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Conflicts between students as interculturally incompetent behavior

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Abstract

The study focuses on intercultural conflicts, which constitute an important part of multicultural education. The author focuses on the definition of intercultural conflicts and their development. The focus is particularly intercultural conflicts at school to tertiary education. The study aims to give an overview of the issue of intercultural conflicts, perform their basic classification and present training theories associated with them.

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1. Introduction

The theme of this essay is intercultural conflict between students. This topic was choosed for several reasons. In recent years, a strong research thrust focusing of the effect of culture on the performance of work teams has developed. For instance, research on „relational demography“ examines how individual differences (homogeneity and heterogeneity) in gender, age, tenure, culture and/or nationality affect performance in teams and organizations (e.g. Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), but not in the school environment. Data shows that the way people interpret their environment, how they think, feel and act, are too often divergent and create barriers that hamper smooth cooperation. However, research on the interaction of people from different cultures and the impact of culture over time is still minimal. Thus, due to a lack of empirical research, we know very little about: a) the role of cognitive, communicative and affective consequences during the development of a shared understanding, and

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b) that is the role of culture and its impact on the dynamics of such social interactive behaviour (Vallaster, 2005). With globalization, the constant interaction between peoples, cultures and civilizations will increasingly become a source of tension and conflict, since mobility and migration will increase, creating multi-ethnic and multicultural societies. At the same time, peaceful co-existence in a multicultural context will be an ongoing challenge. Peoples will have to be brought up to respect, learn about and understand each other's cultures, and ethnic and religious values. To achieve these objectives, universities have a key role to play in promoting and developing education and intercultural dialogue.

A prosperous society, but one where the relationship with others is crucial, is formed by recognizing and mobilizing all resources and skills via areas of effective intercultural dialogue, which gives rise to fruitful cross-fertilisation.

Scientists, teachers, and students agree that the world around them changes both politically and economically, culturally, socially and technologically (Janebová, 2009). Universities are part of the wider society – of contemporary globalization process, and therefore can not be seen only tertiary education in the national context. It can not be seen also because of the efforts of tertiary education institutions and national policies to apply internationalization to the current agendas of the institutions and its development. Universities have great potential for innovation in each country, and they should try to respond to social and other changes or even anticipate them.

According to Council of Europe (2009, pg. 28) in period 2002 – 2005 the percentage of number of foreign students in the Czech Republic as the host country increased by 90% (plus 8769 students). Through internalization of higher education universities becoming microcosm of society, they are “melting pot”. To achieve transparent and participatory democracy, which is a fundamental principle of good government, universities should be a forum for inclusive democracy, a place where students, on the basis of socio-cultural differences, will be able to deconstruct social stereotypes.

Universities are the places where people meet with different cultural backgrounds, values, personality, and therefore there are interpersonal conflicts, natural and inevitable (Turnuklu, Kacmaz, Turk, Kalender et al., 2009). Crawford and Bodine (1996) say that many conflicts in the school environment arising from differences - national, ethnic, gender, class, physical and mental. These differences lead to conflicts, which may take the form of prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and/or hate crime. However, these conflicts must be viewed comprehensively, because their nature is not only prejudice and discrimination, but also due to the structure and relationship of inequality and privilege. These intercultural misunderstandings are leading to intercultural conflicts.

This essay discusses three principal research questions: What is the nature of intercultural conflict? What is the process by which intercultural conflict develops? And how can individuals be taught, trained and/or mentored regarding the development of intercultural conflict competence?

2. Nature of intercultural conflict

According to Ting-Toomey (2009) is intercultural conflict defined as the perceived or actual incompatibility of values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes in a face-to-face context. Intercultural conflict can be about substantive, relational, and/or identity conflict goal issues.

Intercultural conflicts arise because of misunderstanding of different cultural, ethnic and religious values, different social class, or gender inequality, and most of these conflicts are the result of intolerance and ignorance of these differences, so called the interculturally incompetent behavior. Janebová (2010) points to the fact that in the seemingly homogeneous „national culture“ there exists experiences of other people, subcultures, organizational culture, and other cultural level, which break down the idea of culture as „coherent“, and emphasize its internal differences.

Despite a significant amount of research on intercultural conflict, there are relatively few syntheses of this literature. Additionally, the diversity of literature on intercultural conflict is generally not integrated across contexts. In the Sage Handbook of Conflict Communication Oetzel, Ting-Toomey and Rinderle (2006) attempt to address this limitation by introducing a social ecological framework for the study of conflict. Social ecology is the study of the relationship between organisms and their environment (Brofenbrenner, 1979). The framework emphasizes that the environment has multiple levels or contexts and that the relationship of these contexts to the phenomenon of study is complex. An integrated framework of the levels is thus necessary to fully understand conflict communication in context. Oetzel, Ting-Toomey and Rinderle (2006) present the social ecological framework of conflict communication: interpersonal, organizational, community, and international. These levels correspond with Brofenbrenner's (1979) social ecological framework, which divide environmental influences into four system levels: micro (face-to-face interactions in specific settings – interpersonal conflict), meso (interrelationships among various microsystems – organizational conflict), exo (forces within the larger social systems – community conflict) and macro (cultural beliefs and values – international conflict). In particular communication always come into play two individuals whose identity is woven of belonging to different groups, from past experiences, the influence of environment on personal characteristics, etc. (Janebová, 2010). We are focusing just on the interpersonal level, respectively intercultural conflicts in interpersonal dimension (conflicts between two people) arising from the socio-cultural differences.

Culture is hence perceived as a group specific collective phenomenon within a social context and is partially shared among individuals through values and opinions, thought approaches and patterns of behavior. Culture is not perceived as a rigid or static entity, but is in constant flux across individuals within cultural groups, and over time within individuals (Maznevski & Peterson, 1997).

These groups include ethnic groups, religious groups, social classes, women or men, lesbians and gays, etc. (see above Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). This definition we also know from the concept of intercultural education in the Czech Republic in the form of socio-cultural groups, but also according to Pope, Reynolds and Mueller (2004) in the form of inclusive definition of multiculturalism, that would include race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion and age. All of our social identities influence who we are and how we view the world and because of the complexity of diversity, authors aids that we all experience life from the perspective of those social identities whether we realize it or not.

Socio-cultural group is such a group of people that can be defined on the basis of race, ethnicity, belonging to socio-economic class, gender, language, national identity, sexual orientation, physical or mental handicap or subcultural affiliation.

According to Hofstede (2001) each group of people or category of people is equipped with a set of shared programs that make its culture. Because in each of us belongs simultaneously to many different social groups and categories, inevitably we carries several layers of mental programming, corresponding to different levels of culture.

Within intercultural competence development, it is important to consider cultural distance, which is a key contributor to intercultural conflict. The greater the cultural distance between the two conflict parties, the more likely the assessment of the conflict negotiation process would be misconstrued. The cultural membership distances can include deep-level differences such as historical grievances, cultural worldview, and beliefs. Individuals from contrasting cultural communities often bring with them different value patterns, verbal and nonverbal habits, and interaction scripts that influence the actual conflict interaction process. Intercultural conflict often starts off with diverse expectation concerning what constitute appropriate or inappropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviour in a conflict encounter scene (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Defining intercultural competence is the basis for understanding intercultural conflict and understanding the context of conflict and the development of professional competencies are the foundation for solving conflict situations.

Deardorff (2009, s. 14) defines intercultural competence as “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes”. Intercultural

competence include three basic dimensions: affective, cognitive and behavioral and the authors approach to developing models of intercultural competence (i.e. Deardorff, 2009). Ting-Toomey (2009) point out that developing intercultural conflict competence within the larger intercultural competence setting is critical because conflict creates further perceptual distortions and emotional flooding in the cultural encountering process.

3. Intercultural competence as possibility to prevent conflicts

Intercultural conflicts often arise because the intercultural competence wasn't developed. Intercultural competence in particular include: intercultural knowledge (awareness of their own cultural values, norms and traditions and their importance to our personality, learning from different cultures and prevent prejudice and stereotypes), intercultural sensitivity and adaptability (to be sensitive and empathetic to the foreign culture and interpret emotions in a culture of others) and the art of intercultural communication (ability to communicate without communication noise and confusion and the ability to deal with intercultural conflicts / problems). Communication skills in the intercultural situation, as subcompetence of intercultural competence (behavioral competence), is critical for managing conflicts effectively. It includes authenticity, art of listening, be aware of and respect formal rules in foreign culture, correctly interpret nonverbal signals, to nuances as specificity of humor and irony of different cultures (Morgensternová & Šulová, 2009). The Council of Europe has responded to these challenges too. In May 2008, the Council of Europe adopted a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, which not only brings together and formalises the long-standing commitment of the Council of Europe in this area, but strengthens it (Council of Europe, 2009). For the purpose of this book is intercultural dialog understood as a process which consists of an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express themselves and the willingness and ability to listen to the views of others. Intercultural dialogue contributes to the political, social, cultural and economic integration and cohesion of culturally diverse societies. Grown equality, human dignity and sense of common purpose. Its aim is to develop a deeper understanding of different worldviews and practices, increase collaboration and participation, enabling personal growth and transformation, and spread tolerance and respect for others. Among the stakeholders that should promote intercultural dialogue, include institutions of higher education.

Researches dealing with the relationship of national culture and social groups (as family, religion, social clubs, profession, work teams and universities etc.) found out that universities have an impact on the behaviour of individuals in case of that individuals currently studying at the university (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Higher education institutions play in fostering intercultural dialogue an important role through educational programs, as actors in broader society and as a place where intercultural dialogue is put into practice. According to Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research (CDESR) are universities are best defined by their universality – their duty is to give an unbiased and open attitude to the world, based on the values of the Enlightenment (Council of Europe, 2009). Universities have the potential to shape the intercultural intellectuals, who will play an active role in the public sphere. To reach this aim should help the scientific research on intercultural studies, dealing with aspects of attitudes "learning to live together" and cultural diversity in all educational activities.

4. Intercultural conflict training

Because is the behavioral competence, respectively intercultural communication competence critical for managing conflict effectively, we will focus in this part of essay on intercultural communication training.

Intercultural communication training is defined in this article as an interactive facilitation and coaching process in which learners are given the opportunity to acquire culturally relevant knowledge, increase self-awareness and other-awareness, manage emotional challenges, and/or practice competent intercultural

communication skillsets (Bennett, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2004). Through effective intercultural training, trainers can intentionally transform the mindsets, affective habits, and/or behaviors of the trainees in order for them to communicate competently and adaptively across cultures. More specifically, intercultural conflict training is conceptualized in this article as the competence-based training of individuals to manage emotional frustration and interaction struggles constructively due to cultural group membership differences. Such differences can stem from a perceived or actual incompatibility of cultural values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes in face-to-face context (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

According to Ting-Toomey (2009) students have to develop intercultural conflict competence. Intercultural conflict competence refers to the mindful management of emotional frustrations and conflict interaction struggles due primarily to cultural or ethnic group membership differences.

The criteria of communication appropriateness, effectiveness, and adaptability can serve as evaluative yardstick of whether an intercultural conflict communication has been perceived as behaving competently or incompetently in an interaction episode (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Intercultural conflict competence can be developed through intercultural conflict training. I would like to review major theory-practice approaches in intercultural conflict training. I'm using selection which Ting-Toomey used in 2007.

The criteria to guide selection of free conflict training approaches for a synoptic review:

- The approach covers either a strong conceptual or an applied angle to understanding culture-based conflict practice
- The conflict theory has either been systematically tested in a range of cross-cultural conflict settings or the applied model has been utilized successfully with a wide range of diverse cultural audience
- The theory or model has an heuristic function for bridging intercultural conflict theorizing processes with conflict application issues
- The conflict concepts and training ideas are readily accessible in published chapter or article format for further reading by curious intercultural researchers or practitioners

We will present the following free approaches: a) The conflict face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988, 2004), b) The S.A.F.E model (Hammer, 1997; Hammer, Rogan, 1997) and c) The A.E.I.O.U. collaborative negotiation model (Raider, Coleman, Gerson, 2006).

The conflict face-negotiation theory

Intercultural conflict often involves different face losing and face saving behaviors. Face refers to a

claimed sense or desired social self-image in a relations or international setting (Ting-Toomey, 1997). Face loss occurs when we are being treated in such a way that our identity claims are either being directly or indirectly challenged or ignored. Face-loss can occur either on the individual level or the identity group level, or both. Repeated face-loss and face-threat often lead to escalatory conflict spirals or an impasse in the conflict negotiation process.

Ting-Toomey (1988) and Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) developed an intercultural conflict theory, namely, the conflict face-negotiation theory. This theory assumes that:

- 1) People in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations;
- 2) The concept of face is especially problematic in emotionally-threatening or identity vulnerable situations when the situated identities of the communicators are called into questions;
- 3) The cultural value spectrums of individualism-collectivism and small/large power distance (Hofstede, 2001) shape facework concerns and styles;
- 4) Individualism and collectivism value patterns shape members' preferences for self-oriented facework versus other-oriented facework;
- 5) Small large power distance value patterns shape members' preferences for horizontal-based facework versus vertical-based facework;
- 6) The value dimensions, in conjunction with individual, relational, and situational factors influence the use of particular facework behaviours in particular cultural scenes;
- 7) Intercultural facework competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively (more Ting-Toomey, 2007).

The S.A.F.E. Crisis Negotiation Conflict Model

The S.A.F.E. model embodies four core motifs or triggers that are related to conflict escalation to de-escalation process (Hammer, 2001). The term „S.A.F.E.“ stands for the following four interactive frames:

- 1) **Substantive demands and interests in the conflict** (the substantive or content goals in the crisis negotiation situation between the subject and the negotiators)
- 2) **Attunement** (the degree of trust, power, control, and empathetic understanding that is being developed between the subject and the negotiators)
- 3) **Face** (the face needs or concerns of the subject as the crisis situation unfolds and the ability of the negotiators to effectively respond to the subject's face needs or desires)
- 4) **Emotional distress** (the ebbs and flows of the emotional state of the subject as reflected through the expression of positive versus negative emotions and, thus, increasing the degree of predictability to unpredictability of the crisis negotiation situation).

The A.E.I.O.U. Collaborative Negotiation Training Model

It is a comprehensive conflict training program that emphasizes a strong „collaborative negotiation“ perspective. Their cultural training philosophies are twofold: that all conflict resolution training programs should integrate a cross-cultural perspective, and that all training designs should also reflect a keen cross-cultural sensibility.

In their intercultural conflict resolution training (CRT) program, Coleman and Raider (2006) emphasize the following three objectives:

- 1) *Knowledge objectives*: for example, to become more aware of key ways in which worldviews differ and how that can manifest into conflict, and also to develop awareness that competition and collaboration are two main strategies for negotiation and for resolving conflict.
- 2) *Attitude objectives*: for example to shift trainees' attitude in ways that they will commit to the larger goal of increasing the use of collaborative conflict negotiation skills at all levels to create a more just society, and also to develop an appreciation of cultural differences as a source of richness rather than liability.
- 3) *Skills objectives*: for example, to learn to listen when one's own identity group is under attack and be able to avoid ethnocentric or identity-based responses, and also to create a collaborative climate through the use of informing, opening, and uniting behaviors.

This collaborative conflict negotiation model – A.E.I.O.U. – stands for “*attack, evade, inform, open, unite, and with an added “Y” to symbolize yes*”.

Whole raft of studies take as their theme one essential aspect of practical intercultural communication> the knowledge, abilities and attitudes needed to make it work. When it comes to the requisite skills, what is important for intercultural dialogue. The findings of studies on this show clearly, that with all the good intentions in the world, simply wanting intercultural dialogue is not enough to make it happen. This naturally raises the question of training in the necessary competences and resources (Council of Europe, 2009).

Which main research question should be answered? In the area of competences: *Does institution offer courses teaching intercultural skills in specific areas? Does the institution offer training for specialist in the intercultural communication and/or dialogue?* And in the area of research: *Is the institution involved, through its research groups, in national or international research projects relating to multiculturalism? Does the institution encourage research in these areas, through international partnership and/or international network? Does the institution have advisors to manage international and multicultural research teams?*

5. Conclusion

In the present study, we briefly describe the topic of intercultural conflicts at school, focusing on tertiary education institutions. We tried to approach the reader a topic that is very current and is not yet given the attention it would deserve. Intercultural conflicts provide a large space for their theoretical treatment, empirical verification, but also for the application level, which we reflect in the environment of higher education. We consider it important to continue to discuss the issue and develop in the educational environment.

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