

The development of intercultural competency: A structured approach for practical classroom application

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The Intercultural Competency (ICC) Program is a structured program that has been developed at the University of Adelaide's English Language Centre (ELC) to create opportunities for students to connect in a global context. This stand-alone and easily transferable program aims to create meaningful opportunities for mixed-language-ability learners to come together and develop their intercultural competency skills towards becoming global citizens. This paper will illustrate practical ways to create opportunities for concrete experiences in the classroom for the development of these skills and will demonstrate how this has been achieved at the University of Adelaide's ELC. The curriculum framework, lesson plans, program logistics and data from students' and teachers' experiences of this program will be discussed.

Introduction

Suárez-Orozco & Sattin (2007) identified that effective interaction with people and career advancement incorporates more than just fluency in a language or culture. Specific skills are needed, such as innovation, higher-order cognitive skills, and sophisticated communication and collaboration skills. It is the development of these skills which gives students the strategies and tools to connect globally and have the capacity to become global citizens. The Intercultural Competency (ICC) Program focuses on the development of these specific skills, and how they relate to our students enrolled in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS).

Background

Regular contact with diversity does not necessarily produce intercultural understanding in students, faculty and staff. Rather, intercultural understanding is the product of intent and design.

Habacon (2014)

Global citizenship is not a new concept. In fact, many universities around Australia and the world cite global citizenship in their strategic goals and some have even introduced ‘Global Citizenship Programs’. The focus of our ICC program is to help students develop the awareness, knowledge, skills and values needed to become global citizens. However, just knowledge of intercultural understanding or regular contact with other cultural groups does not necessarily lead to intercultural competence (J. Bennett, 2011; Deardorff, 2009; Habacon, 2014), which is needed for global citizenship. To make the development of ICC skills more concrete, and as exposure to diversity in and out of the classroom is not always enough, we addressed this gap and area of student need by designing an organised, intentional program at our ELC. The ICC program and curriculum framework we have developed has been aligned not only with ICC skills development, but also with institutional graduate attributes and the strategic direction of our university. The aim is to give our ELICOS students structured opportunities to develop a set of skills for operating successfully in diverse cultural environments. For these students, language is necessary to support the development of intercultural competence and is a vehicle through which to understand and discuss other perspectives. The explicit focus of this program is to develop ICC skills by integrating sociolinguistic and discourse competency, as well as vocabulary and language development.

Rationale

According to Safiah and Sri (2010), intercultural skills are fundamental for success in the 21st century, within both university and workplace environments. More companies than ever before are recognising the benefits of multilingual and culturally literate employees (Suárez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007). Therefore, students need to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills to maximise the opportunities and challenges they might face in the future. Students with well-developed intercultural competency will be able to enter into new cultural settings and immediately understand what is happening and why, confidently interact with people, and engage in the right actions (Gurin et al., 2002).

The preparation of graduates to be interculturally competent citizens, and to be able to participate in workplaces across the globe is one of the primary aims of the Australian university sector’s goal of internationalisation (Leask, 2015). This is further highlighted by the University of Adelaide’s Academic Board Strategic Plan (2019) which clearly states the need for ‘. . . the development of our students as global citizens with aspirations to experience, participate in, and influence, the global community.’

Although global citizenship is essential for our 21st century ELICOS learners and is

embedded in our institution's strategic direction and graduate attributes, we found it was not identified in any of our English Language Centre program objectives or learning outcomes. Historically, cross-class activities tried to fulfil these university-level objectives; however, they focused mainly on general communication and were not part of the formal curriculum or aligned to program objectives and outcomes. To bridge this gap, we decided to embed opportunities that supported students' development of ICC skills and cultural intelligence (Earley et al., 2006) towards becoming global citizens. The main objectives of the program were to focus on ICC skills at the ELC prior to entering university and to develop the students' capacity to work within a 'borderless' world – without reliance on geographical location – in which there are a variety of perspectives, thus increasing their capabilities for future studies and employability.

Program structure

Our ICC Program is now embedded across all courses at the ELC, integrating other core macro skills including vocabulary and language development. It involves all our students, regardless of level, working together on a common task. It provides structured opportunities to develop ICC by negotiating within varieties of English and building collegial networks through skills development, developing communication across cultures and increasing awareness of global perspectives.

The program is designed to be easily implemented and transferable to academic or non-academic groups and is not reliant on the cultures within the groups. A bank of activities aligned to the specific outcomes of the curriculum, with associated detailed lesson plans, has been developed to ensure the sustainability and self-sufficiency of the program.

ICC activities occur once in every five-week teaching cycle across the ELC. In order to facilitate the implementation of the program, at the start of each cycle, a schedule, lesson plan, tasks and additional resources are sent to all teachers. This teaching schedule is essential to the success of the program. Teachers are placed with other teachers and are given suggested days to conduct the activity. When organising the schedule, the core timetable for all classes is considered to ensure days are allocated that are free from any other activities, such as assessments.

By providing this level of detail prior to cycle commencement, it has been found that it is easier for teachers to schedule the activity into an otherwise busy timetable. It also has the additional benefit of not being an activity that gets left until the last week, which could possibly negate any immediate benefit the students may get out of the activity in transferring skills gained to the current ELICOS classroom.

Curriculum framework

In developing the framework for this curriculum, a developmental model of intercultural competence was considered for understanding the stages of intercultural competence. Based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Figure 1), created by M. J. Bennett (1986, 1993, 2004, 2013), ICC competence evolves over time, from relatively ethnocentric understandings of other cultures to a more comprehensive ethno-relative appreciation. The DMIS identifies that people move through six stages in their acquisition of intercultural competence, from a monocultural worldview to an integration of own and other cultural worldviews. As explained by Hammer et al. (2003), ‘the underlying assumption of the model is that as one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one’s potential competence in intercultural relations increases’ (p. 423).

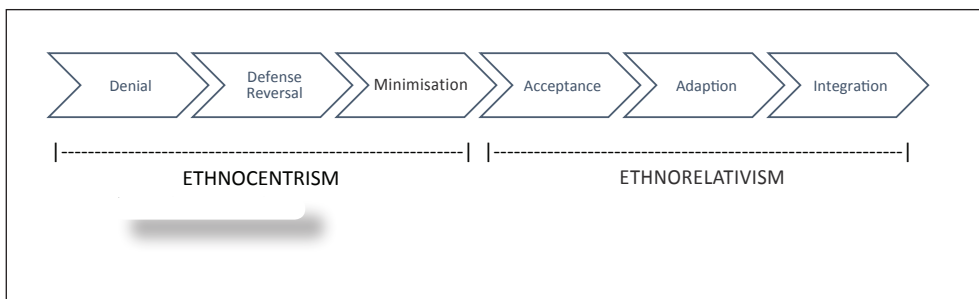


Figure 1: Developmental Intercultural Competence Model (M. J. Bennett 1986, 1993, 2004, 2013)

The curriculum framework was created based on a wide range of literature on learning outcomes and intercultural competency models (J. Bennett, 2011; Bloom, 1956; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006, 2009; Freeman et al., 2009; Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998; Leask, 2008; Oxfam, 2015). Based on this research, Deardorff’s Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2009) was chosen as the framework for this program as the main aims of the program are the development of ICC skills, which worked well when we developed all the aspects of the program, from the framework to the curriculum document and the activities themselves. The model highlights that how one acquires the knowledge, skills and understanding is as important as the acquisition of aspects of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009). Sociolinguistic discourse and linguistic awareness were added to the model, highlighting the interconnectedness of language and ICC skills and providing linguistic support to enable our students to fully participate in the ICC experience.

This model identifies external and internal desired outcomes, as well as three domains (see Figure 2). The three domains are ‘Knowledge and Understanding’, ‘Skills’ and

‘Values and Attitudes’. While no domain is predominant or sufficient, and students are able to move between the domains, the process of attaining a level of ICC begins with the development of requisite values and attitudes. The degree of ICC competence attained through this process is dependent on the degree of knowledge, understanding and skills reached throughout. The desired outcomes may be evident in varying degrees. The internal outcomes may not be visible, but refer to an individual who, on reflection, feels they have learned to be flexible, empathetic and have the ability to adapt to an ethno-relative perspective. The external outcomes refer to visible changes in behaviour and communication style. This is an ongoing process of development and improvement, emphasising the role that lifelong learning has in the acquisition of intercultural competency skills.

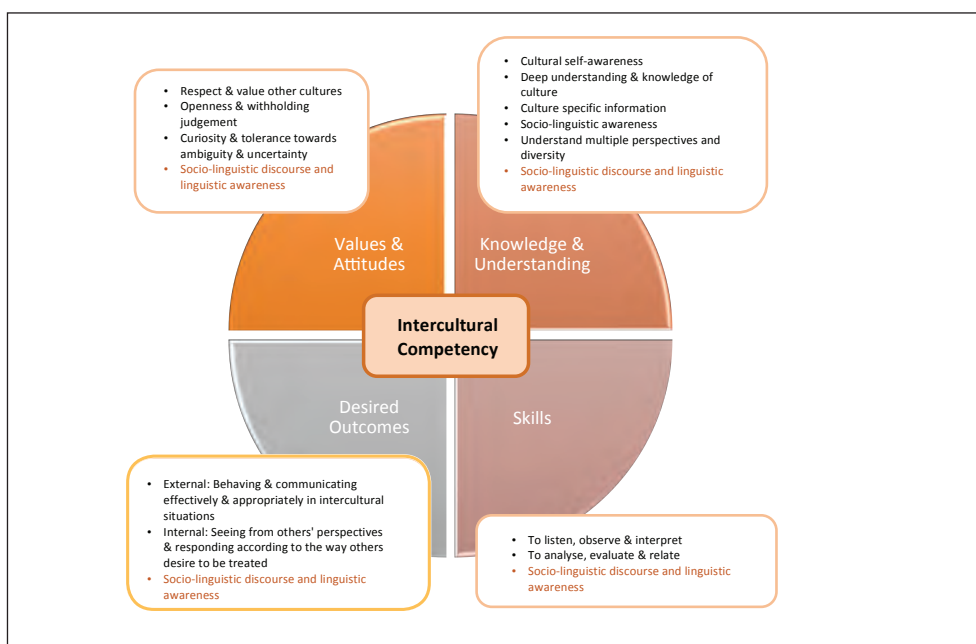


Figure 2: Model for Intercultural Competency Development (adapted from Deardorff, 2009)

Within these domains, there are three levels of development (Ridings et al., 2008): ‘Awareness Raising’, ‘Understanding’ and ‘Autonomy’. Each task within the curriculum provides support for each level of development, thus providing each student with a differentiated entry point to the task and identified skills development. This assisted in selecting and evaluating ‘fit for purpose’ activities that are clearly aligned to the overall domains and the key outcomes to be achieved.

Figure 3 shows a sample section of the curriculum document. The domain is ‘Knowledge and Understanding’; the main elements within this domain include

‘Globalisation and Interdependence’, ‘Identity and Diversity’, and ‘Peace and Conflict’ Within these elements, there are specific outcomes, such as 2.22 ‘Understanding the importance of language, beliefs and values in cultural identities’. These are highlighted in Figure 3.

Each task or activity chosen is aligned with the domains and the learning outcomes.

Domain: Knowledge and understanding (KU)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural self-awareness • Deep understanding and knowledge of culture • Culture-specific information • Socio-linguistic awareness • Understand multiple perspectives and diversity • Socio-linguistic, discourse and linguistic awareness 			
Elements:	Levels of Development		
	Awareness Raising	Understanding	Autonomy
1. Globalisation and interdependence	1.1 Awareness of links with other places (e.g. through food)	1.2 Comparing similarities and differences between places in various parts of the world, including own setting	1.31 Evaluating differences in power relations within and between cultures 1.32 Distinguishing connections and interdependencies between global and local issues
2. Identity and diversity	2.11 Identifying what contributes to self-identity and belonging 2.12 Describing similarities and differences between self and others	2.21 Describing the impacts of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination and how to challenge these 2.22 Understanding the importance of language, beliefs and values in cultural identities	2.11 Evaluating the role of language in prejudice, discrimination and exclusion 2.12 Relating the multi-faceted and flexible nature of identity to ones' own context
3. Peace and conflict	3.1 Awareness that our actions have consequences	3.2 Developing strategies for managing, resolving and preventing conflict	3.3 Constructing creative and positive outcomes of conflict

Figure 3: Sample section from the ELC ICC curriculum

By formalising the curriculum, using research and this clear alignment to skills development and institutional goals, the learning experiences and outcomes are not only more clearly defined, but there are also other additional benefits:

- a formalised and structured program;
- clear rationales, aims and objectives for teachers;

- a wider understanding of the program’s purpose and relationship to the institution’s goals;
- transparent, meaningful, ‘fit-for-purpose’ tasks;
- easier implementation and management for teachers because everything is prepared for them;
- sustainability;
- a bank of tasks; and
- recognition by management.

Lesson plans

The lesson plans have been developed to provide clear alignment with the curriculum framework and specific outcomes, both in relation to ICC skills and language outcomes. Activities include a range of mini case studies, roleplays, simulations, critical incidents, reflections and small group discussions which form the core of the program. Our aim was to provide the teachers with a clear rationale for each task and how it connects to the program curriculum.

Each lesson plan includes the purpose and aim of the activity, as well as a suggested procedure which highlights how the activities reflect the different stages of learning outlined in the curriculum; from ‘Awareness’ to ‘Understanding’ to ‘Learner Autonomy’. A sample lesson plan ‘Towards Intercultural Competency for Global Citizenship’ (Appendix) shows this in more detail.

Our lesson plans also provide identification and suggestions for any scaffolding needed to develop the language and skills that may be required for our ELICOS students to successfully participate in the task, further highlighting the interconnectedness of ‘language education and intercultural communication’ (Fantini, 1997).

We found that teachers often use these lesson plans as a starting point, with many integrating the task and language development with work that is currently being delivered in the classroom. This occurs either by an individual class prior to the task or as an extension activity post-task. Often the teachers of lower-level classes will work on vocabulary and language surrounding the task, assisting the students in addressing the language outcomes prior to the activity taking place. This also provides the students with the confidence to participate actively in the task with classes of other levels. Teachers also extend and exploit the activity and the topic; examples of this include debates, essay writing in academic English classes, and topics for reflective blogs or journals.

Program evaluation

Data is collected through anonymous paper-based teacher and student evaluations and reflections. This enables us to continuously improve, adjust and modify the program as we progress. This also allows us to capture the student voice and gain a deeper understanding of their experience. As a result, the data has reinforced our objectives and demonstrates that students highly value the program.

In 2016, at the initial stages of the program, students were asked to complete a self-evaluation of the ICC skills they felt they had developed as a result of the program in order to gain an understanding of the program's impact. A sample data collection from 354 student respondents at that time illustrated that 99% of students enjoyed the activities and considered the program important for their English language development. Further analysis of the reasons highlighted two main themes: the opportunity to practise listening and speaking skills, and speaking with people of different cultural backgrounds. Within the latter theme, students identified that the program assisted them in:

- broadening their horizons;
- understanding different cultures and different thinking;
- knowing how behaviour is shaped by culture;
- increasing confidence in interacting between cultures;
- having confidence to speak with people from different cultures;
- acceptance of difference;
- improved communication skills; and
- feeling comfortable in the classroom.

Student responses also indicated that 84% would like the program to be conducted more often than the scheduled five-weekly activity, with 42.7% preferring weekly and 41.5% preferring fortnightly.

Based on the findings of a review conducted in 2018, the validity of the self-evaluation reflective tool came into question. As a result, a retrospective post-then-pre-design tool was developed to gain a deeper understanding of students' self-reported perceptions of their development of ICC skills through the program.

The retrospective post-then-pre-design tool asks students to rate their perceptions of their development of ICC skills twice: now as a result of the program, and reflecting back on the same aspects before participating in the program.

Asking students to reflect on both these aspects at the same time means that they may have a better understanding of how the program content has assisted in the development of their ICC skills, as well as providing an indication of the changes in their attitudes and values. This tool is less intrusive and avoids pre-test sensitivity and bias that may occur due to the students over- or under-estimating their skills (Howard, 1980; Lam & Bengo, 2003).

The Self-Evaluation Questionnaire includes 20 reflective questions. For each one, students provide 2 responses. First, in the column labelled ‘Now: after the ICC Program’, they tick the box that best describes them at that point. Then, in the shaded column labelled ‘Before the ICC Program’, they tick the box that described them before this program. Teachers pre-teach vocab and scaffold this questionnaire when necessary, depending on the language level of the students. The following table shows a sample of the type of questions used:

Table 1
Sample Questions (5/20) from Student Self-Evaluation Questionnaire

	Now: after the ICC Program			Before the ICC Program		
	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.						
I am interested in learning about different cultures.						
When I meet people from different cultures, I compare how my culture is similar to their culture.						
Being around people from different cultures makes me feel uncomfortable.						
I learn a lot when I interact with people from other cultures.						

Teacher feedback is also collected through an Evaluation and Feedback Questionnaire distributed at the end of each 20-week program. The purpose of this feedback is to gather invaluable ‘front line’ advice on what worked well, feedback on activities and tasks, ideas for extension activities and what the needs are for further development. With the formalisation of the program, curriculum framework and clear rationale, we have had teacher ‘buy-in’ and their feedback has indicated that the lesson plans, materials and resources are much appreciated and have now become part of the

culture of the organisation, and that they have gained invaluable insight into the essential role of ICC development in language teaching.

CONCLUSION

We believe that our graduates now leave our centre with an education that has supported not only their language and skills development, but their intercultural competency skills development. The curriculum framework and fit-for-purpose activities are aligned to course outcomes and are meaningful to students, teachers and management. This program is systematically embedded within theory-grounded curriculum design and can be incorporated into programs as part of a transformative pedagogy for all students to enhance their future success. It is sustainable and transparent with clear aims and objectives and could be easily adopted in other contexts (language centres or schools, training centres, and primary, secondary or tertiary sectors). All of our language courses have now formally included the development of intercultural competency in their core course objectives and outcomes which has addressed the gap in student needs initially identified in our centre. In conclusion, we have observed a new vibe in our centre and there is a noticeable new camaraderie amongst the different student cohorts, showing a cultural shift in understanding and communicating with others.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Towards Intercultural Competency for Global Citizenship	
Awareness of Intercultural Competency	
About the Activity	This activity gives learners the opportunity to show an awareness of intercultural matters and reflect on their own level of cultural sensitivity. It also gives learners the chance to explore different attitudes towards intercultural communication and reflect on ways they have become more competent interculturally.
Aim/s	Intercultural Competency Skills Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To develop an appreciation of multi-faceted and flexible nature of personal identity• To evaluate experiences, learning and feedback and use it to inform future learning, thinking and action• To adapt behaviour to new cultural environments• To listen to, reflect on and evaluate another person's point of view and respond appropriately• To identify and address the challenges of intercultural communication• To show sensitivity to diverse perspectives and cultural norms when managing conflict• To integrate new or revised perspectives into own learning, thinking and actions Language Skills Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To learn / practise vocabulary related to intercultural communication• To learn / practise making suggestions• To learn / practise negotiating

<p>Suggested Procedure</p>	<p>Awareness activities</p> <p>1. In small groups, ask students to brainstorm what Intercultural Communication is and what it involves. Use Worksheet 1 to assist with this activity.</p> <p>This should be followed up with whole class feedback to highlight the aims of the activity to the students and to see how much agreement can be found. You might establish that complete agreement on this subject is rare.</p> <p>2. Worksheet 2 is an introduction to some common attitudes. You may need to check the vocabulary with your students to ensure task is clear. Words that may be problematic include: <i>gestures</i>, <i>explicit</i> and <i>assume</i>.</p> <p>Organise mixed pairs (one student from each class); ask them to discuss each statement and try to come to some agreement about which version is most applicable. If they decide not to agree, that is fine, but their discussion should centre on reasons for the opposing versions. It would be a good idea to do an example.</p> <p>One of the statements refers to ‘being the same deep down’. The meaning of <i>deep down</i> is crucial; at a very deep level, everybody is ‘human’, at a higher level, everybody is clearly different. So, discussion should be about the issue of the level at which differences become significant and how one might recognise them.</p> <p>Developing Understanding</p> <p>3. Students should now pick three or more statements from the worksheet which they consider important. They may choose to modify these statements to make them true for them.</p> <p>Feedback – each pair joins with another pair and shares their responses.</p> <p>Facilitating Learner Autonomy</p> <p>4. Bring the group together. Ask the group to think about people they know or have met with different levels of cultural sensitivity. Ask students to discuss in pairs if they have any experience with cultural insensitivity or sensitivity (positive and negative).</p> <p>5. Introduce the final task as a way to define a progression in attitudes towards other cultures. In pairs, students consider the stages in Worksheet 3, and place them in an order that is logical for them, starting with a ‘mono-cultural approach’ and finishing with ‘becoming enthusiastic about cultural variety’.</p> <p>6. Feedback – there is no fixed answer, although a suggestion is given below. Students should be encouraged to consider different options and in feedback consider reasons for each stage.</p>
<p>Possible problems and solutions</p>	<p>Depending on the level of your class you may need to do some vocabulary or language work with them before they do the task. See the ‘Aims: Language Skills Development’ for an outline of the language that will be needed for this task.</p> <p>The final activity could be followed up in individual classes.</p>
<p>Additional Resources</p>	<p>See the Developmental Model for Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) for a more in-depth analysis of the progression.</p>
<p>Extension Activities</p>	<p>Students could reflect on their own personal Intercultural Competence development during their time in Australia and try to place themselves on the scale and post to the class blog. They could also discuss ways of developing progress along the scale. If time, this could also be done in class.</p>