Improving International Communication and Understanding

Students as Teachers in Multicultural Groups

Introduction
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Editor
"That's Not Me"
Learning to Cope with Sensitive Cultural Issues
(Reliving teacher learning experience with local and exchange students)

Comments
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We Can Benefit from *'Local Internationalization'*

➢ Academic mobility offers multiple opportunities for intercultural pedagogical development – BUT opportunity can also bring awareness of *opportunities that have been overlooked*

➢ Local and exchange students often float past each other,
  ➢ thus missing an opportunity to participate in the creation of a learning space, inhabited by people in transformation
  ➢ who are creating shared frames of reference as they explore the diversity and commonality of their taken-for-granted cultural assumptions about self and others

➢ The goal of the 'local internationalization' approach is to take full advantage of international exchange programs
  ➢ In the process, local and exchange students can represent cultural resources who can learn from each other
  ➢ as the teacher operates as an observing-participant learner who provides springboards for multicultural group discussions

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Where does pedagogical development come from?

➢ Economic development comes in society when neglected resources are used in a creative and meaningful way

➢ Turning previously neglected resources into active, meaningful resources is also important for universities

Any ignored resources in universities?

➢ Local and exchange students
  ➢ whose combined cultural knowledge is greater than the cultural knowledge of any teacher

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Students as Learner-Teachers

➢ The Finnish and exchange students are the experts about their cultures
  ➢ but are often unaware of their taken-for-granted cultural expertise at the beginning of the course

➢ Students don't work together to solve theoretical academic problems
  ➢ They work together to *discover, interpret* & *communicate*:
    ➢ *Where, why* and *how* cultural overlap ends and difference begins when dealing with social relationships in their cultures

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Autonomous Learning During the Courses

➢ Students participate in bi- or multi-cultural groups of 5–7 with at least 2 students who have grown up in the same cultural environment in each group

➢ Students move beyond communicating only as individuals through double-checking their comments about cultural ways of living and communicating

➢ Students send reflective essays to group members after every class and required reading assignment

➢ This communication approach encourages reflecting about what is rather common for cohering social diversity in their respective cultures

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Communication face-to-face and via reflective essays to group members

➢ Students write rather freely in their essays to group members and the teacher about their confusion or frustration after each class and reading assignment

➢ This helps the students reflect on the group discussion, clarify points and raise questions prior to the next session

➢ This also helps the teacher become aware of how different individuals or groups interpret their experiences. Awareness of confusion and new ideas coming from multicultural groups provides springboards for the next class

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Discovering the Unexpected in Self and Others

➢ Diversity in the students' learning experiences has been rather common
  ➢ Some students experience a rather systematic step-by-step discovery process during which something new, which they didn't expect, often pops up during group discussions
  ➢ Most students experience **'why this?'-'why that?'** confusion, even frustration, before discovering the unexpected about self and other

➢ No intercultural learning experience can be organized, if realistic, in a way that is always best for every individual student or multicultural group during the pedagogical development process
  ➢ This is intercultural reality

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Learning via Experience for Teacher and Students

➢ During the course the teacher experiences multiple unexpected discoveries related to cultural issues and develops more appropriate ways to cope with them in future courses
  ➢ As the privileged learner, the teacher learns **class after class and course after course from the discovery process in the multicultural groups**

➢ During the discussions in multicultural groups
  ➢ **seeds are planted**, start to take root and begin to clarify the value of learning via experience

Example of learning via experience

"When reflecting about the whole course … I really have to admit that compared to other course which involved multinational teams, there was really a constant discovery process of new things and attitudes."

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**Pedagogical Examples of using Rich Cultural Resources
in two 'Local Internationalization' Courses**

*Intercultural Communication Course
&
Intercultural Management Course*

Learning about self and the other
as
a human, cultural and personal being
comes when given
the responsibility and opportunity to learn via experience

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Intercultural Communication Course

Coping with intercultural discomfort
when widespread *'discomfort with silence'*
enters a culture *'comfortable with quietness'*

➢ Widespread 'discomfort with silence' has often been part of an external and 'self-imposed' Finnish discomfort in intercultural situations

➢ Exchange students are often confused when Finnish students show their interest and respect for others by listening and French students show their interest with active interruption

➢ Finnish references to the positive sides of Finnish 'comfort with being silent/quiet' (hiljainen) rarely comes to the surface
  ➢ when Finnish students begin to interact in their multicultural groups

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**Communication Trapped by Categories
'Talk' (+) vs. 'Silent' (-)**

➢ Exchange students, e.g. French, often initially refer to Finns as socially disconnected (silence = social void)

➢ Finnish students offer a variety of replies within the two categories, e.g.,

  ➢ We talk, not as much as you / we don't talk enough
  ➢ We are silent / too silent / not that silent

➢ Communication between Finnish and exchange students is easily trapped by two communication categories:

  ➢ 'talk' (+) vs. 'silent' (-) without reference to the positive sides of Finnish 'comfort with quietness'

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Invisible Finnish Cultural Meaning of 'Hiljainen'
Hidden by Reliance on 'Proper' English

➢ Reference to the talk/silent categories is reinforced when Finns are unaware of how they are translating 'hiljainen' (silent/quiet) into English for exchange students

➢ Finnish students have two correct alternatives:
  ➢ They often choose 'silent' instead of 'quiet'
  ➢ They also often refer to Finns as 'shy' people
  ➢ These words hide the positive meanings in 'hiljainen' & 'ujo'

➢ Finnish-French example: Finnish students are unaware that
    (1) 'silent' in French is often socially negative and that
    'silent' (silencieux) + 'shy' (timide) is more negative
    (2) 'quiet' is positive and 'quiet' (tranquille) + 'shy'
    (timide) in French can also be at least neutral

➢ French students are also unaware that the words 'silent' & 'quiet' come from the same Finnish word 'hiljainen', which is semantically associated with multiple positive Finnish meanings

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Movement Between English and Mother Tongue

➤ Movement back and forth between English and the mother tongue is very important when using English as a shared international language

➤ This movement takes students back into their cultural environments

➤ Students with a good command of English gradually become aware of their reliance on '**false friends**' as movement between English and mother tongues brings multiple hidden cultural meanings to the surface during the group discovery process

➤ In this context *false friends* are
  ➤ Exact same words in English that carry different meanings
    ➤ into the students' implicit multiple cultural frames of reference in their groups

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Movement Beyond Talk (+)/Silent (-) Categories

➤ As Finnish and exchange students move beyond the two communication categories, they discover cultural interpretations of

  ➤ Comfort/discomfort *when talking* in different contexts

  ➤ Comfort/discomfort *when silent* in different contexts

➤ Students then begin to discover overlap and divergence in their cultural feelings of comfort and discomfort

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'Discomfort with Silence'
Finnish-French Cultural Overlap

➤ There is clear Finnish-French cultural overlap when there is, e.g.,
  ➤ A problem of self confidence in the silent person
  ➤ A problem of a person who wishes no social interaction

➤ The cultural ways of sending and interpreting messages often means, however, that
  ➤ A Finnish student often interprets the acts and speech of a Finnish person differently from the way a French student interprets the Finnish acts and speech
  ➤ The same challenge can also be seen from a French perspective about French acts and speech

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'Comfort with Quietness'
Absence of Cultural Overlap

➤ French examples of 'comfort with silence' are often linked to remaining silent when one know s/he shouldn't talk, e.g.,
  ➤ Cinema
  ➤ Interesting lecture
  ➤ Church
  ➤ Library
  ➤ When studying, etc.

➤ These French examples, which are rather common among continental Europeans, are rarely mentioned, if ever,
  ➤ by Finnish students who focus on quietness as one natural way to be rather than situations when one should not talk

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Breakthroughs for Finnish students

➤ During the course Finnish students start realizing how translations between Finnish and English had been sending negative messages in English about Finnish cultural rich points
  ➤ They had been educated to rely on 'proper' English just like students throughout Europe

➤ Misunderstood culturally dense Finnish terms include 'kommunikoida ilman sanoja', 'hiljainen', 'harkita', 'mietiskellä' and 'olla omissa oloissaan':
  ➤ Communicate without words, think, reflect, ponder and be in one's own thoughts and/or respect the privacy of others, even on occasions when surrounded by others

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Finnish Natural Movement Between 'Comfort with Quietness' & 'Comfort with Talking'

➤ As Finnish students discover taken-for-granted comfort with silence/quietness, they become aware of how and why
  ➤ Movement back and forth between 'comfort with quietness' and 'comfort with talking' is a natural Finnish way to be

➤ This Finnish natural way is rarely understood in the same way by people from cultures where silence often means 'socially disconnected'

➤ Only active interaction between Finnish and exchange students can bring these ignored aspects of Finnish culture to the surface

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Understanding Self as a Cultural Being
Opens the Door to Understanding Strangers

➤ Once Finns become aware of their taken-for-granted comfort with quietness,
  ➤ they become comfortable explaining to exchange students when, how and why they feel comfortable with silence/quietness

➤ Once Finns explain their taken-for-granted
  ➤ French students begin to feel more comfortable with the Finnish ways and begin to explain the cultural logic of their discomfort with silence

➤ It is not enough to adapt to others
  ➤ It is important for strangers to help each other become aware of and develop competence to explain the taken-for-granted 'richness' in their cultures that might be interpreted as social 'poverty' points by others

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An Intercultural Management Course

➤ Students have academic knowledge about leadership and team building and an advanced knowledge of English

  ➤ They are often anchored by two presumptions:
    ➤ Theoretical models for leadership and team building are appropriate for implementation in different cultures
    ➤ 'Proper' English sends the same message to everyone with a good command of English

➤ The goal of the course is to provide opportunity for learning about self and others via experience

  ➤ Theoretical knowledge can be misleading unless students also develop competence for discovering, interpreting and communicating cultural aspects of leadership and team building that are hidden in reliance on theory and 'proper' English

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Course exercises

➢ Gender roles in business and society
➢ Participation in decision making
➢ Groupthink negotiation challenges
➢ Multiple cultural meanings hidden in leadership strategies
➢ Etc.

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Comments on the Importance of
Local Internationalization

➢ **Kari Kylänpää**: extensive intercultural experience (e.g., Information Coordinator: Erasumus Student Network) and participation in a SEFE awarded 'Local Internationalization' course

➢ **Jane Honka**: successful intercultural communication courses that could still benefit from 'Local Internationalization'

➢ **Tiina Naskali**: extensive intercultural experience (e.g., Finnish Representative: European Erasmus Student Network) and participation in Jane Honka's course

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Contact hypothesis: conditions

➢ Group members should be of equal status, and in relatively equal numbers

➢ Contact should have the potential to extend beyond the immediate situation NB superficial contact not productive

➢ Programs should promote intercultural understanding, and maximize cooperation within groups

➢ Opportunities should be given for interaction; this will result in more positive intergroup attitudes and reduced prejudice

➢ Strong institutional support for the contact should be provided

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Group Discussions

➢ Discuss ways to use local and exchange students as rich cultural sources who can teach and learn from each other

➢ Discuss: Where is the resistance to fully using ignored resources for 'local internationalization'?
  ➢ Teachers: perhaps if unaware of the value of using ignored resources
  ➢ Academic structure: perhaps …
  ➢ Students: perhaps …

➢ Discuss possible ways to deal with silent and active resistance to using local and exchange students as rich academic resources

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"That's Not Me": Learning to Cope with Sensitive Cultural Issues

Discovering responsibility and opportunity to benefit from 'local internationalization'

Our common human inability to know what we don't know can often overshadow intercultural realities. We all carry 'cultural baggage' that is often invisible, can easily become weighty and must be dealt with, regardless of where we are in our globalizing environment. The goal of the book is: developing competence to unmask self and others and to move from uncomfortable 'that's not me' to comfortable 'this is me'.

The approach described in this book is the result of more than a decade of intercultural collaboration and ethnographic discovery. The local and exchange students involved found that they had much to learn and teach about their cultural backgrounds, while the participating teachers discovered how to make use of students as rich cultural resources and to learn as participant observers. The authors include Austrian, American and Finnish teachers.

Conference participants can contact michael.berry@tse.fi for a special book offer. If the book is also used in courses, a low cost offer is possible.

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