Living with diversity: Intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence

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Migration

• In the last 20 years, migration has altered the world in a fundamental way.
• The current waves of migration across the world are being driven by many different factors, including:
  – Warfare
  – Persecution
  – Famine
  – Poverty
  – International trade and business
  – Labour market needs and employment opportunities
  – The emergence of global communication and transportation networks
  – The hope of a better life
• The scale of migration over the past 20 years has meant that virtually all countries have become increasingly ethnically diverse during this period (Global Commission on International Migration, 2005; OECD, 2010)
Some figures

Percentage of foreign-born residents in the total population of various countries (OECD, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Notice that, in all of the countries listed here, the percentage of foreign-born residents increased between 2005 and 2010
Cultural diversity

• An important characteristic of this cultural diversity is the sheer range of minority groups that are now living in each country
• In the past, the main minority groups in any country were people from countries which had colonial links to that country
• However, this situation has changed dramatically over the last 20 years
• For example, in 2010 in Sweden, the largest minority groups were (Eurostat, 2012):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>166,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>155,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>125,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>63,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>49,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>48,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>44,951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>43,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>43,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>40,165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Super-diversity

The situation in Britain is even more extreme, which is now being characterised as “super-diverse” (Vertovec, 2007)

Super-diversity involves:

– A very large number of different migrant groups living within a relatively small geographical area
– Many of these groups are historically new groups to the country involved
– Each group may be relatively small in numbers
– Migrants within each group usually have a range of different legal statuses (e.g., workers, spouses and family members, students, asylum seekers, etc.)
– Migrants often retain transnational links to their countries of origin

Here is an illustration of the levels of diversity in the London Borough of Newham (from Vertovec, 2007)
Responses to immigration

• The reality is that most migrants and ethnic minority individuals make significant and substantial contributions to the countries in which they live (Alexander & Knowles, 2005; Burrell, 2009; Eade & Valkanova, 2009) through:
  – Their labour
  – The taxes they pay
  – Their participation in local communities
  – Their cultural activities

• However, over the course of the last 20 years, new forms of xenophobic nationalism have emerged in many countries which have high levels of immigration from abroad (van Amersfoort, 2011)

• This rise in xenophobic nationalism has been accompanied by the rise of populist radical right-wing parties in many European countries (Hainsworth, 2008; Mudde, 2007)
• These radical right-wing political parties feed on, but also exacerbate, feelings of anxiety and resentment among sections of the national majority populations

• These negative feelings among majority populations often stem from perceptions that the country and its way of life are being threatened by a wide range of problems, including:
  – The demographic swamping of the national majority population
  – Competition for employment
  – Pressure on public services
  – The erosion of traditional national cultural values

• In reaction to this hostility and prejudice, some immigrants and ethnic minority individuals choose to live in separate communities (sometimes called ‘parallel societies’ which live alongside each other without interacting) (Cantle, 2001)
Separate communities

These separate communities typically involve:

• ‘Self-segregation’, where minority individuals prefer to live in a residentially segregated area where the majority of other residents are predominantly people from their own ethnic group

• The members of these communities may abstain voluntarily from participation in mainstream society and may have minimal interaction with people from the national majority culture – this is sometimes a result of the fears and anxieties which they have about the discrimination and prejudice which they might face if they do try to participate

• Residential segregation is often also linked to segregation in schools

• Acting together, these conditions can lead to the cultural isolation of ethnic minority communities
• The rise of xenophobic nationalism, radical right-wing nationalist political parties and segregated communities poses a threat to the stability and well-being of our societies
• These various phenomena also raise questions concerning the most appropriate policy approaches that should be used for managing cultural diversity
• Traditionally, many European societies have adopted multiculturalist policies to try to deal with the challenge of cultural diversity
• Multiculturalist policies differ considerably from one country to another but are mainly distinguished by two main characteristics (Kymlicka, 1995, 2007; Parekh, 2000):
  – The **official recognition of group differences** and of the fact that minority groups have their own distinctive identities, beliefs and practices
  – The **accommodation of social institutions and practices** to the cultural needs of minority groups
The backlash against multiculturalism

• However, since 9/11, multiculturalism as a policy approach has been under attack across Europe (and also in the USA, Canada and Australia) (Modood, 2007)

• Since 9/11, multiculturalism has been held to be responsible for:
  – The rise of segregated communities
  – The fostering of extremism and radicalism
  – The destruction of unified national communities

• As a consequence, many European politicians are now turning away from multiculturalism, proclaiming that multiculturalism ‘is dead’ or ‘has failed’
A new policy approach

• However, there is now a new alternative policy approach that has been developed for managing cultural diversity which has not yet been widely applied within our societies

• This new approach is called ‘interculturalism’

• A leading proponent of interculturalism has been the Council of Europe (2008, 2011)
The Council of Europe

• The Council of Europe is an international organisation which was established in 1949 and has its headquarters in Strasbourg
• It is an entirely separate body from the European Union
• The Council of Europe has 47 member states
• The principal aims of the organisation are to protect and promote:
  – Human rights
  – The rule of law
  – Democracy
• The most well-known body of the Council of Europe is the European Court of Human Rights, which is responsible for the legal enforcement of the European Convention on Human Rights
Interculturalism

• In 2008, the Council of Europe published a *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*

• The *White Paper* argues that:
  – In culturally diverse societies, tolerance is vital
  – Tolerance requires the genuine recognition of, and respect for, the diversity of cultural traditions, ethnic and cultural identities and religious beliefs
  – However, social cohesion also requires the harmonious interaction of people and groups from different cultural backgrounds
  – In order to achieve harmonious interaction between people and groups from different cultural backgrounds, intercultural dialogue is required

• Intercultural dialogue is defined in the *White Paper* as “*the 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*”
Intercultural dialogue

• The *White Paper* argues that a failure to engage in intercultural dialogue:
  – Encourages the development of stereotypical perceptions of other people
  – Builds up a climate of mutual suspicion and tension between cultural groups
  – Fosters intolerance and discrimination within society

• The *White Paper* makes some very strong claims on behalf of intercultural dialogue, claiming that it:
  – Allows people to achieve a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices
  – Increases co-operation and participation between people from different cultural groups
  – Reduces prejudice and promotes tolerance and respect for people from other cultures

• Interestingly, some of the claims made in the *White Paper* are backed up by psychological research
The contact hypothesis
(Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)

• The contact hypothesis proposes that intergroup bias, prejudice and hostility can be reduced significantly by bringing groups into contact with each other, as long as this contact takes place under appropriate conditions:
  – The contact needs to take place between people who perceive themselves to be of equal status within the contact situation
  – The contact should be sufficiently prolonged and sufficiently close that it has the potential to allow meaningful relationships or friendships to develop between the participants
  – The contact should involve cooperation on joint activities that are aimed at achieving common goals (rather than competition between groups)
  – The contact needs to be backed by an explicit framework of support by those in authority or by social institutions

• In other words, existing psychological research does support the idea that intercultural dialogue can be effective for reducing prejudice and promoting tolerance towards other cultural groups if it takes place under appropriate conditions
Intercultural competence

• The *White Paper* goes on to argue that, in order for intercultural contact and dialogue to be maximally effective in promoting tolerance, understanding and respect, citizens need to acquire intercultural competence.

• However, the *White Paper* is very unclear about what intercultural competence actually is, apart from it being the competence which a person needs in order to engage in intercultural dialogue.

• To really understand what is meant by this term, we instead need to look at the social science research literature, where considerable attention has been given to the concept of intercultural competence over the past 20 years.

• There has in fact been a proliferation of different models of intercultural competence in disciplines such as management, health care, counselling, social work, education and psychology.
Models of intercultural competence

• Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) classify these various models into five types:

1. **Compositional models**: these models identify the various components of intercultural competence but do not specify the relations between them – they therefore simply contain lists of the relevant attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours which together make up intercultural competence

2. **Co-orientational models**: these models focus on how communication takes place within intercultural interactions, and how perceptions, meanings and intercultural understandings are constructed during the course of these interactions

3. **Developmental models**: these models describe the stages of development through which intercultural competence is acquired

4. **Adaptational models**: these models focus on how individuals adjust and adapt their attitudes, understandings and behaviours during encounters with people from other cultural backgrounds

5. **Causal path models**: these models postulate specific causal relationships between the different components of intercultural competence
Problems with the existing models

• Spitzberg and Changnon note that many of the terms which are used to describe intercultural competence in all five types of model (e.g., adaptability, sensitivity, etc.) have not yet been properly operationalised or validated in empirical research.

• Many of these models probably have ethnocentric biases as most of them have been developed within western European and North American societies – many models probably lack cross-cultural generalizability.

• Certainly, most of the models reviewed by Spitzberg and Changnon are underdetermined by the available evidence – they contain many speculative elements, and they are typically tested in very restricted situations with limited numbers of participants drawn from a small range of cultures (sometimes from only a single culture).

• Compositional models make the fewest assumptions concerning the nature of intercultural competence, because they only aim to identify the various attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours which make up intercultural competence, without speculating about the interconnections, casual pathways or developmental relationships between them.
Despite the large number of models, there is considerable consensus among researchers and intercultural professionals concerning the definition of intercultural competence and its components.

Deardorff (2006) used a survey to collect data from scholars of intercultural competence and from university international administrators.

She found that 80% or more of the respondents agreed about 22 of the core components of intercultural competence.

Deardorff also found substantial agreement over the definition of the term ‘intercultural competence’.

The definition which was endorsed the most strongly by the scholars was:

“The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes”

Here, “effectively” means that one is able to achieve one’s objectives (at least in part) in these interactions.

And “appropriately” means that the interactions do not violate the cultural rules and norms which are valued by oneself and by the other person.
A problem

• However, this definition is problematic because it fails to explain what the term ‘intercultural’ means
• This is, in part, because the concept of ‘culture’ itself is not explained
• Indeed, in the research literature on intercultural competence more generally, there is a very noticeable under-theorisation of what ‘culture’ is
• For example, in the recent *SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, which was edited by Deardorff (2009), out of the 29 chapters in the book, only one chapter provides any extended discussion of what culture actually is
So … what is culture?

• ‘Culture’ is a notoriously difficult term to define
• That said, distinctions can be drawn between the material, social and subjective aspects of culture:
  – Material culture: the physical artefacts which are used by the members of a particular human group (e.g., food, clothing, housing, goods, tools, etc.)
  – Social culture: the shared institutions of the group (e.g. the language, religion, laws, rules of social conduct, family structure, labour patterns, folklore, cultural icons, etc.)
  – Subjective culture: the shared knowledge, beliefs, collective memories, identities, attitudes, values and practices which group members use as a common frame of reference for thinking about, making sense of and relating to the world
• Culture itself is a composite formed from all three aspects – it consists of a network of material, social and subjective resources
• The total set of cultural resources is distributed across the entire social group
• Each individual member of the group appropriates and uses only a subset of the total set of cultural resources which are potentially available to them
Defining ‘culture’ in this way means that social groups of any size can have their own distinctive cultures.

This includes nations, ethnic groups, cities, neighbourhoods, work organisations (e.g. universities), occupational groups (e.g. academics), gender groups, sexual orientation groups (e.g. gay men), disability groups (e.g. hearing-impaired people), generational groups (e.g., youth), families, etc.

For this reason, all people belong simultaneously to many different cultures.

Which particular culture predominates in a person’s thinking and behaviour is often context-dependent.

For example, I myself regularly participate in the cultures of England, of London, of academia, of developmental psychology and of my family life.

- At the moment, because I am at a conference, the culture of being an academic is dominant.
- When I am at home with my family, the culture of my family life predominates.
- When I am walking around London, the culture of London street life predominates.
Variability within cultures

- In addition, it is important not to underestimate the variability which exists within most cultural groups.
- Most cultural groups are internally complex collectivities in which the material, social and subjective resources that are perceived to be associated with membership of the group are contested by different individuals and subgroups within it.
- In addition, even the boundaries of the group itself, and who is perceived to be within the group and who is perceived to be outside the group, may be contested by different group members – cultural boundaries are often very fuzzy.
- This internal variability of cultures is, in part, a consequence of the fact that all people belong to multiple cultures but participate in different constellations of cultures – so, the ways in which they relate to any one culture can depend on the points of view which are yielded by the other cultures in which they also participate.
• Furthermore, the meanings and the feelings which people attach to the particular cultures in which they participate are usually personalised as a consequence of their own life histories and personal experiences.

• Adding further to this internal differentiation and variability within cultures, different meanings and feelings can be ascribed to a culture by the same individual in different contexts according to their specific needs and goals in those contexts.
The fluid and dynamic nature of culture

• Because cultural participation and cultural practices are context-dependent and variable in these ways, cultures provide fluid sets of resources from which group members actively construct and negotiate their own meanings and interpretations of the world across the various contexts which they encounter in their everyday lives

• If the meanings and interpretations which an individual ascribes to one of the cultures in which they participate are sufficiently novel, and then become ‘fashionable’ or attractive to other people in the group, they may in turn contribute to the total pool of cultural resources available to group members and may therefore subtly change the culture itself in the process

• Finally, it should be noted that all cultures are also dynamic and constantly changing over time as a result of:
  – Political, economic and historical events and developments
  – Interactions with and influences from other cultural groups
Summary

• In short:
  – We all participate in multiple cultures
  – Each culture is internally variable, diverse and heterogeneous
  – The way we participate in our various cultures is context-dependent and fluid
  – All cultures are dynamic and evolving
The problem of the concept of ‘intercultural’

- You can perhaps now begin to appreciate some of the problems which I have with the concept of ‘intercultural’
- If we all participate in multiple cultures in the ways that I have indicated, but we each participate in a unique constellation of cultures which we personalise to fit our own life circumstances, then every interpersonal encounter which we experience is potentially an intercultural encounter
- However, for me, what differentiates an intercultural encounter from an interpersonal encounter is that the individual perceives the other person as having a different cultural background from themselves
- I do not have the time here to go into the complex social psychology of how interpersonal perception becomes intergroup perception – this is the extensive body of work that has been conducted under the banner of social identity theory and self-categorization theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Brown & Gaertner, 2001; Ellemers, 2012)
• The crucial point here is that in intercultural interactions, one does not respond to the other person on the basis of their own individual characteristics
• Instead, one responds to them on the basis of their membership of a different culture – they are perceived as a member of a group rather than as an individual person
• Intercultural encounters, defined in this way, may involve contact between people from different countries, people from different regional, linguistic, ethnic or religious backgrounds, or people who differ from each other because of their lifestyle, gender, social class, occupation, sexual orientation, etc.
• An interpersonal encounter becomes an intercultural encounter when cultural differences are perceived and made salient either by the situation or by the individual’s own orientation and attitudes (cf. Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994)
If an interpersonal encounter becomes an intercultural encounter, that is the situation where intercultural competence is then required in order to achieve harmonious interaction and effective dialogue.

So, my definition of intercultural competence, which builds on Deardorff’s definition, is as follows:

“Intercultural competence is the ability to consistently apply through behaviour a combination of the attitudes, skills and knowledge which are needed for understanding, and for effectively and appropriately interacting and communicating with, people who are perceived to be culturally different from oneself.”

And on the basis of this definition, one can then start to outline some of the components of intercultural competence.
So what are the core components of intercultural competence?

* Drawing on the range of research that has been conducted in this field, and the numerous conceptual models that have been proposed across different disciplines, these components can be broken down into four main categories:
  - Attitudes
  - Skills
  - Knowledge
  - Behaviours
Attitudes

• The attitudes involved in intercultural competence include:
  – Openness to people who are perceived to be from other cultural backgrounds
  – Respect for other cultures
  – Curiosity about other cultures
  – Willingness to learn about other cultures
  – Willingness to suspend judgement
  – Willingness to tolerate ambiguity
  – Valuing cultural diversity
Skills

The skills include:

- Skills of interacting with people who are perceived to be from other cultural backgrounds
- Empathy – the ability to understand and respond to other people’s thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings
- Skills of adapting to other cultural environments
- Linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication
- Skills in discovering information about other cultures
- Skills in interpreting cultures and relating cultures to one another
- Skills in critically evaluating and judging cultural perspectives, practices and products, including those of one’s own culture
Knowledge

• Cultural self-awareness – of one’s own cultural positionings, preconceptions, stereotypes, etc.
• Communicative awareness, especially of the different linguistic and communicative conventions within different cultures
• Culture-specific knowledge, especially knowledge of the perspectives, practices and products of particular cultural groups
Behaviours

• Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately during intercultural encounters
• Flexibility in cultural behaviour
• Flexibility in communicative behaviour

• And more controversially:
  Having an action orientation, that is, a disposition for action in society in order to enhance the common good, especially through the reduction of intercultural prejudice, discrimination and conflict
The research agenda

• Our understanding of most of these various attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours which together comprise intercultural competence is still very poor.

• Questions which need to be answered empirically include:
  – How does each of these components develop within the individual learner?
  – What are the social, educational, cognitive and motivational factors which influence the acquisition of each component?
  – Are there particular sequences in which the various components are acquired?
  – Is the acquisition of some components a necessary prerequisite for the acquisition of other components?
  – How are the different components inter-related?
  – To what extent does the development of intercultural competence vary depending on the specific cultural setting in which an individual lives, and the specific intercultural encounters which an individual experiences within that setting?
What we do know about intercultural competence

• Intercultural competence can be enhanced through intercultural education and training (Klak & Martin, 2003; Pascarella et al., 1996)

• Intercultural competence can also be enhanced through a range of intercultural experiences (Straffon, 2003; Zhai & Scheer, 2004):
  – By attending international schools
  – By attending multi-ethnic institutions which have a non-discriminatory environment
  – By having extensive contact with people from other countries

• There are sometimes group differences in levels of intercultural competence (Pascarella et al. 1996; Zhai & Scheer, 2004):
  – Females tend to be more interculturally competent than males
  – Older individuals tend to be more interculturally competent than younger individuals
  – Minority individuals tend to be more interculturally competent than majority individuals
• Intercultural competence may be related to wider attitudes (Caligiuri, Jacobs & Farr, 2000), including:
  – Holding a more global, international perspective
  – Lower levels of ethnocentrism

• Some individual and personality characteristics may also be related to higher levels of intercultural competence (Caligiuri et al., 2000), including:
  – Optimism
  – Openness
  – Extraversion

• Advanced proficiency in one or more foreign languages is also sometimes related to higher levels of intercultural competence (Olson & Kroeger, 2001)
The role of education professionals

• Because of the known impact of intercultural education on intercultural competence, the Council of Europe’s *White Paper* calls on teachers, youth workers and other educational professionals to take a more central role in fostering the intercultural competence of young people.

• However, for them to do this, there is a need for the development of new resources and materials which can be used within educational settings to help teachers and youth workers to achieve this goal.

• The Council of Europe itself has already developed some toolkits and materials that may be used towards this end.

• These include the *Intercultural Learning T-Kit* and the *All Different All Equal Education Pack*, both of which contain a large range of activities, methods and resources that can be used to enhance students’ intercultural competence.
Other Council of Europe resources

• A further educational instrument that has recently been developed by the Council of Europe is the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE)

• The AIE is based on an explicit compositional model of intercultural competence derived from the work of Byram (1997) and the INCA project (2004)

• The AIE fosters the development of a number of components of intercultural competence by supporting learners’ critical reflection on encounters with people from other cultures which they themselves have personally experienced

• In addition, a companion tool, the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media* (AIEVM), is about to be published

• The AIEVM has been designed to assist learners to reflect critically on specific images depicting people from other cultures which they have encountered in the media (for example, on television, in a film, on the Internet, etc.)
Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

Images of others
An Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media
Two further needs

• While all of these existing educational materials may be useful for enhancing the intercultural competence of young people, there is a need for further materials to be developed, especially materials that are tailored specifically to the circumstances and requirements of the particular cultural settings in which young people live.

• In addition, all of these materials still need to be formally evaluated for their effectiveness in actually bringing about change in learners – there is a very noticeable lack of evaluation of all these existing tools.

• So, a further challenge for future research is the evaluation, using methodologically sound procedures, of the different materials which are available in the area of intercultural education.

• I would argue that, given the significance of the intercultural approach for contemporary European societies, it is crucial that the choice of educational tools and materials is based on robust evidence concerning their effectiveness.
Thank you for listening!

For further information, please see the following weblinks:

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue:
www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/publication_whitepaper_id_en.asp

Intercultural Education:
www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Intercultural_education/Overview.asp

Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters:
www.coe.int/t/DG4/AUTOBIOGRAPHY/

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