Learning to Appreciate Intercultural Differences as a National Resource (Effective Intercultural Responsive Teaching)

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Introduction

To teach a foreign language is to teach its culture, language without its cultural materials is useless. However it is not easy to do such challenging task. When the teacher should mediate between two completely different cultures; he finds himself obliged to be selective, neglecting some aspects of the target culture, while forgetting that ignoring something does not make it goes away. We all see the world through cultural glasses and the lense through which we view this world shapes our reality.

What is Culture?

Culture is a dynamic construct of passing on the norm, behaviours, attitudes and other cultural items. Geertz (1973) defined culture as a ''historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodies in symbols… by means of which men can communicate, perpetuate and develop their own knowledge about and attitudes towards life.''(p.89). Hofstede (2005) argued that culture is ''software of the mind''. Porter (1991) explained culture as a medium that touches and alters all aspects of human life. A simple and brief definition of culture is : system of behaviours that helps us act in an accepted or familiar way. It is the way we think, act, and interact. We are all the same, all different and partly the same and partly different. We are all the same as far as our human nature is regarded, completely different as far as our personalities are regarded ; and culturally speaking we are partly the same and partly different.

Components of Culture

- **Symbols :** are things which represents other things. It can be both abstract or concrete, each particular culture has its own and specific symbolic elements.

- **Language :** is a system of words and symbols used to communicate with other people. There is no culture without language. This latter enables us to invent, share, save and transfer those cultural meanings. It is through language people have their sense of identity.

- **Values :** are general abstract rules and principles which determine what is right or

wrong, accepted or unaccepted.

- **Norms :** are specific instructions for behaviours established by values. They refer to the guidelines that define what is conventional and expected from us and from other people in various situations and settings.

Teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is Teaching Tolerance

Intercultural communicative competence, or ICC, refers to the ability to understand cultures, including your own, and use this understanding to communicate with people from other culture successfully. In Byram's (2000) viewpoint, ICC is "the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own". (p.297). To put it differently, ICC, involves awareness of different values & behaviours of the others as well as skills to deal with them in a non-judgmental way. Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence was used in foreign language teaching, the model was conceptualised in a number of basic competences of intercultural speaker:

- **Skills of Interpreting and Relating (savoir comprendre):** the ability to interpret a situation or ideas from another culture, to explain it and relate it and link it to one's own culture.

- **Skills of Discovery and Interaction (savoir apprendre/faire):** the ability to acquire new ideas and knowledge of a culture and monitor this knowledge, attitudes and skills in real life communication.

- **Intercultural Attitudes (savoir être):** curiosity and openness and willingness to relativise one's own values, norms, behaviours and see them from an outsider's perspective.

- **Knowledge (savoirs):** people's products and practices and the general processes of social and individual interaction.

- **Critical Cultural Awareness (savoir s'engager):** the ability to evaluate critically and on explicit basis of perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures.

Table 1. Byram's ICC Component Chart (1997, p. 34)

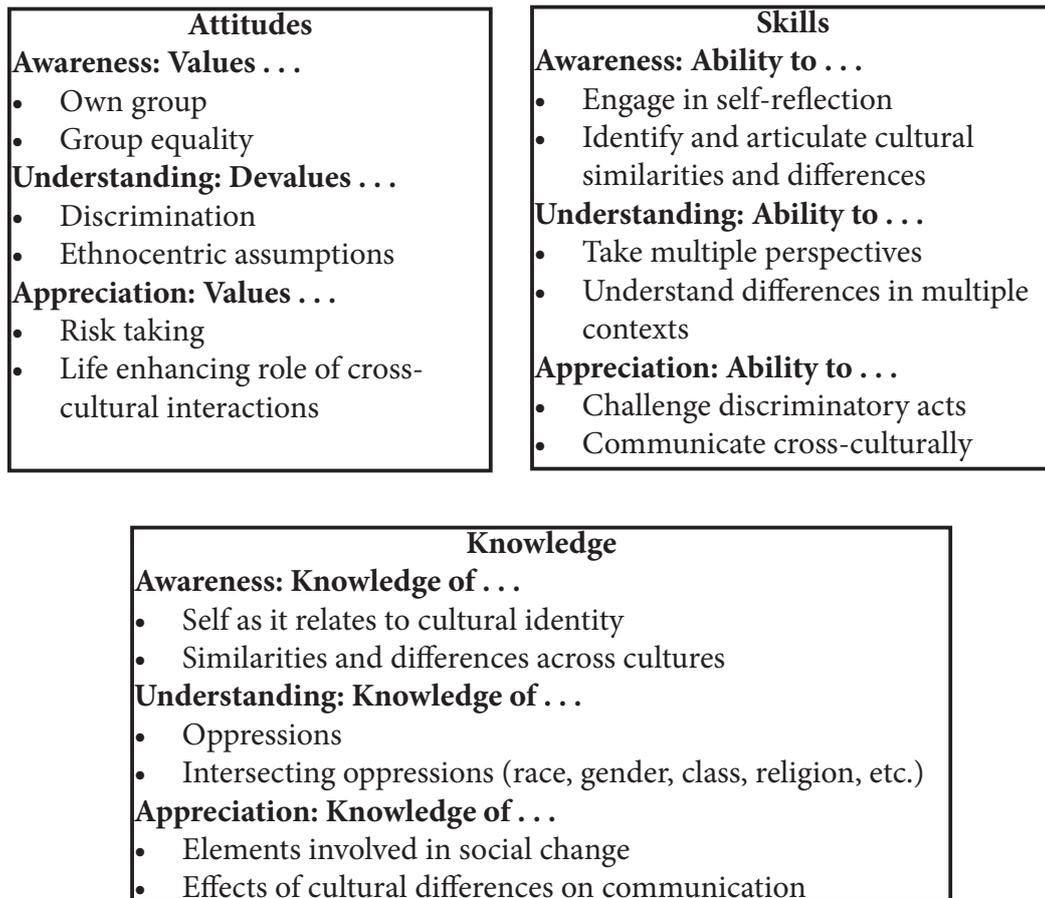|	**3. Skills** Interpret Relate	
2. Knowledge Of the self and other; of interaction: individual and societal	**5. Critical Cultural Awareness (Education)** Political Education	**1.Attitudes** Relativising self Valuating other
	4. Skills Discover and/or Interact	

Attitudes	Skills
Awareness: Values . . . • Own group • Group equality **Understanding: Devalues . . .** • Discrimination • Ethnocentric assumptions **Appreciation: Values . . .** • Risk taking • Life enhancing role of cross-cultural interactions	**Awareness: Ability to . . .** • Engage in self-reflection • Identify and articulate cultural similarities and differences **Understanding: Ability to . . .** • Take multiple perspectives • Understand differences in multiple contexts **Appreciation: Ability to . . .** • Challenge discriminatory acts • Communicate cross-culturally

Knowledge
Awareness: Knowledge of . . . • Self as it relates to cultural identity • Similarities and differences across cultures **Understanding: Knowledge of . . .** • Oppressions • Intersecting oppressions (race, gender, class, religion, etc.) **Appreciation: Knowledge of . . .** • Elements involved in social change • Effects of cultural differences on communication

Figure 1. Intercultural Competence Components Model: Adapted from Howard Hamilton et al. (1998)

Tomlinson (2001) holds that cultural awareness involves a gradually developing inner sense of the equality of cultures, an increased understanding of your own and other people's cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures both connect and differ (cited in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004, p. 3). According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), cultural awareness includes three elements:

- awareness of one's own culturally-induced behaviour

- awareness of the culturally-induced behaviour of others

- ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint (p.5)

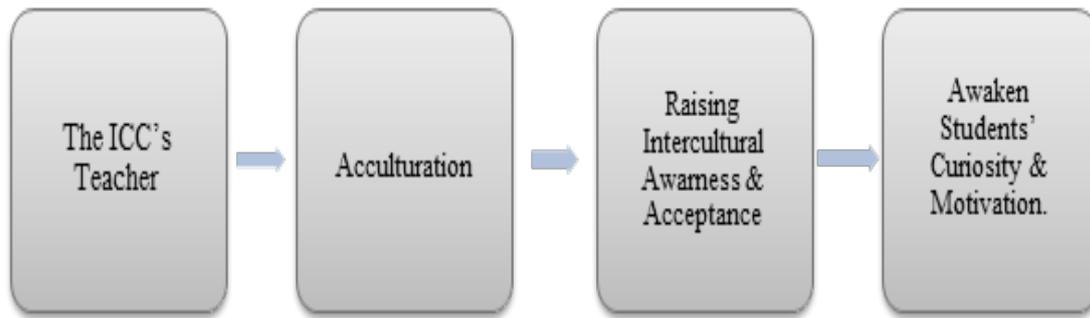For an ICC Teacher there are three steps to pass through:

Figure 2. ICC Teacher's Role

The teacher helps students become familiar with the theoretical framework of intercultural communicative competence. This is through defining terms like culture, acculturation, intercultural communication and intercultural competence. The task of the teacher is not to provide comprehensive information or bring the foreign society into the classroom for learners to observe and experience; but to develop in students the competence that will help them relativise their own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours and investigate for themselves the otherness, what is different from their "norm". One example is understanding that economy of language is just a matter of cultural perspective e.g., Italian and Indian people tend to express themselves in a very detailed manner, however; in UK or Germany people are more concise and precise. The idea of individualism/collectivism is differently perceived, when the US is highly individualist country while china is more a collectivist country. Teachers assist their students better understand one's own cultural identity and how it is formed as well as to understand what unities or separates people from different cultures. So that they can avoid and break stereotypes. Yet dealing with culture clashes and culture shock. That is how students can share a common understanding of the key concepts of intercultural communication as well as being able to accept and deal with things from intercultural perspective. Indeed effective intercultural responsive teaching is necessary and crucial to t the teaching-learning process.

Baxter Magolda (2005) provided a representation of levels of progressive competence. By identifying initial, intermediate, and mature levels of intercultural development and explaining the progression of students' competence. This model attempts to identify the levels of awareness of, sensitivity to, and ability to adapt to diversity across cultures. Low levels of awareness typify less competent modes of intercultural interaction, and high levels of awareness typify more competent modes of intercultural interaction.

Initial Development Level	Intermediate Development Level	Mature Development Level
Cognitive	**• Cognitive**	**• Cognitive**
*Categorical knowledge	*Evolving awareness and acceptance of perspectives	*Able to consciously shift perspectives
*Naïve about cultural practices	*Shift from authority to autonomous knowledge	*Use multiple cultural frames
*Resists knowledge challenges	**• Intrapersonal**	**• Intrapersonal**
• Intrapersonal	* Evolving identity distinct from external perceptions	*Able to create internal self
*Lacks awareness of social role intersections (race, class, etc.)	* Tension between internal and external prompts	*Challenges own views of social identities (class, race)
* Lacks awareness of cultures	* Recognizes legitimacy of other cultures	*Integrates self identity
* Externally defined beliefs	**• Interpersonal**	**• Interpersonal**
* Differences viewed as threats	* Willingness to interact with divergent others	*Able to engage in diverse interdependent relationships
• Interpersonal	* Explores how social systems affect group norms and relations	*Ground relations in appreciation of differences
¡ Identity dependent on similar others		*Understands intersection of social systems and practices
*Different views are considered wrong		*Willing to work for others' rights
* Lacks awareness of social systems and norms		
* Views social problems egocentrically		

Figure 3. Intercultural Maturity Model: Adapted from King and Baxter Magolda (2005, p. 576).

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension

A theory that compares unique and specific aspects of culture :

- **Power Distance :** this dimension expresses the degree to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

- **Individualism vs. Collectivism :** this dimension focuses on the questions about whether prefer a close knit network of people or prefer to be left alone to fend for themselves.

- **Masculinity vs. Femininity :** masculinity represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success.

- **Uncertainty Avoidance :** this dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.

- **Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation :** long-term orientation can be interpreted as dealing with society's search for virtue. Societies with a short-term orientation generally have a strong concern with establishing the absolute truth.
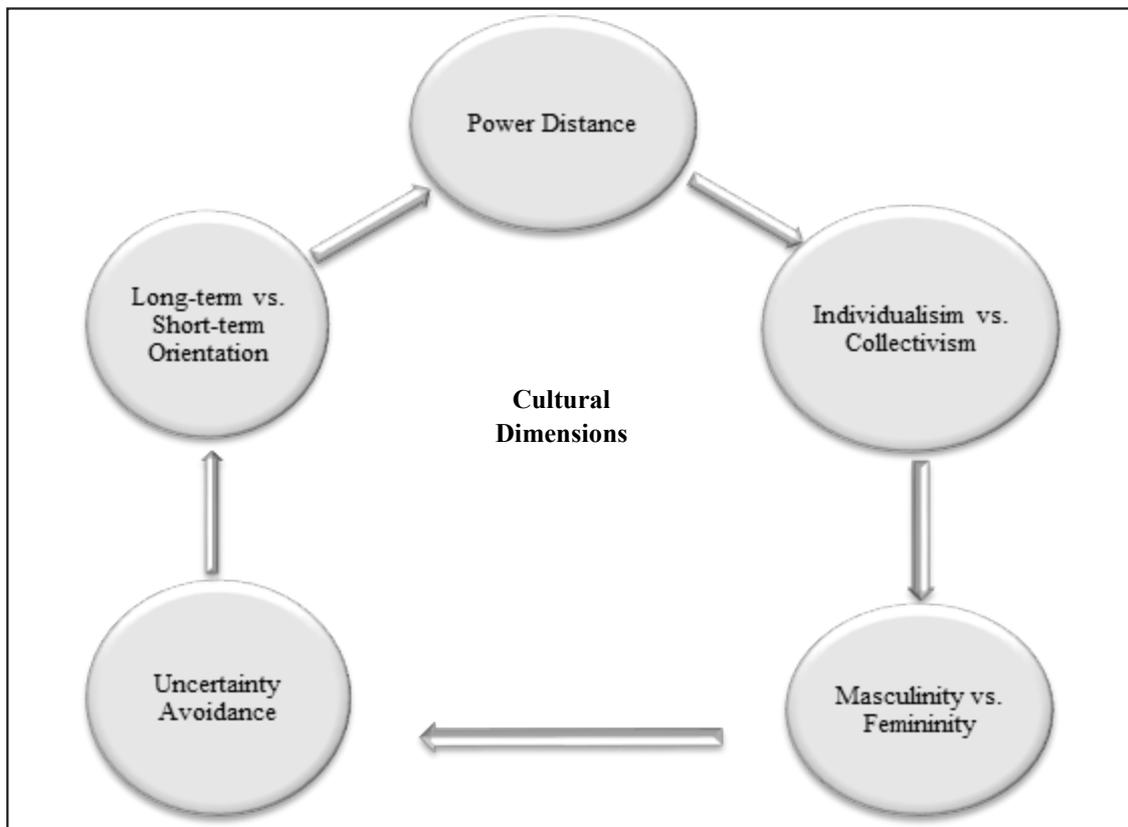

Figure 3. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

The Pedagogy of Stereotypes and the Danger of One Story

Lippmann's conceptualisation of stereotypes (1922) as ''pictures in our heads'' (p.3). Elligan (2008) stated that stereotypes are cognitions of one social group about another social group. In cognitive linguistics, Geeraerts (2006) stereotypes are regarded as a mental category easily applied to all members of that category. Pinker (2003) found that ''… people's ability to set aside stereotypes when judging an individual is accomplished by their conscious, deliberate reasoning'' (p.205). People see what they want to see and they don't see what you see.
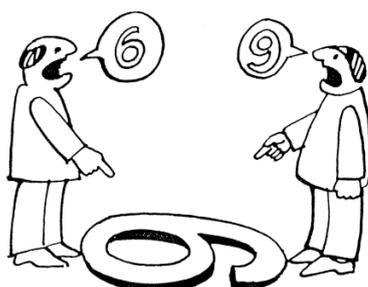
Levin and Adelman (1982) stated that there are a number of reasons behind cultural conflicts and clashes such as ethnocentrism, stereotypes, misinterpretations and prejudice. People need to avoid those clashes through increasing awareness of both, their own attitudes as well as cross cultural differences. Raising intercultural awareness is recognising and understanding cultural influences rather than losing our cultural identity.

Conclusion

The need of preparing students who are interculturally responsive is one of our century's essential demands. In the classroom, being culturally competent is understanding how cultures differ under the surface and how cultures react differently to similar situations. Teachers should develop their students' cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills, as well as strategies to extend their cultural knowledge. Teachers' awareness and understanding of the basic elements in intercultural communication is essential for students' development in any cross cultural situation.

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