Intercultural Communication Reflection Essay #1:

Autobiography: Implication for Intercultural Communication Effectiveness

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Intercultural communication becomes inevitable nowadays since we not only communicate with people from our own country but also with people from different countries. Arent (2009) defines, "Intercultural communication is the sending and receiving of messages across languages and cultures. It is also a negotiated understanding of meaning in human experiences across social systems and societies." It can be implicated to every culture, values, beliefs and competences as well as my Thai culture. There are various foundational elements of intercultural communication that influence my way of life, values, beliefs and attitudes such as enculturation, flexibility, open-mindedness, the conscious incompetence stage and the unconscious incompetence etc. Moreover, since I came to George Mason University, I have learned about different cultures and that also moderately enrich me to be more effective communicator.

I was born and grew up in Bangkok, Thailand where is considered as one of the most collectivistic culture. In collectivistic cultures, people find the importance to attend and fulfill the need of others (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). I live in a large family, with 1 brother and 4 sisters including me, and we all are close to each other. My parents have taught me to always be kind, compassionate, and honest and one of my family's value enculturation is how to care and help people even in difficult times. Back to my childhood life, I always help my parents to take care of my younger sisters, which can help ease the burden for my parents. On the other hands, my older sister and brother are excellent role models for me as well. Moreover, my family believes in the Karma and its effect on presence, gratitude and to be grateful to parents in order to succeed in future life. Consequently, some of the same beliefs were passed down to me. Although, my parents did not always teach me every single thing, I can see and observe them and elders doing a particular thing. For instance, to pay respect to the elders by pressing hands

together in front of your chest as a gesture of respect (Non-verbal symbols). In addition, Thai

people put a great value on courtesy like politeness and respect, respecting elders is very crucial

in Thai culture. This demonstrates that there is high power distance culture among Thai people

and my family. I obviously obey my parents and never shout at them because I respect them.

Referring to Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) mentioned, "People in large power distance

cultures tend to accept unequal power distributions, hierarchical rights, asymmetrical role

relations, and rewards and punishments based on age, rank, status, title, and seniority." (p.48).

This is also related to my position in family, university, workplace and society. However, my

parents' process of enculturation was a valuable perspective that has influenced the person I am

today. Enculturation can affect people in several ways of the understandings and beliefs depend

on their given society (Demorest et al. 2008).

In 2012, when I was studying in the UK for my Bachelor's Degree, I had a friend who

could not speak English very well and was struggling to find an accommodation. In that

situation, I spent 2 days taking my friend to the housing agencies and discussed the whole

process of the agreement. The next day, I helped her move all belongings and organized

everything, put stuff in the place. I then realize my parent's belief that to help people in difficult

time is considered as "Goodness and merit". This can count as values in my family's culture,

which had a strong impact on my way of life and I believed that if in the future I may face the

same situations as my friend, I will be able to overcome those problem easily. By doing so, I

accepted that my values and beliefs influence my friend who comes from different cultures more

or less.

During the time in George Mason University, it is significant to understand intercultural

communication flexibility while communicating and staying in different cultures. Intercultural

communication flexibility in my point of view means that an adaptive capability to interact with people who are from various cultural backgrounds. At first, it may be difficult for me to apprehend an individualistic society, because we are brought up with a set of beliefs and values. When I was asked to work as a group or doing presentation, Americans students usually split their work individually and do each task on their own as compared to people in Thailand. People often work together and help each other to complete the task. With the passing of time, I understand the way they are and try to adapt myself into their culture. In general, having open-mindedness is very important in intercultural communication, it helps us learn about other people and other cultures and make us better communicators.

Meanwhile, the four stage of learning model (A Straircase Model) can highly assist people to develop intercultural communication skill. It involved in the process of progressing from a very incompetence way of how we look at the world to a very competence way where we are able to communicate more easily (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). In fact, I am an international student who English is not a first spoken language, I aware every times when I communicate with American people that my accent may be unfamiliar to them. Beside that I have lived in the UK for several years so, some word pronunciations may be different in the States. However, I have tried to learn American accent and I believe my American English will be better by time goes on. In this point, I know that I reached the conscious incompetence stage, as well as the acceptance and acknowledgement of my incompetence. Another situation, one day at the shopping mall in New York, I was asking a person at the information desk, "Excuse me, do you know where I can use a lift?" A guy did not understand what I supposed to say then he asked me one more time, "Sorry, can you say again?" I kept saying, "the lift" and I spelt "L-I-F-T", but he still looked baffled and waited for my answer but then I said that I want to go to the

fourth floor, he suddenly replied, "Oh! You want to use the elevator". This stage of communication appeared in unconscious incompetence because I do not know what I do not know but I continued saying it because I do not know that Americans called lift as "Elevator".

Finally, intercultural communication has adjusted my way of thinking to have better adaptation to a new environment (the US culture). It leads me the necessary knowledge and dynamic skills to create cross-cultural communication effectively which helps me to reduce feeling of anxiety in contacts with members of other cultures especially, with Americans, in the long run. By the same token, this class influences me to increase self-awareness of my own culture, values, norms and cultural identity with regard to avoid ethnocentrism. As my role identity here, in the US is the international student and I cannot see and judge my own culture as the center of the universe (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). It is necessary to understand the way people around you behave because I admitted that every culture has their own values. One of my learning goals for this class is also to learn more from people who come from different cultures. At some points, I assume that people can combine the best of all cultural aspect to solve some particular problems or a workplace problem in future life.

References

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