ASSESSMENT OF SUSTAINABLE INTERCUTURAL COMPETENCE INCREASE IN TRANSNATIONAL INTERNSHIPS

Gabriele Abermann, Salzburg University of Applied Sciences, Rosalyn Eder, Salzburg University of Applied Sciences, Austria, Yussuf Erdil, Mugla University, Turkey

Introduction

Vande Berg (2001, 31) indicates that in today's world of higher education, demonstrated outcomes and applicability to the real world are vital to the sustainment of academic programs. According to Rundstrom (2005) the skills needed differ from those even 15 years ago and must empower graduates to compete in a global market with an increasingly educated population. One way to address this is to integrate transnational work placements or internships into the curricula. While the domain-specific skills applied and practiced in this context are usually well described, supervised and assessed, it is often wrongly assumed that in doing the placement abroad or having become proficient in another language, there is an automatic increase in intercultural competence.[1] Furthermore, both graduates and employers are often at a loss to explain and communicate exactly what they have learned or what they are looking for. In order to support sustainable and accountable intercultural competence acquisition and gain, the following issues seem relevant:

- Have students been prepared for their transnational placement? Are they familiar with the impact of culture shock? Are they aware of the potential difference between host country and organizational culture? Do they have the terminology to describe the skills they are going to acquire or increase and thus communicate these to future employers?
- What support structure has been implemented to fully exploit the learning opportunity for students?
- Are enterprises aware of the potential for cultural misunderstandings and as a possible result, not able to fully utilize the potential of these students?
- Have the learning outcomes for intercultural competence been defined and what assessment and evaluation measure is carried out to verify their accomplishment?

The SKILL2E Project[2] addresses these questions and aims at designing a comprehensive concept that will tackle these issues both from the educational and the corporate angles. This concept rests on three pillars: i) the usage of an on-line assessment instrument; ii) a support structure including a pre-departure training as well as an on-line platform for self-reflection; and iii) a cultural mentoring concept for enterprises.

This paper focuses on the online assessment instrument by first outlining the theoretical framework and then the concrete implementation scenario. In this context, sustainability means that both students and enterprises will benefit and utilize the placement results after it has been completed. Accountability refers to the method used for verifying learning outcomes and the related competence gain and thus, in return, contributes to sustainability.

Intercultural Competence Assessment

Wiseman and Koester (1993) identify two critical components of competence: effectiveness and appropriateness. As Bennett, Bennett and Allen (2003, 244-245) explain, intercultural competence is "the ability to relate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" which requires "culturally sensitive knowledge, a motivated mindset, and a skillset." One of the primary purposes of developing intercultural competence is to address diversity issues. This contributes to "effective recruitment and retention of members of underrepresented groups, management of a diverse workforce, productivity of multicultural teams, marketing across cultures, and to the development of a climate of respect for diversity in the organization" (Bennett, Bennett and Allen, 2004, 149). Utilizing a combination of questionnaire and the Delphi-method in analyzing the concept and measurement of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2009, 478) defines intercultural competence in terms of its outcome: "The overall external outcome of intercultural competence is defined as

---

[1] The term 'competence' is used within the project context and in this paper as a comprehensive overall term including a set of skills, attitudes as well as knowledge and understanding. Competency, by contrast, is defined as a discrete and constituent item of any competence.

[2] This project has been selected in the LLP-Erasmus University-Enterprise Cooperation 2010 (10% success rate). The consortium comprises six universities and four enterprises from Austria, Finland, Great Britain, Romania, Spain and Turkey as well as 2 US institutions.

the effective and appropriate behavior and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further detailed in terms of appropriate [author's italics] behavior in specific contexts (appropriate behavior being assessed by the other involved in the interaction)." The following figure illustrates how the components are inter-related in a developmental and time-sensitive manner in a continuous loop but at any stage influence one's intercultural interactions.
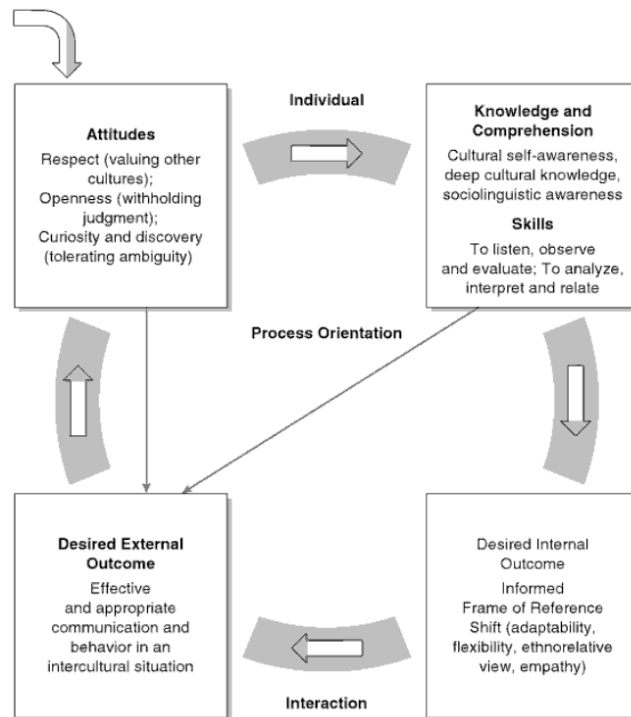

Figure 1: Deardorff Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Spitzberg and Changnon 2009, 33)

Deardorff's model seems well suited in the context of the SKILL2E concept with its intended strategic interventions before, during and after the internship abroad. It might be presupposed that anyone intending to do an internship abroad already displays to some extent the requisite attitudes Deardorff cites. These can then be enhanced as well as the participants' motivation and knowledge through the pre-departure training. The communication scenario for (self-) reflection should prove as a further catalyst towards ethnorelativity and associated skills, which, in turn, should result eventually into appropriate and effective interaction. In order to verify this hypothesized interrelationship in our concrete context, the use of an assessment instrument at defined points of the preparatory phase, during and after the internship itself seems a reasonable approach. The implementation scenario of the assessment instrument in the project context is described below.

Assessment in the context of SKILL2E is a crucial component that needs to be integrated in every aspect of the learning process of the students. Fantini (2009, p. 460) stresses that "instructional objectives, course design and implementation, and assessment must be inextricably linked: otherwise, the educational process is compromised." As illustrated in the assessment model below, there must be a direct linkage between assessment and explicit goals and objectives - therefore, it is of utmost importance that the aspects that need to be assessed in a learning process, and instrument to be utilized, are clarified and identified. This presupposes the necessity of defining specific measurable learning outcomes in order to make assessment possible and valid. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and the Culture Shock Model are those most pertinent to address the issues raised in the SKILL2E project as they provide an explanation of the stages a person moves through in the process of intercultural competence acquisition. The DMIS Model (Bennett, 1993) distinguishes in total between six stages. The three ethnocentric stages are characterised by projecting one's own cultural view onto any interaction, either by ignoring, defensively rejecting or minimizing cultural differences. By contrast, the three ethnorelative stages indicate an increasing ability for perspective shifting and cognitive, affective as well as behavioural adaptation to specific cultural communication situations as indicated in the following figure:

Development of Intercultural Sensitivity

Experience of difference

Denial   Defense   Minimization   Acceptance   Adaptation   Integration

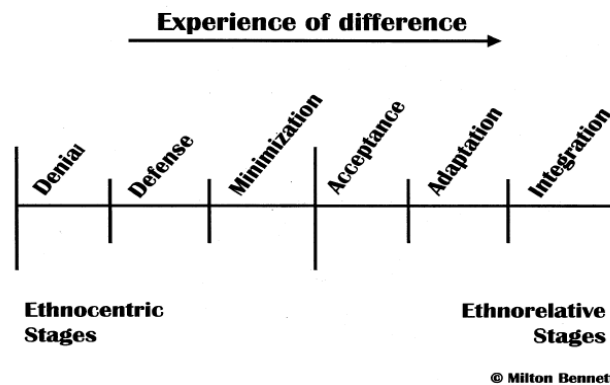**Ethnocentric Stages**   **Ethnorelative Stages**

© Milton Bennett

Figure 2: The Six DMIS Stages (Bennettt, 1993)

For Bennett (1993, 26), moving through these stages is associated with personal growth and must be seen as multidimensional. This development, therefore, involves the whole personality - one's thinking, feeling and acting. In the SKILL2E concept it will be considered an achievement if participants display a change after the internship and the associated SKILL2E interventions with respect to the stages the DMIS delineates. Here, Janet Bennet's (2003) claim that any training and intervention strategy should be informed by the individual stages participants are currently in, has to be taken into account as well and translates therefore into using the assessment instrument for needs analysis.

Assessment Instrument Implementation

According to Deardorff (2009) intercultural competence is an "ongoing process." It is therefore important to provide opportunities for project participants to reflect upon and assess the development of their own intercultural competence. This involves incorporating "... integrated assessment throughout a targeted intervention" – in our case, primarily the pre-departure training and the online communication scenario. In this context it is interesting to note that the only competency that all intercultural experts agreed upon as essential was the "ability to see from others' perspectives." As a consequence, the selected assessment instrument should definitely measure any increased ability of perspective shifting and the associated appropriate attitudes and behaviours. Within the SKILL2E context, the assessment instrument will serve two main objectives:

- As a diagnostic tool including usage in the sense of a formative test (Fantini, 2009, 463)
  - to be able to provide better, customised training for students in the pre-departure training
  - to identify key competencies students already have or have acquired / strengthened / intensified during the placement. This will provide them with appropriate verbalizing skills to communicate their overall competence gain after the placement to, for example, employers. This usage is related to the term "formative assessment" used in the recognition of prior learning context, which in turn is a major objective in the context of Lifelong Learning, one of the key Bologna and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) objectives.
  - to identify the current profile of the cultural mentors so that they can be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses when mentoring and in case training is provided to again tailor the training accordingly
- As an assessment tool in the sense of an achievement test (Fantini, 2009, 463)
  - to identify whether the intervention measures such as the pre-departure training, the reflection and the cultural mentoring have had an impact on the participants' intercultural competence gain

Based on the evidence above as well as the definition of competence and the theory base used in the context of the SKILL2E project, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI[3]), a multipurpose instrument, has been selected to assess the intercultural competence gain. The IDI meets all SKILL2E selection criteria: user-friendly implementation, free of cultural bias, availability in consortium languages (either English or native language), theory base and price-performance ratio.

---

[3] http://www.idiinventory.com/

IDI v3

The IDI in its current version (IDI v3) is a 50-item instrument, carried out either in a pencil-and-paper or, as in our case, an on-line version and takes about 15-20 minutes to complete. It is based on actual statements selected from interviews of a directed sample of 50 subjects representing cross-cultural and situational diversity (i.e., not limited to university students). Using a 5-point response scale from agree to disagree, statements are evaluated such as "People from other cultures are generally lazier compared to people from my culture" (Paige 2004, 99). Additionally, four open-ended questions support capturing the respondents' intercultural experience. The instrument can be used both for individuals as well as establishing group profiles and has been widely implemented in both the corporate and educational worlds as it offers "a powerful explanation of effective interaction across cultural boundaries" (Hammer 1999, 62). The following figure illustrates this continuum of increasing sophistication in cultural interactions based on the Intercultural Development Continuum (ICD), a further development of the DMIS:
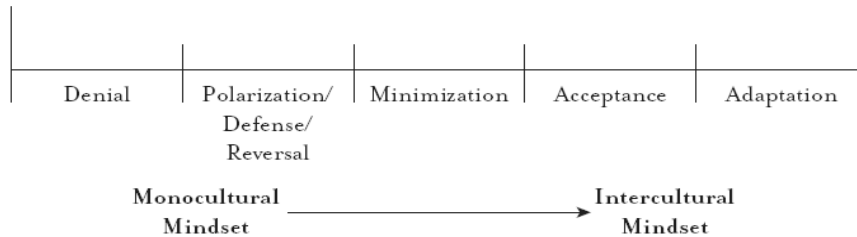

Figure 3: The Cultural Development Continuum

Reliability and Validity of the IDI is high as has been outlined above. For an extensive description of the development as well as the validity and reliability testing of the IDI see Hammer (1999, 2009, forthcoming) Hammer and Bennett (2001a, 2001b), Hammer et al (2003), Bennett (2004), Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2007). The following two scenarios and associated figures show the envisaged IDI deployment in the SKILL2E Project with Scenario 1 comprising both the educational and corporate environments and Scenario 2 focussing on the corporate context only.

SKILL2 E Scenario 1

It is intended to use the assessment instrument before and after the pre-departure training as well as after the placement. This should support training design and address the challenges students face with respect to their cultural orientation. It should also guarantee that all intervention strategies consider the stage-appropriate mindset. The learning outcomes for the training need to be tailored to the specific stage students are in but should always include a move up the IDC towards the intercultural mindset.

Figure 4: IDI Implementation scenario for transnational placements /internships

SKILL2E Scenario 2

In this scenario that is actually a segment of the Scenario 1 the project target group of enterprises is focused on. As we see great potential in the Cultural Mentoring Concept in developing into a method to address diversity issues in a company, we will also trial this concept in combination with the usage of the IDI in general, not only those resulting from employing international interns. A major task will also be the alignment of the instrument usage with the general SKILL2E evaluation plan and the involvement of all stakeholders, not least the feedback from the students participating in the training on the realistic formulation of the learning outcomes (Deardorff, 2009).

Figure 5: IDI Implementation scenario in corporate context

The following sections further detail the implementation purposes especially relevant for the SKILL2E Project.

Training Needs Analysis

According to Fowler and Blohm (2004), in this phase the primary goals and learning outcomes of the training are determined. In our case, the pre-departure training aims at supporting the intercultural competence gain and the readiness to reflect on cultural issues and as a consequence, to modify behaviour.

(Self-) Reflection of Personal Intercultural Competence and Development

As cultural self-awareness in its widest sense forms a key constituent of intercultural competence, it is vital to provide opportunities for the project participants to acquire, if necessary, intensify and most importantly, practice this skill. In the project, the online communication scenario will develop the framework for guided self-reflection during the work placement. Culture incorporates here the national, ethnic but also organizational, business sector and/or gender-related environment in the sense of Hofstede's (2005, 4) "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes people from one group or category of people from others." This might also raise identity issues that need to be addressed and can be identified through IDI usage with respect to the Cultural Disengagement Scale. The individual profile generated by the IDI and the ensuing interpretation and reflection with a certified trainer, should prepare and support the students for the self-reflection on their cultural experience. The Online Communication Scenario is based on the model developed in the national LeonardodaVinciII Project Skills, which has been presented at various conferences such as the SPACE 2008, NAFSA 2008 and EAIE 2009. The diagram below illustrates the model highlighting its alignment with Kolb's learning cycle. This was considered as one of the relevant factors for achieving sustainability as learners were addressed in various ways and thus engagement could be intensified. The pre-departure training focused on awareness-raising and sensitizing students for cultural differences using Hofstede's five dimensions as a reference framework alongside Hall's high and low context communication and the culture shock model (abstract conceptualization). The intercultural diary carried out as a blog in an online learning platform provided the opportunity to document intercultural observations at the workplace (reflective observation), which were re-evaluated in a double reflective loop in the guided structure of the intercultural placement report. It was hypothesized that these strategic interventions would enable reiterated conscious decisions with respect to trialling context- appropriate behaviour (active experimentation) during the transnational placement (concrete experience).
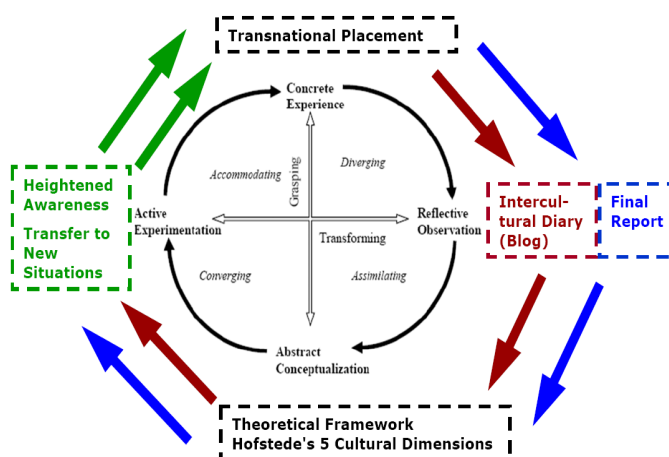

Figure 6: SKILLS Model for Sustainable Intercultural Competence Gain in Transnational Placements (Kolb's Learning Cycle diagram adapted from Kolb and Fry, 1975)

Familiarization with and Employment of Intercultural Competence Terminology

A major objective of the SKILL2E project is to reap sustainable benefits from intercultural encounters, not least how such competence acquisition or gain can be applied in the current or future workplace environment and be explicitly transferred into a skill upgrade. The prerequisite is therefore, the identification and proper communication of the skills acquired and how they will be useful for an employer. In Deardorff's (2009, 487) words, learners need to be able to "articulate clearly and specifically what they have learned." In accordance with Paige's (2004, 89) purpose of presenting theory and bridging theory with practice, participants will be introduced to the underlying concepts and associated specific terminology. It is, however, not only the participating students that need to be familiarized with the terminology, also higher education professionals and business representatives need to be able 'to speak that language'.

Support in Implementing the Cultural Mentoring Concept

In this context, two specific use cases are relevant. On the one hand, as already discussed, the IDI will be used in some pilot cases to analyze a particular person's qualification profile for acting as cultural mentor and in case training is advisable, tailor the training design to the specific needs. On the other hand, the instrument will be used in combination with other quantitative and qualitative measures to assess what impact the cultural mentoring has had for the participants.

Conclusion

Sustainable learning needs to be grounded in sound theory that pays heed to a competence-based approach. Accordingly, learning outcomes must be verifiable. In the case of "soft skills", such as intercultural competence, this requires innovative assessment approaches. In the SKILL2E project the IDI as a multidimensional assessment instrument is embedded in a comprehensive concept to support the learning curve through targeted training and guided self-reflection opportunities. It will provide all participants including placements students and their supervisors as well as enterprises with a new model for a sustainable and accountable intercultural competence gain.

References

1. BENNETT, M.J. (1993). Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity In: Paige, M. (Ed.). Education for the intercultural experience (pp. 21-71). Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.

2. BENNETT, J.M, BENNETT, M.J. AND ALLEN, W. (2003). Developing Intercultural Competence in the Language Classroom In: Lange, D.L. and Paige, M. (Eds.). Culture as the Core: Perspectives on Culture in Second Language Learning (pp. 237-270). Greenwich: Information Age.

3. BENNETT, J.M. AND BENNETT, M.J. (2004). Developing Intercultural Sensitivity. An Integrative Approach to Global and Domestic Diversity. In: Landis, D., Bennett, J. & Bennett, M. (Eds.). Handbook of Intercultural Training, 3rd Edition. P. 147 – 165. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

4. DEARDORFF, D. (2009). Implementing Intercultural Competence Assessment In: Deardorff, D. (Ed.). The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Communication (pp. 477-491). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

5. FANTINI, A.E. (2009). Assessing Intercultural Competence: Issues and Tools In: Deardorff, D. (Ed.) The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Communication (pp. 456-476). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

6. HAMMER, M.R. (1999). A Measure of Intercultural Sensitivity: The Intercultural Development Inventory In: Fowler, S.M. and Fowler, M.G. (Eds.) The intercultural sourcebook (Vol. 2) (pp. 61–72). Yarmouth: Intercultural Press.

7. HAMMER, M.R., BENNETT, M.J., & WISEMAN, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The Intercultural Development Inventory In: International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27 (pp. 421-443).

8. HAMMER, M.R. (2005). Assessment of the impact of the AFS study abroad experience. New York: AFS

9. HAMMER, M.R. (2009). The Intercultural Development Inventory In: Moodian, M.A. (Ed). Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence (pp. 203-217). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

10. HAMMER, M.R. (2011) Additional Cross-Cultural Validity testing of the Intercultural Development Inventory In: forthcoming publication in the Intercultural Journal of Intercultural Relations.

11. HOFSTEDE, G. AND HOFSTEDE, G.J. (2005). Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind. NY: McGraw-Hill.

12. PAIGE, M. (2004). Instrumentation in Intercultural Training In: Landis, D., Bennett, J.M. and Bennett, M.J. (Eds.) Handbook of Intercultural Training. 3rd Ed. (pp. 85-128) Thousand Oaks: Sage.

13. RUNDSTROM, T. W. (2005). Exploring the Impact of Study Abroad on Students' Intercultural Communication Skills: Adaptability and Sensitivity In Journal of Studies in International Education 4(9) (pp. 356-371).

14. SPITZBERG, B. AND CHANGNON, G. (2009). Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence In: Deardoff, D. (Ed.). The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence (pp. 2-52). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

15. VANDE BERG, M. (2001). The assessment of learning outcomes in study abroad In International Educator, 10(2), 31

16. WISEMAN, R. L. AND KOESTER, J. (1993). Intercultural Communication Competence. Thousand Oaks: Sage.