



7th International Conference on Globalization and Higher Education in Economics and Business Administration, GEBA 2013

## Intercultural communication in business schools: what we can teach and how we can evaluate

Sorina Chiper\*

*Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, 22 Carol I Ave. Iasi, 700 506 Romania*

---

### Abstract

The teaching of intercultural communication in business schools has relied quite extensively on the theoretical model developed by Geert Hofstede and his followers. While Hofstede's dimensions provide clear labels and an apparatus which can be used in the explanation of situations of intercultural conflict, overemphasis on labels can distract one's attention from the fact that "intercultural communication" is first and foremost a form of communication which, in order to be efficient, has to observe certain rules. This article argues in favour of a return to a discourse-based approach in the teaching of intercultural communication; it also pleads for the development of students' critical thinking and for their involvement in the learning process by making self-evaluation a part of their learning path.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi.

Keywords: intercultural communication; business schools; teaching; discourse-based approach; evaluation.

---

### 1. Introduction

The spread of multinational corporations as the dominant form of business organisation has stimulated an increased interest in intercultural communication as a soft skill necessary for a tolerant and peaceful atmosphere in business offices and the success of negotiations and daily business operations. Increased competitiveness on the global market has come to bring employees together so as to collaborate in multinational teams, either in person or

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: + 40 746 437 938; fax: + 40 232 201627.  
E-mail address: [sorina.chiper@feaa.uaic.ro](mailto:sorina.chiper@feaa.uaic.ro), [sorinachiper@gmail.com](mailto:sorinachiper@gmail.com)

virtually. They are required to cope with multiplying and diversifying challenges, to become increasingly flexible and to learn with each other, from each other and about each other. Companies, therefore, are willing to invest in their employees' intercultural training. Angouri(2010) even argues that there has been an "explosion of interest in culture, cultural diversity and intercultural (IC) facilitation and training in the context of the multinational corporate workplace" (p. 207). In the same line of thought, universities in general and business schools in particular have set the task for themselves to prepare graduates for the culturally diverse labour market. What this means is that the focus is now on developing competences that graduates can use right after leaving school, in the companies that hire them. This article tackles precisely what business schools can teach and how they can evaluate competences.

## 2. Intercultural communication in teaching practice

Teaching for the purpose of developing intercultural competences and not for the purpose of transmitting knowledge has a few implications: the format and delivery of classes has been changing, and they are now similar to training sessions; there is (or there should be) less weight put on theory and more focus on practical exercises. In addition, the final grade is a reflection of the student's (or trainee's) skills and competences, rather than a measure of the extent to which he or she has internalised theories or definitions of culture.

However, there is still a sort of inertia in propagating one understanding of culture as national culture. This lopsided view is perpetuated by the fact that most books on intercultural training contain this reductionist understanding of the concept of culture. To give just one example, in my institution, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, the most popular authors among teachers of intercultural communication or intercultural management are Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars, Edward T. Hall and Harry C. Triandis. Teaching intercultural communication by resorting to the dichotomies elaborated by these authors has obvious didactic advantages: one can better understand and remember when information is presented in a contrastive manner. Yet their approach emphasises a form of "interculturality" where the nation of origin is overemphasised at the expense of communication.

In practice, intercultural communication does not occur only between professionals with different countries of origin, as wide apart as the United States and Japan. We can use the adjective "intercultural" to label interactions between professionals from neighbouring countries, or from the same country, coming from different ethnic backgrounds, among which differences are not radical but gradual. At the same time, what differentiates them is not only nationality or ethnicity, but also their profession, gender, age, and life experience. Thus, every interlocutor inhabits different dialects and sociolects, and professional jargons, which make professional communication in the global economy to be an essentially inter-discursive communication, as Scollon and Scollon (2001) argued in their book *Intercultural Communication. A Discourse Approach*.

In this book, Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong Scollon started from their empirical observation that "virtually all professional communication is communication across some lines which divide us into different discourse groups or systems of discourse" (p. 3). Since language is inherently ambiguous, proficiency in one's own discourse system and awareness of the specificity of the discourse system of one's interlocutor cannot prevent misunderstandings or blockages in communication. Making quick inferences is one way of dealing with ambiguity. This process depends on one's ability to decode the context of the communicative situation in which speakers are engaged, by focusing on its main components: the scene, the degree of formality, the participants, the message form and its sequence (p. 11-40).

What sets apart Scollon and Scollon's *Intercultural Communication. A Discourse Approach* is the fact that unlike texts written from a managerial perspective, the former views culture outside the lenses of the nation state and focuses on the discursive construction of identity. Culture, in this perspective, is not a set of pre-established norms and rules that one would enact in daily life, as Hofstede's metaphor of the software of the mind implies (Hofstede 1997), but a dynamic, on-going process of discursive co-construction. This understanding of culture agrees with Street's statement that "culture is a verb" (1993). The emphasis on culture as a process needs to be reflected in our teaching practice, as well. Therefore teaching materials ought to be based on real-life situations rather than on

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/980132>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/980132>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)