The IDI and the Training of US Students Abroad
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Over the past two and a half years, the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) has been piloting a teaching and learning initiative that makes significant use of the Intercultural Development Inventory. My CIEE colleagues and I have expanded this initiative rapidly; by the end of the 2010-11 academic year, "The Seminar on Living and Learning Abroad," a new elective course we've developed as a part of this initiative, will be offered at nearly all of our ninety semester programs abroad. Staff based at our headquarters in Portland, Maine continue to train staff and teachers abroad to teach the Seminar, which is designed to help students become more interculturally competent.

We've relied very extensively on the Intercultural Development Inventory since the beginning of this initiative. We knew, in planning the course four years ago, that without a valid and reliable means of accurately assessing the intercultural needs and progress of both teachers and students, we wouldn't be able to meet our primary goal—to help students learn to interact more effectively and appropriately in new and unfamiliar cultural situations.

We begin our training of staff and teachers who'll be teaching the Seminar at our programs abroad by having each of them complete the IDI. In individually debriefing their reports, we work to help teachers understand that their own, as well as their students', worldviews will significantly affect both how they teach the Seminar's intercultural concepts and largely experiential activities, and how their students are likely to approach and learn through the course. We might work, for example, to help a teacher at lower Minimization understand that in characteristically avoiding and minimizing difference herself, she'll probably be skilled at finding ways to avoid serious disagreement and conflict with and among the students in her classes; that when she works with a student at Polarization, she'll need to keep in mind that this student will characteristically experience and respond to course readings and activities very differently from students at Minimization or Acceptance; and that when an individual student approaches her outside of class with a problem, she'll want to respond to him or her in ways that are consistent with that student's intercultural learning needs and capacities.

Our individual training sessions with new Seminar teachers—most of which we carry out through telephone or skype conversations—include reviewing with them the sorts of comments that individuals at different worldviews typically make. We also help the teachers recognize affective states that may offer insights about an individual student's worldview (for example, that "persistent niceness" is a quality that's often associated with Minimization). At training sessions that we periodically organize, in the US or abroad, for groups of new Seminar teachers, we demonstrate, through staged role plays, the behavior and comments associated with students at Denial, Defense, Minimization, and so on; and we also role play some of the coaching techniques we've

developed that allow teachers, during one-on-one meetings with students, to take their worldviews into account in responding to their needs. We use IDI debriefing, coaching and training sessions with new Seminar teachers, in other words, to introduce them to the importance of developing "mindful perceiving" skills—to become more aware of and to take into account their own, as well as their individual students', worldviews in teaching the course.

Students complete the IDI shortly after they arrive at the program sites—ideally within the program's first week. Teachers rely on information in the group and individual reports as an important way to identify their students' intercultural learning needs. During the last week of the semester, their students take the IDI a second time—thus providing teachers and Portland-based staff with a valid and reliable means of understanding to what extent the course is meeting its goals. We use the IDI at our Portland offices for a third purpose, as we collect and analyze end-of-program scores to evaluate the success of the Seminar's on-line curriculum, which all of the teachers follow during the first one or two semesters that they teach the course. Our discussions with new teachers during and after their first two semesters of teaching the course, and our analysis of student IDI data across all of our semester programs, allow us to identify broad patterns in the students/ response both to the curriculum and to the teachers' facilitation of it, and to make adjustments in both the shared on-line curriculum and our coaching, for the following semester.

A final word about our several uses of the IDI. We at CIEE have confidence in the IDI because rigorous testing has shown it to be valid and reliable. While decisions about the design and delivery of study abroad programs and courses have historically been based on little more than subjective observation and anecdote, the IDI is designed to get beyond student self report. Historically, when a student had returned home and told his or her faculty and advisors that the experience abroad had been "life changing" or "transformational," or that "being abroad was the best experience" they'd had since starting college, the report was too often taken as evidence that the student had learned very effectively abroad. Research this past decade, including several major studies that have relied on the IDI to measure the intercultural development of students abroad, has taught us to become more wary about such self-reports. Version 3 of the IDI, on the other hand, provides a "mixed methodology" approach to assessing the ways that our students are responding to cultural difference and similarity, from the beginning through the end of their experiences abroad.

When we occasionally hear colleagues dismiss the IDI as simply another form of "self report," we couldn't disagree more strongly. We understand, through rigorous research and our ongoing experience in assessing student intercultural gains through the Seminar, that the IDI differs fundamentally from traditional self-report data collection techniques—that it offers us considerably more than do simple interviews, focus groups, opinion or satisfaction surveys. Such traditional self-report techniques have face validity; when students are asked, for example, to answer a self-report question in a survey along the lines of, "Do you think you developed interculturally through your study abroad experience?", they respond with a subjective opinion. And because self-report

queries are generally transparent, allowing students to figure out what the tester expects or wants to hear, students can easily align their responses to meet that expectation.

The IDI does not suffer from these limitations. It is a psychometric instrument that has been shown through rigorous testing to have both content and construct validity. When our students respond to the fifty items in the instrument, we know they're not merely offering subjective opinions, and we're confident that they're not normally able to "psych out" the test. The rigorous development of the IDI, and the considerable testing that has established its validity and reliability, allow Seminar teachers at our programs abroad to use it to determine and respond strategically to student needs each semester, and allow Portland-based staff to make changes in the Seminar curriculum and in the training of new Seminar teachers.