Potentials and limitations in the assessment of pluri/intercultural competence

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Purposes – raise questions (answer them?)

• Intercultural competence
• Some existing ways of assessing
• The value of assessing IC
• Alternative assessment
Part 1

Intercultural competence
and
intercultural communicative competence
in intercultural communication
What is IC and what can I do with it?

What is it? - definitions refer to:
  • knowledge; skills; attitudes – in some cases, critical reflection

What can I do with it?
  • be ‘successful’ in communication/interaction (with or without a foreign language)
  • act as mediator /ethnographic-interpreter
What can it do for me?

Related to ‘education’ / ‘Bildung’ - self knowledge and self-development

1 Through **necessity** to know self ‘as others see us’
→ to improve communication – link to ‘usefulness’ /success in communication
  • To ‘know myself’ (me and people like me e.g. teachers OR music-makers OR people who live ‘here’ etc i.e. as members of social groups)
  • and to ‘know others’ (lawyers OR artists OR people who live ‘there’ etc.)

2 Through **option** to **reflect critically** on self and others →
What is Intercultural Communication?

• Teacher and Lawyer talking about an illegal incident in an English school
  • See each other as ‘lawyer Smith’ and ‘teacher Jones’
  • Professional social identities with different professional cultures and discourses in ‘same’ language

• [not personal identities: John Smith and Peter Jones]

- They need Intercultural competence – across professional cultural boundaries in ‘same’ language
• English lawyer talking to French teacher in English about an illegal incident during a student exchange /visit to an English school
  • See each other as ‘English lawyer Smith’ and ‘French teacher Dupont’

  • Professional social identities with different cultures and discourses AND DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

  • [not personal identities: John Smith and Jacques Dupont]

In both examples:
• Social identities are prominent/salient
• And so are stereotypes, prejudices, different discourses/pragmatics ...
Purpose of [teaching] IC and ICC

To overcome stereotypes, prejudices and other barriers to understanding, and communicate well people need:

Either 3\textsuperscript{RD} PERSON: ICC MEDIATOR WITH IC + LANGUAGE take a ‘third position’ i.e. seeing both perspectives and relationship between them

• Or Or THEY NEED TO BE THEIR OWN MEDIATOR
Where both speak ‘the same’ language:

**Intercultural competence (IC)** –
2 people using *same* language to interact and their group identities are *salient* -

OR ... where they speak ‘different’ languages:

*Intercultural communicative competence (ICC)*-
2 people [as above] but using a *different* language to interact and their group identities are *salient*
Part 2

Assessment of Intercultural [Communicative] Competence
Can Intercultural Competence be assessed?

“Yes”

→ there are tests available ... FOR IC but not ICC [i.e. language not assessed]

Online tests e.g. idiinventory.com
Reviews e.g. http://crlt.umich.edu/interculturalcompetence


BUT ...
2 views on assessment

For example

• CEFR/CV – competence is scalable with pre-determined criteria

• Liddicoat and Scarino – ‘criteria emerge from the judging process itself’
‘Progress’ in IC:
Can I become better – on a scale?

• More knowledge
  • about... - a social group (e.g. lawyers and their discourse)
  • about... - what facilitates and hinders intercultural communication (e.g. prejudice, turn-taking etc.)

• More skills and more skilled
  • Listening, observing, comparing, analysing, evaluating, critiquing

• ‘More’ attitudes
  • From openness to curiosity to respect - a progression(?)

Based on Deardorff 2006, Byram 1997 – see Spitzberg and Changnon 2009
“Pluricultural competence” – “descriptors for intercultural competence are included”

• “The reason for associating descriptors in this area with CEFR levels is to provide support to curriculum developers and teachers in their efforts
  (a) to broaden the perspective of language education in their context and
  (b) to acknowledge and value the linguistic and cultural diversity of their learners” (p.124)

My question: Is assessment main purpose?
My comments:

• Scales imply absolutes/non-context-specific progression – do they predict degree of ‘success’ in specific situations?

• Connection with language competence – implied but not specified e.g. Level B1 : Can discuss the objectivity and balance of information and opinions expressed in the media about their own and other communities.

• Also: ACFTFL can-do: https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements
• Communication = making/exchanging/interpreting meanings in specific events/ moments/ situations:
  • ‘developing intercultural understanding is more about constructing a relationship between participants in an interaction than using culture and language as static explanatory elements’ [e.g. talk about school incident]

• Connection with language competence – ‘the intercultural is (therefore) relational and is fundamentally linked to language’

• ‘success’ dependent on more than knowledge, skills, attitudes, critical awareness - every situation different

• If assessment is ‘evaluation of success’, then no pre-determined criteria or scales can predict degree/level of success
HOWEVER ...

[my comments]

• Knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical awareness can be assessed as potential not guarantee for success
  • competence not performance

[AND we assume knowledge, skills, attitudes, critical awareness can be taught and learnt.]
And then ....

Problem of performance and competence

GENERAL:
• Only performance can be assessed
• Competence is inferred from performance (but future performance not guaranteed)

SPECIFIC TO INTERCULTURAL
• Performance can be ‘insincere’ e.g. in attitudes
• Performance is (nearly) always ‘inter’ and depends not only on assessee
If it is so difficult, why assess?

• Because all learning should be assessed ... - formative, summative etc

• To introduce IC and make it ‘serious’
  • Policy/curriculum makers - use assessment to introduce curriculum change
  • Washback effect on pupils and teachers
  • Forward effect on employers and gatekeepers to further education [‘ the crucial extra certificate ...]
  • CAN ONLY BE DONE WITH HIGH STAKES ASSESSMENT (?)

• BUT – ethical issues – assessing attitudes [➔workshop]
Part 3

Alternative assessment
Alternative 1. Self-assessment

[Example in workshops]

• Addresses ethical issues

• Better on validity – record multiple specific performances over time.

• Usable for high stakes?
Alternative 2. **Don’t assess!**

AND use other means to make ‘serious’ at least for learners (and therefore teachers)

e.g. Kramsch:
The relentless demand for testing, scoring and ranking serves institutions – e.g. schools, businesses, immigration services – that need to include and exclude, but they do not necessarily serve the needs of education. […] We should then measure what can legitimately be measured and refuse to measure the rest, even though it is essential that we teach it.

OR - Can self-assessment do this? An empirical question!
To conclude ... 

• Many issues – no generalisable answers – only specific positions

• My position ...  
  • Assessment cannot be ignored – despite ethical issues
  • Assessment of success of an (real-life) event – not an option in education 
  • Achievement assessment of teachable knowledge skills attitudes and criticality – desirable but ethically problematic
  • Self-assessment combined with teacher assessment – feasible and desirable AND needs to become ‘serious’

• Your position?
Bibliographic starting points


