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Schriftleitung:

Prof. Dr. Friederike Klippel

Prof. Dr. Gudrun Ziegler

Herausgeber-Gremium:

Prof. Dr. Friederike Klippel

Prof. Dr. Gudrun Ziegler

Prof. Dr. Sabine Doff

Prof. Dr. Dietmar Rösler

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Kontaktadresse:

forum-sprache@hueber.de

www.forum-sprache.de

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Teachers' beliefs about integrating the development of intercultural communicative competence in language teaching

Case studies of Hungarian pre-service English teachers

Ildikó Lázár

Abstracts

This article 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 on the perceived role of culture in language classes and by exploring two Hungarian pre-service English teachers' beliefs about their role in the development of intercultural communicative competence. The study also examines what factors influence trainee teachers' beliefs and recommends action for reforms in teacher education based on the findings about the many variables that have an impact on pre-service language teachers' personal theories about their role in developing intercultural competence.

Cet article a pour objectif principal de montrer le statut du développement de la compétence interculturelle dans l'enseignement de langues étrangères et dans la formation de professeurs en Europe. L'étude présente les résultats de travaux récents concernant la perception du rôle des dimensions culturelles en classe de langue. Ainsi, les théories personnelles de deux professeurs d'anglais en formation d'origine hongroise sont analysées quant à leur rôle dans le développement d'une compétence interculturelle et de communication.

L'étude examine aussi les facteurs qui agissent sur les théories personnelles des futures professeurs et recommande quelques pistes pour des réformes dans le domaine de la formation initiale. Ces recommandations s'inspirent des conclusions des travaux récents traitant des variables multiples qui influencent les théories personnelles des futures professeurs quant à leur rôle dans l'enseignement des langues.

Dieser Aufsatz gewährt Einblicke in den gegenwärtigen Stellenwert, den die Herausbildung interkultureller Kompetenz im Fremdsprachenunterricht in Europa sowie in der Lehrerbildung genießt. Dies erfolgt auf der Basis aktueller Forschungsergebnisse zu kulturrelevanten Aspekten der Sprachausbildung im allgemeinen und speziell anhand der Analyse von Selbstreflexionen zweier ungarischer Fremdsprachenlehrkräfte bezüglich ihrer Rolle bei der Vermittlung interkultureller und kommunikativer Kompetenz. Die Studie untersucht weiterhin, welche Faktoren die Theoriebildung and Überzeugungen von Lehramtsstudierenden beeinflussen und präsentiert angesichts verfügbarer Analyseergebnisse Vorschläge zur Reform der Lehrerbildung hinsichtlich der Entwicklung interkultureller Kompetenz.

Ildikó Lázár, PhD
 Department of English Language Pedagogy,
 Eötvös Loránd University
 Egyetem tér 1-3
 HU-Budapest 1053
 Hungary
 Email: ildiko.lazar@gmail.com

Policy documents and context

Since the 1980s, language teacher education has been influenced by the intercultural dimension to varying degrees. Language education has an increasingly important role as shown in the White Paper entitled *Towards the Learning Society* (1995), 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 the feeling of being European across a diversity of cultures and by integrating the wealth of the diverse citizens of Europe. Multilingualism is part of both European citizenship and the learning society (European Commission, as cited in Byram 2003: 7).

The *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR 2001) gives a detailed description of what competences language learners are advised to acquire in foreign languages during their school years. One of the most important 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” (CEFR 2001: 3). 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 (cf. CEFR) is described as knowledge of the society and culture of the communities in which a language is spoken. It deserves special attention, especially since unlike many other aspects of knowledge it is not part of the learner’s previous experience and may easily be distorted by stereotypes.

Intercultural awareness is defined 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” (CEFR 2001: 103). Among the user/learner’s competences intercultural skills and know-how (also called *savoir-faire*) are defined (CEFR 2001:104) following Byram’s (1997) model. Existential competence (also called *savoir-être*) is defined as follows:

The communicative activity of users/learners is affected not only by their knowledge, understanding and skills, but also by selfhood factors connected with their individual personalities, characterised by the attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and personality types which contribute to their personal identity. (CEFR 2001: 105)

According to a reference study written for the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, if learners are to be involved in understanding other cultures in order to successfully communicate with them, then teachers need a training that does not only prepare them to focus on structures, lexis, functions and a few facts about the target country, but also helps them teach their learners to deal with the complexities of intercultural communication (Willems 2002: 7-10). The author presents how the intercultural dimension of language teaching can be incorporated into language teacher education programs through examples of topic areas to be included and methods to be used with trainees who have the opportunity to spend a period of residence in a country where the language is spoken. Willems (2002) also has suggestions for teacher educators in countries where residence abroad is not available for trainees for economic, geographical or political reasons.

In most European countries pre-service language teachers acquire knowledge about the nature of second language acquisition and the methodology of language teaching during their studies. In most cases, they also have the opportunity to develop their teaching skills during methodology seminars and/or by holding a certain number of real-life lessons within schools. Some teacher education programs favor a more theoretical, and sometimes more philological approach, some advocate a clearly practical approach, and there are yet others that believe that the education of professional teachers should be based on the development of a reflective, systematic, and principled rationale

underlying practice by means of continuous interaction between the theoretical and practical elements of a methodology course (Ur 1992).

The influential *European Profile for Language Teacher Education* (Kelly & Grenfell 2004) suggests that trainee teachers are taught that they have a vital role in promoting positive social and cultural values and that teaching and learning foreign languages should 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. According to Kelly & Grenfell (2004) these values are ideally fostered through inclusive and context-sensitive classroom management strategies and a choice of teaching materials that reflects social diversity and cultural plurality. Furthermore, trainee teachers should become aware that their language teaching can influence their learners' abilities to understand and respect others and they ought to learn how to convey that language learning has these benefits for learners beyond technical linguistic competence (Kelly & Grenfell 2004: 39-42).

Definitions 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 defines *culture* as a world view, i.e. “a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting” (1998: 10). Bennett 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” (1993: 16). The definition of culture in language teaching as defined by Byram (1997), Kramsch (1998), and Bennett & 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 (often called big ‘C’ culture) of one or two of the target countries. 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 see culture (with a little ‘c’) as dynamic and variable within and across cultures.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is understood as “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (Bennett & Bennett 2004) similarly to Byram (1997, 2003), and Samovar & Porter (1993) among others. According to Byram's model (1997), which contributed to the descriptions of the *CEFR*, 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/own cultures 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” (Byram 1997: 51). Finally, the skills include interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction as well as critical cultural awareness/political education. In the present paper describing a qualitative study concerned with trainee teachers' beliefs about the role that intercultural competence development plays in language teaching, Byram's (1997) model served as the basis of inquiry.

Much can be learned from research on teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning in the last two decades, and it is widely acknowledged that personal theories, or beliefs, play a significant role in language teacher development. What exactly do we mean by personal theories or beliefs? In the present paper, the two terms are used interchangeably and are understood in the sense that a personal theory or “a belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour” (Borg 2001: 186).

As for teaching culture through language, Byram and his colleagues identified three idiosyncratic orientations that primarily determine teachers' practices: (1) personal philosophy about language teaching in general; (2) personal experience with the target language culture(s); and (3) expectations regarding the learning abilities of the given group of learners (Byram et al. 1991: 63). Byram and his colleagues found that out of these three factors the teacher's intercultural experience is the one that primarily determines his or her culture-teaching practices. However, it is probably a safe assumption that teachers' earlier intercultural experiences (2) can strongly influence their beliefs about language (and culture) teaching in general (1).

Despite the importance of personal theories or beliefs, there is often very little effort invested in finding out how trainees' practices and underlying principles actually change following a training course. However, this would especially be important because even young pre-service teachers have many conscious or unconscious principles about and attitudes towards teaching that are built up and internalized during years of experience as language learners (Freeman & Richards 1993; Kontra 1997). However, 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 also call attention to the need to first investigate "what there is" as opposed to giving recommendations for "what there should be" (2004: 150). The research studies reviewed below and the case studies described in this paper try to fill this gap.

In an article 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. The questionnaire study conducted in 2003 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) rightfully 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. She draws attention to the fact that most teachers seem to ignore that the foreign language should not only be regarded as a target but also as a means to learn about the world.

A questionnaire study conducted in 2001 within a research project at the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) on the frequency of culture-related activities in the English language classroom in four European countries showed results that reflect some of the above conclusions (Lázár 2007). The statistical analysis of 393 questionnaires filled in by English teachers in Estonia, Hungary, Iceland and Poland 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 participants. With regards to activities potentially developing intercultural communicative competence as sampled in the second part of the questionnaire, the results were even more mixed. To give a few examples, 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 discussing *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. 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 for at least three weeks" and "attending ICC workshops or training courses" did make a significant difference in the frequency of culture-related activities. Furthermore, 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 (Lázár 2007), which seems to indicate

that teacher education has a more significant impact on teachers' beliefs and practices than a long stay abroad.

A follow-up qualitative study (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al. 2003) conducted within the same project 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 (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al. 2003: 35).

In a 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) found that the great majority of the 424 participating teachers from 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 (Sercu et al. 2005: 13-20).

From the articles above, it seems that the beliefs and behavior of teachers depend on their studies and experiences at school to a large extent. In addition, there must be many other factors that have an impact on their personal theories. It is therefore important to explore teachers' views on the role of ICC and the most important factors that influence and sometimes change their beliefs.

Case studies: Trainee teachers' beliefs about the role ICC plays in the language classroom

Research design and methods

A series of case studies of pre-service English teachers conducted at Eötvös Loránd University 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 these personal theories. Two of these case studies are presented here: two pre-service English teachers, who come from different backgrounds, have very different life experiences and substantially differing personalities and attitudes to teaching. Both trainees had attended the compulsory EFL Methodology foundation courses and an optional Methodology of Intercultural Communication Training course (ICC course) held by the researcher. Since both trainees did their teaching practice during the time of the research 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.

Data collection followed a repeated measures design by using pre- and post-course questionnaires with the trainees, lesson observations and in-depth interviews. 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 aim of the lesson observations was to better understand the trainees' personal theories by also investigating real behavior in real classrooms as recommended by Nunan (1991: 260).

The Methodology of Intercultural Communication Training course (ICC course) was optional, and it could be taken by any fourth or fifth year English major who wanted to obtain a teaching degree. The aim of the ICC course was 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 approach was based on Kolb's cycle of experiential learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb 1983). The requirements included active participation in the discussions based on the readings (Brown 1994; Byram 1997; Huber-Kriegler, Lázár & Strange 2003; Tomalin & Stempleski 1993), lesson plans with an intercultural focus based on currently used course books, a reflective description of the activities presented by fellow students and the trainer, and a seminar paper summarizing the results of a small-scale classroom research project that the students had to carry out during the term. This optional ICC course lasted one semester and consisted of fourteen 90-minute sessions. The two participants of the research were selected based on their very different attitudes to teaching in general and to developing ICC in particular.

The case studies explored the following areas of possible influences on the 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 Intercultural Communication Training,
- ▶ 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 the 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, steps have been taken according to the principles of naturalistic investigations as recommended by Lazaraton (2003) among others. These included that the researcher aimed to explore what there is and to have the insider's perspective, and the data collection meant a prolonged engagement with the participants to build trust and better understand their beliefs. Furthermore, triangulation involved the use of multiple methods of inquiry and a variety of data sources, and 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.

Results of the research

Background information and the summary of the results of the research are presented in the table below for the sake of brevity.

The participants	Gabi	Zsuzsa
Age	24	21
Residence	Budapest	Budapest
Teaching experience	teaching assistant at university, 4 months at a language school	only some private students
Wants to be a teacher	yes, in a secondary school	yes, probably in public education, but also interested in other jobs
Went to school abroad	no, but attended a bilingual school in Hungary	no (only one year of kindergarten)
Lived abroad	no	yes, nearly two years in Egypt at the age of 4-5
Family background	several teachers in the family, long discussions about education	topic of family not mentioned (avoided) in the interviews
Impact of primary and secondary school teachers on beliefs	appreciated learning about the world from some native speaker English teachers, liked that many teachers were transmitting values, and taught them critical thinking and good study skills	one role model was very kind, helpful and enthusiastic about his subject (mathematics), another was very strict, soldier-like but with a systematic and meticulous approach to the study of history
Completed Methods 1, 2 courses	yes	yes
Impact of Methods courses on beliefs about the cultural dimension	not discernable	not discernable
Completed ICC course (readings, activities, classroom research, etc.)	yes	yes
Attitude to the ICC course and its topic as observed during the course	open, curious, creative, interested, actively contributing her reflections to the discussions	negative, critical, doubtful, reserved, passive
Impact of ICC course as recorded in the questionnaires and the interviews	ranked many culture-related activities and topics much higher in post-course questionnaire; growing awareness of the importance of ICC in EFL; a larger repertoire of activities	ranked some culture-related activities and topics much higher in post-course questionnaire; growing awareness of the importance of ICC in EFL; a larger repertoire of activities
Compulsory teaching practice (TP)	15 hours completed	15 hours completed
Evaluation of teaching practice by school-based mentor	“excellent”	“excellent”
Evidence of impact of ICC course on teaching practice	a few (un)conscious attempts at including the cultural dimension	many consciously planned and developed ICC activities based on supplementary material

Table 1: Background information about the participants and summary of results

Case One: Comments and interpretation

The evaluation of the data collected about the state and the formation of Gabi's personal theories of teaching culture through language is naturally influenced by subjective factors. I saw her teach that class of secondary school children at the practice school three times and found that her teaching skills were amazing, her rapport with the students was excellent, her planning was intelligent and creative and her decisions during lessons were obviously informed by theory. In addition, she has a managerial style that she very skillfully combines with a good sense of humor and an affectionate attitude to the children in her class. She is very reflective, devoted to teaching and eager to develop. In the interview it also turned out that she was already applying for a teaching position at her former secondary school.

At the end of the data collection procedure Gabi seemed to believe that culture-related activities should be systematically integrated in language teaching, especially for more mature teenagers at a higher level of linguistic competence as evidenced by the way she filled in the post-interview questionnaire. Gabi evaluated the importance of teaching big 'C' culture and little 'c' culture to younger and lower level students as moderately important. Intercultural skills development and attitude formation scored somewhat higher. For 9th graders at intermediate level all scores were increased by one point. Finally, for 11th graders at upper-intermediate level she marked little 'c' culture, skills development and attitude formation as very important, and the rest of the categories as quite important.

Building on her previous intercultural experiences at the bilingual secondary school, she now began to see more clearly that lessons with a cultural focus had to be incorporated more consciously into the syllabus. Although she claimed that more mature students at higher levels of proficiency were more apt for studying the cultural dimension, she also expressed the belief that if coursebooks gave a little more guidance in this respect, it would not be difficult to incorporate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for intercultural communicative competence.

Gabi's family background and experience in the bilingual school had equipped her with more conscious and unconscious theories about teaching than the average trainee and obviously had a huge influence on her personal theories about language teaching in general. Her role model teachers included language instructors who "*conveyed something educational, and a lot of important values.*" Instead of rote learning, Gabi and her schoolmates were taught critical thinking, which she really appreciated. It seems that the atmosphere at her school and her teachers' open, tolerant and motivating approach to teaching can be felt in Gabi's attitude to language teaching as well. This is probably why she believes that raising interest in the world, transmitting values, and accepting differences are important educational goals in language lessons. In this sense, it is understandable that she could easily relate to the educational nature of attitude formation and intercultural skills development expected from teachers aiming to develop intercultural competence.

Although Gabi never lived abroad, as she explained it in the interview, she had come to the ICC course with ideas and feelings about the importance of culture in communication and a significant amount of exposure to otherness. She had had lessons taught to her class by a variety of native English speakers at secondary school, she had spent time showing American exchange students around in Budapest, she traveled with her parents and she has friends abroad. Out of these factors, it is the exposure to other cultures offered by her school as described above that seemed to influence her most in that it made her open, curious and accepting, and showed her methods of teaching that reinforce and develop these attitudes.

Gabi claimed to have profited from the useful theoretical and practical foundations for her teaching practice during the compulsory Methodology courses. She said she had become aware of the importance of conscious planning, of being clear about her own aims and objectives in teaching, and she found it useful to combine and reflect on theory and practice in light of her own and her fellow students' peer-teaching sessions and

concrete examples of good practice. However, she could not recall learning anything about the cultural dimension of language teaching during the Methodology courses.

The ICC course made her aware of the importance of something she had instinctively suspected to be important and was very curious about. Gabi claimed to have learned and tried out many useful intercultural activities during the ICC course but was not always sure how these could be naturally built into a lesson. The qualities she listed as important for successful communication in the foreign language included *“modesty, non-judgmental attitudes, flexibility, ability to adapt easily, openness, tolerance, critical thinking and the ability to draw back and observe,”* which also clearly reflected an increasing awareness of the significance of intercultural competence. In her justifications at the end of the post-course questionnaire, she explained that knowing the language has to be supplemented by *“factual knowledge about the way of life of the people who speak that language”* and about the reasons *“why they live that way.”* She emphasized the importance of *“the context”* where communication takes place and mentioned that the qualities she had listed would *“help people understand and handle cultural differences”* more easily. She acknowledged that her views had changed to some extent during the course.

Gabi gave a thorough evaluation of the knowledge and skills she had gained during the ICC course. She claimed she had been *“presented with something she had longed for.”* She said she had enjoyed discussing the theory of intercultural communication and participating in the activities during the course. She also claimed that her earlier instincts and feelings about the importance of culture in communication became more conscious and systematic due to the knowledge acquired in the ICC course. She said she realized that the language was not only learned *“to ask for a post card or buy something”* but also *“to learn about other ways of thinking and the reasons behind the differences.”*

Gabi admitted to have hesitated about how to incorporate culture and what to incorporate during her teaching practice despite all the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired earlier during the ICC course. Her lessons contained some well-designed and truly creative tasks sometimes unconsciously filled with cultural input as observed during two of her lessons. However, according to her the culture-related activities were very few in number, perhaps a total of three or four activities during the fifteen lessons that she taught at the practice school. One reason for this may be that she was teaching 7th graders at pre-intermediate level, an age group and proficiency level that she did not consider appropriate for a lot of cultural input, skills development and attitude formation in her post-interview questionnaire either. On the other hand, she was obviously not always aware of what can be considered a culture-related activity.

When asked about the cultural content of her own lessons during teaching practice, she mentioned a few short passages from newspaper articles, and occasionally comparing the given topics with Hungarian culture. She did not mention the 10-minute practice activity for the passive voice that she had created herself and had unconsciously filled with a lot of interesting cultural information. On the other hand, she emphasized that it would be easier to incorporate culture at a higher level of proficiency, and gave two examples of how she explored stereotypes and discussed racism at length in several language classes with her first-year university students.

As for the possibility to include the cultural elements considered important, she was quite optimistic despite her views on the difficulties of incorporating culture systematically into the language course as expressed in the interview. However, in the remarks attached to the post-course questionnaire she explained that it was only possible to include all these cultural elements *“so easily”* in 11th grade if the students were also exposed to intercultural input in earlier years. What she emphasized was the principle of gradual development and the importance of maturity. According to her, as the students mature,

the more important intercultural competence becomes, the easier it is to incorporate [its constituents] because what you want to convey is not so much the language anymore, but something educational, the medium of which is the foreign language.

Not only did she mention that coursebooks should be more helpful in this respect, but at the end of the interview she also said that if coursebooks gave *“a little guidance, it [incorporating ICC] would be really easy.”*

Gabi showed a lot of interest in all the topic areas of the interview, she was the most reflective and most talkative of all the participants, and she demonstrated genuine interest when the questions inquired about her views on intercultural communication and the ICC course. Participating in this research, especially in the interview seemed to be an eye-opener for Gabi in the sense that by saying her thoughts out aloud when answering the questions, she seemed to have made a few discoveries about what to incorporate into language lessons, how to proceed with it and why it would be beneficial. This also seemed to indicate that the interview and the post-interview questionnaire together with her learning and teaching experience started to produce what could be called a productive turmoil in her thinking about the intercultural dimension of language teaching.

Summary of Case One

It is interesting to note that despite her exposure to native speaker teachers at a bilingual school, her participation at the ICC course, her excellent practical teaching skills and theoretical knowledge about teaching, and the awareness raising effect of this research, Gabi's personal theories about teaching culture through language seemed relatively shaky and disorganized. The data suggest that more intercultural communication training courses, more helpful teaching materials and perhaps some more guided practice would help her in embedding the cultural content in language lessons without her feeling that it is artificially imposed on the material.

Case Two: Comments and interpretation

Zsuzsa was chosen to be the second participant primarily because of her behavior during classes and her answers to the pre-course questionnaire: she seemed to be the least enthusiastic – of all the trainees in that particular group – about the intercultural dimension of language teaching. She was passive and critical, and she often looked unhappy to be there on the seminars. I was relieved to learn that she would not mind participating in the research.

Zsuzsa acknowledged several times during the interview that, before the ICC course, she had never thought about the possibility of incorporating culture teaching in her language lessons. During the interviews she seemed to be an open and curious person who was always interested in learning about other cultures but it had not occurred to her that the English lesson could be used to teach students about otherness, acceptance, non-judgmental thinking as well as skills development in the areas of observation, interpretation and mediation. Towards the end of her involvement in this research project she seemed to have internalized many of these new ideas and approaches, and her English lessons during teaching practice also proved that she was of the opinion that culture was an integral part of language learning. Furthermore, her lessons also testified that she had the tools and skills to implement this recently developed personal theory.

As for the ICC course, I was truly surprised to hear her say that she had found the course *“extremely useful.”* She said she would have

never thought about daring to go further than differences between British and American pronunciation and spelling [...] but that, God forbid, we could learn about other cultures, too, that would have never occurred to me. But actually, I still use your culture shock game, you know, with the Indian and Chinese people. Well, this was very useful for me, and it put everything in a new light that this was possible to do, too. ... Yes, this was a completely new aspect for me that you can learn a lot more on a language lesson than just the language.

As for influences on her personal theories about teaching culture through language, it seemed that the only university course that had a direct impact on her beliefs in this area was the ICC course. Although Zsuzsa was seemingly unsatisfied during the course, it

turned out in the interview that she had benefited from the seminars in the sense that she began to see that language teaching could be more than just grammar and vocabulary teaching. Despite the fact that she did not like the group she was in and that she found the course less dynamic than she would have liked to, she also appreciated learning concrete tasks that help incorporate culture-related knowledge, skills and attitudes into the English lesson.

It seemed that it was especially skills development and attitude formation that she found very important for all age groups at all levels of proficiency in order to develop intercultural communicative competence. Interestingly, the course seemed to have reinforced some of her unconscious beliefs about the importance of learning to compromise, or to adjust to other cultures. When she was very young, she 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.”* During one of our last discussions during her teaching practice, she clearly blamed teacher education programs for not incorporating any of these areas into the curriculum, claiming that teachers would not have to reinvent something on their own if they were trained to develop intercultural competence during their university studies.

Zsuzsa's personal theories about language teaching in general appeared to coincide with many of the characteristics of the ideal language-and-culture teacher. She intended to use the language to teach something to the students about the world, to educate them, to form their attitudes, to challenge their stereotypes and to facilitate their learning process. This is the reason why she will probably not need much more help in teaching culture through language: she is aware of what is important for her to teach and she knows how to incorporate it in her lessons.

When she was talking about why teachers do not usually teach the cultural dimension of the foreign language, she said *“It is undoubtedly because of teacher education, in other words ... it [the idea] doesn't necessarily have to occur to the teacher just like that... but there should be someone to tell us...”* Finally, she added that *“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.”*

Summary of Case Two

In Zsuzsa's case it seems that aside from a few indirect influences on her personality and attitude to teaching in general, it was primarily the ICC course that developed her to be a conscious and devoted teacher of culture through language. Previously it had not occurred to her that the English lesson could be used to teach students about social practices in other cultures, about accepting otherness, or about skills that are indispensable for successful intercultural communication. She blamed teacher education programs for not raising trainee teachers' intercultural awareness and for not giving them the tools to develop their prospective students' intercultural communicative competence.

Zsuzsa's English lessons during teaching practice provided a wonderful opportunity for her to try out her ideas and skills to implement this recently developed personal theory. The fact that she was allowed to experiment during teaching practice and that she was not scolded for being provocative, for doing things differently, or for neglecting the course book in favor of supplementary materials must have helped her tremendously. The freedom to experiment and the professional and personal support she received from her mentor teacher during teaching practice were obviously indispensable for the development of her personal theories of teaching culture through language.

Findings of the study

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, the participating trainees showed evidence of some conscious efforts – with varying degrees of success in their implementation – to incorporate the intercultural dimension during their teaching practice as well.

The major findings of this case study lead to 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 two pre-service English teachers presented here.

The methodology course on the development of ICC provided new information, new perspectives and new tools to the trainee teachers. It turned out that traveling and 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. On the other hand, 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. As a result, future English teachers often 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.

In addition, 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.

It is the course book 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. 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.

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.

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. It is natural that some of the input of a course is occasionally reinterpreted by the teachers to fit their own beliefs about language teaching in general.

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. Although some of the input of the course was lost and some of it was reinterpreted, the theoretical knowledge and the practical teaching skills the trainees were exposed to during the seminars 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 this one training course that they had attended.

Attending only one course on the theory and practice of the role of intercultural communication training 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.

Conclusions and recommendations for teacher education

The implications of the results of this study 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 or fourth 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 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.

It seems then that there is a strong need to incorporate ICC into teacher education programs systematically. University courses on the methodology of developing intercultural competence have 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. In addition, courses have 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 also 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. Finally, for a beneficial multiplying effect, it would be vital to train the trainers so they do not work against these changes in teacher education but instead could help overcome the obstacles in the way of intercultural competence development.

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