

**DARE+: Approaching and Building Intercultural Competence**  
**By Darla K. Deardorff, Duke University, d.deardorff@duke.edu**

Intercultural competence is a lifelong process of learning how to communicate and behave appropriately and effectively with those from different backgrounds (including different ages, religions, gender, and so on).<sup>1</sup> Here appropriateness means that such communication and behavior meets others' expectations of what is acceptable while effectiveness means that the individual has met his/her goals in the interaction.

Given that this particular competence is a lifelong process, it is important to recognize three important considerations: 1) No one training, course, or experience (such as study abroad) can result in achievement of intercultural competence 2) Every individual is at a different place in his/her intercultural journey so a one-size-fits all approach to developing intercultural competence will not work and 3) Intercultural competence development, in the end, is more about the process than about achieving results. Thus, the focus should be much more on the process itself, including HOW one's intercultural competence continues to develop over time, which intercultural dimensions (of knowledge, skills or attitudes) are improving (and how and why), and which ones need to be strengthened further. In addition, a focus on process requires thoughtful reflection on what went well in an actual intercultural interaction, what could be improved, and what lessons were learned upon further reflection.

In designing intercultural activities and experiences, it is helpful to explore first some definitions of intercultural competence (see Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009, for over 20 different definitions), and prioritize which intercultural elements or dimensions should be addressed through an activity or experience. Even though no one training or activity can result in intercultural competence, a helpful starting point is often in having learners engage in activities that increase their own cultural self-awareness and identity. Research has shown that starting with one's own cultural identity is very helpful as a first step in improving interactions with others. Several of these types of identity activities can be found in resources such as IEREST (available online), INCA, Council of Europe's TASKS (available online) and books such as "Building Cultural Competence: Innovative Activities and Models" by Berardo and Deardorff (Stylus, 2012) and *52 activities for improving cross-cultural communication* by Stringer & Cassiday (Intercultural Press, 2009).

In including activities with students to work on interculturality, it is important to explore the following design considerations:

- 1) Meet learners where they are (what are their needs, recognizing these will vary throughout the group?)
- 2) Go beyond knowledge (to include skills and attitudes)

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that there are many different definitions and terms used to describe this concept. The first research-based definition and framework of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006) can be found here: [https://www.nafsa.org/ /File/ /theory\\_connections\\_intercultural\\_competence.pdf](https://www.nafsa.org/ /File/ /theory_connections_intercultural_competence.pdf)

- 3) Incorporate active learning
- 4) Involve the learners in the process (how will learners' needs and ideas be incorporated and addressed?)
- 5) Provide authentic intercultural engagement opportunities
- 6) Integrate assessment for/as learning and transformation
- 7) Go beyond a one-time intercultural activity/course/workshop
- 8) Build in critical reflection as crucial to intercultural development (Deardorff, 2015)

Moreover, here are some questions to answer when including intercultural activities/experiences:

- 1) How is intercultural competence being defined? Based on what?
- 2) Which elements or dimensions of intercultural competence need emphasis or strengthening?
- 3) What is the purpose of the activity and how does that align with learners' needs?
- 4) How does this activity meet learners where they are?
- 5) How does this activity help enhance learners' intercultural competence development?
- 6) How does this activity go beyond knowledge?
- 7) How does this activity include multiple perspectives
- 8) How does this activity avoid reinforcing stereotypes?
- 9) What kinds of active learning are incorporated into the intercultural learning experience?
- 10) How will learners be included in designing the activity?
- 11) Does the activity provide opportunities for authentic engagement?
- 12) Does the activity include critical reflection so that the learners can step back and reflect on their own learning in the activity?
- 13) Does this learning go beyond a one-time activity/course/workshop? In other words, how will learners continue to develop their intercultural competence?
- 14) How is assessment integrated into this learning activity (beyond a pre/post measure)?
- 15) How does this intercultural learning connect with other learner development?

Exploring these design considerations and questions will aid trainers in developing appropriate intercultural interventions that will help enhance learners' intercultural competence development.

#### References

Deardorff, D.K. (2006). The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence. *Journal of Studies in International Education*.

Deardorff, D.K. (2015). Exploring Intercultural Competence as a Key Competence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Presentation to DARE+. Groningen, The Netherlands.

Spitzberg, B. & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing intercultural communication competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 2-52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

