Are they picking up what we’re putting down?

Efficacy and Impact of a Cultural Transition Course for First-Year International Students

February 5, 2016   |  Nelson Brunsting
WISE Conference   |  Wake Forest University
Overview

- Introduce the challenge
- Examine the research literature
- Focus the research question
- Outline the method
- Interpret results
- Jointly determine limitations, conclusion, and future research
Introduce the Challenge

Students make multiple transitions, all with a cultural component, when attending university in a foreign country.

Greater cognitive and emotional load of multiple transitions correlates with acculturative distress, leading to:

- Lower academic achievement (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004).
- Illness, depression, and hopelessness (Wang et al., 2013).

Call: What can we do to help international students successfully navigate these transitions?
What are colleges doing?

- Pre-Orientation Programs
- Bridging Programs
- International Student Housing
- Transition courses (both for-credit and non-credit)
- Others?
Examining the research literature

- Andrade (2006)
  - Most useful semester class information: host culture expectations, host culture social norms, and group-work experience

- Kovtun (2011)
  - Student outcomes from semester class:
    - Greater perceived written and presentation abilities
    - Higher comfort with people of diverse races/orientations

- Smith & Khawaja (2014)
  - Student outcomes from course-like intervention (8 hrs):
    - Increased coping self-efficacy
    - Increased psychological adaptation
Bringing in Theory

- Relative Acculturation Extended Model (Navas et al., 2005)
Determining Course Content

Challenges/stressors for college students:
- Academic expectations and work
- Navigating roommate issues
- Managing time

Additional challenges for international students:
- Language
- Academic writing
- Knowledge of host culture social norms
- "Cultural literacy" in host culture
- Adjusting intercultural skills to different contexts

We'll be perfect roommates as long as you never touch anything of mine and leave the second my friends come over.
Building Course Structure and Content

- 1 credit hour (12.75 contact hours, 50min/wk, 1 semester)
- 2 sections, ~15 students each

Content:
- Theory and intercultural skills
- Academic expectations (classroom structure, faculty office hours, presentations, group-work)
- Navigating roommate issues
- Cultural norms and expectations
- Cultural literacy (news, media, and sports)
Developing the research question

- Do students report increases in perceived knowledge, confidence in using, and usefulness of the nine focal concepts taught in the course?
  1. Intercultural competence
  2. Shifting perspectives
  3. Suspending judgment
  4. Solving problems with roommates
  5. Communicating with students from other cultures
  6. Interacting in class with students from other cultures
  7. Making friends with students from other cultures
  8. Communicating with faculty
  9. Self-advocacy
Method

KEEP CALM AND USE THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD
Outlining the method

- Longitudinal design with three time points
  - T1: early fall semester (within first six classes) first year
  - T2: end fall semester (after class completed) first year
  - T3: end fall semester sophomore year

- Survey Measures
  - KCU Form (Lane, Menzies, Bruhn, & Crnobori, 2011) adapted to test for nine intercultural skills or applied contexts
  - Campus Belonging (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990)
  - Campus Social Support (Sarasone, Sarasone, Shearin, & Pierce, 1993)
Directions
Please rate the concepts or skills in terms of how knowledgeable you are about them, how confident you are in your ability to implement them, and how useful each concept or skill is for you. CIRCLE the number that best represents your rating for EACH concept or skill.

Knowledge
0 = I have no knowledge of this concept or skill.
1 = I have some knowledge of this concept or skill.
2 = I have more than average knowledge of this concept or skill.
3 = I have a substantial amount of knowledge about this concept or skill.

Confidence
0 = I am not confident in my ability to use this concept or skill.
1 = I am a little confident in my ability to use this concept or skill.
2 = I am confident in my ability to use this concept or skill.
3 = I am very confident in my ability to use this concept or skill.

Usefulness
0 = I do not believe this concept or skill is useful.
1 = I believe this concept or skill is somewhat useful.
2 = I believe this concept or skill is more useful than average.
3 = I believe this concept or skill is very useful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept or Skill</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>Usefulness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural competence</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-advocacy</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<td>Communicating with students from other cultures</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<td>Solving problems with roommates</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making friends with students from other cultures</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating with professors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shifting perspectives</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<td>0 1 2 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspending judgment</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
<td>0 1 2 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administering the Survey

- Survey Administration
  - In last 15 minutes of class (for students in course)
  - Online through Qualtrics (for students not in course)

- Survey Response Rate
  - Class: T1 90.6% (29 of 32); T2 96.6% (28 of 29)
  - Online: T1 9.0% (8 of 89); T2 25% (2 of 8)
Results
## Pre-/Post-Survey Increases in KCU Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Confidence</th>
<th>Usefulness</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Intercultural competence</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.50***</td>
<td>.37*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shifting perspectives</td>
<td></td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.27*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspending judgment</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Solving problems with roommates</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.21*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating with students of other cultures</td>
<td>.47***</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interacting in class with students from other cultures</td>
<td>.30*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Making friends with students from other cultures</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating with faculty</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-advocacy</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.36*</td>
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</table>
## Campus Belonging at T2 (end of fall)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Coefficients&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>10.428</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D_KCU_IC</td>
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<td>.638</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>-.027</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D_KCU_Inter</td>
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<td>.567</td>
<td>.325</td>
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<tr>
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<td>D_KCU_Shift</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D_KCU_Suspend</td>
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<td>.672</td>
<td>2.646</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CB_1_Agg</td>
<td>.418</td>
<td>.309</td>
<td>.315</td>
<td>1.355</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: CB_2_Agg
In their words

- What was the most important idea or concept you learned?

  “Culture can be analyzed through different lenses. To know more about culture will help me interact with others”

  “From this course I learned how to get along well with my roommates”

  “How to interact with other people and get to know the culture to understand the reactions of people better”
Discussion
Acknowledging Limitations

- No control group
- Small sample size \((n = 28)\)
- KCU measures perceived knowledge, not actual
- Others?
Making contributions

- Students in cultural transitions course perceive gains in both intercultural skills and in using skills in certain challenging situations.
- Even a one-hour course can be effective.
- Intercultural competence and shifting perspectives may impact campus belonging.
- Connection with students on campus may be more important than connection with faculty for campus belonging.
- Others?
Mapping the future

- How would you refine, change, or build on this work?

- Refine focus of intercultural skills and contexts to teach and assess.

- Include more outcomes: Academic, well-being, global engagement.

- Seek a more diverse sample, potentially with current international high school students.
Go forth and contextualize
Questions?