

THE SMELL OF FRIED ONIONS AND OTHER STORIES: A CASE STUDY IN A NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

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*A man is always a teller of tales
he lives surrounded by his stories and
the stories of others; he sees everything
that happens to him through them,
and he tries to live his life as
if he were recounting it.*

Jean-Paul Sartre

In the past few years in South Africa the concept of 'multiculturalism' has become a buzzword which captures a variety of ideas about managing the country's cultural diversity and effecting reconciliation; the success of which is supposed to create national unity and a new nationhood. Nelson Mandela's words at his inauguration in May 1994, *Many cultures, one nation*, exemplify at least one popular conception of multiculturalism. But a buzzword, especially when it is imbued with political correctness (e.g. the usefulness of national unity/nationhood), is an ambiguous tool of the mind if it is not subjected to rigorous conceptual scrutiny which explicate the variety of uses a buzzword acquires and the new tensions it may create - specifically in a society that cannot wish away its history and its diverse and complex cultural composition.

With reference to recent attempts in South Africa to restructure history education in schools and making changes to history syllabi and textbooks, Cuthbertson (1994:1133) points out how these debates remind of the 'multicultural wars' that have raged in the United States in a similar societal

context of cultural diversity. There multiculturalism has been regarded as the cause of a fractured history and has lead to separation instead of integration because of its links with political correctness. Hence, he concludes that multiculturalism and political correctness need to be demythologized.

THREE MODELS OF MULTICULTURALISM

C.N. Hall (1997:654) argues that the concept of multiculturalism is often oversimplified and states that 'multiculturalism includes a wide variety of alternative perspectives, from relativist to absolutist, probably no more or less than might be found in any other school of thought.' From a variety of scholarly reflections (Hall 1997; Hall 1997; Jordaan 1998a; Pedersen 1994; Villa-Vicencio 1995) at least three distinct applications of the concept of multiculturalism emerge. For purposes of convenience these can be identified as the *cultural separatist model*, the *assimilation model* and the *pluralist model*. The merits, demerits and implications of these models will not be argued here at length. My exposition is merely aimed at supplying a brief conceptual clarification to enhance the reader's understanding of this case study.

The cultural separatist model

In this model multiculturalism is intentionally grounded in an essentialist notion of ethnicity in terms of which 'ethnic groups are typically imagined as if they were natural, real, eternal, stable and static units' (Sollors 1996:58). From a postmodern perspective, Sollors argues that such groups are 'invented' for a variety of reasons, for example, to mobilise their members for political purposes. Likewise De Waal (1998:40-41) indicates how the acceptance of ethnicity as a 'natural given' may lead to the glorification of the assumed homogeneity, uniqueness and common descent of ethnic groups culminating in a clear demarcation of 'us' and 'them'.

In this demarcation the natural spontaneous phenomenon of non-political ethnic consciousness, which is based on the perception of difference, is often transformed into an ethnic mobilisation process whereby the *elite*

(leaders of an ethnic group) create an imagined community and patrols the ethnic boundaries between 'us' and 'them' to stake out their claims. Imagined aspects of the invention of uniqueness may include, according to De Waal (1998:42), traditional clothing, folk tales and a selective understanding of the group's own history.

In the context of political correctness (nation building/national unity) this approach to multiculturalism clearly chooses *perceived difference* as a basis for cultural segregation, which is seen to be the only peaceable way of maintaining and respecting cultural diversity. The ideal of 'national unity/one nation' means at most that diverse cultural groups are accommodated in the same geographical space.

Various scholars have argued that the emphasis on difference and ethnic purity, passed off as natural, may be regarded as:

- * new and disguised forms of maintaining power and the privileges of particular cultural groups;
- * reviving 'race instincts';
- * neo-colonialism and neo-apartheid; and
- * reproducing imperialist modes of discourse whereby, in the South African context, the opposition between the knowing (Western) agent and the object of knowledge (African) is perpetuated (Anderson 1996; Cuthbertson 1994; De Kock 1992; Pedersen 1994; Villa-Vincencio 1995).

Rejection of cultural separatism as a way of managing cultural diversity, is, of course, not a recent occurrence. For example, in 1905 the Afro-American author C.W. Chesnutt (1905:25) observed:

Frankly, I take no stock in this doctrine. It seems to me a modern invention of the white people to perpetuate the color line. It is they who preach it, and it is their racial integrity which they wish to preserve: they have never been unduly careful of the purity of the black race...Why should a man be proud any more than he should be ashamed of a thing for which he is not at all responsible?...Are

we to help the white people to build up walls between themselves and us to fence in a gloomy back yard for our descendants to play in?

More recently, in the African context, various African scholars and writers commented on the 'invention' of labels such as the 'typically African collective consciousness' and 'lack of individualism' which supposedly set Africa apart from their European counterparts. These authors, e.g. Appiah (1992), Hountondji (1983) and Wiredu (1980), regard such inventions - stemming by and large from the conceptions of Europeans who came to Africa as missionaries, researchers and colonialists - as a fictitious unanimism which obscures the diversity of African culture and thought. Consequently, through overgeneralisation and stereotyping, a proper understanding of and debate about sameness and difference and the discovery of shared humanity, are hampered.

In conclusion, the hallmark of the cultural separatist model is that of maximising cultural differences in a particularist way; of maintaining 'us' and 'them' by ethnic demarcations.

The assimilation model

At its core the assimilation model employs the 'melting pot' metaphor whereby it is argued that, for the sake of nationhood/national unity, cultural diversities should, through careful social engineering, be *assimilated* into the cultural character of the politically and/or culturally dominant group (Marsella & Pedersen 1981).

This universalist position in matters of managing cultural diversity is, of course, not a recent phenomenon. For example, in the context of colonialism and oppression in Africa, the assimilation model has been vigorously employed. How this happened in Africa is comprehensively described in Bulhan's (1977; 1980; 1985) dialectical theory of cultural in-betweenity which will serve as basis for the subsequent brief exposition of assimilation and its consequences.

He points out how black Africans' initial enchantment with the dominant colonialist Western culture created the urge to be fully assimilated into the dominant culture. Influences of the traditional indigenous culture continued to co-exist with the 'new' culture, but were clearly in conflict with it. To resolve the conflict the indigenous culture was rejected in favour of the dominant culture. Gradually this rejection has led to *capitulation* to the dominant Western culture. Signs of such capitulation were, for example, a patronising attitude towards the indigenous culture and idealisation of Western culture. The patronising attitude itself was nurtured and strengthened by the negative evaluation of traditional African culture by the colonialist mentality, with the result that, for example, black children were taught at school to despise or denigrate their own cultural heritage.

According to Bulhan's theory the capitulation phase of cultural in-betweenity contained the seeds of a psycho-existential crisis among black Africans, and caused them to embark on a desperate search for their cultural roots and identity. At its core this crisis indicated disenchantment which occurred when black Africans, in the colonialist context, were confronted with the realities of racism, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination in terms of which they had a low-status identity and were regarded as second-class citizens; and, with that, the realisation that full assimilation into the dominant Western culture is an impossible project. At this point, black Africans felt wholly marginalised and experienced an intense identity crisis.

Disenchantment has been described in a variety of ways by black scholars and black consciousness leaders. For example, Manganyi (1973:68), who presently is director-general of the Department of National Education, has written as follows:

We are at a time in our history as black people on the verge of caving in spiritually, culturally and psychologically to...the sheer power of psycho-social domination...we are almost reduced to self-negation and other forms of mindlessness.

Likewise Stephen Biko (1978:43), deceased black consciousness leader, wrote:

All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.

According to Bulhan's theory the psycho-existential crisis was resolved through a psychosocial process of *revitalisation* which was a reaction to assimilation. Bulhan's theory states that revitalisation amounts, on the one hand, to a repudiation of the dominant culture and, on the other, an uncritical and romantic glorification of the indigenous culture. The dominant culture is regarded as the cause of loss of identity among members of the indigenous culture, and is blamed for all the problems and hardships experienced in the process of assimilation.

The function of revitalisation was to bring about a re-evaluation and rediscovery of meaningful indigenous cultural forces. The black consciousness movement in South Africa expressed this sentiment in a variety of ways, e.g. by redefining black identity positively and by cultivating a new self-esteem and self-understanding (Lötter 1992). It is enlightening to quote Stephen Biko (1978:43) in this regard:

The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump life back into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity; to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth.

Although Bulhan regards revitalisation as an important phase in cultural in-betweenity, he argues that it cannot be but transitional in the face of new realities such as a global civilisation, increasing intercultural contact in a variety of life-settings and their collective effects on cultural change. These factors anticipate a third phase in his theory, i.e. radicalisation, which in turn anticipates the pluralist model of multiculturalism.

Radicalisation entails forming multiple personal identities by integrating the indigenous culture with the dominant culture. In this phase black Africans who have had a Western education and training feel comfortable about their indigenous culture - so much so that they are keenly aware of its merits and demerits and are able to see these in clear perspective. At the same time they are equally comfortable with the dominant Western culture and equally able to evaluate its merits and demerits. The way in which *ubuntu* has been applied successfully in multinational (culturally diverse) companies (Mbigi 1997) serves as an illustration of radicalisation as conceptualised by Bulhan.

In conclusion, the hallmark of the assimilation model is that of minimising differences in cultural diversity in an universalist way, i.e. of assuming the existence of sufficient sameness and to exploit this, either by ignoring difference and/or through applying political power to design programmes of social engineering. In practical terms it assumes, for example, that the same psychological processes are operating in all humans independent of culture, and would therefore not provide for any modification to counselling or educational practices to fit different cultures (Pedersen 1994).

The pluralist model

The pluralist model occupies a reconciliatory position between the two preceding models by arguing that a selection of either of the two as a basis for managing cultural diversity results in a false choice. Although not assuming an explicitly stated pluralist position, Pedersen (1994:3) captures the heart of the pluralist model as follows:

Multiculturalism presents us with a paradox because it requires us to look at how we are the same and how we are different at the same time. The multicultural perspective is one of the most important ideas in this century because it emphasizes both the ways that we are unique and the ways that we share parts of our identity with others.

What makes this view pluralist is that it points at the way in which human beings, coming from different cultures, discover and appreciate their sameness (common humanity) and difference (unique humanity) through acts of shared meaning-making; thereby acknowledging and embracing the existence of multiple realities and the notion of a polyphonic self that 'enters' and 'exits' these realities in Protean-like fashion (Gergen 1996; Lifton 1996; Zweig 1996).¹

At a psychological level of constructing individual self-hood the embracement of pluralism may be seen as cultivating the capacity to accommodate multiple cultural influences so that these become part and parcel of the individual's self-identity. Two examples to elucidate this capacity for multicultural awareness and a pluralist construction of self-hood: First, the black writer and intellectual Es'kia Mphahlele (in Oliphant 1997) who has been exposed to diverse cultural influences in the course of his life. He wrote as follows about his African and Western cultural heritage:

These two ways of living...in South Africa are much more integrated than you will find outside South Africa...I have reconciled a good number of these disparate elements in me. My African values continue to remain a top, solid thing inside me, the African humanism...wanting to be one with the community, which is very African; this individualism also...the European part of [me] but at the same time you get this middle point where you can reconcile these disparate elements. I think I have done so in me.'

Secondly, the Jewish American writer Saul Bellow who advised the Indian author Chirantan Kulshresta on how he could draw creatively from his almost forgotten Hindu heritage (quoted in Jordaan & Jordaan 1998:635):

¹ The reference to 'Protean' derives from the Greek myth about Proteus, a sage who could look into the future and spoke the truth. But it was difficult to obtain his disclosures since he only spoke if you could pin him down and force him to do so. To avoid this and being confined to a single form, he readily changed himself into a lion, a dragon, a leopard, or into water, fire, a wild hog, etc. From this metaphor derives the notion of the 'disappearing self' - the Protean person carrying many selves within the self.

You can try. You should take the risk of trying. You have been influenced by the Hindu faith at a tender age. How can you deny it? It is one of the many things that has made you what you are; it is the greatest treasure you possess, which you need not repudiate to anyone. It is part of your creative, imaginary life and as such to be cherished - not as a religious faith, not by means of rational argument, but as something that is yours spontaneously, a fact of life. This is how I regard my own Jewishness, as a source of strength - not because I have studied the Talmud or other scholarly works, but because at a sensitive and vulnerable age I experienced my Jewishness and see it as a gift, something I need not reason about.

Against the background of these three models I will now briefly describe a case study of 'multiculturalism-in-action'.

CASE STUDY

Background

During and after the fairly peaceful transition to a majority government in South Africa in 1994 there existed a generalised euphoria about the capacity of the South African nation to come to terms with its violent past and history of racism. To participate in nation-building numerous institutions at the time initiated steps to inculcate - within the increasingly culturally diverse workplace (resulting *inter alia* from affirmative action) - a corporate ethos of multicultural awareness and sensitivity.

At the University of South Africa the services of an outside consultant were obtained to run a series of multicultural sensitivity workshops to improve race relationships within the institution. Members of the Department of Psychology decided to try something different in view of research evidence that such 'let's-get-together-and-discover-one-another's-culture' workshops often fail to produce positive results, tend to create great conflict as well as a kind of 'cook-book' approach to managing cultural diversity (Wiggill

1994).² A number of UNISA academics and students were invited to form part of a group to design a multicultural competency programme for UNISA. A research grant was also obtained from the university's Research and Bursary Committee. It was argued on the basis of what UNISA could gain by having its own well-researched in-house multicultural competency programme.

Altogether 24 persons accepted - a culturally diverse group consisting of white Afrikaans and English-speaking men and women, Indian men and women, black men and women, and a coloured person. They came from diverse departments, e.g. psychology, communication, business economics, African languages, industrial psychology, sociology, missiology, science of religion, the Bureau for University Teaching and the Student Services Bureau. In terms of rank there were also major differences between group members - ranging from vice-deans to heads of departments, to senior and junior lecturers, and three undergraduate students.

Methodology³

As background for the first meeting in January 1995 reading material dealing with various views on the concept of multiculturalism was distributed - very much the same material discussed in the exposition of three models of multiculturalism. In an accompanying letter the initiator of the project explained the purpose of the project and the research method.

² Wiggill's (1994:10-12) reference to the dangers of a cook-book approach to multiculturalism deserves further attention. In what he identifies as a maximalist approach to multiculturalism, an enormous amount of time is often devoted to teaching people recipes for dealing with 'Zulus' or 'women' or 'Afrikaners' and so on. This approach runs at least two risks: (1) that people merely learn a short-term strategy to deal with the problem at hand, for example getting a work group to define its objectives, but there is no long-term improvement in relationships. (2) this approach may actually continue existing cultural stereotypes. For example, accepting the stereotypes/generalisations that blacks are group-orientated and collectivist and that whites are individualist, may lead to particular expectations and behaviours in the work place which obscure the real diversity in the work place (as is indicated by Bulhan's description of radicalisation). Needless to say, this calls for strained relationships.

³ The description of the case study is based on video-recordings made of each session, articles published by Heese (1997) and Naidoo (1997), unpublished presentations given by some of the participants at a special reflective conference in 1996, personal communication with the initiator of the project, prof. Jackie Jordaan, and some personal notes made during the meetings.

The idea was to structure the group into two circles, an inner and outer circle. The inner circle would conduct discussions and deliberations while the outer circle would observe, record, interpret and subsequently comment in ethnomethodological fashion (Atkinson 1992; Zimmermann & Polner 1970). The intention was that the inner circle at one session would become the outer circle of a subsequent session, so that one group of participants would not consistently form the inner circle or *vice versa*.

It was also explained that a leaderless group approach would be followed to allow for the spontaneous unfolding of leadership patterns. The idea was to meet once a week for about two hours. It was further agreed that the participants should call each other by their first names.

As can be expected from a group of academics the research method was seriously challenged at the first meeting - opposition to the discomfort and embarrassment at being observed as a member of an inner circle, and the frustration of not being allowed to participate as member of the outer circle. After much debate it was decided to form one group, each member freely participating as she/he wishes.

Phase 1: Confusion at large

Given the purpose of the project - to design a course in multicultural competence - a number of interesting features emerged from the first few meetings:

- * There were clear differences in the participation style of blacks and whites. Whereas white members tended immediately to get 'down to business' focusing on the urgent matter of formulating objectives and strategies in aid of developing the course, black members' participation was characterised by a variety of 'preludes'. In some cases these preludes were aimed at stepping back into history to convey to the group their historically disadvantaged position and to reflect on the 'why's' and 'wherefore's' of participating. Some other preludes expressed serious misgivings about the real motive for the venture and doubted its success. And in some other instances preludes could be

seen as a manifestation of the African conception of communalism - establishing, as it were, connectedness before business.

- * In the process a great deal of anger and resentment was expressed by some black participants. They perceived the UNISA culture as unfriendly, even hostile, and referred to their powerlessness amidst white Afrikaner male domination in the UNISA; and the multifarious dehumanising effects apartheid had on them.
- * Some participants experienced the multicultural group atmosphere as indicative of distrust and hostility. Signs of distrust emerged with regard to the stated intention of establishing a course on multicultural competency. It was claimed, for example, that the concept of multiculturalism could be used to 'bamboozle blacks' and to 'keep the "darkies" in their place' - neo-apartheid in disguise with the implication that multiculturalism was race and power-driven. Vociferous explanations by some white members that this was not the case if one would, for example, pursue a pluralist understanding of multiculturalism did little to alleviate the tension in the group
- * Amidst the predominantly serious 'face' of the group, spontaneous humour and laughter were not uncommon in the group's deliberations.
- * Arguments and counter-arguments, at times in a typical academic lecturing style, circled to a large extent around issues about the three models of multiculturalism discussed in the first part of the article. Members generally indulged in talking to rather than listening to one another, each trying to convince the other of the 'correct' view of multiculturalism.
- * When participants were asked to state what they expected to gain from the project, responses ranged from highly academic formulations to concrete personal concerns, often related in simple story-like format. A few examples of these expectations are:

- To establish the need for and importance of exploring the possibilities of sameness rather than difference;
- To test whether the empirical psychology of reconciliation, as expounded in the contact hypothesis, would work in this particular setting;
- To establish how multicultural competence may be used to foster entrepreneurship in business, and to effect a booming economy; insisting that the black cultures will have to adapt to the demands of a sophisticated economy, and that the Japanese experience should be emulated;
- To understand what multiculturalism means and to develop sensitivity skills;
- To break with superficiality in multicultural encounters;
- To address the question of the equality of cultures;
- To effect changes in the dominant culture of UNISA - against the background that an insignificant percentage of UNISA staff was black; and that the dominant corporate culture was white, conservative and racist.
- A newly appointed black female junior lecturer expressed her expectations as follows:

'How do I demonstrate multicultural competence in the following situations?: I answer the phone. It is evidently a white student. But then a moment's silence would follow when the student discovers it was "a black voice". Often such students ask to speak to a lecturer - apparently assuming the "black voice" cannot help them; that it is not a "real" lecturer speaking.' She laughed heartily at the irony of it all and continued: 'Now black students would phone. And they would do an even worse thing - not accepting that the "black voice" can be of any help, asking for a "person" to speak to!'

How she would gain acceptability in a culturally diverse academic context, was for her the vexing question. At a later occasion she told the group: 'Don't think that because I speak with an accent, I also think with an accent.' She also reflected in a humorous way about her first 'unfriendly' day at Unisa: With great enthusiasm she arrived at Unisa

in the heat of summer. There was no furniture in her office. She enquired about this. The first item to be delivered was a heater!

- Another black female lecturer related how demeaning it was to work in an essentially unfriendly hostile environment - being appointed as an academic (under a policy of affirmative action), but not being affirmed as a colleague who is lonely in a strange place. She recalled how difficult it was to decide where to go for tea and considered drinking tea with the black cleaning women. 'Will multicultural sensitivity help me?', she wondered.
- * No progress was made with the project itself. Agreement could not be reached about anything - not even about a mere listing of factors that should be looked at in developing a multicultural competency programme. On occasion a persuasive argument on the logic of operationalising the empirical evidence of the 'contact hypothesis' to arrive at a sensible starting point, was flatly ignored.⁴
- * As time passed, frustration ran high as the group did not seem to make any progress with designing a course. As soon as the group seemed to agree about a direction to follow, somebody would 'sabotage' the plan

⁴ In its most rudimentary form the 'contact hypothesis' states that increased contact between members of various race and/or cultural groups may be effective in reducing hostility, stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination *if the contact takes place under specific favourable conditions*. These favourable conditions are important in view of the empirical evidence that contact between races/cultures does not in itself have the desired effect, and that in many instances prejudice and stereotyping increase after contact (Cook 1984; Brewer & Miller 1984; Stephan 1986). The nature of favourable conditions have been extensively researched, e.g. Allport (1954); Mynhardt & Du Toit (1991); Schwarzwald, Amir & Crain (1992). Such favourable conditions have been listed and discussed in the context of the new democratic dispensation in South Africa by Jordaan (1998a) and Jordaan & Jordaan (1998). These factors are:

- * a legitimising societal norm that 'validates' contact and reconciliation;
- * equal status of members during contact;
- * personal interaction between group members;
- * cooperative activities in which all members participate;
- * a multicultural ethos; and
- * critical consciousness of covert and overt forms of oppression.

of action; as soon as structure was imposed somebody would 'destructure' it. The group seemed to be going no-where.

- * As the first five to six weeks went by members start dropping out of the group. Some apologised they had too much work; others simply did not come again; and some others intimated that the project was doomed to fail, or would not yield the desired result given the group's working method. After six weeks only twelve members of the original remained as 'regulars'. Incidentally, this figure is more or less the 'ideal' number for effective group functioning when the group task involves or requires intense personal contact (Douglas 1978). This smaller group consisted of the same basic racial/cultural mix described earlier.

Phase 2: Turning points

The smaller group continued with its regular meetings. Group members became more comfortable with each other during meetings, but also outside the group situation. For example, when group members encountered each other in the passages of, and in formal meetings at, UNISA they would spontaneously talk to one another, share jokes and discuss general UNISA matters. There were also other indications of greater openness, e.g. the students in the group would visit group member lecturers in their offices to discuss personal problems. As group members came to know each other better, there were indeed signs of personal interaction in terms of the contact hypothesis (see Note 4) as well as a developing *group cohesion* (Zaccaro & McCoy 1988). But still no real progress with the group task was made.

Two specific events brought about change and new direction:

On one occasion the group arrived and sat around talking, but not actually discussing the topic at hand. It went on like this for 30 minutes. The project initiator (a white senior woman professor) later indicated that on this occasion she deliberately, contrary to the group's expectation, avoided starting the session. Then the following conversation ensued when a young

black woman lecturer (identified as A) turned to the project initiator (identified as B) sitting next to her and said:

'What are we waiting for, B - for Godot?'

'We might very well be waiting for Godot', B responded.

Hearing this conversation, a somewhat perplexed white male senior lecturer, who had his basic training in the natural sciences, asked:

'Who's Godot?'

Almost simultaneously the two women responded:

'Nobody knows.'

The white male was even more perplexed.

Immediately following this conversation the black woman lecturer (A), who up to that point was somewhat reserved in the group discussions, turned to the group, clapped her hands and said firmly: 'Ladies and gentlemen, can we start now.' The whole group came to order immediately - and down to business.

At least two aspects about this scenario are important: Firstly, in terms of the contact hypothesis (see Note 4) this was a clear sign of the matter-of-fact acceptance of equal status - i.e. a young black woman lecturer bringing senior white academic staff to order and wishing things to 'move'; unlike what was happening, or rather not happening(!), in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. Secondly, I believe it can be assumed that the black woman lecturer felt empowered to act as she did because deep down she experienced the advantage of her multicultural awareness - sharing with a white senior woman professor a bit of 'insider' Western literary information about which a white male group member obviously had no knowledge.

At this meeting the group managed to identify a number of objectives for the proposed multicultural programme. Subsequently a workshop was held to discuss and properly conceptualise the listed objectives. Progress was in the making. At this workshop *stereotyping* was identified as a major stumbling block in improving race/cultural relationships. The importance of *personal narrative* in dealing with stereotyping was also discussed, and

it was suggested that we hold a stereotype reduction workshop with the assistance of an outside facilitator.⁵

The group decided against it because they believed that there was sufficient competence and openness in the group to deal with this particular matter. Instead, the group accepted the offer of one of the participants, a white woman professor (hereafter referred to as C) to make a presentation entitled: 'Myself as an Afrikaner: a case study.'

(Another group member, a white woman senior student advisor (hereafter identified as J), also made a presentation at a later stage. For the purposes of brevity her contribution - which dealt with her feelings of alienation in a particular UNISA context - and the group's responses will be incorporated in the subsequent exposition.)

A few weeks later C told her story. She introduced this by talking briefly about interpersonal trust as a precondition for honestly sharing knowledge about yourself with others, and the right to be reticent about things that are too private and too painful.

C showed the group a photo-album of her Afrikaner great grandparents, grandparents, parents, her coloured nanny whom she trusted and loved and made her wonder in later years what 'swart gevaar' means, her present family (husband, children and grandchildren) her garden and home, the black people that work for the family. Just an ordinary family - old pictures of serious-looking, unsmiling ancestors; and more recent pictures showing a happy laughing family.

While specific photos were identified and shown to the group by another group member, she told her story in a very sincere and often humorous

⁵ Stereotyping - a word that derives from the Greek words *stereo* and *typos* which mean *inflexible impression* - is characterised by the perception and retention of information which affirms your fixed ideas about people belonging to a particular group, whereas information that refutes or questions such fixed ideas, is ignored or forgotten (Duckitt 1991; Foster 1991; Thiele 1991). Typical examples of stereotypes are: *Italians are emotional; Afrikaners are racists; Blacks are lazy; Politicians are corrupt*, and the *English are liberals*.

manner; at times hesitating and pausing to control deeply felt emotion. In brief, C talked about her background of poverty, the 'lost years' of her childhood when an undetected hearing problem caused her to underachieve and becoming alienated from family and school friends because she was too shy to say she could not understand what they were saying; the great joy when the hearing problem was resolved and, with that, the happiness of achieving academically, making good friends and being elected head girl of a big school in her matric year; the happiness of being in love for the first time at university ('if music be the food of love, play on'); her first clear awareness of the ugly face of apartheid and the corruptions of too much political power; the death of her husband at a very young age; her fears of not being able to raise their two children properly; happiness again when she met her present husband and having two more children; her anxiety about the future of our society; but also the great hope that things will work out if people would only start caring, showing respect and becoming involved. She also told of numerous family myths, e.g. that education is the key despite economic hardship; that one should always honour the elders; not to regard poverty, sickness, fatigue and personal pain as assets to be displayed ('to always keep the chin up') - family myths that are still guiding her. Finally, she talked about her Afrikanership; of shifting over the years from Afrikaner nationalism to the full embracement of 'being an Afrikaner' whose definitive characteristic resided in a deep love for the Afrikaans language. She ended her presentation by saying she wishes to change the title to: 'Myself as an Afrikaner: a story.'

It should be noted here that, unlike what had become customary in the group, there were no interruptions; no clarification seeking questions; no 'yes-but's' and no impatient body-language. The participants were indeed *listening*.

After her story was told there was at first absolute quiet; but an intense sense of presence and belongingness could be felt. And then, spontaneously, one by one the group members began to respond with equal sincerity and compassion, interspersed with bouts of humour and laughter. First they acknowledged their appreciation that C entrusted them with her story, and then started relating personal narratives to indicate how C's story resonated

with theirs in many similar and different ways. These resonances can be grouped as follows:

- * *The confirmation of family myths* - as 'life-rules' coming from the past and providing direction into the future.

Black student D recalled how respect for ancestral spirits guides a family through difficult times.

A black woman lecturer (A) talked about family values and said C's story brought tears to her eyes because she was extremely worried about whether she will be able to inculcate the importance of having values in a younger generation.

An Indian woman lecturer (E) reflected on the importance of family myths in her context, and humorously added that C's family story was not what she expected. She thought it would be a sociological exposition of an Afrikaner family tree!

- * *Maintaining human dignity despite adverse conditions*, e.g poverty, exclusion and discrimination.

A black married woman student (F), who previously was unemployed and obtained a job in UNISA's production department through the mediation of a group member, told the group how often in her youth they had nothing to eat at night. They would then throw onion skins into the coal stove so that passersby could say: 'Oh, its cooking time. What a nice smell!'

Another black woman lecturer (G) - the one who had a heater delivered to her UNISA office in the heat of summer - addressed J and said: 'Welcome to our world, J. To feel alienated is normal.' She then related the difficulty of and challenge to 'remain on course' when white students make you feel the university and education belong to them only.

- * *The rites of passage in life* reveal sameness and difference.

A white senior woman education specialist (H) reflected on how the group members' responses to C's story demonstrated the rituals which help us to traverse life crises; those crucial moments when we pass from one state of being to the next. Rites of passage do this by taking the collected wisdom of a culture and presenting this knowledge in the form of life-affecting comprehensible 'dramas' that can be shared by all. Such dramas, she said, are extremely photogenic, as was evident in C's illustrated photo-story.

- * *Mutual respect and caring across the racial/cultural divide:* Another major resonance with C's story were a variety of personal narratives dealing with basic respect and caring among races/cultures.

Black student D, who up to this point addressed C as 'prof C', for the first time referred to C by her christian name. He then recalled how he hated white people until he met C who was unlike what he expected. She showed great respect towards him and other students. For him she became his 'campus mother' because she always cared about his studies, insisting that he should take his future seriously and prepare himself for a career. Now he tries to think and feel differently about white people.

A black women professor (I) told how she came to have deep respect for trustworthy white people. Her mother worked as a domestic for an English family, where she often helped her mother. When she graduated from standard 8, the English family gave her the ceremonial black gown which all their children had used and that had been in their family for many years. When she had no funds to go to university, her mother's employers assisted her in getting a loan. 'These acts of respect and kindness bring feelings of solidarity that can never be forgotten', she said.

A white student advisor (J) related in her presentation that how, when she was a small child, her nanny (a Bushmen woman) whom she loved dearly, gave her a name which means 'as the wind blows'. To this very day she remembers this name and often feels that the name has become a metaphor for her life and the many places she has been to. Black student D thanked her for remembering and honouring the name, because in his culture the

names given to you by your family are important and must be respected. 'You must live up to the name given to you by loved-ones', he said.

Reflecting on these and other narratives a white male professor (K) pointed out that relating these stories would have been impossible at the earlier stages of the group's evolution. Trust and respect made it possible to share these narratives, and by doing this the group demonstrated *in vivo* the root meaning of respect - derived from the Latin word 'respectus' which means to 'look back care-fully'; at the personal histories of self and other.

At a subsequent meeting the group decided temporarily to suspend its objective of developing a course in multicultural competence. Instead, it was decided to arrange a one-day conference at UNISA to share the group experience with the wider university community. It was agreed that everyone should make a short presentation in which they would 'take a few steps back' and reflect on the group's evolution.

Phase 3: Sharing the group experience

In May 1996 the one-day conference entitled: 'Rainbowism at Unisa - stories of caring' was held. Invitations were sent to all UNISA staff. About 70 people, representing a multicultural mix, attended the conference. The titles of these stories were:

The beginning of the story; Good and bad stories about the multicultural group experience; From frustration to illumination; Discovering sameness through otherness; Multiculturalism: Where do we begin our story?; Why I fell out of the bus - told by a group drop-out; My rainbow experience; Beyond culture: Conversations and the re-invention of self; Meet me at the forum; Stories will hold us together.

REFLECTION

The course of events in the evolution of the group can be analysed from a variety of perspectives. The purpose of my reflection is threefold:

- * To analyse story-telling (narrative) as a powerful epistemology in understanding how we come to know humanity;
- * To explore why pluralism provides a sound foundation for multicultural competence;
- * To derive a tentative model of multicultural competence.

'Let me tell you a story'

The choice of methodology for designing a course in multicultural competency, and the prior distribution of scientific reading matter to drive the research process, clearly indicates to what extent the research designers assumed, at least initially, that the problem of multicultural competence will be solved by the rational tools of the intellectual trade; by making it a rational cognitive project. This is underscored by some of the discursive practices which characterised Phase 1 of the project, e.g. some participants pointing at the empirically proven facts of the contact hypothesis (see Note 4) and insisting that its *operationalisation* would yield the necessary results. The implicit argument is clear: 'We would come to know multicultural competence, as an aspect of humanity, by applying research facts in a direct way.'

The group's resistance to this proposal does not necessarily imply an outright rejection of what is known empirically about some or other aspect of humanity, but points at the possibility that an *alternative way of knowing* was sought. The variety of personalised ways in which some participants formulated their expectancies about the project (see Phase 1) are indicative of this possibility. In this way they 'voiced' their own common-sense understanding of the project.

The above suggestion that some participants sought an alternative way of knowing can best be understood by outlining two apparently antithetical modes of knowing the world, including self and others. The one says: 'Let us do an experiment' and the other says: 'Let me tell you a story.' What these two modes of knowing entail are described as follows by Bakhtin (1986:161):

The exact sciences constitute a monologic form of knowledge: The intellect contemplates a 'thing' and expounds upon it. There is only one subject here - cognizing (contemplating) and speaking (expounding). In opposition to the subject there is only a voiceless thing. Any object of knowledge [including human phenomena such as multicultural competence: my insertion] can be perceived and studied as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining as a subject, become voiceless, and consequently cognition of it can only be 'dialogic'.

What Bakhtin describes as a monologic form of knowing is, of course, associated with a positivistic epistemology and all its derivatives which can be identified as, e.g. experimentalist, modernist, linear, operationalist, logico-deductive and cognitivist ways of knowing. Such monologic modes of knowing entail all inquiries that may be seen as emanating from the view that the human sciences can only enhance their scientific status if they would emulate the natural sciences.

Many scholars have argued that the application of a natural-scientific (positivistic) epistemology to human affairs runs the risk of not dealing with human reality, or of dealing with it in a limited way. The philosopher Charles Taylor (1985:92-93), for example, observes:

There is a constant temptation to take natural science theory as a model for social theory; that is, to see theory as offering an account of underlying processes and mechanisms of society... But the big disanalogy with natural science lies in the nature of the common-sense understandings that theory challenges, replaces or extends. There is always a pre-theoretical understanding of what is going on among members of a society, which is formulated in the descriptions of self and the other which are involved in the institutions and practices of society.

Taylor's views of common-sense understanding, seen as a 'pre-theoretical understanding of what is going on', brings to mind Abelson's (1977:1-12)

description of how aspects of a person's privileged self-knowledge become known - through *infallible first-person statements* (or *avowals* in Ryle's (1966) terminology) which constitute a 'state of being' that cannot be wished away, or analysed and understood in the same way that physicists and biologists understand natural phenomena. Some scholars capture the same idea differently by asserting that people, as participators in the meaning-making discourses of everyday life, have *agency*, i.e. they have an active role in the ways in which they understand the world and run their lives (Gergen 1985; Harré 1993; Shotter 1989; Smedslund 1993).

Against this background, my contention is that the group's resistance to the cognitivist project - carrying the implication that their (or the group's) multicultural competency would be *operationalised* - could, at least in part, be attributed to a concern that this monologic mode of knowing would render them voiceless, and would denigrate their agency and their common-sense understanding of what is going on. Hence, they - possibly subconsciously - were seeking an alternative mode of knowing.

Bakhtin, as quoted above, provides an alternative mode of knowing in his insistence that human cognition can only be dialogic, i.e. when human subjects (e.g. members of the multicultural group) are given 'voice' and agency in interacting with others. This point of view confirms the essentially social foundation and dialogical dependence of the human mind - that ordinary people interact, engage in dialogue and construct meanings about the real world through intersubjectively shared symbols and language categories and shape their lives accordingly (Bateson 1979; Bruner 1990; Hermans 1993; Sampson 1989).

To paraphrase Ryle (1971:309-310) slightly, it is these meanings - flowing from real people dialoguing, calculating, conjuring, hoping, resolving, tasting, bluffing, fretting, quarrelling, accusing, multicultural course-designing, story-telling and so on - which ought to be taken seriously in order to arrive at an understanding of what it means to be human, and to what extent people are similar or different in their contextualised ways of being calculators, conjurers, hoppers, resolvers, tasters, bluffers, fretters,

quarrellers, accusers, multicultural course-designers, story-tellers and so on.

It is precisely the difference between monologic and dialogic modes of knowing that made Wilhelm Dilthey (in Mueller-Vollmer 1986) realise a century ago that understanding (German: *Verstehen*) others entailed communication, an element of identification and empathy with the object of understanding. Hence Dilthey's famous dictum: Understanding is *finding you in me, and me in you* and in a dialogical process conveyed by language.⁶

Among postmodern scholars from a variety of disciplines there is consensus that story-telling is one of the primary forms through which the dialogical

⁶ Dilthey's dictum of *finding you in me, and me in you* manifests itself in a variety of ways in the creative literature (stories/narratives) of many cultures. Three examples will suffice:

*In the American playwright Tennessee Williams' drama *The Sweet Bird of Youth* a character says: 'I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding - not even that - no. Just for your recognition of me in you...'

*In a similar context of understanding, but in a different cultural setting, the South African black poet Spho Sepamla (1976) wrote as follows about occurrences in the apartheid past that gave him the blues:

*the blues is the shadow of a cop
dancing the immorality act jitterbug
the blues is the Group Areas Act and all its jive
the blues is the Bantu Educational Act...*

The poet then complains about his father's screams at night, about people crowded together on station platforms, about empty promises and forgotten intentions. Finally he joins all people, white and black, since - as he says - *we are all blues people*:

*I want to holler the how-long blues
because we are the blues people all
the white man bemoaning his burden
the black man offloading the yoke
the blues is you in me*

*In *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, by Louis de Berniere, a young Greek woman (Pelagia) falls in love with an Italian captain (Antonio Corelli) during Italy's occupation of Greece in the Second World War. When circumstances drove them apart, their love and deep respect for each other endures, allowing each to assume the culture of the other: Henceforth, Pelagia spoke only Italian, which Antonio taught her; and Antonio became a Greek citizen. She finds herself, as it were, in his Italian-ness; and he finds himself in her Greek-ness.

The key words - recognising you in me and finding me in you - coming from the tempero-spatially different cultural worlds of Wilhelm Dilthey (Germany), Tennessee Williams (America), Spho Sepamla (Africa) and Louis de Berniere (Greece/Italy) point at the essence of human encounters where love, compassion and respect lead to the discovery of mutuality in adversial diversity.

nature of the human mind and shared understanding emerge (Hermans 1993; Howard 1991; Randall 1995; Sarbin 1986). This says that the narrative mode of knowing comes so naturally that one may view story-telling in humans almost as an instinct - analogous to spiders weaving webs and beavers building dams. In this regard Barthes (1993) pointed out that narration (story-telling) is simply there like life itself; it is international, transhistorical, transcultural. Lötter (1993:23), in his analysis of mutuality in cultural diversity as exemplified in the film *Dances with wolves*, suggests that stories invite dialogue and can serve the function of exploring mutuality by determining why some things become disputes, conflicts and so on:

By examining all the aspects and sides thereof people come to understand one another's point of view. At the same time the dispute or conflict may be redefined and viewed in a new light... [exploring mutuality] can lead to the development of affiliation and affection because strangers are transformed into neighbours through empathy and the discovery of shared interests...

Such mutuality, Lötter suggests, may lead to the internalisation of the principle of equal consideration of interests and equal respect so that it becomes a fundamental part of people's conception of what is good. This principle may then shape their character and become part of their ethos, their way of life. Lötter quotes Habermas (1984:574) in this regard: 'Reziproke Verbindlichkeiten entstehen nur aus intersubjektiv geteilten Überzeugungen.'

The linkages between the above considerations about a narrative mode of knowing and the group events outlined in Phase 2 of the project, are obvious. The resonances that flowed from the acts of story-telling and story-listening exemplify how the sincerity of first-person utterances (associated with privileged self-knowledge), told by selves in the presence of others, induced the exploration of mutuality; of finding you in me, and me in you.

I am, of course, not arguing here that these acts of story-telling and story-listening did attain, in a few magical moments, a transformation to the kind

of ethos that Lötter refers to above. But it does confirm the power of narrative as an epistemological lens which explores in life-like fashion the ingredients of shared humanity, and tells us things about self and others that formal empirical theories and rational arguments cannot do in similar fashion. The sharing of personal stories enhanced the group's evolution from separateness to connectedness and can be seen as an important ingredient in becoming multiculturally competent. Nuttal (1998:87) indicates how personal stories (autobiographical accounts) often display a kind of cultural intertextuality. Such shared stories may then be regarded as a foundation for the way in which the greater story which connects, unites and reconciles may emerge through what Gadamer (1988:272) calls the (cultural) fusion of horizons. He says:

...[the fusion of horizons] always involves the attainment of a higher universality that overcomes, not only our own particularity, but also that of the other. The concept of the 'horizon' suggests itself because it expresses the wide, superior vision that the person who is seeking to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand - not in order to look away from it, but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion.

The role of displaying a photo-album in invoking in the group stories, requires special attention:

'Let me show you my photographs'

In a phenomenological reflection on photography in his book *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes (1981:5) comments on the antiphonal nature of photographs:

Show your photographs to someone - he will immediately show you his: 'Look, this is my brother; this is me as a child', etc; the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look', 'See', 'Here it is!'; it points a finger at certain *vis-a-vis*, and cannot escape this pure deictic language.

What he implies, is that in showing your photos to others you are inviting reciprocity and sharing something inescapably human. You are in fact asking via the directives of deictic language: 'Look at me; my memories; my life.'

Showing interest in photographs contains two related elements, according to Barthes (1981:25-27). Firstly, looking at a photograph entails the 'extension of a field' which you perceive as familiar in terms of your knowledge and culture. Barthes calls this the 'studium' of a photograph which means looking at it with a kind of general interest, but without special acuity. But the second element disturbs or punctuates the 'studium'

...it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow and pierces me...This second element...I call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut little hole...A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).

By displaying her photo-album to the group members and pointing at specific photos, C punctuated her narrative and identified what was poignant, moving, affecting, painful as well as endearing to her memories. In this regard Van den Berg (1990:155) indicates to what extent words (narrative) and images (pictures/photographs) become closely connected - such that the viewer is led, as it were, on a guided sight-seeing tour of the narrator's world. But at the same time the deictic gesture invokes the antiphony of 'I am showing you my photos'; thereby inviting the other to explore beyond the field element; to (whilst looking and listening) empathetically 'visit' their own (photo-like) memories and to allow themselves to be moved; to be punctuated by her *and* their punctuations; to be bruised by her and their bruises and to be endeared by her *and* their endearments. Thus, the display of the photo-album contributed to the exploration of shared meaning and mutuality, and finding me in you, and you in me.

Epistemological 'reconciliation'

Against the background of the above exposition of two *apparently antithetical modes of knowing* (monological and dialogic/narrative), and

the way in which they operated in the evolution of the multicultural group, the following questions arise:

- * Were the many months that the group spent on, for example, trying to operationalise the contact hypothesis (see Note 4) via a monologic mode of knowing wasted effort?
- * Can one validly argue that the empirical facts of the contact hypothesis, and the insistence by some group members during Phase 1 that these facts should be operationalised to effect multicultural competence, were irrelevant to the group's evolution from separateness to connectedness?
- * Is it justified to infer that the narrative mode of knowing (story-telling and story-listening) is a necessary and sufficient condition for attaining multicultural competence?

These questions can be addressed as follows:

There is an inherent discourse between the two modes of knowing in the sense that both are directed at understanding a particular slice of real-life - the problem of managing cultural diversity and attaining multicultural competence *where* and *when* members of the diversity interact. More specifically, this inherent dialogue is exemplified by the fact that *personal interaction* between group members was identified in the empirical research on the contact hypothesis as a basic factor predicting improved relationships between culturally diverse group members (Brewer & Miller 1984; Schwarzwald, Amir, & Crain 1992; Wilder 1986).

Personal interaction in such research generally means that group members start talking to each other as individuals rather than as 'representatives' of their cultural groups.⁷ In terms of the principles of interpersonal attraction process theory (Aron, Aron & Smollan 1992; Berscheid 1985; Levinger & Snoek 1972) personal interaction prepares group members to discover

⁷ A specific incident during Phase 1 needs to be mentioned here: While the group was discussing the influence of cultural heritage, a white male participant addressed a young black women: 'What does this mean from the perspective of your culture? Do you still speak your mother-tongue?' She was extremely embarrassed because she, in fact, did not know or speak 'the language' at all. The questioner regarded her as a representative of her cultural group, whereas she saw herself as representing 'herself' as an individual.

mutuality at a later stage. This process starts at a point of no significant contact (or mutuality) and moves through phases to a point of deep *interpersonal and social penetration* (Altman & Taylor 1973), when it becomes possible to discover mutuality and shared meaning, for example, through the methodology of narrative. See Figure 1 for visual outline of this process.

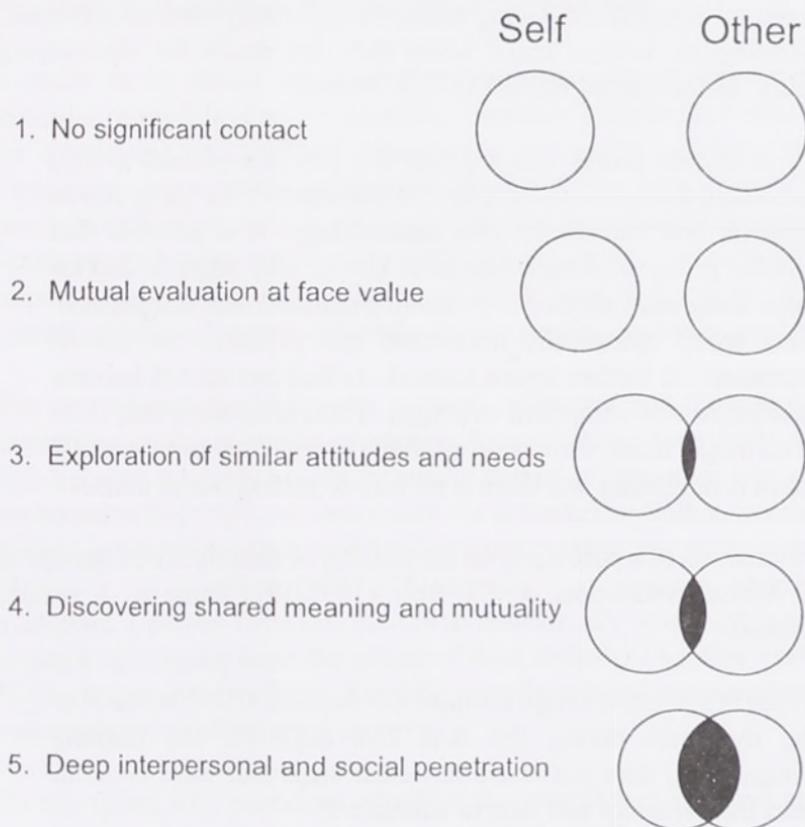


Figure 1: A process of interpersonal attraction

What this suggests, is that the empirical facts of the contact hypothesis are indeed relevant to a group's evolution from separateness to connectedness, but that these 'facts' must be re-enacted *in vivo* as existential, life-like experiences in order to facilitate the deep interpersonal and social penetration which would allow the discovery of mutuality. Stated differently, the empirical facts about the necessity of interpersonal interaction cannot be prematurely 'announced' (by way of lecturing, for example) as a 'tool' or 'recipe' for managing diversity or attaining multicultural competence. Group members apparently need time to reach a psychological 'critical mass' when they are ready for discovering mutuality. In this regard Heese (1997:27) notes:

...one cannot simply run a group like this [the project group] according to a prescribed recipe. It is necessary for the group to discover and validate its own methodology. It is possible that another group working in the same kind of way might in fact hit upon some other method of promoting multicultural competence. This group specifically discovered and validated the use of narration...A further lesson learned...is that one cannot become multiculturally competent overnight. There is no short cut, there is no magic wand, there is no infallible recipe. It takes time and it takes commitment and there is no way of getting out of that...

In their analysis of a case study on the training of racially mixed groups in South Africa, Swanepoel & De Beer (1995:301) came to a similar conclusion:

There is no simple recipe to make this happen. Close analysis of the dynamics during the first five days [of the training programme] does not reveal any clear steps that were taken to start the dynamics and then to maintain it.

What this further suggests is that a group is basically capricious and seems to develop its own 'personality' and 'volition' which determine how and when it gets to the point of 'critical mass'.

The above argument also favours the view that the two modes of knowing are indeed only apparently antithetical. They can be 'reconciled' in the following sense: Both are equally valid but different ways of looking at a particular human reality (to manage cultural diversity), and the validity of both could be used judiciously to inform, prompt and guide an *unpredictable process* of discovering mutuality and becoming multiculturally competent.

Pluralism as foundation of multicultural competence

It needs to be stated up front that both the cultural separatist and assimilation models of multiculturalism cannot be regarded as viable bases for developing multicultural competence. As argued earlier, cultural separatism carries within it simply too much negative *ethnic baggage*. Its heavy emphasis on cultural difference implies maintaining separateness which precludes discovery and constructive exploration of mutuality and respect. The conflict risk potential of this model is extremely high in contact situations between culturally diverse people, e.g. in the work place.

The assimilation model ignores cultural difference and regards it as a negligible variable in human interaction. Its conflict risk potential is equally high because it simply avoids the reality that in an important way people are bound to their cultural community. As indicated by Bulhan (referred to earlier), application of this model will in some or other way evoke rejection. Moreover, as Kymlica (1991:175) argues, it is just not possible to transplant a person from one culture to another, nor is it easy to erase a person's upbringing (note the advice of Saul Bellow to a fellow-writer of Hindu origin, cited earlier). Kymlica regards cultural membership as a constitutive part of personal identity.

To appreciate why pluralism, of which the central features have already been outlined earlier, provides a psychologically sound basis for multicultural competence, it is perhaps useful first to consider the *nature of culture* briefly.

In his analysis of a range of definitions of culture, Moulder (1992:17-18) concludes that they, taken together, support the following claims about *everyone's culture*:

Firstly, everyone's culture has been created for them, and largely by people who are older than they are and who began to shape their behaviour, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and values from the moment they were born. Secondly, everyone's culture is always changing, because they are always adapting to new groups of people and to new social, political and economic situations. Thirdly, none of the members of a cultural group is totally homogenous; that is why new groups are always coming into existence and going out of existence. Fourthly, no cultural group is totally unique; this is why some individuals from extremely different backgrounds and with extremely different life experiences manage to form alliances and to co-operate with each other. Finally, nobody finds it easy to change the culture that they inherit because it has taught them how to behave, as well as what to believe, to feel and to value; and most people, once they have learned these things, want to keep it that way.

From a psychological perspective Moulder's 'stocktaking' analysis suggests the following views and interpretations:

- * Everyone's culture contains common ground (confirmation of mutuality) as well as ground that differentiates people (confirmation of difference).
- * Everyone's culture creates a unique identity that resides in difference, as well as the possibility of assuming multiple personal identities which reside in the common ground.
- * To confirm only unique identity, as is implied by cultural separatism, is in its very core a denial of the possibility of mutuality - a denial of the fact that biologically, psychologically and socially everybody is like everyone else in a great many respects. This denial means that in your mind you are 'switching' uniqueness 'on' whereas the possibility of mutuality is switched 'off'.

This 'strategy' sets the individual up for a variety of defensive attitudes, beliefs, feelings and values in order to keep the uniqueness intact. According to Rokeach (1960) this amounts to a basic *closed-mindedness* from which the language of 'us' (the in-group) versus 'them' (the out-group(s)) flows almost naturally. At a social interaction level this defensiveness creates what is called the perception of *out-group homogeneity* (Judd, Ryan & Park 1991; Linville, Fischer & Salovey 1989; Linville & Jones 1980) which means that members of groups other than your own are regarded as 'all alike'. At the same time this defensive (closed-minded) strategy creates the perception of *in-group heterogeneity* which allows the defensive individual to say: 'We are not like that' and: 'Unlike them, we are not the same.' But at its very basis both these perceptions are illusory and a denial of reality.

* To confirm both the unique identity and multiple identities, as is suggested by pluralism, is a confirmation of mutuality with regard to a variety of behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and values. From a psychological perspective this kind of 'double' confirmation attains three things:

Firstly, at an individual level it frees the person from the burden of defensiveness; of setting up all kinds of strategies to keep things as they are when in reality things are changing. Rokeach (1960) views this as a manifestation of a basic *open-mindedness* concerning the world of people, things, ideas and events.

Secondly, at a social level it allows social recategorisation (Tajfel 1978) in terms of which the 'difference' boundaries between 'us' and 'them' blur and/or shift to the extent that, for particular purposes, 'they' becomes part of 'us'. Thus, for example, white and black women may find that for the purposes of their concerted struggle for women's rights, they experience themselves as an extended 'us'. This, then, gives rise to the development of a *common in-group identity* (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, Dovidio 1989; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio & Bachman & Anastasio 1994) which is a confirmation of mutuality with regard to, for example, particular concerns and interests.

Thirdly, while an individual may explore, enjoy and put to practical use a common in-group identity, this does not necessarily imply a severance of the ties with regard to particular aspects of the original 'inherited' cultural group. Thus, for example, a person may share a common in-group identity with persons from other cultures on the basis of some or other spiritual or moral commitment, and yet retain close ties with the 'inherited' cultural group because they speak his/her mother language. See Figure 2.

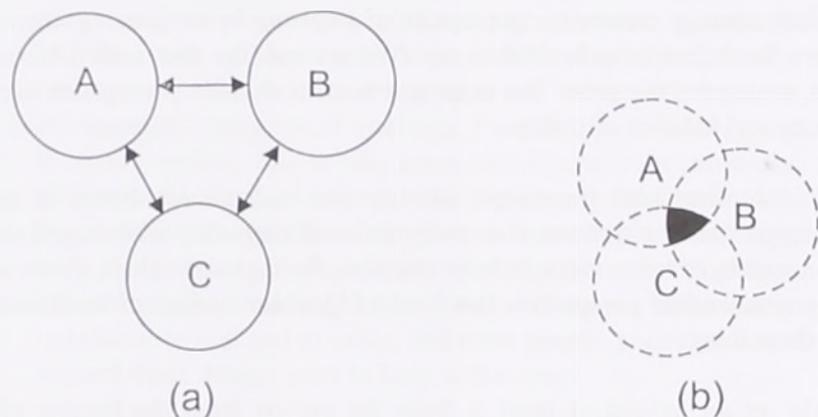


Figure 2: The social recategorisation of cultural group boundaries

In (a) three cultural groups (A, B and C) are socially distant in terms of perceived difference. The arrows between the circles indicate incidental and superficial contact. In (b) the overlapping shaded area represents the discovery of a common in-group identity which implies recategorisation in terms of an extended 'us' for particular purposes. The non-overlapping areas in (b) indicate that the personal or social identities associated with the original 'inherited' cultural groups (A, B and C) can be maintained simultaneously with the exploration of the new common in-group identity.

This point can be anecdotally illustrated: On his death bed the 'English' writer Joseph Conrad is supposed to have said: 'When I write, I write in English. When I die, I die in Polish.' Which means to say: For the purposes of his literary production, he identified with the English language and the English literary scene which constituted his membership of a common in-group identity. But this did not nullify his Polishness. Other examples of this kind of *double consciousness* (of mutuality and difference) were mentioned earlier with regard to the views of Es'kia Mphahlele and Saul Bellow. Open-mindedness, as a way of looking at the world, allows a person to develop an acute awareness of the rich and enriching varieties of life, and induces the capacity to accommodate multiple cultural influences so that these become part and parcel of the person's self-identity. This is exactly what pluralist thinking is about.

Isaiah Berlin (1996:48) unpacks this line of pluralist thinking as follows:

...pluralism [is] the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathising and deriving light from each other, as we derive it from reading Plato or the novels of medieval Japan - worlds, outlooks, far remote from our own. Of course, if we did not have any values in common with these distant figures, each civilisation would be enclosed in its own impenetrable bubble, and we could not understand them at all...Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is only possible because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them...

In a culturally diverse society, for example South Africa which has a history of separateness and all the demeaning deprivations it brought along for cultural groups that had no political muscle to effect what Rawls (1985:202) calls *equal consideration of interests and equal respect for all human beings* (and all cultures), the pluralist model is ultimately a moral and psychologically sound choice.

A tentative model of multicultural competence

The exposition of the three models of multiculturalism and the case study, as well as the subsequent reflection, point implicitly at a number of basic components of a model of multicultural competency. It is tentative in that the case study represents a limited range of multicultural experiences which implies that the model cannot summarily be generalised to all multicultural situations.

Multicultural competence can be viewed as a *mode of being in the world* which is characterised by:

- * knowledge of self and others;
- * particular listening skills;
- * particular attitudes and values; and
- * a participatory life-style

I will not argue these components at length but rely mainly on summarising of, and back-referencing to, points already mentioned or argued.

Knowledge of self and others

Clearly the multicultural group's evolution from separateness to connectedness was not possible in the absence of sharing knowledge of self and others. Telling a personal narrative, as C did in the presence of group members, constitutes a disclosure of the self-knowledge that she chose to convey, i.e. her privileged self-knowledge (see Luft 1970 for the varieties of knowledge that may play a role in such situations). Likewise the group members, in spontaneously responding to C's narrative, disclosed the privileged self-knowledge each chose to convey.

These disclosures resonated to such an extent that themes of mutuality and difference were revealed - mutuality to the extent that I (the story-listener) recognise something of me in you (the story-teller), and difference to the extent that the I (the story listener) have a unique personal history which belongs to me and constitutes part of my personal identity.

It is precisely this mutuality and difference - and the respect and appreciation thereof by both story-tellers and story-listeners - which are enriching. At least in theory, this can contribute to greater self-understanding in the sense that I (the story-listener) have come to know and appreciate myself better in the light of the story-teller's narrative and *vice versa*.

A poetic rendition of this possibility comes from William Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, where Cassius tells Brutus:

*And since you know you cannot see yourself
So well as by reflection, I, your glass,
Will modestly discover to yourself
That of yourself which you yet know not of..*

In the context of the multicultural group knowledge of self and others was disclosed through the methodology of personal narrative. Personal narrative, however, cannot be regarded as the only means of obtaining such knowledge. For example, less intense personal interactions (greeting, friendly humorous talking, working and socialising together); reading about different cultures and their history; and exploring diverse cultural products like music, art, films, literature, museum exhibitions and sport are also enriching means of obtaining knowledge of self and others (Davison 1998; Grundlingh 1997; Grundlingh, Odendaal & Spies 1995; Jordaan 1988, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998b, 1999; Makoni 1998; Malan 1987; Ndebele 1998).

Particular listening skills

In the description of Phase 2 of the case study specific mention was made of the listening attitude that obtained in the context of story-telling. Social science and communication scholars regard listening as an acquired skill that comes in various forms and serves different purposes (Anstey 1991; Egan 1986; Hugo 1990; Johnson 1990). But for the purposes of building multicultural competency one particular feature of listening to the other stands out. This skill may be called the *suspension of judgementalism*. The

novelist Marcel Proust (1922:18) writes as follows about the opposite of this listening skill:

...we pack the physical outline of the creature we see with all the ideas we have already formed about him, and in the complete picture of him which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice that these seem to be no more than a transparent envelope, so that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our *own ideas of him which we recognize and to which we listen* [my emphasis].

This is exactly what suspension of judgementalism is not about. To listen to the other's story, and at the same time seeking confirmation of the ideas (e.g. stereotypes) you have already formed of the other, cannot bring about story resonance, respect and the recognition of mutuality and connectedness. Suspension of judgementalism entails a kind of reflective silence which ensures a *double consciousness* in the story-listener - full awareness of mutuality and, simultaneously, full awareness of difference.

The suspension of judgementalism with regard to the first-person utterances of the story-teller, brings about a *here-and-know* interpersonal validation of mutuality and difference to such an extent that it invites subsequent dialogue and more formal discussions. Such dialogue, in turn, can serve the function of exploring mutuality and difference by determining why things become (cultural) disputes and conflicts, and how best to resolve them. In this further dialogue additional listening and other communication skills of a more cognitive kind are required (Hayakawa 1962, 1966; Jordaan & Jordaan 1989; 1998; Swanepoel & De Beer 1995).

Particular attitudes and values

Central to building multicultural competence is the attitude of *open-mindedness* (Harvey & Schroder 1963; Jordaan & Jordaan 1989; Rokeach 1960) which resonates with Popper's (1973) notion of creating an open

society. This attitude cherishes diversity in all its variety and suggests that the imposition of a single viewpoint about anything is hardly ever justified. Open-mindedness therefore embraces pluralism and entails a continued exploration of the world of ideas, opinions, options, approaches and points of view in a critical and self-critical manner. This includes societal and cultural critique which provides a framework within which people can determine where they stand, or should change or modify their stand, on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value, and what needs to be done to resolve the problems of living together in cultural mutuality and diversity.

But open-mindedness, thus described, may result in an empty project if it is not carried, as it were, by the other competency components; and by embracing the *cardinal value* of equal consideration of interests and equal respect for the dignity of all human beings and their cultures. As Lötter (1993:19) indicates, this value presupposes that human beings and the cultures they belong to have certain interests, things that matter to them and that they care about, that they want to have protected. An equal consideration of such interests implies that each person's and each culture's case must be heard according to the *audio et alteram partem* rule.

Ensuring that this cardinal value translates into practice, requires what Freire (1972:40-41) calls a *critical consciousness of oppression*, especially in its more subtle varieties, e.g. a white male executive who welcomes a qualified and experienced black woman to occupy a top management position but, then, restructures his management team to ensure she does not become involved in crucial decisions.

A participatory life-style

Building multicultural competency is not a spectator sport. Of course, all the preceding components require some or other form of active involvement, but there is an additional element suggested by the contact hypothesis - participation in spontaneous and well-planned *cooperative activities* (Bettencourt, Brewer, Croak & Miller 1992; Cook 1978; Devries, Edwards & Slavin 1978). Such activities often lead to the identification of

common goals, developing common values and a common search for problem solutions (Swanepoel & De Beer 1995). These activities may also cause culturally diverse participants to experience the 'us-them' barriers as being illusory. From this flows the possibility of social recategorisation in terms of an extended 'us' (common in-group identity) who not only want to accomplish a given task successfully, but also to derive satisfaction and pleasure in doing it.

Of course, such activities often lead to serious conflict among culturally diverse participants - sometimes precisely because of cultural differences and sometimes because of inevitable competition concerning the distribution of 'commodities' such as power, prestige, jobs, money and land. These difficulties can however be resolved more easily if the other components of multicultural competency have become a mode of being.

Two final comments about the model:

- * The practical value of the model rests to a large extent on the existence of a *legitimising social norm* which conveys the message that intercultural contact, discovering mutuality and respecting/appreciating diversity, is morally necessary and justified.

The establishment of such a norm and how it flows through to the grass roots level of a diverse society (to businesses, schools, technikons, universities, churches, community action groups, the workplace, etc.), depends to a large extent on the norm set by authority figures, for example, the explicit positive attitudes that political leaders and other authority figures hold towards cultural diversity, and how they manifest these attitudes in visible contact behaviour.

In the absence of such a legitimising norm debilitating cultural stereotypes and prejudices remain in place in very subtle ways, or become reactivated by seemingly trivial events or incidents (Blanchard, Lily & Vaughn 1991; Greenberg & Pyszczynski 1985; Wilder & Shapiro 1991).

- * Taken together the intimately interwoven components of the model and the existence of a legitimising social norm, provide the impetus for a *spiralling process* of continued searching for and discovery of mutuality whilst maintaining an enriching diversity. The spiralling feature of the model suggests that the more you do it, the better it gets and the more fusion of cultural horizons may occur (see Figure 3).

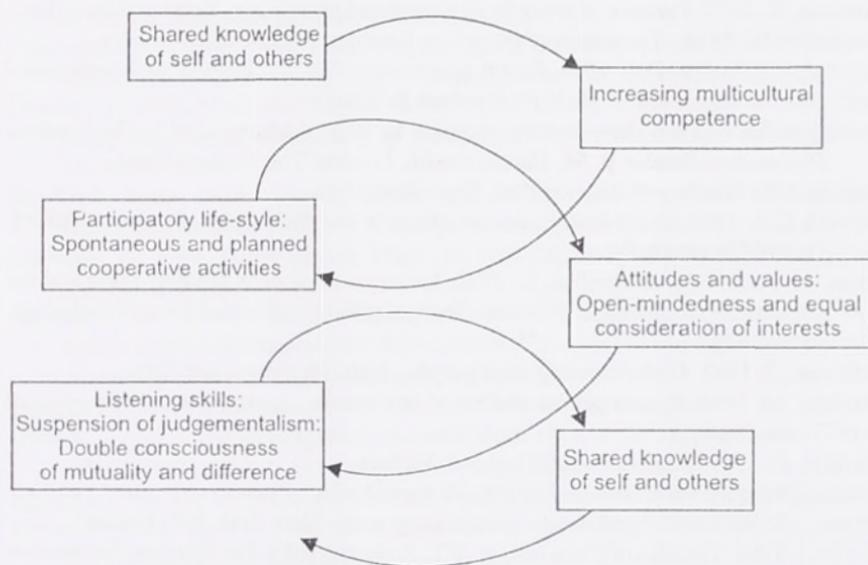


Figure 3: A spiralling process of multicultural competency

Concerning the *process* feature of the model, it was argued earlier that the evolution from separateness to connectedness is an unpredictable process that needs to be managed by patience, good judgement and commitment. It provides no recipe for success in the complex configurations of cultural diversity.

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