Guiding the Intercultural Mediators of Tomorrow

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Abstract: The internationalisation in higher education (IoHE) is a topic discussed in various educational forums; the overarching goal of preparing students to live and work in today's interconnected world guides the administrative and educational practices of universities around the globe. This article presents an exploratory case study addressing the internationalisation practices of the Centre for Intercultural Communication and Competency Laboratory; the focus is on three workshop series delivered between 2012 and 2017. The pedagogical design of the workshops is informed by the current understanding of internationalisation of higher education as applied in local settings. The theoretical framework guiding the analysis is *negotiating reality approach* proposed by Antal and Friedman (2003). In the study, the design of each workshop series is evaluated considering the two key concepts of Antal's and Friedman's approach – advocacy and inquiry. The presented analysis allowed for a more systematic view on the Centre's activities and achievements as related to IoHE. We believe the outcomes of this study will support the development of the future activities of the Centre and will inform the efforts of other educators to establish effective intercultural mediation practices in similar contexts.

Keywords: internationalisation in higher education; intercultural competence; intercultural mediation; inquiry; advocacy

1 Introduction

The internationalisation in higher education (IoHE) is a topic discussed in various educational forums; the overarching goal of preparing students to live and work in a globalized world guides the administrative and educational practices of universities around the globe. Educational programs promoting mobility and internationalisation such as ERASMUS are well known for their contribution to the efforts to promote international connections between institutions, faculty, and students. These efforts are guided by the recognition that the young people attending the universities today will live and work in a world that is increasingly interconnected. They are the people

who will face problems affecting the global society and economy and will work collaboratively on resolving them. The increased need for effective cooperation between political entities, communities, and businesses calls for citizens and leaders who are ready to facilitate open communication and cooperation between intercultural networks.

While large international programs play a crucial role in the process of preparing students for the globalized world, the significance of their impact would be less powerful if the universities do not develop and apply practices promoting internationalisation and do not shape their curricula, so that they reflect the current need for intercultural literacy and mediation skills. *The 2015 comprehensive study Internationalisation of Higher Education* (de Wit *et al.*, 2015) outlines that although there is no single model for internationalisation that would fit every institution, there are common key developments in education worldwide. These developments reflect the processes of globalization and call for the recognition of the increasing influence of internationalisation that shapes higher education curricula and approaches to transnational education. An important driving force of curriculum changes is the growing understanding of the role of intercultural competence in the modern work place.

According to the Hart Research Associates Report *Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work* (2018), "notable increases have occurred in the level of importance that they [business executives] place on recent graduates' ability to analyse and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures (a nine-point increase since 2014)" (p. 13). Similarly to the Hart Research Associates Report, the Culture at Work Report prepared by Ipsos, the third largest market research company in the world based in France, outlines the increasing value of intercultural awareness and skills in the workplace. This recognized importance of intercultural competency and skills suggests that the conceptualization of internationalization curricula should be approached with consideration of the power of education to instil intercultural awareness and competency that would be evident in specific actions and contexts.

In this paper, we will present an exploratory case study aiming to analyse past internationalisation activities of the *Centre for Intercultural Communication and Mediation* at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," Bulgaria with a focus on the workshop series organized in *The Intercultural Competency Laboratory.* The analysis is guided by the *negotiating reality approach* proposed by Antal and Friedman (2003, 2005) as we view that this approach would allow revealing the potential of specific educational practices to support the development of transferrable intercultural mediation skills.

2 Theoretical Framework

The *negotiating reality approach* proposed by Antal and Friedman (2003, 2005) presents an effort to overcome some of the limitations of intercultural competence developmental models currently informing activities and research in education and workplace. More specifically, it aims at resolving the limitations of the integration-orientation models proposed by Bennett (1998, 2017).

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In his 1998 seminal article *Intercultural Communication: A Current Perspective*, Milton J. Bennett proposes a cultural adaptation model, which was informed by Peter S. Adler's view on culture shock. Bennett defined six stages of intercultural sensitivity development: (1) denial, (2) defence, (3) minimization, (4) acceptance, (5) adaptation, and (6) integration. Antal and Friedman state that while the developmental stages provide a sound understanding of intercultural mediation skills development, approaching the contemporary intercultural practices only from the perspective of this model poses serious limitations. Achieving the most advanced level of the developmental sequence (integration) allows people to "use knowledge about their own and others' cultures to intentionally shift into a different cultural frame of reference" (Bennett, 1998, 17). However, the internalization of more than one frame of reference typically requires an immersion into another culture; with consideration of the dynamic nature of international connections nowadays, achieving integration into a culture as a final goal might be somewhat a misleading or even impossible goal within formal educational contexts. Antal and Friedman also view that Bennett's model may raise certain ethical concerns. "To adapt to each new culture they [managers] encounter demands chameleon-like behaviour and essentially a surrendering of their own cultural identity" (Antal and Friedman, 2003b, 7). Furthermore, the "prescription" to fit (adapt/integrate) may reduce people's behaviour to a form of manipulation that simply aims to achieve certain goals in intercultural settings (Antal and Friedman, 2003b). With these considerations in mind, they propose a new approach "based on the recognition that individuals are culturally complex beings and each interaction is a unique situation to which the participants bring their expectations, values, and repertoires of behavior" (7).

Therefore, the goal of the negotiating reality approach is to build intercultural competency skills that are transferable and applicable in a variety of situations involving intercultural mediation. Three key questions lay in the basis of this approach: "(1) How do I perceive the situation? (2) What do I wish to achieve in this situation? (3) Which action strategy do I intend to employ to achieve my goals?" (Antal & Friedman, 2003b, 8). Guiding people to revisit their answers to these questions with consideration of the "other" opens opportunities for engagement in intercultural mediation that involves expanding tacit cultural knowledge and understanding of others' logic. Thus, in the core of the negotiating reality approach to intercultural education is building the ability to consciously expand people's repertoires of actionable knowledge in intercultural situations.

To apply the approach in our project, we adopted three major steps:

(1) "Knowing when and how to interrupt one's automatic functioning" (Antal & Friedman, 2003a, 19); in other words, developing own theories of action to inform the conscious perception of own stances – shaped and guided by the three key questions presented earlier.

(2) Building awareness of the other's cultural frames that would define the perception and interpretation of reality as well as revisiting people's own cultural frames.

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(3) Engaging in critical inquiry of mediation strategies and exploring the possible outcomes.

The process of negotiating reality in intercultural mediation, as viewed by Antal and Friedman, is powered by two forces – *advocacy* and *inquiry*. They define *advocacy* as "clearly expressing and standing up for what one thinks and desires" (2003a, 21) and *inquiry* as a process of "exploring and questioning both one's own reasoning and the reasoning of others" (2003a, 21). In the model, *advocacy* and *inquiry* are presented in four possible combinations of behaviours in actual intercultural settings:

(1) low advocacy/low inquiry;
(2) high advocacy/low inquiry;
(3) low advocacy/high inquiry;
(4) high advocacy/high inquiry.

In our view, the *advocacy/inquiry* model provides a sound framework for design and analysis of intercultural learning activities. For the purposes of our analysis, rather than assigning low or high level to each concept, we view each one as presented in a continuum with a "high" and "low" ends. We view that the advocacy/inquiry framework provides sound guidance for the analysis of intercultural training activities revealing their potential mediation power.

3 The Intercultural Competency Laboratory: An Exploratory Case Study

3.1 Design

The site selected for the case study is the *Centre for Intercultural Communication and Mediation* at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," Bulgaria. The case is *The Intercultural Competency Laboratory* with focus on the analysis of the workshop series delivered between 2012 and 2017. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to view in retrospection the types of workshops offered at the Centre's *The Intercultural Competency Laboratory*. The goal is to evaluate the design of the activities in terms of their potential to support the intercultural competence development of the participants. We believe that this analysis offers insights that would be useful for the future work of the Centre especially with the consideration that its new affiliation within Sofia University will present opportunities to reach out to a broader audience. Thus, the goal of the study is to interpret past learning activities in order to inform the future educational actions.

The data were collected through the exploration of various documents related to the workshop series: reports, session plans, and participants' final projects. The data analysis included:

- Developing a learning activity interpretation matrix based on the chosen framework

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- Reviewing the data and identifying themes
- Organizing the themes using the matrix
- Analysing the organized data
- Based on the analysis, developing abbreviated matrixes for each workshop series and explaining them with a short narrative.

The *research question* that guided the analysis is:

What is the potential of the workshops offered at the Centre's Intercultural Competency Laboratory to develop intercultural competence and mediation skills?

The potential is conceptualized in the context of Advocacy/Inquiry framework (Antal & Friedman, 2003a; 2003b). Following Byram, Nichols, and Stevens (2003), we understand intercultural competence as an interplay of "knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds" (5). An interculturally competent communicator is a person "who has the ability to interact with 'others', to accept other perspectives and presentations of the world, to mediate between different perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluations of difference" (Byram *et al.*, 2003, 5). In this context, we view intercultural competency to be comprised of skills that are transferable and applicable in a variety of situations involving intercultural mediation.

The following matrix was developed to facilitate the analysis of each workshop series. Based on this matrix, the level of advocacy/inquiry was interpreted.

Table 1: General matrix

Workshop Activities Design	Advocacy/Inquiry Descriptors
The design of the learning activities allows for addressing the following aspects of intercultural competence:	
In the activity, the students: (1) Express/articulate own views, thoughts, experiences, perceptions, desires (2-a) Interpret own perceptions, experiences	The activity has the potential to engage student in: *Advocacy* through (1) Modifying one's automatic functioning by transforming tacit knowledge to explicit; (2) Building awareness of own cultural frames
(2-b) Interpret others' perceptions, experiences. (3) Participate purposefully in intercultural communication interactions and interpret the outcomes.	*Inquiry* through (1) Building awareness of others' cultural frames; (2) Engage in critical inquiry of mediation strategies and explore the possible outcomes.

For this analysis, we view that an exploratory case study informed by the *negotiating reality approach* would allow conceptualizing the mediation power of the workshop series offered by the Centre.

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3.2 Context

During the period presented in this paper, *The Centre for Intercultural Communication and Mediation* at Sofia University was affiliated with the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies. All activities of the Centre have been informed by the principles of intercultural communication and mediation, as the Centre's overarching goal is to create an educational space for development and promotion of intercultural competencies of students and faculty.

3.2.1 Centre's guiding goals and vision

The work of *The Centre for Intercultural Communication and Mediation* at Sofia University reflects one of the emerging areas of focus as outlined in the *Internationalisation of Higher Education* (de Wit *et al.*, 2015) – the "internationalisation of the curriculum, transnational education and digital learning" (27). The Centre officially opened on March 19th, 2008 in relation to the European Year of Intercultural Dialog and the 120th anniversary of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridsky." Two main documents served to inspire and inform the goals and vision of the Centre: *The Sofia Manifesto* (2006) and *The Charter of Transdisciplinarity* (Nicolescu, 1994).

The Sofia Manifesto was created as a statement and an outline of the key outcomes of the 2006 International Conference *The Place of Philology and the Humanities in the 21st Century Society.* This conference was organized by the Association of the Faculties of Philology and Philosophy of the Francophone Universities (AFELSH) and Sofia University; the conference participants discussed the role of humanities for informing successful intercultural communication and mediation in the modern world.

The Charter of Transdisciplinarity (Nicolescu, 1994) informed the strategies for achieving the overarching goal of the Centre, which is to provide opportunities for interdisciplinary dialog and research related to culture and communication. In the Centre, undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty members and scholars gather to share experiences and explore issues related to multilingualism and cultural diversity. This collaboration provides opportunities for dissemination of research and practices related to intercultural communication and education as viewed through the prism of different disciplines, actors, modes, and experiences.

3.2.2 The Centre's activities

Following the guiding principles of multiculturalism and interdisciplinarity, the University and guest scholars serving as associate members of the Centre were engaged in:

- Designing specialized trainings for interpersonal, intercultural, and professional communication;
- National and international exchange of expert knowledge that approaches multiculturalism and cultures from the perspective of different disciplines and experiences;

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- Organizing workshops for faculty and students aiming at development of materials, dissemination of knowledge, and experimentation in the field of cultural diversity;
- Organizing and moderating public discussions of new topics related to the humankind, language, culture, and society;
- Development of scholarly projects deepening the understanding of intercultural communication and mediation.

To assure the flexibility and inclusiveness of the Centre, its activities were carried by working groups organized around topics, which focused on promoting intercultural understanding and knowledge:

(1) Shared journeys;
(2) Shared international educational and scholarly news;
(3) Shared pedagogical practices for technology-supported learning;
(4) Shared art experiences and reflections as related to culture and multiculturality;
(5) Shared thoughts on religious diversity.

3.3 Intercultural Competency Laboratory: The Workshop Series

While the activities of *The Centre for Intercultural Communication and Mediation* included a great variety of topics, modes, and participants, the focus of the analysis of this case study is on the three workshop series aiming to foster student interdisciplinary research with emphasis on building of intercultural competencies.

3.3.1 Participants

The working group for this initiative was created following the principles of the horizontal integration of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies majors and programs. The first workshop opened in 2012 with 15 students; the number of participants grew significantly over the next years reaching 60 by the year of 2017 when the last session of the workshop series was completed. The participants included international and domestic students from various Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies undergraduate majors and master's programs as well as faculty members and students from the *Higher Francophone School for Administration and Management* (ESFAM).

- *Sofia University Majors*:
  - French Philology
  - Italian Philology
  - Arabic and Semitic Studies.
- *Sofia University Masters Programs*:
  - Francophonie, Multilingualism, and Intercultural Mediation;
  - Anthropological Studies of the Mediterranean Region and the Balkans: Italy - Bulgaria;

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  - Program for Translation with Languages of Asia and the Middle East;

- *Higher Francophone School for Administration and Management* (ESFAM).

One of the major challenges was that the participant group was very dynamic: new participants were allowed to join the workshop series while some participants left the workshop group. This flexibility had its advantages as well as it allowed more people to engage in the training and naturally promoted the process of collaboration between more experienced and less experienced peers. However, we recognize that it also posed some organizational challenges and shaped the design of the workshop series and the learning outcomes.

3.4 Analysis of the Workshop Activities

The overarching goal of this initiative was to develop a working didactic model for effective collaboration between students and educators in learning and research settings. The work was guided by the overarching goal of the Centre – fostering the development of intercultural competencies in interdisciplinary settings. The Centre team of associated members organized a series of workshops designed to provide a venue for brainstorming, experimentation, and development of materials.

The pedagogical foundation for the workshops followed the key aspects of intercultural competence: intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills for interpreting and relating (Byram, 2003). In addition, the design of the workshops was informed by the principles of *transdisciplinarity* as "shared understanding based on an absolute respect for the collective and individual Otherness united by our common life on one and the same Earth" (Charter of Transdisciplinarity, art. 13, 1994).

The workshop pedagogical design and learning outcomes were informed by the conceptualization of the intercultural competence components as outlined by Byram *et al.* (2003):

- *Intercultural attitudes (savoir être):* This component presents curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend belief about other cultures and belief about one's own. Intercultural attitudes encompass the ability

  - to express willingness to relativize one's own values, beliefs and behaviours,
  - not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones, and
  - to be able to see how they might look from the perspective of an outsider who has a different set of values, beliefs, and behaviours. In other words, to form the ability to 'decentre'.

- *Knowledge (savoirs):* The knowledge component encompasses social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction. So knowledge, in this context, can be defined as having two major components: knowledge of social processes, and knowledge of illustrations of these processes and products.

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The latter includes knowledge about how other people see oneself as well as some knowledge about other people.

- *Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre):* These skills represent the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own (Byram *et al.*, 2003, 5-6).

The workshops aimed to offer an opportunity to students and faculty to work collaboratively as sociocultural mediators. The activities were designed with consideration of the overarching goals of the initiative as related to real-life experiences in globalized social settings. To assure the active engagement and transfer of theoretical knowledge to skills evident in practice, we adopted the following pedagogical approaches aiming to foster active engagement and connection between theory, knowledge, attitudes, and practice:

- Experiential learning: learning through reflecting on doing (Kolb, 2015);
- Project-based learning: learning thought investigation research and resolving authentic, engaging, and complex questions (Markham, 2011);
- Problem-based learning: learning through the experience of solving an open-ended problem (Wood, 2003).

Following the emerging topics in IoHE and intercultural education, the project-based workshops were designed around three themes: (1) technology and communication; (2) intercultural studies and cross-cultural communication: connecting theory with personal experiences; (3) intercultural communication practices in business, educational, public, and social settings.

3.4.1 Advocacy/Inquiry framework: Workshop activities and analysis

Workshop Series 1: Technology and communication

The workshops dedicated to technology and communication engaged the participants in:

(1) Learning about the conventions for successful presentations and discussing these conventions in the context of their previous experience,
(2) Mastering technical skills related to technology-enhanced presentations, and
(3) Collaborating in the process of project development.

During the opening seminar, the participants were introduced to the main aspects of effective presentation of information with technology in face-to-face and virtual settings. The seminar was followed by a discussion session. The participants reflected on their understanding of sound multimedia presentation design and delivery practices as well as strategies for successful written and oral communication in various

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communicative and cultural settings. The discussion session was followed by several hands-on workshops during which the participants engaged in creating collaborative presentations. The presentation assignment required including content that addresses participants' experiences and observations abroad. The final outcomes were posters adopting infographic design and PowerPoint presentations about their intercultural experiences.

When viewed in the *advocacy/inquiry* framework, the teaching/learning process and outcomes of technology and communication workshops revealed a strong tendency towards a high level of advocacy and relatively lower level of inquiry. The review of the design of this workshop sequence revealed that to an extent this *advocacy/inquiry* relation was motivated by the design of the sessions and the project guidelines: the technology discussion and project requirements called for expression and articulation of own observations and experiences. While the topic of the project was cultural observations, it did not emphasize the presentation and reflection on purposeful interactions with people from another culture. Because the project addressed experiences, which happened before the intercultural competency training, the actual cultural interactions addressed in the projects were rather exploratory in nature. The following table presents the *Workshops Series 1* within the analysis matrix.

Table 2: Workshop series 1 – matrix

<table>
<tr><th>Workshop Activities Design</th><th>Evaluation</th><th>Advocacy/Inquiry Descriptors</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">The design of the learning activity allows for addressing the following aspects:</td></tr>
<tr><td>In the activity, the students:
(1) Express/articulate own views, thoughts, experiences, perceptions, desires</td><td>Yes</td><td rowspan="2">The activity has the potential to engage student in:
Advocacy through
(1) Modifying one's automatic functioning by transforming tacit knowledge to explicit;
(2) Building awareness of own cultural frames.</td></tr>
<tr><td>(2-a) Interpret own perceptions, experiences</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td>(2-b) Interpret others' perceptions, experiences.</td><td>Partially</td><td rowspan="4">The activity has the potential to engage student in:
Inquiry through
(1) Building awareness of others' cultural frames;
(2) Engaging in critical inquiry of mediation strategies and explore the possible outcomes.</td></tr>
<tr><td>(3) Participate purposefully in:</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>a. intercultural communication interactions</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td>b. interpret the outcomes, and</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td>c. propose solutions.</td><td>No</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Advocacy level: We evaluated the Advocacy level of this workshop as high. The *opening seminar* addressed conventions of technology-enhanced presentation practices and was followed by a discussion about the application of the conventions. This allowed students to establish awareness of their own cultural frames as well as transform and articulate knowledge as related to the topic of their presentations. The *project*

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task centred on participants' own experiences thus empowering them to develop and interpret their own views and reflections.

Inquiry level: We evaluated the Inquiry level as low. Presenting or considering the voices of the "others" was not included as a requirement and thus did not emerge in the projects. As a result, this task design motivated students to focus on their own exploration of the "foreign" culture and practices. The task design did not guide the students to critical analysis of these experiences through addressing their own doubts and judgements. Therefore, this workshop series had a limited power to lead the participants to new insights as related to "others" in intercultural interactions.

Workshop Series 2: Experiences of cross-cultural interaction

The workshops in this series were dedicated to the theme of intercultural studies and cross-cultural interactions. The activities prompted the participants to develop a project that would reveal their interpretations and reflections on practices and values from their own culture or a culture they study in depth as part of their majors. These workshops guided the participants to generate narratives about cultural practices, beliefs, and values and interpret these practices, beliefs, and values within a particular framework. The final project of the workshop was a text supported with visuals and multimedia (optional).

The overarching theme assigned to the project was to unveil the portrait of a culture, so it is understandable to the "other" and to propose effective communication strategies based on tacit and explicit cultural knowledge and practices. The final project was to compose cultural guides. The purpose of these guides was defined as providing support to outsiders for understanding cultural practices and thus to facilitate the intercultural communication between them and the "natives" of the described culture. In their guides, the students described and interpreted practices related to verbal and non-verbal communication, etiquette rules, social roles, and contexts of their own culture or the culture of their academic studies; they used personal cases, visuals, multimedia, and literary work to illustrate the chosen practices.

When analysed in the context of the *advocacy/inquiry* framework, the design of these workshop sessions was grounded on an attempt to describe reality with considerations of others and propose culture-informed reality negotiation strategies. The table 3 below presents the *Workshops Series 2* within the analysis matrix.

Advocacy level: The evaluation of the advocacy level of this workshop series was "high." The design of the learning activities of the second workshop series involved activities that could characterize them as high on advocacy level as the activities clearly called for expressing and explaining what is perceived to be "appropriate" in the context of a particular culture. The format of the project (guide) presumed, however, that the presented practices are somewhat prescriptive and should be adopted by the "others" without explicit negotiation.

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Table 3: Workshop series 2 – matrix

Workshop Activities Design	Evaluation	Advocacy/Inquiry Descriptors
The design of the learning activity allows for addressing the following aspects:		
In the activity, the students: (1) Express/articulate own views, thoughts, experiences, perceptions, desires	Yes	The activity has the potential to engage student in: *Advocacy* through Modifying one's automatic functioning by transforming tacit knowledge to explicit Building awareness of own cultural frames
(2-a) Interpret own perceptions, experiences	Yes	
(2-b) Interpret others' perceptions, experiences.	Partially	The activity has the potential to engage student in: *Inquiry* through Building awareness of others' cultural frames Engaging in critical inquiry of mediation strategies and explore the possible outcomes.
(3) Participate purposefully in:		
a. intercultural communication interactions	Potentially	
b. interpret the outcomes, and	Potentially	
c. propose solutions.	Potentially	

Inquiry level: The design of the learning activities in these workshops suggests a *higher level of inquiry* (as compared to the activities in Workshop Series 1). This higher position on the inquiry continuum is defined by the reflective and interpretative nature of the learning activities and final projects. The participants were guided towards the conscious exploration of their own or the target cultural knowledge. They worked towards the goal to identify, interpret, and articulate key cultural aspects with the intention to guide people in a possible/future intercultural situation. The final project required reflection and revision of cultural practices and beliefs; it also included a fair amount of reasoning as the underlying motives for the practices and the beliefs had to be explained. The sessions and project guidelines, however, did not include hearing the actual voices of those for whom the guides were intended – these voices were rather presumed.

Workshop Series 3: Intercultural practices – fieldwork

The third group of workshops aimed to provide the participants with the opportunity to bring together the competencies and skills built in the two previous workshop series. The participants who joined the workshops later were engaged in collaboration and scaffolding with their more experienced peers and had access to the materials developed previously. The workshops provided the opportunity to get involved in fieldwork aiming to research various aspects of intercultural practices in a variety of social settings while engaging in intercultural communication.

The opening part of the series included seminars addressing topics such as research design, field data collection, and data analysis. In the following discussion meetings, the students explored research strategies that would support the investigation of four themes as presented in another culture: (1) education, (2) social interaction

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in communities, (3) business communication, and (4) communication in government and international relation settings. The students could choose a theme or a combination of themes for their research. In their final projects, they presented the data collected during their fieldwork and engaged in the analysis of these data. The data were gathered through:

- Systematic ethnographic observations of cultures different from the participants' own culture;
- Text analysis of media publications relevant to the theme including both their own and the target culture;
- Interviews and surveys designed by the participants and targeting respondents from both the own and target cultures.

A vital part of this workshop series was to step out of the formal educational environment and collect information from international and domestic students.

The workshop development sequence was:

(1) Formulating the project and developing instruments;
(2) Collecting data through intercultural interactions;
(3) Systematizing analysing the data;
(4) Developing final projects that aim to negotiate intercultural contexts.

To present the collected information and its analysis, the participants developed manuals or research papers supported by multimedia presentations, posters, and/or culturally informed advertisement materials. They addressed their discoveries related to a variety of topics within the chosen theme presenting intercultural communication practices based on literature and their real-life experiences. The table 4 below presents the *Workshops Series 3* within the analysis matrix.

Advocacy and Inquiry: We view that the design of the third series of workshops promoted intercultural negotiation grounded on the values of the participants and their respondents. Therefore, it could be suggested that the design of this series of workshops achieved a high advocacy/high inquiry level. The overall focus of the series was to guide the participants in their learning about the respondents' culture, as well as to allow the participants to pose and answer possible hypotheses about the target culture while working on the projects.

The process of creating the interview and survey questions allowed the participants to establish meaningful connections between theory and practice by posing hypotheses and reasoning about those hypotheses. Moreover, during the processes of developing their data collection instruments (rubrics, questionnaires, surveys), they engaged in reflection on their own cultural practices and perceptions and extended them to the target intercultural context. Following the intention of these workshop sessions to

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promote discovery of cultural practices and reasoning about them, during the fieldwork, the participants initiated and engaged in active intercultural negotiation within a particular theme. The requirement to develop culturally sound supporting materials that would exemplify the outcomes of the research, motivated the students to interpret their own and others' perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours.

Table 4: Workshop series 3 – matrix

Workshop Activities Design	Evaluation	Advocacy/Inquiry Descriptors
The design of the learning activity allows for addressing the following aspects:		
In the activity, the students: (1) Express/articulate own views, thoughts, experiences, perceptions, desires	Yes	The activity has the potential to engage student in: *Advocacy* through Modifying one's automatic functioning by transforming tacit knowledge to explicit Building awareness of own cultural frames
(2-a) Interpret own perceptions, experiences	Yes	
(2-b) Interpret others' perceptions, experiences.	Yes	The activity has the potential to engage student in: *Inquiry* through Building awareness of others' cultural frames Engaging in critical inquiry of mediation strategies and explore the possible outcomes.
(3) Participate purposefully in:		
a. intercultural communication interactions	Yes	
b. interpret the outcomes, and	Yes	
c. propose solutions.	Yes	

4 Conclusion

Through the presented workshops, the Centre organized a dynamic laboratory, which served for years as a ground for collaborative exploration of intercultural communication and mediation practices. The materials developed during the three workshop series are currently used in a variety of courses, which address topics related to techniques for professional communication, business etiquette, and anthropology of religion at *Sofia University and Higher Francophone School for Administration and Management* (ESFAM).

4.1 Answering the Exploratory Case Study Research Question

The analysis of the learning activities in the negotiating reality – advocacy/inquiry framework, guided us in the process of answering the exploratory case study research question:

What is the potential of the workshops offered at the Centre's Intercultural Competency Laboratory to develop intercultural competence and mediation skills?

The assessment of the potentials of these activities to support the development of intercultural mediation skills of learners informed the conclusions of this case study.

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We found clear differences as concerned to the design of the workshop series and their advocacy/high inquiry balance. While in the first workshop series the presentation of advocacy and inquiry was imbalanced, the design of the following workshops allowed to achieve a greater balance between advocacy and inquiry. We interpret these differences as a logical progression of engaging the participants into the process of intercultural communication skills acquisition. These differences also present the process of Centre team's expertise development.

The presented analysis allowed us to reflect on what we have achieved and learned as intercultural educators. We believe this exploratory case study will inform and support the development of the future activities of the Centre as it currently goes through significant organizational changes. Our hope is that our reflection on the design of the learning practices will also inform the efforts of other educators to establish effective intercultural mediation practices in similar contexts.

4.2 What Lies Ahead

We will conclude this paper with a brief presentation of the Centre transition, which motivated this exploratory case study. In 2019, *The Centre for Intercultural Communication and Mediation* left its "home" – the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philologies and became part of *The Francophone Centre* at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." This change of affiliation marks an important stage of the Centre's development as it provides opportunities for engaging actively more University faculties in its activities. Sofia University is a member of *The Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie AUF* and *The Francophone Centre* plays a leading role in University's internationalisation activities and contacts with the Francophone universities network and beyond. *The Centre for Intercultural Communication and Mediation* team looks forward to the exciting and challenging prospect to embrace a larger number of disciplines, students, and faculty members in the effort to promote interculturality. Inevitably, this will add new projects and will map new routes for developing inclusive and innovative internationalisation practices.

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