Intercultural Development and the International Curriculum

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Abstract

Intercultural competence is an increasingly desired and necessary skill in a globalized world. This study uses the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to assess the development of intercultural competence in a group of students in the School of International Studies at the University of the Pacific. Students undergo both an interdisciplinary, international curriculum and they study abroad for at least a semester, taking courses on cultural adaptation both before they leave and at reentry. They are administered the IDI during their first semester, and in the semester in which they return from abroad. The study finds significant gains in intercultural competence for these students. On average, their IDI scores advance 19.78 points, which is both a significant change for these students and is significantly different from university students who have not been part of the international curriculum or studied abroad.

1. Introduction

Intercultural competence is an increasingly desired and necessary skill in a globalized world. The extent to which it is possible to live one's life without needing to recognize and adapt to the cultural differences of neighbors, friends, colleagues, and even family has rapidly diminished in the last decades. Differences in communication styles and time orientations, both common cultural differences, can lead to profoundly negative evaluations of other people if we do not know to look for the variations. Those negative evaluations can be miserable for everyone involved, and in the worst-case scenario, the misunderstandings and unnecessarily negative judgments can be dangerous. In a culturally complex world, it is easily arguable that the most appropriate (both practically and morally) response to this reality is mutual adaptation—people should develop an understanding of cultural differences and the skills to both understand the behavior of others, and appropriately shift their own behavior in interactions with others (Hammer, 2009).

Universities within the United States have attempted to address this need through two basic frameworks: first, an ongoing concern for domestic diversity issues, and second, internationalization of education. Fundamentally, the two have much in common. Recognizing and adapting well to cultural differences ultimately means understanding the ways that cultural differences, power, and privilege create different lived experiences for people in a variety of geographic and political systems. Thus, the skills useful in managing across international boundaries must necessarily be turned back on one's own culture. In any circumstance, global or local, developing intercultural competence means usefully integrating cultural commonalities *and* differences in ways that let us both devise common visions and then approach them with creative vigor.

This study focuses primarily on the international aspects of intercultural competence since it derives from work in an academic unit devoted to international studies and seeks to address the following two questions: Do students in international studies programs come out of their education more interculturally competent than students following other curricula? Do

students who study abroad come away from the experience significantly more likely to recognize cultural differences and better able to adapt to them?

One of the primary goals of sending students abroad has always been to advance their cultural "sophistication"—to make them ready for a life lived across political and cultural borders. Study abroad exposes students to a non-native cultural environment (with levels of immersion varying with type of program), and can lead to some adaptation to that environment. That still leaves the question of the extent to which what students learn in one environment generalizes to more advanced intercultural competence generally.

Academic programs in international studies have not so clearly had the development of intercultural competence as a focus. International Relations, which is a typical framework for curriculum in international studies, is a sub discipline of Political Science, and the dominant theoretical frameworks in the discipline do not assume the relevance of intercultural knowledge. Multi- or interdisciplinary programs tend to add economics, history, language study, and sometimes anthropology. The disciplinary variety, as well as the studies themselves, might make students in such a program more attuned to diverse ways of conceptualizing the world, ultimately preparing students to become more interculturally competent. However, assessment of these programs of study in relation to their impact on intercultural competence is virtually non-existent. This study seeks to close that gap.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Developmental Model of Intercultural Competence/Sensitivity

One of the dominant theoretical frameworks for understanding intercultural competence has become Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS, Bennett, 1993). Bennett argued that intercultural sensitivity/competence is not some innate characteristic, but a learned ability. As people gain experience in intercultural situations, and reflect on those experiences, they develop more complex understandings of culture that lead to greater ability to discern cultural differences, and ultimately, to appropriately modify their own behavior in non-native cultural circumstances. Intercultural experience is likely a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for gaining cultural sensitivity; an experience must be processed and considered by a person or it may very well be filed away with little long-term impact on the person's worldview (Kelly, 1963).

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993; Paige, et al., 2003; Hammer, 2009; Hammer, in press) divides the experience of cultural difference into more monocultural (Denial, Polarization), transitional (Minimization) and global/intercultural (Acceptance, Adaptation) mindsets.[1] With a Monocultural worldview, people assume that their own culture is central to reality. It does not occur to them that other people necessarily have different cultural frameworks, or that those frameworks, if recognized, must not be judged in

[1] Bennett (1993) uses the language of "ethnocentrism" and "ethnorelativism"—the language employed in this study reflects shifts in the terms as the theory has developed over time (Hammer, 2009; Hammer, in press; Paige, et al., 2003).

light of their own understanding of appropriate human interaction. The transitional worldview of Minimization is neither fully monocultural nor fully intercultural in orientation. People with a Minimization orientation are generally able to bridge across cultural communities by focusing on commonalities but are less effective when differences need to be more deeply understood and adapted to. People with an intercultural/global worldview both recognize that others have different cultural frameworks and accept that those cultural frameworks are equally complex and real in comparison to the home culture. An Intercultural or Global mindset allows a person to develop the ability to empathize with people who have different cultural frameworks, and to act in ways appropriate to that framework, seeing distinct cultural patterns as equally plausible choices for human behavioral patterns (Bennett, 1993).

Within these orientations, there are profound differences among people. In Denial, people are simply unaware of cultural differences. This may be the result of isolation, occurring naturally or through deliberate avoidance of difference (Bennett, 1993). It is an increasingly difficult stage to linger in the contemporary world with both its multiple forms of media and high rates of migration introducing people to others who are culturally different nearly constantly.

People in Polarization have recognized that there are cultural differences, but non-native cultures (and sometimes their own) are seen in fairly simple ways, not as complex realities of their own. Polarization is seen particularly in the need of the person to hold a clear hierarchy of cultures as a way of making sense of the perceived cultural difference. One characteristic position of a Polarization orientation is Defense, where recognition of difference is accompanied by fear and a sense of threat to the home culture. In the hierarchy then, the home culture is defined as right, good, and proper, and others as wrong, bad, and inappropriate. The flip side of Defense is Reversal, which is identical to Defense in its recognition of difference in relatively simple, stereotypical ways; however, people in Reversal have reversed the hierarchy by defining their own culture as wrong, bad, and inappropriate, and some other culture with which they are modestly familiar as more desirable. Reversal is often believed by the people experiencing it to be quite sophisticated because of its critical gaze on the home culture, but in truth fails to move beyond the simplistic, polarized understanding of cultures and cultural differences.

The third orientation of intercultural development is Minimization of cultural differences. Differences are recognized, but determined to be immaterial to a real understanding of human relations. Rather, those who minimize cultural difference argue that to really understand people, it is necessary to focus almost exclusively on similarities across cultures. Typically, this is based on either biological similarity (all people have the same physical needs), or a philosophical belief system (we are all children of the same god, all subject to the same external structural forces, etc.). People using a Minimization orientation may consider surface cultural differences interesting, or even fun (particularly objective culture—visible aspects like food, art, music, etc.), but not relevant to truly understanding other people. They may well view too much consideration of culture difference to be dangerous. They are likely to think that deep down, everyone is pretty much like them, thus still seeing their own cultural framework as real and natural, and not recognizing the complexity and legitimacy of other cultures (Bennett, 1993).

If people move beyond Minimization of cultural differences to an unthreatened acceptance of cultural difference as natural and other cultures as legitimate, real, and complex in

their own right, then they have moved to an Intercultural, or a Global Mindset, a fundamental shift in worldview which is unlikely to reverse itself. The DMIS model divides the position of Interculturalism into three stages as well. In the first, Acceptance of difference, people understand that their own culture is one of many equally complex ways of organizing human behavior. They may prefer some sets of behavior to others, but all are seen as the legitimate, and likely the preferred reality of the people in those cultures. Beyond Acceptance is Adaptation to cultural difference. Cognitive Adaptation is the ability to see the world through the cultural framework of another or other cultures with which the person is familiar. Behavioral Adaptation is the ability to (increasingly unconsciously) modify one's behavior so that it is seen as normal within the resident culture (Bennett, 1993).

The final stage of the DMIS is Integration, in which a person has developed a conscious identity as a person on the margins of multiple cultures, developing their own identity through integration of aspects and values of the various cultures that they have experience. If this is constructive marginality, they are likely to enjoy their position on the margin as giving them the opportunity to serve as a cultural bridge between others (Bennett, 1993). It is significant to note that this stage of the theory, with its focus on integration of identity, differs from the other stages that are clearly about developmental competence (Hammer, 2009), a distinction that becomes relevant in the measure of intercultural competence development.

2. 2 Intercultural Development and Study Abroad

One of the goals of studying abroad is to increase students' intercultural competence, or the ability to adapt to cultural differences while abroad and be able to generalize those skills after they have returned home. Within a developmental model like the DMIS, this means seeing forward movement through the stages of the model toward an Intercultural/Global mindset. Study abroad programs can take many forms, some leading to more immersion in a host culture and some to less. Students may spend a few weeks abroad or a year. They may be in fairly contained programs in which they and other students from a home institution stay together and have faculty from their home institutions with them, or they may directly enroll in a host institution and live with a family of that culture for the duration of their time abroad. A number of studies, using a range of different measures, have attempted to discern what the impact of study abroad is on the ability of students to sense and adapt to cultural difference. Many have found changes in students' overall sensitivity to cultural difference, though the results have not been entirely consistent.

Using the Intercultural Development Inventory as one of their assessment measures, Paige, Cohen, and Shively (2004) found that the students in their study have an overall shift toward an intercultural mindset. In particular, they found students showing less Polarization (Reversal) and some increase on the Acceptance/Adaptation measures. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeison, and Hubbard (2006) in their study of students in a short-term English language program found a similar reduction in Polarization (Reversal) and increase in the Acceptance/Adaptation measures, though the change in overall IDI of students in their group is not statistically significant.

Other studies (Engle & Engle, 2004; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004) suggested modest gains for students, though once again, not necessarily statistically significant changes from before to after study abroad. Finding something similar, Emert & Pearson (2007) pointed out that while the changes seen from study abroad were relatively small, that should not be surprising given the developmental nature of intercultural competence, requiring as it does fairly substantial experiences and processing of those experiences over time. While using student surveys to gauge a number of different student changes, Ingraham & Peterson (2004) found that the length of a study abroad experience is correlated with the strength of the impact.

Williams (2005) made an important addition in her study by including a control group of students who did not study abroad. This allowed her to discern changes due to study abroad compared to those that might result from natural maturation of the students. Presumably, all university students will be exposed to new people and ideas over the normal course of their education, and this could have an impact on their overall development scores in the same timeframe as study abroad. Rather than using the IDI to measure intercultural sensitivity, she used Olson & Kroeger's (2001) Intercultural Sensitivity Index, which is also based theoretically on the DMIS framework, although it has not been subjected to the same level of reliability and validity testing that has characterized research on the IDI. The authors concluded that there were significant differences between the two groups: in particular, students who spent the semester abroad showed both greater increases in the measures of the Intercultural or Global Mindset and greater increases in their intercultural communication skills (a focus of that study). One implication of this is that there may not a significant maturation effect over a short period of time.[2]

Koskinen & Tossavainen (2004) made clear the importance of assistance for students in study abroad programs to make the most of their experiences. They examined the experiences of nursing students abroad, and find a range of reactions, including a large proportion for whom the abroad experience reinforced their views that nursing was pretty similar everywhere (statements commonly made by people using a Minimization orientation), another proportion who found that being abroad just demonstrated how their own system was superior (Polarization—Defense), and a smaller group who found clear differences in the home and host systems and found them stimulating (Acceptance and perhaps Adaptation). It was clear to the authors from the responses, however, that all of the students needed intercultural training and mentoring to make the most of their experiences both while they abroad, and once they had returned to their homes in Finland. After coming home, the students fairly commonly said that their study abroad seemed to have little connection to their real lives, and that they could not see a real change in their lives because of it (p. 117). The authors, probably correctly, pointed out the need for better reentry training and better training throughout the program if real gains are to be made from such an exchange.

There are fewer studies of the role that curriculum places in development of intercultural competence, and those too are often related to study abroad. Paige, Cohen, & Shively (2004)

[2] Regarding possible maturation over longer time frames, Mahon (2006) does find that older teachers (ages over 50) are likely to show less agreement with the Polarization statements of the IDI, and more agreement with the Acceptance/Adaptation cluster, though both younger and older teachers are likely to be overall in the Minimization categories.

asked whether a particular intervention/curriculum makes a difference for study abroad students. Two groups of students who had studied abroad were compared: one served as a control and the other had received a particular language and cultural strategy intervention. While on the whole, they all shifted toward more intercultural sensitivity; there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups. This might suggest that if indeed curricular interventions are necessary for students to make the most of study abroad experiences, the specific design of those interventions is crucial to their likely impact on students.

3. Empirical Assessment of Students' Intercultural Development

This study is designed to consider the consequence of study abroad in conjunction with an international curriculum on students' ability to discern and adapt to cultural differences in context. The intercultural competence of the students of the School of International Studies (SIS) at the University of the Pacific (Stockton, California) is routinely assessed for purposes of program evaluation. The School has explicit learning objectives, one of which is that students will gain experience in living and working (studying) abroad, and that they will develop intercultural competence in preparation for global careers.

The instrument used to measure students' levels of intercultural sensitivity in SIS is the Intercultural Development Inventory. The IDI (v.3) is based on the theoretical framework of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, and is a 50-item inventory in which participants are asked to rate the level of their agreement with a series of statements about their relationship to and evaluation of cultural difference on a five-point Likert scale. Different sets of statements assess participants' orientation toward Denial, Polarization (Defense and Reversal measured as separate scales), Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation. The instrument has been found to be both valid and reliable (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Hammer, 2009,; Hammer, in press; Paige et al, 2003) as a measure of intercultural competence/sensitivity. The overall IDI scores range from 55-145 and follow a normal distribution with a mean of 100 centered in Minimization, and a standard deviation of 15. A score below 85 indicates that a person is primarily operating in the realm of Polarization; 85-114.99 represents a primary orientation in Minimization, and scores of 115 and above indicate Acceptance and Adaptation. The individual scales have final scores ranging from one to five and are identified as Trailing orientations (those orientations that are found before or prior to the assessed Developmental orientation score. Scores below 4.0 are considered indicative of an "unresolved" Trailing orientation and scores of 4.0 and above suggest that a person has "resolved" that particular Trailing orientation in developing their intercultural competence.

The IDI is particularly appropriate for use as an educational assessment tool because of its explicitly developmental framework. It is understood that developmental processes are not strictly linear, and that the acquisition of intercultural competence should not be thought of as a transformative experience. Learning (of anything) is a process of confrontation and consideration of the material to be learned, which naturally results in inconsistent advances and occasional withdrawals. The IDI allows professors to assess students and then, in development and delivery of learning material, self-consciously "correct course" as necessary in guiding students' development. The IDI allows for fairly subtle evaluation of profiles since different aspects of development are measured simultaneously. Thus, we can see people who are

primarily in late Minimization still dealing with potentially Trailing orientations in Polarization and even Denial. The use of the IDI in IDI Guided Development® (Hammer, 2009) then allows us to "close the circle" in assessment of programs: we are able to use the information gathered on individuals and groups to redesign our courses to achieve our goal of advancing intercultural sensitivity.

The students in the School of International Studies are enrolled in an interdisciplinary curriculum designed to give them a global mindset, and one of the requirements of this curriculum is that they study abroad for at least one semester. Both the interdisciplinarity of the curriculum and the study abroad experience are considered critical components to the development of intercultural competence in the students.

The interdisciplinary social science curriculum of SIS requires at least four semesters of a modern language other than English, and courses in economics, political science, and anthropology, in addition to unique interdisciplinary core courses. Several of the core courses are team-taught by professors in different disciplines (an anthropologist and an economist teaming up, for instance). In these team-taught courses, all professors are present for all classes, so the students, from their first semester, are routinely treated to the sight of their professors arguing about how best to see, understand, or study some issue being addressed. This approach is a deliberate and self-conscious attempt to introduce the students to multiple perspectives on historical, political, economic, and cultural issues throughout their education.

As a critical part of the study abroad experience, Pacific has had an integrated study abroad curriculum for thirty years. The University of the Pacific has a wide range of study abroad choices for students, and the students in this study spent a semester or more in a variety of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania. At Pacific, all students who choose to study abroad for at least one semester are required to take a two-unit, half semester course, Cross Cultural Training I. The curriculum of the course focuses primarily on development of culture-general knowledge and skills intended to be applicable to any intercultural experience, while the students are also required to gain culture-specific knowledge of their prospective host countries through a series of short research papers and other assignments. While the course originated in the 1970s and thus predates the theoretical explication of the DMIS, its design reflects the same theoretical framework and assumes a developmental model of intercultural competence.

Students returning to Pacific from study abroad may take a second two-unit, half semester course, Cross Cultural Training II. This reentry course is required of all students in the School of International Studies. Students are explicitly discouraged from "shoeboxing" their experiences, putting them in a shoebox with their photographs and going right back to their life as if there had been no study abroad experience. Rather, they are encouraged to integrate the experiences into their lives, personally and professionally, in a reflective, meaningful, and useful way. The primary objective of this course is to have students place what they learned while abroad—about the process of culture learning, about themselves, their values and goals, about their own culture and their host culture, etc.—into a larger framework of lifelong development of intercultural competence.

Given the explicitly developmental framework of the curriculum of the School of International Studies, and that of the Cross Cultural Training program and study abroad experience in particular, we expect to find that students who have returned from abroad and have taken Cross Cultural II will demonstrate statistical significant positive advances in their intercultural competence/sensitivity as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory.[3] Over several years, students have been administered the IDI in their first semester in SIS, and it is again administered in the semester after they return from studying abroad. Students typically begin study abroad in the fall of their junior year, so the vast majority is taking the IDI for the second time during the second half of their junior year or during the senior year.

In this study, we exam the IDI scores of 53 students, comparing their first year scores to their Cross Cultural II (CCII) scores using simple dependent samples t-tests (matched pairs). Data used here were collected from 2007-2010. The fundamental question of this research is the following: do we, as predicted, see significant development in these students' intercultural competence/sensitivity?

An examination of the data clearly demonstrates that the answer to that question is yes. In their first semester, this group of students had a mean IDI score of 91.81. Their primary orientation is Minimization, but they demonstrate fairly substantial Trailing orientations in Polarization, in particular for this group of students, in the area of Reversal. When we examine the same students two and a half to three years later, the mean IDI score is 111.61 (cusp of Acceptance/late Miminization). The mean change for this sample of SIS students was 19.78 points, and the confidence interval indicates that the mean change on the IDI for all SIS students lies between 14.97 and 24.60 points. The difference between their scores in the first semester and after they have studied abroad is significant at the .000 level ($t = 8.249$).

In order to verify that this apparent change was indeed a result of the curriculum and study abroad experiences of students in the School of International Studies and not the result of simple maturation or the natural effects of a university education, the results were compared to two other groups. First, a random group of first year students not in the School of International Studies took the IDI.[4] Their mean IDI score was 87.66 ($n=47$). While the SIS first-year students have a slightly higher sample mean, using an independent samples t-test, we see that these two groups' IDI scores are not significantly different ($t=1.61$; $p =.11$). SIS students, in their first year, look quite similar to all Pacific students.

We then administered the IDI to a group of random seniors at the University. Their mean IDI score was 91.31 ($n=35$). Again using an independent samples t-test, we find that the seniors' IDI scores are not significantly different from the freshmen ($t =-.26$; $p=.21$). In other words,

[3] While the results are not part of this study, the quantitative IDI results here are coupled with qualitative evaluation of student work in the Cross Cultural II course in the overall assessment of student development.

[4] The University of the Pacific has an all-University freshman seminar requirement. Students are randomly assigned to sections. They also have an all-University senior requirement, and while students choose their own sections, there is no theoretical reason to assume that there would be a relevant impact on their IDI scores from their choice of section.

there was little maturation effect for these students. These findings give us confidence in our assessment of the change in SIS students and its likely causes. The scores of SIS students, while quite similar to other incoming first year students at Pacific, are profoundly different from other seniors at the university. *There would seem to be no question that the curriculum of the School of International Studies with its attendant self-conscious guided development in intercultural competence is having a significant and positive impact on those students.*

4. Conclusions

The curriculum of the School of International Studies, including its required study abroad component, has a clear impact on the development of intercultural competence. Given the results here, there can be little doubt that their course of study is affecting these students in fairly profound ways. They spend four years in a social science program that is both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, and the integrated (and in some courses, team-taught) curriculum consciously exposes them to the idea of different ways of conceptualizing the world from the beginning. This is done originally in terms of academic disciplines as they digest political science, economic, historical and anthropological evaluations of contemporary world issues from their first semester.

However, explicit intercultural training is a core element of the curriculum from the beginning as well, and students see study abroad as the defining element of the program. The second cross-cultural training class ensures that the students spend a semester after they return from abroad reflecting on what they have learned from the experiences. A critical element of the overall program's success is likely that the curriculum is integrated—professors consistently discuss student learning objectives, and how each of the courses offered fit together and map onto those overall objectives. The findings here offer supporting evidence that the education is meeting at least one of its primary goals.

This study inherently demonstrates the importance of the theoretical and practical focus on developmental frameworks in understanding how people perceive and adapt to cultural difference. It demonstrates as well the value of the Intercultural Development Inventory as both a reliable means of assessing students' base levels of intercultural competence when they enter a program, and as a tool for assessing the outcomes of specific sets of interventions in their attainment of this learning objective that is seen as increasingly important on American campuses. It is clear from these findings that university students can make tremendous advances in intercultural competence with the right set of experiences and consistent and critical formal reflection on the meaning of cultural differences as well as similarities.

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