Module 3

Conflict management in the Classroom environment

Learning objectives

Being competent and able to understand the different cultural backgrounds will assist you by:

1. Understand how people from different cultural backgrounds behave, communicate, express feelings and perceive the world
2. Understand basic cultural differences influencing intercultural communication
3. Identify different forms and means of intercultural communication and how to manage them
4. Understand the principles and conditions of effective intercultural communication
5. Avoid cultural conflicts related with communication

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3.1 Introduction

Intercultural communication is defined as a set of interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds, which consists of a process of exchanging, negotiating and mediating cultural differences through language and non-verbal. As a competence, intercultural communication involves the ability to be aware of how cultural differences influence communication process and its outcomes. Through this competence we realize the distinctions between people coming from different cultures. The essence of intercultural dialogue is to understand the meaning-making process of others, to fully accept the perspective of others and be aware of it throughout the communication process.

3.2 Self-Awareness

To be in a position to really understand the perspective of others you need to be fully aware of what your perspective is. What are your values? What are your norms? How does your culture influence the way you look and interpret things. Most of the conflicts which arise in intercultural setting is the difference in the internal meaning-making process which affects the way we give meaning to things around us. We only understand others when we have a reference point of where we are.

Saussure explained that a sign was not only a sound-image but also a concept. Thus he divided the sign into two components: the signifier (or "sound-image") and the signified (or "concept"). One can see this happening all around us. From a Macro perspective one can look at the different cultures which exists and observe how the meaning of objects and events change according to that culture. A simple handshake and looking at the person's eyes while greeting someone is considered a normal and respectful behaviour in Europe and the US. Whilst the same behaviour will be considered rude and unpolite in Japanese culture.
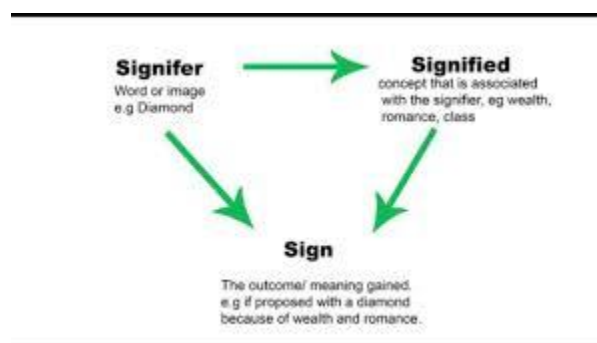
This gets more complicated when on top of the cultural influences there are also the life experiences which are also shaping the meaning we give to things and events around us. If students coming from Europe and from Africa are shown a gun, they would all know what the signifier is, but the signified interpretation of the gun might be very different. For students coming from Europe it might mean, movies or toys but for the students coming from Africa it might mean horror or war.

The difference between the signifier and the signified is what causes most conflicts and stress when working with people coming from different backgrounds. This highlight the need to be aware

that everything around us, everything that we say can be interpreted in different ways and not necessary the way we originally intended it to mean. These differences in the way we interpret things and events around us creates conflict because they are not easily seen. Some of these differences are ingrained deep with us and we must really be aware of our own internal processes before we can really be sensitive to others.

When you think about it you realise that things which are accepted and agreed upon in one culture can mean the totally opposite for someone coming from a different culture. This affects how one perceives authority, time, proximity, food, relationships, love, friendships, non-verbal language, and education. Therefore, this changes many things and the everyday life communication, which is essential, especially in an educational environment.

3.3 Types of conflict

What types of conflict are we commonly confronted with?

Human beings always have the tendency of putting others into pigeonholes. This often helps us to shape the world around us and make it comfortable to live in. Such categories for example are sex, race, social status amongst other things. The need to make our world better for ourselves always tempts us to prioritise groups according to our perception about them. When we prioritise, we put our group in the driving seat, while we put others at the back as they are of less value. The consequences are usually transferred into stereotyping, lack of respect for other cultures, discrimination, and racism. Conflicts in these situations are often unavoidable, as the less valued group becomes vulnerable and insecure.

Conflicts usually occur at different levels: from our personal lives to organisational and national levels. These levels can be summarised as:

Intra-personal: as individuals we are often in conflict with ourselves, about our values, choices and commitments in life.

Inter-personal: disagreement between two people on a purely personal level

Inter-group or organisational level: such conflicts occur between groups on the basis of values, power and relative equality, e.g.: organisation and a government.

Inter-cultural or community: conflicts that occur between two groups owing to struggle for territory, religious superiority, cultural values and norms. E.g.: Jews and Arabs, Muslims and Christians etc;

National conflict: conflict between nations…

Levels of Conflicts

Conflict if not tackled properly can easily escalate to a situation which will be very difficult to diffuse. For many years many spoke about the importance of integration but very few did anything to facilitate the process to allow people coming from different ethnic groups to integrate and learn about each other. As an educator, it is important to be aware that are different levels of conflict. By knowing which stage is the conflict at, you can use the right tools to deescalate the conflict to make it manageable.

Disagreements What was the specific incident / problem? (How did it start?) What were the feelings you had in the situation? What were your thoughts about it? Did you feel misunderstood? (feelings, motives or responsibilities misinterpreted)

Personifying which other persons were involved in the incident? How did you feel about this / these person(s)

Extension of the problems Which other things confirmed your negative attitude about this person? Did an escalation happen – a major argument / fight?

Giving up on dialogue Did you stop talking to each other / start avoiding each other? What did you say about this / these person(s) to others?

Creating enemy-images Who did you try to get as your allies Did conflicts with others occur because they did not agree with you on this issue

Open hostility / Polarization Were extreme actions taken?

For more information about how to start tackling conflict please follow the link:

https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/toolbox_tool_download-file-400/8.TOOLS%20FOR%20A%20CONFLICT%20MANAGEMENT.pdf

3.4 Coping strategies

Feedback

One of the most basic things which is most often overlooked is to give and ask for feedback. Through receiving feedback we can learn a lot about who we are. Feedback act like a mirror through which we can understand our own behaviours through the eyes of others. By giving feedback we will be doing the same to others, increasing their own self-awareness. To ensure that the feedback we are giving is constructive and positive its important to keep the below few points in mind:

- Always give precise and factual feedback, combined with examples based on observable behaviour (and not on the personal qualities which you believe to be the cause). Pointing out the consequences of the behaviour in question makes it possible to place the facts in context and provides the necessary perspective.
- Only give sincere feedback with positive intentions: help the person to improve and to widen his viewpoint, adding positive information with the aim of encouraging him and motivating him rather than sugar-coating things by trying to understand the person's viewpoint.
- Only give feedback on an individual, face-to-face basis, and using the first person singular: the use of "you" is a little accusatory, while the use of "one" or "we" displays a more collective approach.
- Involve the person you are speaking to in efforts to find solutions and common grounds and make sure that they are understanding what you are mean.
- Avoid asking 'why' and replace the why with 'how' and 'what'. 'Why' questions tend to instigate defensiveness, whilst 'how' ad 'what' questions are more logical and less personal. An example of this might be:
  "Why are you angry?" And replace with "What is making you angry?" As you can see there is a shift from the internal process – 'Why?' to a more external process by using the 'What?)

Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtl5UrrgU8c&t=69s

Understanding the source of conflict

Particularly in situations when challenging or sensitive issues are explored, the Socratic Method can be a very good way of dealing with potentially difficult situations. For example, if a student makes a statement which is offensive and distasteful, the "natural" response of the listener is to feel negative emotions regarding that, such as disgust, fear, antipathy or hatred; and a "natural" urge is to argue. Going down the path of Socratic questioning and using logic in conversation will take us away from the emotion and, hopefully, make the student recognize through the lack of logic in their argument, the inaccuracy of their statement.

Type	What is it?	Examples
Conceptual Clarification Questions	These are questions that encourage students to reflect upon and critique the material in depth. This brings clarity to the thought process and enables students to form impressions and rationale with evidence.	"Why do you say that?" "Did you mean it like this?" "Can you give an example?"
Probing Assumptions	These questions make students critique and reflect on their own assumptions or beliefs on which they are basing their understanding.	"How did you come to that assumption?" "Why do you choose to believe or assume that?" "Do you think that the assumption could be wrong?"
Probing Rationale, Reasons and Evidences	These questions help students to strengthen their arguments through deeper research into the material.	"Where does it state that such an incident occurred?" "Are there any other pieces of evidence to support this claim?" "Based on what evidence are you making this statement?"
Questioning Viewpoints and Perspectives	This type of questioning helps to broaden student perspective, and shows that there is more	"What other alternatives do you feel it can point to?"

	than one way of thinking about a topic.	"Is there any other meaning to what the author wrote?" "Do you this could have been what the author meant when he made that claim?"
Probing Implications and Consequences	This questioning strategy stimulates students to consider the logic of their arguments and evidence.	"How would this assumption affect…?" "What consequences will… have on…?" "What happens next?"
Questions about the Question	This method encourages reflection and critical analysis of the session	"Why do you think I asked…? "Why do you ask that?" "Can you tell me the meaning of your question?"

## 3.5 Conflict Management Models

In this module we will be covering two models which will help you to tackle conflict which might arise by looking at the conflict from various angles. But before we go into the models its important to understand that even conflict itself is influenced by culture.

Hammer theory states that people need to understand and recognise that there are differences in conflict styles across cultural communities, and with that awareness we must learn how to understand from each other and how to face and resolve intercultural conflicts.

Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DazLm-VB-Ik

The four main conflict resolution styles are:
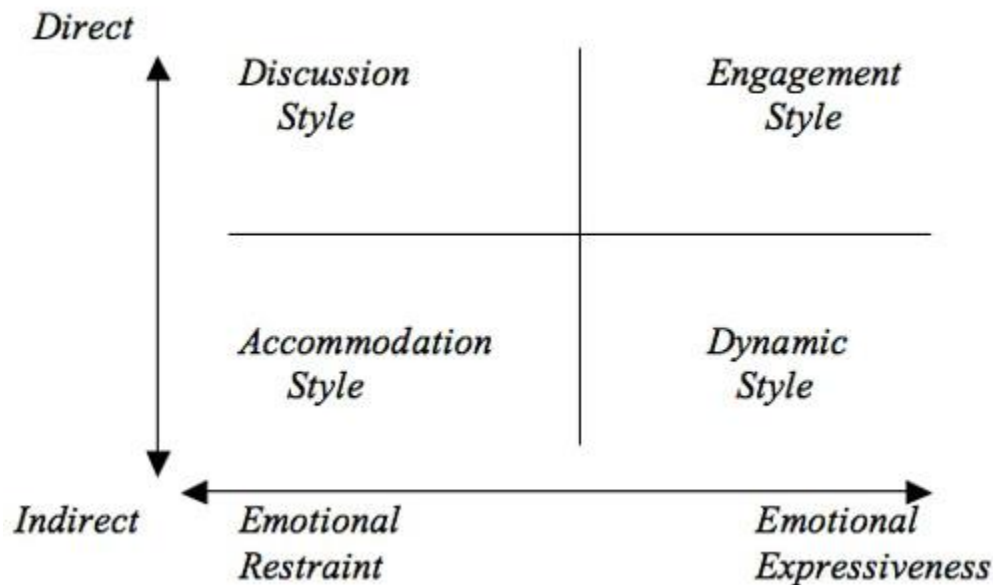
- **Discussion style.** It involves the use of a verbally direct path: "say what you mean and mean what you say". Within this style, when talking about the disagreement, people tend not to throw in their own personal feelings in the discussion. Examples of cultures that typically use this communication style are Northern European cultures and white North Americans.
- **Engagement style.** This style is confrontational and verbally direct using strong verbal and non-verbal communication. In the engagement style, sincerity is judged by the intensity with which each party conveys emotion. Russian and Greek cultures can be used as examples of this communication style
- **Accommodation style.** It emphasizes ambiguity in language use in order to help ensure that a conflict does not "get out of control". That is, maintaining emotional calm and reserve is essential to this style for enabling interpersonal harmony to counter relationally damaging disagreements among the parties. Southeast Asian and Japanese cultures are traditionally related with the use of this communication style.
- **Dynamic style.** This style uses indirect language which is often communicated through third party intermediaries, showing more emotion during a conflict. The credibility of

each party in the dispute is gauged by how emotionally expressive and intense they are. Arab cultures are representative of this communication style.

When tackling any kind of conflict, it is important to keep in mind how the conflict is being experienced by all the parties involved. Once the styles are identified of all the parties involved it would be easier to contain and to process the conflict and turn it into a learning opportunity. As an educator, your main role is to increase the cultural awareness of all the parties involved and to assist the students to think and reflect about the root of the problem. By focusing on the real problem at hand the situation will start understanding that everyone has their own perspectives and they need to learn to negotiate and learn from each other.

The 5 Conflict Management Styles – Thomas Kilmann
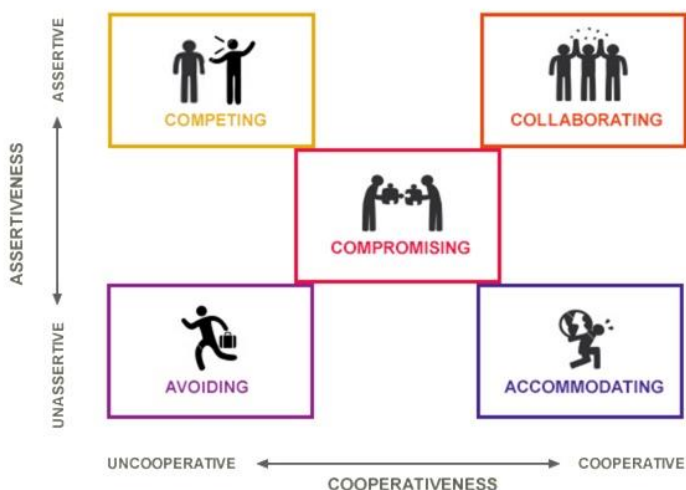
1. Accommodating

An accommodating style forsakes your own needs or desires in exchange for those of others. You would be putting the concerns of others before your own. This style usually takes place when you either simply give in or are persuaded to give in. This style could be appropriate to use when you care less about the issue than the others, want to keep the peace, feel as though you are in the wrong, or feel like you have no choice but to agree to the other point-of-view.

2. Avoiding

An avoiding style completely evades the conflict. You would neither pursue your beliefs nor those of the others involved. Simply, you would continuously postpone or completely dodge the conflict whenever it comes up.

This style could be appropriate to use when the conflict seems trivial, you don't have the time or need more time to think, you feel as though you have no chance of winning, or you're afraid of being met with resentment.

3. Compromising

A compromising style attempts to find a solution that will at least partially please all parties. You would work to find a middle ground between all the needs, which would typically leave people unsatisfied or satisfied to a certain extent.

This style could be appropriate to use when it's more important to reach a solution than for the solution to be great, a deadline is rapidly approaching, you're at an impasse, or you need a temporary solution for the moment.

4. Collaborating

A collaborating style attempts to find a solution that will meet the needs of all parties. Rather than trying to find a middle ground solution, you would aim for a solution that satisfies everyone and ends up being a win-win situation.

This style could be appropriate when multiple perspectives need to be addressed, there is an important relationship present between the parties, the final solution is too important for anyone to be displeased, or the beliefs of multiple stakeholders must be represented.

5. Competing

A competing style takes a firm stance and refuses to see the perspectives of the other parties. You would keep pushing your viewpoint at others or keep rejecting their ideas until you get your way.

This style could be appropriate when you have to stand up for your rights or morals, need to make a quick decision and force others to get on board, need to end a long-term conflict, or have to prevent a terrible, opposing decision from being made.

Now that you're familiar with the different ways to approach conflict, let's see how these styles can be used in day-to-day conflicts.

Link to a table on Kilmann's Model
file:///C:/Users/Clive/Downloads/Conflict%20Management%20Styles%20Comparison%20Grid.pdf

Link to more resources and models for conflict management

http://peacefulschoolsinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/cooperative-guide-to-conflict-resolution.pdf

3.6 Conclusion

> This module series marks an important that it is possible to achieve even the most difficult things with cooperation, teamwork and a willingness to learn how to overcome stereotypes and prejudice. Through education we can help the students and young people to understand that differences do not have to be threatening but rather enriching especially when people come together with good will and eagerness to learn about the other. It is this willingness to learn about the other that will take us all a long way forward in our own process of development as individuals and communities.

Key Learning Points

- **Self-Awareness:** It is important to increase our own self-awareness as educators and help the students and young people to learn more about their own values, perspectives and believes.
- **Signified and signifier:** An object or event can mean different things to different people. We all interpret things around us based on our values, perspectives beliefs and past experiences.
- **Different types of conflict:** from our personal lives to organisational and national levels
  Different levels of conflict: By knowing which stage is the conflict at, you can use the right tools to deescalate the conflict to make it manageable.
- **Feedback:** As a coping strategy, feedback act as mirror in which you will learn more about other and about yourself.
- **Socratic Method:** Using the right questions at the right time is essential to reduce conflict and facilitate understanding. Turning conflicts into potential learning opportunity
- **Hammer's Conflict Model:** Hammer theory states that people need to understand and recognise that there are differences in conflict styles across cultural communities, and with that awareness we must learn how to understand from each other and how to face and resolve intercultural conflicts.
- **The 5 Conflict Management Styles – Thomas Kilmann:** Accommodating, Avoidance, Compromising, Collaborating and Competing.

References
- Ferdinand de Saussure (1959). *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Thomas, K. W., and Kilmann, R. H. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc., 1974).
- Hammer, M. R. (2010). The Intercultural Development Inventory manual. Berlin, MD: IDI.