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MULTICULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. *It is because of the rapidly increasing interconnections among all nations, the need for mobility and the urge to be academically competitive in relation to the rest of the world, that multicultural education in all its facets is becoming more important than ever. A new language pedagogy is gaining ground, wherein multicultural awareness along with multilingualism constitute the core of the foreign language (L2) curriculum. Thus, in-service teacher training has a strategic role in preparing Europe's education systems to meet the challenges of change and to equip students to respond effectively to those challenges. The paper will, therefore, explore the requirements of culturally responsive language pedagogy, the foreign language teacher's roles within the new paradigm, the possibilities and benefits of first-hand multicultural experience and ways of instilling multicultural awareness and competence into students, all for the purpose of embracing and appreciating diversity as a means of both academic and personal growth.*

Key words: *mobility, multilingualism, multiculturalism, foreign language (L2) curriculum, in-service teacher training, diversity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the changing economic and political context of Europe, the need for cross-cultural communication and understanding is more urgent than ever. Many educational institutions have undergone a profound process of change leading towards the promotion of international or intercultural understanding, tolerance, linguistic and cultural diversity. As a result of increasing globalisation, internationalisation and intercultural competence have become key issues in higher education institutions across the world. In order to remain competitive in the higher education market, universities need to cater to the growing number of international students (Krajewski 2011: 138). Therefore, foreign language (L2) mastery represents a win-win competence in the knowledge-based society. Namely, learning and understand-

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ing foreign languages undoubtedly builds bridges between people, communities and cultures. Understandably, speaking someone's language does not mean the automatic solution to all the differences, but it is a window through which one can catch a glimpse and begin to appreciate the other's point of view and develop an awareness of the existence of other perspectives. And that is an essential stepping stone to better mutual understanding. Being able to speak to one another raises awareness of what people have in common and at the same time increases mutual respect for cultural differences. This diversity is by no means a threat, but an opportunity to be curious, to learn and appreciate.

Language competence is becoming one of the key factors in promoting international cooperation and mobility between higher education institutions in the European Union and beyond. Mobility and L2 competence are inextricably linked: mobility fosters language learning because languages are learnt better and faster in their countries of origin (Klimek and Jenner 2008: 30). Similarly, language skills facilitate mobility and intercultural encounters, all of which create a positive feedback loop.

However, in order to mutually respect and understand each other in multicultural societies, L2 competence itself is insufficient; it is of crucial importance that people from different cultures develop intercultural competence (Byram 1997; Barro et al. 2002; Bagić i Vrhovac 2012). The notion of intercultural competence, in simple terms, involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills that enable individuals to behave appropriately in a certain socio-cultural context. These skills, among others, encompass awareness about others and oneself, critical observation of cultural behaviour patterns and appreciation of other's and one's own values. Bennett (1997: 16) has wittily remarked that we need to understand more completely the cultural dimension of language, its social or philosophical content in order to avoid becoming fluent fools. Indeed, while acknowledging the obvious importance of language as a communication tool (Corbett 2003: 2) the advocates of the 'intercultural approach' also emphasise its very important social functions.

In light of all this it can be stated that foreign language education is by definition an intercultural subject matter (Sercu et al. 2004: 85). Language teachers are mediators of language and culture in L2 classes. They have a specific task of developing their students' knowledge and skills in the domain of languages and cultures, thus enabling the students to understand the world around them and to communicate successfully across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Grenfell et al. 2003: 19). Such a task is both complex and challenging, and requires the teacher's ongoing professional development. The aim of the paper is to explore the intercultural approach to L2 education, the necessity of professional teacher development through gaining direct experience of multicultural environments and sharing good practice. The authors of the paper will try to show that this kind of teacher training is a great asset and a valuable resource for both teachers and students alike, thereby stressing the fact that cross-cultural teaching is most effective when teachers themselves have had such first-hand experience.

2. INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE NEW ERA

During the last decade of the 20th century and at the beginning of our new millennium, enormous changes occurred in most European countries, which provided a powerful incentive for innovation and reforms in their education systems. A strong process of integration has led to a uniform education policy, which, in turn, has brought about standards ensuring easier international comparability of education systems, levels of

achievement, and educational as well as greater professional and employment mobility. Schools have started supporting more the individuality of students and preparing them for future challenges – through the adequate transfer of knowledge, skills, including intercultural ones, and through responsible action in the classroom community. By doing so, schools enable students to grow beyond the boundaries of their own cultures. Education institutions have taken an important role in developing the intercultural competence of students, beyond preparing them for their chosen professional field. It has become clear that 'knowledge' as such is not enough, and that cross-cultural skills, positive attitude towards other cultures and awareness of other cultures are needed to the greatest extent possible. If cross-cultural interactions fail, the consequences can be serious: misunderstanding, conflict, even ethnic strife might eventually result (cf. Fantini 2002: 16).

The European Union (EU) has set the ambitious target of getting as many EU citizens as possible to learn two languages in addition to their mother tongue. The EU policy of multilingualism is a long-term vision encouraging language learning in school as well as on a lifelong learning basis (*The Magazine 26*: 20). The concept of multilingualism, recognized as a key economic, social and personal asset, has a real potential for a deeper understanding and tolerance between people, generally speaking. While learning one foreign language in addition to one's mother tongue is good, learning a second additional language is even better. Schools and higher education institutions across Europe are trying to respond to that challenge by offering as wide a range of languages as possible in their curricula.

Intercultural language learning has become an important focus of modern language education, a shift reflecting greater awareness of the interdependence of language and culture (Ho 2009: 63). There are numerous definitions and scientific writings about intercultural competence, and although 'interculturalists' cannot agree upon a common definition, what they unequivocally agree upon is the nature of the intercultural experience. Intercultural experience revolves around the development of competence in another culture and proficiency in its language, which provide the opportunity for powerful reflections on one's own native world view (Fantini 2000: 26). This notion is best captured by the expression "looking out is looking in" – an idea that so fully pervades the field of intercultural education, and significantly echoes in the disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, psychology and linguistics. However, the most comprehensive and by far the best known model of intercultural competence has been provided by Byram (1997). He explicitly states that his model is designed to help teachers of languages to understand the construct of intercultural competence. By wanting to show the inextricable connection between language and culture, and the interplay of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural competence, Byram coined the term "intercultural communicative competence" (ICC, for short), which sheds more light on the complex construct of underlying abilities.

Byram's model of ICC encompasses (Byram 1997; as cited in Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009: 66):

1) *attitudes* relating to curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own culture,
2) *knowledge* referring to familiarity with the social groups and their products, practices in one's own and the other's country, and with general processes of societal and individual interaction,
3) *skills of interpreting and relating* denoting the ability to interpret documents or events from another culture and relate them to those of one's own,

4) *skills of discovering and interacting* indicating the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to apply knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication or interaction,
5) *critical cultural awareness* representing the ability to critically evaluate perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Although Byram admits that all these can be acquired through experience and reflection, namely without the intervention of teachers and educational institutions, he advocates their being taught in the classroom setting (Byram 1997; as cited in Sowden 2007: 307). Of all the mentioned dimensions of ICC, cultural awareness is considered by many interculturalists as crucial to cross-cultural development (cf. Fantini 2000: 28; Fantini 2005: 2) – it is the keystone on which effective and appropriate interactions depend. Cultural awareness represents a conscious understanding of the role culture plays in language learning and communication, both in L1 and L2. It is reinforced through reflection and introspection in which both the learner's L1C(ulture) and L2C(ulture) are compared and contrasted. The aspects of cultural awareness can be implemented in teaching practice in a number of ways, however there must be a systematic framework for teaching language and culture together. Byram emphasizes the need to understand the multi-faceted nature of culture which promotes the intercultural speaker and intercultural citizen (Baker 2012: 65).

We all belong to and are shaped by a series of interlocking cultures, which influence the way we see the world, make decisions and interact with others. It goes without saying that people belonging to diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds will be confronted with cultural differences, in particular with respect to people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. Though Europe is in the process of developing its own *international* culture in some areas, cultures still retain their specificities or distinctiveness, because people argue, raise children, interact with others, make friends, order, negotiate, etc. quite differently. What is important is that individuals are fully aware of cultural differences and are ready to deal with them in a non-judgmental way. Culture is a dynamic construct which constantly changes. The metaphor of an iceberg to understand culture has been employed by many theoreticians of foreign language education. The visible part or the tip of the iceberg relates to Culture with a capital **C**, whereby art, theatre, music, literature, architecture, folklore, law, fashion, religion and other cultural artefacts provide knowledge of its creator and users (Hall 1976, adapted from Lange 2011: 7). The deep structure, representing the submerged or invisible culture – culture with a small **c**, concerns attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, customs, superstitions, work ethic, thought patterns and actually an endless list of different notions such as beauty, respect, friendship, values of leadership, prestige, health, love, etc. An intercultural approach to foreign language teaching recognizes the relevance and synergy of both dimensions, for culture can only be completely explained and understood through the unity of 'the visible' and 'the invisible' layers.

Language scholars and L2 teaching specialists agree on the importance of culture, the intercultural approach and its desired outcome – intercultural competence – in L2 classrooms and other *language-and-culture-related* settings or academic fields. However, one of the criticisms addressed to the intercultural approach is the lack of information on how it can be implemented in foreign language classes. Scholars have published guidelines or general principles for the intercultural approach, but these seem to be more like lists for general principles of language teaching (cf. Lange 2011). What is missing is ready-to-teach advice or materials. Consequently teachers most often have to rely on their own resourcefulness and strengths to raise awareness of intercultural differences arising from

different values, behavioural patterns and ways of thinking as well as of culturally determined aspects of language use and to develop empathy, open-mindedness and respect for others and the like. Liddicoat (2002, adapted from Ho 2009: 66) proposes a core set of principles for L2 language and culture acquisition, which serve as a set of suggestions, not all of which are relevant in all educational settings. They are as follows:

1) *acquisition about cultures*,
2) *comparing and contrasting cultures*,
3) *exploring cultures*,
4) *finding one's own "third place" between cultures*.

The acquisition of cultures begins with foreign language learners exploring the diversity and complexity of different local and national cultural groupings, which should lead to an awareness of the multi-voiced nature of cultural characterizations (Baker 2012: 68). L2 learners are engaged in discovering their own *invisible* cultural dimensions and cultural "otherness" and self-reflecting on the influence of their own L1 culture on their language interaction with people from other cultures (Ho 2009: 66). A discussion between the students within any class, even in supposedly monolingual/monocultural settings would reveal an astonishing diversity of linguistic and cultural influences. To illustrate, learners could engage in group discussion activities regarding the differences in ideas that make up a family in their own family trees. This task can raise students' awareness of the diversity within their own culture and their individual concepts of family (Tomalin and Stempleski 1993, cited in Ho 2009: 69).

Through comparing and contrasting cultures, learners look for similarities and differences with the target culture in comparison with the source culture. Having an understanding of their own culture, learners gradually decentre from it, reduce ethnocentrism and develop respect and empathy towards people of the target culture. It should be pointed out to L2 learners that each culture has different values and none of them is better than the others in the target culture. The following is but an example of how different cultural perspectives between the British and Serbian culture could be exploited in the L2 classroom:

Table 1 Cultural differences in values between the British and Serbs

Great Britain	Serbia
The British tend to apologise frequently.	Serbs tend to do less so.
The British find it inappropriate to waste others' time by being late.	Serbs do not generally consider being on time quite as important.
The British do not have an equivalent for "Bon appetit". In principle, they do not say anything at the start or end of a meal.	Serbs have an expression "Prijatno", which they use at the start of every meal.
The British need "personal space" as an area around themselves for comfortable social interaction.	Serbs tend to stand closer to the interlocutor and make personal contact, thus adding to the verbal message.
The British tend to refrain from asking too straightforward questions about somebody's personal life.	Serbs tend to be more direct when asking questions or giving opinions and remarks.
Charity and voluntary work are part of their daily existence.	The idea of charity and voluntary work are in their beginning stages.
The British are very eco-friendly.	Serbs have not yet reached that level of environmental awareness.

Since comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 cultures might be a sensitive issue which might lead to misunderstanding, learners should beware that "communication style norms" or "cultural norms" (generalizations) can apply to most people in a cultural group but not to every individual within that culture (cf. Stringer and Cassiday 2009). However, if a cultural norm is applied to everyone in a cultural group in a rigid manner, generalizations tend to evolve into stereotypes. It is not in the spirit of intercultural education to make negative value judgments, given the obvious cultural diversity; one needs to be value-neutral and reduce any tendency towards forming stereotypes. Learners could also develop cultural awareness and most effectively acquire cultural input through direct, personal experiences, by immersing themselves in an L2 country, and indirectly – through literature, film and music, which could then lead to stimulating discussions in classroom settings.

The model of developing learners' intercultural competence through exploring L1 and L2 cultures can be conducted through ethnographic interviews with invited native English speakers/cultural informants who would interpret and construct their own model and/or experience of intercultural communication through the presentation of English cultural norms (Liddicoat 2002; cited in Ho 2009: 67). This practice, done in the class or outside the class, would help L2 learners present an oral report about their findings from interviews. Learners could also be asked to independently explore and present an aspect of the foreign culture. The Internet, collaborative learning, chat rooms, email, film, television, radio, newspapers, novels and magazines, language-learning materials and other resources could be extensively used to explore cultural representations. These and other available resources might be exploited to engage learners in actual instances of intercultural communication, thus enabling them to develop intercultural awareness and reflect on its relevance to their acquired experiences. In the same vein, L2 learners could be asked to create cultural simulations in the class, thereby developing their understanding of the cultural norms of interaction with English native speakers. They could participate in all kinds of role play situations where people from 'different cultures' meet, which can undoubtedly lead to intercultural sensitization.

In the process of finding one's own "third place" between cultures, learners decentre from their own culture, observe the target culture and create *a third place* where they can observe and reflect on both their own and L2 culture. Kramsch (1993; cited in Ho 2009: 67) indicates that this third place is where L2 learners synthesize elements of different cultures and establish their own understanding of the cultural differences between those cultures. It is on this dynamic and boundless space where L2 learners bridge the potential gap between cultural differences and achieve their communicative goals. In the L2 classroom this process can be effectively carried out through problem-solving activities, case studies or critical incidents which involve cultural dilemmas. Cultural dilemmas can increase learners' awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences and encourage them to participate in discussions about potential solutions, for example:

- *You are newly employed in a country whose language is not your first language. You are relatively fluent but still struggle with some of the more technical language of your organization. Your manager persistently completes your sentences when you hesitate to think about the proper phrase for what you want to say*. (Stringer and Cassiday 2009: 101)
- *You are a new employee (or student) in the country whose language you are studying and notice that a group of people go out for drinks or lunch together very regularly and you are never invited*. (adapted from Stringer and Cassiday 2009: 101)

Cultural dilemmas enable L2 learners to mediate between their source and target culture in order to reach an intercultural position, *the third place*, where their points of view can be recognized, mediated and accepted as such (Liddicoat et al. 2003; Ho 2009: 72). From such simulated situations L2 learners are able to establish an understanding of cultural differences between their native and the L2 culture, then develop an ability to look at themselves from the other's perspective (*to make the familiar strange*) and adjust their own behaviour to the specific context. This is an effective way for students to develop tolerance and empathy towards the behaviours of people originating from other cultures and eventually resolve intercultural misunderstandings.

As can be seen, all the aforementioned models of intercultural teaching engage L2 learners in versatile cognitive, behavioural and affective aspects of language-and-culture teaching through a variety of interactive tasks and activities whereby learners develop their cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective intercultural communication. It seems that language-and-culture learning is far more complex and far richer than the emphasis on communicative competence in L2 education tends to suggest (Sercu 2005: 180). This clearly indicates that teachers of language-and-culture need a more complex, meaningful and enriching education. Academically and pedagogically, teacher education should provide opportunities for learning which are cognitively and experientially oriented. Since L2 teachers are the most important mediators and daring leaders, they need to experience an L2 culture first hand, because intercultural competence can best be developed and understood through direct, real-life intercultural experiences.

3. An Experiential Approach to in-Service Teacher Training

As has been mentioned throughout the paper, foreign language teachers have a huge responsibility to acquaint learners with language-and-culture learning which would challenge and modify their perspective on the world and their cultural identity (cf. Sercu 2005: 180). They need, so to speak, to 'mould' a language learner or citizen in linguistically and culturally diverse Europe, into a well-balanced, knowledgeable, reflective thinker, an inquirer and a tolerant communicator – that is to say a true language learner or intercultural speaker who is ready to self-invest in his/her language education. To do this successfully teachers ought to possess professional skills, background knowledge, personal qualities and the urge to invest in and commit to becoming life-long learners themselves in the multidisciplinary fields of foreign language acquisition. Teachers need to undertake training in a wide range of methods and approaches developed elsewhere, and to share their own ideas and practices with others. That is why due attention should be paid to teacher education which would enable teachers to obtain the necessary expertise, or practical and theoretical support for the responsibilities that await them.

However, as Lázár so rightfully observes:

> *Unfortunately, there is still very little emphasis placed on the cultural dimension of language learning because very few teacher training institutions include intercultural communication training in their curriculum, and intercultural competence usually does not feature among graduation criteria.* (Lázár 2007: 5)

Indeed, curricula at university level, generally speaking, seem to be geared mostly to fit academic purposes or prospective profession-related issues, while the aspects of ICC, which can be so easily implemented in any university subject with some intervention and guidance on the part of the teacher, are a must of the far-reaching concept of the multicultural classroom and multicultural experiences. Generally speaking, teachers cannot be prepared for all the challenges they will face throughout their careers. Therefore they need to make use of all the opportunities of in-service professional development in order to update and broaden knowledge acquired during initial teacher education, and maintain a high standard of teaching. And professional development is "a lifelong process which begins with the initial preparation that teachers receive and continues until retirement" (Villeagas-Reimers 2003; as cited in Musset 2010: 12).

One of the most effective ways of in-service language teacher training is for teachers to gain direct experience of multicultural environments, to share good practice and good ideas and consequently to instil in students intercultural awareness and competence. This kind of training is a great asset and valuable resource for education, and on a personal level it is a unique experience of embracing and valuing diversity as a means of one's academic or professional and personal growth. A good teacher is a self-motivated and motivating learner whose professional development should go beyond the most common practice of extensive reading, curriculum development activity, research and dissemination conference involvement. Specialised, intensive in-service training courses in the target language country (even relatively short ones) become opportunities to effect change in teachers, extending beyond the duration of the programme to their lives and teaching careers once they come home. The popular slogan: "think globally, act locally" can therefore be restated as: "participate globally, act locally" (Fantini 2000: 26). Such courses provide "important intercultural educational experiences out of which participants develop intercultural competencies that help them become more effective in their chosen fields – whether in social work, education, politics, business, or others" (Fantini 2000: 26).

We attended several in-service teacher training courses in the United Kingdom (Bodrič 2010, 2011), which is a unique and invaluable experience for every language teacher no matter the level, type or context of language teaching. As language teachers, ELT professionals and life-long learners of the target language and culture we considered this kind of self-development to be our obligation towards the teaching profession, and that we would be incomplete without such an immersive and enlightening experience. Although we financed the trip and course ourselves, not everyone needs to do so as many teachers from the European Union are eligible to apply for Comenius and Erasmus funds to finance summer teacher training courses in Britain, and some education institutions will most probably send their teachers on such courses and cover the cost as an investment in their staff. However, there are still many teachers who save up and end up spending money equivalent to several months' salary to be able to attend specialised courses taught in Britain. Nevertheless, such an investment is well worth the drain on their finances as the skills and qualifications gained from such intercultural training are an invaluable long-term investment.

These courses are not just about ELT methodology or cultural awareness, they are also about introspection and self-evaluation, as well as the ability to observe a number of teachers from other cultures, each with a unique approach to their work and learning from them, integrating what is good into our own teaching styles. Teachers from different countries and cultural backgrounds such as Morocco, Slovakia, Albania, the Czech Re-

public, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Serbia all contributed to this rich learning environment. Eager for more professional development and cross-cultural encounters, we shared our common concerns and gained strength and a sense of optimism from being together, in the belief that we are not alone and that our concerns are not specific to our teaching contexts. We willingly embraced this holistic learning experience and picked up teaching ideas from each other, expanded our cultural awareness and intercultural competence by interacting with our colleagues, host families, tutors, local people and the environment in general. Total *immersion* helped us to successfully broaden our range of teaching strategies, and also develop our language and cultural awareness. The significance of building intercultural competence or integrating culture into language teaching was pointed out to us, because no matter how well we have learned a language, if our language lacks cultural context, it is like getting Miss World to work in a coalmine – pretty but of limited use. Furthermore, we learned about the significance of exposing ourselves not only to the official culture of a country, namely its art and literature, but also to the more mundane culture of everyday life, culture with a 'small c' such as food, clothing, customs, etc.

On in-service training courses in Britain we used one type of intercultural approach to L2 teaching and developing ICC – *ethnography* (investigations of particular social contexts or cultures). The ethnographic approach can be life-based and classroom-based. One of the key components of an ethnographic methodology is *triangulation*, which involves the use of multiple methods or multiple data sources in order to verify the researcher's interpretations of a community (McKay 2006: 79). And one of the crucial components of ethnographic research is *observation without bias*, where the researcher/ethnographer carefully observes every aspect of a particular context. The next logical step is naturally doing fieldwork or taking field notes, which implies taking detailed descriptive notes of what has been seen or heard, and finally analyzing them. On the courses we used the ethnographic life-based techniques meaning that we literally went into the field or did field research according to the tasks assigned: we observed, described, analysed cultural specificities, behavioural patterns of the cultural differences we came across. Keeping a reflective journal, proven by many studies to be a successful ethnographic technique of observing, recording and understanding cultural patterns, contributed greatly to the development of our intercultural competence. We became keen observers of British life, we recorded critical events in our experiences and reflected on them accordingly. The importance of reflective journals either in classroom teaching or on a study abroad is emphasized by many scholars (Goodson and Sikes 2001; as cited in Faizah 2008: 34):

> *Not only is a document of this kind useful for providing factual information, it can also help with analysis and interpretation, in that it can jog memory and indicate patterns and trends which might have been lost if confined to the mind.*

We sharpened our observation skills to get a feel and taste of England not from the perspective of just a tourist being shown things but by us ourselves, teachers and researchers, having the chance to explore it and by course educators also structuring the intercultural experience by exposing us to the lived experience of many different people within that culture – younger and older, male and female, richer and poorer. By researching and interviewing many local people we immersed ourselves in culture in a more interactive way, getting at what is underneath that *iceberg*. We learned that it was

great to do things outside the classroom and make the walls between what goes on inside and outside the classroom much more permeable. All of us teachers coming from different cultural backgrounds shared a common academic background and a common goal and felt part of the world, part of humanity in general, because such teacher development courses are very much about finding out that we have far more in common than what divides us. Even though we originated from different cultures and have different ways of behaviour, we learned how to understand and negotiate those differences; in the end it is the basic human needs and desires that we share. On top of everything, such courses are a wonderful opportunity for professional cooperation, newly found friendships, in addition to being immensely satisfying professional experiences. Creating appropriate channels to share both personal and professional issues extends the in-service training experience and keeps people from different cultural backgrounds in contact – which is precious.

Not only did we learn about British culture and history and noted down our reflections in the reflective journal but we also critically analysed teaching strategies and discussed the ways they could be adapted to our teaching situations. To illustrate, since the intercultural approach we were exposed to would be extremely difficult to take anywhere but in the target culture itself, the classroom variants would have to be somewhat modified. Namely, each student in the L2 classroom could be given a fact about British culture and they could go round the class on a "fact-finding tour". This would not only enable them to learn the facts in question but would also encourage them to communicate about them, thus reinforcing the newly-acquired knowledge. The students could then report back to the class retelling some of the facts they have learnt in the course of their "tour". Students could also undertake research projects and explore an aspect of British culture but while doing so they should distance themselves from their cultural frame of reference and present it as if it were seen from the outsider's point of view. Furthermore, L2 learners could be asked to share their experiences in the foreign country and what they have learned from them. Also, teachers might share with learners their own intercultural experiences in the foreign country in an effort to lead them to an appreciation of L2 culture and make them think about their own culture. Teachers might also tell their students what they found fascinating or strange about the foreign culture(s), which might provide food for thought.

Fully equipped through first-hand experience teachers can more easily present cultural content and raise students' awareness of the existence of diverse cultural patterns, thereby stimulating their empathy to become predisposed to studying other cultures in later life. Cross-cultural teaching is most effective when teachers themselves have been through the experience first. There is a wide variety of techniques (some of which were mentioned throughout the paper) which can be employed to help students to encounter and understand the L2 culture, acquire and expand cultural features shared by the members of the target society. Authentic material – such as newspapers, magazines, realia or postcards, travelogues, souvenirs, old coins, photographs, magazine clippings of current events, songs, advertisements – can have an important function of bringing the world of the target culture into the language classroom.

All in all, language skills and intercultural competence should not be barriers to studying and working either abroad or in the country. There are many exchange programmes (such as Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig, etc.) developed for wider categories of people and integrated into vocational training as well as in academic education. Education and training curricula make the most of exchanges, partnerships and eTwinning with schools, colleges or universities in other countries. This acts as

a powerful incentive for learners to deepen and widen the knowledge of other languages, contribute to the mutual enrichment of nations and their better understanding, and consequently to support economic and social development.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, given that foreign languages have assumed a high position in the European curricula, that they are being taught at an increasingly early stage, and that students have a chance to learn at least two foreign languages during their compulsory education, much has been done to encourage a longer-term productive change and a more context-sensitive approach to intercultural foreign language pedagogy. This is of particular importance for young people for the following reason: language skills are the key to intercultural dialogue and it is essential to encourage intercultural dialogue among young people while they are developing their world view and acquiring skills and competences for their future. Encounters with other cultures only stimulate their curiosity and eagerness to fully connect with their peers from all over the world. Direct contact and experience with people of other languages and cultures in a positive and invigorating environment provide excellent opportunities to establish and foster intercultural communicative competence. ICC development is a lifelong process and one is never completely "interculturally competent", for there will always be new challenges to embrace. In order to interculturalize teachers' thinking and help them reshape their teaching practice it is necessary for teachers to experience intercultural encounters first hand, demonstrate intercultural competence themselves and promote its acquisition in its full sense. It is, therefore, of crucial importance to interculturalize foreign language education, pre-service and in-service teacher training alike.

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SUSRETI KULTURA U NASTAVI ENGLESKOG KAO STRANOG JEZIKA

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Zbog sve sve većeg povezivanja među narodima, kao i potrebe za pokretljivošću i konkurentnošću u akademskom svetu, višekulturno obrazovanje u svim segmentima postaje značajnije nego ikada. Nove tendencije su uslovile pojavu jednog novog pristupa nastavi jezika u okviru kojeg višekulturna svest i višejezičnost predstavljaju jezgro nastavnog plana i programa stranih jezika. Otuda profesionalno usavršavanje nastavnika ima stratešku ulogu u pripremanju evropskih obrazovnih sistema da prihvate izazove novonastalih promena i da osposobe studente da se efikasno izbore sa tim promenama. Rad će se, prema tome, baviti zahtevima jezičke nastave orijentisane ka kulturi, potom ulogama nastavnika stranog jezika u okviru nove paradigme, mogućnostima i prednostima lično doživljenog višekulturnog iskustva, kao i načinima razvijanja višekulturne svesti i kompetencije studenata, sve u cilju prihvatanja i poštovanja različitosti kao sredstva akademskog i ličnog razvoja.

Ključne reči: *pokretljivost, višejezičnost, višekulturnost, nastavni plan stranih jezika, profesionalno usavršavanje nastavnika, različitost*