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Critical Reflection in Developing Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

In enhancing intercultural attitudes, storytelling and critical reflection have been used as methods in teaching and learning intercultural communication. Storytelling and sharing act as non-threatening, holistic, and easily adaptive methods in different settings (Deardorff, 2020). This paper introduces a teaching method employed in intercultural communication lessons as a part of action research: storytelling with critical reflection based on the frameworks by Barrett et al. (2013) and Deardorff (2006, 2009, and 2020). Critical reflection is seen as a transformation in students' growth in understanding self and relations to the world (Kuiper, 2017), the construction of 'self' and 'others' (McAllister et al., 2016), and sharing experiences and taking actions based on one's experiences (Deardorff, 2009). As a result, the students' stories were analyzed in terms of how they share their experiences, compare, and interpret cultural differences, and reflect on self and the other's awareness. It was found that the method helps to raise learners' awareness of cultural 'selfness' and 'otherness,' and to shift their attitudes towards more ethnorelative ones.

要旨

異文化間の態度を促進するために、異文化間コミュニケーションを教育・学習する方法として、ストーリーテリングと批判的省察が用いられてきた。ストーリーテリングと分かち合いは、威嚇的でなく、全体的で、異なる文脈に容易に適応できる方法である（Deardorff, 2020）。本稿では、異文化間コミュニケーションの授業におけるアクション・リサーチで用いられた教授法を紹介する： クリティカル・リフレクションを用いたストーリーテリングは、Barrett ら（2013）と Deardorff（2006、2009、2020）のフレームワークに基づいている。クリティカル・リフレクションとは、自己理解と世界との関係性の発展（Kuiper, 2017）、「自己」と「他者」の構築（McAllister et al. 学習者はストーリーの中で、自分の経験を共有し、文化の違いを比較・分析し、自分自身や他者への意識を振り返る。これは、学習者の文化的な「自己」と「他者」に対する意識を高め、より民族的なものへと態度を変化させるのに役立つ。

Intercultural communication cannot be avoided in this globalized world, and intercultural competence forms the foundation for successful global communication and collaboration in our increasingly interconnected world; therefore, developing students' intercultural competence is a requirement for English language teaching. Intercultural competence is a multifaceted concept, defined by several key principles in the field of intercultural communication. It signifies the ability to navigate and thrive in diverse cultural environments, emphasizing the principles of mutual respect, common understanding, and cooperation of diversity. Based on my empirical observations and pedagogical encounters with Vietnamese students studying English at the University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi (ULIS, VNU) it is evident that they do not learn in a multiracial or multinational environment but rather in an interregional and intersocial one. The Internet, mass media, and social media provide much of their exposure to and experiences with international communication. They have limited contact with foreign tourists and authentic materials, which might have a substantial impact on their perspective. Attributions, stereotypes, and labels may result in them having an ethnocentric frame of mind. This demands that teachers, in addition to imparting knowledge and fostering motivation and skills, reduce stereotypes and overgeneralizations, which are components of intercultural communication competence.

This paper addresses the teaching contexts and strategies to develop one of the intercultural competence components—attitudes, which are assumed to change from ethnocentric to more ethnorelative ones in my Intercultural communication lessons at ULIS, VNU. Critical reflection is seen as a transformation in students' growth in understanding self and relations to the world (Kuiper, 2017), the construction of 'self' and 'others' (McAllister et al., 2016), and sharing experiences and taking actions based on one's experiences (Barrett et al., 2013). It helps raise learners' awareness of cultural 'selfness' and 'otherness' and shift their attitudes towards more ethnorelative ones. Critical reflection can be implemented in the classroom through storytelling, a class activity in which students can tell and share their stories without fear of being judged, biased, or manipulated by external forces.

Theoretical Framework

Intercultural communication is the process of mutual interaction in which differences may occur due to cultural impacts that are sufficient for making a difference (Baldwin et al., 2014) or when communication with culturally similar people is lost (Lustig and Koester, 2010). Rogers and Steinfatt (cited in Jackson, 2014) use the phrase 'the exchange of information between individuals who are unalike culturally' to describe the difficulties when individuals

from different cultures communicate. Lustig and Koester (2010) define intercultural communication as a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, and contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings. In other words, as a result of dissimilarities in beliefs, values, norms, practices, and perceptions, intercultural communication may involve the misinterpretations and misunderstandings of others. Intercultural communication may not necessarily be communication between individuals of different countries or nationalities. It occurs when they have different cultural backgrounds, therefore, even if they are from different regions in a country or different occupational, age, gender, or interest groups. Intercultural communication may occur between individuals with different beliefs, values, and norms.

Intercultural competence is a term often used to describe the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures (Lustig and Koester, 2010, p. 67). Intercultural competence involves "culture-specific understanding, culture-general understanding, and positive feeling for the other culture" (Wiseman et al., 1989), as well as different skills and attitudes such as "charisma, flexibility, empathy, non-ethnocentrism, personality strength, optimism, self-efficacy, and the ability to facilitate communication" (Brian Spitzberg, cited in Baldwin et al., 2014). In broader terms, Deardorff (2006); Martin & Nakayama (2010); Lustig & Koester (2010) propose different intercultural competence components, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, actions and behaviours. These components must be aligned with human principles of interrelatedness, equality, respect, dignity, participation, inclusion, and empowerment (Donders & Laaksonen, cited in Deardorff, 2020, p. 5). Respecting other cultures means bridging cultural differences.

Developing intercultural competence embraces many approaches and stages that require a lifelong process and individual-centeredness (Deardorff, 2020). Therefore, we should start with empowering individuals with internalized knowledge, skills, and attitudes. As language teachers, we can boost the students' communication skills, change their attitudes towards the more ethnorelative, and enhance their cultural knowledge, both general and specific, through a variety of in-class and out-of-class activities, such as formal and informal/non-formal learning (Deardorff, 2020), ranging from formal, structured, and designed lessons of intercultural communication to cultural exchange and cultural understanding enhancement activities. It is important to note that, as stated by Deardorff (2020), a one-time training or experience is insufficient to achieve intercultural competencies.

Byram et al. (2002), Barrett (2013), and Deardorff (2020) list the following attitudes as

important parts of intercultural competence: curiosity and openness, respect, and empathy; tolerance, and acceptance of cultural diversity; self-awareness and awareness of others. To accomplish the development of intercultural attitudes towards more ethnorelativism, language teachers put a strong emphasis on fostering students' awareness of cultural relativism and respecting other cultural values.

Barrett et al. (2013) recommend planning principles for facilitating the process of cultural self-awareness for students in formal and non-formal education. In other words, these are principles for learners' self-exploration in terms of their exposure to dissimilar cultural situations. These principles are:

- *Experience*: Developing attitudes of respect, curiosity, and openness; it can be either 'real' or 'imagined' to acquire knowledge of other cultures.
- *Comparison*: Comparing what is unfamiliar with what is familiar, then making comparisons for understanding
- *Analysis*: Explaining what lies behind similarities and differences
- *Reflection*: Developing critical awareness and understanding
- *Action*: Engaging with others through intercultural dialogue and becoming involved in cooperative activities with people of other cultures (Barrett et al; 2013, p. 15)

To achieve the above, critical reflection and storytelling activities were employed in the intercultural communication lessons described in this paper. Critical reflection, as its name implies, is the process by which students can reflect critically on what they see, hear, experience, and feel. Brookfield, cited in Mc. Allister (2006, p. 370) notes that the critical reflective thinker can: (1) identify the assumptions that underlie their thoughts and actions; (2) evaluate the accuracy and validity of these assumptions; and, as necessary, (3) reconstitute these assumptions. Deardorff (2020, p. 9) highlights three dimensions of critical reflection: a) making meaning of one's experience through descriptive, analytical, and critical considerations; b) being communicated in a number of ways, such as in written form, orally, or as an artistic expression; and c) taking action based on one's reflection. Technically, critical reflection is a 'learning by thinking and acting' method that improves students' internalised knowledge and attitudes, thereby enhancing their ability to act. Critical reflection is viewed as a transformation in students' growth in understanding self and relations to the world (Kuiper, 2017), the construction of 'self' and 'others' (McAllister et al., 2016), and sharing experiences and taking actions based on one's experiences (Barrett, 2013).

Storytelling, on the other hand, is one of the oldest forms of human communication. People create narratives to pass down knowledge and connect with one another. It provides a medium for self-expression to share their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and perspectives in a creative and personal way. The use of storytelling in teaching cultures is not new; nonetheless, its application remains for specific reasons, such as conveying personal messages, expressing oneself, and transmitting lessons to future generations. In the context of teaching intercultural communication, storytelling and sharing can be considered a method for assisting students to unfold their thinking and values, from which they can learn from themselves and others. They act as a non-threatening, holistic, and easily adaptive force in various contexts. (Deardorff, 2020).

Methodology and Aims

The research method used in the paper is action research, which follows a structured and evidence-based approach to implementing storytelling techniques and assessing their effectiveness within the specific context of Vietnamese students at ULIS, VNU. It emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and adaptation to enhance the possible outcomes of intercultural competence for students. The aim of this method is to assess their changes in attitudes towards cultural differences in their practical contexts.

Among the intercultural competence components in the frameworks suggested by Byram (2002) and Deardorff (2006, 2009), attitude is the fundamental starting point. In my classes, storytelling and sharing are used to increase students' intercultural sensitivity, with the focus on the enhancement of their intercultural attitudes. To achieve this, I emphasize promoting knowledge and enhancing their intercultural attitudes through 1) awareness of cultural differences, 2) respect for cultural diversity, 3) development of non-ethnocentrism, compassion, and empathy, and 4) raising the level of critical observation skills. The teacher should work as a facilitator to a) demonstrate his or her respect for every experience, b) encourage students to share their stories by listening for understanding, c) engage students in critical reflection in discovering their own cultures and exploring others to see the differences and similarities with non-judgmental attitudes, and d) cultivate their motivations for intercultural communication.

The storytelling activity had been applied to the 3rd and 4th year students of English during the academic years 2020–2022, at Vietnam National University, Hanoi, University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS, VNU). Students shared their personal narratives via either written or digital platforms after learning about the basic concepts of intercultural

communication, including culture-related terms and intercultural communication definitions. They could write essays, or they could use a smartphone or laptop to record their stories in a variety of formats such as presentations, story diagrams on Padlet, short videos on Pecha Kucha or Canva, comic drawing, and poster designing to demonstrate how their attitudes have changed in response to an event, a person, or a cultural or social assumption. At the conclusion of the course, they were required to write brief reflective essays analyzing the changes they had made. The tentatively suggested questions in the story are:

> Tell me the story of (some) belief(s)/value(s)/norm(s)/ social practice(s) that you hold and that was/were popular in your community in the past … but then you changed your thinking about it (them). Your story may include the observations, comparisons, and reflections of the communication between you and people from different countries, regions, communities, etc. Here are the suggested questions to help:
> - *What was/were the belief(s), value(s), norm(s), or social practice(s)?*
> - *How did it/they change? It could be someone, an event, a happening, an incident, etc. that transformed your awareness.*
> - *What can you learn from this experience*?

Figure 1 illustrates the four-step reflective process students were encouraged to carry on all throughout the above storytelling. In the first place, as required, students begin by sharing their experiences, often utilizing flashbacks to revisit the past events or situations. This step serves as the foundation for self-reflection to lay out the narrative of their experiences. In the second step, the focus shifts to identifying differences between various events or situations. This comparative analysis requires a keen eye for discerning variations, changes, or contrasts in different aspects of these experiences from intercultural communication concepts, namely values, beliefs, norms, and social practices. Step 3 takes this analysis further, encouraging a critical examination of how these differences impact the students. It involves delving into the causes and consequences of these variations. Finally, in Step 4, the important goal is to draw meaningful conclusions. By reflecting on the self-awareness and personal growth that arise from the previous steps, individuals can extract valuable lessons and insights.
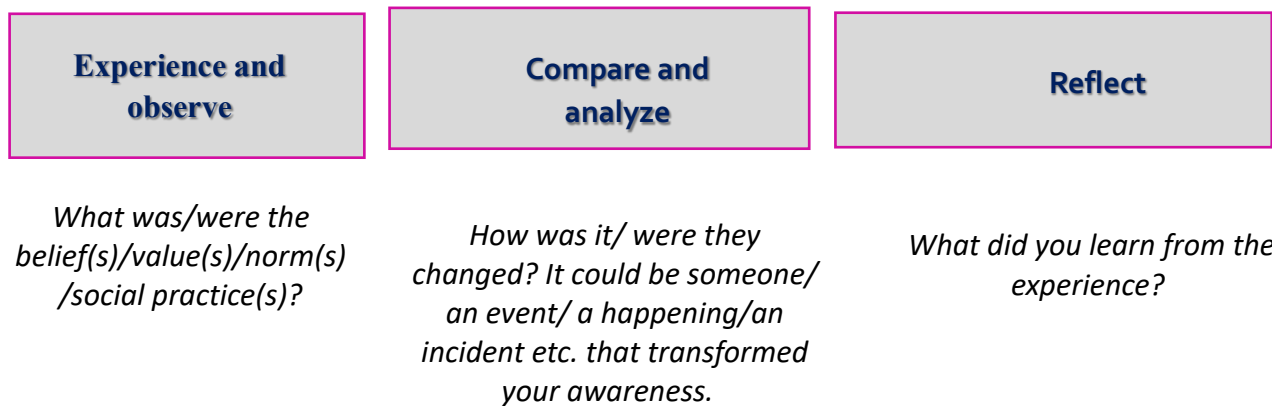
Figure 1

Cultural Awareness Storytelling Reflective Process
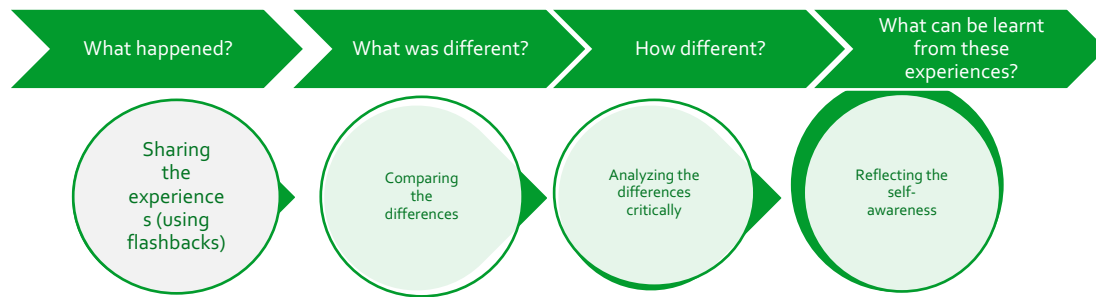
In turn, the above storytelling process is an adaptation of Barrett al.'s (2013 three) principles for students' cultural awareness through self-reflection, shown on *Figure 2*. In the first principle, "Experience and observe," the focus is on sharing experiences and identifying specific beliefs, values, norms, or social practices. The second principle's goal, "Compare and analyze," is to understand how these beliefs or values have changed. This change can result from various social and cultural factors, such as an individual, an event, or an incident that transforms one's awareness. In the principle "Reflect," individuals derive insights and learning from their experiences, which is the important aim of this process. It encourages self-awareness and personal growth by allowing one to connect their past beliefs, the transformative incidents, and the resulting lessons learned.

Figure 2

Critical reflection in Storytelling Process

Experience and observe	Compare and analyze	Reflect
What was/were the belief(s)/value(s)/norm(s)/social practice(s)?	*How was it/ were they changed? It could be someone/ an event/ a happening/an incident etc. that transformed your awareness.*	*What did you learn from the experience?*

Note: This figure is a visual adaptation of Barrett et al's (2013) planning principles.

In summary, the utilization of critical reflection within the context of the intercultural communication classroom serves as an instructional approach aimed at enhancing students' personal development and transforming their intercultural attitudes. This is accomplished by facilitating their introspective engagement with past experiences, observations,

comparisons, and the application of critical thinking.

Analysis of the Students' Narratives

Upon the examination and analysis of the students' narrative essays, several salient observations emerged, which will be described in the following pages. Please refer to the *Appendices A and B* for illustrative samples of students' work.

Students developed a much more open attitude, even transforming their thoughts and worldviews.

Excerpts from the respondent's answers such as the following;

"*For a long time, I held the belief that Muslims are all religious extremists, and even terrorists, who are very likely to express aggression against others. This belief was fostered mainly under the influence of the mass media and my family's education… Last summer, I enrolled in a virtual forum namely Bali International Student Festival. …Through teamwork, I could strongly sense their open-mindedness and peace love.*" (N.L.P)

"*I realized that there is nothing wrong with a person being gay or lesbian… I hope people towards more of tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality and I think the best way to do that is be open - then, people will be able to see that gay people aren't really different.*" (T.M.L)

… suggest that when guided by intercultural knowledge and lessons, students may have a perceptible broadening of their perspectives, developing a more encompassing understanding of individuals coming from diverse religious, regional, norm, and value-oriented backgrounds. In addition, these results reflect students' changes in attitudes towards cultural differences, becoming more tolerant and accepting of cultural differences. The changes could be very small, for example, solutions to disagreements and conflicts in their daily habits, or they can be more encompassing, like changes in their worldview of LGBT people or Muslim people.

Students saw the need to develop their own critical cultural awareness.

Responses such as the following:

"*The truth is that stereotypical gender roles have proved to be able to hurt everyone from men to women when they are not welcome us to be ourselves, do things that we, as a*

unique individual want. Therefore, I believe that it is time for both genders to speak out and let our voices be heard, it is time for us to decide what we want to be not the society. It is true that it will take time to change the society perception, but if we do not take action, who? and if it is not now, when?" (T.M.L)

"I used to think of myself as a tolerant, positive person who rarely make judgements and look down on others. As I went through the course, I realized that I had not been that open-minded. I may not judge things on the outside, yet interiorly(sic) I hold personal assumptions that is untrue and sometimes negative about things." (M.B.T)

… point towards the idea that students seemed to have learned to respect diversity, to have acceptance, empathy, and solidarity, and to reduce cultural and social biases through sharing and cooperating. The process of exploring new cultures and meeting new people seemed to have and helped them realize how much they have changed.

Students demonstrated a recognition of disparities between their own identities and those of others, thereby manifesting a profound respect for diversity.
For instance, the following entry;

"I recognise(sic) the importance of one's original cultural identity, which is quite self-explanatory because it gives each and everyone of us an "identity", a foundation of core culture to dwell on." (V.P.A)

… suggests that students may exhibit an awareness of the distinctions between their own identities and those of their peers, showcasing a deep appreciation for diversity. This could foster a harmonious and inclusive learning environment, encouraging mutual respect and the exchange of valuable perspectives.

Students demonstrated a recognition of the significant role that intercultural communication plays in mitigating both past and future challenges.
Expressions such as "*valuable lessons in the future*", "*living with tolerance*", "*help me a lot in the future*" represent the students' reflections on the prospective benefits of intercultural communication for their future lives. Students seemed to have exhibited heightened awareness regarding the underlying triggers of communication conflicts and adeptly devise resolutions characterized by enhanced tolerance and adaptability.

Discussion

The aforementioned findings derived from the narratives of students serve to amplify some noteworthy perspectives. First, the results suggest that critical reflection in storytelling can encourage students to share, observe, compare, analyze, and learn from their own stories. It seems to help them promote the transformation in their personal growth by raising learners' awareness of cultural 'selfness' and 'otherness' and shifting their attitudes to more ethnorelative ones. Through their stories, students realize how much they have subconsciously stereotyped or judged other cultures based on their own values, beliefs, and norms.

With respect to the students' intercultural sensitivity, the intercultural lessons seemed to have triggered a change from ethnocentrist to more ethnorelativist views. Instead of their failures to see the cultural differences and having "superficial cultures," they tended to recognize and appreciate the cultural differences, as pointed by Bennett (2004). As a result, their pre-assumptions about intercultural communication are challenged and improved. In this sense, in is reasonable to assume that in the short term, this could lead to changes in their mindset about the imbalance of the world and society. They seemed to realize the social injustice for people of different genders, ages, occupations, etc. and the sustainable development of social and cultural diversity and value other cultures as their own. On the long term, it could be extrapolated that this could benefit their personal growth as socially responsible individuals in their cross-cultural interactions.

Pedagogical Implications

Intercultural competence requires lifelong learning; therefore, just a few intercultural communication lessons in the class cannot give the students' skills, attitudes, and knowledge they need. Instead, it needs to be built up as a gradual and long-term process. Teachers as facilitators should encourage students to participate in inside and outside of class activities such as group projects, international student exchange programmes, and discovery tours to improve their culture-specific knowledge and practice their culture-general knowledge. Storytelling and sharing are among the ways to help students express their profound feelings and thoughts and to consciously have respect for diversity.

As Kuiper (2017, p. 30) states, the relationship between teacher and student develops a class culture unique to the participants, which facilitates transformative learning for the teacher as well as the students, the roles of the teachers in intercultural communication lessons are therefore very important. It is the respect and willingness to listen, the non-

judgmental attitudes, and the openness that encourage students to share their stories.

In conclusion, teachers and students would both benefit from using storytelling and sharing in intercultural communication lessons. Students can share and learn from their own experiences, think more critically about cultural diversity and relativism, improve their intercultural attitudes, and learn more about other cultures. In addition to enhancing their pedagogical professional development, teachers obtain benefits from comprehending the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and social contexts of their students, thereby fostering the growth of empathy and compassion.

Conclusion

This paper presents an approach aimed at boosting students' intercultural attitudes, a fundamental component of intercultural communication competence (Byram, 2002; Deardorff, 2006, 2009). Drawing upon the principles of cultural self-awareness proposed by Barrett et al. (2013) and Deardorff's practical tool of story circles (2020), the approach incorporates storytelling and critical reflection activities to foster the students' intercultural communication competence. These activities encompass personal narrative sharing through written or digital mediums, guided by specific suggestions, facilitating an exploration of their own cultural backgrounds, a comparative analysis of their past and transformation, and an examination of the lessons derived from these experiences. The resulting reflections indicate the students' adoption of a more empathetic perspective, transformative shifts in their thoughts and worldviews, and a heightened awareness of critical cultural dimensions and diversity. These findings underscore the role of intercultural communication knowledge in ameliorating past and anticipated challenges. It is noteworthy that both teachers and students stand to gain significant benefits from these activities, as they contribute to the development of empathy, compassion, and a deeper respect for diversity.

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Appendix A

Examples of students' stories

Student 1

SEX EDUCATION

Over the course of history, we are living in a culture where *superstitious norms* and *beliefs* have become deeply inculcated in our mindsets about everything. For a conventional country like VietNam, sex has long been considered a *sensitive topic*.
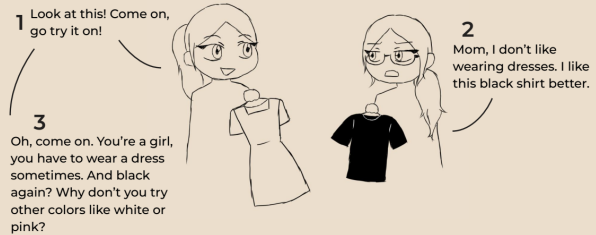
ME - A 20 YEARS OLD GIRLS growing in a traditional family where prejudice about sex is deeply-rooted can now confidently make informed decisions, build healthy relationships and, protect myself in this ever poised-threatening society thanks to my new perspectives in sex. Therefore, from my own story, I want to voice that "just be open in this world, be ready to reset your mind and willing to adapt to new values if possible"

Student 2

Ever since I was born, I have been living with the concept of **masculine** and **feminine** clothes drilled into me by so many people. I always hear opinions about **"girls have to dress like this"** and **"boys have to dress like that"**.
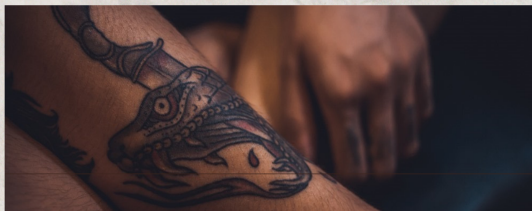
Like one time I went shopping for clothes with my mom some years ago, and mom gave me advice on my fashion choice:

1 Look at this! Come on, go try it on!

2 Mom, I don't like wearing dresses. I like this black shirt better.

3 Oh, come on. You're a girl, you have to wear a dress sometimes. And black again? Why don't you try other colors like white or pink?

Student 3

TATTOOING

Vietnamese from the last few centuries have inherently an unfriendly view of tattoos. The reason for these prejudices dates back to the 19th century when criminals were often active in factions, each of which had its own logo tattoo. Since then, tattoos have been considered as a sign to identify "scoundrels" and tattooing in my religion is mostly common among addicts or gypsies.

However, instead of being arrogant and aggressive like I had imagined, he was extremely friendly and enthusiastically helped me to complete my assembly. Thanks to his extensive knowledge and intelligence, our team won the first prize.

For a moment, it dawned on me that not everyone with tattoos behaved the same. After the session was over, I asked him why he got that tattoo and what it meant. His answer really surprised me. The tattoo on his arm is called Maori, it represents the strength and courage of New Zealanders as well as the desire to be protected by the gods.

In fact, tattooing itself is not evil. Whether it means good or bad is due to our specific social circumstances and our own preconceived views.

From that experience, I have had a different view of tattooing as well as tattooed people because every tattoo has a special meaning or cultural value behind it and tattoos can not speak a person's personality properly. Therefore, I have broken the habit of judging a person by his appearance as the true beauty comes from inside.

Student 4

When I was a child, I learned that pink and delicate, frizzy things belonged to girls, whereas blue or red and superheroes belonged to boys. I researched about the background of these two hues and discovered that everything began in the 19th century when baby clothes in pastel color became commonplace. Pink was given to girls since pink is a romantic hue, and women are perceived as having stronger emotions. This idea was widely held. I may still visit a bookshop in modern times and observe the same color discrimination on notebooks, backpacks, and other items. When I was a child, not just me but adults also, would laugh at a boy who wore a pink shirt and call him gay - which was frowned upon. Even though I was making fun of those individuals, I never realized that my taste was different from what was considered acceptable; I enjoy superhero films and the color blue, but I always wanted to buy pink stuff to fit in with the other kids, despite not knowing any of the princess. Consider a primary school setting where the coolest kid is the one with the most ponies or Ben 10 on their bag.

When I was made aware by my sister that homosexuality is natural, I understood why this color discrimination was wrong. I've been doing study on the Lgbtq+ community and have discovered that what individuals enjoy and dress has nothing to do with their sexual orientation. More and more are beginning to call attention to this absurd inequality. There is a very well-known comic strip about a young girl who teases a man wearing a pink shirt. He responds by giving her a cup of hot boiling water from the pink faucet and stating, "Pink is for girls, right? Here is your pink." Moreover, a bunch of my highschoolers used to put a gallery in 2020 with the slogan "NO MORE GENDERED OBJECTS" to increase public awareness of the issue of prejudice.

I now take delight in possessing blue items and donning sports gear. Although it is bad that there is still inequality among us, I have hope that more items will be produced in different colors for children to suit their preferences, and that eventually children will be able to choose their preferred colors for clothing, just like I do.

Student 5

SAME-SEX
R E L A T I O N S H I P

VALUES

Vietnamese people still hold firm to the value of **traditional gender norms**. Normally, love and marriage should be formed by two main genders: male and female. For the old generation, they consider same-sex relationship is something unacceptable. The youth are currently abusing it to be up-to-date, to be trendy more than they actually are. It is also believed that the homosexuals have their body part shortage, rather than being accepted as a completed individual. Breathing the some atmostphere, being educated by the same system, it is plausible that I also have that thought in mind, that homosexual are typically **different and strange, even have thoughts of despise them.**

However there was a happening that transformed my awareness....

My best friend – Ha started a same-sex relationship when we were in high school. One day in the first subject of the class, she proudly announced the news to me. At that moment, the confusion and awkwardness showered me. I stopped her and talked to her about how wrong she was in having that "kind" of relationship, then even advised her to see the doctor for treatment. Of course, we had a big quarrel and didn't talk to each other for long. Our relationship became awkward and difficult.
For that cold period, I have so many thoughts in mind. Friendship is one of the significant parts in my youth, especially the close one. Ha is my precious friend and have been so supportive along the way I grew up. Basically, she is a perfect individual with excellent study and has a good family base. Hence, I wonder what make Ha become like this…
What I have done to understand more about her action is to join the homosexual community via Internet. The more I read, the more knowledge I gain . Their feelings, their experience appeared in front of my eyes, stimulated me, and adjusted me. I realized that loving the same gender is not wrong, love has no limitation for gender, or any condition. There is no curation for this because there is no body shortage or young indecisive thoughts from the beginning. The only problem is my ignorance about this that significantly hurts my friend.

A happening

PRIDE
love is love

Lesson

I wrote a long letter to apologize for my actions. Personally, I thought our friendship would come to an end, however, the day after, Ha actively came to my seat and talked about homework. We gradually came back to where we were, even more intimate after that big disagreement.
Every journey of my life, I gain more about the world. Although it is not easy to get used to new things, I don't have hostile thoughts about them. Moreover, this community interests me with its humour and bravery so that I became a supporter for same-sex relationship.
After this experience, I learnt that same-sex relationship is not wrong, it is just too novel for Vietnamese to fully accept it. However, we should have a multidimensional viewpoint about all aspects in life to live as a better self.

Appendix B

Excerpts of students' essays showing their attitudes and transformations.

N.L.P (20E21): *"for a long time, I held the belief that Muslims are all religious extremists, and even terrorists, who are very likely to express aggression against others. This belief was fostered mainly under the influence of the mass media and my family's education… Last summer, I enrolled in a virtual forum namely Bali International Student Festival. …Through teamwork, I could strongly sense their open-mindedness and peace love."*

D.N.H (20E23): *"Since I was just a small bubbly child, sex has been prejudiced as a taboo in Vietnam, hence even my parents weaseled out of mentionting sex-ed when I tried to ask some embarrasing information about my body's sexual development…I was quite a straightforward girl so I continued questioning my grandparents for further discovery. However, they ashamedly told me that talking openly on this topic could lower their prestige in society, thus like my parents - the adults in general, they attempted to preclude me from diving deeper into this sensitive issue…In that class, there was a traumatising figure that still vivid in my mind to date, which is according to the World Health Organization (WHO), Vietnam is one of the three countries with the largest number of abortions in 2017… the traumatising fact that struck me was when I came to know that my distant nephew living in a district of the northern mountainous province of Son La (Muong La) was physically abused by her teacher. Not until this time could I become fully aware of the critical importance of sex-ed eduaction, especially in the far-away land in VietNam. My sexual value has been radically transformed since then."*

N.T. T. H (17E6) *"I realized that there is nothing wrong with a person being gay or lesbian. Huong Giang Idol, who is one of the people in the LGBT community not only beautiful but also talented, has helped homosexual people come out and express themselves the way they want without fear of others being slanderous. I am happy to say that now I view homosexuality as enriching. I hope people towards more of tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality and I think the best way to do that is be open - then, people will be able to see that gay people aren't really different."*

T. M. L. (17E6) *"The truth is that stereotypical gender roles have proved to be able to hurt everyone from men to women when they are not welcome us to be ourselves, do things that we, as a unique individual want. Therefore, I believe that it is time for both genders to*

speak out and let our voices be heard, it is time for us to decide what we want to be not the society. It is true that it will take time to change the society perception, but if we do not take action, who? and if it is not now, when?"

M. B. T. (16E2): *"I used to think of myself as a tolerant, positive person who rarely make judgements and look down on others. As I went through the course, I realized that I had not been that open-minded. I may not judge things on the outside, yet interiorly I hold personal assumptions that is untrue and sometimes negative about things."*

V. P. A. (16E2): *"After 15 weeks of the course, I was taught to adopt a multi-angle perspective when viewing a cultural case intraculturally, interculturally, and cross-culturally. Furthermore, being informed more about multiculturalism helped me to suspend judgements, avoid stereotyping and respect differences between cultures and groups."*

Author's Biography

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