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The Increasing Importance of How We Think of the “Others” During a Time of Uncertainty

Abstract: This article presents one of the current and evolving societal challenges during the time of Covid-19 crisis and uncertainty: equity in education. Equal opportunities and how we think of the “other” play a vital role on maintaining a stable society. Transformative learning opportunities develop intercultural competencies and cultural proficiency. Finally, a process model for the Development of Intercultural Competencies is presented, accompanied by a table of functional factors completing the model.

Keywords: transformative learning; equity in education, intercultural competencies, equal opportunities, socialization, cultural proficiency, transformative process

摘要 (汤姆·斯图尔特 & Hillamaria Seauve Rantajääskö: 在不确定时期, 我们对“其他人”的思考方式的重要性越来越显著): 本文介绍了新型冠状病毒危机及不确定时期当前的和正在不断发展的社会挑战之一: 教育公平。机会均等以及我们如何看待“他人”对维持社会稳定起着至关重要的作用。变革性的学习机会发展了跨文化的能力及文化水平。最后, 提出了跨文化能力发展的一个过程模型, 并附有完成该模型的功能因素表。

关键词: 变革性学习 教育公平, 跨文化能力, 机会均等, 社会化, 文化水平, 变革过程

摘要 (湯姆·斯圖爾特 & Hillamaria Seauve Rantajääskö: 在不確定時期, 我們對“其他人”的思考方式的重要性越來越顯著): 本文介紹了新冠病毒危機及不確定時期當前的和正在不斷發展的社會挑戰之一: 教育公平。機會均等以及我們如何看待“他人”對維持社會穩定起著至關重要的作用。變革性的學習機會發展了跨文化的能力及文化水平。最後, 提出了跨文化能力發展的一個過程模型, 並附有完成該模型的功能因素表。

關鍵詞: 變革性學習 教育公平, 跨文化能力, 機會均等, 社會化, 文化水平, 變革過程

Zusammenfassung (Tomm Stewart & Hillamaria Seauve-Rantajääskö): Dieser Artikel stellt eine der aktuellen und sich entwickelnden gesellschaftlichen Herausforderungen während der Zeit der Covid-19-Krise und der Ungewissheit vor: Gerechtigkeit in der Bildung. Chancengleichheit und die Art und Weise, wie wir über den “Anderen” denken, spielen eine entscheidende Rolle für die Aufrechterhaltung einer stabilen Gesellschaft. Transformative Lernangebote entwickeln interkulturelle Kompetenzen und kulturelle Fertigkeiten. Schließlich wird ein Prozessmodell für die Entwicklung interkultureller Kompetenzen vorgestellt, das von einer Tabelle mit funktionalen Faktoren begleitet wird, die das Modell vervollständigen.

Schlüsselwörter: transformatives Lernen; Chancengleichheit in der Bildung, interkulturelle Kompetenzen, Chancengleichheit, Sozialisation, kulturelle Kompetenz, transformativer Prozess

Резюме (Том Стюарт, Хилламариа Сеув-Рантайеске: К вопросу о возрастающей роли паттерна «думать о других» в период кризиса и неопределенности): В данной статье представлен один из наиболее актуальных и востребованных в период неопределенности (связанной с распространением коронавирусной инфекции) вызовов – справедливость, рассматриваемая через призму образовательного дискурса. Отмечается, что определяющую роль для сохранения стабильного общества играют равенство шансов и алгоритм, через который мы думаем о других. Трансформативные образовательные модели способствуют развитию межкультурных компетенций и культурных навыков. В заключительной части работы представлена процессуальная модель, сопровождаемая и одновременно дополняемая таблицей с перечислением функциональных факторов.

Ключевые слова: преобразующее обучение, равенство шансов в образовании, интеркультурные компетенции, социализация, культурная компетенция, трансформативный процесс

At this time, we face perplexing situations; the present threats of the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest. Can the importance of the impacts of transformative learning and the development of intercultural competencies influence policy makers, educators, parents, and students to be sure that the education systems will provide equitable educational experiences for all learners and adequately prepare students of all races and ethnicities for success in a rapidly changing and complex world? Initially, consider the economic landscape. There is, without doubt, an existential divide between rich and poor, as well as, an apparently shrinking middle class. A stable democratic society is sustainable only with an educated populace. Poverty often leads to educational inequity. Widely recognized international education expert and innovator, Pasi Salberg stated, “As the financial stakes grow, it becomes increasingly challenging to maintain focus on the real learning” (Salberg, Hasak, & Rodriguez, 2017). The impact of the socioeconomic differences among students can no longer be ignored. Therefore, equal opportunities for education must be attainable at all levels of society; hence, equity in education. Schooling systems need to be adaptable to offer equal opportunities for students despite socioeconomic status or race.

Divergent systems have developed worldwide, and no society has the *one best system*. But, some are probably better equipped to address the present and coming challenges. Some countries, for example the Nordic areas, Canada, and Australia have stronger publicly financed structures supporting education, as well as innovative and successful programs. The USA and, quite frankly, many 3rd world countries, are tending towards a more heavily market-based economic approach to funding education, or simply poor funding. Given the uncertainty looming ahead because of the current crises, to what extent is it possible to provide an equitable education for all? Therefore, close attention should be paid to equitable allocation of resources to prevent an even greater divide that may escalate to further tension.

Dewey (1916) argues, “Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life.” What shall we expect to see in terms of social and health norms? Equity is not only an economic and educational consideration, but perhaps most critically a societal issue. Steps must be taken to provide students with socialization opportunities for shared experiences with “others” (defined as members of any social, cultural, ethnic or racial population, as indicated by race, creed, color, or self-identification). Growing uncertainty and ignorance shifts the blame easily to “the other”. We live in a pluralistic society. Perceived and/or real cultural differences and resultant attitudes are potentially sensitive issues. Significantly, the presence, identification, and stereotyping of intercultural and multicultural differences may increase divisiveness, tension, and conflict presenting a challenge to educators, students, policy makers, government agencies, and the general public in all walks of life. Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell (2009) argue that entitlement gives the dominant group the power to establish, define, and differentiate others as outsiders. The value of the socialization aspects of schooling, including time for play, are vital. With the challenges of social distancing, the traditional role of schools as places of socialization will present challenges.

In other words, students need to become more culturally literate and through transformative learning opportunities, develop intercultural competencies. Ultimately, increasing opportunities for intercultural interactions and acquiring tools for cultural proficiency appear relevant to transformative learning and development of intercultural competencies. These are manifest in interpersonal, community, national, and international educational efforts to transform internal frames of reference and affect external behaviors to promote understanding (Deardorff, 2006). Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell (2009) describe cultural proficiency as a mindset and worldview influencing the way an individual or an organization makes assumptions for the effective description, response, and plans to deal with issues that arise in diverse environments. Their recommendation is that focused efforts directed at the development of intercultural growth may lead to transformative learning in the form of meaning-making shifts. The intended results evolve from looking at cultural differences as a problem to being part of a solution where learning culturally proficiency leads to learning effective interaction with other cultures.

The Process Model for Development of Intercultural Competencies

Figure 1 illustrates our proposed model of how this transformative process may occur. This model connects operationalization of those concepts to functional factors and positive attitudes toward others that represent actual active participation, behaviors, and experiential learning. These concepts fit within a

spiraling framework that highlights a sequential progression in the development of intercultural competencies, transformations, and positive attitudes toward others. The inner circle and its operationalization represents a cyclical attainment of those outcomes. In this way one has achieved, demonstrates, and retains the competencies to positively and constructively interact with the other and successfully navigate within other cultures.

Below is the process model for the Development of Intercultural Competencies accompanied by a table of functional factors which complete model.

The diagram or chart of Functional Factors for the Development of Intercultural Competencies (Table 1) describes the corresponding factors, behaviors, and actions that relate to and complement the Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competencies (Stewart, & Seauve-Rantajääskö, 2020). The factors are interventive steps of interactive learning experiences designed to help students along the growth continuum in developing intercultural competencies and transformations. The sequence, significance, and number of each of these factors may vary depending on the actual context. However the factors, being evermore interwoven into the overall process model, contribute as a whole to reach the desired outcome: changing attitudes and desired outcome of functioning within *the cycle of accepting diversity*. Not only does this transformative learning process results in a better understanding of “the other” but also better discovery of oneself. “Who are you?” and “Who am I?”

Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competences. Stewart, Seauve-Rantajääskö (2020)

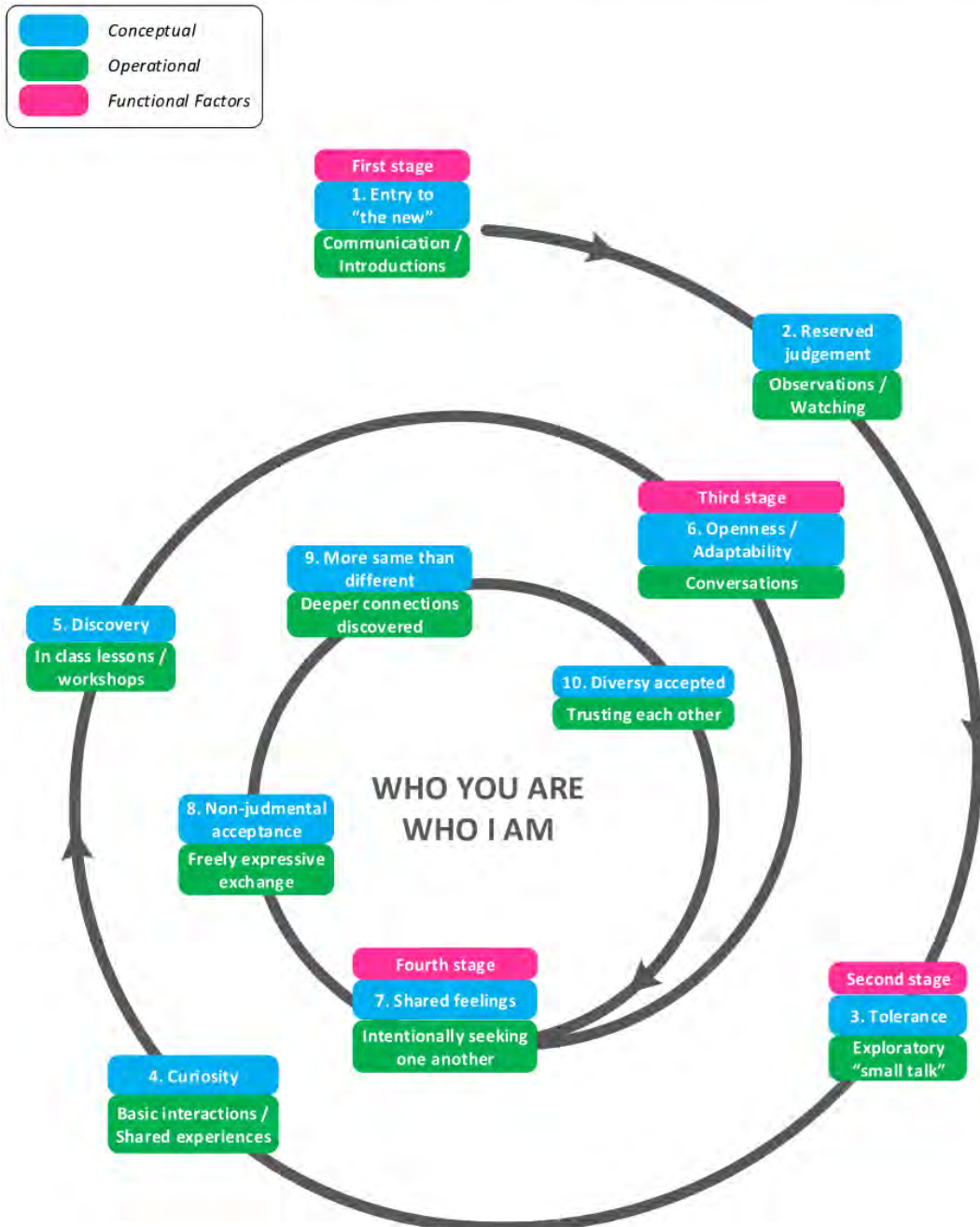


Figure 1. The Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competencies (Stewart, Seauve-Rantajääskö, 2020).

	Starting Point Phases 1-2	Second Stage Phases 3-5	Third Stage Phase 6	Desired Outcome Phases 7-10
Conceptual	Communication, Reserved judgment	Tolerance, Curiosity, Discovery	Openness & Adaptability	The cycle of accepting diversity
Functional Factors				
Stage-specific emphasis	Heterogenous Groups, Defining Community Values	Activities which promote curiosity and lead to discovery	Experiencing a safe, non-judgmental environment, Willing Self-disclosure (taking off our “masks”)	New Competencies, Transformations, Perceptions, and possibly Attitudes
Breakdown of activities in the context of a language and culture learning seminars and camps	Dining together (Sharing everyday life activities together)			
	Music & Songs (Uniting through the universal language)			
	Art & Workshops, outdoor activities, sports, walks and talks			
	Field Trips Together (Unique shared experiences)			
	Shared Poems & Stories (Activities that purposefully create discussion)			
	Games & Skits (Activities for fun and laughter)			
	Cultural Sharing in Evening Programs			
	Student-generated Shared Experiences			

Table 1. Functional Factors for the Development of Intercultural Competencies

The relationships and patterns of informant responses led from the indicated categories to the more general conceptual domains of the Intercultural Growth Continuum: Functional Factors for Development of Intercultural Competencies and in Model 6.1, The Process Model for the Development of Intercultural Competencies. The four domains, or phases along the continuum are, 1) nature of communications and reserving judgments; 2) tolerance, curiosity, and discovery; 3) openness and adaptability; 4) the cycle of accepting diversity. These domains of the continuum, a level subordinated by the themes or categories and supported by the functional factors correlate with the activities described below. The examples of activities from the language and culture seminars and camps concur with and show connectedness to the attributes of developing intercultural competencies described by Deardorff (2004).

These attributes germinate through the shared experiences by inclusive and invitational activities that draw informants together. The importance of individual development regarding knowledge arising from awareness of one’s own cultural norms and by being sensitive to the norms of different cultures should not be understated. Processing the knowledge involves cognitive skills such as compare and contrast, critical thinking, analytical and evaluative abilities, and a flexibility in cognition. Utilization of the skills allows the participant to observe, listen, interpret, and relate while developing and experiencing an informed shift in their personal frame of reference and in meaning-making. This, in turn, provides a scaffolding for building increasingly greater intercultural competencies and the capacity for transformative thinking.

Learning from experience is more than just “being there.” As Bennett and Salonen (2007) argue, learning occurs within our capacity to construe those events and situations in which we are engaged and then to reconstruct them in transformative ways. For example, after several days at one of our international language and culture seminars in Finland, in an informal after dinner conversation with several faculty and students, one of the students, a woman from Morocco, suddenly began to cry. We asked her what was the matter. She said, “back at home they told me that all Americans would hate me because I’m Muslim; but I see you don’t hate me, it feels like you love me.” We affirmed this to be so. She sobbed a few more times just slowly shaking her head and saying, “they told me you would hate me.” After composing herself, she told us, “I love being here with you, wish I could stay here forever, and I love you all.” There is a significant and effective role in the evolution of individuals and cultures in a constructive and desirable direction through shared experiences. And in doing so, it may create a more aware, kinder, gentler, and increasingly tolerant society.

Generations of young people await and deserve opportunities to develop and grow skill sets and mind sets to become positive and culturally competent global citizens. Ultimately, we find more questions than answers. Predominating may be this: in the face of diverse and continually evolving world conditions, what are the most effective, efficient, and purposeful ways to develop and institute programs and practices to encourage pluralism, shared experiences, appreciation of others, and acceptance of differences to support the growth of intercultural competencies and transformations?

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