

## Developing learners' intercultural communicative competence using thinking routines in inquiry-based English language teaching

### Nyelvtanulók interkulturális kommunikatív kompetenciájának fejlesztési lehetőségei gondolkodási stratégiák felhasználásával a gimnáziumi információalapú angolnyelv-tanulás során

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#### Absztrakt

A tanulmány célja bemutatni, hogy miként fejleszthetők a gimnazista korú nyelvtanulók interkulturális kommunikatív kompetenciái gondolkodási stratégiák alkalmazásával az angol mint idegennyelv információalapú tanulása során. A bevezetőben meghatározzuk az interkulturális kommunikatív kompetencia fogalmát, valamint fejlesztésének kiemelt helyét a hazai, jelenleg is érvényben lévő *Nemzeti alaptanterv*ben. Ezt követően az információalapú nyelvtanulás koncepciójának ismertetésekor annak olyan elemeit gyűjtjük össze, amelyek a nyelvtanulás támogatását szolgálják az információalapú társadalomban zajló idegennyelv-tanítás során. A gondolkodási stratégiák bemutatásakor kiemeljük szerepüket a tanulói gondolkodási tevékenységek segítésében, valamint, hogy miként segítik a tanulókat saját gondolkodási tevékenységeikre adott reflexiójukban. A tanulók metakognitív tudatosságának fejlesztésével a tanárok lehetővé teszik számukra, hogy megtervezzék, nyomon kövessék és irányítsák tanulási folyamataikat. A tanulmány további részében olyan gondolkodási stratégiákra adunk példákat, amelyek (1) információk keresésére és feltárására, (2) információelemek szintetizálására és rendszerezésére használhatók, valamint (3) további releváns információk keresésének hatékonyságát támogatják. Az angol mint idegennyelv tanórákon kipróbált feladatok elvégzése során a nyelvtanulók interkulturális kommunikatív kompetenciái fejlődnek. A tanulmány összefoglalásaként összegyűjtjük a gondolkodási stratégiák tanításának és tanulásának előnyeit, amelyek az angol mint idegennyelv gimnáziumi tanórai keretek között történő tanítása során a nyelvtanulók fejlődését segítik elő.

**Kulcsszavak:** interkulturális kommunikatív kompetencia, gondolkodási stratégiák, metakognitív tudatosság, információalapú angolnyelv-tanítás

## Abstract

The paper explores the development of the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of high-school learners of English as a foreign language through the implementation of thinking routines within an inquiry-based language teaching framework. Emphasizing the importance of ICC, the paper begins by situating this competence within the Hungarian National Core Curriculum. The inquiry-based language teaching approach is then examined, highlighting its alignment with the needs of teaching English as a foreign language in an information-based society and its efficacy in promoting active English language learning. The paper introduces thinking routines as strategic tools that teachers can employ to scaffold learners' thinking and enhance their metacognitive awareness. Subsequently, three thinking routines are presented as implemented during English lessons in a Hungarian high school. The paper argues that such an approach not only improves linguistic proficiency but also equips learners with the intercultural communicative competence necessary for meaningful engagement in our globalized, information-based society.

**Keywords:** intercultural communicative competence, thinking routines, metacognitive awareness, inquiry-based English language teaching

## 1. Introduction

In today's information-based society, due to the pervasive presence and affordability of digital technology (Cope & Kalantzis, 2010), English language teaching (ELT) strategies should be in line with the learners' needs so that they can construct their ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2010) across cultures, contexts and learning environments (both offline and online). Being able to communicate across cultural contexts in an information-based society involves being an intercultural communicator. Teachers of English as a foreign language therefore need to be able to develop the intercultural communicative competence of their learners in a way that allows them to effectively take part in offline and virtual discourse in English.

The present paper showcases the possibilities for developing the intercultural communicative competence of high-school learners of English with the help of thinking routines in inquiry-based English language teaching. The introduction highlights the concept of intercultural communicative competence with a special focus on its presence in the Hungarian National Core Curriculum. The inquiry-based language teaching approach is then described, shedding light on the features that are conducive to fostering language learning in today's information-based society. The thinking routines are then introduced as strategies used by teachers for scaffolding thinking and tools to help learners become aware of their own cognitive resources in relation to task demands. By building learners' metacognitive awareness, teachers enable them to plan, monitor and control their learning processes. In the rest of the paper, examples of thinking routines are provided that can be used (1) for introducing and exploring ideas, (2) for synthesizing and organizing ideas, and (3) for digging

deeper into ideas. The tasks in relation to which each thinking routine is described are designed to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence during classroom English skills development teaching cycles. In the conclusion of the paper, the advantages of using thinking routines in inquiry-based English language teaching aimed at developing learners' intercultural communicative competence are collected.

## **2. Constructs of intercultural communicative competence and their presence in the Hungarian National Core Curriculum of 2020**

Intercultural communicative competence has been seen as an extension of communicative competence as it is “to a large extent the ability to cope with one’s own cultural background in interaction with others” (Beneke, 2000, p. 109). In order to be able to understand and relate to the cultural background of a person, the constituents of culture should be taken into consideration. Holló (2019) proposes a working definition of culture in language teaching and sees it as a “a set of common values, knowledge, views, ideas, behavioural and communication patterns and attitudes which people learn during the socialisation process” (p. 17). They can be decisive for the members of a certain group of people and can distinguish them from other groups. Holló (2019) classifies a person’s knowledge elements of culture into three thematic groups: (1) civilization, (2) communication and behaviour and (3) discourse structure and composition.

It was Bárdos (2004) who decided to place ‘cultural competence’ at the centre of the communicative competence model, arguing that the components of the latter are all culturally embedded. In his view, linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences all derive from cultural dispositions, claiming that culture could impact the ways speakers respond (both cognitively and affectively) to situations (Bárdos, 2002). Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard and Philippou (2014) elaborated on the compositional model of intercultural competence as being a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to:

- understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself;
- respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people;
- establish positive and constructive relationships with such people;
- understand oneself and one’s own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural ‘difference’. (Barrett et al., 2014, pp. 16–17).

Intercultural communicative competence entails “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive and behavioural orientations to the world”

(Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 7). The appropriate and effective management of such interactions requires learning about and interpreting other people's cultural perspectives and relate them to one's own. Interculturally competent speakers are "able to use their intercultural encounters to learn about and reflect critically on their own cultural affiliations" (Barrett et al., 2014, p. 23).

The Hungarian National Core Curriculum (NCC) of 2020, being a strategic document compulsory for all educational institutions and stakeholders, provides the ideological-theoretical-philosophical grounds for the main areas of knowledge to be conveyed. Framework curricula have been developed for the 4, 6 and 8-grade secondary grammar schools and they determine the contextual regulatory frameworks of grades 5–12, 7–12 and 9–12 respectively, while also providing support in terms of both curriculum and methodology. The 2020 NCC requires the development of foreign-language competences in four key areas: (1) mediation, (2) written communication, (3) daily language use and (4) interculturality and civilization (Farczádi Bencze et al., 2020). As Farczádi Bencze and his colleagues (2020) point out, one aim of foreign language teaching should be to enable language learners to get to know the people and cultures that use the target foreign language, through which the learners can engage with the target culture(s). The emergence of English as a *lingua franca* (i.e. English used to communicate among people from different first language backgrounds) raises questions of teaching culture in the age of global English (Kimmel, 2020). During foreign language learning, the learners' personal and social competences develop, as well as their awareness of their own and other cultures. The activity ideas presented in section 5 of this paper contribute to the development of high-school English language learners' intercultural communicative competence while raising their awareness of differences between traditions, the process of creating a report in English and structuring a text-based discussion in English.

### 3. Inquiry-based ELT fostering language learning in the information-based society

When learning English as a foreign language, learners are immersed in an environment full of potential meanings. Learners should engage in perception, action and interpretation in a continuous cycle of mutual reinforcement so that meaning can emerge (van Lier, 2004). In an information-based society, meaning can be seen as information. The classroom practices which involve the promotion of learning through "guided and increasingly independent investigation" of complex information are part of a teaching strategy that centres inquiry-based learning (Lee et al., 2004, p. 9). When learners are encouraged to explore new information and meanings through personal discoveries and exploration, (1) they can actively build their knowledge and understanding, (2) develop their cognition and metacognition, (3) experience changes in their affective and cognitive domains as they progress and (4) need time to reflect on and process new information and meanings (Ismael & Elias, 2006). Inquiry-based learning has certain governing principles which are summarized in Table 1.

Principle 1	Principle 2	Principle 3	Principle 4
Learners are at the centre of the entire process, while teachers, resources and technology are adequately organized to support them.	All learning activities revolve around information-processing skills.	Teachers facilitate the learning process.	Emphasis should be placed on evaluating the development of information-processing skills and conceptual understanding.

Table 1. Principles of inquiry-based learning (proposed by the author)

In inquiry-based instruction, learners are allowed to fully explore problems and scenarios, so that they can learn from not only the results, but also the process itself. Learners are encouraged to ask questions, do research (e.g. web quests), and obtain evidence that supports their claims and results. There are four forms of inquiry that are commonly used in inquiry-based teaching (Table 2).

<b>Confirmation inquiry</b>	Learners are given a question, as well as a method, the result of which is already known. The goal is to confirm the results. This enables learners to reinforce already established ideas, and to practice their research skills.
<b>Confirmation inquiry</b>	Learners are given the question and the method of achieving the result, but the goal is to provide an explanation that is supported by the evidence gathered during the research.
<b>Guided inquiry</b>	Learners are only given a research question. The main goal is to design the method of research and then test the question itself.
<b>Open inquiry</b>	Learners must form their own questions, design research methods, and then carry out the inquiry itself. They must present their results or findings at the end of the process.

Table 2. Four forms of inquiry (based on Mackenzie, 2016)

#### 4. Visible Thinking and thinking routines

In 2005, researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education concluded a five-year project exploring how to cultivate thinking dispositions in diverse school settings. They and their collaborators in various schools developed an approach, called “Visible Thinking”, with thinking routines as its core practice. Visible Thinking consists of six key principles as shown in Table 3.

<b>1. Learning is a consequence of thinking.</b>	Learners' understanding of content, and their ability to retrieve information increases when they think through—and with—the concepts and information they are studying, very often while sharing and building on one another's knowledge.
<b>2. Good thinking is not only a matter of skills, but also a matter of dispositions.</b>	Open-mindedness, curiosity, attention to evidence, scepticism, and imaginativeness are characteristics that are anchored to cognitive skills.
<b>3. The development of thinking is a social endeavour.</b>	The sociocultural character of classrooms and schools should ensure that thoughtful learning is pervasive, not sporadic.
<b>4. Fostering thinking requires making thinking visible.</b>	Effective thinkers make their thinking visible, meaning they externalize their thoughts through speaking, writing, drawing, or some other method so that they can then direct and improve those thoughts. Visible Thinking also emphasizes documenting thinking for later reflection.
<b>5. Classroom culture sets the tone for learning and shapes what is learned.</b>	Eight forces that shape classroom culture: (1) classroom routines and structures for learning, (2) language and conversational patterns, (3) implicit and explicit expectations, (4) time allocation, (5) modelling by teachers and others, (6) the physical environment, (7) relationships and patterns of interaction, and (8) the creation of opportunities. Depending on their form, these forces can support or undermine the rhythm of thoughtful learning.
<b>6. Schools must be cultures of thinking for teachers.</b>	Eight forces that shape classroom culture: (1) classroom routines and structures for learning, (2) language and conversational patterns, (3) implicit and explicit expectations, (4) time allocation, (5) modelling by teachers and others, (6) the physical environment, (7) relationships and patterns of interaction, and (8) the creation of opportunities. Depending on their form, these forces can support or undermine the rhythm of thoughtful learning.

Table 3. Key principles of Visible Thinking (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2008, pp. 57–58.)

Thinking routines are “simple strategies for scaffolding thinking that were designed to be woven into a teacher’s ongoing classroom practice” (Ritchhart, Church & Morrison, 2011, p. xvii.). Ritchhart et al. (2011) see thinking as a cognitive skill to develop understanding, and routines are thought of as “any procedure, process or pattern of action that is used repeatedly to manage and facilitate the accomplishment of specific goals and tasks” (p. 45.). Consequently, thinking routines might be viewed as tools, structures and patterns of behaviour. When thinking routines operate as tools for promoting understanding, they are used to build explanations and interpretations,

reasoning with evidence, making connections, considering different viewpoints and perspectives, forming conclusions, uncovering the complexity of ideas, etc. Thinking routines can also support and structure learners' development of understanding. Understanding is an outcome of thinking, the result of application, analysis, evaluating and creating that can be achieved in eight thinking moves (Figure 1), according to Ritchhart (2023).



Figure 1. The map of eight thinking moves to build understanding (Ritchhart, 2023)

The steps of the thinking routines act as scaffolds to lead learners' thinking to higher and more sophisticated levels. When thinking routines are used regularly during classroom activities and become part of the pattern of behaviour of the classroom, learners internalize messages about what learning is and how it happens. Learning in this way involves uncovering one's own ideas and connecting new ideas to one's own thinking.

## 5. Examples of thinking routines applied in teaching cycles

In this section, the implementation of three thinking routines is presented in three different teaching cycles (Table 4). The thinking routines selected are all based on the work of Ritchhart, Church & Morrison (2011) but they have been adapted to English language learning scenarios and the corresponding levels of language ability described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The implementation of the thinking routines was done in a high school in Budapest within three groups of 16–18 learners of ages 15–17 over the course of their English lessons. The contents are in line with the topics offered by the corresponding course books. The implementation of each of the thinking routines as described below was done in lessons of 45 minutes.

Thinking routine	CEFR level and content	Aims
See, Think, Wonder	B1, Observing and interpreting a photograph showing the tradition of making Easter bonnets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To motivate learners' engagement</li> <li>- To help learners formulate observations, interpretations and questions for further research</li> </ul>
Chalk Talk	B2, In groups, learners articulate and document their thinking at the beginning of the process of writing a report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To help learners generate ideas related to a writing task</li> <li>- To support the first phase of written text production within a process-based approach to writing</li> </ul>
The 4C's	C1, Providing a structure for a text-based discussion based on a reading text about the "secret billionaire"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To support learners in making connections, asking questions, identifying key ideas, and considering the application of these ideas</li> <li>- To scaffold and structure a text-based discussion</li> </ul>

Table 4. A summary of the thinking routines presented in this section (proposed by the author)

### 5.1. See, Think, Wonder

This is a thinking routine which encourages learners to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations. It can be used to set the stage for an inquiry-based teaching cycle for learners at B1 level of the CEFR. Before the beginning of the Easter holidays, a British tradition can be explored: the tradition of making Easter bonnets and hats. In the intermediate (B1) student's book of the Pioneer course book series (Mitchell & Malkogianni, 2015), unit 4 offers strategies for learners to speculate about a picture. Using the language input provided in the course book, learners explore a tradition with the help of the See, Think, Wonder thinking routine. To motivate learners' engagement, without letting them know the topic of this particular tradition, the teacher projects the following colour photograph (Image 1).





Image 1. Easter bonnet inspiration (Source: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/family-kids-news/gallery/pictures-easter-bonnets-hats-6842991>)

Next, learners are given some time to observe the photograph. Then, the teacher explains that they are first going to describe exactly what they see, not what they think they see. Learners work in pairs and document their observations and reflections in a chart, as shown in Figure 2. In the second step, learners describe what they think about what they are seeing, prompting questions such as “What else is going on here?” or “What do you see that makes you say that?”, which might help learners move away from giving unsupported opinions, instead encouraging them to use evidence to explain their thoughts. The last step of the thinking routine helps learners articulate what they are wondering. In the last column of the chart, learners should write questions which they will focus on answering during the next part of the inquiry-based teaching cycle. When done within a framework of guided inquiry, learners design the method of research (in this case a web quest) and set out to find answers to their questions.

SEE	THINK	WONDER
What do you see?	What do you think about that?	What does it make you wonder?

Figure 2. A chart to document learners’ responses during the See, Think, Wonder thinking routine (proposed by the author)

Using this thinking routine, learners develop their intercultural communicative competence, as they get to know about a specific cultural practice (a British tradition), and they can share their thoughts and reflections about it. Observing a photograph of children wearing Easter bonnets allows learners to notice cultural symbols, traditions and practices. This initial observation is the first step towards understanding the cultural significance of such traditions. Learners acquire knowledge elements of civilization, practise using speech functions (formulating and sharing opinion, asking questions, comparison) and engage in exchanging ideas while carrying out Internet-based research. Formulating questions about the photograph encourages learners to explore the cultural and historical context of Easter bonnets. Researching these questions helps learners gain a deeper understanding of the traditions and values associated with Easter celebrations in different cultures. Conducting Internet-based research to find answers to their questions develops learners' ability to seek out, evaluate and synthesize information from various sources. This process enhances their analytical skills and ability to engage with intercultural content critically.

## 5.2. Chalk Talk

This is a routine that help learners articulate their thinking at the beginning of a writing process. The process-based approach to teaching writing (Hedge, 2003) includes (1) generating ideas, (2) planning and organizing, (3) drafting and re-drafting, (4) reviewing (including editing and proofreading) and (5) publishing the text. As a result, the text emerges out of a creative process during which learners have the chance to interact with each other. The Chalk Talk routine can be applied during the first phase of this process. The writing task assignment (level B2 of the CEFR) is the following: "You have been asked by a member of the town council to write a report (in 150–190 words), suggesting ways in which your hometown could be made more attractive to tourists. You should focus on services, the general environment and sights." (Mitchell & Malkogianni, 2015, p. 53). Learners work in three groups and each group is given a chart sheet of paper and markers. The three areas of hometown development are distributed among the groups and learners are invited to record their ideas and questions on the blank sheets. The teacher encourages learners to read and add to each other's ideas with additional comments and questions. Groups stay with their original recording sheet for 5–10 minutes and then rotate to another group's paper, commenting on what others have written. When learners have rotated as a group, they return to their original starting places to read what others have written on their original Chalk Talk paper (Image 2). Some time is allowed afterwards to debrief the process itself, asking the groups how their thinking developed during the Chalk Talk. In the next phase of the writing process, learners of the same group organize the contents of their Chalk Talk paper.

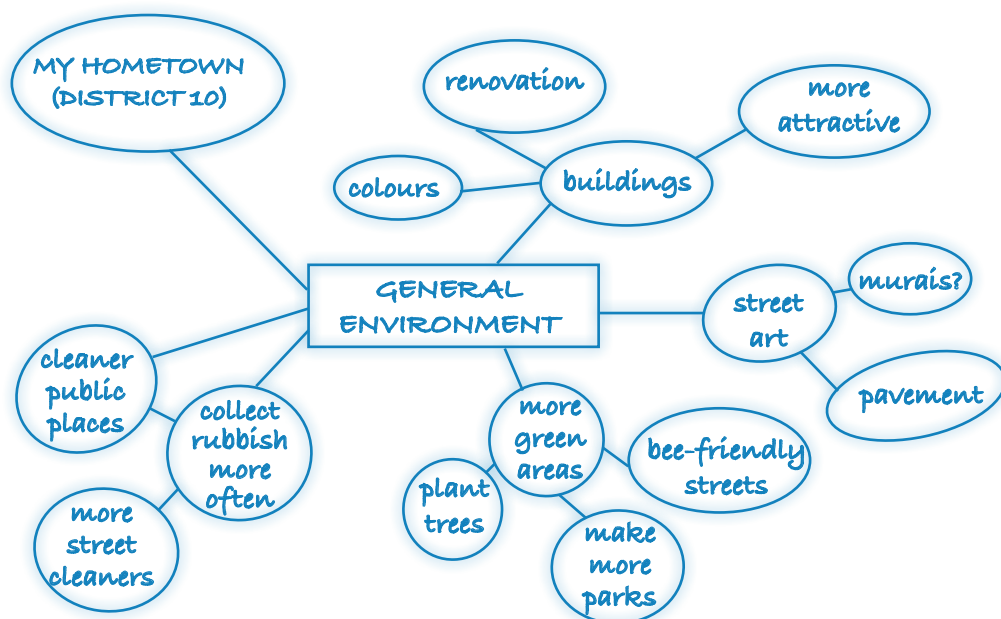


Image 2. Sample Chalk Talk sheet where learners have recorded their ideas (proposed by the author's learners)

Using this thinking routine also offers opportunities to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence. They acquire and reflect on cultural knowledge elements about the work of a town council, as well as features of a town or district that can be beneficial for enhancing tourism. When thinking about what makes their hometown attractive to tourists from different cultural backgrounds, learners must consider diverse cultural preferences and expectations. During the steps of the process-based written text production, learners develop their skills for producing a coherent and cohesive written text of a specific genre (report). Mind mapping facilitates the organization of ideas in a clear and logical manner. This skill is essential for writing coherent and persuasive reports, which are crucial for effective written intercultural communication. The constraints of a particular written genre are among knowledge elements that are part of learners' intercultural communicative competence. With the help of the Chalk Talk thinking routine, learners engage in exchanging, ranking and evaluating ideas, using different speech functions. This language development is vital for learners' ability to communicate effectively in diverse settings.

### 5.3. The 4C's

This thinking routine provides learners with a structure for a text-based discussion built around making connections, asking questions, identifying key ideas and

considering application. Two pages of a course book (Soars et al., 2019) designed for advanced learners (C1 level of the CEFR) of English offer reading and speaking tasks related to an abridged report on an American philanthropist called Chuck Feeney. He is known as the “secret billionaire” for having given away nearly all of his \$8 billion fortune to charity. The two-pager takes learners through six reading and speaking tasks, but it might be difficult for learners to explore the application of ideas suggested in the text. The 4C’s thinking routine (Figure 3) scaffolds a text-based discussion.

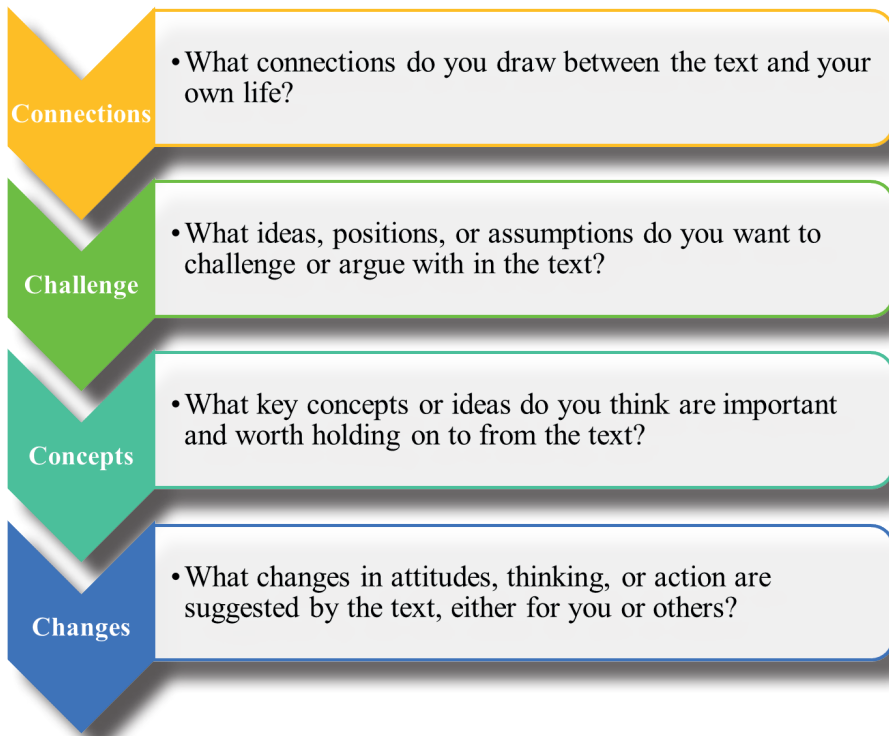


Figure 3. The 4C’s thinking routine based on Ritchhart et al. (2011) (proposed by the author)

After doing the tasks suggested by the course book, learners are assigned to groups of three. Before the discussion begins, group members are given time to identify passages from the text that correspond to each of the C’s. These should be underlined or in some way highlighted so that they can later be shared with the group. In the group, discussion begins with one learner sharing a connection that he or she made, reading the text passage and explaining the connection. Members of the group may add their comments on the offered passage. The next learner of the group then shares his or her passage and the discussion continues in the same matter until each member has shared a “connection.” The group then moves on to the next “C,”

always making sure that the chosen text passage is first shared and then discussed. Groups may be asked to document their discussion using a graphic organiser (e.g. one suggested in Figure 3). When learners connect the text about Chuck Feeney to their own experiences or to other cultural contexts, they deepen their understanding of different cultural perspectives. For instance, understanding Feeney's philanthropy in relation to cultural values around wealth and charity in different societies can foster a nuanced appreciation of these concepts. Discussing how key elements of Feeney's philanthropy could apply in different cultural contexts allows learners to think about the practical implications of cultural values. This consideration promotes adaptability and the ability to apply intercultural understanding in real-world scenarios.

## 6. Conclusion

The Hungarian NCC considers interculturality and civilization as a key competence area which learners of English as a foreign language in Hungarian schools should develop. Intercultural competence consists of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action so that learners can become aware of and relate to their own cultural affiliations and those of a speaker with a different cultural background. For teachers of English as a foreign language, tools are needed so that they can foster and scaffold their learners' development of the above. Understanding information is a key element of meaning-making in the information-based society in which learning takes place, so classroom practices involving the promotion of learning through the investigation of complex information are preferable. The framework of inquiry-based instruction can be utilized to support the learning process of English as a foreign language as well. Thinking routines are tools that teachers of English as a foreign language can adapt in order to support and structure learners' development of understanding. The three thinking routines presented in the paper enable learners to plan, monitor and control their learning processes while communicating in English during classroom activities. The thinking routines encourage learners to develop their understanding of cultural nuances, perspectives and contexts embedded in language use. They provide structured opportunities for learners to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds, as well as those of others. The activities in which the thinking routines are used expose learners to cultural practices and discourse about them which expands their cross-cultural knowledge base, enabling them to better understand and appreciate cultural differences. These thinking routines provide meaningful contexts for language learning by connecting language use with cultural understanding as well as opportunities to develop their metacognitive awareness while communicating in English.

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