

## Intercultural Competence in the Education Process

Maria Rosa Elosúa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, Spain

Correspondence: Maria Rosa Elosúa, Departamento Psicología Básica I. Facultad de Psicología. UNED. C/ Juan del Rosal, 10. 28040 Madrid, Spain. Tel: 34-91-398-7969. E-mail: melosua@psi.uned.es

Received: December 3, 2014

Accepted: December 23, 2014

Online Published: February 19, 2015

doi:10.5539/jel.v4n1p72

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v4n1p72>

### Abstract

The kind of this paper offers a synthesis about the wide range of psychological variables which influence how a person adapts when they are in a new or unfamiliar cultural context. This study takes as its starting points the educational value of the intercultural experience and the need to study this experience from interdisciplinary and plural focuses that enrich the light shed by different sciences and knowledge in their comprehension, description and explanation. The objectives of this study are as follows: 1) to describe and explain some of the important psychological variables which are influential in the exposure to new or unfamiliar cultural contexts from the perspective of current transcultural psychology; 2) to focus on intercultural competence as a current relevant dimension in the educational process of each person, and specifically in how international university students who are temporary residents of another country manage cultural transition; and 3) to situate intercultural competence in the process of the construction of cultural identities, promoting relationships with higher levels of equality and solidarity between different actors, peoples and cultures.

The study of intercultural competence will be applied to the educational process which affects 10% of international university students, with contributions from transcultural psychology. Transcultural psychology offers today psychological tools and a perspective that are indispensable to understand, describe and explain better intercultural competence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** intercultural competence, university students, cultural identities, intercultural experience

### 1. Introduction: Framework of the Study and Objectives

To come across other people in our lives from other cultures is a gift, but also a challenge. Come across others, or meet others? One and the other, and both. It is likely that most of the time we come across others, but sometimes we meet them.

Coming across others, and even more meeting them, is a gift through which we receive and we learn, but it is also a challenge because sometimes we do not completely understand their way of acting, understanding, feeling, speaking, assessing, and it may even be that we do not know well the history of these peoples nor their native languages.

The framework of this study has various important elements: 1) it takes as a starting point the educational value of intercultural experience (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2003) and the need to study this experience from interdisciplinary and plural focuses which enrich the light shed by different sciences and knowledge in their comprehension, description and explanation. Within the set of different scientific disciplines, this study is carried out from a psychological perspective. Its focus is the psychological study of the affect, behaviour and cognitions (ABC) of people exposed to another culture. 2) It centres on international university students who are temporarily resident in another culture/country, because, firstly, the author would like to share my own experience and secondly, this is the situation of around 10% of the university population. 3) It is interesting to understand how to manage this cultural transition so that each person has minimal adverse or conflictive effects of intercultural contact/meeting, and so that there are optimal psychological results of cultural contact, through the development of intercultural competence.

The fundamental objectives of the study are the following: 1) To describe and explain, from the perspective of transcultural psychology, some of the important psychological variables which influence the behaviour of a person when they are exposed to new or unfamiliar cultural contexts; 2) To focus on intercultural competence as a current relevant dimension in the educational process of each person, and specifically in how international

university students who are temporary residents of another country manage cultural transition; and 3) To situate intercultural competence in the process of the construction of cultural identities, promoting relationships with higher levels of equality and solidarity between different actors, peoples and cultures. This paper offers a synthesis about the wide range of psychological variables which influence how a person adapts when they are in a new or unfamiliar cultural context. The study takes as its starting points the educational value of the intercultural experience and the need to study this experience from interdisciplinary and plural focuses that enrich the light shed by different sciences and knowledge in their comprehension, description and explanation.

## **2. Intercultural Contact: Processes and Results**

The development of transcultural psychology in the last fifteen years has been very important and includes contributions from different areas of psychology such as, among others, social psychology, developmental psychology and the psychology of personality, which were unknown twenty years ago (Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, & Sam, 2011; Elosúa, Candau, Llopis, & Romera, 1994). The globalisation process, which began at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has led to a significant increase in the theory and research into the psychology of intercultural contact between tourists, university students who are temporarily resident in other country, business people, immigrants and refugees (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). It should be borne in mind that in 2002, the number of people living outside the country of their birth was around 175 million, more than double compared with 1975 (Bok, 2006). This shows the need to prepare new generations to live, assess and work in a world which is much more cosmopolitan than that of previous generations.

It is important to note that affect, behaviour and cognition are found in people's dynamic and constant interaction. The affective dimension refers to the psychological adjustment processes which take place when people meet others from different cultures. The behaviour component is related to the changes which are produced through learning and through the development of specific skills which stem from sociocultural adaptation. The cognitive dimension studies the cognitions which form part of knowledge and the values of a person with a specific identity, which has implications both for the self, and for the perceptions and relationships between diverse cultural groups.

### *2.1 Groups in Intercultural Contact*

Intercultural contacts can be classified into two large categories: those which take place between the residents of a nation or a society which is culturally diverse, and those which take place when a person from a society travels to another country with a specific objective; for example, to work, study, collaborate in a development project, etc. This study will focus on the second category.

The term sojourner has been used to describe people who travel to a different culture or country. For example, to study for a doctoral thesis in a university in a different country from that of the initial degree studies. This category supposes that the stay is temporary, and that there exists the intention to return to the original culture when the objective of the visit has been accomplished, although this is often not the case. Examples of sojourners include students abroad (who are the focus of this study), business people, technical experts, volunteers, missionaries, military personnel, diplomats, and even tourists. In the longer term, it is necessary to include immigrants and refugees among these "sojourners".

It is also important to distinguish between the process which defines intercultural contact and the institutional structures which can support and help, or hinder, in this process. On a national level, these include different regulatory norms such as policies for dealing with immigrants, anti-discrimination regulation in the workplace, education and housing rental, as well as the social climate which supports or opposes multicultural life. On an international level, countries may make positive contact with foreign visitors easier or more difficult, through visas, and education or employment regulations. All these contextual characteristics, which are very important, tend to be studied by different disciplines, among others anthropology, sociology, history and political science. More specifically, psychology has begun to take into account the importance of the characteristics of the context of the receiving country in order to ease cultural contact, from a psychological perspective.

Since the Second World War, governments and different types of institutions and foundations have supported and promoted a large number of students who study for a degree or doctorate outside their own country. Foreign students are often a visible minority and make up around 10% of the student population on many university campuses; it has been calculated that there are over a million university students outside their country or culture of origin.

## 2.2 Dimensions of Intercultural Contact

It is also necessary to differentiate between the dimensions of intercultural contact which take place between members of the same society/culture and/or country and the contact which is produced between members of different societies/cultures and countries. Ward et al. (2001) comment on a model by Bochner (1982), in which the main dimensions of cultural contact occur in relation to different variables: time of residence, purpose and type of task. In our case, international students or sojourners, all the interactions are affected by a fundamental distinction between the social role of the receiver and that of the visitor.

## 2.3 Results of the Contact

A brief historical view of the different results that have been produced from intercultural contact between different groups shows, according to Ward et al. (2001), that these results can be classified into four categories: genocide, assimilation, segregation and integration.

From a perspective of the more individual results of contact, four response styles are often found: 1) people who, especially when the second culture has a superior social status, reject their culture of origin in order to adopt the new culture; this produces “separation”; 2) people who, following the profile mentioned above, become militant nationalist; this produces “assimilation”; 3) a third profile which is quite common is that of people who do not feel “at home” in either of the two cultures and who can feel “marginal” in both cultures, leading to “marginalisation”; 4) people who integrate the second culture in their cultural identity, and depending on the time they spend in the second culture can become bicultural or multicultural; this produces “integration”.

In the case of international students, this can be a case of integration since adaptation occurs when the respective cultural groups maintain their core cultural identities. As will be explained below in the section on “intercultural competence”, this integration is only achieved to a greater or lesser extent depending on some psychological variables. If a scale of zero to one hundred were set, and an empirical study performed, it is likely that there would be a very wide range of variability between some people and others; it would even be possible that some students would never really integrate into the new culture.

## 2.4 Theoretical Perspectives of Intercultural Contact

In the scope of psychology, according to Ward et al., (2001), there are two theoretical focuses which have influenced the orientation of research in this area of study. The first is the focus of cultural learning, which has been developed more systematically in the last 20 years and which has made the connection between research and intercultural training. The second is more closely linked to psychological stress models and techniques for dealing with stress coping strategies applied to the study of transcultural transition and adaptation.

1) The cultural learning focus has its roots in the experimental and social psychology of Argyle (1969), who carried out a pioneering study based on the social skills and interpersonal behaviours which are connected to the transcultural problems which occur when the temporary residents in a country, immigrants or refugees have difficulties in managing their personal meetings in the everyday life of the new socio-cultural context. That is, the necessary adaptation becomes a set of specific cultural learning skills which are necessary to live in the new cultural environment. From this perspective, researchers who have adopted the focus of cultural learning have emphasised the importance of specific cultural variables for this necessary process of adaptation. These studies have included, among others, the variable of general knowledge of the new culture, the language or communicative competence, the quantity and quality of contact with people of the new culture, networks of friends, prior experience abroad, cultural distance and transcultural training. During the three decades from 1970 to 2000 Adrian Furnham and Stephen Bochner have been strong defenders of this focus of cultural learning.

2) The focus on the model for coping with psychological stress, however, focuses on the stress which is generated by life changes produced when people are in a new sociocultural context, which requires difficult processes of psychological and emotional adjustment, with new coping strategies. This focus has been strongly influenced by the psychological model of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This theoretical framework is wide, and incorporates characteristics both of the individual (the person) and of the situation that can ease or hinder the adjustment processes to a new culture in the necessary transcultural transition. Some of the variables studied are life changes, personality factors such as control locus, extroversion and tolerance of ambiguity, cognitive assessment of change, psychological coping styles, social support, satisfaction within a couple, quality of relationships both in the home and with people in the new sociocultural context, and demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, gender and social status. An important aspect of this second focus is that an effective adaptation to the new environment can be achieved by taking into account some aspects which do not depend solely on the adjustment of the individual to the stressful situation, as the mentioned before.

Although the focuses on cultural learning and coping with psychological stress have dominated the work carried out on culture shock for many years, especially with reference to the transcultural adaptation process, social identification theories have also had an influence in this area of study. It is important to highlight two theoretical and conceptual frameworks which have emerged from the wide scientific literature about the self and identity.

3) A third perspective, which is broadly consistent with the theory and research into the psychology of personality, has underlined aspects of ethnicity or cultural identity, and is linked to the focus on acculturation. In general terms, this focus of transcultural studies considers acculturation as a state, rather than a process, and deals with defining and measuring the psychological construct at a given moment in time, identifying its relevant predictors, correlates and consequences (Navas et al., 2005).

4) A fourth focus, more closely linked to social psychology, has underlined the importance of between-groups perceptions and relationships. From this perspective, the interactions are studied between members of the welcoming culture and community and various members who are temporary residents in the country or groups of immigrants, and the relationships between the groups are interpreted within the conceptual framework of the theory of social identity.

Social identity theories are widely cognitive and logically share some common characteristics with other different studies based on the importance of human cognition in the attitudes and values shown during cultural transitions and intercultural meetings.

5) Finally, from communication theory, some authors (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984), have posited a focus of avoidance of uncertainty, which also reflects a cognitive perspective, but at the same time incorporates some important variables both from the cultural learning focus and from the focus of coping with psychological stress. By underlining change and the lack of familiarity as significant characteristics of intercultural experience, research studies have shown that one of the principal tasks facing individuals in the process of acculturation is to reduce the uncertainty, which includes the capacity to predict and explain their own behaviour and that of others during intercultural interactions. Also coherent with this idea is the study of the knowledge variables of the welcoming culture, attitudes towards people from the welcoming culture and the attitudes of these people with members of cultural groups who are temporary residents, along with communicative competence and language, cultural identity and cultural similarity in the prediction of the reduction of uncertainty and intercultural adaptation.

### **3. Intercultural Competence**

How do we know whether a person is interculturally competent? What does it mean to be interculturally competent? The concept of “intercultural competence” is complex, as we attempt to show in this study. Derek Bok (2006) highlights the need for students to “think interculturally”, for which knowledge alone is not sufficient. Additionally, language may be necessary, but it is also not sufficient for intercultural competence. Mere contact is not sufficient to develop intercultural competence, as Gordon Allport (1954) expressed many years ago; see the superb synthesis carried out thirty years later by Pettigrew (1998), analysing and widening the possibilities of the model previously developed by Allport, progressing towards a theory of intercultural contact.

In the area of education, the focus naturally tends to be on knowledge-history, literature, language, music, etc.-which are products of a culture, sometimes referred to as “objective culture”. While these “products” give valid windows on the understanding of a culture, this knowledge is not enough to develop intercultural competence. Therefore, within the educational process there is an urgent need to deal with “subjective culture” (Triandis, 1994), that is, to provide students with the foundation, reference frameworks, skills and knowledge to develop an understanding of the underlying cultural values, communication styles and visions of the world in order to understand better the behaviour of others, to interact more appropriately and effectively, and become more interculturally competent (Elosúa et al., 1994).

Therefore, what is the key to intercultural dialogue? In the process of cultural learning one of the keys would be to construct authentic relationships through observing, listening to and asking people from other cultures to teach us, and to share through personal dialogue relevant questions about their and our cultures. Respect and confidence are essential to build and develop these authentic relationships through which we can learn from and with others. Research has shown (Knapp & Daly, 2011; Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Ryan, 2003; Savicki, 2008) that suitable preparation is necessary to learn and develop intercultural competence, especially before intercultural experiences such as studying abroad or working in an international company or organisation. Therefore, intercultural competence does not appear from one day to the next; rather, it is necessary to develop intercultural competence intentionally. This learning and development can happen through suitable preparation, meaningful intercultural interactions and the construction of authentic relationships.

Intercultural competence is a continuous learning process throughout a person's whole life; there is not a moment when a person is finally "interculturally competent". Given that it is a permanent learning process, it is important for students to engage regularly in a reflection on their experience of their own learning in this area (Deardorff, 2006; Yershova, DeJaeghere, & Mestenhauser, 2000).

When defining what intercultural competence is, one of the most significant studies is that of Spitzberg and Changnon (2009). We will follow these authors in the synthesis of conceptualisations, theories and current models of intercultural competence, complementing it with other studies (Davcheva, 2003; Ryan, 2003).

### *3.1 Intercultural Competence Models*

Revising current psychological models of the components of intercultural competence, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) indicate that at least two different focuses could be considered: a sequential focus which would consist in studying the different models one by one, and a more thematic focus which would try to study some of the essential components of intercultural competence in different models transversally. The first focus underlines the uniqueness of the models, while the second places emphasis on the common aspects of the models. These authors divide the models of intercultural competence into different categories, such as composition models, co-orientation models, evolutive models, adaptation models and causal process models. The detailed development of each of these types or categories of models will be left for a more exhaustive publication.

Nevertheless, it may be convenient to indicate succinctly that the term "competence" is used sometimes as conceptually similar to a set of capacities or skills, whereas at other times the concept refers to a subjective assessment impression. The first meaning is that which is used more frequently and also corresponds to the normative sense of the term. However, there are some problems with this focus, as for example the same behaviour or skill can be perceived as competent in one context but not in another (Spitzberg, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002).

Despite these limitations, for the purposes of this study the term "competence" is considered appropriate to refer to the management process which university students go through during the period of cultural transition which they experience outside their country/culture when they interact with people from other cultures. It is also important to highlight that it is not groups that interact, but individuals (Spitzberg, 1989). The extent to which individuals show aspects of, or are influenced by, their cultural group makes this interaction an intercultural process.

This is why the majority of models of intercultural competence begin and centre especially on the individual as the unit to be analysed, although most recognise the importance of including other factors (Lustig & Koester, 2006). The focus which has dominated and underlies the models of human competence consists of some central components: motivation (affective and emotional dimension), knowledge (cognitive dimension) and skills (behavioural dimension). However, specifically in order to incorporate a wider set of influences on human competence, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) extended the conceptualisation of intercultural competence to include also the context (situation, environment, culture, relationships, function) and the results (perceived convenience, perceived effectiveness, degree of satisfaction, understanding, attraction, intimacy, assimilation, success with the task).

### *3.2 An Intercultural Competence Model, According to Deardorff (2006, 2009).*

The model of intercultural competence proposed by Darla Deardorff (2006, 2009) lies in the last category of models of causal processes. This type of models propose explicit hypotheses related to the connection of the five components of the model, and therefore can be checked by gathering empirical data.

This model is conceived as a process which is developed in the person beginning with the development of 1) attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity and discovery) which favour the acquisition of 2) given knowledge (cultural awareness, a deep knowledge of the culture including understanding of other visions of the world, sociolinguistic awareness), as well as a set of skills (observation, listening and assessment; analysis, interpretation and relationship). This process moves from a more individual level to a level of greater social interaction.

The degree of intercultural competence depends in turn on the degree of acquisition of these attitudes, knowledge and skills, which is shown by 4) internal results and also 5) external results. The internal results refer to the fact that these attitudes, knowledge and skills lead to internal results of flexibility, adaptation, ethno-relative perspective and empathy, which are produced on an individual level and are necessary for intercultural competence. When this happens, individuals are able to see themselves from the perspective of

others, and to respond to them taking into account the way in which the other people want to be treated. Individuals can reach these internal results to a great or lesser degree of success.

The external results are a subsequent step in the process of intercultural competence. The sum of the attitudes, knowledge and skills, as well as the internal results, are shown through an individual's behaviour and communication which become the visible results of intercultural competence experienced by others. Therefore, according to the model proposed by Deardorff (2006, 2009), this leads to the definition of intercultural competence as "effective and appropriate behaviour and communication in intercultural situations". Effectiveness can be determined by the individual, while the assessment of whether the communication and behaviour are appropriate or not can only be determined by another person, and are connected to cultural sensitivity and the adherence to the cultural norms of the other person.

Among the key aspects of the positive assessment of the model, it is necessary to point out that these five global elements form intercultural competence, providing a comprehensive theoretical framework with a verification method of the relationships between the five elements. More importantly, it offers the possible and necessary development of intercultural competence in university students abroad.

At the same time, it is important to underline that this model integrates and illustrates very well that intercultural competence is a process which lasts a person's whole life, and that there is no point at which a person becomes completely interculturally competent. Along the same lines as it can be seen to be pedagogically appropriate, the model helps to develop the way in which the intercultural competence of students can be increased, promoting the acquisition of the necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills.

Another interesting aspect of the model is that it helps to understand better the role of language in the development of intercultural competence, as language alone does not ensure competence in a given culture, as mentioned above. Therefore language is a necessary tool, but it is not sufficient as a skill within intercultural competence; what is more, language in itself can be an important vehicle in understanding others' visions of the world, which is crucial in the development of intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence must be implemented intentionally in all educational stages, through programmes, guides, experiences and courses both for the students in each country/culture and also for international students who are temporary residents in another country/culture.

In summary, although the model of intercultural competence proposed by Deardorff (2006, 2009) seems to us to be very valid, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, pp. 35-45) offer a magnificent summary of the status of the conceptualisation of intercultural competence, which is well worth studying in depth and extending. Without entering into the large list of models included, these authors analyse four aspects which are still problematic and which seem very important from a psychological perspective to continue the study of intercultural competence in future research.

The first problem is related to deepening theoretical awareness as to whether motivation, knowledge and skills are really separate states and processes. Additionally, some potentially relevant concepts seem to be absent. For example, little attention is paid, although it deserves more, to the emotional aspects of people who interact. Apart from the traumatising effects of culture shock or the implicit correlates of anxiety, it is considered that the people who interact are conceived in general from a cognitive perspective, as rational beings. In contrast, political and psychological language experts consider that the majority of language processing and thought takes place on a subconscious level. Therefore, it is likely that the conceptualisations of intercultural competence are centred excessively on aspects which are conceptual, rational, conscious and intentional. It could be said that, with the exception of anxiety, even the motivation component tends to be too cognitive by nature; what is more, this anxiety is often seen as a product of rational information processing. In this sense, theories about emotional and affective assessment may make a necessary and important contribution which could complement the current models of intercultural competence. The corporal dimension and feelings have been systematically excluded from western thought; for this reason, it would be important to recover the role of feelings in the reading that is made of the experience, and to work with this dimension in training of intercultural competence, as suggested by Bennett and Castiglioni (2004).

A second problem deals with the nature of the concept of adaptability. Adaptability seems to be a central concept in all the models of intercultural competence. However, this concept of adaptability has not been measured to a high degree of validity, partly because it has not been conceptualised in great detail. The subcomponents of adaptability, such as sensitivity, empathy, or the ability to see things from another's perspective have not been specifically conceptualised nor put into operation in order to show their validity. For example, adaptability is always a process of change, but from what starting point? If adaptation is a central characteristic of this

competence, and if it can be supposed that a resident can adapt to the other person of the welcoming culture, it is not clear to what extent both people should adapt to each other. If this adaptation overly compromises someone's own personal identity, this exchange may cause a price to be paid in other aspects of competence. Finally, adaptability is by definition a process of variability, but the majority of focuses to measure it treat it as a characteristic, a constant predisposition which behaves inconsistently. These and other problems of the concept of adaptability have been examined previously, but more convincing solutions have yet to be found (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Spitzberg, 1994a, 1994b; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989).

The third problem is the potential ethno-centrism of the models. The majority of the models have been developed and measure in western contexts, particularly Anglo-Saxon. At present it is difficult to assess the possible biases of these models in their possible application to other cultural contexts of Latin America (Portillo & Sinnigen, 2009), Africa (Nwosu, 2009), Asia (Chen & An, 2009; Manian & Naidu, 2009) and Europe (Moosmüller & Schön, 2009). For example, the emphasis of western cultures on individuality would tend to give higher priority to assertiveness skill, whereas the tendency towards more collectivist cultures Eastern countries could emphasize empathy, sensitivity and conformity (Spitzberg, 1994a, 1994b). Definitively, intercultural competence is broadly seen today as a concept and an individual characteristic, and it is therefore measured very individually, despite repeated calls for a broader consideration which also takes into account the perspective of the relational dimension in intercultural competence, as some research has suggested (Ickes & Simpson, 1997; Kenny, 1994).

The last problem is how to identify the best model. On the one hand, it is tempting to argue that the variety of models is a sign of postmodern diversity and that cultural diversity in itself can require a range of parallel models. However, it is clear that there is a set of theoretical common metaphors in the majority of the models. Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) argued that any integrating model of interpersonal competence would need to conceptualise a minimum of five components: motivation, knowledge, skills, context and results. Evolutive models indicate that the time element of the relationships should also be considered, and relational models emphasize the importance of including all the participants involved and their interaction processes, going beyond the individual as the only unit of analysis.

In sum, it is necessary to continue this line of research in order to clarify possible solutions to the problems mentioned above.

#### **4. Intercultural Competence in the Process of Construction of Cultural Identities**

In the development of this section, we will follow mainly the analysis offered by Kim (2009) on identity and intercultural commitment.

It is important to start this fourth and last point by stating that, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of identity in general and cultural identity in particular have played a central role in social research into intercultural relationships and behaviour between groups.

From the psychological perspective, one of the authors who has worked most on the development of identity is Erik Erikson (1950). For this author, identity is at the centre of the process of a person's development during their life, both individual (or personal) identity or group (or collective) identity. Therefore, these two dimensions are complementary in the person, who always belongs to -at least- one culture or social reference group. However, group or collective interests have gradually and increasingly become under interest, beyond their implications for the interest of the personal self. In fact, as Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987) observed, some years ago a change occurred towards the perception of the self beyond that of a unique person, giving more emphasis to the ethnic identity or that of the cultural reference group. There are recent proposals (Gallagher, 2013) on the theory of the self which include the corporate mind, experience, the affective dimension, intersubjectivity, cognition, narrative and the structures of the cerebral cortex.

The use which is made in this study of the term identity implies that the identity of the global self of the individual is made up of both dimensions, personal and social. In turn, the term cultural identity is used to refer to the group dimension of identity. Therefore, it is an inclusive concept which represents similar terms such as national, cultural, ethno-linguistic and religious identities, continuing with the use given to the term in social science.

Taking this a step further, Kim (2009) takes up again the behavioural orientations and characteristics which she identified some years before (Kim, 2001, 2005a, 2005b), "inclusion in identity" and "security in identity" as two characteristics which are conceptually different, but which are significant in understanding the behaviour of the individual in situations which involve others who are culturally or ethnically different.

#### *4.1 Inclusion in Identity*

In the area of social science, various concepts have been used to refer to the behaviours which are associated with an approach towards or a withdrawal from others who are culturally and ethnically different. It is important to begin by highlighting that a first trend which was very widespread, in which individuals categorise themselves and others as “in the group” or “outside the group”, has been used to explain how constructive intercultural commitment can be hindered in the theory of social identity and the theory of the categorisation of the self (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Different studies (Hamilton, Sherman, & Ruvolo, 1990; Hewstone & Giles, 1986) have shown that this psychological trend can lead to the creation of stereotypes, and even worse, to the development and maintenance of prejudices (Elosúa et al., 1994).

Later, and in an attempt to reinforce the positive association between inclusion in identity and the associated intercultural behaviour, Kim (1988, 2001, 2005a, 2005b) developed the concept of “intercultural identity”. As an extension of and a counterpoint to the conception of cultural identity based on a group, Kim (1988) introduced this concept to refer to an orientation of self-other success which an individual develops over time. Therefore, intercultural identity is conceived as a continuous process of adaptive changes from a monocultural character to another which is increasingly more complex and inclusive, which lasts an individual’s whole life. Kim (2001, 2005a) has explained that, through prolonged and extensive intercultural communication experiences, the identity of an individual experiences two transformation processes which are interrelated: individualisation and universalisation. The individualisation process implies a clear definition both of the self and of the other as a singular unique individual, and not only as a member of a conventional social category. With this capacity, it is more likely that the conventional categories “in the group” and “outside the group” can be overcome, such that individuals can perceive themselves and others based on individual qualities. Alongside this process of individualisation there is the process of universalisation, the parallel development of a cognition of synergies which arises as the individual becomes aware of the relative nature of values and of the universal aspect of human nature. It is important to highlight that in the process of becoming intercultural in the orientation and construction of identity, according to Kim, the individual probably becomes more competent, choosing constructive actions and taking personal decisions which go beyond the norms which are present in a particular culture.

By underlining the transforming evolution of the person through these two processes of individualisation and universalisation in the orientation self-other, Kim (1988, 2001, 2005a) draws a distinction between intercultural identity and other related concepts, such as “bicultural identity” and hybrid identity’ which are centred on the sum of particular cultural characteristics. At the same time, the concept of intercultural identity is related to Adler’s (1982) concept of “multicultural identity” which takes the psychological state of “belonging or not belonging to a single culture” and the philosophical concept of Appiah (2006) of “cosmopolitanism”, a type of inclusive, global and moral citizenship which is used as an alternative to a nationalist ideological conception.

There are many research studies (Kim, 2009) which provide empirical support to the importance of “inclusion in identity” as a factor which creates greater intercultural relational commitment. For example, Matsumoto, LeRoux, Bernhard and Gray (2004) analysed the psychological potential of intercultural adjustment and their results indicated that there was a component of openness and flexibility, another component of critical thinking, and other components of personality characteristics which contributed to the psychological adjustment.

The results of the study in the area of transcultural psychology suggest that inclusion in identity allows for constructive intercultural commitment, and from this perspective, is a fundamental underlying force in the individual’s intercultural competence.

#### *4.2 Security in Identity*

Together with inclusion in identity, there is “security in identity”, that is, the degree to which individuals feel secure with their identity. This security adds an important element to the set of intercultural competence which allows individuals to commit to actions and activities which imply others who are culturally different. It could be said that security in identity is a type of internal resource which allows quality of flexibility and relaxation in behaviour. That is, it is the capacity for individuals to join and feel empathy towards others without losing their own personal identity, as well as being creating and effective people in order to respond to problems and difficulties which may occur.

As a broad concept, security in identity is oriented in the same direction as other related concepts, for example self-confidence and self-esteem, which arise when a person shows a positive attitude towards themselves and others. As Kim (2001, 2005b) indicates, positive identity is also an important element in security in identity. Along the same lines, it could be said that this positive identity is at the roots of “metamotivation” (Maslow,



1969), a type of self-confidence which allows individuals not to be emotionally trapped in irrational feelings of inferiority or defence, but rather to search for more practical and adaptive alternatives when they are interacting interculturally.

There are some research studies which confirm the behavioural relationship which can be established between the security in identity and intercultural commitment which are present in a person with intercultural competence. For example, the study carried out by (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008) showed that Americans of European origin, compared with ethnic minorities, tended to derive their personal self-esteem from their own personal identity and not from their cultural identity. Moreover, David, Morrison, Johnson and Ross (2002) found that white people had as a reference both black and white fashion models, whereas black people tended to identify themselves more with black models. However, it is important to highlight that these studies do not usually refer to university students abroad, and it would be useful to know whether the results found with immigrant teenagers and workers can be generalised to university students who are temporarily resident abroad.

To conclude this section, it is important to underline the fact that the two behavioural characteristics studied by Kim (2009), inclusion in identity and security in identity are mutually dependent; what is more, it is likely that one cannot exist without the other.

## 5. Conclusions

The conceptualisations of and the research into intercultural competence have been carried out for five decades of academic activity. An important and encouraging conclusion is that currently there is a large set of models, as well as interesting empirical data to improve our intercultural competence. It should even be remembered that the majority of these models concur, and highlight essential psychological variables which are common to the process of adjustment and psychological adaptation to a new situation or cultural context.

However, great effort should be made in future research to check the validity and transcultural generalisation of some of the models which are currently posited, as up to now there have been few studies carried out along these lines (Deardorff, 2006; Lund, 2007; Cupach, 2002).

If we observe the set of intercultural competence models now, as Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) do, it is possible to identify a hierarchical structure with more than 300 concepts related to intercultural competence and communication. It is obviously necessary to offer a simpler model which can integrate and synthesize such diversity successfully; psychological and social processes are very complex, but this does not mean that they are not plausible. The history of science continues to advance, and constantly shows us that models are necessarily simplified versions of the reality which they aim to represent and to test. Therefore, it is necessary to have clear orientations which synthesize and integrate the set of all these variables and psychological components which have been analysed in this study, so that future models centre more on fewer variables and can be better verified, with the corresponding demands of validity, reliability and generalisation. Therefore, only then can transcultural psychology, and the scientists who work in this area of study and the different complementary and necessary disciplines in the wider study of intercultural competence, integrate the theoretical models (with their corresponding measurements) and extend the psychological structures and dimensions involved-and put into practice by people who are resident in another country/culture-with their corresponding processes having been identified, examined and synthesised.

What are the implications of this intercultural competence abroad for other educators and social actors? Bearing in mind, as mentioned above various times, that intercultural competence is not an automatic phenomenon, it has to be directed through the different educational teams and institutions with a clear educational objective. Only in this way can we incorporate the process of development and optimisation of intercultural competence as a core of our educational programmes in order to assess later its effectiveness and possibilities for improvement.

Therefore, we can state and propose that it is possible and necessary to progress in the learning and development of intercultural competence in all the areas of the educational process. In this study we have focused on the educational process, but there are elements which can be incorporated and adapted appropriately to other contexts. For example, in educational centres, the curriculum could be revised in order to assess how aspects of intercultural competence-such as other views of the world-could be incorporated in the curriculum. This would also require educators and social actors to be appropriately prepared to guide the students in the development of this process, which in turn implies that these educators need to understand and deepen their awareness of this intercultural competence.

Without doubt, some work has been done, as this study shows, which means that it is not necessary to start from scratch. But judging from the poor development of humanity that we are living (one only has to switch on the

TV and see the daily news), it is necessary to take seriously the fact that the greatest problem we face is “to learn to live together”. Our lives and survival depends on this. In the words of Martin Luther King, “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.” We must choose to open paths to life.

### Acknowledgements

My special thanks to Michel Thomé, Gérard Mbonabuca, Jacinta Ho Kang-Mei and Emmeline Palabrica, great friends without whom I would not be the person who I am today, nor would I have the intercultural competence that I have acquired thanks to our true relationships and friendship.

### References

- Adler, P. (1982). Beyond cultural identity: Reflections on cultural and multicultural man. In L. Samovar, & R. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (3rd ed., pp. 389-408). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Allport, G. A. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Alred, G., Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Intercultural experience and education*. Great Britain: Cromwell Press Ltd.
- Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Argyle, M. (1969). *Social interaction*. London: Methuen.
- Bennett, M. J., & Castiglioni, I. (2004). Embodied ethnocentrism and the feeling of culture. A Key to training for intercultural competence (pp. 249-265). In D. Landis, J. M. Bennett, & M. J. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training*. California: Sage Publications.
- Berry, J. W., Poortinga, Y. H., Breugelmans, S. M., Chasiotis, A., & Sam, D. L. (2011). *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bochner, S. (1982). The social psychology of cross-cultural relations. In S. Bochner (Ed.), *Cultures in contact: Studies in cross-cultural interaction* (pp. 5-44). Oxford: Pergamon.
- Bok, D. (2006). *Our underachieving colleges: A candid look at how much students learn and why they should be learning more*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chen, G. M., & An, R. (2009). A Chinese model of Intercultural Leadership competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 196-208). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davcheva, L. (2003). Learning to be intercultural. In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Intercultural experience and education* (pp. 67-86). Great Britain: Cromwell Press Ltd.
- David, P., Morrison, G., Johnson, M., & Ross, F. (2002). Body image, race, and fashion models. *Communication Research, 29*, 270-294.
- Deardorff, D. K. (Ed.). (2009). *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). The identification and assessment of intercultural competence. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 10*, 241-266.
- Elosúa, M. R., Candau, V., Llopis, C., & Romera, C. (1994). Interculturalidad y cambio educativo. In *Hacia comportamientos no discriminatorios*. Madrid: Narcea.
- Erikson, E. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Gallagher, S. (2013). A pattern theory of self. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 7*, 1-7.
- Goff, P., Steele, C., & Davies, P. (2008). The space between us: Stereotype threat and distance in interracial contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 91-107.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Hammer, M. R. (1984). Dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: Culture specific or culture general? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 8*, 1-10.
- Hamilton, D., Sherman, S., & Ruvolo, C. (1990). Stereotype-based expectancies: Effects on information processing and social behavior. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*(2), 35-59.
- Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. L. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*, 421-443.

- Hewstone, M., & Giles, H. (1986). Social groups and social stereotypes in intergroup communication: A review and model of intergroup communication breakdown. In W. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Intergroup communication* (pp. 10-26). London: Edward Arnold.
- Ickes, W., & Simpson, J. A. (1997). Managing empathic accuracy in close relationships. In W. Ickes (Ed.), *Empathic accuracy* (pp. 218-250). New York: Guilford Press.
- Kenny, D. A. (1994). *Interpersonal perception: A social relations analysis*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Kim, Y. Y. (1988). *Communication and cross-cultural adaptation: An integrative theory*. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2005a). Adapting to a new culture: An integrative communication theory. In W. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 375-400). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2005b). Association and dissociation: A contextual theory of interethnic communication. In W. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 323-349). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2009). The Identity factor in Intercultural Competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 53-65). California: Sage Publications.
- King, M. L. (1963). *Yo tengo un sueño*. Discurso pronunciado el 28 de agosto de 1963 en EE.UU.
- Kleg, M. (1993). *Hate, prejudice, and racism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Knapp, M. L., & Daly, J. A. (Eds.). (2011). *The SAGE Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (4th ed.). California: SAGE Publications.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, coping and appraisal*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2006). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across culture* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Manian, R., & Naidu, S. (2009). India: A Cross-cultural overview of intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 233-248). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maslow, A. (1969). A theory of metamotivation: The biological rooting of the value-life. In H. Chiang, & A. H. Maslow (Eds.), *The healthy personality* (pp. 35-56). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Matsumoto, D., LeRoux, J., Bernhard, R., & Gray, H. (2004). Unraveling the psychological correlates of intercultural adjustment potential. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 28, 281-309.
- Medina-López-Portillo, A., & Sinnigen, J. H. (2009). Interculturality versus intercultural competencies in Latin America. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 249-263). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moghaddam, F. M., Taylor, D. M., & Wright, S. C. (1993). *Social psychology in cross-cultural perspective*. New York: Freeman.
- Moosmüller, A., & Schönhuth, M. (2009). Intercultural competence in German discourse. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 209-232). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Murphy-Lejeune, E. (2003). An Experience of Interculturality: Student travellers abroad. In G. Alfred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Intercultural experience and education* (pp. 101-113). Great Britain: Cromwell Press Ltd.
- Navas, M., García, M. C., Sánchez, J., Rojas, A. J., Pumares, P., & Fernández, J. S. (2005). Relative acculturation extended model: New contributions with regard to the study of acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 21-37.
- Nwosu, P. O. (2009). Understanding Africans' Conceptualizations of intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 158-178). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 65-85.

- Precht, E., & Lund, A. D. (2007). Intercultural competence and assessment: Perspectives from the INCA Project. In H. Kothhoff, & H. Spencer-Oaety (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural communication* (pp. 467-490). New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ryan, P. M. (2003). Searching for the intercultural person. In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Intercultural experience and education* (pp. 131-154). Great Britain: Cromwell Press Ltd.
- Savicki, V. (2008). *Developing intercultural competence and transformation: Theory, research, and application in international education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Spitzberg, B. H. (1989). Issues in the development of a theory of interpersonal competence in the intercultural context. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 13, 241-268.
- Spitzberg, B. H. (1994a). The dark side of (in)competence. In W. R. Cupach, & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (pp. 25-49). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Spitzberg, B. H. (1994b). Ideological issues in competence assessment. In S. Morreale, M. Brooks, R. Berko, & Cooke, C. (Eds.), *Assessing college students competency in speech communication* (1994 SCA Summer Conference Proceedings, pp. 129-148). Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Spitzberg, B. H. (2000). What is good communication? *Journal of the Association for Communication Administration*, 29, 103-119.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 2-52). California: Sage Publications.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1984). *Interpersonal communication competence*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (1989). *Handbook of Interpersonal competence research*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2002). Interpersonal skills. In M. L. Knapp, & J. R. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3rd ed., pp. 564-611). Thousand Oak, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behavior. *Social Science Information*, 13, 65-93.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, & W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (2nd ed., pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Triandis, H. C. (1994). *Culture and social behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Turner, J., Hogg, M., Oakes, P., Reicher, S., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The Psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). Hove: Routledge.
- Yershova, Y., DeJaeghere, D., & Mestenhauser, J. (2000). Thinking not as usual: Adding the intercultural perspective. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 4, 39-78.

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).