**Chapter 2: Developing Critical Intercultural Competence through Understanding the Location, Product and Processes of Dialogue**

Nick Pilcher

orcid.org/0000-0002-5093-9345

Vivien Zhou

orcid.org/0000-0002-4458-1236

**Abstract:** The idea of ‘intercultural competence’ (ICC) has been beset by tension between training models presenting culture as understood through ‘nation’ based constructs, and counterarguments disparaging such models as reductive and othering, dividing national groups rather than promoting ICC. Consequently, educational projects to nurture students’ ICC often face an ‘either – or’ issue regarding the encountering of situations and events along an essentialist / non-essentialist axis. To date, dialogue has been championed to promote ICC yet little work critically analyses how dialogue is (and can be) taught, framed, and reflected upon in teaching ICC, particularly vis-à-vis the essentialist / non-essentialist tension. This chapter attempts to add insights to current explorations in this area by sharing our approaches to ICC teaching. First, we present a conceptual framework to understand and frame dialogue in ICC, drawing on concepts developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (see Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981, Bakhtin et al, 1986), David Bohm (1996), and Martin Buber (1947) to consider the location and context; the product, and; the processes of dialogue. We then illustrate this framework through extracts from students’ reflective journals about their experiences of ICC. Finally, we discuss how we use these extracts to help students in ICC critically both at the levels of conceptualisation and practice.

**Keywords**: Dialogue, Intercultural Competence, Bakhtin, Buber, Bohm

# Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss how we explore the teaching and development of intercultural competence in a (postgraduate) intercultural communication module by using concepts related to dialogue. Specifically, we approach dialogue through a tripartite lens that considers the location and context of dialogue, the nature and quality of this dialogue, and the process of dialogue. In the following, we begin with a broad review of how intercultural competence is conceptualised in the literature. Then we outline a number of concepts related to dialogue that we have identified as useful for understanding and developing intercultural competence. Next, we present and discuss examples drawn from the learning journals written by students we had taught prior to our conception of this tripartite framework, where these students reflected on their intercultural competence development through working with cultural others in group projects. We are using such material in class to inform current students’ analytical understandings of intercultural competence and exploring how these understandings can aid their intercultural competence development *in situ* while they engage with intercultural group tasks of a similar nature. We hope that our account and reflections in this chapter provide a useful case study for others exploring the methods for teaching intercultural competence.

# Intercultural competence: At the intersection of culture, space and dialogue

Intercultural competence is conceptualised in various ways across fields of study, lacking unity in its definition (Rathje, 2007). A widely agreed classical conceptualisation presents it as the ability to (inter)act appropriately and effectively in contexts that involve cultural difference (Perry & Southwell, 2011). This ability is usually elaborated through ‘structural models’ that describe intercultural competence as the composite of certain attributes, attitudes and skills, such as respect and empathy (Rathje, 2007). Michael Byram’s (1997) five-*savoir* model of intercultural communicative competence (usually referenced by others through the acronym ICC) in foreign language education is one of the earliest contributions in this category of work. This model has greatly influenced subsequent theoretical developments, pedagogical interventions, and educational policies (e.g., the Council of Europe’s *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, 2018) about intercultural competence. Notwithstanding, this model (amongst others conceived within a similar paradigm) has been an object of interrogation in the last two decades as interculturalists respond to critical turns in the field (Hoff, 2020). We outline some of the critical concerns below, which have informed our approach to intercultural competence. We will, however, use the ICC acronym to refer to what we understand to be the fuzzy notion of intercultural competence. The purpose is not to reference any specific work regarding intercultural competence (such as Byram’s concept of intercultural communicative competence), but to highlight the much deserved identity of a domain of research that is traceable to theoretical models conceived in a specific historical context and has since been vibrantly evolving (including Byram’s ICC model itself) as researchers’ understandings progress and deepen (Hoff, 2020).

Díaz’s and Dasli’s (2017) review of the ‘critical’ trajectory of language and intercultural communication pedagogy provides a useful lens for understanding some key limitations of ‘old’ conceptualisations of ICC. One of these concerns the meaning of culture. There are what are considered to be ‘essentialist’ notions of culture, which focus on identifiable characteristics which researchers seek to discover and describe to others. These characteristics are typically mapped onto national entities and widely applied in the practical world (especially in business) as a type of ICC that helps individuals conduct ‘intercultural transactions’ (e.g., Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2004; Hall, 1976). In this paradigm, culture is compared to the ‘software of the mind’ (Hofstede, 1991) that individuals grow into. Yet, such approaches are considered by critical interculturalists as ‘reductionist’ (Holliday, 1999), stereotyping in nature or effect, and even as ‘politically correct racism’ (McSweeney, 2013, p. 486). Such approaches promote a version of ICC through instilling assumptions into individuals’ minds with regard both to how they see culture and how they will expect to interact when communicating interculturally. For critics of ‘essentialist’ approaches, culture should more precisely be conceived in relation to the particularities of situations and multiplicity of identities (e.g., Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 1999). When individuals interact, they need to recognise that rather than consisting of one (main) identity, the interlocutors may demonstrate many (intersecting) cultural affiliations and these are subject to change (Burnapp, 2006). Therefore, the anti-essentialist view encourages a cognitively ‘critical’ version of ICC that is characterised by openness to complexity and uncertainty and resists static representations of culture.

Nevertheless, a number of authors suggest that in the actual practice of (as compared to classroom contextualised theoretical or pedagogically discussed and situated) intercultural communication, especially in situations that involve tension, interculturally-minded individuals may find themselves oscillating between essentialist and non-essentialist understandings of culture and sometimes strategically draw on *a priori* assumptions to ‘complete’ the interaction (e.g., Dervin, 2016; Zhou & Pilcher, 2018). It is arguable that individuals inevitably hold certain assumptions about the ‘characteristics’ of the people they communicate with and withholding such assumptions in actual encounters is not always possible. This view adds a further dimension to understandings of intercultural communication as a dynamic and unstable process.

As noted by Díaz and Dasli (2017), another ‘critical’ turn in intercultural communication pedagogy is associated with the socio-political agenda regarding the cultivation of ‘good citizens’ (Gonçalves, 2015, p. 68), who are expected - and suitably equipped – to ‘push against’ (Gorski, 2008, p. 521) the interests of the powerful so that the non-dominant can find a voice (Lee, 2016). This goal extends the meaning of ‘critical’ ICC to include a sensitivity to power relations and a political attitude to resist acts of injustice in intercultural settings.

Intertwined with these critical thoughts is the consideration of *where* intercultural interaction occurs, i.e., the ‘inter’ of different ‘cultures’. In intercultural communication literature, such a location is sometimes discussed through the concept of ‘thirdness’ (e.g., ‘third space’, ‘third place’, ‘third culture’ drawn from postcolonial theory and language learning theory). However, this concept has come under scrutiny in recent years (MacDonald, 2019), as it can be appropriated variously to construct intercultural communication as essentialist, non-essentialist, political, or apolitical encounters.

The kind of ICC we engage with in our teaching is informed by what is briefly reviewed here. We explain to our students the evolution of the ICC concept and various critical perspectives on it. We emphasise the fluid, relational and processual natures of intercultural communication and sensitise students to the politics of intercultural interaction. Conceptually and pedagogically, we have come to draw on *dialogue* as a device to explore the multi-dimensionality of ICC. In intercultural communication literature, the phrase ‘intercultural dialogue’ is frequently used and commended as a way of ‘promoting peace, equality and justice across interactional contexts’ and giving voice to non-dominant perspectives (Lee, 2016, p. 236). As a concept, intercultural dialogue is sometimes discussed in relation to the work of scholars known for their theorisations about dialogue, such as Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin (e.g., Mangano, 2015, 2017; Min, 2001; Simpson & Dervin, 2020). The phrase is also gaining recognition in educational policy documents, a prominent example being the Council of Europe’s *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) (Council of Europe, 2018), which explains intercultural dialogue as ‘an open exchange of views between individuals or groups who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations from each other’ (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 32).

We are, however, conscious that the concept of dialogue can mean different things to its users and articulations about it can be deemed ‘flawed’ when subjected to different interpretive lenses (see, e.g., Barrett & Byram, 2020; Simpson & Dervin, 2019). There is also a debatable ‘means-end’ question regarding whether intercultural dialogue requires ICC as a ‘prerequisite’ (as suggested in the RFCDC) or the development of ICC can benefit from experiential engagement with intercultural dialogue. These considerations all form part of our conceptual exploration with students. For our primary teaching purposes (i.e., students’ ICC *development*) and current focus in this chapter, we choose to present both ICC and (intercultural) dialogue (as well as their relationship) as fuzzy concepts. Compared with academic analysis of these concepts as an end in itself, we are more interested in what happens when students engage experientially in intercultural activities in the light of relevant academic debates, how they go about the process of working with culturally others and how they perceive/articulate their development of ICC in that process. Therefore, on the one hand, we employ ICC and dialogue as conceptual devices to set the intellectual learning context for our students, while deliberately refraining from prescribing meanings to them by privileging any selected definitions. On the other hand, we try to approach dialogue as a reasonably tangible process so that learners can draw on something concrete (compared with the somewhat mystical non-essentialist vocabulary such as ‘complexity’, ‘ambiguity’, and ‘uncertainty’) when reflecting on their intercultural learning experiences (Hoff, 2020, p. 68). In the following, we discuss a framework that emerges from this exploration, which is based on a synthesis of concepts from several dialogue theories and may work as a guideline for approaching dialogue in practice.

# Key concepts in dialogue

The theory in dialogue that shapes our work is informed firstly by Mikhail Bakhtin’s (see Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Bakhtin et al., 1986[[1]](#endnote-1)) thoughts on *nesarveseno* (or incompleteness) and the critical role played by context and ownership of words; secondly by Martin Buber’s (1947) concepts expressed in *Between Man and Man* of genuine dialogue, technical dialogue, and monologue disguised as dialogue; and thirdly by David Bohm’s (1996) thoughts from the work *On Dialogue*, particularly the idea of suspension of assumptions. These concepts, developed from various traditions, have some notable overlaps with ICC theories. However, what seems lacking in the latter is a thread of argument that links these scattered concepts towards an explanation dedicated to intercultural dialogue. It is this area we are interested in addressing. As we demonstrate below (see Table 2.1 at the end of the chapter), we have synthesised the above concepts into a framework we use in our class discussions to address dialogue in intercultural communication in terms of its *location*, *product*, and *process*.

Regarding the *location* where dialogue takes place in intercultural communication, we consider the role of context (Bakhtin, 1981) and the idea of ownership of words (Bakhtin, 1986). Although Bakhtin does not appear to provide an exact definition of ‘context’, his use of this term underlines both its association with different perspectives and situations, and its importance (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). According to Bakhtin (1986), context is ever shifting and changing. It is thus essential for those participating in intercultural communication to be aware of this, especially as the differing nature of the context can be heightened in the communication between individuals with different cultural backgrounds. A key aspect of context is who ‘owns’ the words used. According to Bakhtin (1986, p. 89), words can have three types of owner: ‘as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an other’s word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other’s utterance; and, finally, as my word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression’. Words may be understood differently and have different conceptual bonds in different languages (De Saussure, 1959), thus being highly subjective (Voloshinov, 1973 [1929]). Closely related to context is the Bakhtinian concept of *nesaverseno* (or incompleteness) (Bakhtin, 1981), which suggests that any (intercultural) communication is open-ended by nature. As the context where intercultural communication occurs is ever changing and differing, individuals should refrain from the thought that they have ‘finished’ their learning about and developing their ICC.

In relation to the nature of the *product* of the dialogue, we draw on Martin Buber’s work (1947) with regard to three kinds of dialogue. For Buber, in a ‘genuine’ dialogue, individuals ‘really have in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turn to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation’ (Buber, 1947, p. 19). In an intercultural interaction, this can merge with the non-essentialist perspective that those engaged in dialogue see each other as individual agents rather than as representatives of a particular culture’s essence. This can provide a useful lens for learners to reflect on what they are producing through their interactional activity. Much focus on the respective ‘cultural’ backgrounds of the interlocutors can be seen as inadequate for a ‘genuine’ dialogue. A second type of dialogue is ‘technical’ in purpose, which according to Buber (1947, p. 19) is ‘prompted solely by the need of objective understanding’. It is goal-focused and aims to achieve concrete outcomes. This type of dialogue may take place when interlocutors discuss the mechanics of a project or conclude a task. Buber’s third classification of dialogue is ‘monologue disguised as dialogue’, whereby only an illusion of dialogue has occurred: ‘two or more men, meeting in space, speak each with himself in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources’ (Buber, 1947, p. 19).

With regard to the *process* of dialogue, we draw on David Bohm’s (1996) argument that the success of dialogue is pre-conditioned by suspension of assumptions. According to Bohm, we all hold basic assumptions, ‘such as assumptions about the meaning of life; about your own self-interest, your country’s interest, or your religious interest; about what you really think is important’ (Bohm, 1996, p. 8). As assumptions exist or arise, it is necessary to ‘suspend those assumptions, so that you neither carry them out nor suppress them. You don’t believe them, nor do you disbelieve them; you don’t judge them as good or bad’ (Bohm, 1996, p. 20). According to Bohm, when encountering an unfamiliar assumption, ‘the natural response might be to get angry, or get excited, or to react in some other way’ (Bohm, 1996, p. 21). Such responses will direct dialogue to closure. However, if interlocutors are able to suspend assumptions they ‘may also think of it as suspended in front’ of them so they ‘can look at it – sort of reflected back’ as if they ‘were in front of a mirror’ (Bohm, 1996, p. 20). In this way assumptions can be explored as a valuable resource for dialogue, especially in an intercultural context where ‘difference’ is commonly expected. In the following, we move on to our data and therefrom draw examples to illustrate our dialogue framework.

# Source and details about our data

The material we present below is extracted from the coursework written by students we teach on a UK-based (postgraduate) intercultural communication module. The material was not purposefully generated for research projects and was produced at a time when we loosely mentioned the word ‘dialogue’ in class without deliberate introduction of any dialogue theories. Therefore, this material predates our dialogue framework and provided an important source of inspiration for our conception of the latter. In more recent iterations of the module, we began to use quotes from this material – which in a way is ‘uncontaminated’ by intervention from dialogue theories – to illustrate the concepts from our dialogue framework. We are exploring how this theory-informed and data-supported approach can help current students develop their ICC *in situ* while undertaking experiential intercultural learning activities. For our current purposes, we selectively present the material available to us to illustrate our dialogue framework, while recognising that the same material (e.g., if analysed with a case study approach or more comprehensively for inductive themes) is open to many alternative interpretations regarding ICC and/or dialogue.

The module in question has remained relatively stable in structure over the years (despite the increasing weight placed on dialogue). It specifies ICC development (in the workplace) as a key learning objective and is delivered over a typical UK academic term. The class has been of a compact size (between 20–30 students) and always constituted by students of diverse nationalities (e.g., Germany, Italy, France, China, UK, India, Poland, USA and Russia). Students attend weekly seminars as a whole group, where we guide them to explore theories and concepts in the field and facilitate topic-related discussions in connection with their personal experiences. For the assessment, we ask students to work in groups (of four or five individuals) over a period of seven weeks to design and deliver an intercultural training workshop for volunteers from the practical sector (which can vary from company managers and employees to university staff and students not undertaking intercultural communication studies). Students are instructed to negotiate their own approach to implementing the workshop (e.g., starting with a needs analysis with their ‘trainees’ and completing the task by gathering feedback from the volunteers) and coordinating their group work (e.g., the frequency of group meetings and division of tasks). Each group will submit a report (worth 30% of their grade) where they collectively present and analyse the rationale and implementation of the workshop. This is followed by an essay submitted by each individual, which details their meta-reflections on their personal ICC development through the process of working with others in this group task (worth 70%). The material we present below is extracted from the individual essays (with approval from the university’s ethics committee and the relevant students).

# Illustrative examples of the dialogue concepts

We now present some quotes from the students’ reflective essays to illustrate the previously discussed concepts on dialogue. We do so in the same order to their presentation above: the location, product and process of dialogue.

## Location – context, incompleteness, word ownership

The location of dialogue and the importance of context were highlighted in many comments. For example, the unanticipated complex nature of the context of dialogue was noted by one student, whose experience of constructing the intercultural training session

helped me to realize that diversity management and intercultural competence development are far more complicated than their handbook-descriptions and guidelines.

Others wrote of the important influence of their mood on how they communicated with others, noting that:

in my case it depends a lot also on my mood of the moment, if I am tired, stressed or if I do not feel appreciated in my own work. If this is the case, I tend to be more rigid towards others’ ideas and I have always thought this is a side of my personality I want to improve and dominate.

Also, individuals could behave differently in different contexts, one participant writing that:

the fact was that during the training session, trainee B was totally different and nothing like what we perceived before… by interacting with B face to face and also at that specific context… we realise that we didn’t look beyond the visual attributes and we held biases on trainee B.

Others wrote of how they realised factors such as age and characteristics may need to be considered, and even physical aspects of the context could impact upon the development of ICC. One individual wrote:

we all (4 members) sat closely round a single PC and I felt this physical closeness helped strengthening the group bond somehow.

Regarding the Bakhtinian concept of *nesaverseno* or incompleteness of dialogue, many students wrote of how they felt ICC is ongoing and ever changing, for example:

reflection is an extremely subjective and intimate action which can never be reduplicated in its content not even by the same person, because their experiences of the world are ever changing.

Another student wrote of how ICC was an ongoing cognitive process, and how a rich picture of individuals was continually being built up during the development of ICC, writing:

Intercultural praxis is closely linked to mindfulness and self-reflection as it can be defined as an ongoing cognitive process, aimed at combining critical and reflective thinking to form a more all-encompassing, rich mental picture of the individual… within an intercultural context.

In terms of different understandings of words and ideas, one participant commented on how the:

‘same’ stimuli can be perceived differently from one person to another or from one group to another, which implies that the reality of the world is deeply subjective. In this [sic. these] terms, cultural diversity refers to what is culturally perceived as uncommon.

For another student, the existence and understanding of different people’s motivations and intentions and emotions were key in ICC. This student wrote that:

intercultural competence is not stable and therefore it may be challenged by factors such as emotions, different contexts, other people’s motivations and intentions.

## Product – genuine, technical, monologic

Regarding the concept of genuine dialogue, many students wrote about the importance of considering those they were engaged with in dialogue as human beings (Buber, 1947), which in an intercultural context can be related to non-essentialism and ‘mutual respect’. For example, one student wrote:

throughout the entire group work, I am aware of the working in a group with people from various cultures could be difficult and challenging. However, with the mutual respect, and with objective viewpoints towards different cultures, in short, in a non-essentialist view to work with people will help us to increase cultural awareness and competence by working in a world with diversified cultures.

Similarly, another student wrote of the need for respect and the importance of non-essentialist approaches:

Why did they not behave as the national culture dimensions as Hofstede claimed? By considering this, my competence and awareness cultural diversity have begun to increase. To be specific, I start to understand that the theory proposed by Holliday (1999), in his study, he reveals that the culture should be considered in a more non-essentialist view… We should deal with people from other culture [sic. cultures] equally and respectfully. Thus, I have started increasing the awareness of culture that there is always an exception in every culture.

For us, these comments indicate a certain level of ICC development, as the writers were conscious about their attempts to see others as human beings, accord respect, and empathise with them by drawing on a non-essentialist perspective. Here, intercultural communication correlated closely with Martin Buber’s description of dialogue as a genuine product, where interlocutors are seen by each other as individuals rather than as someone who would conform to a previously learned set of essentialist characteristics. As another student wrote of their experience:

it seems that we should deal with people from other cultures respectfully and objectively, we should not be chained by our stereotype of a certain culture, instead, we should communicate with people in a non-essentialist view by considering the personality and ethnography of the person you are communicating with.

Regarding illustrative examples of technical (Buber, 1947) dialogue (i.e., focused on the task or objective at hand), we identified a few and were surprised to note that in these examples, the students commented on the value of essentialist approaches. One student recounted that when his group worked through the technical details of their group report, the experience ran counter to his ‘familiar’ cultural experience whereby time is spent more on building relationships than mechanically examining the details of the task. Notably, this student felt confused as to his ICC development. He wrote as follows of other students in his group:

they hold their opinions towards some details of our writings such as the punctuation and the format of our part. This is definitely a challenge to my patience as a Chinese who possesses less concerns about the details of our job, what we concerns more is the relationship between your partners, ‘guanxi’ in short. Therefore, I chose to calm down and listen to their opinions humbly. As a result, this situation increased my stereotype... Thus, I started confusing that whether the group work has increase my intercultural competence or it strengthen my stereotype of a specific culture.

Nevertheless, this student also wrote of the value of this stereotype in this particular context, ‘this rigidity and patience are what we need for this time-consuming task’. Here then, for this student the technical nature of dialogue focused on a specific task at hand that in turn could help develop ICC and could draw on ICC related materials that highlight the benefits of certain essentialist characteristics, provided they are useful for the task. Here then, considering the benefits of particular essentialist characteristics to specific tasks may show their use in particular technically focused activities.

In terms of monologue disguised as dialogue, we looked for comments showing that the students were aware of the expectation of dialogue in their interaction but felt nothing was actually gained from it. One student wrote of how a ‘general chat’ in their group meeting occurred:

Today we finally had this follow up meeting but it did not go as planned. No one really gave any feedback about how they felt during the whole group process. We only had a general chat. I feel that it could have been very beneficial but I think we only wasted time this way.

For us, such a ‘general chat’, where participants refrained from expressing and exchanging their thoughts, indicates the closure of dialogue with none becoming wiser and all still relying on their own resources (Buber, 1947).

In a somewhat similar example, another student wrote of her belief that her group would have performed much better with more transparency and sharing of feelings. She wrote,

I believe our group deeply suffered from the lack of transparency which caused the avoidance in sharing our feelings about how the work was proceeding and which influenced the work division and increased frustration among group members. A more transparent communication is an important aspect of any group work, and especially for a group showing such diverse approaches.

Notably, this led to what this person considered to be increased frustration, a feeling perhaps due to how the process of dialogue was being approached.

## Process – assumptions

In relation to suspension of assumptions (Bohm, 1996), there were examples both of adverse impacts where assumptions were not suspended, and positive impacts where they were. Regarding the former, one student wrote of how another group member, albeit unintentionally, cited assumptions from a book with regard to how ‘Spaniards’ behaved, and how they felt this was almost racist:

Person 2… relied almost all her statements on a book, which talked about the habits of ‘Spaniards’… I mean I am 100% convinced that this person did not mean to and just repeated what was written in the book, but it sounded honestly negative, almost racist.

In another example, a student wrote of how feelings of annoyance and frustration can occur if a dismissive approach to diversity is taken, and how this limits the development of ICC. He wrote:

the group work showed me how a negative and dismissive approach towards diversity can lead to feelings related to annoyance, discomfort and frustration which, if not tackled within the process through confrontation and therefore open communication seem to limit the use of a set of intercultural skills.

Here then, in line with Bohm (1996), failure to suspend assumptions was closely connected to feelings of anger and frustration, and this in turn was felt to have an adverse impact on dialogue and the development of ICC.

However, suspending assumptions was considered hard to do. One student wrote of her struggle to adapt her behaviour:

In some situations, however, I struggled with adapting my behaviour or judgments, because I was sure that my way of approaching certain tasks was the ‘right’ one. In other situations, I was a little bit more aware of and accepting of different preferences.

Indeed, some students’ comments directly resonate with Bohm’s suggestions to step aside from assumptions:

From this experience, I learned that being aware and treat my interpretation as a hypothesis, to test and confirm, rather than certainty.

Another student wrote specifically of how the ability to stop seeing one’s own behaviours as being the only correct ones, in other words, to suspend assumptions, was the key to developing ICC. In his words:

Intercultural attitude is marked by curiosity and openness and is the disposition not to consider one’s own values, behaviours and beliefs as the only correct possibility; the savoir comprendre [understanding of knowledge] is the ability to interpret elements from different cultural perspectives; knowledge refers to the understanding of other people’s and ones’ own world.

# Discussion and conclusions

The dialogue framework we draw from relevant theories and students’ accounts of their intercultural group work experiences has enabled us to develop a pedagogical instrument about the location, product, and process of dialogue (see Table 2.1 below).

<TABLE 2.1 HERE>

We are using this instrument to engage current students to reflect on dialogue while they themselves are conducting similar group tasks as those recounted by earlier cohorts. Particularly, we guide students to consider this table in relation to questions such as below:

* How do the examples on the right match the points on the left?
* What do you think about the above concepts and ideas?
* Will the concepts facilitate the development of intercultural competence in group work?
* What may some of the challenges with them be? Could these be overcome?
* Can consideration of these elements be integrated into any intercultural competence development? Should they be? If they are, how could they be?
* Would it be useful to consider these before any group meeting? Or after any meeting?

As such, by relating their own intercultural learning experiences to the accounts of students who had previously undertaken similar learning journeys, current students are able to put into context what it means by the shifting nature of intercultural communication (e.g., context, meaning of words, incompleteness of dialogue, efforts and struggles to ‘combat’ essentialism). Our aim is that students will acquire a sensitivity to the ‘types’ of dialogue they produce with their group partners and consider ways of steering their interaction towards genuine dialogue (and avoiding monologue disguised as dialogue) where possible. Using this framework, we are also able to emphasise the possible failure to suspend assumptions or ‘expectations’, which can lead to feelings of ‘frustration’ or a feeling that the person holding the assumption, whether intentionally or not, is adopting an ‘almost racist’ stance. Such perceptions create feelings whereby dialogue will not ensue (Bohm, 1996) and such feelings may in effect deter individuals’ will to progress a possibly ongoing dialogue in intercultural contexts. Conversely, attempting to suspend assumptions – i.e., to identify assumptions and treat them as hypotheses to be confirmed or refuted in each particular and ever changing context – is more constructive in facilitating intercultural dialogue.

Our current students’ class-based responses to analysing others’ (and their own) intercultural group work journals this way have shown more nuanced understandings of ICC compared with their earlier peers. It is, however, harder for us to track the thread of dialogue systematically from ‘ready-made’ material such as students’ coursework essays, as they are designed to address the module’s theme on ICC and students can choose to focus on any specific aspect(s) of it and develop it at depth. We are therefore interested to explore more closely (e.g., through research interviews) what students are learning, conceptually and experientially, when they consider ICC in tandem with dialogue. We hope that our account and reflections here provide a useful case study for others also exploring the teaching and learning about ICC, in a world that prompts people to aspire for mutually respectful action and yet often challenges them to withdraw from genuine dialogue.

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**Key take-away points**

* Outlines key theoretical concepts related to the location, product, and process of dialogue to help students understand and undertake intercultural communication in nuanced ways.
* Relates these concepts to the critical learning, development, and reflection on ICC of learners conducting group tasks to help them understand what is happening and also understand any potential challenges involved.
* Details a pedagogical instrument with guiding questions to illustrate to others how to use these concepts when teaching ICC in classes and workshops.

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1. We note here that whilst we refer in the abstract and the in the first instance here to these references as ‘Bakhtin and Holquist (1981)’, and as ‘Bakhtin et al. (1986)’, we hereafter refer to them as ‘Bakhtin (1981)’ and ‘Bakhtin (1986)’. This is because the ideas are those of Mikhail Bakhtin but also because they are presented in works edited and annotated by the other authors [↑](#endnote-ref-1)