# *Critical thinking in the intercultural context: Investigating EFL textbooks*

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## Abstract

The multicultural world has made intercultural teaching necessary. It should focus on students' ability to comprehend quickly and accurately, and then act appropriately and effectively in a culturally complex environment in order to achieve the desired goal. Intercultural competence is important for successful communication across cultures, and so is critical thinking since the two, if they are not "parallel" (Bennett, 2013), at least overlap (Deardorff, 2009). This article tries to shed light on the linkage between intercultural and critical thinking skills and reports on the findings of research done on whether and to what extent EFL textbooks used in Polish schools contribute to fostering critical thinking skills in students. The study analyzed the cultural content of 20 coursebooks to check whether they go beyond merely depicting the target culture, or various foreign cultures, and involve students in practicing critical thinking, that is, prompt them to explore intercultural encounters and processes, and scrutinize how diverse cultures influence their own understanding of reality. The research revealed an insignificant and limited capacity of the textbooks to develop students' critical thinking.

*Keywords*: critical thinking; intercultural competence; EFL textbooks

## 1. Introduction

While facing representatives of foreign cultures human beings often tend to appeal to stereotypes, prejudices and overgeneralizations, which yields a range of misunderstandings and impedes intercultural interactions. The critical thinking (CT) tradition recommends instructing individuals to use their mental abilities and entails self-improvement in thinking through introducing standards that help assess thinking so that eventually errors or blunders of thought are limited. Such an approach results from the assumption that humans possess the capacity for good reasoning which can be nurtured and developed. According to Paul (1992), "to think well is to impose discipline and restraint on our thinking – by means of intellectual standards – in order to raise our thinking to a level of 'perfection' or quality that is not natural or likely in undisciplined, spontaneous thought" (p. 2). Good critical thinkers are able to process and interpret the available data, make assumptions, monitor implications of their decisions, analyze various points of view and frames of references before making any assessment, and above all, to distinguish between reasoning and subjective reaction.

Since living abroad and travelling, and thus having contact with diverse cultures, are so commonplace nowadays, there is a need to constantly develop students' intercultural competence (ICC) in a foreign language (FL) classroom; equally important seems practicing systematic critical reflection because its micro-skills help solve problems in cross-cultural encounters. Therefore, teaching for CT should become a priority in education. This article tries to explore CT and its relationship with ICC and seeks to examine the potential of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) textbooks used in Poland for developing both CT and ICC.

## 2. Critical thinking defined

Dewey (1910) described critical thinking as an active process of purposeful reflection during which judgment is suspended. Building on his work, Ennis (1985) depicted it as "reflective and reasonable thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 45). The researcher claimed that CT comprises not only the two lower levels of Bloom's learning domains taxonomy (knowledge and comprehension), but also a significant portion of higher-order thinking: the top three levels (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). CT goes beyond recalling factual knowledge and concepts, and prompts individuals to reason and solve problems. It incorporates creative activities, such as formulating hypotheses, questioning and investigating, noticing similarities and differences, comparing and contrasting, finding alternatives, exploring viewpoints and drawing conclusions. In a similar vein, Hallett (1984) equated CT with the development of logical

reasoning abilities, whereas according to Scriven and Paul (2003, p. 2), it is a "disciplined process, not an end" and a "learned skill, methodical, thought out, not random." It "takes time, energy, skill and dedication" (Petress, 2004, p. 463).

Facione (2010) defined CT as the ability to reflect and withhold judgment before making a decision. In his opinion, CT, conceptualized as an intellectual ability "has a purpose (proving a point, interpreting what something means, solving a problem)" and "can be a collaborative, noncompetitive endeavor" (p. 4). Creative or innovative thinking "leads to new insights, novel approaches, fresh perspectives, and whole new ways of understanding and conceiving of things" (p. 14). The researcher asked an interdisciplinary panel of 46 scholars to conceptualize the cognitive and affective elements of CT. On the basis of their contributions, he identified six essential cognitive skills (analysis, interpretation, inference, evaluation, explanation, and self-regulation) and a set of dispositions conducive to practicing CT.

Analysis involves exploring relationships among statements, questions, concepts or descriptions used in the text. It helps distinguish components working together (parts and subparts) and their relationships (cause-effect, co-cause, co-effect or symbiosis). It includes examining ideas, detecting and analyzing arguments, asking quality questions which are helpful to specify, amplify, verify or validate, and questions designed to probe for more information, challenge and motivation (Petress, 2005). Finding the similarities and differences between two approaches to the solution of a given problem, comparing and contrasting them, or pointing to the main thesis in an article and identifying its supporting reasons exemplify analysis in practice (Facione, 2010). Interpretation allows "comprehending and expressing the meaning or significance of a range of experiences, situations, data, events, judgments, conventions, beliefs, rules, procedures, or criteria." It "includes the sub-skills of categorization, decoding significance, and clarifying meaning" (p. 5). As examples of interpretation, Facione mentions reading a person's intentions and emotions from facial expressions, distinguishing the main idea from subordinate ones in a text, paraphrasing someone's ideas, or clarifying what a sign or graph means. Inference helps identify elements needed to consider relevant information, form hypotheses and deduce the consequences. It involves subskills of questioning evidence, conjecturing alternatives and reaching conclusions by resorting to inductive or deductive reasoning. To illustrate inference, Facione (2010, p. 6) lists reflecting on the implications of the advocated position, synthesizing the related ideas into a coherent picture or developing options for addressing a particular problem. The skill of evaluation allows assessment of the credibility of a person's perception, experience, situation, judgment, belief or opinion and the logical inferential relationships among their representations. If we compare the strengths and weaknesses

of alternative interpretations, determine the credibility of a source of information or judge if the evidence provided supports the conclusion drawn, we engage in evaluation (p. 6). Explanation allows presenting the results of one's reasoning in a coherent and convincing way. This includes "stating and justifying that reasoning in terms of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, and contextual considerations upon which one's results were based" (p. 6). The researcher exemplifies explanation by the following activities: designing a graphic representation of the subordinate and superordinate relationship among concepts/ ideas or referring to the evidence on the basis of which the author's position on a particular issue has been accepted or rejected.

The sixth cognitive skill, self-regulation, helps an individual "look back at all dimensions of critical thinking and double check itself" Facione (2010, p. 7). The researcher calls it "metacognition," because it "raises thinking to another level" and is the key to responding correctly to the IC situations. By working together with the other five cognitive skills, self-regulation involves monitoring and correcting the interpretation offered, examining and correcting the inference made or reviewing and reformulating earlier explanation. Self-regulation helps an individual reconsider in an inner dialogue his/her assumptions, opinions, beliefs and initial judgments. When developed, it allows maintaining a high level of performance in stressful IC encounters. As examples, the scholar mentioned separating personal opinions concerning a text from those of the author, reconsidering one's own interpretation or judgment following further analysis of the facts, revising answers in view of the errors discovered in the previous analysis or changing the conclusion due to misjudging the importance of certain prior factors.

Except for the cognitive skills constitutive of CT, Facione (2010) elaborated on its affective domain and identified the dominant personal attributes characteristic of a critical thinker. They include:

> inquisitiveness with regard to a wide range of issues, concern to become and remain well-informed, alertness to opportunities to use critical thinking, trust in the process of reasoned inquiry, self-confidence in one's own abilities to reason, open-mindedness regarding divergent world views, flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions, understanding of the opinions of other people, fair-mindedness in appraising reasoning, honesty in facing one's own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, or egocentric tendencies, prudence in suspending, making or altering judgments, willingness to reconsider and revise views where honest reflection suggests that change is warranted. (p. 11)

CT requires integration with creative thinking. According to Paul (1992)

> it involves our working out afresh our own thinking on a subject, and because our own thinking is always a unique product of our self-structured experience, ideas, and

reasoning, it is intrinsically a new "creation," a new "making," a new set of cognitive and affective structures of some kind. (p. 4)

CT allows to make and shape ideas and experiences so that they may be used to structure and solve problems, frame decisions, and effectively communicate with others.

## 3. Critical thinking and intercultural competence

Deardorff (2009), one of the few researchers who analyzed the linkage between CT and ICC, maintains that ICC "promotes effective and appropriate decision-making, but within contexts that are culturally complex" (p. 479). By referring to decision-making which requires the application of CT, the author points in her definition indirectly to the relationship between CT and ICC. In addition, in her earlier research aimed at identifying the requisite skills and processes necessary for competent intercultural relations, Deardorff (2006) mentioned two of the six CT skills included in Facione's work: analysis and interpretation.[1]

Other CT skills she listed were: comparative thinking, cognitive flexibility and the ability to withhold judgment and relate. Since these three skills demand that an individual reflect on his/her own inferences and judgments, they exemplify self-regulation. Furthermore, Deardorff (2006, p. 254) mentioned attitudes conducive to competent IC communication, that is, respect, openness and curiosity, two of which are convergent with Facione's open-mindedness and curiosity, the components of the critical spirit.

Similarly, for Milton Bennett (2013), developed CT is an asset in IC encounters; he claims that the cognitive skills significant for CT and ICC overlap and are integral to effective cross-cultural communication. In his opinion, developing ICC "parallels the development of critical thinking" (p. 109). References to the skill can also be found in Janet Bennett's (2009) tripartite framework of ICC made up of *mindset* (knowledge), *skillset* (skills), and *heartset* (attitude) (p. 97).

The skillset (behavioral dimension) requires practicing such CT skills as analysis, interpretation, inference, empathy, active listening and information gathering. Bennett also includes within this skillset the ability to solve problems while building and maintaining relationships, which demands practicing all the CT skills identified by Facione (Miller & Tucker, 2015, p. 122). The scholar's heartset involves attributes of competent IC communicators, such as "curiosity, initiative, non-judgmentalness, open-mindedness and tolerance of ambiguity" (Bennett, 2009, p. 97). They align with Facione's critical spirit and foster effective self-regulation.

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[1] While referring to Facione's work, I refer to the book published in 2010. However, the scholar's earlier publications on CT appeared much earlier, in the 1990s. Hence, Deardorff was able to quote his research in 2006.

While discussing ICC, Stier (2006, pp. 6-7) emphasized its dynamic character and interactional context, claiming that it helps recognize cultural peculiarities, situational conditions and actors involved. Similarly to Bennett, he made a skill of coping with problems originating in IC encounters an important element of intrapersonal competencies constitutive of his ICC definition. Another component he mentioned is interpersonal competencies, which refer to interactive skills and help detect and accurately interpret variations in non-verbal cues, subtle signals and emotional responses, acquire verbal and non-verbal language, and suitable turn taking. Furthermore, they make the person more aware of his own interaction style and help him to respond appropriately depending on the context.

The scholar believes that IC education should foster CT, enabling students "to analyze intercultural encounters, processes and scrutinize culture-influences on one's view of the world" (Stier, 2006, p. 8). CT skills seem to be crucial in developing students' ability to grasp and critically analyze discursive biases in IC encounters or in public discourse and their own perceptions of reality. These skills help recognize the relative, non-transparent and contextual nature of cultural knowledge.

Stier's conviction about the importance of CT for developing ICC can be noticed in his definition of the concept. The researcher defines ICC as "the ability to reflect over, problematize, understand, learn from, cope emotionally with and operate efficiently in intercultural interaction-situations" (p. 9). Thus, the cognitive skills of analysis, interpretation, inference, evaluation, explanation and self-regulation, and the dispositions described earlier, seem to be helpful, if not indispensable, in gaining this multifaceted ability.

Analysis has been identified as a salient component of ICC by Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 269) in her four step O-D-I-S model. She claims that effective IC communicators should be aware of personal and cultural assumptions, cognitive complexity and the importance of frame-shifting when encountering the unfamiliar. They need to be able to mindfully withhold their subjective evaluations in such situations, the first natural reactions typical of human beings, and reverse the usual order of response by adopting special strategies. Before they effectively assess what other people are doing or saying to them, they should observe, describe, interpret and suspend judgment. Only then will they be able to engage appropriately. Careful observation (sharpened perception), followed by as objective description as possible (analysis) and avoiding speculations, guesses or value judgments, allows an individual to interpret (analyze) the situation or make educated guesses. The ability to describe and objectively analyze before making any assessment (suspending judgment) seems to be the foundation of IC communication; any subjective responses should wait until the stages

of description and interpretation (in the sense of analysis)[2] have been completed. Thus, CT skills are correlated with the components of the O-D-I-S model, which is presented in Table 1, and seem to play a very important role in it.

Table 1 Ting-Toomey's (1999) O-D-I-S model versus Facione's (2010) critical thinking skills

| Concept | The constituents of the concept | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| O-D-I-S model | Observe | Describe | Interpret | Suspend judgment |
| CT skills | Self-regulation | Analysis, self-regulation | Analysis, explanation, interpretation, inference, self-regulation | Self-regulation |

The above discussion shows that CT and IC skills overlap. Thus, students in a FL classroom which aims at developing their ICC should be engaged in using CT on a regular basis, since CT "entails effective communication and problem solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism" (Paul & Elder, 2006, p.4). Competent critical thinkers approach IC encounters well equipped to reduce bias, partiality and prejudices which impede such contacts, and, thus, their chances for successful cross-cultural interactions are high.

Although some researchers (Miller & Tucker, 2015) analyzed the contribution of using CT skills to students' ICC development, no study was undertaken to analyze the relationship between the two concepts in EFL textbooks. The current article is an attempt to fill in this research gap.

## 4. Research: Rationale, aim and methodology

The present research stemmed from the author's interest in adapting and implementing IC teaching and learning to the Polish context, where the majority of student population is homogenous ethnically and had gone through a largely mono-cultural socialization. Few cultural minorities live in the country, and teachers are mostly Polish graduates of local English departments. Consequently,

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[2] Ting-Toomey's (1999) model derives from DIE exercises (describe, interpret, evaluate), introduced in the mid-1970s by Janet and Milton Bennett to IC training at the University of Minnesota. In 2008 the DAE version of this exercise was offered: Interpretation was replaced with analysis since the word *interpret* in ordinary language usage is perceived as a synonym of *evaluation* and is associated with subjective reactions including judgment. *Analysis* as the word used in the context of science, math and other problem-solving endeavors seems to be more adequate (Nam & Condon, 2010). There are also other, similar tools, for example, OSEE (observe, state, explore and evaluate) (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012).

students do not have much access to cultural worldviews different from those of their own, both in the classroom and outside it, and cannot experience the difference between their own perception and that of people from other cultural backgrounds. In such a situation, education authorities should recognize the importance of incorporating into FL curricula content enabling students to see the world beyond their own limited experience and increase their capacity to engage in unfamiliar situations with representatives of diverse cultures. It is in the FL classroom that students should attain the ability to put together, and thus experience cultural differences as preparation for IC communication. Since, as was shown earlier in the article, there is a linkage between ICC and CT, appropriate IC content of textbooks, together with exercises designed to develop students' CT may, to a certain degree, make up for the lack of direct contact with multicultural classmates or teachers from different cultures.

The study aimed at investigating the cultural sections of ELT textbooks used in Polish high schools and checking whether their contents bring CT language explicitly and systematically into the classroom, and encourage discipline and restraint in students' thinking, thus stimulating their development in this area. The research was meant to answer the following specific questions concerning students' engagement in critical reflection on the presented culture material, namely, whether, and to what extent the examined textbooks prompt learners to:

1. reason things out on the basis of evidence and good reasons, that is, analyze and interpret cultural input in the presented artifacts, with their constituencies, patterns and relationships among them;
2. ask questions eliciting in-depth cultural background of the presented content and then, by means of inferencing, formulate appropriate explanations and evaluations;
3. challenge cultural biases, prejudices and stereotypes and thus practice self-regulation and control over the affective domain.

Most of the examined books have a separate section devoted to teaching culture through presenting and exploring diverse cultures (except for the *New English File* series and *Oxford Matura Trainer*, where whole books had to be examined). The research focused on the textbooks used in Poland since it was part of a larger project which attempted to assess whether ICC was developed in FL classrooms in the Polish context.[3]

A content analysis of 20 EFL textbooks, all of which are listed in the appendix, was carried out in the summer of 2015. Six titles targeted at high school

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[3] The findings of the previous studies were published in Sobkowiak (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b).

students aged 15 to 18 were examined: *Oxford Matura Trainer* (two levels), *New Matura Explorer* (four levels), *Matura Prime Time Plus* (four books), *New English File* (four levels), *Matura Solutions* (four books) and *Framework* (two levels). Most of the textbooks (except *New English File*) have a seal of approval granted by the Polish Ministry of Education and are recommended for use in Polish FL classrooms, so they can be considered as constituting a representative sample.

The books were selected at random. A mixed-methods approach of quantitative and qualitative research was applied. First, following a thorough review of the literature on IC learning and teaching, as well as on CT (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2005; Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Byram, 1997; Byram & Fleming, 2000; Corbett, 2003; Facione, 2010; Houghton, 2012; Kohls & Knight, 1994; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Sercu, 2000), a list of ten most typical IC task-types was compiled. These activities were considered to have potential for developing both students' ICC and CT, namely engaging them in analyzing, interpreting, inferencing, evaluating, explaining and self-regulating. Second, to increase the validity of the study, the list was checked by two experts who confirmed the activities' capacity to develop both ICC and CT.

In the quantitative part of the study, all the textbooks were examined in search of the identified activities. A reading passage oriented towards a specific cultural issue with a set of exercises which accompanied it (i.e., a reading comprehension exercise, a vocabulary exercise, and a listening passage with a follow-up comprehension exercise) was treated as one example of an activity aiming at exploring culture and simultaneously practicing CT (one item in the tables in the results section). A separate, single task designed for learners to write a short passage, preceded by their individual searches of the available sources, was also considered as one activity (one item in the tables).

The main concern was to count the frequency of the exercises fostering students' CT in the analyzed textbooks. To increase the reliability of the results, the sample was double-checked for the presence of such tasks. Data collection and their analysis were conducted by the present author. All the books were considered separately to facilitate the identification of the ones with the highest numbers of the singled out tasks.[4]

At the qualitative stage of the study, the cultural input in the sample was analyzed, that is, all the texts with the accompanying exercises and the context in which they appeared. This was done to consider the nature of cultural presentations and their contexts, and assess their potential for nurturing students' CT skills.

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[4] The same data were used to analyze the potential of EFL textbooks for developing students' ICC in Sobkowiak (2015b).

## 5. Results and discussion

Very few tasks identified for the purpose of the study are firmly grounded in the framework of constructivist pedagogy, which is conducive to nurturing students' CT and assumes that learning emerges through a process of purposeful reflection and dialogue. In the sample, there is a scarcity of authentic, open-ended, real-world tasks with a large capacity not only to develop different IC competencies but also to help students practice a range of CT skills in classroom discussion, debates and other knowledge-building interactions. Students are not confronted with problems to solve, and if there is no problem, there is no point in thinking critically. Images of culture are not approached critically, that is, learners are not encouraged to consider why culture is presented in a particular way, or what alternative presentations would be possible. They are not prompted to support the presented judgment with reason and evidence or consider possible criteria on which to base this judgment. Nor are they asked to make sound inferences and analogies, or find and analyze correlations between the images presented in the textbook and their own perceptions and experiences.

Questions such as: "Is the author's thinking about the world justified from our perspective?," "How does he/she justify it from his/her point of view?," or "How can we enter his/her worldview to appreciate what he/she has to say" do not appear in the sample. Consequently, students have no opportunities to reconstruct (translate) the logic of the writer of the text they are reading into the logic of their own thinking and experience. Only such disciplined intellectual work "would result in a new creation – the writer's thinking for the first time could exist within the reader's mind" (Paul, 1992, p. 5).

Furthermore, no section was found in the sample with explanations regarding how the principles of CT can be applied to any IC exercise, especially to the task of making decisions in culturally complex situations. This lack of intellectual standards by which one could appropriately assess his or her thinking makes it impossible to move from the superficial to the substantial in fostering quality CT. Besides, without students' prior exposure to a particular foreign culture, such guidelines seem requisite for the successful completion of the activity.

Table 2 lists IC activities that provide ample opportunities for using CT and specifies which sub-skills are activated while performing them. Those exercises encourage students to analyze, advocate and criticize ideas, to reason inductively and deductively, and prompt them to reach conclusions based on sound inferences drawn from the material provided, which results in the development of their ability to distinguish facts from judgment and belief from knowledge. The rubric was created by the present author and used to assess the potential of the examined textbooks for fostering CT in students. The tick in the table (✓)

indicates that a particular activity has been classified as having such potential. The distribution of IC activities stimulating CT in the sample is shown in Tables 3-8.

## Table 2 IC exercises fostering critical thinking skills

| Exercise type | Skill/disposition practiced | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Analyzing | Interpreting | Explaining | Inferencing | Evaluating | Self-regulation | Open-mindedness | Reducing one's biases, prejudices and egocentrism | Suspending judgment |
| Exploring foreign cultures | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Exloring learners' culture | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Contrasting/comparing cultures | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ethnographic project | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Critical incident | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Developing socio-cultural pragmatic abilities | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Reflecting on values, assumptions and beliefs | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Exploring non-verbal communication | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Conflict mediation | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

## Table 3 Distribution of IC exercises fostering CT in *New Matura Explorer*

| Exercise type | Level | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Elementary | Pre-intermediate | Intermediate | Upper-intermediate |
| Exploring foreign cultures | 4 | - | 5 | 8 |
| Exploring learner's culture | 1 | 6 | 2 | 7 |
| Contrasting and comparing cultures | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Ethnographic project | - | - | - | - |
| Critical incident | - | - | - | - |
| Developing learners' socio-cultural pragmatic abilities | - | - | - | - |
| Reflecting on values, attitudes and beliefs | - | - | - | 5 |
| Exploring non-verbal communication | - | - | - | - |
| Interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| Conflict mediation | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 7 | 7 | 8 | 23 |

## Table 4 Distribution of IC exercises fostering CT in *New Matura Solution*s

| Exercise type | Level | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Elementary | Pre-intermediate | Intermediate | Upper-intermediate |
| Exploring foreign cultures | 11 | 13 | 8 | 4 |
| Exploring learner's culture | 4 | 4 | 1 | - |
| Contrasting and comparing cultures | - | 2 | - | - |
| Ethnographic project | - | - | - | - |
| Critical incident | - | - | - | - |
| Developing learners' socio-cultural pragmatic abilities | - | - | - | - |
| Reflecting on values, attitudes and beliefs | - | - | 2 | - |
| Exploring non-verbal communication | - | 1 | - | - |
| Interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations | - | - | - | - |
| Conflict mediation | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 15 | 20 | 11 | 4 |

## Table 5 Distribution of IC exercises fostering CT in *Matura Prime Time Plus*

| Exercise type | Level | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Elementary | Pre-intermediate | Intermediate | Upper-intermediate |
| Exploring foreign cultures | 3 | 8 | 2 | 4 |
| Exploring learner's culture | 5 | 12 | 2 | 4 |
| Contrasting and comparing cultures | 6 | 2 | 3 | - |
| Ethnographic project | - | - | - | - |
| Critical incident | - | - | - | - |
| Developing learners' socio-cultural pragmatic abilities | - | - | - | - |
| Reflecting on values, attitudes and beliefs | 1 | - | - | - |
| Exploring non-verbal communication | 1 | - | - | - |
| Interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations | 1 | - | - | - |
| Conflict mediation | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 17 | 22 | 7 | 8 |

## Table 6 Distribution of IC exercises fostering IC in *New English File*

| Exercise type | Level | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Elementary | Pre-intermediate | Intermediate | Upper-intermediate |
| Exploring foreign cultures | 5 | 2 | - | 2 |
| Exploring learner's culture | - | - | - | - |
| Contrasting and comparing cultures | - | - | 2 | - |
| Ethnographic project | - | - | - | - |
| Critical incident | - | - | - | - |
| Developing learners' socio-cultural pragmatic abilities | - | - | - | - |
| Reflecting on values, attitudes and beliefs | - | - | - | 2 |
| Exploring non-verbal communication | - | - | - | - |
| Interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Conflict mediation | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 5 | 2 | 3 | 5 |

## Table 7 Distribution of IC exercises fostering CT in *Framework* and *Oxford Matura Trainer*

| Exercise type | Level | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Framework (Elementary) | Framework (Pre-intermediate) | Oxford Matura Trainer (Basic level) | Oxford Matura Trainer (Advanced level) |
| Exploring foreign cultures | 10 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Exploring learner's culture | 1 | - | 1 | 1 |
| Contrasting and comparing cultures | - | - | 1 | - |
| Ethnographic project | - | - | - | - |
| Critical incident | - | - | - | - |
| Developing learners' socio-cultural pragmatic abilities | - | - | - | - |
| Reflecting on values, attitudes and beliefs | - | 1 | - | - |
| Exploring non-verbal communication | - | - | - | - |
| Interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations | - | - | - | - |
| Conflict mediation | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 11 | 6 | 3 | 4 |

Table 8 The overall distribution of IC exercises fostering CT in the investigated textbooks

| Exercise type | No. |
| --- | --- |
| Exploring foreign cultures | 98 |
| Exploring learner's culture | 51 |
| Contrasting and comparing cultures | 21 |
| Ethnographic project | - |
| Critical incident | - |
| Developing learners' socio-cultural pragmatic abilities | - |
| Reflecting on values, attitudes and beliefs | 11 |
| Exploring non-verbal communication | 2 |
| Interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations | 5 |
| Conflict mediation | - |
| Total | 188 |

Albeit exploring foreign cultures prevails in the sample (98 items/activities), in two textbooks not a single example of such an exercise has been found (*New Matura Explorer. Pre-intermediate*, *New English File. Intermediate*). The distribution of this activity type in the analyzed textbooks ranges from 1 to 13. However, no textbook contains ethnographic projects, which could provide students with unrivalled opportunities to investigate and analyze cultures, interpret and explain their findings, and exercise the meta-cognitive ability to self-regulate, a "heartset" skill common to CT.

In most cases, cultures are presented and treated in isolation, and explored implicitly: Learners are expected to read a text on a specific aspect of a foreign culture and do the accompanying exercises focusing on a comprehension check or vocabulary practice. Students are not expected to explore anything on their own, nor are they required to perform any tasks involving observation, analysis or assessment of (a) foreign culture(s). They do not have much chance to practice CT and, thus, realize that cultural diversity with its own internal validity and value is a norm, and any culture is multi-dimensional. Consequently, exposed to a body of factual knowledge about a particular country, the learners, positioned as external observers of cultural facts and deprived of the opportunities to interpret cultural practices considered relevant to increase their capacity to communicate in IC situations, passively consume the information about iconic figures, natural wonders, prominent architecture, regional food, and so on.

A considerable number of the exercises activate only lower-order learning and thinking, focus more on recall than reasoning and do not engage students in genuine intellectual work. They seem to be very superficial, and kill students' curiosity and the desire to question deeply; if we want to generate curiosity, the exercises must evolve into disciplined inquiry and reflection. In other words, every answer should generate more questions. This was not observed in the analyzed sample. Some chapters of the examined books have end quizzes of a multiple choice type that require only rote-learning. Although exercises refer learners

to their culture, they are not vehicles of in-depth exploration. Consequently, they give students a rationale for using the cognitive skills described earlier to a very limited extent.

For example, while exploring famous artists Pablo Picasso and Vincent Van Gogh (*New Matura Solutions. Elementary*), students are asked to write a short text about another artist, writer or musician. This will involve searching for information in various sources. However, in the book, this is not preceded by any discussion of the factors that have made both artists famous, how the perception of fame has changed over the years, and what it looks like across cultures. Such an approach excludes practicing self-regulation since the first prerequisite to using it is the awareness of cultural assumptions made by everyone arising from cultural backgrounds. Only after students realize that cultural conditioning leads people to viewing situations in a predetermined way and that their reactions are typical of the ones considered appropriate in their native culture will they habitually stay alert to cultural differences and check their own understanding of cross-cultural encounters. Since self-regulation helps double check earlier explanations, interpretations, inferences and evaluations, it is an extremely useful tool in reformulating initial judgments. Without such prior coverage, students' compositions will focus on presenting factual information, and little learning for both CT and ICC will take place in the process of completing the task.

The second most common IC activities nurturing CT in the sample stimulate learners to explore their own culture (51 items). Their distribution ranges from one to 12. However, in as many as six books such exercises do not appear at all (30% of the sample). In only four books do students have an opportunity to explore their native culture five times or more (20%). This reveals that even if there are activities referring students to their own culture, they do not work on this frequently enough, nor on a regular basis, so students' chances to exercise CT, together with proper affective attitudes towards otherness, and be released from the confinements of ethnocentrism, are very limited.

Not a single exercise promotes looking at well-known Polish culture practices from a different perspective than the Polish one. Learners are not invited to look afresh at their home culture nor to view themselves as others might see them. Naturally, people do not observe others from any other viewpoint than that determined by their own cultural conditioning and, thus, do not exercise "detaching themselves from their usual behaviors and mindsets and standing back and gaining a different perspective," so students should be made aware of it in a FL classroom. This would help them communicate appropriately and effectively with foreigners in the future (Kohls & Knight, 1994, p. 66).

The third most frequent activities uncovered in the analyzed textbooks prompt learners to compare and contrast cultures (21 recordings). Such activities

help correct the inferences made earlier, and help review and reformulate former explanations. They prompt students to reconsider their assumptions, opinions, beliefs and initial judgments. They are also conducive to developing the affective domain, especially open-mindedness regarding divergent worldviews and flexibility in considering alternatives and opinions. Their distribution in the sample ranges from one to six. However, in as many as 10 textbooks, such tasks have not been found at all (50% of the sample). Cultural comparisons introduce students to different cultural practices and help them relativize their own cultural practices. However, to achieve this, students have to activate a range of CT micro-skills, which were not found in the examined coursebooks.

Critical incidents (situation judgments) present students with a real-life ambiguous conflict provoked by differences in cultural values and behaviors, and encourage them to use CT skills to analyze the situation, reflect on it, form hypotheses, find cause and effect, clarify meanings, explain the reasons for miscommunication, and, by deducing the consequences (reaching conclusions by resorting to inductive and deductive reasoning), make appropriate decisions that would settle the conflict. By providing access to meaningful content, such real-life scenarios can help students understand abstract concepts better and enable them to embrace multiple perspectives. Critical incidents are useful in probing the cultural assumptions people make in interactions with foreigners and allow for providing alternative interpretations. Not only do they sensitize learners to cultural differences and develop their IC sensitivity and competence, but they also contribute to fostering CT. Yet no critical incidents have been found in the analyzed textbooks.

The cultural input of the examined books does not give students much access to reflecting on their own values, attitudes and beliefs, nor on the ones of strangers (11 times). The distribution of this exercise category in the sample ranges from one to five. However, in 15 of the books, such tasks do not appear at all (75% of the sample). It is their huge disadvantage since such exercises provide opportunities to monitor and correct one's interpretations and reconsider assumptions, opinions, beliefs and initial judgments.

The frequency of another IC activity type promoting CT, namely interpreting visual and verbal cultural representations, is even smaller: In the whole sample there are only five examples. Such exercises, which involve students mainly in clarifying meaning and asking questions designed to probe for more information, were found in only five books (25% of the sample) and only once in each. This shows that the examined textbooks will not prepare students to analyze how messages are constructed or to explain, interpret and understand them across cultures.

Non-verbal communication is practiced in the sample even less frequently. In fact, two examples are included only in two textbooks; that is, in the

majority of the sample (90%) nothing is done to make students aware of the differences in this area of IC communication. No exercises designed to work on students' socio-cultural pragmatic competence have been found in the sample, either. Activities designed to activate this domain prompt students to verify and validate their assumptions, decode significance and clarify meaning. If learners are to produce situationally appropriate utterances, they have to be able to determine what can be said, to whom, and where, when and how. Such practice in a FL classroom is extremely important since how we do it in our native language is a powerful influence working against the appropriate use of a FL.

## 6. Conclusion and implications for future research

The literature review has uncovered that CT skills help learners develop ICC and contribute to more appropriate and effective communication across cultures. Thus, developing knowledge of other cultures and communicative practices in a FL classroom has to parallel fostering the ability to critically reflect on and adapt knowledge by means of reasoning. However, CT is not a hallmark of the investigated textbooks, and their capacity to develop students' CT is very low. The study revealed that their cultural contents do not involve many activities which promote students' purposeful reflection: Out of 10 activity types identified as fundamental for fostering CT, four were not found in the sample at all. Although the coursebooks provide some opportunities to explore foreign cultures, and contrast and compare them, which requires reasoning, they do it very superficially and mostly indirectly, merely by providing texts for reading.

The examined material does not stimulate students to go beyond appraisals of the presented culture material and pursue alternative interpretations. Neither the questions nor the activities accompanying the texts allow learners to think more deeply, or analyze their feelings, interpretations and responses. The exercises with the highest potential for nurturing CT, that is, ethnographic projects and critical incidents, were not found in the sample at all. Students seem to be expected to be passive recipients of the information presented in the textbooks rather than active learners: The activities included in them do not require meaningful participation from students, nor do they prompt them to inquire or react in various ways to the input provided.

No explicit or systematic framework for CT was found in the sample. In a similar vein, students are not encouraged to take the ownership of their thoughts: In the books, there are no stimuli to question the presented content, find alternative solutions or recognize one's limitations regarding exploring different viewpoints, making conjectures and drawing conclusions. Very limited opportunities to practice CT will not be conducive to developing open-mindedness

toward cultural diversity, mindfulness or respect for otherness, the pillars of cross-cultural understanding. Neither this lack of teaching for CT will contribute to reducing students' biases, prejudices and egocentrism, nor to challenging stereotypes deeply ingrained in them concerning particular cultures and their communities, which will constitute serious impediments to an effective IC dialogue.

The study demonstrated that FL textbooks need refurbishing. In particular, more CT language and open-ended questions should be included so as to encourage the development of independent cognitive and reasoning skills in their users. A considerable effort has to be made to assure that CT is taught through coursebooks so that they promote more opportunities for student-centered discovery that promotes reasoned discourse. It has to be remembered that active involvement in classroom activities does not equate with learning CT; what matters is not that students are merely engaged, but how they are engaged.

The present study is characterized by some constraints which should be addressed since they provide agenda for future research. The findings obtained provide a crude picture of fostering CT in the sample. To help validate the current analysis, a more detailed qualitative investigation of the textbook content should be undertaken. It will increase the credibility of interpretations and provide a more reliable answer to the research questions. Furthermore, observations of classes where the investigated textbooks are used and interviews with both students and teachers using them would help determine more reliably whether and to what extent CT is practiced at school (textbook content can be a springboard to teaching for CT if it is wisely complemented by the teacher).

As for the future research agenda, it would be justifiable to explore the available FL syllabi and check whether they contain explicit and systematic frameworks for CT teaching. Furthermore, the analysis of FL teacher training programs (both pre- and in-service) would demonstrate whether they include separate modules designed to instruct teachers how to reconcile content coverage with fostering of CT. Since the current study analyzed CT in an IC context, it would also be useful to measure whether and to what extent students' performance in IC interactions changes over a period of exposure to CT instruction. The results could provide arguments for convincing educational authorities to emphasize teaching for CT.

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## APPENDIX

### Investigated textbooks

Dooley, J., & Evans, V. (2014a). *Matura prime time plus. Elementary.* Newbury: Express.

Dooley, J., &Evans, V. (2014b). *Matura prime time plus. Pre-intermediate.* Newbury: Express.

Dooley, J., & Evans, V. (2014c). *Matura prime time plus. Intermediate.* Newbury: Express.

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Falla, T., & Davies, P. A. (2011a). *New Matura solutions. Elementary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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