Intercultural Educational Practices: Opening Paths for Dialogue

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Abstract: The present article offers an overview of the concept of 'othering' from the field of intercultural and postcolonial theories, and discusses empirical processes of 'othering' through a small 'experiment' with Master students in journalism, media and communication from Bangladesh and Nepal at Dhaka University in November 2010. The issue of concern is how socio-cultural diversity and societal integration exist in a relationship of greater or lesser tension, depending on the degree of reflexivity and flexibility of collective identities. The article is based upon a small qualitative research study that explored the awareness of group identity in intercultural communication. The article reveals how students responded to and made sense of constructed 'imagined communities' in the broader context of intercultural communication.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, cross-cultural education, othering processes, collective identities.

1. Introduction

Since 2008, 48 students and a number of teachers from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Norway have participated in two Masters Programs in Journalism, Media and Communication at Dhaka University in Bangladesh, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). One explicit aim of the program is to use the international network to provide students and teachers with cross-cultural learning and research opportunities.

The mixture of nationalities and backgrounds of both students and teachers make discussions around interculturality highly relevant. It is commonly argued that the study of intercultural communication tries to answer the question, "How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?" (e.g. Bennett, 1998; Fielding, 1996). Fielding (1996) describes fundamental patterns of cultural differences, and presents a long list of barriers to effective intercultural communication amongst learners, among them defensiveness, different world views, different values and beliefs, prejudices, different languages, different ways of using and interpreting non-verbal codes, different ways of constructing messages, unequal power, and the failure to allow for individual cultural differences within a group. These descriptions stress some of the frequent causes of intercultural communication challenges in a multicultural learning environment. As students and teachers enter into multicultural cooperation, they are often faced with generalized differences. Therefore, in the words of Singh and Rampersad, "learners need to identify these problems and realize how their culture may be shaping their own reactions. It is important for them to see the world from others' points of view." (2010, p. 4).

The present article is an attempt to explore this field further and to get more insight into

the challenges and possibilities of an intercultural learning setting. It is guided by an objective of building a bridge between theoretical concepts and the students' daily life. Intercultural learning is thus a link to the purpose of this article, namely to reveal the students' awareness of group identity in intercultural communication. In this process several interlinked questions geared towards understanding the meaning-making processes in an intercultural learning process were asked:

- How can we as participants in a multicultural setting of learning, teaching and exchange, in a practical manner, open our eyes for challenges such a learning environment involves?
- How do university students studying media and journalism at MA-level perceive an experimental project as a means of learning about intercultural communication?
- How do we perceive 'us' and the 'other' on a general basis?
- Is it possible to create a larger understanding of, and awareness around, 'othering' attitudes and behavior towards 'in-group' and 'out-group' members?

2. Methodology and Materials

The aim of the study is to grasp some central meaning making processes in an intercultural learning process, while making sense of some central terms within the field of postcolonial theories, such as Orientalism, stereotyping, labeling and 'othering'. The project is rooted in a concern about how, from a pedagogical point of view, we may build a bridge between the theoretical concepts related to ethnocentrism and 'othering' on the one hand, and actual experiences of students on the other. Hence this article is an attempt to bring together discursive and spatial processes as we often witness them in media and interpersonal communication, and discuss how they are grounded in rather simple communication processes of identity and belonging. The project finds its inspiration in approaches referred to as 'collaborative action research into practice' (Feldman, 1999). Within such a framework, teachers are being encouraged to engage in self-reflective inquiry as part of their pedagogical development. Both experimental and global learning has been associated with reflection (Gibson, Rimmington & Landwehr-Brown, 2008, p. 16), characterised as a critical process in sensemaking when individuals exploit their own experiences as a source of knowledge (Freire, 1970). Therefore, this article is mainly a descriptive-explanatory attempt to make meaning of, and perhaps relate more closely to, some central concepts in intercultural and post-colonial theories. To do this, a form of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was adopted. Grounded theory derived from symbolic interactionism, which purports that meaning is understood and negotiated via social interaction (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). Different versions of grounded theory have been used extensively in intercultural contexts (Sheridan & Storch, 2009). Following the participants' main concern and how they continually try to make meaning out of it, is perceived as core, hence the researcher's main task is to constantly ask the question – What is going on? Grounded theory allows the researcher to access the "lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings" of participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 10) and aims to discover a theory or explanatory framework by examining concepts and their properties grounded in the

data (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007, p.1373). In short, grounded theory makes it possible for us to know "what is going on" or happening "in or around an event" (Morse, et al. 2008, pp.13-14).

The event in question here, was a theoretical classroom discussion of post-colonial theories and 'othering', and a follow up 'experiment' (classroom activity) among the 25 Master students at the NOMA programme in journalism and media studies, and myself, their teacher. The 'experiment' involved the introduction of a test called Diversity Icebreaker (DI). The DI was developed as a psychological test, it exists in 19 languages and is often used as a tool in communication training and team development processes[1].

The DI tool consists of 14 questions, each with three alternative answers. An example: Question 4:

- I want to know what possibilities will open up in the future.
- I want to know how ideas can be applied in a useful and practical manner.
- I want to know how suggestions affect us as people.

The respondent divides six ticks across each question, so that one ranks the statements as to how well they fit. After having answered the 14 questions of the self-scoring questionnaire individually, the respondent gets to measure the answers against a key, and will find that she is most dominant red, blue or green. The colour each person belongs to is believed to be anchored in each individual's personality and preferences for communication. The creators of the test describe a blue preference to be characteristic of people who are often:

cautious, concrete, conscientious, constructive, detail-oriented, dutiful, effective, fact-oriented, focused, grounded, honest, logical, loyal, organised, practical, precise, rational, self-disciplined, solution-oriented, systematic, thorough, tidy

a red preference is characteristic of people who are often:

considerate, easygoing, emotionally driven, empathetic, engaged, harmonious, impulsive, inclusive, integrative, open, outgoing, positive reassuring, responsive, sensitive, sociable, spontaneous, tolerant, understanding, warm

a green preference is characteristic of people who are often:

alternative, broad-minded, creative, courageous, energetic, funny, imaginative, impatient, impulsive, independent, individualistic, innovative, ingenious, inspiring, inventing, philosophical, playful, pondering, provocative, reflective, self-assured, untraditional, visionary

The test's strength is that the answers to the test are also formed by the context in the

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[1] For more detailed information see http://www.diversityicebreaker.com

way that the students themselves were to make the definitions of each group after they were constructed, as we will see in the following. The creators of the DI test explain how "in seminars we experienced that the test used in special ways could generate unique possibilities for creating a climate of psychological safety and openness, where participants could share thoughts about themselves and others, with laughter and self irony (Ekelund & Rydningen, 2010, p. 5). The author of this article came across the DI test somewhat accidentally and had tried it at a few occasions as a communication tool in cooperation with Norwegian students of media and communication in Oslo, but never in a more intercultural communication setting such as in the Dhaka classroom.

The discussions here hence focus on the micro-sociological perspective of an intercultural classroom setting. A central method is qualitative observation. The project qualitatively analyses emergent themes during the work with the test, and in the students' reflective discussions during and shortly after the experiment. Furthermore, short, semi-structured interviews were conducted among all students and transcribed verbatim at the end of the experiment, in order to provide the students an opportunity to express their thoughts regarding the process, structure, interpersonal interaction and general experiences and feelings. Some of the questions posed were:

- Please describe your experience of the session.
- How well did the experiment enlighten the concepts of stereotyping and othering?
- What do you believe challenged communication in and between the groups, and what worked well?

In the following, there will be a closer look into how the process evolved, but first there will be a presentation of some of the central concepts of the theoretical framework that steers much of the discussion here, namely post-colonial theories and intercultural communication.

3. We and the Other

The conceptual pair of 'We and the Other', derived originally from G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) and has subsequently often been used within the framework of post-colonial and feminist thinking (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1993; hooks, 1992). Edward Said's most influential book *Orientalism* (1978) and theory of Orientalism offers a correction of the history of the Middle East, which was drawn and imposed by the West. The line of reasoning shows how European writers and historians throughout centuries created a perception of the Orient as the mirror image of the Occident. The Orient was constructed as being backward, irrational and emotionally guided, in contrast to the modernity and rationality of the West. Increasingly, the Orient has come to be seen more than a geographical denomination, and first of all as a linguistic and symbolic concept. Standing out as one of the most persuasive books within the postcolonial tradition, *Orientalism'*s proposed relation between 'the self' and 'the other' is central to the work. Othering may produce and stabilize ideas about difference, dominance and positioning.

According to Stuart Hall, our own identity is to a large degree created precisely in

comparison with others, through meeting with people and contexts we define as "different" (Hall, 1997). Hall draws four arguments about how we perceive difference:

- **The linguistic argument** of Ferdinand de Saussure: Difference is central to make sense of things. We make sense of 'black' by comparing it to 'white' and so on. Yet, this manner of thinking stresses the opposites – there is a range of shades between black and white for instance.
- **The dialogic argument** of Mikhail Bakhtin: Difference is core to understanding as from a cultural and intercultural perspective, dialogic interrelations are a viewing of each culture from the standpoint of another.
- **The anthropological argument** carried forward by Paul DuGay and Stuart Hall as well as by Mary Douglas. Each culture gives meaning by classifying things. Classification is seen as an ordering principle according to which one decides what is similar or different.
- **The psychoanalytical argument** of Sigmund Freud. The 'other' different from the self is central to how we form our identities.

The arguments, Hall claims, influence the general framework through which we come to think of difference. Or in the words of Sarah Corona Berkin "The existence of the Other is an indispensable resource for man's own consciousness of himself and his culture" (2011, p. 1). From many different perspectives, categorising, classifying, and perhaps even stereotyping, is a way of making sense of the world around us. It is when different values are attached to the labels we put on people in a structural manner, that these processes become seriously problematic. During the colonial period for instance, difference was used as a reason for oppression, subjugation and colonisation.

Ever since Rudyard Kipling wrote the poem '*White Man's Burden*' in 1899 to legitimate imperialism and the colonial project, the stereotyped African as "Half devil – half child" has been a recurring theme in representations of the Other.

Take up the white man's burden
Send forth the best ye breed
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new-caught sullen peoples
Half devil and half child
(Kipling 1899)

Africans were presented either as naive child-like characters in need of help from the north, or as savage, wild and violent figures. Then as now, the Other was labeled as different from the norm, ascribing to the first characteristics in opposition to the norm, such as in this table of binary opposition:

Us	Other
Civilised	Wild
Adult or parent-figure	Child-like
Culture	Nature
Rational	Irrational
Free	Dependent

Following Simone de Beauvoir (1949) *women* are the Other, the sex defined by men and patriarchy as not male, and consequently they are less than fully human. In the colonial situation the colonised woman would hence be defined by a double colonialisation, both by patriarchy and colonialism, and may be added to the table:

Male	Female

Also in our contemporary context, these processes of differentiation may be used for a particular purpose, as Tehranian argues:

> In one sense both government and commercial media have their own interests in creating images of 'self' and 'other'– to command allegiance, and to sell products and services, respectively. The two systems thus tend to exacerbate international tensions by dichotomizing, dramatizing, and demonizing "them" against "us" (Tehranian, 2002, cited in Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005, p. 19).

Studies of media representations (e.g., Simonsen & Eide, 2007) found that *who* constituted 'the other' in a specific society's media was object to change over the years, cultural identities are not permanently fixed, but undergo constant transformations, as reflected by Stuart Hall:

> Cultural identity… [i]s a matter of "becoming" as well as of " being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation (Hall, 1994, p. 394).

Jésus Martìn Barbero (2011) argues that today, the new Other, the exiles and the immigrants continue to be excluded in the new colonisation created by globalisation. 'Insiders' and 'outsiders' to social issues is a concept that is an integral part of participatory action and nation-states are not the only ones to possess differentiated identities and cultures. As Daniel Mato (2011) reminds us, it is also possible to observe the development of identity production processes at a much smaller scale. Mato argues that in order to study social participation from the perspective of intercultural communication "…it is necessary to observe on a microscale the *processes* of production, circulation, appropriation, reconstruction, and/or transformations of the formulations of meaning that occur in relations between the stakeholders involved" (2011, p. 19). The classroom identity formations studied here, might be seen as such a microscale observation of processes of identity creation and meaning making.

4. Bridging Theories and Practices

On November 4th 2010, the topic of my morning lecture at the NOMA Regional Master Programme (RMP) in Journalism, Media and Communication at Dhaka University was postcolonial theories. The concepts of Orientalism, stereotyping, labeling and 'othering' in the media were central. The students from Bangladesh and Nepal were engaged and interested, and keenly participated in the discussions. After lunch break on the same day, we returned to the classroom and a new topic was introduced: communication tools and the Diversity Icebreaker (DI) test. In amazingly short time the classroom became a living example of creating and negotiating the concepts of 'Us' and the 'Others' in a manner that literally speaking made the theories we had discussed earlier come alive.

In the RMP at Dhaka University, the students had known each other for a couple of months when the DI test was carried out. The students come from both Bangladesh and Nepal, and the communication between them was intercultural in the sense that it involved face-to-face communication between people from different national cultures. There are many potential binary oppositions in the RMP group: Nepali versus Bangladeshi, Hindu versus Muslim (which mainly, but not totally followed the Nepal versus Bangladesh dividing line), Male versus Female, Nepalese speaking versus Bangla speaking, some at home, others visiting a foreign country, some younger and some more senior, and probably some class and even caste differences too (even though that was harder for me to detect, and all the students in one way belong to the 'elite' just by being MA students at the prestigious Dhaka University, and also having been 'hand picked' for a scholarship programme). Cultural distance is often considered to be larger when people speak different languages, or have different social structures, religion, and standard of living. I had been lecturing the group for one intensive week before the test was carried out and also spent time with them in more social settings, e.g. on a day trip out of town. My impression was that the main divisive line in the group was the nationality/language one, and then secondly, the gender one.

The students answered the self-scoring questionnaire individually. After ranking three different statements on the 14 different topics, they got a score indicating whether they were mainly a blue, red or green person. Then the class was divided according to those groups; the red and the blue groups were the largest with 10 members each, whereas the green group had 5 members. All the groups were multicultural in the manner that they consisted of both Nepali and Bangladeshi students, Hindus and Muslims as well as male and female.

In the manual to the DI test the different colours' characteristics are described in the following manner:

People with strong **blue** preference are concerned with being concrete and practical. They like to calculate and work towards solutions, in a systematic manner. They want things to be useful and serve a purpose. The aim of communication is to solve tasks in a precise way. They are often seen as organised, focused, rational and without unnecessary emotional outbursts or a need to stand out in social contexts.

People with a strong **red** preference enjoy spending time with other people. They are

often described as warm and easy-going with the ability to create security and positive feelings among people. They consider the emotional part to be more important than action and concrete ideas. They appear socially responsible at the same time as they are concerned with having respect for each individual person.

People with a strong **green** preference are easily triggered by new ideas and the possibility of being able to do things differently. Unusual and untraditional ideas and solutions set their enthusiasm on fire. They enjoy looking deeply into a question or issue at the same time as they look for the overall picture and new angles from which to tackle their task. They tend to make their mark quickly often with thoughts and ideas that can dominate and influence what to focus on later. (Ekelund & Rydningen, 2010, pp. 7-9).

The above descriptions were not given the students at this stage; rather, the students were immediately asked to define themselves and the other groups. For instance the blue group was asked: – What characterises you as a group, what characterises the people in the red group and what characterise the people in the green group? This process took place in the same classroom – the different groups were situated in three different areas, but could watch the other groups and hear them discuss and laugh.

the blue group   the red group   the green group

The first part of characterising the in-group went rather quickly and it was quite striking to see how close the different groups' descriptions of themselves were to the DI manual's cited above. Then the groups started to describe the other colours. In order to speed up the process of creating 'out-groups', I walked between the groups and said, for instance, to the red group: "the blue group is not all that polite when it comes to describing you, so feel free to go ahead…" Quite quickly the groups were more outspoken in their labelling of the others. This might be seen in light of the above mentioned anthropological argument about how we perceive difference, where classification is considered central in the creation of meaning. All the three groups were mixed in terms of languages, nationality, religion and gender. However, the wide

range of differences within the groups was overshadowed by the new group identities in the DI experiment, which were tangible only after a few minutes.

5. Reshaping Theoretical Learning through Dialogue and Experience

The three groups were then asked to make a communication strategy specifically tailored to the two other groups. The answers further developed on how the groups described each other.

> *Blue group about the green:*
> Greens are clever, there is a need to motivate them, address them as the leaders and tell them to disseminate the message and they will be inspired, they will believe they are in power, influence their social awareness, they are innovative and humorous, give them the facts and they will serve as spokespersons.

> *Red group about the green*:
> They are the mastering group, sometimes a bit arrogant, general messages don't affect them, you have to tailor the messages specifically, they are high goal-oriented persons, imaginative.

> *Green about the blue:*
> They need to the point and very clear-cut communication, no nonsense. They are concerned about their money, 'buy one, get one free' would work well as a commercial strategy.

> *Red group about the blue:*
> They need to-the-point messages, very practical, use mathematical metaphors, rather than philosophy and language. The blues don't like to waste their time, they feel a need to see the coherence and larger picture.

> *Green group about the red*:
> They need to be addressed by a polite approach that is taking care of their feelings. They love new friends and will gradually get used to new ideas, but it takes time.

> *Blue group about the red:*
> They need an interpersonal form of communication to be involved, messages can be entertaining and repetitive, they need to feel secure and within their comfort zone, traditional mindset.

Many of the descriptions of the other groups, took the in-group, 'us' as the norm and gave the characteristics of the 'other' groups with that norm as a starting point. The process developed as a progressively spiraling dialogue between fragments of information that informed the definition process, which again informed the focus of the next level of discussion. It was highly interesting to observe how the real sense of belonging to the in-group increased when I asked

the groups to define the others, and how the in-group feeling intensified within each group when being labeled by the others. This is related to the dialogic argument of Bakhtin seen above, and its relational dialectics, which emphasizes communication as a social, or joint, venture, between interlocutors. Hence, both the positive differentiation of the in-group, and the (mainly) kind mocking of the out-groups had a group identity-forming effect. Ultimately, the resulting expectations regarding the behaviour of the respective other influenced the interpretation of the actions of that other, as when the blue group commented on the red: "they always talk a lot and often in a quite chaotic manner" and the red groups responded in exactly such a manner. Following Bakhtin, Baxter (2004, p. 121) stresses how "contradictions are not internal cognitive dilemmas located in the individual mind, that, in turn serve as the basis of the individual's communication". Instead Baxter argues, "contradictions are located in the relationship between parties, produced and reproduced through the parties' joint communicative activity".

The cases illustrated in a practical way how different interpretations of specific challenges are confronted and also may correspond to the diverse "cultures", "worldviews", "rationalities" or "forms of common sense" (Mato, 2011) of individuals that interconnect precisely because of these issues. Emotional tensions between the three groups were witnessed as prejudice, and particular social dynamics unfolded. Hence persons who would not necessarily be 'allies' in ordinary life were found banded together through their involvement in processes of othering as well as creating the parameters of their own colour group. The processes clearly transcended the traditional lines of division (nationality, language, gender, religion) that characterized and sometimes separated the other groups in the class. The process in many ways echoed the words of Young Yun Kim, describing how the relational facets of collectivism are

> …depicted by porous boundaries between in-group members that allow thoughts, ideas, and emotions to flow freely. It focuses on the relationship shared by in-group members (Kim, 1994, p.34).

In terms of gender the groups were quite equal. The red group consisted of five female and five male members, the green group of two female and three male members, and the blue group of five female and five male members. It was interesting to witness how gender differences appeared in the red, but not in the blue and green groups. In the red group only the men did the talking in the plenary session; in the two other groups, both sexes talked. However, in the red group at least two persons were talking at the same time all the time. These differences might be accidental, but it was interesting to witness that the RMP students described that they conceived the characteristics of the red group to be closer to what would be considered as traditional values in both Bengali and Nepalese culture, and that in these cultures women traditionally would talk less than men in public.

When the discussions in the classroom had continued for a while, and the relationship between the groups was a bit tense, although there was a lot of laughter too, the discussions were brought to an end. In the spirit of the grounded theory framework, described above, I asked the students: – What is going on? – What processes are we actually witnessing here? When the students then realised that these were exactly the processes of creating 'we' and the 'other' that we had discussed theoretically in relation to post-colonial theories earlier the same

day, there was a general feeling of excitement in the classroom, and several of the students exclaimed "– Oh No! "

6. Talking about it

The DI exercise provided an opportunity to see othering processes develop and for the students to recognise how easily we all adapt to them. After the first surprise it gave the class an occasion to collectively continue to reflect upon processes of stereotyping, othering and cross cultural communication. The next phase of the small 'experiment' was hence a common reflection on how processes of categorizing ideally should work both diversifying and integrating, as all the groups would possess potential resources for the common good, and most of the students agreed that an ideal group in most cases would consist of people from all three colour groups. It was interesting to notice how the students in their collective reflections touched upon the potential to liberate oneself from old collective definitions through creating new, echoing Ekelund, Davcheva and Iversen (2009).

In the interviews all the students were positive to having used the DI as part of the classes on Orientalism, othering and stereotyping. Some emphasized that they really enjoyed the creative part of the process where defining the groups was a central element. Several described the exercise as a collaborative learning process for everybody involved. Several students also expressed how they had been surprised when they apprehended that the exercise could be seen as a process of othering in real life. The relationship between the students' comprehension of the theoretical concept of othering, and the experiences from the empirical learning process was striking. When they eventually realised what kind of processes they had been part of, also the theoretical concepts got new meaning. "This is one of the strongest feelings of understanding I've ever been through", one of the female students from Nepal said in interview. One of the male students from Bangladesh said " I am more of a practical person, and I have never liked theory much. The session opened my eyes for how theory and real life are related to each other. It was a real 'aha! experience' !"

In the interviews, some expressed an increased sensitivity to the differences in the RMP student group too. A male student from Bangladesh said : "Up until now there have been some dividing lines in the class. The Nepali students have mostly been sticking to themselves，and so have we. I think we are more aware and perhaps more ready to change this now."

One of the male students from Nepal said in interview: "What a learning experience! I will never forget!" The same student had been crying "— Oh, No!" when the excersise was over，and he realised what processes had taken place through the exercise. A female student from Bangladesh said: "We felt taken by surprise when we realised how quickly the group feeling was created", and some expressed that they felt somewhat " 'ashamed' of their own othering reactions" through the exercise. Thus, it was seen as highly important to talk thoroughly about the processes that had taken place immediately after the end of the exercise.

7. Intersectionality and Producing Sameness and Otherness

Another interesting line of discussion following from this can be linked to the concept of

'intersectionality', which was firstly coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and which has been expanded on since then by other scholars (Orgeret, 2010). Intersectionality may be defined as a theory to analyze how social and cultural categories intertwine (Knudsen, 2006). The word intersection literally means that one line cuts through another. Mostly used within the field of gender studies so far, the framework of intersectionality suggests that power structures based on gender, race, ethnicity, political orientation, class and the like do not function independently of one another, but must be understood together. The DI experience was fruitful in illustrating how an individual in different social settings, and at least for a period of time, may emphasize one part of a multifaceted identity more than others.

The experience with the Bangladeshi and Nepali students emphasised the argument that dimensions of culture and the dimensions in the Diversity Icebreaker have something in common:

> Diversity Icebreaker categories are partly unconscious, they are created by language, they are used to constitute groups that lead to intergroup dynamics and prejudices, people have emotions related to these categories and at the end they often are tightly intertwined with identity. And so are cultural descriptions and dimensions, too. For this reason the Diversity Icebreaker seminar has huge similarities to cultural dimensions. Both types of diversity have good communication as important part of overcoming the challenges.

Among the abundance of possibilities for creating identity, the DI tool proved to be an effective producer of both sameness and otherness, and of highly effective discursive and spatial processes. Combined with grounded theory, as part of teaching postcolonial theories on othering and Orientalism, the tool developed more situated, inclusive understandings of identity. It also provided a good opportunity to see these processes develop and recognize how easily we adapt to 'imagined communities'. In discussions of intercultural communication we often see how different cultural identities influence role expectations, perceptions and intercultural interaction. That elements of cultural belonging can be overshadowed by other kinds of group identity constituting a new culture (of 'blue', 'red' and 'green' values) at least for a certain period of time, became clear here.

> The diversity of labels and multiplicity of meanings behind labels should not be taken as a reason for withdrawal from intercultural interactions. On the contrary, they are all the more reasons why such interactions are necessary. Only through engaging the other, we can begin to examine our assumptions and appreciate the complexity and many forms of identity (Kinefuchi 2009, p. 114)

The practice of intercultural communication is as old as humankind, coming into existence the first time people from different tribal cultures encountered one another and tried to communicate (Samovar et al., 2009). Hence intercultural communication is nothing new even though the processes of globalization have facilitated increased contact among cultures. Globalization may be described as "a seemingly unstoppable process that brings each of us into

greater contact with the rest of the word and gives our daily life an increasingly international orientation" (Samovar et al., 2009, p. 6). Increased international cooperation, economic interdependencies, travels, immigration, studies and, as a result, cross-cultural friendship, working relationships, intercultural marriages continue to rise. A development towards an increasingly multicultural 'global village' clearly requires new communication skills. An awareness of how social and cultural categories intertwine and evolve both inside and outside the classroom is believed to be central to such knowledge.

8. Conclusion

This article has through a small "empirical" experiment exemplified how the construction of one's own identity as part of a group identity and collective self-understanding, invariably goes along with the construction of ideas about the other. In other words, there is no inclusion without a certain form of exclusion.

In examining collective identity structures and their constructors, and clarifying the conditions under which certain forms of group identity may exercise an integrating as well as a separating effect, this article also stresses that openness around these processes may promote a feeling of confidence where people are less afraid of sharing beliefs and preconceptions. Although most identities naturally tend toward stability, they are never static. Their changing character is grounded in the fact that identity is never a finished product, to be called upon when required, but needs to be constantly negotiated. Construction of identity also consists of selective phenomena. Identity is seen as multi-layered, we move in and out of different roles as the above experiment showed, but some identities are more consequential than others. Although intercultural differences can be reduced, they can hardly be removed. Furthermore, some of the group commonalities are important and necessary as they promote the feeling that we belong to as human beings.

Kevin Avruch and Peter Black (1993) argue that one's own culture provides the "lens" through which we view the world, the "logic" by which we order it and the "grammar" by which it makes sense. The experiment with the DI test certainly did not change the students' cultural lens for good, but for a little while it provided them with other logics and grammars than the usual ones, and hence made them all more aware of the lens that we usually take for granted, that we tend to consider 'normal' and often even link to 'common sense'. This awareness is core. In an article on communication challenges in a multicultural learning environment in South Africa, Penny Singh and Renitha Rampersad (2010) forcefully argue that developing intercultural competence includes self-reflection.

The understandings from the Dhaka experiment clearly show the need to be aware how to interact with people with respect across differences, whether these differences are more or less 'constructed' based on individual traits of personality such as in the example here, or based on more broadly shared cultural values and traditions. Showing maturity of thought and action in dealing with other people is core. Through awareness of intercultural differences, for instance, by setting them up as a mirror such as in the example discussed here, many communication problems could probably be avoided.

This article has contended that empirical processes, helped forward by tools such as

the Diversity Icebreaker and grounded theory, may generate awareness of how processes of collective identity are created and negotiated. It is believed that many problems can be solved or avoided through an awareness of the components of intercultural communication, and how binary oppositions of us and the other are created. It is an urgent task to investigate the collective identity structures observed within societies at many levels, and the role played by socialization authorities, such as education institutions, in processes of integration. Further research is needed, but programmes such as the DI are believed to have great potential in order to address some complex social problems and for us to comprehend the "microprocesses of production and negotiation of meaning that take place in the concrete experiences of participation" (Mato, 2011, p.18). The awareness raising further offers a fruitful assistance for better communication in a multicultural or culturally diverse higher education context. It echoes some of the ideas of the 'engaged pedagogy' school (e.g., hooks, 2003; Freire, 1995), believing in proposing ways for students to emancipate themselves as they both define and negotiate the labels in question and learn about each others' lived realities. In response to Samuel Huntington's proposition that the world would be divided by the clash of civilisations (1993), Tu Weiming stated that "civilisations do not clash, only ignorance does" (2006, p.12). Making people aware of processes that cultivate intercultural awareness and fight ignorance seem to be a good way ahead in a world where perceived binary oppositions between Us and the Other frequently result in violent conflicts.

> In my opinion, intercultural communication envisions a reality, which will support the simultaneous existence of unity and diversity, of cooperation and competition in the global village, and of consensus and creative conflict in multicultural societies. In this vision, our different voices can be heard both in their uniqueness and in synergistic harmony (Bennett, 1998, p. 31)

Awareness and sensitivity raising may prepare students and teachers alike for their future and imagined communities while reshaping significant aspects of cultural learning.

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