Rethinking Intercultural Competence: Theoretical Challenges and Practical Issues

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Introduction

We live in a globalised society characterised by fast communication and interconnectedness. In this context, how could we educate our students for this globalised world? How could we prepare them to become global citizens able to solve global problems, such as climate change? It is a fact that we cannot continue to educate as we used to, because the world in which our students are going to live and work is indeed very different from what it used to be some twenty years ago.

Intercultural competence (IC hereinafter), the main concept discussed in this volume, is key to becoming a global citizen, but there is still a no clear and standardised definition of it. Additionally, different terms, like intercultural sensitivity, global competence or cross-cultural competence are frequently used as synonyms for IC.

IC is part of what is known as soft skills, which are a combination of social and communication skills, personality traits and attributes, such as emotional intelligence and a positive flexible attitude, among others, which enable people to navigate their environment, deal with others and achieve their goals.

There are different existing models regarding IC acquisition and development, the most remarkable being the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett 1993), the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff 2006, 2009), and the Intercultural Competence Model (Matveev/Milter 2004). However, there is a significant overlap in the ideas presented in these models, which reiterate the

cognitive, behavioural and affective dimensions involved in IC development (Arasaratnam 2013). Furthermore, many authors agree that IC is composed of an interrelated set of cognitive, behavioural and affective competencies (Bennett 2008; Gudykunst/Ting-Toomey/Wiseman 1991; Ruben 2015).

For the purpose of this discussion, we understand IC as the ability to behave and communicate 'effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes' (Deardorff 2006: 247–248). It involves

> [k]nowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role. (Byram 1997: 34, cited in Deardorff 2006: 247)

The question here is: Is IC acquired and developed by simply taking one or two university courses? Most of the authors agree that acquiring intercultural competence is a developmental process. It does not just happen in a moment or after taking one course.

Taking into account that learning is an individual process and therefore developing IC is also individually done, our main questions are: what can we do as lecturers and trainers to expand intercultural learning? In a world where educational systems are more and more standardised, how can we promote training for our university students to become global citizens and interculturally competent? How could we promote reflection and intercultural encounters in institutions that are rooted in a national/ local context and that give priority to fast learning over critical analysis and resilience?

Our proposal consists in creating an intercultural campus, where the following elements should be present:

> An internationalized curriculum;
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> Co-curricular activities and programmes;
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> Study abroad programmes;
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> An internationalized environment;
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> Foreign languages;

Intercultural learning and intercultural activities;

Governance and institutionalization;

In the following pages, we will further explain how these elements should be included to create the intercultural campus and consequently contribute to develop our students' IC.

The main elements in an intercultural campus

An internationalised curriculum

The premises to be considered when developing an internationalised campus are that knowledge is not universal, its perspective and transfer is a community process, and the classroom is a place where knowledge is shared and all its members construct new knowledge.

How inclusive are we with the diversity present in our classrooms? We all have students with great diversity in our class, thus we continue teaching the same contents with, we believe, the same methodologies. When talking about an internationalised curriculum, we refer to it in terms of content and delivery (Otten 2003; Teekens 2007). Curriculum development, is key to integrating diversity and to creating an intercultural campus. We may affirm that it is indeed the most important element in the intercultural campus.

The curriculum is at the centre of the students' learning experience and through it universities may develop international and intercultural knowledge and skills (Paige 2005).

There are some assumptions that need to be revised, because they are rooted in many universities' cultures: an internationalised curriculum is not teaching a course in English; professors teach the same way they were taught when they attended university; professors' main duty is research and thus they do not need to learn any teaching methodology; what is taught within the classroom is key for my students' future profession; and finally the idea that studying abroad is just for fun because what we teach is much better than what they teach in other universities in other countries.

Once these assumptions of how learning happens in a university campus are challenged, we will be able to start reflecting on our own teaching and what we teach.

In order to internationalise the curriculum we propose the following:

The infusion of courses with international content; comparative approaches in research projects and teaching; interdisciplinary studies;

Studies focused on civilizational approaches;

International and intercultural studies;

International development studies;

Internationalization of professional schools, pre-professional schools and K12;

Faculty and staff development in the international area;

International institutional linkages and international networking of scholars:

Involvement of students and faculty in internships with an international perspective either abroad or locally (cf. Brustein 2007; Carter 1992; Childress 2010; Knight 2008; Paige 2003; Sierra Huedo 2013; Teekens 2003).

As for the pedagogies that should be used in an internationalised curriculum, using case studies, critical incidents and role-plays, implementing service learning, maximising the diversity in the classroom with group projects and promoting experiential learning are significant guidelines.

Co-curricular activities and programmes

Co-curricular activities and programmes on an intercultural campus should be carried out on the campus and with the community. Students need to work with the community and with the diversity that is local to them as well as making connections globally. Learning not only takes place within the classroom, thus it is important that the students interact with and acquire knowledge of local institutions and non-governmental organisations within their closest community. They could include: intercultural service learning programmes (evaluated in one course); social events and activities promoting diversity and contact with people from different cultures; activities that create awareness about the multicultural other (on

or off campus); solidarity week (dealing with topics that create awareness such as fair trade; climate change inequality, etc.) and volunteer work.

Study abroad programmes

There are many universities that are trying to implement a compulsory study abroad experience for ALL their students. Currently, there is no questioning the importance of study abroad in any student's life, and the impact that this experience has on the professional personal lives of our students. During Obama's Administration the President and the First Lady highlighted the importance of studying abroad, no matter what your economic situation was. There should be more financial aid so all students can afford studying abroad. Another way to expand the study abroad opportunity would be with short-term study abroad programmes including volunteer work abroad. The impact of such an experience is key in the success of any local community and country.

Another key element is measuring the impact of study abroad on the students. Universities need to offer courses or seminars for incoming students, in order to maximise their learning while abroad.

An internationalised environment

That the environment is key in any educational organisation has been known since Greek times. It is well known that Aristoteles attached great importance to where the classes were held. Diversity on a campus that champions it is palpable: cafeterias, international campus days, signs, world maps, flags and diversity in art among many other elements may contribute to creating an international environment.

Foreign languages

When we talk about foreign languages, we are referring to courses taught in other languages and courses of non-mainstream languages. These will

help students to learn about other cultures. Universities need to help non-mainstream languages be part of the general culture of different communities and in doing so they can help such languages survive.

Intercultural learning and intercultural activities

The academic domains work as silos (Mestenhauser 2011). Even though more and more international organisations are pushing academics to work in a more transversal way, academia as we know it prevails and compliments individualism. The OCDE as well as many researchers have established the main competences for the twenty-first century which are as follows: collaboration, communication, information technology literacy, citizenship, creativity, critical thinking and social/cultural skills. We propose the creation of compulsory courses on Intercultural Communication, Human Rights, International Development in all degree programmes. These courses will help ALL students no matter what they are studying to acquire the knowledge and competences for the twenty-first century. These courses should include compulsory work with the community.

Governance and institutionalisation

Last but not least is the institutionalisation of all the internationalisation strategies to create an intercultural campus. These strategies should be top-down and bottom-up decisions. It is the only way to ensure that all these activities and programmes are not created just because one professor or one administrative staff suggests doing so. If major impact is sought, then the institutionalisation of strategies is the key element in promoting change. This impact needs to be measured, and therefore strategic plans to foresee their implications need to be created along with institutional policies. Sierra Huedo (2013) affirms that change is possible in a university by firstly garnering for one strategy, looking around to see who your allies are, creating a vision, then including more people in this vision, and finally setting up short-term and reachable goals. Once those

goals are reached, the next step is to plan a strategy and continue learning from accomplishments and failures with peers. Assessing activities and learning from failures is the only way to continue promoting intercultural change in an educational organisation.

Conclusions

Acquiring IC is a developmental and individual process that requires the activation of cognitive, behavioural and affective skills. For IC development, taking one course in intercultural communication might help, but more is needed to prepare our students to become interculturally competent. However, the access to diversity and learning within that diversity may encourage and help create a more globally-minded person.

Our proposal is the creation of an intercultural campus where certain elements, as the ones presented here, are key to help students to develop the aforementioned skills. Additionally, when designing courses and strategies, the existing models for developing IC should be taken into consideration.

In short, the university campus should reflect our current globalised and diverse society, promote intercultural learning and train its students to become global citizens who see themselves globally connected but locally active.

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