

# 1.1 From Culture to Intercultural Citizenship Education

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This chapter examines the concepts of culture, intercultural competence, citizenship and intercultural citizenship: key concepts in understanding the *how* and *why* of the ICEPELL project.

## Key Concepts

### 1. Characterising culture

*“Culture” is a difficult term to define, largely because cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous and embrace a range of diverse practices and norms that are often disputed, change over time and are enacted by individuals in personalised ways.*

(Council of Europe, 2018, p. 30)

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Culture is not restricted to a particular country but is rather associated with any social group or community (e.g., teachers or doctors, dog owners or bird watchers, city folk or country folk). From this perspective, the culture of any group is a network formed from three components: **products**, **practices** and **perspectives**.

» **Products** are the tangible items produced by a cultural group or society, such as clothes, music, food, books, art and monuments; also included here are intangible items, such as laws, conventions and institutions.

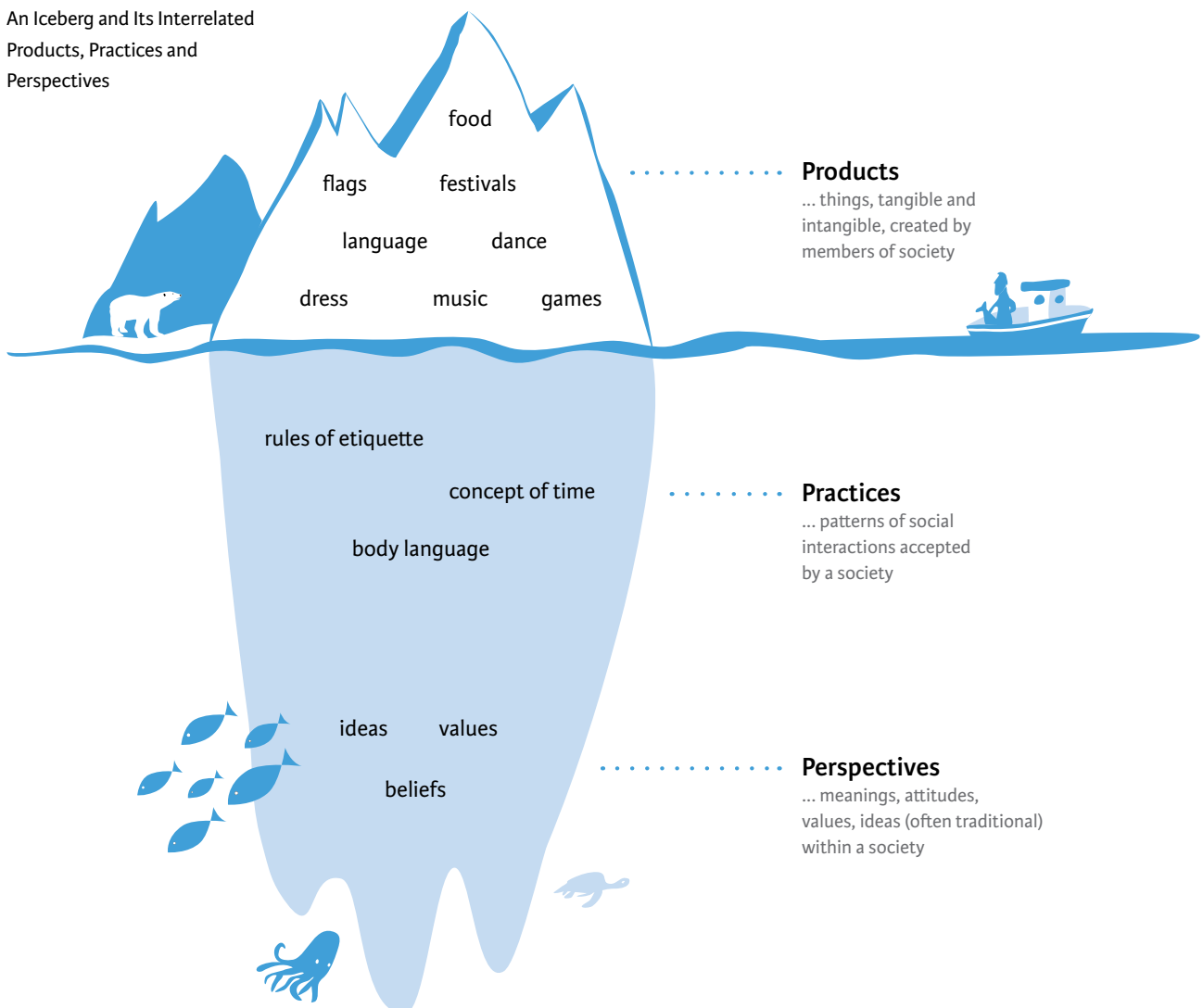
» **Practices** refer to the behaviour patterns of social interactions, such as greetings and gestures, conventions, customs and daily routines.

» **Perspectives** are the philosophical outlooks and beliefs of the group, such as values and assumptions. These are intangible, invisible elements of culture that underlie both practices and products.

The way these three components intersect means that *individuals occupy a unique cultural positioning*. Besides, the meanings and feelings which people attach to particular cultures are personalised as a consequence of their own life histories, personal experiences and individual personalities.

The intersection of these three components can be illustrated in the metaphor of an iceberg, which is only partly visible on the surface; what is seen above the water is only a very small fraction of what is going on underneath. A large proportion of our own culturally shaped knowledge is invisible, under the water, and mostly subconsciously applied in our everyday interactions. Visible aspects of culture, those that can be seen above the water, are usually cultural products like art, music, literature, food, clothes, dance, holidays and gestures. Invisible aspects of culture, those hidden under the water, are more subjective, often unconscious, and usually associated with practices and, especially, with perspectives, such as religion, politics, social etiquette, work ethics, notions of time or the nature of friendship and love (see Figure 2). For each distinct cultural and social group, there are visible and invisible aspects of culture that the metaphor of the iceberg helps us visualise.

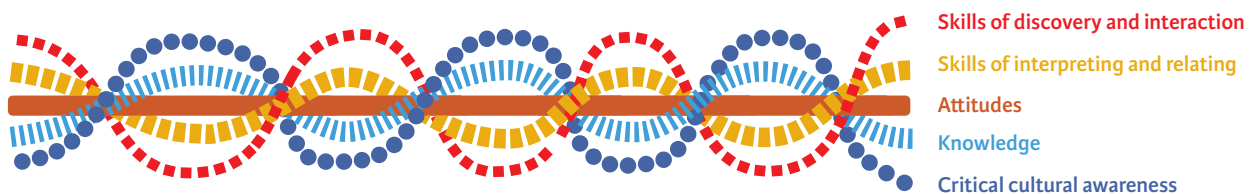
**FIGURE 2**  
An Iceberg and Its Interrelated Products, Practices and Perspectives



## 2. Defining Intercultural Competence

Learning a language to communicate with others should not just be about learning vocabulary and grammar, but should also involve learning how to interact with others in a socially and culturally appropriate manner. In other words, language learners need to develop intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence.

The intercultural dimension of language learning contributes to learners becoming intercultural speakers, engaging in communication and interaction with others through intercultural dialogue. To develop intercultural competence and become intercultural speakers, Byram (1997, 2021) has outlined a set of five intercultural competences, which when associated with interaction in a foreign language in an educational context contribute to Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). The competences are dimensions of **attitudes**, **knowledge** and **skills** and are interrelated, rather like the strands of a rope that are braided together to make it thick and strong (see Figure 3).



**Attitudes** are the foundation of intercultural competence and the main strand in the rope. The targeted attitudes are curiosity, openness and a readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. Positive attitudes come naturally to younger children and should result in their increased curiosity and acceptance of difference. However, younger children may still find it difficult to place themselves in others' shoes and see something from a different perspective, i.e. to '**decentre**'.

**Knowledge** is another important competence which should move beyond acquiring information about a specific culture and instead focus on knowledge of the products and practices of certain social groups; these include one's own and those of others. This includes a knowledge of how own and other social groups and individuals interact. With their natural curiosity and interest, children are usually keen to find out about other social groups and their products and practices. They also have some awareness of their own cultural practices.

**FIGURE 3**  
The Strands of Competences  
Interrelated Like a Thick Rope

**Skills of interpreting and relating** involve helping children interpret the products and practices of other social groups, explain them and relate them to their own social group. Children's curiosity and openness make noticing similarities and differences very easy; they naturally make comparisons. However, children should first be encouraged to find out and understand why something is the way it is in their own culture. Reflecting on their own cultural practices or products will stimulate self-cultural awareness as a result. Then, they should be encouraged to observe and identify and compare and contrast what they have discovered.

**Skills of discovery and interaction** are dependent upon learners bringing together their existing knowledge of a situation and a positive and open attitude; this enables children to engage in social interaction to find out more. Early language learners can learn how to ask relevant questions as well as analyse products and practices and respond in an appropriate manner, exploiting their knowledge and skills and coping with communication flowing under real-time constraints. Additionally, children should be encouraged to tolerate ambiguity during interaction with others; some situations might be unclear or might remain open to interpretation because of different cultural premises. As a result, children may be able to successfully mediate, demonstrating an ability to empathise, decentre and cooperate with others.

**Critical cultural awareness** is the competence that brings learners' attitudes, knowledge and skills together for a purpose in language education. Language learners will observe, identify, compare, contrast and ultimately evaluate cultural products and practices, but there needs to be an awareness of the criteria they are using to do this and a need to use a similar criterion to evaluate their own products and practices (Byram & Doyé, 1999, p. 143).

This ability to look at oneself and one's social group through the discovery of others contributes to ensuring children decentre, take a different perspective and challenge what is taken for granted. This should be carefully mediated by a skilful teacher, so that children move beyond the notion of tolerating difference to developing a critical understanding of their own and other cultural products and practices (Byram & Doyé, 1999, p. 143).

An intercultural education depends upon skilled language teachers, as educators, who together with their learners develop a critical understanding of their own culture and 'cultural selves', as well as that of others, acting in a sensitively and culturally appropriate manner (Kirsch, 2008, p. 157). This also implies that intercultural competence

mobilises competences more commonly associated with the **cognitive dimension** of learning but also, very importantly, competences related to the **affective dimension**.

### 3. Defining Citizenship Education

Modern citizenship education is no longer about being able to convey information about political institutions and processes; instead, as a school subject, it should focus on developing competences leading towards ‘effective and constructive interaction with others, thinking critically, acting in a socially responsible manner and acting democratically’ (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 9). In many schools in Europe, citizenship education is now part of the curriculum, seen as a cross-curricular element, with potential for integration into any subject. This includes early English language learning.

The Council of Europe (2018) has developed a *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* to support education systems in educating children to be democratic citizens, to become more aware of the challenges they may encounter in life, to realise the implications of certain decisions and to recognise that some behaviours are unacceptable (e.g., bullying or hate speech).

These competences overlap with those of ICC. They are **knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes**, together with a **values competence**, which comprises valuing human dignity and human rights; valuing cultural diversity; and valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of the law (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 38). The objective, then, of democratic citizenship, is to empower learners to ‘act as competent and effective democratic citizens’ (p. 37). Being an effective democratic citizen involves assuming an active role in society, both locally and globally, by becoming ‘proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world’ (UNESCO, 2014, p. 15).

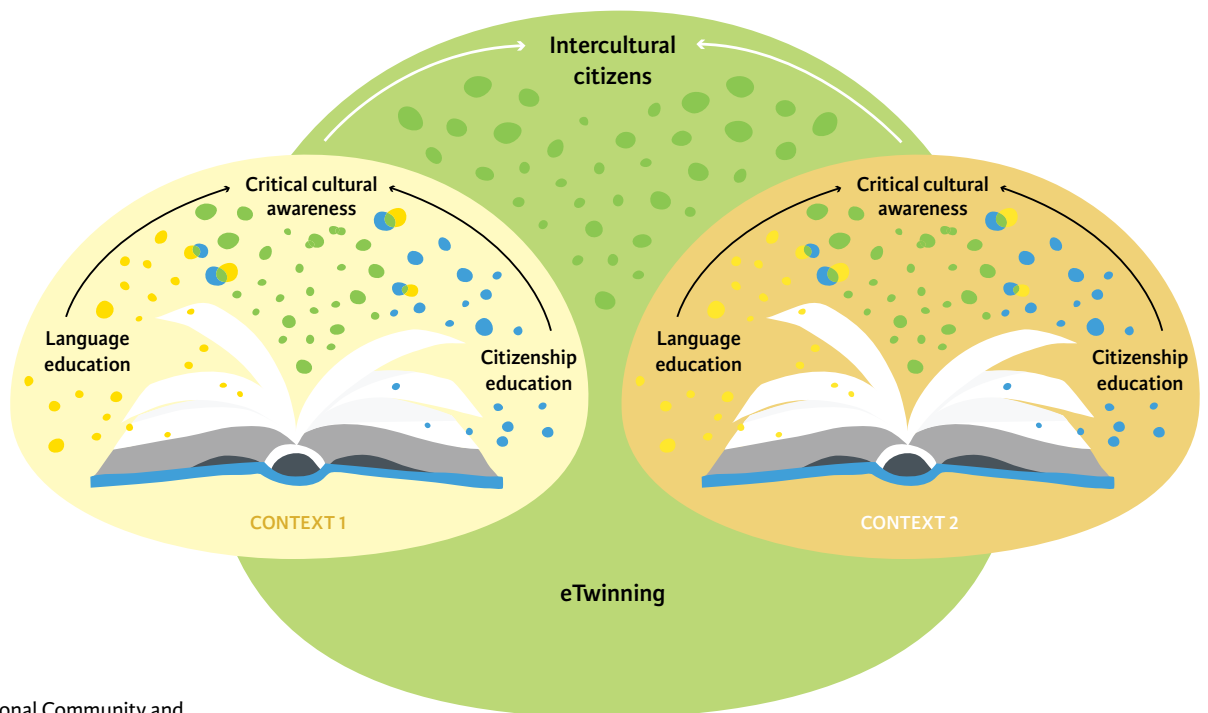
### 4. Defining Intercultural Citizenship Education

In Intercultural citizenship education<sup>1</sup>, the relevant content for purposeful language learning should focus on citizenship matters and issues. Intercultural citizenship education fuses foreign language learning and civic action in local and/or international communities based on citizenship education principles. It further develops Byram’s

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Byram uses the acronym ‘ICit’, however in the ICEPELL project we use the acronym ‘ICE’ throughout the project, in particular when labelling the intellectual outputs (e.g. ICEKit and ICEPro Course)

dimension of critical intercultural awareness by suggesting that teachers encourage their children to reflect critically on what is happening around them and engage in socially conscious, action-taking activities together. This is done by adopting a teaching approach which is action oriented and political. By ‘action oriented’, we mean that teachers and their children need to take action and move beyond their classroom walls to engage with their communities. By ‘political’, we mean that teachers and their children should be motivated by their beliefs to become ‘proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world’ (UNESCO, 2014, p. 15). However, to become intercultural citizens, teachers and their learners need to engage in cross-border communication, as ‘transnational communities’ (Byram et al., 2017, p. xxii). In the ICEPELL project, *eTwinning* (see Chapter 1.2), a European Commission initiative, was used to connect groups of children and their teachers across Europe (see Figure 4).



**FIGURE 4**  
The Transnational Community and  
Intercultural Citizenship Education  
in the ICEPELL Project

## **Relevance and Implications of Intercultural Citizenship Education for Teachers of English**

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In order to integrate intercultural citizenship, teachers need to plan for three sets of objectives in their early English language learning contexts: language objectives, intercultural objectives and citizenship objectives. There should be an attempt to go beyond the linguistic systems orientation of language learning and instead see language as a tool to support meaningful interaction with others, with the goal of becoming democratic citizens together. Authentic and relevant resources like the picturebook, as used in this project, are the perfect stimulus for action taking when carefully mediated because they prompt children to reflect on their local and global environments, and they provide many opportunities for extension activities (i.e. after-reading and beyond-the-book activities), which encourage children to be proactive contributors to a better world (see Part 2).

In Europe, connecting with teachers and their groups of children in other countries has never been easier given the popularity of virtual platforms like *Zoom* and *Microsoft Teams*, together with support structures like *eTwinning* (see Section 1.2). However, becoming intercultural citizens through English lessons requires that teachers connect and collaborate with the school community and involve others in the resulting intercultural citizen projects. For example, consider the following:

- » **The need to be flexible to connect with classes in other countries.** Connecting virtually with other teachers and their learners is a highly relevant activity, but it is often disregarded due to the constraints of time differences, differing teaching schedules and school internet access.
- » **School community involvement.** When extension activities include children going into the playground to play traditional games (see ICEKit#15 Unplugged), this requires support (parents/caregivers, day care staff, etc). Some activities might require collaboration across the teaching team so that children can devote more time to certain activities, e.g., painting rocks in ICEKit#10 Say something.
- » **Parent/caregiver involvement.** When planning for activities that take children beyond the classroom walls and into the community, parents/caregivers might, e.g., accompany children on a trip to the park for a clean-up (see ICEKit#11 Clean up!) or support children's water-saving activities (see ICEKit#6 Cyril the lonely cloud and ICEKit#12 We are water protectors).

## Applying Intercultural Citizenship Education: The ICEPro Course

The ICEPro Course (see Part 3) was designed around the seven effective features of professional development, combining practice-related tasks with **reflection**, **experimentation** and **dialogue** to increase awareness of the theory-practice nexus and support the development of action plans for future practice. During the practice-related tasks, participants engaged with the theoretical background of intercultural citizenship through hands-on experiences developed around picture-books with intercultural and citizenship themes.

Specific to the ICEPro Course was the creation of ‘Erasmus Groups’, made up of one participant from each partner country. In their Erasmus Groups participants learned *with* and *from* each other. They also co-created a set of teacher resources, an ICEKit (see Part 2), around a selected picturebook by exchanging ideas based on their personal experiences, professional backgrounds and cultural sensitivities. As they did this, they actively engaged in intercultural dialogue and honed the competences associated with intercultural communicative competence and democratic citizenship, in particular, its affective and pragmatic dimensions.

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