CHAPTER 3

# Intercultural Learning and Images in ELT: Exploring Cultural Imaginaries through Photographs

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**Abstract:** This chapter presents an argument for the relevance of using photographs for intercultural learning in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. More specifically, we suggest that by activating, expanding, and challenging the cultural imaginaries learners bring to and take from photographs, a more dynamic form of intercultural learning can be encouraged. A dynamic form of intercultural learning emphasizes the "inter" of intercultural and dismantles the dichotomy between "us" and "them", making intercultural learning a personal and transformational process. Based on theoretical explorations and classroom experiences, we propose a set of general principles as well as three specific activities which have been implemented with secondary school and university-level learners. The activities all utilize photographs as prompts for reflective dialogues surrounding cultural imaginaries and aim to create complexity and multiplicity in the learners' understanding of themselves and others. Encouraging this type of understanding is crucial given the increasingly complex and culturally diverse environments learners need to navigate in their everyday lives, formal education, and future work lives.

## Introduction

The aim of the current chapter is firstly to provide a theoretical exploration of the utilisation of images, and photographs in particular, as a tool for intercultural learning, and secondly to suggest specific

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photograph-based classroom activities that aim to facilitate learners' reflections on and understanding of their own position when navigating between different cultural perspectives. In the last two decades, intercultural education has increasingly been recognized as an explicit aim of English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in many countries, including Norway (e.g., Faas et al., 2014; Grant & Portera, 2011). In parallel with this, theoretical and empirical investigations into *what* intercultural learning is and *how* it might best be promoted within EFL classrooms have proliferated. This chapter adds to these theoretical discussions by proposing that the field should incorporate more intercultural practices which emphasize the "inter" of intercultural and the fluidity of culture and identity; namely, practices that dismantle the "over here / over there" cultural divide. We feel that the need for this new focus is particularly acute as teachers and learners around the world negotiate new multicultural realities in their classrooms. We propose that one way of remedying some of the polarizing practices that weaken intercultural learning is by activating, expanding, and challenging the learners' cultural imaginaries through the use of photographs. As will be argued, the reading of cultural differences in photographs can be considered an intercultural encounter in its own right. Images play a central role in young people's lives today and have been shown to serve as a powerful basis for critical discussions surrounding interculturality in the language classroom (Brown, 2022; Hoff & Habegger-Conti, Forthcoming; Habegger-Conti, 2021; Heggernes, 2019). In the following, we will first discuss some challenges we have identified in intercultural education and outline the main principles behind approaching intercultural learning, which we define as "the process of developing the ability to navigate between different cultural perspectives" (Brown & Savić, in review). Following this, we will discuss the relationship between intercultural learning and the process of reading images through as an investigation of the social and cultural imaginaries that affect our readings. Finally, based on our theoretical explorations and classroom experiences, we will propose some general principles for working dialogically and reflectively with photographs in the EFL classroom as well as three activities for classroom use that aim to promote a more dynamic form of intercultural learning.

## Intercultural learning and EFL teaching in Norway

Intercultural education "emphasizes a particular intercultural perspective" and is a "way of understanding teaching and education […] which takes into account and tries to face with *all manner of diversity* which may be present in the classroom" (Portera, 2011, p. 21). As both a perspective on and a way of understanding education, intercultural education encompasses a declaration of *what* should be taught and how. Further, it is delineated through policy documents and curricula as well as research on education. In this chapter we refer to intercultural learning as a more specific component of intercultural education: namely, what occurs in the classroom in the processes of learning and interaction between teachers and pupils.

In practice, the premises of intercultural education tend to portray concepts like culture, nation and identity as stable and unified while also upholding an "our-culture/their-culture" binary (Dervin, 2015; Holliday, 2011). For example, even the reflective practice of decentring, which has been defined as "a willingness to suspend one's own values, beliefs and behaviours […] and an ability to see how they might look from an outsider's perspective" (Byram et al., 2009, p. 23) is premised on an "outside/inside", "centre/periphery" system. Firstly, it implies that the learner must somehow step out of his/her own perspective to understand "the other", which suggests that there is no "I" in the other; thus, there are no similarities or overlapping ground from which a common understanding can be built. Secondly, the idea of seeing something from someone else's perspective implies a degree of knowing that reduces the other to one's own epistemological system (Habegger-Conti, 2019). It may thus fall into essentialism and stereotyping, failing to consider that all cultures are comprised of individuals and that every culture "reflects and is constitutive of a multiplicity of voices reflecting a whole array of conflicting and competing discourses" (Crawford & McLaren, 2003, p. 131). We therefore suggest that intercultural learning should aim to create complexity and resist the urge to provide clear answers by bringing forth a multiplicity of perspectives and reflecting on their intersections and

contradictions. Similarly, through accepting the dynamic nature of identities and cultures, intercultural learning should also aim to be transformative, to "spur change in [the learners'] worldviews" (Kearney, 2016, p. 2), as opposed to treating "us" and "them" as static entities incapable of change.

In fact, several scholars have suggested that cultures should not be regarded as entities at all. Dervin (2015), for example, argues that one does not meet another culture "but people who (are made to) represent it – or rather represent imaginaries and representations of it" (p. 9). Kramsch (1998) has similarly argued that culture is "a discourse community that shares a common social space and history and common imaginings" (p. 19). Social imaginaries can be understood as "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings" and as "a common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). Gaonkar (2002) writes that imaginaries "exist by virtue of representation or implicit understandings, even when they acquire immense institutional force; and they are the means by which individuals understand their identities and their place in the world" (p. 4).

Cultural imaginaries help to form, but also keep in place, a society's main institutions, while simultaneously reinforcing "culture" as a single, stable entity. These imaginaries also help us to define others in such as way so as to highlight their differences from us. For example, we may consider indigenous cultures as "more traditional", and ourselves as "more modern" and reproduce these imaginaries when presenting certain aspects of Native Americans to our learners by only showing photographs of Native Americans wearing their traditional dress and not ever in business attire. Cultural imaginaries may also create labels about people that give legitimacy to a certain way of viewing the world. Words like "immigrant", "expat", or "economic migrant" are applied to different groups of people and reflect imaginaries about social class, economic status, and country of origin.

An awareness of culture as a common imagining has yet to constitute a starting point for intercultural inquiries in the English classroom. On the contrary, learners are asked to comprehend culture as a stable entity (even when allowing for diversity within a culture), to study culture as a

set of facts that can be learned, and to view other cultures as fundamentally different from their own. We therefore propose a radically different understanding of culture in intercultural education and a shift in practice from learning *about* other cultures to learning about the way that we *imagine* cultures to be (including our own) and why.

From this perspective, intercultural learning can be seen as deeply personal and as being equally concerned with gaining increased awareness of oneself in relationship to others as it is about gaining awareness of others. However, while there has been a relatively consistent focus in the literature on intercultural education on knowledge, skills, and attitudes, self-awareness is often overlooked or not separated from the knowledge-component (cf. Khanukaeva, 2020). In line with this, self-awareness is often treated as a *means* towards understanding the other, rather than as an aim in itself. As argued by Kramsch:

> Breaking down stereotypes is not just realising that people are not the way one thought they were, or that deep down 'we are all the same'. It is understanding that we are irreducibly unique and different, and that I could have been you, you could have been me, given different circumstances – in other words, that the stranger, as Kristeva says, is in us. (1995, p. 85)

It is only by working within the realm of the personal that these understandings can be created, expanded, and further nuanced, and as such it is here that the "inter", the betweenness, can be addressed. The aim of intercultural learning should therefore not just be to examine different perspectives but to create opportunities for expanding, challenging, and/or reconsidering one's own. As a result, learners should also be guided to challenge and/or reconsider the uniqueness and differences that reside within their home country.

Another challenge of intercultural education is that the concept of intercultural competence itself is often treated as a stable and unified concept as opposed to an ongoing and never-ending process (Dervin, 2015; Lund, 2008) which can manifest itself differently in different contexts. By seeing intercultural learning as deeply personal and transformational, there is a need to recognize that "discomfort, anger, and annoyance are part of the process" (Dervin, 2015, p. 96), and thus challenge the idealistic

notion that intercultural competence can lead to complete harmony and acceptance of differing viewpoints.

Similarly limiting perspectives can be seen in how intercultural learning is defined and operationalised in the curriculum for English in Norway. While the curriculum recognizes the diversity within nation borders, for example when it is stated that the subjects shall provide the foundation for "communicating with others, both locally and globally" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 1), there seems to still be an equation between culture and language, seen for example in the use of the phrase "encounters with [...] English-language cultures" (p. 7). This reductive concept of culture can be problematic as it can "rid 'the other' of his/her plurality" (Dervin, 2015, p. 13) and has implications for intercultural learning, where students should develop an understanding of the "different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 1) of an implicit "other". The curriculum further states that the English subject should "open for new perspectives on the world and ourselves" and "develop the pupils' understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 2), but it provides little guidance for how teachers can achieve this goal. Moreover, these ideals are not reflected in the specific competence aims for learners, which ask learners to compare the difference of the rest of the world (other, periphery) to Norway (normal, centre). For example, after Year 4 learners are expected to "talk about some aspects of different ways of living, traditions and customs in the English-speaking world and in Norway". Without specific guidance for how teachers should lead learners to this goal, and by maintaining a "rest of the world" and "Norway" divide, such aims undermine the overarching goals of intercultural education defined by the curriculum. In Year 10, the final year of obligatory education in Norway, the specific competence aims lead learners towards a unidirectional acquisition of knowledge, asking them to "explore and describe ways of living, ways of thinking, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019, p. 9). As such, while working with this type of competence aim in the EFL classroom "*may* entail a

critical investigation and comparison of different worldviews (including the learners' own)" (Hoff, 2018, p. 78), this is not explicitly stated, even though the verb "to explore" is defined by the curriculum as "in some cases" including "to investigate different aspects of an issue through open and critical discussion" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2018, p. 16).

Based on the challenges described above, we propose that intercultural learning is better understood as developing the ability to navigate between a multiplicity of cultural perspectives. An important part of this is that intercultural education should include practices which help learners understand the situatedness of their own perspectives and imaginaries, and practices which do not aim to search for any one "truth" or "answer" but rather a multiplicity and complexity of truths and answers. Perhaps most importantly, intercultural learning needs practices that allow for discomfort and tension in the classroom as both learners and teachers explore opposing feelings and beliefs. In the following, we will discuss the ways in which images, and photographs in particular, can provide a powerful starting point for engaging in these types of practices in the EFL classroom.

## Using images for intercultural learning in the EFL classroom

The process of making meaning from images, as with any other text, is deeply connected to cultural practices. Images communicate through already-formed pictures in our head about what a thing is. For visual recognition to occur – for learners to understand what it is they are seeing – they must be able to confirm and organize visual codes according to what is already known (the word "recognize" literally means to "know again"). For example, which cultures we consider as "modern" is grounded in our imaginaries of what "modern" *looks like* to us (Habegger-Conti, 2018, p. 49). Lippmann (1922/2017), one of the first scholars to study stereotypes as "pictures in our heads", writes:

> For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out

> what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture. (p. 81)

Images may also activate our cultural imaginaries more quickly and easily than written text as our markers of cultural difference are mainly visual: hair and skin colour, style of clothing, etc. Because of the way and speed with which visual recognition occurs, we argue that images offer a unique possibility for investigating not only the imaginaries that are enacted in the representation of a culture but also those which arise in our culturally situated readings of these images (Habegger-Conti, 2018, p. 49).

Central to this argument is the fact that the reading of images can be considered an intercultural encounter in its own right. As stated above, the markers of difference that activate our imaginaries will often be visual, whether they are activated in face-to-face encounters or mediated through images. Consequently, a textbook image of someone who is marked as different will allow learners to form some impressions about the peoples and cultures that are represented, while the meaning taken from the image will also be guided by learners' previous imaginaries, beliefs, and assumptions. In this sense, the reading of an image created in a cultural context different from one's own can be seen as "a form of intercultural communication in itself" (Hoff, 2016, p. 52), a communication between the learners' previous imaginaries/meanings and the imaginaries/meanings at play in the image. While a learner may never travel to Ghana or India, and while a learner might not encounter people from these parts of the world in their everyday lives, they will still have ample access to encounters mediated through visual media. Moreover, as opposed to real-life intercultural encounters, the reading of images allows the reader the possibility to slow down the processes that happen during meaning-making and reflect on them. As Sturken and Cartwright (2009) argue, "To interpret images is to examine the assumptions that we and others bring to them at different times and in different places" (p. 46). By engaging in interpretation and reflection, the personal and cultural imaginaries can be brought out into the open and a more multifaceted understanding can be created, indicative of intercultural learning.

In this context, photographs must be seen as particularly powerful potential intercultural encounters. Photographs often go unanalysed and unchallenged because of the common belief that a photograph depicts reality accurately (Sherwin, 2008). The "truth claim" that we give to photographs means that we more readily accept photographic representations as factual rather than as constructed. We may ignore the role of the photographer or editor in creating a photo, or a particular context for the photo (a textbook including images of people with darker skin tones in a unit on "immigrants" may unwittingly define people with brown skin as outsiders of the majority culture). And while the (mis)recognition of an image of a person with brown skin as an "immigrant" may function at the level of the imagined, this categorization is also enacted outward to the real world as we determine who belongs and does not belong to "our culture". This is particularly problematic in FL education where photographs are made to represent a culture, or subculture, rather than an individual, and photographs included in EFL textbooks have been found to portray a "fragmentary, one-sided and superficial" presentation of cultural groups (Lund, 2006, p. 281). Moreover, an image is by default a static representation, drawn or shot from a single perspective, unlike a literary text which may be heteroglossic and provide opportunities for exploring stories from several angles. Photographs in the FL classroom may thus lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes and single stories about a particular nation or culture or individual. As Nigerian author Adichie (2009) explains, to "show a people as one thing, and only one thing, over and over again" represents not only a form of stereotyping but an abuse of power: "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person".

Nevertheless, the very roadblocks to the aims of intercultural education that photographs and our practices of visual recognition constitute may also be used to create complexity and resist the urge to provide clear answers. By investigating our cultural imaginaries through photographs, we can help learners to develop "thick descriptions" of people or cultures (as opposed to thin, superficial knowledge; Holliday, 2011, pp. 28–29), and thus encourage the creation of a richer story, based on multiple perspectives, along with a better understanding of the complexities of discourse

and ideologies. Moreover, unlike a verbal text that requires comprehension of a specific language, photographs are immediately comprehensible to learners of all language levels. They are also easily accessible as a teaching tool: plentiful in textbooks and other EFL learning materials and within hand's reach on laptops and mobile phones. Photographs may thus be some of the best tools we have in the FL classroom for encouraging the type of intercultural learning that seeks to examine different perspectives while simultaneously helping us to challenge and reconsider our own.

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the cultural significance of images within the field of FL research. This can be seen in the growing number of studies investigating images in EFL textbooks with a specific focus on culture (e.g., Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017; Derakhshan, 2021; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). However, fewer studies have investigated how images are actually interpreted and engaged with in EFL settings, or how we can best engage with them to promote intercultural learning. The research that has been conducted supports the argument made above that learners use their existing knowledge, experiences, and imaginaries to make meaning from photographs when other context is missing (e.g., Brown, 2019; Kiss & Weninger, 2017). Likewise, instructional studies have pointed to the potential of engaging with images in the EFL classroom to encourage empathy, perspective taking, and cultural awareness (Heggernes, 2019; Lindner & Garcia, 2014; Yeom, 2019); to gain awareness of one's own and other's perspectives (Yeom, 2019); and to modify previous stereotypes (Forsman, 2010). Importantly, however, the studies all point to the significance of facilitating in-depth engagement with the images to reach these aims, for example through structured questions (Lindner & Garcia, 2014), questions which encourage reflection on stereotypes more generally (Forsman, 2010), or allowing learners to co-construct meaning by letting them explore possible answers themselves through asking open questions (Brown, 2022; Heggernes, 2019). Building on this research, as well as the theoretical framework presented above, we will in the following propose and discuss some general principles and three specific classroom activities which can be utilized in the EFL classroom when working with photographs to promote intercultural learning.

## General principles and specific classroom activities

The general principles we will suggest here are grounded in Freire's (1970/1993) problem-posing model of education, which was proposed as a counterpart to the traditional "banking" model of education. In the banking model of education, teachers are seen as keepers of knowledge, which can then be transmitted to the learners who will passively receive, memorize, and repeat it. Classroom discourse will focus on reporting on what is already known, i.e., recalling and displaying assigned information (Nystrand et al., 2003). In the problem-posing model of education, on the other hand, teachers and learners explore, learn, and solve problems together through critical dialogue. Rather than asking questions which aim to elicit pre-defined answers, teachers pose open questions and allow the dialogue to develop from the learners' contributions. Although originally situated within the field of critical pedagogy, we believe that this approach to education is aligned with the aims of intercultural learning in several ways.

Firstly, if, as we have suggested here, culture is viewed as multifaceted, dynamic, and diverse, then it follows that any attempts at addressing culture in the classroom, whether through photographs or otherwise, must aim to disrupt rather than reinforce reductive imaginaries surrounding cultural groups. As such, the creation of complexity is an important aim in itself. One way to create such complexity is through dialogue, as dialogue can prompt learners to "examine issues from different angles, broaden their views, and deepen their understanding of the text, and, by extension, the world around them" (Abednia, 2015, p. 84). However, this type of dialogue cannot be created through asking questions which aim to elicit pre-defined answers, as these types of questions have the effect of restricting rather than encouraging classroom dialogues. As such, an important principle for creating complexity through classroom dialogue is to pose authentic questions; that is, questions which are asked without a predefined answer in mind and which allow for a range of responses.

Secondly, if intercultural learning aims to be transformative, then the *process* of learning is as important as the outcome. When teachers ask closed questions with pre-defined answers in mind, the focus is on the

answer and the process is overlooked. By engaging in authentic dialogue in which learner contributions are considered important and valuable, learners are seen as agents capable of creating meaning, rather than just receiving it. As such, through this process they can engage in real learning and real transformation (Freire, 1970/1993) initiated partly by themselves. A second important principle is therefore that the teacher allows the learners space and time to work through problems and co-construct new understandings together. To achieve this, teachers need to be keenly aware of their own position of power in the classroom and avoid guiding the learners towards specific ideological positions (McConachy, 2018). In addition to asking authentic questions, this also entails withholding evaluative statements, both positive and negative, and resisting the urge to provide answers (Brown, 2022; Heggernes, 2019).

Furthermore, as outlined previously, intercultural learning is personal and transformative, and classroom activities should therefore allow for tension and discomfort as learners and teachers engage in exploring opposing feelings and beliefs and in challenging their own. When teachers invite learners to bring their own experiences, beliefs, and feelings into the classroom dialogue, they are also asking them to expose themselves – to become vulnerable to the comments and judgements of their peers and teachers. The types of topics dealt with in relation to cultural beliefs and imaginaries are often very sensitive in nature and may lead to conflicts between groups of learners in the classroom (Granville, 2003). A third principle is therefore to actively create a classroom environment for dialogue; an environment in which disagreements are encouraged, but within a framework which is recognized by mutual respect and trust between learners and between learners and teachers alike. This includes making the aims and rules of classroom dialogue explicit, e.g., openness, humility, respect for difference of opinion, and scaffolding the process by providing continuous feedback and advice on how to be a good listener, e.g., by providing eye-contact and paying attention to the responses by their peers (Abednia, 2015).

We suggest that these principles should underpin any activity and discussion which aims to encourage intercultural learning. That is, to encourage intercultural learning which is aimed at creating complexity in

the learners' understandings, rather than a divide between our culture / their culture, and which is transformative and personal, rather than merely academic, teachers should aim to 1) engage in dialogue *with* the learners, 2) allow learners to take a lead in the common co-construction of complexity, and 3) facilitate an environment where learners feel free to be vulnerable and to respectfully disagree with each other. In the following, we will propose a set of three specific activities which utilize photographs as a starting point for such dialogues and then discuss these in relation to their affordances for intercultural learning within the EFL classroom. Our experiences with these activities in both upper-secondary and university classrooms provide the basis for our discussion and reflections. However, we believe that with some adaptations, these activities can also be used in lower secondary and primary school classrooms.

## Reflecting on and challenging imaginaries through photographs

As argued previously, imaginaries develop and are reinforced as people interact with their environments, whether in real life or mediated through various media, and these imaginaries are often activated visually. While imaginaries are unavoidable, or perhaps because they are, it is important to facilitate an increased awareness and critical reflections on these in order to promote intercultural learning. With the following activities these imaginaries can be activated, challenged and/or expanded through the use of photographs in the EFL classroom. The activities were selected based on our classroom experiences with them, in teacher education and/or as part of a PhD research project conducted in an upper secondary school (Brown, 2021), as being particularly useful for moving the focus away from the "other" as a separate entity, and towards oneself in relation to others.

### Activity I – Blindfold task

The first activity, which we have named "Blindfold task", is inspired by Vasquez et al. (2013) and involves the learners in making guesses about what

a photograph of a specific group of people might look like and, following this, reflecting on the sources of these assumptions in classroom discussions. Depending on the level of engagement in the follow-up dialogue, the activity may take between 10–20 minutes. The activity does not require any pre-knowledge on the part of the learners and may in fact be best suited at the start of a teaching unit on a specific cultural group as a way of activating the learners' prior knowledge. The aims of the activity are for the learners to 1) develop their awareness of their own imaginaries, i.e., self-awareness, and 2) challenge these imaginaries and reflect on their origins.

In preparation for the activity, the teacher should find a photograph depicting people from a cultural group that they want to focus on. The photograph should break with common imaginaries about the group in one or more ways (for example, the photo could depict an older Native American man dressed in a business suit in a city setting). It is advantageous if the specific cultural group is one that the learners are likely to be familiar with through various media as the activity will work best if the learners have rich imaginaries about the group. The grouping can be defined either broadly (e.g., Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants) or more narrowly (e.g., "thugs", politicians).

The activity is conducted in two stages in a full-class setting. During the first stage, the teacher tells the learners that they will show them a photograph depicting the chosen cultural group. For the sake of simplicity, we will in the following use "Native Americans" as the chosen group. It is important that the photograph remains hidden at this point, but the teacher can provide some contextual information (e.g., that it is a group of Native Americans). The teacher then asks the learners to imagine what the photograph will look like. To scaffold this imaginative process, a list of questions can be displayed for the learners, focusing their attention on different aspects of their imaginaries. The questions could for example be:

1. What are the ages of the people in the photograph?
2. What are they wearing?
3. What are they doing?
4. Where will they be?

5. What other things might we see in this photograph (items/buildings/surroundings)?
6. What type of colours will the photograph have?

The learners should be given 2–3 minutes to imagine the photograph and note down their thoughts, individually or in pairs. Following this, the learners are invited to share their thinking in a full-class discussion, and the teacher may write down the ideas that come up to create a visual representation of the class's joint imaginaries. Once the sharing of ideas is over, the learners can be asked to reflect on why these were the ideas that came to mind, thus starting to address the second aim related to reflecting on the origins of their imaginaries.

Following this, the second stage of the activity is initiated by showing the photograph to the learners. It can be advantageous if this is displayed on a big screen so that everyone gets time to look at it in some detail. After giving the learners a minute to read the image, the teacher initiates a discussion on whether or not their imagined photograph conformed with the actual photograph, and if so, in what ways it was similar or different. Frequently, this part of the activity will contain an element of surprise for the learners if the photograph is sufficiently different from what they are accustomed to seeing. Regardless of whether it did or did not conform with the learners' imaginaries, however, the reflections on the similarities and differences between the imagined and real photograph can form a powerful basis for a discussion on why this was or was not the case. In this way, the learners can jointly reflect on their own imaginaries and the effects of these, as well as their origin, which in turn promotes self-awareness.

## Activity II – Which country is this a photo of and why?

Activities that point to our knowledge about other cultures as "a common imagining" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 19) can help learners to recognize that culture is a social construction, not an actual entity that exists. With this in mind, the second activity for exploring imaginaries with photographs is called "Which country is this a photo of and why?". It has been adapted from the Reading International Solidarity Centre's (RISC) online toolkit

for challenging stereotypes, “Brazil or UK?”. The activity asks learners to guess whether the people represented in the photographs live in Brazil, India, or the UK, and then to explain what in the photograph makes them think that. The activity is best run in small groups for about 10 minutes (or enough time to think, respond, and listen to what others in the group have to say). Another 15–20 minutes can be used afterwards for a classroom discussion and summary for a total of around 30 minutes. The main aims of the activity are 1) to explore our imaginaries of Brazil, India, and the UK; 2) to reflect on the sources of these imaginaries; and 3) to become more aware of diversity within cultures and nations.

In preparation for the activity, the teacher can use the 22 photographs available on the RISC toolkit website (risc.org.uk/toolkit) or find images from the internet that do not immediately look like the places they are (for example, the RISC toolkit uses an image of a child on Santa’s lap from Brazil and a park filled with deer from India). The images can be downloaded from the website and photocopied so that each learner or group has a copy to work from, or they can be displayed on a screen. If time is limited, or to make the task slightly easier for younger learners, the teacher may want to choose a smaller selection of photographs.

At the beginning of the activity, the teacher should explain that the main goal is not getting the right answer; rather, what is most important is what the learners think and why they think this. The learners should first be asked to look at the images individually and decide on the countries that the photographs are from. The learners should then be divided into groups (4–5) where they share their answers and explain to each other why they chose as they did. (In our experience the learners are still very interested in who guessed correctly, but this initial excitement did not detract from eventually discussing their imaginaries about the UK, Brazil, and India.)

The groups will then share their responses in a full-class setting with their teachers. The teacher can help to encourage the ‘why’ part of the discussion. If, for example, learners chose the photograph of the deer as coming from the UK, the teacher can ask: What makes this look like the UK? Where do our ideas about what the UK looks like come from? Why did not you choose India for the deer photo?

Depending on the age level and ability for critical thinking, the teacher may simply summarize the lesson in terms of "how we imagine India / the UK / Brazil to be" versus how we usually see it depicted, or, with more mature students, ask the learners to think about why we need or want to imagine these countries this way, and how these imaginaries help us define ourselves. (For example, the fact that we think of India as having only elephants and tigers, may help us to define our own culture as "normal" and the culture of India as "exotic", or very different from ours.)

## Activity III – Exploring the single story: Cultural belonging and individual identity

So far, the activities have been focused on activating the learners' imaginaries and promoting self-awareness. The final activity presented here builds on this but extends the focus to creating complexity in the learners' understanding of themselves and others by helping them 1) to challenge the existence of any one "truth" about a culture, also within their own community; 2) to seek out and create multiple, and thus more complex, stories about a culture; and 3) to reflect on single stories in their own culture and the extent to which they feel that cultural imaginings are important to an individual's identity. This activity should be given at least 30–45 minutes so that learners have sufficient time to think and reflect.

To prepare for the activity, the teacher should find a photograph from the internet that contains strong cultural associations for the country in which they are teaching. (In Norway, for example, this might be a photograph of snowy mountains with skiers, a photo of a sweater knitted in a traditional pattern, or a photo of someone wearing a *bunad*, the Norwegian national costume).

At the start of the activity, the teacher shows the learners the photograph and asks them to write down the first 2–3 things that come to mind when they see this photograph. Their associations can then be shared with the class and written down by the teacher on either the blackboard or a similar visual tool. This visual representation of the class's association can then work as support during the ensuing discussion in which the class will come up with a single story that the photo tells (for example, "Norwegians ski").

In the second stage of the activity, students should discuss the following in small groups (4–5):

1. Where do you think this story about Norwegians comes from?
2. Is it still an important story to use when describing Norwegian culture today?
3. To what extent do you feel that this story defines you?
4. What other stories could be told about Norwegians?

In the third and final stage of the activity, the teacher will ask the learners to perform their own search for images of a particular country (for example, "India") or a particular group of people (for example, "Irish" or "Native Americans"). In groups they should discuss the following:

1. What single stories about ____ do you find in the images on the internet?
2. Where do you think these stories come from?
3. What other stories can be told about these people / this country?

To conclude this activity, the teacher may initiate a discussion with the learners about the extent to which it might be helpful or harmful to create single stories about a nation's cultures, and the extent to which any group of people can agree on a single identity. Some questions to help learners consider different perspectives on identity and culture could be:

1. In what ways might it be helpful to create single stories about a nation's culture? In what ways might this be harmful?
2. Why might people choose to identify with a national culture?
3. Who is included and excluded by our stories about national cultures?

A possible follow-up activity, which could also be connected to a textbook unit on a particular country or culture, asks learners to actively search for additional images about that country or culture, and then create a digital

montage (using free online tools like Google's Book Creator or Padlet) with the aim of showing multiple and differing, or even contradictory stories about a people or culture. In this way, the learners are encouraged to construct more complex understandings of the cultural group in question. With older learners, the teacher can also initiate a higher-level discussion about what the consequences of single stories might be for how we understand people as similar or different to ourselves.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, we have argued that some of the challenges in intercultural education can be addressed by focusing more attention on the "inter" of intercultural education; that is, the intricate, complex, and dynamic relationships between ourselves and various others. We have proposed that by approaching cultures as imaginaries – as assumptions, beliefs, and ideas we and others carry – the divide between our culture / their culture can be problematized. Furthermore, as these imaginaries are activated visually, we have suggested that photographs can be a powerful tool in the EFL classroom to initiate the type of reflective dialogues necessary for intercultural learning to be personal and transformational, and to aim for complexity and multiplicity.

Based on this, we have proposed some general principles as well as specific activities for how photographs can be used as prompts for reflective dialogues surrounding cultural imaginaries in the EFL classroom. While our experiences with these activities have been restricted to the upper-secondary and university level, we believe that given sufficient scaffolding (e.g., use of L1 vs. L2, simplification of the questions and dialogues) the activities can also be adapted for use in lower secondary and primary school classrooms. Additionally, we would like to point out that such activities do not need to be treated as one-off events. Rather, we suggest that the underlying principles and the types of questions presented here could strengthen an approach to intercultural learning and images in the ELT classroom more generally. Moreover, it can be advantageous to, for example, routinely discuss learners' imaginaries when encountering new photographs in textbooks or other media. Given the centrality of

images in today's society and their significant "role in shaping individual and collective attitudes, beliefs and identities" (Gil-Glazer, 2019, p. 68), we believe it is crucially important to see photographs not simply as illustrations but as intercultural encounters, and to analyse and discuss them through the lens of cultural imaginaries.

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