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Chapter 5
A Model of Intercultural Competence and Its Implications for the Foreign Language Curriculum

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Abstract

Although study abroad has often been promoted as an effective means of developing cross-cultural knowledge and skills, this process has been difficult to assess due to the challenge of defining intercultural competence. This chapter reports the results of a research project designed to answer to this question. Using a Delphi technique for group consensus building, 20 intercultural experts engaged in successive rounds of proposing and rating definitions, ultimately achieving 80% agreement or higher on key characteristics of intercultural competence. Not only useful for understanding what is meant by intercultural competence, these characteristics also form the basis for a new cyclical and dynamic conceptualization of the process of developing intercultural skills. This model holds implications for curriculum design and assessment, which are discussed as well, particularly as they relate to the concerns of language educators.

Foreign language educators and international programs directors alike have long agreed that study abroad offers at least three potential desirable learning outcomes: greater language proficiency, increased self-confidence and self-reliance, and a higher level of intercultural competence. However, while language proficiency has been evaluated through pretest-posttest comparisons (e.g., Allen & Herron, 2003; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995; Freed, 1991; MacGregor, 2005), and personal development has been shown through self-assessment survey data (e.g., Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990; NSSE, 2005), intercultural competence has been notoriously difficult to assess.

Part of the problem lies in the challenge of defining this construct. Scholars throughout the past 30 years have attempted to characterize intercultural competence in its various iterations but without consensus. Some have focused on the communicative nature of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1999; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984), while others emphasize different aspects of intercultural competence, including developmental stages (Bennett, 1993; Hoopes, 1979; Pedersen, 1994); a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Fantini, 2000; Gudykunst, 1994; Lambert, 1994; Paige, 1993); situational aspects (Lustig & Koester, 2003; Pusch, 1994); and broader definitions that encompass transnational or global competence (Dinniman & Holzner, 1988; Gundling, 2003; Hunter, 2004; Rosen, 2000). Nonwestern perspectives of intercultural competence also emphasize harmony (Miyahara, 1992; Yum, 1994). Wiseman

(2001) cites research on behaviors related to intercultural competence which include "being mindful (Gudykunst, 1992), interaction involvement (Cegala, 1984), recognition of nonverbal messages (Anderson, 1994), appropriate self-disclosure (Li, 1999), interaction management (Wiemann, 1977), identity maintenance (Ting-Toomey, 1994), uncertainty-reduction strategies (Sanders, Wiseman, & Matz, 1991), appropriate display of respect (Ruben, 1976), immediacy skills (Benson, 1978), ability to establish relationships (Hammer, 1987), and expressing clarity and face support (Kim, 1993)" (p. 10). (For a more complete review of this literature, see also Deardorff, 2004, including discussion of Baxter Magolda, 2000, Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1999, Bradford, Allen, & Beisser, 2000, Cavusgil, 1993, Chen, 1987, Collier, 1989, Dinges, 1983, English, 1998, Fennes & Hapgood, 1997, Finkelstein, Pickert, Mahoney, & Douglas, 1998, Hammer, Gudykunst & Wiseman, 1978, Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000, Hanvey, 1976, Hess, 1994, Hett, 1992, Kealey, 2003, Kim, 1992, Koester & Olebe, 1989, Kohls, 1996, Kuada, 2004, La Brack, 1993, Ruben, 1976, Samovar & Porter, 2001, Satterlee, 1999, Spitzberg, 1989, Stewart & Bennett, 1991, Storti, 1997, Tucker, 2001, Wiseman, 2001, Yum, 1994, Zhong, 1998.)

This chapter reports the results of an investigation designed to address the problem of multiple, divergent understandings of one of the most central goals of international education—that of intercultural competence. The first phase of the project involved achieving consensus among leading experts in the intercultural field on the characteristics and definition of intercultural competence and on the best methods of assessing this construct in students. In the second phase, these findings were used to derive a cyclical model of the process of developing and assessing intercultural competence. Using this model as a point of departure, this chapter then explores the implications for educators who would like to build the development and assessment of intercultural competence into their curricula, either at home or during study abroad.

Defining Intercultural Competence

With the aim of solidifying our understanding of the concept of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2004) constructed a panel of 20 internationally known intercultural scholars, including 2 of the 3 most influential authors in the field (Hart, 1999). These experts participated through electronic mail in an iterative Delphi technique (Linstone & Turoff, 1975), in which a series of three rounds of questions prompted them to generate definitions of intercultural competence, refine those definitions, and ultimately reach some level of agreement on key characteristics, as well as on appropriate assessment methods. Additionally, higher education administrators participated in the final round of the Delphi to indicate their acceptance or rejection of the data developed by the intercultural experts. (For further details on this study, see Deardorff, 2004, and Deardorff, in press.)

The first round of questions generated a great breadth of definitions among intercultural experts. However, the top-rated definition characterized intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in

intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes." There were numerous other statements developed by the experts regarding intercultural competence that received 85% or higher agreement including the ability to shift one's frame of reference appropriately, the ability to achieve one's goals to some degree, and the ability to behave appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations. Interestingly, most of these definitions focus primarily on issues of communication and behavior in intercultural situations.

Although these constructs might seem to favor productive skills, the specific competencies that emerged through consensus had a decidedly receptive tone to them: to analyze, interpret, and relate, as well as to listen and observe. As Table 1 indicates, the experts also agreed on the importance of cognitive skills, including comparative thinking and cognitive flexibility. Their strong emphasis on analytical abilities points to the importance of *process* in acquiring intercultural competence and the attention that needs to be paid to developing these critical skills. This finding confirms Yeshova, DeJeagbere, and Mestenhauser's (2000) argument that the intercultural perspective along with intellectual competencies is integral to developing intercultural competence.

Table 1
Intercultural competence elements with 80%–100% agreement among top intercultural experts

Specific components of intercultural competence include:

Accept (*n*)	Reject (*n*)	Mean	SD	Item
20	0	3.4	(0.7)	Understanding others' world views
19	1	3.8	(0.6)	Cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment
19	1	3.7	(0.6)	Adaptability—adjustment to new cultural environment
19	1	3.5	(0.6)	Skills to listen and observe
19	1	3.4	(0.8)	General openness toward intercultural learning and to people from other cultures
19	1	3.4	(0.8)	Ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication and learning styles
18	2	3.8	(0.4)	Flexibility
18	2	3.8	(0.4)	Skills to analyze, interpret, and relate
18	2	3.7	(0.6)	Tolerating and engaging ambiguity
18	2	3.6	(0.6)	Deep knowledge and understanding of culture (one's own and others')
18	2	3.5	(0.8)	Respect for other cultures
17	3	3.5	(0.9)	Cross-cultural empathy
17	3	3.4	(1.0)	Understanding the value of cultural diversity

Table 1 (continued)

| Accept (*n*)	Reject (*n*)	Mean	SD	Item
17	3	3.3	(0.9)	Understanding the role and impact of culture and the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved
17	3	3.2	(1.0)	Cognitive flexibility—ability to switch frames from etic to emic and back again
17	3	3.0	(0.8)	Sociolinguistic competence (awareness of relation between language and meaning in societal context)
17	3	3.0	(1.1)	Mindfulness
16	4	3.6	(0.8)	Withholding judgment
16	4	3.4	(0.8)	Curiosity and discovery
16	4	3.2	(0.9)	Learning through interaction
16	4	3.1	(1.2)	Ethnorelative view
16	4	2.9	(0.9)	Culture-specific knowledge/understanding of host culture's traditions

With regard to specific components of intercultural competence, the experts in particular seemed to feel strongly that one component alone is not enough to ensure competence (i.e., knowledge or language by itself). In fact, the items shown in Table 1 received 80% or higher acceptance by the top intercultural experts in this study. These results are quite significant because there has previously been no consensus among experts as to what constitutes intercultural competence. It is important to note that one element received 100% agreement from the intercultural experts: "the understanding of others' world views." This finding substantiates other literature that upholds respect for other cultural perspectives as essential to intercultural competence, where "world view" is described as basic perceptions and understandings of the world (Fong & Furuto, 2001; Ibrahim, 1985; Sue & Sue, 1990). For language educators, it is perhaps surprising to note that the intercultural experts did not reach consensus on the role of language in intercultural competence: Some felt that it was an essential component, whereas others did not.

Based on this understanding of what intercultural competence is, the question of particular interest to educators becomes the process of its development. Organizing the characteristics of intercultural competence in a visual and dynamic way, a model of acquisition begins to emerge.

A Model of Intercultural Competence Development

There are many ways in which the items in Table 1 could be grouped. Figure 1 eliminates long fragmented lists by placing these components of intercultural competence within a cyclical framework.

Figure 1
Process model of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2004)
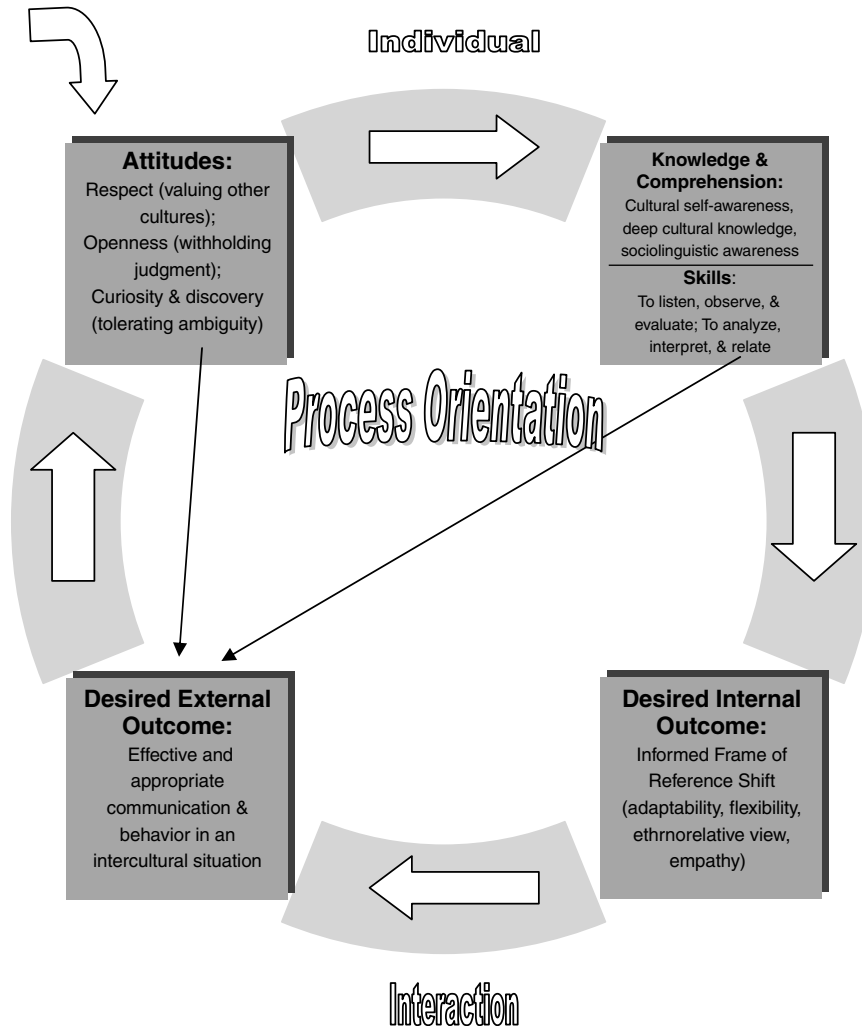
Notes:
- Begin with attitudes; move from individual level (attitudes) to interaction level (outcomes)
- Degree of intercultural competence depends on degree of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, and skills

Though individuals can enter this process at any particular point, attitude is a fundamental place to start (Byram, 1997), as illustrated by an arrow in this visual representation. Attitudes have been considered an essential element of language acquisition for some time now (e.g., Krashen's, 1982, concept of the affective filter). Similarly, Lynch and Hanson (1998) highlight the fundamental role of attitude in the development of intercultural competence: "After all the books have been read

and the skills learned and practiced, the cross-cultural effectiveness of each of us will vary. And it will vary more by [the attitudes] we bring to the learning than by what we have learned" (p. 510). Okayama, Furuto, and Edmondson (2001) reinforce the foundational importance of attitude by stating that

> What may be most important is . . . to maintain culturally competent attitudes as we continue to attain new knowledge and skills while building new relationships. Awareness, the valuing of all cultures, and a willingness to make changes are underlying attitudes that support everything that can be taught or learned. (p. 97)

The model in Figure 1 concurs with these scholars in emphasizing the importance of attitude to the learning that follows. Specifically, the attitudes of openness, respect (valuing all cultures), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity) are viewed as fundamental to the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that will lead to both the conceptual shifts and the behavioral changes needed to increase intercultural competence.

As respect, openness, and cultural curiosity increase, so does cultural knowledge—both awareness of one's own cultural norms and sensitivity to those of other cultures. Greater cultural comprehension is acquired, as well as deepening factual and procedural knowledge. As the model emphasizes, this awareness and knowledge is gained through the development of key communicative and cognitive skills, such as listening, observing, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating. These skills, in combination with the prerequisite attitudes and the resulting knowledge gains, ideally lead to an internal "frame of reference shift" in which adaptability and flexibility play a central role. This mental shift ultimately manifests itself in the observable (and thus assessable) "external outcome" of effective and appropriate communication and behavior in intercultural situations. Definitions of *appropriate* and *effective* are taken from Spitzberg's (1989) work, where appropriateness is the avoidance of violating valued rules, and effectiveness is the achievement of valued objectives.

Whereas the model clearly depicts through its circular format that attitudes lead to acquisition of knowledge, which helps to reshape internal frames of reference that then influence external behaviors, it is important to notice that each part of the model can impact the others directly as well. For example, new knowledge can directly affect observable behavior, or an internal frame of reference shift can influence attitudes by increasing curiosity, openness, and/or respect. The fact that the model is not linear also emphasizes the cyclical nature of the process. External outcomes—that is, increasingly appropriate communication and behavior—serve to promote further respect, openness, and curiosity, attitudes that fuel the continuation of the cycle and the ongoing development of intercultural competence. It is also essential to note that throughout the model mindfulness is key: Participants must be aware of the learning that takes place at each point and must be given the process skills necessary to analyze their acquisition of intercultural competence.

There are a number of advantages to conceptualizing the development of intercultural competence as a dynamic and recursive process. First, this model provides a structured way of understanding the experts' definition of intercultural competence, while honoring the complexity of their ideas. Second, the model allows for degrees of competence: As the number and degree of acquired components

increases, so does the probability of a greater degree of intercultural competence as an external outcome. Third, the anticipated outcomes of intercultural competence development progress logically from the individual level of attitudes and personal attributes to the interactive cultural level. Moreover, the specific skills delineated in this model are useful for acquiring and processing knowledge about one's own culture, as well as about other cultures. Fourth, identifying specific skills and outcomes allows for the development of context-specific assessment indicators, as well as providing a basis for general assessment of intercultural competence, thus embracing both broad and detailed dimensions of the definition. Finally, this model emphasizes both the internal and the external outcomes of intercultural competence, instead of focusing solely on the goal of appropriate observable behavior. (For further details on this model and the research study, see Deardorff, 2004, and Deardorff, in press.)

It is interesting to compare this model of intercultural competence to the four developmental stages developed by the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE, 1996), which include (1) recognition of global systems and their interconnectedness (including openness to other cultures, values, attitudes), (2) intercultural skills and experiences, (3) general knowledge of history and world events, and (4) detailed areas studies specialization (e.g., language). Both models begin with the importance of attitude, and both emphasize knowledge, skills, and experiences. However, the two models diverge in their outcomes, which is to say that they do not rely on the same understanding of the construct of intercultural competence. Whereas the model delineated in this chapter is based on a definition that includes one's cognitive frame of reference and one's observable behaviors, the ACIIE model emphasizes knowledge and skills as outcomes. This difference further underscores the importance of establishing a common definition of intercultural competence based on views of experts in the field.

Implications

Not only is intercultural competence a desired outcome of study abroad, it is also a common goal of foreign language education. The model proposed here thus holds implications for the foreign language curriculum, both on campus and overseas. First, it is important to understand that the development of intercultural competence is a *process* that requires time and conscious effort. Language study alone does not necessarily make one interculturally competent, nor does one automatically acquire intercultural competence simply through an experience abroad. The development of intercultural competence cannot be approached in an ad hoc fashion or considered to be a guaranteed by-product of acquiring language skills. It cannot occur through sole reliance on the reading of cultural notes or on the occasional discussion or presentation in language class about culture. Even a "capstone" course will be insufficient to bring about advanced levels of intercultural competence. Rather, the development of students' intercultural skills and understanding must be intentional, cohesive, and coordinated. It must run throughout the students' educational experience and develop out of a foundation of awareness. It must also go beyond the tip of the cultural iceberg to include deep cultural learning as part of the language acquisition process.

To delve beneath the visible surface of the cultural iceberg, students must be taught the key process skills throughout their curriculum—the skills for acquiring deep cultural knowledge through listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, relating, and evaluating. An important part of this process is for students to reflect on the knowledge and skills they are gaining, as well as on changes in attitudes that they may experience. Thus, intercultural competence development must be *interwoven* into the curriculum from the very beginning. For this reason, the work of language program directors (LPDs) with beginning and intermediate language courses is essential, for it is at this level that the groundwork is already being laid in the area of attitudes and skills. Students in these courses can benefit from opportunities to examine their own cultural norms, to develop observational and analytical skills, and to become aware of the importance of openness and curiosity when approaching cultural phenomena. Emphasizing these aspects of the model early in the curriculum will help students be better able to acquire and understand cultural knowledge in more advanced courses later on, thus enabling them to progress more efficiently toward desired internal and external outcomes.

Just as intercultural competence development needs to be fostered and honed throughout the curriculum, it also needs to be assessed in process-oriented ways. Thus a second area of implications involves the evaluation of intercultural skills and knowledge. Despite the apparent challenges, the intercultural experts involved in this study agreed that intercultural competence can indeed be evaluated. Table 2 provides a list of the assessment methods upon which they reached consensus.

Table 2
Assessment items with 80%–100% agreement among top intercultural experts

Ways to assess intercultural competence include:

| Accept (*n*)	Reject (*n*)	MEAN	SD	Item
18	2	3.2	(0.9)	Case studies
18	2	2.9	(1.0)	Interviews
17	3	3.7	(0.8)	Mix of quantitative and qualitative measures
17	3	3.4	(0.7)	Qualitative measures
17	3	3.2	(0.9)	Analysis of narrative diaries
17	3	3.2	(0.9)	Self-report instruments
17	3	3.2	(0.9)	Observation by others/host culture
17	3	3.1	(1.0)	Judgment by self and others
16	4	3.1	(1.1)	Developing specific indicators for each component/dimension of intercultural competence (ICC) and evidence of each indicator
16	4	3.0	(1.2)	Triangulation (use of multiple data collection efforts as corroborative evidence for validity of qualitative research findings)

Table 2 (continued)

Accept (*n*)	Reject (*n*)	MEAN	SD	Item
Issues raised by experts in assessing intercultural competence include:				
19	1	3.6	(0.5)	ICC assessment involves more than just observable performance.
19	1	3.4	(0.6)	It is important to consider the cultural and social implications of assessing ICC.
17	3	3.6	(0.6)	It is important to determine who measures ICC, who is the locus of evaluation, in what context, for what purpose, to what benefit, the time frame involved, the level of cooperation, and the level of abstraction.
16	4	3.2	(0.9)	It is important to measure the degrees of ICC.
16	4	3.1	(0.7)	When assessing ICC, it is important to analyze the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved.

As indicated in Table 2, intercultural experts agreed that it is important to use a variety of assessment methods in measuring intercultural competence. The highest rated methods include the use of case studies and interviews. These techniques are perhaps best incorporated into course work, both at home and overseas. Other methods preferred by the experts include analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments, and observation. It is interesting to compare these recommendations from the intercultural experts with the actual assessment practices reported by the university administrators who also participated in the study. According to their responses, summarized in Figure 2, administrators largely agree with the intercultural experts that interviews and observations are among the most valuable methods of assessing progress toward intercultural competence. Other top methods currently in use include student presentations, portfolios, and professor evaluations.

One surprising finding is that there was not agreement among the experts on the use of pre- and posttesting, a technique that is commonly used by institutions, according to the data in Figure 2, and that has been widely used among language educators in conjunction with measuring the effectiveness of study abroad. Given the process-orientation of the model described here, educators may do well to reconsider the value of product-oriented testing, which seems less likely to tap into the attitudes and mental frames of reference so integral to intercultural competence. LPDs can contribute to this needed shift away from traditional testing of cultural understanding by incorporating more experiential learning formats into beginning and intermediate language courses and using these activities as a means of assessment as well. (For a detailed discussion of one experiential learning option that fosters shifts in intercultural knowledge and awareness, see Dupuy in this volume. For an in-depth guide to assessing intercultural competence, see Deardorff, 2004, and Deardorff, 2005.)

Figure 2

Intercultural competence assessment methods used by institutions
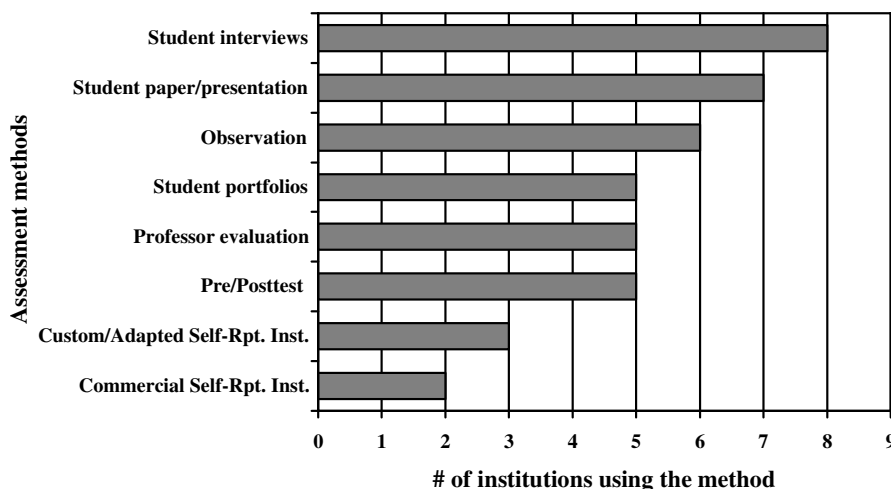
Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the first research study to document consensus among top intercultural experts on the definition and assessment methods of intercultural competence. It is hoped that this study's findings, along with the process model of intercultural competence developed from the results of the study, will benefit language educators in adapting both home and overseas curricula to address intercultural competence as a key student outcome. The development of intercultural capabilities needs to be understood not as a guaranteed product of a singular experience, such as overseas immersion or a particular course, but rather as an ongoing process that integrates interactions and experiences in a variety of learning contexts throughout the curriculum. Through a coordinated and intentional approach, language programs can play a key role in the development of students' intercultural competence.

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