



2015
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Language and “Intercultural Competence”

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Today's Take-Away Ideas

1. Present-day educators often put little emphasis on language proficiency as a key ingredient in the “intercultural competence” students should acquire.
2. An opposing view sees language as an essential gateway to intercultural knowledge, empathy, and interaction—even when cultures use dialects of the “same” language.
3. On this opposing view, without language skills, students (and SIOs) achieve, at best, awareness of cross-national differences and some degree of functional transactional competence, but both depend upon the superior (because bilingual) intercultural competence of their student (and professional) interlocutors.

Session Objectives

To convey knowledge of the ways in which language proficiency may constitute a defining characteristic of “intercultural competence” (ICC).

To convey knowledge of why some believe that a lack of language proficiency may result in an inferior form of ICC that depends upon the superior (because bilingual) ICC of classmates, professors, and others.

To consider the degree to which audience participants’ experience and expertise support the above two knowledge possibilities.

To consider how the content of this session might or should affect the goals and methods of those who seek to instill ICC in their students.

Languages and the definition of “education”

- For the first century and a half of our history, intermediate-level fluency in a foreign language was seen as an essential attribute of an educated person, and REQUIRED for graduate studies.
- While academic use of non-English materials declined, language skills came to be seen as highly desirable attributes for employment.
- With English as the entire world’s second language—and not just the college-educated—language study has come to be seen as largely unnecessary, even as a waste of time and money.
- As a result, the continuing reduction, and sometimes total loss, of language requirements for the bachelor’s degree over the last forty years in the U.S.—despite continuing student and employer demand for career-related language ability—have resulted in a widespread redefinition of “liberal education”, leaving out languages.

Leaving languages out of “liberal education”

- As proof of this impending loss, consider the VALUE rubrics of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), 2009.
 - VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) is a campus-based assessment initiative sponsored by AAC&U as part of its LEAP [Liberal Education and America’s Promise] initiative.
 - (<http://www.aacu.org/value>)

The sixteen VALUE rubrics

Intellectual and Practical Skills

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Written communication
- Oral communication
- Reading
- Quantitative literacy
- Information literacy
- Teamwork
- Problem solving

Personal and Social Responsibility

- Civic engagement—local and global
- Intercultural knowledge and competence
- Ethical reasoning
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning
- Global learning

Integrative and Applied Learning

- Integrative learning

Leaving languages out of the definition of “liberal education”

- The word *language* appears numerous times in the 16 definitional rubrics, but only in the following sense, as stated in the Glossary--
 - Language: Vocabulary, terminology, and sentence structure. Language that supports the effectiveness of a presentation is appropriate to the topic and audience, grammatical, clear, and free from bias. Language that enhances the effectiveness of a presentation is also vivid, imaginative, and expressive.
- --and never with the words *foreign*, *native*, or *second* in front of it.

The sixteen VALUE rubrics

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- [Inquiry and analysis](#)
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Of course, some disagree with the premise that language is dispensable

- For example, Christa Olson, vice provost for international programs at Drake University, who used words and phrases related to language in four of six paragraphs in a piece she wrote entitled “Driven by the Global Intercultural Imperative” to which Drake is committed—six times in the final two paragraphs. (Fall 2014 issue of the Drake University Magazine, <http://www.drake.edu/magazine/?p=6621>)

Here's (part of) why language is a key ingredient of ICC

- Even low-level language skills prove their value in conveying respect and breaking down interactional barriers, particularly with interlocutors whose English is less fluent than your own.
- Everyday cultural rituals, interactional etiquette, negotiation of social status, understanding of humor, and expression of values, almost always depend critically use of a given culture's language.

Elspeth Jones

- Emerita Professor of the Internationalisation of Higher Education, Leeds Beckett University, UK.
- Honorary Visiting Fellow, Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan.
- Currently in Osaka, Japan, from which she will deliver her presentation via Skype.

Let's get this out there right away!

1. Learning a language doesn't automatically develop intercultural competence.
2. You can develop intercultural competence without learning a language.

At the heart of the problem

“It is difficult to get across to those who speak only one language how greatly life is enriched through competence in another. [...] Fluency in another language takes us beyond mere tolerance of ‘otherness’ and requires us to engage with alternative worldviews as a matter of course.” (Jones 2012)

But what is ICC?

- Importantly, it is intercultural so it does not have to be international.
- Internationalization at Home
- Offering alternative perspectives, and challenging cultural assumptions and stereotypes held by all students.

Language study encourages us to:

- Deconstruct the linguistic world as we know it, to tolerate ambiguity, and to embrace cultural “otherness.”
- Recognise that apparently direct translations are fraught with potential misunderstanding.
- Realise that cultural “others” may not see the world in the same way.

Cultural relativism

This kind of disorientation and negotiation of meaning helps to break down linguistic and cultural ethnocentrism through challenging the perspectives that we view as normal, helping us “doubt the superiority of our own cultural values,” as Robert Selby put it, and questioning established notions of personal identity.

Mini-survey via social media

“I think that learning a language is a humbling experience. It makes you put things into perspective. As we discover that there is no right or wrong way of saying things, that there are concepts that others have that we do not have a clue aboutwe realise how arbitrary our views and assumptions are within our native culture, how narrow-minded and ignorant we can be at times, and ultimately how small we are as individuals.” *(survey respondent)*

In summary

Language learning can help to develop intercultural competence but it is not enough alone.

Equally there are plenty of monolinguals who have developed excellent intercultural competence.

BUT

“It is a baleful sign of our times that one of Newt Gingrich's most effective attacks on Mitt Romney is that he is so un-American he dares to speak French. [...] Command of a foreign language shows the wrong priorities, according to this line: it shows a willingness to work hard at understanding another culture, its language and mores. Real Americans don't do that.”

Will Hutton in The Guardian 5/2/12

Thank you

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My work is available to read at

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Or via my website



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John D. Heyl

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- Former president of AIEA (2000-2001), author of *The SIO as Change Agent* (AIEA, 2007), and co-editor of *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education* (2012).
- Vice President for Strategic Partnerships, CEA Study Abroad (Phoenix)

Critique of the ICC “Consensus”

- ICC as Social Science – Dozens of “frameworks,” choose your favorite. . . “The formulation’s the thing.”
- 21 schemas, 300+ elements – 3 on language proficiency
 - Spitzberg, B.H. & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing intercultural competence. In Darla K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 2-52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- ICC goals and liberal education – “Adaptability, flexibility in the face of uncertainty, curiosity.” Aren’t these the same goals as those of liberal education? What makes ICC goals different?

Lowering the Bar

ICC proponents have lowered the bar to “competence” by emphasizing the following:

- **The Myth of the “fluent fool”** – These are always extreme cases and in no way represent the benefits of second language fluency.
- **Limits of ICC in English** – “. . . higher order intercultural competence assumes both deep cultural knowledge and the ability of interlocutors to communicate with one another in ways that incorporate the nuances of culture.” (Deardorff and Jones, 2012) – That is through second language fluency. But Deardorff and Jones also say that “a measure of intercultural competence” is possible in one’s own language alone. What is this “measure of intercultural competence” that is possible through monolingual communication?

Headwinds

- **The Primacy of International Student Recruitment** – US institutions, in particular, are becoming expert in developing the intercultural competence of international students. BUT this doesn't mean expanded intercultural competence of domestic students.
- **Short-term Study Abroad** – This rapidly expanding segment of US study abroad – except for intensive language study abroad - virtually rules out second language components.
- **The Next 300,000 Studying Abroad (IIE Generation Study Abroad)** - The next cohort toward IIE's goal – as largely first generation college students - will not bring the same cultural resources and preparation as the first 300,000.
- **Foreign Language Study Declining in US** – Foreign language study was down 6.7% from 2009 to 2013, according to a recent MLA survey.



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