Chapter 7
Making Sense of Intercultural Interaction

Kate Dunsmore
Fairleigh Dickinson University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter presents a visual sense-making activity in the field of intercultural communication. The activity is rooted in the literature that treats learning as a process of constructing meaning. The premise for this activity is that critical thinking depends on learning beyond memorizing discrete items. This perspective views learning for critical thinking as a process of integrating new knowledge into existing mental frameworks, which are then re-shaped in the learning process. The discussion begins with foundations in learning theory and their application to teaching intercultural communication. The description of the activity begins with the classroom setting and concludes with an appraisal of the activity in practice. Considerations of technology, curriculum design, and combining pedagogical strategies are included.

KEY IDEAS FROM LEARNING THEORY

This book explores the role of visual representation in fostering critical thinking. Halx and Reybold (2005) review the definitions of critical thinking that a range of researchers have investigated, concluding that there is broad agreement that critical thinking involves "purposeful, reasoned and goal-directed" engagement with a

topic (p. 294). Consideration of multiple perspectives and "an evaluation of one's own thought processes" are also widely agreed upon constituents of critical thinking (pp. 294-5).

The American Philosophical Association assembled a cross-disciplinary panel in 1990 to develop by consensus a definition of critical thinking. The definition below is taken from the *Executive Summary of the Delphi Report* (Facione, 1990):

We understand critical thinking to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based (p. 2).

Thus agreement seems strong that critical thinking involves judgment and the ability to articulate reasoning. In this regard, concept mapping and other forms of visual representation would be likely to foster critical thinking because they support the process of students making sense of a conceptual framework (Novak, 2007). This emphasis on the process of students constructing meaning and understanding rather than on how information is delivered is promoted in constructivist learning environments. Constructivist approaches tend toward collaborative and sense-making activities and away from traditional lectures (Wilson, 1996). For more on the constructivist theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, please see the Support Material, which is available on request.

Boghossian (2012) sounds a note of caution regarding constructivist or constructionist approaches that have insufficient opportunities for correction of student conceptions. However, I would argue that approaches tied to deep or meaningful learning (defined below) provide such opportunities without sacrificing the advantages constructivist approaches offer in developing the self-regulatory aspect of critical thinking. Much of the literature on concept mapping and other forms of visual deliberation expresses the advantage of these techniques in terms of fostering deep learning or meaningful learning. There is considerable overlap in the ways researchers define and use these terms, as well as those who discuss learning in terms of mental models. I turn now to a review of these areas of overlap.

The integration of new concepts into existing understandings has been characterized as meaningful learning (Novak & Cañas, 2008; Windschitl, 2002, p. 136) or deep learning (Tagg, 2003; Lau, Liem, & Nie, 2008). Deep learning involves integrating knowledge across multiple contexts (Nelson Laird & Garver, 2009) and is thought to foster greater retention in contrast with rote memorization (Tagg, 2003; Windschitl, 2002).

The process of integrating multiple frameworks has also been discussed as replacing mental models (Oliver & Hannafin, 2001) and as connecting schemas (Nishida,

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