

# Internationalisation, intercultural communication and intercultural competence

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## *Abstract*

This article assumes that the internationalization of higher education demands more elaborate pedagogical approaches to utilise the experiences of multiethnic student groups and to facilitate every student's acquisition of intercultural competencies. Drawing from three internationalisation ideologies embedded in the educational discourse, it is argued that intercultural communication – as a field of study or a discipline – can play a key role in this endeavour. Twelve fields of consideration, when international educators work with students, are also identified.

Keywords: Internationalisation, intercultural communication, ideologies, intercultural competence

## **Academia: A Global Play-Ground**

Contrary to common belief, the academic quest for knowledge has since the beginning of times been an international endeavour (Sjöstrand 1970; Egidius 2001; Stier 2003/2004a) where access to recent innovations and the transmission of up-to-date knowledge have depended on the mobility of the intelligentsia. Yet there is something unique about contemporary higher education, since the *world* of today is different; global conditions are local concerns and local actions have global repercussions, enable sustainable development or trigger global competition (see Giddens 1996; Appudurai 1996; Beck 1998; Bauman 2000; Castells 2002).

Late modernity, and particularly globalisation, has produced a metamorphosis in self-images and goals among universities around the world. The hegemony of neoliberalism (or if you like; the fall of Cold War socialism) has prevailed in ideologies and policies of higher education. Accordingly, the European Union stresses mutual exchange of 'know how', strategic utilization of competencies, quality-improvement of higher education and the vital role of higher education for ensuring sustainable development and life quality for people (Stier 2003; see also the European Commission 2003). Most clearly these ideas are expressed in the *Bologna Declaration* (1999):

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an aware of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. The importance of education and educational cooperation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount...(Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education).

The European Union also stresses the need for educating a future labour force that 'possesses' adequate intercultural competencies. Yet references to intercultural communication education (ICE) are seldom found in public documents. Assuming this description of the academic context is reasonably fair, there is a need for: (1) scrutinising the ideological basis of higher education; (2) drawing from these ideologies, discussing the role of ICE in higher education; (3) identifying the cornerstones of intercultural competencies; and (4) proposing an adequate model for ICE.

Inspired by the discourse on educational ideologies and intercultural competence four concerns will be addressed in this article. It outlines the cornerstones of intercultural education and introduces a tentative pedagogical approach, the *IPSO FACTO-approach*, for ICE or overall intercultural education in academia.

## **Ideologies of Higher Education**

With Edward Hall's (1976) discussion on education as a point of departure; is education simply an example of how humankind has created complex institutions to do and enhance what people once did for themselves? And

is education up to par with the society of which it is an integral part? Almost seventy years ago John Dewey wrote:

Learning...means acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is taught as a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future. It is to a large extent the cultural product of societies that assumed the future would be much like the past, and yet it is used as educational food in a society where change is the rule, not the exception (Dewey 1938:19).

Few people today would claim that the world is static. Rather, it is axiomatic that a rapidly changing and increasingly global, multicultural world requires increasingly complex skills and knowledge from people. Yet educational institutions are not fully prepared to accommodate the needs of late modernity, nor is the human potential to learn and obtain such 'new' competencies fully adequate – two facts which have lead higher education to formulate internationalisation-policies and develop ICE in various guises. Even if a trend toward convergence is visible, still diverging or even contradictory *ideologies*<sup>1</sup> seemingly guide internationalization in higher education (Stier 2004a). I refer to these as idealism, instrumentalism and educationalism.

*Idealism* draws from a normative assumption that internationalisation is good *per se*. It serves to highlight global life-conditions and social injustices and offers an emancipatory worldview:

Common international concerns and an inter-dependence of nations demand that students and faculty members... are productive and aware citizens of the State, the US and the world. (Excerpt, Policy on Internationalisation at an American university)

These insights are believed to urge students to actively demand a global resourceredistribution and to ensure every person in the world a decent living-standard. Internationalisation should also induce tolerance and respect, in students. With this being said it may contribute to a democratic, fair and equal world (Stier 2004a).<sup>2</sup>

The idealistic view of internationalisation can be criticized. Being clearly counterproductive to its ambitions, it may come across as arrogant and may sustain ethnocentric worldviews – i.e., it is seen as a one-way flow where 'they can learn from us' and 'we have little to learn from them'. The others' competencies are devalued and vast parts of the world are victimized. Internationalisation is seen as an efficient instrument to educate the 'uncivilized' and reflects Western cultural imperialism and claims of global hegemony.

*Instrumentalism* considers internationalisation as a viable road to profit, economic growth, sustainable development or ideological goal-attainment of political regimes, multinational corporations or interest groups. Nowadays many employers seek multilingual professionals with knowledge of diverse cultural codes. Typically instrumentalists favour 'real', *de facto* competencies with wide application-ranges (Beck 1998).

[An increasingly internationalised economy] will require larger and larger pools of welltrained, multilingual, internally knowledgeable employees. (Excerpt, Policy on Internationalisation at a Canadian university)

The value of such competencies stems from how easily and rapidly they can be enacted in professional praxis and money-generating contexts (Stier 2004a). For identical reasons instrumentalists view internationalisation, life-long learning and inclusive education as means to ensure a sufficiently large and skilful labour force, adequate for an increasingly complex global and multicultural market:

The university is responsible for providing students with the information, knowledge and skills they need to compete in a complex international marketplace. (Excerpt, Policy on Internationalisation at an American university).

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<sup>1</sup> Analytically, these ideologies are idealtypes constructs – i. e. they are to be viewed as means of discussion on rather than mutually exclusive categories (Stier 2003). Also, typically universities and educational policy-makers do not adhere to merely to one of these ideologies, but vacillate between them.

<sup>2</sup> Similar ideas can be found in Habermas' notion of *deliberative democracy*.

Against this background, it seems fair to suspect that higher education in general and ICE in particular will become an increasingly valuable global commodity.

The instrumentalist approach can also be criticised for its lack of global solidarity:

[w]ealthy nations attempt to attract academic staff and fee-paying students from the 'poor' world, not only for short-term financial gains, but with an intent to keep their competence in the country, thus risking to 'brain drain' their home countries. (Stier 2004a:91).

Apart from economic incentives, internationalization may be used for ideological purposes, e.g., to impose the Western lifestyle on others or reflect a large-scale identity projects, aiming at replacing local, regional or national identities with supranational ones (Stier 1998). The Bologna Declaration assumes that internationalization of higher education may contribute to ideological convergence, a European sense of community and cultural conformity – and, consequently, to social harmony.

*Educationalism* prescribes a distinct notion of education that is not limited to institutionalised education which easily allows for 'practical application'. Resting on the German notion of *Bildung* (or in Swedish, *bildning*) it rather recognises the personal or societal value of *learning itself*. Exposure to 'strange' cultures with its features, social expectations and language-requirements is considered a unique multilevel learning experience where intercultural competence, knowledge of and respect for other cultures may be developed (Stier 2002/2003):

Critical thinking, personal development career preparation, evaluation of one's own activities in an international perspective and respect for other peoples and cultures, values remain a cardinal element of all education. Increased intercultural education also contributes to increases appreciation of one's own culture. (Excerpt, Policy on Internationalisation at a Swedish university)

Thus, 'being an outsider' may also shed light upon the home culture's unique features and oddities, contribute to the person's self-understanding and stimulate metareflection.

What criticisms can be raised against educationalism? Macro-oriented sociologists may accuse educationalists for (though not necessarily intentionally) individualizing structural and global problems, where educating and 'enlightening' people is seen as the wonder cure *par excellence* for coming to terms with poverty, inequality or exploitation. Undoubtedly, there is a thin line between being a critical observer, interculturally competent participator and a self-righteous educator. In short – the educationalist's ambitions must not end with merely analysing the actions and perspectives of others but must be followed by continuous scrutinies of his or her own. Nor should the educationalist routinely settle for the obvious and most convenient interpretations of reality.

### **Intercultural Communication**

Common sense tells us that internationalisation, in one way or another is about intercultural communication. Gudykunst and Kim (2003:17) conceptualise the *phenomenon* of intercultural communication as '...a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures.'

The keyword here is process. In the Swedish discourse the term *kulturmöte* (literally cultural *encounter*) has frequently been designated to any contact (or clashes) between cultures (e.g., in literature, communication styles, management styles, customs, value orientations). Unfortunately, such encounters are commonly analysed without consideration to their processual character. Intercultural communication should, therefore, be viewed and analyzed as a complex process, not merely as an encounter.

Moreover, intercultural communication is by some social scientists seen as an academic *discipline* – that is to say, one branch of communication studies, anchored in its characteristic ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. At the same time, intercultural communication is a field of concern for several other academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, social psychology, sociology, education, media studies, cultural anthropology and management). For them, intercultural communication is viewed as an object of study or a problem within the realms of these disciplines. The ideologies discussed above have to varying degrees influenced these disciplines' views on intercultural communication.

Against this background, and despite the absence of an exhaustive or unequivocal meaning of the term, there is a common preoccupation with intercultural communication. Hence, people with these interests are more willing to take on the challenge of the global, multicultural world and are probably better equipped to live up to academic internationalisation-policies than any one else. With this said; the role of intercultural communication education in attaining the goals of internationalisation and, more specifically, in providing optimal intercultural competence-education is essential – if not conditional.

### Intercultural Competence

A common denominator for internationalisation-ideologies and ICE is how they, albeit for different reasons, recognise the vital importance of intercultural competence and how they facilitate the acquisition of such skills. So to what does intercultural competence refer? Elsewhere I have suggested that intercultural competence, for the sake of discussion, can be divided into content-competencies and processual competencies (see Stier 2003).<sup>3</sup>

*Content-competencies* predominantly have a one-dimensional or static character and refer to the *knowing that-aspects* of both the 'other' and the 'home' culture. They include knowledge of history, language, non-verbal behaviour, world-views, 'do's and don'ts', values, norms, habits, customs, taboos, symbols, behavioural patterns, traditions, sex roles etc. Typically much of such cultural 'knowledge' stems from 'reductions' or stereotypes and are attributed positive or negative value and emotional colour (Allport 1979). Content-competence does not ensure full culture functionality. The term *processual competencies* considers the dynamic character of intercultural competence and its interactional context (Hall 1976; Stier 2003/2004b/c). Such competencies are relative to the cultural peculiarities, situational conditions and actors involved. This *knowing how-aspect* of intercultural competence, involves intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. *Intrapersonal competencies* involve cognitive skills, that is to say, placing oneself in the position of the other (perspective-alteration), viewing oneself 'from the outside' (self-reflection), alternate between and *acting* according to 'insider' and 'outsider' roles (role-taking), coping with problems originating in intercultural encounters (problemsolving) and keeping an open, receptive mind and noticing cultural peculiarities (culture-detection), without valuing them automatically and uncritically (axiological distance).

Intrapersonal competencies also pertain to emotional skills, i.e., understanding why feelings occur and their implications (Ruben 1977; Triandis 1984), coping with diverse feelings (e.g., xenophobia, uneasiness, uncertainty, ambiguity, frustration, anger, ethnocentrism.) triggered by unknown cultural settings (Bochner 1982; Gudykunst 2003), and preventing them from automatically determining one's actions or interpretations of behaviour or events.

*Interpersonal competencies* refer to interactive skills, that is to say, detecting and accurately interpreting variations in non-verbal cues, subtle signals and emotional responses (interpersonal sensitivity), mastering verbal and non-verbal language, turntaking (see Ruben 1977; Triandis 1984), cultural codes surrounding conversations and being aware of one's own interaction style (communication competence) and adequately responding to contextual meanings (situational sensitivity).

### ICE Revisited

As we saw, ICE has several, complementary (but occasionally conflicting) goals. First, it should enhance students' understanding of the dynamics of intercultural interactions. Second, ICE should enable them to obtain intercultural competence. But more specifically, *what* should be learned and *how* should ICE be designed to reach these goals? Starting with the first goal; by providing a set of theoretical tools, ICE should assist students in disentangling intercultural dynamics and the consequences for social interaction, grasp the vital role of culture for human communities, and appreciate the inherent problems and potentials of intercultural interplay. This ambition seems relatively uncontroversial.

By contrast, the second goal seems more problematic. In itself intercultural competence is multifaceted and complex, where certain skills probably cannot be obtained via higher education, but must result from exposure, first-hand experience and reflection. And, considering the market of intercultural consultants, there is a lot of intercultural 'training' out there that academia perhaps should not be concerned with (e.g. providing simplified and commonly stereotypical cookbook-recipes of cultural competence). ICE's preoccupation with culture shock (see Oberg 1969; Furnham & Bochner 1986), intercultural competence, intercultural growth, intercultural transformation and intercultural personhood (see e.g., Bochner 1982; Gudykunst & Kim 2003; Stier 2004b) springs from a normative conviction, which in addition to the domains and responsibilities of ICE needs to be further debated.

Ideally ICE should possess six 'i-characteristics'. Springing from the above described ideology of educationalism, it must focus *intercultural* themes and examples and reflect varying perspectives, ideologies and worldviews. Preferably it should take adopt an *interdisciplinary* perspective as its point of departure. By being *investigative* ICE should evoke curiosity and passion for new cultural experiences and knowledge and assist students in dissolving their own cultural imaginaries. Study groups should be *integrated* – that is, made

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to these competencies are *academic* competencies. They will not, however, be discussed here. In discussing *competencies*, Rychen and Hersh Salganik (2001) book has been a source of inspiration.

up by both host nationals and international students. ICE should be *interactive* and facilitate instructor-student and student-student communication. This interaction can also be monitored and utilised as a pedagogical resource. As far as possible, teaching should stress *integrative* views where the theory-practice connection is present.

### Intercultural Competence Revisited

The idealtypical outcomes of ICE pertain to six areas of intercultural competence (the six 'c's), where the first three largely resemble the intra- and interpersonal competencies discussed earlier. After an ICE students should have obtained *communicative* competencies in at least two languages. They should be able to function in both mono- and multicultural teams and groups, which refers to *cooperative* competencies. The education should have had positive impacts on their professional *confidence*, self-confidence and their *commitment* to universal human rights (and be prepared to argue for these values?). But ICE at the academic level extends beyond this. After completing their education, students should also have obtained meta-competencies. More specifically, they should have obtained a frame of *critical thinking*, i.e., to be able to analyse intercultural encounters, processes and scrutinise culture-influences on one's view of the world. One aspect of this is *discourse awareness* (Stier 2004b) – the ability to grasp and critically analyse discursive biases in ICE or in the public discourse (on for example culture, ethnic diversity, cross-cultural interaction etc) and their implications for one's own understanding of reality. E.g., drawing from simplistic, essentialist assumptions much ICE-literature stresses cultural differences and disregards similarities, assumes that intercultural encounters *in most cases* cause misunderstandings among people and that culture is the *primary* determinant of behaviour. By the same token, ICE-educators are surprisingly unaware of – or at least unwilling to share – their cultural biases.

At the same time, critical thinking pertains to problems of *comparability* – to recognise the cultural relativity of reality and the non-transparent and contextual nature of cultural knowledge.

### Pulling the Strings Together

The internationalisation of higher education is an unavoidable fact. In this endeavour at least three divergent ideologies are present. A common denominator for them, however, is how they recognise the importance of ICE.

The rationale for this article, among other things, has been to discuss a more up-to-date version of ICE and its learning outcomes. It was suggested that idealtypical outcomes of ICE relate to six areas of intercultural competence (the six 'c's). Three of these *Intercultural Programmes' Student Outcomes* (IPSO) refer to meta-competencies and extend beyond 'knowing that' and 'knowing how-aspects of culture' (and go beyond much traditional ICE). Instead they are about *knowing why and or even knowing why one knows why and not knows why*. Hence, intercultural competence is the ability to reflect over, problematise, understand, learn from, cope emotionally with and operate efficiently in intercultural interaction-situations. Possessing this competence is likely to increase students' future 'employability' on the labour market.

Moreover, the preferred six 'i-characteristics' of ICE are prime *Features of Academic Curricula and Teaching Orientations* (FACTO) and make up a fertile ground for intercultural learning and acquisition of intercultural competence. By putting the IPSO and FACTO together a slightly new approach to ICE is available. This IPSO FACTO approach is to be seen as *one* attempt to summarise, visualise and convert the assumptions, goals, foci and concepts that constitute a large part of ICE into a tentative educational working-model.

But before such a model can be implemented and become a valuable aspect of higher education, educators, researchers and university administrators must spell out and openly discuss the aims and underlying ideologies of ICE. They need to set aside personal prestige, end old academic feuds and instead identify mutually acceptable compromises, in order to uncover and deconstruct widely spread preconceptions that taints much of current ICE – and which they, if they are not careful, unintentionally and continuously reproduce. And even if the most obvious area of application of such a model presumably is curriculum-development, pedagogical refinement and production of study material in higher education, it has the potential to inspire and widen the scope of research in the field as well.

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