

Extracurricular Activity-based Intercultural Education at Chinese Universities

Rationale, Design and Practice

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Abstract—Students’ intercultural competence should be considered as an important outcome of institutional internationalization in today’s higher education. Chinese universities should make good use of diversified educational resources to promote students’ intercultural competence. This paper first introduces Byram’s ICC Model in the intercultural education and the educational goals conforming to the talents cultivation at Chinese universities in the globalization era, and then develops an intercultural education system out of the current extracurricular resources accessible at the Chinese universities. This system, based on extracurricular activities, is consisted of two major parts: training program and competence contest, which are suggested to be operated in the joint framework of students’ affairs and teaching administration. Suggestions on operation principles and further development are also included.

Keywords—*intercultural education; ICC Model; pedagogical design; extracurricular activities; Chinese universities*

I. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1980s, intercultural education is a new trend in the world. Countries all over the world, especially developed countries, attach great importance to the intercultural competence of young students for both national interest and individual development. In China, the government states that, in the Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020), „a large number of talents shall be cultivated that are imbued with global vision, well-versed in international rules, and capable of participating in international affairs and competition“.

In the context of globalization, young students’ competence in intercultural communication and international interaction is essential to sustaining individual development, strengthening national competency and even to preserving world peace and promoting human civilization. For one thing, intercultural competence is an important driving force for sustainable development for young students. School education should prepare the young students to be internationally competitive, and hence, to assimilate easily into the academic, business, political and cultural fields. In the light of that, intercultural education is of equal vital

importance to each individual as education for life, morality, and information technology. In the long run, intercultural education will contribute to the global competitiveness of a country or region. The people of a country can learn from foreign achievements in reflection of their own civilization so as to improve their “soft power” and to prevail in the international competition. Intercultural education is also conducive to inspiring a sense of world citizenship that is spiritually mature, open-minded, communicative and future-oriented, that respects and understands cultural diversity and abides by international rules. Additionally, intercultural education is an effective instrument to preserving world peace and human civilization. Despite of economic globalization, civilizational conflicts never seem to diminish. As Samuel Huntington noted in *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order*, cultural differences form the genesis of conflicts after the Cold War. As civilizations advance, the human development will not have further breakthrough unless mutual understanding and coexistence of different civilizations is augmented.

With the increasingly significant role China is playing in the world affairs, the government demands a large number of talents to be equipped with excellent intercultural competence and professional capability. In this sense, how to effectively implement intercultural education becomes an essential mission to consider for the world-class universities.

Student affairs are an important facet of China’s higher education and ought to be adapted for comprehensive educational purpose and international education trend in this country. Higher education community in China has reached a consensus that one of the important goals of higher education is to cultivate talents with international perspective and competence to participate in international cooperation and competition. Tongji University, for example, proposed its educational standard as “Professional elites with solid academic skills, practical capabilities, innovative thinking, global horizon and social responsibilities”. Promoting students’ intercultural competence has become an important part of the university education and student service.

II. THE OVERALL GOAL OF UNIVERSITIES" INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

A. *Developing Open and Inclusive Intercultural Thinking*

According to UNESCO, intercultural education is to „promote respect, mutual understanding, and enrichment of cultural diversity“. Higher education institutions should advocate intercultural education in order to promote students“ respect for diverse individuals, cultural groups, different national cultures, values and lifestyles; to reach a wide understanding of cultural diversity and pluralism; to cultivate intercultural thinking of inclusiveness; and to develop tolerance. Intercultural education shall provide the platform for students to be exposed to other cultures beyond their own, to facilitate understanding of and interact amicably with people from different cultural groups, and to tackle intercultural issues in a calm and proper manner.

B. *Well-versed in International Affairs and Global Code of Conduct*

The challenges and opportunities from globalization have been some of China’s major concerns for development in the new era. Knowledge of international affairs and global code of conduct can provide far-reaching assistance to China’s participation in international affairs and international competence enhancement, and thereby smooth integration into globalization. Therefore, intercultural education aims to equip newer generations not only with foreign languages and intercultural thinking but also with knowledge of international affairs and familiarization of global code of conduct.

C. *Cultivating Communicative and Cognitive Skills*

The core of intercultural communication is to facilitate interaction within the different cultures, races and ethnic groups, the communication between entities that have varying degrees of cultural difference and share meanings by mutual understanding. Intercultural education in college hopes to improve students“ understanding of their own and foreign cultures, to have correct intercultural cognition and social skills compatible with intercultural interaction, to develop capabilities to communicate and collaborate with other cultural group members and to maintain good interpersonal relationship in their future career.

D. *Promoting Self-awareness of Traditional and Contemporary Chinese Culture*

Traditional and contemporary Chinese culture is an important component of world cultures. Chinese culture embraces and exchanges with other cultures, and continually evolves by learning from others. Intercultural communication shall constitute the obligation to disseminate broad and profound Chinese culture throughout the world. Cultural diversity is an important task to ensure ethnic equality and to preserve Chinese culture, which dictates that intercultural education should stress not only on tolerance for foreign cultures, but also on the global communication of the Chinese culture. Therefore, it is very strategically important to promote students“ self-awareness and communicative

skills of traditional and contemporary Chinese culture and affirm their identity through their own culture, language and value.

III. THEORETICAL BASIS FOR IMPLEMENTING INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

The study of constituent elements of intercultural competence is an important task in intercultural education. In this regard, related theories have been proposed by many scholars, including Brent D. Ruben, Michael Byram, Young Yun Kim, Brian Spitzberg, Judith Martin, and Thomas Nakayama, etc. The most widely accepted theory by western academic community in this field is Michael Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC Model), which elaborates on five dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, interpretative skills and comprehension, abilities of discovery and interaction, and critical awareness of cultural elements (Byram, 1997). In China, there were also related models being proposed and questionnaires being drawn up, targeting at the intercultural education realities for university students.

Intercultural education is a new trend that integrates theoretical studies and teaching practices of intercultural communication. The new idea employs cultural differences and proactive role of interactive education to facilitate mutual understanding and learning of students from different cultural backgrounds. In this regard, UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education brought up constructive principles and measures for intercultural education. But in practice, China’s intercultural education, at the present, consists of no other than foreign languages teaching. Unfortunately, the important role of student affairs and teaching administration in this practice has not been fully recognized.

The extracurricular intercultural sessions discussed in the paper is a well-designed scheme based on Byram's ICC Model and deployable university education resources.

IV. EXTRACURRICULAR EDUCATION SCHEME FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Cultivating intercultural competence is a gradual, subtle process that cannot be accomplished overnight. Sessions in curriculum provide insufficient time to meet the demand of intercultural education. It is necessary to conduct variety of extracurricular activities as a complement that helps students develop their intercultural competence in practice. Educators could take advantage of internet and multi-media to organize all kinds of cultural activities that encompass both the Chinese and foreign students (refer to Huang, 2018). In the process, students could be exposed to foreign cultures and promote their social skills.

Student affairs at universities have the distinctive features, in which extracurricular activity is a frequently-used approach. Integrating intercultural education into student affairs framework allows organizers to utilize relevant student affairs platforms as vehicles, on which extracurricular activities are designed and carried out. Based on this belief, a working model of intercultural competence

for training program design is constructed by the author (Huang, 2017). The scope of “activity” in the author’s study is quite broad, which includes any interaction related to intercultural or international communication. Both indoor activities (e.g. lectures, workshops and training courses, etc.) and outdoor activities (e.g. group studies or visits, projects in college grounds or the local community, etc.) are involved (Huang, 2015).

The paper makes a case study of Tongji University, where two extracurricular platforms are designed in accordance with the requirement of talents with global vision and Byram’s ICC Model. The two extracurricular platforms are “Workshop for Promoting Intercultural Competence” and “Intercultural Star Contest”.

A. Workshop for Promoting Intercultural Competence

The activity is theoretically based on five dimensions of Byram’s ICC Model: knowledge, attitudes, interpretative skills and comprehension, abilities of discovery and interaction, and critical awareness of cultural elements (Byram, 1997).

The workshop aims to cultivate students’ intercultural competence in various ways. It consists of two modules: theoretical lecture and practical exercise.

Theoretical lecture includes intercultural theories, international affairs and rules, introductory courses to Chinese culture in English, case analysis of typical intercultural communication and knowhow to find solutions to practical problems.

Practical exercise includes all kinds of intercultural activities, including Intercultural Exhibition, international conferences, Buddy Program and Case Sharing Seminar where students who have exchange experiences abroad to share their intercultural experience.

The course design is as follow:

TABLE I. ACTIVITY DESIGN FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Module	Theme	Requirement
Theoretical Lecture	Internationalization and Intercultural Competence Cultivation	Compulsory
	Intercultural Knowledge and Situational Communication	
	International Understanding: Cultural Idioms and Critical Thinking	
	Global Communication of Chinese Culture	
	Analysis of Intercultural Communication in Film & TV	
	International Exchange & Studies	
Practical exercise	Introduction of Tongji International Communication Platform	Optional
	Global Village	Compulsory
	Buddy Program	
	Language Corner	
	Others	

^a Note: The author’s study advocates that activities in the training program should be organized using English as a *lingua franca*. This does not mean to limit the program’s content to the cultures in English-speaking countries, or to develop specific communicative rules of the target language, but aims to foster students’ appropriate strategies to communicate with people from diverse languages and cultural backgrounds taking English as a tool (Huang, 2015).

B. Intercultural Star Contest

The activity intends to promote students’ intercultural competence through competition, testing students’ intercultural knowledge and capabilities. It consists of two rounds in the competition (the preliminary and the final).

1) The preliminary (grades converted by percentage to the final results)

- Written test of intercultural knowledge and international rules
- Live presentations and questions response

2) The final

- Quick response to intercultural questions
- Intercultural role-play and speech
- English presentations on Chinese culture

These activities cover the dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, critical cultural awareness and students’ communication skills in intercultural situations through indirect test means (descriptive method).

V. IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES AND SUGGESTIONS

The two proposed programs shall be implemented in accordance with the following principles and suggestions.

A. Implementation Principles

UNESCO has long attached importance to intercultural education and issued UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education that elaborates on principles and suggestions of implementing intercultural education. Intercultural education must build on cognitive analysis of constituent elements of intercultural competence, on which many scholars have been very constructive. Given China’s realities, we would like to propose the following suggestions:

1) *To integrate educational resources and to enrich teaching pattern and content:* Intercultural theory and practice should be considered equally important, which help students to think reflectively and interculturally.

2) *To help students have deeper understanding and recognition of Chinese culture and accept Chinese culture as the dominant ideology:* This complies not only with UNESCO’s principles, but also China’s strategic needs.

3) *To effectively adopt modern information technology in intercultural education that guides young students to learn with online resources:* Internet information and communication tools have been developed to support intercultural dialogue, learning, debate and research. These tools facilitate intercultural interaction between people from different backgrounds, which also provides students with a variety of opportunities for development of intercultural competence (Huang, 2018). Some open-source platforms allow educators to independently design learning modules, students to learn collaboratively and to make self-assessment, recordings, presentations and reflections.

B. Organizing Suggestions

Intercultural education mobilizes resources from many educational sectors including teaching administration and student affairs. Educators need to plan in an integrated manner and use resources effectively. The platforms shall include many different intercultural courses of different schools and variety of practical exercises like competition, summer workshop and festive celebration, supported by considerable amount of faculty members and other human resource.

More specially, the author would like to add more following suggestions:

1) *Building up the Fixed Mechanism for Intercultural Education*: It is recommended that teachers and researchers of intercultural education be assembled to work in groups that are responsible to make decisions and policies in the field, and to supervise program operation. Also, universities should introduce policies that accredit intercultural education in the credit system. Students participating in and completing sessions for promoting intercultural competence should be granted related certificates. Additionally, universities should issue policies that make sure the teachers' involvement in the intercultural education are reasonably recognized in their payment.

2) *Promoting various platforms and authentic practice*: Intercultural educational platforms aim to help students understand more about language and culture, to effectively communicate in various contexts, to anticipate and avoid cultural misunderstandings arising from different cultural expectations, and to promote students' intercultural competence through class discussions of cultural adaptation and cultural compatibility. Intercultural practice creates authentic intercultural situations where students could promote intercultural communication and think reflectively about Chinese and foreign cultures.

3) *Enriching Teaching Resources and Practicable Resources*: Foreign language teachers are the main human resource to execute intercultural education. Universities should clearly recognize the indisputable role of foreign language teacher in the internationalization of higher education. Foreign language teachers serve as a bridge between students' native culture and the target culture. The teachers' intercultural understanding has a direct influence on students' intercultural competence and acquisition for the foreign cultures. Teaching resources from native and foreign partner institutions should be integrated in order to make joint efforts for promoting intercultural education. Student organizations, where students take the lead to educate themselves, are important vehicles for intercultural education and should be accounted for.

VI. CONCLUSION

The emphasis on intercultural education for universities students will enhance the outcome of institutional internationalization efforts (Coulby, 2006; Deardorff, 2006).

It is an important facet of internationalized higher education and conforms to higher education developmental trends for universities to promote intercultural education (Lasonen, 2009), to cultivate open-minded and inclusive intercultural talents who are imbued with global vision, well-versed in international rules, and dedicated to developing traditional and contemporary Chinese culture. In this globalization era, Chinese universities should learn from the intercultural education experience in other countries and fully employ the available teaching resources and students' extracurricular activities, in order to promote students' intercultural competence for the sake of both national strategy and individual development. This will serve the mission of China's participation in global governance and building a community of shared destiny.

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