Developing Contextual Consciousness: Approaching Intercultural Communication Competence with a Constructivist Paradigm

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THE MYTHS OF NATIONAL ASSIMILATION AND GLOBAL CONVERGENCE
THE GLOBE IS NOT MELTING (EXCEPT THE ICE)

Actually, globalization and social diversity means more cross-cultural contact and increased emphasis on cultural differences

Geert Hofstede IBM Study

In the “global village” our neighbors will be profoundly different from ourselves

Marshall McLuhan, 1964

The Dialectic of Objective and Subjective Culture

**Big “C” Culture**
- Cultural institutions: what people create (e.g. art, political structure)

**Little “c” Culture**
- Cultural worldview: what people experience (e.g. social interaction, cultural values)

Socialization
- The coordination of meaning and action among people interacting within a boundary

Role Enactment
- Interpersonal and group interaction
The Dialectic of Intercultural Communication

Meta-Coordination (Cultural Bridging)

Culture A (Coordinating System)  
Culture B (Coordinating System)

Contextual Consciousness

- Contextual Acuity
  - The self-referential ability to recognize one’s own personal, cultural, and organizational role context.

- Contextual Agility
  - The self-reflexive ability to shift perspective from one’s own to various other personal, cultural, and organizational role contexts
Behaving and communicating, including languaging, do not demand consciousness, and indeed our ancestors thrived for most of human history without it. But language through metaphor is able to create new circumstances, when necessary.
"The mind is still haunted with its old unconscious ways; it broods on lost authorities; and the yearning, the deep and hollowing yearning for divine volition and service is with us still."
— Julian Jaynes

Neat, but...

The Drift of Consciousness

Analogue “I”  Theory of Mind
Metaphor “me”  Co-evolution
Adaptation
**PRE-SCIENTIFIC PARADIGMS**

- Reality is an unquestionable condition – a manifestation of unknowable powerful forces: **NO OBSERVER**
- People of one’s own group are real – others belong to the fearsome and/or exploitable environment

**ALTER-ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENCE**

- Reality is the natural manifestation of god(s) and its study is a form of meditation: **OBSERVER EMBEDDED IN RELATIONSHIP**
- People of one’s own group are chosen by god(s) and naturally superior, but other groups may have valuable knowledge and resources that could be acquired
NEWTONIAN (Universalist) PARADIGM

- Reality has an objective existence: looking in the same direction, every observer sees the same thing: OBSERVER INDEPENDENCE

- Different forms of civilization are just better or worse variations on the single universal reality: HIERARCHY OF CIVILIZATIONS

CULTURAL UNIVERSALISM

THE HIERARCHY OF CIVILIZATION
EINSTEINIAN (Relativist) PARADIGM

- While an absolute reality exists, it cannot be perceived objectively since all observers exist in systems that limit perspective: OBSERVER DEPENDENCE ON CONTEXT
- Civilization must be understood in terms of its own perspective (cultural relativism)

CULTURAL RELATIVISM
THE CONTEXTING OF CIVILIZATION

Civilized
Barbarians
Savages

A
B
C
D
ABSOLUTISM / RELATIVISM SHIFT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newtonian/Absolutist Paradigm</th>
<th>Einsteinian/Relativist Paradigm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Facts” exist objectively</td>
<td>“Facts” are selected according to one’s perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A factual dispute is about the actual truth of the matter</td>
<td>A factual dispute is really a clash of narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument seeks to garner the best, most objective evidence</td>
<td>Argument is appropriately the manipulation of facts to create a more powerful narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjectivity is to be avoided as an interference to rationality</td>
<td>Subjectivity is embraced as the primary tool in narrative building</td>
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QUANTUM (Constructivist) PARADIGM

- Reality (including ourselves) is co-created through interaction with our environment (including other people): OBSERVER/OBSERVED INTERACTION
- Culture is both the collective process of constructing reality and its product: CO-ONTOGENY
CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

- Reality (including ourselves) is co-created through interaction with our environment (including other people).
- The probability of events is influenced by intention and expectation.
- Human groups have a co-evolutionary relationship.

Co-ontogeny
RELATIVISM/CONSTRUCTIVISM SHIFT

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<td>“Facts” are selected according to one’s perspective</td>
<td>“Facts” can be true or not in a defined context</td>
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<td>A factual dispute may occur when contexts are defined differently</td>
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<td>Argument is appropriately the manipulation of facts to create a more powerful narrative</td>
<td>Argument is about the goodness of one context over another</td>
</tr>
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<td>Contexts can be defined in both subjective and objective ways</td>
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The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Perceptual Experience of difference

- **Denial**: Failing to perceive the existence or relevance of culture
- **Defense**: Perceiving specific cultural groups in polarized and evaluative ways
- **Minimization**: Focusing on common human experience and universal values to reduce prejudice
- **Acceptance**: Attributing equal human complexity to different cultural groups
- **Adaptation**: Generating appropriate and authentic alternative behavior
- **Integration**: Including cultural context in decision-making and acting with contextual ethical commitment

Ethnocentrism **→** Ethnorelativism

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THREE KEYS TO ETHNORELATIVISM

1. RECONCILIATION OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY
2. CONSTRUCTION OF VIRTUAL THIRD-CULTURES THROUGH MUTUAL ADAPTATION
3. EXERCISE OF ETHICAL COMMITMENT IN RELATIVISM

Reconciling Unity and Diversity

UNITY

focus

uniformity

DIVERSITY

divisiveness

innovation

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Mutual Adaptation: Co-creating Virtual Third Cultures

Host Culture

Culture A

Culture B

Third Cultures

Ethicality

William Perry

Lee Knefelkamp

The “search for truth” obscures what ought to be the foundation of ethical choice—an understanding and respect for the views you disagree with, accompanied by a conscious commitment to the choice you make in the face of those viable alternatives.
THE PERRY SCHEME OF ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Positions 1-4: Seeking truth

- Dualism: Absolute right/wrong given by authority
- Multiplicity: Uncertainty of multiple perspectives; whatever

Position 5: Creating meaning

- Contextual Relativism: Knowing demands taking perspective

Positions 6-9: Making commitments

- Commitment within Relativism: Considered choices made in the face of legitimate alternatives

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Co-Ontogenic Ethicality (The Ethics of Mutual Adaptation)

Seeking the actual truth (or at least, “truthiness”)

- Dualism: Absolute right/wrong given by authority
- Multiplicity: Uncertainty of multiple perspectives; whatever

Creating meaning (empathy)

- Contextual Relativism: Knowing enough to decide demands taking perspective

Making commitments (exercising consciousness)

- Commitment within Relativism: Considered choices made in the face of legitimate alternatives

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