislava, Nottoden, Kau-

nas, Sulejówek, Ljubljana, Stuttgart, Graz, Zagreb and Malmo in 2005, we trained a total of nearly three-hundred language teachers and teacher trainers. In the meantime, a small group of enthusiastic colleagues adapted *Mirrors and windows* to French for use by French-speaking trainers and teachers (*Miroirs et fenêtres*, 2005). For more information about the project and the results, please consult the project website at www.ecml.at/mtp2/ICCinTE/Default.htm.

The guide for teachers and trainers

The most important tangible product of our project is a publication consisting of a booklet and a CD-Rom entitled *Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence - A guide for language teachers and teacher educators* (Lázár et al, 2007). The theoretical background, the course design templates, the methods, materials and activities described in this publication by fifteen of the European trainers who participated in our project will hopefully help other teacher educators and language teachers in both the theoretical and the practical aspects of incorporating intercultural communication into the syllabus. The present article aims to introduce the booklet and the CD-Rom by briefly explaining the background and the rationale and by giving a taster of what readers can expect to find in the publication.

The printed booklet of *Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence - A guide for language teachers and teacher educators* provides the introduction to the main chapters of the publication: defining the terminology in intercultural communication training, planning intercultural communication courses and workshops, using materials and activities based on literature, films and songs to develop intercultural

The authors give concrete and detailed examples of activities and projects to incorporate literary pieces, film scenes and songs into teaching.

competence, and guidelines and sample tasks for assessing intercultural communicative competence. The bulk of the materials can be found on the accompanying CD-Rom. These include the theoretical background to intercultural communication training in language teaching, the workshop and course planning guidelines, a wealth of teaching materials and activities, as well as assessment tasks and descriptors of competences, research articles, workshop reports, and our reflections on the lessons we learnt from the intercultural communication workshops we had held in 12 European countries within the framework of the ICCinTE project of the European Centre for Modern Languages between 2004 and 2006.

Key terms

In our guide, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in general terms is defined 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; Corbett, 2003; and Samovar and Porter, 1993 among others). For intercultural communication courses aiming to develop intercultural communicative competence we use teaching culture through language and teaching language-and-culture interchangeably. These courses consciously and systematically incorporate elements of both “big C” and “little c” culture-general knowledge through culture-specific examples that are not necessarily coming from

the target language culture(s). They emphasize skills development in the areas of observation, interpreting and relating, mediation and discovery, as well as attitude formation to increase respect, empathy and tolerance for ambiguity, to raise interest in, curiosity about, and openness towards people from other cultures, and to encourage a willingness to suspend judgment.

Planning and organizing intercultural communication courses

Following the description of the theoretical background, the next chapter of the publication is meant to help the teacher or trainer in planning intercultural communication workshops and/or courses. This chapter was written by Aina Kackere, Ildikó Lázár and Gabriela S. Matei, and it is organized according to the most important questions a teacher or trainer has to reflect on before designing a workshop or course: Who? Why? What? and How? For example, content areas to discuss in a workshop or course that intends to develop intercultural communicative competence are listed as follows:

Possible content areas to cover:

1. the target language culture's (C2) social practices, customs and life-style
2. similarities and differences in values, beliefs and norms between C1 and C2
3. cultural differences in perception between C1 and C2, C3, etc.
4. the nature and dangers of stereotyping
5. the acculturation process (including culture shock)
6. nonverbal communication and proxemics
7. attitudes of openness, curiosity, empathy and non-judgmental thinking
8. useful communication strategies in intercultural settings
9. other: _____

After considering the general principles readers might want to select some fitting techniques and activities from the list below:

Recommended Techniques and Activity Types:

1. Brainstorming (to map out what participants have in mind about certain issues);
2. Short presentations (to find out about participants' experiences, to provide input for further discussion);
3. Critical incidents (to raise awareness of cultural differences and their importance in communication by analyzing cross-cultural misunderstandings);
4. Role plays and simulations (to experience as much as possible what it is like to communicate with people from other cultures);
5. Project work (to give ideas for culturally enriching projects that participants can do with their trainees or students in their teaching work);
6. Ethnographic tasks (to give ideas about the learning potential in doing interviews and observations);
7. Quizzes and rating tasks (to offer the group concrete information about different cultures and thus stimulate a purposeful discussion in small groups);
8. Pair or small group discussion helps the participants loosen up before discussing the ideas with the whole group or class;
9. Discussion: essentially after each of the above activity types it is of great importance to exchange ideas, discuss the participants' own experiences, and generate further thoughts. Discussion helps both the workshop facilitator and the participants to clarify their attitude towards the stated questions or the perceived problems.

Methods and materials to develop intercultural communicative competence

The next substantial chapter of the publication discusses further methods and describes activities based on literature, films and songs that can help develop intercultural communicative competence. This chapter was written by Christiane Peck and Veronika Rot-Gabrovec with Michaela Čaňková, Ildikó Lázár and Gerlind Vief-Schmidt. Following the general guidelines at the beginning of the chapter, the authors give concrete and detailed examples of activities and projects to incorporate literary pieces, film scenes and songs into

teaching. These include activities to explore three poems by Liz Lochhead, Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, Malamud's *Black is my favorite color* as well as lesson plans to exploit the cultural input in films like *Real women have curves*. The chapter also includes guidelines for using songs to develop intercultural competence, again with specific examples to help the teacher or trainer incorporate musical pieces into language teaching or teacher training. Finally, the chapter concludes with a bibliography of recommended works, which provides the reader with a rich selection of ideas for further reading, viewing and singing.



Marie Michèle Poncet, *Petite rencontre au jardin*.

Examples from the activities suggested for literature-based lessons include the following tasks:

- Find something in the story you know well from your own fairy tales, stories or novels.
- Is the topic/theme/story something that you encounter in your folktales as well?
- Find something in the story you don't know at all from your own fairy tales or novels. Write a "letter back home" to a character from one of your tales, and describe the "culture shock".
- Underline the features that appear to belong to a culture different than your own, and explain how they differ. Do the differences blur the meaning(s) for you, and/or make the story more exotic/strange/interesting?
- Do you think your response to the text was conditioned by the culture-bound associations and connotations? Which part/elements do you find particularly troublesome?
- What information does the text give you about the people, their life and relationships in the past?
- Illustrate the story or change it into a comic strip. Use all sorts of (stereo) typical features of your culture (typical hairstyles, costumes, types of houses). Can the story be adapted to your culture? Why (not)?
- *Hot Seat*: Interview one of the characters who has come to visit your town about his impressions.
- Do the colours and numbers mentioned in the text have the same meaning in your culture and in the culture the text is from or is about? Think about them on two levels: first explore the universal, dictionary meanings (e. g. *white/weiss/bela*), then explore the specific meanings (e.g. white as the colour signalling innocence, purity or mourning).
- Find the passages in the story or novel where the characters either verbally or otherwise show their attitudes to time, to showing emotions, gender issues, physical beauty,

bringing up children, family, old age, education, social classes, other races and nationalities, religion. On the basis of these passages, draw a chart showing your opinion of the value system in the community/country described in the novel.

- Write a letter to one of the characters. Focus on one of the events/symbols etc in the story or novel, and ask about the meaning. Explain why the event is difficult to understand for you.

In the sections on films and music, the reader will find general ideas or guidelines to help explore and exploit films and songs to develop intercultural communicative competence. These sections are further divided into three sub-sections, starting with pre-viewing and pre-listening activities, including association games and discussion starters, then ideas for while-viewing and while-listening activities from jigsaw viewing and gap-filling to script writing and acting out, and finally, a section on post-viewing and post-listening tasks to help students process the experience gained from the film or song and from the discussion activities themselves.

Here are some examples from the sections on using films:

- Transfer the information of the scene to your own cultural context and imagine what this scene would be like in your country.
- Try to find reasons why the characters act the way they do.
- Write a short script and act the scene out in front of the class.

Having listened to a song and read the lyrics, it is important for the students to discuss the setting, the theme, the style, the atmosphere, qualities of the character/s mentioned in the song, and so on. Further examples for activities for songs:

- Imagine you are the main character in the song, and write down what

you did and ate yesterday, what your plans and fears are in connection with the future, and/or what basic values you would teach to your children.

- What is the message of the song? Do the students share the same hopes/fears? Why (not)? What is similar and what is different in their part of the world?
- Discuss if there is some advice they could give to the singer to cheer him up and alleviate his fears.
- Either orally or in writing compare the topic, situation, story... of the song with
 - your personal experiences
 - the situation in your country
 - the target language country (if the song is from somewhere else)
 - the country of your classmates who come from a different cultural background
- Write a continuation to the text (if the song tells a story, try to write part two)
- Do some research on the Internet about the topic of the song, the singer/band, the style of music or the historical or cultural background to the song.

Assessment of intercultural communicative competence

Part Two of *Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence - A guide for language teachers and teacher educators* is concerned with the assessment of intercultural communicative competence. These chapters of our publication were written by Denise Lussier with Siyka Chavdarova Kostova, Ksenia Golubina, Daniel Ivanus, Guadalupe de la Maya Retamar, Liljana Skopinskaja and Silvia Wiesinger. Part Two provides a framework of reference for ICC, and discusses the importance of evaluating its three dimensions: knowledge/savoirs, know-how/savoir-faire, and being/savoir-être. After a general discussion of the recom-

mended methods of assessment, the authors list the suggested steps in assessing ICC, basing most of their sample assessment tasks on a unit of the intercultural communication textbook

Mirrors and windows:

Before teaching (at the beginning of the course):

- Self-evaluation of cultural knowledge and perceptions: culture log
- Self-evaluation on being: profile – diagram, survey to assess ICC profile
- Use of the portfolio

During teaching

- Use of the portfolio

After teaching (at the end of the unit or book)

- Assessing each dimension separately
 - a) Assessing intercultural knowledge / savoir
 - b) Assessing intercultural know-how / savoir-faire
 - c) Assessing intercultural being / savoir-être
- Assessing two intercultural dimensions
- Assessing by means of an integrative task

The introductory sections and the sample assessment tasks described in these chapters intend to help the trainer/teacher's work in the process

of evaluating their trainees/students' intercultural communicative competence both with theoretical guidelines and practical ready-to-implement assessment tools.

Conclusion

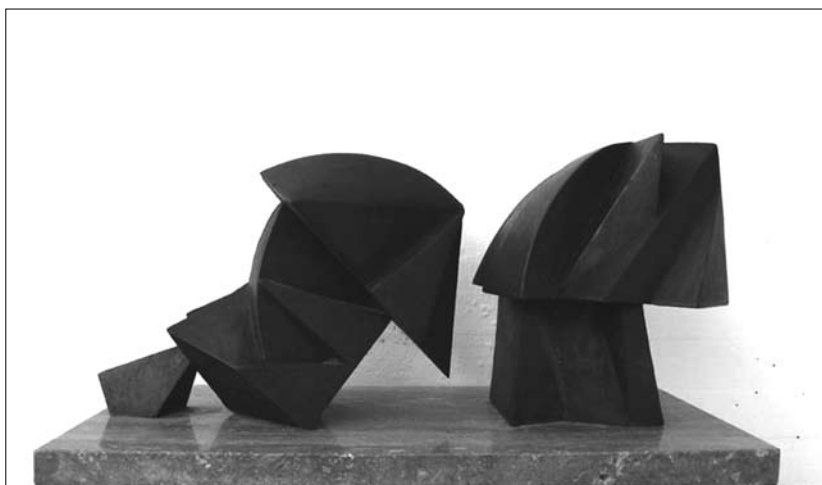
In addition to the above chapters, the CD-Rom also contains further information about the work carried out during the ICCinTE project, including detailed workshop reports and templates, and some of our ICC-related research articles. By writing the publication entitled *Developing and assessing intercultural communicative competence - A guide for language teachers and teacher educators*, the authors and editors hope to give language teachers and language teacher educators useful theoretical guidelines as well as practical ideas to help incorporate intercultural communication training into the language teaching and teacher training curriculum more systematically. The knowledge and experience we gained and then exploited in order to write this publication would not have been available to all the participants of the project without the continuous support of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz.

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Marco Piffaretti, *In marcia verso*.