



4th Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Service- Learning

The practice of reflection as a mean to
develop reflective intercultural
competence and its assessment through
the RICA model

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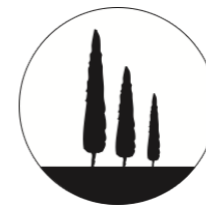


The International Center for Intercultural Exchange at Siena

The International Center for Intercultural Exchange at Siena is an organization based in Siena, Italy, and is composed of several distinct units that share a common mission and work towards promoting intercultural exchange, both in Italy, the U.S. and around the world through a commitment to service-learning and community engagement.



Siena Italian Studies



NOVE CULTURAE VENTURES



The International Center for Intercultural Exchange at Siena

The International Center is dedicated to high quality student learning outcomes.

In order to achieve this...

- In 2004 the International Center faculty first developed an instructional approach: **FICCS**
- In 2008 the IC team subsequently developed an assessment tool, **RICA**, to measure the **unique competence** resulting from the use of the FICCS approach: **Reflective Intercultural Competence**.



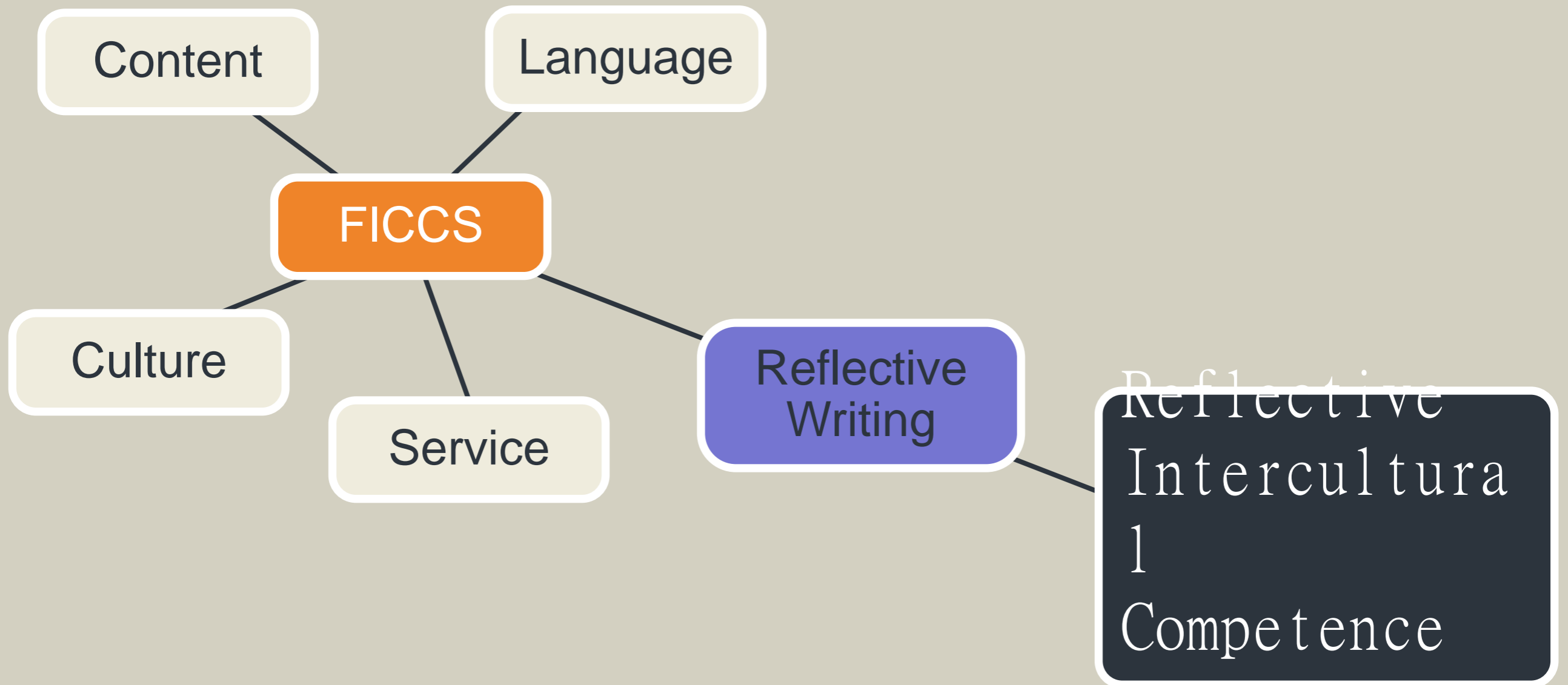
Service at the International Center

Service programs offered at the International Center for Intercultural Exchange because it allows for a deeper engagement with the host society.

Depending on the academic track of the student within the programs offered at the International Center (Academic Semester or Service-learning program), students are engaged from a minimum of 2 hours/week to a maximum of 20 hours/week in service-learning.



FICCS: Full-Immersion Culture Content and Service





The FICCS Approach

FICCS (Full-Immersion: Culture Content & Service) is the purposeful union of guided and spontaneous acquisition in order to develop Reflective Intercultural Competence through the components of its acronym along with the employment of Reflective Writing.



Reflective Intercultural Competence (RIC)

... is a competence gained through a structured and guided reflection process; it implies a conscious elaboration of intercultural encounters thus allowing a full engagement of the student who, hopefully, becomes a social actor in the host culture (C2).





FICCS: Culture

Culture

live: it is the way we think, the languages we speak, the way we relate to others. Therefore Culture can be the culture of a group/population, but it is also a very personal concept, it varies a lot even among people belonging to the same group. Culture is something bigger than the food we eat, the music we listen to or the way we dress, but one belongs to it. Culture is not fixed but it is something that a community/society constantly builds, we transmit culture from generation to generation through our societies.



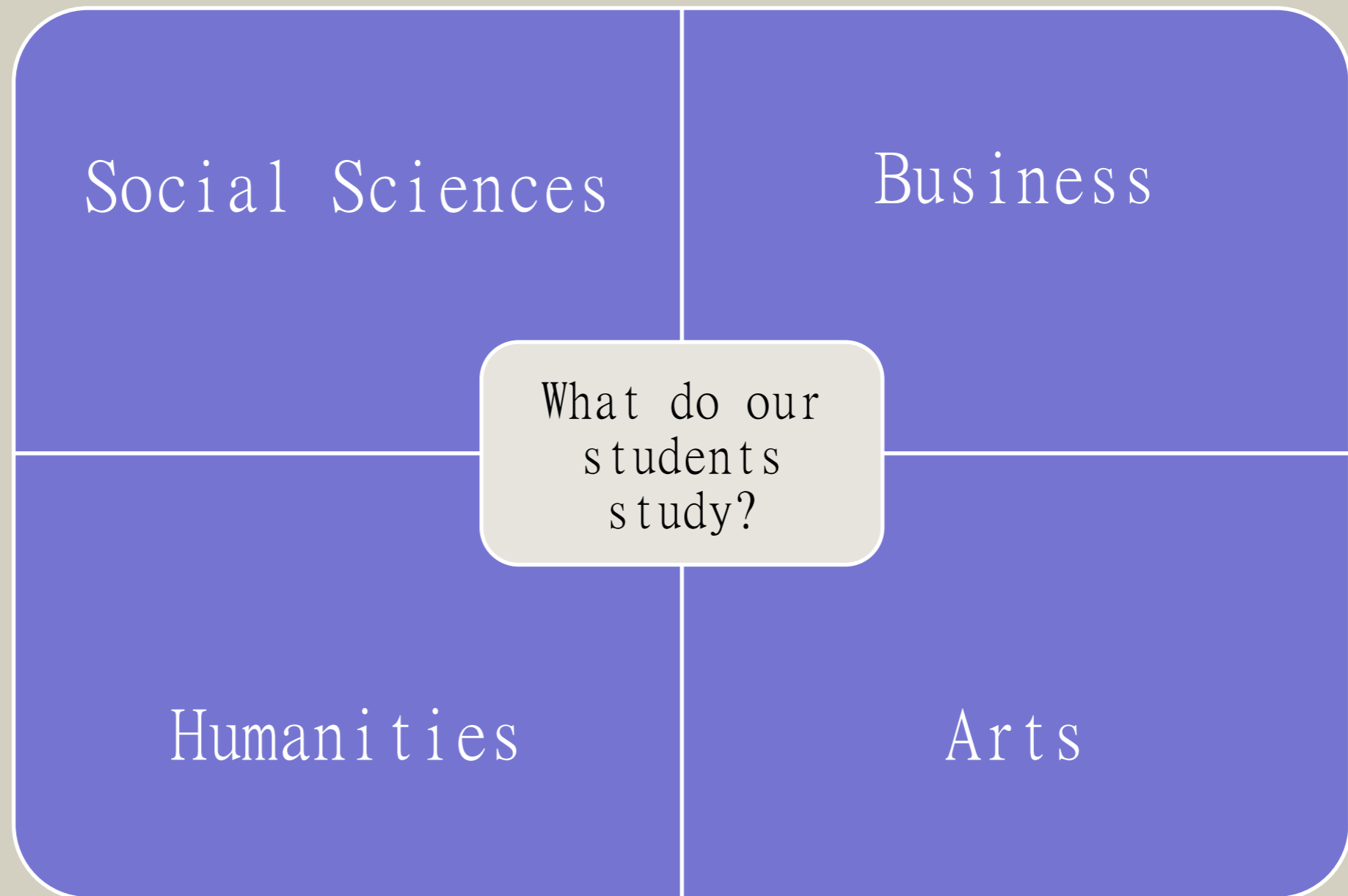
FICCS: Culture

For FICCS, culture can be described as a SPIDER WEB supporting all cultural expressions.

Like a spider, students weave their own web in order to arrive to and connect the various aspects of reality surrounding them, gauging themselves with the difficulties that they face (the web could break, the strings could be weak) and successes that they encounter (the web is strengthened, allowing it to catch and keep information to be studied).



FICCS: Content





FICCS: Service

Service sites at SIS

Healthcare

La Misericordia (ambulance service)

Casa di riposo "Poggio al Vento" (elderly home)

Hospital "Le Scotte"

"Il Laboratorio" (center for the mentally/physically disabled)

Social Aid/Immigration

La Mensa Dei Poveri (daily soup kitchen)

La Corte Dei Miracoli (Immigrant service center)

Education

Kindergarten

Elementary school

High school



Reflection while immersed in the C2

Reflection unites the experiential and academic experience and learning, uniting the two opposite poles of acquisition --academic and experiential-- which are combined using the FICCS approach.

Through reflection the student creates his/her own understanding with an intercultural perspective.

Reflection also serves as an antidote to intercultural stress.



Reflective Writing (RW) Class Structure

Although reflection is an individual process, it is guided and structured in our Reflective Writing course.

Class meets once a week during which the students share journal entries with the instructor and their peers concerning their studies, service and overall experience.

The journal entries provide data on the RIC developmental levels of the students.



The Role of the Reflective Writing Instructor

In the classroom the role of the instructor is a delicate one and implies a deep cultural sensitivity.

The instructor is a key reference point and represents the social actor *par excellence*. He/she is the perfect bridge between two cultures and, even better, has a multicultural identity himself/herself

He/she facilitates the encoding/decoding of all cultural signs of the C2.



Learning Outcomes: the RICA Model

Reflective Intercultural Competence Assessment Model analyzes the development of RIC through the FICCS approach.

The FICCS approach belongs to the tradition of Reflective Education which is applied in our case to the acquisition of second languages and cultures. The necessary conditions to apply RICA to any other context are: full-immersion in a C2 along with FICCS criteria (language courses, content courses taught in the second language, home stay, service component) and of course the implementation of a structured reflective writing course.



Having
there

The RICA Model (F. Biagi, L. Bracci)

tool in order to evaluate the development of RIC.

The RICA model follows the tradition of developmental models such as DMIS (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) by J. Bennett & M. Bennett (1986). In these models “as one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one’s potential competence in intercultural relations increases” (Bennett J. and Bennett M. “Developing Intercultural Sensitivity” in Handbook of Intercultural Training (2004). p. 152)



The RICA hypothesis

Service-learning students proceed in the development of RIC at a faster pace since they are stimulated by a much deeper and sustained engagement in the C2.

Thus far approximately 80 journals have been analyzed which can confirm this hypothesis.



The six RICA levels

Pre-contact (1)

Contact (2)

Culture Shock (3)

Superficial Understanding (4)

Deep Understanding (5)

Social Acting (6)



1. Pre-contact

Students are immersed (physically and/or mentally) in their own culture and they can have different perceptions about the C2:

- prejudice,
- negative and positive stereotypes,
- total lack of exposure,
- lack of interest,
- strong excitement for the new adventure,
- positive expectations...



2. Contact

Students have a first superficial contact with the C2, it is mostly a phase of observation where students can be anchored to their own culture at different degrees.





3. Culture Shock

It “is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (K. Oberg, 1954)

Students manifest contrasting emotions and feelings such as euphoria, disorientation, fear, rejection of their own culture C1 and/or the C2, etc.

There can be times of frustration mostly due to language barriers and to the difficulty to adapt.



4. Superficial Understanding

Students dwell in a sort of limbo where they start to notice and reflect upon the most obvious cultural differences; they can show proper cultural behaviors in the form of routines and automatic and subconscious acts, and begin to deconstruct stereotypes regarding the C2.

There can continue to be some frustration due to language barriers and due to the difficulties in adaptation, as seen in level 3.



5. Deep Understanding

Students can show several attitudes based on their personalities, expectations and previous experiences such as flexibility, respect, appreciation, suspension of judgment, overcoming of some prejudices.

Sometimes a new perspective about their background and past experiences in their own culture can result.

Often the student comes to feel “at home” also in the C2, acknowledging a developing dual/ “plurima” identity.

Also, a growing sensitivity for differences within the C2 might be developed, as well as a sensitivity for differentiating among various C2s.z



6. Social Acting

The full achievement of RIC. When the student reaches this stage, he/she changes his/her role. He/she is not a spectator anymore but he/she becomes an actual actor on stage of the C2, spanning different cultures and multicultural identities.



Therefore, in this stage the competence becomes a fully active one and the final transformation of knowledge into competence takes place.



Journal Analysis and Criteria

Student journals are a collection of weekly entries to which they add their final reflections at the end of their sojourn.

The journal analysis is structured the following way: reading of the entries in chronological order, selection of proper cultural reflections, level matching.

Criteria for selection:

Substantial Reflective content: less observations/descriptions and more reflection.

Well structured journals: weekly reflective entries that allow us to trace student's RIC development.

Student's permission, respecting student's privacy.

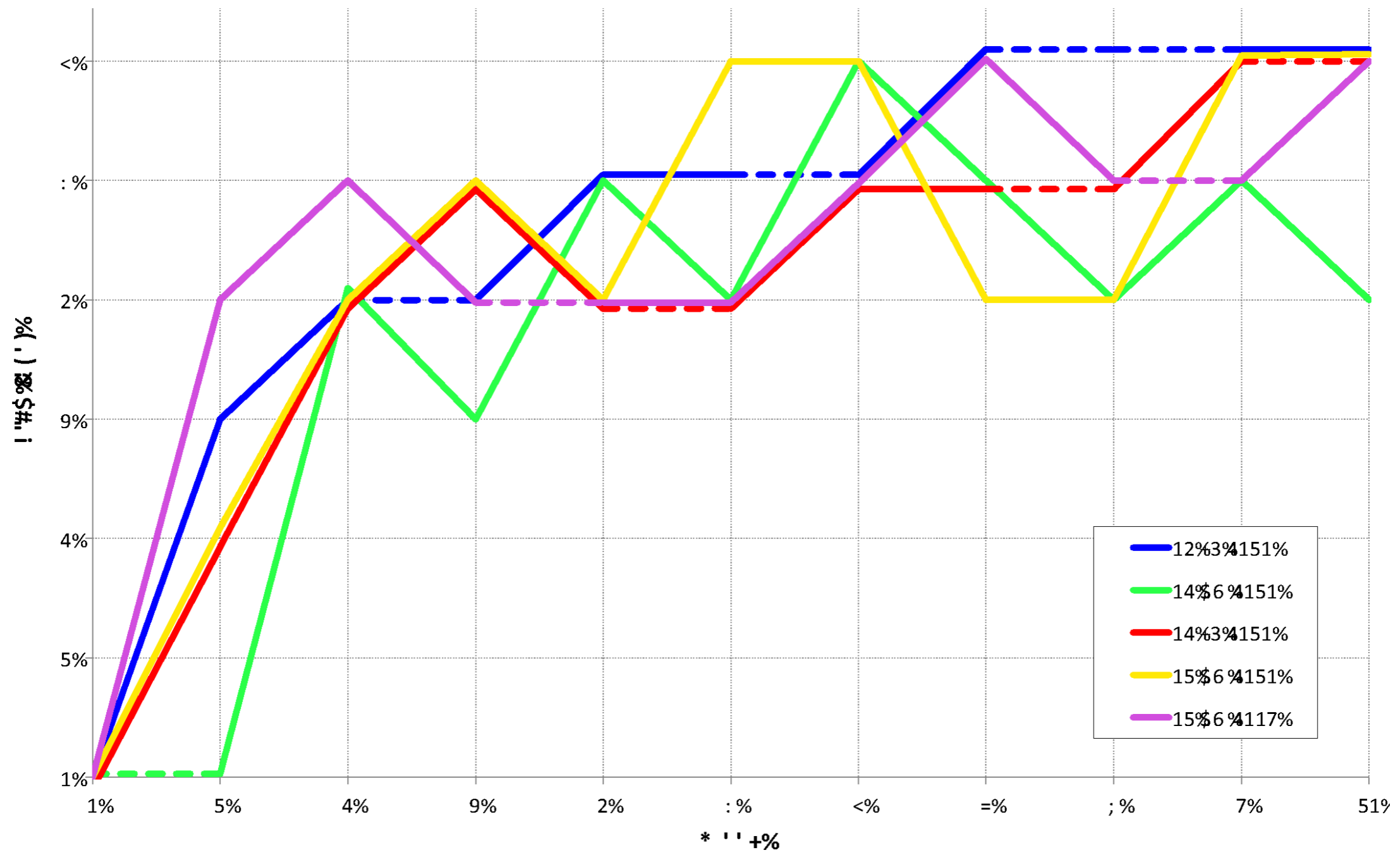


RICA Graph

In order to give a visual representation of the students' RICA development, we have chosen to create the RICA Graph. On the X-axis we have placed the time variable measured in weeks. On the Y-axis we have placed the RICA levels.

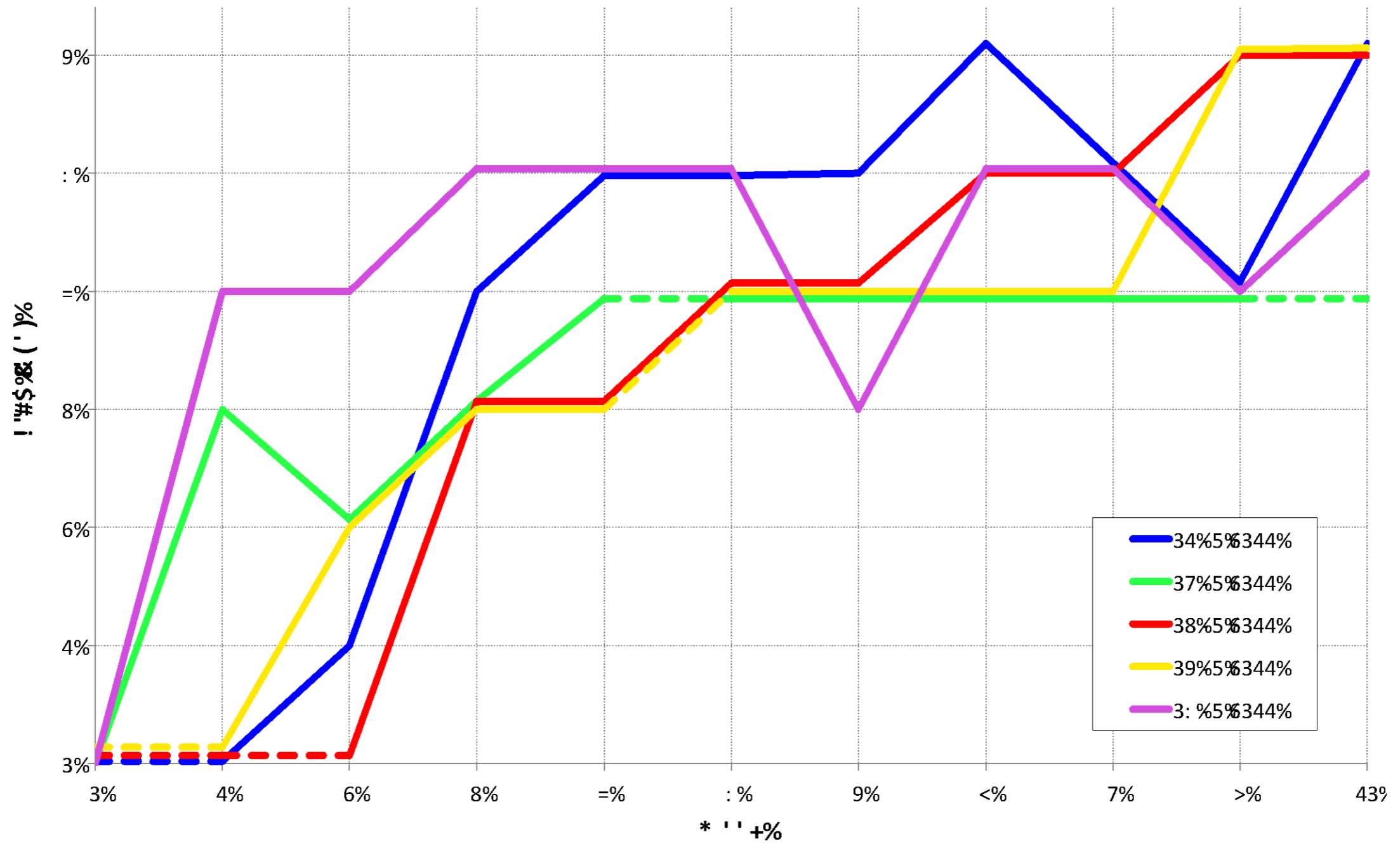


Graph SL





Graph non-SL





Conclusions

The results shown by the RICA graphs provide an initial confirmation of our hypothesis that Service-Learning students reach level 6 at a faster pace than Non Service-Learning students.

The studies carried out at the IC confirm that *true* full-immersion cannot exist without engagement in the host society, because the highest level of reflective intercultural competence is only achieved through this civic engagement in the C2.



Graph 41 AU 2012 SL

