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Intercultural Competence Development for Open and Distance Learning

Introduction

In 2015 there were 4.5 million international students globally. This is an increase of 150% since the year 2000. The majority of these students are studying in OECD countries like the USA, Canada, England and Australia but many “non-traditional” countries are attracting international students including Japan (300,000) and Malaysia (250,000). According to The Economist these numbers are expected to grow to “7m-8m by 2025, driven by population and income growth in developing countries where local provision is poor” (Economist, 2016). It should be noted that these numbers only include students who physically cross international borders to study and so likely miss many international open and distance learning students. Hard data on ODL students crossing international borders is hard to find, however, in 2013, the number of students taking online courses in the United States from outside the US was 0.2% of the total number of online students (US Department of Education, 2014), which is a small number but the growth predictions are clear. In sub-Saharan Africa alone the post-secondary sector is projected to double by 2045 to 400 million students (Oxford University, 2015, p. 15). As has been noted earlier by authors including Sir John Daniel, it is not likely that this growth can be accommodated by traditional bricks and mortar institutions (Daniel, 1996). Clearly this influx of international students presents financial opportunities for all parties as well as other educational and cultural opportunities. However, it also presents many challenges in terms of marketing to and meeting the educational, personal and professional needs of international students as well as the staff and faculty that work with them.

On the education side, all of these challenges mean that educators are now teaching increasingly culturally diverse student populations. For open and distance learning mediated through technology, research has shown that cultural differences persist in the online learning environment and may have negative effects on learning (Uzuner, 2009; Liu, Liu, Lee & Magjuka, 2010). Many researchers and practitioners have called for interculturalization and internationalization of teaching that involves faculty and students gaining intercultural awareness and intercultural competence to tackle the challenges (Leask, 2013; Teeken, 2003). The hope is that such a process of internationalization and interculturalization will lead to culturally inclusive instructional design and teaching. This paper explores, from a practical standpoint, ways intercultural competence can be incorporated into open and distance learning. This is necessary because many of the good practices regarding intercultural competence development in the literature have focused on traditional face-to-face programs. However, open and distance learning, by its nature, is a cross cultural endeavour with an added complexity of technology-mediated human interaction. Intercultural competence in this context is just as important as the face-to-face counterparts.

We will further provide a framework to examine the issue and make recommendations for meeting some of the challenges in this area. In short, we advocate a deep and experiential approach to intercultural competence development for faculty and students at open and distance learning institutions.

Definitions of Open and Distance Learning

Open and distance learning (ODL) is one of those terms, like science, that people recognise when they see it but are often at pains to actually define it. ODL has been defined as an educational process that meets the multiple needs of students using systematic course design and learner support (O'Rourke, 2009). It has also been defined using more of a knowledge exchange approach where it means the exchange of information either online or face to face,

synchronously or asynchronously (DeBeer, 2010). What most definitions of ODL have in common is the idea that, at its heart, ODL is about meeting people's learning needs where they are at. This includes the systemic design of curriculum, student support and the development of academic activities both inside and outside of the "classroom" (Msweli, 2012). There are two problems with these definitions. The first is that, in our view, they don't make a strong enough distinction between what is ODL and, simply, what is good learning. The other problem is that much of the current literature around ODL seems to use the term as a catchall term to describe anything beyond traditional classroom study.

Originally open learning and distance learning were terms that described completely different phenomenon. Distance learning was simply "learning at a distance" where instructor and students were separated by time and/or geography. This separation is often mediated using one or more technologies. Open learning could include distance learning modalities but it was really more about the supportive approach institutions took towards students who might not meet the traditional criteria for learning (Aucoin, 2013). So this included programs that would encourage and support learners who have the capacity for learning but might not meet the traditional requirements for institutionalised learning – especially in post-secondary institutions. Examples of open learning approaches have included using technology (as in distance learning) but also programs like prior-learning assessments rather than a focus on high school grades for entrance into universities, providing extra supports for students who are not traditional learners like counselling and even day care services for single parents and flexible scheduling for people working full time. What open and distance learning do have in common is a belief that learning should be available to all people regardless of their formal (and some would argue artificial) qualifications, geography and schedules.

In the era of wider access through technologies and globalization, open and distance learning in more contemporary terms, becomes a cross-cultural endeavour as many programs cross national and cultural boundaries to reach students. This may involve students and faculty mobility but in many cases it means the physical border crossing is not necessary, yet the interaction has been transmitted across borders via technologies. In other words, internationalization and interculturalization is happening without physical mobility. Jane Knight's definition captures the all-encompassing features of internationalization as she stated internationalization is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight 2003, p.2). The relationship between ODL and internationalization is articulated by Msweli in that "ODL [is] a system and internationalization [is] a process" (Msweli, 2012). This metaphor sets the stage for locating intercultural competence development in an internationalized curriculum, as well as the teaching and learning processes that take place at a distance and/or via technologies. In other words, intercultural competence development for faculty and students of ODL is a concrete step towards integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of ODL programming.

Definition of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence as a concept has evolved over time. It is generally conceived as one's ability to function and communicate effectively in a cross-cultural setting. Further examination of such abilities led to various models of intercultural competence. Deardorff (2009) summarized many of these models that describe intercultural competence in detail, such as composition models (attitudes, skills and knowledge as three main components), co-orientation models (components and processes are present simultaneously with emphasis on outcomes on the components), development models (continuum of progression from less intercultural to more intercultural), and adaptation models (components and processes are present with emphasis on

processes). Underlying these different models is a definition that depicts intercultural competence as ones' ability to act effectively in a cross-cultural settings with sensitivity to different cultural systems and ways of thinking, and with appropriate skills to develop and manage relationships with cultural others (Deardorff, 2009; Gudykunst, 2004). The goal is to better understand one's own cultural positioning and be able to adapt and integrate differences.

"Adaptation" and "integration" are terms from the theoretical framework proposed by interculturalist Milton Bennett in the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993). The theory stipulates that one moves from an ethno-centric view when making judgements based on his/her own cultural frame of reference, to ethno-relative views when using different cultural frames of reference to form judgements and guide behaviours. The argument is that one can "become" intercultural, advancing from one stage of development to another; and that becoming interculturally competent means reaching adaptation and integration stage.

Intercultural competence can also be viewed as having certain skills, knowledge and attitudes manifested as internal and external outcomes (Deardorff, 2006). For example, internal outcomes means an interculturally competence person can shift his/her frame of reference when making a judgement. This person is also flexible and empathetic towards others. Regarding external outcomes, the behavioural aspect is emphasized. An interculturally competent person can act and behave in a culturally appropriate manner given a particular situation. This model also takes into account the developmental process that a person can learn and grow over time. Both Bennett and Deardorff's models highlight the idea of growth. Therefore, there is the notion that intercultural competence involves intentional learning and building the capability to integrate differences and create new synergy between multiple cultures (Byram, 2012).

Framework for Intercultural Competence in Open and Distance Learning

When it comes to internationalization in ODL, the above-mentioned definitions of intercultural competence need to be re-contextualized. We propose that two groups of stakeholders, namely students and faculty, are the key players and so their intercultural competence development needs to be examined more closely.

Students

Intercultural competence in ODL has less a focus on the actual encounter or content and more on how we communicate and interact in a technologically-mediated space. Instead of only discussing a person's ability, we need to turn our attention to the dialogue between people and the spaces between us. By focussing on the intercultural spaces between us we give ourselves room to grow.

For example, in a typical graduate course that we teach on international relations, there are students from the United States, China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Senegal, France, Mexico and Canada as well as Canadian First Nations. Clearly, we cannot speak to all cultures that exist in that class. Even if this were the goal of the course there are ethical issues associated with a middle aged Francophone (one of the author's background) trying to tell the stories of diverse cultures. How can we ethically tell other people's stories and try to describe what it means to be of a different culture, gender or age? It is impossible to focus on a given culture without favouring or disfavouring one or more cultures. The solution we have found is to create classroom "spaces" where no one has a cultural advantage. This is akin to not focussing on the individuals but the spaces between individuals and let the learners fill in the spaces. The hope

here is that the learners will actually create a new culture (Lee, 200). This is particularly exciting in online learning environments that use new and social medias where it has already been established that new cultures are often created in these virtual environments (Shuter, 2016, p. 230).

Creating a new online class culture also means creating a wide-variety of activities where learners can find their own comfort zones and authentic voices. These activities need to move beyond the typical “lecture-discuss” method so often employed in western classrooms. In online learning this pedagogy gets translated to Power Point or video, followed by online discussion, and perhaps a summary PowerPoint and video. In other words, the traditional model has been to give students content, have some discussion, and then follow up with some sort of assessment. This pedagogical model is limited and does not take into account the various cultural ways of learning used by a diverse student body. The bigger question is: if we only ask students to conform to a western way of teaching and learning, are we capitalizing on student cultural knowledge and educating global citizens? Are we, in fact, in danger of a sort of educational neo-colonialism?

Particular to ODL is the use of technology as an essential tool for communication and learning. To begin, faculty need to provide a wide-variety of opportunities and media for interaction. Students will blossom in some environments and fail in others. This is sometimes as simple as allowing students to email questions to the instructor rather than using only online forums in a learning management system, or employing blogs, text, visuals like concept maps or videos, as a reflection tool to allow students to demonstrate learning in different ways. When these tools are used, students need to be encouraged to find their authentic voices and share their cultures. They need to actively engage in exchanging perspectives, create the new culture by using technologies and realize their intercultural competence as an outcome of the learning process.

Faculty

Faculty’s intercultural competence translates into two main responsibilities: curriculum development and teaching/facilitation. Specifically, faculty should consider various indicators of intercultural competence within their own teaching. Based on Deardorff’s (2011) model, we suggest that intercultural competence can be mapped to teaching processes in ODL context by asking the following questions:

Attitude

- Am I open to learn about students’ different backgrounds?
- Do I make quick assumptions about a student or do I withhold judgement while I get to know a student better or explore all facets of a situation?
- Am I able to use technologies effectively to overcome communication barriers that may lead to quick assumptions and inaccurate judgement?

Knowledge

- Can I describe my own cultural conditioning? For example, what cultural values affect how I behave and communicate with others?
- How would I describe my students’ worldviews? How might these differ from mine?

Skills

- Do I provide a safe and supportive environment for all learners?
- Do I encourage students to bring their cultural knowledge and assets into the course?

- Do I engage in active reflection on my interaction with those from different cultural backgrounds?
- How do I support students in becoming more sensitive to cultural differences and develop culturally inclusive communication styles in the technology-mediated environment?

Internal Outcomes

- Am I able to adapt my behaviour and communication styles, in a technology-mediated environment, to accommodate students from different culturally conditioned communication styles?
- Am I able to be flexible when responding to students' learning needs, seeking to understand those needs from their cultural perspectives?

External Outcomes

- How culturally appropriate have I been in my interactions with students?
- Was I able to meet my goal of being culturally inclusive? How will I continue to meet this goal?

In terms of curriculum development, Bond (2003) offered three categories of actions to make curriculum content more international and intercultural. We use her categories and propose the following questions as considerations. Here, we'd like to emphasize the developmental nature of intercultural competence. Positive and well-articulated answers to these questions indicate faculty's high level of intercultural competence, but at the same time, engaging in this process of internationalization will, in fact, further enhance faculty's intercultural competence.

Add-on approach

- To which units/lessons can I add discussion about an international or intercultural issue?
- What assignments can be added to include intercultural perspectives?

Infusion

- What intercultural learning outcomes should be designed into lessons and assignments?
- What readings can I include that will provide diverse worldviews?
- How can I incorporate students' cultural knowledge as an asset in the learning of the course content?
- How can I incorporate media and technology to capitalise on intercultural opportunities?
- What assessment criteria am I using that views cultural differences as an advantage rather than a deficiency?

Transformation

- How do I encourage critical thinking, using different worldviews and paradigms?
- What culturally comparative perspectives can I include in my research, which will then inform my teaching?
- How can I engage my students in knowledge construction that utilizes diverse perspectives?
- How can achieving the course outcomes enable students to work and live in the host country, in their home country or globally?

Intercultural Competence Development

Given the need for students and faculty to develop intercultural competence by focusing on the spaces in between, and by continuously engaging in the process of internationalization with regards to teaching/facilitation and curriculum development, what can we do to enable such development to provide the necessary supports, especially within the ODL context? The table below summarizes the desired outcomes and methods for ODL institutions to embark on intercultural competence development for students and faculty.

	Student	Faculty/facilitator
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1: Effective Intercultural Communication • Level 2: Discipline-specific intercultural competence • Level 3: Workplace-related intercultural competence, e.g. working in intercultural teams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1: Effective Intercultural Communication • Level 2: Discipline-specific intercultural competence • Level 3: Intercultural competence applied to curriculum design and teaching • Level 4: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning – intercultural issues in discipline and/or ODL
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops or online modules designed to raise awareness about cultural differences • Learning activities designed to foster intercultural competence development • Counselling and coaching support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops or online modules designed to raise awareness about cultural differences • Workshops designed to help faculty to re-design their courses or programs • Initiatives to provide in-service mentoring and community of practice • Resources to support research in intercultural issues

Table 1: Framework for Intercultural Competence Development in Open and Distance Learning

This framework outlines the different levels of outcomes for students and faculty respectively, and includes some potential methods to work towards achieving those outcomes. For students, the most basic level is an understanding of cultural differences and how to communicate effectively across cultures, including the online class culture. The second level will require students to investigate different perspectives embedded in the disciplinary knowledge. To draw an example from another course we teach, achieving this moderate level of intercultural competence students are able to make and understand statements like “this is how Human Resources policy is implemented in Canada, but this may or may not work in India (insert another country/culture here), and this is why”. At the third level, students are able to apply their knowledge and skills in their workplace/professional practice. Their ability to work with cultural differences and create an online class culture should be transferable to their workplace. For

example, they may need to deal with intercultural communication issues in teamwork or leadership contexts, and then use comparative perspectives they gained in Level 2 to solve problems. Taking the previous example to this 3rd level, students will be able to design and implement a Human Resources policy for a company that operates in both Canada and India.

For faculty there are four levels. The first level is similar to the students' outcome. An awareness and skills in becoming a better intercultural communicator is the focus. The second level is specific to the discipline. Again, similar to students, at this level, faculty will be able to teach a concept and offer comparative perspectives. It is worth noting here that the point is not that faculty need to know all the cultures in the world and offer comparisons. This is simply not practical. However, it is possible for the faculty to offer comparison with a culture other than his/her own, and then model the kind of critical thinking and analysis required to do such work so the students can learn how to do the same analysis, using their own cultural knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, faculty's intercultural competence needs to be applied in curriculum development and teaching/facilitation. Within our framework, this is a Level 3 outcome. This goes beyond the conventional definition of intercultural competence and in the ODL context, curriculum development utilize the systematic instructional design, which is an advantage in ODL when it comes to internationalization. It is an object, a concrete area, for further work. When this level is achieved, faculty can effectively employ culturally inclusive teaching in ODL and thus help students to more easily achieve their own Level 2 and 3 outcomes.

For faculty who have a mandate in research, the Level 4 outcome is applicable. They become the contributors to our collective knowledge about good intercultural practice in ODL. The fourth level for faculty incorporates the scholarship of teaching and learning which is critical for faculty who need or want to use their teaching as part of their research as well as the tenure and promotion process. The philosophy behind this approach is to not separate one's teaching and research but to actually make their teaching and research synonymous. At this level faculty will incorporate intercultural competence into their research and teaching portfolios. Our experience has been that many tenure and promotion committees are open to this idea of scholarship as it still meets the research and publication needs of the school.

Challenges and Outlook

In open and distance learning institutions the desire to create globalised citizens in our students, faculty and staff is often a stated goal at the school level (See for example UBC, 2016; RRU, 2016; Oxford, 2016) and these goals percolate through most program and course offerings. Our experience has shown that this process cannot be an add-on. Rather it must be part of a systemic rethinking at the institutional level in much the same way that information technology has become a systemic part of higher education.

The question then becomes how can we ensure that we are being intercultural in terms of intercultural competence development in the core function of delivering ODL programming? Our experience has shown that a multi-pronged approach is needed. This approach can work in any organisation concerned with intercultural issues but came from our work primarily at post-secondary institutions. The approach needs to include the following:

- Learning design/curriculum
- Communication
- Student support
- Technology
- Marketing
- Social and cultural development at the individual and community level

These issues further need to be examined at all levels of the institution including the faculty and student levels. For example, in our programming at the student-level, intercultural

competence needs to be at the heart of pedagogy. This includes, as examples, pre-program orientations as well as online modules actually embedded in the content. That is to say that creating intercultural and global citizens needs to be a systematic approach beginning before the students begin their studies and being infused within each course of their programs. Simply, creating intercultural citizens must be a stated and measured goal at the school, department/program and course level in much the same way goals like good writing, reading, critical thinking and teamwork might be infused throughout a school curriculum. On the faculty/facilitator side, intercultural competence development would include:

- Workshops
- In-service mentoring
- Research
- Communities of practice/dissemination
- Scholarship of teaching and learning

These strategies aim at making intercultural competence an explicit outcome and sustainable effort in the long run so ODL will embody culturally inclusive practices in the process of internationalization.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our goal in this paper was to make the argument that intercultural competence and communication is lacking in higher education generally and open and distance learning in particular. We have mostly made an economic and political argument in this paper that by not embracing intercultural notions of communication and pedagogy we are doing a disservice to our students, our institutions and our communities. That by not making intercultural communication a core part of our planning pedagogy (as with technology infrastructure) we are at risk of alienating and abandoning the very stakeholders we are hoping to attract and serve. However, at its heart we believe that institutions and faculty should embrace intercultural competence as a fundamental part of education because it is the right thing to do in order to avoid the negative consequences of educational neo-liberalism and pedagogical imperialism (Goodfellow et al, 2006). If we can use intercultural competence to open learning spaces for students and help them to be globalised citizens then that is the right thing to do and we should be doing this. And so we call on faculty to explore these ideas among themselves as well as with their other stakeholders.

In order to make intercultural competence more practical, we have put together a framework as well as specific development workshops that ODL institutions can use to develop internationalization strategies. Clearly these strategies will vary from institution to institution and even from department to department which is precisely why intercultural competence is so important. We recognise that the “culture” part of the intercultural competence equation means many things to different people. Culture, in this context, includes ethno-culture and language but also gender, age and what has come to be known as corporate or classroom culture. As educators we all recognise that our “classes” exhibit unique personalities and our experience has shown that a degree of intercultural competence can, in large measure, resolve many of the challenges associated with these intercultural mixes as well as capitalise on the opportunities they present.

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