

*Intercultural Education of Pre-graduate Teacher Students from the Perspective of Intercultural Sensitivity: Comparative Insight into the Czech Education*

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**Abstract**

The paper focuses on the issue of Czech pre-graduate teacher training students' intercultural sensitivity within a comparative insight into the Czech educational system. The main applied techniques include: a) intercultural sensitivity-oriented content analysis of the Czech Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education, b) a questionnaire particularly consisting of Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS, Chen, Starosta, 2000), c) qualitative open item monitoring understanding the concept of 'other people, other cultures'. The paper provides an insight into what the sampled Czech teacher students in the pre-survey understand by 'other people, other cultures' as a key concept of intercultural sensitivity and education but also specifies basic terminological and methodological settings of intercultural education within the Czech education at the level of school curriculum documents.

Keywords: intercultural sensitivity, pre-graduate students, pre-service teachers, intercultural education, multicultural education, educational policy, Czech educational system

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## Introduction

The contemporary Czech society faces a wide variety changes: social, economic, educational, in particular. This trend does not seem to be exceptional and its framework as well as effect, causes and consequences, are of multiple and most probably global character, though numerous regional cultural conditions are highly recommended to be taken into consideration. The paper follows to fulfil two key aims: a/ to provide an insight into Czech educational curriculum documents, particularly *Framework Education Programme* (FEP), from the perspective of multicultural/intercultural education articulated as a key, cross-sectional educational topic in basic education; b/ to provide an insight into the phenomenon of intercultural sensitivity of pre-graduate students of teacher studies. The pre-survey took place at the Faculty of Education University Hradec Králové (Czech Republic) in spring 2016; the proposed Czech version of *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* (ISS) will be modified on the grounds of the pre-survey and further statistical processing.

### Intercultural sensitivity as a concept: features of the applied approach

As to the concept of intercultural sensitivity and features of the applied approach, intercultural sensitivity represents the main scope with a view to how much focus this component needs generally as well as in the field of teacher professional education. The need for more attention, care and support to intercultural sensitivity is intensified by turbulent and complex social change undergoing contemporarily in the world globally as well as in numerous, though not completely, separated local regions of the world. Turbulent, dynamic, and complex social changes appear to be nurturing grounds for contemporary turmoils and proclamations or attacks based on xenophobia (fear of strangers) and heterophobia (fear of difference) as two types of fear which push societies to behave in a self-closed way (Temizkan, 2007, In, Akıncı, Kule, 2014, p. 205).

New conditions of the globalised world accentuate the plural identity marked by names such as multicultural citizenship or transnational citizenship. Nation-states can no longer continue to claim that the cultural structure in their own boundaries is homogeneous (Yücel, 2006, In Akıncı, Kule, 2014, p. 207); it is difficult to find a real homogenous state, due to the fact that neither transferring solely technology cannot be accompanied with preserving its own culture to a full extent (Temizkan, 2007, p. 254, In Akıncı, Kule, 2014, p. 208). This form of heterogeneous world increases demands upon intercultural sensitivity, upon schools and teachers. Contemporary world needs: interculturally competent teachers, or rather interculturally aware, sensitive, and adroit teachers. This saying alludes to Chen, Starosta (2000) differentiation of intercultural competence into three fields:

- *intercultural sensitivity* – affective aspect of intercultural competence, subjects' active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures,
- *intercultural awareness* – cognitive aspect of intercultural competence, understanding of culture conventions that affect how we think and behave,
- *intercultural adroitness* – behavioural aspect of intercultural competence, ability to get the job done and attain communication goals in intercultural interactions (Chen, Starosta, 2000, p. 4).

Intercultural sensitivity is viewed as an affective construct effecting also seemingly-only dominantly cognitive processes of misunderstanding/understanding. According to Chen and Starosta (2000) intercultural sensitivity stands for '*ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural difference that promotes an appropriate effective behavior in intercultural communication*', and it is measured to the levels of five domains: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, interaction attentiveness. For the purpose of measuring intercultural sensitivity Chen and Starosta have developed *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)*. *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)* developed by Chen and Starosta has been applied into a survey among pre-graduate teacher students at Faculty of Education (University Hradec Králové) in spring 2016.

In a more complex and contextualised way for example Zerzova (2012) applies the term in an overview of relevant studies and instruments/models in relation to intercultural sensitivity within intercultural competence. Among the Czech students the 24-item *Intercultural Sensitivity Scale* has been used for the first time within a pre-survey to monitor and have first feedback on perceiving of the Czech translation and Czech wording; there will be done partial retranslations. The 24 item scale was used in the structure resulting from Aydogan and Akbarov (2014) factor analysis and differentiation of five fields of intercultural sensitivity: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, interaction attentiveness. After readjustment of the translation and wording all of necessary procedural steps will be done within the instrument adaptation.

Apart from the standard ISS, which cannot be used as an instrument for presenting valid and reliable data in Czech environment at this moment, there is space to comment on one qualitative question that was asked within the pre-survey, the question is asked in part one of the questionnaire: "*In the following statements a – x there are mentioned formulae: 'people/members of other cultures/of diverse cultural features, culturally different people'. Who, what people, what groups of people, do you have in mind upon hearing these words/concepts?*" For more see below, section: Pre-survey: How do Czech pre-service teachers perceive concept: 'other cultures' in 2016.

### **Intercultural sensitivity in the context of Czech education and school change**

Intercultural sensitivity in the Czech education belongs to quite new concepts in the Czech Republic and should be viewed also in a wider context of the Czech school curricular reform undergoing since the beginning of the century. The key change aspects include: *framework educational programmes (FEPs), school educational programmes (SEPs), pupils' key competences, electronic evidence of pupils, state-level of matura examination, school optimization (merging and closing down of schools), school self-evaluation, teaching standards, innovative teaching technology*. The Czech school curricular reform might be divided into three stages (Janík, 2013): 1. systemic reconstruction (1999 – 2004), 2. general implementation (2005 – 2011), 3. reform modification (2012 - ). The stages can be dated and specified briefly in the following way (for more see Vrabcová, 2015).

The stage of systemic reconstruction (1999-2004) might be considered to be initiated in 1999 by *Educational Strategy (Konceptce vzdělávání, MŠMT, 1999)* as one of the

key documents. Another key document that is often described as the one initializing the reform and the stage is the White Paper (*National programme for Education Development*, MŠMT, 2001). Among other documents forming the base for this stage of systemic reconstruction we can enumerate: *Long-term Conception of Education and Educational System Development in the Czech Republic* (authorized in 2002), and consequent school-curricular documents called 'framework educational programmes' specified for all types and stages of school education in the Czech Republic: *Framework Educational Programme for Pre-primary Education* (2002), *Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education* (initial pilot version: 2002, authorized obligatory version: 2004) etc. In the year of 2002 the first versions of some of the framework educational programme for vocational secondary education originated at the level of wider training fields, and in accordance with the proposed Education Act. Between the years 2002-2003 *National Institute of Vocational Training (Národní ústav pro odborné vzdělávání)* realized a project "Posun – Move: Let's help school to teach differently" aiming to assist editing school educational programmes. (Phare NUTS II). In 2003 the modified conception of framework educational programmes are peer-reviewed, and these steps result in modified manual/guidebook and further rules for further creating other set of framework educational programmes for vocational training. It was only in 2004 that all framework educational programmes of vocational training started to be conceived. This stage is to be closed by the *Education Act No. 561/2004* and Act No. 563/2004 Collection of Law, on Pedagogical Staff.

Within the stage of general implementation (2005 – 2011) there can be traced some other projects aiming to support implementing the new curricular documents in the field of secondary vocational training (marked with letter S); this project was divided into three waves marked by end-years 2006, 2007, 2008). The versions of curricular documents from this second stage of general implementation are/were specific by inconsistency and improperly specified relations between concepts, such as objectives, competences, standards, in particularly. Inconsistency was apparently proved even on the basis of partial content analysis focusing key competences and cross-curricular topics within four framework educational programmes (for pre-primary education, basic education, grammar schools, and secondary vocational training). Supporters of extreme subjectivism or those prioritizing content creating model of education projecting might equate this inconsistency with the positive effects, might see it as a sign for existing pluralism in educational environment. However, it rather represents an obstacle to identifying key competences as well as competency-oriented teaching practice (Vrabcová, 2007).

The third stage called reform modification (2012 - ) is considered to start in 2012, opens the current situation and is mostly related to the intended revision and modification of FEPs, as well as other activities in the field of educational and curricular policy (including preparation of the *Educational Strategy 2020*). This stage is specific with the following documents:

- *Framework Educational Programme for Pre-Primary Education (revised version, 2012)*,
- *Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (revised version, 2013)*,
- *some FEPs for Secondary Vocational Training (2012)*,
- *Education Policy Strategy of the Czech Republic for 2020 (2014)*,
- *Act No. 472/2011 (School Act Amendment, 2011)*,

- *Act No. 370/2012 (School Act Amendment, 2012),*
- *Act No. 197/2014 (Act on Pedagogical Staff, Amendment, 2014).*

Nonetheless, this stage is specific by supplementary re-orientation of the curricular reform (Janík, 2013).

The following lines present selected findings of 2016 pre-survey into issues: 1/ How do Czech pre-service teachers perceive concept: 'other cultures'? 2/ How is intercultural sensitivity implemented into Czech compulsory education via *Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (revised version, 2013)*, one of the key documents of the reform modification stage?

### **Pre-survey: How do Czech pre-service teachers perceive concept: 'other cultures' in 2016?**

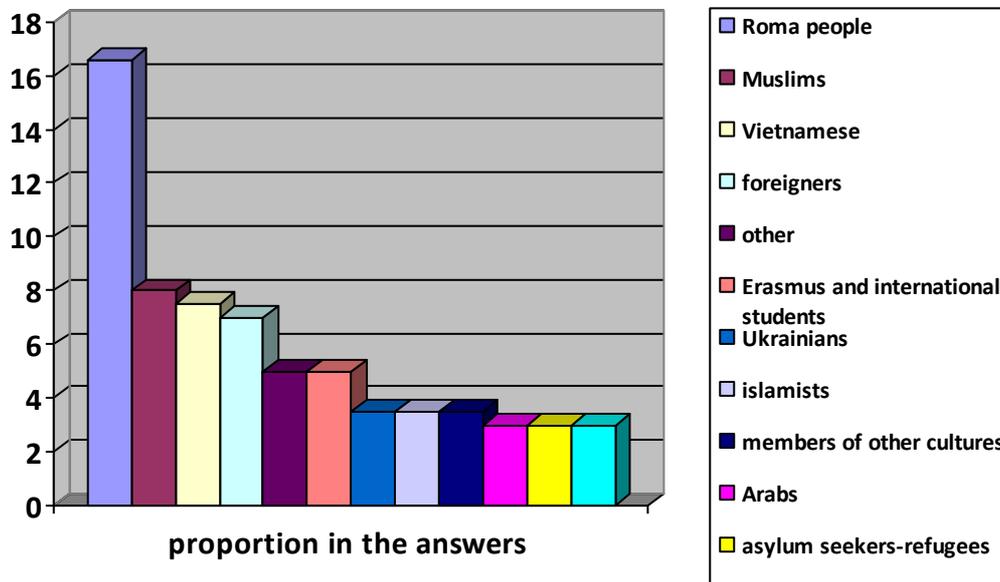
Table 1 shows structure of how the respondents (n = 69: 29 males, 40 females; age mode: 20; mean length of teaching practice: 4.8 months, mode: 0 months) in the pre-survey sample answer. Respondents could write any associations to the monitored concept. Among the answers respondents mention 52 different types of answers; these are categorized according to the type of group combined with local-knowledge on how some of the scale employed concepts are used, including the colloquial usage and implicit meanings.

<b>Groups - types</b>	<b>Students' terms</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Roma people (16.6 %)	<i>Roma people</i>	33x	16.6 %
States (22.5 %)	<i>Other nationalities, national minorities</i>	7x	3.5 %
	<i>Ukrainians</i>	7x	3.5 %
	<i>Vietnamese</i>	15x	7.5 %
	<i>Russians</i>	4x	2.0 %
	<i>Slovaks</i>	3x	1.5 %
	<i>Americans (US citizens)</i>	3x	1.5 %
	<i>Afghans</i>	2x	1.0 %
	<i>Turks, Poles, Libyans, Germans, Hungarians</i>	1x each Total:5	2.5 %
Continents and continent parts (6.5 %)	<i>Asians</i>	5x	2.5 %
	<i>Africans</i>	3x	1.5 %
	<i>Coloured/ black people</i>	3x	1.5 %
	<i>Europeans</i>	1x	0.5 %
	<i>People of Middle East</i>	1x	0.5 %
Indigenous people (1.5 %)	<i>Native Americans, Celts, Maasai people</i>	1x each Total: 3	1.5 %
Religion (15 %)	<i>Religious minorities and groups</i>	5x	2.5 %
	<i>Religious people generally</i>	1x	0.5 %
	<i>Muslims</i>	16x	8.0 %
	<i>Christians</i>	1x	0.5 %
	<i>Jews</i>	5x	2.5 %
	<i>Buddhists</i>	1x	0.5 %
	<i>Any other denomination</i>	1x	0.5 %
Socioeconomic (7.5 %)	<i>homeless</i>	2x	1.5 %
	<i>immigrants</i>	6x	3.0 %

	<i>Asylum seekers - refugees</i>	6x	3.0 %	
Sexual orientation (2.0 %)	<i>Sexual minorities</i>	1x	0.5 %	
	<i>homosexuals</i>	2x	1.5 %	
Language (0.5 %)	<i>People of different languages</i>	1x	0.5 %	
Explicitly non-specified or based on more criteria - Groups related to implicit and/or biased meanings due to which cannot be ranked to any of the above categories (28.0 %)	<i>foreigners</i>	14x	7.0 %	
	<i>Erasmus and other international students in our country</i>	8x	4.0 %	
	<i>other cultures and members of other cultural values</i>	7x	3.5 %	
	<i>Islamists</i>	7x	3.5 %	
	<i>Arabs</i>	6x	3.0 %	
	<i>tourists</i>	3x	1.5 %	
	<i>Other: mothers with children, young men, hosting people in foreign countries on holidays, terrorists, teachers, actors, Czech Slavia football team fan, school mates, friends, parents students, tribes</i>	1x each  Total: 11		5.5 %
		52	199	

**Table 1: Sample's associations to the concept 'other people/other cultures'**

From Table 1 it is evident that there are 10 groups that were articulated by more than 3 % to substitute and symbolize 'other culture' from the respondents' individual point of view. For more see Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Prevailing types of groups perceived as 'other' by the sample of Czech teacher education students (pre-survey)**

## **Intercultural Insight into Czech Framework Education Programme for Basic Education**

To provide an insight into how intercultural education and intercultural sensitivity is viewed and articulated in the *Czech Framework Education Programme for Basic Education* (FEP BE) as one of the key educational curriculum documents it is necessary to mention cross-curricular topics (Czech: *'průřezová témata'*) as a category.

The Czech Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education defines this category of topics as a means of schools focus on six topics taught at the schools obligatorily but in an optional way: either as separate subjects or as cross-curricularly intertwining topics taught not solely in a subject called as each of the six cross-curriculum topics but in cooperation with several teachers teaching across different subjects. Cross-curriculum topics in the FEP BE are related to current issues and represent a kind of core of basic education and they are articulated as (FEP BE, 2013):

- personal and social education,
- democratic citizenship,
- education towards thinking in European and global contexts,
- multicultural education,
- environmental education,
- media education.

Cross-cultural topics are designed to provide pupils opportunities for individual engagement and teamwork in one of the six topics, and thematically to promote pupils' personal development, primarily at the level of concerns, attitudes, and values, not only facts. All cross-curricular topics are organised similarly; comprise characteristics of the cross-curricular topic, description of its relationship to educational areas, and specified benefits that are potentially to be attained by pupils at the level of each of the cross-curricular topic at the level of knowledge, skills and abilities as well as their attitudes, and values. The recommended content of the cross-curricular topics for basic education are divided into educational areas. Each educational area contains an available range of themes (activities, ideas). The selection of themes and the manner in which they are operationalised into the syllabi is up to the individual schools' decision and it must be articulated by each school in their *School Educational Programmes* (SEPs). Cross-curriculum topics represent a mandatory part of basic education. Schools must include all cross-curricular topics contained in the FEP BE in any of the year-form within Stage 1, and in Stage 2.).

### **Basic Characteristics and Benefits of the Cross-curricular Topic: Multicultural Education**

At the level of basic education, the cross-curriculum topic of Multicultural Education aims at awareness of diverse cultures and their traditions and values as an instrument for increased awareness of the pupils'/pupil's cultural identity, traditions and values. Improvement of mutual understanding as well as developing their specific cultural identity is also targetted at according to the *Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education*. It is designed to develop sense of justice, solidarity and tolerance. Multicultural Education is conceived as topic deeply affecting interpersonal relationships at school, including teacher-pupil relations and relationships among

pupils, between school and family, and between school and local community. Consequently, Multicultural Education according to FEP BE is supposed to contribute to mutual understanding between groups, tolerance, and to eliminate or minimise animosity and prejudices towards the *'unknown/the other'*. Conception of Multicultural Education in FEP BE is designed to penetrate all educational areas. It is particularly closely tied to the above mentioned educational areas, particularly: *Language and Communication through Language, Humans and Society, Information and Communication Technologies, Arts and Culture, Humans and Health.*

However, there is observable culture-standard approach and focus on awareness and cognitive level with less intense or systemic focus on affective level and intercultural sensitivity, and low attention to transcultural or at least intercultural approach. These withdrawals are evident from these points, based on content analysis of the explicit benefits specified in FEP BE (2013), particularly:

- Members of the majority are supposed to learn the fundamental characteristics of other nations living in the same country, and both groups thus can find common points of reference for mutual respect, joint activities and cooperation.
- As an environment which brings together pupils from various social and cultural backgrounds, the school should ensure an atmosphere in which all will feel equal, in which minority pupils are successful in a majority environment and in which majority pupils learn about their minority classmates' culture.

Success seems to be measured by succeeding in a majority environment, members of majority group are viewed as members of hidden superiority culture (majority pupils learn about their minority classmates culture). There are still conceived on the grounds of polarized world: *'we'* and *'they'*, *'majority/minority'*, and vice versa.

## **Conclusion**

Teachers' adequate openness towards changes, flexibility and pro-innovative involvement have become a part of new value system necessary and specific for the teaching profession and modern *'dream teachers'* (Vrabcová, 2015). Significant findings used in the field of pro-innovative involvement of Czech teachers also result from the survey by Světlík (2004) with the aim to trace the influence of cultural dimensions and values upon the Czech teacher. Attitudes - inner components of subjective evaluation of school as well as more general societal and social reality substitute also key element of school culture and society.

Apart from some rather exceptional communities, pluralism at the level of population structures appears to be omnipresent. Communities and population structures consist of different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities. Apart from some very few regions or locations of monocultural character, it is far from reality if someone proclaims multiculturalism can be skipped and abandoned on the grounds of that history proves multiculturalism does not work; multicultural societies at the level of human diversity in majority of population structures exist; another issue is how political, economic, social and other types of systems approach to the diverse reality. Teachers' intercultural sensitivity appears to be of crucial importance.

Harding (2005), for example, points out that according to The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2001) teacher candidates must develop proficiencies for working with students from diverse backgrounds; dispositions that respect and value differences, and skills for working in diverse settings, which is easier said than done because many teacher education students have little experience outside of their own culture. It is known that all students (not only of teacher studies) bring to class their own biases and stereotypical points of view, and the best natural way to increase awareness of their own beliefs as well as being culturally sensitive lies in culturally diverse classes. This expanded understanding and awareness is a chance for improving teachers' work with diverse students. (Harding, 2005) In Neito's words (2000, In Harding, 2005), one must become a multicultural person before they can become a multicultural teacher. Understanding oneself in relation to culture of others is a long-term if not lifelong process. Becoming a multicultural teacher is no less than a self-transformation, it needs time, and students – prospective teachers need to develop intercultural sensitivity continually and the best way is to base it on the natural, positive (at the ideal case) everyday experience with diverse community, diverse and multi/intercultural education at schools. It is also known that young children are less prejudiced and stereotyped and that they are under strong influence by prejudices/stereotypes as well as attitudes of their parents.

Czech society used to be quite homogeneous in the past; a milestone is represented by Velvet Revolution and consequent opening of the borders. Currently the Czech Republic as well as other regions of the world faces highly increased migration, in a longer time-span, globalization of the world increases demands upon intercultural communication competence and its component: intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity must be focused more at the level of basic education and obviously in teacher education. Teachers' intercultural sensitivity is a key prerequisite of developing teachers' intercultural competence necessary for relevant teaching diverse, globalised, plural societies of today. Intercultural communication competence needs to be developed systemically as other teaching competences are. Culturally standard approach based apart from other attributes on 'we-they' identity aspects, needs to be developed further in the direction of transcultural approach where individual human being is recognized and fully respected in its uniqueness not primarily as a member of a group. Multicultural education articulated in the *Framework Educational Programme* needs to be innovated to the level of intercultural or even transcultural approach, and teacher education must work on more effective, informal though systemic real-life, intercultural professional development.

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