

Sociocognitive Conflict and Cultural Diversification: Problems and Strategies for Teachers

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Abstract

This paper offers a conceptual analysis of the dynamics of “sociocognitive conflict” (Doise & Mugny, 1984) in an educational context as a consideration for managing cultural diversification. Understood in developmental literature (e.g. Doise & Mugny, 1984; Druyan & Levin, 1996; Perret-Clermont, 1980; Tudge 1989) sociocognitive conflict is the result of a contradiction or mismatch between the cognitive operations an individual applies to a situation and the sociocultural¹ conventions that contextualise the situation. Cultural diversification entails increasing exposure to different sociocultural conventions and practices. Within the educational context, the classroom is especially conducive to sociocognitive conflict. This is because diverse sociocultural conventions embedded in pedagogy and curriculum content meet relatively frequently with the developmentally sensitive cognitive operations of individual learners. Given the evidence that sociocognitive conflicts can facilitate or debilitate development (Tudge, 1989), the dynamics of sociocognitive conflict raise important questions in educational contexts: What are the key dynamics that affect sociocognitive conflict as a positive or negative influence on development? What pedagogical strategies can help manage sociocognitive conflict to facilitate development amid increasing cultural diversification? Is cognitive development always a desirable outcome of sociocognitive conflict?

In this paper, I identify some of the dynamics surrounding sociocognitive conflicts that may affect developmental trajectories amid cultural diversification. I also identify and provide examples of three complementary strategies for positively managing sociocognitive conflict in the classroom. These include, (i) *Metacognitive strategies* that engage students directly with the cognitive operations needed to coordinate otherwise opposing binaries arising through cultural diversification, (ii) *Experiential strategies* that engage students with self-representations of “the other”, and (iii) *Integrative strategies* that provide opportunities for collaborative problem solving through interaction between diverse cultural perspectives. Collectively, these strategies aim to facilitate development in response to increasing cultural diversification.

Introduction

Educational commitment to cultural inclusion is a response to the increasing cultural diversification of Australian society. Diversification through increased migration², advances in communication technologies, and the resultant embedding of liberal

¹ I use the term “sociocultural” interchangeably with the “socio” in “sociocognitive”. The assumption is that there is a direct relationship between the social conventions of a group and the group’s culture (interrelated beliefs, practices, values, rituals, knowledge etcetera).

² As evidenced by post-1996-7 migration trends reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007, ¶ 1).

academic discourse on multiculturalism in curricula, all contribute to a tangible encounter between individual students and diverse cultures in the context of schooling. Diversification of any form engages a cognitive developmental dimension: “In order for teachers to be able to implement the principle of cultural inclusion in their classroom, they need to have general sociocultural knowledge about child and adolescent development” (Zeichner, 1992, p.9). Understandably, the technologically accelerated increase in cultural diversification has seen the re-emergence³ of an interdisciplinary exchange and synthesis between culture and cognition (Bruner, 1999; Voiskounsky 1998). Indicatively, Voiskounsky writes, “Global computer networks give a kind of universal access to new ways of communication and cognition. At the same time the representatives of diverse cultures have specific culture-related patterns of cognitive and communicative behavior” (1998, p.101). The field of culture and cognition asks with a new relevancy – what cognitive operations, schemes and structures are embedded in the cultures that meet in the classroom? How do these cultures interact with each other in cognitive and epistemic terms? How does the developing mind of the school-aged child and adolescent accommodate or assimilate such diversity? These questions warrant attention in educational contexts where diverse cultures with complex social conventions meet with individual’s developing cognitive operations to produce a sociocognitive conflict.

There is much interest in the potentially facilitative effect of cultural diversification on cognitive development (Kögler, 2008). Kögler writes, “In order to provide the highest quality education for today’s students, we need to understand especially the ways in which multicultural courses support cognitive, and not just moral or social, development in students” (2008, ¶ 3). However, poorly managed sociocognitive conflict caused by cultural diversification can have adverse effects. In a school context, studies on cultural diversification and school violence (Cartledge & Johnson, 1997; Jordan, 2002) reveal some of the dangers of poorly managed diversification. In part, individuals without the cognitive resources to coordinate or accommodate the ontological and epistemological complexities of a meeting of cultures may respond with the only available tools they have – dichotomising and dualistic tendencies that engage the cultural other as a threat to self. I wish to bring attention to cognitive considerations in the management of cultural diversification. Specifically, I wish to highlight the existence of sociocognitive conflicts arising from cultural diversification – this, in order to better inform management strategies in the context of culturally diverse schooling.

Sociocognitive Conflict

The term “sociocognitive conflict” was popularised by Doise and Mugny (1984) in their studies of the effect of peer group involvement on individual Piagetian operations.

Defined within a structural-developmental paradigm:

. . . sociocognitive conflict is a source of disequilibrium. It is disequilibrium that is at once both social and cognitive. It is cognitive disequilibrium in that the cognitive system is unable to integrate simultaneously its own responses and those of others within a single coherent whole. It

³ I use ‘re-emergence’ to recognise the early recognition of interaction between culture and cognition evident in the theory of Piaget (1928/1971), Vygotsky (1934/1978), and Luria (1976).

cannot account for others and itself at the same time. It is social disequilibrium since this is not simply cognitive disagreement. It involves relations between individuals for which this conflict poses a social problem. (Doise & Mugny, 1984, p. 160)

Studies of sociocognitive conflict have focused on individual to peer interactions (e.g. Druyan & Levin, 1996; Perret-Clermont, 1980) and individual to expert or authority figure interactions (e.g. Saljo & Wyndham, 1990).

In part, this paper is a conceptual application of the author's empirical research into the educational implications of developmental dynamics related to fundamentalisms (Adam, 2003) and the sociocognitive conflict experienced by some individuals in the cultural contexts of religious fundamentalisms (2008). The research engaged Helmut Reich's sociocognitive question in the context of fundamentalist cultures:

Has an individual only those characteristics or patterns of behaviour, A, that were generic to the group to which he or she had been assigned . . . ? Or, B, could an individual develop outside that range according to his or her own dynamic of inner abilities and outer stimuli? (2002, p. 150).

However, the question applies to all cultures interacting with individual cognition – what is the cost of development “outside that [cultural] range”? Development “outside the range of the group” can be a socially and/or cognitively costly process. Indigenous academic, Martin Nakata, acknowledges the difficulty of negotiating dual cultural identities:

The choice becomes one between silence or laying themselves open to challenge from the more authoritative elements of the corpus or the more confident speakers in their tutorial group ... It is often the case that Indigenous learners are unsettled and confined by both the accepted or orthodox Western and Indigenous interpretations of their experience ... But they cannot easily forge a deeper understanding without being called into alignment with one position of the other ... Thus it is difficult to work through the inherent tensions of the everyday world. (2007, p.222)

Are educational institutions and educators well equipped to facilitate the working through of these tensions? Nakata continues, “Currently, professional preparation is inadequate in terms of equipping graduates to work the relevant elements of two knowledge systems together in the interests of better practice” (2007, p.222). There are many dimensions involved in the meeting of cultures in an individual's life-world (Streib 2001). The cognitive dimension is one that needs more attention – especially in the context of childhood and adolescent schooling. Cultural diversification in the classroom poses some individuals a sociocognitive challenge when the sociocultural conventions of their own culture and the dualistic tendencies of childhood and adolescent cognition make it difficult to accommodate diverse perspectives. The calculation of cost when the sociocultural and the cognitive collide provokes a difficult question concerning the imperative status and directionality of development – “which way is up?” (Gruber, 1986). This is an especially important question to consider in a classroom context where cultural diversification presents sociocognitive conflicts between individual students and their peer group and individual students and their teacher.

Figure 1 represents two related types of sociocognitive conflict giving rise to four characteristic outcomes or dynamics. Conflict A in Figure 1 represents a sociocognitive conflict in which the individual's cognitive environment is unable to differentiate and accommodate contents that are differentiated and accommodated in their sociocultural environment. There are two common outcomes represented in Figure 1 for this type of sociocognitive conflict. Outcome 1 is a debilitation of development through sociocultural change. The individual resists or arrests cognitive development when the cost of

cognitive development is greater than the perceived cost of sociocultural capitulation. Here, in order to resolve internal dissonance, the individual seeks an alternative sociocultural environment that is more compatible with their cognitive environment. While this may result in the resolution of internal dissonance for the individual, it may require a sustained conflict with their former sociocultural environment.

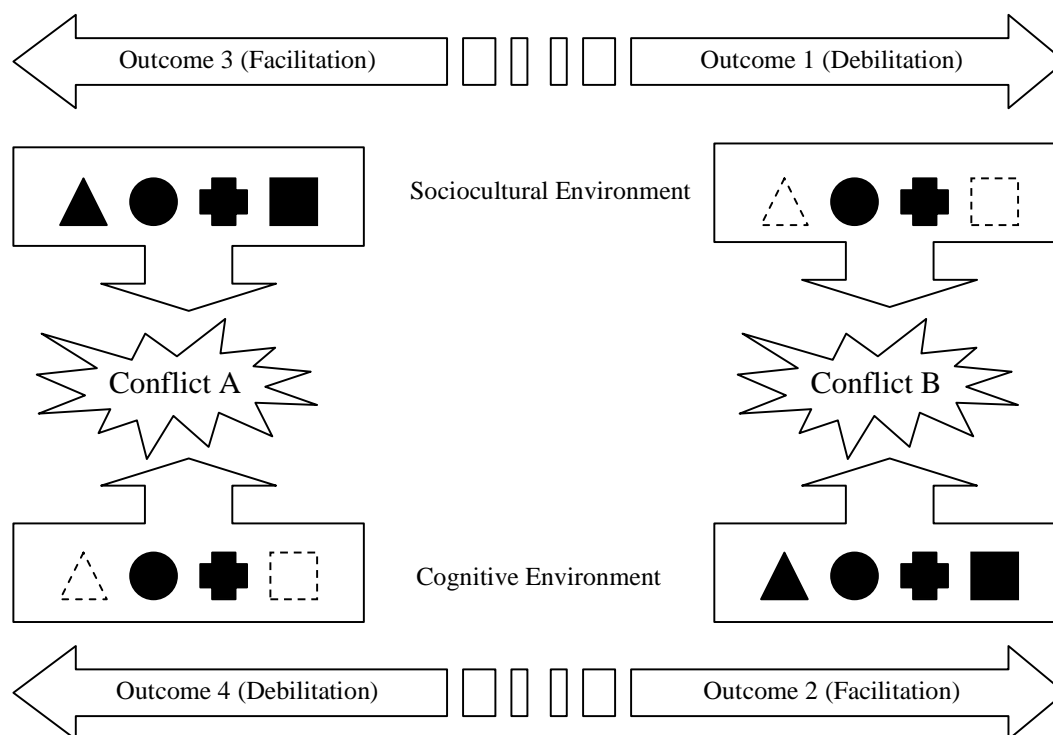


Figure 1. Types and Outcomes of Sociocognitive Conflict: Dotted shapes represent undifferentiated contents. Solid shapes represent differentiated contents.

The culturalisation of this response produces a form of “fundamentalism” which reinforces a dualistic and oppositional mode of categorisation to assimilate rather than accommodate diverse “others”. In a school setting this outcome could be reflected by an individual’s attraction to a subculture that reinforced a dualistic enmity with other subcultures and the dominant culture. Outcome 2 is a facilitation of development through cognitive change or accommodation. Here, the individual generates new operations to coordinate new perspectives presented by the broader culture (Ames & Murray, 1982). However, if the individual perceives their previous operations to be embedded in a culture – accommodation may involve the short term rejection of that culture with all of the social and emotional costs this rejection involves. This dynamic is represented in Conflict B.

Conflict B in Figure 1 represents a sociocognitive conflict in which the individual’s cognitive environment is able to differentiate contents that are not differentiated in their sociocultural environment. There are two common outcomes

represented in Figure 1 for this type of sociocognitive conflict. Outcome 3 is a facilitation of development through sociocultural change. Here, the individual resolves internal dissonance caused by a cognitively repressive culture by seeking an alternative sociocultural environment that sponsors and facilitates their development. Outcome 4 is a debilitation of development where an individual restricts or compartmentalises their cognitive operations in order to find better compatibility with their sociocultural environment.

Which way is up?

Are the outcomes that facilitate cognitive development “more valuable” than the outcomes that debilitate or compartmentalise cognitive development? Gruber’s (1986) question of development, “which way is up?”, is an important consideration for educators in culturally diverse environments. It is especially important to consider given that many teachers in an Australian context will have been educated at the intersection or point of transition between a modernist Western scientific paradigm and a postmodernist liberal paradigm. The culturally diverse classroom in the West is a microcosm for the intersection of modernism with its developmental certainties and postmodernism with its celebration of cultural diversity. Though it is notoriously difficult to capture the referent of these terms, the modernist paradigm lauded the development of individual and cultural scientific thought at the expense of some cultural diversity, while the postmodern paradigm lauded individual and cultural diversity at the expense of the development of scientific thought. French philosopher, Bruno Latour, writes eloquently of a “war of the worlds” (2002) that is arguably manifested in individual sociocognitive conflicts. Of modernist optimism he writes:

There was always the hope that differences of opinion, even violent conflicts, could be eased or alleviated if only one focused a little more on this unifying and pacifying nature and a little less on the divergent, contradictory and subjective representations humans had of it . . . modernisation compelled one to mourn the passing of all one’s colourful pretensions, one’s motley cosmologies, of all the many ways of life with their rich rituals. ‘Let us wipe our tears’, the modernists liked to declare, ‘let us become adults; humanity is leaving behind its myth-imbued childhood and is stepping into the harsh reality of Science, Technology, and the Market. It’s a pity but that is the way it is: you can either choose to cling to your diverse cultures, but conflicts will not cease, or, alternatively, you can accept unity and the sharing of a common world. (2002, ¶ 3)

The postmodern argument against or beyond modernism and its developmental imperative raises the nature of the truth that such developmental progress is seen to reveal:

For if nature has the immediate advantage of imparting unification, it also has the serious drawback of being fundamentally devoid of meaning. Objective facts in their harsh reality can neither be smelled, nor tasted, nor can they provide any truly human signification. The modernists themselves were fully aware of this, and even acknowledged it with a sort of malicious joy. The great scientific discoveries, they were glad to say with a shudder, are incessantly wrenching us from our little village and hurling us into the frightening, infinite spaces of a frozen cosmos whose centre we no longer occupy. (Latour 2002, ¶ 6)

For Latour, the postmodern return to diversity struggles to escape the criticism that meaning is closely related to the sense that one has access to reality:

You possess meaning, perhaps, but you no longer have reality, or else you have it merely in the symbolic, subjective, collective form of mere representations. You have the right to have a culture, but all others likewise have this right, and all cultures are valued equally . . . In this combination of

respect and complete indifference, we may recognise the hypocrite condescendence of cultural relativism . . . No one wants to be just tolerated anymore. No one can bear to be just one culture “among others”. Reality is now once again becoming the issue at stake (2002, ¶ 8-11).

Collectively, these passages reveal the difficulty faced by teachers who are at once given the task of encouraging cognitive development and the task of valuing sociocultural diversity – sometimes they clash. An understanding of this clash is the first step in its management.

My suggestion is that sociocognitive conflict can be useful if it is managed, devastating if it is mismanaged, and likely to be mismanaged if it is not recognised. Here, it is important to differentiate conflict management and conflict resolution. Management suggests that conflict is inevitable and inextricably linked to growth. Resolution suggests that conflict can be ‘solved’. Development is a process that requires conflict. It is unrealistic and perhaps not even desirable to envisage development without conflict or adversity in diversity. Developmental optimism characterises cross-cultural educational literature. The following extract from a science education perspective is illustrative of the aims of culturally diverse education:

Although educators obviously differ in their perspective, there is no doubt that the creation of culturally responsive science curriculum has powerful implications for students for at least three reasons. The first is that a student might conceivably develop all of the common skills and understandings while working from and enhancing a traditional knowledge base. The second is that acquisition of the common ground, regardless of route, is a significant accomplishment. And the third is that exploration of a topic through multiple knowledge systems can only enrich perspective and create thoughtful dialog. (Stephens, 2000, p.10)

It is possible to affirm these three reasons for culturally responsive curriculum as objectives. However, the meeting of objectives requires a process that recognises and manages the obstacles that stand in its way. Poorly managed, the meeting of multiple knowledge systems, far from enriching perspectives, can impoverish perspectives and cause a retreat from dialogue into the social and cognitive security of the familiar. Dialogue is, “the co-creation of new meaning through mutual understanding and reciprocal communications between two or more parties” (Roberts, 2002, p.6). “New meaning” can threaten “old meaning” that is inextricably embedded in cultural discourse. The meeting of cultures is a transformative process but the transformation is not always equal, or mutually enriching, at least in the short term. In the context of Indigenous Knowledge, Nakata questions:

But what happens, or what do we need to consider, when Indigenous Knowledge is brought into relation with the disciplines in the academy? In their differences, Indigenous Knowledge systems and Western Scientific ones are considered so disparate as to be ‘incommensurable’ (Verran, 2005) or ‘irreconcilable’ (Russell, 2005) on cosmological, epistemological and ontological grounds. In our arguments to include such knowledge in disciplinary content in Indigenous higher education, how these differences frame possible understanding and misunderstanding at the surface levels of aspects of Indigenous Knowledge requires some attention. (2007, p.183)

Sociocognitive conflict is one product or form of the meeting of the “incommensurable” or “irreconcilable” aspects of diverse cultures.

It is somewhat controversial to suggest that some cultures and subcultures are more or less developed than others. This is perhaps because the metaphor of development is quite value-laden in a Western culture that has historically associated the formalisation of scientific thought with progress. Representative of developmental analyses of culture is Barnes’ *Stages of Thought: The Coevolution of Religious Thought*

and *Science* (2000). Barnes uses a Piagetian framework to trace cultural development arguing that, “there is a lot of evidence that cultures do develop certain thought styles or cognitive methods in an identifiable, albeit sometimes uneven, sequence” (2000, p. 7), and that “A culture may maintain a simpler easier style of thought as its dominant style for many centuries or even millennia, even if some individuals go beyond the culture’s general achievement” (2000, p. 17). However, he is acutely aware of the dangers of using a developmental framework to analyse culture:

Any theory of cultural development nominates some types of culture for the role of the less developed and others for the more developed. If cultural development is supposed to parallel individual development, then the cultures called less developed are being compared to children. This is a dangerous continuation of colonialist attitudes that have caused much suffering. (2000, pp. 6-7)

It is difficult but possible to separate the empirical reality of cultural development from its value-laden connotations by disambiguating value from simplicity and complexity.

A person who places high value on relative simplicity and closeness to nature may judge that it is regressive rather than progressive to move from simple counting to higher math, or from traditional kin relations to Confucian social order. But the pattern of development may well exist, whether any of us find it valuable or not. (Barnes 2000, p. 10)

It is tempting to wonder whether the ability to separate “reality from value” or “is from ought” is indicative of development. If it is, then there is reason to suggest that development moves from simplicity to complexity to a postformal negotiation between the two. This trajectory is supported by research in “postformal development” (Sinnott 1981, 1984, 1989). What does this direction of development mean for the management of sociocognitive conflict? The direction of development implies two things; first, inasmuch as different structuring tendencies are embedded and embraced by proximal cultures, there will be sociocognitive conflict; second, as development enables the postformal recapitulation of earlier structures and styles, development can be encouraged as a means of managing sociocognitive conflict.

Sociocognitive Conflict in the Classroom

As key professionals at the intersection of culture and cognition, teachers have an important role in recognising and managing sociocognitive conflict experienced through cultural diversification. In many cases, sociocognitive conflict results in negligible growth pains related to cognitive development. Consider the following example from *The Art of Teaching Primary Science* (2007) concerning children’s developing concepts of the moon. The text recognises that “As children’s conceptual knowledge becomes more sophisticated, their explanations of events become more complex” (Hickey, 2007, p. 46). For example, an early unsophisticated or simple concept of the moon may be that “the moon is made of cheese” (p. 47). Hickey notes that such a concept may be reinforced in cultural discourse, for example, where “Wallace and Gromit visit the moon and it is made of cheese”⁴ (p. 47). A simple sociocognitive conflict could arise through the meeting of a teacher’s knowledge that the moon is made of basalts and a child’s knowledge that the moon is made of cheese. It is perhaps safe to say that a child’s social-

⁴ “Wallace and Gromit” is a popular animation with a multi-layered appeal to different ages. In the episode alluded to, Wallace invents a rocket to take him to the moon. On landing he takes a bite of the moon to confirm that it is indeed made of cheese.

emotional commitment to Wallace and Gromit will not be shattered by a transition of ideas consistent with the increasing sophistication and complexity of cognitive development. Though, as Hickey notes:

Most teachers will agree that you should help children recognise when their ideas do not match current views, but just saying 'You are wrong' is not good teaching practice. It is more productive to help to help children revise their ideas. (p. 48)

In these cases, healthy sociocognitive conflict leads to cognitive development without significantly compromising sociocultural meaning. In the case of the cheese moon, the reconceptualisation of Wallace and Gromit as story rather than science disturbs far fewer sociocultural conventions than the reconceptualisation of a sacred scripture or cosmology. In the case of the persistent literalisation of the cheese moon, it is easy to agree with Hickey that "most teachers will agree that you should help children recognise when their ideas do not match current views" (p.48). Not all cases are so clear cut. Not all sociocognitive conflicts are as innocuous.

Consider the instance of a child with the cultural knowledge that the Prophet Muhammad split the moon in two and put it back together again⁵, or that the moon was created *ex nihilo* less than 10,000 years ago⁶, or that the moon is a man who waxes fat by devouring the spirits of those who break tribal laws (Hulley, 1996) or wanes when his disgruntled wives cut him with their axes (Norris, 2007). In these instances, it is more problematic to assume that a teacher *should* help such children to see that their ideas do not match current Western scientific views. The modes of meaning are complex and the stakes of sociocognitive conflict for the individual are high. One-dimensional deference to the position that such views of the moon are obviously "wrong" and "inferior" is little more developed than the one-dimensional literalisation of the views themselves. Cultural diversification increases the encounters between culture and cognition. The encounter is problematised by a Western Scientific claim, historically rooted in the enlightenment and ideologically wedded to modernism, that it represents the most advanced stage of cognitive *and* cultural development.

Much has been written on the intersection of indigenous knowledge and Western scientific discourse in education (e.g. Nakata 2004, 2007). Indigenous academics such as Martin Nakata acknowledge the tension that can exist between the two:

Indigenous academics, therefore, operate in a tension between the expectations of academic and indigenous communities that both informs and constrains the development of an Indigenous academic community . . . when we stray into perceived intellectualisms or activity that does not at first sighting appear to have a direct relation to community interests, we can be called into question by our communities as to the relevance of our work and whether we are leaving community interests behind and becoming too immersed in ways and thinking of the 'White world'. (2004, p. 2)

My suggestion is that this tension is a manifestation of a more basic sociocognitive conflict that is intensified by cultural diversification. My concern is that children and adolescents in a school environment experience a similar tension or sociocognitive conflict but lack the cognitive, pedagogical, social, and cultural support to engage conflict productively. Their reactions fall short of solutions and too often see the

⁵ The Qur'an refers to this act in several verses including Surah 54:1-2, "The Hour has approached, and the moon split. But whenever they see a sign, they turn away and say, 'This is evident magic'".

⁶ A belief derived from a literal interpretation of Genesis and popularised in Christian creationism.

violence, depression, and escapism through substance abuse, which accompany a failure to successfully accommodate “the other” without losing one’s self.

Strategies for Managing Sociocognitive Conflict

Positive developmental outcomes from cultural diversification are not guaranteed - they must be fostered, facilitated, nurtured, and managed. I identify and provide examples of three complementary strategies (*experiential*, *metacognitive*, and *integrative*) for managing sociocognitive conflict in the classroom. Collectively, these strategies represent an attempt to recognise and manage the developmentally facilitative and debilitating potential of cultural diversification.

Experiential Strategies

Experiential strategies engage students with self-representations of “the other”. These strategies by no means avoid conflict and may even serve to clarify points of conflict. However, encounters with self-representations of the other can help to negate conflicts over mis-representations generated in the absence of self-representation. In developmental terms, experiential strategies facilitate the development of perspective taking (Selman and Byrne 1974, Selman 1976). Here, managed sociocognitive conflict facilitates a move from subjective (I see you) to self-reflective (I see you seeing me) to mutual perspective taking (I see you seeing me see you) and beyond. It seems reasonable to assume on the basis of even the loosest age-stage relationship that school-aged children and adolescents are prone to see the other, without seeing the other see them. Accordingly, experiential strategies do not merely place culturally diverse others in proximity – that is to provoke conflict – rather, they encourage listening to the self-representation of the other in order to develop more complex perspective-taking (I see you seeing yourself, I see me seeing myself). In a meta-analysis of developmental theory, Marchand writes:

According to various authors (cf. Kramer, 1983, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1980), the relativistic conception of knowledge develops during adolescence and young adulthood, thanks to the growing expansion of social space which confronts subjects with (1) different points of view and different values (Kramer, 1989); (2) with the assumption of roles which, at times, can be difficult to reconcile; and (3) with the choice of one direction among many possible ones (Labouvie-Vief, 1980; Kramer, 1983). (2001, ¶ 16)

Cultural diversification in the classroom represents this “growing expansion of social space”. Facilitated development in the face of cultural diversification is represented by Outcome 2 in Figure 1 – it leads to increased capabilities for differentiation amid diversity and a complex coordination of diversity. The desired effect of this development is to humanise the intentions of the other and to broaden the boundaries of the self.

It is problematic that these cognitive developments and their desired effect can be obfuscated by the contents of culture because some cultures are structured to protect and perpetuate very simple perspective-taking. In the context of religious development Oser and Gmünder claim, “Cultural development can hamper or sponsor the construction of individual stages while, simultaneously, shaping the content of the stages” (1991, p. 94). The difficult task of the teacher is to facilitate development through the sociocognitive conflict that occurs when one culture experiences another. Experiential strategies offer genuine encounters of the other in managed environments. However, management

involves recognising and offering a range of cognitive and social solutions to sociocognitive conflict and an understanding of their consequences.

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies engage students directly with the cognitive operations needed to coordinate otherwise opposing binaries arising through cultural diversification. I suggest that it is necessary for educators to actively sponsor some conceptual tools and learning experiences to help students manage rather than despair the “irreconcilable” dimensions of diverse cultures in the classroom. Metacognitive strategies highlight and offer alternatives to the dualistic, absolutist, and dichotomous structuring tendencies (Perry, 1970, 1981; Baxter Magolda, 1992) that characterise childhood and adolescent epistemologies.

One example of a metacognitive approach could be the overt teaching of Reich’s model of relational and contextual reasoning (RCR) (2002). Consider the multiple cultural perspectives and explanations that compete in a culturally diverse classroom. In Reich’s terms, “the issue is to ‘coordinate’ two or more ‘rivalling’ descriptions, explanations, models, theories or interpretations” (2002, p. 15). Reich uses a ground-shift figure (Figure 2) to explain RCR:

To see simultaneously three faces of a given cube is compatible, the wish to see simultaneously (without mirrors) more than three faces is incompatible with reality. The meaning of noncompatible can be illustrated by answering the question ‘How many full three-dimensional cubes are there?’ (2002, p. 44).

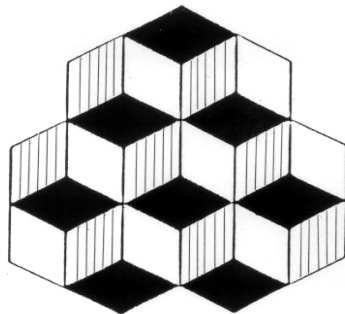


Figure 2. ‘Figure-ground’ Shift of the Number of Cubes (From Reich 2002, p. 44).

The answer to this question distinguishes early structuring tendencies from RCR.

Most people will answer “six”, and, when the figure is turned on its head, “seven”. The figure having stayed the same, applying formal binary (Aristotelian) logic would conclude that one of the answers must be wrong, and proceed to determine which one. In contrast, RCR logic will confirm that “six” is correct in one context, and “seven” in another context. (2002, p. 44)

Metacognitive strategies employ such lessons to extend the range of cognitive tools available to resolve a sociocognitive conflict. In a meeting of cultures RCR adds the cognitive tool of “complementarity” to the existing tool of “binary dualism” to conceptualise the meeting. It does not replace active construction but it places tools in cognitive proximity should students wish to use them to resolve the apparent conflicts of

cultural difference. The remaining strategy integrates experiential strategies and metacognitive strategies to facilitate development.

Integrative Strategies

Integrative strategies provide opportunities for collaborative problem solving through interaction between diverse cultural perspectives. Integrative strategies create situations where students actively choose from a range of cognitive tools to engage conflicts arising from cultural diversity. In a school context interactive strategies can take the form of debates, forums, discussion groups, scenario tasks etcetera. Such strategies bring the problems of diversification into collective consciousness. Students are given and construct a language of awareness to engage the problems that diversification brings. For example, consider the recent controversy over the wearing of the *Hijab* in English, French, and Australian schools. Though the outcome of the issue (wearing or not wearing) is a binary issue in a given school context, quite different developmental operations can inform “the same” outcome. “The same” outcome informed by different developmental operations is akin to the identical tips of two icebergs of vastly different mass – one will sink ships, one will not. The decision to allow or disallow the wearing of Hijab can at once be reasoned by the most egocentric dualistic absolutism or the most inter-subjective multi-perspective relativism. The rationale for a developmental approach to sociocognitive conflict is that the former basis for a decision will do more long-term damage than the latter. Integrative strategies provide students with the opportunity to engage such conflicts arising through cultural diversification with sufficient cognitive tools.

Conclusion

I have sought to bring attention to the existence and dynamics of sociocognitive conflict amid cultural diversification. Two types of conflict were identified giving rise to four outcomes or dynamics of sociocognitive conflict. Subtle and abstract as these dynamics appear, their manifestations can be individually and culturally devastating, if misunderstood and mismanaged. To reiterate Kögler’s hope for quality education, “we need to understand especially the ways in which multicultural courses support cognitive, and not just moral or social, development in students” (2008, ¶ 3). Conversely, we need to understand that culturally diverse environments can create cognitive, social, and moral crises and conflicts if teachers neglect the developmental dynamics of diversification. Collectively, the *Experiential*, *Metacognitive*, and *Integrative* strategies outlined in the previous section contribute to the management of cultural diversification in educational contexts. The revisitation of sociocognitive conflict in the context of schooling is one contribution to the management of inevitable cultural diversification in the shrinking village of the 21st Century.

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