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Intercultural Teacher - a case study of a course

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Introduction

Is it possible to become intercultural by attending a course? If so, how does this process happen and how do we get to know what happens? My paper will deal with these questions with the help of students' reflections written during a pilot course carried out at the Teacher Education Programme at Jönköping University, Sweden in Autumn 2005.

Background

Exchange students from our partner universities in mainly EU countries have taken courses for a number of years at our School of Education. For several reasons the time had come for the entire offer of courses to be revised. As internationalisation of Swedish higher education expects universities to integrate native and foreign students there is an expressed demand for more English-medium courses. Our Teacher Education Programme documents state that teacher students should acquire intercultural competence. This buzz-word as so many others has too long been taken for granted and the concept has not been questioned.

Towards this background the planning of *The Intercultural Teacher*, a full-time one semester course of 30 ECTS credits started in spring 2004. It was decided that the new course would apply to foreign and Swedish students. Four teachers from different disciplines were recruited for a planning group, all with a personal commitment to international and intercultural issues. *The Intercultural Teacher* was offered to students for the first time in autumn 2005 and ran as a pilot project. After having been responsible for the planning-team I was selected the course-leader.

General description and aims of the course

The general description of the course was written to meet with current Swedish societal demands and academic policy of internationalisation.

Becoming a teacher in an internationalised world and in a multicultural society requires intercultural competence. Personal as well as professional development is called for to enhance the teacher's intercultural understanding. The aim of this course is to create possibilities for the student to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes to meet these new demands through theoretical and practical tools as well as through experiential learning.

A combination of Swedish and international students in the course will create an intercultural learning environment. The course contents as well as the team reflect a multidisciplinary approach allowing for flexibility.

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A course is evaluated against its aims. As intercultural competence (IC) is a core concept of the course it had to be defined as aims. They are based on a theoretical framework (Byram 1997). In addition to Byram's components of IC the aims are extended to specifically include religion and living conditions. The course description states that through this course the students should acquire:

- Culture specific and culture general knowledge
- Knowledge of self and other
- Knowledge of interaction: individual and societal
- Insight regarding the ways in which culture affects communication and education
- Insight regarding the ways religion affects values
- Knowledge of living conditions in different societies
- Skills to interpret and relate
- Skills to discover and/or interact
- Attitude to relativise the self and value the other
- Positive disposition towards learning intercultural competence
- General disposition characterised by a critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one's own

Participants

Students

Due to some misunderstanding the information about the course was published on the web site of our institution too late in spring 2005 for individual students to plan their studies in time. This unfortunate event reduced the applicants to 14 students though it was agreed that the pilot course would take up to 20 students. During 2005 we had three Linneaus-Palme¹ agreements with among others Ho Chi Minh City University of Pedagogy in Vietnam, Mzuzu University in Malawi and Pune University in India. Two students from each of these partner universities were offered the course². Two free-movers applied, one from Spain and one from the US, though the latter left the course for personal reasons after a week. Six Swedish students enrolled, training for various age groups.

For a group with the objective to develop intercultural understanding there was a good mixture of students regarding future teaching profession, age, gender, nationality, religion and interests, though the group could have been somewhat larger. A heterogeneous group is a tremendous resource for a course like this but not entirely easy to handle.

Teaching staff

The four teacher educators, (two male and two female) in the earlier planning team formed the course team representing Science of Religion, Biology and Environmental studies, Swedish Language and Literature and Education (Language and Culture). Seven

¹ An educational exchange programme with developing countries financed by the Swedish government

² The female Indian students left the course after module 2 for family reasons.

other Swedish lectures gave sessions on e.g. citizenship education; conflict solving, media and the Global School. They also helped the team to supervise the students' field-studies and their final papers and to examine the latter.

We were also fortunate to attract some foreign guest lecturers, who gave between two to ten sessions each. Two were from Vietnam (the Vietnamese school and Global Health education), one from India (Women in India and Citizenship Education in Indian schools) and one from the USA (African-American women, Critical thinking, Social hegemony, ICT skills).

Course contents

The course was divided into four modules (7,5ECTS each).

Module 1 Introduction of theoretical and practical tools

The time resource was concentrated to this first module. We felt that it was important for students and teachers to get to know each other and to get a thorough introduction to set the structure of the course. The module was described in the course document as including:

- The concepts of culture, multicultural and interculturality
- A socio cultural perspective on communication in education
- Living conditions and environment
- Values and religion, ethnicity and identity
- Citizenship education in an international perspective
- Conflict solving
- ICT skills
- Ethnography in practice

Module 2: The teacher as Ethnographer: Field studies

The second module is considered the core module of the course. Now the students were offered the opportunity to observe and analyse their observations with the help of the theories and methodological tools they had acquired in module one. During the field studies the students collected data for their final paper written in module 4. Course documents said:

Field studies (5 weeks) in various educational contexts according to the student's special interest, outside Sweden for outgoing students and in Sweden for incoming students. The aim of the field studies is to offer the students insight in daily life and educational conditions for citizens in an unfamiliar society in order to develop a deeper intercultural understanding. During the field study the student will be mentored by a local instructor in the field. Prior to the field study a personal plan will be made for each student.

The international students got placements in Swedish schools in accordance with the age level they were training for. Swedish students went in pairs to Jerusalem, El Salvador

and India. The course team visited the Swedish students abroad for a week and the international students on two occasions. With two exceptions the local mentors were extremely helpful to the students.

Module 3: Intensified theoretical studies

According to the course document module three should:

- Build onto previous field studies within common areas (below) and other specific areas in agreement with the group
- Religious traditions in transition
- Media
- Gender
- Sustainable development
- Citizenship education (basic values in education)

In practice this module went wrong due to various circumstances. We had planned for the students to decide the contents themselves according to their own needs and preferences. Before they started their field-studies we had a meeting with the students to discuss the outline. They gave some suggestions, but for various reasons these were not fully carried out. In addition the time management went wrong, a number of lectures were cancelled due to illness. The course lacked structure and there was little or no control that the students had read any texts and few seminars followed up the course literature. There were no written assignments. The students were very critical and surely had the right to be so. Both course team and students felt very frustrated.

Module 4: Final written assignment.

The final assignment will permit the student to inquire into a selected area of personal interest, which is prepared in module 1, investigated in module 2 and further developed in module 3

The last module was supposed to tie the previous modules together and it seemed to work out well according to the plans. However we ran short of time because we could not keep the international students over Christmas and New Year when there are no classes though officially the spring semester does not start until the end of January.

How do we know what happened to the students?

Becoming intercultural is mainly a process and according to Stier, (2002) it is 'dynamic and must be understood in a given social and cultural context' (p. 13). This process is unique for each individual and takes place in the interaction between individuals and in self-reflection of the individual. Dialogism (Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Wertsch and Dysthe) is the theoretical background drawn on for group-discussions and continuous written student reflections. This study relies on the students' final reflections after the course of what they have experienced and felt during the semester. To these accounts personal communication with students and my own observations are added. Of course a critical

stance has to be taken towards what people say and write. This is specifically the case if the writing also may be understood as part of an assignment.

Every Friday for 16 weeks the students posted a weekly reflection on a web-based discussion forum, Ping-Pong. According to the students' wishes they could only be read by the teachers.

Within a month after the course the students posted their final reflections on Pingpong for everyone to read. The instructions were:

In this paper you will concentrate on the development of your own intercultural competence during the semester. Now you include the social and cultural context of the course, the interaction of the group in class and outside and give examples from discussions. You have about 16 personal weekly reflections. Go back to those and try to read them with the eyes of an outside spectator (do that a couple of times). Use Steer's theoretical model, *Becoming Intercultural: The acquisition of intercultural competences* (Steer 2002, p12-14) to analyse your own intercultural journey. Steer's whole text is very useful to start your thinking about your development

Teaching and learning in an intercultural perspective

The teaching methods were a variety of lectures, seminars, group studies and practical assignments. An electronic forum, Pingpong was also used for posting students' reflections and assignments, as well as for texts and messages for the group, for interactive discussion groups and for questions and answers. This forum seemed to be very useful both for students and teaching staff, once the technical skills were required.

It was specifically appreciated by international students to whom it was new. The level of ICT skills within the student group varied but was in general improved for everyone, including the teachers.

To the international students the difference in teaching style and academic culture between home and Sweden was a great intercultural challenge:

The first time I attended the classes, I found everything very strange because the way classes were being conducted was very different from the way we do.--
-This explains why at first I found it very hard to participate in Swedish classes where they emphasize on class discussions and group discussions. The teachers believe that students too have knowledge and even the teachers can learn something from them rather than in Malawi where students are viewed as blank jars waiting to be filled with knowledge from their teachers. ---The interesting thing is that as time went on, I started participating in both class discussions and group discussions. The most important thing that I learnt was to be confident. At first I was not participating in class because I was doubting myself if what I will say is right or wrong but due to the type of teaching methods I was exposed to, I started having confidence in myself. I always told myself that I can also contribute something to the class. TO

In fact the reactions of the international students certainly were a real intercultural experience even to the Swedish teachers and students. During the first week one Swedish student talked to me about her worries that the Swedes dominated too much. Should they keep themselves back to give space to some of the international students who said nothing?

It was in the smaller study groups that the discussions were good and I think it could depend on the cultural differences. So it was during these discussions I got the most of the knowledge. In the bigger class it was not until the end of the course that all told their personal view. So that was a system that suited the Swedish students more, while the international students got a cultural experience which we could see that they succeeded in adjusting to. KAP

At first we were a shy and pretty quiet group but that changed as we got to know each other. Sometimes we disagreed but mostly we had vivid conversations about our different countries and cultures and we showed each other respect. Being such a small group we got to know each other well and the atmosphere felt secure. The Swedish students were more used to speak out in the classroom, which was pretty obvious especially in the beginning. We were also more often on time, which didn't take me by surprise. PIA

In some aspects our lessons were monocultural since we used our school's way of teaching. That means that I as a Swedish student did not get as much intercultural challenge until I went away on my field studies. In the case of the international students, I think that it was good that our lessons were based on a Swedish pattern. They were the ones who were the 'exchange students' and were about to meet and live in a new culture for four months. And since we were six Swedish students in the class we gave them opportunities to ask questions about what they found strange in our culture, questions that always arise when one is in the middle of a new setting. KAP

The fact that foreign teachers took part in the course made the Swedes realise what it meant to be exposed to an unfamiliar teaching style:

Due to the fact that early in the first module we had two professors from Vietnam enhanced the social understanding of their culture. From what I could understand I saw that some of the exchange students were not accustomed to our teaching culture where we students are free to question the teacher or discuss during the lectures. That made it hard for me in the beginning to interpret if they did not understand, were not interested or simply just were not used to the system. After that we had lessons with Mr T. and Mrs T., it became easier to understand what a student in Vietnam was used to.

The group has opened during the term and become more dynamic. I think there would have been a great possibility to develop further in the group if we had had more classes after our field studies, as was the intention from the beginning. The Swedish perspective has been the ruling one in the classroom as

well as the Swedish teaching style. I noticed the difference the week when The African-American professor gave classes, which meant I as a Swede also had to make a greater effort since her way of teaching was different and she expected the class to act differently from how I know the Swedish teachers expect me to act. It made me realise our different starting-points in the class regarding the teacher-student communication. In general smaller groups for discussions meant that we could go deeper than when meeting with the whole group. The different views of formality were also seen for example in the final seminars. KAL

To get the group together we arranged a camp the second weekend where Swedish and international teachers took part:

Normally the group dynamics gets better and better the more time you spend together and this I feel was clearly the case with this group too. The last two weeks were among the best, just as things were taking off and getting really nice the course came to its end. I feel the course started in a brilliant way by spending the weekend together in Bunn. MAR

We did go to a weekend camp in the beginning of the course, which was great fun. We learned a lot about each other, we cooked, discussed a lot of interesting subjects and we went canoeing. I had no idea that you can learn so much about a person just sitting in the same canoe for a couple of hours. Javier and I shared some of our dreams with each other. PIA

One of the unforgettable events was the weekend course we had. This was nice because I was able to interact with my classmates and I learnt how to cook different Swedish foods and for the first time in my life I went canoeing. THAO

Every Friday the students posted their reflections of the week on Pingpong:

Weekly reflection is the new concept to me from earlier days. I was not totally familiar to how to write weekly reflection at the first time. Although I haven't any knowledge about how to write weekly reflection, I started to write about lectures, teaching and which difficulties I had faced during lectures. It was new concept and new work for me because before that I never done this type of work. This work or reflection always helped me to who was work done by me (?). I noticed one thing is that I improved my opinion and English language.

I learnt one thing from all reflections that as a teacher I will use this method in my school and college I will be able to understand students' problems and their opinions RAH

There were some problems connected to language skills. At the beginning some of the students did not feel comfortable with English as the course language. One of the international students had obviously not enough language skills to benefit fully of the course. Though the prerequisites demanded were 'very good knowledge of spoken and written English' - in fact TOEFL test was required - the partner university had not taken

their responsibility to control this. Unfortunately this student seemed to be quite unaware of his lack of communicative skills. Others were on the contrary very conscious about their English:

The language was my main handicap during the first weeks of the course. I was absolutely terrified when I had to talk in public. It was also difficult for me to understand the rest of the international students, except X and Y, due to their unfamiliar accents. It was very strange for me because I am a participative and communicative person and it seemed like I was shy. For me it was a big pressure when I was asked to say my opinion about something. This affected me not only at the University but it also affected me in the rest of the time outside the class. As the time pass by I was more and more participative, more the 'real' Javier. JA

On the other hand being confronted with different Englishes was a true intercultural experience mostly to the Swedes used to British or American native speaker norm. They were challenged to understand accents strange to them like African, Vietnamese and Indian English. It really trained their ability to develop as intercultural speakers:

We all faced a problem since none of us could communicate with all class mates in our own mother tongue. Even if all had to use English as the second language, there were differences in how well we mastered it, and that contributed to the difficulties of over bridging the differences between our cultures. One example was when we talked about bush people and one person in the class became confused and wondered what George Bush had to do with the discussed topic. In this context we had taken the expression for granted as Lahdenperä describes it. KAP

Students' reflections

Unless there is an accessible and easily understandable theory as a model for analysis it is difficult to get to grips with what happens to an individual. The aims of the course were based on Byram's theoretical framework of IC (1997) and all that was done in the course could be justified from that theory. But still I have found it difficult to use his theory in detail as a model for analysing the students' reflections. In practice his five *saviours* are intertwined and difficult to separate. I have organised the reflections according to knowledge, skills and attitudes but the borders of three main components seem to float into each other, not to mention the subdivisions.

Knowledge

Culture specific and culture general knowledge

Another important thing that I learnt is **to be on time**. (At the beginning) I was always late for classes. Since the Malawians are not good at keeping time this affected me during the first few weeks but later on I learnt to use time properly and also always tried to be on time. TO

Similar things could have totally different meanings. While I was fascinated about the children's behaviour at school, other classmates thought that the student's behaviour were not appropriate and they even questioned the clothes they wore. **It is clear that we have different references to compare to.** JA

I know that the course I have attended was a 'special course' but through my experience in Sweden together with other people have told me, I have the impression that in Sweden, the learning is more focused on the success of the students, **It is important that you learn what you need.** In Spain the pressure is usually terrible; you have to prove what you know one specific day or with one assignment. I have seen also that in Sweden they spend a lot of money in education; a course like 'The intercultural teacher' would be almost unthinkable, at least, in my home university. JA

I noticed during my field studies the differences between primary school in Spain and in Sweden. I could see that here there are more resources, that means more money, and how the politicians and the headmasters and teachers worked together to decide what was necessary. Before coming to Sweden I have heard about the figures, Sweden was one of the countries in the world that spent more money in education and had one of the best educational systems. Spain was one of the countries in the UE that spent less money. **Now there are not only figures for me, I know that in first person.** JA

I have got a deeper understanding, even though I knew it before, about democracy and **how fortunate we are here in Sweden.** For me democracy is a possibility to make a difference, freedom of speech, religion, living, sexuality etc, peace, respect, equal rights and human values. In many countries people lives with little freedom in those areas. PIA

I have now **gained some knowledge and have a better idea about how a few more people in the world live their lives and how they interpret the world.** That is very interesting, and I am grateful for getting the opportunity to be enriched by it. But like always I can't draw any general conclusions from it. To meet one or two people from one country is only one or two people's interpretations of life, at this particular time of their lives. MAR

Knowledge of self and other

When I am learning I like to have a wide foundation of general knowledge before I start to analyse and get emotional insights. In the article written by Byram we read how important knowledge is for someone who wants to develop a critical mind. He also states that it is crucial that if we should succeed in developing such ability we have **to receive knowledge from the social context. This must truly have been given to the international student who lived, studied and made their field studies in a new surrounding.** KAP

The fact that I was the only non-Swede European and even more the only student from a western country **made me feel that I have a particular role to play within the group.** When some opinion from another part of Europe was required I was the one to talk. **Sometimes what it was said about Sweden or the Swedes was the same for me as Spaniard,** for example when someone said that nowadays people get married older than 30 years ago, the wedding celebrations, the low birth rate, etc. **When I heard about other countries I could know how different the cultures were. ---I am not the same person I was when I left Spain in August.** I have had a lot of wonderful experiences here, I have travelled and the main thing for me, I have met incredible people from all continents. We worked as family and we became friends. **The stereotypes have been broken in pieces.** JA

In the beginning I experienced it more difficult to study with our internationals until we went on the weekend course where more time were given to socialising. **I believe that the more different cultures you come from the more time you need to get to know each other.** KAR

It demands a lot of energy to reconsider one's cultural values all the time. My interest for the other students cultures and how they looked upon my, changed with my mood, if I was tired or not. If I was tired I could almost only take in the 'know' aspects of a society (as Stier describes it). I think that it was harder for me and the other Swedish students to receive the processual competencies that Stier writes about in connection with content competencies. Although we could listen to what the others told about their society we could never experiences it ourselves in the same way as they had opportunities to experience what we were describing. **---I think that I became a bit disappointed at myself when I realised that I did not always have the energy to plunge deep into other cultures.** KAP

My intercultural journey was more of emotions than theory. To stay in Palestine is an emotional experience most of all, I learned that it is very easy to have the academic and political correct answers then you are in the calm and peaceful Sweden. But in the eye of the storm there is a reality which you always need to deal with. **I am now more humble and I can separate small problem from big ones.** PER

What I must have learned and **deepened my knowledge about is differences in gender and ages.** I, as an little older man in a group with most young women, was many times alienated, sometimes I didn't understand them and I thought I was the must stupid man in the world and sometimes I thought they were very unripe and superficial. Unfortunately there were very few discussions of differences in gender, ages and classes. But I have learned from this course that sometimes I don't understand women and they almost never understand what I mean. PER

When studying abroad, **I found that I very proud of my country.** I could tell about it day by day. In my first presentation, I showed the flag of my country and our Great Father - Ho Chi Mina. I wondered if my friends thought I talk too much. But I thought they could understand me because they also went abroad like me.

Many people I met often asked me about the war in Vietnam, our Party and what I thought about Americans. Therefore, I thought I had responsibility to tell them more about my country, not only the past but also the present. THAO

In addition, **I become more confident.** Europe now is no more strange for me. When away from home, **I recognized my family had an important role in my life.**

I have learned about other cultures and about my own. **You think you know your culture, and deep inside you do, but it is when somebody starts to ask you about it that you become aware of how it's really working. PIA**

Going to El Salvador was for me a journey that taught me a lot about myself. **I understood that a person can adjust to different cultures, customs, traditions and cockroaches even though it seemed impossible to begin with.** I realized again the **importance of family and friends, how people can stand up for each other in times of need.** I realized that despite of poverty people can be generous. I had a marvellous time in that beautiful country, I made a lot of friends, I visited beautiful places, I ate and cooked traditional food and I saw a **life style completely different from my own.** I also experienced some difficulties; hurricanes, flooding, eruptions and poverty. I will take those experiences with me in life and **try to be more grateful for being fortunate. Living in Sweden is in many ways very easy. PIA**

The educational settings differ from country to country. The school systems are different, the values are different etc.

In El Salvador for example the teacher reads out loud from a book and the students write it down, in Sweden that is how we did it a long time ago. Mostly it's a question of resources and traditions. In Sweden a student can interrupt the teacher if he/she wants to ask something, in India that wouldn't happen. In Sweden the teachers are more informal with the students than the teachers in Vietnam.

In Sweden the students have to take a big responsibility for their knowledge and education, in other countries the students are seen as a blank sheet of paper that needs to be filled. The size of the groups differs as well, in Sweden we have pretty small groups (**I thought I'd never say that, we are spoiled here in Sweden**), 20-35 students, in many other countries they can be almost twice the size. Of course that affects the teaching methods. PIA

I have learned that the word 'respect' when it comes to teacher-student relations means totally different things in Sweden compared to other

countries. In my point of view arguing with a teacher is a sign of interest, attention and critical thinking. In many countries that would be a total lack of respect. PIA

During this semester with the course Intercultural Teacher I have become aware of that an intercultural competence involves not only an ability to respect otherness, but also an awareness of your own culture. **It is in the meeting with another culture that my own culture becomes visible and I can learn something about my culture.** When returning from El Salvador I had learnt for example that as Swedes we think it is very important that the school and the society take their responsibility for children in crises and give them emotional support, whereas that might not be highlighted in the same way in other countries. Another understanding was that **although we claim to be individualistic in Sweden, we actually depend a lot on the State. I believe it is when people refuse to learn about their own culture in the encounter with another culture that prejudice is created.** To quote Dr Carol Davenport (20050915) 'Don't talk about other cultures if you're not aware of what is attached to your own.' KAL

Also I found the reading, reflecting and discussing one of my favourite novels; Brick Lane, most enjoyable and interesting. It is **from sharing the emotions around the end scenario of book that I have one of the nicest and most catching intercultural/personal memories.** Pooja and me were talking informally about the novel, both saying that it ended a bit sad and admitting that we both cried a bit at the end. The funny thing was that she cried for Chanu's sake when he left for Bangladesh without his family. I on the other hand cried for Nazneen's sake when she said goodbye to her lover, Karim. We really laughed out loud at this and then suddenly Per appeared and wondered what we found so amusing. As we told him he said that he had felt upset at about the same thing as me – but from Karim's point of view. This made us laugh again! MAR

I and my classmates had many opportunities to discuss many interesting topic like religion, environment, democracy, conflict solution, the role of women and so on. **I thought it was so helpful to know different opinions about one topic because this made me understand much more clearly about myself and others.** THAO

Studying with international students has also opened my eyes for many things. **I have read** about the poverty in Malawi, but **it wasn't until I sat down** with Thikale and Towera **and discussed the situation in their country that I understood** how bad the poverty is. I knew about the female situation in India but got it directly shown in class by Rahul and Pooja. I knew Vietnam was a communist republic and Binh and Thao showed me what respect for your country really is. Javier told us about the water problem in Spain, I had no idea earlier. PIA

Knowledge of interaction: individual and societal

When we met outside school ...everybody left their demands on formalities behind and the atmosphere got more open and relaxed. **What I have learnt both from the class and from El Salvador is that cultural enrichment always lies in the relationships that you create and what you learn from these rather than in places you visit. KAL**

- Insight regarding the ways in which culture affects language and communication

During the Mini Ethnography that we carried out just before our field studies, I and Thao from Vietnam went to the library's cafeteria for our observations. During these days I think that some intercultural competencies were getting better. **At first I felt it was difficult to collaborate with Thao and when I look back upon it, it must have been because we had very different ways of working together.** In the beginning we did every thing as I proposed because she did not come with any other suggestions. In the evening I thought that **maybe she was accustomed to another culture where she by politeness accepted what I said.** The day after our first observation I did not longer expect that she would contradict me if she wanted something in a different way. **After this we could easier work together, once we had found the culture differences and become aware of them. KAP**

Other cultural rules exist in our way of communicating and expressing ourselves. I have met some straightforward answers to questions this term that both made me smile and realize the differences. I have also been surprised when confronted with non-expected questions, understanding that the surprise stems from that I would not normally be asked the same question by a Swede. **But by being asked the question I can understand something new both about my own culture as about the culture of the person asking me the question. KAL.**

I have also learned that it is very difficult to express one self in English, there are always nuances in languages which often are important if one wants to express one self clear. Before when I have used English it has always been in a context where all in discussions are very familiar with the subject and its expressions. In this course the group was heterogeneous and we all had different skills and weaknesses. **I now better understand how difficult it must be for foreigners to make them selves understood in Sweden and I also understand that many of the misunderstandings and conflicts between foreigners and Swedes are in fact linguistic problems. PER**

*Skills**Ability to interpret and relate*

In the class we made a revelation about skin lotions that women use all over the world. We realized that depending on where you live it either is prepared to

make you look tanned or pale depending on the cultural definition of beauty in that area. When this was revealed I had the feeling that we, the female part of the class, from now on will be able to stand above these beauty ideals in some way being able to see the absurdness in the issue when the dark skinned want to look pale and the white skinned want to look tanned. Suddenly the question about beauty seems humoristic and not as serious as before. I mean although I am pale in Sweden and considered less beautiful because according to the Swedish beauty ideal I should look tanned, I am still beautiful in a Vietnamese or an Indian context.(!) I think a great advantage from my intercultural development, is exactly about this. **From now on I have much more experiences to compare with in my daily life and these relativise my own life and surrounding.** I am not stuck to a narrow point of view, believing for example that a tanned skin means beauty, but I have got the tools to broaden my perspective and see the bigger picture. I am sure similar revelations can be made in other more serious areas as an effect of **an intercultural dialogue which in its turn will give a greater possibility to impact our societies and break down existing lies.** KAL

Coming from different cultural backgrounds in our class this semester, I have noticed that like it is said in *The Silent Language*, **rules are made visible when they are broken.** In El Salvador for example people left the table when they had finished eating and did not wait for the others around the table to finish. Since I am used to that people leave the table when everybody have finished their meal the broken rule became visible to me, a rule I was not very aware of that I apply in a Swedish lunch or dinner context. KAL

Although it was a great strain on me I do not regret going to India but it would have been a completely different trip if I had gone as a younger woman with no children. This is one reason why I easily could identify myself with Pooja being without her daughter here in Sweden. This is one of the most exciting things to discover, that **two women that are each others opposites still can feel exactly the same way – sometimes. This is often the thing that fascinates me when I meet all kinds of people, how much we have in common and how similar we are although we live our lives in different ways.** MAR

People are not first and most different; **we are very similar, with the same needs and interest.** When you can see other in your self its easier to understand people's behaviour. People act very similar in similar situations but they live under different circumstances. PER

Metacognitive strategies to direct own learning

Looking at what I did in Jonkoping; I remind myself of good **ethnographic eyes through which I used to look at a new world** in four months and **also the eyes for having a new look at the familiar things in my home country.** BI

In conclusion I must say that **my intercultural ability has changed** during this course. Within the course **I have received tools for how I can step out of my own culture to evaluate why I am reacting as I do, as well as I have learned methods of evaluating other cultures.** KAP

The first time I went to church in El Salvador, I sat one hour waiting for the service to start. The second time I went there I arrived one hour late on purpose and at that time they were just about to start. I felt I had adapted quite well to the existing view of time in this particular church. Is that how I can sum up my intercultural development during the semester? Is the *intercultural competence* achieved by watching how people act and trying to imitate them? Stier calls this competence *culture-contents-competence* and it refers to the knowledge of a culture, but another part that also is very important is the *processual competence*, which includes the how-aspect of a culture where the interculturally interested person takes a more active role in understanding the specific culture. KAL

In addition, I learnt about Ethnographic Eyes. When practicing Note taking and Note making, I learnt how to observe things objectively and avoid using my meanings, beliefs to evaluate what I see. **Now, before giving my opinions about something, I often ask why it happens like that and do continued analyzing.** THAO

Attitudes

Attitude to relativise self and value other:

We talked about arranged marriages in India. One of our mates got married like that and said that it was the best way to do it because the parents were the ones who knew better what it was the best for their daughter or their son. I was shocked to hear that, it was really difficult for me to accept the fact that an educated woman thought that, but **I tried to think that she had been told all her life that an arranged marriage was the best and probably the only option. The kind of respect for the parents must be different as well.** In Malawi there were not arrange marriages but one point took my attention. It was common that men have lovers and their wives or girlfriends were aware of that, in a European country these situations means most of the times divorce or separation. **In Malawi it was not that easy for women.** JA

I was able for the whole month to observe classes at an upper secondary school. Honestly speaking, I have experienced quite a lot of new things, which were very different from what I had always thought a secondary school should be like. **The observations I made at this school made me to critically look back and evaluate** all the Malawian secondary schools systems, **sometimes I could appreciate the Malawian school system while other times I could appreciate the Swedish school system.** TIK

The important thing I learnt from the course Intercultural teacher is **accepting differences**. THAO

In meeting with the Salvadoran culture I have had to develop my *intercultural competence*, especially the *processual competencies*, for example when meeting with a lot of dictation in the schools or the fact that our host family had an employed housemaid. As a Swede I am not used neither to dictation nor employed housemaids. **My first reaction in both cases was feelings of judgement but fairly soon I realized that thinking in this way was not the intercultural way of dealing with these issues.** I had to try to see it with the Salvadoran's eyes and detect from my own culture. In my weekly reflections I can see how I step by step create an understanding for the employment of a housemaid and I realize that the problem enters the situation when entering it myself. **It is in my encounter with this reality and when the housemaid's service is offered to me, that the problem arises.** It was hard accepting the fact that she was going to do things for me that I could do and is used to doing myself. **After some time I could focus on the positive aspects and see her point of view.** She was lucky to have a job that she liked and where she was treated well. In other words **it is a development towards an intrapersonal, processual competence, where I can leave my own feelings behind, detect from my own culture and cope with an up-coming problem.** KAL

I think about myself as a pretty open minded person but in this course **I have come to realize that awareness of my own culture is something I can improve.** Seeing my life from the eyes of my class mates I have understood that it isn't as 'perfect' that I used to believe. PIA

I was afraid because I was going to be living with people I do not know. In addition to this, I read some books about Sweden which said that the Swedes are racists and **I thought that they will be segregating my friend and me because we were from Africa. Fortunately, things did not go as I expected.** TO

Throughout the course we have discussed gender questions and during my field studies I met another look upon women. The first time I talked with Pooja the woman student from India, we talked about arranged marriages. **From my point of view it was totally incomprehensible, but after that she described it for me several times I got to understand her arguments. It is when I put myself into her culture and listens to her values that I can comprehend how arranged marriages can be suitable.** She told me that she and her husband were responsible for their families as well as for them selves. Here in my surroundings my marriage is only a question for me and my spouse and that is why the question of arranged marriages is strange. KAP

By meeting many people and talking to amicable friends, **my view about the world has an obvious improvement.**

That was the first time I saw so many things new. A real western modern country with hard working people. They had a high awareness of themselves and their position in the society. Those were the students who always wanted to express their own ideas without any worry or fear. That was a school where teachers and students were equal and showed equality all the time. In fact, no one was higher in the society. I still remember the image of Hagabodaskolan's headmaster queued up for his lunch which we may never see in Vietnam or any other Asian countries. Those were the image of teachers and students went to class on time, the very scientific arrangements of everything, from the school's work, the materials, the ways of teaching, the ways of learning, the ways the contexts were handled to the ways the necessary formalities were simply complied. **Everything seemed to be better. It is true to some extent and people like to explain it with one reason: Sweden is a modern country with no war in more than 200 years.**

However, I think it differently. ---'Nothing is better; nothing is worse, just different!' In other words, they are quite different ways of doing the things throughout the history. No one should give such a judgment, why Vietnam, India or Malawi is so underdeveloped. It could become a big mistake in terms of intercultural. Looking deeply into my society with intercultural eyes or ethnographic eyes, what I am seeing is a rapid developing country which is waking up after a long time being in painful wars. ---Wearing a pairs of new glasses, **we see the familiar becomes strange.** Now I can see many new signs - --We are trying to make the things better. BI

I have learnt to appreciate other people's culture and religion because **at first, I thought my values and religion are perfect but I came to understand that even other people's values and religion are perfect.** TO

During the course **I have tried to view the world not only from my point of view but from the point of view of my mates** who had different cultures, religions, ways of life, thoughts and so on. **This does not mean that I am going to change my convictions but I think that know I can better understand people with different cultural backgrounds.** JA

For me it was good to see Arabic and Jewish cultures in their own countries. Here (=in Sweden) it is easy to conclude that they do not try enough to adjust to our society, but **after seeing these people in their social context I realised that they really are adjusting here in Sweden.** It was also an eye-opener for me that **I should practice in letting go of my culture so that others could more easily feel at home.** KAP

Since we were six students representing Sweden, a lot of the time was spent on **discussing Swedish cultures and habits. This was a help to learn how to take a step back to look upon my own culture with the eyes of a foreigner.** KAP

Positive disposition towards learning intercultural competence

I believe that the **development that I and my fellow students have gone through would not have been possible without what Byram (2001) calls an *intercultural attitude*** which can be defined as an ability to decentre from one's own beliefs and take the perspective of a person from another culture. We all entered this course with open minds, willing to learn about other cultures and step by step achieve an *intercultural competence*. Without an open attitude an *intercultural competence* could never be achieved. KAL

We learn to know each other, to be sympathetic with each other, to show respect to all, no matter what kinds of people we are, white, yellow or black, male or female, religions and ages, above all, we learn to make a peaceful world. **The intercultural teachers do not stop there; we also have a mission to teach our students to be like that.** Be intercultural, learn from each other with respect and objective attitudes. ---**It is a long life journey and it is a must for all intercultural teachers to work out and learn the new things on that way.** BI

I think that the more fruitful aspect of the course has been the multicultural composition of the group. How **we share our different experiences.** JA

It was ok to meet people from all over the world but on the other hand **I was aware that I was missing the contact with Sweden and the Swedes.** My main link with Sweden was my Swedish classmates and during the field studies the teachers in the school. However **I tried to stay with Swedish people every time I had the opportunity.** JA

Even though I have developed my *intercultural competence* during this semester I would not say I am finished, **the process has just started** and will probably not be completed but continue to develop. As students of this *Intercultural Teacher* course we might not specifically have changed our opinions, but **we have kept our minds open to take in new impressions and opinions** that have developed and broadened our *intercultural competence*. KAL

Intercultural understanding is all about knowledge and respect. As Banks says, individuals should be treated and treat one another as equal citizens, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race or religion. Appreciation, understanding, and evaluation are three capacities of democratic citizenship that multicultural education can and should cultivate. Many groups in many societies do not accept the principle of civic equality. **I realize that I can't change the world, but I can change myself. If I treat everybody the way I want to be treated I can make at least a little difference.** PIA

In a wider perspective intercultural education **is a way of realizing human rights.** PIA

To be a good intercultural teacher I have to be open towards, curious about and tolerant of other people's behaviours, beliefs and values. **But it is also of great importance that I am aware of my own behaviour, beliefs and values.** PIA

General disposition characterised by a critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one's own

One thing that I am not going to revalue is when a culture oppresses someone of a different gender or race. I have grown up with the ideas that women are as valuable as men, and even if I would help immigrants to get more accustomed to Sweden if I accepted their way of thinking, I think it is more important to show that all beings are equal. **But still, I have to try to understand how and why some cultures values are as they are. I did also see that I must be aware of the fact that I as Christian can influence my relations towards others. For people who do not share the same believes it can be difficult to live with me since I have strong opinions on certain aspects. These opinions are evidential truth for me, but that is not what everyone believes. But with this consciousness I hope that I can prevent misunderstandings.** I have learned that if I explain why I react as I do, it creates a greater understanding and respect for my beliefs and that goes for the opposite as well (if someone explains their actions for me). KAP

I understand that for many people religion and national identity are important and I accept it as I accept most of opinions. **To be intercultural is for me to respect all individuals but not always agree with other. On the contrary; I think it's better to take part, have an own opinion, and of course be prepared to change opinion in interaction with other opinions.** Silence and objectivity doesn't develop human understanding but to act according to ones conscience with mutual respect with other opinions creates respect and understanding. In Palestine I thought a lot of what Sartre called the individual responsibility. I think its our duty to do what we can do and what we think are right, if we try to escape from the reality and close our eyes for what happened around us we will suffer from agony. And it is in this process we learn from other and develop intercultural competence. PER

Discussion

How do we know that the student has improved her/his intercultural competence?

'What are the ways we can discover whether people have become IC - questions of evaluation and assessment' Mike Byram asks. I think the uncertainty and lack of good methods about these matters are key issues discussing why teaching intercultural competence in practice is so difficult. The culture-content competencies, the know aspects of a particular culture or culture in general (Stier, 2002), are not problematic in this respect. However IC is to a great extent a process where the student develops knowledge, skills and attitudes. You cannot define the development of processual competencies (ibid.) by showing evident measurable results. In this course we have used students' reflections as a kind of self-assessment portfolio. Next time we must make sure

that the skills of self-reflection are more thoroughly dealt with at the course start so even students who are not familiar with the theories behind it and with the methods could be better trained to reflect in practice.

Is it possible to become intercultural by a course?

The data of the study tell us that at least ten of the twelve students consider themselves to be more intercultural competent after the course. Their reflections tell us that they are right. Two of the students say that the course has not changed them:

There is a Swedish mode of expression, 'you can't learn an old dog to sit', and maybe this phrase expresses my intercultural journey. I haven't changed my mind that much and haven't received much new thoughts but I have developed and refined my old thoughts PER.

When I read my past reflections it strikes me that they mostly deal with the frustrations made by not gaining the professional teaching knowledge I had expected or hoped for. It is therefore very difficult to write a meta cognition of what I have professionally learnt as I feel that I have mainly had my previously established thoughts and feelings confirmed and further cemented. This is a disappointment to me as I had hoped to develop myself somehow interculturally, both on a professional and a personal level. Not in the way of a radical personality change, it's unfortunately too late for that...But at least to have one or two of my many personal opinions challenged, twisted around and to be forced to observe them closer or in a different light. I had been looking forward to discuss and investigate varieties of professional teaching ideas and cultural consequences from using some different methodical approaches. I am sorry to say that I still have no clue to what degree I am intercultural competent or not, and I am very doubtful if I am better qualified to be an intercultural teacher today than what I was in August.

Reading and reflecting over the general description of the course, my final thought is that there are never any built in automatics that a course or a classroom is to become intercultural simply by the students/pupils being from different cultures. This is a classic trap to walk into!

Did we really create an intercultural learning environment? MAR

These two students are the oldest ones, in their late thirties, and the most experienced students when it comes to living abroad, voluntary work and travelling. Does this mean that they are so interculturally competent already that they have nothing new to learn or does it mean that our course could not meet their high expectations because they needed 'more' than the others? Are there levels of intercultural competence towards an ongoing and never ending development or are there just two stages of being intercultural - incompetent and competent?

Can intercultural competence be taught?

No, I think it can only be learnt. How this happens has no general answer but in this case study I have tried to present how it may happen.

Surely the intercultural learning environment and the deliberate use of self-reflections have supported the students' process of developing 'intercultural competence. The latter has been a means to decentre and look back upon your own reactions. For this Pingpong has been a very useful medium. The use of Pingpong will be further developed in the next course. Weekly reflections and all course papers could be available for common reading within the group with specific tasks to add comments to peers and have a public discussion. More organized oral discussions in small groups could be arranged to create more frequent interactional learning opportunities.

Learning happens during interaction between people. Research has shown that to maximise the conditions for lasting learning you need to be emotionally involved to a certain degree and in a semi relaxed state of mind. This might be difficult to achieve in a traditional educational setting; and probably the reason why most of the really important learning actually takes place outside the classrooms. This is true also when I look back at the past months spent at the course Intercultural Teacher. It is during the social moments like lunch breaks and coffee drinking that I have learned the most, not during the lectures. MAR

Many of the students say that they learnt so much outside the lecture room. Then, could they have done just as well without a course? No, with no course there would not have been an 'outside'. I feel convinced that the combination of formal education (and training), experiential learning in an unfamiliar society combined with continuous structured reflections and organized informal discussions in peer groups has a good potential when it comes to developing intercultural competence.

I must say the whole semester has been an authentic experience, not an academic one only based on literature, but an intercultural course experienced in real life and with authentic actors. It has been an encounter between people, eye to eye and in a natural way. I am glad to be able to draw that conclusion. KAL

Having had the privilege to teach this course I have learnt a lot about our students, about myself and about my profession. Theories on learning by self-reflection and by interaction must more deliberately be related to theories on intercultural competence next time we give the course. By now I realise more clearly that intercultural education as all education is highly dependent on intrapersonal and interpersonal communication which has to be trained.

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