

Intercultural Education: A theoretical Approach to Cultural Value Orientations

Abstract

As multiculturalism has become the matter of the day, it is not only the business world that must adopt to changes; the academic sector must also deal with the trend as well. As such, the necessity to accommodate cultural diversity has become more apparent. Education not only helps to make sense of the local culture, it offers individuals insights and skills they need to survive in the changing world. Only through multicultural education can people learn about those problems and issues that cut across ethnic, national, and gender boundaries and learn to understand how other groups process experience in ways that may differ from our own perceptions. This paper aims at highlighting some of the main models of cultural value orientations and applying them in real-life and everyday educational and teaching contexts.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communication, Cultural Value Orientations, Multicultural Education*

1. Introduction to Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communications, regardless of its recent developments, tends to be a relatively unexplored academic field. Regarding its beginnings, it is impossible to separate its origin from the development of linguistics in the 1920s. As for its father, E. T. Hall is widely accepted as the forerunner of the field by raising such issues as “intercultural tensions” and “intercultural problems” in the 1950s (Chen & Starosta 1998: 8). In fact, Hall’s contributions extend to focusing the traditional anthropology studies on comparative culture study thus shifting from the study of culture from a “macro perspective to a micro analysis”, which allowed the study of practical needs of the interactants in communication. Hall further linked culture with communication by replacing “the emphasis from qualitative methods of anthropology to the quantitative methods of communication research”. Precisely, Hall analyses communication as a “rule-governed, analyzable, and learned variable” (Chen & Starosta 1998: 8-9).

Further works which redefined the field in the 1970s included Stewart’s *American Cultural Patterns* (1972) and Samovar & Porter’s *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (1973), Prosser’s *Intercommunication among Nations and People* (1973), *Cultural Dialogue* (1978), Smith’s *Transracial Communication* (1973), Condon and Yousef’s *Introduction to Intercultural Education* (1975), and Asante, Blake, and Newmark’s *The Handbook of Intercultural Communication* (1979), to name a few. However, it was only in the 1980s when the field “began to move from disarray to a more coherent focus” (Chen & Starosta 1998: 10) with the publication of such works as Gudykunst’s *Intercultural Communication Theory: Current Perspectives* (1983), Gudykunst and Kim’s *Methods of Intercultural Research* (1984), and Kim and Gudykunst’s *Theories in Intercultural Communication* (1988).

2. Communication vs. Culture

The formal study of communication goes back to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* of two thousand years ago. In fact, early views of human communication tended to embrace a mechanistic perspective of the communication process. Such a perspective regards communication as a unidirectional process in which the receivers are passively influenced or victimized by powerful sources. Recently, more and more scholars have treated human communication as a process in which our behaviors can be explained by referring to our intentions, reasons, and goals. In other words, we are active agents, possessing the ability to choose actions in the interactional process rather than being driven by external factors that determine our behaviors (Chen & Starosta 1998: 21). Regarding its definition communication remains “the process whereby humans collectively create and regulate their social reality” (Trenholm & Jensen 2008: 4).

As far as culture is concerned, we are programmed by our culture to do what we do and to be what we are. In other words, “culture is the software of the human mind that provides an operating environment for human behaviors” (Chen & Starosta 1998: 25). As for its definition, it consists of “learned patterns of perception, values, and behaviors, shared by a group of people, which is dynamic and heterogeneous. Culture also involves our emotions and feelings” (Martin & Nakayama 2008: 28). Like communication, culture also tends to be holistic, learned, dynamic, and pervasive (Chen & Starosta 1998: 26). In fact, successful

intercultural communication is based on three main factors: (1) the positive feeling we possess at the affective level, including information, self-esteem, comfort, trust, and safety; (2) the beliefs we bring into the intercultural encounter at the cognitive level, including expectations, stereotypes, uncertainties, and misunderstanding of rules or procedures; and (3) the action or skills we possess at the behavioral level, including verbal and nonverbal communication skills in intercultural settings.

3. Defining Patterns of Cultural Value Orientations

In fact, it was Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) who first introduced the concept of cultural value orientations. The other most common models for the study of cultural values orientations include Condon and Yousef (1975), Hall (1976), and Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1984).

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Model

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck singled out five universal problems faced by all human societies and identified their respective cultural value orientations:

1. What is the character of human nature? (the human nature orientation)
2. What is the relationship of people to nature (and supernatural); (The man-nature orientation).
3. What is the temporal focus of human life? (the time orientation)
4. What is the modality of activity? (the activity orientation)
5. What is the modality of a person's relationship to other persons? (the relationship orientation)

Thus, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck provided three possible variations of the solution for each problem:

Range of Values

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Human nature: | Basically good | Mixture of good and evil | Basically evil |
| Relationship between Humans and Nature | Humans dominate | Harmony between the two | Nature dominates |
| Relationship between Humans: | Individual | Group-oriented | Collateral |
| Preferred Personality: | “Doing”: stress on action | “Growing”: stress on spiritual growth | “Being”: stress on who you are |
| Time orientation: | Future-oriented | Present-oriented | Past-oriented (quoted in Chen & Starosta 1998: 46). |

In fact, the above questions and responses help us understand broad cultural differences among various cultural groups- national and ethnic groups as well as groups based on gender, class and so on.

Condon and Yousef's Model: Condon and Yousef (1975) revised and extended Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's five categories to include six spheres of universal problems all human societies must face: the self, the family, society, human nature, nature, and the supernatural. Under each sphere the authors added three to five orientations with three variations of the solutions for each one.

SELF

Individualism-interdependence

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Individualism | 2. Individuality | 3. Interdependence |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------|

Age

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. Youth | 2. The middle years | 3. The old age |
|----------|---------------------|----------------|

Sex

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Equality of sexes | 2. Female superiority | 3. Male superiority |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|

Activity

- | | | |
|----------|----------------------|----------|
| 1. Doing | 2. Being-in-becoming | 3. Being |
|----------|----------------------|----------|

THE FAMILY

Relational orientations

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1. Individualistic | 2. Collateral | 3. Lineal |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------|

Authority

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Democratic | 2. Authority centered | 3. Authoritarian |
|---------------|-----------------------|------------------|

Positional role behavior

- | | | |
|---------|------------|-------------|
| 1. Open | 2. General | 3. Specific |
|---------|------------|-------------|

Mobility

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. High mobility | 2. phasic mobility | 3. Low mobility, stasis |
|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|

SOCIETY

Social reciprocity

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Independence | 2. Symmetrical-obligatory | 3. Complementary-obligatory |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|

Group membership

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Many groups, brief identification, subordination of group to individual | 2. Balance of nos 1 and 3 | 3. Few groups, prolonged identification, subordination of the member to the group |
|--|---------------------------|---|

Intermediaries

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. no intermediaries (directness) | 2. specialist intermediaries only | 3. essential intermediaries |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|

Formality

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. informality | 2. selective formality | 3. pervasive formality |
|----------------|------------------------|------------------------|

Property

- | | | |
|------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. private | 2. utilitarian | 3. community |
|------------|----------------|--------------|

HUMAN NATURE

Relationship

1. rational
2. intuitive
3. irrational

Good and evil

1. good
2. mixture of good and evil
3. evil

Happiness, pleasure

1. happiness as goal and sadness
2. inextricable bond of happiness
3. life is mostly sadness

Mutability

1. change, growth, learning
2. some change
3. unchanging

NATURE

Relationship of man and nature

1. man dominating nature
2. man in harmony with nature
3. nature dominating man

Ways of knowing nature

1. Abstract
2. circle of induction-deduction
3. specific

Structure of nature

1. mechanistic
2. spiritual
3. organic

Concept of time

1. future
2. present
3. past

THE SUPERNATURAL

Relationship of man and the supernatural

1. man as god
2. intellectual goals
3. man controlled by the supernatural

Meaning of life

1. physical, material goals
2. intellectual goals
3. spiritual goals

Providence

1. good in life is unlimited
2. balance of good and misfortune
3. good in life is limited

Knowledge of the cosmic order

1. order is comprehensible
2. faith and reason
3. mysterious and

unknowable (quoted in

Chen and Starosta 1998: 49).

The following chart compares the different orientations of the Chinese and Northern Americans toward family:

| Family | China | United States |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Relational Orientation | Lineal orientation- Characterized by a highly developed historical consciousness and a close association with extended families. Wife tends to be subordinate to husband and to parents in family. | Individualistic orientation- Older and younger members of the family always share the same values. Wife and children are more equal to husband, and children must be obedient to parents. |
| Authority | Authority orientation- Reflects a strong orientation toward paternal authority. | Democratic orientation- Obligations are open to negotiation. The family is child-centered. |
| Positional role behavior | Specific orientation- Generation, age, and sex hierarchy is very strong; i.e., the older generation, elders, and male are superior. | Open orientation- Obligations are open to negotiation. |
| Mobility | Low-mobility orientation- The family structure and an agricultural society made the Chinese settle in a fixed place and cultivate the land in an orderly fashion. | High-mobility orientation, conjugal family structure, no kinship bondage and high degree of technology and transportation have produced a highly mobile society. (Chen & Starosta 1998: 47) |

Hall's Culture Context Model: Hall (1976) divided cultural differences into two categories: low-context culture and high-context culture.

Low-Context Culture

1. Overtly displays meanings through direct communication forms.
2. Values individualism.
3. Tends to develop transitory personal relationship.
4. Emphasizes linear logic.
5. Values direct verbal interaction and is less able to read nonverbal expressions.
6. Tends to use "logic" to present ideas.
7. Tends to emphasize highly structured messages, give details, and place great stress on words and technical signs (Chen & Starosta 1998: 51).

High-Context Culture

1. Implicitly embeds meanings at different levels of the sociocultural context.
2. Values group sense.
3. Tends to take time to cultivate and establish a permanent personal relationship
4. Emphasizes spiral logic.
5. Values indirect verbal interaction and is more able to read nonverbal expressions.
6. Tends to use more "feeling" in Expression.
7. Tends to give simple, ambiguous, nonexistent messages.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions: Hofstede (1980, 1983, 1984) compared work related attitudes across over forty different cultures and found four consistent dimensions of cultural values: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity:

Power Distance

Low power distance

Less Hierarchy better

High power distance

More Hierarchy Better

Feminity/Masculinity

Femininity

Fewer gender specific-roles

Value quality of life, support for unfortunate acquisition

Masculinity

More gender-specific roles

Value achievement, ambition,

of material goods

Uncertainty Avoidance

Low uncertainty avoidance

Dslike rules, accept dissent
dissent

Less formality

High uncertainty avoidance

More extensive rules, limit

More formality

Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation

Short-term orientation

Truth over virtue

Prefer quick results

Long-term orientation

Virtue over truth

Value perseverance and tenacity
(Martin & Nakayama 2008: 43).

The dimension of individualism and collectivism describes the relationship between the individual and the group to which the person belongs. Individualistic cultures stress the self and personal achievement. People in an individualistic culture tend to emphasize their self-concept in terms of self-esteem, self-identity, self-awareness, self-image, and self-expression. In other words, the individual is treated as the most important element in any social settings. Personal goals supercede group goals, and competition is often encouraged in this culture. Moreover, in individualistic cultures people tend to emphasize more affiliativeness, dating, flirting, and small talk in social interactions. Hofstede's findings indicate that the United States, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Italy, Belgium, and Denmark belong to this group. By contrast, collectivist cultures are characterized by a more rigid social framework in which self-concept plays a less significant role in social interactions. In these cultures people are expected to be interdependent and show conformity to the group's norms and values. Columbia, Venezuela, Pakistan, Peru, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Chile, and Hong Kong are the top nine collectivistic cultures specified in Hofstede's studies. If we compare them with Hall's high- and low-context cultures, we can see that individualistic cultures tend to be similar to low-context cultures and collectivistic cultures to high-context cultures.

The dimension of power distance specifies to what extent a culture adapts to inequalities of power distribution in relationships and organizations. High-power-distance cultures tend to orient to authoritarianism, which dictates a hierarchical or vertical structure of social

relationships. Thus, people in high-power-distance cultures develop relationships with others based on various levels of hierarchy. The differences of age, sex, generation, and status are usually maximized. The Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, India, Singapore, Brazil, Hong Kong, France and Columbia represent the high-power-distance cultures in Hofstede's studies. Low-power-distance cultures are more horizontal in terms of social relationships. People in these cultures tend to minimize differences of age, sex, status, and role. Instead, individual differences are encouraged. Thus, they tend to be less formal and more direct in social interactions. Australia, Israel, Denmark, New Zealand, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Switzerland are those countries that scored low in power distance scales.

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance measures the extent to which a culture can accept ambiguous situations and tolerate uncertainty about the future. Members of high-uncertainty-avoidance culture always try to reduce the level of ambiguity and uncertainty in social and organizational life. They pursue job and life security, avoid risk taking, resist changes, fear failure, and seek behavioral rules that can be followed in interactions. Such cultures are found in Greece, Portugal, Belgium, Japan, Peru, France, Chile, Spain, and Argentina. However, other cultures including Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Ireland, Great Britain, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and the United States are oriented to cope with the stress and anxiety caused by ambiguous and uncertain situations. Members of low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures tend to better tolerate the deviant behaviors and unusual stress connected with the uncertainty and ambiguity. As result, they take more initiative, show greater flexibility, and feel more relaxed in interactions.

Finally, the dimension of masculinity and femininity refers to the extent to which stereotypically masculine and feminine traits prevail in the culture. In masculine cultures men are expected to be dominant in the society and to show quality of ambition, assertiveness, achievement, strength, competitiveness, and material acquisition; thus, the communication styles are more aggressive. In male-dominated cultures women are expected to play the nurturing role. Hofstede's studies show that Japan is the best example of a masculine culture. Other nations in this category include Australia, Venezuela, Switzerland, Mexico, Ireland, Great Britain, and Germany. Members of feminine cultures tend to emphasize the quality of affection, compassion, emotion, nurturing, and sensitivity. Men in these cultures are not expected to be assertive. Thus, gender roles are more equal and people are more capable of reading nonverbal cues and tolerating ambiguous situations. Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Chile, Portugal, and Thailand represent feminine cultures according to Hofstede.

4. Intercultural education

Based on the aforementioned models of cultural value orientations, multicultural education should raise four significant issues such as exposure to multicultural perspectives, maintaining of cultural identity, development of intercultural communication skills, and diversification of curriculum (Chen & Starosta 1998: 226).

Even though the exposure to multicultural perspectives seem to be underestimated in the Albanian context, recent developments in the educational sector particularly in the private one have paved the way for a better understanding of Albanian society as a changing one in terms of cultural values and expectations. Moreover, multicultural education is closely linked

not only with individual identity but also with the collective cultural identity: “Multicultural education functions to help students rediscover their culture of origin and to strengthen, maintain, and create feelings of belonging to a community and of respect for culturally diverse values” (Chen & Starosta 1998: 227).

As a result, the development of a set of intercultural communication skills remains a must both on verbal and non-verbal communication. The following example intends simply to shed light on some cultural expectations:

“Asian Indians: Only urbanized Indians shake hands. They have a relaxed sense of time. They tend not to date prior to marriage. They may interrupt the speaking of others. They maintain a strong respect for secular and religious teachers. Many practice dietary restrictions. They tend not to participate in classroom discussions. They like clearly defined tasks and exercise close supervision over their subordinates.

African Americans: They may be more consensus-oriented than European Americans and generally function well in group modalities. They tend to value oral expression. They like to develop an individual, distinctive verbal and non-verbal style. Most can switch codes between black English vernacular (Ebonics) and standard English. They like to know where a person individually stands on an issue. Their proxemic distances tend to be closer than those of European Americans” (Chen & Starosta 1998: 228).

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