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## Critical Thinking as a Tool for Managing Intercultural Conflicts

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### Abstract

This study focuses on critical thinking as a tool for managing intercultural conflicts in relation to development of intercultural competencies which plays crucial role in the process of managing intercultural conflicts. Study presents characteristics and analysis of multicultural competencies and critical thinking which considers possible assumptions for the empirical study of these phenomena. In basic terms gives an overview of the primary complaints determining multicultural competencies and core competencies of critical thinking, then the elementary facts creates an interaction model in the relation to intercultural and multicultural education.

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*Keywords:* critical thinking, multicultural competencies, core competencies, intercultural conflict

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### 1. Primary interpretation of expected relation

With globalization, the constant interactions between people, cultures and civilizations will increasingly become and the mobility and migration will create a multicultural society and the question of peaceful coexistence in the context of the cultures will be an ongoing challenge. Intercultural society is one in which there is a mutual meetings, cultural exchanges, cooperation and dialogue of people who are culturally different. This difference can be understood as an opportunity to enrich themselves, but can also be a potential source of conflict. Intercultural misunderstandings and conflicts arises because interculturally incompetent behavior, during the dealing with people

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who are different. Multicultural society encourages us to characterize and determine the multicultural competencies and find new methods, processes, content and resources to develop these competencies which will help us to succeed in today's multicultural world. To development of intercultural competence can help critical thinking skills, such as basic strategy of the individual's competence in the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation.

This study is devoted to the topic of critical thinking as a tool for managing intercultural conflicts. This topic is discussed from the perspective of need of development of intercultural competencies which play crucial role in managing intercultural conflicts. This need is observed in connection with the development of key skills, knowledge and attitudes that an individual needs to solve problems arising because of intercultural misunderstandings. These key competencies are intercultural competencies. Paper points out on critical thinking in the determination of intercultural competencies, presents interdependence between these two phenomena and present interaction models.

Primarily, we will refer to the formulation of the concepts of critical thinking and intercultural competence in relation to their mutual analysis and then we will attempt to find relations between these concepts.

### *1.1. Multicultural competence*

Since the 80s of the 20th century in the USA we can see the first mention about multicultural competencies in the context of counselling psychology and improving the quality of provision of psychological counselling in a multicultural environment (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Sue et al. described the first three components of multicultural competencies: awareness, knowledge and skill. This three-component model served as a tool to improve the quality of provision of psychological counselling in a multicultural environment (In Pope & Reynolds, 1997). This three-dimensional model reflected the need to improve communication and work of counselling workers who are in a constant contact with clients of different socio-cultural background.

In today's scientific publications we can find various synonyms of this term – it is intercultural competence, multicultural competence, intercultural conflict competence or even intercultural communication competence. In this paper we use mainly terms intercultural and multicultural to honor the wording of each author. We will specify the differences between the two concepts in the chapter 1.3.

All definitions of multicultural competence which we will present, understand the concept of competence as a complex set of several components, among include: knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and communication. The ability to be culturally sensitive and responsible points out Mueller & Pope (2001). Cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence are put into context Morgensternová & Šulová (2009). Culturally sensitive person should have intercultural competence (the sum of knowledge, skills and personality traits) that will help him orientate oneself and succeed in today's culturally diverse society.

If we want to define multicultural competencies, we must first come from a general perspective, which represent multicultural competencies as the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that pupils or students learn in the process of multicultural education (Hladík, 2006).

It is a very broad and general definition, which gets the content thanks to Pope and Reynolds. Pope and Reynolds in 1997 defined multicultural competence as "awareness, knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively across cultural differences with different groups of people." Reasonable generality and accuracy at the same time we find in instrumentally-rational definition of Deardorff (2009). Deardorff on the basis of the research contacted the panel of 23 experts in the field of multicultural competencies from USA, Canada and Great Britain. The result of this research was a consensual definition, where is multicultural competence understood as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes". Intercultural competencies which were defined by panel of experts focuses primarily on communication and behavior in intercultural situations (intercultural contact). The outcome of the research were also models of intercultural competence - pyramidal and process (Deardorff, 2004, p. 196). We will present pyramid model of intercultural competence which is intended to development and measurement of intercultural competencies of students in tertiary education.

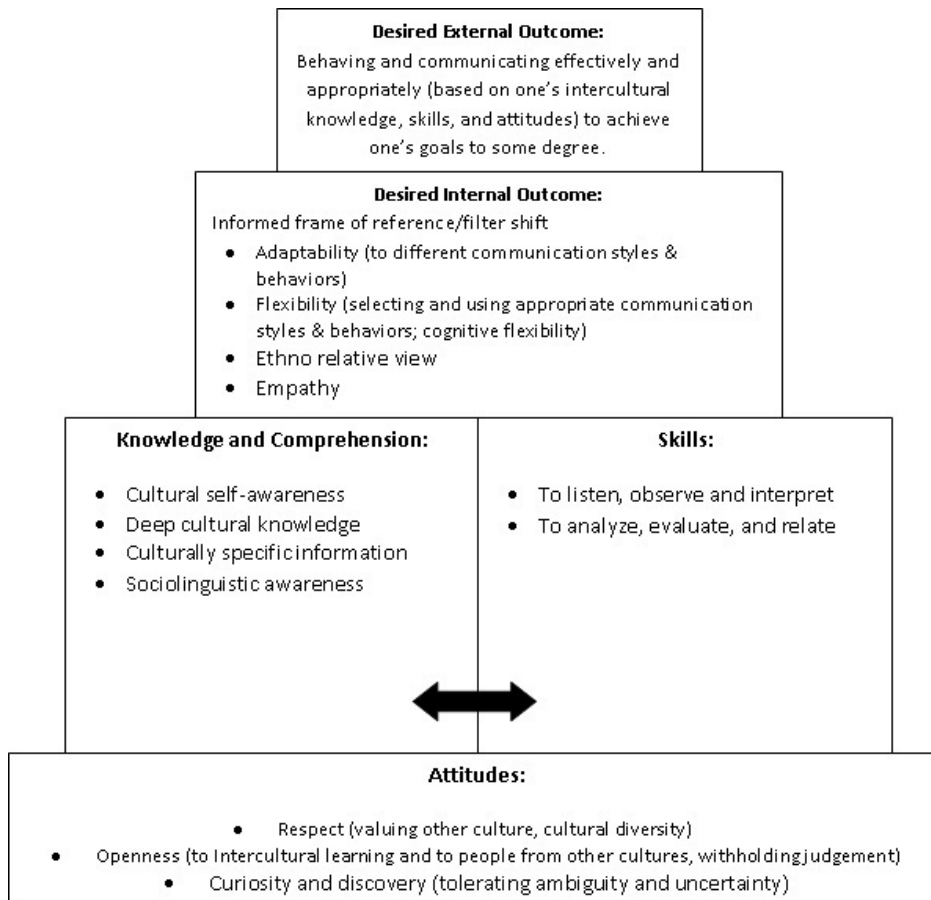


Fig. 1 Pyramid model of intercultural competence

The cornerstone for the development of intercultural competence and thus intercultural conflict resolution skills are essential **attitudes** (what we can see on the Fig.1 Pyramid model of intercultural competence). Mainly it is attitude of tolerance, respect (valuing other cultures) and openness to different cultural groups and life forms (withholding judgment), including an awareness of the need for personal involvement and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity).

At another level of model of intercultural competence according to Deardorff (2009) is **knowledge and comprehension** where belong cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness. To listen, observe and evaluate; to analyze interpret and relate are desirable **skills** of intercultural competence. These skills are closely related and are essential and play an important role in cases related to critical thinking skills. One of the key competence of critical thinking are cognitive competences, which Turek (2008) describe as a ability to think independently, impartially, identify main ideas, formulate appropriate questions, identify unspoken assumptions, recognize bias, emotional factors, propaganda, learn suitability and appropriateness of the information, recognize stereotypes and clichés to use intellectual standards to assess the quality of thinking.

Let's get back to the cognitive competencies in the general sense and their correlation with multicultural competencies. Already the solving problems skill has a significant relationship to multicultural knowledge, attitudes and skills of the individual. Based on the problem-solving skills, we can identify the problem associated with minority groups and cultural differences, as we can appropriately choose how to solve these problems, how to assist to persons belonging to these groups and appropriately choose our help and support they need. We can see the fundamental links between theoretical approaches, we outlined above: *cognitive competence* → *multicultural*

*knowledge and attitudes*. This relationship is shown in an elementary concept, because our cognition, cognitive characteristics allow us to create knowledge and understanding of certain issues.

Adaptability, flexibility, ethno relative view and empathy is **desirable internal outcome** (at the interpersonal level), ie. individual's ability to adapt and flexibly use different communication style behavior. Negotiate and communicate effectively and appropriately during achieving own goals is **desired external outcome** at interactive level (Dearnorff, 2009). Intercultural competence is the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness and communication skills during problem solving interactions appropriately, effectively and adaptively. The criteria of communication appropriateness, effectiveness and adaptability can serve as evaluation criteria to determine whether a conflict of intercultural communication is perceived as competent or incompetent (Ting-Toomey, 2009) and it could be a consequence of intercultural conflict<sup>†</sup> or not.

By acquiring intercultural competencies, we are able to understand the difference not as a potential source of intercultural conflicts but as an opportunity to enrich themselves. Intercultural competence contributes to shape respecting relations between different cultures in order to avoid negative events (intercultural conflicts) that occur in multicultural societies.

### 1.2. Critical thinking

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of active and skillful conceptualization, it is process of applying, analyzing, synthesizing or evaluating of information obtained or created with the help of observation, experience, reflection, consideration and communication. In its basic form is based on universal values such as: clarity, accuracy, consistency, relevance, persuasiveness, depth, width and justice thinking” (Scriven & Paul, 1987). Another definition of critical thinking that we will present, is the concept of critical thinking according to Watson and Glaser. They created the test of evaluation of critical thinking as a basic assessment method for examining the level of critical thinking. “Critical thinking is a phenomenon in which are closely linked attitudes, knowledge and eligibility. Such unit includes:

1. Attitudes to identify information that includes the ability to realize the existence of problems and acceptance of general need to prove the truth
2. Knowledge about the types of valid inferences, abstractions and generalizations, in which is logically determined the severity or the accuracy of different types of evidence
3. Eligibility of using of such attitudes and knowledge ” (Watson & Glaser, 2000, s. 24).

We already know the list of multicultural competencies together with their indicators. Also, we have already mentioned the basic definition of critical thinking, and now, for the purposes of this paper, we focus on the core competencies of critical thinking.

The first key competence of critical thinking skills is the **interpretation**. Interpretation is described as an individual's ability to sort information, decode, evaluate the significance of information or clarification of the meaning. Specifically, it can be defined as the interpretation of the understanding and importance or significance in accordance with a range of experiences, situations, data, events, decisions, rules, practices or criteria. Currently we show examples of basic skills which the individual has: recognizes and describes the problems without passion; distinguish the main idea from the other ideas in the text; constructs a tentative categorization or a way how to organize what they learn; can specify the charts or what characterize the graphs; identifies the author's focus and opinions of authors

The second key competence is the **analysis** or exploration of ideas, detection and analysis of arguments. When

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<sup>†</sup> Intercultural conflict is defined as a perceived or actual discrepancy of cultural values, norms, customs, habits and traditions. Ting-Toomey & Oetzel (2001) define intercultural conflict as "emotional experience of frustration in conjunction with the perceived incompatibility of values, norms, goals, scarce resources, processes and /or outcomes between at least two people from different cultural communities in an interactive situation." Intercultural Conflict arises because of differences between the two groups of people (two people) and their socio-cultural misunderstanding during communication. We are often poorly informed about the differences between the various socio-cultural groups and their different behavior, which leads to mutual verbal and nonverbal misunderstandings.

we use the analysis? Mostly in situations where we want to determine the deductive relations between information, questions, concepts, descriptions or other forms of presentation, which could express beliefs, decisions, experiences, reasons, information and opinions. Again, we show examples of basic abilities of an individual who has developed these skills, thus analysis in critical thinking. An individual is able: identify similarities or differences between the two approaches to solving problems; is able to decide what is the main argument of the text, identify developed assumptions, identify unstated assumptions and follow reason why the author supports this claim; has the ability to illustrate the relationship between sentences or paragraphs and can identify the main purpose of the article.

The third key competence is called **evaluation**, when an individual is able to evaluate the claim and assess arguments. Evaluation is used to assess the credibility of statements or other information, which are: descriptions of human perception, experience, situation, judgment or conviction, and it also serves us to assess the logical strength of the actual or intended inferential relations between descriptions, questions or other forms of representation. An individual possessing the skills evaluation is able to: determine the credibility of the author; assess whether the assumption of the argument is legitimate or consider mutual support of two arguments; compare the strengths and weaknesses of alternative interpretations and consider whether are argumentative conclusion adequately conclusions deduced; assess the logical strength of arguments based on hypothetical situations and determine if additional information is needed to strengthen arguments.

**Inference** is the fourth key competence of critical thinking. Synonymous expression is: questioning the evidence, making assumptions and drawing conclusions. We use it when we want to identify and secure elements needed to create the appropriate conclusions, to create a hypothesis, and this hypothesis should assume relevant information. Furthermore, we use inference, if we develop statements resulting from the data, claims, beliefs, opinions, concepts, descriptions, questions or information of any nature. Competence inference allows us to: identify the original information which could support our view; see the consequences of defending one's position; create the opinions from sources which we read; formulate an opinion by considering opposing views; conduct experiments and applications of correct statistical methods and confirm or refute empirical hypotheses.

The fifth key competencies critical thinking is the **explanation**. This includes the reporting of results, explanations of procedures and presenting arguments. Specifically, we use it if we want to bring results through considerations, justify the assertion of evidence, concepts and methodology. With the key competency explanation has individual these abilities: explain what one thinks and concludes; state the reasons for foreign results; justify foreign practices and arguments; organize one's findings and the results in graphs and give a description of research methods, together with the criteria for achieving those results; argue in a specific situation; design charts that represent relationships between concepts and ideas; can cite information that is subject to criticism.

Last, the sixth key competence is **self-regulation**. In the critical thinking we use for this key competence also the term the self-esteem and self-control. It is a conscious monitoring of cognitive activities, the elements used in these activities, as well as the conscious monitoring of learning outcomes and skills applied in the analysis. An individual possessing these skills of self-regulation is characterized by the following capabilities: use critical thinking to himself to improve previous opinions; monitoring and processing interpretations; the ability of examining the views with sensitivity to possible errors; personal interest to see how one understands; ability to reassess the interpretation or decision with regard to the analysis of the facts of the case; review of responses due to errors, together with a review of its own discoveries and conclusions of this work (Facione & Facione, 1994).

This key competence – self-regulation is highest competence that can one achieve within the cognitive skills of critical thinking. Therefore, this competence will be closely involved with regard to the definitions of various authors, their descriptions and possible assumptions for the development of self-regulation. But now we will state the following table of integral concept of key competencies in critical thinking. This table describes the different levels of competencies of critical thinking and describes which abilities an individual has within these levels.

Table 1 The levels of key competencies of critical thinking (Facione &amp; Facione, 1994).

Key competence of critical thinking	Level of competence		
	High: consistently makes the following	Acceptable: often makes the following	Insufficient: very often makes the following
<b>Interpretation</b>	Accurately interprets the information, statements, graphs, queries etc. Right classes / groups the objects correctly identifies main ideas, problems and questions.	Accurately interprets information, graphics, questions, etc. Right classes / groups the objects correctly identifies main ideas.	Misrepresent the information, statements, graphs, queries etc. Confuses the grouping and categorization, mistakenly identifying the main ideas and confuses them with irrelevant information.
<b>Analysis</b>	Identifies the most important arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con. Correctly distinguishes reasons, it is able to realize major and minor differences and similarities and identifies key unspoken assumptions.	Identifies relevant arguments pro and con. Correctly distinguishes causes and is able to realize major and minor differences or similarities.	Is not able identify the strengths, relevant counter-arguments. Needs support to determine the cause. Ignores the major differences and similarities.
<b>Evaluation</b>	Thoughtfully evaluate the main alternatives from different angles. Correctly distinguishes between right and wrong and justified arguments. Properly evaluate the credibility of sources and assesses the relative strength of a number of related arguments.	It offers an analysis and evaluation of alternative points of view. Correctly distinguishes between well and poorly reasoned arguments. Properly evaluate the credibility of sources.	Ignore and superficially evaluates alternative points of view. Does not distinguish between well and poorly reasoned arguments. Gives misleading arguments. Estimates and underestimates the credibility of sources.
<b>Inference</b>	Creates confirmed, prudent and unmistakable conclusions. Correctly recognizes the need for additional information to create partial results and is able to identify the source of information for follow-up action.	Creates the unmistakable conclusions, recognizes the need for additional information to draw reasonable conclusions.	Creates unjustified or mistaken conclusions.
<b>Explanation</b>	Justifies the key results and procedures, explains assumptions and reasons. Present causes and evidence in an organized, clear, understandable and comprehensive form.	Justifies some results or procedures, explains reasons. Present causes and evidence in an organized, clear, understandable and comprehensive form.	Justifies a few results and procedures, seldom explains the cause. Causes and evidence presents in unclear and disorganized manner.
<b>Autoregulation</b>	Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead. Is open to new ideas, assumes obvious problems and is asking relevant and challenging questions.	Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead. It is open to new ideas and assumes obvious problems.	They defend their views of their own interest or prejudice, regardless of the cause. Coming to conclusions too hastily, or refuses to process the obvious conclusions. It is suspicious of reasoning as a means of making decisions and solving problems.

### 1.3. Contexts of critical thinking and multicultural competence

If we want to find the relationship between critical thinking and multicultural competencies, we have to look back retrospectively at the concepts underlying the need to develop these key competencies. In Czech and foreign literature two different concepts can be found. It is concept of intercultural education and multicultural education. Generally it can be said, that the current pedagogy treats these two concepts of multicultural and intercultural unsystematically, and that in the field of intercultural learning / multicultural education it is very difficult to find a unified conceptual apparatus.

#### 1.3.1. Concept of multicultural education

The first view of the relationship between critical thinking and multicultural competencies are in the conceptual framework of **multicultural education**. It takes place in the context of the educational reality in which, from our point of view, is essential to develop the critical thinking skills of students for interiorization of multicultural competencies by implementing of multicultural education to the arrangements for tertiary education. Description and interdependence we are presenting under the graphical representation of the model. This context is illustrated in

the interaction model, which is with its utility located in tertiary education.

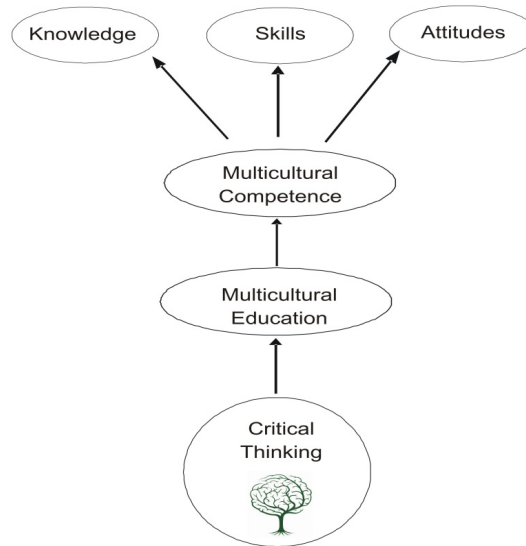


Fig. 2 Interaction model of critical thinking and multicultural education

We also conjecture that critical thinking is a tool for removing prejudices and stereotypes of individuals through multicultural education which is taught for several years as a theme within the RVP (The Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education in Czech Republic), but the teaching of multicultural education takes place at universities too. The influence of multicultural education in multicultural competence is not in doubt. The goal of multicultural education should be the development of student's intercultural competencies which is necessary.

The interaction model shows that critical thinking is a cornerstone. Critical thinking is an integral part of the cognitive functions of individuals. On the basis of critical thinking, we are able to analyze information, explain it, and also evaluate our own self-regulated learning.

Multicultural education is at least three things: *an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process*. Multicultural education incorporates the **idea** that all students – regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics – should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. Another important idea in multicultural education is that some students, because of these characteristics, have a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently structured than do students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics (Banks & Banks, 2007).

Critical thinking is connected to multicultural education which can be characterized „as a **process** through which individuals create positive ways of perception and evaluation of cultural systems different from their own culture and on this basis they regulate their behavior towards members of other culture” (Průcha, 2001). Thanks to effective and meaningful multicultural education, individuals acquire multicultural competencies - multicultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. The individual components of multicultural competence and their content are introduced in the first part of the paper.

Multicultural education is also a **reform movement** that is trying to change the school and other educational institutions so that students from all social-class, gender, racial, language, and cultural groups will have an equal opportunity to learn. Multicultural education involves changes in the total school or educational environment. It is not limited to curricular changes (Banks & Banks, 2007).



### 1.3.2. Concept of intercultural learning

The second concept of correlation of intercultural competence and critical thinking that we will present is the concept of **intercultural learning**. Ideological bases of intercultural learning correspond to the specific educational tools which can be described by four pillars (Buryánek, 2002). These pillars are not partial, independently existing entities, but are in mutual correlation. It is pedagogical constructivism, critical thinking, interactive teaching and cooperation.

**Pedagogical constructivism** focuses on the way how the knowledge and understanding is developed, on the process, how we handle ambiguous reality, how we construct instrumental truths - we find beneficial. Pedagogical constructivism tries to respect the natural learning processes. Learning understood as spontaneous and substantially continuous human activity; people want and need to explore the world around them. The knowledge and skills that a person will acquire during problem solving are much more permanent than the seemingly easier and faster memorized and prepared right solutions.

**Critical thinking** is the ideal competence and intercultural education is concerned with the development of this competence. In relation to the objectives of intercultural education are especially important these competencies and objectives:

1. critically evaluate the complex and often "invisible" social mechanisms at the of society, small populations and small groups
2. understand the world in context (eg. causes of migratory movements, the influence of strong economies to global poverty, etc..)
3. distinguish between the causes and consequences of social processes (eg. ability to understand the fact that most marginalized individuals and groups are rather victims of social mechanisms, and not guilty of their own situation)
4. separate facts from interpretations, especially in the perception and evaluation of media messages
5. resist manipulation
6. be able to assess the situation from more than one perspective
7. recognize prejudices and negative stereotypes that prevent adequate and useful grasp of social problems

The third pillar refers to the need to change ingrained roles of teacher and student and the need for activation of all participants in the teaching. **Interactive teaching** (as one of the main didactic principles of pedagogical constructivism) requires the active participation of students in meeting the educational and training goals. The teacher and students become partners, which combines the efforts to achieve a common goal.

The last pillar - **cooperation** - refers to socialization ideal of teaching, not only in the context of intercultural education. Cooperation is the specific kind of interaction. If the third pillar says that while teaching is desirable maximum degree of communication and interaction between teacher and students and among students themselves, the fourth emphasizes how this interaction should look like.



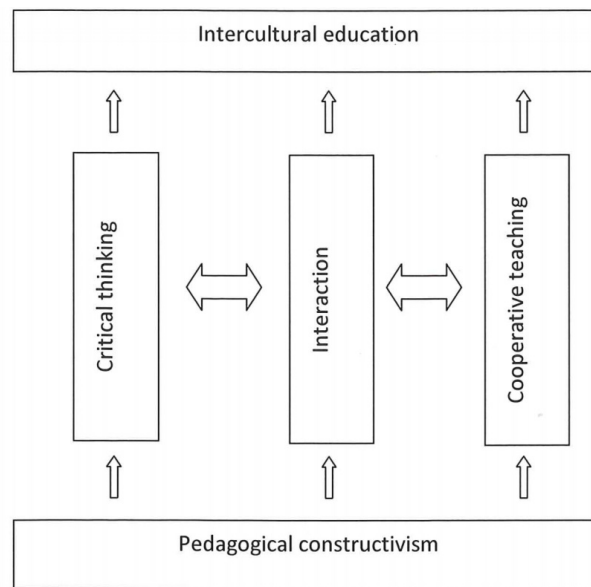


Fig. 3 Interaction model of critical thinking and intercultural learning

## 2. Conclusion

The paper gives the basic definition of the expected interaction between critical thinking and multicultural competencies. Explains how we conceptualize these phenomena and how they are built into the mutual relations. As part of a terminological definition of the issue, we assume for empirical examining following assumptions:

*We assume that there is a mutual relation between the level of critical thinking and multicultural competence of an individual.*

*We expect that the integration of critical thinking methods increases the multicultural competence of individuals in tertiary education.*

As it was already mentioned, these assumptions will be examined by the test which analyzes multicultural competence of an individual and by using the methods of critical thinking. Test is designed in correspondence with psycho-diagnostic methods of critical thinking and by test methods of analyzing the multicultural competence of an individual.

At the end of this paper we demonstrate the need, if not the necessity of linking the various methods, approaches, processes and phenomena to develop a comprehensive concept of multicultural education in tertiary education, and to increase personal and professional commitment of the students.

For our purposes, we will not deal with personal or professional involvement of students, but we will name it as the *multicultural commitment*, ie. student is able to deliver an opinion, participation and motivation of students to participate in multicultural issues and problems in Czech society. By the development of students' thinking through critical thinking we are creating a stimulating environment for the development of their worldview and fertile ground for the development of competent individuals in the 21st century.

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