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Article · January 2016

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Yes, You Can!: A Critical Questions Approach for Developing and Incorporating Intercultural Sensitivity Efforts into ANY Classroom

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Abstract: The educational literature has blossomed with information on becoming interculturally sensitive (e.g., Bennett, 2004, 2009), discussions on theory and practice for education aimed at enhancing intercultural sensitivity in students (e.g., Bleszynska, 2008), or how to identify and assess intercultural sensitivity as a learning outcome (e.g., Deardorff, 2006). Much of this work provides information on why an educational emphasis on intercultural sensitivity is important, and guidance on how to incorporate such an emphasis into particular courses. The difficulty, then, is not in locating a myriad of resources on the topic but how to simplify the concept of intercultural education so that it can be incorporated into the flow of any classroom. In other words, what would intercultural sensitivity look like in students as a result of what we DO in the classroom? The present article deconstructs the literature in an attempt to demonstrate how a hands on approach to intercultural sensitivity was gleaned from the literature and put into practice in a course on Prejudice, Discrimination and Hate.

Introduction

An educational emphasis on intercultural sensitivity (being referred to as awareness, competence or sensitivity) is not new. Indeed, much groundwork for what some perceive as a relatively new creation in education has been firmly rooted in the education literature and discussions of pedagogical practice since the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Bennett, 1986, 1993, 1998, 2010; Martin, 1989; Renwick, 1994). But the foundations for intercultural education are almost as old as the education journals themselves. Indeed, some of the earliest and still cited work predate many other educational practices (e.g., Dewey, 1897; Hans, 1958) and emphasized what would become an emphasis on intercultural education as foundational in education. In other words, an intercultural education approach is not (should not be) discipline bound; it is at the core of educating citizens—regardless of degree or major.

It seems beneficial, however to ask and answer a series of questions in order to develop an intercultural foundation to one's educational practices. For each question, then, some resource must be located that works best for the individual in terms of understanding and integrating that work into one's courses. What follows, then, are the questions the current author found most useful to consider in developing and assessing courses with an intercultural foundation and the work from the literature most relevant to putting that understanding into practice. This is not meant to be, nor does it come close to being, an exhaustive or best practice list, nor is the literature review exhaustive or even comprehensive. It is simply what this author found most useful in thinking about designing an intercultural framework into ALL of his courses. These questions (outlined in Figure 1) include (but certainly are not limited to):

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Figure 1. Critical Questions for Incorporating Interculturalism into ANY Classroom

1. What does intercultural mean? (Bennett, 1986)
2. Is intercultural sensitivity unique to my discipline? (Bleszynska, 2008)
3. What would intercultural sensitivity look like in students? In other words, what would interculturally sensitive students be able to do that they could not do before? (e.g., Bennett, 2011).
4. How can I assess if an emphasis on intercultural sensitivity is having an impact on my students? (e.g., Tupas, 2014)

Having taught an online course (often multisite between multiple universities) on prejudice, discrimination and hate for more than 20 years, the author of this article can attest to the struggle that one encounters in turning a belief in intercultural understanding and education into practice in one's discipline.

Question 1: What does Intercultural Mean?

The call for papers from the editor in the previous special issue of the *Journal of International Social Studies* states that intercultural: "broadly emphasizes the development of perceptions and skills that facilitate collaborative interaction between people of different cultural groups" (Cushner, 2015, p. 1). Cushner's definition assists the faculty member in placing intercultural sensitivity enhancement efforts into context. No single course, indeed an entire degree cannot make one interculturally competent. In order to assist students in making progress in terms of intercultural competency, though, one must choose a starting point. Adopting a definition, even one as well constructed as Cushner's, leaves out an important element of what it means to attempt to teach interculturalism. What does intercultural look like? In other words, what would students who are more intercultural do that students who are less intercultural are not as able to do? This is the brass tacks, if you will, of teaching with the goal of enhancing intercultural sensitivity in students. In fact, this question likely lies at the heart of what intercultural educators need to know. As such, this question will be addressed in a section of its own below. Bennett (1986) provides a straightforward answer to this question (that, again, will be explored in more depth below) when he produced his developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. With this model, Bennett suggests that intercultural sensitivity develops in a series of stages that facilitate movement away from a more ethnocentric way of thinking about the world to a more ethnorelative way of thinking about the world.

Question 2: Is Intercultural Awareness or Understanding Unique to My Discipline?

Bleszynska (2008) discusses Intercultural Education in comparison to other educational approaches that "cross it or complement it" (p. 538). According to Bleszynska, intercultural education is interdisciplinary. As such, it can be incorporated into courses in the behavioral, humanities and social sciences. The key is to acknowledge, based on level of course and degree of required learning objectives, where an intercultural emphasis fits within the context of any given course.

But how does one accomplish this? According to Bleszynska (2008, pp. 537-545), "competencies should address the following issues: (1) Sensitizing students to cultural differences and the construction of a

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sense of commonality with those who have other cultural backgrounds, (2) Basic knowledge of culture and cultures and development of awareness of one's own culture, (3) Psychological aspects of acculturation processes and intercultural contact, (4) Intercultural communication, (5) Peaceful solution of international conflicts, and (6) Specialized issues (psychological evaluation, counseling and intercultural education, social work and management of culturally heterogeneous groups etc.)." Clearly, some content courses, such as "counseling diverse populations" or "psychology of diversity" (pp. 543-544) are directly constructed with intercultural thinking in mind. It seems logical to conclude, however, from Blesznyska's list that ANY course could be constructed to emphasize an intercultural sensitivity approach to the topic. More guidance on how this might be accomplished will be included later in this work.

An important consideration as one attempts to incorporate an intercultural approach into a classroom, was articulated by Coulby (2006). He asks, "Is our understanding of intercultural education limited by being perceived within states or cities (that is within systems)? The unit of analysis of Intercultural Education rarely strays across the borders of states." (p. 248). It seems the same might be said for intercultural education in universities—does it ever cross degree boundaries or is it most often perceived as the purview and responsibility of colleges of education and not so in other colleges such as the sciences or Liberal Arts?

Question 3: What Would Intercultural Competence (or Awareness, or Sensitivity) Look Like in Students?

To develop assignments and experiences into our classrooms (be they face-to-face or online) that would promote advancements in intercultural sensitivity, we first have to know what skills are foundational to such an awareness. Only by knowing those skills, could a faculty member know what to look for in students. Janet Bennett (2011) defines intercultural competence as involving cognitive, affective and behavioral skills. As such, faculty should be able to design assignments and experiences in courses that facilitate (and document) progress in each of these areas. The specific skills associated with intercultural competence by Bennett are:

Cognitive

- Cultural self-awareness
- Culture-general knowledge
- Culture-specific knowledge
- Interaction analysis

Affective

- Curiosity
- Cognitive flexibility
- Motivation
- Open-mindedness

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Behavioral Skills

- Relationship building skills
- Behavioral skills: listening, problem solving
- Empathy
- Information gathering skills

An important part of understanding what intercultural competence would look like in our students, is to know what leads to intercultural competence. Though many educators and researchers have provided guidance in this arena (e.g., Bennett, 1986: Borrelli, 1991; Cushner, 2009), the most succinct list might be that provided by Bennett in 2011. In this workshop, Janet Bennett suggests both what we know about Intercultural Competence and what leads to such competence. Specifically, she suggests:

"A Few Things We Know About Intercultural Competence:

- Cultural knowledge does not necessarily lead to competence.
- Cultural contact does not necessarily lead to competence.
- Cultural contact may lead to reduction of stereotypes.
- Language learning may not be sufficient for culture learning.

What does lead to Intercultural Competence?

- Intentional and developmentally sequenced program design.
- Balancing challenge and support; anxiety reduction.
- Facilitating learning before, during and after intercultural experiences.
- Depth of intercultural experiences, language immersion.
- Intercultural competence training.
- Cultivating curiosity and cognitive flexibility." (Bennett, 2011, p. 5)

Banks (2011) reminds the reader of the importance of challenging assimilationist conceptions of citizenship. Harkening back to Piaget's work on Assimilation (see Piaget and Cook, 1952), Banks emphasizes the tendency for students (and teachers not being careful in the development of intercultural efforts in the classroom) to assimilate first. In other words, when confronted with something new, the normal tendency is to attempt to assimilate that information into existing schemas. In a way, then, information needed to enhance intercultural sensitivity is often softened and minimized because the individual assimilates that information (forces if necessary) to fit into an existing worldview. As Piaget (e.g, Piaget, 1936; Piaget & Cook, 1952) suggests, however, developing a more complex and complete worldview requires one to accommodate information that does not fit into existing schemas. In a sense, this is what intercultural education is all about. But this does not happen without effort, practice or purpose. The key, therefore, is to balance discipline-based content, with purposeful, frequent and assessed efforts to engage in intercultural thinking.

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Question 4: How Can I Assess If an Emphasis on Intercultural Understanding is Having an Impact on My Students?

This question, of course, centers on issues of outcome assessment. This kind of outcome assessment is not, necessarily, about programs or about accreditation visits. It is about asking and answering the question of whether what one is doing in the classroom to foster and promote the advancement of intercultural awareness is resulting in such advancement. If a primary emphasis in our classroom—regardless of the content discipline—is the advancement of intercultural competence, then how do we determine if individuals have made progress in this regard? Milton Bennett (e.g., 1986, 1993) suggests that intercultural sensitivity is developmental in nature. If something is developmental, it does not just appear but unfolds at least partially as a result of experience. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), developmental means, "interaction between physical and psychological processes and with stages of growth from conception throughout the entire life span" (APA, 2015, p. 4). As such, experiences would be an essential element of advancing any form of development. Bennett's stages, then, could be considered a continuum along which people grow into being more interculturally sensitive (more *ethnorelative* in Bennett's terms) but experiences are necessary to foster that growth. The stages of the development of intercultural sensitivity according to Bennett are:

1. Denial
2. Defense
3. Minimization
4. Acceptance
5. Adaptation
6. Integration

The first three stages are considered to be ethnocentric, meaning we experience our own culture as central to what is real. It is OUR reality, therefore it must be THE reality. The final three stages are considered to be ethnorelative. This means we come to view our own culture experienced through the context of other cultures. We might, for example, consider that our cultural view on a certain issue, such as when an individual is perceived as an adult, is not the only way of viewing that issue.

But the question as to whether students are making progress in becoming more interculturally aware can only be answered if we ask it. We will not know unless we design and implement methods for measuring such change. If infusing intercultural education into our classrooms is as fundamental to us as content, we should assess progress on it like we do progress on content understanding. If we value this kind of change, then we must assess it like we would content or discipline-based outcomes. As an example, an emphasis on intercultural sensitivity was recently infused in three courses: (1) Psychology of Prejudice, Discrimination and Hate, (2) Sport Psychology and (3) Forensic Psychology. Despite the varied content of these three courses, assignments were developed that required students to consider important content and theories within an intercultural context. In addition to these assignments (see Osborne & Kriese, in press; and Osborne, Kriese & Davis, (2014) for examples of assignments developed for several courses), self-reported changes on all six levels of Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity were gathered at two points in a semester and students completed a Tolerance for Ambiguity (TFA) measure (McClain, 1993). The tolerance for ambiguity measure was included as

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recent research suggests low levels of tolerance for ambiguity might serve as a barrier to progress in developing intercultural sensitivity (e.g., Osborne & Kriese, in press).

If Tolerance for Ambiguity is a barrier to becoming more ethnorelative (a primary marker of the development of intercultural sensitivity according to Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2004), then those who score higher on the TFA measure, should show the most significant drop in ethnocentrism and the most significant increase in ethnorelativism. As can be seen in Table 1, Tolerance for Ambiguity scores are negatively correlated with change scores on ethnocentrism (as TFA scores go higher, ethnocentric ratings go lower and vice versa), whereas Tolerance for Ambiguity is positively correlated with ethnorelativism scores. In other words, those students scoring higher on Tolerance for Ambiguity at the beginning of the semester rated themselves significantly lower in ethnocentrism at the end of the semester than at the beginning of the semester. Additionally, those scoring higher on Tolerance for Ambiguity at the beginning of the semester also reported the most positive improvement in ethnorelativism scores.

This is consistent with findings by Osborne & Kriese (in press), who suggested that Tolerance for Ambiguity might interfere with the kinds of thinking necessary to progress from ethnocentric toward ethnorelative levels on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. Of course, these data do not allow one to draw causal connections. Further research is needed to determine if findings such as these occur with non-self-rated scores on Bennett's model and to begin to delineate the causal directions of such findings.

Table 1. *Correlations Between Levels on Bennett's Model and Tolerance for Ambiguity*

Heading 1		**TFA**	**CenDiff**	**RelDiff**
TFA	Pearson Correlation 1	-.331**	.820**	
	N	101	101	101
EthnocenDiff	Pearson Correlation	-.331**	1	-.450**
	N	101	101	101
EthnorelDiff	Pearson Correlation	.820**	-.450**	1
	N	101	101	101

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The purpose of this paper is a call for practice, not data collection and analysis. As such, further analyses of these data will be held for a different venue. The goal in presenting this limited look at the data, however, is quite straightforward—if we value designing our courses in such a way that students become more ethnorelative (or interculturally aware, or interculturally sensitive, etc.), then we must assess how much progress is being made and make our best effort to uncover factors that promote and/or inhibit that progress. In the current study, Tolerance for Ambiguity appears to be a characteristic

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that inhibits movement from *ethnocentric* to *ethnorelative* ways of thinking. For further discussion of designing assignments to foster intercultural sensitivity and assessing the impact of those assignments, see Osborne & Kriese (in press) and Osborne, Kriese & Davis (2014).

Tupas (2014) provides direction in moving from thinking about engaging students in the kinds of critical thought necessary to promote interculturalism and the materials one might design to prompt such thinking. According to Tupas (2014), students responses to materials created with the goal of promoting interculturalism can be categorized in three ways: (1) reifying, (2) critical, and (3) conflicted (p. 243). Reifying often results in students considering some abstract concept to be concrete. Culture, then, would be easy to define and, once someone's culture is understood and taken into account, those differences can be understood and, perhaps put away. Critical responses, however, show that students are able to recognize stereotypes and view culture as less concrete, thereby not losing sight of the reality that culture does not trump all individuality. In critical responses, culture is recognized as an important element in individuality but not a sole determinant. Conflicted responses, according to Tupas (2014), however, appear to be the most common in classrooms. With these responses, students attempt to critically think about culture but wrap this thinking and the discussions that result from it up in reifying tendencies. In this regard, the student can convince him or herself that they are thinking in intercultural ways but are not.

Perhaps the most important walking away point from Tupas (2014) is that efforts to develop intercultural sensitivity must be deliberate and carefully planned by the teacher. Students must be given practice in moving from reifying to critical analyses and shown the difference between critical and conflicting analyses. Additionally, Tupas discusses (and provides some examples) how classroom prompts (such as examination questions) can prompt a reifying or critical response. As such, the faculty member must be careful to write prompts and create classroom interactions, assignments and activities that prompt and reinforce critical thinking about interculturalism.

Discussion and Conclusions

How does one develop a course—regardless of discipline or student level—that can foster advancements in intercultural sensitivity in students? Much guidance and advice can be gleaned from the literature already reviewed. But the simplest method might be to keep Janet Bennet's (2011) hints about things to know about intercultural competence in mind during syllabus construction. As a reminder, she suggests that: (1) cultural knowledge does not necessarily lead to competence, (2) cultural contact does not necessarily lead to competence, (3) cultural contact may lead to reduction of stereotypes, and (4) language learning may not be sufficient for culture learning. So, knowledge, by itself, is not enough. But it is a place to start. The faculty member can design course assignments, lectures, discussions, etc. that enhance cultural knowledge. One cannot become culturally competent without cultural knowledge. But Bennett's point is that knowledge is not the end point. So, design assignments that require students to learn about other cultures. Often, this is the beginning and the end of classroom efforts to foster intercultural competence. But Bennett (2011) suggests this is only a first step.

Cultural contact also will not lead to competence—but it can help. Poorly constructed cultural contact situations, however, can actually make things worse (e.g., Osborne & Kriese, in press). Cultural contact

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is likely necessary for the reduction of stereotypes but is best saved for appropriate times and courses. Again, not every course must accomplish every element of advancing intercultural competence. It would be wise to consider what is most likely to be accomplished within one's course—do not dream too small nor too big!

Modern language programs appear to be built upon the understanding that language learning and culture learning are not one and the same. So, individual courses need not depend one upon the other. The author of this paper teaches a course on prejudice, discrimination and hate. In any given semester, different issues from different countries can become topical in the course. Students need not have language understanding in order to begin to understand what is happening in that culture and how those events might reflect cultural difference. On the other hand, even understanding the language does not lead to understanding the culture. The faculty member must stay right sized and recognize how much can actually be accomplished within a single course. A literature course, for example, can expose students to some elements of a given culture but cannot create cultural competence. In conjunction with other courses such as language courses, service-learning courses and even study abroad opportunities, one can create a cultural competence process. Regardless of what other opportunities are available to students, though, any course can facilitate progress on the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity if assignments are constructed with these levels in mind and assessments are done often enough to note progress.

Having kept these concerns in mind during the construction of a draft syllabus, the faculty member could then do a course assessment and consider Bennett's (2011) discussion of what leads to intercultural sensitivity: (1) intentional and developmentally sequenced program design, (2) balancing challenge and support; anxiety reduction, (3) facilitating learning before, during and after intercultural sensitivity experiences, (4) depth of intercultural experiences, language immersion, (5) intercultural competence training, and (6) cultivating curiosity and cognitive flexibility. Does my course keep each of these in mind?

As an example, the faculty member might ask him or herself, "does my course provide opportunities to facilitate learning before, during and after an intercultural experience"? If I am teaching an art history course, for example, discussion can center on a particular culture before going to an art exhibit from someone from that culture. Students can be given culturally-based discussion questions to consider while attending the exhibit, and class discussion after the exhibit can facilitate additional learning. How this looks in a particular course is, of course, unique but Bennett's advice would seem to work regardless of course, discipline or course level.

The reality here is simple. Intercultural sensitivity does not happen by accident. Additionally, no single course can accomplish movement from denial (the first level) to integration (the highest level). But every course CAN facilitate progress. Keeping Bennett's (2011) guidance in mind, one can construct a syllabus designed specifically with the goal of fostering advancement in intercultural sensitivity within the context of a particular course in a particular discipline. Additionally, Bennett's advice on what leads to intercultural sensitivity can be used to develop activities and assignments (again within any course in any discipline) that would move a student closer to such competence. Lastly, one must assess student progress. The author of this work surmised that Tolerance for Ambiguity (low levels of it) would be a barrier to the kind of thinking needed to make progress on Bennett's continuum in a course on

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prejudice, discrimination and hate. Assignments were designed requiring students to assess themselves on the Tolerance for Ambiguity measure and to do self-assessments on Bennett's levels (e.g., rate yourself on the level of denial, etc.). As expected, students with the lowest TFA scores were also the most ethnocentric—lower on intercultural sensitivity. Assignments such as these can be included in any course. Students could do such a self-assessment before and after a series of discussions, for example, in a history course to see if the discussions are prompting movement along the continuum.

The present paper is built upon a simple but important assumption that intercultural sensitivity can be built into and assessed in any course. How intercultural sensitivity is infused into and assessed in a particular course, certainly, will differ for a myriad of reasons. If, however, we start with the assumption that it can be done, the challenge is how to accomplish that infusion. The education literature has literally exploded with information relevant to these efforts. The current paper is simply an effort to delineate the questions (and provide some hints about where to find and how to use the answers thus discovered) necessary for building a course (focused on enhancing intercultural sensitivity in students) from the ground up. But infusing assignments, discussions, activities, lectures, etc. with an emphasis in enhancing intercultural sensitivity does not guarantee that students will make progress in developing more intercultural ways of thinking.

As Bennett has long suggested (e.g., Bennett, 1986, 1993, 2004), intercultural sensitivity is developmental in nature and, thus, dependent upon experience. Well-constructed assignments and courses should foster progress on the developmental levels of intercultural sensitivity. Osborne & Kriese (2015) show that this is possible. But what we do and emphasize in the classroom is not the sole determinant of whether students make intercultural sensitivity progress. Preliminary work by Osborne & Kriese (in press) and current findings, for example, demonstrate that Tolerance for Ambiguity (or a lack of it) can interfere with efforts to promote more ethnorelative ways of thinking.

Tupas (2014) suggests that assignments (e.g., group discussions, examination prompts, etc.) can be designed in such a way as to promote critical analysis of intercultural issues. Indeed, Tupas (2014) argues that concerted and deliberate effort must be made on the part of the teacher to ensure that the prompts do not simply encourage reifying or conflicting responses. This is consistent with Bennett's (e.g., 1986) suggestion that intercultural sensitivity is developmental in nature. If the natural tendency is to be ethnocentric (highlighted by denial, defense and minimization), then consistent and concerted efforts must be made to encourage (demand?) that students progress beyond this.

In some sense, to ignore this tendency would do more harm than good. In an earlier work, Osborne, Kriese, Tobey and Johnson (2009) made a similar argument in terms of advancing student critical reflection in such courses when they stated,

> In our view, it is important to acknowledge that "understanding" does not mean to "accept." The goal is not to get everyone to agree; the goal is to get people to truly explore and understand how and why opinions differ. To understand means to realize the circumstances and motivations that lead to differences and to realize that those differences are meaningful. It is our belief that discussing social issues (such as prejudice or racism) without requiring students to explore the roots of their views, understand the roots of other views, and appreciate the nature and importance of different views about those issues perpetuates ignorance. To raise the

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issue without using a critical thinking framework may simply reinforce prejudices by giving them voice without question. (p. 48)

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