Chapter 4
Exploring Hofstede’s Cultural Dimension Using Hollins’ Structured Dialogue to Attain a Conduit for Effective Intercultural Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The need for better intercultural relations among majority and minority students on university campuses persists largely because of the inability of both groups to understand one another culturally. The surge of hate crimes in 2008-2009, at universities such as Columbia University, University of Maryland, and the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, reawakened attention to the latent existing majority-minority campus tension. In addition, the impetus for increase in the number of diverse students at universities fails to take into account the need for adequate dialogue on diverse cultures necessary for enhanced civil co-existence (at the very least) of majority and minority students on university campuses. Consequently, a six-month study was conducted on a university campus, involving majority and minority students in structured dialogue discussing cultural theory in relation to their life experiences. The qualitative study sought to determine whether increased knowledge of a cultural theory through structured dialogue among diverse students affected college students’ perceptions of intercultural interactions. This chapter reports about the findings and implications for colleges and universities.

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INTRODUCTION

Growth in intercultural experiences is inevitable in a 21st century characterized by globalization. Yet most individuals are not adequately prepared for successful intercultural encounters. The aim of higher education is to equip students for effective citizenship through the acquisition of knowledge and professional skills (Coulter & Wiens, 2008). The 21st century professional skills, namely intercultural competence, ought to be considered a focus in institutions of higher education (Jacobs, 2010). “Intercultural experiences”, “intercultural competence” and “globalization” are broad and often contested concepts. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, the terms are defined as follows. Intercultural experience refers to “something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through” occurring between or involving at least two cultures, specifically Americans of Black and White cultures. Intercultural competence is defined as the capability of two or more cultures, specifically American Blacks and Whites to fathom or gauge the other culture’s perceptions, thinking, feeling, and actions. Globalization refers to an increased skill and thought of citizenship towards one’s country, other cultures, and the world.

UNDERPINNINGS OF INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES, INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY, AND GLOBALIZATION

According to Appiah (2006), “Cultural purity is an oxymoron. The odds are that, culturally speaking, you already live a cosmopolitan life, enriched by literature, art, and film that come from many places, and contains influences from many more” (p. 110). Undoubtedly, intercultural experiences influence a culture, yet culture by definition emphasizes resistance to change. Culture is a collective adaptive response to a material environment (what distinguishes us from other animals that adapt by evolutionary mutation) and a holdover (often irrational because the material environment has changed) of relationships, practices, values, and ideas that once had survival value for the community. Intercultural experiences may be enlightening or detrimental to developing citizenship. For instance, intercultural experiences where individuals engage in adaptive responses to one another often lead to enhanced skills in national and global citizenship. On the other hand, when an intercultural experience is an imposition of ideas, values, beliefs, actions involving a dominant-recessive relationship then the experience will often result in conflict.

Intercultural competence may avert conflicts associated with cultural differences. To become a person of intercultural competence, one has to understand that when individuals of different cultures, who are unconsciously “culturally conditioned” interact, the individuals are likely to experience gaps or disconnection in each other’s meaning and actions and not understand why. According to Kochman (2009) cultural differences play a covert role when different cultures interact, e.g., Blacks and Whites, and yet cultural differences are generally ignored or overlooked. Differences in culture are overlooked because different cultures often assume they are operating according to identical speech and cultural conventions. The meaning they are assigning to their interactions are the same, and therefore, the motives they are ascribing to each other - based on the assumption – are also justified (Kochman, 2009). Intercultural competence develops when an individual interacts with individuals from other cultures armed with the preceding understanding or skill and motivated to observe, listen, and ask questions in order to better gauge the other culture.

Intercultural competence would foster globalization, an emerging world-wide dialogue about sustainable human development (Smith, 2003). According to Walker (2005), globalization leads to global awareness of global issues that cross national frontiers, which include disease, the
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