Gyermeknevelés Tudományos Folyóirat, 2025, *13*(3), 111–124.
https://doi.org/10.31074/gyntf.2025.3.111.124

Tanulmány / Study Article

Building Blocks to Social Justice: Using Patchwork and Literature to Develop Intercultural Knowledge

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the design, implementation, and best practices used in the course, Intercultural knowledge, held in English through the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education (ELTE TÓK[2]). As an elective course, Intercultural knowledge can be attended by any student from the faculty, including pre-service daycare providers, pre-school educators, and primary teachers. In order to promote intercultural competence while raising awareness of issues pertaining to social justice, the interdisciplinary approach of combining patchwork with literary texts by authors Alice Walker and Susan Glaspell was applied. In practice, combining patchwork with selected literary texts has been shown to create an atmosphere of collaboration and cooperation that develops intercultural competence while encouraging discussion on sensitive topics related to social justice and inequity.

Keywords:

intercultural competence, patchwork, Alice Walker, Susan Glaspell, social justice, collaborative learning

This paper discusses the design, implementation, and best practices used in the course, *Intercultural knowledge*, held in English through the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Eötvös Loránd University's Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education (ELTE TÓK). As a competency, the ability to navigate intercultural situations has become increasingly essential for

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[2] In Hungarian the name of the university is Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE); TÓK represents the Tanító- és Óvóképző Kar, translated into Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education in English. In this case 'faculty' refers to the division of the university that would be the School of Education in American English.

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furthering not only communication but also understanding in a globalized world. Given the growing number of immigrant children in European classrooms, intercultural competence is also a necessary skill for future educators to possess. As an elective course, *Intercultural knowledge* can be attended by any student from ELTE TÓK, including pre-service daycare providers, preschool educators, and primary teachers. This course is additionally open to students from any school within ELTE, and it is common for there to be two to three students who have no background in education and are studying in fields as diverse as economics, art history or psychology. The only prerequisite to the course is an advanced level of fluency in English. Due to the increasing rate of internationalization, a growing number of Erasmus[3] students also choose this course as a part of their study abroad programme at ELTE TÓK. Approximately 15 to 20 students per semester take *Intercultural knowledge*, the majority of whom identify as female.

Considerations for Course Design

When planning the course content, a few factors had to be taken into consideration. The internationalization process at ELTE TÓK has not only led to the presence of Erasmus students from Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Greece, Georgia, Germany, France, Belgium, and Turkey but also includes students from English-language, international programmes, such as the full-time Kindergarten BA Programme launched in 2019 and the Early Childhood Education BA started in 2024. Together, these opportunities have led to a growing number of fluent English speakers whose credit fulfillments demand the availability of an advanced-level, English-language elective. Additionally, widespread access to digital resources, streaming services, and travel abroad has contributed to the increase of students at ELTE TÓK who may not study English within the classroom, yet have attained a relatively high level of fluency and wish to maintain or hone their language skills. One of the main challenges is therefore how to develop the competences of advanced speakers while also bridging the gap between a student who is preparing to be a daycare provider as opposed to one studying to be a primary teacher or even an economist and adapting to the needs of a culturally diverse group.

In recognition of the emphasis placed on intercultural competence by *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (2001, 2023), a document created by the Council of Europe for the purpose of establishing a uniform set of criteria for language instruction throughout the

[3] Erasmus students are exchange students who attend the university through an Erasmus Programme scholarship. Officially known as the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students, the Erasmus Programme facilitates the mobility of students primarily within the European Union. ELTE TÓK has a robust network of Erasmus partnerships with other European universities and hosts approximately 40 Erasmus students per semester.

European Union, the course was given the rather broad title of *Intercultural knowledge*, an umbrella term that provided enough leeway to design content that could satisfy the needs described above while also indicating that the main mission of the course would be to promote intercultural competence. As Ildikó Lázár pointed out in 2003, "intercultural competence is not necessarily included in the curriculum in most teacher training programmes in Europe" (p. 71). Indeed, most language courses at ELTE TÓK focus on language training and therefore develop the more traditional competences of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Yet, according to Rodríguez and Puyal (2012), "higher education will probably play an important role in providing intercultural training and preparing students to understand and accept cultural diversity. This internationalization calls for new methodologies that can help students achieve intercultural skills in order to interact efficiently in intercultural situations" (p. 108). Smolcic and Arends (2017) argue that teachers tend to see the world from their own racial, gendered, and cultural viewpoints; it is the duty of teacher training to ensure that students gain the ability to analyze critically their own culture while simultaneously possessing "a consciousness of how human differences are used by people in power to rationalize inequities and maintain their position in society" (p. 52). This combination of perceptions is how intercultural competence has been defined for the purpose of designing the course, *Intercultural knowledge*.

Given the target language, the culture in question is necessarily connected to English-language culture, yet the aim was neither to repeat the content of the *Civilization of English-speaking countries* course held for those pre-service primary teachers specializing in English nor to make the error of representing culture merely by its visible forms, such as food, clothes, holidays, etc. For the purpose of *Intercultural knowledge*, culture was defined based on the praxis of the Brazilian educator and reformer, Paolo Freire, who views culture "as a systematic acquisition of human experience" (1973, p. 48). According to Neumann (2015), Freire's interpretation of culture "incorporates the concrete, but reaches deep into the symbolic" (p. 436). As a proponent of critical education, Freire's praxis places great emphasis on critical inquiry, problem-solving, and social justice. In short, the challenge was manifold: how to create a course for advanced speakers whose intercultural competence could be developed in a way that would reveal the symbolic nature of culture while also promoting critical inquiry and drawing attention to social justice? Rodríguez and Puyal were correct in stating that new methodologies were required; I chose to combine patchwork, a visible, yet highly symbolic aspect of US culture, with selected literary works by Alice Walker (1944-) and Susan Glaspell (1876-1948) in order to invite inquiry and discussion into issues such as homosexuality, immigration, racism, segregation, and domestic violence. Since each 90-minute class is roughly divided into sixty minutes of inquiry and discussion and thirty minutes of patchwork, this paper will be separated into two sections that examine the methods used

to teach patchwork and the literary works. Although, for the sake of clarity, I analyze these two aspects separately, each is built one upon the other in a way that creates an organic whole.

Building Blocks: Teaching Patchwork

As a technique, patchwork – a form of needlework in which small, geometric shapes of fabric are sewn into patterns forming what is known as pieced blocks that are then sewn together to make quilts – has been in use for millennia and can be found in cultures around the world, including ancient Egypt and China ("Patchwork," n.d.). Quilted pieces of clothing date back to the medieval period, when the practice of sewing layers of fabric together was done to create protective padding for armour. Later, this technique was used to create warm bedding, known as quilts. Quilts consist of three layers (a top, the middle batting, and a backing) that are quilted together by means of running stitches done in highly decorative paterns; in Great Britain, the earliest form of a quilt had a top made of one piece of cloth, leading to a kind of quilt known as a whole-cloth quilt.

Quilting was brought to North America by English colonists who, according to historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, over the next few generations experienced a revolution in how cloth was produced as weaving went from being primarily done by male artisans in the seventeenth century to becoming the basis of what Ulrich terms the "female economy" in the late eighteenth century (p. 4). The fact that the feminization of cloth production coincided with the birth of the United States as a nation indicates the way in which arts such as patchwork and quilting are interwoven into US culture. Given the labour involved in cloth production and the difficulty in accessing imported fabric, it was necessary to save each and every piece of cloth: this sense of economy gave rise to patchwork which, in turn, spread throughout the United States as settlers moved West.

My own experience with patchwork and quilting stems from my family origins: for generations the women of my family have done various forms of needlework – including patchwork and quilting – while living in the cold mountains of northern New York State. By the age of four, I was learning how to knit, and cannot remember a time when I did not know how to use a needle and thread. The presentation that I hold on patchwork and quilting in the first class of *Intercultural knowledge* therefore combines the historical and cultural knowledge described above with my personal history, much the way the patchwork quilts I show to the class use cloth – sometimes taken from old clothes, sometimes bought with the direct purpose of becoming a quilt – to commemorate personal memories, thereby turning oral history into a visible cultural artefact. Quilts are intrinsically connected to each significant stage of life, from a baby quilt made to celebrate a new life, to a memory quilt used to preserve the clothing of someone who has died. Like

many American families, my own saw how, after World War II, quilts became replaced by factory-made blankets; during the 1980s of my childhood, it appeared that quilts could only be a thing of the past. Most of the women in my family also stopped making them: I have had to teach myself how to piece patchwork blocks and quilt. My presentation then turns to the revitalization of patchwork and quilting which I witnessed in 1996, with the appearance of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Washington D.C. (Stull, 2001). The first discussion we have as a class surrounds how the AIDS Memorial Quilt acted as a silent, yet powerful protest against the treatment of LGBTQ communities during the AIDS epidemic. Students' experience of the COVID pandemic emerges as a point of comparison.

As I tell the story of each quilt I show, I also ask students to think of their own stories and consider whose story gets told. Since patchwork and quilting has predominantly been done by women, how often do the oral histories of women get told? What about in their own culture? What story would they like to have told in university classrooms, for example? When they become teachers, what stories will they tell their own students? To quote the historian, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), "any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly" (p. 27). Not only a cultural artefact, a quilt also bears silent testimony to a history that can only be told if the quilt's narrative is passed down along with the quilt. Educators play an undeniably large role in the transmission of cultural narratives – or in the transmission of silences. I then ask students to create their own patchwork block while thinking of the silences in the stories that they have been told about their own culture.

Given that the majority of students has never threaded a needle, it is first necessary to teach the fundamental components of sewing; piecing a patchwork block only requires the most basic knowledge of sewing, why patchwork was traditionally used to teach young children how to sew in the United States. I offer examples of the many ways in which patchwork can be used to teach young learners, including the solving of mathematic problems (Carey, 1992). Fortunately, the required materials are also easy to acquire: students can choose from a large bag of fabric scraps that was donated to ELTE TÓK for the purpose of holding this course, purchase their own material, or bring cloth from home.[4] In the spirit of sustainability, I also recommend turning old clothes into a patchwork block, and some students have used this project as an opportunity to preserve a piece of clothing that can no longer be worn, but contains too many precious memories to be discarded. Once the fabric has been chosen, a needle, thread, scissors, a small ruler, and a pen or pencil are the only tools required. After the presentation and discussion, I show

[4] I would like to thank Ilona Hudák for donating the fabric used in Intercultural knowledge. Without her generosity, this course would be far more difficult to hold.

students how to measure, cut, and put together the squares used to make a simple nine-patch block.

For many, these steps require learning how to thread a needle or knot a piece of thread and take a first stitch. Like their usage of English, each student displays different levels of abilities in constructing and sewing their block. While I go around the classroom to help students individually, I observe that small clusters begin to form on their own as more advanced students aid those who struggle. The atmosphere of the class turns to one of the hallmarks of collaborative learning, observational or vicarious learning, i.e., "when one acquires information from watching another" (Nokes-Malach et al., 2015, p. 650). Since some students are guaranteed to forget their scissors or have the wrong kind of needle, the sharing of tools leads to an organic form of positive interdependence, an aspect of cooperative learning that can be produced by only providing one tool per group, thereby requiring students to cooperate (Oxford, 1997). Although both collaborative and cooperative learning have been strongly recommended for the language classroom and the promotion of intercultural competence (Lázár, 2020), I find that following a top-down approach to either (in which the teacher structures both the groups and the exercise) is less conducive to the development of the spontaneous conversations that arise among the students as they design, create, and work on their blocks. By the end of the class, students have 'broken the ice' on their own and Erasmus students, primary teachers, daycare providers, economists, art historians, psychologists, and pre-school educators are all getting to know one another.

As Igel and Urquhort note (2012), it should not be forgotten that members of Gen Z (including those born in the early 2000s) may struggle with being team players, a circumstance that –based on my observations – was only exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Additionally, the few young men who take the course sometimes require reassuring: they do not want to seem feminine for doing what they have been taught is 'women's' work. Some male students use this project as an opportunity to embrace their 'feminine' side while others turn their patchwork block into a homage to a national flag or their favorite sport team's colours. By the end, the young men are quite proud of their work and one even brought in his winter coat so I could teach him how to sew on a button that had fallen off; as another young man commented, "This course is good so we can grow up and not depend on our mothers." The precision required to design, measure, and put together a block also reminds male students of woodworking or playing with Legos. It is also sadly common for many students to lack the basic hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills needed to thread a needle, a phenomenon that underscores the absence of handicrafts in schools. Sometimes threading the needle proves the most difficult part of making a block: hand muscles must be developed before students can do it on their own. Students generally experience patchwork as an opportunity to slow down by doing something so

repetitive, it becomes meditative; other students are forced to learn to have patience when it comes to learning a new skill.

The issues mentioned above can all be addressed with a bit of individual attention. However, one of the main obstacles to creating a patchwork block also appears to be a matter of school socialization: no matter what country the student comes from, I find that an overwhelming number of students are hesitant to do anything that might lead to a mistake. One way in which I mitigate this issue is by assuring them that I will not assess skill when grading their work: they can only get one of two grades, either a failing mark for not doing a block, or a five, the highest grade I can give, for completing one block. In my opinion, creating a block for the very first time deserves a high grade for the effort involved, no matter how skilled the execution of the block was. The block must be completed by the end of the course and class time is provided each week for working on it. Students are encouraged to create at their own speed; some take most of the course to sew the one block, while others sew multiple blocks. Some students have asked me to show the next step of quilting the block while others have turned their blocks into pillows, Christmas tree decorations, or pencil cases. If a student has completed the block and does not wish to make more, during the provided handicraft time of the class they can crochet, knit, or do embroidery, skills I can also demonstrate. While this policy does help, I still find students unwilling to produce something that might not be perfect. Particularly among Hungarian students it is very common for them to ask me (repeatedly) for permission to create; is it really acceptable for them to choose this or that material? Do I really mean it when I say they can make the design their own? "Yes, but is this *all right*?", they anxiously continue to ask.

My solution to the students' anxiety regarding perfectionism is to introduce them to Gee's Bend, Alabama (US), home to generations of African American quilters who have developed their own, highly distinctive style of patchwork that does not follow a prescribed pattern (Sohan, 2015). Instead, a Gee's Bend quilter reuses virtually any kind of material to create a unique design that is notable for its lack of straight lines or geometric perfection. Yet, for all their 'imperfections', these quilts still possess their own power and beauty, as can be seen in the Youtube video that we watch about the Gee's Bend quilters, their art, and their lives (Curran, 2018). Despite their skill, it is evident from the video that the Gee's Bend quilters live amidst rural poverty and have had few opportunities for formal education; their usage of the African American dialect not only exposes students to a different aspect of English but also contrasts sharply to the next video I show featuring the professional quiltmaker, Joe Cunningham (Craft in America, 2014), an urban, White, male quilt artist who draws inspiration from Gee's Bend quilts.

Joe Cunningham's educated language usage starkly underscores the difference between being a professional artist – one with his own studio and special, expensive tools – and the traditional Gee's Bend quilter whose main

aim is to make something pretty and keep her family warm. The story of how Gee's Bend quilts became recognized as an art form leads into the discussion,[5] which focuses on the following questions: who gets to be an artist? How is art canonized? What is cultural appropriation? What is the difference between formal and informal education? Is there such a thing as 'female' versus 'male' art? Most importantly, once students have seen Gee's Bend quilts, when their own block is not a perfect square, I remind them how Gee's Bend quilters turn each 'wonky' block into a unique form of personal expression. Gee's Bend quilts invite us to enter another culture while also giving us permission to create freely, without the pressure of perfectionism.

For the sake of continuing these discussions in other classes, I use additional Youtube videos, thereby introducing students to the work of Navajo quiltmaker, Susan Hudson, and her technique of using applique and piecing techniques to tell the history of her tribe and make intergenerational trauma visible (Craft in America, 2019). Susan Hudson's spoken dialect offers insight into another aspect of English while ushering in crucial aspects of American Indian history, such as genocide and the legacy of residential schools. As a part of this introduction, I also tell students about Lakota star quilts, another example of intercultural influences evolving into a unique art form. Other than allowing us to discuss the repeated theme of whose story is told and how, introducing these artists and their works – from Gee's Bend to Joe Cunningham's urban studio or the Navajo reservation – decentres the common perception of quiltmakers as rural, White females who are 'truly' American.

Literary Works: Alice Walker and Susan Glaspell

Decentreing the myths surrounding quiltmaking as the old-timey, homey craft of the patriotic, thrifty (White) housewife requires a deep look into the kind of material used for quilts: cotton. Although other fabrics can be used, good quality cotton is undeniably the best type of fabric for creating a quilt. In fact, the batting inside the quilt is usually made of cotton as well, even though polyester or wool can also be used. The 'golden era' of quiltmaking occurred in the nineteenth century, when cotton production in the US reached its apex in the American South. With the founding in the 1820s of the Lowell textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts and the influx of cheap, immigrant labour (mainly young women from Ireland), cotton textiles became easily available. In other words, with the rise of industry, quiltmaking

[5] Classroom participation (50%) forms the third mark students receive for the course and is assigned for participation in the in-class discussions. Accuracy is not assessed as the fear of being marked for grammar usage keeps many students from speaking. Other than the block (25%), students are evaluated for one piece of creative writing (25%) that is connected to the literature part of the course. The written assignment is graded based on content and task completion.

came to depend upon the labour of slaves working on cotton plantations and the exploitation of female immigrants, facts that refer to silent narratives not generally acknowledged in the study of quiltmaking. While the plight of the Lowell mills' workers echoes today in the rise of fast fashion and the conditions found in Third World garment factories, students are less familiar with the legacy of slavery, including Jim Crow laws, racial segregation, and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, to which the Gee's Bend quilters also refer. (In fact, cotton picking is still one of the few jobs available to the inhabitants of Gee's Bend.) Written by the civil rights activist, poet, and author, Alice Walker, the essay 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' (1972) and the short story, 'Everyday Use' (1973), serve to connect these issues of social justice to the topic of quiltmaking. In homage to the Lowell factory workers, the play *Trifles* (1916) by Susan Glaspell is used to discuss women's rights via quiltmaking.

As Rodríguez and Puyal (2012) state, literary texts possess the power to build sociocultural images and experience a hitherto alien world. Furthermore, "The use of literary texts can promote reflection on cultural differences, develop understanding of the home culture, and consequently enhance more tolerant and open attitudes towards other cultures" (p. 108). 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' is an essay on differences, such as the difference between the opportunities available to a White woman as opposed to a Black woman. The central questions of the essay – which Black female artists can Walker turn to for inspiration and why were her mother and grandmother not viewed as artists? – are answered by the example of her mother's garden. Its beauty proves that the garden, the meals her mother prepared, and, yes, the quilts Walker's mother created are all the work of an artist who created sources of artistic inspiration. Walker decentres the concept of what should be conceived as art, thereby inserting the folk art of quilting into the discourse of what could be considered the High Culture of a literary essay. As she does so, Walker additionally uses the technique of bracketing to insert Black history and culture into the argument of another famous essay, 'A Room of One's Own' by Virginia Woolf. In other words, she rewrites the canon in a way that forces readers to reconsider their preconceptions regarding knowledge and what knowledge is transmitted. By the end of 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens', the social injustice caused by erasing Black history from literary discourse – or quilting from the artistic canon – has been reversed. Another silence in the narrative has been given a voice.

Although its language is not easy for even advanced students to understand and demands that we review this text together in class, this essay provides a powerfully personal, yet also theoretically persuasive backdrop to the art of the Gee's Bend quilters. It also prompts students to think of what art surrounds them in their own families. As the one writing assignment of the course, I ask students to write a description (in either prose or poetry) of the informally taught tradition or art that they can find at home. If they have not

learned something akin to this from their families, what art or skill have they taught themselves? Over the years, I have received beautiful testimonies to the art found in baking, cooking, canning, sewing, collecting driftwood at the seaside, biking, or setting a traditional, formal table for guests. Given the multicultural composition of the group, these essays not only demonstrate the students' often remarkable creative writing abilities but also capture the essence of their own culture. I read selections of these essays aloud in class anonymously so we can all appreciate that which was previously taken for granted while rewriting our own concept of what makes for art. The resulting discussion provides reflection on both Walker's essay and the influences that make up our lives.

Through the narration of a Black mother describing the arrival home of her daughter, Dee, the short story, 'Everyday Use', probes the question of whether quilts should be valued as works of art or instead put to everyday use as functional objects. Maggie, the daughter who remained home with her mother in the house that does not change, knows the oral history behind each and every patch in the heirloom quilt that Dee demands be given to her because she values it enough to hang it on a wall, as a piece of art, rather than put it to the daily use that would ultimately destroy the quilt, as Maggie would.

Dee has left the world of Maggie and her mother and brings back with her the influences of the Civil Rights movement, the "Black Is Beautiful" movement, the "Back to Africa" movement, and the Nation of Islam movement. To provide students with this historical and cultural information, I hold a short presentation on these movements and also show pictures of the type of house typically found in the American South that the narrator describes. The unchanging nature of the house symbolizes, I argue, the continuation of systemic racism, just as the sharecropper house closely resembles the slave cabins found at antebellum plantations. Within this context, this short story describes the clash between traditional and modern culture, as represented by the two sisters. Who should inherit the heirloom quilt? The sister who learned how to make quilts, but only sees them as blankets bearing the stories of her ancestors, or the sister who never learned how to make a quilt and knows none of her ancestors' stories, yet would be able to preserve the quilt as an *objet d'art*? The mother's decision to give the quilt to Maggie feels just according to the logic of the story, but is it actually the right decision? After all, only Dee would have the ability to write down the oral history Maggie knows. The discussion mainly centres upon these questions as students argue about the meaning of a quilt.

In my analysis of the story, I point out how the narrator – a Black woman from the South who mentions having had little opportunity for formal education – uses literary language in an internal dialogue that seems to follow the meandering style of storytelling, yet is cleverly woven together with the narratological technique of repeating the future simple tense in the phrase, "I will". Walker therefore creates an internal voice of dignity, knowledge, and

creative expression for a woman who – when she speaks – slips into the African American dialect used by the Gee's Bend quilters. Walker challenges our perception of the uneducated and poor; the question of whose voice is heard when telling a story returns in our reading of *Trifles*, the one-act play written in 1916 by Susan Glaspell, the first female playwright in the United States.

Trifles describes the investigation into the death of John Wright, a Midwestern farmer found choked to death by a rope knotted around his neck while he was lying in bed. On the isolated farm, only his wife, Minnie Wright, could have been the perpetrator; she is taken into custody and her house is being searched for clues by the district attorney, sheriff, and the neighbour who reported the crime. The men are accompanied by the sheriff's wife and the neighbour's wife; as they search the house and grounds for clues of the missing motive, the women prepare clothing to be taken to prison for Minnie. While going through the quilt blocks in Minnie's sewing basket, the women find evidence of Minnie's motive to murder her husband and are able to determine whether Minnie had been planning to quilt or knot the log cabin quilt she had been making, an allusion to both the murder and quilting that is not understood – and therefore derided – by the men. In the end, the women decide not to reveal their knowledge of Minnie's motive, thereby ensuring that Minnie will not be prosecuted for the murder of her husband.

Although the characters are repeatedly prevented from saying it aloud, it is heavily indicated that Minnie was the victim of domestic abuse. This obstruction in voicing a taboo topic is further exemplified by the total absence of Minnie's voice: she is the only character never present in the play. The other characters talk about Minnie while she herself is kept locked away. The effect of Minnie's absence is amplified in the title Glaspell gave to the short story she wrote based upon the play: 'A Jury of Her Peers' (1917). In the United States, the right for women to vote was only ratified in 1920: at the time that these works were written, only White men could sit in juries, passing judgement on court cases. By demonstrating the difference between men's and women's language and worlds, Glaspell encourages readers to question the justice of a system that only allows men to investigate, prosecute, and sentence murders. While women can actively participate in most political systems today, the question remains of whether domestic abuse is still a taboo topic or not. Additionally, we discuss the ethics of the women's decision to conceal the evidence of Minnie's motive, thereby obstructing justice. What is justice exactly? To answer the question of whether or not domestic abuse cases are more justly judged today, students are invited to describe the situation in their own country.

As one of the activities done for analyzing this play, the class is asked to sketch out the floor plan of the kitchen described in the staging instructions. The reason for drawing the scene is twofold: on the one hand, European students are less familiar with the lay-out and appearance of a Midwestern, American farmhouse. To aid their visualization, I show pictures of old

farmhouses from this region. On the other hand, establishing the lay-out of the furnishings, doors, windows, etc. makes the play's symbolism visible: the freezing cold kitchen with the stove that never heats up the room also circumscribes the world of the female characters in the play. While the men come and go from the doors that lead upstairs or outside, the women remain in the kitchen. Although the 'world' of this kitchen is occupied by the tasks, feelings, acts, and decisions of women, it is still a space heavily inscribed by patriarchy. Like the unchanging sharecropper's house in 'Everyday Use', the kitchen in *Trifles* testfies to the silent confines imposed by a systemic injustice that determines the very structure of the 'house' itself. This silence is reinforced throughout the play, as characters are repeatedly interrupted and stopped from describing Minnie's abuse. As Trouillot argues, "Power does not enter the story once and for all, but at different times and from different angles. It precedes the narrative proper, contributes to its creation and to its interpretation" (p. 28–29). Our reading and discussion of the play is followed by watching it performed by the Edge Ensemble Theatre Company in a Youtube video (Edge Ensemble, 2021). In the follow-up discussion, I encourage students to draw comparisons between what we have learned about structural injustice and more modern movements such as the MeToo movement and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Conclusion

Although I have taught this course multiple times, I have never had a student refuse to sew the block. Motivation is generally high, a phenomenon I credit to the fact that this course is taken as an elective, therefore it can be assumed that students are interested in the subject. After completing the block, a very few students have declared that they will never pick up a needle and thread again, yet they still struggled to the very end to finish their block. Other students have been inspired by the technique and created lovely projects. Some students have stated that sewing machines would be faster and easier; to this I reply that speed and ease is not the aim of the course. Allowing students to work on their blocks in class not only encourages collaboration but also means they are doing their own work, rather than having a family member sew the project for them, a 'solution' students have admitted to employing when it came to handicraft assignments done for other ELTE TÓK courses. The one recurring frustration I have as a teacher springs from the following tendency: if the course has many Erasmus students from the same country, these students will immediately switch to their native language when it comes time to sew the blocks. While alternate seating arrangements can alleviate this issue, the number and composition of Erasmus students can still make it difficult to ensure that the entire class is conducted in English. I consider this issue to be a test of both my and the class's ability to negotiate intercultural challenges.

Over all, the response to the course has been so positive that I have created a condensed version of *Intercultural knowledge* to add as a unit to my course entitled *English-language literature in communication*, thereby applying this interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of a literature course. While students are often surprised to be sewing in a literature class, they react positively to this innovation. The reward in combining patchwork with literary works is twofold: first, I get to enjoy seeing the shy pride students take in showing their finished work. I find it is important to encourage this sense of pride as many students seem to feel their accomplishment should remain hidden, a reaction that may be cultural in origin. I also recommend not allowing students to criticize their own work, as many automatically do when presenting their block. Secondly, through the analysis of literary texts and videos, I get to hear students hone their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Their critical thinking skills are not only activated but also remain present in connection with their own culture and that of others. In practice, combining patchwork with selected literary texts has been shown to create an atmosphere of collaboration and cooperation that develops intercultural competence while encouraging discussion on sensitive topics related to social justice and inequity. By addressing the silence left in narratives, it is the aim of this course that students ultimately gain an insight into the value of their own voices.

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