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TOLERANCE AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE:

CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE.

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Today, in the world of globalization and mass mobility, appears the increasing need to study intercultural effectiveness in terms of cross-cultural contact. It is of great importance to explore not only the process of entering into the new culture, the accessible opportunities and the choices that a person makes, but also the result of all this, i.e. the consequences.

There is a consensus nowadays that cultural adaptation is a very complex, multi-dimensional process "in which a person becomes capable of functioning effectively in a culture other than the one he or she was originally socialized in" (Haslberger, 2005 p. 86). Adaptation depends on both personal and situational variables that set the parameters within which an individual finds a specific, personalized way of adapting.

It is generally accepted that intercultural adaptation aims at achieving integration of cultures which leads to a bicultural or multicultural personality. (Berry, 1997). This is possible when the interacting groups voluntarily choose this strategy: an integrating group willing to accept basic values and attitudes of the culture of the dominant society and, at the same time, a dominant group ready to accept these people, to respect their rights and values, and to adapt social institutions to the needs of the minority groups. In this context, intercultural competence is a key indicator of intercultural communication and interaction.

The study of intercultural competence is a relatively new stream in the social sciences. Intercultural competence refers to the sensitivity of cultural diversity, i.e. the ability to behave in an appropriate way, and to adapt one's communication and interaction according to the context. Intercultural competence also involves the development of one's skills and attitudes when successfully interacting with people of diverse backgrounds. Such a competence has always existed because people have always lived in more or less multicultural societies. In this respect, we speak about "family" competence, meaning not by birth, but acquired in the childhood from the parents and the surroundings. (Philip Paelman & Mark Verlot (2003). Developing one's intercultural competence is an aspect of a lifelong socialisation process, or a lifelong project. From early childhood and throughout our lives, we learn more and more about dealing with social and cultural differences and relating to them in developing our own identity. Kramsch (1993) is one of those who say that when a person develops one's intercultural competence, one develops 'a third place', i.e. one creates a special personal linguistic and cultural identity that is new and completely one's own (Kramsch, 1993). One does naturally not become a native speaker of the

foreign language; one develops into something else, something which Byram calls an intercultural speaker, i.e. a person who can mediate between various cultural contexts, also in terms of language: interpret, translate, clear up misunderstandings, etc.

Earlier research tools of intercultural communication, such as Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (PONS; Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979) and Interpersonal Perception Test (IPT; Costanzo & Archer, 1989), demonstrate that the ability of a person accurately to interpret nonverbal behavior is associated with a positive interpersonal effect. Individuals scoring higher on these research tools have higher relationship ability and are perceived by their friends as more socially skilled (Costanzo & Archer, 1989; Rosenthal et al., 1979). Research on the model of cultural assimilation (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971) has shown that the ability to interpret and understand the deeply rooted cultural rules, underlying the behavioral patterns in a foreign environment, is associated with the successful integration of the non-native population. The person, in particular, who is capable of understanding the values and beliefs of the foreign culture, has more effective relations with the collaborators and a higher level of cooperation with the native population. Understanding intercultural competence enables us to go beyond the limits of our own worldview. According to Ferguson (1980), "the greatest revolution in the world- one that occurs with the head, within the mind". For this to happen, however, we need to be educated and to become better global player who are able to sympathize with and understand the others under their conditions, which also deepens the assessment of our own inheritance (Fantini, 1999). Intercultural competence offers such a promise. Therefore, the development of intercultural competence continues to be at the core of all programs and cross-cultural research.

What is intercultural competence? How is it displayed, and what are its characteristics? Could individuals be trained in order to increase their intercultural competence? These are some of the questions that contemporary social scientists attempt to answer.

If we refer to the results of socio-psychological research, examining various aspects of multicultural competence, we can see that the structure of the construct consists of three main components:

- *cognitive dimension-* (knowledge of their own culture and of other cultures, knowledge of techniques to prevent and resolve intercultural conflicts; methodical readiness to work in a multicultural classroom, etc.),
- *value-affective dimension-* (a developed system of humanistic values and value orientations, consistent with the principles of multiculturalism, positive ethnic identity, tolerance);
- *behavioural dimension* **-** (the level of formation of intercultural interaction skills; ability to apply methods of pedagogical work in a multicultural team; humanistic-oriented style of pedagogical interaction, etc.) *(Cui & Van den Berg 1991; Sercu 2004; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).*

Regardless of the existence of many definitions of the term Intercultural communicative competence, there are three common aspects, based within them:

1. Ability to form, develop and maintain relationships;
2. Ability to communicate effectively and therefore a minimum of loss;
3. Ability to reach a consensus and develop collaboration with the others (Fantini, ed. 1997; 1999)

Moreover, these basic aspects are not solely for the study of intercultural relations, they are also relevant for interpersonal research. The intercultural level of communication is more complicated, though. When people interact by means of culture, the common between them decreases, and the differences- increase dramatically. The augmentation of intercultural differences is caused mainly by the differences in language, culture, world perceptions. Intercultural capacity can often be demonstrated by behavioral acts or traits. Usually, these are empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, humor, tolerance for ambiguity. These characteristics are used by many psychologists when describing an intercultural successful personality (Kealey and Protheroe, 1996) and also in the description of cross-cultural psychology (Kelley and Meyers 1992). But we still have not addressed the question: Can these traits be trained or developed in someone who does not possess such qualities?

In his study of intercultural competence Fantini, A. E. (1997, 1995, 1999) offers 5 dimensions: awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge and proficiency in the host tongue. Namely the awareness dimension is recognized by many researchers as an important component of intercultural competence and as the strongest dimension that leads to deeper knowledge, skills and attitudes. To learn to understand, realize, feel and express ourselves in alternative ways, is a necessary condition for intercultural effectiveness.

According to the Dutch researchers, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000), intercultural effectiveness, intercultural adjustment, and multicultural sensitivity, are all parts of the wider definition of cross-cultural oriented personality characteristics. In order to assess that personality, they have developed the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ). They have defined five traits that are part of such personality: ***cultural empathy, open mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility and social initiative:***

1. Cultural empathy or "sensitivity"- expresses the ability of a person to feel sympathy for the feelings, thoughts and behavior of representatives of other cultural groups. Typically, this dimension is most frequently studied in relation to intercultural effectiveness (Arthur & Bennett, 1995; Ruben, 1976).
2. Open mindedness- is considered an open and unbiased attitude towards the members of the out-group and towards the different values and norms. Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978) and Ronen (1989) have found out that "freedom of bias" is a crucial attitude related to multicultural effectiveness.
3. The third dimension, emotional stability, is rarely to be seen in the workings on multicultural effectiveness. It refers to the tendency of remaining calm in difficult

situations and against the trend of demonstrating strong emotional reaction in case of tension. In the works of Abe and Weisman (1983),Church (1982), Hammer et al. (1978) it is emphasized that the ability to cope with psychological tension is a key dimension of intercultural effectiveness (Van der Zee, & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

4. Next dimension- flexibility. It expresses the ability of a person to quickly adapt to new situations, to learn from previous mistakes, to develop new social skills.

5. Social initiative and the tendency of a person to actively participate in the social situation and to take initiative. For example, several studies put stress on the importance of the ability to form and maintain contact (Hawes & Kealy, 1981; Kets de Vries & Mead, 1991) and to take initiative (McCall, 1994; Spreitzer and others, 1997).

Finally, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2002) have found that these five dimensions can predict international effectiveness. They have conducted a study at an International Business School in the Netherlands, where they have found higher levels of these five dimensions in the international students as compared to the native ones.

In order to achieve an effective intercultural interaction, the importance of cultural tolerance should be taken into account. Cultural tolerance is defined as the attitude of a person towards the social norms and customs of a culture that is perceived as foreign (Gasser, 1995). In their analytical works Hannigan (1990) and Ronen (1989) describe variables which can predict the functioning of international representatives in terms of foreign culture. These are: authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, openness to testing and tolerance for ambiguity.

Tolerance is defined as one of the most essential social competences- readiness and ability of a person to live and act constructively in the diverse world. The problem of tolerance, caused by its strategically significant goal, has become very pressing in the psychological and social sciences. All researchers on the issue of tolerance have found that it can not be defined unambiguously. There are dozens of *interpretations and definitions of the term* tolerance, i.e. the very phenomenon is heterogeneous, multi-aspect and multi-component. It has many types, forms, options, levels, phases on an individual level. For instance, tolerance is:

• Potential for accepting different ideas and opinion;

• Admission and broad-mindedness, solving of practices, action, behavior; allowing a person or an opinion to exist without interference, solving of differences in religious views without discrimination;

• Ability to accept, tolerates, stand, resist; to allow the existence or to put up with somebody or something. Aspiration and ability to establish and support a community of people who differ in some respect from the dominant type.

The diversity of these definitions also points out differences in emphasis, culture and historical experience. But what does it really mean to tolerate someone? To tolerate a group or a person means to accept their right to self-identify in a way

that differs from your own, and at the same time to limit this right only to the sphere of private space, to reduce it only to a "private opinion" or a "private choice". In order to admit one's individual identity, we should recognize the culture that determines the acts of his/her self-identification.

Tolerance is most often associated with ambiguity and vagueness, as a possible variable to mitigate individual behavior. Many psychologists try to explain or categorize individual tolerance towards vagueness Budner (1962), Norton (1975), Rydell & Rosen (1966), Macdonald (1970), Leavitt & Walton (1983) and McLain (1993) and to develop research tools measuring tolerance towards ambiguity. Many attempts have been undertaken in order to explore the relationship between tolerance and other constructs such as prejudiced attitude, rational decision making, psychology of perception and ability to master a second language (Budner 1962; Chapelle & Roberts 1986). There is scientific research focused on the ability of people to withstand psychological pressure, stress, tension in a decision-making situation, uncertainty.

A number of researchers (Lange & Houran, 1998, 1999) indicate that the emotional personality variable, called "tolerance for ambiguity", has a key role in the process of treatment of unidentified stimuli. Also, people with a high level of tolerance for ambiguity do not exhibit anxiety when faced with polysemantic stimuli.

Many social and psychological studies also emphasize on the close connection between ethnic identity and degree of tolerance expression (Berry, 1997; Phiney, 1997). According to their results, positive ethnic identity leads to a tolerant type of relationship, while the loss of positive identity- to intolerance and extremism (Стефаненко, 2001; Лебедева, 2003; Татарко, 2004).

Therefore, the study of tolerance is an up-to-date scientific and psychological issue. The formation and development of tolerance will reduce the stereotypical thinking, prejudice and conflicts between certain social groups. In this regard, modern social educational and political situation requires a serious rethinking of the prevailing traditional model of education in the direction of its multi-cultural intensification. In the report "Key competences for Europe" summarizing the outcome of the symposium in 1996 in Berne devoted to the program of the Council of Europe, five key competences in education were defined. One of them is related to life in a multicultural society, i.e. intercultural competence. The report emphasized that in order to monitor racism and xenophobia and to create a tolerant environment, education should foster intercultural competence in young people. One of the important tasks of school and university education is to make the goals of development and cultural environment of society comprehensible to students of all nationalities, to expand personal understanding of other cultures, to identify and expand the forms and modes of intercultural communication between different national groups.

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INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN GREECE: SOME POLICIES AND GOOD PRACTICES AIMED AT THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS' CHILDREN

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Abstract: *Referencing the main aspects of contemporary intercultural education in Europe, the current publication presents some intercultural education policies in Greece and reviews several good Greek practices in the field. Attaining quality intercultural education is shown as a main tool for helping the process of integration of immigrant's children into the Greek society.*

Key words: *intercultural education in Greece, immigrant's children in Greece, immigrant's children integration*

1. Introduction

Immigrant integration is without a doubt an important issue in the modern world and it is no wonder that it has been researched from various scientific points of view. The necessity for development in this direction is also apparent by its concurrence with relevant European directives (Lisbon strategy, 2000; Barcelona educational council, etc. 2002) according to which the new role of the teacher is