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the foreign language learner’s ‘Intercultural  
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## **Table of contents**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. THE CONCEPT OF ‘INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE’ .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. DEFINING ‘INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE’ .....	6
2.1.1. <i>Perspectives on ‘Culture’: Ethnocentrism, Cultural Relativism and                     Enlightened Eurocentrism.....</i>	<i>6</i>
2.1.2. <i>Intercultural Communication – Communicative Competence? .....</i>	<i>12</i>
2.1.3. <i>‘Intercultural Competence’ .....</i>	<i>17</i>
2.1.4. <i>Competence – Performance – Assessment .....</i>	<i>22</i>
2.2. ‘INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE’ SITUATED IN THE AUSTRIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM .....	25
2.2.1. <i>‘Intercultural Competence’ In the CEFR .....</i>	<i>29</i>
2.2.2. <i>‘Intercultural Competence’ In Austrian School Curricula .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<b>3. PROMOTING ‘INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE’ IN FOREIGN     LANGUAGE TEACHING.....</b>	<b>34</b>
3.1. APPROACHES IN THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE .....	39
3.2. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.....	47
3.2.1. <i>Learner Autonomy and the Role of the Teacher.....</i>	<i>48</i>
3.2.2. <i>Collaborative Learning .....</i>	<i>51</i>
3.2.3. <i>Role of the Learner’s First Language(s) .....</i>	<i>54</i>
3.3. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN PROJECT WORK.....	60
3.3.1. <i>Learning Environment in Fieldwork .....</i>	<i>63</i>
3.3.2. <i>Learning Environment in Tandem Learning.....</i>	<i>66</i>

<b>4. ONLINE COMMUNICATION IN RELATION TO ‘INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE’ .....</b>	<b>71</b>
4.1. DEFINING ‘ONLINE COMMUNICATION’ .....	73
4.1.1. <i>Types of Computer-based Communication</i> .....	75
4.1.2. <i>Differences to Face-to-Face Communication</i> .....	79
4.2. ONLINE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION .....	86
4.2.1. <i>Learner Autonomy and the Role of the Teacher</i> .....	88
4.2.2. <i>Collaborative Learning</i> .....	92
4.2.3. <i>Role of the Learner’s First Language(s)</i> .....	98
4.3. ‘ONLINE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION’ IN PROJECT WORK.....	102
<b>5. CROSS-CULTURAL PROJECTS.....</b>	<b>105</b>
5.1. PRESENTATION OF PROJECTS.....	107
5.2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS .....	108
5.2.1. <i>‘Online Intercultural Communication’ in Cultura</i> .....	109
5.2.2. <i>‘Online Intercultural Communication’ in E-Tandem</i> .....	113
5.3. COMPARISON AND EVALUATION .....	115
5.3.1. <i>Learner Autonomy</i> .....	120
5.3.2. <i>Collaborative Learning</i> .....	123
5.3.3. <i>Role of the Learner’s First Language(s)</i> .....	127
5.4. ADAPTATION TO AUSTRIAN SCHOOL PROJECT.....	129
<b>6. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>7. BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>GERMAN ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>154</b>

## 1. Introduction

From a foreign language teacher's perspective today's learner is embedded in society shaped by both innovative technology and cultural diversity – the two cornerstones of this thesis. The Web 2.0, or 'Social Web', exercises a bridging function between these two poles as it allows users all over the world to engage with one another, and thus enables multi-cultural contact, for instance via social networking services. This thesis acknowledges this trend as a starting point and aims to connect the potential of online communication to an educational context. More precisely, it shall investigate the link between online communication and the foreign language learner's furthering of intercultural competence.

'Intercultural Competence' is (not only) regarded a key competence in foreign language learning/teaching. The discussion on intercultural dialogue, steadily gaining momentum, is reflected in the aims of the Council of Europe, whose members seek intercultural understanding on an international plane. The Council's White Paper highlights the indispensability of intercultural competence and advances that

[n]ot to engage in dialogue makes it easy to develop a stereotypical perception of the other, build up a climate of mutual suspicion, tension and anxiety, use minorities as scapegoats, and generally foster intolerance and discrimination. The breakdown of dialogue within and between societies can provide, in certain cases, a climate conducive to the emergence, and the exploitation by some, of extremism and indeed terrorism (Council of Europe 2008: 16).

This extract clearly underpins the educational relevance and pedagogic dimension of intercultural dialogue. Similarly, the significance of media has been integrated into educational documents. As regards the Austrian school system, the general part of the AHS curriculum points out

Innovative Technologien der Information und Kommunikation sowie die Massenmedien dringen immer stärker in alle Lebensbereiche vor. Besonders Multimedia und Telekommunikation sind zu Bestimmungsfaktoren für die sich fortentwickelnde Informationsgesellschaft geworden. Im Rahmen des Unterrichts ist diesen Entwicklungen Rechnung zu tragen und das didaktische Potenzial der Informationstechnologien bei gleichzeitiger kritischer rationaler Auseinandersetzung mit deren Wirkungsmechanismen in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft nutzbar zu machen (BM:UKK 2004a: 2).

This thesis acknowledges that online communication as well as Intercultural Competence ought not to be ignored in school teaching. It aims to critically engage with the characteristics of online communication and to explore its possibilities as well as restrictions as regards the foreign language learner's promotion of 'Intercultural Competence'.

In the implementation of media into education it is vital that the teaching methodology must regulate the use of the medium. The computer is hence not per se valuable but shall adapt to the methodology instead of determine it (Klein 2000: 3).<sup>1</sup> With regard to the furthering of 'Intercultural Competence' by means of the internet, the computer shall hence be seen as a tool, which enables students to connect on a geographical broad scale in order to work together on the individual's promotion of 'Intercultural Competence'.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the contact with remote partners the learners shall experience that the medium not only mediates or represents reality but in doing so creates a proper reality which is not value-free (BM:UKK 2001: 3). When regarding online communication as a potentially fruitful site for learning in a foreign language learning context, the possibility of hazard shall not be neglected. As regards mass communication, in particular, the *Grunderlass Medienerziehung* (BM:UKK 2001: 1) specifies:

Im Massenkommunikationsprozess mittels Massenmedien ist es möglich geworden, einer unüberschaubaren Menge von Empfängern bei räumlicher und/oder zeitlicher Distanz gleiche Mitteilungen zu vermitteln. Damit eröffnen die Medien einerseits Chancen zu weltweiter Kommunikation, zu Weltoffenheit und zur Weiterentwicklung der Demokratie, andererseits aber bergen sie auch die Gefahr verstärkter Manipulation in sich. Die durch Medien veränderte und sich verändernde Wirklichkeit ist eine Herausforderung und eine Chance.

This extract highlights the significance of reflection as regards media use. In education the teacher as well as learners shall assume a critical position in this regard: media literacy, which represents an education principle in Austria, denotes

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<sup>1</sup> Following Warschauer's (2000) terminology, the approach underlying this thesis is an 'instrumental view' as the computer is regarded as an instrument with which objectives are to be pursued.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, internet connection does not rely on the medium computer but can also be accessed via mobile phones, for instance. However, the focus of this thesis is on online communication via computers only. cf. Bachmair, Pachler & Cook (2009) for a topical discussion on mobile learning.

the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts (Commission 2009: 3).

This quotation underpins the necessity of the learners' media literacy, which is indispensable for smooth online communication processes and prepares learners for adult life as it denotes a "key pre-requisite[...] for an active and full citizenship in order to prevent and diminish risks of exclusion from community life" (Commission 2009: 4). It is a vital role of schools to educate learners to be able to take part in (virtual) life as future citizens, which is the basis for democracy. To promote their critical abilities and active citizenship learners shall develop into media literate users. The principle of education acknowledges the school's task to educate young people growing up digital<sup>3</sup>:

Angesichts der Herausforderung durch die elektronischen Medien muss sich die Schule verstärkt dem Auftrag stellen, an der Heranbildung kommunikationsfähiger und urteilsfähiger Menschen mitzuwirken [...] (BM:Ukk. 2001: 1).

Democratic as well as cultural life is mediated through various media the deliberate use of which is hence clearly essential. This also presents a cross-curricular principle of the British National Curriculum (2002), which further points out the transformative effect on the computer user:

The media plays a significant role in shaping and defining our culture and our view of the world. New technologies continue to transform the way we work and learn. [...] Informed and responsible citizenship requires that young people become critical consumers of media, able to reflect on the relationship between reality and the world portrayed by the media. They should be aware of the ability of the media to inform, entertain and influence public opinion, and its important role in society. Young people need opportunities to become discerning and critically literate in relation to the media and the internet, learning to question the authenticity, accuracy and reliability of the information they encounter.

In addition to the critical and purposeful use of media, learners shall naturally also be prepared to adapt to changes in communication in the world. Media literacy is hence linked to lifelong learning: with the advent of rapidly developing technologies e-literacy on part of the learner is crucial. The user or social agent needs a certain degree of autonomy, which is an objective of today's education, for keeping pace with technological advances.

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<sup>3</sup> The expression 'grow up digital' lends itself to Tapscott's homepage: [www.grownupdigital.com](http://www.grownupdigital.com).

As reflected in Austrian school curricula in the present situation and, on a broader scope, in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), 'Intercultural Competence' is positioned in language learning/teaching besides language proficiency. In this thesis a working definition of the competence in question will be established in relation to the documents mentioned above. In order to be able to elaborate on the concept of 'Intercultural Competence', it is indispensable to establish a working definition of 'culture' first. Naturally every individual is brought up and raised in a certain environment and is hence culturally loaded. This way, in an intercultural or cross-cultural<sup>4</sup> encounter, different values, attitudes and opinions are likely to meet.<sup>5</sup>

Intercultural encounters might entail reactions of various kinds on all participants involved in the communicative situation. A specific cultural script can be perceived as irritating and confusing and possibly evokes unpleasant feelings such as anger; but at the same time, on the other end of the spectrum, might expose reactions such as admiration, fascination, or amusement. While it is true that cross-cultural experiences can expose unpleasant reactions and attitudes, the starting point of this thesis is the perspective of "[...] *Ich-Betroffenheit als Chance zur Auseinandersetzung mit eigenen und potentiell fremdkulturellen Normen- und Regelsystemen*" (Bender-Szymanski 2008: 213; italics in original). Cross-cultural situations shall hence deliberately be established in the foreign language classroom so that students get the opportunity to promote their intercultural competence. In a learning environment such as Austrian schools, the learners shall thus work with their emotions towards foreign cultures: in a nutshell, the furthering of 'Intercultural Competence' means to overcome negative feelings, and, at the same time, goes beyond a quick laugh.

Project work denotes a practice that is beneficial for the foreign language learners' development of cross-cultural competence. The suitability of this learning environment will be demonstrated with reference to the significant

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<sup>4</sup> The two terms will be employed as synonyms throughout this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Language jokes or puns often make use of the fact that individuals are shaped by their surroundings. *Le thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed*, a book title by Mehdi Charef, for instance, plays on a misunderstanding based on cultural difference: an immigrant learner interprets what his Mathematics teacher actually says, namely le théorème d'Archimède [Archimedes' theorem], according to his cultural environment and mishears it as *Le thé au harem d'Arché Ahmed* [tea in Arché Ahmed's harem].



factors of learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the deliberate integration of the learners' first languages. Fieldwork and tandem learning, which can potentially combine the project method with the use of computers, will be scrutinised with regard to their furthering of 'Intercultural Competence'.

Moreover, two university projects that employ the computer in the realm of education in order to promote the students' 'Intercultural Competence' shall be introduced and analysed. After a comprise presentation of the projects, a comparison shall highlight the outstanding factors of the respective educational environments or settings assisting in the development of the competence in question: learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the role of the L1. These factors linked to both, classroom design and didactics, will be surveyed and discussed with regard to fieldwork and tandem learning. This way, the effects of technology on learners, which depend on its pedagogical implementation, will be outlined.

Finally, the projects shall be viewed from a secondary school teacher's perspective. In this regard, the following questions shall be of relevance: in how far can the projects introduced be applied to an Austrian foreign language classroom? How shall the learning environment of future projects implementing online communication be designed in order to allow the learners to promote their 'Intercultural Competence'? It shall hence be concluded by exploring some pedagogical implications for future projects at secondary school level.

## **2. The Concept of 'Intercultural Competence'**

In today's understanding of 'Intercultural Competence', this notion does not denote the learner's mere knowledge of facts and figures on the target culture. Before an elaboration on the concept as such, this section shall introduce the definition of 'competence' and shall hence concisely present what more 'competence' comprises if it is not solely factual knowledge.

Although Erpenbeck & Sauter (2008: 33) speak from a vocational background I agree with their view that a competence can only be acquired in situations that leave space for variation and creativity. A competence accordingly denotes

[...] Fähigkeiten [...], in solchen unsicheren, offenen Situationen selbstorganisiert handeln zu können, ohne bekannte Lösungswege

,qualifiziert' abzuarbeiten, ohne das Resultat schon von vornherein zu kennen (Erpenbeck & Sauter 2008: 33).

Such ability draws back on values, which can take the form of interiorised rules and constraining norms. In other words, besides knowledge acquisition the internalisation of values is vital for the development of a competence. The formation of a competence is hence a process in which the individual puts knowledge into action by demonstrating and forming values. Behaviour, values and knowledge are hence the subcategories which constitute a competence (Erpenbeck & Sauter 2008: 33-35).

In other words, the acquisition of knowledge, values and performance merge to form a competence.<sup>6</sup> The next chapter aims to explore and define 'Intercultural Competence', which accordingly cannot be reduced to an affective learning objective or to factual knowledge only. It shall be continued by investigating how this specific competence relates to the emotional, cognitive and pragmatic dimension.

## **2.1. Defining 'Intercultural Competence'**

In exploring 'Intercultural Competence' it is inevitable to examine the underlying concept of 'culture' at first.<sup>7</sup> To begin with, a concise theoretical background of different views on 'culture' shall be given.

### **2.1.1. Perspectives on 'Culture': Ethnocentrism, Cultural Relativism and Enlightened Eurocentrism**

Among different perspectives on the notion of 'culture', the term ethnocentrism is well-known to describe a perspective which equates 'culture' with 'nation'. The in-group, i.e. one nation, glorifies its own value and belief systems while disregarding those of another nation or out-group. Hansen (1996: 67) critically

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the CEFR defines a learner's competence as "the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions" (Council of Europe 2001: 9).

<sup>7</sup> The notion of 'culture' has been exhaustively analysed across various disciplines. For the purpose of shedding light on 'interculturality', only a selection of relevant issues concerning 'culture' shall be presented.

refers to this point of view as “eine Schutzimpfung gegen die realistische Einschätzung der eigenen ethnischen Gruppe“.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, cultural relativism rejects this form of self-idealisation considering the lack of objective factors in judging cultures. This perspective acknowledges that although cultures might be different they are of same value and shall not be judged from the perspective one is familiar with.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of staying at the binary level of the opposing extremes of ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, Nieke (2000: 193) suggests another position, namely ‘*aufgeklärter Eurozentrismus*’<sup>10</sup>, and defines it as follows:

eine solche Haltung gibt sich nicht der Illusion hin, ganz vorurteilsfrei die Orientierungs-, Deutungs- und Wertungsmuster einer anderen Lebenswelt, einer anderen Kultur verstehen und akzeptieren zu können; das ist stets nur aus dem Blickwinkel der eigenen Kultur möglich.

In other words, naturally every individual is affected by the national, regional and social cultures they are members of, and hence engages in interpretations according to learned value and belief systems. Neuner (2003b: 46) figuratively illustrates that “nous ne pouvons percevoir le monde étranger qu’à travers notre propre ‘prisme socioculturel’”. This social dimension of the term ‘culture’ is likewise illustrated by the metaphor of ‘software of the mind’ describing it as mental program (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 2-3).

According to the position of enlightened eurocentrism culture is acquired throughout one’s life and not inherited: “[c]ulture is learned, not innate” (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 4-5). This view consequently allows for others to have different opinions, values and practices and at the same time acknowledges that individuals can never fully abandon their own position or perspective (Nieke 2000: 193).

The working definition of ‘culture’ underlying this thesis relates to the definition of ‘culture’ as

ein abstraktes, ideationales System von zwischen Gesellschaftsmitgliedern geteilten Wissensbeständen, Standards des Wahrnehmens, Glaubens, Bewertens und Handelns [...], das in Form kognitiver Schemata organisiert ist und das sich im

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, ‘nation’ is not a given reality but a label invented for constructed political entities and actually reflects the will of political leaders (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 18).

<sup>9</sup> For an in-depth presentation of these contrasting views cf. Nieke 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Nieke (2000: 192) refers to **eurocentrism** since he found that the dominant thinking tradition has been mainly European so far so that approaches from other backgrounds can be integrated into that label.

öffentlichen Vollzug von symbolischem Handeln manifestiert (Knapp 2008: 82).

Following this definition, 'culture' acknowledges intranational cultural differences and multiple group memberships and relates to a cognitive, attitudinal as well as pragmatic construct. It is regarded as a heterogeneous entity as society always divides by social, regional differences or/and differences according to age. Individuals can hardly be assigned to only one specific culture but are rather characterised by multiple memberships – not only if they have a multicultural background in terms of the essentialist use of the term culture; culture hence describes a transnational concept: it follows that the equation of 'culture' with 'nation' is simplistic and cannot be held (Knapp 2008: 83).<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the working definition of culture does not refer to culture as a stable or static notion: Nieke (2000: 44) highlights the dynamics of 'culture' by explaining that the socialisation of new generations, i.e. the integration of new members into already established systems, is a process shaped by internalisation. The (new) members of society constantly learn traditional values and behaviour in a partly subconscious way so that they share the expectations of what is conform to the norm. The established scripts serve as interpretation patterns of situations and actions and form a model for decisions about one's own actions (Knapp 2008: 82). As this process holds an individual characteristic, 'culture' is not a static notion: members of society repeatedly deviate from what has been established as norm (Nieke 2000: 45). Therefore, the norms of the in-group might not only change through time but the group also never shares exactly the same expectations. Földes (2007: 29) takes up these notions of heterogeneity and dynamics and suggests the term '*Navigationssystem*' as synonymous for 'culture' describing it as an orientation system

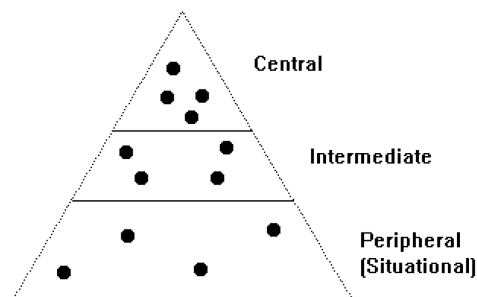
das die Bestimmung von Standort und die Feststellung des einzuschlagenden Kurses unterstützt, aber diese nicht erzwingt, d.h. es sind dabei auch andere Optionen möglich, indem man sich nicht (ganz) nach dem [sic] durch das Navigationsinstrument vorgegebenen Informationen richtet.

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<sup>11</sup> It is obvious that every individual has multiple identities. As regards language use, an essential element of identity, Wandruska (1979 in Neuner 2003a: 14) coins the term 'innere Mehrsprachigkeit' to highlight that even before foreign language learning, every social agent is plurilingual in one's first language as they possess a range of linguistic varieties such as dialect, standard language or technical language etc.

In other words, 'culture' is a social as well as cognitive construct manifested in actions, a "semiotisches und rituelles Netzwerk [...]" (Földes 2007: 9). 'Culture', or rather cultures, is a multifaceted construct that might change in a diachronic as well as synchronic way.

Figure 1 (adopted from Libben & Lindner 1996: 7) illustrates culture as knowledge system.



**Figure 1**

The triangular space denotes culture as a cognitive representation, in which central elements describe core or fundamental cultural elements, which cannot be easily modified, and peripheral or contextual elements, which can be modified in various situations. Whereas the former, i.e. concepts on morality, might be in conflict with one another, the latter are flexible and adapt to different situations: sometimes we use our hands in eating chicken, in other situations we eat with fork and knife and in another context we use chopsticks (Libben & Lindner 1996: 7). In contrast, "[m]ore central cultural elements, the ones that are really associated with who you are, seem much more closely packed" (Libben & Lindner 1996: 7). Usually notions of love, honour and justice are not easily contextualised, for instance.

When speaking of interculturality, in the process of cultural acquisition various cultural elements are confronted with one another. As already suggested an individual does not maintain distinct cultural systems apart from one another. In cultural acquisition, "biculturalism creates and integrates elements of two cultures in the same cognitive space" (Libben & Lindner 1996: 9). Culture is hence characterised by continual change between cultural elements: new elements can be integrated just such as old elements can be adapted (Libben & Lindner 1996: 13).

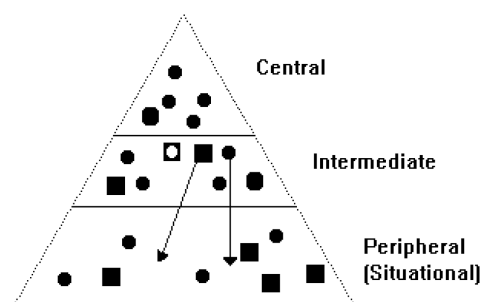
Successful integration of new knowledge into already established systems depends on the relation between the old and new elements: at the

periphery of the cultural system, contextualisation usually reduces the potential of conflict between concepts whereas at the core of the triangular space successful culture acquisition is more demanding (Libben & Lindner 1996: 9).

Naturally emotions and attitudes play an essential role in the handling of foreign cultural scripts, i.e. their acceptance, refusal or adaptation.

[L]e monde étranger [...] nous paraît alors dangereux, inquiétant, voire menaçant, surtout si on touche aux domaines sensibles de la 'normalité' (comme les tabous, par exemple) (Neuner 2003b: 52).

Stress created by the meeting of cultural elements can be reduced in various ways. Apart from the contextualisation of cultural elements, Libben & Lindner (1996: 9) found that either one cultural element is replaced by another, or the two elements form a new cultural element in the culture acquisition process. Figure 2 (adopted from Libben & Lindner 1996: 13) shows that culture acquisition causes established cultural systems to reorganise.



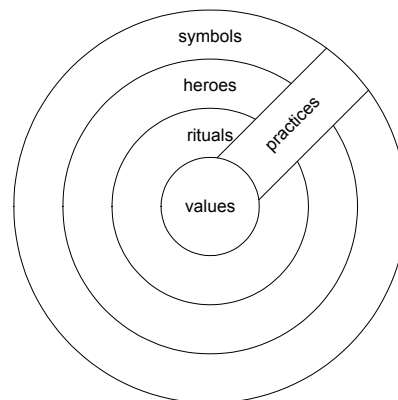
**Figure 2**

The figure depicts cultural acquisition with cultural scripts belonging to culture 1 as circles and those new cultural elements from a culture 2 as squares. The illustration demonstrates by means of arrows that contextualisation as a strategy for stress reduction can be relatively easily applied to conflicting cultural scripts on the bottom of the triangular representation (Libben & Lindner 1996: 12). However, “the more central elements are difficult to contextualise or situationalise” (Libben & Lindner 1996: 13). Other stress reduction processes are consequently needed:

[t]he square with a white circle in the middle represents a case of one cultural element winning out over another, the square with the rounded corners represents a case of amalgamation [...] (Libben & Lindner 1996: 12).

Culture is a complex cognitive network linked to one’s own identity and ongoing identity formation. In the representation of culture as onion the unconscious property of culture is foregrounded alternatively to the

concentration on the cognitive property: figure 3 (adopted from Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 7) presents different layers of depth and positions values as the inner skin or layer of the onion demonstrating their deep manifestation.



**Figure 3**

The onion model visualises that it is easier to change or adapt to new symbols than to new values, which are at the core of one's culture. Values are internalised throughout one's life so that it is unlikely to recognise or feel other values. Symbols, heroes and rituals are abstract entities which can generally be adopted with less unease. They are visible through practice, i.e. action or behaviour demonstrating the underlying cultural meanings. This visual representation concentrates on feelings and their demonstration, not on knowledge. In culture acquisition "[c]ulture change can be fast for the outer layers of the onion diagram, labelled *practices*. [...] Culture change is slow for the onion's core, labelled *values*." (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 12-13; italics in original).

Additionally, Bolten (2001: 50) highlights the complex dimension of 'culture' by denoting cultures as "Systemzusammenhänge [...], die sich kommunikativ aus sich selbst heraus entwickeln [...]". While this chapter elaborated on the cognitive and emotional representation of culture, the next chapter focuses on the behavioural element of intercultural competence, which is, as will be shown, closely related to communicative competence. The following chapter shall concentrate on communication in relation to interculturality.

### 2.1.2. Intercultural Communication – Communicative Competence?

As highlighted above, 'culture' comprises a social aspect, and simultaneously depicts an individualised notion. Bolten (2001: 38-39) suggests 'culture' as product<sup>12</sup> of (intercultural) communication as there undoubtedly is a close interdependence between interactions, or the transmission of attitudes, knowledge and values, and established norms, or what is observable as cultural artefacts.

Regarding interaction as vital influence in establishing 'cultures', this passage henceforth stresses one aspect or meaning of 'culture' further, namely that of "*Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*" (Knapp 2008: 84). Again, individuals are not restricted to only one communications community or speech community: dependent on different communication domains they participate in various communities, which is the rule rather than the exception (Knapp 2008: 84). The same person interacts with different people at work, at a conference, at home, or at the playground resulting in different discourse styles.<sup>13</sup>

Following Knapp (2008: 81) an interpersonal or intersubjective view of cross-cultural communication in contrast to an intracultural view shall be adopted in order to highlight the complexity and heterogeneity of 'culture' and hence intercultural communication: cross-cultural communication is a process of interaction with others – but, contrary to the common use of the term, not always merely characterised by participants from different nations speaking different languages. When viewing culture as communications community the following question arises: what are the particularities of an **intercultural** communication compared to any communication?

The decisive factor in speaking of cross-cultural communication is the circumstance that participants see the vis-à-vis as member of an out-group (Auernheimer 2008: 43). Group membership is maintained by a sense of belonging and thus creates social identity. This means that interculturality is

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<sup>12</sup> It is significant to notice that the term 'product' applied here does not suggest a finite and finished layer of meaning to 'culture'; as already outlined, the notion of 'culture' cannot be seen as a homogeneous construct.

<sup>13</sup> 'Intercultural communication' is, similar to 'culture', an inconsistent term differently applied throughout various disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, communication science, pedagogy and linguistics. cf. Földes (2007: 7, 11-15, 25) for a topical discussion on the terminology.



constructed throughout the communication by its participating parties. Put differently, a communication carries the label 'intercultural'

wenn in der Kommunikation zumindest der eine Teilnehmer diese als interkulturell ansieht sowie sein kommunikatives Herangehen und sein Sprechverhalten dementsprechend gestaltet [...] (Földes 2007: 37).

It is hence the relationship between the participants that is vital in regulating the course of cross-cultural interaction. 'Critical incidents', i.e. situations receptive to problems occurring in the communication, are not the outstanding factors for labelling a communication 'intercultural'. Nevertheless, in case a failure occurs in a cross-cultural communication, it is usually or predominantly due to failures on the personal interrelation aspect (Auernheimer 2003: 107).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Bolten (2001: 25) points out that the cause for misunderstandings usually lies in a participant's failure to acknowledge the cultural (inter)dependency between oneself and the other throughout the interaction.

It follows that different cultural scripts are not per se ascribing intercultural communication; however, they certainly influence the relationship aspect of the parties involved in cross-cultural communication. Varying scripts on gesture, for instance, imply underlying value systems and are realised according to established norms. While in some areas the vis-à-vis is expected to hold eye-contact, in others it is regarded impolite or offensive to do so, for example. When a participant seen as a member of an out-group does not adhere to rules of politeness, the relationship aspect, which is largely conveyed non-verbally and subconsciously, is affected somehow. Arising misunderstandings or incomprehension due to contrasting scripts or unfulfilled expectations can even lead to breakdowns in intercultural communication (Knapp 2008: 86).

As already established, cultural schemata are largely subconscious. As a result, violations of expectations are often not ascribed to cultural differences but interpreted as character flaws (Knapp 2008: 88). The participating parties' attitudes towards the respective other are vital in the course of interaction. It is worth noting that cultural differences are more likely to complicate the interaction if the participants are situated in an asymmetrical communication, i.e. if status is unequally distributed amongst the participants. In contrast, in

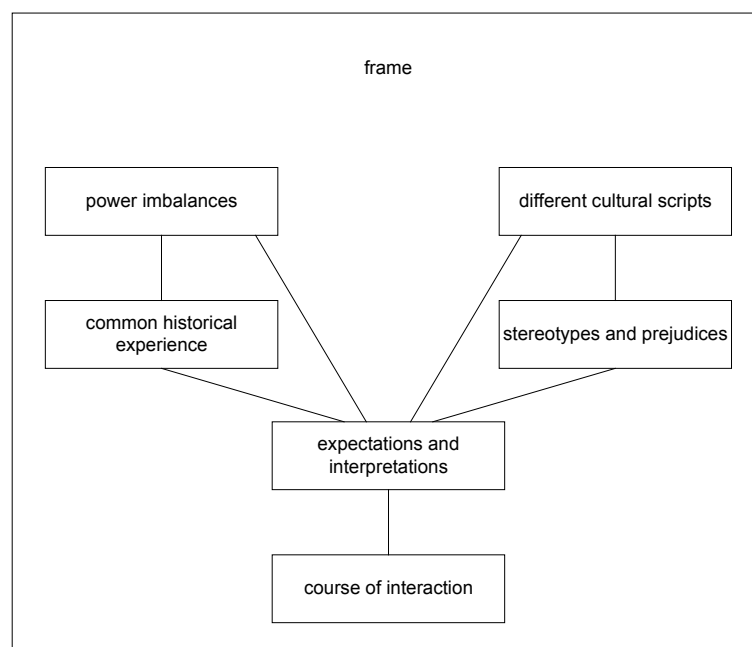
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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed presentation of a content and relationship aspect in communication cf. Watzlavick (2007: 53-56).

symmetric situations humour or willingness to help, are usually applied to avoid failures in communication (Auernheimer 2008: 57).

Naturally, also language proficiency plays an important role influencing the course of communication. Knapp (2008: 85-86) highlights that cross-cultural communication is often characterised by unequally distributed language proficiency: either a participant communicates in a foreign language or all participants communicate in a lingua franca. The self-manifestation and hence the relationship aspect between the participants are naturally shaped accordingly.<sup>15</sup>

It has become obvious that every communication holds the potential of misunderstandings or incomprehension. Figure 4 (adopted from Auernheimer 2008: 46; my translation) proposes several dimensions in an intercultural communication that influence the course of interaction and consequently, dimensions which leave space for communication failures: Auernheimer (2003: 108) identifies four categories, namely power imbalances, different cultural scripts, common historical experience, and preconceived ideas on 'the other', i.e. stereotypes and prejudices<sup>16</sup>. These dimensions shape the interlocutors' expectations as well as interpretations.



**Figure 4**

<sup>15</sup> The foreign language learner, for instance, cannot communicate without difficulty or effort so that verbalisations may be less precise or differentiated.

<sup>16</sup> Stereotypes and prejudices both denote narrowed perceptions: "Wie sich Bilder (Images) bzw. Vorstellungen von etwas Fremden zu Stereotypen verfestigen, so fossilisieren [...] Ansichten und Meinungen über Fremdes zu Vorurteilen" (Bolten 2001: 57).

This heuristic model<sup>17</sup>, which pictures these four dimensions situated in a cross-cultural communication, includes a frame denoting a socio-structural context that is present in any communicative situation and, for instance, includes degrees of formality. Power imbalances, such as differences in law, status or language competence, and the common historical experience reciprocally influence each other shaping the images on the out-group by means of discourse. At the same time the common experience forms expectations.

Figure 4 thus nicely illustrates that cultural differences, i.e. differences in cultural scripts, are only one factor out of many that are vital in determining the course of intercultural communication (Auernheimer 2008: 45-57). As in any communicative situation:

[i]nsgesamt gilt, dass komplexe Kommunikationsprozessen vielfältigen Einflüssen unterliegen, die in ihrem Zusammenwirken das kommunikative Handeln des Sprechers in spezifischer Weise konditionieren (Földes 2007: 19).

To draw back on the relationship aspect, the perception and behaviour of the participants involved in cross-cultural communication is shaped by three dimensions: one's self-perception, i.e. the individual's perspective on one's self, the perception others have on oneself, and by meta-images, i.e. the expectation on the expectations of the other. In case the interlocutors expect others to have a certain cultural script, they might knowingly adapt their own behaviour to what they believe to be correct and common in the cultures confronted with (Bolten 2001: 55). This means that next to generalised views on the other or heterostereotypes, also autostereotypes, i.e. perceptions on the ingroup, are vital in influencing the course of the intercultural communication (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 327).

It follows that any intercultural communication leaves space for intercultural hypercorrection, i.e. an inappropriate attempt to adapt to the other according to imagined or learned foreign schemata. Common knowledge, i.e. shared cultural scripts, or knowledge of a foreign script are clearly not **the** determining factors in successful communication but one out of many factors.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The model does not present a simplex cause-effect diagram; instead, the different factors relevant in intercultural communication affect each other.

<sup>18</sup> Hansen (1996: 105) stresses in this respect that the term 'Intercultural Competence' as such is irritating since, as already demonstrated, it misleadingly highlights the ponderousness of cultural differences.

As regards the relation between communication and culture, throughout intercultural communication an interculture is created which denotes a third space, i.e. a new space, not merely the sum of the cultures involved.

[...] Interkulturen [...] werden permanent neu erzeugt, und zwar im Sinne eines ‚Dritten‘, einer Zwischen-Welt C, die weder der Lebenswelt A noch der Lebenswelt B vollkommen entspricht. Weil es sich um ein Handlungsfeld, um einen Prozess handelt, ist eine Interkultur also gerade nicht statisch als Synthese von A und B im Sinne eines 50:50 oder anderswie gewichteten Verhältnisses zu denken. Vielmehr kann in dieser Begegnung im Sinne eines klassischen Lerneffekts eine vollständig neue Qualität, eine Synergie, entstehen, die für sich weder A noch B erzielt hätten (Bolten 2001: 18).

Bolten (2001: 18-19) exemplifies interculture by suggesting that the negotiation of greeting can take the form of shaking hands, kissing or any other alternative, which cannot be known beforehand. Negotiation that occurs on the linguistic level is referred to as ‘negotiation of meaning’. In cross-cultural communication the participants negotiate meaning between one’s own world and the others’ world.

Relating back to the culture-concept, Reuter (2004: 242; italics in original) rejects the image of a mosaic-like concept of ‘culture’ as communications community and instead suggests a “[...] *Kulturmelange* im Sinne einer wechselseitigen kulturellen Durchdringung globaler und lokaler Sinnbezüge“. In this respect, the practice of culture in terms of interculturality and cross-cultural communication implies that cultural elements are not embedded in either one culture or in the other culture; they rather relate to one another. (Reuter 2004: 252).

This chapter focussed on the dimension that culture is constructed throughout interaction. As already established above in 2.1.1 at the same time it is a cognitive and attitudinal construct. These dimensions are naturally complementary, which is highlighted in cultural acquisition or socialisation processes. The three aspects – behaviour, attitudes and knowledge – further rely on the individuals’ competences: intercultural communication relies on awareness on part of the interlocutors, who realise their own cultural embeddedness and “that others brought up in a different environment carry a [possibly] different mental software for equally good reasons” (Hofstede &

Hofstede 2005: 358-359). The next chapter aims to scrutinise what dimensions 'Intercultural Competence' incorporates.

### 2.1.3. 'Intercultural Competence'

Referring to the previous chapters, 'Intercultural Competence' comprises more than successful cross-cultural communication and cannot be reduced to factual knowledge or an open or tolerant attitude either: table 1 (adopted from Auernheimer 2008: 57; my translation) depicts the diversity of 'Intercultural Competence' by illustrating that competence, i.e. knowledge, attitudes and the capacity to act, as established earlier, relates to all four dimensions that are identified in the intercultural communication as presented in the previous chapter. Cross-cultural competence thus relates to power relations, the common historical experience, images on the other, and to cultural differences.

	knowledge	attitudes	capacity to act
power relations			
common historical experience			
stereotypes and prejudices			
different cultural scripts			

**Table 1**

Followingly, knowledge concerns, amongst others, areas of history, law, psychology, and sociology. As regards attitudes and values, sensitivity towards asymmetrical relations, expectations on the other and one's self and the ability of reflection are, for instance, included in the term 'Intercultural Competence'. Concerning the behavioural level strategies to overcome misunderstandings in the cross-cultural communication are indispensable.

Highlighting the importance of reflection, Auernheimer (2008: 45-55) suggests that cultural schemata shall be reflected upon to avoid irritation and conflicts in cross-cultural communication: the intercultural speakers are aware of the scripts they are confronted with and further engage in a deconstruction of static standards as orientation patterns for cultures. Bolten (2001: 58) stresses in this regard the usefulness of hypothetical knowledge in forms of stereotypes and prejudices insofar as they pose a "[...] Skelett, das angereichert werden will mit einer Fülle differenzierender Erfahrungen". They are hence ideally treated

as temporary makeshift, or orientation function, assisting the promotion of 'Intercultural Competence'.

Byram (1999a: 18-19) equally highlights the value of reflection. He regards reflection to be a precondition<sup>19</sup> of intercultural communicative competence: *savoir-être* describes attitudes that enable the learner to reflect upon and step outside of learned scripts and to engage with foreign ones. The further precondition, *savoirs*, comprises the knowledge of familiar as well as foreign schemata as well as the knowledge of how each party is seen by the other and also includes the knowledge of the course of an intercultural communication. Not only foreign cultural scripts shall be reflected but also the inherent patterns. Figure 6 (adapted from Byram 1997: 34) situates these dimensions in a model.

	<b>Skills</b> interpret and relate ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )	
<b>Knowledge</b> of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal ( <i>savoirs</i> )	<b>Education</b> political education critical cultural awareness ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )	<b>Attitudes</b> relativising self valuing other ( <i>savoir être</i> )
	<b>Skills</b> discover and / or interact ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )	

**Figure 6**

As can be seen, additionally, the intercultural speaker is characterised by the following three skills: *savoir-comprendre*, i.e. the skilful interpretation of texts and the relation to oneself, *savoir-apprendre*, i.e. the successful discovery of formerly unknown attitudes, knowledge and scripts, and *savoir faire*, i.e. the actual handling of an intercultural communication (Byram 1999a: 19). The borders of the skills of interpreting and relating and the skills of discovery and interaction are blurred: while interpretation focuses on the analysis of (familiar and foreign) data, discovery highlights the locating/gathering of data, which can be accomplished in interaction or without, i.e. when the data is found in documents (Byram 1999a: 20).

According to Byram (1999b: 370) education is ideally occupied with critical cultural awareness building, a learner's ability which he describes as "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". The educational methods will be taken up at a later stage in chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> The term pre-condition is unfortunate or misleading as these "[k]nowledge and attitude factors [...] are also modified by the processes of intercultural communication" (Byram 1999a: 19).

Byram's model of intercultural competence includes the specification of the dimensions into subcategories: Byram established objectives, which "cannot easily fit into most European national or school curricula. Singling out some of its parts, however, would deprive the model of its consistency" (Burwitz-Melzer 2001: 30). Byram's framework, which includes the emotional, pragmatic as well as cognitive level, is depicted in the following figure 7, which states the specific objectives (Byram 1997: 57-64).

<p><b><u>Knowledge (savoirs)</u></b></p> <p>a: knowledge about historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries.</p> <p>b: knowledge about the means of achieving contact with interlocutors from another country (at a distance or in proximity), of travel to and from, and the institutions which facilitate contact or help resolve problems.</p> <p>c: knowledge about the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins.</p> <p>d: knowledge of the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries.</p> <p>e: knowledge about the national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own country.</p> <p>f: knowledge about the national definitions of geographical space in one's own country, and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries.</p> <p>g: knowledge about the national definitions of geographical space in one's own interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own.</p> <p>h: knowledge about the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and one's interlocutor's country.</p> <p>i: knowledge about social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's</p> <p>j: knowledge about institutions, and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them.</p> <p>k: knowledge about the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country.</p>	<p><b><u>skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre)</u></b></p> <p>a: ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins.</p> <p>b: ability to identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present.</p> <p>c: ability to mediate between conflicting representations of phenomena.</p> <p><b><u>Critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager)</u></b></p> <p>a: ability to identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures.</p> <p>b: ability to make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria.</p> <p>c: ability to interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes.</p> <p><b><u>skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire)</u></b></p> <p>a: ability to elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and to develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena.</p> <p>b: ability to identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations.</p> <p>c: ability to identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances.</p> <p>d: ability to use in real-time appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country, culture and language and the extent of difference between one's own and the other.</p> <p>e: ability to identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and society.</p> <p>f: ability to identify and make use of public and private institutions which facilitate contact with other countries and cultures.</p> <p>g: ability to use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture.</p>	<p><b><u>Attitudes (savoir être)</u></b></p> <p>a: willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable.</p> <p>b: interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices.</p> <p>c: willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment.</p> <p>d: readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence.</p> <p>e: readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction.</p>
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**Figure 7**



It has become clear so far that intercultural competence is a complex entity. The intercultural speaker is able to engage with formerly foreign attitudes, values and behaviours. Bredella & Delanoy (1999: 14) observe in this regard: “Was fremd ist, kann vertraut werden, und was vertraut ist, kann fremd werden”. The learner is further preoccupied with the other and with oneself at the same time.

Es ist ein Perspektivwechsel – nicht nur im Blick auf die anderen, sondern eben gerade auch mit Blick auf sich selber und auf diejenigen, die der eigenen Gruppe zugerechnet werden (Hansen 1996: 98; italics in original).

As regards the relationship aspect between the parties involved in intercultural communication it shall be highlighted that the potential of incomprehension, present in any communication, can be overcome. Knapp (2008: 88) stresses in this regard the importance of willingness to communicate:

Divergenzen in den Konventionen des Kommunizierens können zu Kommunikationsproblemen im interkulturellen Kontakt führen – sie müssen es aber nicht. Entscheidend ist zum einen, ob die Interaktanten diese Unterschiede erkennen und im Bestreben, Fremdheit zu reduzieren, sie auszugleichen bzw. für ihre Interpretation der Kommunikationsereignisse einzubeziehen versuchen, oder ob sie sie zur bewussten Konstruktion von Differenz und Fremdheit einsetzen wollen.

In other words, it is essential how the participants involved handle the relationship aspect. A sensibility for otherness, a willingness to indulge in cross-cultural communication and to maintain the communication is vital and prerequisite of the formation of a new communications community or interculture throughout the cross-cultural communication.

Consequently, ‘Intercultural Competence’ implies an ethic aspect. Nieke (2000: 194) suggests „einen vernünftigen Umgang mit den Konflikten“, which does not imply the avoidance of conflicts but the acceptance of different values and ideologies in cross-cultural encounters. It is clear from this that cross-cultural competence does not denote the successful manipulation of the participants but aims to build up and maintain relations and to develop new communications communities (Knapp 2008: 96).

It has already been established that the personal relationship aspect ideally is not characterised by manipulation or disregard. Furthermore, intercultural competence does not denote uncritical fascination. The following quotation demonstrates how xenophobia and xenophilia, or an urge for the exotic, both deviate from crosscultural competence:

In der Xenophobie meidet man das Fremde, um das Eigene nicht in Frage stellen zu müssen, im Exotismus zieht es einen in die Fremde, und man muß deshalb zu Hause nichts ändern (Erdheim 1987: 50 in Hammerschmidt 1998: 102).

It has become clear so far that the intercultural speaker is involved in scrutinising and questioning both known and foreign scripts. Intercultural competence asks the individual to reflect upon himself or herself and to suspend one's beliefs.

Although the **teacher's** intercultural competence is the core of Bender-Szymanski's analysis, I regard the following aspects as equally essential for students:<sup>20</sup>

*reflektiert die Kulturgebundenheit eigenen Denkens, Wertens und Handelns, erkennt sich selbst auch als individuellen Deuter von Wirklichkeit, dekonstruiert seine Schemata über ‚typische‘, transsituational gültige und über die Zeit stabile kulturelle ‚Standards‘ und entdeckt Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen kulturellen Systemen“ (2008: 217-218; italics in original).*

This extract highlights the three-dimensional culture concept and the critical, analytical position of the individual who is engaged in the promotion of intercultural competence.

#### 2.1.4. Competence – Performance – Assessment

‘Intercultural Competence’, as has already been established, comprises more than successful (intercultural) communication and constitutes a complex term, which includes knowledge, attitudes as well as behaviour – elements that are closely interdependent. This section aims to explore the competence in question with regard to assessment.

The concept of intercultural competence apparently poses the question on the distinction between competence and performance as, to take up the point made earlier, as a competence such as ‘Intercultural Competence’ includes performance, i.e. behaviour or interaction. The relation between these poles is however more obscure than this suggests. Communicative action is one aspect of what Byram terms intercultural communicative competence and at the same time a temporal indication of the competence in question. Bender-Szymanski (2008: 206) suggests that a competence can be deduced from

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<sup>20</sup> When it comes to the promotion of intercultural competence in fact students as well as teachers both take on the role of learners.

behaviour so that “[...] Kompetenzen mindestens nicht geringer ausgeprägt sind, als es sich in ihren Handlungen manifestiert”. Bender-Szymanski (2008: 206; italics in original) understands cross-cultural competence therefore as

*gezeigte* und damit beobachtbare Fähigkeit [...] und damit eigentlich [...] eine ‘Performanzkompetenz’, aus der auf die zugrundeliegende, dann stringenterweise als ‘Kompetenzkompetenz’ zu benennende, geschlossen wird.

Nevertheless, at the same time she concludes on this matter that

Es ist [...] eine schwierig zu beantwortende Forschungsfrage, ob ein ‘defizitäres’ Verhalten einer Person in interkulturellen Interaktionssituationen auf mangelnde (z.B. kognitive) Kompetenzen oder auf nicht bewältigte Barrieren zurückzuführen ist, die verhindern, dass sich eine vorhandene Kompetenz auch im gezeigten Verhalten manifestiert (Bender-Szymanski 2008: 206).

‘Intercultural Competence’ can hence possibly be reflected in successful cross-cultural communication but it is possible that barriers in communication such as inhibition hinder its demonstration. Moreover, “learners might have cognitive knowledge of aspects of social interaction without necessarily being willing or able to perform or enact the appropriate behaviour” (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 139). Without (enough) practice various fields of knowledge are unlikely to be manifested in concrete action just as underachievers might deliberately counteract a demonstration of *savoirs*.

Additionally, assessment of intercultural competence through performance only assesses what is observable. Even if behaviour can be (digitally) recorded to revise aspects of the competence for close analysis, it still remains a hard endeavour to separate out single elements of the composite competence (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 147). Behaviour also draws on empathy, for instance. The relationship between these interrelated poles or constituents of intercultural competence is unclear: factual knowledge does not automatically lead to empathy, for example, but can, on the contrary, hinder the promotion of cross-cultural competence by means of self-fulfilling prophecies (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 39).

Moreover, as regards the measurement of attitudes and values it is doubtful to assume underlying values from behaviour as this method relies on qualitative interpretation and is hence not objective. Hofstede & Hofstede (2005: 21) point out the difficulty of what is feasible to assess, but also of what is desirable to assess and postulate that “[i]nferring values from people’s actions

only is cumbersome and ambiguous". The question arises whether it is ethically acceptable to assess intercultural competence as

the ways in which attitudes can be changed or encouraged are often indirect: through contexts of presentation of information, through personality, credibility and interpersonal relations. Methods which are more direct and manipulable are often ethically suspect [...] (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 137).

Put differently, it is problematic to influence attitude change, and even more so when consciously using indirect means. Naturally, it is a delicate matter to measure the affective and moral dimension of intercultural competence. When measuring values by means of written essays statements can relate to the desirable or the desired, which further complicates the assessment: in the first instance, abstraction is expressed such as in statements about people in general. In the latter more practical examples are foregrounded. "The desirable relates more to ideology, the desired to practical matter" (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 21). These two points of view can easily mismatch or differ from each other and even when the desired is closer to actual behaviour attested by the interviewee it does not necessarily present the way he or she would really behave in the actual situation (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 21).

Furthermore, and importantly, 'Intercultural Competence' denotes an ongoing process. Consequently, 'Intercultural Competence' denotes a dynamic concept not directly and entirely observable. The never-ending dimension of 'Intercultural Competence' is incorporated into the following definition: Bolten (2001: 60) acknowledges the infinite property of the competence in question and suggests 'Intercultural Competence' as "permanente[...] Lernbereitschaft um die fortschreitende Differenzierung seiner eigenen Schemata bzw. Stereotype [...]". This supports the practice of an autonomous learners, who is equipped with tools how to regulate or further their intercultural competence inside and outside the foreign language classroom. The intercultural learners, who are engaged in self-assessment, are aware of their (level of) competencies.

To summarise, as regards the assessment of intercultural competence, attitudes and behaviour, i.e. constituents of competence and complex entities forming an ongoing process, naturally cannot be assessed in the same way as factual knowledge. Additional information for assessment in form of evaluation interviews, for instance, relies on interpretation which is not objective. As this

thesis views 'Intercultural Competence' not as a status quo but as a process shaped by cultural awareness-building and reflection on all dimensions discussed a temporary documentation is not optimal either. The development of this competence is seen as an ongoing, never-ending process divided into numerous interrelated sub-processes, whose furthering shall be promoted in the classroom by shaping the learning environment appropriately. Portfolios are a means to record the individual's development of a competence.<sup>21</sup> Or, "[a]n alternative is to evaluate courses rather than assess individuals" (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 137). This suggestion will be taken up at a later point: in chapter 3.2. elements linked to didactics and the design of the learning environment, which furthers the promotion of crosscultural competence, will be identified. The following subchapters shall highlight the theoretical position of 'Intercultural Competence' in the Austrian school environment. For this purpose, the CEFR and Austrian school curricula will be scrutinised.

## **2.2. 'Intercultural Competence' Situated In the Austrian School System**

Before focusing on the educational documents, the CEFR and the Austrian school curricula, a wider picture shall be drawn in order to connect 'Intercultural Competence' to educational development or the position of education in society. Any school system can be viewed from two complemental perspectives. According to the division by Belz & Müller-Hartmann (2003: 72; italics in original)

*[s]chools* are synchronic, socio-cultural environments in which learning and teaching take place, but *schooling* refers to the diachronic socialization processes of teaching and learning to value, judge, and assign meanings in the socio-political contexts of schools.

As regards schooling, the school design throughout time, i.e. development in education, is on the one hand dependent on the prevailing school structure

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<sup>21</sup> The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a tool to record intercultural experiences besides language competence. For more information on the ELP cf. the webpage of the Council of Europe (2009).

already established and on the other hand on the dedication of social agents.<sup>22</sup>

Kress (2008: 7) supports this distinction and points out

Education [...] is an institution where principled selection, preparation and design of matter to be learned in interested engagement is the issue: the design and production of sites/environments/occasions of learning deemed essential in their society.

Alongside constant changes in technology, economy and politics due to changes in society and cultures throughout time, the school's aim of the learners' "pursuit of full participation in a democratic society" (Kress 2008: 1) is a prevalent objective. It is thus an educational principle of schooling to develop competences of dealing productively with new occurrences which cannot be provided for in school as they are likely to be unforeseen. This is not to say that school systems do not respond to the aforementioned changes, though – they however do so "at different rates at different times" (Kress 2008: 1). Kress (2008: 1) points out that today's schools are largely based on the concept of nation-state going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, as already outlined in chapter 2.1.1 nations are more complex than the term suggests for a country does not represent a single cultural entity – even less so with today's wide range of multimedia available. To what extent or in which form a policy integrates a new development such as intercultural digital communication, which may be intranational or international, is hence somewhat constrained by traditional concepts underlying today's schools.

The CEFR and its reference to multiculturalism just as the establishment of 'Intercultural Competence' as an educational principle in Austria denote reactions to ongoing socio-economic and socio-political developments such as globalisation and the establishment of the European Union. Nowadays there are various trends which exert an influence on the educational system. The state aims to educate citizens, and, at the same time, today's global market, which influences or guides the state and its institutions, shapes the development of educational systems in as far as it aims to develop 'consumers' (Kress 2008: 2).

The growing importance of the market has promoted several educational changes by now: as regards power relations, there has been "a shift [...] from hierarchical to more open, participatory relations, captured in the shift of

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<sup>22</sup> Social realism points out the close interrelatedness between these two poles (Belz & Müller-Hartmann 2003: 73).

emphasis from teaching to learning” (Kress 2008: 2). The creation of the European Union has resulted in a single market, which gives more significance to the individual learner or consumer in spe (Byram 2008: 5). Thus, social, political and economic changes can be integrated into the policy level as regards educational documents and the establishment of educational principles as well as through shifts in pedagogical and didactical methods. As education has as objective to prepare students for life, there is an urgent need for institutions to incorporate these changes.

Also the Web 2.0 technologies have seen this shift of authority: the Social Web connects people from all over the world through participatory affordances in a multimodal way according to the users’ communicative needs (Kress 2008: 2-3).<sup>23</sup> The metaphor of ‘new millennium learners’ describes learners whose lives are shaped by new technologies. However, it is not a generic term as “the effects of digital technologies on learners are deeply influenced by factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status” (OECD/CERI 2008: 1). Due to the fact that there is variation among the user-generation the difficulty of establishing and/or adopting educational policies arises. Nevertheless, strategies are needed to cope with changes and to provide compensation strategies for the so-called ‘Mathew effect’ of the digital divide. This notion describes the ever-widening gap between individuals who are empowered by cultural capital to use the potential of digital technologies in contrast to underprivileged individuals impeded to do so and the trend that

those who benefit from a better socio-economic environment find it easier to benefit from technologies [...], and they thus increase their advantage and privileged situation in comparison to those who lack such an accompanying capital (OECD/CERI 2008: 6).

Parallel to the dissolution of hierarchical power structures as regards authority and authorship in its original sense, a further trend is the fact that canonical knowledge has widely disappeared, also in the field of education (Kress 2008: 4-5). Today’s learner and user of various media has changed from a consumer to an active participant or producer of social life providing he or she is media literate. The ‘Social Web’ potentially enables “new forms of sociality and community” (Kress 2008: 4). In other words, the Web 2.0 “allow[s] users to become producers and create virtual identities which allow them to engage in a

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<sup>23</sup> The nature of the relationship between technology, and technological change, and society will be taken up at a later point again.

number of social spaces and activities” (OECD/CERI 2008: 18). Following the topical definition of culture and crosscultural competence, the promotion of intercultural competence, as will be seen in chapter 3, does not merely comprise the instruction of a pre-defined canon acknowledging learner-centredness.

The trends described above have required new (ongoing) thinking in the educational realm. Kress (2008: 5) stipulates that

[o]ne essential requirement for future oriented visions for Education is the bridging of the processes active and valued in the world outside the school and those processes active and valued inside the school.

Socioeconomic and sociopolitical trends as well as technological development must not be ignored in education; the question remains on the relation between these poles: education is not asked to mirror developments but critically think them over and correspond to them somehow (Kress 2008: 9). Kress (2008: 9) observes that “[t]he ‘young’ crave challenge and will seek it if they are not offered it”. Nowadays, a process-oriented rather than a test-oriented approach is integrating the realities outside into schools, who aim to correspond to the needs of the future generation, so that schooling is shaped by autonomous and active learners.

A school that acknowledges trends and developments has the following underlying principle, namely “of making available those resources which are judged necessary/essential for full participation of ‘learners’ in their present and future social lives” (Kress 2008: 6). Intercultural Competence is regarded to be one skill essential for future life. Kress (2008: 6) states that

[t]he profound change in educational aims is that from Education viewed as an institution for the reproduction of culture [...] – Education as a socially conservative institution; to Education as a means of shaping new generations and a new culture – Education as a socially transformative institution.

Education shall promote a kind of learning which denotes “an active engagement with the world, not acquisition but transformation, not consumption but production” (Kress 2008: 9). Following a learner-centred approach it is hence essential how ideas and concepts relate to the learners and how they engage with them. As outlined in the following documents, ‘Intercultural Competence’ denotes a crucial competence for today’s learner engaged in (intercultural) processes in the world.



### 2.2.1. 'Intercultural Competence' In the CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is the result of supranational cooperation in the field of foreign language teaching/learning and depicts

a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe [...] describ[ing] [...] what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively (Council of Europe 2001: 1).

This extract illustrates that the focus is laid on the capacity to communicate in newly acquired languages. The CEFR, developed by the Council of Europe, is a framework shaped by the Council's principles and consequently concentrates on Europe's diversity concerning cultures and languages seen as precious resource that shall be protected and promoted, and aims for the overcoming of prejudice and discrimination. The Council of Europe seeks

to develop a form of education in Europe which meets the needs of modern society and to bring the peoples of Europe together by fostering awareness of and enhancing *a common European identity* [...] (Planet 2000: 26; italics in original).

Elsewhere (Council of Europe 1998 In Council of Europe 2001: 3-4) the following objectives are formulated:

- To equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry.
- To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication.
- To maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely taught.
- To meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries, which requires a sustained, lifelong effort to be encouraged, put on an organised footing and financed at all levels of education by the competent bodies.
- To avert the dangers that might result from the marginalisation of those lacking the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe.

Not only these goals of the Council of Europe and the procedure of establishing the CEFR indicate an intercultural dimension; a survey of the tool itself makes clear that interculturality is an underlying concept. There is explicit reference to the furthering of intercultural competence by stating that

[i]n an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language education to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture (Council of Europe 2001: 1).

The Framework hence concerns itself with guiding foreign language learners, or social agents, towards a successful (intercultural) communication acknowledging that "each individual forms relationships with a widening cluster of overlapping social groups, which together define identity" (Council of Europe 2001: 1). As regards identity, the CEFR further specifies that naturally a foreign language learner does not replace the mother language and culture by the newly acquired language and associated cultures; the pluricultural and plurilingual learner rather has access to the various systems and the ability to relate the systems to each other:

The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences (Council of Europe 2001: 43).

As has been exemplified so far, the development of interculturality as specified in the CEFR relates to a dynamic conception of culture. Language as such has a dual status being part of culture and a device with which culture can be accessed. Learning a foreign language is thus seen as a stimulus for promoting intercultural competence (Council of Europe 2001: 6). The framework defines plurilingual and pluricultural competence as

the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw (Council of Europe 2001: 168).

As the tool recognises that communicative proficiency is not merely dependent on linguistic competence, it divides between general competences

“not specific to language, but which are called upon for actions of all kinds, including language activities” (Council of Europe 2001: 9), and communicative language competences, “which empower a person to act using specifically linguistic means” (Council of Europe 2001: 9). Dividing these components into greater detail, the general component consists of *savoir* (declarative knowledge), *savoir-faire* (skills and know-how), *savoir-être* (existential competence) and *savoir-apprendre* (ability to learn) whereas the communicative language competences comprise linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of interculturality relates to various aforementioned dimensions. Intercultural awareness, for instance, forms part of declarative knowledge:

Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’ produce an intercultural awareness (Council of Europe 2001: 103).

Naturally, these worlds referred to in the quotation are diverse entities shaped by the respective perspectives. Knowledge also includes an “awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other, often in the form of national stereotypes” (Council of Europe 2001: 103). Regarding *savoir-faire*, intercultural skills and know-how include the use of strategies to overcome intercultural misunderstandings and stereotypes (Council of Europe 2001: 105).

*Savoir-être* describes

the sum of the individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes which concern, for example, self-image and one’s view of others and willingness to engage with other people in social interaction (Council of Europe 2001: 11-12).

To summarise, the CEFR, which takes the social dimension of foreign language learning into account, highlights the complexity of culture and describes it on the emotional, pragmatic and emotional level. It proclaims that

in a person’s cultural competence, the various cultures (national, regional, social) to which that person has gained access do not simply co-exist side by side; they are compared, contrasted and actively interact to produce an enriched, integrated pluricultural competence, of which plurilingual competence is one component, again interacting with other components (Council of Europe 2001: 6).

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<sup>24</sup> cf. Council of Europe (2001: 101-130) for a detailed description of these competences.

The nature of plurilingual and pluricultural competence is described as composite, uneven and changing. Drawing back to language proficiency,

it is not a matter of being satisfied [...] with the development of a limited or compartmentalised mastery of a foreign language by a learner, but rather of seeing this proficiency, imperfect at a given moment, as forming part of a plurilingual competence which it enriches (Council of Europe 2001: 135).

The CEFR does not segment intercultural competence into ‘can do-descriptors’ or into any other form of objectives in contrast to the six levels of the linguistic competence (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). Byram (2003: 13), whose intercultural objectives could be seen in figure 7, points out to the objectivity necessary for the establishment of descriptive criteria:

Les descripteurs de la ‘tolérance de l’ambiguïté’ ou d’une dimension similaire de la compétence interculturelle sont [...] susceptibles d’impliquer un jugement moral de ce qui est acceptable ou non, de ce qui figure dans la description ou n’y figure pas.

In evaluating aspects of intercultural competence subjective thoughts on morality are automatically incorporated and render the assessment unobjective and hence not useful for a wider comparison. Therefore, subjective criteria would counter the objectives of the Council of Europe, whose focal point lies at European level.

Just as the section above focused on the CEFR as a reference tool for foreign language teachers as regards the dimension of interculturality, an analysis of the Austrian school curricula will accordingly follow below.

### 2.2.2. ‘Intercultural Competence’ In Austrian School Curricula

A curriculum seen as “the path travelled by a learner through a sequence of educational experiences” acknowledges that

plurilingual and pluricultural competence may begin before school and continue to develop out of school in ways which proceed parallel with its development in school (Council of Europe 2001: 174).

‘Intercultural Competence’ is clearly not exclusively a matter of education policy but concerns society and politics in general.

Education policy in Austria has taken up the concept of ‘interculturality’: since the beginning of the 1990s, ‘Intercultural Learning’ has been established

as a common principle of education.<sup>25</sup> The webpage of the BM:UKK (2009; bolt in original) specifies that

**Das Unterrichtsprinzip hilft allen Beteiligten zu entdecken, dass**

- Menschen gleichwertig, aber unterschiedlich sind.
- dass die Identität eines Menschen auch, aber nicht ausschließlich kulturell bedingt ist und dass sie sich im Laufe eines Lebens verändern und weiterentwickeln kann.
- dass es möglich ist, mit Unterschieden zu leben.
- dass man voneinander lernen und trotz unterschiedlicher Lebensumstände einander achten, helfen und in Freundschaft leben kann.

In order to demonstrate that intercultural competence has been incorporated into Austrian school curricula, the AHS-curriculum will serve as an exemplum and will be analysed in the following.<sup>26</sup> From the general part of the curriculum (BM:UKK 2004a), relevant for *Unterstufe* (lower secondary school) as well as *Oberstufe* (upper secondary school), it can be seen that the concept of interculturality is twofold included. Part one labelled 'Allgemeines Bildungsziel' refers to the principle of education: it acknowledges the importance and relevance of 'Intercultural Competence' in today's world specifying that

Der Unterricht hat aktiv zu einer den Menschenrechten verpflichteten Demokratie beizutragen. Urteils- und Kritikfähigkeit sowie Entscheidungs- und Handlungskompetenzen sind zu fördern, sie sind für die Stabilität pluralistischer und demokratischer Gesellschaften entscheidend. Den Schülerinnen und Schülern ist in einer zunehmend internationalen Gesellschaft jene Weltoffenheit zu vermitteln, die vom Verständnis für die existenziellen Probleme der Menschheit und von Mitverantwortung getragen ist. Dabei sind Humanität, Solidarität, Toleranz, Frieden, Gerechtigkeit, Gleichberechtigung und Umweltbewusstsein handlungsleitende Werte (BM:UKK 2004a: 4).

Moreover, part two labelled 'Allgemeine didaktische Grundsätze', which focuses on teaching methods, points out that

Interkulturelles Lernen beschränkt sich nicht bloß darauf, andere Kulturen kennen zu lernen. Vielmehr geht es um das gemeinsame Lernen und das Begreifen, Erleben und Mitgestalten kultureller Werte. Aber es geht auch darum, Interesse und Neugier an kulturellen Unterschieden zu wecken, um nicht nur kulturelle Einheit, sondern auch Vielfalt als wertvoll erfahrbar zu machen.

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<sup>25</sup> Assigning schools the task to match society's (ever-changing) requirements, Binder & Daryabegi (2002: 91) interpret the introduction of interculturality into the school statute as "[...] Reaktion auf die durch Migration veränderte gesellschaftliche Situation [...]".

<sup>26</sup> This type of school has been chosen for its outstanding factor of incorporating 5<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade, i.e. its relevance for students of the widest age group.

Durch die identitätsbildende Wirkung des Erfahrens von Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschieden der Kulturen, insbesondere in ihren alltäglichen Ausdrucksformen (Lebensgewohnheiten, Sprache, Brauchtum, Texte, Liedgut usw.), sind die Schülerinnen und Schüler zu Akzeptanz, Respekt und gegenseitiger Achtung zu führen (BM:UKK 2004a: 5).

It can be seen from the quotations that cultural awareness is explicit in the curriculum. An analysis of the specifications for English as school subject, or more precisely, 'Lebende Fremdsprache (Erste, Zweite)', demonstrates further that 'Sozialkompetenz und interkulturelle Kompetenz' and 'Interkulturelle Kompetenz' are incorporated as 'Bildungs- und Lehraufgabe' in the Unterstufe and Oberstufe-curriculum respectively without formulating concrete objectives.<sup>27</sup>

It has become evident that the Austrian school environment, shaped by the curricula and the CEFR, which both refer to interculturality, takes 'Intercultural Competence' into account and at the same time refuse the formulation of precise learning objectives. By incorporating cross-cultural competence into these documents it is nevertheless clear that it is a factor in education.

However, Binder & Daryabegi (2002: 92) found by means of interviews and classroom observations

dass die Praxis Interkulturellen Lernens keine institutionalisierte, selbstverständliche Grund-Lehr-Haltung ist, sondern vom Engagement und Interesse einzelner LehrerInnen abhängt.

Proceeding from this consideration, in the following the teachers' possibilities of furthering the learners' intercultural competence will be in the centre of focus. More precisely, the possibilities of shaping the learning environment to be beneficial for the promotion of the competence in question will be scrutinised.

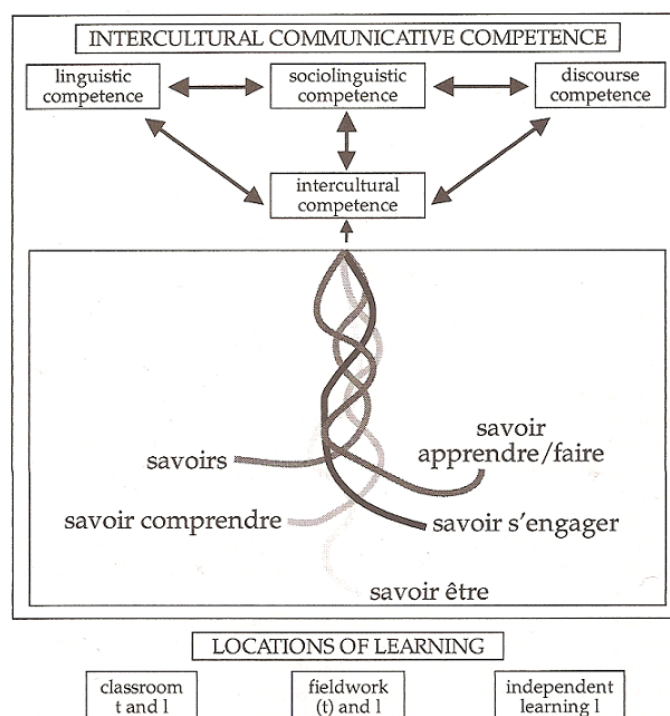
### **3. Promoting 'Intercultural Competence' In Foreign Language Teaching**

Following the definition of 'Intercultural Competence' underlying this thesis, this section is concerned with its promotion. Apart from the educational classroom Byram (1997: 65) identifies two further sites where intercultural competence can be promoted, namely the experience outside school with/without pedagogic

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<sup>27</sup> cf. the Unterstufe-curriculum (BM:UKK 2000) and Oberstufe-curriculum (BM:UKK 2004b) for a detailed outline.

support. These locations are depicted at the bottom of figure 8 (adopted from Byram 1997: 73). The distinctive difference between learning and the foreign language classroom is the fact that the latter is influenced by institutional formalities. This setting will put possibilities as well as constraints onto the individual learning processes, which are at today's centre of foreign language classroom, as will be examined at a later point (Byram 2008: 6-7).



**Figure 8**

This model situates crosscultural competence in relation to its subcompetences, which accounts for the complexity involved.<sup>28</sup> The figure further demonstrates that intercultural competence includes attitudes, skills and knowledge and supplements communicative competence with an intercultural dimension. The establishment of intercultural dialogue denotes a dynamic process in which language competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence play a role. Mao (2009: 145) describes this interrelatedness with regard to the promotion of cross-cultural competence as follows:

[t]he ultimate goal of teaching culture is to nurture the intercultural communicative competence that will complement with language competence to accomplish to a fuller extent the communicative function of language.

To take up the idea again that there are various sites of learning mentioned above, an educational setting is not a condition or prerequisite for

<sup>28</sup> In the figure, the abbreviations 't' and 'l' signify 'teacher' and 'learner' respectively.

the development of intercultural competence. However, it can widely contribute to critical cultural awareness building (Byram 1999a: 20). Byram (1999a: 19) refers to the interplay of learner and teacher as *savoir-s'engager*, which describes the animation of the learner by the supportive teacher to challenge what seems to be self-evident.<sup>29</sup> As the focus of this thesis is on foreign language education only, it aims to investigate approaches to further the learners' 'Intercultural Competence' in foreign language teaching, which

has the experience of otherness at the centre of its concern, as it requires learners to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar experience through the medium of another language (Byram 1997: 3).

In foreign language teaching the target culture is mediated either via textual cultural representations such as newspaper articles or fiction, or, in case the learners interact with the target culture, via the spoken or written course of interaction. The intercultural learner assumes the role of a mediator who negotiates (textual or lexical) meanings and for instance clarifies differences. Byram & Morgan et al. (1994: 157) define the characteristics of the mediator as being able "to relativise and understand himself and his own culture and to negotiate on the basis of this understanding". The learner shall hence constitute meaning by critically engaging with foreign as well as his own cultures.<sup>30</sup>

Obviously the foreign language classroom lends itself particularly to intercultural competence as learning a foreign language has per se an intercultural dimension:

Der Schüler, der die fremde Sprache benutzt, erfährt zum einen, daß die scheinbar ontologische Einheit von Sprache und Bedeutung auseinanderfällt, und zum anderen, daß sich die Dinge nicht so einfach von einer Sprache in die andere übersetzen lassen (Bredella 1999: 89).

In other words, language mediates culture and the reciprocal evocation of language and culture is particularly present in foreign language learning. Highlighting the correlation between culture and language use Byram & Morgan et al. (1994) adopt the hyphenated term 'language-and-culture'. Alternatively, Agar (1994) coins the term *languaculture*.

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<sup>29</sup> At the same time, of course, in a school setting also the teacher assumes a learner role and is asked to question and qualify unconscious ethnocentric values (Byram & Zarate 1998b: 13).

<sup>30</sup> The skill of mediation of the intercultural speaker or 'mediator' is decisive in distinguishing him or her from a bicultural speaker (Byram 2008: 55).



Although language and culture are closely linked, they are not identical. Hofstede & Hofstede (2005: 328) stress that

[I]language and culture are not so closely linked that sharing a language implies sharing a culture; nor should a difference in language always impose a difference in cultural values.

Both, language and culture are integral parts of one's identity but are still not the same. Although sharing the same language, an Australian taxi driver might have little in common with an Indian university Professor of Mathematics just as both do not assume completely new identities when conversing in a foreign language or lingua franca, for instance. An essentialist conception of the equation of the linguistic system and the cultural system does clearly not hold true (Risager 2006: 3).

As reaction to the inherent relevance of interculturality in foreign language learning/teaching, the focus of former foreign language education, namely language competence, has been enlarged by the **intercultural** communicative approach: the learner is not seen as approximating a target language speaker in terms of a near-native speaker linguistic competence any more but as an intercultural speaker (Byram & Zarate 1998a: 10).<sup>31</sup> Trim (1998: 6) summarises this paradigm shift as follows

Using a foreign language in a way which shows understanding of its sociocultural dimension does not mean abandoning one's own cultural identity in order to become a carbon copy of native speakers, but rather developing a more complex personality in which both cultures interact, enabling the learner to bridge the cultural gap.

The foreign language learner, who engages in the creation of a third space, represents a social agent who uses language according to his means. Language hence "plays a crucial role not only in the construction of culture, but in the emergence of cultural change" (Kramsch 1996: 3). Consequently, language education automatically implies "ein Infragestellen vorhandener Identitäten und Vorstellungen bezüglich des Selbst und des Fremden" (Byram & Zarate 1998b). Through cross-cultural interaction or the confrontation with the other, native and foreign scripts that are previously taken for granted are questioned, revisited and qualified. This process naturally includes a linguistic dimension as the learners who are working on their skills and attitudes are at

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<sup>31</sup> The concept of a 'native speaker' and its multifarious nature will be scrutinised at a later point.

the same time involved in language use. Byram & Morgan et al. (1994: 39) highlight that

[t]here can be no negotiation of shared meanings and understanding of the world if interlocutors simply encode their own meaning without seeking to understand its relationship to that of others.

The potential of foreign language teaching as regards the promotion of intercultural competence has been taken up by the Council of Europe. As outlined in the White Paper (Council of Europe 2008: 29) “[l]anguage learning helps learners to avoid stereotyping individuals, to develop curiosity and openness to otherness and to discover other cultures”. Language classes may certainly help learners to see that interaction with individuals with different social identities and cultures is an enriching experience. At the same time, learning a foreign language does not automatically promote the learner’s intercultural competence but relies on a supportive learning environment.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, personal intercultural experiences do not necessarily support the learner’s cross-cultural competence either; they can even confirm existing stereotypes and prejudices by means of self-fulfilling prophecies in which case “preconceptions and stereotypes are not altered but reinforced, because only confirming information is selected” (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 39).<sup>33</sup>

Kramsch (1993: 234) stresses the potential of learning environments that refuse the essentialist view of culture by suggesting that

[f]oreign language teaching, because of its saliency of national characteristics, is particularly prone to viewing this fence [i.e. the border between cultures] as a dichotomous boundary. But experiencing the boundary means discovering that each of these cultures is much less monolithic than was originally perceived; each includes a myriad of potential changes [...].

The foreign language classroom is ideally a space for the learners to engage in cultural mediation and their development of intercultural competence, which relies on a rich environment. In the next chapter the methodological implications of successful intercultural learning for foreign language course design will be surveyed before scrutinising the particular elements of a learning environment

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<sup>32</sup> The command of a foreign language can theoretically even foster the damage of cultures in as far as they can get exploited or manipulated with the help of linguistic means, for instance.

<sup>33</sup> The assumption that experiences in a foreign language environment automatically trigger crosscultural learning has been described as the ‘Magic-Carpet-Ride-to-Another-Culture Syndrome’ by Robinson (1978: 138 in Bateman 2002: 318) highlighting that it denotes wishful thinking that cannot hold true.

supportive for the furthering of crosscultural competence. In the following, methods as regards the current foreign language learning/teaching landscape promoting the learner's development of 'Intercultural Competence' in class will be under investigation.

### **3.1. Approaches in the Current Landscape**

With the paradigm shift to the foreign language learner as intercultural speaker the

learners have to be addressed not as deficient monoglossic enunciators, but as potentially heteroglossic narrators. The texts they speak and the texts they write have to be considered not only as instances of grammatical or lexical enunciation, and not only as expressing the thoughts of their authors, but as situated utterances contributing to the construction, perpetuation or subversion of particular cultural contexts (Kramsch 1996: 8).

The modern language teacher, who encourages the learners to ever-develop their intercultural competence, places the learners' needs central in education and pays attention to "the shifting and emerging third place of the language learners [...]" (Kramsch 1996: 8).

Parallel to the paradigm change to the foreign language learner as an intercultural speaker, the demands on the methods aiming at the furthering of intercultural competence have changed. Acknowledging the (topical) definition of culture and interculturality underlying this thesis, it is obvious that knowing a list which informs about foreign cultural schemata following an ethnocentric tradition is inappropriate: a programmatic approach does not assist the promotion of a complex and dynamic competence such as intercultural competence but wrongly suggests conformity and thus an illusory security (Knapp 2008: 93). The learner, who is encouraged to further his or her intercultural competence, is ideally embedded in promotion processes, which not only cognitively challenge the learner but cater for all dimensions of the composite competence, i.e. knowledge, emotions and behaviour.<sup>34</sup>

As 'Intercultural Competence' comprises a cognitive, emotional and pragmatic dimension, an approach that relates to more than only one level of

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<sup>34</sup> Hammerschmidt (1998: 242) describes purely cognitive involvement as a state of being "ohne Anker"; cross-culturality requires the self to be embedded in processes involving their thoughts, emotions and actions.

intercultural competence is certainly appropriate since it recognises the diversity and complexity involved. Bateman (2002: 320) suggests that

culture learning that occurs at only one or two levels, such as in the learning of only cultural facts (cognitive level) or appropriate cultural behaviours (behavioral level), may be insufficient to affect learners' attitudes toward the target culture.

As the dimensions of crosscultural competence are closely interrelated, the promotion needs to be embedded into this complex.

Acknowledging the dynamics of culture and interculturality the focus of the current landscape is more on the development of the intercultural learner's procedural skills than on mere static knowledge. Consequently, pre-set conversation strategies on the successful handling of critical incidents are not an adequate method to cater for the successful intercultural performance. Culture is a dynamic construct and the procedure of mere strategies does not enable the learner to negotiate one's way in new and ever changing contexts (Tenberg 1999: 68). There are no preset recipes to successful intercultural communication as a strategy cannot be detached from a communicative event: a strategy might not be utile in every situation as interlocutors might assume different roles according to different communication situations influencing time, place and the relationship aspect (Knapp 2008: 95).

Followingly, the focus of a topical intercultural competence methodology is more on the conditions for learning or how to teach, i.e. the design of the learning environment, than on what to teach (Neuner 2003b: 17). The learners might find themselves in unexpected situations and cultures are dynamic constructs so that learners need to be autonomous. The learner's response to learning is thus in the foreground. It follows that the learner characteristics are vital in choosing an adequate method. Concerning a learner's intercultural competence, learner centredness is indispensable. Empathy, for instance, relies amongst other things on the learner's preexperiences and character: "[i]n order to empathise with another individual one needs to take into account personality, situation, social groups and national identity" (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 25).

In promoting an intercultural understanding, the learner is asked to develop role distance by establishing and deepening an understanding and awareness of one's identity and by breaking up the illusory universality of one's own culture. The foreign language learner gains new insights and experiences

in the foreign culture as well as rethinks his or her own cultures (Neuner 2003b: 45). Naturally, the psychological development of learners and learner variables play an essential role in the degree of ability to decentre. Bredella & Delanoy (1999: 15), for instance, observe

Wenn der interkulturelle Fremdsprachenunterricht die sprachliche und kulturelle Identität der Lernenden anerkennt, dann müssen [...] die Lernenden Gelegenheit haben, ihr Vorverständnis, ihre Erwartungen und Erfahrungen zu artikulieren.

Naturally, in the development to shift perspectives, to decentre and to reflect critically “one’s own cultural standpoint, one’s own existing values and expectations affect one’s own perceptions” (Byram & Morgan et al 1994: 152). Similarly, Neuner (1998: 75) specifies that

[t]he learner’s own world and the sociocultural experience forming his own outlook on life play an important role in his perception and evaluation of sociocultural phenomena of the foreign world. Therefore, his own world must not be excluded from foreign language teaching [...].

With regard to learner characteristics it is vital for teachers not to rely on coursebooks for interests of the actual class can vary.<sup>35</sup> What is more, “authors’ *opinions* might easily be (mis)taken as *facts*, and the manipulative character of any kind of pre-selection is not (always) made transparent (enough)” (Fischer 1998: 76; italics in original). Furthermore, due to their nature as print texts, school books cannot present an up-to-date view on intercultural matters and the presentation of the target culture is often not authentic. For these reasons, supplementary measures, in forms of materials, activities and projects, ought to be taken.

Complying with the learner-centred approach the class shall have a decisive role in the course design such as the identification of relevant cultural elements (Pachler, Barnes & Field 2009: 183). Similarly, Byram & Morgan et al. (1994: 50) suggest that

a selection [...] should be partly determined by auto-and hetero-stereotypes in the foreign group and in the learners’ own national social group [...].

This way the existing resources and conceptions of the learners would be used as a starting point for the promotion of intercultural competence following a learner-centred approach.

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<sup>35</sup> cf. Morgan (2001) for a project which has the learners create a material package (including various media) themselves, which is exchanged with material from a partner class.

As could be seen in figure 2, which visualises culture acquisition, every learner has already acquired reference systems (in his or her first language-and-culture), which are present in the classroom as basis for further investigation. Zarate (1999: 11) highlights the value of the learner's former individual experiences, which shall be integrated into the educational setting: the intercultural speaker is characterised by the informed reflection on foreign and on one's own cultures.

Especially as regards reflection, the age of the learners influences didactic measures. Usually, it is easier for younger learners to focus on affective learning objectives than on (meta-)cognitive ones (Byram & Zarate 1998b: 17). General terms like 'culture', for instance, are more difficult to grasp for younger learners. In a spiral progression students have the opportunity to revisit elements and can hence strengthen their individual skills according to their own developmental needs: a spiral progression allows for topics and themes to reoccur without duplicating the same learning objectives or learning effect as the individual learners benefit from the multiple references.

As students in puberty might feel insecure, they consequently look for support in their peer group while discriminating themselves from the out group: "das Abgrenzungsbedürfnis, der eigene Ethnozentrismus, wird geradezu zur Voraussetzung für Stabilität und Verhaltenssicherheit" (Hansen 1996: 107). In contrast, students in upper secondary school

können den Diskurs über Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zu/mit den ‚Anderen‘ zulassen, weil ihre Verunsicherung nachgelassen hat, ihre Rollensuche zu vorläufigen Ergebnissen geführt hat (Hansen 1996: 107).

Despite this trend every group of adolescents is made up of individuals with different abilities concerning their degree of ethnocentricity and of abstraction, levels which depend on individual identities including their various preexperiences.

[D]evelopmental theory suggests that some learners will attain the requisite conceptual and moral stage before the end of lower secondary, although others may not (Byram & Zarate et al 1994: 171).

A spiral progression as well as a method that accounts for all dimensions of culture acknowledges the heterogeneity of the learners. An experience-oriented method to culture learning, in which the learners experience the

conditions of intercultural communication, integrates cognitive ability and the capacity to act. What is more, the integration of a general component such as a discussion on abstract terms like 'culture' or 'ethnocentrism' is essential as these notions can be useful in reflection. Discussions on abstract terms are fruitful for metacommunication in helping to step outside of one's role, i.e. they are a means to further reflection. A combination of culture-specific and culture-general approaches is therefore adequate since they complement one another (Kainzbauer 2002: 23). Kramsch (1996: 3) similarly highlights that intercultural competence does neither focus on the universal property of culture, i.e. the humane character, nor on the particularities of different cultures, i.e. the essentialist binary of the cultures of the ingroup and outgroup. Instead, interculturality asks for

[b]reaking down stereotypes [...] understanding that we are irreducibly unique and different, and that I could have been you, you could have been me, given different circumstances [...] (Kramsch 1996: 3).

Therefore, "[t]eaching culture means [...] teaching not only how things are and have been, but how they could have been or how else they could be" (Kramsch 1996: 3).

A contrastive approach is useful in the promotion of intercultural competence, which is supported by research into the learners' psychological development. Although a comparative methodology, which relies on the relativity of phenomena and reflective insights into cultures, is particularly fruitful when learners reached a certain stage of moral development, comparison shall nevertheless be established at an early stage. Again, a spiral progression is helpful as students can reconsider elements at a more mature stage (Byram & Morgan et al 1994: 171). This way, in a class which is naturally heterogeneous learners gain the opportunity to promote their individual competence by various degrees of complexity and detail balancing between individual insights and collective experiences. Byram & Morgan et al (1994: 170) suggest that to contrast cultural elements from one culture with another is a suitable method for beginners as well as experienced learners independent of their age and summarise that

[t]he differentiation between levels should be made in terms of the complexity of the comparative analysis of a given cultural

phenomenon and, secondly, in terms of a gradual increase in the detail of cultural phenomena.

Furthermore, the historical dimension of culture can ideally be increased in time in a spiral progression, in which phenomena will be revised at a later stage. This procedure acknowledges the dynamic property of culture, which allows for cultural variation in time. Just as culture holds social and local diversity, it includes historic traditions. Townson (1999: 76) highlights that the historical dimension underlying cultural schemata shall not be left aside in promoting intercultural competence as it provides essential additional layers of meaning. In other words, a synchronous approach focusing on the observation and interpretation of the diversity of topical schemata only is not sufficient since it ignores numerous opportunities for the learners to get involved and actively participate in the construction of knowledge. What is more, the dispensation with the (historic) evolvement of stereotypes and images tends to reinforce or strengthen them instead of enrich them with other aspects.

The comparison of cultures allows the learners to adopt a *regard croisé*, an outlook from a double perspective:

Confrontation with their [the learners'] own culture seen from the perspective of others is an important means of bringing unconscious and 'naturalised' beliefs into consciousness so that their relativity and specificity can be acknowledged (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 44).

This perspective allows the learners to realise that their scripts are not natural but learned. This certainly does not imply an evaluation of what behaviour/attitude is the right or wrong one, i.e. a double perspective does not imply a judgement but helps to relativise schemata. The starting point for a comparison can either be the look on 'the other' or the familiar (Planet & Byram 2000: 89). Cultural representations present the basis of a *regard croisé*: the texts carry cultural information susceptible to comparison and can either be a representation of a perspective or of a culture: while the former represents "a look at culture, [the second describes] a look out from culture" (Risager 2006: 167). Byram & Morgan et al. (1994: 55) further point out that

[t]he techniques of [cultural] representation may be both 'realistic' and 'fantastic'; images and 'stories' may be of actual people and places or may be caricatures or fiction, but they must always refer to reality.



Literature typically presents a look out from inside culture. They are suitable for the promotion of intercultural competence and can stimulate discussion:

Les textes littéraires englobent une foule d'informations intéressantes et bien organisées spécifiques à la culture, sur les gens, leurs actes, leur comportement et leurs expériences, [...] invitant ainsi à la discussion sur d'autres cultures (différentes) et leurs pratiques (Babamova, Grosman, Licari & Pervan 2003: 107).

Fenner (2001: 19) points out that literature is a suitable departure especially for lower secondary school learners as the text, presenting an outlook or personal voice of the foreign culture, confronts the learner, whose degree of abstraction is less advanced, with the particular. The pupils at that age generally find it easier "to relate to and identify with particular individuals and situations than with the general".

Byram (2000: 23) suggests that

to reflect on their own social identity as well as learning about others', texts which describe the experience of a foreigner living in the pupils' country are particularly effective. They give an outsider's view on the too familiar reality which pupils think they know, and 'make the familiar strange' (Byram 2000: 23).

The classroom similarly lends itself to relativising one's own assumptions in sharing ideas with peers. This way, the cultural particularity and the general is balanced. Kramsch (1993: 240) similarly suggests with relation to textual representations that "[t]he constant struggle between individual and social meanings in discourse needs to be accepted and exploited, rather than ignored".

The literary text does not only provide insights into the 'foreign culture' but also offers literary language such as metaphors, which leave space for different interpretations. Therefore, literature's potential lies in

the 'space' where the learners can experience the multiplicity of meaning. [...] Literature gives the learners ample opportunity to explore the multiplicity of language as well as culture when they engage actively in the reading process to discover meaning (Fenner 2001: 16).<sup>36</sup>

In general, contrasting lexical items can clearly be a point of departure for intercultural learning. Connotations of L1 items lend themselves to be contrasted with the apparently equivalent foreign language patterns. Lexis thus provides an insight into cultures (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 44). Texts are a

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<sup>36</sup> cf. Kramsch (1993) for a detailed discussion on the approach using literary texts, especially chapter 4 and 5.

rich source as regards the learner's receptive understanding as well as activities such as follow-up discussions with peers (Fenner 2001: 17).

By focusing on learners' interpretations and problems in the intercultural encounter with the foreign language text, peers and teacher can mediate a dynamic process of developing language awareness and cultural awareness (Fenner 2001: 39).

Risager (2006: 169) points out that in foreign language teaching in the move towards the intercultural communicative speaker also texts and topics which relate to the students' own cultures are to be included. She distinguishes (Risager 2006: 161) between internal and external cultural representations and references: the internal ones are from a L1 context while the others are from a foreign language context. In this regard, in today's language classroom internal as well as external representations are present including representations from the insider and outsider perspective. Cultural representations can naturally take a wide range of visual and textual authentic document types.

Such documents can range from tourist brochures to videos and posters, which can in turn be complemented by asking pupils in a contact class to provide their own visual and textual accounts of their environment as they would present it to outsiders (Byram 2000: 23).

In chapter 4 the possibilities of the computer and its potential of furthering the learner's intercultural competence will be scrutinised. Before concentrating on this tool, in the next chapter factors of a suitable learning environment acknowledging the implications of the intercultural learner will be introduced, i.e. a site of learning, which takes the requirements for a suitable methodology described above into account. It has become obvious that

learners need to engage actively with alternative interpretations of the world, meeting phenomena which express some of the shared meanings of the foreign culture and which they can compare and contrast with their own [...] (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994: 50).

The learning environment, shaped by the decisive characteristics of learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the particular function of the learners' L1s, shall be investigated with regard to intercultural competence. Concerning the introduction of e-projects and their evaluation at a later point, the leading question is on what learning can take place through classroom design.

### 3.2. Learning environment

Since the learning environment shall further individual learning, the foreign language learner's response to it shall naturally be evaluated. As regards the relation between a learner's development and its assessment it is vital to bear in mind that

although learning is directly related to the course of child development, the two are never accomplished in equal measure or in parallel. Development in children never follows school learning in the way a shadow follows the object that casts it. In actuality, there are highly complex dynamic relations between developmental and learning processes [...] (Vygotsky 1978: 91).

These dynamics make the assessment of learning a delicate matter. The process approach to educational course design focuses on the individual development of the learners by optimising the educational environment for the learning processes. As a course proceeds, formative assessment provides a means to facilitate immediate improvement of the design aiming to ensure that the factors established in class have a beneficial influence. Additionally, summative assessment at the end of a course reviews the learning objectives established and evaluates in how far they have been reached throughout the learning environment. Hedge (2000: 355) lists several methods of how students can be directly involved in the conscious design of the learning environment through feedback:

- Interview students in groups or individually.
- Ask students to complete questionnaires in class or at home.
- Ask students to write key comments on posters.
- Hold an informal discussion.
- Ask students to make evaluative notes individually on the week's class to give to the teacher.

What is more, learners can draw conclusions on their learning processes by creating learner diaries or portfolios, which "provide[...] a comprehensive picture of his or her capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses" (Hedge 2000: 390). This way, reflection on what furthers and impedes their learning is encouraged and facilitated.

As outlined above it is not sufficient to create a learning environment that potentially supports the learners' development of intercultural competence but it is further vital to constantly investigate the effects of the environment on the learning processes throughout the course in order to ensure its support. The

learners' promotion of their intercultural communicative competence shall be enabled by optimising the learning environment as described in the following in which the factors supporting the development of learners' intercultural competence will be outlined.

### 3.2.1. Learner Autonomy and the Role of the Teacher

As established earlier the learner's individual experiences are a vital dimension in the promotion of intercultural competence. Apart from the learner characteristics as crucial starting points in the intercultural classroom, the learner, who is asked to reflect upon himself and to question unconscious scripts, shall take responsibility for his role as social actor and shall be embedded as autonomous learner in the classroom; for instance, "students should be encouraged to take an active part in the revealing of the cultural information" (Mao 2009: 147). This means that students shall be actively and consciously involved in what Byram identifies as 'the skill of discovery and interaction'. Learner autonomy is crucial to Byram's framework as can especially be seen in the component of *savoir-apprendre*: the learners shall acquire techniques which they can apply independently to other aspects, i.e. without reliance on a teacher.

Naturally, it is impossible for teachers to predict in what situations the learners will find themselves in future. In other words, the teachers cannot prepare the learners for every situation that will one day be relevant for the students. The teacher's task is hence to assume the role of a coach or trainer supporting or guiding the learners on their way towards greater self autonomy, which denotes a learner's process of becoming an active, self-determined social agent. In this way, the teachers prepare the learners for unpredictability in as far as they help them to strengthen their autonomy and self-responsible learning.

Learner autonomy [...] is part of a wider development in education that aims at preparing young people for lifelong learning through the ability to organise and direct their own learning inside and outside the school context (Camilleri 1999: 5).

Camilleri (1999: 5) points out: "[a]s learner autonomy becomes a pedagogical ideal [...] the greater the need there is for teachers to be adept at encouraging its practice". Teachers are hence not indispensable although the

autonomous student is defined by the ability to master cross-cultural situations in which teachers are not present, for the learners are aware of their capabilities and know how to react in a self-responsible way by regulating the use of the target language outside of the classroom.

Autonomy on part of the student is helpful for intercultural experiences, in which the learners take on the roles of mature social agents, which in turn further promotes the learners' self-determination:

[t]he acquisition of autonomy is a response to the need to master situations which are first and foremost defined by their unpredictability and by cultural and linguistic uncertainty (Zarate 1999: 11).

Byram (1997: 69) regards learner autonomy as essential in intercultural encounters: "[f]or experience to become learning, learners must become autonomous in their capacity for refining and increasing their knowledge, skills and attitudes". Students who only apply learned pre-set strategies in cross-cultural communication and do not tackle the situation in a responsible and deliberate way are not prone to promote their intercultural competence. Consequently, the teacher's role is to provide a learner-friendly environment of learner autonomy:

A learner-centred approach means that teachers do not provide answers in the form of ready-made analysis of information, but only provide information or sources of information, requiring learners to make their own decisions about what is important and what is trivial (Planet & Byram 2000: 90).

The learner is an active participant in the construction of meaning and looks for cultural similarities and differences in a contrastive approach. As a social agent with preexperiences as part of (ever-developing) identities the autonomous learner makes conscious and informed decisions about his or her behaviour in the crosscultural communication. The principle of learner autonomy is embedded in constructivist learning theory which regards autonomous learners as preconditions of learning:

[k]nowledge is discovered by students and transformed into concepts students can relate to. It is then reconstructed and expanded through new learning experiences (Panitz 2001a).

This means that the learners do not passively accept the information provided by the teacher but assume active roles in their learning. Autonomous learners rather critically reflect on their learning processes, which includes their

individual learning strategies and styles, with the aim to further their learning. Besides the learner's ability to determine and manage their needs the environment shall enable the learner's self-responsible attitude (Rivers 2001: 287). Self-management and also self-assessment depend on metacognition. The metacognitive ability involved in planning and monitoring one's learning process relates to the metacommunicative skill involved in intercultural competence: in both, self-awareness is essential as the learner is subject of introspection and is asked to reflect upon oneself including one's language use (Rivers 2001: 279).

Apart from taking influence in the design of the learning environment, autonomous students reflect on their learning outcome by means of self-assessment and, for instance, establish criteria or/and means to evaluate themselves. The teacher's sensitivity is demanded for in order not to overburden the learners. It is clear that the regulation and the assessment of the learner's own learning progress imply and require the student's ability of how to learn.

Learner autonomy, which is closely linked to lifelong learning, is an essential paradigm from which the students' (future) development benefits. As regards the intercultural dimension Bredella & Delanoy (1999: 15) point out that

[a]ls erfahrungsorientierter Ansatz verlangt interkultureller Fremdsprachenunterricht danach, daß Lernende aktiv am Entdecken von Bedeutungen mitwirken. Das bedeutet auch, daß sie selbst [...] am Entwickeln von Aufgabenstellungen beteiligt werden.

When students share the responsibility for the selection of materials and aims, the teacher leaves space for the learners to pursue their own interests. The learners can be personally involved in the definition of aims and activities. This can be motivating and promote the learning process (Pachler & Field 1999: 68).

By allowing learners to draw on their own curiosity, interests and active involvement through independent learning, successful outcomes can be seen to be more likely, leading in turn to yet more positive attitudes (Pachler & Field 1999: 67).

This means that in their exploration of cultures, learners shall be given a voice as regards the design of lessons including the definition of learning objectives.

As learners might feel overchallenged in assuming an autonomous role as moderators of their learning alongside the teacher, the degrees of their autonomy shall gradually rise: learner autonomy shall be carefully introduced

and encouraged to avoid frustration on side of the learner. Learner autonomy is a continuum: in distant learning, for instance, i.e. a form of learning without the presence of a teacher, the experienced language learner decides where and when to learn. This setting requires great autonomy on part of the learners, who can feel overchallenged by this demand. Therefore, “[l]earner independence needs to be seen as a developmental process, with strategies and skills being introduced to the learner in a gradual way“ (Pachler & Field 1999: 70).<sup>37</sup> Learner autonomy refers to the individual learner’s capability, and in an intercultural context denotes for example the successful mediation between native cultures and foreign cultures. It is thus further related to social responsibility, which leads on to the next element of a fruitful learning environment.

### 3.2.2. Collaborative Learning

A further supportive characteristic concerning the learner’s intercultural competence is collaborative learning, a principle that relies on learner autonomy. Communication between learners is obviously a keyword regarding this practice and shall be briefly specified: learner interaction can be seen from two different perspectives, namely ‘cooperation’ and ‘collaboration’. While both terms allude to a grouping of several learners, they hold different characteristics: ‘cooperation’ implies that the participants have different tasks in trying to construct knowledge; the labour is thus divided amongst them. In contrast, students grouped in ‘collaboration’ are mutually engaged with one another so that the process rather than an end product is in the centre of inspection (Panitz 2001a).

Panitz (2001a) concludes on collaborative and cooperative learning

[c]ollaboration is a philosophy of interaction [...] where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and respect[ing] the abilities and contributions of their peers; Cooperation is a structure of interaction designed to facilitate the accomplishment of a specific end product or goal through people working together in groups.

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<sup>37</sup> cf. Hedge (2000: 86-96) and Camilleri (1999: 43-71) for a suggestion on possible activities on learner training towards learner autonomy: activities on the reflection on learning, the training of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and the self-monitoring of the learning process are included.

Clearly, collaborative learning draws on learner autonomy: learners are grouped in interaction to responsibly engage with one another, which simultaneously reduces their dependence on the traditional teacher as source of all knowledge. The teacher's role is altered in collaborative learning in as far as this practice "shifts the responsibility for learning away from the teacher as expert to the student, and perhaps teacher, as learner" (Panitz 2001a). In collaborative learning the teacher is not regarded the expert any more but takes on the role of a facilitator (Panitz 2001b).

As already mentioned under 3.2.1., learner autonomy denotes a practice which takes up the idea of the constructivist approach. Collaborative learning, more precisely, draws on the **socio**-constructivist theory suggesting that social interaction leads to individual learning. The importance of interpersonal communication is illustrated by the following findings: students who are characterised by the same level of mental development can be guided through communication, which influences their individual subsequent learning processes resulting in outstanding outcomes. This gap is referred to as 'the zone of proximal development' by Vygotsky who defines it as

*the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers* (Vygotsky 1978: 86; italics in original).

The zone of proximal development hence refers to the potential of collaboration, which creates processes of maturation and learning. It can be regarded as

the 'buds' or 'flowers' of development rather than the 'fruits' of development. The actual development level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively (Vygotsky 1978: 86-87).

In other words, the establishment of zones of proximal development through collaborative learning enable the individual to promote developmental processes. Collaboration is thus the basis for the individuals' development of internal thinking underlying "the notion that developmental processes do not coincide with learning processes. Rather, the developmental process lags behind the learning process [...]" (Vygotsky 1978: 90).

The socio-constructivist theory hence stipulates that



[l]earning comes about through transactions and dialogue among students and between faculty and students, in a social setting. Students learn to understand and appreciate different perspectives through a dialogue with their peers (Panitz 2001a).

In cultural mediation, knowledge is constructed by the individual learners who collaborate with partners they regard as 'foreign'. Collaborative learning complies with self-determination on part of the students and at the same time relies on the individuals learning with and from one another. It is valuable for the promotion of intercultural competence, as collaborative activity makes learners' various thoughts and ideas explicit and open for discussion. As a result, the learners' reflection on and their critical analysis of thoughts and ideas is facilitated.

The learning community assumes a vital function providing various advantages: the peers provide the opportunity to negotiate meaning and to discuss alternative views. Individuals can learn from peers who are more knowledgeable as regards their own identity and their native scripts. Moreover, the colleagues provide stimuli for reflection. The feedback provided by peers hence has a vital role in the individual's reflection and further stimulates the emotional level involved.

Collaborative learning lends itself to cross-cultural communication where students can be grouped with partner classes from a different region, whose learners they regard as 'foreign'. The interaction between the learners relies on the successful mediation of opinions and the negotiation of meaning, which might lead learners to specify, alter or reformulate hypotheses as the peers provide new information, ideas and experiences. In this sense, collaborative learning helps to see that "what we call our 'own' culture is incomplete and fragmentary, that it is traversed by ignorance, that it is imperfectly owned" (Freadman 2004). In a direct engagement with 'the other' the learners are encouraged to develop a nuanced perspective.

Collaborative learning, which comprises cross-cultural communication, is vital for cultural mediation to take place, which denotes

a broad category which covers understanding, explication, commenting, interpretation and negotiating various phenomena, facts, texts, behaviour, situations, feelings, emotions, etc., between people belonging to different cultures or subcultures. (Iriskhanova, Röcklingsberg, Ozolina & Zaharia 2003: 103).

In intercultural communication the learners shall recognise variation among individual opinions in the collaborative learning with individuals.

As the focus of today's school environment often lies on content coverage by the teacher and the learners' "content memorization and individual [...] performance through competition" (Panitz 2001b) the practice of collaborative learning demands from the teacher as well as the learner to engage with a technique they may be relatively unfamiliar with. Students, who are used to a teacher-centred classroom, might not be familiar with posing critical questions and helping one another, for instance. Therefore, it might be useful to verbalise the characteristics and benefits of collaborative learning in class (Panitz 2001b).

### 3.2.3. Role of the Learner's First Language(s)

As could be seen in chapter 2.2.1, parallel to globalisation and internationalisation processes, the CEFR focuses on the foreign language learner as plurilingual and intercultural speaker. With this paradigm shift, the use of the foreign and native language has changed in foreign language instruction in that the use of the learner's L1 is not frowned upon any longer. In a foreign language setting, the learner gains insights into new language structures and cultural systems, which do not exclude already acquired systems.

As new experiences relate to already established patterns, their presence is useful in the FL-classroom. The introduction of a second culture or third culture does not simultaneously signify intercultural understanding but denotes a starting point in the endeavour (Byram 2008: 72-73).<sup>38</sup> In a contrastive approach to further intercultural competence, the comparison of L1 and FL linguistic features correlated with cultural meanings provides a fruitful endeavour.

Certainly, especially with regard to the learners' intercultural competence, the learners' L1s play a crucial role: in the individual's language learning the mother tongue is linked to identity formation: "[a] first language is typically learned in the family in early childhood as part of one's fundamental social,

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<sup>38</sup> It shall be noted that for this reason a bicultural person and an intercultural speaker are not synonyms although in some instances, they are identical.

emotional and intellectual development” (Risager 2006: 7).<sup>39</sup> In intercultural learning the learners’ identities are made explicit for further investigation:

[l]earners should become aware of their own social identities, especially their national identity, and discover how their own (national) identity is defined by others, as well as studying the national identity of those who speak the foreign language as a mother tongue (Byram 2000: 22).

Linked to this objective is the promotion of the learner’s language awareness, an important part of their *savoir-être*. In Byram’s (2008: 2) words,

[t]hose who teach second and foreign languages have to think about how the language is offering a new perspective, a challenge to the primary language of identity, and a different vision of the culture(s) in which they live and have hitherto taken for granted.

Complying with the definition of culture underlying this thesis, learners of the same class never form a homogeneous entity – as regards their language competence they inherit individual linguistic resources. Moreover, as the current school environment is usually shaped by learners with different native languages and/or plurilingual students, the linguistic diversity in a single classroom is even emphasised.

In intercultural dialogue unique learner biographies may give rise to discussions on nativeness, which in fact “constitutes a non-elective socially constructed identity rather than a linguistic category” (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 2001: 100). The notion of a ‘native speaker’ is hence delicate in as far as it is not merely defined by linguistic competence as case studies by Brutt-Griffler & Samimy (2001: 100) have shown. Learners will apply the social construct of native speaker differently to international collaboration partners, bilingual or plurilingual partners:

[i]t is as though knowing another language excludes the possibility of being an ‘*authentic* native speaker’ – a view based on the implicit assumption that bilingualism is a problem rather than a resource. (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy 2001: 102).

The rigid construct of a nation state thus has implications on today’s teaching of foreign languages in a post industrial society in which economy is service based (Byram 2008: 3). The intercultural and multilingual speaker is foregrounded in policies, as authenticity of a cultural representation does not depend on the enunciator’s imagined possession of language. The artificial binary of native

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<sup>39</sup> In contrast, a foreign language is not automatically acquired but the (continuing) result of conscious learning processes after the L1 acquisition (Risager 2006: 7).

and nonnative shall be replaced by the hybrid communication partner, who is a rich source and a unique mosaic of languages.<sup>40</sup>

In FL education a mosaic of languages is hence present and susceptible for irritation:

im Fremdsprachenunterricht kann die Selbstverständlichkeit der muttersprachlichen Konnotationen durch den fremdsprachlichen Gebrauch erschüttert werden (Hammerschmidt 1998: 133).

As regards the complex relationship between language and culture, Risager (2006: 196) refers to language as a Velcro fastener:

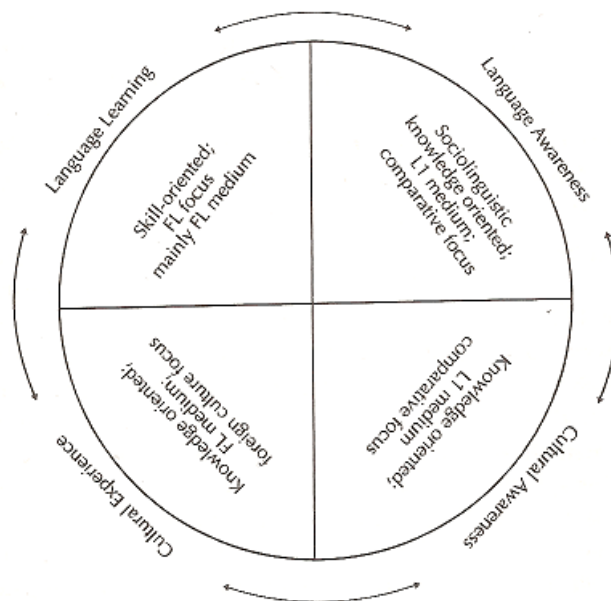
language can easily change context and thematic content, but once it has been introduced into a new place and/or is used for a new content, it quickly integrates and 'latches on'.

It is thus possible to transfer discursive practices from the students' L1s to foreign language contexts in terms of a sociological point of view: to a given context one can refer to in different languages. In contrast, from a psychological stance it is impossible to separate language from life experiences (Risager 2006: 157). The inseparability between language and culture from the latter point of view is obvious in the practice of reflection, which accounts for the usefulness of the use of the L1: as experiences are situated in specific contexts one experiences the difficulty of describing events in a different language other than the L1 when the event was experienced in a native language setting. Events can hence not be translated without difficulty. In a cross-cultural interaction, in which the individuals shall reflect on their own cultures involved it is clear that the role of the L1 is essential and shall find its way into foreign language learning/teaching.

Byram (1995: 94) situates the L1 use in language education suggesting the native language for the creation of awareness: the learners shall use the L1 in reflection and the mother tongue has an essential role in the comparisons of both linguistic and cultural patterns. These practices are depicted in figure 9 (adopted from Byram 1995: 95).

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<sup>40</sup> As regards the multitude of languages in a foreign language learning/teaching setting, the learners also have varying (pre-)experiences of the foreign language. The question on the correlation between the native language and the foreign language has lead to the rise of the interlanguage hypothesis suggesting that the foreign language learner is characterised by a developing interlanguage, a linguistic system with discrete features.



**A model of foreign language education**

**Figure 9**

Byram (1995: 94) stresses that in a real situation there will not be dedicated an equal amount of time to every segment of this pie chart. The model further does not depict an inclusive figure for it neglects the multicultural dimension given the possibility of a learners' multitude of first languages (Byram 1995: 97). Nevertheless, it nicely demonstrates the significance of the learner's L1.

Referring to the distinction of expression and content Pachler, Barnes & Field (2009: 199) point out that

from a learner's perspective, an approach involving L1 as well as the TL [target language] enables them to work at a far more sophisticated level on content than otherwise.

This extract stresses that the L1 is useful for a learner in enunciating a complex thought, for instance, in contributing to a discussion. In other words, the importance of content in intercultural learning justifies the use of the L1 as by applying the L1 simple generalisations are avoided.<sup>41</sup>

In general, a linguistic form comprises implicit cultural aspects next to referential meanings. Therefore, words can function as rich points, as their cultural meaning lends to discussion. The cultural meanings including connotations can be explored when experiencing the look at the expression from a native speaker perspective.

<sup>41</sup> Advanced students might be able to express what they want to convey as fluently in the foreign language as in their L1. Depending on their language competence meaning-focussed interaction in a foreign language can be encouraged.

In situations where the language is used as a foreign language (or late second language) there are many opportunities for adding an even greater variability to it when using the language as first language (or early second language) (Risager 2006: 122).

Collaboration with others is a fruitful means to achieve this practice: in a regard *croisé* culturally rich words are explored together with reference to different content dimensions or different uses. Complying with the dynamic culture notion underlying the thesis, culture is mediated through texts, which opens up to two perspectives:

[I]n linguistic practice can [...] be considered [...] partly as taking place in a social network and embedded in a complex historical, societal context, and partly as embedded in the implied different life contexts of individuals, with the ensuing different meanings in their respective life narratives and life projects (Risager 2006: 157).

Consequently, the individual character of the culture concept shall not be neglected when exploring 'the other'.

Naturally, the representation of cultures can take the form of texts produced in the foreign language or in the learners' L1s. Next to the deliberate choice on the language of text materials in forms of (non-)literary texts, the choice which language(s) to use in the foreign language classroom includes further questions on the group composition. In collaboration, the likelihood of manifold languages to meet is enhanced and often influenced by a deliberate decision.<sup>42</sup>

As already established earlier, for reflection on part of the learner, metalanguage is a beneficial means:

Fremdverstehen impliziert [...] das Verstehen des Eigenen. Man muß die Grenzen der eigenen Sichtweise erkennen, um andere Sichtweisen zuzulassen und sich auf sie einzulassen. Dazu bedarf man aber auch einer besonderen Sprache, die es erlaubt, das eigene Lernen und Verstehen zu artikulieren (Bredella & Delanoy 1999: 13).

Metalanguage can be acquired in the first as well as any foreign language and depicts a supportive element in the reflection process. A native speaker does not automatically possess metalinguistic competence in the L1. As regards the status of a native speaker further, it shall be highlighted that he or she is not necessarily in the position to make informed decisions about the correctness of

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<sup>42</sup> In some settings the working language between partner students is chosen as follows: students of a foreign language x, who are native speakers of language y might be grouped with native speakers of the same language x studying the language y. This way the authenticity of input is regulated.

a L1 enunciation. Therefore, he or she is not automatically capable of correcting and explaining errors made in his native language.<sup>43</sup>

Linguistic diversity does not only concern the foreign language classroom. The promotion of plurilingualism in schools is a long-term process, which may involve many agents:

The promotion of linguistic diversity is a question of whole-school development. As many partners (learners, teachers, parents, experts, administrators) as possible need to be involved and enthused by the aims and objectives concerned. In this way the school becomes a community within which everyone works towards a common goal (Camilleri 2007b: 69).

The linguistic diversity in education is hence not restricted to the classroom but also comprises external agents. Plurilingual and intercultural education can have wide-spread effects, for instance via school partnerships: „schools can capitalise upon the presence of students who speak other languages, and who have other cultures, as sources of learning for the whole school” (Camilleri 2007a: 66). The contact to partner students in the classroom can further be motivating:

An exchange between peers [...] has the potential to increase the students’ motivation to find out about the language and culture of a group in a different culture who find themselves in a similar classroom situation. (Penz 2001: 107).

Naturally, the computer is a practical tool to establish contact beyond the classroom walls. This idea will be taken up at a later point.

To sum up, the learners’ promotion of intercultural competence deliberately takes advantage of a situation in which learners with different language biographies collaborate. Cultural as well as linguistic diversity thus have a prominent place in the intercultural foreign language classroom. Hansen (1996: 99) stipulates on language diversity that

Interkulturelles Lernen nimmt sprachliche Pluralität in Form von Sozio- und Dialekten sowie natürlicher Mehrsprachigkeit auf und bezieht diese Pluralität in den fremdsprachlichen Lernprozeß mit ein.

In the next chapter, the learning environment of project work will be introduced. Projects depict a possible practice of incorporating the factors,

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<sup>43</sup> What is more, in collaboration the role of correction shall be well thought of as it might influence the relationship between the communicating parties in unpleasant ways. This includes thoughts on how broad or detailed correction shall be to avoid frustration on the side of the learners.

which support the learner's promotion of intercultural competence, outlined above in 3.2. This form of practice has been chosen with regard to the compatibility with the computer as this idea will be taken up in chapter 4.

### **3.3. Learning Environment in Project Work**

The principles of learner autonomy, collaborative learning, and the use of the learner's native language(s), can be realised in project work on intercultural competence. Projects, a collaborative learning arrangement, provide a holistic approach as they involve the learners emotionally, allow for cognitive confrontation as well as practical experience. They are thus an ideal method for the promotion of intercultural competence. Although the students can theoretically work on all the dimensions involved in intercultural competence, i.e. attitude, knowledge and behaviour, different emphases can be put on these dimensions – in accordance with the learners. What is more, in accord with the complex and dynamic notion of interculturality underlying this thesis, it is certainly an illusion to provide a suitable learning environment for learners to fully acquire one objective of an intercultural speaker in a single project.

Projects can be realised in foreign language education but at the same time lend themselves to interdisciplinary teaching. As the BM:BWK (2001: 2) specifies: “[p]roject-centred education shall help to learn ‘networked thinking’ [...]”. Projects can even go beyond the classroom walls and incorporate the local community, the learners’ parents or specialists who provide expert knowledge on a specific topic.<sup>44</sup> Project work which aims at the promotion of intercultural competence, encourages learners to work together in critical collaborative inquiry to develop and further cross-cultural awareness. Moreover, it can promote intercultural communicative competence by having the learners experience cross-cultural communication.

The practice of project work implicates that authority is given to students. Projects are hence characterised by “the encouragement of student responsibility for planning, carrying out, and presenting a task” (Hedge 2000: 363). As Bessenyei (2002: 155) puts it

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<sup>44</sup> When considering intercultural projects with partners on a supranational basis, the heterogeneity of culture shall nevertheless be in the foreground refusing an essentialist approach reducing culture to a nation only.



Im Projektunterricht haben LehrerInnen eine neue Rolle. Sie sind nicht BesitzerInnen und Quelle allen Wissens, sondern ModeratorInnen gemeinsamen Wissensmanagements.

Although learners shall assume an autonomous and independent role, the teachers are not dispensable but also assume an active role

providing assistance with the structuring of planning and decision-making processes and the necessary didactic and organisational set-up, the conveyance of competences regarding work processes, and the awareness building of groupdynamic processes as well as the support of reflection processes (BM:BWK 2001: 6).

In other words, the teacher seeks to assist and facilitate the students' learning processes. Learners, who are involved in the design of project work, shall decide with the teacher on explicit objectives that are open for negotiation. The project work shall be linked to the student's reality and is hence dependent on the learner characteristics. The project on intercultural competence needs to tie in with the learners' interests:

[p]rojects can meaningfully be linked to controversial topics, about which pupils have an opinion which they are keen to communicate, as well as to real life experiences of pupils, such as their reading, listening and viewing habits, school life, hobbies and pastime, family life etc (Pachler, Barnes & Field 2009: 193).

Projects to which students can relate are potentially motivating, which is crucial for the course of the project. Usually, they imply "activity outside the classroom in the students' own time" (Hedge 2000: 364).

The practice of project work further depicts an answer to complex demands on the pupils, who shall prepare for lifelong learning, as the following extract referring to project work shall illustrate:

[b]y applying adequate educational methods schools must increasingly allow for the development and promotion of dynamic abilities and different skills as only well-informed, competent, and motivated people will be open for the changes in society and will be prepared for the new developments (BM:BWK 2001: 5).

Project work furthers the learners' ability and autonomy and contributes to the development of the students as democratic and able citizens.

The success of project work requires thorough planning, which implies optimising the design of learning. "Successful projects tend to have very clear aims and objectives and a clearly defined thematic structure and time-frame" (Pachler, Barnes & Field 2009: 192). In order for project-centred teaching to be effective, it shall be organised in a number of chronological phases: In the initial

phase, the mood is set for project-work: a topic is identified and the initial motivation by the participating parties is aroused. Then, objectives are agreed on in relation to the learners' competences and skills and a time plan is set up. Only then, the actual project work is executed. This phase shall leave space for reflection and discussion on occurring problems to ensure the flow of the project and to motivate the parties involved. Moreover, the learning environment shall continuously be assessed to optimise the effect of the learning environment on the learners. Finally, the project's results can be presented to a chosen audience and the project shall be evaluated in terms of the earlier-defined objectives to reflect on its success with respect to future projects (BM:BWK 2001: 7). This means that project work allows for objectives to be established as the grounds of the project, which shall be summatively assessed in the end, and for the establishment and constant assurance of a rich learning environment.

When it comes to the assessment of a project, it naturally poses the question of how and what to assess. Panitz (2001b) suggests the following methods for assessing group efforts: the teacher observes the students in interaction or the learners themselves observe the nature of their own contributions or do quizzes or assignments on the project work. While it is clearly vital to assess in how far the objectives of the project have been realised, it shall be highlighted again that it is crucial for learning to be continuously assessed.

The subsequent chapters introduce the practices of fieldwork and tandem learning, which can be incorporated into project work and which both involve direct contact with 'the other' situating the learners in intercultural dialogue, which provides the basis for the intercultural investigation.<sup>45</sup> Following Byram, the site of learning in these instances is the classroom and outside the class with pedagogic support. These two methods have been chosen for they can be linked to online communication, which will be the focus in chapter 4. In the following, fieldwork and tandem learning shall be scrutinised with regard to their suitability for the learner's promotion of intercultural competence, i.e. in how far the supportive factors of the learning environment concerning intercultural competence as established above are implemented.

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<sup>45</sup> Naturally, both techniques can be combined with other forms cultural representations such as literary texts, statistics, films, songs, or cultural artefacts such as clothing etc.

### 3.3.1. Learning Environment in Fieldwork

Fieldwork denotes a qualitative research practice in which the learners assume the role of ethnographers and are engaged cognitively, behaviourally as well as affectively. The learners, for instance, interview individuals so that the interviewee's underlying subconscious schemata are made explicit and available for further exploration and comparison (Bateman 2002: 320). Other methods of data collection include observation, elicitation, and the carrying out of questionnaires. Of all these types, observation is the least structured or guided approach, whereas an interview or elicitation depicts a more controlled way of data collection guiding 'the other'. Originally, this approach taken from anthropology is conducted in a foreign environment, and usually in a foreign country.<sup>46</sup> However, the ethnographical practice is also possible when the learners are not in the foreign country but find interview partners in their close environment: home ethnography denotes the practice where the learners interview 'the others' in their local community (Bateman 2002: 321). In doing so, learner groups can visit different nearby locations. This way, learners can draw on external agents and their valuable unique resources as regards linguistic and cultural diversity. Apart from study visits the learners can further engage with partner schools or exchange students that are currently school visitors.

The practice of fieldwork obviously relies on the principle of learner autonomy having the learner explore 'the other' on his own, which is connected to the role of the teacher as facilitator of the learner's learning processes:

the ethnographic approach gives both learners and teachers the chance to explore new roles in the classroom. Learners take on more responsibility with regard to their learning processes, while the teacher exchanges the traditional role of someone who imparts knowledge for the role of consultant and counsellor (Parsons & Junge 2001: 205).

Naturally, in fieldwork self-fulfilling prophecies are possible to occur, which confirm stereotypes rather than break them up. However, Yang (2010: 29) suggests that

[t]he key to successful observation and inference is freeing oneself as much as possible from the restraints of one's own cultural experience. This requires cultural relativism, sensitivity and objectivity in perceiving others' culture.

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<sup>46</sup> Fieldwork is further applied in the disciplines of linguistics, biology, geography or history, for example.

In order not to manipulate the incoming info it is crucial for the learner to be conscious about his or her perceptions and expectations. As established earlier, the point of view of enlightened eurocentrism is useful in this regard, which acknowledges the cultural lenses but does not allow for judgements.

The learners who engage in ethnographic endeavour ideally expose their unique pre-experiences and make individual contributions in the creation of meaning (Bateman 2002: 328). The learners' pre-experiences, which are vital in intercultural learning, can be made explicit in an ethnographic interview as the basis for comparison, i.e. as starting point for a regard croisé, the dual perspective on the cultures involved. Fieldwork is hence useful in promoting the skills of interpreting and relating as it encourages attitudes and thoughts to be made explicit and open for further investigation (Byram 1999b: 368).

Naturally, the interviewee or the observed is in a special position and might expose behaviour or attitudes which are not natural or original but due to the attention they receive. Fieldwork has effects on the observed, which are subsumed under the Labovian observer's paradox<sup>47</sup>. In project work incorporating fieldwork, the insights gained from the observed are to be seen as valuable data gained as input and the basis for further investigation. The method of fieldwork is thus not a means for its own sake but combined with reflection and can be linked to quantitative techniques such as interpreting statistical data, for instance. What is more, the learner is, in contrast to the professional ethnographer, not asked to depict a scientific picture of the cultures studied but uses the practice for the promotion of intercultural competence, which provides him or her with a starting point of subsequent thinking processes, which partly take place in the classroom.

Van Lier (1988: 16) describes the practice of the ethnographer as follows:

The ethnographer is always on the lookout for patterns and regularities, and, beyond that, for underlying patterns that connect. This means that both in-depth study and global scanning are needed; metaphorically speaking the ethnographer needs both microscope and telescope, and uses them alternately to view the same landscape.

For the learner the classroom is an ideal means to relativise the insights in collaboration with his peers. The individual insights gained are placed in a wider

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<sup>47</sup> For more information on the paradox cf. Labov (1972).

context, which relates the differences found to a wider picture and stresses cultural heterogeneity.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from yielding an insight into the foreign cultures, fieldwork simultaneously allows for introspection:

As they come to understand the point of view of an individual from another culture, students become aware of aspects of their own culture that are often invisible until seen in contrast with other cultures. They learn that there are other ways of looking at the world besides their own, and begin to comprehend how they are seen by others. This understanding can lead students to a fuller awareness of their own culture and how it influences the way they see the world (Bateman 2002: 321).

This means that fieldwork represents a starting point for the learner to engage with foreign as well as native cultures. As the learners are embedded in an authentic situation surrounded by 'the other' they act as cultural mediators. Parsons & Junge (2001: 215) found that fieldwork can be possible and fruitful already for beginners, which are not so skilled yet in (intercultural) communication involving the target language: in their project the beginners were grouped with more experienced learners; this way, zones of proximal development could be established giving the learners the opportunity to learn from more knowledgeable peers.

In other words, following the framework of Byram (1999b: 369) fieldwork caters for the component of the skills of discovery and interaction as the learners are embedded in intercultural dialogue eliciting culturally rich material. It depicts an ideal location for intercultural learning, which thrives on its integration into the foreign language classroom:

[i]n order to benefit in terms of consolidating knowledge and ensuring a critical comparative analysis and the development of >critical cultural awareness<, fieldwork has to be combined with classwork (Byram 1999b: 377-378).

In class, the learners find a supportive environment to relativise their findings and critically reflect upon them with the help of their peers. Collaborative learning further supports the learner in seeing that their own identities are not natural but acquired.

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<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the data can be used for all sorts of subsequent activities: audio or video tapes can be transcribed and text genres can be altered. Some texts further provide nonverbal information.

In a model case study, Byram (1999b: 378) incorporates pre-fieldwork in class as a means to have the students recognise their own assumptions. During the fieldwork the teacher supports the learners in the collection and analysis of data. Finally, the findings the learners gained from the ethnographic endeavour are presented in the form of a written essay. In this sense, fieldwork denotes a location of learning with pedagogic support situating the learner as ethnographer in a preparation phase, the actual execution of the project, and in a presentation phase.

### 3.3.2. Learning Environment in Tandem Learning

Apart from fieldwork, tandem learning depicts a promising complement to the foreign language classroom. Tandems denote a “one-to-one arrangement” (O’Rourke 2007: 49) grouping two learners with a different L1 each. On a tandem ride, which relies on both cyclists to get exercise,

both partners are in the same boat, facing similar, if not identical, challenges in communicating in their target languages. They are thus more likely, on average, to display understanding of their partner’s difficulties and concerns (O’Rourke 2007: 47).

Tandem hence denotes a practice of “reciprocal support and instruction between two learners, each of whom is a native speaker of the other’s target language [...]” (O’Rourke 2007: 43). It is worth mentioning, however, that a tandem does not rely on the myth of the native speaker: partnerships can be established with plurilingual speakers or second language speakers.

Tandem learning originally is a form of face-to-face learning focusing on the promotion of linguistic competence and “does not prescribe a particular structure, or even imply any particular conversational content” (O’Rourke 2007: 46). This form of open learning hence relies on the learners’ self-awareness and builds on learner autonomy as the learners are given great freedom concerning decisions on their learning processes. “In order to sustain the learning focus, they must also monitor and evaluate both objectives and means, being prepared to alter both in the light of experience” (O’Rourke 2007: 46). Tandem learning thus draws on the principle of learner autonomy and allows for interest-guided learning.

Next to learner autonomy, the principle of reciprocity ensures that time is evenly divided between the two languages involved in the learning arrangement. The two languages involved have thus an alternating role in as far as half of all messages is produced in the respective L1 and half in the respective foreign language. The partners hence contribute equally to the partnership and mutually support one another.

Reciprocity is the particular strength of tandem learning: each partner at different times takes the role of learner and expert, so that both sides of the learning process are constantly in focus (O'Rourke 2007: 46).

However, partners may not be completely aware of facts and procedures in their own culture and consequently transmit a somewhat blurred image. The partner is hence asked to assume critical cultural awareness (Woodin 2001a: 48). Bechtel (2003: 323) suggests that depending on their pre-experiences and knowledge, the tandem partners may actually be the experts on one's native culture. What is more, the partners might have different goals and varying levels of motivation, which can actually lead to failures of the partnership. The collaboration is hence ideally marked by positive interdependence.

In tandem learning the students engage in authentic intercultural communication; two L1 speakers collaborate with one another who reciprocally regard the partner as 'the other'. This learning arrangement is the basis for cultural mediation: the learners present their views on their own and the foreign culture, try to understand and empathise with different views and critically reflect on them. Next to providing a means to converse in the target language, a tandem partnership may clearly yield an insight into cultures. Brammerts (2000) suggests that

[a]s learning in tandem is always based on communication between members of different language communities and cultures, it also facilitates intercultural learning.

With regard to the promotion of intercultural competence, the tandem learning arrangement hence enables the learners to purposefully get involved with cultures and allows them to draw on their partners' cultural and linguistic insight. At the same time in a tandem exchange the partner shall not be seen as the representative of the foreign culture. With other words, the danger of the essentialist view shall be avoided in intercultural learning.

In-class discussion is a means to relativise findings from an individual tandem (Bechtel 2003: 324). Activities in class also make the heterogeneity of one own's culture explicit (Bechtel 2003: 369)

Diese Interaktion zwischen dem Sozialen und dem Metakognitiven ist nicht nur grundlegend für die Entwicklung von Autonomie bei Fremdsprachenlernern, sie ist auch das Herzstück einer erfolgreichen Tandempartnerschaft (Little 2001: 19).

The teacher has a vital role in providing the didactic support necessary for successful tandem learning, i.e. in structuring or moderating the in-class activities. Relating to reciprocity, both sides of the tandem exchange shall share the aim to further one's intercultural competence to ensure a consistent and motivated interaction.

Besides intercultural competence linguistic competence can be focussed on: in tandem the learners shall decide on whether and how to correct each other, a factor influencing the relationship aspect of the intercultural dialogue. In an authentic communicative situation intuitive knowledge is externalised by language use. It shall be highlighted that

native-speaker 'expertise' is just the implicit competence of someone who normally speaks their language unreflectingly; it is not the analytical expertise of the language teacher or linguist (O'Rourke 2007: 48).

Nevertheless, the practice of thinking about language use including one's own language is beneficial in promoting language awareness. Similarly, although the L1 speakers take on the role of an expert in their respective cultures, their insider perspective is naturally marked by their cultural lens and shall be consequently treated with care.

In organising a tandem in school, it is essential to deliberately structure the collaboration as learners are not per se experts in open learning. This means that the learners shall not be left completely alone in deciding what and when to learn.<sup>49</sup> Teachers assume an important role in supporting the tandem partnership in setting it up and further continue being a facilitator of learning processes once the partnerships have started. Tandem learning in a school context thus may take the form of a guided approach and hence partly relies on

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<sup>49</sup> As regards the infinite range of topics for tandem exchanges, O'Rourke (2007: 51) suggests proposing a menu of activities from which students can choose so that learner can be responsible for and actively involved in the design of the exchange.



the role of the teacher, who is in the position to ensure the success of this methodology.

Wenn Lehrer selbstgesteuertes Lernen im Tandem organisieren, dann bedeutet das nicht ein Abgeben von Verantwortung an die Lerner, sondern eine Höhergewichtung der Erziehung zur Selbstständigkeit, wobei die bei freiwilliger und selbstständiger Arbeit meist höhere Motivation und die Möglichkeit, individuelle Lernverfahren einzusetzen, vielfach auch zu verbessertem Lernerfolg führt (Brammerts 2001: 15).

During the tandem exchange the teacher can act supportive depending on the level of autonomy on part of the learners (Bechtel 2003: 27-28). Furthermore, when two partners are all too soon content with a seemingly similar assumption on a specific topic on a superficial level, for instance, the teacher's role is to raise questions that allow the students to delve into the topic again (Bechtel 2003: 369).

Following a learner-centred approach, the learners' expectations are vital in the design of the learning environment. In case the teacher wants to integrate tandem learning into a course, tandem learning naturally needs to have particular objectives or purposes so that it is possible for the learners to enthusiastically engage with one another (O'Rourke 2007: 49-50).

For an intercultural tandem to be successful it is necessary for the learners to engage in a dialogue with one another: in tandem learning, the learner depicts his or her own culture and gets an insight into the foreign culture, which is the basis to engage in a double perspective. As the learner experiences how he or she is seen by the other, the student receives valuable input for reflection. In case the exchange only takes the form of monologues there can be no mediation between cultures (Bechtel 2003: 366). Nevertheless, tandem learning depicts a potentially suitable method for the promotion of cross-cultural competence.

Geeignet ist die Tandemsituation für interkulturelles Lernen insofern, als der Lerner als erlebendes, entdeckendes und verstehendes Subjekt im Mittelpunkt steht, und zwar sowohl bei der Informationsweitergabe über die eigene Kultur als auch bei dem In-Beziehung-Setzen von eigener und fremder Perspektive (Bechtel 2003: 367).

However, at the same time, Bechtel (2003: 368) sees a boundary to tandem in as far as the learners need to open up in a tandem. In case a partner is not ready to communicate there can be no negotiation of meaning, and followingly,

no cultural mediation. It is hence vital that the partners are matched adequately and that they can relate to the topic. O'Rourke (2007: 57) points out the fact that a warm-up is suitable for the tandem to be successful since it involves the partners to get to know each another.

Moreover, the decision of how to match students shall be made thoroughly in order to minimise the chances of a failure of a tandem exchange. It is possible that the size of the student groups involved is uneven or that students do not find partners themselves. A group partnership to counteract mismatching group sizes might unbalance the 50-50 time and language split in case an individual is matched with a group (O'Rourke 2007: 57).

As the tandem exchange usually takes place between two partners only, it shall be thought of whether and how the teacher monitors the tandem exchange and for what reasons. Two classes may work together so that the interdisciplinary dimension of interculturality can be taken into account facilitating the arrangement of a tandem. Theoretically, not only sent e-mails but also videorecordings of conversations present valuable culturally rich data and can serve as basis for subsequent in-class activities.

A further advantage of tandem is that in a tandem session various documents can be incorporated, for instance clothes, which may pose a starting point for discussions (Woodin 2001a: 48).

In the following, the notion of 'online communication' will be introduced as a basis for the analysis of projects, which extend the FL classroom by means of the internet. With the help of computers learners are engaged in realistic and meaningful communication. The individual who is engaged in online communication in contrast to face-to-face communication will henceforth be seen as social agent of a (partly) virtual community and as a user. It shall be shown that integrating new media into the school environment is a means to support a methodology valuable for the promotion of 'Intercultural Competence'. At the same time, the incorporation of media into the foreign language classroom caters for the students' needs and corresponds to their reality. As Tapscott (2008: 1-2) points out:

[t]he old model of pedagogy – teacher-focused, one-way, one-size-fits-all – makes no sense to young people who have grown up in a digital world. [...] Education – at school and on the job – needs to be revamped to cater to young people who have grown up digital. The old model, the sage on the stage, needs to be abandoned, and

schools and employers need to look at education as an interactive, collaborative venture that lasts a lifetime.

Today's learners, or digital natives, shall be supported in their promotion of intercultural competence by a thoughtful design of their learning environment.

Web-based technologies have been advocated as particularly promising examples of computerbased learning with the potential to enable language students to interact across geographic, linguistic, and cultural lines. In this increasingly complex landscape in which technology is used to foster communication across cultures, language teachers often encounter learning scenarios that may well extend beyond the known terrain of their current roles (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 190).

As outlined above, the principles of learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the particular role of the L1 shall be established throughout and with the help of the Web 2.0.

#### **4. Online Communication in Relation to 'Intercultural Competence'**

This chapter focuses on online communication with regard to cross-cultural competence. As regards digital technologies and the individual's cognitive development, media "modify not only the speed at which people deal with and manage information but also how they eventually transform it into knowledge" (OECD/CERI 2008: 2). Digital media thus influence learning. Education needs to react to this development. However, by means of a study conducted in 2007 it was found that the computer is underrepresented in EU classrooms as half of the informants, which are (primary as well as secondary education) pupils and teachers, declared not to have used the computer in class during the last year (OECD/CERI 2008: 4). There is thus an urgent crave for an adequate educational policy, and, what is more, the significance of digital literacy needs to be established in the actual classrooms.

According to Kress (2008: 5) the notion of e-literacy takes in the provisionality and unpredictability of texts in the new media world and denotes a new model of communication

in which the rhetor has interests, is aware of the resources available for designs to put these interests into the world, understands the audience and its characteristics and also understands what the matter to be communicated demands.

This rhetorical approach incorporates the user as active and autonomous agent, who is not only in the position to critique but to design and produce. Particular resources afford production where “meaning is made material and can become subject to review, comment, engagement and transformation” (Kress 2008: 5). The basis of the rhetorical approach is the user or rhetor as a (re-)maker of knowledge. Clearly, an underlying principle of this approach is learner-centeredness: “[a] rhetorical framing for Education demands that the learner is at the centre of designs for learning” (Kress 2008: 7).

Autonomy is closely related to the principle of collaboration. Blees & Rittberger (2009: 1) summarise the potential of the Web 2.0 attributing to it “a qualitative leap in web technologies that have made the internet more creative, participative and socializing”. When considering the affordances of new information and communication technologies, Wesch (2008) suggests that parallel to the evolvement of the social web, the information and communication culture of students has altered in as far as media may serve knowledge construction. School environments ought to acknowledge this trend and thus need to cater for this development. The introduction of media literacy as an educational principle has taken up this idea and continually gains importance as the learners shall use the ever-developing media appropriately in constructing their knowledge and competence acquisition processes.

In contrast, an education system that does not take into account the new reality of students but merely places emphasis on what students need to acquire to pass a certain grade is characterised by what Wesch (2008) terms a ‘crisis of significance’: the learning result in form of a grade shall not depict the only motivation behind education; the focus and the significance shall rather lie on the establishment and promotion of learning processes. The use of new technologies in class can counteract this crisis by acknowledging the new communication and information culture.

In the promotion of intercultural competence, it is exactly the process that is emphasised for it comprises a dynamic concept and not a matter of fact or a result that is attained in a single class project. This section aims to combine two cornerstones, namely the use of media in school and the learners’ development of cross-cultural competence, i.e. two factors which aim to counteract the crisis of significance. The following pages seek to investigate the link between the

promotion of this particular competence and online communication. It has already been established that a supportive learning environment takes into account the factors of learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the learners' L1s. This methodology supporting the learner's intercultural competence does not rely on face-to-face-encounters. It will be explored in more detail throughout this chapter that also mediated communication can successfully incorporate a supportive learning environment in e-supported project work. The following quote illustrates the concern of the foreign language teachers in this regard: it is their task

to facilitate the learners' interaction with some small part of another society and its cultures, with the purpose of relativising learners' understanding of their own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours, and encouraging them to investigate for themselves the otherness around them, either in their immediate physical environment or in their engagement with otherness which internationalisation and globalisation have brought into the world (Byram, Nichols & Stevens 2001: 3).

Obviously, with the help of communication technology the learners can, providing they are e-literate, easily establish direct and personal contact with others in tandem learning or fieldwork.<sup>50</sup>

The computer is hence a tool which facilitates the establishment and the promotion of intercultural communicative competence. With the help of communication technology learners with different cultural backgrounds can interact with one another beyond the classroom walls. Before focusing on implementing online communication in the furthering of intercultural competence and investigating the ways in how far this means of communication can support the promotion, a definition of this particular way of communication is needed and shall therefore be provided below. A brief outline of the term shall suffice in order to shed light on internet-based educational projects.

#### **4.1. Defining 'Online communication'**

Concerning the working definition of 'online communication' underlying this thesis, this term is applied to human-human interaction that is enabled through internet connection. As the medium of the computer is in the centre of

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<sup>50</sup> Electronic media further facilitates the exchange in terms of organisation and documentation, which will be outlined at a later stage.

inspection, computer-mediated communication (CMC) shall serve as synonym throughout this thesis.

Electronic learning or e-learning<sup>51</sup>, which is a term commonly applied by laypersons as well as specialists, comprises quite a diffuse concept and shall shortly be mentioned in its relation to online communication: in its broadest sense e-learning denotes the use of new information and communication technologies in education, i.e. computer assisted language learning (CALL) (Rietsch 2003: 76). It may hence relate to computer-based training as well as web-based training. Clearly only the latter branch requires access to the internet and might include online communication (Dittler 2003: 12).<sup>52</sup> For this reason, against the popular use of the term, 'e-learning' is not used alternatively for online communication throughout this thesis.

The Web 2.0 and its user-friendly applications create numerous and versatile possibilities for users to interact with one another: various tools allow the user to contribute text or audio files as well as visual expressions in forms of videos, photos or images. I refrain from a technologically deterministic view on CMC, however, as electronic communication does not merely imply data exchange. It more adequately denotes

a process of human communication via computers, involving people, situated in particular contexts, engaging in processes to shape media for a variety of purposes (December 1997).

It follows that the intentions and expectations of the users shall not be neglected in CMC. It is the user as social agent who chooses, uses, and shapes media to their means. At the same time, the decisions by users are not decontextualised: naturally, so called 'affordances' of communication technologies make certain suggestions to users; this term hence depicts a mid-position between a technological deterministic view and a socio-constructivist view (Graves 2007: 331).

Affordances as "properties of the world defined with respect to people's interaction with it" (Gaver 1991: 80 in Graves 2007: 332) do not provide a control entity implicit in the technology but rather exert a guiding function for the user. Thus, the historical evolvement and further development of technologies can be interpreted in as far as a tool or object does not merely determine its use

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<sup>51</sup> cf. Dichanz & Ernst (2001) for a detailed discussion on the term e-learning.

<sup>52</sup> The notion of e-learning is further used to describe distance learning, a setting where the user is learning remotely from the teacher and other learners.

but rather makes suggestions to the social agents. Graves (2007: 336) describes this dual perspective as “what [...] a technology not only permits but also suggests to the society rendering it [...]”. Acknowledging this position therefore, it is clear that “technological development [...] both shapes and is shaped by social, economic, and political forces” (Graves 2007: 337) so that “[t]echnology and sociocultural practice evolve together, each feeding back into the other” (Graves 2007: 343).

In the following, different forms of online communication will be investigated. The types of online communication described below are viewed in relation to the needs of the users aiming at their furthering of intercultural competence while, at the same time, acknowledging the technological specifications. Although they evolve in time, genres will be scrutinised – a genre on the one hand implies possibilities/constraints by the underlying technological affordances and on the other hand depicts a “part of the mechanism of emergence, giving expression to features and norms that a developing technology has just made possible [...]” (Graves 2007: 343).<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Types of Computer-based Communication

Multimodality offers social agents “different modes for achieving complex requirements” (Kress 2008: 6) in the communicative situation. Design thus relies on the autonomy on the designer or producer who chooses modes which perform certain functions. As already mentioned, there are varied applications available that support different types of written and/or spoken interaction. These tools further often differ in their allowance of filesize: a text message might be restricted to certain amount of characters just as a successful transfer of audio or video files might be dependent on their size. Thus, the users’ needs undoubtedly are in the foreground of designing (multimodal) online learning environments and choosing the mode of interaction that is allowed by a specific application.

Apart from this distinction based on different channels for interaction, online communication can take various social formats. The interaction between

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<sup>53</sup> Up to now there is already a variety of tools, which can be explored for their suitability for expression, consumption and/or social collaboration. The future development in technology surely holds further innovations as regards software providers.

users can take the form of either synchronous or asynchronous mode. Users who wish to communicate in synchronous mode are required to be online at the same time as synchronous communication denotes real-time interaction. This social format enables an immediate response or feedback and may include chat functions, call devices, and video conferencing.

In contrast, asynchronous communication describes a delayed communication between participants, who are therefore not required to be online at the same time. Consequently, this type of interaction leaves more time for reflection (on the content as well as the form of the contribution) as there is time to dwell on the written discourse typed out. At the same time asynchronous communication may encourage long waits or unanswered messages, which might cause an exchange to seize. Users can interact asynchronously with one another via web logs (blogs), video blogs (vlogs), message boards (forums), or electronic mails.

The distinction between synchronous and asynchronous communication is not bound to genres but blurred: blogs, typically a form of asynchronous communication can for instance incorporate chat functions. Moreover, platforms or learning management systems often offer a combination of both modes of interaction. The present media is often characterised by blurred genres so that the boundaries between them cannot be drawn clear-cut (Kress 2008: 4).

Concerning the interpersonal composition of these forms of online interaction, in both, asynchronous as well as synchronous communication, more than two users can communicate with one another: e-mail programs, for instance, permit mails to be sent to multiple recipients just as many users can contribute to blogs, for instance; what is more, chats can accommodate more users just as many synchronous phoning-providers allow for multiple participants to be involved in one call. The design of computer applications might hence allow for “[c]ommunication [...] [to] flow from one to one, one to many, or many to many [...]” (Craig 1999: 25).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Users, who read a message or receive a file, can usually choose to respond to the group or to the individual who originated the posting.



Technologies therefore allow for collaborative learning. Users can work collaboratively in asynchronous communication on wikis, for instance, which are webpages that are open to editing.<sup>55</sup>

Students can use wikis to create a set of documents that reflect the shared knowledge of the learning group. Wikis can also be used to facilitate the dissemination of information, to enable the exchange of ideas and to facilitate group interaction (Augar, Raitman & Zhou 2004).

Wikis can thus be a means of group assessment: apart from summative assessment, they lend themselves to formative assessment as open editing, the underlying principle, allows “a unique interface where information is not fixed (as in a print model) but fluid and flexible to meet the needs of the community [...]” (Ferris & Wilder 2006: 1). A wiki is hence an ideal place for ongoing collaboration and exploration.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly to wikis, blogs may also constitute collaborative webpages: they may take the form of a digital diary, whose postings are chronologically ordered. A blog is thus a webpage which allows for collaboration in as far as messages by more members may be posted in one blog having the comments to single blog entries create a dialogue. The following quote demonstrates an affordance of blogging:

Even though the contents are primarily presented in (reverse) chronological order in a blog and a focus lies on the direct exchange of experience and comments, contributions can be thematically sorted by categories and tags [...] in order to provide easy orientation within the entire learning environment (Blees & Rittberger 2009: 12).

Tagging thus allows users to structure the web space. Wikis’ non-sequential form which constitutes a hypertext can also be organised according to the users’ conceptions:

[w]ikis’ text inputting and linking functions lend themselves to creating a hypertext that is comprised of many small text modules that are linked together semantically (Ferris & Wilder 2006: 5).

In contrast to blogs, in a wiki learners can not only add but also change existing content in the webpage. Dieberger & Guzdial (2002: 1) summarise:

[t]he Wiki is an unusual collaborative space because of its total freedom, ease of access and use and because of its total lack of

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<sup>55</sup> The features of a wiki depend on the application design; usually they allow for file uploads enabling multimodal collaboration and communication.

<sup>56</sup> All contributions (or web page alterations) can usually be tracked back so that earlier version can be restored.

predetermined structure. As every user has exactly the same rights on the Wiki, it is an inherently democratic space [...].

Social software, in forms of wikis as well as blogs and other genres, denotes a space for the students and the teacher to distribute and share information and experiences including links to external resources. Online applications are hence a means to extend classroom discussions as they can include external agents and can be used outside the classroom. The Web 2.0 thus caters for networked thinking, a crucial principle for educational projects (BM:BWK 2001: 2). The non-linearity of these genres, i.e. the possibility of hyperlinking and tagging in order to organise the web, also supports and furthers networked thinking. At the same time, it calls for media literacy as users who are not e-literate might get lost in cyberspace due to cognitive overload.

Naturally, considerations as regards the choice of application might further regard the following: the necessity or lack of registration for the tool, its user-friendliness, and whether it is account-binding and cost-binding. What is more, some devices provide storage and retrieval functions, which enable communication threads to be tracked back and reviewed. In case multiple participants are involved in online communication it is then characterised by so-called multi-strand interchanges, which denote interwoven lines of communication produced by the interaction of multiple users. In a synchronous environment overlapping threads of communication render the contextualisation of meanings difficult – especially if the network is not restricted to a certain amount of participants. The role of a moderator can be allocated to users in order to structure these multi-strand interchanges and to organise the discourse. In face-to-face encounters, these interchanges also emerge but usually cannot be tracked back because of their immediacy. In synchronous communication, chat threads, or in asynchronous communication, blog threads can be accessed any time to review the matter or even change the discourse thanks to the application design. As the user can (re)read the written discourse produced by other users so far, it is easy for him or her to join in a discussion. This technological specification might be advantageous as subsequent to the interaction the threads can serve as a basis for further reflection, or input for discussions etc.

In the following, the space for interpersonal communication will be scrutinised with regard to the crucial elements in promoting the learner's cross-

cultural competence as outlined in chapter 3. When implementing social web tools in education, the demand for media literacy is emphasised with regard to the requirements of today's dominant culture of knowledge construction and the educational policy goal of lifelong learning. Downes (2007: 27) summarises on the evolvement of the Social Web and its significance for education

[l]earning technology that promotes autonomy, encourages diversity, enables interaction and supports openness will, in the main, be more effective than technology that does not. And thus we will see learning technology evolve from the approach defined by the learning management system to the idea that is the personal learning environment.

The next section scrutinises the differences of an online learning environment in contrast to face-to-face interaction with regard to identity construction.

#### 4.1.2. Differences to Face-to-Face Communication

This section aims to investigate how identity construction is established in online communication in opposition to hard copy communication. In any interpersonal communication the participants' identities are crucial in establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. As regards identity construction in the Web 2.0, an active and dynamic space, there is a need for "a 'decentered' perspective, in which one person must imagine the other person for lack of being able to hear, see, or touch him or her" (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 202). It is clear that "the nature of the medium exercises a strong pressure on the nature of the text and vice-versa" (Council of Europe 2001: 94). As Thorne (2003: 40) puts it "The structure of texts, literacy, and communicative practices are tightly bound to the materiality of their conveyance and representation [...]". The user, who is separated from the communication partner by distance and/or time, expresses their identity – a process, which is further commented upon or processed by other users:

Die Produzenten basteln [...] nicht isoliert am Ausdruck ihrer Identität, sondern sind über persönliche Netzwerke in virtuelle Gemeinschaften eingebunden, die die erstellten Inhalte nicht nur wahrnehmen, sondern auch filtern, kommentieren und weiterverarbeiten (Panke 2007: 5).

This is especially valuable when users aim to develop their cross-cultural competence. Once they type out their thoughts and ideas, they become open to

further investigation and they can engage with other users to co-construct and create meaning. In online communication

language [is to be seen] not as a closed set of linguistic structures, but as an open set of semiotic signs whose meanings can only be negotiated, not codified (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 200).

Internet communication tools are sources of valuable data as they generate interaction threads or online cultural artefacts. Thorne (2003: 39) takes up the notion of affordances, i.e. “[t]his dialectical approach to the relation between agent and structure [...]” (Thorne 2003: 39) and puts the cultural embeddedness of internet application as follows: “cultural-societal structures provide affordances and constraints that shape the development of specific forms of consciousness”. Any user can engage with a wealth of cultural representations on the web.

Generally, in text-based online communication, which provides information only via alphabetic scripts, non-verbal cues are omitted as the communication partner remains invisible. Therefore, three dimensions of paralinguistics cannot be included in the same way. Firstly, body language, i.e. proxemics, posture, gesture, body contact, facial expression as well as eye contact, cannot be employed in writing. This means that a potentially culture-dependent element is lacking. Secondly, extra-linguistic speech-sounds<sup>57</sup>, which, by definition fall outside the established phonological system, and again might carry conventionalised meanings, are missing in alphabetic scripts. Thirdly, prosodic qualities<sup>58</sup>, which are also established by conventions “(e.g. related to attitudes and states of mind), but fall outside the regular phonological system in which prosodic features of length, tone, stress may play a part” (Council of Europe 2001: 89), cannot be provided in online communication (Council of Europe 2001: 88-90).

Byram (1997: 13) summarises the functions of non-verbal communication, which can operate on several levels: they are a means to identity presentation as well as communicate interpersonal attitudes and support interaction. As described above, a user cannot construct his or her

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<sup>57</sup> Examples for extra-linguistic speech sounds in English are “sh’ requesting silence, ‘s-s-s’ expressing public disapproval, ‘ugh’ expressing disgust, ‘humph’ expressing disgruntlement, ‘tut, tut’ expressing polite disapproval” (Council of Europe 2001: 89).

<sup>58</sup> In English, “voice quality (gruff, breathy, piercing, etc.), pitch (growling, whining, screaming, etc.), loudness (whispering, murmuring, shouting, etc.), length (e.g. ve-e-e-ery good!)” (Council of Europe 2001: 89) constitute examples of prosodic qualities.

identity in the same way in writing as in face-to-face communication; he or she applies a wide range of other strategies to cater for language/culture-specific elements: in compensation paratextual features might be employed in non-verbal written communication. These features include visual elements such as

illustrations (photographs, drawings, etc.)[,] charts, tables, diagrams, figures, etc. [as well as] typographic features (fonts, pitch, spacing, underlining, layout, etc.) (Council of Europe 2001: 90)

and denote possibilities for the user to construct his or her identity in online communication.<sup>59</sup> The presentational facility in text-based CMC shall not be underestimated as the computer not only holds a legible form of written texts that can be easily transmittable but further, for instance, allows for texts to be translated into Braille by particular programs so that a text-based communication between blind students and sighted students is facilitated (Barr 2004: 46).

As regards multimodality, the internet generally allows the user to construct his or her identity not only through language based interaction but throughout many channels. At the same time, the users need to learn how to handle this opportunity in order not to be overchallenged:

Mit Multimedia steigen die Anforderungen an unsere Sinne durch die Parallelität der Präsentation der Einzelmedien. Eine Effektivitätssteigerung des Lernens durch den Einsatz von Multimedia allein kann also nicht automatisch erwartet werden (Rietsch 2003: 78).

Donath (1996) points out that an online identity has different properties compared to face-to-face encounters:

[I]n the disembodied world of the virtual community, identity is [...] ambiguous. Many of the basic cues about personality and social role we are accustomed to in the physical world are absent.

In CMC the learners' "words appear on the screen, bearing the full weight of their historical, ideological, social, and cultural density" (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 201). As already established earlier, the personal interrelation aspect is significant in intercultural communication. At the same time, the emergence of user-generated content and online communication opens up questions on safety, ethics and authorship:

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<sup>59</sup> Usually tools provide fixed graphics and images. Emoticons (smileys), for instance, might be used to compensate the lack of body language etc. and hence create similarities to spoken interaction. The choice of nicknames is a further example of identity construction.

the widespread and viral penetration of social applications in the Internet allow them [the users] to generate third spaces whose rules, contents, inner life and, most importantly, active members, some of them with faked identities, complete escape adult detection and responsible supervision (OECD/CERI 2008: 18).

The implementation of online communication into the realm of education definitely raises pedagogical issues, which calls for e-literacy on part of the learners as well as teachers.

The internet can tempt to deliberately mask certain identity markers. As a result, 'flaming', i.e. unsocial behaviour such as verbal insults by users, can occur. This danger is more likely to occur when there is open access to the interaction as this danger is fostered by the convention of anonymity. A moderator is in the position to restrict the participation by having the users register and bind to a social contract to counteract this form of cyberbullying. This contract can take the form of netiquette, i.e. rules on how to behave appropriately and politely on the internet.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, users can actually even deceive others on purpose by hiding their true identity, which is an objective by trolls, for instance. This demonstrates the importance of media literacy taking into account that "[i]dentity cues are sparse in the virtual world, but not non-existent" (Donath 1996). The users shall thus assume the role of critical producers and consumers on the web and be able to recognise manipulative identities.

Quite contrarily, the communication partner may be idealised so that a relation of so-called 'hyper-intimacy' may quickly arise between participants of online communication (Thorne 2003: 54). Thorne (2003: 53-54) enhances the term 'hyperpersonal interaction' coined by Walther and applies it to a CMC context:<sup>61</sup> the term describes the process of overenthusiastic uncritical identification with a communication partner who is not known prior to the online communication. In this form of online interaction "the cues available take on increased significance" (Thorne 2003: 54). Thorne further updates Walther's concept and points out that today, it is not e-mails but instant messaging that is likely to create these forms of hyper-intimate or hyper-personal relationships (Thorne 2003: 54).

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<sup>60</sup> For e-mail etiquette (netiquette) cf. Pirillo's webpage (1999).

<sup>61</sup> cf. Walther (1996) for his original outline of the notion.

Perceived anonymity on the internet may also have a positive effect. Warschauer (1997: 472) points out that shy students may participate in online communication more compared to face-to-face interaction as they are less inhibited when not being directly confronted with the communication partner(s).

As already established, the Web 2.0 does clearly not diminish social identities. Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche (2002) prove by means of their study that “cyberspace itself has a culture(s), and is not culture-free”. As in face-to-face encounters, the perceived difference is what can render the intercultural communication delicate. “The greater the perception of cultural differences between the ‘speakers’ online, the greater the incidents of miscommunication” (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002). In online intercultural communication misunderstandings can arise from perceptions of time and punctuality, role differences etc. Key aspects that influence the course of intercultural CMC are, for instance,

‘etiquette’, rules of formality/informality, flexibility, interaction style (including greetings/farewells, use of apology), expectations of response speed, and work ethic (tensions between relationship building communications and ‘on-task’ communications) (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002).

As regards the features they observed, it can be concluded that

[i]n identity creation the style including length and content of the postings reveals cultural differences of the way the participants reveal themselves. Some adopt a formal or informal style, the length of postings varies (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002).

What is more, users are not restricted in their self revelation or in the way of responding to communication partners but are flexible and can adjust to them by means of ‘style mirroring’ (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002). Potentially, “[c]haracteristics of electronic genres, communication styles and routines, and viewing/listening practices differ between cultures” (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002). Therefore,

[w]hen computer users from different cultures communicate online with one another, they may have different views on what genre (discourse type and discourse style) is appropriate for the exchange (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 191).

Thorne (2003: 38) terms these communities of practice ‘cultures-of-use’, i.e. communities which differ in their norms and use of media along generations, locations, gender etc. In case different online communication patterns are

realised, the partners may react to it in a way, which may give rise to misunderstandings.

It is clear that an online culture denotes a communications community, the term applied by Knapp (2008: 84) already introduced in 2.1.2. In an intercultural cyberculture, the cultures create a new communications community. The virtual environment holds various identities, which are expressed directly as well as indirectly (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002). As online communication does not erase social identities, in the virtual world people are not automatically on equal footing even if they use the same technology.

Popular media often suggest that communication technologies [...] will bring about people around the world together in a global village where cultural differences cease to matter. But this perceived dominance of technology over culture is an illusion. The software of the machines may be globalized, but the software of the minds that use them is not (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 330).

Hofstede & Hofstede (2005: 330) continue that online technologies may even emphasise cultural differences in a cross-cultural interaction, for instance by applying different communication strategies, which are bound to agreed convention. Thorne (2003: 40) summarises that “[i]n short, artifacts embody historical processes that shape, and are shaped by, human activity”. This means that online communication tools do not only imply the collectives’ underlying norms but further depend on individual’s attitudes. Applications are used differently by users whose needs and expectations shape the tool.

As already outlined in chapter 2, culture leaves room for individual alterations. Consequently, in a CMC context, individuals may voice individualistic attitudes on media (use). In a case study which investigated personal preferences, e-mailing was for example perceived by some to be unsuitable for peer communication but reserved for hierarchical interaction (Thorne 2003: 56). In an educational context, therefore, the choice of medium shall be openly verbalised to avoid frustration as the applications chosen “play a critical role in how and even if the communicative process and accompanying interpersonal relationships develop (Thorne 2003: 57)”. It is necessary to verbalise what form of communication is desirable or expectable before starting an online project in school. It follows that



communication technologies will not by themselves reduce the need for intercultural understanding. When wisely used they may be among the tools for intercultural learning (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005: 331).

The Web 2.0 is a potential venue for promoting intercultural communicative competence. Through the mediation of the computer online communication enables geographically and/or temporally expanding opportunities for interaction, i.e. time-and/or-place independent communication. Naturally, media-literacy is crucial in this regard. It is obvious that

[a] learner's access to digital cultures is largely determined by their ability to manage the special modes of interaction that predominate in the online environment (Levy 2007: 117).

The students need to understand that there are boundaries, especially as regards text-based interaction, but at the same time they shall experience that computer-mediated communication offers possibilities to construct one's identity. Online communication shall hence not be seen as a substitute but rather as complementary to travel and real-life encounters. "[C]yberspace' itself has a culture, and is not simply a neutral and value-free platform for exchange" (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002). Online communication clearly does not endanger face-to-face communication as it does not substitute real life encounters. It is rather a surplus which "opens up opportunities for participation in global networks, thus extending the normal boundaries of social networks" (OECD/CERI 2008: 11).

It has been established that the internet is not a neutral space but an environment that social agents can use for interaction; cultures are transmitted and not hidden. In the promotion of intercultural competence, the social or identity markers shall be deliberately dealt with and not disguised or avoided (O'Dowd 2007: 34). For teachers, the fact that online communication across cultures can result in miscommunication results in challenges in course planning concerning cross-cultural e-projects:

[e]xpanding our understanding of the process of intercultural communication in a virtual learning environment is a necessary step in designing exemplary networked learning in international/intercultural education (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche 2002).

In the following, online communication shall be regarded as a space for learning and more specifically for promoting the foreign language learner's

intercultural competence. Ahrens (2003: 175, 181) describes the online environment as an benefit and refers to them as 'neue Handlungs-, Wahrnehmungs-, und Kommunikationsräume', which are not to be seen as independent or isolated spaces but rather as enriching complement to face-to-face-socialisation processes.

Der virtuelle Raum ersetzt nichts – ist nicht prothetisch – noch kann er als völlig losgelöst von der konkreten Ortsgebundenheit gedacht werden. Diese neuen Räume bilden gegebene Realitäten keineswegs nur ab, sondern stellen Zusatzrealitäten bereit. Anstelle einer bloßen Verdoppelung von Realität werden neue Wahrnehmungs- und Handlungsräume erschlossen (Ahrens 2003: 181).

In this way, new forms of identity creation are provided. Online communication enables authentic communication situations in as far as communication is not a simulation but a real one. Users can engage in meaningful intercultural communication and foster their intercultural competence promotion.

Es entstehen Gelegenheiten zum Feedback, zur Diskussion und zur Reflexion von Praktiken und Entscheidungen. Dadurch, dass Vernetzungstechnologien als Spiegel fungieren, wird bislang Implizites explizit (Ahrens 2003: 183).

Just as visits to foreign countries do not trigger intercultural competence, the mediated dialogue does not automatically further cross-cultural competence: "Das Internet schafft zwar (medial vermittelten) Kulturkontakt, trägt damit aber nicht automatisch zu Kulturverstehen bei" (Richter 1998: 15; underlined in original). Similarly, Auernheimer (2003: 162-163) points out that only the contact established does not automatically lead to a growth in intercultural competence without a thorough didactics. In the next chapter the factors of a supportive virtual learning environment will be depicted.

## **4.2. Online Intercultural Communication**

A means to counteract the so-called crisis of significance in education, i.e. to achieve the creation of meaningful links, is for teachers as well as learners to "realize[...] and leverage[...] the existing media environment" (Wesch 2008). The use of CMC in foreign language education implies questions on the design of the learning environment, the focus of this section.

As regards the educational environment, connectivism depicts a learning theory which expands the socio-constructivist theory by deliberately taking into

account the evolvement of media and its significance for learning and knowledge construction. It acknowledges that parallel to the fast growth of media environment, information construction has become fast:

connectivism constitutes a pragmatic conception of learning that actively draws upon the societal changes to learning and consequently integrates them into learning processes. Web 2.0 (social software) instruments hence become increasingly relevant as they promote perfectly an exchange of knowledge and the development of competencies in networks and on the web (Erpenbeck & Sauter 2007 In Blees & Rittberger 2009: 3)

Siemens (2004) outlines the principles of this theory as follows: acknowledging the socio-constructivist theory, knowledge construction relies on multiple voices or opinions; importantly, learning may further “reside in non-human appliances” (Siemens 2004), a trend which is taken into account by connectivism. To support lifelong learning it is vital to encourage and maintain connections, which shall be established “between fields, ideas, and concepts [...]” (Siemens 2004). Connectivism acknowledges that the establishment of links is a learning process in itself as tomorrow decisions may take another form than today due to a changing socio-economic environment. The ability of autonomous and networked thinking is crucial in this regard.

The connectivist learning theory suggests a cyclic knowledge development in as far as the individual is connected with a network which feeds back into the personal knowledge organisation. “This cycle of knowledge development [...] allows learners to remain current in their field through the connections they have formed” (Siemens 2004). Individuals thus learn from interaction, from which further individuals learn or keep up to date. This way, individuals learn what is needed for the future. Siemens (2004) summarises

The field of education has been slow to recognize both the impact of new learning tools and the environmental changes in what it means to learn. Connectivism provides insight into learning skills and tasks needed for learners to flourish in a digital era.

The computer promotes the learning cycle as it allows for personal reflection and interaction in one single medium drawing on both learner autonomy and collaboration. The following sections focus on the elements of learner autonomy, learner collaboration as well as the learners’ L1(s) and investigate their role in intercultural CMC.

#### 4.2.1. Learner Autonomy and the Role of the Teacher

As already established, in the virtual world, the individual users meet and form a new communications community. According to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005: 363) “[e]verybody looks at the world from behind the windows of a cultural home [...]”. To pursue this metaphor literally, the internet can be seen as an inner courtyard where individuals with cultural baggage encounter one another. The preexperiences of the users are vital parts of their identities and important in deciding the course of interaction.

Naturally, when incorporating the computer as a tool into the foreign language classroom, a learner-centred approach shall deliberately be adopted.

The full potential of ICT support should be explored in learner-centred strategies to shift pedagogic orientation to cater more for the role of the learner in the learning process, taking advantage of the resources and tools made available in the digital age (Al-Khatib 2009).

The use of the medium shall deliberately not disguise a teacher-oriented method because the learners’ preferences and their level of media literacy are crucial factors influencing their learning processes. Panke (2007: 13) points out

[u]m die Potenziale von Web 2.0 fruchtbar zu machen, müssen Lerninfrastrukturen als System der Studierenden wahrgenommen werden und nicht als eine von den Vorstellungen der Dozierenden geprägte Umgebung.

As regards new information and communication technology learner autonomy clearly calls for e-literacy as the students shall behave responsibly within the diversity, topicality and wealth of information the internet offers (Richter 1998: 14). Learners shall be able to handle their virtual identity. In identity construction, for instance, they shall autonomously deal with the various forms and functions of channels of multimodality.

Media literacy further refers to how the learners handle personal information, which, in case it is published on the web, can present a danger. Security in chat rooms and in blogs can be increased by teachers in restricting the network to a limited amount of members, for instance. What is more, a release form signed by the pupils’ guardians might be useful in “giving the school or institution permission to publish student writing – before publishing their work” (Dudeney 2000: 134 In Miguela 2007: 100). Pseudonyms may be a further means of maintaining school-safe blogging, for instance. The level of

privacy naturally depends on the learning objectives. In developing intercultural communicative competence the learner is involved in sharing personal ideas and opinions so that what the student produces and questions is actually more in the foreground than the accuracy of his speech production. Similarly, Donath (1996) suggest that

balancing privacy and accountability, reliability and self-expression, security and accessibility requires a series of compromises and trade-offs whose value is very dependent on the goals of the group and of the individuals that comprise it.

In the endeavour of promoting cross-cultural competence, the users often have multiple channels at disposal for transmitting their identity, which is a beneficial characteristic:

insbesondere Bilder und Musik sind als präsentativsymbolische Darstellungen geeignet, Gefühle und Emotionen anzusprechen; neben kulturspezifischen Symbolisierungen gibt es eine Vielzahl transkulturell kommunizierbarer Symbolbedeutungen, gerade auf dem Hintergrund der Globalisierung der Medienkommunikation [...] (Niesyto 2007: 38).

Text, image and sound are possibly integrated into a single medium, which consequently allows for learning with all senses and accounts for the emotional level involved in intercultural competence.

Multimedia with its nature of hypertexts pose a challenge and, at the same time, a possibility for autonomous learning: it is possible for learners to pick and choose from simultaneous material or to open up online dictionaries or encyclopaedias to support their learning. In other words, “[s]tudents can explore the material at their own level of proficiency, understanding, and interest” (Kramsch 1993: 197).

As already highlighted, learners shall take on a self-responsible way in using different or multiple modes of communication. They are not only users: applying Web 2.0 tools denotes the mergence of consuming as well as creating. “User werden Autoren und bringen aktuelle Inhalte ein, korrigieren Fehler und sorgen für eine ‚lebendige‘ Website” (Kerres 2006: 2). Downes (2007: 26) stipulates that “[a]utonomy is enabled through a personal software environment. In Web 2.0, it is enabled through the provision of content creation tools [...]”

Learner autonomy is linked to collaboration in the Social Web as the users produce knowledge together through communication. This is further linked to openness as learners are enabled “to take their learning out of the

classroom and to make it something they can share with the world, to make learning the *result* of sharing with the world” (Downes 2007: 27; italics in original). This property of Web 2.0 software at the same time highlights the role of single identities forming a democratic space: “each entity in a network must be able to contribute to the network, and each entity needs to be able to receive from the network” (Downes 2007: 26).

Similarly, Brosnan (2002: 71) points out that new technologies “emphasise the finding, understanding and interpreting of information rather than its memorization”; virtual spaces are hence venues for the learner’s promotion of autonomy and simultaneously require autonomy and e-literacy skills on part of the learner. To be able to draw advantages of the Web 2.0 the user clearly depends on media literacy, which allows them to create platforms of expression, interaction, reflection, critical thinking, and problem-solving – the computer may thus be a supportive venue for the development of intercultural competence. Parallel to the rise of learner autonomy, the teacher’s monopoly of knowledge shrinks – a process which has accompanied the rise in technology.

The traditional role of the instructor as a tutor and transmitter of knowledge in a teacher-centered classroom no longer suffices in classrooms without walls where no single person’s expertise can match the richness of cultural resources and contacts accessible through the Internet (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 190-191).

Kramsch (1993: 199) also acknowledges that teachers are not the sole proprietors of knowledge any more and points out that

[t]he advances in multimedia technology have brought about a revolution in the transmission of knowledge that has been compared with the Gutenberg invention of the printing press.

With regard to lifelong learning, the teacher’s task is to prepare students for their adult life and autonomous citizens. With (mobile) access to the internet, canonical (cultural) knowledge is clearly out-of-date. Teachers shall guide learners in a gradual way towards learner autonomy and intercultural speakers. Webquests are a means to gradually increase learner autonomy as they engage the learners in a discovery-oriented activity with online status. The social web can thus provide tools which support scaffolding in order to minimise information overload.

Below different settings involving various roles of learners and teachers are visualised in figure 10 (Tscherteu & Langreiter 2008: 217). On the far left,

the teacher has a mediating role teaching the students. In the middle, the learner is isolated from peers or teachers. On the right hand side the situation how it is enabled through the Web 2.0 is pictured.



**Figure 10**

In this setting, learners as well as teachers are part of a learning community constructing knowledge together. Moreover, concerning intercultural competence, teachers likewise take on the role of learners in sharing experiences and getting to know new experiences and insights, which may result in changing identities. Social web tools thus authorise learners provided they know how to handle their autonomy:

Theoretisch kann jede(r) LernerIn durch die Vernetzung das Wissen von absoluten SpezialistInnen ermitteln und sich Standpunkte zu Eigen machen, die dem der Lehrenden nicht entsprechen (Pachler & Kysela-Schiemer 2002: 52).

It follows that assessment is not simplex but involves the individual behaviours, emotions and attitudes. It is not desirable – and furthermore nearly impossible – for teachers to control the traditional way of learners acquiring knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

Dadurch, dass der/die Lehrende nicht mehr die Autorität besitzt, Lehrinhalte zu bestimmen, wie auch durch die vergrößerte Distanz kann der Lernerfolg nicht mehr leicht kontrolliert werden (Pachler & Kysela-Schiemer 2002: 60).

This quotation further highlights the importance of learner autonomy: the learners shall assume the role of self-responsible agents about their learning. Autonomous learners hold critical thinking skills, which shall be enhanced and further promoted in schools. Schools thus ideally pose an environment in which students shall learn to identify and counteract various kinds of manipulation (Byram & Zarate 1998b: 19). Learner autonomy and e-literacy are also indispensable for the learner's intercultural competence. When present in virtual

<sup>62</sup> cf. Stratmann, Preussler, Kerres (2009) for information on e-portfolios for assessment.

environment, the learners shall assume critical positions in the consumption and production of virtual environments.

Da Schule schon längst kein Informationsmonopol mehr hat, sondern die meisten Informationen bei Schüler und Schülerinnen über Medien ankommen, führen Ethnozentismen in den Medien möglicherweise zu einer Entwertung solcher Informationen in Schulen, die wenig ethnozentrisch sind (Hansen 1996: 110).

Critical awareness on part of the students can successfully counteract these ethnocentric representations, however.

The computer can not only be used as a tool for self-expression, which can store and transmit one's thoughts and ideas: users can further communicate their experiences and ideas, the basis for collaborative work. The next chapter elaborates on this principle. How the learners are not only actively engaged in their learning process but also shape the learning process of others will thus be outlined in the next chapter.<sup>63</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning draws on learner autonomy and can be realised online as the Social Web allows the construction of communities or networks, which are independent of (time and) place:

Modern communication and collaboration technology empower learners to self-organise their learning activities within groups that transcend physical and temporal boundaries. These emergent learning networks can provide new ways of accessing and acquiring knowledge and competences (Neumayer & Greller 2008: 182).

Learners can thus engage in long distance exchanges in different forms of communication in order to construct knowledge together.<sup>64</sup> In other words, the Web 2.0 tools allow users from remote locations to communicate with one another by mediational affordances. Warschauer (1997: 473) terms this affordance of technology 'many-to-many communication' which refers to the possibility that "any member of a group may initiate interaction with any or all of the other".

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<sup>63</sup> Apart from human-human interaction, students can further be involved with interactive texts as cultural representations, for instance in form of online interactive literature.

<sup>64</sup> The internet further facilitates group configurations within the classroom walls as it does not require tables and chairs to be moved.



In collaboration users can share and exchange texts, which promotes their individual learning processes:

the text-mediated view links the concepts of expression, interaction, reflection, problem-solving, critical thinking, and literacy with the various uses of talk, text, inquiry, and collaboration in the classroom (Warschauer 2007: 472).

CMC is a means to make thoughts visible and transferable and “can encourage both reflection and interaction” (Warschauer 2007: 472). With the computer as a tool for communication, the collaborative mode of working is facilitated and local users can engage with remote users in an online intercultural dialogue. Learners, who construct knowledge together in collaborative endeavour, can, for instance, explore culturally and linguistically diverse rich points online. Belz & Müller-Hartmann (2003: 73) define these

as instances of communicative behavior, such as words, gestures, or patterns of interaction, in one languaculture that members of a second languaculture do not understand or misunderstand when they encounter them.

The mere establishment of links between users is not sufficient as it is crucial to maintain relationships in order to successfully produce content and knowledge in these complex networks. As regards the network structure, and especially the maintenance of networks, group size certainly influences the group dynamics: especially in synchronous text-based communication a large group may lead to fewer contributions:

too large a group and students will be tempted to 'lurk' (to be present, but not participate). If the group is too small, the exchange can resemble a role play more than a discussion (CILT & All 2005: 1).

Naturally, group constellations are dependent on the learning objectives. The bigger a learning group the more complex are the expectations of the community members. As Hofstede & Hofstede (2005: 361) point out “[t]he learning process itself is culturally constrained [...]”. Thus, what is in-time varies among members, and they might hold different conceptions on the degree of uncertainty avoidance or tolerance of ambiguity. These factors or rich points influence the communication, of course and may make the online collaboration challenging as well as promising.

Collaboration through the internet, i.e. the establishment of online communities, obviously relies on internet access so that it denotes a cultural practice acknowledging the digital divide:

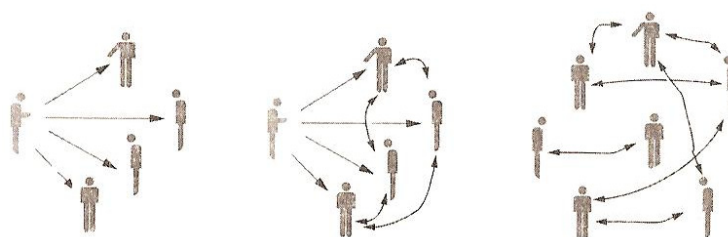
Technology itself is cultural, of course. [...] With the advent of the Internet and the many forms of group that may be realised online, another dimension of groupness has become available (Levy 2007: 109).

The collaborative form of learning can be implemented online in asynchronous or synchronous mode. In synchronous communication the discourse is collaboratively constructed by negotiating meaning such as in face-to-face encounters, which can be seen from interwoven discourse threads: “[p]artners co-construct meaning and negotiate content and tone; each utterance is contingent on nearby utterances” (O’Rourke 2007: 53). In synchronous communication, the users additionally receive immediate feedback. The learners negotiate and share meanings in real time in a virtual community practising rapid interaction. However, also asynchronous communication is a collaborative endeavour which is particularly visible in multiauthoring blogs. However, Thorne (2003: 49) suggests that in contrast to synchronous interaction an asynchronous genre such as “e-mail supports a temporally sequenced set of responsive monologues rather than dialogic interaction”. It is true that in asynchronous as well as synchronous CMC information overload can result in monologues in case the user can not respond to the amount of information they receive and consequently ignore it (Warschauer 1997: 473).

The success of the interaction depends certainly on the individual learners and their level of e-literacies. An asynchronous form of communication is not less likely to support the promotion of intercultural competence in as far as it just as well establishes contact between learners. To ensure fruitful group dynamics it is for instance possible to share personal biographies in the initial project phase to break the ice. Byram (1999b: 376) points out that students might experience psychological dilemmas of not knowing how to react to unknown communication partners they have never met face-to-face. Ice-breaker activities can have positive effects on their interaction, which, in turn, has positive effects on their intercultural dialogue.

Wesch (2008) suggests the following division of e-collaborations and summarises the different models of communication – namely of mass, hierarchy, and network. Communication of mass relates to the pupils following along while communication of hierarchy is based on authority. Finally, network communication is a virtual space for equal participation. Clearly, today's learners shall be involved in a network situation, and more precisely, be actively involved in creating a network, in which they participate on equal footing with their peers and teachers. In education, it is necessary to go beyond the grade as driving force and create significance by engaging students acknowledging that learning is “helping students create meaningful connections” (Wesch 2008).<sup>65</sup> The teacher shall hence act as facilitator and help students to engage in and maintain online relationships in collaboration and support their collaboration avoiding unnecessary friction.

This scenario of interaction is pictured on the far right of figure 11 (adopted from Tscherteu & Langreiter 2008: 216), which proposes different teacher-student/student-student interactions. It highlights the reciprocity of communication between autonomous agents, which blurs the roles of students and teachers, who are all actively involved in the creation of meaning and relationships. The distinction of teacher-student and student-student interaction gives way to a new space where all are equally engaged in the communications community.



**Figure 11**

In contrast, in a traditional school setting, as exemplified in the figure on the left, the teacher communicates to the students, who passively take in what is taught. In the middle, a typical e-learning scenario is depicted, which involves student-student interaction but which is directed by the distant teacher as organiser directing the learners.

<sup>65</sup> Meaningful connections applied here both relate to the establishment of links to other ideas and concepts and to the creation of one's personal identity.

The learners who work together in virtual groups, may search or exchange information/opinions or/and produce texts, which simultaneously denotes

a [...] change from the teacher being regarded as the source of all knowledge – an instructor – to the teacher as someone who shapes the learning experiences of [his or] her pupils and helps them develop the skills and understanding to find, evaluate, interpret and communicate knowledge – a facilitator (Brosnan 2002: 75-76).

Learners engaged in online collaboration are independent of the teacher as source of knowledge as they construct knowledge together. In the promotion of intercultural competence, every individual brings in his or her cultural knowledge contributing to individual learning processes. In contrast, in a traditional teacher-centred discussion, the conversation usually takes the form of IRF/E, which denotes an initiation by the teacher, a response by a learner and a follow-up or evaluation by the teacher (Warschauer 1997: 474). The technological affordance of many-to-many communication can easily overcome this rigid structure and by doing so supports the promotion of intercultural competence.

Instruction in a classroom thus changes to dialogue in and beyond a classroom and to meaningful and authentic communication within a given context. Knowledge is created by the learners collaboratively, a process which is supported by the teacher who designs the appropriate learning environment with the learners. The task of the teacher lies in nurturing online communities, which is actually

different than designing. We [teachers] must respect the integrity of the community. In time, we [teachers] may come to think of ourselves more as 'learning technologists' than as 'instructional technologists', and 'learning support specialists' more than 'instructional designers' (Wilson & Ryder 1998).

The teachers shall maintain group harmony between the learners and further may, depending on the learning objectives and preferences of the learners, act as the group's memory keeping all the exchange. Depending on the level of learner autonomy and maturity, membership to networks may be restricted or controlled by a teacher in order to further the supportiveness of the environment. The learning community shall provide feedback on the individual's development and not hinder it by flaming, for instance.

Feedback provided by the learner group is important to create something new; content memorisation presented by teacher is not in the foreground here.

In an educational setting, the community is usually supervised by a teacher limiting the amount of participants while transferring the authority to the learners as social actors. Downes (2007: 26) further stresses the importance of network organisation in order to further learning:

When networks are properly designed, they reliably facilitate learning. This is because, when properly designed, the network will itself learn. Through the process of interaction and communications, the entities that constitute the network will form a mesh of connections. Knowledge is embedded in this mesh of connections, and therefore, through interaction with the network, the learner can acquire the knowledge (Downes 2007: 26).

In successful networks not only knowledge in the traditional sense is in the foreground, of course. Naturally, the learners are confronted with different attitudes and emotions, mediated by language and other channels via the computer. This makes online collaboration valuable for the promotion of cross-cultural competence. Learners can communicate in multimodal ways with one another, which is beneficial for the promotion of the diverse aspects of intercultural competence. As regards the written form of collaboration, language based (asynchronous as well as synchronous) communication is particularly suitable for reflection for “the written word slows down the process of communication. It fosters reflection and a critical stance vis-à-vis one’s own and the foreign meanings” (Kramsch 1993: 175).

To sum up, networks are characterised by diversity and autonomy and at the same time foster these principles. Diversity, for instance, supports knowledge construction, which “allows us to have multiple perspectives, to see things from a different point of view [...]” (Downes 2007: 26). Naturally, diversity is linked to learner autonomy as sharing multiple experiences draws on a self-responsible attitude in handling the sharing of personal information and experience online. The learners further intrapersonally construct knowledge by integrating new experiences into their existing patterns or revise old constructs such as learned cultural schemata. Panke (2007: 5) refers to the potential of user-generated-content as

Möglichkeit im Austausch mit interdisziplinär zusammengesetzten Online-Communities eigene Wissensbestände in neuen Kontexten anzuwenden, zu erweitern und ggf. zu korrigieren.

Internet-supported collaboration thus relies on (technical) networks, forms (interpersonal) networks and furthers networked learning in the sense that it

connects learners from various backgrounds. In CMC distant students may collaborate and construct meaning together: they advocate their positions, respond to questions and comments and revise their position. The virtual environment is therefore a venue for students to challenge and mediate their ideas and perspectives. CMC thus facilitates

that community members progress in their epistemic understanding, perhaps moving from black-and-white views of knowledge toward more sophisticated views of how we come to know things (Wilson & Ryder 1998).

As the community members provide different backgrounds the learners gain new perspectives. In this way, the community members support one another:

Rather than being controlled by a teacher or an instructional designer, learners might 'self-organize' into functioning communities with a general goal of supporting each other in their learning (Wilson & Ryder 1998).

Collaboration naturally relies on learner autonomy and e-literacy. The users' interaction and thereby their constructed texts also influence ideas on authorship and plagiarism, which are concepts that have actually evolved before the emergence of multiple user generated content. Today's technologies allow for open editing, for instance; within networks of unstable power relations the producers design environments with the help of Web 2.0 tools – a process, which potentially holds more than a critique to established systems, as the design allows the users to live or experience their vision with the help of media.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.2.3. Role of the Learner's First Language(s)

As already established "[i]t is [...] possible to distinguish Intercultural Competence from Intercultural Communicative Competence" (Byram 1997: 70). The foreign language learners can be occupied with their own identities and L1(s) to further their cultural awareness without entering in contact with 'the other', for instance. With the help of (online) software, the learners can produce their own written language based voice and video texts, which can be explored by themselves for various aspects such as complexity, gender roles, regional

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<sup>66</sup> At the same time the creative and productive potential of the Social Web afforded can negatively influence a person's development in case the user does not acknowledge that the real world is present parallel to virtuality but runs the risk off "coming adrift" from the rest of society" (Kress 2008: 3).

differences, use of dialects etc. Naturally, these texts can subsequently be sent in form of written texts, visual and audio files to partner schools. These native texts represent authentic cultural representations for their partners and may serve as basis for intercultural dialogue aiming at the promotion of intercultural communicative competence.

The internet naturally facilitates the collaboration among remote learners and by doing so enables the encounter of various cultures and languages. What is more, the World Wide Web can function as rich resource of linguistic as well as cultural information. As regards intercultural communicative competence Kramersch suggests “to use the computer not as an instrument for single-voiced discourse, but as an enrichment for a double-voiced discourse among learners” (Kramersch 1993: 202). Individual learners can connect themselves to explore various cultures and languages. In intercultural communicative competence the learners shall develop into new online speech communities, which depending on the learner group constellation might involve a constant tension between various languages.

Students can hence deliberately be engaged in dialogues with learners whose first languages serve as rich source as regards cultural and linguistic aspects. As regards the production of online language-based texts in telecollaboration, Ware (2005: 79) suggests that

[o]nline writing needs to be viewed [...] as a collage of foreign language texts borne out of an ongoing inquiry among individuals who are situated in both an immediate context of situation and in a larger context of culture.

As regards foreign language text productions, asynchronous communication is ideal for beginners, as this form of interaction allows for texts to be composed offline: the learners can write blog entries or e-mails prior to posting or sending them. This way they can take the time they need in producing and revising a foreign language text. As regards the linguistic accuracy of the text

decisions will need to be taken, for instance, whether pupils' messages have to be checked by the teacher before they are sent and to what extent redrafting by the teacher is required. Alternatively, pupils in the partner school could be asked to provide diagnostic feedback for each other (Pachler, Barnes & Field 2009: 193).

Whether and in what form the texts are corrected is best negotiated in the learner groups with the teacher to balance the objectives and the responsibility of the teachers and students involved.

In contrast, synchronous communication is ideal for learners to develop skills of spontaneous communication in the foreign language. It is a mode that lends itself to promoting fluency as the learners do not have the time to linger over the text. Both modes of interaction lend themselves to feedback on accuracy by the communication partners. While in asynchronous communication the partner has time to compose the individualised feedback, in synchronous communication feedback is more of a spontaneous kind, i.e. mainly correcting mistakes which lead to an immediate misunderstanding. While theoretically, in both kinds of communication, feedback on the form of the text is possible, it shall be stressed that in cross-cultural competence, content gains particular importance acknowledging a learner-centred approach. Accuracy or the language form is not the only concern of today's language instruction any more.

With online communication of both kinds it is beneficial that the oral and written texts cannot only be transmitted but usually also be stored. Therefore, it is possible to revise the material sent and received. The texts which are hence available offline in forms of threads can be reviewed as regards their form as well as content.

In synchronous forms of communication such as in an internet discussion forum or an open chat, and especially in those synchronous environments which are not intended for foreign language learners, communication difficulties may arise for language learners due to "the distinctive features of chat, such as the strictly linear and discrete ordering and presentation of turns, and the lack of non-verbal cues [...]" (Levy 2007: 117). To actively participate in an open environment is recommendable for more advanced learners as the users are expected to write in their target language in real-time.

Synchronous communication shall be slowly encouraged in order not to overchallenge the learners. In general, all learners need to be prepared for this kind of interaction. Levy (2007: 118) suggests that the learners first participate in more closed forums for training. Furthermore, it may be possible for learners to write in their L1s and read in the target language initially in order not to



overchallenge them. With more confident learners, it may then be possible to slowly increase the amount of the foreign language used, without slowing the speed of communication down too much (CILT & All 2005: 1). Real-time communication may be perceived as difficult for its immediacy. As regards the nature of synchronous CMC Levy (2007: 116) further suggests that

[i]nterpreting contextual meaning successfully is made more demanding in chat conversation because native speakers frequently produce incomplete or abbreviated sentences.

Synchronous environments which are not deliberately designed for language learners' needs can nevertheless be used for educational reasons. When users seize opportunities of real time interaction with target language speakers, the intercultural encounters can foster their intercultural competence: the peers function as partners to negotiate linguistic as well as cultural aspects

in a meaningful personalized way, which is particularly beneficial for students who study language by distance because it provides the opportunity for a type of informal conversational interaction with NSs [native speakers] (Tudini 2007: 596).

In a supportive network, the seemingly harsh environment of synchronous interaction can be fruitful and at the same time opens up a variety of opportunities for students to support the conversation in the foreign language. The internet for instance provides resources such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

Through a system of windows on the computer screen and the user's control of speed, direction, tracks, and scripts, learners can get as much lexical, grammatical, and informational help they need; they can browse, explore, trackback on the material, make observations and make decisions on their own [...] (Kramsch 1993: 197).

What is more, even for beginner learners, the synchronous forms of communication may provide a rich authentic venue as "[t]hese forums bring with them a set of cultural norms and expected behaviours" (Levy 2007: 117). Online communication may hence be beneficial for beginners as well as advanced learners. A forum, for instance, provides valuable insights in as far as it

exposes students to the ways in which cultural groups establish and maintain their membership through acceptance and non-acceptance, and through the influence of privileged individuals within the group, for example the moderator, or 'older' members who for various reasons have acquired status within the group (Levy 2007: 117-118).

CMC provides insights into cultural practices. What is more, the discourse the learners are exposed to in authentic communication is a rich source for the increase of passive vocabulary.

#### **4.3. 'Online Intercultural Communication' in Project Work**

This section focuses on web supported project work. In projects, which integrate web-based teaching into traditional attendance classes, the computer does not replace face-to-face encounters but supplements in-classroom activities with CMC – a form which is known as 'blended learning' (Akyol, Garrison & Ozden 2009: 65). By combining online and offline learning an additional site of learning is created as online communication provides a further stimulus for face-to-face collaboration and discussion.

"Some educators view the computer as offering a respite from teacher-led learning" (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 191). It is true that the use of the computer may support a learner-centred approach. This is however not to say that the teacher is indispensable. In cross-cultural collaborative electronic communication the teachers balance the learner autonomy by structuring the learning processes.

There are certainly steps teachers can take to prepare for teaching via the Internet. Pedagogical precautions can be taken to reduce the number of [...] possible misunderstandings [...] (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 199).

At the same time misunderstandings provide a rich source, especially in the promotion of intercultural competence. Belz & Müller-Hartmann (2003: 85) propose to view socioinstitutional or sociocultural constraints in a telecollaborative project not as negative factors which are to be eliminated for smooth communication processes but as a means to access the process of cross-cultural competencies.

Naturally there are multiple factors which shape the project's progress. As regards synchronous communication, for instance, it might be logistically impossible of scheduling both groups to be online at the same time as the time schedules of the institutions involved are likely to differ. Furthermore, workload anticipated by the teachers involved may be misaligned as learner assessment patterns are embedded in one's respective culture. The work the teachers

expect the learners to do during the project may thus vary and cause friction influencing the course of the project (Belz & Müller-Hartmann 2003: 84). Belz & Müller-Hartmann (2003: 84-85) point out the individualised notion next to the socioinstitutional affordances at play as they found that

the history and content of each teacher's academic socialization into the profession of language teaching and particular job responsibilities influence[...] the differing significance that he or she attach[...] to certain aspects of syllabus design [...].<sup>67</sup>

Teachers' behaviours are thus crucial in establishing project work – a systematic approach which relies on learners as well as teachers involved. Teachers shall pay attention to the degree of learner autonomy the project may demand. At the same time, instances which are not foreseen are to be seen as learning opportunity for all involved; “they are valuable precisely because they cannot always be avoided” (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 199). Projects cannot be overly structured as their characteristic is process-orientation, which implies a certain freedom and leeway for unforeseen events. Ware & Kramsch (2005: 199) point out with reference to the promotion of the learners' cross-cultural competence that

[e]ven the most insightful in-class discussions about different cultural interpretations can only focus on a small number of the actual messages exchanged by all students in two classrooms.

In projects the participating students shall be supported but not controlled by their peers and the teacher. They shall further share the expectations on and objectives of the project, which are best openly discussed in order to ensure an undisturbed flow of the project. As regards the participation in online interaction, the participating students agree what acceptable participation would be, for instance, how many posts they expect a week etc. Moreover, before engaging in online communication “students should [...] be encouraged to discuss usage norms and expectations with their online peers” (Ware 2005: 78). Naturally, in telecollaboration group dynamics might prove to hinder the communication. By discussing the expected style, length and accuracy of the posting and the expected time of the posting or exchange they avoid frustration. The social and

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<sup>67</sup> Belz & Müller-Hartmann (2003: 86) suggest that “[b]est practices for telecollaborative teaching may include the establishment of long-term teaching partnerships between international colleagues. It is likely that pedagogical and socioinstitutional understanding between teaching partners will increase over time such that subsequent iterations of the same telecollaborative course will present fewer organizational, pedagogical, and theoretical challenges to the participants”.

institutional aspects may create tensions in an online exchange and require deliberate choices which are to be made explicit before and during the exchange (Ware 2005: 79). The interaction is thus constantly negotiated by the participants who can take on an autonomous role in their learning processes.

Pachler, Barnes & Field (2009: 192-193) suggest the following organisational steps to enter in contact and to maintain relationship with a partner school. At the preparation stage, the teachers from both schools get in contact with one another and agree on the purpose of the project. Following this precondition of a successful project, an introductory stage follows, which has the learners and teachers involved get to know one another. In this phase the multimodality of the web is useful in presenting a varied and appealing picture of the respective socio-cultural and socio-institutional environments. After that, the online exchange between the participants commences. This ideally does not only take the form of question and answer but has the pupils involved in follow-up questions. The learners shall enter into a collaborative dialogue that occupies them further in class or at home. The students thus relate the input by their partners to already existing knowledge and expand or revise their knowledge in terms of a new communications community. Finally, the students are asked to present their conclusions and compare them with others' suggestions. The learners are further asked to present their results, which can take various forms: "compilation of a display, brochure, newspaper, video/audio recording or webpages, summary of learning outcomes, project evaluation, good-bye letters" (Pachler, Barnes & Field (2009: 193).

During the online exchange, the students should further be asked to keep a learner diary or log "in which they reflect on their work, note new vocabulary and structures, etc." (Pachler, Barnes & Field 2009: 193). This requires the learners to reflect on their learning processes and supports their learner autonomy. The teacher is involved in this process as he or she sometimes joins in a metadiscussion about the learning processes in the plenary in order to support the students' learning. The teacher can for instance provide the learners with additional learner strategies. This way the progress of the project is documented and monitored.

It has become obvious that although projects are in line with a learner-centred approach which further learner autonomy the teachers are not only

necessary in order to set up and coordinate an educational project. Throughout the project they are further involved in facilitating the communication between learners. In other words, “[t]he teacher also needs to be available throughout to clarify any difficulties, questions and misconceptions pupils might have” (Pachler, Barnes & Field 2009: 193).

In the following, two projects which include CMC and aim to further the intercultural competence will be scrutinised with regard to their respective learning environments. The factors of learner autonomy and the role of the teacher, collaborative learning and the use and role of the learners’ L1s will provide the methodological framework for investigating the cross-cultural projects.

## **5. Cross-cultural Projects**

In the following two e-projects applied in higher education that connect learners across languages and cultures will be introduced; they depict examples of what Warschauer (1997: 470) terms ‘long distance exchange’ placing remote learners into online learning environments. Throughout the blended learning projects teachers, who, for instance, aim to foster the individual’s *savoir-être* are crucial in the development of the learners’ intercultural competence by taking on a supportive role:

[a]s students explore the nature of language and communication across cultures through their technology-mediated interactions, teachers will be pivotal in helping them take such an intercultural stance (Ware & Kramsch 2005: 203).

Concerning the methodologies underlying the pedagogical support, the first project incorporates fieldwork and the second project comprises an e-tandem into the face-to-face sessions – two methods, which have been scrutinised in chapter 3.3 for their suitability for the promotion of intercultural competence. Throughout this section they will be surveyed with regard to their use of CMC.

The networks or communities that are created throughout these transnational collaborations are cross-cultural and heterogeneous.<sup>68</sup> The learners not only experience interculturality in terms of intercultural

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<sup>68</sup> When the partners in the telecollaboration are referred to as target and source culture throughout this chapter the complexity, i.e. nation-internal diversity, is still in the foreground following the definition of ‘culture’ outlined in chapter 2.

communication by collaborating with one another but also explicitly work on their cross-cultural competence in class. It will be analysed in how far a learning environment supportive of the learners' promotion of cross-cultural competence is established with help of the internet, i.e. particular attention will be paid to the factors outlined in chapter 4.2. When scrutinising these telecollaborations, the following socio-constructivist perspective shall be borne in mind: "If technology challenges roles, then it is because social changes have allowed those roles to be challenged" (Moore 2002). Naturally, at the same time the technological tools have afforded these changes. CMC holds the potential to promote the learner's intercultural competence given he or she is willing to actively pursue this objective. With the internet as tool the social agent ideally reflects upon native and foreign perspectives, practices and artefacts, which denotes intrinsic, intrapersonal processes that can be encouraged – rather than prescribed – with the help of the digital tool and pedagogic support.

Apart from the design of a learning environment its evaluation is crucial for learning processes. Following a process-oriented approach the learning environment is formatively assessed throughout the project work.<sup>69</sup> Kress (2008: 7) supports this practice and suggests that

forms of assessment will have to start from the perspective of the learner's central, productive and participatory and 'interested' position, so that an evaluation of principles of design, of principles of learning as transformation [...] become central.

Nevertheless, in addition to a continuous evaluation of the learning environment a summative assessment at the end of the collaboration shall reflect on the whole project including their role of CMC in retrospective and shall highlight modifications for future projects.

Throughout the subsequent analysis of the e-projects the integration of online communication is not to be seen as a panacea as its acceptance and effectiveness depend largely on its implementation. O'Dowd (2007: 33) suggests that

[o]nline communication is a powerful tool for foreign language education which offers a wide range of advantages for educators who seek to introduce them into their classes, but it should not be

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<sup>69</sup> As already suggested, learner diaries or (e-)portfolios present a means to document the learning processes and thus make them explicit and useful for adaptations in the learning environment, for instance.

seen as a 'silver bullet' that will bring about change and innovation by itself.

Before the relevant factors that influence the effectiveness of online communication in concrete examples of fieldwork and e-tandem will be analysed, these telecollaborations will concisely be presented.

## 5.1. Presentation of Projects

Both projects explicitly aim at the students' furthering of intercultural competence and create settings in which the students interact with their peers in-class and with their distant learning partners outside the classroom via asynchronous communication. The blended learning settings adopt a comparative approach so that culture learning takes place in both directions: the respective partners are not only regarded as informants of rich cultural data or even passive representatives of the target culture with insight knowledge. In contrast, the students shall assume autonomous roles and actively explore the source and target cultures.

The internet is a useful vehicle enabling easy and quick contact between learners from different locations to work together in this exploration; the computer holds the potential of collaboration and comparison as can be seen from the following quotation.

If cultural comparison suggests an active and ongoing engagement between cultures, then the World Wide Web and web-based tools are natural vehicles for entering into international and intercultural dialogue (García & Crapotta 2007: 65).

The success of the collaboration naturally relies on the activeness of the participants. In what ways CMC is integrated into the online fieldwork and e-tandem will be outlined in the following. The following table present the respective socio-institutional environments of the intercultural exchange projects before outlining their specific course designs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> As outlined in Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001) and Vinagre (2007).

	CULTURA	E-TANDEM
project duration	8 weeks (one semester; 1999)	12 weeks (one semester; '05/'06)
cultures involved	French cultures – U.S. cultures	Spanish cultures – Irish cultures
participants	<p>1) 67 students of French (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge)</p> <p>18-22 years old, ≤ 3 years of French at High School, intermediate-level French course, optional course: 4h/week</p> <p>2) 79 students of English (Institut National des Télécommunications, Evry)</p> <p>20-23 years old, 8-10 years of English studies, 3h/week</p>	<p>1) students of English (Nebrija University, Madrid)</p> <p>2) non-specialist students of Spanish (Trinity College, Dublin),</p> <p>10 student dyads, 19-22 years old</p>
cross-cultural objectives	<p>a) develop students' understanding of foreign cultural attitudes, concepts, beliefs, and ways of interacting and looking at the world</p> <p>b) acquire means by which to access and compare artefacts, practices and values in another culture and in their own taken for granted realities</p>	a) encourage learners to get to know and understand their counterparts' culture
types of online communication	web forums available via common webpage <a href="http://cultura.mit.edu/">http://cultura.mit.edu/</a> (online registration required)	e-mail (in total 20 exchanges)
other materials	questionnaires, opinion polls/statistics, films, online newspapers/magazines, articles	dictionaries, films
project evaluation	<p>formative: learner journal</p> <p>summative: individual questionnaire at the end of the project, final written essay, application to new context (new material) or repetition of an activity</p>	<p>formative: learner journal</p> <p>summative: individual questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the project (yes/no and open-ended question types)</p>

**Table 2**

## 5.2. Methodological Frameworks

This section scrutinises how the computer has been integrated into the project work aiming at the learners' (ever-developing) promotion of cross-cultural competence. In the following subchapters the underlying concept of culture relates to the cognitive, emotional and behavioural level.



### 5.2.1. 'Online Intercultural Communication' in Cultura

In the pre-fieldwork stage of Cultura<sup>71</sup> the “students are sensitized to the very notion of culture” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 60). The starting point of the project is a general introduction into the realm of interculturality following a reflection-first approach. The learners for instance write a paragraph on what culture means in their target language and subsequently discuss the concept.

After this introductory phase the computer enters the stage although the students do not yet delve into explorations of the target culture: the medium is used for gathering data. Outside of the classroom both learner groups fill in three online questionnaires about their respective identities, which are designed to highlight cultural differences: firstly, free word associations to keywords, secondly, sentence completions and thirdly, a type of questionnaire that elicits the learners' reactions to hypothetical situations.<sup>72</sup> This endeavour has the learners create their own cultural material online, a process which is facilitated by the representation function of the computer. The outcome of these questionnaires, which the students fill out in their respective L1s, is stored on the computer in the form of two juxtaposed lists. The qualitative data can thus be distributed on the Cultura-site and shared between present and remote users. It follows that digital ethnography allows fieldwork through computer contact, i.e. it incorporates the application of new technologies into the process of ethnography. Fischhaber (2002: 6) explains that „Digitalisierung ist notwendig, um die Distributions- und Präsentationskanäle der Neuen Medien nutzen zu können“.

The described procedure represents a technique, which allows values and attitudes to be stored on the webpage. This way, invisible notions are made available for subsequent activities (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001: 56). The columns, which list the cultural material side by side, serves as rich basis for work in the classroom in which the learners take on the role of investigators and observers: after the systematic data collection the data is first

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<sup>71</sup> The Cultura model was designed by Furstenberg Gilberte, Waryn Shoggy and Levet Sabine in 1997 and can be applied to “any two cultures, whether they are national cultures, business cultures, or even sub-cultures” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001: 57).

<sup>72</sup> Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001: 60) suggest the following range of topics for the project and hence the questionnaires: “work, leisure, nature, race, gender, family, identity, education, government, citizenship, authority, and individualism”.

analysed by the learners individually. As similar questionnaire items are juxtaposed on a single screen, the computer helps the students “to see and identify what is usually hard to access, namely, different ways of representing reality, different underlying connotations, and different attitudes” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 59). Scrutinising the word association questionnaires, the students for instance experience “how a word is understood in the source culture as well as how it is (differently) grounded in the target culture” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 79). After an individual observation of the material, a collective analysis of the ethnographic data follows. “The class becomes a place for reflection, where ideas are exchanged, syntheses are made, hypotheses spelled out and tested” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 82).

Since the learners’ names are removed from the questionnaires the focus can be laid on patterns and not so much on individual contributions. Cultura is thus “a data-driven approach that enhances the students’ research skills and objectivity [...]” (Levy 2007: 119). The notion of ‘culture’ is however simultaneously individualised in this method as various perceptions of individual learners, who have responded to the questionnaires, are highlighted.

[T]he teacher’s and learner’s understanding of their own culture [...] will inevitably be an individual interpretation, modified by such factors as world knowledge, experience living abroad, political awareness and so forth (Levy 2007: 111).

The students reflect on the responses, both individually and with their peers in class so that they are sensitised to a multitude of opinions (Levy 2007: 119).

After that stage the contact to the partner group is established: outside the classroom the students communicate in forums, which are accessible to every member of the project via the Cultura-webpage. These forums are attached to each questionnaire type and provide a rich venue for the exploration of cultures.

There they exchange observations, communicate their first reactions, preliminary findings and conclusions and address questions and doubts raised by the information. Their goal here is to get a better understanding of the cultural values and beliefs that lie behind the differences they have observed (García & Crapotta 2007: 66).

The in-class activity is thus enriched by the forums by the insights of the respective partner class. The learners are collaboratively engaged with one

another, and, on the basis of the questionnaires, they share their views, clarify and respond to messages in order to understand each other's cultures. The forums are the environment for the learners to gain a dual perspective on the cultures involved as they collaborate to "understand each other's culture through the eyes of the other, in an interactive process of reciprocal co-construction" (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001: 59).

As outlined, Cultura does not introduce the intercultural exchange at the beginning of the project. As a consequence possible culture shocks are reduced by priming the learners to the abstract topic of culture before having them directly engaged with their partner class. Levy (2007: 119) concludes on this method that "[t]his framework actually allows culture to be contested within a safe, carefully managed learning environment".

The asynchronous exchange in the forums between the two project groups is finally integrated into in-class discussions, which are held in the target language. The students analyse and compare the cultural data gained in the questionnaires and forums. The peers support the individual's culture learning in terms of a zone of proximal development as "[w]hat one learner will come to understand or learn when observing or engaging in a cultural exchange, another may not" (Levy 2007: 111). The insights the learners gain from discussing with their peers are posted back as feedback to the partner group in the forums. This setting allows a deepening of a *regard croisé* as the students examine and analyse their mutual preconceptions and look at their own culture from the foreign perspective.

In digital ethnography, as in any qualitative research method, the individual researcher constructs knowledge in relation to otherness. The learners' pre-experiences are confronted and contrasted with new experiences, which encourages the individual to understand cultural data from an outsider's perspective (Beers 2001: 6). In Cultura, this *regard croisé* is animated throughout the forums and further in-class work. The voices of 'the other' are integrated into this intrapersonal dialogue at the stage of the forums. In this process the students naturally recognise their own assumptions and gain introspection, which is the precondition of cross-cultural literacy. Beers (2001: 9) highlights the necessity of reflection by stating

[t]his awareness of self and other as gained in the research process is a significant step toward becoming multiliterate digital text designers and interpreters in one's own and the target language.

The new communication technologies enable an online intercultural dialogue, in which the potential for reflection and exchange lies:

Dieser Dialog ist [...] das ausschlaggebende Kriterium für den Einsatz von Neuen Medien und ethnographischen Projekten im Fremdsprachenunterricht, die zum erfolgreichen Perspektivenwechsel anleiten wollen. Ziel des Unterrichts ist es schließlich, dass die Fremdsprachenlerner durch das eigene Forschen nicht nur Einblicke in die Vorstellungen und Konzepte einer fremden Kultur erhalten, sondern ein neues Kulturbewusstsein gewinnen [...] (Fischhaber 2002: 15).

Technologies make thinking processes explicit and at the same time establish contact between target and source cultures (Fischhaber 2002: 15).

Besides cultures languages are inspected in the classroom: during the telecollaboration the learners reformulate the data gained in the questionnaires and create and share semantic networks. On the basis of these representations, which visualise how different concepts relate to one another, they discuss cultural differences. These webs are dynamic aids which support the organisation of the learners' ongoing thinking processes. Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001: 76-77) recapitulate that the organisation of concepts may differ between cultures so that the students' perceptions may lead to revisions of taken-for-granted issues.

Finally, quantitative material such as opinion polls and statistics are integrated into the project, which can be accessed via the common cultura-website. As Cultura is a project which aims at developing the students' understanding of cultural values and practices, in providing the learners with new cultural material to analyse their learning development is enhanced. These resources are a means to include anonymity in the personal endeavour:

[t]his kind of data allows students to place their own initial observations as well as their transatlantic partners' comments and findings in a broader, more objectified, sociocultural context (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 61).

The external resources, which extend the Cultura project, might include films, which add new dimensions to communication as defined in 4.1.2, namely body language, extra-linguistic speech sounds and prosodic qualities. Films hence provide the students with new patterns to analyse and integrate into their

exploration. The learners are engaged in a cyclic analysis as they revise phenomena in ever greater depth. Besides the questionnaires, new materials provide the basis of input. The learners are thus engaged in ever-expanding exploration and analysis throughout the project: the field of inspection is broadened having the learners revise conclusions already drawn. The data is both examined in class and with their partner class in the forums to seek correlations between different materials.

To summarise, Cultura relies on internet connection and denotes

an interactive process that comes about via the exchange of diverse materials – raw or mediated – by multiple partners: learners, teachers, other students, other teachers, and experts (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 62).

The learners, who are supported by their peers in class, link the individual voices, i.e. the voices of their present and remote partners and text authors. Students in Cultura create communities to support one another in the exploration of cultures by providing new insights, which form the basis of hypotheses testing and relativisations. They are encouraged to “gradually construct and refine their own understanding of the other culture, in a continuous and never-ending process” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 62). The detailed pedagogical framework, which follows the stages of thick observation, thick interpretation, thick comparison, and thick description, as defined by Beers (2001: 10-12), prepares the students for the digital fieldwork. What is more, progressive stages accompany the learners throughout the exchange and build on one another following an increasing complexity. The next subchapter introduces the methodology of the e-tandem before providing a comparison between these two approaches.

### 5.2.2. ‘Online Intercultural Communication’ in E-Tandem

Prior to the exchange the participating student groups are prepared for the telecollaboration: they are introduced to the nature of teletandem via e-mail, which familiarises the students with the general principles of tandem learning and outlines specific information about the expected e-mail length and exchange frequency. Next to organisational issues this preparatory stage sets the mood for the e-tandem. Moreover, “[a]t the start of their tandem learning

venture, students can be sensitised to the possibilities of development of their intercultural communicative competence” (Woodin 2001b: 200) to raise the students’ awareness of their responsibility in their learning processes.

In their first exchange the students present themselves and their daily lives in the e-mail to create a supportive basis for the subsequent exchange. In the second week the students delve into the cultural comparison: stereotypes are addressed with the following leading question in mind:

What aspects do you have in common with your partner and in what do you differ, and to what extent is all this because of your different nationalities and cultures (Vinagre 2007: 244-245).

Although the guidelines provide the students with ample suggestions concerning the themes and topics of the learning partnership throughout the exchange, the topics of the actual exchanges may vary from partnership to partnership as they choose from a range of topics according to their personal interests, for instance between music, art or literature.

The guided tandem approach in the educational context allows that the source cultures are also inspected and questioned by the learners. The students are not only supported by questions, which guide them through the telecollaboration, but the learners also think about their own attitudes, values etc. in class. This ensures that the e-mails are not only based on curiosity about otherness but go beyond superficiality and enable a regard croisé.

Furthermore, throughout the telecollaboration the learners provide their partners with error correction. Besides intercultural competence language is hence foregrounded acknowledging the interrelatedness between language and culture. The students negotiate the way of correcting one another and shall use dictionaries in the production of target language texts, i.e. in the application of the foreign language in context. Next to the content of the exchange deliberate focus is hence put on the form of the e-mails.

The students include reflection on their encounter with unknown lexis, error correction as well as cultural aspects into their learner diary. The following guiding task relates to intercultural competence based on a comparative approach: “[w]hat aspects related to your partner’s culture and way of life have you learned about? Compare them with your own and give your opinion briefly” (Vinagre 2007: 244). These instructions incorporate the three dimensions of

culture, namely behaviour and values and artefacts, and the students are free to choose and report the aspects that they focussed on with the partner.

The objectives of the learner diary need to be carefully worded, as their form may influence or structure the outcome (Woodin 2001b: 199). Ideally the learners are advised on how often to write in the diary as otherwise, students may only begin to write shortly before its submission deadline. In this case, its potential as a tool for formative assessment would have been lost. At the end of the exchange the diary is handed in to the project coordinator for, as outlined in the guidelines, it is relevant for the evaluation of language use (Vinagre 2007: 244). The diary further provides information about the development of the learner's intercultural competence. It is therefore an instrument, which builds language competence as well as cross-cultural understanding and further represents input for discussions on culture in face-to-face sessions.

In the final presentation stage, the learner chooses one topic, i.e. one cultural aspect, which he or she presents at the end to the peers in class. This way the students share their learning processes and create a platform for further discussion on the cultural elements. Although the presentation stage rounds up the previous exchange, the learners experience that the learning has not come to an end but that through their online communication they temporarily got insights into cultures. They can choose to continue this mode of intercultural learning after the e-project in their spare time. The guided approach is beneficial, however, as it involves peers in the process: the blended learning arrangement allows the individuals to share their perceptions on the cultures involved online and in class and thus to challenge negative as well as positive auto and heterostereotypes.

### **5.3. Comparison and Evaluation**

While the home culture engages in class-to-class collaboration in Cultura, in the e-tandem student dyads collaborate. From this follows that in the former setting the students can get into online contact with a multitude of foreign voices while in the latter online communication partners are restricted to a single representative of the target culture. However, several dyads can join and discuss a chosen topic to provide a wider online audience (Woodin 2001b: 200).

While an e-pal project can potentially also incorporate a third culture to form a tridem, Cultura's template relies on a dual partnership.<sup>73</sup>

In both e-projects the cross-cultural dialogue is expanded with the native peers in the classroom to enhance reflection and provide for a heterogeneous concept of culture; in Cultura this endeavour is also continued in online modus. Naturally, the nature of the intercultural communication depends on the skills of each individual involved: concerning the quality of the CMC, teachers ought to support the learners in writing e-mails that ideally are not impersonal monologues and forum entries that relate to previous entries or comments. Whereas successful communication in e-mails depends on two partners only, forum exchanges rely on more participants. The former form of communication is due to its duality more difficult to establish in case the classes do not comprise the same amount of learners and is also easier to break down.

Naturally, just as the students are involved in different interactions with different partners, not every student profits the same from the telecollaboration – even with the same conversation partner the learning outcome would be different. This section investigates whether the potential of online communication has been exploited in the projects with regard to the objectives of intercultural competence as formulated by Byram (cf. Figure 7 of chapter 2.1.3). It shall be scrutinised which objectives from a total of 29 as identified by Byram are addressed in the respective learning environments.<sup>74</sup> The learners' journals and questionnaires form the basis of this investigation.<sup>75</sup> As these materials rely on personal perceptions they do not provide an objective evaluation. Nevertheless, this approach is useful since it demonstrates the new insights gained by individual students and makes their personal development of competences explicit.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, it is true that not all factors that have been promoted are possibly reported; it is possible that learner diaries do not

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<sup>73</sup> In a tripartite telecollaboration two languages are used in exploring three cultures. Blogs provide a clearly laid out alternative to e-mails in the case of a tridem.

<sup>74</sup> Byram's framework of intercultural communicative competence, which includes affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of culture, is divided into four aspects of cross-cultural learning: attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness.

<sup>75</sup> The quotations from the diaries are as outlined in Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001) and Vinagre (2007).

<sup>76</sup> Naturally, these insights gained remain anecdotal and "much research is needed to try and assess what the students really learn and how they learn it" (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 94).



document each and every element. For this reason, the evaluation also points out objectives that can potentially be attained in the e-projects introduced.

To begin with the skills, skills of interpreting and relating may be promoted in Cultura and the e-tandem, in which the mediation between different cultural representations is central (c). Foreign as well as native cultural phenomena are scrutinised in these telecollaborations; the students may recognise ethnocentric attitudes as they are engaged to produce a multifaceted analysis of cultural phenomena (a). A Cultura student, for instance, remarks that the project helped “to demystify the image that we have of another culture: to finally have the reality and the truth from the people concerned”. Misunderstandings or failures that occur in the asynchronous communication can become the subject of investigation and can be purposefully integrated into the exchanges (b).

Skills of discovery and interaction may be furthered in as far as the students are engaged in the identification of patterns in common and foreign cultural phenomena and the relations between them (a, b, e). A Cultura student realises cultural multifacetedness within these patterns and reports “that there are some small differences in the behaviors which have consequences that can be huge”. With the integration of films the non-verbal dimension is incorporated into the students’ endeavour to communication patterns (c). Potentially, students can search themselves for additional material including institutions to integrate them into the cultural exchange, which demands high learner autonomy (f). The real-time requirement for the objectives (d, g) cannot possibly be accomplished in asynchronous communication and hence cannot be promoted in both projects, bar the projects are adapted to include synchronous communication.

Apart from the learners’ skills, the dimension of attitudes may be developed: the students need to be willing to engage in the cultural exchange and be genuinely interested to dive into the exploration as ethnographers or tandem partners. They experience ambiguity and are ready to question traditional and conventional opinions relying on decentring of their selves (a, b, c, d, e). In the e-tandem one student reports in his diary that before the exchange he did not imagine Ireland to be an appealing country and that now he imagines “a country with very friendly people, beautiful country with a lot of

history". This comment denotes a positive attitude or changed perception of the 'other' culture and is hence a positive development. Another student experiences that general assumption are never right and discovers that "[t]here is more to their [Irish] food than fish and chips and hamburgers [...]". What is more, some students realise that otherness or the foreign culture is not exotic but that they "in fact, [...] have a lot in common".

Savoirs are an integral part of the e-project and Cultura: the respective partners provide insider information and the articles and statistical information involved in Cultura further inform the learners. In the summative questionnaires of Cultura, the students report that the forums and the in-class discussions are good sources of cultural information. After the project "95 % of [French] students [that handed in the questionnaire] state emphatically that they have learned something about American culture". Similarly, the e-tandem partner is a source of insider information. What areas of knowledge are furthered naturally depends on what topic the dyad chooses to focus on in the e-tandem, in which reciprocity is an explicit principle: one student reports to be aware of the fact that he profited from the insight knowledge of his partners: "it was nice to know that I was helping someone else to expand their horizons as well". In general, in tandems the verbalisation of taboos is more risky as the exchange relies on two partners only and can easily fail. However, they can be a focus of departure for intercultural learning (g). It is noticeable that both projects allow a deliberate integration of the diachronic dimension of culture (a, d, e): in Cultura documents such as articles can, for instance, be well chosen to provide for this dimension and in the e-pal project the in-class work can similarly refer to historical relationships, for example.

Savoir s'engager is particularly explicit in Cultura, which has the students employ semantic networks and identify hidden cultural values in order to further objective analyses of representations (a, b). The interpretation of these networks represents a "tool for 'seeing' what the other students in another country might feel" (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 81). One student reports that

[t]he same word may have two different meanings that can lead to confusion; We should not judge one's behaviour quickly, we should take other's cultural background into account [...].

The learners act as mediators and negotiate opinions based on informed decisions (c). Critical cultural awareness is also addressed in the e-tandem, in which stereotypes are questioned in a guided approach with in-class sessions. Overgeneralisations are enriched by a multitude of voices in class, which point out similarities as well as differences in the target as well as in the source culture.

To conclude, the online tandem learning just as the Cultura have positive effects on the students, who gained insights into the foreign and their own cultures according to their individual developmental stages. Without further research these single examples do not describe how the students develop intercultural competence. However, the examples demonstrate that some learners report increasing developments in the promotion of cross-cultural competence. A learner realises that intercultural competence is a process, which does not end with the tandem exchange: “[...] I still need to learn more about them in order to understand them better”. Quotes from the learner diaries show the individual progress the students throughout the project.

[A]s participants construct their own learning environment, both individually and collectively, they become independent and critical learners whose goal is not to arrive at fixed and definitive conclusions about another culture but to learn to interpret and analyse (García & Crapotta 2007: 82).

Similarly, the students in Cultura are engaged in this never-ending process, whose progress depends on reflection – an innate issue which lends itself to the documentation in diaries that can be further inspected for the learners’ subjective progress. Furthermore, they highlight the formative nature of the endeavour and support the students’ learning processes. Rather than prestructured learning objectives and their assessment, an assessment for learning becomes central. It is necessary to provide, maintain and improve a learning environment that allows the learners to promote their intercultural competence.

In the following, the projects’ characteristics that are supportive of cross-cultural learning, i.e. learner autonomy, collaborative learning and the role of the L1s, will be outlined. Their incorporation into the online learning environments influencing the development of intercultural competence will be scrutinised.

### 5.3.1. Learner Autonomy

The learners produce their own material (questionnaires, forum entries and e-mails) in order to engage in the quest to understand the relation between their selves and otherness in both e-projects. The students are active explorers, whose background knowledge and pre-experience is integrated into the project. Parallel to the e-tandem in modifications of Cultura, students also add personal material to the web “such as pictures and documents from their family and everyday life, with the goal of creating a richer mosaic of information [...]” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 62).

The creation of material by learners is found to be beneficial for the learners’ level of motivation as their own responses are integrated into subsequent analyses (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 63). At the same time, the involvement of the students might lead to instances where learners feel they must defend their own cultures.

If students are asked to represent themselves and their culture, is it any wonder that they speak from the heart? Equally, if these beliefs or values are challenged or contested, it is likely that the discussion will be heated [...] (Levy 2007: 115).

Neither the tandem nor the modified Cultura presents an anonymous approach so that the students’ emotions provide a vantage point. The learners shall understand the project’s underlying intercultural objectives and its underlying culture concept: the students shall engage with one another not to protect one’s culture but to create and explore the third space between the cultures.

The students involved in the Cultura project shall principally share similar life experiences and be of the same age as “[t]his makes more possible a choice of topics that will be more or less of equal interest to both groups” (García & Crapotta 2007: 69). Fischhaber (2002: 4) stresses that “Projektthemen sollen den Lernern [...] nicht aufgedrängt werden, sondern mit ihnen aus ihrer Situation und aus ihren Bedürfnissen heraus entwickelt werden“. In the e-tandem the students choose from a range of topics: the dyads negotiate the cultural aspects they want to concentrate on for further discussion thus being actively involved in the course design.

Following a learner-centred approach in both telecollaborations the learners are involved in the course design: in Cultura, for instance, the teachers “allow student thinking to drive lessons” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet

2001: 85). The students explore the common and foreign cultural patterns involved so that their learning processes structure the exchange as well as the work in-class.

The tandem diary furthers the learning processes and encourages self-reflection on language and culture (Vinagre 2007: 244). The integration of journals in class shifts responsibility to the learners, who continuously support each other in the assessment of their foreign language acquisition and culture learning process.

The telecollaborations ask the learners to give feedback in the final stage of the project. In Cultura the students have reported the tediousness of filling out the questionnaires, for instance. In a modification the items got consequently reduced. Final essays, which serve as project evaluation, may be sent to a peer counterpart for feedback, instead of to the teacher. After the e-tandem exchange one student expresses the wish “to make the guidelines a little less strict”, which demonstrates that students in a single class hold different degrees of autonomy. Although the students could choose from a range of topics they had to speak of customs, for instance – a compromise so that in-class discussions have a central theme. Concerning the amount of exchanges per week, a student suggests making one out of the two optional instead to boost motivation.

In Cultura and the e-tandem the learners take on an active and self-responsible role as users. The teachers do not intervene in the forums in order not to inhibit the learners, which should write what they felt and not fear censorship (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 97). Likewise in the e-pal project the teacher only reads and keeps track of the students’ work after the learners have sent it. New technologies are a means to foster learner autonomy „wenn sie als Hilfsmittel, Denkwerkzeuge und als authentische (virtuelle) Lernumgebungen verstanden werden [...]“ (Fischhaber 2002: 4). The Cultura-website, the forums and the e-mails are tools, which demand and develop the learners’ autonomy. Naturally, e-literacy is indispensable in this regard; the potential of media relies on learner autonomy as well as on e-literacy. When integrating films, for instance, media literacy needs to be integrated as a video allows multiple interpretations by camera positions (Fischhaber 2002: 6). What is more, the learners need to understand that cross-

cultural competence “does not automatically come about via computer-mediated communication” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 75). Next to autonomous learners the teacher has a crucial role in supporting the creation of a beneficial learning environment including the set up of the telecollaboration and timeschedules, the selection of topics and the choice of additional material.

Woodin (2001b: 199) experienced that learners in tandem are curious about their partners but do not engage in a closer analysis. To circumvent this situation he suggests the presence of some kind of support. The exchange is hence ideally supplemented with in-class activities. Nevertheless, as exemplified in the example of Cultura

[o]nce the teacher has set up the tasks students take centre stage. They are the ones observing, inquiring, investigating, hypothesising and interpreting, tasks they undertake jointly with their cross-cultural partners (García & Crapotta 2007: 70).

Fischhaber (2002: 5) reflects on the teacher support in fieldwork: „[d]ie Vermittlung von wissenschaftlichen Arbeitsmethoden und ethischen Prinzipien ist notwendig, wenn Lernende zu Forschern werden sollen“. Concerning the ethos involved in communication, the guidelines of the e-tandem include netiquette, which instructs the learners to be polite and respect diverging opinions, for instance. Learner autonomy is balanced by the teacher, who aims to assist the learners to avoid pitfalls such as overgeneralisations or failed communication. They further help them overcome too literal interpretations and break up interpretations found at an early stage of the project (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 84). Similarly, Fischhaber (2002: 17) points out with reference to fieldwork

ohne eine sensible und interkulturell geschulte Anleitung scheitert ein ethnographisches Projekt zur Kulturvermittlung vielleicht schon an den ersten Verständnishürden und voreiligen Interpretationen der Lernenden.

Teachers shall “further challenge[...] students in their construction of hypotheses and cultural understanding” (García & Crapotta 2007: 71).

As the intercultural dialogue and new themes develop, or as issues or misunderstandings between the groups arise, the teacher must find ways to guide and arbitrate without intruding or usurping student initiative (García & Crapotta 2007: 71).

A balance between abstraction and concretion, and the use of metacommunication, which include discussions on irony, for instance, are useful means (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 84).

Importantly, the students do not only take responsibility for their own learning but are partly responsible for the learning processes of their partners. Reciprocity is an explicit principle of tandem learning. Similarly, the students in Cultura shall draw on “an equal degree of commitment between the partners” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 95). This leads on to the next characteristic.

### 5.3.2. Collaborative Learning

The participants with different cultural backgrounds are grouped in online and face-to-face learning. To ensure successful communication the learner groups shall be similar to one another so that the topics chosen are of equal interest to the participants. The groups shall further share similar educational backgrounds in the telecollaborations. In the e-tandem student matching proved difficult as for some students the course was optional and not part of their compulsory subjects. They seized the exchange when they perceived the workload as too much and dropped out of the course, which left the Spanish students without a partner. Consequently, the coordinator of the project had to look for tandem partners in other institutions during the semester as an alternative (Vinagre 2007: 241). The principle of reciprocity is thus vital in the exchange to ensure a smooth and balanced partnership, which is an explicit principle in tandem learning.

Collaboration leads to individual intrapersonal learning:

culture learning will derive from interactive exchanges that allow for action and reflection that encourage a ‘dialogue’ in the learner’s mind between the broader generalisation and individual instance (Levy 2007: 121).

The peers, which have not been known to the learners prior to their first communication in both projects, have a vital role in the learning settings. As the learner groups are distant from one another, socio-institutional factors can complicate the exchange. On the other hand, this setup allows for the integration of topical material of the home cultures (Brammerts 1999: 8). The

learners can, for instance, share files such as photographs of their homes or schools with their partners. The nature of electronic mail allows attachments, and the messages are sent quickly to the receiver who gets up-to-date information (Vinagre 2007: 243). Whilst the students in Cultura denote many-to-many communication, the e-tandem involves a dyad of students in the creation of “a ‘zone of proximal development’ in which each student can provide the scaffolding needed by their partner” (Morley & Truscott 2003: 54).

The decision between asynchronous and synchronous modes of interaction likely relies on practical implications. For synchronous communication it is necessary for the participants involved to be online at the same time, which can be difficult to achieve with different time zones, course structures and different time of access to computers. Next to these practical implications it shall be born in mind that the

[c]hoice of mode will affect the kinds of activities that learners can engage in, perhaps the nature of the relationships that emerge, and certainly the kind of language used, the way in which it is processed, and the way in which language itself comes into focus in the course of interaction (O’Rourke 2007: 52).

The asynchronous mode of interaction offers much time for reflection and is hence ideal for reflective texts which can be at the same time conversational. Asynchronous and synchronous text-based online communication usually offer long-term availability so that the strand interchanges can be stored and archived given the tool chosen provides this storage mechanism. “This allows the learner, at his leisure, to reflect on whichever aspects of the dialogue or language are of interest to him” (O’Rourke 2007: 52).

Moreover, CMC allows short term-availability, which denotes the ‘real-time visibility’ (O’Rourke 2007: 53) of the linguistic outcome on the screen. In other words, the written text is visible while it is actually being produced throughout the conversation. This allows the user to reread and eventually alter what is intended to be sent before actually sending the message to one’s partner. In asynchronous communication the time for reflection is increased and the participants can take their time in drafting and revising messages at their pace before sending them to their communication partners, whereas in synchronous communication there is a momentary urge to editing due to time pressure (O’Rourke 2007: 53).



For this reason asynchronous communication is ideal for form-focussed interaction for there is more time that can be dedicated to linguistic style. The written teletandem exchange and forum entries make thoughts explicit and enable the students to revisit them as they are stored on the computer. Naturally, asynchronous CMC can be combined with synchronous forms of communication. “Synchrone Kommunikation kann die asynchrone Kommunikation beim Tandemlernen sinnvoll ergänzen, denn es werden auch andere Fertigkeiten geübt“ (Brammerts 1999: 6). With the modification of the telecollaboration, namely the integration of a mixed mode of delivery the learning opportunities are increased, for instance, by practising spontaneous communication.

Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet (2001: 92) point out the necessity of “an appropriate balance between content acquisition and informal communications which could to [sic] easily degenerate to ‘chat’”. In the evaluation questionnaires the students deliberately suggest videoconferences and chat rooms as further desired venues, as they experienced the time delay as tedious (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 90). Videoconferences have already been integrated into Cultura and “proved very useful in terms of allowing students to go more in-depth on certain topics and to compare data orally during conferences” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 74). They boost the learners’ motivation by intensifying the dialogue: tandem chat and face-to-face online meetings could additionally be established.

As cyberspace is not a culture-free space in text-based CMC, on the one hand misunderstandings can arise due to lack of non-verbal cues. However, on the other hand learners may engage in a personal dialogue due to the anonymity of the medium and hyper-intimacy can occur (Brammerts 1999: 8). The students engaged in intercultural dialogue shall assume a literate position and be prepared for culture specific perceptions. Concerning online genres

email correspondents need to be especially prudent when choosing the level of formality, directness and length if their intercultural communication is to be effective ( Murphy & Levy 2006).

The teacher, who acts as facilitator, structures the exchange so that asynchronous communication usually precedes synchronous communication. What is more, during the online exchange they “help learners become more aware of how meaning is derived from context, moment by moment, during

each communicative event” (Levy 2007: 121). Similarly, in Cultura the students work at first individually and make interpretations about cultural aspects on their own before sharing their findings in class and in the forums. The project manager regards this as crucial element and announces:

[c]learly, these forums go much deeper than traditional e-mail student exchanges that often limit themselves to sharing information about each other’s daily lives. In Cultura, the bulk of information takes place at the social, political, and cultural level, which is at the root of cultural literacy (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 73).

In an adaptation to the Cultura project, students integrate personal documents and photos on the webpage providing “yet another locus of exchange and comparison of perspective” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 74). In this way a more personalised exchange parallel to the e-tandem is established providing a rich venue of a multitude of voices in the forums.

In class the students share their insights and develop hypotheses with their peers. Therefore they can explore the heterogeneity of their own cultures. In Cultura the learners first engage with their peers in class: “They are then in a better position to relativize the idea of cultural value when confronted with the responses from the target culture” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 79-80). They share their findings with others and by doing so create a zone of proximal development, which allows them to gain new insights and make informed decisions. In contrast, in the e-tandem, the contact to the partner is the starting point for reflection in class but likely depicts an example of a contrastive method of the promotion of cross-cultural competence.

The remote partners contribute to the relativisation of hypotheses and can provide clarification.

Mit Hilfe der digitalen Ethnographie können sich die Fremdsprachenlerner im Einnehmen der Außenperspektive und in der distanzierten Beobachtung der eigenen ethnozentrisch geprägten Sichtweisen üben (Fischhaber 2002: 12).

The forums enable the learners “to observe how categories can be fluctuating variables rather than universal constants [...]” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 81). Similarly, the sharing of e-mails in class creates a multifaceted picture of the target culture.

Die digitalen Medien bieten dem Lerner authentische virtuelle Lernumgebungen, welche kulturelle Kontexte liefern und in denen die Lernenden verschiedene Perspektiven kennen lernen, ein

Forum zur Veröffentlichung seiner individuellen Ergebnisse, und ermöglichen die selbständige Anwendung und Benutzung von ‚Denkwerkzeugen‘ (Fischhaber 2002: 12).

### 5.3.3. Role of the Learner’s First Language(s)

Both projects involve learner groups whose (institutionalised or official) L1 represents the foreign language of the other group and vice versa. This allows each learner group to perceive the partners as representatives or ‘native speakers’ of the target language, although the setting may involve second language, bilingual or plurilingual speakers. The use of the L1 is vital in Cultura as the cultural bases are foregrounded with help of native associations:

Word associations, for instance, only have value if they are made in the speaker’s ‘native’ language. Only then can one hope to access the hidden cultural values, which are intrinsically language-bound (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 97).

The learners gain insights into the partners’ mental representations connected to lexis, connotations and an understanding of the relevance of context by viewing the aspects in juxtaposition to their self-produced data. The source language is further useful in highlighting different patterns in their own cultures pointing out cultural as well as linguistic complexity and heterogeneity in the source culture (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 79).

In Cultura the students further use the L1 on the web. This aims to ensure that different linguistic competence levels do not hinder the communication (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 87).

The choice of the L1 for much of the work in the shared C1-C2 spaces emphasises the importance of representing one’s own culture and one’s relation to it as accurately as possible. Thus, there is more likelihood that discussion will centre upon culture differences rather than inadequacies with the target language (Levy 2007: 119).

While the source language is used for the questionnaires and in the forums, the target language is used for in-class discussions in which the teacher supports the interaction. Learners are thus exposed to the authentic target language as they read the messages by their partners. This arrangement thus creates

authentic texts, which serve for further analysis, facilitate the expression of complex thought and make nuances possible (García & Crapotta 2007: 70).<sup>77</sup>

At the same time linguistic aspects are not ignored in *Cultura*, for “students learn the language as they learn about the culture [...]” (García & Crapotta 2007: 71). They explore thematic vocabulary in context in order to improve communication skills and passive comprehension. By engaging in intercultural communication via the forums the learners are embedded in interaction, which has them realise that errors can lead to failures in communication (García & Crapotta 2007: 71). Similarly, they “become aware of how semantic networks are construed in both the target and source cultures” (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 56) to avoid or come about miscommunication.

As regards the language use in the e-pal project half of the text is written in each language. The guidelines explicitly ask the students to use a dictionary for writing the mails as “[t]his way you will enhance your knowledge of vocabulary by using new words/expressions different from the ones you already know” (Vinagre 2007: 243-244). Due to the asynchronous nature of the communication the students have ample time for drafting the text, which further facilitates the process. Additionally, error correction is practised so that the partner “can support the learner in his attempts to express himself in the target language” (Vinagre 2007: 242).

In synchronous communication the reciprocity principle is more difficult to adhere to as “[d]ifferences in proficiency can lead to considerable differences in the amount of language produced per minute [...]” (O’Rourke 2007: 49). This means that the same time devoted to each language does not ensure an even text production so that the language balance is disturbed. What is more, in synchronous communication the language balance can be disturbed by what O’Rourke (2007: 58) terms the ‘lingua franca effect’. This denotes the effect, “in which partners drift into the habit of using the target language of the more L2-proficient learner” (O’Rourke 2007: 49). Learner autonomy can counteract this effect in as far as the learners consciously reflect on and monitor their learning process including the use of language. These processes are supported by the

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<sup>77</sup> The necessity and benefits of L1 use shall ideally be verbalised in class; otherwise, students might petition their teacher, which happened in the *Cultura* project (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 97).

learner diaries (O'Rourke 2007: 49). Besides, the teacher shall raise the learners' awareness of language use, and there are software tools to analyse the language balance of the strand interchanges (O'Rourke 2007: 58).

In an adaptation of Cultura the students use the target language in the forums. The reason for this change has been the motivation this setting creates: the learners are motivated to work on their language competence in order to successfully communicate with the remote partners. As a result, students may gain a higher level of confidence in their foreign language use (García & Crapotta 2007: 71).

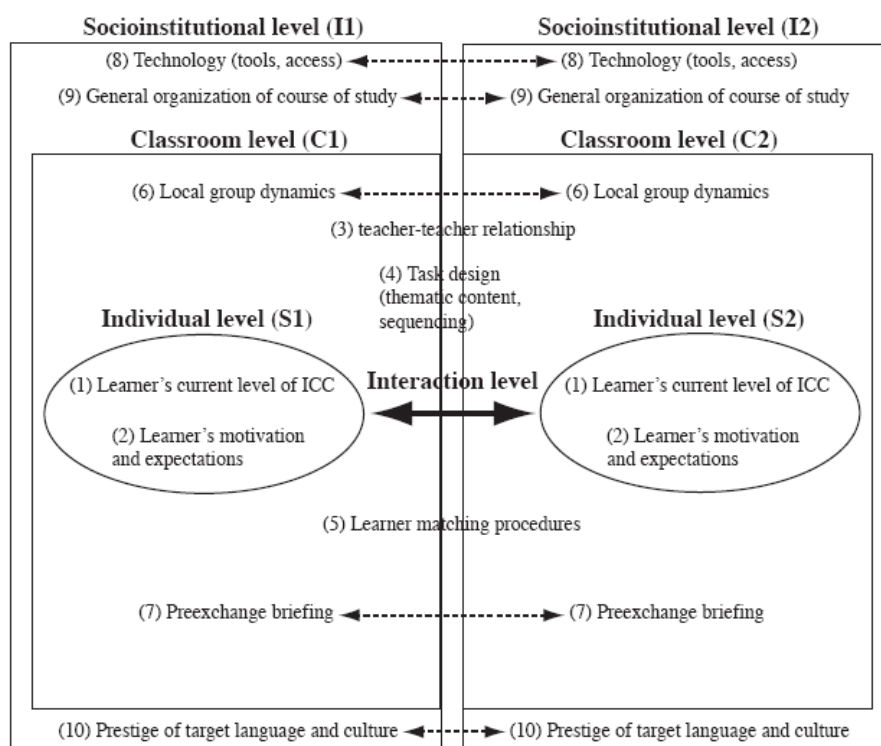
#### **5.4. Adaptation to Austrian School Project**

As online intercultural exchanges imply promises as well as constraints, the practical implementation of an e-project relies especially on thorough course design. This section aims to investigate in how far the projects introduced, which have been carried out in tertiary education, can be applied to a secondary school environment. More precisely, it shall be investigated in how far an application is possible in a secondary school in Austria.

In general any plan to thoughtlessly copy the projects introduced is inappropriate.

It is not possible or desirable simply to copy what one teacher does into another teacher's classroom, not even in the same education system let alone across different education systems. Teaching has to fit the occasion, the learners, the teacher's own style [...] (Byram, Nichols & Stevens 2001: 2).

The following figure concentrates on the interpersonal interaction between two individuals of the intercultural exchange and highlights the various factors that affect the telecollaboration. Figure 12 (adopted from O'Dowd & Ritter 2006: 629) denotes a model which summarises these factors involved in telecollaborative projects that may cause miscommunication.



**Figure 12**

As can be seen from these listed factors, CMC is influenced on the personal, classroom and socio-institutional level. It is not advisable to seek an identification of all potential reasons for failed communication prior to the project in order to minimise them but rather see occurring pitfalls as learning opportunities. This requires teachers to have

a battery of techniques and practices which they can use in the course of their online exchanges in order for their students to derive maximum benefit from the exchanges (O'Dowd & Ritter 2006: 639).

Students can, for instance, analyse parts of a failed intercultural discourse of a previous exchange or engage in the analysis of the actual ongoing interactions (O'Dowd & Ritter 2006: 639).

Naturally, institutional backgrounds afford various possibilities as well as constraints so that institutional expectations and the schools' technological possibilities are not be neglected. Some in-class time can be dedicated to writing e-mails or forum entries for reasons of pedagogical support by the teacher. This option is especially useful for beginner learners, and especially in case the learners write in the target language, as teachers can act as facilitator during the process (García & Crapotta 2007: 73). In a modification to Cultura only half of the forum entries are written in the L1 and the other half in the target language. The tandem method is incorporated in this way. Slightly more than

two thirds of the one student group and approximately 90% of the second group report in post-questionnaires to be in favour of the integration of the respective target language (García & Crapotta 2007: 74). The schools' infrastructures certainly influence how to organise the distribution of students between the available technologies and consequently may have impacts on the course design.

Apart from socioinstitutional constraints a needs analysis at the beginning of every project shall highlight what the learner group already knows recognising the relevance of the learner characteristics in project work. Naturally, each learner group is composed of individuals with different learning styles and types: the integration of ICT, which relies on e-literacy on part of the students as well as teachers, caters for the creation of an additional learning space in which some of the learners' needs may be stilled (Stickler & Hampel 2007: 18). What is more, the students' attitudes toward the medium used denote a crucial factor in the success of the CMC (Jin & Erben 2007: 303-304).

In telecollaboration the schools' various time schedules need to be coordinated. Intercultural projects shall not be seen as add-on element in the language classroom; importantly *Cultura* as well as the e-tandem integrate language and culture learning. The teachers shall at least allow two months for *Cultura*, for instance.

[A]s *Cultura* is a process and not a product, the project needs to take place over a sufficient period of time to develop fully and to produce valid analyses (García & Crapotta 2007: 70; italics in original).

Next to contrasting class schedules a different distribution of holidays may influence the common project timetable. The success of the project further relies on similar expectations including the expected workload and “[b]efore starting a project, teachers need to have a clear idea of what they want to achieve from the virtual collaboration” (Miguela 2007: 99). Shared objectives and topics are essential and shall be agreed upon in the planning phase and be equally committed to ensure the success of the project. The computer cannot only serve as collaboration and presentation tool but can further be useful in the project coordination.

The eTwinning facility ([www.eTwinning.net](http://www.eTwinning.net)), for instance, facilitates the set-up of transnational projects and cooperation with a partner class/school.

After registration it provides a search tool to find partner teachers in Europe, which aim to integrate ICT in the learners' promotion of intercultural competence. Search criteria like country, languages used in the exchange, age of the learners, and school subject facilitate the query. The webpage also enables team-twinning, i.e. the integration of more source cultures into the collaboration, which might be relevant for the establishment of a tridem. In a secondary school environment teachers can negotiate with their class the project format at the end of the first term of a school year and use the holidays for finding partner to match the expectations. When a contact to a partner school has been established the platform further provides a chat and a message system in a safe restricted environment. The participants additionally have access to a collaborative workspace to which files and documents can be uploaded. Zeidler (2006: 71) concludes on eTwinning:

Die Flexibilität, Vielfältigkeit und Kontinuität von eTwinning ermöglichen es, die ganze Schule einzubeziehen und das Wir-Gefühl kontinuierlich zu stärken. [...] Gerade die Kontinuität in eTwinning-Projekten kann mehr kulturelles Verständnis in der Schule schaffen und nachhaltige Veränderungen erzeugen.

It is desirable to involve the whole school: At the presentation stage of project work also external people such as parents may be present.

In Austria next to syllabus coverage the educational principles are relevant for all subjects. In a secondary school environment the project can hence be treated as cross-curricular endeavour involving more school subjects. Also the BM:BWK (2001: 8) suggests that

[t]he goals of the educational principles can best be achieved through the joint effects of many or all subjects. Project-based education is one of the most adequate ways for the concrete implementation.

As a result, the required time may be more easily attained.<sup>78</sup> Cultura may be combined with mathematics or geography as opinion polls and statistics are integrated into the project, which might also cater for syllabus coverage. Moreover, the school subjects arts and informatics could join the interdisciplinary project and support the students' media literacy and their production of their own material:

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<sup>78</sup> In the upper secondary school the so-called compulsory optional subject can combine with the regular foreign language lesson to provide more time.



Die Aufzeichnung von ethnographischen Daten mit digitalen Medien und die Bearbeitung durch digitalisierende Software bieten [...] die Möglichkeit, die Linearität, die analogen Audio- und Videoaufzeichnungen innewohnt, zu durchbrechen und gänzlich neue kulturelle Texte aus dem vorhandenen Material zu konstruieren. So können Videosequenzen aus dem chronologischen Ablauf der analogen Aufzeichnung gelöst werden und, nachdem sie durch eine geeignete Software digitalisiert wurden, in einer völlig neuen Zusammenstellung präsentiert werden (Fischhaber 2002: 6).

With the arts and/or informatics teacher the presentation of cultural elements can be explored thoroughly. The foreign language teacher is essentially not a specialist in ICT and may, of course, also rely on the skills of learners who may be in a position to resolve occurring technological problems, for instance. In vocational schools the relevance for the world of work is self-evident so that teachers of various subjects may be willing to participate in the cross-curricular endeavour.

Although the projects introduced only contain asynchronous communication, synchronous communication can be integrated. Especially beginner learners shall be introduced gently to spontaneous and real-time communication conducted in the foreign language. Learner autonomy needs to be balanced when learners have less elevated target language proficiency. Videoconferencing provides a means to carefully introduce real-time production in the target language. The careful introduction of videoconferencing described as follows may be useful:

[t]eachers may, for example, ask pupils to prepare a question each in advance [...]. At one end, each pupil in turn sits in front of the camera to ask the question. At the other end, where responses will need to be more spontaneous, the class could work as a whole or in small groups. A representative then presents the answer to camera (CILT & ALL 2005: 2).

Alternatively, the speaking time can deliberately be restricted in order not to overburden the learners. What is more, videoconferences can be combined with a chat facility to support the learners in providing a further channel in the real-time exchange, for instance to write down new vocabulary or proper names (CILT & ALL 2005: 2).

Today, digital natives may regard e-mail as old communication medium given the diversity of social networking services and real-time communication providers. However, as seen in 2.2 'new millennium learners' is an umbrella

term which comprises individuals with different levels of competencies. O'Dowd (2003: 138) stresses that in general "learners are no more likely to know how to compose effective emails [...] than they are likely to be aware of the skills and knowledge necessary for intercultural learning". A needs analysis sheds light on the learners' skills. Teachers shall integrate students into the project design so that each individual learner benefits from the telecollaboration:

[w]e [teachers] must trust that our students are intelligent and capable. Furthermore, in order to create effective learning environments and understand their learning experiences, we must enter into dialogues which allow them to become active participants in the construction of their education (Carel 2001: 160).

Concerning the metacognitive level especially younger learners may have difficulties in reflecting on a political level. The degree of difficulty of the supplementary anthropological or philosophical texts involved in Cultura hence needs to be carefully evaluated before their integration in order not to discourage the learners. Next to non-fiction, literary texts may be included. It shall be highlighted that literary competence is not the same as cross-cultural competence, which not only comprises a larger set of texts. Intercultural communicative competence draws on interpersonal interaction as

[i]t is easier for learners to understand that knowledge of and skills in interaction with the daily values, beliefs and behaviours of other people is useful in communication as well as valuable in stimulating reflection (Byram 2008: 228).

This is self-evident in real communication but not from the engagement with literary texts: CMC enables practice of intercultural communicative competence.

In a secondary school setting the Cultura and tandem approach can be combined in as far as at the beginning, the students may write autobiographies including photographs in form of e-mails in order to set the mood for the exchange and for a more personal communication in the project (García & Crapotta 2007: 72-73). This allows getting to know the sociocultural backgrounds involved similar to the first e-tandem exchange. After the Cultura exchange, tandems can be formed, which can be continued in a subsequent semester. Or, the learners can be encouraged to continue the telecollaboration in their free time.

## 6. Conclusion

In today's post-nation-states human capital is foregrounded. This development has begun to be integrated into language learning policies, which build upon the principles of a nation-state. Internationalisation and its effects such as new (digital) forms of entering into interpersonal relationships have influenced educational documents, such the CEFR and the national curricula of Austria, and the establishment of educational principles. Multicultural and plurilingual ideas as consequences to changes in society have started their competition with national ideas in education (Byram 2008: 23).

It goes without saying that it is a vital necessity of education to prepare young learners to social, technical, political and economic changes. Teacher education, policy documents and the practice of examination are areas in which old concepts have slowly been started to be rethought but a lot needs to be done – teacher's awareness is crucial and shall be innovative in this regard. This thesis had as starting point the inspection of intercultural competence and the use of new communications technology in the foreign language classroom and presents a contribution to the discussion on their deliberate integration into foreign language education.

Foreign language teachers ought to counteract the illusion of language without culture and “can promote through their didactical methods a conscious processing of the differences between languages and taken-for-granted realities they embody” (Byram 2008: 111). Byram (2008: 41) coined the term ‘tertiary socialisation’, which

embodies the idea that teachers and others can help learners to understand new concepts (beliefs, values and behaviours) through the acquisition of a new language, new concepts which, being juxtaposed with those of the learners' other language(s), challenge the taken-for-granted nature of their existing concepts (Byram 2008: 113-114).

In other words, teachers shall deliberately encourage the learner's experience of otherness. Foreign language classrooms ought to be the place for tertiary socialisation in which the learners gain new opinions while questioning the perspectives of the nation state (Byram 2008: 41). In reaction to globalisation, the learners ideally challenge language patterns, gain self-awareness and question ‘national identity’ (Byram 2008: 123).

Throughout this thesis online communication has been regarded as a supplementary space for learning in the foreign language classroom and as a space for tertiary socialisation. The comparison of telecollaborative projects at third level education that aim at the furthering of intercultural competence has demonstrated that online communication can support the learner's development of the competence in question if the implementation of this form of communication follows pedagogical implications: CMC can unleash its potential when the design of the learning environment allows for learner autonomy, collaboration as well as the integration of the learners' L1s – crucial factors assisting the beneficial use of technologies.

As we [teachers] move towards offering an increasing range and variety of online, technology-mediated, and self-access language-learning materials, it is important to remember and consider the needs of learners in actually utilizing these materials (Hoven 2006: 250).

Today's teachers are confronted with new millennium learners, who do not constitute a homogenous group. As a result, digital literacy cannot be taken for granted but needs to be trained. A potential generational gap between learners as digital natives and teachers shall be circumvented by the adaptive measure of thoughtfully including ICT in class. There are no doubts that new technologies exert an influence on humans and, vice versa, "[t]he nature of our use of technology changed with the adoption of Internet tools in our daily lives" (Hoven 2006: 236). Hoven (2006: 250) observed that

it is only when the technology becomes stable that we [teachers] are able to conduct sufficiently rigorous investigations of the effectiveness, usefulness, and appropriateness of the use of that technology in improving the learning experience of our learners.

Developments in technologies may thus result in different or new (learning) opportunities, which call for never-ending investigations. Teachers ought to keep track of these developments including the research by applied linguists and take on a critical stance on the integration of these tools, which shall mediate pedagogical objectives. Teachers likewise need to prepare the students for lifelong learning. Referring to today's new media landscape, "[e]ducation has to come to terms with, accommodate to that world and attempt to understand and use its practices where these are appropriate" (Kress 2008: 5). This thesis has sought to make a contribution to the application of CMC at

the secondary school level, which is an area still in need for more extensive research of the integration of ICT in schools.

Pedagogy shall adapt to the ever-developing world the learners as well as teachers find themselves in (Hoven 2006: 250). In retrospective it can already be observed that “[a]s technologies have changed through the millennia, so have teaching methods” (Ferris 2006: 1). Although language and culture are closely interconnected and cross-cultural competence denotes a crucial component in today’s post-industrial world marked by quick technological advances

[t]here is still a lack of sound and well articulated pedagogical plans for integrating intercultural learning into standard foreign language classes at all levels of instruction (Jin & Erben 2007: 291).

On the European policy level at least interest in intercultural communicative competence will not fade:

the Council of Europe will develop a framework of reference describing competences for intercultural communication and intercultural literacy [...] (Council of Europe 2008: 45).

Even if the intention of establishing scales of intercultural competence similar to the linguistic competence descriptors is expressed by the Council of Europe the actual realisation lies in the future as objective or quantified levels of an ongoing competence are difficult to attain. However, the demand is present as it is widely “recognised that ‘what is not tested, is not taught’ [...]” (Byram 2008: 219). An alternative to the risky and ambiguous issue of the integration of moral into evaluation is self assessment – a mode which has been pursued in this thesis. Also peer assessment or a joint evaluation between teacher and learner are attempts to circumvent the teacher’s sole role of assessor. Nevertheless, these forms of evaluation do not resolve the dilemma of the distinction between the desirable and the desired; following a learner-centred approach, it however denotes a method that builds the learners’ autonomy and involves the learners in their promotion of ongoing learning processes.

As shown, the use of CMC in foreign language teaching can make a difference to these learning processes although the implementation needs to be carefully designed. Teachers are naturally “operating under curriculum, institutional, financial, time, technical, and skill constraints” (Hoven 2006: 250). Thus, they need to be skilled to install the principles of digital technology use in class. Teacher training needs to prepare teachers for these issues so that they

are skilled to work against the constraints by traditional concepts present in schools. Only then, foreign language teachers can support their learners in the promotion of 'Intercultural Competence', which has already risen to a key competence in the vocational world. The role of education is to prepare learners for an ever-changing world so that teachers ought to "show learners how they can and should engage with the international globalised world in which they participate" (Byram 2008: 229).

Today's post-industrial age has led to adaptations such as the educational paradigm shift towards the intercultural speaker. García & Crapotta (2007: 63) reflect on this transformation in the educational realm as follows:

The notion of the 'global village' was everywhere palpable, with the internet making cultures immediately accessible and present in everyday life, and with globalisation and new waves of migration rendering societies increasingly multiethnic and multilingual. The importance of intercultural communication and of the profession's need to tackle this issue head-on could not be ignored.

E-literacy is essential for students to participate in and create democratic and social (digital) life, which implies that the use of media is culturally dependent. In their pursuit of preparing learners for the world, teachers counteract the 'crisis of significance' as coined by Wesch (2008). The use of (cross-cultural) CMC does not automatically translate into cross-cultural competence. In general there is a lack of empirical evidence of investigations of the use of technology in schools. Due to socio-institutional factors influencing the learners' processes analytical research in the field is difficult as outcomes vary from context to context. Therefore, personal reports are prevalent in research, which are useful for investigating the integration of factors in specific learning processes. This supports the idea that

the right question is not whether technologies are worth using or not, but rather how to use them to improve the quality and the results of education (OECD/CERI 2008: 17).

In order to assure the success of learning processes the voices of learners must not be ignored (OECD/CERI 2008: 19). It is necessary to individualise learning processes and to account for the heterogeneity of new millennium learners. The teachers as well as the learners shall work together to leverage the online space for creating successful intercultural learning environments.

[W]e, language teachers, can and must play a key role. We are well-positioned to do so as we constantly operate at the intersection

of language and culture. But we owe it to our students to go beyond the mechanics of language and delve, head on, into the world of cross-cultural literacy (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001: 95).

We owe it to today's students, which are the designers of tomorrow.

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## GERMAN ABSTRACT

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit hat als Ziel, die Faktoren einer Lernumgebung im Fremdsprachenunterricht zu definieren, welche Computerunterstützte Kommunikation integrieren und die Entwicklung der Interkulturellen Kompetenz unterstützen. Vorerst wird das Konzept der Interkulturellen Kompetenz näher beleuchtet, wobei Kultur in Beziehung zu Ethnozentrismus und Kulturrelativismus sowie zur Position des Aufgeklärten Eurozentrismus gesetzt wird, um eine theoretisch fundierte Basis zu schaffen. Hierbei werden die Ebenen der Emotionen, Performanz und Kognition berücksichtigt. Des Weiteren wird Interkulturelle Kommunikation der Kommunikativen Kompetenz gegenübergestellt, sodass die Charakteristika der Interkulturellen Kompetenz und die Problematik ihres Assessments näher untersucht werden können. Zudem wird ein Bezug zum österreichischen Bildungssystem hergestellt, dessen Bezugsdokumente – die Curricula und der Gemeinsame Europäische Referenzrahmen für Sprachen – Interkulturelle Kompetenz verankert sehen. Im dritten Kapitel stehen die Unterrichtsmethoden, die aktuell den Fremdsprachenunterricht prägen, im Zentrum. Die Faktoren der Lernumgebung, und zwar Lernerautonomie, Kollaboratives Lernen und der Einbezug der Erstsprache, werden in Hinsicht auf die Förderung der Interkulturellen Kompetenz begutachtet. Weiters werden Projektunterricht und im Speziellen Feld- und Tandemmethode als günstige Methoden beleuchtet. Das vierte Kapitel führt schließlich den Begriff der Computergestützten Kommunikation ein. Nach einer Begriffsklärung synchroner und asynchroner Kommunikation werden die Unterschiede zur nicht medial vermittelten Interaktion dargelegt. Wiederum werden die drei Merkmale, die Lernerautonomie, Kollaboratives Lernen und die Rolle der Erstsprache, mit Bezug auf ihre Umsetzung in einer computerunterstützten Lernumgebung analysiert. Analog zum vorhergehenden Kapitel wird Projektmethode unter Verwendung des Computers dargestellt. Im fünften und letzten Kapitel werden zwei Projekte, die sich durch asynchrone Kommunikation auszeichnen und deren Ziel die Entwicklung der Interkulturellen Kompetenz der Fremdsprachenlerner ist, miteinander verglichen. Hierbei wird die Rolle der Online-Kommunikation in den beiden Blended Learning Szenarien, Feld- und

Tandemmethode auf ihre Ausbildung der Interkulturellen Kompetenz untersucht. Lernerautonomie, Kollaboratives Lernen und die Funktion der Erstsprachen finden außerdem Berücksichtigung in der Analyse der Hochschulprojekte. Abschließend rückt die Realisierung der Projekte im österreichischen Schulsystem ins Blickfeld. Faktoren, die hierbei involviert sind, werden dargelegt.

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