



Teaching Intercultural Communication Competence to Business Students

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Abstract. This article summarizes a pilot study conducted by a consortium of American universities as part of an effort to address problems of intercultural communication competence in business students. These intercultural communication problems are defined in theoretical terms, and data is presented in order to identify student needs with respect to the theoretical framework. This data suggests potential communication problems that may confront American business graduates working abroad. A curriculum for addressing the needs highlighted by the data is presented, and results from the implementation of the curriculum are discussed.

Keywords: intercultural communication, cross-cultural skills, international business education.

1. Introduction

In 2001 a group of eight faculty members from four American universities entered into a partnership with the goal of finding ways to better prepare American business students for intercultural communication in the global economy. This consortium was formed and funded on the assumption¹ that business students, while receiving excellent training in the business component of international business, are woefully under-prepared for face to face communication with members of other cultures, and thus could potentially compromise American ventures abroad. The group, calling itself the Alliance for the Promotion for Cross-cultural Skills for Business Students, was financed by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education (FIPSE) and was charged with the creation of programs requiring business student participation in study abroad programs and in innovative intercultural communication curricula setup precisely for this target group.

In their effort to create this cross-cultural skills curricula for business students, Alliance members initially faced three tasks: defining the problem in theoretical rather than anecdotal terms; developing a set of pedagogical practices grounded in that theoretical framework, and which could be deployed in the study abroad context; and gathering empirical data in order to evaluate the effectiveness

1. The assumption was based on anecdotal evidence supplied by the partners themselves: a group of foreign language and international business professors with considerable experience living and working abroad. David A. Ricks (2000) has compiled a volume of evidence of this type.

of the practices. The decision to use the study abroad experience as a primary vehicle for teaching intercultural communication was also based on a widely held assumption: “one of the most frequently articulated assumptions of study abroad programs is that study in a foreign country for an extended period of time will bring about enhanced levels of international understanding and concern.” (Carlson and Widamen, 2) However, as Carlson and Widamen note, there is little empirical evidence supporting this assumption. The lack of empirical evidence is due, at least in part, to the difficulty in defining and assessing the goals of study abroad programs. A number of constructs have been deployed in an attempt to conceptualize these goals: “worldmindedness” (Samson and Smith, 1957); “globalcentrism” (McCabe, 1994); “global understanding” (Kitsantas, 2004); “global competence” (Sindt and Pachmayer, 2007) to name a few. A unified conceptualization of study abroad goals remains elusive. Assessment within these various frameworks is problematic as well because it has relied on student self-assessment, usually after the study abroad experience has been completed.

Alliance team members turned to the field of intercultural communication for answers to problems of conceptualizing study abroad goals and defining intercultural communicative competence. While a growing body of knowledge, both theoretical and practical, in intercultural communication exists, its integration in foreign language and international business curricula has been minimal.

Milton Bennett’s (1993) “Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity” (the DMIS) was adopted as the theoretical paradigm for cross-cultural skills for a number of reasons relevant to our needs. First, the DMIS elaborates a theory of stages through which individuals pass as they develop intercultural competence. Second, these stages can be readily identified by a psychometric instrument which Bennett and Mitchell Hammer have developed for that purpose. The “Intercultural Development Inventory” or “IDI” is a scientifically valid, theory-based, psychometric instrument which consists of fifty statements about culture and cultural difference.² Respondents indicate, on a scale of one to five, to what extent they agree or disagree with each statement. When the results are entered, a computer program produces a graph showing which stage the individual is in. The development of this instrument is particularly fortunate because it eliminates concerns around student self-assessment. Students are not asked if they have made progress. Rather a psychometric instrument reveals if their psychological state with respect to cultural difference has changed. Another advantage is that because this instrument measures intercultural competence and identifies that measure with a developmental stage, Alliance members could create a curriculum uniquely tailored to the needs of students. This curriculum consisted of an independent study course to be taken by students while abroad. A post-test was

2. The Intercultural Development Inventory or “IDI” is copyright protected and cannot be reproduced here in part or in whole. For more information about the instrument see Hammer (1999), or contact the Intercultural Communication Institute or the author of this paper.

given to students upon their return in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The following pages provide an overview of Bennett's theoretical model, summarize initial IDI test results of the business students of participating universities, describe the independent study course developed by the Alliance, and provide the final IDI test results. The implementation of the independent study course and the IDI test results summarized here constitute a pilot study. The main objective here is to generate awareness of the problem and to spark discussion and debate. More extensive training and testing will be required in order to more reliably assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

2. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

According to Bennett, sensitivity to cultural difference can be developed in individuals and groups according to a predictable pattern. His theory posits the existence of a continuum upon which individuals and groups move as they develop greater sensitivity to cultural difference. This continuum consists of several distinct and identifiable stages that can be grouped into two broad categories: ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. There are three ethnocentric stages: denial, defense/reversal, and minimization. Denial occurs when an individual is unaware of the existence of cultural difference. Individuals in this stage have generally had little or no contact with people from other cultures, either because of actual geographic isolation or because of barriers created to maintain an artificial cultural isolation. The inability to conceive of the existence of other ways of viewing reality that is characteristic of the denial stage manifests itself in a disinterest in cultural difference or in a desire to create and maintain artificial barriers to protect oneself from cultural difference. Contact with individuals from other cultures is generally enough to bring people out of the denial stage.

The move out of the denial stage is, by definition, the realization that there are other culturally informed world-views. For many individuals, cultural difference and the relativity that it implies are perceived as a threat to the integrity of their own cultural world-view. Individuals who experience cultural difference as a threat are said to be in the second stage of Bennett's model: the Defense stage. Defense issues are generally manifested in the development of a polarized world-view. The world is divided into "us" and "them", with "us" being superior to "them". For many intercultural trainers and language teachers, individuals in the defense stage are the most difficult to deal with because they respond to cultural differences by becoming more defensive, not more accepting. The developmental task at this stage is generally to seek out common ground. People with defense issues should look for similarities between cultures until they become comfortable with the common humanity that transcends cultural difference. At the same basic level of sensitivity is the stage Bennett refers to as reversal.

Individuals in the reversal stage maintain the polarized world-view characteristic of the defense stage. The poles, however, are reversed. Individuals in this stage see their own culture as inferior and other cultures as superior.

The denial, defense, and reversal categories subsume and unify many of the constructs deployed in the existing study abroad research literature. When Carlson and Widaman ask students questions about their beliefs “that problems of developing nations should be of no concern to the developed ones” or that “conflicts among particular nations do not affect the rest of the world” (p.5) they are probing for denial issues. When they ask about “respect for traditions, culture, way of life, etc. of other cultures” (p.5) they are assessing defense issues. When they ask students about “your critical views of your own country” (p.5) they are examining reversal issues. McCabe, although without naming or defining the concept, provides an example from a student essay in which the student demonstrates the resolution of his own reversal issues:

It (the voyage) has made me look at America as another culture ... and maybe as before when I used to go out in Texas and I would see Americans as being loud and outgoing, love to party, love to drink, and all that stuff... I used to think of it as being maybe a problem which I didn't understand or didn't agree with, and now its more like I look at it as part of the culture and I can accept it more.
(McCabe, 6)

The third stage of development is the minimization stage. As the name suggests, individuals in this stage tend to minimize the importance of cultural difference. They operate with the notion that we are all the same. While this profile does represent an increase in sensitivity to cultural difference, it is still an ethnocentric world-view because the presumed sameness is inevitably grounded in the individual's own cultural values and assumptions. This category too is present in existing study abroad research. Carlson and Widaman, for example, when they probe students for the “view that values of your own society are not universal and that values of other societies are just as valid,” (p. 5) are looking for student minimization issues. Discussion of minimization issues, whether explicitly talked about or implicitly alluded to, is not as prevalent in the study abroad research literature as is discussion of denial and defense issues. This may be due in part to the fact that the minimization mindset is less frequently associated with ethnocentrism. The research for this study makes clear that minimization issues are far more common than either denial or defense issues. It is possible that many program organizers and researchers suffer from minimization issues as well and therefore do not identify it as a manifestation of ethnocentrism.

There are three stages on the ethnorelative side of the continuum: acceptance, adaptation, and integration. In the acceptance stage, individuals become aware of and accepting of cultural relativity and cultural difference. This acceptance enables them to begin to discern patterns of cultural difference. As with the other stages described by Bennett, existing study abroad researcher literature sites

examples of acceptance among student sojourners: “This experience taught me to be understanding of other countries, and it taught me how important it is to be accepting of diversity and different lifestyles” (Sindt & Pachmayer, 5). Again though, while it is generally recognized as a goal and as a desirable outcome of study abroad, nowhere is it named and described as a stage in a coherent model. In the next stage, adaptation, individuals learn to adapt, first in their thinking and then in their behavior, in order to effectively accommodate cultural difference. In the final stage, integration, individuals are not only bi-cultural, integrating two cultural systems with a capacity to change perspectives and behaviors according to the given cultural context, but actively use this bi-cultural perspective to reflect upon their identity as it relates to culture.

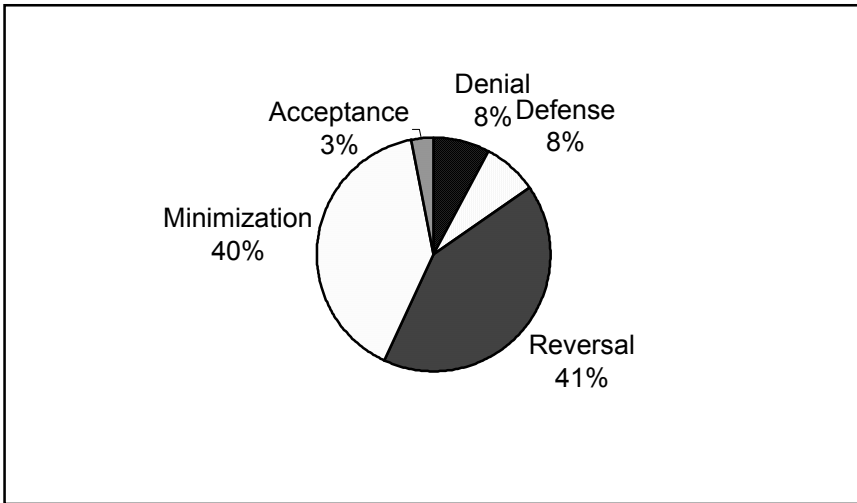
While the Bennett model may be the most comprehensive model currently available for assessing the impact of study abroad and intercultural communication training, it is not able to account for every aspect of the study abroad experience. The DMIS is an instrument for assessing competence in the domain of “subjective” culture. That is, it assesses an individual’s sensitivity to the cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions as they effect the culturally characteristic behaviors of the members of a given culture. The DMIS does not look at objective culture or at student gains in knowledge of objective culture. What students are able to learn about political and economic systems, religions, education systems, social institutions such as the family and marriage, art, theater, literature, music, etc... are not accounted for by the IDI or the DMIS.

3. Intercultural Sensitivity in American Business Students

In order to obtain a sense of where American business students were on the DMIS continuum, and to establish a control group, the consortium tested with the IDI a total of sixty-four seniors in business administration from the four American universities involved: Nicholls State University (NSU) in Thibodaux, Louisiana; University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Arkansas; University of Tennessee (UT) in Knoxville, Tennessee; and Florida International University (FIU) in Miami. Both NSU and UCA cater to a largely local student population. The sampling participants can be described as coming mostly from a small town or rural environment and from a cultural milieu that is relatively homogenous. Often they are the first generation in their family to attend college. None of them had ever studied or lived abroad nor had they completed course work in intercultural communications. While both NSU and UCA have foreign exchange students on their campuses, consortium team members report that there is relatively little contact between American students and foreign nationals. The University of Tennessee is a much bigger school, as well as being the state’s flagship institution. They can boast of a higher caliber of student than NSU or UCA as well as greater cultural diversity on their campus. None of the students sampled,

however, had ever studied abroad or taken courses in intercultural communication. FIU can also lay claim to a more culturally diverse student population. The city of Miami itself is multi-lingual and multi-cultural. The university welcomes students who grew up in this environment, as well as a large foreign student population. Taken as a whole, the sample population is sufficiently diverse to make these results generalizable to students throughout the United States. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage breakdown, by DMIS stage, of all tested students from the four universities.

Figure 1:



The majority of students tested fell into either the minimization stage (forty percent) or the reversal stage (forty-one percent), with sixteen percent testing in denial and defense and only three percent testing in the ethnocentric stage of acceptance. Not a single student demonstrated a level of sensitivity that would imply an ability to adapt to the communicative conventions of another culture. The group profiles from each of the four universities indicate that students from the smaller, more rural institutions (NSU and UCA) have slightly more issues in denial and defense (although most of their students are still in the minimization or reversal stages). Students at the larger, more culturally diverse institutions are slightly more sensitive, but nevertheless demonstrate ethnocentric profiles. With sixty-two out of sixty-four students, selected at random from four different universities as diverse as NSU, UCA, UT, and FIU testing ethnocentric, one is fairly safe in asserting that American business graduates leave their universities with an ethnocentric world view. While the post-test results that will follow are not based on a large enough sampling to be statistically significant, these pretest figures do provide compelling evidence of a problem faced by American businesses and American business schools.

Americans with a minimization profile will tend to assume that, since others are basically like them, what works in the United States will work in other cultural contexts as well. While cultural differences specifically associated with the work place (power distance, attitudes toward uncertainty, key to productivity, source of status³) will be one source of problems, misunderstandings will not be limited to these areas. Differences around time, personal space, touching behavior, non-verbal communication, and communication styles, to name only a few, will also be a potential source of misunderstanding. The inevitable misunderstandings are likely to be attributed to personality conflicts, ineptness, or even cultural inferiority.

For the purposes of effective intercultural communication, the reversal profile, characterizing forty-one percent of the tested students, is not an improvement. While these individuals are likely to look favorably upon the host culture, they are also likely to be unaware that the values and assumptions informing the negative feelings toward their own culture are themselves culturally informed. This blind spot in the role that culture plays in one's perception of reality, and in informing one's behavior, will seriously limit or prevent the individual from discerning cultural patterns. A program that seeks to facilitate intercultural communication in business students must address these issues.

4. The Alliance Approach to Teaching Intercultural Communications

The Alliance for the Promotion of Cross-cultural Skills for Business Students has developed a two-fold strategy for teaching intercultural communication skills to business students. The first element is the study abroad component. Developing intercultural competence necessarily involves interacting with people from other cultures. Initial test results, however, indicate that simply sending students abroad for a semester does not make them ethnocentric. Of the eight students sent overseas during the Alliance's second year, all eight tested into the ethnocentric minimization profile upon their return. Clearly something more than mere contact is needed if universities and students are going to get the maximum benefit from the relatively brief sojourn offered by most study abroad programs.

With this goal in mind, the Alliance has created an independent study course in intercultural communication consisting of a pre-departure orientation, in-country readings, and targeted writing assignments. The pre-departure orientation consists of three sessions. The first session establishes and explains the theoretical and practical goals of the program. Students listen to a short lecture outlining Bennett's theory of intercultural sensitivity, they receive a packet of reading assignments, and they receive a course syllabus indicating what is

3. These concepts are presented in Hofstede (1980).

expected of them. Expectations include not only course work in business and the development of linguistic competence, but also reflection on the host culture and on their own culture, and the organization of their reflections into well structured essays. Next, a cross-culturally experienced advisor meets in a private conference with each student in order to discuss his or her Intercultural Development Inventory profile. This session provides students with an understanding of their intercultural communication limitations and gives them a goal toward which to work. The teacher guides students to consider their beliefs about the nature of culture, as revealed by their IDI profiles, in order to prepare them to question the assumed universality of their cultural framework. A final session on cross-cultural adjustment stress provides students with a theoretical model of culture shock⁴ – one that explains the process as consistent with the DMIS – and with practical measures for coping with culture shock in healthy, productive ways. The goal of these sessions is to prepare students for the experiential learning that generates greater sensitivity to cultural difference.

The bulk of the independent study course is carried out in the host country. The student packets contain reading assignments designed to provide students with “culture-general” theoretical concepts in intercultural communication. The reading assignments may or may not contain specific information about the target culture; rather, they are intended to provide students with tools which will enable them to experience the culture, and reality, in a new way. Students are asked to apply the concepts they have read about as they observe and interview members of the host culture. Thus they acquire specific information about the host culture through their own investigations. At the same time as students struggle to accurately perceive and understand the host culture, they are expected to reflect upon and observe their own culture. Particularly for individuals with minimization issues, greater awareness of the cultural assumptions and values informing their own behavior is critical for more effective cross-cultural communication. At the conclusion of each assignment, students must write a short composition summarizing their findings and e-mail it to their advising professor in the United States. This arrangement allows for dialogue with, and guidance from, the advisor in the discovery of the host culture.

The independent study course consists of an introduction, six thematic units, and a conclusion. The introductory unit contains Ben Feinberg’s article entitled “What Students Don’t Learn Abroad”, and Milton J. Bennett’s introductory chapter to *Basic Concepts in Intercultural Communications*. The Feinberg article, a somewhat cynical opinion piece lamenting student failures to learn about the cultures they visit, is intended to remind students that while self-discovery, particularly as it pertains to one’s own cultural frame of reference, is important, they are abroad primarily to learn about the host culture. The Bennett piece is intended to provide students with a general overview of the intercultural

4. Sources for the session on culture shock are Grove and Torbiörn (1993), Weaver (1993), and Paige et al. (2002).

communication field. Students are also asked to complete several learning styles inventories in Paige's *Maximizing Study Abroad*. These inventories provide students with insights into their strengths and weaknesses as language and culture learners. Finally, students are asked to write a brief essay outlining the goals of their sojourn. Students are encouraged to complete this introduction prior to departure.

The second unit, "Cultural Values and Assumptions" is intended to challenge the minimization world-view, thus laying a foundation for the discovery of cultural difference. The reading selections and the essay topic call into question the existence of universal assumptions and values in order to make students aware of the relativity of their own values and cultural assumptions. The notion that values and world-view are universal is what characterizes their minimization world-view, and that erroneous assumption is addressed in this unit. Since this unit constitutes the foundation of the course, it receives special attention.

It can generally be determined whether the student has moved into acceptance from their unit 2 essay. If they have, they can begin to discern patterns of cultural difference. Upon successful completion of the unit on values and assumptions, students begin to look at specific examples of culturally informed assumptions: time (monochronic versus polychronic – based on the work of Edward T. Hall), personal space, touching, and non-verbal communication (with texts from Stewart and Bennett, Hoffman, and Wattley-Ames), locus of control (external versus internal), particularist versus universalist cultures, collectivist versus individualist cultures (all three with texts from Storti), communication styles (high context versus low context with texts from Stewart and Bennett and Asselin and Mastron), and cultural differences in the workplace (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, attitude towards work, key to productivity, and source of status with texts from Cushner and Brislin).

Of the eighty-eight students pretested with the IDI for this pilot study, only seven post-tested with an ethnorelative profile. Sixty-six of the students were in the control group and received no training or study abroad experience. Twenty-two students went abroad. Eight of those twenty-two received no intercultural communication training and those eight returned with an ethnocentric profile. Fourteen students took the independent study: seven returned with an ethnocentric profile and seven returned with an ethnorelative profile. It may be worthwhile to take another look at those fourteen independent study students in order to determine what occurred.

As mentioned earlier, Unit 2 (Assumptions and Values) constitutes the foundation upon which the course is built. In this unit the reading material and interview assignment are specifically designed to provide experiential learning that challenges the minimization worldview. In the essay response to this assignment, one can often see whether or not students are moving into the acceptance stage. The reading assignment for the unit consists of two very short theoretical passages and two examples – one of a values related behavior and one

of an assumptions related behavior. The theoretical texts aim to help students conceptualize the notions of assumptions and values. In this unit students read that:

Cultural assumptions may be defined as abstract, organized, general concepts which pervade a person's outlook and behavior. They are existential in that they define what is "real" and the nature of that reality for members of a culture . . . Additionally, cultural assumptions exist by definition outside of awareness. That is, we cannot readily imagine alternatives to them. (Stewart and Bennett, p.12)

Interculturalists use the "sunglasses" or "colored lens" analogy to explain how our world view is filtered through the perspective of our deep culture – the hidden part of our cultural iceberg – embedded within us. Imagine for a moment that all Americans are provided with yellow sunglasses. No one notices them as anything special because everyone has them. What makes the sunglasses yellow is that unique set of values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that Americans have in common. The yellow lens thus represent "Americanness". In France, everyone is also provided with sunglasses, but the sunglasses are blue. (Asselin and Mastron, p.145)

With respect to values, students read that "cultural values refer to the goodness or desirability of certain actions or attitudes among members of the culture. As such, values prescribe which actions and ways of being are better than others" (Stewart and Bennett, p.14). Armed with this new understanding of cultural values and assumptions, students are given the following passage to read and analyze:

Once, in New York, I met a Russian artist who tried to explain to me why his compatriots are so despondent when they get to America. Like most self-respecting Russian artists who end up emigrating, he was a pretty active dissident. And yet, he told me, his eyes filling with a revealing fire, he felt convinced that Russia was the greatest, really, the only – country in the world. "We defeated the Germans in the war, we had the greatest literature in the world, we had the greatest culture. It was such a pride," he said intently. I looked back intently, trying to understand. National pride? It seems, for our globe, a terribly old-fashioned sentiment. I hardly know what it means. (Hoffman, p. 74)

In an essay to be e-mailed to an advisor at the home institution, students are asked to identify the values that underlie the Russian man's characterization of Russia as a great country. They are asked if people from their country share these values when they characterize their country as great and if not, what values they do demonstrate. They are then instructed to interview two or three members of their host culture to find out what values inform their positive feelings about their country. Based on their reading and interviews they are asked if they can make any conclusions about the universality of values.

During the course of the grant, three distinct types of responses occurred as students completed this assignment. Some students clearly get the point

immediately, without the need for any intervention on the part of the advisor. The following statement by student A confirms this category of response:

These conclusions go to show that there is not a defined worldwide commonality for values . . . France is right to value their culture. It is a very optimistic and creative aspect of their life in France, and they should have pride on that level. Most Americans are right to value their freedom because it is something that a lot of other countries would die for.

This quotation demonstrates that the student is aware that the French and the Americans use a different measuring stick, a different set of cultural values when describing their positive feelings about their countries. Moreover, the student accepts this difference in values and validates it. Once this mindset has been reached a student can begin to discern different cultural patterns.

The second and third types of responses occurred with the roughly fifty percent of participating students who failed to immediately move into the acceptance stage while working on this unit. The following statement by student B is characteristic of individuals in this category: "I have found that there is universality in values that give each person a sense of pride and nationalism for their county." Despite readings on the DMIS, despite the assignment to interview host culture members and compare values (or the lack thereof) that inform feelings of patriotism, this student has held on to the ethnocentric notion that universal values exist. Interestingly enough, the student provides, in her own essay, evidence to the contrary: "I *disagree* (emphasis mine) with the article *Lost in Translation* when the narrator concludes that he feels that national pride is an old sentiment that does not exist." This disagreement underscores the relativity of the very values student B is defending as universal. Many students cling tenaciously to their world-view, despite the existence of evidence that contradicts it, and these same students tend to resist work, perhaps unconsciously, that undermines the integrity of that world-view. Students, like the one in the previous example, who do not demonstrate ethnorelativity in this essay, tend to post-test with the same ethnorelative minimization profile that they pre-tested with unless the students' advisor intervenes and establishes a dialogue with them around the issues raised by the unit.

The third type of response concerns those students who initially failed to demonstrate increased sensitivity to cultural difference, but who, thanks to an advisor's intervention, were able to work through their minimization impediments and move into the acceptance and adaptation stages. An example of this type of situation comes from Student C. Student C's IDI pretest placed him, like most study abroad participants, in the minimization stage. Like student B, his initial contact with a foreign culture did not appear to push him into acceptance, rather it seemed to force a retreat into defense. In his reaction to the *Lost in Translation* text he writes:

She describes the Russian artist as having an extreme sense of pride for his country, but he also shows a sense of ignorance. The Russian believes that Russia is the greatest country in the world and that no other country even compares to it. At the same time he decided to immigrate to the United States, the same country that put Russia into economic ruins. Why would someone leave a place that they thought was so great?

Student C works with the notion that we are all the same, as long as he is not actually dealing with a person who deploys cultural values different from his own. Developing intercultural sensitivity is necessarily an experiential process. Any effective intervention must be calculated to enable the student to experience reality in a new way. Simply telling a student that he is wrong about something, or that he has retreated into defense, is likely to be ineffective or to make matters worse. The initial intervention with Student C consisted of three parts: first, a validation of the time, energy, and reflection that the student had invested in the assignment; second, a summary of the views he had expressed, formulated as a series of questions so as to verify that the advisor had correctly understood the student's position; and third, questions intended to focus the student's attention on his own defensive mind set in a non-threatening way:

What I would like you to do now is analyse your own initial explanations to these cultural differences in terms of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. (Summaries of it can be found in *Maximising Study Abroad* and the Introductory unit of your packet). Would you characterise your statements as denial, defense, minimisation, acceptance, or adaptation? Why? Justify your response.

Student C's response to this intervention constitutes a victory for the Alliance and for the student himself:

In my original paper and revision of *Lost in Translation*, I used ignorance as an excuse for the beliefs that did not correspond with my own. This may be a part of the "Defense Stage". It may be possible that I am attaching some negative characteristics on people that do not view things the same as I do. To be honest, I never really thought about it before this paper. Even though I am learning about the differences in cultures, sometimes it is not enough. Time and devotion are the other aspects that I believe can add to my own personal growth and development in communication across cultures.

After this remark Student C was allowed to move on to the other units of the independent study. He post-tested in the ethnorelative stage of adaptation.

5. Discussion

Some preliminary hypotheses can be established based on the data provided by this pilot study, keeping in mind, of course, that it is a pilot study and the study

abroad sample group is not large enough to be statistically valid. Participants in the study can be grouped into four categories: 1) students who did not study abroad and have had no intercultural training course, 2) students who studied abroad, but had no intercultural training before or during their sojourn, 3) students who studied abroad and had an intercultural training course, 4) one student who studied abroad, had an intercultural communication course and also received extensive intervention from an advisor.

Group one, with ninety-seven percent testing in one of the ethnocentric stages, represents the average American graduate in business administration: no study abroad experience, no intercultural communication training, ethnocentric world-view. Group two students have received the same formal training as group one, but have the study abroad experience. Available data indicates that these students generally return from their sojourn with greater knowledge about the cultures they have visited.⁵ These students continue, however, to be characterized by the ethnocentric world view, and, if working internationally, risk being plagued by similar types of communication problems as their counterparts with no study abroad experience. For the purposes of this pilot study, this group was composed of only eight students, not a large enough group to be statistically valid. However, it is worth emphasizing that all eight students, without exception, post-tested with the same ethnocentric minimization profile as those students who had never been abroad. This data is also consistent with the findings of Opper, Teichler, and Carlson on attitudes: "It is frequently assumed that increased knowledge will reduce skepticism or even prejudice about another country, and also possibly foster empathy for other cultures. This hypothesis is not clearly supported by the findings of the current evaluation [...] post-sojourn assessments did not show links between increase in knowledge and increasingly positive opinions" (120). Moreover, this data is consistent with the predictions of the intercultural communication theoretical literature. If, as Stewart and Bennett assert, "cultural assumptions exist by definition outside of awareness [...] we cannot readily image alternatives to them," then it is not surprising that students do not imagine these alternatives without some type of intervention. Taken as a whole, the data on groups one and two confirm empirically the original assumption of the Alliance team members: American business graduates lack the necessary communication skills to work effectively with people from other cultures.

Group three consists of fourteen students. Like group two, this is not a sufficient sampling to be statistically valid. Moreover, the stated goals were realized in only half of those participants who took the class. Nevertheless, the

5. Opper, Teichler & Carlson (1990) examined changes in foreign language proficiency and knowledge and attitudes about the culture and society of host countries. They concluded that sojourn participants had made substantial gains in knowledge of education systems, political systems and institutions, foreign policy, domestic policy, immigration problems, economic systems, geography, social structure and issues, customs and traditions and cultural life (art, music, theater, sports).

independent study course can be considered as a step in the right direction. This is especially encouraging when one considers the student in group four who received extensive intervention. If the course work is monitored by a competent advisor, one who knows when and how to intervene with students who are struggling with key concepts, it may be possible to achieve a much greater rate of success.⁶

6. Conclusion

Without some kind of cross-cultural training, individuals will continue to view reality through the only cultural grid available to them. An effective intervention will necessarily focus a student's attention on those cultural values and assumptions that inform their own frame of reference. Moreover, intercultural training is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. The pedagogical needs of individuals in the different stages differ greatly from one another. The Alliance independent study was designed for the needs of individuals in minimization. It would most likely be counterproductive if used with people in denial and defense. In fact, one student with cultural marginality⁷ issues who took the class found that the material gave eloquent voice to the cultural realities he had already experienced, but it did not impact his marginality issues. Thirdly, the results illustrate that even within a given stage, individual training needs can vary greatly. Some students require little or no intervention; others require a great deal. Since seven out of fourteen students failed to progress to the acceptance stage, it would seem that students require intervention and dialogue as often as not. Finally, advisors must possess certain skills and knowledge: effective intervention assumes sufficient command of the theoretical model to identify in student essays the stage that a student is in, an understanding of the special needs of each stage, and, most significantly, the advisor himself must have an ethnorelative profile reflecting extensive knowledge of intercultural communications scholarship, both theoretical and practical.

While the Alliance project is ostensibly about effective communication with people from other cultures, it is also about maintaining (or perhaps acquiring) a competitive edge. The ability to think and act like potential customers and competitors would be an asset in any business context. While American business schools do an excellent job of providing the necessary business knowledge to

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6. The author of this article does not mean to suggest that study abroad is an indispensable component of intercultural communication training. It is certainly possible, at least theoretically, to develop an ethnorelative world view without leaving one's own country. Students who attend universities where intercultural communication coursework is offered, and where it is possible to interact with individuals from other cultures, could realize the goals of this program without a mobility component.
 7. Encapsulated marginality is a condition found in some persons who have mastered two or more cultures. In so doing they lose their sense of a coherent cultural identity. See J. Bennett.

their students, their representatives lack a clear understanding of the assumptions and values that motivate business practices around the globe. With limited exposure to foreign language, limited study abroad experience, and little or no effective intercultural communication training, many of America's business students are simply not getting the education they need for success in the global economy. How can these limitations be overcome? A program like the one described above is a step in the right direction. Intercultural communication skills do not simply occur; they can, however, be cultivated and encouraged through controlled readings, directed observation, and informed mentoring.

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