

Keynote speeches at the workshop: Researchers on the Move - Intercultural Dimensions in Science and Humanities

March 3, 2009 - Vienna

Timetable

11:00 Introduction

11:45 Keynote speech by
Dr. Alicia Cabezudo

12:00 "World Cafe"

13:00 Lunch ☺☺☺

14:00 Summary of results

14:30 Keynote speech by
Dr. Helen Nalumu Nakimbugwe

14:45 "World Cafe"

15:45 Coffee break ☺☺

16:00 Summary of results

16:15 Discussion with keynote speakers

16:45 Conclusions & wrap up

— 17:00

Challenging interculturality through team work in scientific research. Some reflections and ideas on approaching intercultural practices.

Keynote speech by **Prof. Dr. Alicia Cabezudo**, Social Scientist, focus on education for peace and global learning, University of Rosario, Argentina. Visiting professor at the University of Barcelona, Spain. acabezudo@unr.edu.ar



Index

- a. Introduction
 - b. Reflecting on the concept Interculturality
 - c. Justifications for working under this umbrella
 - d. Some basic conditions for successful results
 - e. Possible general steps to work on
 - f. Challenges
 - g. Some policy approaches
- Summary

a. Introduction

Managing Europe´s increasing cultural diversity in a democratic manner - rooted in the history of the continent and enhanced by globalization - has become a priority in recent years. This is reflected in the national school systems and in the research field where students and investigators of the whole world work together at such intercultural contexts. How shall we respond to diversity in theoretical research and on-field work when partners are coming from different cultures, backgrounds and histories? What is necessary to exchange and talk while working in specific themes? What are the challenges, the obstacles , the basic conditions and the possible steps to follow in order to try to succeed in this reality of today's scientific field?.

This paper tries to respond in a brief way to the present questions and set some reflections on interculturality coming from life-long experience working as instructor of students multicultural groups and team partner in intercultural researches during many years.

b. Reflecting on definitions about Interculturality

For the purpose of analyzing interculturality in scientific research and on-field team work it is necessary to reflect on the concepts of "learning" and "culture" and how these concepts were understood under the light of institutions and even team partners engaged in a starting research phase .

Today when referring to learning we can talk about many considerations on learning: cognitive learning, emotional learning, behavioural learning and even learning as an structured process or simply as a dynamic process . Actually all those kinds of "learnings" occurred when facing interculturality in research work.

Same happened with culture, a huge concept that have been discussed along the years but rarely was approached in team - work for exchanging views and discuss about it meanings and interpretations . The "cultures" from where team partners are coming , for example their educational background at school and university , set the "format" of their thoughts and behaviour in their on -coming "research style and preferences " . These "formats" are generally reflected in their own activity as researchers, not only in the chosen methodologies but also in the interactions with team partners. Hence culture perspectives are necessary to be talked openly, particularly in environments where very many "research styles or formats" are combined as the case of multicultural teams.

The path from multiculturalism to interculturality is exactly this exercise of exchanging, confronting and discussing together in order to find common approaches to the goals the study or research work demanded to the team. The methodology to be applied is the intercultural dialogue that will not solve all the problems - as no existing methodology really do - but will help to open new ways for thinking and relating for further purposes.

Setting this necessary clarifications on key concepts as "learning" and "culture" and the need to deep on them in intercultural scientific work, I shall display my own vision on interculturality .

I understand interculturality as a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, economic , social and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and equal opportunities to communicate their views. This process requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the others.

The term interculturality can be understood on different levels. On a more literal level, the inter-learning that this educational context creates refers to an individual process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes or behaviour that is connected with the interaction of different cultures . Very often , however, intercultural learning is seen in a larger perspective to denote a concept of how people with different backgrounds can live together peacefully, and the process that is needed to build such a society. Learning in this context is consequently understood less on a purely individual level, ***but emphasizes the open ended character of this process***

towards an intercultural society which is one of the main goals on supporting intercultural research.

Intercultural team work is a process. This process demands that you have to know yourself and where you come from - before being able to understand others. It is a challenge also, as it involves very deeply rooted ideas about what is good and bad, about structuring the world and your life and in this case about how you are going to face multicultural issues in your academic life . Intercultural learning is a challenge to one's identity – but it can become a way of living, certainly a way of thinking and relating to the others at the same time than enriching the own identity and history.

The history that all human beings built through individual and collective experiences interacting with the micro and macro contexts. That is why interculturality has a social-political dimension and this is the perspective from where we have to investigate and approach the concept nowadays.

c. Justifications on working under this umbrella

People from different cultural backgrounds, if such can even be said to truly exist, have lived in close proximity to each other forever. It was only with the recent drawing of nation - state borders that people began to think otherwise. For the inhabitants of most modern cities in Europe and elsewhere in the world, cultural diversity has come to be a normal state of affairs, with which they live in relative peace. For many people, cultural diversity is a resource and asset. Nevertheless, in some situations cultural differences are perceived and portrayed as a social and political liability. In recent years, the ways in which distinct groups representing different backgrounds interact have come to the centre of political and social attention, Often and unfortunately, this attention is negative, because of the perception that the meetings of different communities result in social disorder. ¹

Nevertheless, intercultural mechanisms have demonstrated its contribution to political, social, cultural and economic integration and have contributed to the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. Fostering equality, human dignity and a sense of "common purpose", interculturality - as a political social concept - have deepened a better understanding of diverse world views and practices , increased cooperation and participation, have allowed personal and collective growth and transformation , the freedom to make choices and have promoted respect for each other .

Hence, more than ever before, being the global more frequent and necessary in research teams and on-field studies, interculturality showed that we are linked to others on every continent . . .

- Socially through the media and telecommunications.
- Culturally through movements of people everywhere
- Environmentally through sharing one planet and its goods and basic materials
- Economically through intercontinental trade
- Politically through international relations and common systems of regulation

¹ See "On Intercultural Dialogue". An approach by Yael Ohana in *Euromed School Forum*. Publication of the Interkulturelles Zentrum ,Vienna, 2008,pp23

Intercultural teams in scientific work have to deal with this inter-linked reality , have to recognize its existence and impact in the search processes . Due its inherent characteristics the chosen investigation - strategies most usually applied are compatible with methodologies that happened to be,

- active (learning to be, to know and to do)
- interactive (through discussions and debates)
- relevant (focused on real challenges in the field)
- critical (encouraging critical thinking while supporting autonomy)
- collaborative and cooperative (fostering mutual learning)
- participative (giving voice to different actors while recognizing their roles)

d. Some basic conditions for successful results

Successful results working in an intercultural environment required basic pre-conditions in team - members. Very many of these conditions are based in attitudes fostered by a democratic culture. Some of the most relevant we can point out here are,

- acceptance of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as basic pillars in building society
- recognition of equal dignity and mutual respect as well as gender equality
- capacity to reflect on and find the barriers that prevent intercultural dialogue
- open mindedness
- willingness to engage in dialogue and allow others to express their point
- capacity to resolve conflicts by peaceful means
- recognition of the well - founded arguments of others
- critical thinking
- ability to argue effectively
- sense of identity and self-esteem
- empathy and sense of common humanity
- value and respect for diversity
- recognition of complementary identities
- capacity for cooperation
- belief that people can make a difference (team group as well)
- take responsibility for their own actions (members of teams as such)

e. Possible general steps to work on

It is certainly different the steps that have to be taken considering research work or on-field studies. Anyway some general steps when working at intercultural level can be isolated and they were presented here as ***a mere proposal*** in order to be a platform for further development in each investigation field - at theoretical or practical level.

- identify clearly the interests and concerns of the members of the intercultural team
- explore own values and attitudes related to that interests and concerns . Confront them with the others'
- choose appropriate methodologies to start the work. Discuss different strategies coming from diverse academic backgrounds of the team members
- make global connections

- explore your interests and concerns at local and global level
- confront your interests and concerns with the others
- try to find common strategies, methodologies and adequate paths for developing a collective working plan
- debate on evaluation processes considering diverse views according different backgrounds. Establish who should participate in the evaluation, what should be evaluated, how should be evaluated the process and the results.

Many times during the process of planning the work and during on-going research, intercultural teams suffered processes where intercultural sensitivity is very explicit causing steps back in the research result and complex - resolving interactions, very much attached to the subjectivity of team members. We can divide these processes of intercultural sensitivity in those so-called ethnocentric stages that caused

- denial, in the form of isolation and / or separation
- defense, in the form of denigration, feel of superiority and/ or reversal
- minimization, of "the other" thoughts, ideas, universe or physical appearance

ethnorelatives stages that caused

- acceptance, that is to say respect for the other, for different behaviour and value difference
- adaptation, in the form of empathy and / or pluralism
- integration, to the thoughts / ideas of the others, to the general context ²

f. Challenges

Interculturality, as a predominant trend of our contemporary world, offer us a number of new opportunities, but at the same time they raise questions that make us aware of a number of challenges that we have to consider while developing research and studies.

I have met many challenges dealing with multicultural groups and intercultural dimensions along my path as international student myself - when young and non experienced "citizen of the world" - as instructor in international courses in very many geographical settings and as team member of several international teams on teaching and research. Regarding interculturality, the most important challenges at structural level I may point here - according my experience and observations are,

- the challenge posed by the globalisation, demising the impact of cultural mixing of diverse identities and the possibilities of social enrichment from the differences.
- the challenge posed by the media, that widened the opportunities of many but it has also widened the divide between those who have access to knowledge and information and those who do not have such access.
- the multicultural challenge, as cultural interests and identities of minorities are more and more being excluded form the global economic system.
- the challenge posed by the relationship between technology and ethics, posing the question if it is possible to reconcile technical research and progress with an ethics that is in favour of persons and the planet.

² See Concepts of Intercultural Learning by Arne Gillert in *Intercultural Learning T-Kit*, Council of Europe publishing, Strasbourg, 2007. pp 29

- the environmental challenge , as the ecological texture of our time is beginning to tear.
- the challenge posed by violence and war, as violence and war have been rehabilitated as plausible options within the mind of an increasing number of people and nation-states based in the superiority of one civilization or groups over the others.

g. Some policy approaches

According to the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living Together as Equals in Dignity” launched by the Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs at their 118th Ministerial Session in May 7 2008 and published by the Council of Europe in June 2008, there are five yet distinct interrelated dimensions to the promotion of intercultural dialogue, which involve the full range of stakeholders.

Taking in consideration this fundamental document for setting policies on interculturality, the basis for its conceptual development and practices have to be embedded on ,

- a) The democratic governance of cultural diversity , that includes,
 - a political culture valuing diversity
 - human rights and fundamental freedoms
 - from equality of opportunity to equal enjoyment of rights
- b) Democratic citizenship and participation
- c) Learning and teaching intercultural competences by considering
 - democratic citizenship , language and history
 - primary and secondary education
 - higher education and research
 - non formal and informal learning
 - the role of educators
 - the family environment
- d) Spaces for intercultural dialogue
- e) Intercultural dialogue in international relations ³

Summary

Interculturality can be one tool in our efforts to understand the complexity of today's world, by understanding others and ourselves a bit better. Moreover, it can be one of the keys to open the doors into a new society. Interculturality may enable us to better face the challenges of current realities. We can understand it as empowerment not just to cope personally with current developments, but to deal with the potential of change, which can have a positive and constructive impact in our societies. That is why the creation and practice of our “intercultural learning capacities” are needed now more than ever.

In this perspective, intercultural research *is a learning process* that leads to personal growing with collective implications. It always invites to reflect in global dimensions asking ourselves about the roots of the main themes and problematiques emerging in the present society. This learning process have not to be taken as a personal acquisition or a luxury for a few people working in an international

³ See the complete version of this document in Council of Europe / Committee of Ministers Publications. F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex , June 2008 www.coe.int/dialogue

environment. It is about observing, reflecting and acting in an increasingly diverse world that would never return to be as our parents' and grandparents' times - a learning process that can be made by any person .

In this learning process *intercultural work is particularly relevant for how we live together in our societies and how we can build the vision of the future with the others in a transformative process - celebrating diversity and differences towards a better world for All.*

* * *

INTERCULTURE EXPERIENCE OF AN AFRICAN BOKU ALUMNUS – OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL TEAMS IN RESEARCH

Keynote speech by **Dr. Helen N. Nakimbugwe**, Livestock geneticist at the National Animal Genetic Resources Centre and Databank (NAGRC&DB), Entebbe, Uganda. Part-time lecturer at Makerere University, Uganda. Member of a number of research teams.



In this age of globalisation, where more and more researchers are working on international teams, it is crucial to understand how different cultures can harmoniously interface with each other. One way of doing this, is to draw from experiences of people who have worked on these teams and this is what the Commission for Development Studies has done. I would like to thank the Commission for giving me the opportunity of sharing my experiences with you as regards intercultural issues, both as a student and later on as a researcher.

As a student of BOKU, especially as I was undertaking my *Diplomingenieur* studies, I was relatively young and as such receptive to the new culture I had gotten into, that is, the culture of the Austrian people. Although a lot of Austrian cultural aspects which I picked up during my studies have stuck with me e.g. I try very much to keep time, a yes is a yes not a yes for a no as is the case with many of my folks, other cultures like eating while walking on the streets is still uncomfortable with me even within Austria.

The challenges of a black person interfacing with the Austrian culture were many, but the rewards of this interface outweigh the challenges. Many of these challenges have become pillars of my strength and opportunities. For example, learning a new language and attending lectures in this new language at the University was, in the beginning, a nightmare, but learning to read and write in German is a big asset to me now. Knowing the language made me appreciate the Austrian culture more and made it possible for me to have friends, whom I would have otherwise not have had if I didn't know the language.

My studies took longer than I had anticipated, because of some compulsory courses, which I found at the time irrelevant. Take the case of the Austrian Law. How would such laws be of any use to me given the fact that I was not intending to stay in the country after my studies? However, as part of my work, I found myself getting involved in drafting laws to do with Animal Breeding in my country; so the course in Austrian Law gave me a good foundation for this. The wider knowledge base given at BOKU as opposed to the one in my country, at the time, has given me a lot of flexibility in my work. Hence, my interface with the Austrian education culture puts me always a step ahead, because I know something about a lot of things.

Another challenge during my student life was racism which came in different forms. However, exposure to it has enabled me to appreciate what minority groups go through and to understand the basic reasons for its cause. I, thus, hardly get offended by it. As I flew in, I expected to be stopped at Schwechat airport by security agents on my way out because of my colour, and this is exactly what happened. Earlier on, this would make me mad, and I would ask them why they would exclusively pick on me. This time around I just felt sorry for these poor narrow minded guys. During the 1990s, many student hostels in Vienna were plagued with xenophobia, in other words, very few of them accommodated foreign students. I found this outright discrimination. Foreigners had to congregate, by no choice of theirs, in the few tolerant hostels like Haus Doebling. This, on the other hand, gave me an opportunity to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds. One big lesson I learnt from this cultural mix was that human beings are the same all over the world with just some slight differences because of the cultural touch.

Many intercultural challenges which we faced as students were toned down with the entry of Austria into the European Union which saw more exchange of students and researchers between member countries. Indeed, a time had come for Austria to appreciate and understand other cultures. My stay in Austria as a student prepared me for a bigger platform as a researcher on international teams. I will refer to team

members from the developed countries as partners from the North and those from developing countries as partners from the South.

1. EXPERIENCE IN RESEARCH

| <u>Partners from the North</u> | <u>Partners from the South</u> |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many usually would have worked on different teams across different continents, so they tend to look at issues from a global perspective. They are good at publicizing issues – publications, presenting papers at conferences etc. | <p>A good number would have worked on different teams, but in the same country, so they tend to look at issues from a national perspective.</p> <p>Members appreciate publicity of issues, but they do not do it satisfactorily.</p> |

2. FUNDING

| | <u>North</u> | <u>South</u> |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Contribution to a research project | ~ 70% | ~30% |
| Financial commitment | Strong 100€ = 100€ | Weak 100€ = 40€ |
| Type of commitment | Cash / in kind | in kind |
| Financial disbursement mechanism | The financial envelopes are attractive, but accessing their contents is difficult. For example, funds have to go through many bodies – Ministry of Finance, Austria, then through the International Livestock Research Institute then to implementing agencies on the ground (BOKU, NAGRC&DB, Makerere University etc). Each of these bodies have a set of financial rules which have to be followed. | Relatively easier because the source of funds is usually in the same country as the implementing agency. |
| Funds released on time | yes | hardly |

3. OPERATIONAL LEVEL

- Partners from the North are usually too fixed to their agenda which is not clearly known by their partners in the South. This culminates in different research teams using different approaches to tackle the same problem. For example, most of these teams set out to help communities come out of poverty, but they end up causing research fatigue to the beneficiaries. Take an example of a smallholder farmer, research team A is requesting him to attend a training session, in the morning hours, on using a technique aimed at curbing the banana wilt, while research team B is requesting him to be at home, still in

the morning hours, in order to take milk samples from his cows. Since communities need assistance, they will be receptive to whatever comes their way. Communities have had enough of being told that this research and this research are participatory in nature and intended to help them improve their livelihoods. Their standards of living may be low and many members of the community may not have gone far in education, but they are definitely not stupid. They have become experts in analysing the hidden agendas of researchers and as such tell researchers what they want to hear. Their reasoning: why not take the butter side of the bread and move on with your life.

Food for thought: Are we as researchers trying to improve the livelihoods of communities through our research, or are we trying to improve our own livelihoods through making publications and using communities just as conduits to our ends?

2. Partners from the South are slower at doing things e.g., in developing a collaborative research proposal, submitting reports etc. Since there are not so many researchers in the South, researchers, somehow, get involved in so many projects, concurrently. This could be one reason to explain their slowness, but the intrinsic reason is embedded in their culture – most things are done at a slower pace and in a relaxed manner. The hot climate in the South is partly to blame for this culture because it does not allow faster activities of the body. For example, walking faster would, in the process, generate a lot of heat, which heat the body is trying to dissipate. This results in slower bodily activities that finally translate into slower working habits.
3. Partners in the south are not good at planning. They plan two steps ahead instead of five. Is it an issue of not having enough money or an issue that can be traced back to a culture of not planning ahead because we don't have winters? The yearly seasons of the year have forced people in the North to plan ahead – if you don't plan for winter, you plan for your death (freezing and going hungry).
4. Different timeline events for partners. Partners in the North tend to roll out a calendar of events where the southern partners have to fit in their summer or winter time activities. This is not very comfortable with partners in the South, but it is usually the best alternative.
5. Intellectual / educational snobbery. Partners in the North tend to come with an attitude that they know better. It is true that they usually have wider experience, but the local people know their circumstances better. What they read in books about localities usually needs adjustments in order to suit what is on the ground.

As I conclude my speech, I will always remember what Max Rothschild, a re-known professor in pig genetics at Iowa State University once told me – **research with partners in the South is challenging, but the rewards are usually bigger.** It

brings him a lot of pleasure to see families being able to send their children to school because of his research efforts. The role of culture in research teams is a double edged sword which calls for tolerance and respect of one another in this global village. Although cultural differences enrich our outlook on life, they also tend to be an obstacle if they are not well managed. International research work with members from the South and the North shows that research, because of the cultural dimension of team members, tends to move two steps forward and one step backwards. This should, however, not discourage us. The most important thing is to at least move a step forward. It is these small steps which finally lead to giant steps in development. Thanks a lot for your attention.

