Intercultural Competence: The Role it Plays in the College Intensive English Program

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Abstract
In the 21st century, with "globalization" as one of its buzz words, the concept of intercultural competence has drawn attention of participants in all professional fields. In the Intensive English Programs, incorporating intercultural competence into the fundamental competences such as reading, writing, grammar, speaking and communication, not only makes English learning more practical and effective but can also motivate students, both language learners and their native-speaking peers, to become more aware of the reality of this changing world and so to establish appropriate attitude and communication skills, thus become competent and well-rounded global citizens. This paper explores contents and methods the author and her colleagues have developed and utilized in enhancing students' intercultural competence in a college level Intensive English Program in North America. Four elements: attitude, knowledge, skills, and assessments are described and discussed through an action research.

Key Words: Globalization, Intercultural Competence, Intensive English Program, Action Research

## 1.	Introduction

Language and culture are inseparable. Liddicoat (2002) notes that culture shapes what we say, when we say it, and how we say it, from the simplest language to the most complex ones that we use, and culture is also a fundamental factor to the way we speak, write, listen and read. In a traditional language class, the near-native language proficiency has been the goal, and the main content of teaching and learning, and, if culture is ever put into the content, usually the cultures of the host countries where the target languages are spoken and learned are the focus and spot light. However, as the world moves on into globalization, "intercultural competence" has been progressively embraced by scholars and practitioners of language teaching and learning fields (Bennett, 2004). Thus, when intercultural competence is woven into language learning, learners develop a perspective where the culture and language contexts of the students' own cultures are presented and discussed, along with the target culture and language contexts, as Moeller and Nugent (2014) state, "students become optimally prepared for participation in a global world." This paper will investigate how college intensive English programs (IEP) can incorporate intercultural competence learning, in which a learner makes decisions about what part of cultures to hold on to, how to adjust his/her attitude toward certain cultures, and what skills he/she has to obtain, in order to become competent in communicating in the new language with people from all over the world. At the same time, the instructors provide, either to native speakers or to language learners, opportunities for exposure and adventure of global cultures. The action research includes the efforts of faculty, staff, students, as well as the surrounding community, intertwined together to enhance the intercultural competence of both language learners and native English speakers.

## 2.	What is Intercultural Competence?

Messner and Schäfer (2014) define Intercultural competence as "the aptitude to communicate effectively and correctly with people of different cultures." In order to communicate with effect and adequacy, the "preparation" of individuals is necessary, as Sinecrope et al (2012) stated. Therefore, with preparation of learners in mind, it is helpful to investigate the similarity and differences of three cultural related terms that have been widely used for decades: "multicultural," "cross-cultural," and "intercultural," so the true meaning of "intercultural communication" can be realized through teaching and learning. Rodger Nishioka (2014) gives the following definitions of multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural communities and explain the differences among them:

> In multicultural communities, we live alongside one another. We value tolerance, and celebrate one another's…outward expressions of culture. It usually requires only superficial and polite social interaction. In cross-cultural communities, there is some reaching across boundaries. We try to build bridges of relationship between our cultural communities … In intercultural communities, there are comprehensive mutuality, reciprocity, and equality. Our social structures and everyday interactions are defined by justice, mutuality, respect, equality, understanding, acceptance, freedom, diversity, peacemaking, and celebration.

In this statement, Nishioka specifically explains the similarities and differences of the "multicultural", "cross-cultural," and "intercultural" concepts. The quality of "justice, mutuality, respect, equality, understanding, acceptance, freedom, diversity, peacemaking, and celebration" he pointed out an intercultural community obtains vividly describes an interculturally competent community. As a result, the objectives of incorporating the intercultural competence learning in the intensive English program no longer focus on the culture of English-speaking countries exclusively, but also include cultures of the entire world, especially drawing resources from the cultures of the language learners in the program, which can better serve the purposes of "justice, mutuality, respect, equality, understanding, acceptance, freedom, diversity, peacemaking, and celebration."

3.   The Process of Intercultural Competence Learning

When a language learner is pursuing intercultural competence, it takes steps of progress and transformation. Deardorff (2006) found that transformation of attitude, including "self-awareness" and "openness to new values and beliefs," is an important first step to becoming interculturally competent. Then the learner will continue to grow and internalize what he/she has learned. As Byram (1997) describes, the intercultural learning process is not linear. As a matter of fact, it can be viewed as circular, just like a mountain-climbing train swirling from the bottom of the mountain all the way up--although the passengers may see the same sights repeatedly as the train climbs to a higher level, yet they are taken to new perspectives and broader views, and eventually they can reach to the top of the mountain.

4.   The Contents of Intercultural Competence Learning

Bloom's Taxonomy identifies three domains of educational activities (Bloom, et al. 1956): (i) Cognitive: mental skills (knowledge), (ii) Affective: growth in feelings or emotional areas (attitude), and (iii) Psychomotor: manual or physical skills (skills). These three domains can also be considered in the cultural competence learning. The intercultural knowledge domain can include food, clothing, families, government, education, language(s), religion, economy, environment, arts/music, recreation, and holidays, etc. The skills domain can include personal skills and learning skills, as well as manual or physical skills, to enhance intercultural competence: interacting with one another, adjusting to new languages and new surroundings, building relationships with new friends, understanding and correctly interpreting others' experiences, comparing and contrasting different cultures, and recognizing the value of all cultures. The attitude of an intercultural competent person can evolve from tolerance to curiosity, from curiosity to acceptance, acceptance to appreciation, and appreciation to respect, and so on.

In order to implement the intercultural competence to the program, many steps can be taken: first, finding out how many major cultures in the language program and on campus. In the author's institution, Asian, South American, North American, Middle East, and African cultures are all extinguished. The program then organizes a search conference on each cultural. After the search conference, the program proceeds to plan major activities such as restructuring Office of International Student Services to

be more functional, forming an International Committee by faculty and staff, organizing Intercultural Club to include both domestic and international students with faculty/staff members as advisors, setting up Conversation Tables for language learners and native speakers to practice English and other languages. At the same time, students take initiative to offer informal language and cultural classes. By doing so, language learners take pride in their ability of teaching their native languages to native English speakers. This can also enhance their motivation to know more about both English and their own languages. In addition to the above offices and organizations, the Intensive English Program also sponsors a Multi-cultural Food and Performance Night per semester to attract both students and faculty/staff, and even community members, to participate. The Multi-cultural Food and Performance Night, as much fun as it can be, also serves as an intercultural education event.

5.   Sources for Intercultural Competence Learning

5.1 On Campus

The following are opportunities where students of Intensive English Program can explore and discover sources to elevate their competence:

5.1.1 Classrooms: In the English language classes, rich in cultures: poems, autobiographies, short stories, dramas, memoirs, and essays fitting students' language skills are selected for reading and discussion. Students are given topics to research and to give presentations to the public of campus, just like presentations in a conference. We strategically emphasize the learning objectives on families, traditions and customs, comparison between cultures, outside influences and inside transformation, so students can go through the circular learning process described in section 3 of this paper: The Process of Intercultural Competence Learning.

5.1.2 Intercultural Club: The club is formed by both domestic and international students. The club members meet on a weekly basis to offer international and domestic students and the entire campus community opportunities for cultural exposures. The regular activities included dances, music, movies, sports, picnics, and games, etc. The club also arranges an annual multi-culture night, performing music, dances, sports, and arts of a variety of cultures, and of course, an array of foods was served. The multi-culture night attracts participants from both the college and the broader community in town. The members are also invited to other colleges or schools and churches to present the cultural programs.

5.1.3 Conversation Tables: There are three types of conversations desks. First, a group of volunteers is invited to provide language and cultural exchange. The group members, having been trained in language teaching/learning, come to the campus weekly and conduct conversations with students who sign up to the desks. The contents include general topics and questions and answers concerning adjustment to a new linguistic and cultural environment. In addition to talking about shopping, food, music, movies, hobbies, and social networking, more serious topics such as history, traveling, college majors and career choices, relationship and marriage were of much interest at the conversation tables. The participants agree to avoid open discussion of religions and politics, so to make sure no bias or inappropriate conducts are involved. The second type of conversation table is formed by volunteering students who are

interested in offering assistance and support in language learning. The volunteers contact the Intensive English Program and "adopt" one or a few English learners to hang out, eat, or study together. Students give instructors weekly update of their activities as a reflection, and the instructors also make sure the interactions are appropriate and mutually helpful. The third type was more relaxed and spontaneous. Faculty and staff members are encouraged to take lunch at the campus dining hall and make conversations with both domestic and international students. The president of the college even generously offers three free meals to faculty and staff as an incentive in the fall semester. If all the opportunities of three free meals are taken in the fall, six free meals are offered in the spring semester, and then the program starts over again in the next fall. These opportunities greatly encourage interactions and conversations among members of the entire college. International students are especially encouraged by their instructors to participate in the dining hall conversations. Although the third type is informal and not as organized or structured as the first two types, the interlocutors are still able to exchange points of view and learn from one another.

5.1.4 Intercultural Club: The club is formed by both domestic and international students. The club members meet on a weekly basis to offer students and the entire campus community opportunities for cultural exposures and friendship. The regular activities include dances, music, movies, sports, picnics, and games, ethnic fashion show, etc. The club also arranges an annual multi-culture night, performing music, dances, sports, and arts of a variety of cultures, and of course, an array of foods was served. The multi-culture night attracts participants from both the college and the broader community in town. Once in a while, the members are also invited to other colleges or schools and churches to present the cultural programs such as the customs of the Lunar New Year and Ramadan.

5.1.5 Informal Language and Culture Classes: These classes, such as Mandarin Chinese, Chinese Martial Arts, Samba, and Brazilian Martial Arts, offered by international students, prove to be a very good idea for cultural exchange and enrichment. The students made lesson plans and create learning procedures for their "language students" who might be their classmates, college staff, or even their professors. Through teaching and learning simple conversational phrases and sentences, the cultures were learned and exchanged. In order to teach the language of their own, the student-teachers put effort in making plans and create better teaching methods, which also strengthen their motivation of learning English. These language and culture classes are a good example of reciprocity, and the students who teach their languages or cultures develop a stronger sense of belonging to the college.
5.2 Out of Campus

Intercultural competence learning does not have to be limited in the campus or the classrooms. Finding resources and consultant on campus and out of campus are equally beneficial.

5.2.1 Sister Cities Program: the city where the Intensive English Program is located, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA, has four sister cities: Plock, Poland; Takaoka, Japan; Gera, Germany, and Taizhou, China. Many activities are held in the city to exchange friendship and peace through educational, cultural and economic programs (www.fortwaynesistercities.net/). The international students, as well as domestic students, are encouraged to participate in activities such as galas,

cultural parades, music and dances, and sometimes even serve as volunteers in setting up venues, reception, food services, are and craft for children, etc., to promote their own cultures. In order to do a good job in their volunteer works, some orientation tutorials are offered by the Intensive English Program instructors, and the participants try hard to practice English conversations and etiquette, and brush up their understanding of their own cultures.

5.2.2 Other City-wide Festivals: Language learners can also benefit from a variety of other culture-related festivals in the city or surrounding cities for intercultural competence learning. Fort Wayne is a small city, but is able to hosts several culturally rich festivals, such as Greek Festival, German Festival, Japanese (Cherry Blossom) Festival, and Art Festival, etc. Students are encouraged to attend the shows, interact with other participants, and, once again, to volunteer to help with an array of small jobs.

5.2.3 Immigrant communities: According to the website of Hispanic and Immigrant Liaison of Fort Wayne (http://www.unaoc.org/ibis/2011/04/11/hispanic-and-immigrant-liaison-fort-wayne-indiana/), 6% of Fort Wayne residents are foreign-born. Fort Wayne's Hispanic and Immigrant Liaison provides information and assistance for accessing city services and educates the community about cultural issues associated with Fort Wayne's diverse populations. The liaison has worked in partnership with the local Burmese Advocacy Center to invite the community to learn about Burma, its people, history, culture, diverse dialects, music and food and to hold presentations from faculty, researchers, and volunteers who have direct contact with this community. The liaison also offers English and Spanish classes, job skills/financial skills training, as well as cultural competency to immigrant and refugee service providers. The language learners, though neither immigrants nor refugees, are welcome to the events to learner languages and cultures, also to offer volunteer services such as interpretation, event assistance, cleaning, childcare, etc. Students have been richly exposed to a variety of cultures and shared their own cultures with those they meet and serve.

5.2.4 Host Families Program: Host families are volunteers who are recruited from local residents by the International Admission and Services Office. Many of them are college faculty and staff members. The families contact International Admission and Services Office and the Office makes sure they have clear backgrounds, and then the office matches the host families and students, and the families take time to invite students, including students of the Intensive English Program, to spend weekends or holidays in their houses to share traditions and culture and allow their guests to participate in a wide range of their family activities. The student guests also introduce their own cultures to the host families. During the stays, not only is knowledge or information shared, more importantly, values and opinions are observed and considered, and a strong bond is formed between the host family and the student guests. Sometimes the relationship between the family and the guests are so good that it can last long after the students graduate and leave the college or return to home countries.

6.   An Action Research

With these sources and learning opportunities, an action research was conducted. The participants included staff/faculty members and students of the Intensive English Program.

6.1 Research Method and Procedure

6.1.1 Project Meetings: A project coordinator was determined and several advisory members from college faculty/staff were included. The meeting began with sharing personal experiences of intercultural competence learning, conducting self-evaluations, and concluded with developing plans to reach higher level of intercultural competence.

6.1.2 Interacting with People: Students set out to actively interact with people on campus and out of campus. A "Meet and Greet" evening kicked off the interaction. Once knowing one another, students felt free to discuss languages and cultures with classmates, dorm roommates, college staff and faculty. They introduced themselves to people they met in the public libraries, markets, restaurants, stores, churches, etc., and exchanged life experiences and information with them. They were encouraged by the instructors to keep journals and photos of their activities for reflection and memories. Students and college staff/faculty also made use of Conversation Tables and a variety of college activities for on-going interactions.

6.1.3 Artifacts and Photos of Artifacts Presentation: The "touch-able" real items representing cultures were collected and presented in "show and tell" activities. If real item were not available, photos of artifacts were also valued and appreciated. Students showed steamers (*zheng-long*) with which the Chinese *dim-sum* (dumplings and buns with fillings) was cooked, boomerang with which Australian used in hunting, Brazilian tea with the flavor of *guarana*, an exotic South American fruit, and special coffee makers for Arabic coffee, etc. The showing of artifacts and the demonstration of their functions inspired learners to want to find out more of the cultures these artifacts represented. Many questions were asked, and those questions that did not receive satisfactory answers would become topics for further researches. Both the presenters and the audience took ownership of their learning in these activities.

6.1.4 Host Families: As described in 5.2.4, students were invited to host families' houses for weekends or holidays. The interaction would become highlight of their studying in a new country, and they also became "ambassadors" of their own countries to share their cultures to their host families, along with the families' relatives and friends. Many students were so considerate as to present a small gift from their own cultures as a token of appreciation as well as an ice-breaker of conversations.

6.1.5 Volunteer Works: In addition to the volunteer opportunities mentioned in 5.2.1, 5.2.2, and 5.2.3, some local facilities welcomed students to visit as volunteers as well. Some students with higher English proficiency volunteered to help in the campus offices, such as helping new students with campus orientation, registration, and home-coming programs. Some students visited residents in local nursing homes to sing or play instruments for the residents, and

listen to the residents' stories of life. These activities were mutually beneficial—the students learned about American language and about the society, and the residents in the nursing homes had opportunities to have young company from all over the world. Students were also encouraged to keep journals and pictures of their journeys, and some of them did maintain correspondence with the residents even after they left the college.

6.2 Assessment of Intercultural Competence Learning

The objectives of this action research are to measure how students improve their knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward intercultural competence through language learning. The assessment focuses on the three categories; however, several tools for assessment, as described in 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 6.2.4, and 6.2.5, are used for more reliable results:

6.2.1 Observation of learners' performance, interactions, and attitudes
6.2.2 Interviews with learners, one-on-one or in small groups
6.2.3 Learners Notes: Learners kept notes and wrote journals to record their learning progress
6.2.4 Information Quizzes: Quizzes were given from time to time, either on paper or in conversations, to check students' awareness. Below is a sample quiz:

Cultural Information Quiz

Choose one correct answer for each question.
1. In Islam, Ramadan is
   A. a temple for worship
   B. a holy month of fasting and prayer
   C. a type of clothing

2. In the United States on Thanksgiving, most people eat _____.
   A.chicken
   B.turkey
   C. lamb

3. The major language spoken in Brazil is _____.
   A. Portuguese
   B. Spanish
   C. Brazilian

4. Haiku is
   A. an Indian food
   B. a Thai religious ceremony
   C. a very short form of Japanese poetry

5. In the United States, a pot luck party is _____.
   A. a party where everyone dance.
   B. a party where the host sells pots.
   C. a party where everyone brings some food to share.

6. In China, parents gave children money for Chinese New Year in _____.
   A. white envelopes
   B. yellow envelopes
   C. red envelopes

7. Kenya is located on_____.
   A. The east of Africa
   B. The south of Asia
   C. The north of South America

8. Swahili is a language spoken mostly in
   A. North Europe
   B. Hawaii
   C. Africa

9. The main religion of Mexico is
   A. Roman Catholic
   B. Buddhism
   C. Islam

10. Sanskrit is
   A. The primary sacred language of Hinduism
   B. a type of cream
   C. A country in Africa

6.2.5 **Questionnaires:** Below are sample questionnaires, one used for new comers, and the other for students who have experienced intercultural competence learning for a year (from August to May).

6.2.5.1 Intercultural Competence Questionnaire for New Comers

Mark the following statements by checking (v) Strongly Agree, Agree, I Don't Know, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. This is not a test. Think of these questions as a way to find out what you feel about cultures you have known.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	I Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	All Americans speak English.					
2	Once I am in America, I want to forget where I am from.					
3	I have to avoid speaking my native language and speak English only.					
4	I want to introduce my culture to people I meet in America.					
5	Americans are more alike than they are different.					

6	Americans can be as shy as I am.					
7	TV programs help me learn American culture.					
8	I want to know my classmates' cultures as well as American culture.					
9	One single experience can form an impression of a certain culture.					
10	Stereotypes are dependable information to understand a culture.					

6.2.5.2 Intercultural competence questionnaire for students who have completed the one school year (August to May) of Intensive English Program

Mark the following statements by checking (v) Strongly Agree, Agree, I Don't Know, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. This is not a test. Think of these questions as a way to find out what you feel about cultures you have known.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	I Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I feel comfortable speaking English to anyone I meet.					
2	I don't have to worry about being known as an international student.					
3	I have comfortable relationship with my professors.					
4	I have learned American culture in my classes.					
5	I have learned American culture out of my classes.					
6	I have learned cultures other than American culture in my classes.					
7	I have learned cultures other than American culture out of my classes..					
8	I have learned how to discern stereotypes.					
9	I am willing to share my culture with those who are interested.					
10	I am interested to learn more cultures different from mine.					

6.2.6 Rubric for Assessment

After the end-of-year evaluation, students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes are placed into three competence levels--emerging, approaching, and meeting--with the criteria of the following rubric:

	Emerging	Approaching	Meeting
Knowledge	Demonstrates surface or vague understanding of some elements of other cultures	Demonstrates basic but accurate understanding of many elements of other cultures	Demonstrates adequate understanding of most elements of other cultures
Skills	Demonstrates limited skills interacting with members from other cultures	Demonstrates necessary skills interacting with members from other cultures	Is able to interact with members from other cultures with adjustment
Attitudes	Shows limited interests in other cultures	Recognizes the value of other cultures	Is able to accept and adjust to new cultural situations

6.2.7   Results of Assessment

The assessment is an on-going action conducted along with the intercultural competence learning. The results of the assessment are collected at the end of every school year (late August to early May). The following are results of assessment to participants of the Intensive English Program in the past three school years:

	Emerging : 3-5	**Approaching: 6-8**	**Meeting:9-11**
2012-2013	12% (3/25)	32% (8/25)	32% (8/25)
2013-2014	12% (6/50)	14% (7/50)	18% (9/50)
2014-2015	4% (1/26)	16% (4/26)	40% (10/26)
2015-2016	(in progress)		

7.   Conclusion

As this paper is presented in the very beginning of 2016 on January 10, we are aware that 15 years have passed since we received the 21 century. Many events that happened in the past decade suggests that utilizing "intercultural competence" in interacting with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds are not only necessary, but also urgent. Through language programs, cultures can be learned in a more effective way. This paper suggests principles and describes activities of intercultural competence learning, augmented by the students, faculty, and staff of an institution that offers Intensive English Program. A series of Intercultural Competence learning scenarios can help both learners, instructors, as well as administration consider its feasibility and its challenges. Although the activities described in this paper are tried-and-true experiences which attempted to enhance the level of intercultural competence, we believe that the learning process has to continue even after the students complete their formal studies in the Intensive English Program, so that their

behaviors and attitudes toward the intercultural competence can be adjusted for keep. It is the hope of the author and her IEP colleagues that we continue to critique, evaluate, and reshape the action researches we have done, so we can develop better ideas and methods for more effective cultural competence learning.

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