

# ON DEVELOPING ICC: EFL TEACHER-EDUCATOR'S REFLECTIONS

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most recent concerns of foreign language (FL) education is intercultural communicative competence (henceforth ICC), which has been recognised as its major objective due to the global context (i.e. massive migrations, international cooperation in different domains, new technology, etc.). In the present times intercultural competence has become a central ingredient for all European citizens (see e.g. *White paper...*, 2008). Drawing on the research from (inter) cultural and applied linguistics (e.g. Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998) formal documents motivating foreign language teaching assign great importance to the role of an intercultural mediator for a FL user (e.g. CEFR, 2001). Different approaches to developing ICC are recommended (see e.g. Moran, 2001; Cobertt, 2003; Róg, 2014) and studied empirically. After a brief analysis of the most often reported problems related to intercultural teaching and an analysis of the concepts of culture I will discuss my own experience of ICC development during seminars addressed to EFL students, prospective teachers of the language.

## 2. Problems with developing ICC in the FL education context

Despite the many years of research and on-going discussions on intercultural competence researchers in FL education have identified some problems that need to be solved before foreign language learners can be expected to have their ICC devel-

oped to the extent that would minimise the possibility of cross-cultural misunderstanding in their own communication and feel ready to educate their learners to become intercultural mediators. The problems relate to all the components of the FL education system, i.e. teachers, representation of cultural components in teaching materials, attitudes of the learners and educational institutions.

First of all FL teachers need to be well prepared for the role of an intercultural mediator to become role-models for their students. Only if their own ICC is well developed can they feel ready to assume the role of an ICC mediator and help their students to achieve this goal themselves. However, research in many countries (see e.g. Sercu et al., 2005; Lázár, 2007; Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2010; Canh, 2015) has shown that not all foreign language teachers are able, or willing, to integrate culture teaching into their language class and teach their learners to become intercultural mediators. For example, Young and Sachdev's (2011) study of beliefs and practices of English teachers in France, the UK and the USA relating to the application of the ICC reveals that teachers highlight the importance of ICC for language development, however they also report that the ICC was given little emphasis in their teaching. The same is reported about Polish EFL teachers by Sobkowiak (2012; 2015), although the researcher noted a bigger involvement of German teachers (typically a second FL in the Polish educational context). Teachers also often emphasise little support from textbooks and no emphasis on culture learning in tests and institutional syllabi. Mostly teachers justify their negligence of intercultural topics by the lack of time and no focus on ICC in final exams, and often a negative attitude to cultural topics on the part of the learners' from whom the success in the final exams is the main goal (Chłopek, 2009). Also, teachers feel better prepared for presenting facts from the culture of the language they studied themselves and not for general intercultural issues.

Some teachers report a reluctance to tackle culturally sensitive problems because of the experience of their students' negative reactions to ideas which are not congruent with their primary socialization (Werbińska, 2009: 26). Sobkowiak's (2012: 533) learner survey implies differences in ICC teaching between teachers and schools in Poland, as well as teachers' focus on selected aspects of interculturality. The author's comparison of learners' and teachers' surveys concerning ICC leads him to an observation that teachers are somewhat more optimistic about their ICC teaching than their learners (Sobkowiak, 2015: 186).

The analysis of cultural components in FL course-books supports teachers' criticism and reveals that FL course-books tend to concentrate on facts, friends, food, and festivals (e.g. Krawiec, 2010; Karpińska-Musiał, 2015) which may form a misconception of culture as being static. Course-books on principle avoid politically challenging ideas (e.g. religion, the generation gap, gender stereotypes, various family models etc.) presenting culturally neutral contexts. Also, they often place cultural components as separate modules, which make it easy for the overloaded

teacher to ignore them, particularly by those teachers who concentrate on developing communicative competence only (Nazari, 2007).

Having noticed the need for educating FL teachers to assume the role of an intercultural mediator I offer an ICC course for students' of the Faculty of English (prospective EFL teachers) who are continuing their education in the MA programme. Because ICC develops over the span of one's life, the course may be treated as an attempt to develop some basic level of ICC and to sensitise its participants to the importance of self-development.

### **3. (Inter)cultural competence conceptualisations**

(Inter) cultural competence is a complex phenomenon which has been studied by many researchers representing different disciplines, approaches and orientations for over fifty years now. There are many definitions of culture, for example Kramsch (1998: 10) defines it as "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings". A multitude of different cultures coexist within any country forming their own "discourse community", and an individual belongs to many social groups through her/his background, ethnicity, beliefs and daily activities in different social contexts. Thus, such between-groups interaction is intercultural to some point (Alred, Byram and Fleming, 2003: 3).

Researchers proposed different models or theories trying to conceptualise intercultural competence. Spitzberg and Changon (2009: 2–52), after their analysis of the most prominent modern models/theories, noted that from the chronological perspective intercultural competence models evolved from purely "individual-based to more systematic and inclusive" (ibidem: 7) ones. The authors systematise the modern models around five major types, namely: compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptational and causal models. Although they see overlaps between the models, yet the major perspective on culture is different in each of them.

The compositional models focus on an identification of components of a cultural milieu, such as attitudes, knowledge and skills (see e.g. Deardorff's (2006) pyramid model, in Spitzberg and Changon, 2009: 13), and are not concerned with the causal relationship between the components, which in turn is a concern of causal path models. The causal models do not stop at identifying components of intercultural competence but focus on the relationship between them, and thus take also the process into consideration which can be observed in interaction (see e.g. Deardorff's (2006) process model, in Spitzberg and Changon, 2009: 33). Spitzberg and Changon (2009) explain that "causal path models tend to conceive variables at a downstream location, which successively influence and are influenced by moderating or mediating variables that in turn influence upstream variables" (ibidem: 29). Developmental

models identify the stages one goes through during prolonged contact with another culture (ibidem: 21–24). For example, Bennett (1993) has designed a six-stage-scale in Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) which identifies the underlying individual cognitive orientations used to cope with cultural differences, such as denial, defence (reversal), minimization, typical of the ethnocentric phase, followed by acceptance, adaptation and the integration characteristic of the ethnorelative phase. Adaptational models focus on the process of adaptation itself, and treat movement from the ethnocentric stages towards the ethnorelative ones as evidence of competence. They identify different contextual factors which enable an interlocutor to take full advantage of the individual and societal sources of the process of interaction (Spitzberg and Chagon, 2009: 24–29). Co-orientational models (ibidem: 15–21) focus on the attempts of achieving some basic level of reference to the common world resulting in mutual understanding, and thus focus on the outcomes of the intercultural interaction. Spitzberg and Chagon (2009: 17) see the commonalities of co-orientational models in Byram's (1997) influential educational model, which has motivated my ICC course.

Byram views ICC as a complex system which evolves as a result of various experiences of the non-native speaker, such as: formal instruction, fieldwork which optionally may be assisted by teaching or independent learning. Byram alternates the concept of communicative competence, popular among language teachers in the 1980's and 1990's, and lists three of the earlier components of the competence, namely: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, and adds an additional component of intercultural competence. However, the first three components do not refer to the mythical native speaker's competence, but to a non-native speaker's one, which is particularly right in the context of English as a *lingua franca*. The intercultural component includes political education and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*), knowledge of self and other, and of interaction on individual and societal levels (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovering and interacting (*savoir apprendre/faire*) and all of these supported by the attitudes which help to relativize self and value other (*savoir être*) (Byram, 1997: 34 ff). Byram's model is useful for FL teachers for its components are recognised as necessary general competences which should accompany communicative competence (see e.g. CEFR, 2001: 101ff) and are also present in other (inter) cultural models.

Spitzberg and Chagon (2009) do not refer to earlier cultural models, such as "cultural iceberg" (Hall, 1976; Weaver, 1997) or the dimensional model by Hofstede (1981/2001). These models identify different spheres of the cultural milieu (i.e. components) of different degrees of awareness to both native and non-native representatives which may cause incomprehension, and as a result effect co-orientation. Hall (1976) emphasised interconnections between languages and culture (see also Liddicoat et al., 2003) and used the iceberg metaphor to explain culture.

If the culture of a society is the iceberg, Hall reasoned, then there are some aspects visible, i.e. above the water, but there is a larger portion hidden beneath the surface. The visible, external and conscious part is the one that often relates to Culture with a capital C (also referred to as objective knowledge), while the invisible, internal and subconscious part represents the notion of culture with a small c and refers to thought patterns, beliefs, and values of the given ethnic group, etc. The external culture is explicitly learnt and is prone to change, but the internal one is difficult to change. Weaver (1997) compares the communication of two speakers coming from different cultural backgrounds to a collision of two icebergs when the differences can be easily recognized even from a distance, however, what causes real miscommunication is the hidden part of the iceberg, particularly that, as Hall contended (1959: 39), culture hides much from its native user. In other words we are not always aware of our cultural uniqueness. Hall suggested that the only way to learn the internal culture of others is to actively participate in their culture. The metaphorical nature of the concept and visualization of such a cultural crush is what makes it appealing to EFL students.

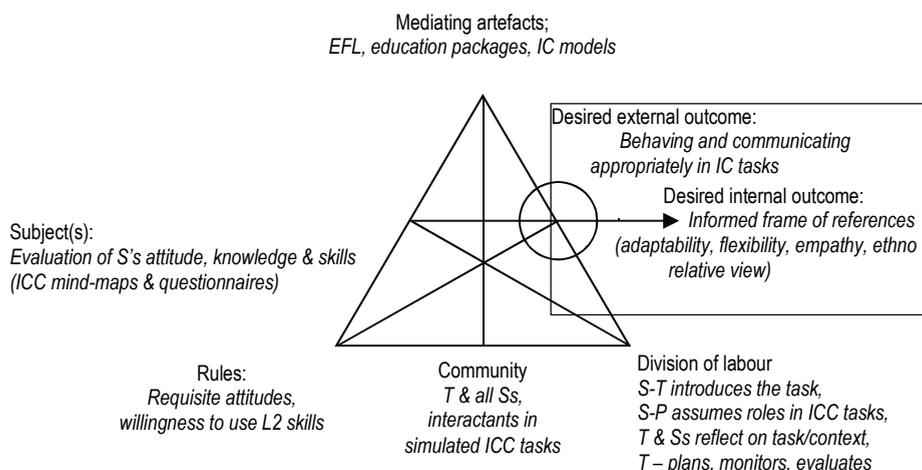
Analysing the problem of the development of intercultural competence Root and Ngampornchai (2013) conclude that most scholars agree on at least three core assumptions, such as: the need to conceptualize intercultural competence within cognitive, affective, and behavioural approaches, the need to consider its end-results in terms of effective and appropriate communication, and finally, acknowledging that it is not specific to any culture but rests on some core and culture-general competencies that individuals can successfully develop. This supports my opinion that ICC classes do not need to be based on one selected model or theory. For example, a model which is not referred to by Spitzberg and Chagon (2009), and which I find useful, is the dimensional one which was empirically developed by Hofstede (1981/2001) who explains that people carry 'mental programmes' which are developed in a family in early childhood (i.e. primary socialization) and are later reinforced in school and society (secondary socialization). After analysing the patterns of behaviour among international staff members of IBM Hofstede identified major factors which are of importance for a given culture and contribute to cultural differences in the workplace. The ones which he considers critical are: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, degree of uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity and long- or short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1991) many of which are included in the models discussed by Spitzberg and Chagon (2009). Some researchers (e.g. McSweeney, 2002; Venaile and Brewer, 2013), however, criticise Hofstede's concepts on some theoretical and practical grounds and find them more as general observations which could be helpful at a group level than as the ones which define individual personality. However, what makes the concept attractive for educational purposes is its online availability for culture comparisons, an issue which may be discussed in the EFL class (see <http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html>).

While attempting to develop my EFL students' ICC I adopt an eclectic approach referring to different cultural models to show the complex and dynamic character of ICC. For my seminar I find as particularly useful Byram's (1997) ICC model and Deardoff's (2006) causal path model because they refer to more or less the same components of ICC and allow to see mutual dependence between them. Deardoff's model additionally perceives the outcomes of intercultural interaction in external (observed appropriate communication) and internal terms (reframed mental structure), and thus may be helpful in assessing the outcomes of ICC training.

#### 4. Background to the study

EFL students in the MA programme have some basic knowledge of culture in the UK and USA, which is the target of the BA programme for English studies in Poland. Their communication skills in EFL are typically at C1 level according to CEFR (2001), however, they may sometimes be unwilling to communicate in EFL during the classes due to different reasons (Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pietrzykowska, 2011; Siek-Piskozub and Nowacka, 2012). Their ICC is also at different levels as they come to the programme from different institutions offering BA programmes in EFL. Thus, the target of my seminar is to make my students aware of how ICC is understood, and how it has become a target of EFL teaching. Students also have to experience culturally challenging situations in the form of simulations and problem solving tasks to become aware of their attitudes towards 'other', as well as to practice the effectiveness of their communication skills in such contexts, to learn the intercultural skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), and the skills of discovering and interacting (*savoir apprendre/faire*). Additionally, they practice running ICC activities in an EFL class (micro-teaching), an experience which they can later rely on in their own teaching.

I apply activity theory (Engström, 1987) for planning, implementing and reflecting upon the ICC seminar. Activity theory (AT) has developed as a result of the evolution of the socio-constructivist theory proposed by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky whose works have become well known in the Western world since 1962 (see e.g. Vygotsky, 1978). While Vygotsky's mediating theory was depicted on a triangle (see the top of figure 1), Engström added new components and interconnected them to show potential tensions between them. The activity system implemented at the ICC seminar for FE students was described in more detail in another publication/article in which I concentrated on the description of the components of the system from the educational perspective (Siek-Piskozub, in press). Here I will focus more on the intercultural dimensions of the seminar. The adapted Engström's model with its all components is represented graphically (see figure 1). I will refer to its components while discussing the organisation and the outcomes of the ICC seminar.



Legend: EFL – English as a foreign language, IC – intercultural competence, ICC – intercultural communicative competence, S – student, S-T – student-teacher, S-P – student participant, T – teacher

**Figure 1.** ICC seminar as an activity system (based on Engström, 1987)

## 5. Research methodology

The adopted perspective in this study is of a retrospective type – reflective and mainly descriptive in nature, and refers to three cycles of the seminar (60hs each) run with different students (all together 59 participants) in the academic years 2011/2012, 2012/2013, and 2015/2016 (see also Siek-Piskozub, 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2015). The goal of the study is to evaluate the impact of the ICC seminar on its participants individual ICC.

### *Research questions*

The study is to provide answers to three general research questions:

Q.1. Is explicit ICC approach motivating EFL prospective teachers to participate in the tasks based on intercultural conflicts?

Q.2. Will participation in the ICC seminar have an impact on EFL prospective teachers conceptualisation of ICC?

Q.3. Will EFL prospective teachers participating in the seminar develop teaching competence related to ICC development?

### *Research tools*

The insights on the *Subject* and also on the *Outcome* components of the AT model (see figure 1) come from three sources/tools: (1) students' mind-maps showing associations with the term intercultural communicative competence designed by

the participants during the first and last class (used for all the cycles), (2) ICC questionnaire aiming at gauging students' awareness of their ICC levels filled in before and after the seminar, (3) ICC seminar evaluation questionnaire, and (4) my direct ongoing observation of the interactions on tasks and during the reflective phase after the task (reflections based on all the three cycles of the seminar). The two first tools were signed by the participants who knew they would have to re-evaluate their opinions at the end of the programme. The ICC questionnaires and the ICC seminar evaluation questionnaire as the data collecting tools were used in the academic year 2012/2013, i.e. during the second cycle. My observations reported here refer to general patterns and not to individual students, nor a particular cycle.

The role of the mind-maps was to give a quick insight into the students' conceptualisation of ICC at the beginning and at the end of the programme. The need to compare their own entry and exit mind-maps by the students was to make them aware of the evolution of their conceptualisations of ICC (*Desired internal outcome*).

The ICC questionnaire was completed twice only by the participants in the second cycle (year 2012/2013,  $n = 19$ ) to estimate the need for such programmes (Siek-Piskozub, 2015). The revision of one's own entries on the questionnaire after the course was also to verify Róg's (2012/2013) stipulation to include intercultural training before sending students for exchange programmes. As partial requirement for his PhD degree the researcher studied the impact of exchange programmes for ICC development and noted an overestimation of students' own ICC levels before the exchange, which then was sometimes down-scored after the experience of studying abroad. The author postulated the need to prepare students for such an experience. The goal of my entry questionnaire, which was an adapted version of the one used by Róg, was to make the students reflect on their ICC attitude, skills and knowledge, and to express their opinions concerning the effectiveness of their prior studies for intercultural interaction. At the end of the cycle they were to re-evaluate their opinions so that both parties (learners and their teacher) could see if ICC can be effectively targeted for in the ICC class.

The ICC seminar evaluation questionnaire was given at the end of the programme to the participants of the cycle 2012/2013 ( $n = 19$ ). It addressed the issue of tasks – i.e. student's attitude to the activities they were involved in (8 questions), the atmosphere during the classes (3 questions), students' sensitivity to intercultural factors (stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, understanding of the complex nature of culture (3 questions), skills which were improved by participating in the seminar referring to teacher competence (planning and running an ICC class – 2 questions), students' interactions (performing on different tasks, co-operation, willingness to share views, needs, opinions – 3 questions), and opinions about the content and manner of running the ICC seminar (4 questions). The numerical data are presented and discussed elsewhere (Siek-Piskozub, 2015).

The goal of my ongoing observations was to note how the interactions on ICC tasks were performed by the students (n = 59), to identify any problems which may appear during activities (e.g. unwillingness to interact in L2 within the task by some students, controversial language and non-language behaviours/reactions) and to discuss the matter with the class and/or suggest possible solutions, etc. (*Desired external outcome*). The observation was not based on any more specific observation scheme. My comments were written on the lesson plan in the 'notes' section. I concentrated on the number of students eagerly engaged in the activity, individuals who refrained from being active, expressed opinions on the simulated problem etc.

### *The treatment*

I will use the AT model to describe the educational treatment referring to its components (see figure 1).

Fifty nine students – participated in the three cycles (1<sup>st</sup> cycle – n = 20, 2<sup>nd</sup> – n = 19, 3<sup>rd</sup> – n = 20). Their EFL competence could be evaluated at C1-C2 levels according to the CEFR (2001). The initial ICC was at different levels for each participant (*Subject*) as depicted by their entry-mind-maps. In one case during the first cycle (i.e. in the year 2011) there was no entry, and in the second cycle in one student's mind-map there was just one very general comment ("the ability to communicate with speakers of foreign languages and speakers from other cultures"). The majority of the participants in the first cycle of the seminar separated communicative competence from target cultural competence (not intercultural one) and concentrated on the components of each. In the following cycle there were more and also more appropriate entries. However, what was still missing in the entry-mind-maps was the affective component of ICC (e.g. tolerance to others, empathy, openness to other cultures/differences), but also some skills were not acknowledged (e.g. ability to verify stereotypes about other cultures, attempts at understanding possible reasons of miscommunication or at solving problems resulting from cultural differences, dealing with culture shock), an observation which was also supported by the ICC questionnaire data. There were some gaps in the knowledge component (e.g. need for awareness of cultural differences, awareness of differences related to age, sex, and nationality of the interlocutors). Also the questionnaire confirmed some gaps in ICC skills that some respondents thought they possessed related to the target culture (e.g. 2 respondents out of 19 claimed that they were unable to describe different relationships in the target culture, while 6 were uncertain about the ability to do so).

The participants from the programme run in the winter semester of 2015/2016 (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle) were better acquainted with the concept of intercultural competence and provided more entries in their mind-maps. Also, they often noted the complex nature

of each entry and presented it as a string (e.g. “contact – connection – interculturalism”, “high C culture vs. low c culture”, “culture – people – refugees, immigrants”), which shows that education for ICC is evolving and more and more students are getting acquainted with it. However, still individual levels of ICC, as estimated by students themselves, varied from person to person. The lowest number of entries amounted to 7 ( $n = 2$ ) and the highest to 18 ( $n = 1$ ). On average there were 12 to 15 entries on an entry mind-map, where every entry was counted for each string.

Referring to the *Mediating artefact*, from the beginning of the seminar it was decided that the language of communication was English, although all the participants were native speakers of Polish (with the exception of the first cycle when we had a participant from the Erasmus exchange programme). The students were encouraged to use all their knowledge and skills during the class and were free to express any opinion they felt ready to share. There were different types of activities which were based on the suggestions coming from two ICC education packages (Brander et al., 1995; Martinet and Taylor, 2000). The books offered suggestions for some theoretical discussions and topic presentations (e.g. different intercultural models, reasons for social/ethnic/regional inequalities) and a lot of scenarios for intercultural tasks to give students an experience of culturally challenging situations (i.e. act as a member of a culturally different group assuming assigned roles, e.g. an unemployed person, a conservative parent, a journalist of a predefined type of press) (see also Siek-Piskozub, 2013 a; 2013b). Besides, the students were encouraged to do their own resourcing in order to prepare three team projects related to the evolution of the concept of language competence for foreign language education, concepts of culture and interculture and approaches to (inter) culture education.

The *Rules* component referred to the English language and social rules of conduct in class, as well as to the roles imposed by the tasks which sometimes might have violated shared social norms of the age or ethnic group, or the attitude of the student. For example, in an activity whose target was to make students aware of the impact of media on our opinions, some students simulated a manifestation, others a contra manifestation related to a chosen by the teacher-student recent political situation, whereas the remaining students observed the event as representatives of various media to prepare a report of/an article on the event. The titles of the press were biased to hint the line of the medium. Sometimes (depending on the cycle of the ICC seminar) the student-teacher suggested some phrases that the “journalists” were to use in their publication. Students were assigned the roles by the student-teacher and had to act appropriately, no matter what their private preferences were.

The *Community* were all the participants (students and teacher), but also the simulated members of other ethnic, age, background, etc. groups at a given task. For example, students had to find themselves in the role of different family members to

negotiate a conflict, foreign tourists on an international trip, radical journalists, immigrants, or being unemployed, etc.

*The Division of labour* depended on the role each student played during a particular class (i.e. student-teacher, student, person interacting in an assigned role). The ICC seminar teacher had planned and coordinated the activities in class and facilitated the reflection after the task was completed, and at the end assessed each participant for their engagement in class, presentations of cultural topics and running the workshop as student-teachers.

## 6. Results

In my analysis of the results I will concentrate on both types of the outcomes of the programme referring to Deardorff's concepts of desired internal and external outcomes.

### *Observation data*

The *Desired external outcome*, i.e. effectiveness and appropriateness of communication and behaviour in an intercultural situation (Deardorff, 2006), was gauged by the observations of students' reactions to some controversial ideas, involvement in the activities, willingness to express opinions on the phenomena discussed, readiness to share with the *Community* their (sometimes very private) intercultural encounters and thoughts, or reveal faced problems. Initially not all students were equally involved in the tasks. Some kept observing their colleagues and, if not directly addressed, would refrain from expressing their opinions. For example, in an activity where the student-teacher informed the group about some ideas which typically divide a society (e.g. accepting refugees, granting equal social rights to homosexuals), and expected them to choose and stand under the sign 'I am for' or 'I am against', and justify their choice, while those who had no opinion on the matter, or were not ready to express it, had to stay in the middle and listen to their colleagues' justifications; after for and against opinions were expressed, the undecided students had to choose their place depending what arguments they considered to be more convincing or they could still stay in the middle, however, this time with an obligation to justify their choice. The reactions of the participants depended on many factors: personality (e.g. shyness), social congruence (how well the members knew each other from other courses in their EFL programmes) but also on the phase in this course. When the activity was introduced early in the programme, there were typically more students who chose an undecided option, and only after listening to the opinions of the others were ready to move and explain, or to justify why they still hesitated to make a decision. However, when the activity was carried out later in the programme, and the members in the group got familiar with each other because of

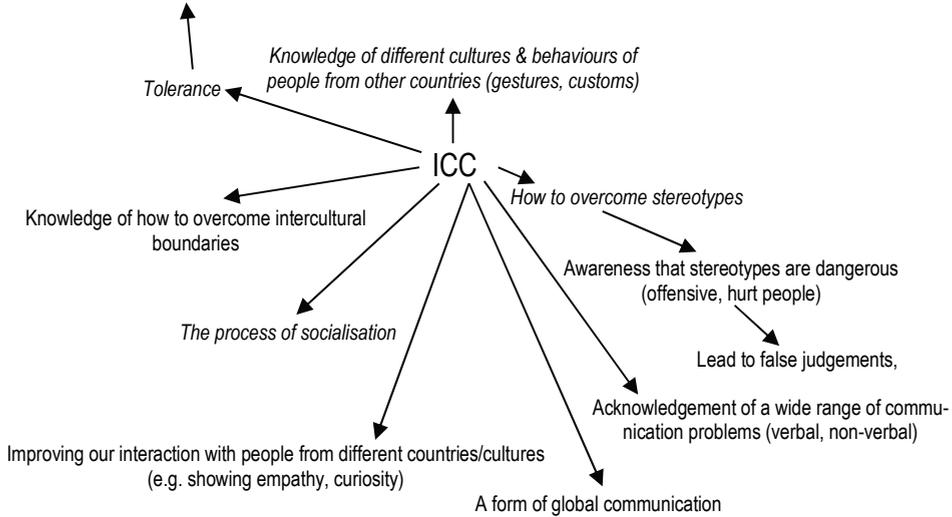
the involvement in the preceding tasks, there used to be few who would not express their opinions immediately. The justification act, in fact, used to turn into vivid discussions with everyone wanting to add something. Such factors as the 'willingness to communicate in EFL', 'openness to the ideas of others', 'not being judgemental', 'skills of interpreting and discovery' could be observed towards the end of the programme on all tasks, and not a single member refrained from taking an active part in the tasks, no matter how challenging they might have appeared. Learners became sensitive to issues of 'prejudice', 'discrimination', 'rejection' which they could show by identifying the phenomena in the simulated activities, describing/analysing them (e.g. referring to linguistic features of the utterance), and expressing their opinion or concern about the need to act against their beliefs during some simulations. They could recall such negative phenomena from their own experience (either as victims or as offenders) and did not refrain from admitting it. Thus, we can conclude that the answer to Q.1 is positive: explicit ICC approach motivates EFL prospective teachers to participate in the tasks based on intercultural conflicts.

Students were also showing the ability to prepare and run an ICC lesson based on a selected task from the recommended packages. They set the ICC goals, explained the nature of the task (usually a simulation or a problem solving task) to their colleagues involved in the microteaching, prepared prompts (e.g. role-cards, texts from different sources), monitored and facilitated other students involvement, led after-the-activity discussion on the level of language competence required for its successful completion, desirable age of the learners, as well as on ways of modifying the activity if there were discrepancies between these factors in a school context. This observation makes it possible to give a positive answer to Q.3: the EFL prospective teachers participating in the seminar have developed teaching competence related to ICC development?

### *Mind-map data*

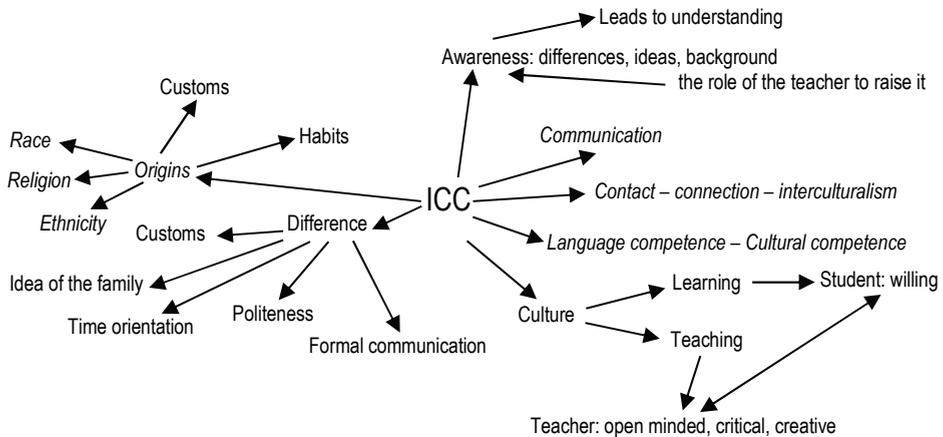
The *Desired internal outcome*, i.e. showing the ability to adapt, be flexible and empathetic and expressing ethnorelative view (Deardorff, 2006), cannot be objectively assessed but can be implied from the comparisons of entry- and final-mind-maps; the latter showed a better awareness of the complex nature of intercultural competence and the needs of intercultural communication. This could be measured by an increased number of entries, but also by the quality of entries (e.g. including social and affective dimensions of ICC) (see figures 2a, b as examples). Interestingly, the students whose initial mind-maps were poor in number and quality of entries improved the most (increase up to 30 entries). The students whose awareness of ICC was higher at the beginning improved not so much in number of entries but their quality. The same pattern was observed in the three cycles. See an example of an entry- and final mind- maps in figure 2 a, b.

Cultural awareness, trying to understand and respect differences, understand that others may have various objectives, different future plans, and dreams because of different cultural backgrounds.



Legend: italics refer to the original entry-mind-maps preserved, normal to new or further developed concepts in the final mind-map.

Figure 2a. Comparison of a student's entry- and final-mind-map (from 2011/2012 cycle)



Legend: italics refer to the original entry-mind-maps preserved, normal to new or further developed concepts in the final mind-map.

Figure 2b. Comparison of a student's entry- and final-mind-map (from 2015/2016 cycle)

### *Questionnaire data*

Only one of the two used in the programme questionnaires will be discussed here in more detail, i.e. the one related to ICC competence self-evaluation. While re-evaluating their own ICC competence (cycle 2012/2013), students introduced some changes. Usually when ICC knowledge or skills were to be evaluated (e.g. “I know how to deal with a cultural shock”) the measure would be raised by one point (e.g. from ‘no opinion’ to ‘agree’, or from ‘agree’ to ‘strongly agree’). The biggest problem was related to the attitude expressed in the statement “I am ready to relativize my culture”. Some students (on both occasions) marked ‘no opinion’ option (5 out of 19 participants), one student changed the ‘no opinion’ estimation into a ‘disagree’, while another one from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘no opinion’ option, or from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘disagree’ (n = 1), ‘disagree’/‘strongly disagree’ to ‘no opinion’ (n = 3). A slight majority (10 out of 19) expressed their positive opinions ‘agree’/‘strongly agree’ equally on both occasions or improved by one point. We may conclude that the answer to Q. 2 is partially positive. Participation in the ICC seminar had an impact on the EFL prospective teachers’ conceptualisation of ICC only to some extent. The data shows that while the development of knowledge and skills may be more easily achieved in the educational context, attitudes may mostly be changed in a prolonged direct experience/practice and thus the change cannot be expected immediately, which supports Bennett’s (1993) claims. This is also supported by Sobkowiak’s (2015: 173) observation of the positive impact of school exchange programmes on students’ own evaluation of their attitudes towards other cultures and foreigners. However, I believe that the participants of the ICC seminar will be better prepared for the possible pitfalls of intercultural communication and will have a more open attitude to ‘others’.

The seminar was positively evaluated by all the participants. They also reported having developed some ICC teaching skills (support to the observation data referring to Q.3), but the results of ICC seminar evaluation questionnaire have been published elsewhere (see Siek-Piskozub, 2013b; 2015).

## **7. Conclusions**

ICC which by many FL educators is considered to be the target for modern FL education can be successfully and explicitly approached in pre-service language teacher programmes preparing FL teachers for the task of intercultural mediator and showing them ways of coping with intercultural problems. A growing awareness of FL teachers of the concepts of ICC proves that the problem has been considered as important by many educational institutions, a conclusion that can be drawn from the fact that most recent participants in my course had better intercultural awareness than their predecessors. My experience shows that with interesting ICC tasks carried

out in a friendly group, students may overcome their initially negative attitude to intercultural issues. The fact that there are packages which offer suggestions for activities available on-line may release the overloaded teachers from the burden of designing their own task, although involvement with the activities in question stimulates teachers' and prospective teachers' creativity (Siek-Piskozub, 2013b). But still we have to remember that ICC development is a dynamic process and cannot be fully accomplished in the educational context.

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