

# NO PREJUDICE-FREE SOCIETY MEANS NO PREJUDICE-FREE TEACHERS, BUT BETTER TIMES ARE COMING: TEACHERS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** Multicultural education tends to be automatically associated with pupils but in practice it places demands on all those involved in the teaching process. Of these the most predominant role is allocated to the teacher who mediates multicultural competence. Pupil attitudes towards foreigners and cultural diversity are not only influenced by multicultural education but also by teachers' beliefs—and teachers' beliefs are largely influenced by personal opinions and attitudes. The author presents the results of qualitative analysis performed on the unrestricted responses of 86 Czech teacher trainees and teachers on the topic of their experiences of foreigners. The analysis indicates their personal attitudes to foreigners, foreign cultures and diversity generally, the level of reflection in relation to cultural diversity, and discusses the results in relation to the wider sociocultural context.

**Key words:** prejudice-free teachers; teachers' beliefs; cultural diversity; multicultural education; the Czech Republic.

## Introduction

*How intertwined are teachers' beliefs, their personal attitudes to cultural diversity, social perception errors and multicultural education?*

When discussing the effectiveness of the various forms of multicultural education one factor that attracts particular interest is the role of the teacher which is arguably one of the most important elements in mediating multicultural competence. The role of the teacher goes far beyond the explicit transference of the subject matter. I believe that in shaping pupil attitudes to cultural diversity the maxim that teachers often teach without actually teaching has particular application. It is at this point that teachers' beliefs come into play more than usual. Ullucci (2007) has the following to say about the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their attitudes towards cultural diversity in the classroom:

Teacher beliefs form the foundation of the child/educator relationship. The expectations teachers have, their beliefs about the educability of children and their personal racism, overt or covert, impact their interactions with students.

I will argue that before we can consider new methods and new curricula, we need to consider our beliefs about the children we teach and how those understandings shape the educational realities of our students.

Ullucci is referring primarily to the US, but I would suggest that her ideas can be applied universally. I would like to explore this more deeply. While Ullucci concentrates mainly on the role the teacher's beliefs play in relation to the educability of pupils from other cultures, in this article I would like to focus on the 'personal racism' of the teacher, 'overt or covert', in relation to the teacher's role in shaping pupil opinions. I suggest that it is the teacher's ethnical stereotypes and prejudices, level of racism, that largely shape not only his or her own beliefs in relation to cultural diversity but also those of the pupil. The teacher may disseminate messages to the pupil, (often) unknowingly, and thus influence pupil attitudes to cultural diversity independently of any multicultural education. As Gay (2015) has aptly put it:

Whether positive, negative, or ambiguous, deliberate or unintentional, implicit or explicit, some kinds of beliefs and assumptions about ethnic, racial, and cultural differences are always embedded in instructional practices. Too often these beliefs are not reasonable foundations for effective instructional practices for culturally diverse students. These beliefs do not have to be explicated to be profound; in fact they often are not. Their ubiquitous and pervasive nature is another testament to their significance. (p. 449)

The explanation for this can be found in any social psychology textbook: it stems from the mechanism by which prejudices work. This mechanism acts as a filter, as a lens, and selects what we look at, hear or feel. This phenomenon features in the debate by social psychologists on errors in perception and attribution, in which they refer to stereotypes as 'energy-saving devices serving the important cognitive function of simplifying information processing and response generation' (Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 2014, p. 175). Thus, simply put, these devices show us the world (largely) as we wish to see it (e.g. Hayes, 1996). No one—not even the teacher—has a patent for objectivity. Stereotyping and other perceptual errors, and not just in relation to attitudes on cultural diversity, affect each and every one of us, but it is through teachers that they may have a particularly strong impact on the next generation.

The main idea behind this article can be expressed by reformulating the citation above by Kerri Ullucci to read: **I will argue that before we can consider new methods and new curricula, we need to consider our (teachers') personal racism, overt or covert, and how it shapes our students' attitudes towards cultural diversity.**

In seeking to explore the lenses of prejudice, we must first establish the nature of the lens. The following two questions may help us in this:

*What personal attitudes do teacher trainees and teachers hold in relation to foreigners, foreign cultures and diversity in general?*

*How do the participants' personal experiences of foreigners and foreign cultures affect their attitudes to cultural diversity?*

When summarising the current status of the research on teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity, Gay claims that while most studies involve prospective teachers, very few deal with practicing classroom teachers, teachers (including prospective ones) of colour, and teacher

educators (Gay, 2015, pp. 436-437). The research in this article, written by a teacher and teacher educator, involves members of all these groups<sup>1</sup>.

To explore mentioned questions I adopted a qualitative analysis approach<sup>2</sup>. The sections that follow describe the research respondents, the qualitative approach taken in analysing the responses, the subsequent presentation of the results, and the final summary in light of the questions posed above.

## Methods and participants

The overall research design, including respondent selection, was determined by the questions listed above. I did not opt for a pre-designed research strategy but for an approach tailored to the research situation that would enable me to gain a sufficiently large amount of quality data (cf. Peräkylä, 2005).

My interest in the role played by teachers' personal attitudes in relation to the effect they have on pupils and students stems from my own training and education as a psychologist and also from my work as a psychology lecturer on teacher training courses<sup>3</sup>.

In selecting the research participants, I took the opportunity to include my own students, some of whom are teachers. In two out of the three selected groups of students I decided to include the answers as a kind of exercise in controlled self-reflection as part of the course, and submitted as part of the student coursework using the online submission system<sup>4</sup>. It was made clear that the exercise was not compulsory but was one of a number of written tasks given out as part of the course, so the return rate was 100%. I am aware that students may have felt a certain duty to complete the task, which may have affected the data, but otherwise it would have been difficult to obtain the data. This is evident from the number of responses I obtained from students when I set the task as a non-compulsory one after the semester had finished; only four students out of the whole year submitted the task<sup>5</sup>. Once all the responses

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<sup>1</sup> In the Czech Republic there is a need to conduct more research on almost all those involved in multicultural education (teachers, teacher trainers, pupils and parents). The latest research I have found in this area relates to: the multicultural competence of students in the helping professions (Hladík, 2014), the intercultural communicative competence of English language teacher trainees (Kostková, 2012), and teachers' understanding of culture and teaching aims in relation to realia and intercultural communicative competence (Zerzová, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> I understand the term *qualitative analysis* to mean that qualitative methods are used in relation to the process of selecting the data, the method of presentation and discussion, and drawing conclusions and/or verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> I also teach Czech as a foreign language (to international university students and to children from the immigrant community, as part of my work with non-profit organisations) and am involved in social psychology research (e.g. Leix, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). I myself am a foreigner who has lived in the Czech Republic for many years. I provide this information since I do not deny that my own professional and personal experiences may have influenced the research and qualitative analysis; however, I seek to put that influence to positive use (cf. Plichtová, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> This was to preserve anonymity: it would be possible for me to identify the author of the piece via the online submission system, but the actual responses do not contain the author's name, just the gender and whether or not the author was also a teacher, and (in some cases) age.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the responses are just as extensive and open as those obtained when the task was one of the set of various written tasks.

had been returned, I had data from 86 participants in total—79 students from a number of teacher training courses on which I taught during the 2014/2015 academic year, 11 of whom were already working as teachers, and 7 teachers who were not students<sup>6</sup>.

The issue of attitudes to foreigners in the Czech Republic has attracted significant media coverage and openly negative attitudes are seen as socially unacceptable; making direct inquiries would thus have increased the likelihood of obtaining empty, politically correct responses. I therefore decided to set a single question formulated such that it avoided directly asking for the respondents' personal attitudes but increased the likelihood that they would be expressed. The students and teachers were all given the same task: to write about 'My experiences of foreigners'.

The method of data analysis was selected once the responses had been collected, printed and read. The responses were, barring one or two exceptions, long (ranging from half a page to a couple of pages, usually the best part of an entire page), rich in content and by and large surprisingly open<sup>7</sup>. Initially I opted for an approach commonly used in the first stage of qualitative content analysis—repeated reading of the responses. I first looked at the responses and formed my first impressions, noting the connections within them, and then re-read the responses gradually identifying the various themes related to my questions. I adopted a simple pen/paper approach to reading and coding the responses and did not use any of the software available for qualitative analysis; I am of the opinion that the latter approach to textual analysis in some way reflects the theoretical positions of the authors of the software (cf. Richards & Richards, 1984; Gavora, 2006), which I felt was undesirable.

The next stage involved preparing the text for the article. This was a more time-consuming stage that initially consisted of selecting the themes I wanted to cover in the article and the appropriate sections from which to quote, and then determining which themes required commenting upon. I also decided to quote directly from the responses as 'insurance' against the researcher seeing something that is not there. Moreover, readers can create their own opinion of the responses analysed. Ultimately a structure emerged providing answers to the questions set beforehand and based on the extracts from the empirical material. The final stage was the conclusion and it looks at the initial research questions within a wider context and indicates opportunities for further research.

I wanted to show the wide variety of opinion expressed by students and teachers; however, given the limited space available I decided just to present the themes that related more closely to the questions, and use one or two extracts at most to illustrate each of the themes, even though some of the themes featured more frequently (note is made of anything of interest in relation to the frequency). Each extract is marked to indicate the respondent's

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<sup>6</sup> The students attended three different teacher training courses: a full-time nursery school teacher training course (27), a distance-learning nursery-school teacher training course (29, of whom 8 had already taught), full-time continuing IT teacher training (19, of whom 1 had already taught) and distance learning specialist subject teacher training for secondary school teachers (4, of whom 2 had already taught). Seven teachers who had already taught in nursery, primary and secondary schools in various towns in the Czech Republic.

<sup>7</sup> It is possible the openness arose because of the way I briefly introduced the task—by quickly explaining the link between the frankness of respondents' answers and the meaningfulness of the research.

gender (M-F), age (where given), and whether the respondent was a student (S), teacher (T), or teacher/student (TS). Since, as I discovered during the analysis, type of study did not reflect any differences in opinion, this information is not provided. The analysis is presented as a series of thematic points (in bold) that crystallised around the two research questions. The extracts are accompanied by commentary explaining the specific socio-cultural context of the phenomenon being discussed for those unfamiliar with the cultural background.

## Findings

*What personal attitudes do teacher training students and teachers have in relation to foreigners, foreign cultures and diversity in general?*

This section begins by looking at the **Czech background**. The Czech Republic is a country that was culturally isolated for a long period before its borders were opened up following the change in political regime in 1989 and its accession to the EU in 2004. It is now rapidly catching up on what is familiar to countries with many years' experience of immigration—coming to terms with all that a multicultural society entails<sup>8</sup>. Although the Czech Republic is still relatively homogenous (foreigners represent around 4% of the population compared to 10% in many western European countries), in recent years there has been a keen interest in various aspects of life in a multicultural society. There is legislation relating to the inclusion of foreigners as new members of society and interest is growing in multicultural education amongst the authorities, universities and non-profit organisations. This is reflected in the education law which provides for multicultural education and in a series of multicultural programmes, adopted from abroad and created at home.

As far as integration is concerned, the situation regarding xenophobia has improved over the past few decades and tolerance of difference is increasing; however, the Czech Republic still carries the hallmarks of a closed society and is not sufficiently aware of the problems many foreigners face (Havlík, 2007; Dluhošová, 2008). Having provided a theoretical description of Czech society in this area, we now turn to the words of one of the research participants for insight into the situation on the ground:

*There aren't many opportunities to meet foreigners in my town. However, I did have the opportunity to work alongside a gentleman from Syria in one of my previous jobs. I was working as an estate agent and the gentleman was looking for a flat to rent. He spoke quite good Czech, but you could tell he wasn't from here (by the way he spoke). I had the feeling that finding somewhere for him and his family to rent would be a problem. It turned out to be even more of a problem than I had thought. We visited a number of properties together and most of the people said that there were other interested parties, but it was clear they simply didn't want the family in their flat. They invented all sorts of excuses so they didn't have to let their flat out to him. Once I even found myself in a situation where the owner threatened me and asked me what I thought I was doing even bringing this kind of client round – had I gone mad?*

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<sup>8</sup> Readers unfamiliar with the history of the Czech Republic will find some basic information in the following English language publication: Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National Identity and the Post-communist Transformation of Society* (1996)—a wide-ranging overview of Czech history and culture.

*While I was trying to find a flat I had the opportunity to get to know the gentleman better and I was pleasantly surprised. He had his own company and employed quite a few local people and you could talk about anything with him. He was just a completely ordinary person (note: I have just reread this and am shocked by what I wrote – why wouldn't he be normal?). If I am honest, at the beginning I didn't really trust him (I'd prefer another word over trust here but I can't think of anything better, I don't really know how to put it, perhaps I felt there was some distance between us). I don't know why. Maybe it's because he told me what country he came from. And possibly it could be the media which is pretty strong on this. If he had said he was from France, I'd probably have looked at him differently. No probably about it, definitely. A colleague of mine had a similar problem when she was looking for rented accommodation for a Vietnamese family. (M, 50, TS).*

In my opinion this response is an example that accurately captures the extent to which ethnic stereotypes and prejudices affect the lives of 'ordinary' people in the Czech Republic. Members of ethnic groups that do not have good reputations encounter serious problems in everyday life, such as finding accommodation as described here. Even someone helping someone like this can expect to be threatened. It is interesting to follow the respondent's note as he hesitates over the fact that his own attitude to the gentleman from Syria was not initially neutral.

What stands out here is the reference to the **influence of the media in shaping attitudes**. Let us now consider Czech media attitudes to foreigners. Two Czech sociologists, Klvačová and Bitrich, describe the main characteristics of Czech reporting on selected groups of foreigners and the way in which the media image of these groups is created, in a chapter titled 'How Foreigners Are (Not) Written About in the Czech press' (2003). They analysed a total of 1,627 articles and found that almost all of them were written from the perspective of Czech society, i.e. they covered the problems Czech society has with foreigners rather than the problems foreigners encounter in the Czech Republic. Their findings indicate the authors of the articles write about foreigners, that is they 'talk about them and not to them', giving foreigners no opportunity to say that they are not all alike, and that they portray the presence of foreigners in the Czech Republic as a peculiar or even pathological phenomenon (pp. 60-64). Klvačová and Bitrich examined articles about the Vietnamese, Ukrainians and Roma in the Czech Republic. They concluded that: 'The Vietnamese are chiefly associated with market stalls, Ukrainians are usually described as labourers or members of organised gangs, while the Romanians are most often portrayed as beggars, pickpockets and thieves'. In this next section, we will be able to compare these conclusions with the responses of the research participants, which I cite mainly in relation to other themes.

**Who is a foreigner?** Some of the participants began their responses by contemplating who the foreigners they could write about might be. Foreigners were generally defined as in the extract below: as someone who does not have Czech citizenship or who cannot speak Czech.

*For me a foreigner is someone who doesn't have Czech citizenship and someone who can't speak or write Czech. (F, S)*

The responses indicate that respondents divided foreigners into two further categories—firstly, those from foreign countries they had visited, and secondly foreigners living in

the Czech Republic. This distinction is important since one of the things it relates to is significant differences in general attitude; while the descriptions referring to foreigners living abroad were largely positive or very positive, those relating to ‘local’ foreigners were mostly neutral or negative.

The foreigners that Czech respondents encounter in the Czech Republic are most often tourists, immigrants (the participants most frequently mention Vietnamese and Ukrainian immigrants) and the Roma. The **Roma** and Slovaks together form another category who are, according to the participants, ‘*not really foreign*’, albeit for very different reasons.

*Roma. In my opinion, there is nothing good about these people. There are of course exceptions who attempt to adopt our culture. Most of them are dirty people who flaunt the rights our ‘stupid state’ gave them. Perhaps I say this because of media influence or the influence of friends and acquaintances, I don’t know, but it is regrettable that these people generally don’t even want to fit into our culture and ruin our lives and the lives of Slovaks and other people.*  
(F, S)

One aspect of Czech society is that it has long held very negative attitudes towards Roma<sup>9</sup>—something it shares with its Slovak neighbours. The Roma are an ethnic minority who have long lived in the Czech Republic and many have Czech citizenship (and so many respondents do not consider them to be foreign), who are recognisable due to their external appearance (skin colour, hair, clothing etc.) and are considered to have ‘difficulty adapting’ to Czech culture. The majority population accuses them of aggressive behaviour (several respondents mentioned this), criminality (this relates to the analysis of the Czech media referred to above) and, also of abusing the benefits system. Here, we can state in simplistic terms that Allport’s *contact hypothesis* does not apply, and that is clearly partly because the conditions for mitigating ethnic prejudice are absent<sup>10</sup>. Openly expressing very negative attitudes in relation to Roma is commonplace in Czech society. Of the responses received 12 were openly negative and only 3 were neutral and 1 positive.

Let us not forget that it is not simply the media that shapes attitudes. The extracts that follow discuss **national xenophobia, intergenerational teaching, the influence of the history of national history** and describe how **negative attitudes to the Roma are created, reinforced and disseminated in Czech nursery schools** (incidentally, the second extract is one of a handful—one of three altogether—that **defend the Roma**):

*In all honesty I have to say that that the Czech character has a certain degree of xenophobia embedded within it, which can be variously ascribed to the history of its wars, because nothing occurs without reason and the impact of the past on Czech distrust of foreigners is very marked*  
(F, 27, S)

*My granny has always said that the Vietnamese are bad because they grow drugs here and the Roma are to be pitied because we are a discriminatory country* (F, S)

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this see, for instance, Jirasová, Pospíšil, & Sulitka, *Národnostní menšiny v České republice* (2008).

<sup>10</sup> Equal status, opportunities to work together, opportunities to get to know each other, contact with non-stereotypical individuals, socially supported contact, working on common goals (e.g. Hayes, 1996).

*I see how often prejudice is expressed by those around me. For example my father likes anything to do with the Second World War. So he doesn't like the Japanese and when I ask him why he can't tell me. On the other hand he is a brilliant car mechanic – and that he can explain to me (F, S)*

*The children notice that Toník's behaviour is non-standard [a boy of Roma origin – A.L.] firstly – he throws things around, can't sit still, seeks attention by prodding those around him – Jeník [a Czech boy – A.L.] mentions this to his mum (despite it not affecting him directly) – his mum shares her opinion of the 'little rascal' and for the next few days repeatedly asks him (when he comes home late): are you feeling unhappy? Has Toník annoyed you, for example? – thus gradually passing on, confirming and layering her own assumptions in Jeník; Jeník, firstly feels loved and wants to keep feeling loved, secondly he already has the fixed idea that Toník is always annoying – since his mum keeps asking him about it – so he tells his mum that yes, he has been annoying him, despite it not really being true, because she is paying attention to him – his mum has a go at the teacher, the other parents notice, the words 'gypsy' and 'rascal' become associated together, further strengthened in a conversation in the cloakroom with the others by Jeník's angry mum (if he so much as harms her Jeník) – in come Toník's parents and loudly complain of racism... (F, 29, TS)*

The **Vietnamese**, along with the Roma, Slovaks and Ukrainians, are one of the ethnic groups that the respondents encountered most frequently in the Czech Republic. Most respondent attitudes to the Vietnamese were negative, only a few were neutral; attitudes to Ukrainians were somewhat more positive. The responses most frequently linked the Vietnamese with the market or cheap market stalls, while the Ukrainians were associated with being cheap labour—comparable then with the findings of the media research mentioned earlier, with the exception that there was no mention of any aggressive behaviour. Those interested in the role of language in interpersonal contact will be interested in the response below referring to the Vietnamese that confirms that foreigners whom we cannot understand are more foreign to us (cf. Petrjánošová & Leix, 2012; Graf, Hřebičková, Petrjánošová, & Leix, in press):

*The first major barrier is their language, which is as foreign as French or Italian for example, but is not as promoted in the Czech Republic, and so we see the Vietnamese as being more foreign (F, S)*

**Slovaks** are another ethnic group, alongside the Roma, whom respondents did not consider to be foreign.

*I will start with those who are closest – the Slovaks, even though they are not considered to be 'foreign'. I have to admit that I have a real weakness for Slovaks and Slovakia. I love their language. As a child I watched, and still do, Slovak TV shows and series (F, S)*

In this case, however, the two conditions for considering a person a foreigner do not entirely apply; first of all until recently the two groups—Czechs and Slovaks—lived together in one state—Czechoslovakia—and secondly the two languages are similar enough that the two nations can understand each other fairly well. Generally that is the case; however, there are generational differences. The younger generation of Czechs who did not experience life



in the common state perceive Slovak differently. The response that follows indicates the extent to which Slovaks are becoming ‘foreign’<sup>11</sup>:

*Recently I have increasingly become aware of the fact that even Slovaks, who I never before considered to be foreign, are in fact foreign. When I first encountered Slovaks, we had no problem making ourselves understood, even though some of the words are different. But now at university I take a compulsory course taught by a Slovak and now realise that we are different nationalities (F, S)*

**We aren’t used to smiles and openness**; this was something most frequently mentioned by respondents in relation to foreigners abroad as having made an impact on them (in total 21 times, generally in relation to visits to England). The frequency with which this was mentioned is, I believe, a reflection of the Czech mentality.

*Walking along the street I would come across people who would stop and exchange a few words with me. It was really nice, usually they just asked how I was, often we talked about the weather and the point of my excursion. Meanwhile they never forgot to smile. Initially, I was taken aback because here in the Czech Republic I have not come across it but gradually I got used to it. The point was they were total strangers and they had no problem chatting to me and talking about the day (F, S)*

Of all the responses I found only three that describe **reality as being better than the prejudice**; one is contained in the first extract, where the respondent expressed surprise that their client was different—better—better than expected, and here is another:

*Although I had heard from many people before I went to France that the French are a proud nation and don’t like to speak any language but French, and that the metro is dangerous and people are often robbed or the worst thing I heard was kidnapped by someone. My experience was totally different [...] I never had the experience that someone would look at me and not talk to me or not try to speak broken English so we could understand each other. They were always obliging and kind so I can’t praise the country more (F, S)*

**Foreigners must adapt!** Attitudes such as this one above were frequently expressed by the respondents—regardless of age or gender, or whether they were students or teachers. The example below is reflective of another strong source of similar attitudes—the media.

*It doesn’t bother me if immigrants come here from all over the world. But what does bother me is if they don’t adapt to the lifestyle here and if they try to make us adopt their customs and habits. If people don’t like the way we live here, our customs etc then they can ‘move on’ and find their dream country. Personally I can’t imagine wanting to live in Syria and professing my Christianity, I would be murdered for sure. Here the opposite is true – nothing would happen and these minorities receive support. I just want to live in my country, honour the customs of this country and not worry that that someone who can’t fit it would do something to me (M, S)*

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<sup>11</sup> For more on this see, for instance, Petrjánošová, Leix, *Languages of border lands, borders of languages: native and foreign language use in intergroup contact between Czechs and their neighbours* (2013).

I consider it important that all the responses from teachers, obtained via my own students, largely related to this aspect—regardless of whether they were by a fifty year old or twenty year old teacher—below is an example:

*Spoilt and running wild [children], the parents make no effort to adapt to our culture<sup>12</sup>*  
(F, 20, T)

**It is as if difference is completely ordinary, like there being a red crayon in the pack.**

*I would like Czech children to feel from the outset that having a classmate who may at first appear to be 'different' is totally natural and nothing special and that they are just another ordinary member of the class like blonde, blue-eyed, bespectacled children... You should only give children who are 'different' silent and unobtrusive support when it is needed and not impose on them and parade about. It seems to me that only this way will we prevent children from learning a false sense of politeness, if we see them as ordinary as there being a red crayon in the pack rather than putting up with difference* (F, 29, ST)

This poetic response with a great deal of reflexivity is part of a longer one by the nursery school teacher I referred to above in relation to the transmission of prejudice in nursery schools.

**Positive ethnic stereotypes** – There are 7 responses in total containing positive ethnic stereotypes or attitudes (as opposed to 36 that refer to negative stereotypes and attitudes). One example is given below:

*Sweden. I was totally taken by the country and didn't want to go home. It was such a carefree, clean timeless country. Of course it is about the financial situation, the political and educational systems and the beautiful countryside. All that has an impact on people and so they are kind and mentally well-balanced. That is why I generally see the Swedes as being very positive and open. They are also very intelligent people who have something to offer the world.*  
(F, S)

The participants also claimed: **it is important to gain an education but one cannot read everything.**

*The things a foreigner might consider normal in their culture might be taken as shocking in ours and vice versa. However, if they don't know that and no-one tells them then they won't understand why the response is the way it is. That's why when I go to a foreign country I try to read about it first, about the culture, dining habits. I think, although probably in vain, that everyone else should do that too. But you can't read everything and so even I sometimes found myself in situations where the locals were shocked and I had no idea why* (F, S)

The most frequently mentioned category (37 times) was **nationality isn't everything.** One could speculate as to how honest the response below is and how often it is repeated because it was seen as socially desirable.

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<sup>12</sup> This is all this particular respondent had to write on the theme *My experiences with foreigners* and it is by a teacher—not a student.

*I don't think it matters where you are from but what your moral principles are, how you behave, what kind of personality you have. Many more things 'tell' you about a person than just their nationality (F, S)*

What influence do the participants' personal experiences have on their attitudes to cultural diversity?

### **Foreign family members and a Czech family abroad as a guarantee of contact**

*I was always brought up by my parents in a multicultural way. Our dad is Slovak so most of our family are in Slovakia, we have other relatives in Sweden, my brother is currently working in Russia and my boyfriend has residency in Andorra, so I really don't think it is about where the person was born but what kind of person they are (F, S)*

Having a foreigner in the close family could in a way 'force' frequent and generally positive contact and usually has a positive impact on the general openness of all the participants. However, they also highlighted another way in which family relations can be 'used' to foster openness—when you have to travel abroad to visit family:

*My granny has lived and worked in Germany for more than twenty years. One of the few ways of seeing her is to travel to Bavaria. Perhaps this is why I have never looked 'foreign' abroad (F, S)*

**Positive relationship to cultural diversity – frequent experiences abroad.** This category includes many references to exchange visits as part of Erasmus type exchange programmes or to working as an au pair. This is the most typical kind of extract:

*For five years now I have been travelling and performing all over Europe with the Dívčí saxophone orchestra in which I play. In total we have visited 16 countries in Europe [...]. I have not had any bad experiences with foreigners since I respect their lifestyles and customs (F, 21, S)*

### **Stereotypes and prejudices – limited experience abroad**

*My experiences of foreigners are so few as to be almost non-existent. It is really because as a family we have never gone anywhere we are likely to come into contact with them. But I have met some of the ones here. I met a German woman in our town. She wanted to see one of the sights, she was very politely behaved and kind. She created a very favourable impression on me. I also met some Italians when on holiday. They were very sociable and outgoing – a bit too much for my taste. One nationality I come across quite frequently is the Vietnamese. They are market traders and my opinion of them isn't that great, but I think they behave the way that particular society allows them to (F, S)*

In light of the *contact hypothesis* no one will be surprised to discover that more frequent contact may positively influence attitudes to foreigners and foreign cultures, while minimal experience is often associated with stereotyping (in this extract: the politely behaved German, the social and noisy Italians, and the Vietnamese—market traders). What is interesting is to

see when the *contact hypothesis* seems not to apply. This example illustrates the idea that **frequent contact does not unconditionally guarantee openness**:

*I have regularly holidayed abroad with my parents since I was 8 years old [...] Personally I am not a great fan of multicultural societies because I think they bring with them a whole range of problems (M, ST)*

*My experiences with foreigners are in no sense limited. A couple of times a year I travel abroad whether out of pleasure or on holiday [...] I am certainly not racist. I simply expect immigrants to honour the traditions of the country to which they have moved and become part of it. Then they won't promote their own ideas and attempt to change things and introduce new things into the country. Thus far I haven't come across anything like this in the Czech Republic but every day you read news about attacks by inhabitants who don't integrate, or who steal, etc. (M, S)*

The examples given above are not the only ones and indicate quite clearly that frequent contact need not automatically result in a generally open attitude to cultural diversity. However, when I returned to the respondents' definition of 'Who is a foreigner?', I realised that responses of this nature related only to foreigners living in the Czech Republic. Descriptions of positive attitudes to foreigners abroad were generally linked to descriptions of frequent experiences abroad. Here is one example indicating that **positive experiences do not guarantee positive expectations**:

*My experiences, as I described earlier, are not particularly numerous but I do have some. I hope to have more in the future and I hope they will all be positive just as they have been up to now. Even though I know that in many cases, this is not the case (F, S)*

This response is another example of the fact that attitudes to foreigners and to cultural diversity generally may not necessarily be influenced through actual contact. The type of personality and extent to which the stereotypes are fixed has to be taken into account. As do other influences such as **fear of speaking a foreign language**:

*I know lots of people who would like to go abroad and work as an au pair for example but who are scared of not understanding people abroad. I'm like that. I'm afraid of going somewhere. [...] It is much more difficult to have experience of foreigners when you are scared of going somewhere or of dealing with foreigners when you can't understand them (F, S)*

## Conclusions

*Travelling is more and more fun but at home we like things our way.*

Teacher and teacher trainee attitudes to foreigners, foreign cultures and diversity generally vary greatly and it seems do not differ from those found in the society they live in. The students and teachers subscribed to a wide range of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices commonly found in Czech society. When comparing the research findings on Czech media attitudes to selected ethnic groups, we find that there is a link with what applies in other countries: 'There also is a high level of congruency between the beliefs teachers hold about cultural diversity and those prevalent in society at large, and these beliefs are highly resistant

to change' (Gay, 2015, p. 449). The responses paint a specific picture of Czech attitudes to cultural diversity: one of the categories most frequently represented is that concerning negative statements about the Roma, which are clearly socially accepted, and 'politically correct' statements such as *it's not about the ethnicity but the person*. On the other hand, many respondents expressed a very high degree of reflection, and understanding of the mechanisms behind prejudice, on the reasons for their own particular attitude to difference.

The effect of participants' personal experiences on their attitudes to cultural diversity cannot simply be reduced to an equation. Three categories emerged:

- a) contact with foreigners and foreign cultures fostered through the family—this could be through having family members who were citizens of other countries, or through having Czech family abroad and the need to visit them etc.—in each of the responses this was associated with positive descriptions of cultural diversity;
- b) frequent contact with foreign countries was associated with descriptions of positive attitudes to foreigners and cultural diversity abroad, but there did not appear to be any connection between this and openness to foreigners living in the Czech Republic;
- c) the requirement that foreigners should adapt to the rules of Czech society featured strongly and linked participants regardless of age, gender or whether they were teachers or teacher trainees. Importantly however, this requirement was found regardless of whether there was any mention of frequent positive experiences of foreign cultures abroad.

The unambiguously optimistic conclusion one could draw is that the current generation of teacher trainees and teachers—along with the rest of Czech society—has incomparably greater opportunity to experience foreign cultures and meet foreigners than their parents did. Less optimistically, this clearly does not automatically mean that negative attitudes to foreigners will disappear; or at least not to all. One could say that attitudes will increasingly be based on personal experiences, which reduces the risk of stereotyping, and that this may lead to a further reduction in the xenophobic tendencies against foreign cultures and against foreigners living in their own countries (or at least outside the Czech Republic). Attitudes to the main ethnic groups who have traditionally lived in the Czech Republic generally contain a strong affective element, so we can expect them to be particularly resistant to change.

The notion of tolerant and non-discriminatory co-existence, in Europe and beyond, is associated with a great deal of uncertainty. The aim of this article is not to impose a single, correct vision of a multicultural society shaped by the best possible model of multicultural education, but rather to highlight the fact that whichever model we prefer, the co-existence of many ethnic groups in one state—now inevitable today—will clearly not lie in the dissemination of ethnical prejudice and the strengthening of xenophobic tendencies. Teachers convey their attitudes both intentionally and unintentionally. There is little we can do with the unintentional ones, but the intentional attitudes should simply be, I argue, intentional. Consequently, we can then—like one of the Czech Republic's foremost pedagogues—ask ourselves: 'Should teachers convey their own attitudes towards ethnic and racial groups or should they hide them and present pupils with the official opinion found in teaching programmes and textbooks?' (Průcha, 2011, p. 68). I cannot answer this; however, as a psychologist I believe that in the long run practically nothing can be hidden. This article, while having no response to this question either, has at least done the initial groundwork

by clearly indicating that ethnic prejudice is as widespread amongst Czech prospective and practicing teachers as it is amongst the general population, and that this simply have to be taken into consideration when creating effective multicultural educational programmes.

But here, instead of investing more and more resources into creating new programmes and acquiring the technology we should be rather investing in teachers and teacher trainees and their multicultural competence. Let us not forget that teachers were influencing pupil attitudes to cultural diversity long before anyone set about defining multicultural competences and will continue to do so even when the power fails in schools and they have to do something with a classroom full of children from all over the world with no lesson plan in hand because it is buried on the hard disk.

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