

Developing Intercultural Competencies :
An Educational Imperative for the 21st Century

Alvino E. Fantini

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How shall I talk of the sea to the frog,
if it has never left its pond ?

Chung Tsu, 4th Century B. C.

In today's world, the effects of globalization and new technologies have had dramatic effects – both positive and negative – on people around the globe. More people than ever before in the history of the world now have direct and indirect contact with each other. Direct intercultural contact occurs through study abroad, migration, and international travel, whereas indirect contact is facilitated through technological advances such as the internet, email, text messaging, skype, and more. This situation presents both new opportunities and new challenges. Today, everyone needs to develop abilities that will ensure positive interactions when dealing with people from other cultures – whether with members of ethnic minority groups within the same country or across national borders – and the university must

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play a major role in this effort.

The development of proficiency in a second language forms an obvious and important part of intercultural abilities, but language alone is not enough. Students also need other competencies. Whereas English is by far the most commonly used international tongue, other languages are also used in intercultural transactions. For this reason, Japanese students – and students everywhere – increasingly confront the need to develop both second language proficiency and intercultural competencies. Universities that recognize this urgent imperative must consider how they can help their students develop both.

But are foreign language courses in Japan, whether at the elementary, junior and high school, and university levels, properly preparing learners? And where are matters of intercultural communication addressed in the curriculum of such institutions? In most areas of the world today, a grammar-translation approach to language teaching has been replaced long ago by instructional approaches that are characterized by three important aspects – communicative, interactive, and participatory. Their focus is on developing the learner's ability to communicate with speakers of other languages, whether these other speakers are native or not, and this is accomplished primarily by teaching students how to perform functions such as greeting, inquiring, requesting, apologizing, and so forth. In this approach, the performance of functions includes appropriate behaviors and interactive strategies that must accompany *speaking* the target language. In this way, the development of second cultural competencies are also assured.

For this to occur, however, the purpose and scope of foreign language education need to be re-examined and reconceptualized. If the expanded goal is to

prepare students for positive intercultural participation through effective communication, learners need not only to make themselves understood, but they also need to gain the acceptance of speakers from other cultures. Acceptance, however, often depends on appropriate behaviors and interactions even more than correct grammar. Once again, the goal of foreign language instruction requires an expanded focus that includes intercultural competencies, not just language as a linguistic system, devoid of context.

This insight, in fact, led to the development of the field of intercultural communication more than 40 years ago (Wight et al in Fantini & Blohm 1999, p. 11). Curiously, intercultural educators while intensely interested in and actively exploring perceptions, behaviors, and interactive strategies across cultures, mostly ignore language itself. Language teachers, conversely, generally overlook behavioral and interactive aspects ; after all, they call themselves “language” teachers, not teachers of “intercultural competence.” Yet, all three areas – language, behaviors, and interactive strategies – together form the components of speech acts whether dealing within one’s own culture or across cultures. For this reason, foreign language study needs to be expanded to include the development of intercultural abilities.

Notions of Intercultural Competence

The field of intercultural communication is quite young and therefore still evolving. For this reason, many important issues remain unresolved, including the most fundamental issue of all : What abilities are needed, in addition to language, for successful intercultural contact and interaction ? In other words, what exactly is intercultural competence ?

Interculturalists have pondered and written about the abilities needed for intercultural success for some time. Yet, despite a number of important attempts (e. g., Martin 1989 ; Wiseman & Koester 1993 ; Byram 1994, 1997 ; Dearsorff, 2004 ; and Humphrey 2007), a search of the literature quickly reveals the dilemma : The use of a wide array of terms that reflects a lack of consensus among intercultural writers and researchers. For example, terms one commonly encounters include : biculturalism, multiculturalism, bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism, communicative competence, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, cultural competence, cultural or intercultural sensitivity, effective inter-group communication, ethnorelativity, intercultural cooperation, global competitive intelligence, global competence, international competence, international communication, intercultural interaction, metaphoric competence, transcultural communication, and so forth. All of these terms are found throughout the literature.

Of these, “intercultural (communicative) competence,” however, appears to be the most common nomenclature and one that is gaining increasing ground as well. Fortunately, this term also builds nicely on a related concept that has already been widely used by language educators over many years – “communicative competence” (CC) (cf. Byram 1997, p. 3). In this view, all individuals possess a native communicative competence (termed CC₁) ; therefore, during intercultural contact, one encounters that of one’s interlocutor(s) (i. e., CC₂). Individuals who choose to develop a second communicative competence, i. e. that of their interlocutors or the CC₂, develop “intercultural communicative competence,” or ICC, in the process of developing the CC₂. This new competence – intercultural communicative competence (or intercultural competence, for short) – then, acknowledges the individual’s abilities in his or her CC₁ and the development of CC₂ and, in addition,

it also acknowledges the novel insights that are only possible when being in a position to compare and contrast both. The possession of both CCs, indeed, creates a unique vantage point, an important aspect of ICC. This vantage point is one that a monolingual, monocultural native of either system cannot possibly access. It is unique to a bilingual-bicultural person.

Figure 1. Intercultural Communicative Competence

$$\text{Communicative Competence}_1 + \text{Communicative Competence}_2 (+ \text{CC}_3, 4, \text{ etc.}) \Rightarrow \\ \text{Intercultural Communicative Competence}$$

To take this discussion a step further, ICC may also be defined as : a complex of abilities that are needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with other speakers who are from a language and cultural background that is different from one's own. Whereas *effective* suggests one's view of one's own performance in the second language-culture (i. e., a cultural outsider's or *etic* view), *appropriate* suggests how one's performance is viewed by natives of the target culture (i. e., a cultural insider's or *etic* view). The task as foreign language learners, then, is to recognize (and clarify) one's own view, or perspective, while attempting to learn about the views of others. In the end, although we may not necessarily develop native-like proficiency, we may aspire to some degree of ability to communicate, behave, and interact in the style of the target culture members.

Components of ICC

The model of ICC described above is based on two recent studies (Fantini, Arias-Galicia & Guay 2000 ; Fantini 2006). Both studies speak of a "complex of abilities ;" i. e., they acknowledge that there are multiple and interrelated

components of intercultural competence. These include : a cluster of characteristics, three areas, four dimensions, target language proficiency, and developmental levels. Not all of these components can be developed easily, however, through classroom work alone. Direct LC₂ experience greatly facilitates their development. For this reason, study abroad programs and other forms of international contact and travel are extremely helpful by providing students with direct intercultural experiences, especially for those with no prior intercultural contact or exposure.

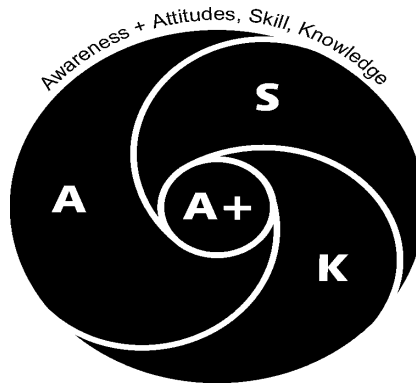
A brief explanation of each component follows : First of all, the characteristics most commonly cited in the literature (and substantiated by research) are : flexibility, humor, patience, openness, interest, curiosity, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and suspending judgments. The three areas are : 1) the ability to establish and maintain relationships, 2) the ability to communicate with minimal loss or distortion, and 3) the ability to cooperate in order to accomplish tasks of mutual interest or need. Each area is related to the other two and one area alone is not adequate for ICC.

In addition, there are four dimensions. These are : knowledge, (positive) attitudes (or affect), skills, and awareness. All four dimensions apply to the target culture (LC₂) in the same way that they apply to one's native culture (LC₁). Of these, awareness is central and especially critical to cross-cultural development. Awareness is developed and enhanced through reflection and introspection that occurs when one compares and contrasts the LC₁ with the LC₂. Awareness is different from knowledge in that it focuses on the self in relation to everything else in the world – things, people, thoughts – and ultimately it helps to clarify what is most important regarding one's own values and identity. Another difference is that whereas knowledge can be forgotten, awareness cannot ; once one becomes aware,

it is impossible to reverse and become unaware.

The four dimensions are configured below in Figure 2 in a sort of pinwheel (Fantini 1999, p 184). This figure illustrates that awareness is central to ICC development and that the first three dimensions promote and enhance awareness – fostered through introspection and reflection – while enhanced awareness, in turn, stimulates development of the other three.

Figure 2. Dimensions of Intercultural Competence



Target language proficiency, as previously stated, is fundamental to this concept of ICC. Ironically, however, language proficiency is generally ignored in most other models of intercultural competence. In the construct presented here, however, proficiency is considered fundamental to the development of intercultural competence, although clearly not equal to it. Target language proficiency at any level enhances all of the other ICC aspects in quantitative and qualitative ways and it does even more: For example, proficiency in a second language causes us to confront how we perceive, conceptualize, express, behave, and interact in our first

tongue, while also providing alternative communication strategies appropriate to the second tongue. The process of learning a foreign language helps us to transcend and transform our habitual view of the world. On the other hand, lack of a second language, even minimally, constrains us to think about the world and act within it in only a single system, our native system. Failure to learn a second language, then, precludes us from experiencing a valuable aspect of intercultural contact as well as all the insights that come with it.

Finally, ICC is a process – one that normally evolves over a lengthy and continuing period of time, albeit with occasional moments of stagnation and even regression. Continuing development depends in part on the degree of contact as well as the strength of one's individual motivation – whether instrumental or integrative – with respect to the target culture. To help measure and monitor ICC development, then, it is useful to establish varying levels by devising benchmarks. These can be accomplished, for example, by using numbers or descriptors, as in the examples given below (cf. Fantini 2000, 2006) :

- Level I: Educational Traveler – e. g., participants in short-term exchange programs (1-2 months)
- Level II: Sojourner – participants engaged in extended cultural immersion, e. g., internships of longer duration, including civic service programs (3-9 months)
- Level III: Professional – appropriate for individuals working in intercultural or multicultural contexts ; e. g., staff employed in international institutions or educational exchange organizations
- Level IV: Intercultural / Multicultural Specialist – appropriate for trainers and educators engaged in training, educating, consulting, or advising multi-national students

Another possibility is to devise terms for progressive and sequential levels, such as : basic, intermediate, advanced, and native-like, akin to those used by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (cf. ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 1985). In the end, no matter how accomplished, it is important to design and implement courses that address all of the components of intercultural competence – from characteristics to developmental levels – accompanied by a comprehensive and quality assessment process. Both are discussed below in the sections that follow.

Designing and Implementing Courses in Intercultural Communication

Given this understanding of the nature of intercultural competence and its components, we are ready to consider their practical implications and applications – how to design and implement effective courses in intercultural communication. When doing so, we must keep in mind that the principal goal of such courses (as well as study abroad programs) is to develop intercultural competencies in our students in addition to multiple secondary objectives. To this end, Mager’s Sea Horse story comes to mind and may be worth repeating here (1997, pp. v-vi) :

Once upon a time, a Sea Horse gathered up his seven pieces of eight and cantered out to find his fortune. Before he had traveled very far he met an Eel, who said :

“Psst, hey bud. Where ’ya goin’ ?”

“I’m going out to find my fortune,” replied the Sea Horse, proudly.

“You’re in luck,” said the Eel. “For four pieces of eight you can have this speedy flipper, and then you’ll be able to get there a lot faster.”

“Gee, that’s swell,” said the Sea Horse, and paid the money and put on the flipper and slithered off at twice the speed. Soon he came upon a Sponge, who said :

“Psst. Hey, bud. Where ‘ya goin’?”

“I’m going out to find my fortune,” replied the Sea Horse.

“You’re in luck,” said the Sponge. “For a small fee I will let you have this jet-propelled scooter so that you will be able to travel a lot faster.”

So the Sea Horse bought the scooter with his remaining money and went zooming through the sea five times as fast. Soon he came upon a Shark, who said :

“Psst, Hey, bud. Where ‘ya goin’?”

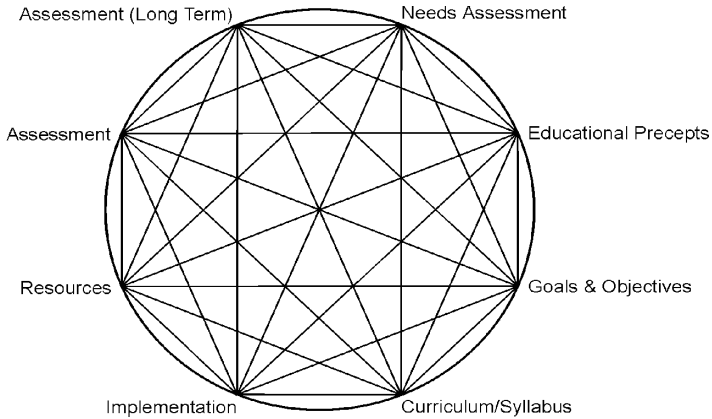
“I’m going out to find my fortune,” replied the Sea Horse.

“You’re in luck. If you’ll take this short cut,” said the Shark, pointing to his open mouth, “you’ll save yourself a lot of time.”

“Gee, thanks,” said the Sea Horse, and zoomed off into the interior of the Shark and was never heard from again.

The moral of this fable, as Mager points out, is that if you’re not sure where you’re going, like the Sea Horse, you’re liable to end up someplace else and not even know it. For this reason, this story serves as a perfect metaphor for the conundrum that exists within educational processes in which instructional objectives, course design and implementation, and assessment, are not aligned. Although such alignment is absolutely basic, educators with inadequate preparation in assessment often face just such a situation. This became obvious in a survey conducted regarding intercultural communication course designs used at 50 universities in the United States that revealed varying degrees of congruence among these three aspects (Fantini 1997, pp.125-148). Stated another way, instructional objectives, course design and implementation, and assessment must be inextricably linked, otherwise the educational process is compromised. This notion is reinforced graphically in the model depicted below in Figure 3. (Fantini 2000-2001, p. 101).

Figure 3. The Gemstone Model



In this model all of the components listed around the circle are connected – from needs assessment all the way around to evaluative assessment (including long term assessment sometimes conducted after the formal course experience is over). The intersecting lines show that each component is linked with all of the others. The model reinforces how assessment is related directly to explicitly articulated goals and objectives and that assessment measures their attainment by the learner. What is to be learned and what is to be measured are related ; they are, in fact, the same. And, since the goals and objectives are about developing components of intercultural competence, clear understanding of ICC and these components again emerge as critical to the educational process. To be sure, educators and trainers working in this area must be competent in conducting all of the areas cited around the circle – competent to establish instructional goals objectives and competent to assess these same goals and objectives.

Assessing the Development of Intercultural Competence

Earlier, it was pointed out that intercultural abilities are known by various terms and with varying meanings. It is obvious, therefore, that clarity about the nature of intercultural competence is a prerequisite not only for the design and implementation of courses, but also in order to properly monitor and assess their results. Let us turn now to an examination of assessment quality. To review, assessment quality can be enhanced by considering several factors (adapted from Deardorff 2004, p 324) :

- first of all, the purpose ; i. e., why assess ?
- the target audience ; i. e., who is to be tested ?
- clarity about successful outcomes ; i. e., what outcomes are being assessed ?
- the use of proper assessment tools and strategies that are aligned with the learning objectives
- the assessment procedure ; i. e., how the test is administered, evaluated, and scored
- aspects of the tests used ; i. e., their scope, efficiency, and length as well as their validity and reliability
- representative and varied samples of student achievement ; i. e., ongoing and not just end-testing), and
- avoiding bias ; i. e., extraneous interference that may affect obtaining adequate and appropriate samples.

Fortunately, quality assessment can be facilitated and ensured today owing to the development of a variety of new evaluative approaches – outcomes assessment, mastery learning, and performance assessment, among others. Their purpose, however, remains the same : to find out how well students attain established

objectives. Newer test formats and strategies help to obtain this information in better and more varied ways, permitting a shift away from traditional paper and pencil tests which, taken alone, are never effective measures of intercultural competence. Approaches that incorporate portfolios, logs, observation, interviews, performative tasks, and the like, are generally more valuable for assessing intercultural competence. All of these options permit a multi-dimensional assessment approach that is essential for monitoring and measuring a complex phenomenon like intercultural competence.

In addition, a comprehensive pilot assessment tool has been developed in response to the ICC concept described in this paper. This tool, known as the Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC), is presented in a “YOGA” format, an acronym that stands for “Your Objectives, Guidelines, and Assessment.” The AIC form is intended to be used as a guide before, during, and after an intercultural course or experience to help monitor the multiple aspects of an individual’s evolving intercultural competence. Hence, the AIC helps in three ways: 1) first, to establish and then critically examine intercultural objectives, 2) to serve as a guide during the intercultural sojourn, and 3) to provide an assessment tool for use at various stages of the process as well as at the end. Hence, the assessment approach is normative, formative, as well as summative (Fantini 2006, pps.95-116). Moreover, the AIC’s YOGA format shifts the focus of the process from teaching to learning, from input to outcome, and from evaluation to development. This is accomplished by engaging the learner as a partner in the teaching-learning process, an approach that is consistent with co-constructive educational approaches in general.

Although the form is about assessing developmental levels of ICC, its completion is based on both observations and performance. It is not about what a

participant *thinks* he or she might do in a given situation, but *what is actually done and observed* – by the participants him / herself, and by others. This responds to differences between *professed intentions* (what one thinks or says one might do in a given situation) and *expressed behaviors* (what one actually does). Abstract notions about competence are substantiated by observed behaviors.

Of course, few individuals ever attain “native-like” behaviors, nor might they desire to do so. (This is especially true of adults ; less so of younger individuals). Most intercultural experiences allow but do not demand native-like behavior, recognizing that individual choices are both complex and personal. Nonetheless, it helps for each person to clarify how far he or she is willing to go and why, and the consequences of their decisions. Often, the result is a clarification of the values that are most central to each person and their identity. Yet, a minimal expectation for all who embark on an intercultural sojourn, it would seem, must be an understanding and tolerance of the host culture (that will, at the very least, allow the participant to be able to stay within the target group), even if not everyone also develops similar levels of appreciation.

An important aspect of the monitoring process is the two-way assessment, involving the learner plus one or more external evaluators. In addition to the instructor, other evaluators may include a peer, a native of the host language-culture, or others. Of these, the host native’s perspective is especially instructive because it provides the “emic” in addition to an “etic” viewpoint, which invariably differ. When using a host native evaluator, however, it is often necessary to translate the form into the host language. For best results, each person using the form will complete it ideally in his or her own native tongue.

It is not unusual that the learner's competence may be perceived differently by each person who completes the form. This is not important. What is important, however, is that the differing perspectives are used to stimulate dialog, reflection, and learning, and that strategies are identified that will maximize further development. This is also the reason for developing together the action plan for the participant's future work at the end of each assessment session.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that completion of a lengthy form such as the AIC will not fully ensure the development of intercultural competence. A checklist, no matter how comprehensive it may be, serves only as a guide. Other means of monitoring the intercultural process should be used in combination with the AIC – journals, portfolios, and other assessment strategies are all helpful. These diverse strategies used in varying combinations provide multiple indicators of ICC development. These indicators are obtained from both discrete and global and direct and indirect assessment formats (see Figure 4 below). This is especially important when assessing areas of awareness and attitudes, which are often more challenging to evaluate than more traditional areas of knowledge and skills.

Figure 4. Multiple Assessment Formats

Global	Discrete
Direct	Indirect

Direct assessment is conducted at specified moments in time, usually announced, and directly documents actual learning. Traditional tests and quizzes measuring acquired knowledge are good examples of direct assessment formats. Other direct strategies include portfolios, capstone projects, and other variations of

embedded course assessments.

Indirect assessment formats are normally ongoing and sporadic, and not often obvious to the learner when they are being conducted. A teacher observes students during a class session, for example, and later makes notes about their performance based on criteria she has established. She might focus on how students interact or participate, whether they are experiencing problems, are asking questions, appear motivated, are on target, or are unengaged. Periodic notes about student performance help the teacher to follow up on specific issues, as needed, in subsequent sessions. Other indirect formats include self-report surveys, interviews, and focus groups in which students report impressions of their own learning.

Discrete assessment focuses on very specific aspects of learning ; for example : Did the student grasp the point at hand, demonstrate a particular skill, or reveal a particular insight ? Its focus is narrow and specific and contrasts with global assessment, which considers abilities that require synthesis and applications in other contexts. Normally, however, several or all of these formats are used. For example, true or false questions on a test are at once both direct and discrete, while a case study utilizes both indirect and global formats. In general, ongoing use of varied formats in combination produces the best indicators of learning over time.

To help with the assessment process, other external instruments are also available. A few select examples are cited below in Figure 5 :

Figure 5. Chart of Intercultural Competence Assessment Instruments

[Note : URLs were confirmed at the time of this writing ; however, URLs and Websites are subject to change over time. For an expanded list of over 90 instruments, see also Fantini 2006.]

ACTFL Proficiency Scale & Guidelines

Measures : Foreign Language proficiency

Description : This instrument provides detailed descriptions of levels of language proficiency based on five levels originally established by the U. S. Foreign Service Institute. The scale lists various levels of communication functions, range of vocabulary, degree of accuracy, and flexibility, that language learners are able to control in four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These descriptions help in setting learning goals, in planning learning activities, and in evaluating proficiency.

Source : Online from the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), 1982, revised 1985.

Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC)

Measures : Intercultural Competence, including language proficiency

Description : This questionnaire, designed in a YOGA Format (“Your Objectives, Guidelines, and Assessment”), is utilized for self-assessment and assessment by peers and teachers. The tool monitors the development of the intercultural competence of sojourners (and hosts) over time, providing valid and reliable indicators that are normative, formative, and summative. Shorter and longer versions exist, as well as versions in English, British English, Swiss German, and Spanish. For the underlying research and the tool, go to : <http://www.experiment.org/resources.html> (click on Final Report, then Appendix G.) ; for a shorter version, see : <<http://www.sit.edu/graduate/7803.htm>>, then scroll down to SIT Occasional Papers Series, Inaugural Issue No. 1, and then locate the article on pps. 25-43.

Source : For permission to use, contact : <alvino.fantini@sit.edu>.

Assessment of Language Development (ALD)

Measures : Foreign language development.

Description : This questionnaire, designed in a YOGA Format (“Your Objectives, Guidelines, and Assessment”), is utilized for self-assessment and assessment by peers and teachers. This tool charts the development of language proficiency over time, providing normative, formative, and summative indicators.

Source : For permission to use, contact : <alvino.fantini@sit.edu>.

Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI)

Measures : Individual potential for cross-cultural adaptability

Description : A culture-general instrument designed to assess individual potential for cross-cultural adaptability based on the assumption that individuals adapting to other cultures share common feelings, perceptions, and experiences that occur regardless of their own cultural background or target culture characteristics. The inventory contains 50 items, resulting in individual profile scores along four dimensions.

Source : C. Kelley & J. Meyers. Intercultural Press. Tel : 1-800 370 2665.

New Directions at Matsuyama University : A Pilot Program

In 2007, Matsuyama University undertook to develop a new M. A. Program in Language Communication. This is an important step toward drawing attention to the need to develop intercultural competence in its students. Among the areas that make up this program (e. g., language, linguistics, pragmatics, and so forth), Intercultural Communication is a required course for all participants. The original course design was based on the aforementioned “Survey of Intercultural Communication Courses” (Fantini 1997). As a result, aside from the goal of developing intercultural competence, this new course is designed to explore a broad range of fundamental intercultural communication concepts and their implications towards more fully understanding the differences and similarities among people of

diverse language-cultures, as well as the effects upon both when individuals of different cultures come into contact.

The course objectives include exploring: 1) the impact of one's native language-culture in influencing how one sees the world, 2) the components of world view and their interconnections, 3) varying cultural taxonomies, 4) intercultural contact and its positive and negative consequences, 5) potential areas of cultural conflict, especially between Japanese and English-speakers, 6) strategies for effective and appropriate cultural entry and adjustment, and 7) intercultural communicative competencies that facilitate positive intercultural relations. This highly participatory and interactive two-semester graduate course is also designed to help students develop a personal and professional understanding of the field of intercultural communication and its implications within the field of Language Communication. Finally, this course requirement is based on the conviction that an understanding of ICC is critical not only for students but also for educators, trainers, policymakers, and others who are in a position to promote the development of intercultural competence – both for international sojourners and those who remain at home.

Conclusion

As language and intercultural educators, helping our students develop foreign language proficiency and other intercultural competencies, we need to be clear and explicit about what we do and how we do it. This is especially true in a field still in the process of defining the fundamental notion so central to our work – intercultural competence. How we conceptualize our subject matter affects how we define goals and objectives, design and implement courses, and monitor and assess

outcomes. Today, increasingly varied assessment options are available that help in conducting effective and reliable evaluation.

Clearly, it is a challenge to develop ICC and it also takes time and effort, but its attainment promises exciting new possibilities. The development of intercultural competence offers a chance to move beyond the limitations of our own ethnocentric worldview. “If you want to know about water,” it has been said, “don’t ask a goldfish.” The goldfish and the frog remind us of ourselves. Yet, intercultural learning and contact provide provocative educational experiences precisely because they permit us to learn about others while also learning more about ourselves.

On the other hand, the lack of any intercultural competencies seems also impossible to imagine in this day and age. In the past, the lack of intercultural competencies have often resulted in negative actions such as the misunderstandings, conflict, ethnic strife, and genocide that have often resulted from failed interactions across cultures. In today’s world, everyone needs intercultural competence, and learning a second language and developing the complex of abilities that lead to intercultural competence are essential in today’s world. They are, in fact, an educational imperative in our times.

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