

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad  
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Volume 36, Issue 1, pp. 280-311  
DOI: 10.36366/frontiers.v36i1.826  
[www.frontiersjournal.org](http://www.frontiersjournal.org)



# Intercultural Professional Development for Educators: Applying Intercultural Learning to Enhance Effectiveness

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## Abstract

To examine the interaction between educators' intercultural development and students' intercultural growth, we studied the impact of CIEE's Intercultural Communication and Leadership (ICL) course. Our results indicate that Educator, Country, Gender, and Field had impacts on students' intercultural gains (Gibson et al., 2023); the focus of this article is solely on educators' perceptions of the factors that shape their ability to foster student intercultural learning. Using the AAC&U's (2009) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric to frame the 22 educator interview responses, our study indicates the tangible results of formally and informally supported educators' intercultural professional development. As a result of educators' intentional intercultural development, they leverage skilled pedagogical techniques to effectively bridge with students to enhance their intercultural learning. Therefore, we argue for the investment, expansion, and mentorship of faculty development, particularly with regards to educator's own intercultural growth, in order to activate and expand students' learning while studying abroad.

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Accepted date: February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Abstract in Spanish

Para examinar la interacción entre el desarrollo intercultural del profesorado y el avance cultural estudiantil nosotros estudiamos el impacto del curso, "Intercultural Communication and Leadership", que enseña el programa CIEE. Nuestros resultados indican que el profesor, el país, el género y la disciplina tiene un impacto en los avances interculturales de los estudiantes que estudian en el extranjero (Gibson et al., 2023); este artículo se enfoca únicamente en las percepciones de los factores que les ayuda a los maestros a fomentar el aprendizaje intercultural de los estudiantes. Entrevistamos a 22 educadores y usamos a la rúbrica "Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE" (2009) de AAC&U para interpretar las entrevistas. Nuestro estudio indica que lo más significativo, para ellos, es el desarrollo profesional que se enfoca en su propio desarrollo intercultural. Con esta formación el profesorado podía usar y aplicar pedagogías para conectar con los estudiantes que efectivamente avanzaban las habilidades interculturales de los estudiantes. A causa de tal, nosotros argüimos que la inversión, expansión y mentoría del profesorado, enfocado en su propio desarrollo intercultural, es necesaria para fomentar las capacidades interculturales de los estudiantes mientras estudian en el extranjero.

## Keywords:

Cultural mentorship, intercultural learning, pedagogical practice, professional development

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## 1. Introduction

The impact that educator intercultural training and development have on student learning has not been systemically studied within the field of international education (beyond case studies in particular locations), nevertheless, the body of research is growing (Gillespie, 2019; Gillespie et al., 2020; Layne et al., 2020). Pin-pointing educators' impact on student learning is challenging because of the myriad variables: different models of teaching and teaching styles, aspects that impact learning in experiential settings, challenges in isolating structural vs individual characteristics that impact learning, divisions between practitioners and university researchers, professional development research separated from scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) research, etc. Nevertheless, more and more researchers are finding that faculty development around quality pedagogical learning interventions can lead to increased student intercultural learning outcomes during study abroad

(Anderson et al., 2016; Johnstone et al., 2020). We know the more trained, and therefore the more effective educators are in helping students notice and process engagement, confusion, and reactions to difference, the more students can grow and learn (Curran et al., 2019; Duke, 2016; Rennick, 2015). Learners need engagement with difference, whether perceived as high or low levels of difference, not just exposure; they also need high levels of guidance acknowledging and negotiating that difference (Engle & Engle, 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2012). Yet intercultural training and facilitation for educators and/or students is not part and parcel of most study abroad nor professional development programs. The impacts of COVID on the education abroad field has also led to increased attention on health, safety, and risk training, which subsequently can lead to waning attention on intercultural preparation amongst international educators.

To further examine the interaction between educators' intercultural development and students' intercultural growth in prior studies, in a context with structured, intentional professional development, we set out to study the impact of CIEE's Intercultural Communication and Leadership (ICL) course. In this optional, upper division communication course, students "increase their own cultural self-awareness, relate culture-specific knowledge to intercultural communication theories and research methods, strengthen their ability to recognize and bridge cultural gaps, and develop intercultural leadership skills to help them become more effective in an interdependent world" (CIEE ICL Syllabus, 2021). More importantly, intentional, systematic, and protracted professional development and mentorship for instructors accompanied the roll-out and implementation of this course. Of particular note, educators' intercultural learning was fostered and mentored. As the educator interviews in our study indicate, their ability to apply their own intercultural learning skills (developed via CIEE's professional development program) allowed educators to effectively bridge moments of cultural dissonance with their students and implement dynamic pedagogies that enhanced student intercultural learning gains. In light of our study and findings, we argue for the investment, expansion, and mentorship of faculty development, particularly with regards to educator's own intercultural growth, in order to activate and expand students' learning while studying abroad.

## 2. Our Study

In a previous article we measured the potential impacts on students' intercultural learning while studying abroad using the pre- and post-study abroad Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) data from 1,858 U.S. undergraduate students studying at CIEE Study Centers and Global Institutes in Latin America, Asia, Europe, and Africa who took the optional Intercultural Communication and Leadership (ICL) course between 2014-2019 (Gibson et al., 2023). We collected demographic information via student surveys, had a control group of 109 students who did not take the ICL course, assessed student assignments, looked at educator IDI scores, and, in 2018-2019, held hour-long, semi-structured interviews with 22 educators teaching the ICL course on CIEE programs across all regions of the world.

The findings from that study indicate two factors that strongly impact students' intercultural learning: 1) active engagement with unfamiliar cultural contexts in non-traditional destinations, and 2) highly experienced educators who act as cultural mentors to help students process the disorienting dilemmas while living abroad. Supporting the idea that students benefit from intentional, guided interventions to increase their intercultural skills, students who took the Intercultural Communication and Leadership course had greater IDI Developmental Orientation (DO) score changes than those who did not (ICL group average DO change = 5.71; Non-ICL group average DO change = -0.846). We estimated the impact of taking the ICL (vs. not taking) on DO change; controlling for confounding variables, taking the ICL course predicted a 6.44 point increase in DO change (statistically significant at 90%) (Gibson et al., 2023).

In this article, we further analyze the 22 educators' interviews to better understand what it is that they believe, think, and do that impacts their teaching effectiveness in eliciting and fostering students' intercultural learning in the ICL course— paying attention to how they saw their own intentionally mentored, progressive, and enhanced intercultural learning as fostering their agility to co-create developmental understanding with their students. During the 2018-2019 academic year, three of the four researchers conducted interviews, either in person or virtually, with the 22 ICL instructors who voluntarily participated in the IRB-approved study. We used a generated, common list of questions to standardize the interviews (see Appendix B for the entire list of questions). We recorded and transcribed the approximately 60-minute interviews, stripped

names of participants, gave them alphabetical and numerical markers, and used emergent coding to find larger themes. Based on those original themes we then grouped the codes, again using emergent coding methods, to find core codes, at which point we found that they mapped well to the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, 2009) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric. This is one of a set of rubrics that AAC&U created to guide core competencies expected of graduates of U.S. higher education institutions.

### 3. Intercultural Learning and the AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge & Competence VALUE Rubric

As Deardorff (2009) and others documented in the seminal *SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, the term intercultural competency (or the 80+ variations on that term) did not yet have a standardized definition or understanding. Today, intercultural development or learning, while still varied in application and assessment approaches, is most commonly defined as the ability to bridge effectively and appropriately with others (appropriately is defined and evaluated by the other culture, not one's own). Valued colleagues (Hartman et al., 2020) are pushing to expand that definition (and term) to include recognizing, resisting and/or responding to oppressive systems. Deardorff (2017) is also leading the charge to assess intercultural learning in both direct and indirect ways, understanding that intercultural learning is a life-long process and that assessments are only snap-shots in that long timeline.

The major themes found in our qualitative research align with each of the three domains found in the current AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric: Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills (2009), with our added category of Behaviors and Actions.

AAC&U Intercultural Competency	Major Themes Found in our Educators' Interviews
<p><b>Knowledge</b> (Cultural self-awareness and knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks)</p>	<p>Formal training, mentorship (formal and informal), and prior cross-cultural experiences, leveraged to facilitate students' learning</p>
<p><b>Attitudes</b> (Curiosity and Openness) <i>and</i> <b>Skills</b></p>	<p>Co-constructing knowledge, traveling the learning journey with students, commitment to own growth, identity as facilitator of learning and cultural mentorship</p>

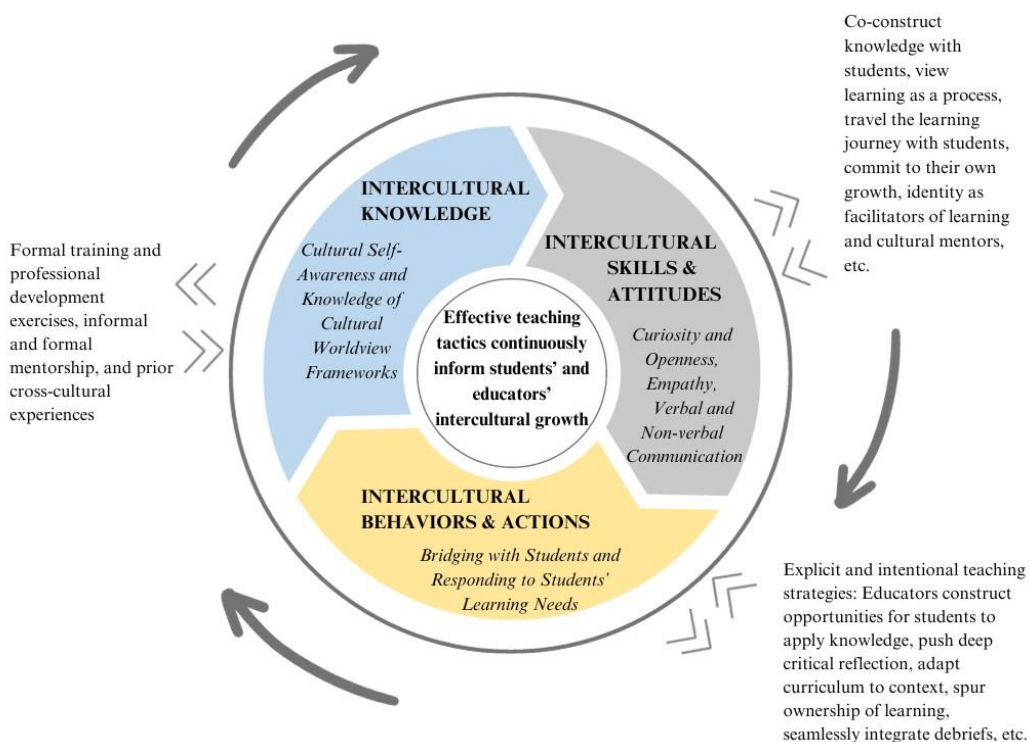
(Verbal and nonverbal communication, and empathy)	
<i>which led to</i>	
<b>Behaviors and Actions</b> (Bridging with others effectively)	Explicit teaching strategies, debriefing as seamlessly integrated, encouraging student investment in learning

**TABLE (1):** CODING MAPPED ONTO AAC&U INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE VALUES RUBRIC

The educator interviews provide a rich understanding of the connection between students' learning gains and instructors' training, role, and experience; instructors who effectively bridged with their students and students' learning needs did so by successfully using pedagogical practices that leveraged their own intercultural learning competencies as defined by the AAC&U. Educators articulated that formal intercultural training and mentorship, in various forms, led them to feel more adept at responding to students' emergent intercultural dissonance in the classroom, and, thus, made them stronger facilitators of their students' intercultural learning. For instance, the IDI Qualified Administrators, Resident Directors and/or more experienced educators facilitate "just in time" discussions and constant debriefing about intercultural dissonance, critical moments and conflicts, emotional reactions, etc. They also foster deeper critical thinking and reflection than their peers via their integrative and constructivist-based pedagogical skills (for detailed pedagogical tactics, please see Sherman et al., in press).

Figure (1) on the next page further illuminates the educator interview themes mapped onto the AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUES rubric. The distinct intercultural categories are interconnected and dynamic – one domain feeds into and informs the others. For instance, the professional development opportunities given to educators enhanced their self-awareness of their interculturality (Knowledge), and that self-awareness led them to share their intercultural learning journeys with their students (Attitudes & Skills) and put that empathy and communication into action (Behaviors & Action) by finding effective teaching tactics so their students, in turn, would expand their own intercultural learning and growth. Activating and applying the totality of their intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes led educators to behaviors and actions that bridged with students in finding effective ways for them to learn. Represented via the gray arrows, outside the four domains, are teaching tactics (identified via the interviews) spurred by intercultural development. Those, too, are interconnected and dynamic –

educators' growing identity as facilitators of growth and learning feeds and informs the specific pedagogical tactics implemented. Furthermore, in engaging these specific teaching tactics, educators not only stimulate student learning but also keep building their own intercultural competence since student learning gains spur educators to engage in their own individual cycles of growth, as intercultural beings and pedagogues.



**FIGURE (1):** MAJOR THEMES EMERGING FROM EDUCATORS' INTERVIEWS, MAPPED ONTO AAC&U INTERCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCE VALUE RUBRIC

## 4. The Intersection Between Intercultural Development and Pedagogical Practice

### 4.1. Intercultural Knowledge Themes Derived from Educator Interviews

Three themes were derived from educator interviews. These are: *Formal Training, Role of Mentorship, and Prior Cross-Cultural Experiences*. This section demonstrates the educators' progress vis-à-vis the knowledge described in the AAC&U's (2009) Rubric. According to the AAC&U Rubric, the knowledge domain encompasses cultural self-awareness and comprehension of cultural worldview

frameworks. Those at the most advanced level:

- Articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how her/his experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).
- Demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs and practices.

Educator interviews mentioned knowledge in this way and also added keys to having and using that knowledge, which include formal training, mentorship and prior cross-cultural experiences.

#### 4.1.1. Formal training

A major theme found within 84% of the interviews was the impact of the CIEE-provided formal training for ICL instructors. Training was multi-level, and encompassed external and in-house approaches, along with a formal mentorship program and ongoing support via an online learning community for instructors. Individual and group intercultural coaching lay at its heart. Instructors regularly engaged with the concepts, theories, and practices they would teach as part of the ICL curriculum. In alignment with the course student learning outcomes, educators engaged in developing cultural self-awareness, awareness of others, bridging, and applying those concepts into an intercultural leadership practice. CIEE designated a full-time, director-level staff member to manage the onboarding and professional development of ICL instructors, in addition to CIEE Human Resources offering organization-wide training, such as the Employee Intercultural Development program managed and created by Catherine Meynhart and Mick Vande Berg, respectively.

During our interviews, instructors stated that the professional development provided by CIEE and the intercultural growth they experienced as a result had a direct impact on their teaching. As one instructor (Participant E3) put it, the combination of internal and external training made available to instructors “helped me grow as a facilitator.” In regard to CIEE supporting instructors pursuing external training, another (Participant D3) reflected on the cultural richness contributed by other participants at the U.S.-based (now defunct) Summer Institute of Intercultural Communication (SIIC), “I met people from very, very different backgrounds—very diverse and that provided a more



global perspective on what defines intercultural communication.” Others also mentioned that participants in the external training activities and exercises had varying perspectives and experiences, which expanded their own notions and views. Of particular import, many registered that time spent in external training programs expanded their own intercultural learning and as a result facilitate students intercultural learning in the ICL course.

The internal CIEE training program encouraged intercultural growth, with each instructor participating in a one-on-one intercultural coaching session after they took the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), an intercultural assessment tool. One instructor stated that “I found it very helpful because it obliged us to stop our crazy pace for reflection and reassess ways and styles of teaching, ways to approach students” (Participant E2). Another mentioned “it brought new perspectives to the way in which I see myself” (Participant C3). And in response to the coaching session, one instructor acknowledged the coaching “helped me decide on my own intercultural development goals” (Participant B4). Overall, internal instructor training program evaluations were typically positive with instructors citing most often that they enjoyed “engaging with other instructors,” “building knowledge around intercultural learning,” and “receiving a personal intercultural coaching session.” Instructors also cited the value of “exploring new ways to use Canvas [LMS]” and “connecting with and building a relationship with my mentor.” Not only did the instructor training program and online community aim to support and prepare instructors to be effective in teaching the ICL course to students. It also targeted the development of the instructor’s own intercultural competence, a key approach to strengthen the delivery and facilitation of the course.

As part of instructor training, educators participated in and enacted ICL course activities as students. In looking at these activities through a student lens, instructors expanded their own perspectives: “Theory is theory but until you have gone through the experience, you know, done the [Kolb Experiential] learning cycle, including doing, not just learning about it, you don’t get it” (Participant D4). This instructor valued playing the role of the student as it prepared them to support students who might disagree as they ruminated on an idea or concept. Students, they said, “think [certain aspects] are nonsense, but it [ICL course] puts ideas in their head and they work with them. The skeptics are sometimes the best teachers” (Participant D4). In particular, instructors experiencing the curricula from a student perspective/experiential learning

framework enabled them to deepen their connections with students—as well as deepen their own intercultural learning.

Another instructor described how their training at the Summer Institute on Intercultural Communication (SIIC) enabled them to be more effective in leveraging students' learning experiences, developing their capacity to understand what many ICL students experience in the class:

It was a good way for me to understand what this class [the ICL] was about, you know, I understood the kind of the dogma behind it. I was a bit challenged in many ways. [...] And so this shock was actually really good for me because it was so extreme and my reaction was so strong that I think it made me a decent ICL teacher because I know I can face the students who don't like what I'm giving them, you know, and so I had to find creative ways to to make them accept that this class is not a regular class. It's not about theory. It's not about reading articles. It's about living and reflecting on your experience. (Participant B3)

Using their own experiences and struggles to connect to the content, instructors were better able to steer interactions with students in more effective and authentic ways – a sentiment repeated by many interviewed instructors.

Once trained and ready to teach the ICL course, educators deeply contemplated their own intercultural journeys. One noted:

But for me, it has been through the [ICL] teaching and learning that [my intercultural competence deepened]. I'm observing more – my students...seeing how they develop and realizing that [reflection] is a great tool. And at a moment even I thought, how could I be the director of this program before not doing or understanding this [intercultural development]?! [...] So for me in a way, [I'm] modeling [for] them [...] in a very humble way, asking questions and being curious myself. While I'm learning, I think they are learning. (Participant A4)

Via internal and external training and experiencing the ICL course as a student and then as teacher, educators expanded their own intercultural learning. Faculty noted that going through the activities and experiences that students go through helped them relate to their students, raised their empathy for students, and provided anecdotes about their own experiences to share with students, including intercultural cultural blunders and aha moments. In sum, continued

professional development, funded and structurally supported by CIEE, was fundamental in developing instructors' own intercultural skills, which then impacted the way in which they intentionally developed their students' intercultural development.

#### 4.1.2. The Importance of Mentoring

In addition to engaging with the curriculum and course activities via in-house and external training, the six-week ICL instructor training program included a formal mentorship component. Mentors and mentees were from vastly different countries and cultures but all were tasked with teaching the ICL course either as a CIEE staff member or adjunct instructor. Veteran instructors were typically matched with new instructors, meeting a minimum of two times prior to the new instructor commencing teaching. Conversations were scaffolded with suggested questions and after meeting with their mentors, the mentees reflected on their conversations via a discussion board embedded in their virtual ICL instructor training. Participants in the instructor training were encouraged to read the reflective summaries and comment on their peers' insights.

During the interviews, instructors attributed multiple benefits to participating in such activities. These mentorships increased their overall confidence and enabled them to achieve greater teaching effectiveness and enhanced ease around debriefing as a facilitation tool in specific. Participant A4 has a Ph.D. in Spanish studies from a U.S. institution. Upon commencing teaching the ICL course, they engaged with their mentor multiple times per week to review classroom dialogue and ask questions such as "How did I do?", "How can I approach this?", "How are my students reacting?", and "How can I do it better?". As they began teaching the ICL course, "There were many times I would leave the class and think, 'did I make a mistake?'. The mentor discussions helped process those impressions and doubts. With an impressive background in teaching literature both in the U.S. and Spain, they nevertheless talked about how those experiences did not necessarily prepare them to teach ICL:

I don't consider myself at all an intercultural expert [...] I always [felt] that it was not my area. So I've been teaching this [...] and it is not like when I was teaching literature that I would go to the class and [...] I felt comfortable with this. This is why the close guidance of [my mentor] was so important for me.

Mentoring opportunities provided a space for mentees to experiment with teaching strategies, deepen content knowledge, and personally engage with the curriculum. In combination with the multi-tiered training opportunities, instructors gained confidence and familiarity with the complexity of facilitating intercultural learning. One instructor describes their mentor as a role model:

The training was very good. [My mentor] is just a very, very good scholar, trainer. He knows the theory well but he can actually translate it into practical experience. [...] The connections were good. He is passionate about these things, so it was easy for it [teaching ICL] to be as infectious as it was for me. Then, not only that, I would then go back and read some of the stuff that he's written as well and I'm like 'Oh wow.' The interventions, the importance of intervening in a student's learning experience in order for them to maximize learning, so that was very good for me. (Participant E1)

Another discussed the confidence they gained in working with their mentor: "I was very worried because of the number of my class; I was about to have 22 students for the first time"; this educator's mentor shared concrete strategies on how to effectively debrief and steer classroom discussions. They asserted, "He reassured me as he normally does. He's a very nice person so he gave me some help [...] I still refer to him if I am in trouble" (Participant A2).

Teachers learn from other teachers, in a mentoring context, and continue to grow and develop their skills as effective facilitators of student learning. The relationships developed among the educators, facilitated by the internal trainings and intentional mentoring, in essence, created a strong Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998).

#### 4.1.3. Prior Cross-cultural Experience

A background with significant cross-cultural experiences is undoubtedly ideal in study abroad teaching. Moreover, the educator interviews demonstrate that the instructors leverage their past travel, study, and work-related intercultural experiences in the classroom. By instructors openly sharing their own experiences, they serve as models for student reflection and engagement with their own study abroad cultural experiences. An overwhelming majority of the interviews revealed that instructors view themselves as not only a professor delivering content and facilitating discussion but also as cultural mentors: "I would consider myself more a cultural mentor or facilitator rather

than an instructor, absolutely” (Participant A1). The intercultural training, their own experiences as mentees, and rich past cross-cultural experiences combine to enable instructors to mentor students on their intercultural journeys.

As cultural mentors, the instructors repeatedly draw from their personal intercultural experiences, sharing their stories, reflections, and connections throughout their time in class. The instructors describe a wide array of past intercultural experiences: participating in study abroad programs, earning degrees at U.S. and U.K. institutions, teaching English in their home cultures, participating in training across Europe and the U.S., and working various jobs where they interface with different cultural groups. For instance, one stated:

When I was 11, I went to an international summer camp in San Francisco with three other Portuguese kids. I went on to participate in more camps [with the same organization] in England and then became a junior counselor at a camp in Austria. I soon began leading camps in Pittsburgh, Finland, Romania, Algeria, and Senegal. [These experiences] changed me and taught me what’s important to me, and who I am and what’s important in my culture. (Participant E2)

Similarly, another mentioned:

I spent five consecutive summers in the U.K. where I was living with a homestay as well as my two years earning a master’s degree at a [U.S. institution]. I’m the type of person that whenever I’m in an environment different from the one I’m used to I try to immerse myself a hundred percent, which for some people is difficult but not for me. I just don’t want to be in a country with other people from my same community. I just hate that. I mean if you’re going to take advantage of the opportunities take it 100% and I did that both in the U.K. and the U.S. I didn’t really spend any time with Spaniards, I just wasn’t interested. (Participant D3)

Yet another stated:

I have never lived abroad but I live with someone who is living abroad in my country. That has changed a lot my perspective of what is Portugal, what it is to live in Portugal, what it is to be here, what it is to have another culture in my life. Those things frame [how I facilitate learning] in my class. (Participant C2)

These instructors, as well as many others, explain how they use their prior cross-cultural experiences and learning to encourage their study abroad

students to act and think with intentionality. They guide growth and development, and help students think through emotional reactions to difference, change, and new cultural understanding. Importantly, they stand alongside students on their intercultural journeys and openly, humbly share their experiences so that their students can flourish. Serving as a representative of the host culture and its nuances, the instructors guide students, ensuring reflection and contemplation, with the ultimate goal of deepening intercultural growth. Most importantly, instructors act as mentors, not mere lecturers of information, to activate that growth and learning.

The AAC&U rubric defines intercultural knowledge as cultural self-awareness and understanding of cultural worldview frameworks, and the instructor interviews identify the process by which educators gain, establish, and leverage their particular set of intercultural knowledge. The instructors noted formal training, including ICL course activities and other intercultural training exercises, as foundational to developing self-awareness, both as intercultural beings and as effective educators. Formal and informal mentoring allowed for another level of self-awareness and development, deepening their knowledge of their own interculturality and identity as pedagogues. Mentoring also created a Community of Practice, or safe space in which to explore questions, negotiate ambiguity, and build confidence. Prior cross-cultural experiences, and the sharing of those experiences with students, also enabled ICL instructors to become cultural mentors to their students.

#### 4.2. Intercultural Skills and Attitudes Themes Derived from Educator Interviews

Four themes were derived from educator interviews. These are: *Co-constructing Knowledge*, *Learning alongside Students*, *Commitment to Own Development*, and *Facilitators of Learning and Growth*. This section demonstrates the educators' progress vis-à-vis the skills and attitudes described in the AAC&U's (2009) Rubric as below:

- Interprets intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview and demonstrates ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.
- Articulates a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact

while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings) and is able to skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences.

- Asks complex questions about other cultures, seeks out and articulates answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.
- Initiates and develops interactions with culturally different others. Suspends judgment in valuing her/his interactions with culturally different others.

As noted above, training, mentoring, and prior experiences allow educators to more effectively leverage the intercultural classroom and learning context. Similarly, the skills and attitudes, central to interculturality, are ones that study abroad educators internalize, and with intentional practice, apply to impact students' learning. ICL instructor interviews demonstrate that they see such skills and attitudes as central to their professional identities as pedagogues and learners. The instructors stress the importance of co-constructing knowledge with students, by showing vulnerability to students and demonstrating that they are on the learning journey with them, as well as commitment to their own intercultural development.

Demonstrating that they are on the learning journey side-by-side with the students helps educators and students view learning as a *process* (not an end product or finite task). For instance, an instructor revealed core attitudes and approaches by stating:

Yes, the fact that we explore and I don't have any solution. We can find solutions together and this is how we build something together and every class is different. So it's really interesting, very interesting how different groups can come to different solutions and have different perspectives. So I really like to work together with the students... (Participant A2)

Even more powerfully explicit is when educators share their values with their students:

[I tell students] So I'm not going to teach you anything. We're here. We are all going to learn from the others. So you're gonna learn from me and I want to learn from you and you're going to learn from your peers. So that's premise number one... (Participant C4)

Co-constructing understanding and traveling the intercultural journey together allows learning to be a navigable, variable process.

Interviewees also consistently noted an abiding commitment to their own intercultural development. It may be in the form of reading, attending conferences, professional development opportunities, advanced degrees or certifications, (vacation) travel to other countries, basically anything that furthers such learning and growth. As one instructor put it, “to be a good facilitator, you learn more than you teach” (Participant B2). Importantly, the attitudes the educators demonstrate -- of co-constructing knowledge, of learning as a journey and process, of vulnerability and sharing of oneself and one’s experiences -- are part-and-parcel of educators’ views that they themselves are learners.

Student growth further reinforces educators’ commitments to their values, attitudes, and mindframes regarding holistic student development:

I see students arriving, seeing them anxious, you know afraid, fear for all of that. And then through interactions, orientations, engagements, you see the growth happening among the students and it feels good to be a part of the process of growth, where you find people who once upon a time would say they would never be able to do this or never be able to do that, but a month or two months or maybe three months into the semester, they’re doing the thing they thought they couldn’t do. And you feel like, ‘wow, this is my contribution to this person.’ So yeah, it’s been good like that. Seeing students grow from where they were to where they are until they depart again... (Participant C1)

I think most students really do feel supported and challenged and most of them say ‘I’m glad that I was pushed to the critical, to be a critical thinker’ and absolutely I think it is a rewarding class for them. And most of us as educators, in the end, we do it because we see the rewards for the students... (Participant A1)

Their statements clearly voice feeling empowered and joy in noting moments when they have an impact on students. Witnessing students’ growth affirms and metaphorically feeds their dedication to teaching the ICL course and intercultural learning in a study abroad context.

The AAC&U rubric defines intercultural skills and attitudes as communication, empathy, curiosity, and openness that means individuals act in



supportive manners, negotiate shared understandings, develop interactions with culturally different others and suspend judgements of them. Ultimately, through the interviews we see more nuance in how these attitudes impact conceptualizations of self and behavior. These educators believe in life-long learning and growth (theirs and students'), in holistic development, in relationship-driven interactions, in intercultural learning as a *process*, and in classroom communities that co-construct knowledge. These attitudes, values and mindframes impact how they act and behave in the class, which in turn impacts' students' learning and growth. Thus, these habits of mind connect to how educators see themselves and implement their role -- as cultural mentors and facilitators of learning and growth (instead of imparters or depositors of knowledge).

#### 4.3. Intercultural Behaviors and Actions Themes Derived from Educator Interviews

Various themes and sub-themes were derived from the educator interviews. These are: *Explicit and Intentional Teaching Strategies such as Opportunities to Apply Knowledge, Critical Reflection, Responsiveness to Students' Learning Needs, Adapting Curriculum, Encouraging Student Investment and Ownership of Learning*, etc. While the AAC&U Rubric does not contain a domain for behaviors and actions, some have adapted the rubric to include this important domain (Deardorff, 2009; Namaste, 2017), especially since the manifestation of those intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes is in action, particularly towards others. The skills and attitudes discussed above encouraged educators to implement impactful actions and behaviors in their teaching in that the educators applied effective pedagogical practices that leveraged students' intercultural learning. For example, they constructed opportunities for students to apply knowledge, pushed deep critical reflection, responded to students' learning needs, adapted the standardized curriculum to their particular context, and spurred mutual ownership of learning (see Sherman et al., in press).

Simply put, what resulted from the interviews was a documentation of *excellent* teaching (for example, Bain, 2004, or Felten & Lambert, 2021). In particular, instructors exhibited their best intercultural bridging skills in that they responded to their students and adjusted classroom activities and pedagogies according to students' needs. They scaffolded assignments and integrated extracurricular activities or experiences so that intercultural

learning happened in and out of class. They used an interactive, activities-based, discussion-rich, engaged learning approach to help students take ownership of the learning process. They brought their whole selves to class and modeled the often humbling learning process by providing many examples of their own experiences of cultural blunders, misunderstandings, and “aha” moments, or those of others. They paid close attention to and fostered positive group dynamics (among the students and between themselves and the students). They explicitly connected theory and practice, and used reflective writing as a necessary tool to foster critical thinking about the “why” (not what) of cultural/human interactions. Debriefing (of critical incidents or activities) was a seamless, integrated process and an integral part of learning. They asked lots of questions, listened actively, and probed underlying assumptions, biases, and prejudices. And, they positioned themselves as learners and facilitators of learning instead of “sage on the stage” imparters of knowledge. Again, as noted, the majority of educators interviewed, which admittedly was a biased sample since they were the ones excited to talk about their teaching, exhibited methods that are best practices well documented in SoTL literature. Importantly, the instructors leveraged their own intercultural learning and development to bridge with students and more effectively foster their learning.

As one of the instructors notes, connection with students and with their learning process is at the core of successful intercultural teaching: “It’s about human connection when you’re learning and teaching, and the way we connect can be different and equally successful” (Participant D1). That connection spurred teachers to be incredibly responsive and adapt the CIEE constructed curriculum. Experienced instructors adapted the course material to match group dynamics in the classroom, strengthen the culture-specific components, and reinforce building intercultural competence as a dynamic, developmental process that encourages students to move beyond both stark comparisons and the minimization of difference. For instance, one educator notes the process of finally claiming agency and adapting the curriculum to best teach their particular context, students, and learning:

It was very challenging at first because I wasn’t experienced, so I was reading all the materials and wanting to say word-for-word what was written on all the PowerPoints. I didn’t want to miss anything; I wanted to do everything right. So I wasn’t personalizing it to myself or to my style of teaching. I was like a machine that was delivering that content. And nowadays, I think it has grown on me, and now I’m

more able to grab that concept and deliver it in my own way – putting my own personality into it and into how I have my own view and perspective on that topic [...] Now I have adapted the curriculum to my own examples. I know what I need to teach this topic, so now I look for videos on YouTube/TEDx and I adapt it more to my country's contexts. (Participant E2)

Of particular note is the knowledge, self-awareness and the level of critical thinking that the educators themselves have, which ultimately guides the curricular changes and adaptations. One instructor noted they do not “connect” to a few assignments that have the potential to “create more division” in an us vs. them way:

[...] when we are going towards the end of the semester, we want to try and move towards a more fuller understanding of intercultural competency and not constantly talking about ‘so this happens here but in [X country] that happens there,’ you know, so those kinds of, yeah, those kinds of things. I just, I don't know, some of the materials I didn't like or some that I felt students would not respond well to. (Participant D2)

In collaboration with their CIEE Academic Director of Intercultural Learning, their alternative assignments focused on more critical analysis and deeper understanding of local culture. Ultimately, the negotiation of the curriculum and the adaptations educators' deemed necessary were important to be able to better bridge with their students and better foster their students' learning.

Part and parcel of intercultural teaching is what is termed “debriefing”, which is the necessary unpacking (via discussion or guided reflective writing) to make sense of cognitive dissonance (Kolb, 1984; Appendix A). Experienced instructors saw debriefing as an equally important step (no more important than the in-class, active learning activity itself). They fully integrated debriefing into the course interactions:

I don't really see a debriefing as separate. I don't see a gap between activity and debriefing, it's part of it. [not doing debriefing] would be for me like you have a meal but you don't eat cheese afterwards, you know, it's nonsense. (Participant B3)

They also used it as a means to foster deep, critical reflection: “I think the debrief is always really, really helpful [...] it's questioning, constantly questioning,

questioning, questioning students and trying to get them to self-reflect that for me seems to be one of the most important pieces” (Participant A1). Integrating debriefs also provided feedback to guide future learning interventions:

We do debriefs so often that they’re already trained, they already know and I can sit there and just, like, say nothing during the class. They will contribute and every time they get comments and they are, to me, very enlightening ... so kind of hearing how they take things and how they process them and how they unpack them... (Participant B2)

As this instructor noted, integrated debriefs also give students agency to build relationships with one another and take ownership of the individual and groups’ learning. While educators articulate and embody excellent teaching in an array of ways, adapting the curriculum and fully integrating debriefs into daily practice are principal ways in which they enhance student learning. The educators’ intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes impact the ways in which they implement effective pedagogical strategies.

In sum, the educators interviewed confirm, in their own ways, Anderson et al.’s (2106) findings that adept, intentional interventions (focused specifically on noticing and processing difference) impact students’ IDI scores. Educators build these refined pedagogical and intercultural skills from communities of practice created by intentional training and mentoring, prior cross-cultural experiences, intercultural attitudes that habits, the experience of putting these into action in ICL courses, and their identity as learners and facilitators of growth. Trained, mentored faculty who had a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) and saw mentoring students’ development as core to their identity as educators were able to use a multitude of pedagogies to foster and enhance student intercultural learning. Ultimately, as the educators state in their interviews, the more effective at developing and leveraging their own intercultural learning (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) the more effective (behavior) educators were in developing their students’ intercultural growth. As the ICL instructors themselves told us, the importance of ongoing training and mentorship of teachers to become effective intercultural educators by investing in and developing their own interculturality cannot be overstated.

## 5. The Current Climate of Study Abroad and Implications from Our Study

The global COVID-19 pandemic, and the social inequities and structural problems it has exacerbated, have renewed interest in cross-cultural exchange. To diversify those benefiting from study abroad experiences, the Joint Statement of Principles in Support of International Education, issued July 2021, by the U.S. Department of State & the U.S. Department of Education set the goal: “Encourage U.S. students, researchers, scholars, and educators *who reflect the diversity of the U.S. population* to pursue overseas study, internships, research, and other international experiences” (p. 3, our emphasis). To diversify study abroad destinations, the 2022 Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act explicitly also encourages increased access to study abroad for U.S. university students, with a particular focus on *destinations outside of Western Europe* and more broadly representative participants (SPSSAPA, 2022, our emphasis).

The push towards increased participation attests to the *potential* study abroad has to increase a wide range of skills, behaviors, and knowledge bases. Study abroad is now considered a pedagogical High Impact Practice (HIP) (Kuh, 2018; Kuh, 2008). Nevertheless, as recent research indicates, its potential is often unrealized. Without intentional design, implementation, delivery, assessment, and integration for educators, students and institutions, study abroad is caught in a cycle of unfulfilled potential (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009; CEL, 2017; Deardorff, 2008; Namaste & Sturgill, 2020; Twombly et al., 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2012). We *want* there to be positive outcomes, in particular we want study abroad to be transformational, but such learning and growth is not guaranteed just by providing access and opportunity.

At best, student learning during study abroad is mixed, with some students growing in various ways, while others learn relatively little (Twombly et al., 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009). In fact, in some cases students come back from study abroad with re-entrenched stereotypes (Jessup-Anger, 2008; Vande Berg et al., 2012). Kubota (2016) argues that “study abroad’s imaginary” (p. 348) and discourse may be a contributing factor to the field’s inconsistent track record with student learning gains. Rexeisen (2013) documents the backslide, which he dubs the “boomerang effect,” that students experience months after study abroad, noting that initial intercultural learning gains are unsustainable without re-entry programming.

Moreover, even with the move from “sink or swim” models of immersion to more constructivist “interventions” to guide learning (Vande Berg et al., 2012), persistent gaps in spreading the positive impacts of study abroad remain. For instance, men continue to study abroad at the same rate – 35% – as *two* decades ago, with a slight dip to 33% in the last few years (IIE, 2020); students of color, first-gens, LGBTQIA+, non-traditional students, etc., while increasingly participating in experiences, still do not reflect the composition of either universities or larger U.S. populations. Again, while efforts, such as the Senator Paul Simon Study Away Program (2022), attempt to address persistent representation gaps and increase access and opportunity, fundamental barriers exist that prevent moving study abroad’s transformational *potential* into reality for all students.

As our study indicates, educators’ intentionally mentored intercultural development impacts their pedagogical agility and effectiveness in fostering students’ intercultural learning, and in light of the current unrealized potential of study abroad, we urge that ALL faculty and practitioners connected to international education participate in and deepen their own intercultural development. There is a dearth of scholarship that focuses on the intercultural growth of study abroad instructors, administrators, student-facing staff, and other key education abroad stakeholders. Foundational studies like the Georgetown Consortium Project (2008) provide great evidence-based insight into interventions and program components that contribute to student intercultural growth but there is little emphasis or reference to the intercultural journeys of other key contributors to the education abroad experience. In a similar vein, the AAC&U rubric have traditionally been used to assess students, but we propose another way is to adapt the rubric to guide and assess the intercultural development of all relevant study abroad stakeholders.

Currently, professionals from multiple fields are working together to tackle structural barriers in the field of international education. Traditionally, equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) research, efforts, and initiatives on U.S. university campuses have run parallel to and separately from those in international education. International study has historically been seen as the preserve of elite schools and students, a glamorous add-on to the college experience, while equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts emerged out of the domestic civil rights movement, responding to immediate localized concerns of racism and sexism on college campuses and in society at large.

Recent decolonizing scholarship on study abroad highlights how the historical legacies of international travel for the elite remain firmly rooted and ingrained; the system and structures of study abroad reflect and maintain oppressive power relationships. Such critique asks international educators to reconsider when study abroad truly becomes a transformative practice for individuals and society, and when it simply perpetuates new colonialist practices (Ogden, 2007). Furthermore, Hartman et al. (2020) contest the rigidity of colonial-based standards of research and terms and urge the field to provide space for “(re)negotiations of our [POC] postcolonial identities” (p. 36). The entire 2020 volume (vol 33, no 1) of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* is dedicated to expanding notions of study abroad and to better integrate EDI into study away contexts. The 2022 volumes (vol 34, no 1 & 2) are likewise dedicated to marginalized voices and HBCU’s -- important steps in addressing the structural barriers embedded in the field of international education.

Student-facing barriers are also being tackled. Students may want to study abroad, but other concerns impede that viability. Major initiatives such as the Obama 100,000 in Asia /Latin America programs (2011), Lincoln Commission (2005), and Senator Paul Simon program (2022) have invested time and funds into making study abroad a possibility for more U.S. students. There are now even opportunities for DACA students to study away in Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, length of time away from family and friends, family obligations, commitments such as sports or organizations, lack of discipline-specific courses that fit various majors or minors, prior experiences or status (non-traditional students, veterans, etc.) are just a few factors that impact students’ decisions to study abroad or not (Bryant & Soria, 2015; Fischer, 2012; Levintova et al., 2020). As a result, faculty-led, short-term programs have exploded in recent years. Increasingly, evidence demonstrates that duration of program is not a major factor in learning *if* programs are designed with intentionality (Rathburn et al., 2020; Paras & Mitchell, 2020) and that short-term programs provide increased access to study abroad, particularly for under-represented disciplines such as STEM.

In light of these much-needed developments, our study indicates what can be gained via intentional, supported intercultural development training for educators. As a result of their own increased intercultural competency, educators leverage accomplished pedagogical techniques and strategies to

effectively bridge with students. Obviously, more research is needed to explore how faculty integrate intercultural and pedagogical skills to effectively foster student growth and learning. We acknowledge the massive financial investment and time commitment intercultural development for *everyone* connected to study abroad implies, but systemic and structural change requires it.

The last twenty years have produced considerable insight into the contextually specific nature of study abroad programs, the wildly variable personal factors that impact student learning on these programs, the guided intercultural learning that is needed for students to process their experiences, the need to engage local communities as equal partners in this learning, and what is to be gained by spreading study abroad to more students and more destinations. Why has student intercultural learning not substantially increased (Vande Berg et al., 2012; Vande Berg et al., 2009)? We have many calls to action (Barkin, 2018; CEL, 2017; Namaste & Sturgill, 2020; Ogden, 2007; Sobania, 2015; Twombly et al., 2012; Wong, 2015; Zemach-Bersin, 2008). Paradigm shifts and structural changes are necessary. One way to encourage these changes is to focus on professional training and development. Instructors need to be trained to recognize the systemic biases ingrained in study abroad in order to deepen intercultural competency, which can thus stimulate effective pedagogical practice. Financial and systemic investment in educators' professional development specifically targeting intercultural learning is necessary. Activating and expanding educators' capacities positively impacts students' learning, as our studies show, and would further move the potential of study abroad towards highly impactful, reflective, deep learning for all.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Alexandra Wood, Ph.D., Quinton Redcliffe, Elsa Maxwell, Ph.D., Tara Harvey, Ph.D., Catherine Menyhart, Mick Vande Berg, Ph.D., and CIEE for their support and contributions.

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## Appendix A: CIEE Debriefing Guide (with permission from authors)

The following offer some general ideas or suggestions for debriefing students' intercultural experiences. These could be adapted and used to debrief an experience that a student has had, a training activity or exercise you've conducted, or a cultural excursion.

### Debriefing around the Experiential Learning Cycle\*

The following is an adapted debriefing exercise originally developed by the noted interculturalist Thiagi (Sivasailam Thiagarajan). The four-step process provides a way, at the end of any activity, to "teach around the wheel" (i.e. around Kolb's experiential learning cycle).

- 1. How do you feel about what we've done? [Concrete Experience]** This gives you a chance to get your students' feelings—positive or negative—out in the open, and is an important part of the learning process. Stay with this until students begin to repeat what's been offered before—it will be important for them to see that you value this step.
- 2. What happened during this activity? [Reflective Observation]** Ask the participants to describe, starting with a chronological accounting of what you've asked them to do, and what they've done. *Ask them to be as specific as they can and to describe in neutral terms.* (Write the chronological steps on a flipchart while they identify them.) Ask next: **Does what we experienced/observed here remind you of anything else you've seen or learned, whether outside or inside this class?** It won't be surprising if students generate several different perspectives about this here.
- 3. What have you learned from this experience? How has this experience contributed to your intercultural knowledge or understanding?** Next ask: **Can we generalize about what we've learned here? [Abstract Conceptualization]** Students are now forming hypotheses about what they've learned.
- 4. Can we apply what we've learned here to any other contexts? [Transitioning to Active Experimentation]** **What could we do next, where putting this into practice is concerned?** Note that you're now asking the students to form one or more action plans to test their

hypotheses. Once they've suggested ways of using the new knowledge or understanding, encourage them to go out and do so.

\*Adapted from Thiagi, 2004 ([www.thiagi.com](http://www.thiagi.com)); D. Kolb, 1984; and J. Zull, 2002. Revised 2008/2009 by M. Vande Berg & M. Quinn. Revised 2014 by T. Harvey.

### Additional Debriefing Ideas

The following are some additional ideas for debriefing methods and questions that you could use in conversation with students and/or during or after an intercultural excursion in order to help them draw more intercultural learning from the experience.

- Apply the Describe-Interpret-Evaluate process to an aspect of your experience. First, describe in detail and value-neutral terms what you observed (try to use as many of your senses as possible). Stay in description until it becomes challenging to do so. Then, using your description, consider multiple possible interpretations. Lastly, come up with at least one positive and one negative evaluation, based on your interpretations.
- Is there anything that we've learned previously that can help you better understand or make sense of this new experience?
- What values/beliefs/assumptions might be at play in what you observed? That is, what aspects of culture did you observe and how might these be connected to other aspects of culture that cannot be directly observed?
- Try to frame-shift. Can you put yourself in the shoes, mind, and heart of "the other" (whether that be the people who live in the area that you visited, the people from the time in history that you learned about, etc.)?

## Appendix B: Educator Interview Questions

### Warm-Up and Academic Training

- Tell me a little bit about yourself and about how you got involved in the field of international education.
- Tell me about your experience working with CIEE. Have you ever received any sort of training in the field of international education or intercultural learning? What did the training entail?
- Which experiences from your past do you think have helped prepare you to instruct students in intercultural learning? How so? Follow up questions if not answered already:
  - How many years have you been working at CIEE?
  - How long have you been teaching the ICL?
  - Have they had any specific CIEE training/coaching in intercultural communication?
  - Of these trainings/coaching, which had the highest impact on your role as ICL instructor?
  - How would you describe the other roles that you have had in the field of international education?
  - What other experiences (personal and professional) have you had that may have helped hone your own intercultural skills?

### Classroom Teaching

- How have you enjoyed teaching the Intercultural Communication course? What have you enjoyed/not enjoyed about it?
- What are some of the challenges of teaching this course in X location?
- Can you walk me through how you might take some of the culture general material presented in the outline for teaching this course and provide students with opportunities to gain culture specific knowledge?
- What is a lesson that you taught that you thought went really well this semester?
- Was there a particular activity that you thought didn't go as well this semester? Why do you think it didn't go as well? How might you change it for next semester?

- Can you describe your chemistry with your cohort of students this semester? What were some of the joys of working with this group? What were some of the challenges?
- How comfortable do you feel debriefing students after activities/at the end of class?
- Do you interact with students outside of the ICL class? If so, to what extent? If so, do you incorporate intercultural learning into your interactions with students? If so, how?
- What is your response when students share critical incidents (either in class or informally)

### **IDI Gains**

- As a group, students in this course had X gains/regressions on the IDI. In general the group is in X stage. Do you have any insights into this data? What factors might have influenced the development of this group's cultural competency?