Stimulating intercultural intellectual capabilities in intercultural communication: testing an innovative course design

Antonenko, T.A.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Just as iron rusts from disuse, even so does inaction spoil the intellect"
-- Leonardo da Vinci, Italian scientist, architect, sculptor and inventor

Having taught for over 10 years at Tomsk State University at the Faculty of Languages, interaction with the students was one of the main drivers during my classes – to see how motivated and dedicated students would get the best out of themselves in the time available, and grow into more capable professionals and stronger personalities. It was, however, also difficult to push for a lot of interaction as this would require students to go 'the extra mile' in many aspects with the system not being appreciative of it in terms of rewarding the extra efforts. The question I have asked myself numerous times is 'Are the extra interactive efforts worth the while for the students beyond the knowledge they are supposed to obtain?'. This study provides me with the opportunity to dig deeper into this question, look at effects of a different way of teaching; teaching with a different focus and with different aims, providing the students with ample opportunities to grow and develop.

1. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, COMPETENCE AND INTEL-LECTUAL CAPABILITIES

Intercultural communication (IC) is an essential part of the contemporary world and becoming increasingly important with increasing levels of globalisation, the IT and internet revolution, and increasing levels of mobility of people and companies globally (Hall, 1959; Yore, Bisanz and Hand, 2003; Torres, 2005). Misunderstandings and cultural miscommunications with representatives of other cultures pose the need to reconsider and improve IC between people working in intercultural environments. The importance of studying IC by students from any background is recognised as a vital need to promote mutual understanding between intercultural communicators from different cultures communicating with each other.

Though the importance of IC has been largely acknowledged and accepted, there are different views and practices on how education and university courses should

contribute to – and *de facto* do – better IC in today's world. Researchers in the field of IC are convinced that higher order learning and higher order cognitive processes like critical thinking, elaboration, argumentation, and self-reflection are important as part of a course in IC, but in practice many courses have not yet implemented this consensus. In fact, many courses on IC in the past have focused, and still do so today, on lecturing about knowledge of IC or have been designed to talk and lecture about intercultural communicative competence (ICC) within a foreign language (Saphonova, 1992; Little, 2000; Leask, 2005; Eisenchlas and Trevaskes, 2007). Also, this is still often the case in the context of teaching Intercultural Communication in Russia in general and at Tomsk State University (TSU) in particular. Education is like the ancient Indian proverb: "If you give a man a fish, he will be hungry tomorrow. If you teach a man to fish, he will be richer forever". Presenting intercultural knowledge to learners instead of making them work with it, and experience it, really developing competences and intercultural intellectual capabilities (IIC), is like teaching someone to fish. In teaching university courses, still often, we are limited to "feeding students with fish, rather than teaching them how to fish themselves and be richer forever".

Going beyond this view of teacher-centred learning, with the teacher as the centre and knowledge provider of the class, many authors have focused on internalising knowledge and international experiences by aiming to grow competences: intercultural communicative competences (Kim, 1994; Byram, 1997; Lustig and Koester, 1998, Sercu, 2002; Renshaw, 2004; Williams, 2005; Deardorff 2006, 2009), and to create a focus on higher and more complex levels of learning (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Belluigi, 2009). Stimulating different types of IC has become more important than just knowledge absorption alone, for any university programme, but especially for language programmes incorporating IC in their curricula (Lustig and Koester, 1998; Sercu, 2002). Stimulating intercultural competences is like teaching learners how to fish, because once they acquire competences, they can be applied in multiple situations and settings anywhere and anytime, making the learner 'richer' forever.

Another way of looking at personal development is through intellectual development (Kholodnaya and Shavinina, 1996; King and Baxter Magolda, 2005; Matsumoto, Leroux, Ratzlaff, Tatani, Uchida, Kim, and Araki, 2001; Arasaratnam and Doerfel, 2005; Shavinina, 2010). The focus of intellectual development is on intrapersonal growth and development that takes place within a person. Through cognitive and meta-cognitive experiences and learning, individuals develop intellectual capabilities – based on experiential learning (Kholodnaya, 2002). Once capabilities are mastered – learning how to fish – learners can aspire to a next level of capability and maturity. Linking intellectual development to the specific case of internalising aspects of Intercultural Communication, the focus of this strand of literature is on intrapersonal intercultural intellectual development; i.e. about personal autonomous learning and growth. Growth occurs through various mental cognitive processes a learner is going through. Intercultural experiences – in this view – are seen as inputs into the experiential learning process that takes place at the cognitive dimension of a person. At the cognitive dimension, they can create disequilibria that start a mental process of thinking, contemplation and reflection on existing beliefs and values,

convergent and divergent thinking processes, that may in turn lead to different mental outcomes.

We agree with and aim to combine both strands of thought that state that emphasis in university courses should be placed on intellectual development, and on stimulating intercultural competences, so that learners truly internalise what they see, feel and hear. The stronger the intrapersonal process students have to go through, the longer-lasting their effects, the more fundamental the changes in a learner, and the more students can benefit from the course, both in- and outside the classroom. Especially for a course on IC, the lessons learnt and experiences gained have ample value in multiple other situations in life. The question for course designers then becomes how we can integrate the literature on intellectual development with the more interpersonal approach to developing intercultural communicative competences and how this integration should be reflected in course design.

2. AIMS AND STRUCTURE

This study aims to design and implement a new course in Intercultural Communication that stimulates both intrapersonal and interpersonal growth in IIC of learners. To that aim, we present a new model focused on growth of intercultural intellectual capabilities (chapter 2), develop course design parameters and course design specifications based on that model (chapter 2), test the measurement instruments for measuring IIC and higher order cognitive processes (chapter 3), test the validity of the course design (chapter 4), and run and measure the effects of the full experimental course in IC on a large group of students (chapter 5).

3. THE THEORETICAL MODEL

ICC consists of dimensions that various authors have touched upon: a (socio)linguistic component, a cognitive and operational component (behavioural, skills), and an affective component. Interculturally competent communicators are able to link their individual intrapersonal learning processes to intercultural dialogue with others who have gone through different experiences. Growth of ICC requires more than skills; it requires both intellectual and psychological individual learning that builds on a complex mental architecture. It is this focus on growth of intellectual capabilities and intrapersonal learning aspects of ICC that links it to IIC.

Through experiences and experiential learning, IIC grows because the experiences create disequilibria in a person's mind, setting a cognitive process of development going (Kholodnaya, 2002). This process is fed in part by interpersonal experiences gained as a result of interaction with others. The combination of interpersonal experiences with intrapersonal experiential learning cause the learner to go through the cognitive (first dimension), meta-cognitive (second dimension), intentional (third dimension) and intellectual capability dimensions (fourth dimension) of growth leading to growth in IIC. New experiences create disequilibria that stimulate critical cultural awareness, cultural stress tolerance and the willingness to experi-

ment with the cultural self. The more these are stimulated, the stronger the intrapersonal process of growth of IIC is expected to be.

Interpersonal dialogue strengthens this process by providing more experiences that feed into the intrapersonal growth process. Intra- and interpersonal experiences are also linked as an outcome of growth of IIC. Interpersonal behaviour can be seen as the manifestation of intrapersonal intercultural growth and maturation. Once a learner has acquired new IIC and has created shared meanings, new frames of mind, divergent ways of thinking, new cognitive schemata, epistemological styles and new ways of coding information have grown. From this point onwards, the full process of further intercultural intellectual growth can start anew when new experiences feed into the cognitive dimension of the human intellect, in a continuous feedback loop.

4.   MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

Many measurement instruments to measure ICC have been developed and used in practical courses on IC over time (Fantini, 2006; Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007; Gottfredson, 1997). For the purpose of measuring IIC and related complex cognitive processes that occur at the fourth dimension, we will analyse what measurement instruments to select, if necessary to redesign, and to use.

Our model of IIC depends on four Course Design Parameters (CDP): critical cultural awareness, cultural stress tolerance, willingness to experiment with the cultural self, and learning in a dialogue, as well as related psychological traits that affect growth in intercultural and intellectual competences positively. These traits are openness, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, creativity, emotional resilience, and behavioural flexibility. Our search for measurement instruments that cover these CDP and psychological traits have resulted in the selection of two instruments: (1) ICAPS-46 (Matsumoto et al., 2001) to measure the intrapersonal process of growth in IIC, and (2) INCA (INCA project, 2007) to measure the interpersonal dimension of IIC growth. It is assumed that growth in IIC requires learners to go through all four of the dimensions of intellectual development: the cognitive, meta-cognitive, intentional and intellectual capability dimensions (Kholodnaya, 2002). In addition to the two aspects of IIC, we also want to measure two processes typical for intellectual capability, the fourth dimension of the theoretical model: critical thinking and self-reflection. For critical thinking we choose the MSLQ-CT (Pintrich et al., 1991) instrument, and for self-reflection, we created the Self-reflection instrument. Finally, in order to aid course design validation, we select the IMI instrument (Ryan and Deci, 1992) to measure intrinsic motivation. Though not directly, an output sought after from the viewpoint of our theoretical model, intrinsic motivation provides information about how much students enjoy the course; and therefore insight into their levels of engagement and openness to the course and its course aims.

All five instruments are tested for internal validity and reliability with the Cronbach alpha values for separate factors and the instrument as a whole (internal validity), and with Pearson correlation coefficients between instruments (discriminant validity). With three testing occasions, we have ample opportunity to evaluate the

quality of the instruments and by revising items and factors to improve validity and reliability before commencing with the full experimental course on IC.

5. COURSE DESIGN

Based on the theoretical model, the course needs to include activities that enhance critical cultural awareness among students, stimulate their tolerance to cultural stress and encourage them to be open and willing to experiment with their cultural selves. The course also needs to stimulate development of interpersonal experiences through dialogue with others. We design the course in IC based on CDP and Course Design Specifications (CDS) that are content-related, pedagogical and comprise of various teaching formats.

The *intended* course design is based on the CDP and CDS that we derived from the theoretical model. The intended course design is the one that exists in the minds of the course designers. We present the course design in chapter 4. The *implemented* curriculum is the operationalised course design as it is *de facto* conducted in the classroom. It is manifested by how it is *perceived* by the students and teachers with whom it has been put in use. Ideally the implemented and perceived course matches the intended course design; i.e. the course as it was given matches the CDP and CDS. In chapter 4, we present and test the course design.

In this study we are then able to test the validity of our course design, by making use of student evaluations, learner reports, learner questionnaires, teacher notes, levels of intrinsic motivation of the students, and time-on-task measurements regarding the course as it is *de facto* implemented. For the trial course run, these measurements lead to suggested modifications that are implemented before the full experimental course is taught. During the full experimental course, measurements will also be taken to see whether the modifications from the trial course have had an effect and to see whether the course design is validated.

6. EFFECTS OF A DESIGNED COURSE ON IIC

Our study culminates in chapter 5 where we will present the results of a full run of the experimental course on IC. The course design is grounded in the theoretical foundation of growth of IIC through intra- and interpersonal experiences (chapter 2). The course design is based on the CDP and CDS that follow from the theoretical model and is tested for validity in the trial course (chapter 4). The instruments used to measure the effects of the designed course on growth in intra- and interpersonal IIC, critical thinking and self-reflection have been tested twice and have been validated (chapter 3). We have implemented a pre-test post-test design with swapping panels (Shadish, Cook and Campbell, 2002) to test whether the course positively affects levels of intra-IIC and inter-IIC of the participants, and whether participants' levels of critical thinking and self-reflection are affected significantly. In chapter 6 we provide a short summary of our findings, a review of the total research and an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of this study as well as points for further research.