Evaluating the Double Loop Learning of Cultural Competence

Steven Henderson, Southampton Solent University, United Kingdom

Maria Tabuenca-Cuevas, Universidad de Alicante, Spain

Rosalyn Baldonado-Eder, Salzburg University of Applied Sciences, Austria

Gabriele Abermann, Salzburg University of Applied Sciences, Austria

Introduction

Intercultural Competence and Double Loop Learning

SKILL2E is a European project funded by the European Commission and comprised of six higher education institutions (HEIs) and four enterprises across the European Union complemented by the expertise of one HEI and one enterprise from the USA. SKILL2E stands for Sustainable Know-How in Intercultural Learning in Student Placements and the Knowledge Transfer to Enterprise. As the name implies, a core idea of the project is to enhance the intercultural competence of HE students during their international workplace placement. To this end, the project offers four supportive interventions to travelling students:

a) a well-tested online assessment instrument which assesses the initial cultural orientation of participants

b) a pre-departure training module based on students' cultural orientation

c) online support to encourage self-reflection

d) cultural mentoring.

At an early stage in the design of the SKILL2E model, it occurred to the academics involved that intercultural competence was a special case of double loop learning. That is to say that genuine cultural competence requires more than the adoption of a series of isolating routines that reduce the turbulence caused by intercultural incompetence. Rather, cultural competence, like double loop learning, requires reflection and experimentation to understand and rectify the actions that lead to reoccurring problems. By way of illustration, consider the following student experience written in a diary:

"Great fun today. Went in to a cafe for lunch and waited for ages before someone served me. Then they brought me the wrong food. Took some sorting out – won't go back there gain".
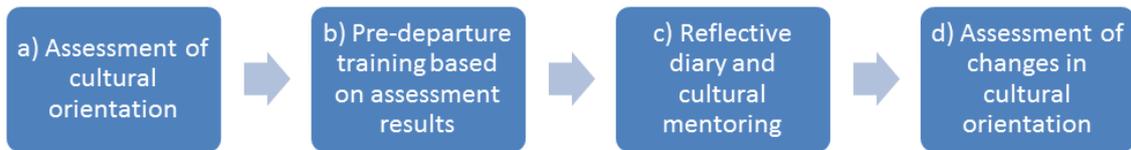
A trivial incident, no doubt, but the underlying issues are apparent. The individual concerned has insufficient intercultural skills to observe that his service expectations, either of time or process, are deficient, or that his language skills create confusion rather than lunch. The incident is passed off as "fun" rather than a problem that he has, there is an implication the cafe is at fault and finally the solution reached is to have lunch elsewhere.

The intention of the SKILL2E interventions is to help students identify such experiences as indicative of a problem – a manifestation of intercultural incompetence. For example, differences in habits at meals are identified as a source of cultural confusion during pre-departure training and this is followed as an item in the reflective diary. A cultural mentor, following up on the diary entry or through discussion, should help the student understand how their insensitivity to cultural difference creates the uncomfortable experience. Thus, the student begins to reflect on such experiences and learns to accept rather than ignore or avoid the cultural discontinuities. It is the learning process, rather than reproduction or mimicry of the current culture that is the heart of intercultural competence. This implies that during work placement, students should have the opportunity to test, evaluate, reject or validate existing knowledge, values and norms and create new cognitive frameworks to help them solve future problems. In terms of intercultural competence, SKILL2E intervention measures have been designed to support students in ensuring acquisition of benefits from intercultural encounters and that the competence acquired can be transferred into other cultures and contexts. Thus double loop learning is an implicit (if hitherto latent) prerequisite.

This paper proceeds by outlining – albeit briefly – the nature of the SKILL2E interventions so that the reader can follow the context more clearly. The argument then outlines workable, measurable routines for double loop learning and intercultural competence. These two routines are then combined into a grid that can be used to analyze the experiences of students into intercultural learning spaces. The paper then develops a methodology for placing such experiences into these spaces. The findings are then discussed, and some conclusions offered.

SKILL2E Interventions

The Skill2E model includes a number of interventions which assist students in their quest for improved intercultural competence. These steps are illustrated in figure 1 and a brief description of each step will be then discussed.

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a) Assessment of      b) Pre-departure      c) Reflective      d) Assessment of
   cultural              training based        diary and          changes in
   orientation     →     on assessment   →     cultural      →     cultural
                         results               mentoring          orientation
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Figure 1: The SKILL2E Implementation Scenario for HEIs

a. Assessment Instrument

As figure 1 illustrates, the assessment instrument provides the groundwork for the pre-departure training and reflective diary during placement. Assessment of intercultural competence is a complicated task which requires a combination of several quantitative and/or qualitative measures. A comprehensive review of instruments used to gauge the intercultural competence gain in transnational placements was undertaken, searching for: user-friendly implementation, freedom from overt cultural bias, availability in consortium languages (either English or native language), rigor of theoretical base and price-performance ratio. Based on these criteria, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was selected to assess both the initial intercultural competence and the post-internship intercultural competence gain. The IDI is based on the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) by Milton Bennett.

b. Pre-departure Training

Students are rarely mindful of intercultural competence as they prepare for their work placements. More prosaic concerns of tasks at work, accommodation and travel are uppermost in their thoughts. In SKILL2E, the pre-departure training consists of a locally adapted core module. General learning outcomes for intercultural competence were formulated for the consortium. Each partner institution designs their own training plan and specifies the learning outcomes based on the IDI group profile of the students. The basic goal of the training is to raise awareness and sensitize the students to cultural differences using intercultural frameworks such as the cultural dimensions based on Hofstede's research (1981), Hall's high and low context communication (1976), and the culture shock model. For example, a student travelling from a very formal culture might be encouraged to think about how this characteristic could be interpreted in various new contexts before departure. This general approach can be enhanced by reflection on their IDI scores as students should have received personal feedback on their results

to ensure that they are aware of their developmental orientation and that they acquire the knowledge necessary for their progression along the DMIS continuum.

c. Reflective Diary

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, intensify and most importantly, practice this skill. According to Deardorff (2009,.478) "It is therefore important to provide opportunities for project participants to reflect upon and assess the development of their own intercultural competence." In the SKILL2E case, the online communication scenario "Interflection" provides the framework for guided self-reflection during the work placement. There are a set of guided questions are the focal point of the diary which permits the students to reflect upon their impressions, observations, and experiences. According to Argyris et al. (1985) and Schon (1987), this double loop learning is essential to the redesign of social structures as well as human action. This strategic intervention enables reiterated conscious decisions with respect to trialling context- appropriate behaviour during the transnational placement.

The use of computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL) for the diary supports individual as well as group learning by fostering interaction and the willingness to communicate. According to Stahl et al. (2006, 419) "Computer support for intersubjective meaning making is what makes the field unique." This attempt to help students make meaning of their interactions in a new culture is done gradually as the diary starts with tasks that collect visual impressions of other cultures and progresses with questions of increasing profoundness. These questions are based on the cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede (2001) and are directly related to the experiences of the participants on their placements. Students can see and share responses to the questions. This is done to attempt to reach more multifaceted views triggered by the questions. The tasks allow for self-monitoring and facilitate the theory of the pre-departure training to be integrated into their daily practice. The other available tools, such as forums, promote collaborative learning which also aides in the adaptation of the participants into their new social environment. Intercultural competence gain is a complex issue and is best done in authentic contexts, thus, the diary attempts to trigger meta-reflection by asking students to reflect on the invisible boundaries (Carroll 1988)

of values, beliefs and attitudes in intercultural situations (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997).

Cultural Mentoring

Cultural mentors are a key component of the SKILL2E concept for the enterprises. The mentors are meant to help interns adjust not only to the company culture but also to the host national culture. It is important for mentors to recognize how group processes are impacted by culture and how intercultural communication impacts on behaviour. This awareness is necessary for the work placement to be beneficial for both the mentor and the intern. In order to prepare the mentor to be, it is necessary to ensure that these people are equipped with the appropriate mindset, heart set and skill set (Bennett 2006) to actually carry out the task. This necessitates reflection of the future mentor's current qualification and task profiles as well as the overall intercultural and interpersonal communication competence. The mentoring process hinges on the relationship between the mentor and the mentee and on the specific frameworks or conditions in which the mentoring process takes place. It is a question of knowing how and when to ask the right questions, rather than supplying instruction or advice as such.

d.   Reassessment of Cultural Orientation
The last step is a reassessment of the process through an analysis of the reflective diary and a second IDI test. In the Skill2E model, the expectation is that students who have undergone all of the interventions will show a shift forward in their intercultural sensitivity development.

Having outlined the nature of the interventions experienced by the students concerned, the paper now begins the development of the double loop learning / intercultural competence model by outlining the nature of both concepts.

Double Loop Learning

Double loop learning (Argyris and Schon 1978) can be understood as a reflective problem solving routine, distinct from single loop learning which is routinely invoked in response to problems. Thus, in the face of a problem, most individuals or organisations will select from a range of previous, acceptable solutions until one works well enough

for the problem to disappear or become less serious. In previous research Argyris et al. (1985) and Greenwood (1998) have shown that double loop learning can be defined as: the result of reflection on the norms, values, and social relationships which underpin human action. Double loop learning requires four distinct and difficult stages:

Stage 1.   The articulation of existing theories in action (called variously, and inexactly, mental models, paradigms and such like in the literature) that lead to both the definition of the problem and the axiomatic solution set;

Stage 2.   The creation of new meanings and understandings as a result of failure of stage 1;

Stage 3.   The derivation of new actions as a result of stage 2;

Stage 4.   The generalisation of a new theory resulting success at stage 3

The processes are intended to both find new solutions to problems, and formulate the underlying logic that explains their relative success. Argyris and Schon (1978) observe that such behaviour is extremely rare, not only because it is both difficult and uncomfortable at an individual level, but also because it runs contrary to many organisational and national cultural habits. For example, the articulation of doubt required at stage 1 is difficult in very hierarchical or polite cultures since it can be construed as rudeness or criticism of a senior. Similarly, where power distance is greater or organisations are large and tightly integrated, stage 3 may not follow naturally from stage two (also referred to as role constrained learning, see Henderson 1997).

Although accepting that double loop learning is a rarity, the authors wonder if the organisational and national cultural impediments to double loop learning affect a placement student to a lesser degree than normal, since the cultural blinds and constraints would not apply so severely. For example, a Spanish student on an overseas placement to a Japanese firm operating in Wales is forced to confront an often bewildering collage of social norms and mores that impact on the effectiveness of tasks in hand. The placement student is in a strong position to recognise the ineffectiveness of these single loop routines - through a mixture of bafflement and frustration perhaps, forcing a more reflective approach which can be shared with the host organisation through the mentor. It is frequently the case that outsiders see things more clearly (Deal and Kennedy 1982), until they have assimilated the cultural norms and paradigms.

Naturally, the use of double loop learning here may invoke and throw into relief many of the same discomforting experiences of alienation and confusion that double loop learning generates at the individual level, but the result of such a process should be the development of competences to deal with cultural displacement. That is to say, the development of cultural competences and the ability to carry out double loop learning might been seen as symbiotic. Therfore, this paper briefly reviews the literature on cultural competence, observing similarities with the literature on single and double loop learning. The paper then outlines a method for capturing and interpreting the experiences of students taking overseas placements as part of the SKILL2E programme and discusses the findings obtained.

Cultural Competence

As the concept of culture can be difficult to define, there are also many definitions of cultural competence. To begin, Fitzgerald (2002) identifies general cultural competence a context-bound, practice-based, awareness, knowledge, attitude and skills concept. Other researchers, like Ramburth (2000), define it as an understanding and acknowledging of similarities and differences in a first step that is followed by taking action to address the issues of difference. Trahar (2007) states that effective intercultural encounters that foster sensitive learning require a personal, intimate and empathetic approach. However, even though there are many models for the development of cultural competences only the two adopted for the SKILL2E model (Abermann 2011, Tabuenca 2012) will be discussed in greater detail.

The Milton Bennett Model

In the article "Becoming Interculturally Competent", Bennett (2004, 62) starts out with these words:

> After years of observing all kinds of people dealing (or not) with crosscultural situations, I decided to try to make sense of what was happening to them. I wanted to explain why some people seemed to get a lot better at communicating across cultural boundaries while other people didn't improve at all, and I thought that if I were able to explain why this happened, trainers and educators could do a better job of preparing people for crosscultural encounters.

In this first extensive study it became apparent that there were two clearly different groups of people characterised by their world view. The first group, categorised as ethnocentric, is characterised by "the experience of one's own culture as "central to reality." (Bennett 1993, 62). The second group, categorised as ethnorelative, has a world view where one's culture is one of many possibilities viable (Bennett and Bennett 2004). These two large groups were also subdivided by different experiences in a sequential manner: Denial, Defense and Minimisation are ethnocentric, while Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration are ethnorelative. In the Bennett Model, in the ethnocentric stage, people go first from denying cultural differences to then defending their own culture, to finally trying to find the similarities between cultures in the minimisation stage. The next three steps, which are part of the ethnorelative stage, include the acceptance of the differences between cultures and the adaptation and integration of the new cultures without losing one's own culture. This model is shown below.
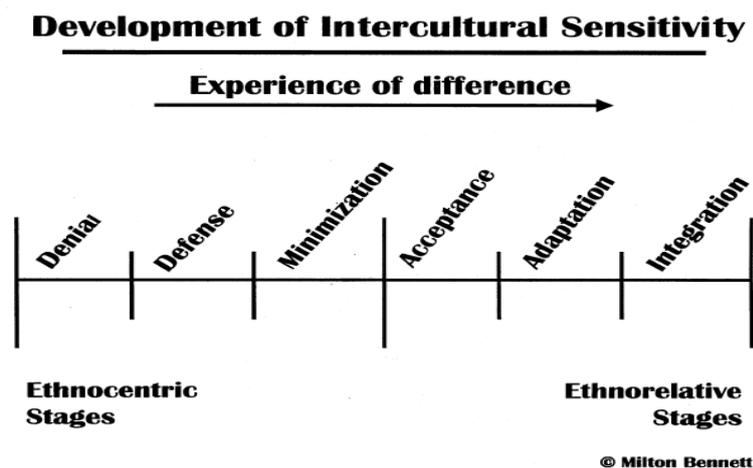

Figure 2: The Six DMIS Stages (Bennett 1993)

Bennet et al. (2004) claim that any training and intervention strategy should take into account the individual stages participants are currently in, otherwise the sequential learning of intercultural competence will not occur. These stages are also the basis for Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) which is is used in the IDI test. The stages of Denial, Polarisation and Minimisation (early stages) would be considered indicative of a monocultural mindset, whereas participants in late stages of Minimisation, Acceptance and Adaptation would be in an intercultural mindset (Hammer 2009). This correlation of the models makes the use of the IDI as an assessment instrument in the SKILL2E model particulary applicable.

Model of Intercultural Competence

Moving one step further, Deardorff (2004, 478) defines intercultural competence in terms of its outcome:

> The overall external outcome of intercultural competence is defined as the effective and appropriate behaviour and communication in intercultural situations, which again can be further detailed in terms of appropriate [author's italics] behaviour in specific contexts (appropriate behaviour being assessed by the other involved in the interaction).

There is an important shift in the concept of competence in which changes in attitudes, knowledge and comprehension in an individual alters their world view and this change can be seen through the appropriate behaviour in new cultural situation. This is reflected in the loop shown below.
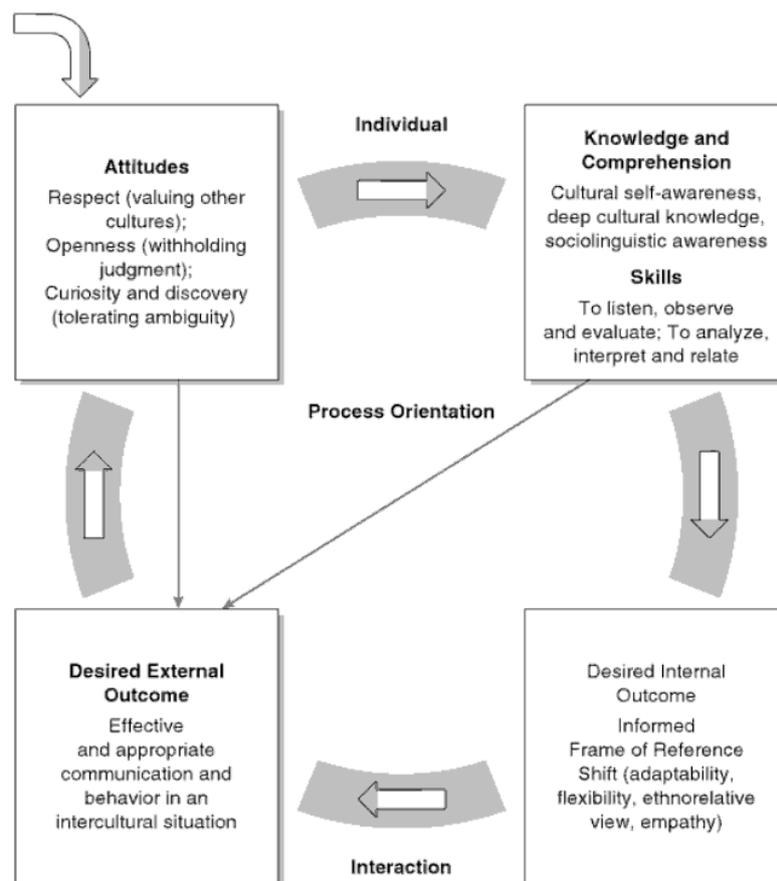

Figure 3: Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Spitzberg and Changnon 2009, 33)

The model in figure 3 illustrates this concept of competence. The Deardorff model provides an appropriate framework where cultural competence is learned sequentially in a learning loop that effectively allows an individual to move from one stage of the DMIS to the next.

As previously explained, in the SKILL2E project, one of the aims was to encourage double loop learning using a three pronged approach: pre-departure intercultural training to gain intercultural awareness, the assistance of a cultural mentor at the work placement to foster intercultural learning experiences, and finally an individual on-line diary for intercultural reflection using guided questions. The application of this approach based on the methodology led to the creation of an expected set of correlations that would correspond to the DMIS stages and double loop learning. These are descibed in the following table.

	Denial	Defense	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation and Integration
Stage 1	Unwilling to accept cultural basis for problems	Willing to accept cultural basis for problems	Willing to accept cultural basis for problems	Willing to accept cultural basis for problems	Signals from home (or other) culture may identify problems more readily than host
Stage 2	Culturally blind – no incentive to change thinking	Cultural problems trivial in context – reluctant small changes to perspective	Cultural problems trivial in context – willing to make small changes in perspective	Willing to accept greater changes in the direction of the host culture	Wider cultural base may make elaboration or discarding of theories less painful
Stage 3	Likely to find frustration with existing actions rather than change behaviour	Reluctantly makes small, single loop changes	Willingly makes larger single loop changes	Unwilling to move from the accepted host practices even if these are ineffective	Unwilling to retain accepted practices if ineffective
Stage 4	Limited engagement – no basis for developed	New theories likely to be pejorative to host culture.	New theories likely to emphasise customs and manners	Restatement or uncritical elaboration of existing ideas.	Cultural relativity may assist elaboration of new

	thinking.		rather than deeper reflection		theories

Table 1: Impact of Bennett's Stages on Double Loop Learning

These cells are predictions of likely behaviours related to the application of double loop learning and gains in intercultural competence. It should be said, at the outset, that the authors did not expect to see many, or indeed any, students from SKILL2E achieving the highest levels. Many factors mitigate against such attainment for any student that was not already operating at such a level – particularly the relatively short duration, the relatively low position of the roles assigned to many students and, of course, their age and inexperience.

Methodology

The method draws upon information sources generated by the SKILL2E intervention. All students do the IDI test before the pre-departure training; so it is possible to see where they are developmentally regarding intercultural competencies and how this relates to the Bennett categories. Students are also required to maintain a reflective diary during the placement. The diary consists of open reflections over time, together with prescribed topics. These topics are those identified as being those likely to be associated with cultural discontinuity, such as greeting, eating together, working in teams, behaviour towards seniors (both in age and hierarchy for example) socialising and so on. The diary entries could be read and analysed for intercultural competency gain, if any, and a richer insight into the learning patterns exhibited by students within Bennett's stages. It needs to be stressed that the questions were designed to spark reflection by implying more than factual recall. The reflection process in itself largely depends on how and what students define as difficult situations or problems.

Once a sample of reflective diaries had been received from students that had completed the programme, a protocol was developed that would enable the researchers to infer both the stage of the student and their learning strategies. During the preparation of the schedule, several cases were analysed, jointly and independently, to ensure similarity of process. It is worth noting that the three researchers were of different nationalities – causing a further level of complication and intercultural reflection.

To illustrate the markers sought, and elaborate on the table above, with participants in Denial, we would note that a student would simply not be able to grasp differences in cultural behaviours because they are neither aware of culture nor that it produces any differences. In other words, the participant would be oblivious to the cultural change in location. For example, one student working in a menagerie increasingly withdrew from the host culture and bonded with some of the animals.

The next stage is Defense, where students can either become very defensive regarding their own culture, elevating its qualities and deciding that all others are inferior or this reaction can be reversed and the student can perceive other cultures to be superior to their own and turn to being overly critical. In these entries, the incomprehension would be quite apparent as in the case of one student who comments on the superficiality of politeness in England, saying that when people need help the natives just walked by and she, a foreigner, had to help a man who had fallen. She called this "false politeness".

The next step is Minimisation, which is the level where most of the participants of the SKILL2E project were developmentally before going on placement. At this stage, students strive to find the commonalities between cultures and tend to gloss over the differences. Here, phrases like: people are the same; this is just like in Spain, etc. The student's behaviour seeks to minimise occasions where the host culture is radically different, by withdrawing when possible. For example, a Finnish student found her work colleagues confusing but located peers that shared her existing predispositions.

In Acceptance, students begin to question the differences and feel a sense of confusion as they are not sure how to adapt this behaviour into their own cultural framework. At this stage, it is normal for students to ask questions like: Why do people here do these activities (such as personal grooming) so openly in the UK where in Spain this would be done more privately? And "How do I feel about doing these activities in public"? Similarly, a student in Spain began attending bullfights reluctantly, without much enjoyment initially, and reflected on the Spanish explanations for what she was predisposed to judge a cruel spectacle.

In the next step, Adaptation, students try to blend/adapt cultural frameworks and they try to see the world from other points of view albeit at times with some confusion and

hesitation. It could be possible to see comments that reflect the student's interest in incorporating actions or reflecting beliefs from the new culture into their own behaviour.

In the last step, Integration, the student would be able to understand, negotiate meaning and behaviours in intercultural situaltions appropriately for themselves and the recipient. At this stage, it would be possible for the student to interact confidently in cultural encounters.

It is important to see that the student's response and reflection, rather than the problem, itself that is the object of analysis and the constituent of the learning space derived. Take, for example, a receptionist praised for her swiftness at home but who is regarded as brusque by customers when working overseas. It is unlikely that such a student in Denial would be aware of the problem, and therefore not reflect on the theories in action (in this case the expected cultural norms) unless it was repeatedly brought to his or her attention. A single loop solution, perhaps training on greeting customers and so on may fix the problem of rudeness, but may not in itself lead to an understanding of the cultural expectations that would be necessary if the student were to be able to develop further. A student in Defense may deflect attention away from the problem by alluding to other performance indicators (such as processing speed) - indeed the student may experience irritation at the time wasted with banal courtesies in day to day interactions if these are not the norm at home. In this case the reluctance to reflect upon the underlying causes of the problem may be reinforced by positive feedback in other respects. A student in Minimization has greater opportunities for reflection – having adjusted to the customs and routines of local culture, there is at least the possibility of accurate reflections on the underlying mechanics so that novel problem solving, and insights from his or her own culture can be deployed. These could be single loop – the student may learn to multitask pleasantries with the mechanics of booking in – or double loop – the understanding that the host culture expects formality as part of respectful customer service. A student in Acceptance will have the degree of cultural relativity and tolerance of ambiguity necessary to fit in to the host culture, but at the same time may be unlikely to challenge elements of the culture that lead to the problem. The sublimation of "self" might imply a reluctance to return to the emotional, norm challenging behaviours required for further double loop learning when the culturally acceptable behaviours create, or at least do not solve, problem by, say, focusing on apologies and commiserations rather than sorting out a mess. Indeed, one might be struck by the similarity of this stage to the "normal" position described by

Argyris and Schon (1978). Only at the acceptance end of Bennett's cycle do we see that a multilateral approach to thinking and feeling readily permit double loop learning, responding to problems and contingencies in a culturally appropriate way. Note also, in the table of behaviours below, that as the right hand end of the spectrum is reached, the identified problems become less closely aligned with individual problems and more closely with organisational, process and performance issues – although this might be expected by definition.

Findings

In this section the paper outlines illustrative results from the analysis. Surprisingly many of the individuals reviewed were in the denial, defence and minimisation categories. Although this was anticipated to some extent, it is disappointing that so many volunteer to work and travel abroad with such a disposition. Moreover, the competence gain is not always evident from the reflective logs – the defense stage seems very strong – even when it creates major problems. For example, a Spanish student teacher on placement in the UK was initially mystified by the amount of time her colleagues spent on pointless bureaucracy and processes (her judgement and, if she had troubled to find out, her colleagues too in all probability) and refused to do it. This naturally caused many "quality" issues at work and soured relationships with her colleagues. Her new mental model consisted of negative thoughts about English people.

The grids below consist of 4 examples from the stages identified as the responses in these categories were the most numerous. They are arranged by degree of intercultural competence: from Denial to Acceptance.

Denial

Student1 Austrian Engineer in Germany

	Denial	Defense	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation and Integration
Stage 1					
Stage 2		Found the big city boring, too perfect, impersonal and cold, little or no culture,			

		everything is over-priced and limited recreational facilities available			
Stage 3	Focuses on improving technical skills and non-technical ways of communicating with customers Flexible working hours suits him perfectly Worries about being part of the team was immediately dismissed as he was easily integrated Appreciates open communication Focuses on meeting performance expectations				
Stage 4	The student met his own personal goals and found the placement very successful and would work for the same firm again. No cultural differences were noticed except for the "anonymity" in the big city.				

This student does not demonstrate any reflections at a higher stage - all entries occur in the defence /denial part of the continuum, and most concern technical aspects of the work. The student does not articulate any reflections of differences in culture. On the one hand, one could infer that the cultural differences between Austria and Germany are small, and therefore do not prompt the double loop problem solving routines. However, such an answer ignores the student's attribution of cultural issues to "the city" rather than himself. The result is the withdrawal of the student from his host environment into the safer work place routines based around technology and team

goals. There are no cultural reflections as such, consequently there is little to identify in stage four – other than new reasons for cultural disengagement.

Defense

Austrian Midwife in Switzerland

	Denial	Defense	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation and Integration
Stage 1					
Stage 2			There are instructions for every movement made by women who had special training in managing household		
Stage 3		Work procedures in the hospital are more structured and follow certain schema compared to Austrian hospitals Guidelines and standards are actively enforced, updated and discussed and midwives work exactly according to these guidelines – unlike in Austria where they gather dusts in dim corners Documentation is precise, detailed, coherent and conclusive – compared to minimal and poor documentation in Austria Lack of hierarchy in terms of communications; interns are expected to contribute to the discussions and give			

		opinions on the doctors' decisions – unlike in Austria where a clear hierarchy is observable Difficulty in the beginning with the requirement of documenting the learning progress through a detailed portfolio and immediate feedback –but indeed find it helpful and a good thing			
Stage 4		Single loop - at the end of the placement, the student views the Swiss' precise and structured work procedures far better			

All the reflective elements of the log can be assigned to the defence / minimisation columns. The role expected abroad was much more demanding than the student expected – greater adherence to procedure and far greater involvement in decision making. There is no great reflection on the pros and cons of the difference outside of job satisfaction.

This particular student exhibits a reverse defence, whereby elements of her own culture and processes are judged pejoratively. Stage 4, the creation of new theories in practice, consists of her understanding of Swiss practice. One can speculate on the disruption that this will cause upon her return, where her opinion is not sought, she is required to defer in all things and routines are less structured. In short, her cultural displacement is likely to be transferred from host to home country.

Minimisation

Spanish Teacher in Italy

	Denial	Defense	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation and Integration
Stage 1			Assumes that the language and the customs are similar enough.	Has an episode on the bus that showed how courtesy towards the elderly is important in	

	Denial	Defense	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation and Integration
					Rome.
Stage 2			Realizes that the food, for example selections of bread and cheese, are much bigger in Italy.	He proceeds to incorporate this courteous act in his daily routine as upon reflection decides that it's "a good thing".	
Stage 3			Observes that double kissing on greeting someone needs to follow a different order otherwise he would end up kissing people on the lips accidentally! He makes the appropriate change.		
Stage 4			Muses on the fashion of men waxing their eyebrows and spends some time deliberating whether or not to do it himself. He also notes the degree of formality in dressing and makes some changes to "blend in".		

All the student's entries are in minimisation and acceptance. This student makes a great effort to fit in – not just at work but in day to day interactions – on the bus for example. His reflections are not deep – he questions very little – but is open to experience and thinks about changes to his behaviour, politeness, clothes and even eyebrow waxing appears on his list of possibilities.

Although quite reflective and open, his changing mental models at stage 4 are geared towards making himself invisible, at a superficial level, at least. He does not report that his foreign clothes and so on cause him problems at work, although given that that he is a teacher, this may be the case.

Acceptance

Finnish Receptionist in Italy

	Denial	Defense	Minimisation	Acceptance	Adaptation and Integration
Stage		Finds Italian driving			

1		terrifying – road law a guide to good practice rather than something adhered to. Notes that he is glad he lives close to work so he doesn't have to use public transport			
Stage 2				Found Italian body language very confusing at first, but seems to have adapted to what Italians communicate; however, does not suggest he uses such body language himself much Seems to enjoy Italian chattiness and draws contrasts with Finnish Strong empathy with employees on short time contracts, and female co-workers, but there is little reflection on what the women themselves may think	
Stage 3			Baffled by poor work ethics and avoids those who say no work and finds jobs to do	Found emotional outbursts displayed by the hotel owners initially fearful, but appreciated as a spectator sport	
Stage 4				Clearly learned a great deal from the placement, and indicates a great enjoyment of the language, culture and history of Italy.	

				Has contrasted the two cultures to give himself a greater understanding and appreciation of his native country	

This student seems to have taken a mature approach. In many ways, stronger adaptation would have undermined the work placement if, say, he left work when given permission or played on facebook. Entries in the diaries suggest the stage of minimization moving towards acceptance, even adaptation, although this is difficult because of contradiction between work place culture / national culture and own desire to learn a variety of skills at work. A cultural mentor might have pushed him further on some elements or suggested different exposure. Appreciation of own culture quite revealing.

Concluding Thoughts

As previously mentioned, the diary analysis proved to have expected yet at times surprising results. The grids above show a typical pattern of results. The cells that capture our interpretation are predominantly located in one column, rather than scattered randomly or forming some other pattern across the grid. This suggests that the relationship between stages of intercultural competence is, in large part, coherent with the learning model when applied to individual students on overseas placements.

Looking across the row for stages 3 and four, where double loop learning might be observed more starkly, one is struck by its absence. It would seem that critical reflection on the host culture and double loop learning problem solving is not the selected strategy for a large number of students studied.

That said, there is evidence of students progressing through the stages, either through a qualitative change in diary entries, or more evidently, thought the pattern produced on the grids above. Where the entry spills across two columns, it is normal to see that the column with fewest entries is to the right of the fuller column, and entries are at stage one or two. This implies that progress is made by experiencing discontinuities and problems rather than observing or absorbing host culture in an academic fashion. This suggests to the authors that problem solving and recognition are crucial elements

to moving between stages, but that the problem is not defined in the way predicted by double loop learning models.

Inspection of these transitions points out that the problem, as such, is the student's experience (ie emotional response) rather than the underlying cultural causes. This observation carries two implications. Firstly, transition depends upon affective responses to what feels wrong rather than intellectual judgements or empirical observations about what is right. Behaving in a fashion that makes one feel better (either by ignoring pointless bureaucracy or waxing eyebrows) does not require double loop learning, neither does accepting behaviours that feel wrong (such as attending bullfights) though use of sympathetic language.

Further these behavioural routines undermine what could be a useful bonus to the host organisation. As outsiders, the students are able to identify and think through some problems that cannot be easily articulated by the hosts. However, this would not necessarily improve the student's affective state – indeed it may jeopardize embryonic work relationships. As such it is similar to the kinds of issues that thwart double loop learning in the normal organisational context.

In short, our juxtaposition of intercultural competence and double loop learning routines strongly supports our contention that the former is a specific case of the latter. Indeed, it is so similar that the normal kinds of social and emotional routines that undermine the benefits of the double loop approach are equally in evidence here in the development of intercultural competences.

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