From the inside out: Transformative learning and teaching

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In small groups, please discuss and then share with the group what “transformative learning away from home” means to you.
A century of intercultural learning abroad

- What is the nature of learning across cultures?
- What is the process by which humans learn across cultures?
- How can humans be taught or trained to do this?


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Three dominant narratives—our community’s “stories”—about learning across cultures

1. Humans become more *cultured* by learning superior ideas and emulating cultivated behavior.

2. Humans become more *culturally aware* through talking about and being immersed in cultural differences.

3. Humans *develop interculturally* through focusing on their own and others’ ways of making meaning, and by learning to respond effectively and appropriately to culturally different others.

Story 1: Positivism
“Learning from the outside in”

“. . . a real external world whose properties are definite and independent of the observer who perceives them. . . . things are what they seem, as perceived through our senses.”

(S. Hawking & L. Mladenow, 2012)
Story 1: Students encounter sophisticated, “civilized” people & places

- With the Grand Tour—this story’s signature program—learning occurs, in privileged places, through exposure to the new & different, and through modeling and imitation.
Story 1 theories:
The world is organized hierarchically
Students learn as we teach and expose them to an unfamiliar and privileged culture “out there”

- Students learn through exposure to the new and different in privileged places.

- Students learn when educators describe, talk about, culture-specific differences.

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Story 1: Theories
We come to know through the scientific method
Story 1: Theories: Behaviorism

Diagram:
- Stimulus: Provided by instructor
- Response:变化由学习者
- Reinforcement: Provided by instructor

Image: Vintage classroom scene with students sitting at desks.
Story 1: The process of learning abroad, described

1. Acquire knowledge about a privileged place and people

2. Directly experience the place

3. Emulate the behavior of cultivated people there

4. Return home more “cultured”—more knowledgeable and worldly

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Story 1 theory:
Social Darwinism

“This survival of the fittest, which I have sought to express in mechanical terms, is that which Mr. Darwin has called ‘natural selection,’ or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life.”
(Herbert Spencer, 1864)
Doubts about story 1: Accelerating erosion of faith in hierarchy
Story 2: Relativism
“Learning from the outside in”—with a difference

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Story 2 theory: 
Egalitarianism

“The things we have in common far outnumber and outweigh those that divide us.” Walt Disney
Story 2 Theory: “Immersion”
Story 2 Theory: Culture Shock*

*U-curve: Oberg, 1955; W-curve: Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963
Story 2: Theory
“Contrast-culture” training approach

“Differences that make a difference”:
• Non-verbal (eye contact, personal space, touching)
• Communication styles (direct/indirect)
• Learning styles (concrete experience/abstract conceptual)
• Cognitive styles (linear logic/spiraling logic)
• Value contrasts (individualism/collectivism)
Story 2: The process of learning abroad, described

1. Learn about and become aware of cultural differences (contrast-culture learning)

2. Immerse myself in the experience abroad—or educators immerse me

3. Return home more culturally aware, sensitive

Question: How do educators act out story 2?

Question: To what extent does becoming more culturally aware allow us to cross cultural boundaries?

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Georgetown Study findings*: Do traditional “immersion” practices foster intercultural learning?

- Take steps to improve language proficiency: Little impact
- Maximize contact with host nationals: No impact
- Enrollment in host school classes: No impact
- Carry out internships, service learning: No impact
- Be housed in home stays: No impact
- Send away for longer periods: Yes—some impact
- Pre departure cultural orientation: Yes—some impact
- Home stays: Yes—when students engaged with host family
- Cultural mentoring at sites abroad: Yes—by far the highest impact practice in the study


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Story 3: Constructivism
Learning “from the inside out”: Acting on our awareness of our own and others’ sense-making
Story 3: Reflection and self awareness

• “There is no way to remove the observer—us—from our perception of the world. . . . Our perception is not direct, but rather is shaped by a kind of lens, the interpretive structure of our human brains. . . . Our brains interpret the input from our sensory organs by making a model of the world.” (Hawking & Mladinov, The grand design, 2012)

• “People don’t learn through experience; we learn through reflecting on experience.” (Sivasailam Thiagarajan—”Thiagi”)
Story 3 Theory:
“Paradigms”*

A paradigm shift “is a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals that changes some of the field’s most elementary theoretical generalizations, as well as many of its methods and applications. . . . When the transition is complete, the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods, and its goals.”

* Thomas Kuhn
* Berger & Luckmann: We and other members of our cultural groups construct the world we perceive and live in.
Edward T. Hall (1994) & the foundational aim of crossing cultures: “Bridging the cultural gap”

• “[Not understanding the Navajo] drove me to look at my own culture, my own assumptions, those beliefs that are out of awareness.”

• “It is the out-of-awareness, tacit differences among us, which lie at the heart of the tremendous misunderstandings that plague our species.”

• “When cultures meet and start interacting with each other, even well-chosen words may not be enough to bridge the cultural gap.”
Narrative 3 theory to practice:
A four-phase transformative training program

- Increasing awareness of our own characteristic ways of making meaning in familiar and unfamiliar cultural contexts;

- Increasing awareness of others’ ways of making meaning in familiar and unfamiliar cultural contexts;

- Managing our emotions and thoughts in the face of ambiguity, change, and challenging circumstances & people; and

- Bridging cultural gaps between ourselves and others: Shifting frames, attuning our emotions and adapting our behavior in effective and appropriate ways.
Phase I: Key concepts

- Constructivism and meaning making
- Perception
- Holistic experience
- Objective and subjective culture
- Development and transformation
- Challenge and support
- Identity: Assumptions, values and behavior
- Mindfulness
Phase I: Practices

• Attend to the autobiographical “I”
• Attend to the mindful “Me”
• Recall my personal vision statement
• Recall my characteristic ways of responding to ambiguity and uncertainty
• Recall my assumptions about intercultural learning and teaching
• Attend to ways that my values and behavior play out differently in different contexts
Phase II: Key concepts

- Suspension of judgment
- Value formation
- Mindful perception
- Empathy
- Values and behavior

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Phase II: Practices

- Perceive non-judgmentally
- Cultivate curiosity
- Generate multiple interpretations
- Listen & observe mindfully
- Inquire mindfully
- Attend to values & limitations of all perspectives
- Cultivate cognitive empathy

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Learning is “the process through which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.” (Kolb, 1984)

“All knowing depends on the structure of the knower.” (Maturana & Varela, 1992)

Also see Zull, J. (2002). The art of changing the brain. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
Another model describing “the structure of the knower”: The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC)

Denial

Polarization

Minimization

Acceptance

Bridges across Difference

Deeply Comprehends Difference

De-emphasizes Difference

Judges Difference

Misses Difference

Monocultural Mindset

Intercultural Mindset

Adaptation

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Modified from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), M. Bennett, 1986
Another model offering insights into “the structure of the knower”: Challenge & support*

Introducing challenge and support: 
Warm up questions*

• What kind of environment do I need in this course/workshop/orientation so I’m able to get out of my comfort zone, yet not go into the panic zone?
  – How can the teacher/trainer/facilitator contribute to getting me into the learning zone?
  – How can the other participants contribute to getting me into the learning zone?
  – What can I do to get myself into the learning zone?

• What can I do, based on what I’ve just heard my peers say, to help others get in and stay in their learning zone in this workshop, much of the time?
Intercultural teaching and learning resources

- WISE Conference (February)
- Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication (SIIC, July)
- Winter Institute for Intercultural Communication (WIIC, March)

- Personal Leadership
- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)