Intercultural Competence in Higher Education: A Normative Anchor, a Developmental Perspective, and a Discursive Approach

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ABSTRACT: How to advance intercultural competence among university educators has become an important topic in the discourse on internationalization of higher education. However, what constitutes intercultural competence, how to promote it, and toward what end remain to be questions that are subject to debate. This conceptual article aims to contribute to the debate by 1) proposing a normative anchor based on Habermas' theory of "principle of universalization"; 2) presenting a developmental perspective on intercultural competence in the context of higher education; and 3) introducing a discursive approach to empirical research on intercultural competence. Drawing on examples from an empirical study, we demonstrate a major challenge facing university educators in teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds and point out the gaps in the existing models of intercultural competence. We then explain first why Habermas' theory of "principle of universalization" may be a guiding principle for defining and practicing intercultural competence; secondly how the discourse of intercultural competence can be enriched by incorporating perspectives from psychosocial developmental theories; and thirdly why a discursive approach to research is a fruitful direction for empirical studies of intercultural competence. Finally, we provide a discussion on the implications of our proposals for teaching and learning in higher education.

Keywords: intercultural competence; intercultural communication; Habermas; ethics of communication; internationalization of higher education

RESUMÉ: L'un des sujets importants dans le discours sur l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur est de comment faire progresser la compétence interculturelle parmi les éducateurs universitaires. Le débat continue avec les questions de qu'est-ce ce qui constitue la compétence interculturelle, comment la promouvoir, et vers quelle fin. Cet article conceptuel a pour but de contribuer au débat 1) en proposant un ancrage normatif basé sur la théorie de Habermas "du principe de l'universalisation"; 2) en présentant une perspective de développement sur la compétence interculturelle dans le contexte de l'enseignement supérieur; et 3) en introduisant une approche discursive de la recherche empirique sur la compétence interculturelle. S'inspirant d'exemples tirés d'une étude empirique, nous démontrons un défi majeur auquel les éducateurs universitaires doivent faire face pour enseigner aux étudiants issus de milieux culturels diversifiés et souligner les lacunes des modèles existants de compétence interculturelle. Nous expliquons d'abord pourquoi la théorie d'Habermas du "principe de l'universalisation" peut être un principe directeur pour définir et pratiquer la compétence interculturelle. Ensuite, nous expliquons comment le discours de la compétence interculturelle peut être enrichi en intégrant les perspectives des théories du développement psychosocial. De plus, nous expliquons pourquoi une approche discursive de la recherche est une direction avantageuse pour les études empiriques de la compétence interculturelle. Enfin, nous présentons une discussion sur les implications de nos propositions pour l'enseignement et l'apprentissage dans l'enseignement supérieur.

Mots clés : compétence interculturelle; communication interculturelle; Habermas et éthique de la communication; internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur

Introduction

A major challenge facing internationalization of higher education is the potential misunderstanding and even conflict that occur in the process of teaching and learning in a multi-cultural classroom. The challenge is particularly acute in the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, where

identities are negotiated, diverse perspectives are tried out, and differences are debated. In fact, culture shock experienced by university educators in teaching international students have become a major source of controversy in the discourse of internationalization of higher education in North America (Fischer, 2016). In addition to the well-documented challenges such as international students' language barriers, group separation, and cultural differences in learning styles, university educators also face the deeper challenges of how to engage students from diverse backgrounds in meaningful discussions when conflicting beliefs and values exist and potentially result in miscommunication and mistrust between students and the instructor, or among students themselves. Under such circumstances, what competencies are required of university educators to meet these challenges and foster critical intellectual engagement in multicultural classrooms?

Some scholars stress the importance of values such as genuine respect, trust, and humility in intercultural interaction (e.g., Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2009). Others recommend a script of conduct, or rules of adaptable behaviours such as knowing one's biases, understanding and adapting to different cultural norms, assisting others in understanding cultural differences in values and norms, and leading in the creation of a new set of unwritten rules (e.g., Hofstede, 2009). As Hofstede (2009) pointed out, key to intercultural competence is the notion of a "moral circle" (pp. 90-100), that is, a community in which the members expect to live by a shared standard of moral rules, often unwritten and implicit. The practice of intercultural competence requires going beyond one's own moral circle, seeing others as morally valuable beings under any circumstances; it also involves the creation of a new moral circle, with its rules clarified so that discussion remains intellectually significant. The question here is, when creating a new moral circle, what moral or ethical principles can be applied *universally*, across individuals who are embedded in their own moral circles, to guide the creation of a new one accepted by all? Further, what would be the process and desirable outcome of creating the new moral circle? Finally, how can researchers who study intercultural competence capture the actual process of its practice and development?

In this conceptual article, we address the above questions by first proposing that Habermas' theory of "principle of universalization" (Habermas, 1990, p. 57) may

be a guiding principle for defining and practicing intercultural competence in higher education. Secondly, we argue that the discourse of intercultural competence will be enriched by incorporating perspectives from theories of psychosocial development, especially those grounded in normative claims about desirable outcomes of human development. Thirdly, we suggest that a discursive approach that pays attention to the actual process of classroom communication is a fruitful direction for empirical studies of intercultural competence. We make the three proposals based on the idea that, without clarifying these normative and empirical issues, research and practice on intercultural competence--at both institutional and interpersonal levels--can easily fall into the trap of developmental, cultural, and ethical relativism and fail to generate theoretically and practically meaningful results.

Before making these theoretical proposals, in the following sections we briefly review the literature of intercultural competence to point out the conceptual gaps in the existing models. We then present two examples from our empirical research to demonstrate international students' struggle as they encounter different moral circles in North American universities.

Challenges Facing Existing Models of Intercultural Competence: A Brief Literature Review

The most common approach to defining intercultural competence in the existing literature is to consider it a set of abilities or skills that facilitate the process of managing intercultural interaction in ways that are more likely to produce appropriate and effective individual, group, or institutional outcomes (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). This approach, however, has the problem of being context-bound. As pointed out by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), the same behaviour or skill may be perceived as competent in one context but incompetent in another. Moreover, despite the effort made by researchers taking a more systemic perspective such as Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), studies of intercultural competence often begin with the individual as the unit of analysis. These approaches pay attention to individual attributes such as motivation, knowledge, and skills, but often fail to take into consideration the social interaction process and outcomes. To advance the field, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) argued that the more a model incorporates specific conceptualization of interactants'

motivation, knowledge, skills, context, and outcomes in the context of an ongoing relationship over time, the more advanced the model is (p. 44). Furthermore, existing models are often based, explicitly or implicitly, on the idea of cultural adaptability. However, who adapts? To what extent? And toward what end? Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) rightly pointed out that the concept of adaptability, which is central to virtually all models of intercultural competence, risks producing, at least theoretically, chameleon behaviours (characterized by excessive compromise of personal identity) that undermine other aspects of competent performance (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

The above arguments highlight three key issues in conceptualizing intercultural competence in higher education. First, if cultural adaptability is a problematic concept in justifying the moral and practical goals of intercultural competence, is there another theory/concept/principle that better plays the role? Second, what are the required core components of intercultural competence? Are they motivation, knowledge, or skills? How do these core components develop? Third, how can researchers observe the practice of intercultural competence, defined as individual traits of motivation, knowledge and skills, in actual interpersonal interaction and communication? While the first question is normative, the second is psychological, and the third methodological. Before addressing these questions, we present two examples from our recent research on how Chinese international students perceive a deeper cultural challenge related to the encounter of a different moral circle in North American universities. Our view is that this deeper cultural challenge experienced by international students suggests a higher demand of intercultural competence in university classrooms, and thus sheds light on the questions of what constitutes intercultural competence in this context and how it can be promoted among both university educators and students from different cultures.

Culture Shock and Value Conflicts: International Students' Perspectives

Here we provide two excerpts from interviews with Chinese international students currently attending universities in the greater Boston area of the United States. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and translated into English. In the first interview, Mei, a female student from

China who majors in mathematics shared with the interviewer her painful struggle when reflecting on the assumptions and values that she had unconsciously adopted in China but now challenged in the United States. "I" indicates the interviewer, and "P" indicates the participant.

Excerpt of interview #1 (Mei).
I: Have your experiences in the United States changed your perceptions of China?
P: In so many ways. For example, I met a girl from Taiwan. When people asked her where she was from, she always said she was from Taiwan, and complained about how people in the street would assume she's Chinese, and how she'd feel offended. I [used to be] really mad about this. I was like, "You are simply Chinese! Why would you deny that?!" It was in my freshman or sophomore year. Later, I read more and more, and realized true identity is what people experience it themselves. In another situation, we had a class on international business and we talked about trade agreements. The issue of Taiwan and Hong Kong came up. There was a girl who mentioned Hong Kong as a country… no, she didn't say country, but she mentioned Hong Kong along with other countries. A Chinese classmate tried to correct her, but the professor didn't pay too much attention to it. I was in my first year, and I was pretty mad. I talked about this with my other classmates, but not with the professor. These were the [cultural] shocks I experienced. It was like all my previous beliefs had lost their value. I began to think maybe everything I have learned is false. It is like I have lived in Truman's world[1]. I later went to talk to that girl from Taiwan and asked her why she didn't feel Chinese. She explained to me that all her family were from Taiwan, including many of the older generations. With all of her experiences growing up in Taiwan and its culture, she feels that when we include her as Chinese, we are imposing it on her. I tried to change her idea, but we ended up having an open conversation, and I learned a lot. I now realize that when I try to change others, I am falling victim to the "collective sense of honour" [I have been taught in China]. I automatically use it to judge good and bad. I didn't grow up in a family that truly believes in collectivism, but am still influenced by the broader culture. After coming here, I became more alert to whether my judgment is based on the

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[1] Dubcovsky, D. (Producer), & Gay, C. (Director). (2015). *Truman* [Movie]. Argentina: Buena Vista International.

collectivist teaching I received [in China], or values I truly believe in.

Coming from mainland China, Mei not only expressed a strong sense of cultural identity herself, she also believed that individuals living in areas such as Taiwan and Hong Kong where the majority of people share the Chinese cultural tradition should see themselves as "Chinese" and proudly declare their Chinese identity, just like Mei herself. Her reaction toward the Taiwanese girl was related to a deeply held and emotionally-charged belief she learned in China: that is, Taiwan and Hong Kong are inseparable parts of China. For her, this is the only truth, beyond doubt. Accordingly, to Mei, non-Chinese claims made by individuals from Taiwan and Hong Kong suggest nothing but the blatant denial of a historical truth. And these false claims damage the collective Chinese identity and undermine China's national territorial integrity. This made Mei "mad." Mei, like many students recently arrived from China, believed that it was her moral and civic responsibility as a Chinese citizen to correct the misbeliefs held by people like the Taiwanese girl she met and to change their sense of cultural identity. Not surprisingly, it was a culture shock for Mei to realize that these basic assumptions and values she had taken for granted for many years were not shared by people she met outside China. She realized, almost with horror, that she could have lived in the Truman's world (Dubcovsky & Gay, 2015), a gigantic studio with constructed reality.

Mei did some soul-searching herself and reflected on how she "automatically" used the assumptions she learned from China to make judgments about good and bad, and she now carefully made distinctions between what she had been told and what truly made sense to her. What exactly is the cultural/ideological tension between the two worlds or moral circles, the one Mei came from and the North American university she attended now? While Mei used the term "collectivist" to describe the drastically different ideological environment where she grew up, Feng, another female student from China studying philosophy and psychology compared side by side what she perceived as the differences between the two worlds in which she struggled.

Excerpt of interview #2 (Feng)
My way of thinking and temperament are very Eastern–very intuitive and holistic. The American way is the opposite. Here

people are expected to be productive, goal-oriented, and focus on concrete outcomes. I often feel torn between these two worlds. But this is exactly why I came here, to be stretched and more inclusive. Good for my personal growth… Like the issues of Tibet or Taiwan. Americans think these areas should be independent. You asked about how the course Ideas and Politics [in China] has influenced me. The idea that they are parts of China is deeply planted in my body. Tibet and Taiwan cannot be independent. When others are against this idea, I feel upset in my stomach. It is a physical reaction. I cannot say they are wrong. They are not talking about facts, only their interpretation. One can interpret an issue from different vantage points. We cannot convince each other. It is not about the accuracy of facts; it is about what facts one chooses to pay attention to and what interpretive approach people take. I try to understand them and share with them some facts. But their understanding of this issue, just like our own understanding, is deeply rooted in their world. Like Dalia Lama, they think he is an inspiring and wise religious leader, and that he was persecuted and is in exile. I can understand them from their perspective. They may know how we see the issue, but cannot accept our point of view. I know something about Buddhism. I separate his religious status from his political positions. But many Americans support his political agenda because of his religious status. I am surprised by Americans' enthusiastic support for Dalia Lama. I think that is blind. We see Dalai Lama as a separationist. Americans use double standards. They won't support a religious leader who insists on the independence of an area within America. They will call him a separationist. But when it is about China, they will fully support that person. This is double standard. To have a good discussion, we need to base it on historical research.

In the above example, Feng pointed out two different ways of thinking that made her feel torn between the two worlds. In her examination of the issue of Tibet and Taiwan, she analyzed how people in the United States hold different perspectives from people in China. She realized that the differences are not due to access to different information but more attributable to identity and emotion. Similar to Mei who was "mad" with the Taiwanese girl, Feng had a physical reaction to the issue, feeling upset *in her stomach* when hearing people arguing for the independence of Taiwan and Tibet. Based on these two examples, we believe that intercultural competence in higher education must include and better define the particular skills that can address these cultural issues, issues about deeply held assumptions, values, and identity that go beneath surface meaning.

However, without necessarily knowing and agreeing with the specific assumptions and values held by students from a different cultural background, without sharing their sense of identity and emotional experiences about sensitive issues such as that of Taiwan and Tibet in China, how can educators support students in their struggle to make meaning of the tension between the different worlds? How can they promote students' learning and development at the same time? What mental capacity is required of educators to deal with the deeper tensions between different moral circles to engage in meaningful conversations with students who hold conflicting assumptions and values? How can educators remain open-minded in this process, but without falling into moral and cultural relativism? Here, we first introduce Habermas' theory of "principle of universalization" (Habermas, 1990, p. 57) to address the normative question we raised earlier: what ethical principle(s) may justify the moral and practical goals of intercultural competence?

In Search of a Universal Principle for Intercultural Competence: Habermas' Ethics of Communication

The aforementioned normative question on intercultural competence is similar to the one that once faced the field of moral development, particularly regarding the capacity for moral reasoning. Laurence Kohlberg's (1986) ground-breaking work changed the field by bringing together the normative and the positive, namely, the Kantian philosophical claim that morality must be justified by universal ethical principles such as justice, and the Piagetian structural analysis of cognitive development pertaining to basic concepts such as time, space, and causality. Kohlberg (1981, 1984) claimed that psychological study of individual moral reasoning should be grounded in universalizable principles of judgment such as welfare, respect, and justice. In response to Kohlberg's claim, other scholars challenged his assumption of justice being the only principle guiding individual moral reasoning. These scholars have advocated their own principles, most notably the principle of care derived from Carol Gilligan's research with women (Gilligan, 1982; 1988) and the three terminal goods (autonomy, community and divinity) put forward by the anthropologist Richard Shweder (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra & Park,1997).

Habermas (1984, 1990) challenged the above theories for being all rooted in a monological application of moral principles. Habermas (1990) argued:

> The problems to be resolved in moral argumentation cannot be handled monologically but require a cooperative effort. By entering into a process of moral argumentation, the participants continue their communicative action in a reflexive attitude with the aim of restoring a consensus that has been disrupted. Moral argumentation thus serves to settle conflicts of action by consensual means. (p. 67)

In our view, Habermas' theory of communication, specifically his emphasis of a cooperative effort to engage in a process of moral argumentation in a reflexive attitude and for the purpose of reaching a consensus, provides a necessary normative anchor for the practice of international competence, which by definition entails the capacity to solve potential problems of disagreements arising from diverse perspectives in the process of interpersonal communication. Habermas' "principle of universalization" states, "for a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects of its general observance for the satisfaction of each person's particular interests must be acceptable to all." (Habermas, 1990, p. 197). Relating to learning, Habermas outlined that "the learning processes by which we acquire theoretical knowledge and moral insight, revise and extend our evaluative language, overcome self-deceptions and difficulties of understanding, depend on [discursive] argumentative practices" (Habermas, 1984, p. 44).

We believe that Habermas' principle of universalization, along with his statement about learning by engaging a plurality of participants and perspectives in argumentative practices, has important implications for the discourse of intercultural competence in higher education. It reinforces the meaning of including participants from diverse cultures in the learning process. It also provides a guiding principle for dealing with situations such as those demonstrated in the above examples of Mei and Feng. That is, agreement is obtained through argumentation based on mutually acceptable procedural conditions. Our view is that his ethical principle can guide university educators in playing the leadership role to create a new moral circle. In this new moral circle, individuals from diverse backgrounds −social, cultural, and political, commit themselves to solving conflicts through consensual means, and to engaging in intellectually rigorous

argumentative practices in a reflexive attitude to reach consensus.

The Mental Demand of Intercultural Interaction in Higher Education: A Developmental Perspective

The psychosocial theories of Robert Selman (1980; 2007) and Robert Kegan (1983; 1997) shed light on the *mental* capacity required for the engagement in Habermas' notion of moral argumentations. The theories also suggest "a journey of increasing epistemological vision" (Kegan, 1997, p. 201) for the promotion of this capacity. Both theories derived from the Piagetian constructivist tradition, viewing the development of self- and social-awareness as involving qualitative changes in the deeper structure of the mind for meaning-making. Implicit in this tradition is the idea that our way of knowing/meaning-making has a relatively stable system, a system that can progress from lower to higher levels of complexity and integration, as a function of interactions between nature (biological predispositions) and nurture (social environment). Selman (2007) argued that the development of social competence is a process of qualitative changes in three components: individuals' capacity to understand the logic of interpersonal relationship (interpersonal knowledge), their social skills to resolve conflicts and deepen a relationship (social strategies), as well as their motivation and abilities to be connected with others (personal meaning and valuing). Underlying these changes is a core social operation (Selman, 2007), the individual's developing capacity to coordinate different social perspectives, starting from young children's inability to differentiate other people's perspectives from their own, to the more mature levels of being able to differentiate, understand, and finally coordinate different perspectives. The key contribution of Selman's theory to the literature of social and moral development, and now to the discourse of intercultural competence, lies in its emphasis on the value of not only understanding others' perspectives but also coordinating different perspectives as the highest level of development.

Similarly, Kegan (1983) argued that psychosocial development is "a life-time activity of differentiating and integrating what is taken as self and what is taken as other" (p. 76). It is a process in which our ways of knowing/meaning-making continuously emerge from

previous embeddedness (differentiation) in order to relate to it in a new way (integration). This transformation process is achieved through rebalancing the subject-object relationship, subjects being elements of knowing that the individual is fused with and embedded in, and objects being elements of knowing that the individual can reflect on and operate upon. A new level of development means that what used to be subjects are now objects to be examined. Based on this idea, Kegan (1983; 1997) described development as moving along five progressively more complex ways of knowing, each being a different system to be incorporated into a high-order way of knowing. At the lower levels, children learn to differentiate themselves first from the physical world (order 0), then from their own impulses (order 1), and later from their own needs, interests, and wishes (order 2). Emerging from the previous structures, young people learn to incorporate others' expectations, needs and desire to value relationship and mutuality (order 3). At the higher levels, individuals learn to differentiate themselves from interpersonal relationships to develop a system of self-authorship, identity, and ideology (order 4). Further, individuals disembed themselves from the system of self-authorship/identity/ideology, and incorporate it into a higher order of knowing, characterized by a structure of inter-individuality that sees the interpenetrability of self-systems (order 5).

Applied to the context of cross-cultural interaction, these two theories suggest a progression in the way we mentally construct our relationships with "others" from different cultures. At a lower order, we are embedded in our own culture, unable to see our own beliefs, values, assumptions, and preferences as social and ideological constructions, and unable to accept others' perspectives being different from us. At this stage, individuals expect and even require others to follow the same rules when constructing reality, just like Mei who once felt mad about the Taiwanese girl and tried to align the other person's sense of identity with her own construction of reality. At a higher order (e.g., the 4th order), we are able to see that we and others both have "pre-constructed constraints" (Kegan, 1997, p. 318), and try to promote the willingness and ability of each party to understand and respect the position of others'. At this level, individuals are able to understand others' perspectives being different from their own and try to find solutions by changing

their own and other's attitudes. At a still higher level, we realize that different perspectives and positions are aspects of a broader picture, each, by its own, is an ideology that is necessarily partial. The conflict between diverse perspectives is now considered an opportunity to disembed us from our pre-constructed constraints, to transform our identification with our own "side" and change our sense of "inevitability or intractable integrity" (Kegan, 1997, p. 318). It is at this level that perspectives are truly coordinated.

To us, developmental theories such as Selman's and Kegan's have important implications for the promotion of intercultural competence, particularly in university classrooms where communication often centres on issues that involve different assumptions and conflicting ideologies. In intercultural context, we are all learners, trying to understand the ideological systems and preferences of people from other cultures. Like Mei, who reflected on how she automatically used the logic and values she learned from China to make judgments about good and bad in a new country, individuals are all embedded in the meaning-regulatory principles of their own culture. People like Feng have the insight of viewing different perspectives as interpretations. Yet they may not be able to see that the different perspectives are actually multiple aspects of one broader picture. While open-mindedness is often emphasized as important skill or quality for effective intercultural communication, developmental theories help us reconsider the issue of open-mindedness by asking and answering the questions of open to what? How?

Both Habermas' theory and the developmental theories introduced here shed light on the questions we mentioned earlier: when cultural values and identity clash, whose values and preferences are more justified? Who adapts? To what extent? In fact, we choose to introduce Selman's and Kegan's theories for the reason that both make an implicit normative claim by defining the higher (better) level of development as the capacity to incorporate and coordinate different perspectives or ways of knowing. In other words, a desirable developmental outcome is the obtainment of the capacity that allows us to be more self and socially aware, and to be more willing and effective in engaging others and society. Competence from this perspective is not the traditional Western notion linked to individual achievement, but a notion of a social and communal mode (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003; Lin & Wang, 2002). This

concept of competence values both individual autonomy and interpersonal connection. It is this strength of the theories that makes them particularly relevant to the conceptualization of intercultural competence, a construct that we believe has an intrinsic normative claim in it. From a developmental perspective, intercultural competence is not a fixed individual trait or traits; it is not limited to knowledge of others' perspectives, preferences, values, or the valuing of mutual respect and mutual change. It is a way of knowing that develops to adapt to the demanding context of intercultural interaction (different from adapting to others' preferences or positions). It is a commitment to engaging others for a better understanding of ourselves and others; it is also a postmodern epistemological stance about education and learning, interestingly in line with the ideas of pedagogical universalism proposed by Comnius in the 1600s (Cushner & Mahon, 2009).

A Discursive Approach to Research on Intercultural Competence

In light of the above discussion, we suggest that a discursive interaction approach to empirical research may address some of the limitations of the existing models of intercultural competence, as pointed out by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) and discussed earlier. In the last three decades, there has been a linguistic shift in empirical research in the fields of developmental, social, cultural, and political psychology, and educational studies (Luke, 1995; 2002; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). Social and political psychologists have suggested that, by attending to the expressive elements of social life inherent in language (Harré & Gillett, 1994), particularly the patterns in how individuals and groups construct, justify, or reject various perspectives, researchers can gain a better understanding of the communication strategies of the individuals and groups, as well as the norms of the culture (Billig, 2001; Edwards, 1997; Kitzinger, 2005; Liamputtong, 2011; Potter, 2012; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993). Developmental psychologists studying culture as a dynamic process have also proposed that the *actual* processes of socialization that shape individual development are rendered accessible through analysis of social interactions (Bruner, 1986;

Corsaro, 1992; Rogoff, 1990), especially discursive interactions (Miller, 1996).

The discursive approach is particularly promising to document the specific situations in which communication problems occur, and to explore the different cultural assumptions and values that have contributed to those communication problems. Researchers can ask open-ended questions or use hypothetical or real-world scenarios that are open to culturally specific interpretations as tools to collect focus group data from diverse populations (pre-determined based on research questions). In higher education context, educators can use scenarios to prompt discussions in the classroom. Whether it is focus group data or classroom discussion notes, researchers or educators can analyze the inter-individual communication process, looking into not only individual-level and context-specific motivation, knowledge, and skills, but also examining the process and outcomes of interaction and communication at an inter-individual level to uncover differences in values, assumptions, perspectives, and processes of identity negotiation and relationship development. The discursive approach does not provide another model of defining and measuring intercultural competence. Rather, it is an approach to data collection and data analysis to which existing models and measures of intercultural competence can be applied, whether they focus on individual perspective-taking and ways of knowing, or relationship processes and outcomes.

Reflection on Action: Implications for Teaching Practice

Built on the theoretical perspectives we have presented, intercultural competence in higher education entails the understanding that the existence of a plurality of participants and perspectives in university classrooms is not a problem but an opportunity for transformative learning. Different assumptions and values held by students from diverse backgrounds are not seen as barriers to be removed or deficiency to be treated. Rather, they are appreciated as assets that enrich the learning environment. While conflict resolution itself may not be a goal of teaching and learning in university classrooms, it can be taken as a learning opportunity to engage students in argumentation to promote participants' awareness and understanding of the different

perspectives and ways of knowing that constitute our shared world.

Accordingly, we perceive three implications of what we have proposed here for teaching practice. First, to open up the space for students to have direct, honest, and respectful conversation with each other and learn to appreciate beliefs or perspectives that are different from their own, university educators can use Habermas' theory of communication as a guiding principle to create a new shared moral circle. This can be achieved by explicitly explaining to students, at the beginning of the class, the ethical principles that guide classroom communication, especially regarding the meaning of argumentation for learning and the procedural conditions described by Habermas. Second, educators can use developmental theories such as Selman's and Kegan's to scaffold students in their developmental journey, supporting students to be aware of their own and others' tightly held beliefs and identity, to better understand others' ways of knowing, doing and being, and, most importantly, to see that differences among us are valuable aspects of the world we all share and are responsible for. Finally, it will benefit university educators to consider their teaching activities an opportunity for action research, taking the discursive approach introduced here to document the specific situations in which communication problems occur, explore the different cultural assumptions and values that have contributed to those communication problems, observe students' and their own developmental trajectories and outcomes, and to constantly reflect on the meaning of intercultural competence in higher education.

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