

Intercultural Communication - A "Key Competence" under Scrutiny'

ANDREA CNYRIM

Hochschule Karlsruhe Technik und Wirtschaft

In the German debate, the concept of intercultural competence faces a curious mismatch:

On the one hand, it seems to be an unquestioned asset, a key qualification that is required in many areas: - the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages promotes it largely, - German Universities have made efforts to create additional certificates giving credits for a set of activities that integrate - amongst others - workshops, international mobility and/or buddy programs, and - a large number of job advertisements call for this key competence. In the seminal Handbook of Intercultural Competence, Deardorff even claims for it to be a prerequisite for "our very survival as humankind"ⁱ.

On the other hand, cross-cultural approaches are under scrutiny in the field, suspected of essentialism, culturalism, of promoting stereotypes, prejudice and thus racism.

In this context, the concept of 'reflexivity of perspectives' has emerged as a promising approach to be integrated in teaching contexts including language instruction, multilingual classroom settings and also offerings for international guest students. The concept will be shortly introduced and discussed using some selected examples from University level training for different audiences.

ⁱ Deardorff 2009, 269: "In the end, intercultural competence is about our relationships with each other and ultimately, our very survival as humankind, as we work together to address the global challenges that confront us in this century".