

SIETAR

Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research

Knapp ♦ Kappel ♦ Eubel-Kasper ♦ Salo-Lee (eds.)

Meeting the Intercultural Challenge

Effective Approaches in Research,
Education, Training and Business

Verlag Wissenschaft & Praxis



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Karla Eubel-Kasper ♦ Liisa Salo-Lee (eds.)

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Meeting the Intercultural Challenge

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SIETAR - The International Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research - is an interdisciplinary professional and service organization established in 1974. The SIETAR global network counts with over 3000 members in more than 60 countries.

Members of SIETAR are professionals from a variety of academic and practical disciplines who share a common concern for intercultural understanding. Their objective is to encourage the development and application of knowledge, values and skills which enable effective intercultural and interethnic actions at the individual, group, organization, and community and national levels.

Interculturalists affiliated with SIETAR are educators, trainers, researchers, consultants, counselors and managers. They perform such specialized multiculturally-sensitive activities as conflict-resolution, international consulting and training for intercultural communication in a wide variety of settings such as business, government, education, health care, non-profit organizations, law enforcement and more.

The SIETAR Congress 1996 in Munich was a joint venture of SIETAR Deutschland, SIETAR Europa and SIETAR International.

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Meeting the Intercultural Challenge

Karl F. Knapp

Erfurt

The subsequent chapters of this book are all based on presentations at the 25th Annual Congress of the Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR), which took place at Munich, Germany, from May 28th to June 2nd, 1996.

For various reasons, this was a very special event.

Firstly, it was the 25th of SIETAR's international congresses and as such it reflected the changes and developments in the field of interculturalism over the past quarter of this century. What had begun originally as dealing with problems of adequate training for development and other overseas personnel - recall that the first conceptualizations of what now is termed "intercultural competence" were then frequently conceived of as "overseasmanship" - over the years evolved into a vast and complex area of multifaceted problems and activities. For example:

- The globalization of the economy and the ever growing cooperation across national and cultural borders in education, business, science and technology create increasing dependencies among nations unparalleled in history and necessitate a heightened awareness for intercultural issues and a substantial competence to deal with intercultural problems both in the political, educational, business and science organizations and in the individuals involved.
- Political developments like the unification process in Europe - as symbolized e.g. by the forthcoming introduction of the single European currency - call into question long established features and boundaries of national identity. Similarly, the fall of the Iron Curtain suddenly enables or even enforces intercultural contacts between close neighbours who had been separated for almost two generations and who lost their knowledge of each other if not, under the influence of the long ideological confrontation, even developed negative stereotypes of each other.
- Technical developments - the most recent ones being satellite TV and the Internet - spread culturally laden information all over the world, but it is still unclear as to what extent it is understood in a culturally appropriate way by its recipients and what effects it may have on their world views, values, norms and ways of life.
- Ethnic conflicts such as in Bosnia, Rwanda, Indonesia, Afghanistan or in

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the former Soviet Union flare up worldwide, and so do cases where fanatics of whatever religious or ideological conviction terrorize their compatriots, all causing a rising stream of refugees fleeing persecution and poverty, leading to immigration and frequently to minority problems in other countries.

- The preferred goals of many of the recent refugee movements, postmodern Western societies, are in a process of social change. The old assimilationist model for the relationship between majorities and minorities does not predominate any more: the metaphor of the "melting pot" increasingly is being replaced by the mosaic. Multiculturalism as new model is emerging, with different social groups claiming an identity of their own in a pluralistic society, an identity based on their respective ethnicity, race, gender or sexual orientation. This diversity imposes an intercultural perspective on most intra-societal contacts, too.
- The question of identity is one of the issues that are related to ethical problems people working in the intercultural field have to face, be they policy makers, researchers or practitioners in business, training or education. Does for example tolerance suffice to solve problems arising from clashes of conflicting group identities? Or: To what extent is it legitimate to change individual identities by education and training?
- Politicians, managers, trainers and teachers have to implement the changes in groups or individuals, changes that are deemed to enhance intercultural communication. Although there is meanwhile a large variety of strategies for change, of methods for intercultural management, training and teaching available, in many cases the adequate means to solve conflicts or to build up the necessary knowledge, the appropriate attitudes and skills still have to be developed. And even more: for many of the strategies and methods used a reliable evaluation is still lacking.
- It is obvious that decisions on social or managerial policies, that objectives and methods of training and teaching should be based on or supported by research. Given the complexity of the cognitive and behavioural dimensions that constitute a culture and the complexity of the situations of intercultural contact, it has become obvious, too, that research to describe differences across cultures, to analyse and explain intercultural communication problems or to develop strategies and methods for changes in groups and individuals has to be interdisciplinary. Monocausal explanations and one-dimensional, polarized models clearly are not sufficient any more. Therefore, new approaches are necessary - approaches that account for the complexity and diversity mentioned before.

These kinds of problems pose considerable challenges to all those working in the field. It was against this background that this anniversary congress

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was put under the motto "Meeting the Intercultural Challenge".

Second, this congress was special because of its venue in Germany. Part of the recent history of this country, in particular during Nazi rule, was in extreme contrast to humanistic values and, of course, to the values shared by interculturalists today. Coming to Germany offered the opportunity to see how a society can change fundamentally - a positive sign for all those who, looking at countries like Bosnia or Rwanda, hope for changes for the better and reconciliation. Coming to Germany at this point in history also offered the unique opportunity to observe, in a real life laboratory, as it were, intra-national and intra-ethnic intercultural communication: how East and West Germans, after an enforced separation of forty years, in their interactions attempted (and still attempt) to deal with all the differences in knowledge and behavior that evolved during these years due to their belonging to different ideological systems and despite their having their cultural history and language in common.

Thirdly, the congress was unique in that it was organized jointly by three SIETAR organizations: SIETAR-Deutschland, SIETAR-Europa and SIETAR-International. The Organization and the Program Committee - both composed of one representative of each of these organizations - managed to handle all the problems resulting from geographical distance and cultural difference during the preparation phase and were happy to realize the success this congress eventually became: more than 900 participants from 54 different countries all over the world attended more than 200 workshops, presentations and special events. This success, however, could not have been possible without the help of the sponsors to the congress:

- Robert-Bosch-GmbH, Stuttgart
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The contributions to the congress captured much of the complexity and diversity typical of the field, aptly representing the multitude of challenges interculturalists have to meet today. It is the intention of this book to present an exemplary selection of reactions to these challenges. Therefore, it was the policy of the editors to select contributions that represent the variety of topics dealt with at the congress and the range of different approaches, methods and styles used. Thus, the reader will find academic papers alongside with