

Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus

Intercultural Communication in Educational setting

Reflection paper

On

Cultural difference across school and home of children with foreign cultural background:
Cultural Orientation Framework

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Task.1

Candidate no:508

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Abstract

This paper employs “Cultural orientation framework” to explain the cultural difference across the school and home of four girls with foreign culture. Mistrust emerged between the school and the parents when outdoor school activity had been discriminated from the indoor and the girls used to be absent on the excursion days. The teachers’ immediate solution was to question the validity of the illness the girls submitted after the excursion. Additionally, the teachers became frustrated with not being communicated openly if there was a standpoint. Neither the schedule had not been adhered nor the teachers were informed in a good time the girls’ absence from the excursion. As Kluckhohn argues, the paper assumes that there are common life problems which all human have to cope with. These problems include the time, modality of human relation and activity and human relation to nature. On the other hand, different people view their own beliefs and practices as normal and natural while those of others are considered as a strange, or even inferior (Hills, 2002,P.4).

Introduction

Culture a word with many meanings. It consists of pattern, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbol. A fundamental issue in the analysis of culture relates to the question of universalism i.e. is some aspects of behaviour universal or relativism, i.e. other aspects of culture (Spencer & Franklin, 2009: 16). Kluckhohn argues that there are common values which human share, i.e. biological traits and characteristics. She says also that there is a difference in people's judgment over their own cultural beliefs and practices and the culture of others. For example they see their own beliefs and practices as normal and natural while it is considered those of others as a strange, or even inferior (Hills, 2002:.4).

Therefore, this paper employs Cultural Orientation Framework (COF) to explain cultural differences across schools and home of minority children. Especially, it is used to illuminate a problem of four girls who discriminate the participation of the school indoor activity from the outdoor school activity. And the school teacher's solution was to suspect the excuse the girls submitted. Because they expected to be openly communicated in any standpoint, and schedules to be adhered or informed in good time if there was a sudden change and these norms did not happen.

This paper organizes in four parts. Followed by the introduction and the case study, the second section discusses Cultural Orientation Framework (COF) to explain the cultural difference across the school and home of four girls in regard to participation of outdoor activities. The third part applies COF on the case to analyze the cultural values of the home and the school and finally a conclusion is drawn on the last part of the paper.

So, it looks at the differences from the perspective of universalism. This position holds that there is a "moral statement" that applies to the school and home of the girls in Norway. "Moral universalism means that moral statements can be inferred from general moral statements that apply to everyone at all times and places" (Quintelier, et al. 2003:216).

1.1. Case study on cultural difference across school-home in Norway

In one family the children are in five different grades. Four are girls and one is a boy. The children speak Norwegian well. The father speaks some Norwegian. The mother speaks a little Norwegian. The children often interpret for the mother and sometimes for the father. Often the girls do not attend school on days of excursions (for example, on nature excursions, trips to the theatre where children role play, or visits to a farm, etc.). When the activity is being planned the parents do not mention that the girls will not be participating in the activity. The girls seem to look forward to the excursion during the planning stage, but do not attend on the day. Afterwards, the parents and the girls explain that the girls were ill. The excuse given for their absence on such excursions is questionable as the girls are never ill when normal classroom teaching (indoors) is going on. The other students in the class also question the excuse given for their absence on excursion days. The questioning is uncomfortable for the girls as both the students and teachers believe that the girls are not telling the truth (Becher, 2004:83). So the question is how can we explain exactly the problem? And who (the girls (student) or the teachers) should take the prime responsibility for solving the problem?

2. Cultural Orientation Framework (COF)

Understanding interaction between members of different cultural groups involves challenges (Spenser & Frankling 2009:50). That challenge refers to variations in individuals' value systems. A value system represents what is expected or hoped for in a society, not necessarily what actually occurs. Values deal with what is required or forbidden, what is judged to be good or bad or right or wrong (Ferraro, 2001:97). This may be a reason that different people, even if they rank-order in same way, have to vary in the relative preferences. Importantly, examining individual value systems helps the school to understand the value system of the parent and their daughters. Gallagher (2001) states that individuals' responses are not values per se but orientations upon which a culture builds its value system. Additionally the individual's value system can also be investigated in two different perspectives; universalistic or relativism; in other words, Etics and Emics. Etics might be chosen when cultural general is studied and emics is used to explain culture-specific situations (Spenser & Frankling 2009:50).

Cultural Orientation Framework is one of theories founded on culture-general views. Cultural Orientation is an inclination for responding in a certain culturally driven way to universal challenges (Rosinki, 2003). COF endorses moral universalism--“moral universalism means that moral statements can be inferred from general moral statements that apply to everyone at all times and places” (Quintelier, et al. 2003:216). This paper uses COF to explain cultural differences across school and home of four girls with immigrant parents. I advance three assumptions to support my decision why i used for COF which was developed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck. First, the paper assumes that employing COF will help the school understand the value system of parent which the girls carry them into school. It will also help the school and the parents to build modality of relation that is based on equality and parent be empowered with culture of negotiation. Finally it will facilitate the school assume the prime responsibility of building mutual trust through recognition of values of each part.

2.1 Common life problems

COF assumes that “there is a limited number of common human problems which all people must at all time find some solutions.” Maznevski and other scholars pointed out that certain problems are found in all societies which make possible a comparison across cultural values (Maznevski et al. 2002:279). This does not mean that every society, even if they rank the order in the same way, has relative preferences for each orientation as the other (Carter, 1990; Ghallagher, 2001). Are there communalities which function as limits to the teachers and parent/girls variability? The answer is yes. The paper assumes also that the culture of school and the home face common human problems, but the response of each group is influenced by its individual value system. Secondly my argument refers to the variations in responses are not information space to be investigated as Gallagher mentioned, but the individual values that trigger the distinction.

I also forward three assumptions to support my argument for existing general problems and different cultural value systems vary; first assuming general problem exists in key five areas of life including temporal focus of life, modality of activity, modality of relation, nature of human nature, human relation to nature. These areas of life pose problems that all societies have to cope with (Spencer & Franklin, 2009:24). Therefore, they would facilitate me to analyze why the relation of school teachers and the parents of the girls, is uncomplimentary and why their responses vary in excursion. Secondly, the alternative solutions available for them are often limited and

known, which help me to explain the relative preferences of each part. Finally, this point connects with the third which holds that these problems and solutions are present at all time present in all societies. It enables me to point that the relative preferences, not necessarily different group rank-order in a same way, are often variable across society.

Consequently, Maznevski et. al (2002) presented a set of five basic problems as questions while every set of problem is associated with two or three possible orientations (Maznevski et al. 2002:276). Different scholars used different terms to form the questions, for example Adler (1997) put question about basic human nature as how do I think about people? Of human relation to nature as how do I see the world? And human relation to people as how do I relate to other people? Finally the time temporal question is formed as how do I use time? .For instance, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck had put the six specific questions as following:-

1. What is the nature of human beings: are they good, evil or neutral?
2. What is our relationship to nature: are we subjugated to nature, in harmony with nature, or do we have mastery over it?
3. What is our relationship to other human beings: is it lineal (ordered position within groups), collateral (primacy given to goals and welfare of groups), or individualistic (primacy given to the individual)?
4. What is our primary mode of activity: is our basic orientation one of being-in becoming, doing or reflecting?
5. How do we view time: do we focus on the past, present, or future?

2.3 Individuals as holders of preferences

A question worth asking is whether or not we should examine the variance in responses or set of values that cause preferences of people to vary. This paper enlightens variations in the responses through investigating parent and school teachers' set of values. "Individuals are clearly identified as value 'holders' thus these values motivate individual behaviour" (Maznevski et al. 2002:279). Understanding these values "will illuminate many elements of individual behavior alone and in social settings, within and across cultures" (Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Schwartz and Bilsky, 1990; Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995; Maznevski et al. 2002:279). "The orientations serve as perceptual filters that screen information and potential choices about behavior (Erez and Earley, 1993), and

provide scripts for social interaction” (Maznevski and Peterson, 1997; (Maznevski et al. 2002:279). “In addition, the cultural orientations will provide an understanding of social behavior patterns, organized systems and decision-making” (Maznevski et al. 2002:279).

2.4 Dimensions are conceptually independent

One of the key assumptions to study cultural difference by employing COF is; first “the conceptual independence of dimensions proposed across and within orientations” (Maznevski et al. 2002:279). This means that the relations among orientations are delinked– Time; Activity; Relations; Person-nature and Human-nature, so a group can prefer past time orientation while being individualistic (Gallagher, 2001; Maznevski et al. 2002). This aspect of orientation allows us analyze culture more in depth and complex. “For example, the ability individuals to agree with two different variables within an orientation may discover that those who prefer differently act differently than those who agree similarly” (Maznevski et al. 2002: 278).

3. Applying the theory on the case

The culture of school and home of four girls with foreign background vary in many ways, but a conflict emerges when they fail to recognize these variations. On the excursion day, the girls had always been absent and illness which is a valid reason acceptable to Norwegian school system had often been advanced to school teachers. The teachers’ immediate solution was to hardly accept any excuse the girls and their parents submitted. If the absence of the girls from the excursion was undesirable behavior, the question is why did not school change the students’ behavior through recognizing their value system? Because the school is an institution that has a resource and expertise it has to deal with cultural differences. A reason might partly be presumed that the school teachers view the girls and parents as “evil/ immutable.” The school’s intervention had been neither a good relation to be built nor other means was employed to change undesirable behavior of the girls. Other factors might also have influenced the neutrality of the school’s interventions. This orientation deals with a person who was viewed as “born evil and incapable of being changed. Therefore requires salvation by an external force (Hills, 2011:6).

Secondly the relation between the agency (parents and their daughters) and the school depends on how parents and the school teachers relate to each other. The family bond was comparatively

strong that might be a reason the girls deferred the parent for their decisions outdoor school activity to be disengaged. As hierarchical society, children defer to their parents and students defer to teachers (Ferrare, 2001:106). Additionally, the parent's failure to communicate openly might be interpreted they deferred to school teachers. This means that school was perceived to have power over the student and parents. It is not necessarily that the perception to be real, as long the parent failed to question and openly communicate their disagreements with the school teachers-- it shows implicitly their acceptance of the inequality. Hofstede's definition of power distance is "the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal." (Hofstede, 1986:307)

On the other hand, the school failed to promote the egalitarian culture that Norwegian relation is founded, to enable parents to utilize their freedom to choose things that they have a reason to value and negotiate openly their standpoints. Norway scores low on power distance dimension (31) which means that culturally people do not accept hierarchical order (Hofstede.com). Conversely, the parents of these girls lived most of their time in developing countries (Becher, 2004:81), these regions score high on the power distance (Hofstede.com). Therefore, this experience might influence the perception of the parents the power of the school to be hierarchical and accept the higher power distance.

Thirdly the difference of modality of school and home activity is uncomplimentary-- each part has a vested interest in maintaining its own value. The challenge lies in a failure of the school teachers to understand that the model of activity that the home endorses was different from that of the school. They were presumably motivated by "doing" culture, i.e. to value what the girls do in the school more than the relation between the girls and their parents. They expected, if there was a conflict between the participation and family relation, taking the excursion part should take precedence over the girls' relation to their parents. So the teachers place an importance in outdoor school activities, open communication, a socialization to be valued and schedules to be strictly followed. While the parents had been motivated by being culture i.e. the relation was valuable to the girls and parent's decision was respected. "Being culture" refers that "our motivation is internal, emphasizing activity valued by our self but not necessarily by others in the group" (Hills, 2011:5)..

Fourthly, the teachers viewed as untrustworthy the excuse the girls and their parent forwarded in relation to their absence from the excursion. A reason may be that the school teachers had not invested much time in building long term relation with the parents. Because the decision of the parent and their daughters over taking schedules and plans seriously, perceiving time friendly and valuing indoor more than outdoor activity had been guided by their cultural norms. The parent who most of their time spent in developing countries honors past time and places greater emphasis on building social relationships. There was a reason that the school teachers do not build long term relation with the home was because they honor past time orientation as the parent. A culture that prioritizes past time can be described as normative i.e “our decision criteria should be guided mostly by tradition” (Maznevski et.al 2002:277). With a relatively low score of 35, Norwegian culture exhibits great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results (Hofstedet.com). So the decision to arrange outdoor school activities and adhere to schedule and time to be perceived a threat and many short term relations are often guided by societal norms.

4. Conclusion

COF has a limitation. It is usually regarded not being in tune with the complex questions of intercultural interactions, especially in more heterogeneous and dynamic nature of much national and ethno-linguistic culture (Spenser, Franklin, 2009:26). The paper used it to examine cross cultural values of school and home of four girls. As Kluckhohn argues humans share common nature in the domain of perception. Their views are often considered differently with regard to the cultural values of theirs and those of others. This case study has noted that cultural values across the home of four girls and their school in Norway, which vary in many ways, influenced the school activities and the relation between the teachers and some of their students. The girls discriminated indoor from outdoor school activity, while the immediate response of the teachers was to suspect a validity of the excuse attached with the absence of the girls on the excursion days. However, the school could have a better understanding if they employed COF to manage the standpoints. The parent could be empowered to understand the egalitarian culture which abandons higher power distance, so they could communicate openly their disagreements over the excursion thus consensus could have been reached.

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