Chapter 9
Fostering Intercultural Competence in Higher Education: Designing Intercultural Group Work for the Classroom

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ABSTRACT
Within the ongoing process of globalization, intercultural competence has been identified as one of the key competences of the 21st century. Universities need to prepare their graduates for working across countries and cultures and have been focusing on the international and intercultural aspect of their programs. Research has shown, however, that the development of intercultural competence in students does not happen automatically but needs to be fostered and supported. Within an action research project, an intercultural group work was designed to foster the development of intercultural competence of business students in an international double-degree program. The analyses of individual self-reflections after the group work suggested that the group work provided students with international working experiences, and that the reflection process has to be structured and supported to foster the development of intercultural competence in students.

INTRODUCTION
In the globalized working environment, intercultural competence (IC) is understood as one of the key-competencies in the 21st century, and many institutions of Higher Education (HE) have implemented and extended their internationalization strategies in recent years. Within the context of Higher Education, internationalization describes the “process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. 6).
Especially graduates from Business Schools are expected to work globally (Kedia and Englis, 2011), and to be able to manage differences in languages, cultures, and time zones. Consequently, Business Schools have been working on including international aspects in their curricula. Institutions of HE differentiate between Internationalization Abroad and Internationalization at Home: Internationalization Abroad describes measures taking place across borders, while Internationalization at home refers to activities carried out at the own campus (Brookes and Becket, 2011). One of the effects of the ongoing internationalization of HE is an increasing number of international students. Although their presence at universities is seeing as beneficial with regards to internationalization, research has shown that their physical presence is not enough to foster intercultural competence of the students, but that the contact has to be structured (Bennett et al., 2013). Additionally, research on the impact of measures to foster IC in Higher Education has been inconclusive, which leads to the following research question: How should group works in HE be designed to have an impact on IC development of students?

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Defining Intercultural Competence

From a sociological point of view, culture can be understood as the “vital world of a group of individuals characterized by shared patterns of interpretation in the context of shared knowledge” (Woltin and Jonas, 2009, p. 469). Geert Hofstede describes culture as something that connects a group of people on the one hand and, on the other hand, distinguishes them from other people. He calls it “the collective programming of the mind” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6). Based on this understanding, intercultural communication occurs “when the participants of a communication situation belong to different cultures and when the partners are aware of the fact that the other person is “different”, when one is perceived as a “foreigner” (Maletzke, 1996, p. 37). So-called intercultural competence is needed to overcome these differences and to handle intercultural situations.

In the context of Higher Education, intercultural competence can be defined as the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2006). Deardorff’s model of IC development describes the development as a process: based on particular attitudes (e.g. tolerance and openness), the acquisition of knowledge about foreign cultures, and the development of cultural self-awareness as well as of certain skills (e.g. to listen carefully, to analyze situations) can initiate a reflection process. Basic (cultural) assumptions may be questioned in this reflection process, which can then lead to a shift of one’s frame of reference and a change of perspective. This internal reflection process may result in effective and appropriate behavior in an intercultural situation, taking into account the objectives of the communication (effective) and the expectations of behavior of the communication partner (appropriate).

Due to the process orientation of this model, it is well-suited to visualize differences in IC development and to improve the design of group works and activities, lectures, seminars and study programs that aim at the IC development of students. Yet, the model does not explicitly take the impact of intercultural contacts on IC development into account. Although the external outcome (“effective and appropriate behavior”) does imply some kind of interaction, the model lacks the importance of intercultural interactions. Still, it serves as a theoretical base in this chapter.
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