CHAPTER FOUR

REFLECTING ON TEACHING “CULTURE” IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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1 A difficult task

Teaching “culture” in foreign language education has a long history in European and North American foreign language teaching (Stern 1983) but has changed in many ways in recent years. Broadly speaking the move has been away from a sole emphasis on knowledge of another culture associated with the language being taught – often assumed that there was only one and that it was homogeneous: “the” culture of the dominant country associated with the language (French and France, Spain and Spanish etc). Knowledge is now complemented by skills and attitudes, and the concept of competence is introduced. Indeed knowledge is in some respects less important than other elements of the competence to be taught, and the task has become more complex. Teaching has become more demanding as pedagogy attempts to include the affective and the behavioural as well as the cognitive. It was never easy however, even when focused only on knowledge because the “body of knowledge” which might be taught is very large and almost indefinable.

It is not surprising then that teachers with many years of experience often say that they do not feel “qualified” to teach “culture” because they do not know enough about a certain country and have no or very little experience of it. This is particularly the case for English because EFL teachers are to be found throughout the world and the vast majority have never visited an English-speaking country. Leaving aside for a moment what “being qualified” might mean and how “culture” might be defined, it is not surprising that teachers in pre-service training or in the early stages of their career may feel even less confident. The EPOSTL thus has the potential to help teachers reflect on what they might mean by “being
qualified” and on what it is they wish to teach – what they might mean by “culture” – and therefore by “teaching culture”.

My purpose in this chapter is to analyse to what extent the EPOSTL contains the factors which would stimulate appropriate reflection. In order to do so, I will discuss the competences which need to be taught and the pedagogic and cultural competences – the “qualification” – which teachers themselves might need in order to teach. I will then consider if and how the EPOSTL focuses on these two dimensions of teaching what I will henceforth call the “cultural dimension” in foreign language teaching and learning.

2 Models of competence

Models have a variety of purposes and kinds (Byram 2009), one of which is to present the essence of a phenomenon, often in a number of elements distilled from it and separated out so that they can be more easily perceived and understood. An architect’s model presented to the public to show how a building will eventually look in its setting is an example. A model of this kind inevitably and deliberately reduces the full complexity and omits some aspects of the phenomenon which are not essential. It contrasts with the kind of model which reproduces the whole phenomenon, in a small or larger format, as do for example models of ships or trains produced by enthusiasts.

Models of competence in culture are of the first kind. The elimination of some complexities and the separation of elements from each other are particularly useful for pedagogy; objectives for teaching and learning can be produced and staged to make the learning process easier. It is possible to concentrate on some elements more than others depending on learners’ needs and on particular learning conditions, which is of course common to all kinds of teaching and learning, not just foreign language education. Teachers can in other words be systematic in the cultural dimension with the help of a pedagogic model as they are in the linguistic dimension with the use of pedagogic grammars.

The need for a systematic approach is self-evident in principle but when teachers have little training in the cultural dimension as has been shown by surveys (Byram and Risager, 1999; Sercu et al., 2005) their practice is often haphazard if well-meaning, as empirical research can show (Byram, Esarte Sarries and Taylor 1991; Göbels, 2009).

Various models exist which can provide a starting point for planning teaching. In a wide-ranging review Chen (2009) provides a useful categorisation and summary – see appendix 1 – and makes a distinction...
between models which are “designed for the purpose of acculturation, which are mostly useful for sojourners, immigrants, or business purposes, and models that are useful for teachers” (ibid.: 49). In a more limited survey, without the distinction Chen makes, O’Regan and MacDonald (2007) analyse seven models of intercultural competence and find the following common features:

1. Tolerance for ambiguity (ability to deal with uncertainty)
2. Behavioural flexibility (ability to adapt behaviour)
3. Communicative awareness (ability to use effective and “relevant” communication strategies)
4. Knowledge discovery (openness to other cultures)
5. Respect for otherness (acceptance of the non-universality of cultural values)
6. Empathy (ability to see the other point of view)

What is noticeable here is that there is a combination of psychological traits with skills and attitudes. These are not readily formulated as teaching aims and objectives and Chen’s distinction is important and leads us to another recent survey.

In New Zealand, developments in the curriculum are focusing on “Intercultural communicative language teaching and learning (iCLT)” and after their review of research into the effectiveness of language teaching of different kinds in developing intercultural competence Newton and Shearn (2009: 59) propose six principles for iCLT, namely that it:

- integrates language and culture from the beginning
- engages learners in genuine social interaction
- encourages and develops an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language
- fosters explicit comparisons and connections between languages and cultures
- acknowledges and responds appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts
- emphasises intercultural competence rather than native-speaker competence.

These principles they relate to the model produced by Byram (1997) and cite this author as a means of summarising the aims of such teaching:
• The acquisition of the linguistic and cultural skills of intercultural communication;
• The development of an aptitude for critical thinking, questioning and challenging assumptions;
• A change from exclusive identification with familiar communities and in particular, the nation state and national identity, to inclusive identification with others with related interests in other societies; the acquisition of new international identities, which complement national and local identities.

(Byram 2006b, pp.17-18, cited in Newton and Shearn, 2009: 72-73)

The New Zealand approach thus focuses on a model of intercultural competence designed for developing teaching objectives by this author (Byram, 1997). Although, as Chen points out, the model has been criticised – not least for the matter of whether it is viable in other education systems than those of Europe and North America – in Germany too, the model has been used as a basis for discussing national standards.

There is some justification therefore for using this model together with the six New Zealand principles as a basis for analysing if and how the EPOSTL helps teachers to reflect on the processes they are engaging in while teaching, and the aims they are setting themselves. Before doing so however we need to address the issue of “being qualified” raised earlier since this is logically prior to a discussion of teaching methods and aims.

3 Am I qualified?

It is perhaps self-evident that “being qualified” to teach the linguistic dimension pre-supposes knowledge and skill in the language in question of an advanced kind, although in some cases being advanced may mean no more than having (a little) more skill and knowledge than learners, because no other options are possible. It was long assumed that the teacher must model him/herself on the native speaker, where in this case “modelling” implies an imitation of the phenomenon in all its complexity. This notion has now been critically analysed and found wanting even if the native speaker still has a role as a necessary ideal (Davies, 2003). Whether this model or some notion of “native speaker-like competence” is used, most teachers have studied the language and the grammar of the language they are to teach during advanced studies and it is therefore seldom discussed whether they are “qualified” to teach the linguistic dimension.
Things are different for the cultural dimension. The question of the native speaker as a model for the cultural dimension has not been addressed in the same way and in the same depth, and teachers often seem to assume that the native speaker is an appropriate model for teaching and learning the cultural dimension too. However, unlike the linguistic dimension, there is no reason to take the native speaker as a model, not even as a necessary ideal. There are in fact good reasons to take another model, that of the “intercultural speaker” (Byram and Zarate, Kramsch, 1998; Byram, 2008). Secondly, advanced studies – unlike the focus on the linguistic dimension – do not necessarily address the question of “qualifying” learners as intercultural speakers. There may be study of cultural matters, together with social, economic and/or historical, as well as the more traditional study of literature written in the language. This is not enough for advanced learners whether as future teachers or in some other capacity; advanced students of language also need intercultural competences.

We have seen there are different models which could be the basis for designing advanced studies in general but it is not appropriate here to discuss which might be more appropriate. For future teachers the same model is appropriate as the one which they will be using to design and teach courses and lessons.

4 The EPOSTL

We are now in a position to summarise the elements which the EPOSTL might help teachers to reflect on:

- the component competences of intercultural competence as defined in Byram (1997), or some alternative pedagogical model, used in two ways:
  - to reflect on the degree to which they have these themselves
  - to reflect on which competences (and to what extent) are appropriate for the learners and the contexts in which they are teaching
- the aims for foreign language education they seek to realise through this teaching of competences
- the principles of the teaching process which will help them to achieve these aims.

“Culture” is explicitly introduced in several places in the EPOSTL: under Methodology”, “Lesson Content”, “Conducting a Lesson”, “the Role of
the Language Teacher”, and “Assessment”. In some places there is reference to development of learners’ “socio-cultural competence” and in others to their “intercultural awareness”. It is not obvious whether there is a significant difference between “socio-cultural” and “intercultural” or, if so, what the relationship between them might be.

There is not either any attempt to give an explicit definition of “culture” even though this is a sub-heading, although there are indications of the implicit meaning in the text. For example in Methodology, G. Culture, 1, we find:

_I can evaluate and select a variety of texts, source materials and activities which awaken learners’ interest in and help them to develop their knowledge and understanding of their own and the other language culture (cultural facts, events, attitudes and identity etc.)._ 

Culture is here seen as “facts, events, attitudes and identity” but also as “etc”, and this open-ended list of rather disparate phenomena might leave the user of the EPOSTL confused. They might benefit from some further discussion with others, as the authors often say is the purpose, but the list does not mention for example behaviours and values, although “norms of behaviour” and “different value systems” are mentioned in following points in the same section.

An analysis of the verbs used shows that learners should “develop knowledge and understanding”, “understand different value systems”, “explore the culture of target language communities”. Teachers should “make learners aware” of similarities and differences of “norms of behaviour”, “stereotyped views” and “the interrelationship between culture and language”. In addition, teachers should “make learners … challenge” stereotyped views. Thus the model of competence implicit here includes knowing, exploring, challenging and being aware. The latter could be replaced by “know about” and therefore might be assimilated to this, leaving three key verbs as indicators: “know”, “explore” and “challenge”. Furthermore, in the discussion of assessment, the competence of knowing (about) is mentioned but there is no clear relationship of the other elements (“explore” and “challenge”) with what is assessed. On the other hand new elements are introduced: the ability to “make comparisons” and “to respond and act appropriately”. There is then some disjuncture between the model implied for teaching and that which is implicit in the assessment, but we now have five key elements: know, explore, challenge, compare and respond and act.
Comparison with the model in Byram (1997) shows that there is some correspondence to all the elements including “critical cultural awareness” (savoir s’engager) in the notion of “challenge”.

This can be summarised by a table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Savoir - element of intercultural competence</th>
<th>Keywords and phrases in the EPOSTL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong> (savoirs): of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction</td>
<td>G 1 To develop their knowledge and understanding of their own and the other language culture (cultural facts, events, attitudes and identity etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills of interpreting and relating</strong> (savoir comprendre): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own</td>
<td>G 3 make learners aware of similarities and differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills of discovery and interaction</strong> (savoir apprendre/FAIRE): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction</td>
<td>G 2 To explore the culture of target language communities out of class (Internet, emails etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong> (savoir être): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own.</td>
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| **Critical cultural awareness** (savoir s’engager): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries | G 5 to reflect on the concept of “otherness” and understand different value systems.  
G 6 to make the learners aware of stereotyped views and challenge these. |

There is no obvious element which corresponds to “savoir être” although the statement G 7 “enhance the learners’ intercultural awareness” might have some place here. There is, too, in the notion of challenging stereotypes an implicit “savoir être” although this would have been much
strengthened if there had been reference to the question of prejudice and not only stereotype (Vivian and Brown 1995; Pickering 2001).

What is missing in particular in “savoir s’engager” is the question of learners becoming aware of their own values system as a basis for making judgements. Indeed, the formulation of the EPOSTL which refers to the need for learners to “understand different value systems” might well imply a values relativism although this is not entirely clear. It is important to distinguish between the ability to “understand” someone else’s values, beliefs and behaviours in the sense of putting themselves in the place of the other and acknowledging the rationale inherent in a system of values and the behaviours which follow from them. For example, the treatment of the mentally ill or the use of the death penalty in some societies can be “defended” within a particular set of values. On the other hand to understand is not to condone that system of values for it can be argued that it is not within the bounds of being human, as many individuals living in the societies in question will agree; such behaviours and values are contested and challenged from a perspective of universal humanity. This is the position taken in Byram (1997) and explained in more detail in Byram (2008).

If we turn to the sections on the EPOSTL which deal with “lesson content” under lesson planning and conducting a lesson, the only mention of culture is with respect to activities which “emphasise the interdependence of language and culture” and to relating what is being taught to “current events in local and international contexts”, the latter perhaps referring to one aspect of the implicit definition we found earlier. There is unfortunately no reference to how to introduce into lessons the other elements mentioned above, for example making learners aware of stereotyped views and challenging them, or reflecting on other value systems. Surprisingly, given the long history of teaching “knowing about” other cultures, there is little on planning and conducting lessons with a knowledge content. The reference to events is not complemented by reference to matters of “cultural facts” or “identity”, for example.

It is in the lessons that we might expect the principles suggested by the New Zealand authors. The first of these refers to the integration of language and culture “from the beginning” and this would match the EPOSTL emphasis on making learners aware of the interdependence of language and culture. The second principle is to engage learners in “genuine social interaction”. There is reference to using the internet and

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1 This is an assumption which ought to be challenged, as Risager (2006) does but there will not be space to do this here.
emails in the EPOSTL to explore the culture of target language communities but this is to be done “out of class”.

The third principle emphasises the capacity to encourage and develop “an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language” which is perhaps a consequence of using Byram (1997) as a guide. The EPOSTL certainly has similar terms as we saw in the analysis of verbs used. Similarly, the fourth principle which refers to comparisons and connections finds its realisation in the EPOSTL where making learners aware of similarities and differences presumably involves comparison, and this is one of the competences mentioned in the section on assessment.

The fifth principle presented by Newton and Shearn is rather general in formulation, namely that teaching should “acknowledge(s) and respond(s) appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts”. It is evident from the further discussion however that the authors are particularly concerned that intercultural teaching should take note of and introduce into teaching and learning the diversity in the classroom. This means first the presence of Maori and Pakeha/European New Zealanders but then also the growing numbers of immigrant children. There is reference in the EPOSTL to this dimension of teaching “culture” in that users are encouraged to reflect on their response to diverse cultural backgrounds among their learners and their previous language learning experience.

The final principle is that there should be emphasis on “intercultural competence rather than native-speaker competence” which clearly reflects discussion of the intercultural speaker at other points in the text. Here again there is a gap in the EPOSTL where there is no discussion of the debate about the native speaker in either the section on “culture” or elsewhere.

**5 Conclusion and future challenges**

I began by arguing that teaching the cultural dimension needs as systematic a basis as the linguistic dimension since the impact is likely to be minimal if teachers just rely on incidental references to culture. The EPOSTL goes some way towards doing this by including references to the different dimensions of intercultural competence and principles of teaching. It remains however rather unsystematic in the presentation and not consistent between discussion of learning and assessment.

The second issue of helping student teachers to reflect on their own qualifications for teaching “culture”, on their own intercultural competence, is not included in the EPOSTL. On the one hand this is consistent with the absence of reflection on linguistic qualifications, but on the other hand...
nothing can be taken for granted in intercultural competence in the way it might be for linguistic competence.

It is evident from the chapter which deals with the origins and processes of producing the EPOSTL that there is a tension between being exhaustive in describing the competences student teachers might need and the length of the document. To add more on self-evaluation of intercultural competence might be too much. A complement which might be useful is provided by the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (www.coe.int/lang) where students might reflect on specific events they have experienced and through these learn about intercultural competence in more depth – ultimately also having the Autobiography as a tool for use in their teaching.

The EPOSTL has provided a significant base for introducing the systematicity which I have argued is crucial. What it makes clear is the importance of taking the cultural dimension as seriously as the linguistic dimension of foreign language education. For many trainees, my experience tells me this is a welcome development since almost without exception the hundreds of teachers I have trained wanted not only to provide their learners with useful skills but also to “broaden their horizons” to quote their the oft-used phrase. This aspect of foreign language education can be pursued through the study of language – through work on language awareness in particular – but it is above all in the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes of curiosity that learners’ understanding of themselves and others will be furthered, and teachers will be able to pursue the liberal educational purposes they express in the reference to broadening horizons.

What is not always evident to teachers and their educators is that such a perspective involves responsibilities. The cultural dimension forces not only a decentring from what is taken for granted and a new interpretation of reality but also a challenge to the values attached within a society to existing interpretations. This may be rather simple: for example, the challenge to the assumption of what is edible or non-edible by knowing and experiencing what other people eat. Yet even this can lead to challenges to assumptions about animal rights. In other cases – such as the questions of treatment of the mentally ill or the use of the death penalty – the questions raised are fundamental and can be disturbing as well as challenging.

The logical consequence of this is that teacher educators should include in their courses a consideration of the role of the teacher in moral education through foreign language education. They need to ensure that trainee teachers have had the opportunity to consider their position,
whether they should remain neutral, whether they should present their own views, whether they should represent the views and values of whoever employs them – perhaps as civil servants, perhaps as employees of a private school. These are questions which teachers of moral education\textperse have faced already and which intrude into the teaching of citizenship. Citizenship education however also includes in the objectives of education and in the duties of the teacher the requirement that they should stimulate their learners to become active in their environment. This too is an issue for language teachers for whom the “environment” is the international world of learners’ interactions through new technologies with people of other language communities. If “Education for intercultural citizenship” (Byram, 2008) is accepted as a purpose for language teaching, then the implications for teacher educators and their courses will offer a substantial challenge for the future.

References


Appendix 1


Table 3.2 Terminology, Notion, and Key Component of Intercultural Competence

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition / Key Component</th>
<th>Researcher/Year</th>
</tr>
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| intercultural communication effectiveness | Behavioural dimension:  
  • Ability – to deal with psychological stress  
  • Ability – to effectively communicate  
| intercultural communication competence |  
  • Motivation – desire to communicate appropriately and effectively with others  
  • Knowledge – awareness or understanding of what need to do for effective and appropriate communication  
  • Skills – abilities to engage in the behaviours necessary to communicate appropriately and effectively | Spitzberg & Cupach (1984, cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 275) |
| intercultural effectiveness |  
  • Knowledge – the target culture  
  • Personal qualities – openness, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, and sense of humour  
  • Behaviour skills – communicative competency, culturally appropriate role behaviour and ability to relate well to others  
  • Self-awareness – with respect to one’s own values and beliefs  
  • Technical skills – the ability to accomplish the task within the new cultural setting. | Paige (1993, p. 171) |
Chapter Four

- Situational factors – relative similarity of the target culture to one’s home culture, receptivity to foreigners, political/economic/social conditions in the second culture, clarity of expectations regarding the role and the position of the foreigner, and the psychological pressures associated with the experience.

### A learning model for being interculturally competent

- **Precondition** – a disorienting dilemma
- **Process** – self-examination, critical reflection, external association, exploration for alternatives, planning for change, acquiring knowledge and skills for change, provision identity.
- **Outcome** – competent and confident, reintegration to life based on new perspective

- Taylor (1994, p. 398)

### Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic

- Over time, the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic plays out not in a smooth linear progression but in a cyclic and continual upward “draw-back-to-leap” pattern.

- Kim (1995, p. 178)

### Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

- Linguistic competence
- Sociolinguistic competence
- Discourse competence
- Intercultural compétence: Attitudes (savoir être), Knowledge (savoir être), Skills (savoir comprendre), Skills (savoir apprendre/faire), Critical thinking (savoir s’engager)

- Byram (1997)

### Transcultural Communication Competence (TCC)

- An operationalization process of integrating knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing group membership differences on a transcultural level.
  - Knowledge – cultural values, verbal styles, identities, and situations
  - Mindfulness – reflexivity, empathy, openness or curiosity, and creativity, which links knowledge with skills.
  - Skills – abilities to conduct mindful observation, mindful listening, identify confirmation, and collaborative dialogue.

- Ting-Toomey (1999, pp. 261-276)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Intercultural competence (ICC)</th>
<th>Fantini (2000, pp. 27-30)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traits</strong> – respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, humour, tolerance for ambiguity, willingness to suspend judgment.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dimensions</strong> – awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge, language proficiency.</td>
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<td><strong>A developmental process for life long.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ICC competence is not innate nor occurs by chance.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong> – awareness or understanding of requisite information about people, communication rules, context, normative expectations in interactions.</td>
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<td><strong>Motivation</strong> – set of feelings, intentions, needs, and drives, which can be influenced by factors of anxiety, perceived social distance, attraction, ethnocentrism, and prejudice.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong> – actual performance of effective and appropriate communication behaviours.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intercultural communication competence (ICC)</th>
<th>Gudykunst &amp; Kim (2003, pp. 275-294)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong> – need for predictability, to avoid diffuse anxiety, to sustain self-conceptions, to approach or avoid</td>
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<td><strong>Knowledge</strong> – of information-gathering, group differences, personal similarities, alternative interpretations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong> – ability to be mindful (openness, alertness, sensitivity, multiple perspectives, present-oriented), ability to tolerate ambiguity (high tolerance leads to comfortable feelings), ability to manage anxiety, ability to empathize cognitively and emotionally with strangers with respect, ability to adapt behaviour (individualists or collectivists), and ability to make accurate predictions and explanations</td>
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<tr>
<th>Intercultural competence (ICC)</th>
<th>Lustig &amp; Koester (2003, p. 42, 65)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A characteristic of the association between individuals, rather than traits or individual characteristics.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal and situational context</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The degree of appropriateness and effectiveness of the interaction</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sufficient knowledge, motivation, and actions</strong></td>
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| **cultural intelligence** (CQ) | A person’s capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context.  
- Motivational  
- Cognitive  
- Behavioural | Earley & Ang (2003, p. 9, p. 87) |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>cross-cultural behavioural competence</strong> (CQ)</td>
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- Ability – to create positive and favourable self-presentation  
- Ability – to frame  
- Ability – to script  
- Ability – to stage  
- Ability – to perform | Tan & Chua (2003, p. 297) |
| **Cultural fluency** |  
- tolerance of ambiguity  
- behaviour flexibility  
- knowledge discovery  
- communicative awareness  
- respect for otherness  
- empathy | Inoue (2007, p. 7) |