



# A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

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# A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING



## INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, intercultural understanding is a crucial skill that fosters respectful and productive interactions among diverse populations. The World Economic Forum highlights intercultural skills and a global mindset as essential skills for individual and organizational success in the 21st century (Reuil, 2022). These skills are especially critical post-COVID, where remote jobs have increased the likelihood of cross-cultural and international collaboration and partnerships. Additionally, organizations such as UNESCO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) advocate for the integration of intercultural education in primary and secondary schools, arguing that it not only enhances students' social and emotional development but prepares students for a competitive global workforce (OECD, 2019; Deardorff, 2020). By explicitly teaching and assessing intercultural understanding, schools equip students with the necessary skills to engage respectfully and effectively with different cultures and, in turn, promote a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Core elements of intercultural understanding are captured by various labels, definitions, and developmental models.

Intercultural understanding includes skills and abilities that overlap with terms such as *intercultural competence*, *intercultural communication*, *intercultural dialogue*, and *intercultural education*. This makes it difficult to tease apart

differences among these terms, which creates challenges for understanding what knowledge and skills should be taught and assessed. This problem, common in educational research, has been called the jingle-jangle fallacy. The jingle fallacy is when the same term is defined differently across research traditions, whereas the jangle fallacy is when different terms are used to refer to the same construct (Duckworth et al., 2019).

This report attempts to distill a clear definition of intercultural understanding for elementary and secondary schooling by drawing on research that spans multiple academic disciplines. The definition emphasizes the distinct features of intercultural understanding: a *knowledge* and *appreciation* of cultural similarities and differences, and the skill to *critically reflect* on one's own culture in relation to others.

This report synthesizes developmental theories of intercultural understanding and contextualizes various developmental claims through an empirical lens. Additionally, it reviews commonly used instructional and assessment methods from an empirical perspective and, further, offers several implications for assessment design and implementation. Findings suggest that intercultural understanding is often described as a lifelong developmental process. However, there is limited empirical research on how intercultural understanding evolves throughout the lifespan. Additionally, there is a lack of strong empirical evidence supporting instructional resources, practices, and assessments of intercultural understanding in primary and secondary education systems.

In short, this literature review (a) provides a working definition of intercultural understanding, (b) describes how intercultural understanding develops, (c) discusses specific instructional practices that support the development of intercultural understanding, and (d) analyzes how intercultural understanding has been assessed. The review concludes with implications for the design and use of intercultural understanding assessments in primary and secondary schools.

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## DEFINITIONS

### What is Intercultural Understanding?

Table 1A (Appendix A) lists 30 definitions of intercultural understanding and related terms, including global competence, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, intercultural dialogue, intercultural education, intercultural learning, and intercultural mindfulness. These definitions were extracted from academic and practitioner-based sources from 1996 to the present and, in turn, were analyzed for common and unique features. This resulted in the following working definition of intercultural understanding:

***Intercultural understanding*** consists of the *knowledge* and *appreciation* of cultural similarities and differences, and the skill of reflecting on one’s own culture in relation to others.

Intercultural *knowledge* includes an individual’s awareness and understanding of the dynamic positions, practices, and power relationships among cultures. Intercultural *appreciation* includes such affective qualities as empathy, respect, and open-mindedness, which enable an individual to recognize and value the diverse perspectives, practices, and contributions of individuals and groups from various cultures. *Reflection* includes skills for critically evaluating one’s own assumptions, biases, and experiences as they relate to other cultures. This is done for the purpose of deepening one’s understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Additionally, intercultural understanding involves recognizing that cultural identities, behaviors, and influences are not fixed. Rather, they are continually shaped by “dynamic positions, practices, and power relationships” (Habecon, 2014). *Dynamic positions* refers to the ever-changing roles and statuses that individuals and groups hold within and between cultures.

These positions can shift because of such factors as social, economic, political, and historical changes. For example, the status of certain cultural groups can evolve because of policy changes, migration patterns, or societal transformations.

*Practices* refers to behaviors, rituals, customs, and traditions characterizing a particular culture. Practices include everything from daily routines and communication styles to ceremonial events and artistic expressions. Understanding these practices is important for appreciating how cultures operate and how individuals express their identities. *Power relationships* refers to the power dynamics that exist within and between cultures. Power relationships dictate who holds influence, authority, and control in various contexts. These relationships can affect access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes. Power relationships can be influenced by such factors as colonial history, economic disparities, and social hierarchies.

As individuals grow in their self-awareness and understanding that cultural positions, practices, and power relationships are dynamic and fluid, they can appreciate and navigate the intricacies of intercultural interactions more effectively (Habecon, 2014; UNESCO, 2013).

*International mindedness* and *global citizenship* often are used interchangeably with intercultural understanding and represent similar constructs in the research literature (Williams-Gualandi, 2015). Other terms overlap with intercultural understanding; their differences, however, clarify the relationships between intercultural understanding and related concepts. These related terms are addressed below.

***Intercultural dialogue*** is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures, which leads to a deeper understanding of the other’s global perception (Council of Europe, 2003; Barrett, 2013). Intercultural dialogue and intercultural understanding have similar

Intercultural understanding involves recognizing that cultural identities, behaviors, and influences are not fixed. Rather, they are continually shaped by “dynamic positions, practices, and power relationships” (Habecon, 2014).

knowledge and affective characteristics. Unlike intercultural understanding, however, intercultural dialogue focuses on verbal and non-verbal exchanges between individuals from different cultures. Moreover, intercultural dialogue encompasses skills and behaviors that can be directly observed via these exchanges.

**Intercultural competence** envelops the concepts of intercultural understanding and intercultural dialogue. Intercultural competence is an individual's ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248). It extends most definitions of intercultural understanding by explicitly acknowledging the essential role of communication and exchange among people of different cultural backgrounds, thereby incorporating the concept of dialogue. Interculturally competent individuals

- embrace a positive attitude towards cultural diversity,
- seek to understand the traditions and beliefs of others,
- recognize and negotiate the tensions arising from ambiguous intercultural situations,
- apply verbal and non-verbal communication skills to facilitate effective communication when two or more cultures are in contact with one another, and
- act and reflect to understand and critically assess one's own culture in relation to other cultures (Odina, 1996).

Intercultural communication and intercultural literacy are other concepts closely related to intercultural competence. Broader umbrella terms that encompass the terms described above include intercultural learning—developing the attitudes, skills, and knowledge for intercultural competence (Heggernes, 2019, p. 2)—and intercultural education—providing learners the competencies required to “operate effectively as citizens” in diverse societies (Council of Europe, 2024).

Intercultural education is often referenced in the context of educational systems and organizations as they develop and implement equitable policy, pedagogy, and social supports for children growing up in foreign countries, or for children raised in underrepresented racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. By doing so, these systems and organizations prepare students to participate actively and harmoniously in a global society (Banks & Banks, 2010). Notably, the terms *multiculturalism* and *multicultural education* overlap with intercultural education, depending on the definition cited (e.g., see Barrett, 2013).

Table 1 presents five prominent definitions of intercultural understanding and related terms to clarify common and unique features. As this table illustrates, intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence tend to extend the construct of intercultural understanding by incorporating communicative interactions and purposeful action (e.g., solving a problem, developing personal bonds). Moreover, definitions of intercultural understanding as a distinct construct vary in the skills they comprise. For example, Hill's (2006) definition includes elements of knowledge and appreciation, whereas the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) includes reflection, dialogue, and competence as additional skills.

Figure 1 illustrates one way to view the relationships among definitional terms associated with intercultural understanding. These relationships can be regarded as a series of concentric circles, in which government and institutionally focused policies, structures, programs, and practices—intercultural education—support the intercultural learning process. Intercultural learning, in turn, represents the development of competencies reflecting aspects of intercultural dialogue and intercultural understanding.

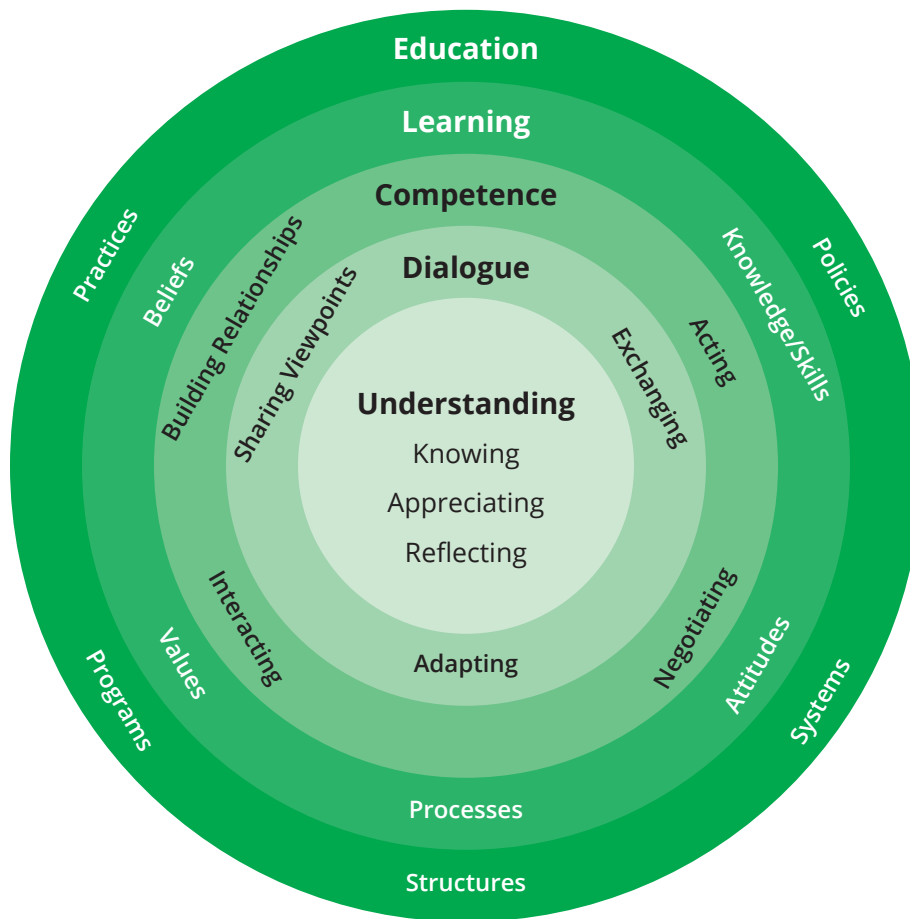
**Table 1. Key Features of Intercultural Understanding and Related Terms**

| Category / Feature   | Global Competence (OECD) | Intercultural Competence (UNESCO) | Intercultural Dialogue (Council of Europe) | Intercultural Understanding (ACARA) | Intercultural Understanding (Hill, 2006) |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>KNOWLEDGE</b>   |                          |                                   |  |                                     |  |
| <b>Cultural Self-Awareness:</b> Knowledge of one's own culture; understanding the lens through which we each view the world.   | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   | ✓  |
| <b>Diverse Perspectives of Cultures:</b> Knowledge of the similarities and differences between cultures.   | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   | ✓  |
| <b>Dynamic Characteristics of Culture:</b> Knowledge of the dynamic positions, practices, and power relations that exist within and across different cultures.   | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   | ✓  |
| <b>APPRECIATION</b>  |                          |                                   |  |                                     |  |
| <b>Empathy:</b> Imagining oneself in another person's shoes; "seeing from other perspectives or world views" (UNESCO, 2013, p. 24).  | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   | ✓  |
| <b>Respect:</b> Valuing the perspectives of all individuals and treating them with dignity.  | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   | ✓  |
| <b>Open-Mindedness:</b> Considering and accepting the ideas, practices, and viewpoints that are different from one's own.  | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   | ✓  |
| <b>REFLECTION</b>  |                          |                                   |  |                                     |  |
| <b>Reflection on Culture:</b> Analyzing and evaluating one's own cultural assumptions, biases, and experiences in relation to other cultures.  | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   |  |
| <b>DIALOGUE</b>  |                          |                                   |  |                                     |  |
| <b>Communicative Exchanges:</b> Openly and respectfully engaging in authentic intercultural dialogue; exchanging views and opinions with individuals and groups from different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   |  |
| <b>Adaptation:</b> Shifting temporarily into another cultural perspective or identity during exchanges.  | ✓                        | ✓                                 | ✓  | ✓                                   |  |
| <b>COMPETENCE</b>  |                          |                                   |  |                                     |  |
| <b>Examining Issues of Global Significance:</b> Addresses problem of global significance using content knowledge and higher-order skills.  | ✓                        |                                   |  |                                     |  |
| <b>Effective Interaction:</b> Acting, interacting, and negotiating appropriately or successfully in a variety of intercultural situations and contexts.  | ✓                        | ✓                                 |  | ✓                                   |  |
| <b>Relationship Building:</b> Forging lasting cross-cultural personal bonds.   | ✓                        | ✓                                 |  | ✓                                   |  |
| <b>Language Proficiency:</b> Proficiency in other languages (bilingual or multi-lingual; see UNESCO, 2013, p. 23; Heyward, 2002)   | (✓) <sup>1</sup>         | ✓                                 |  | (✓) <sup>2</sup>                    |  |

<sup>1</sup> OECD considers language proficiency to be a building block for global competence, but not an explicit feature of its definition.

<sup>2</sup> ACARA considers intercultural understanding capability "core to languages." <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-general-capability/intercultural-understanding#accordion-fceec48c8c-item-a698bb6648>

**Figure 1. Relationship Among Key Terms Associated With Intercultural Understanding**



### Is Intercultural Understanding a Generic or Discipline-Specific Competency?

Intercultural understanding has both general and discipline-specific aspects. Again, intercultural understanding consists of the knowledge and appreciation of cultural similarities and differences and, further, the ability to reflect on one’s own culture in relation to others. The knowledge and skills associated with intercultural understanding are applicable across content domains and contexts. However, the authentic application of intercultural understanding occurs within a particular context. Moreover, the specific contexts in which intercultural understanding is applied often requires specialized knowledge and skills tailored to specific content-domains (e.g., language and literature, mathematics) or fields of study (e.g., healthcare, education, business).

The knowledge and skills associated with intercultural understanding are applicable across content domains and contexts.

In language and literature, for example, students read historical sources from different cultures to explore themes of racial injustice and moral growth. In science, students explore how ancient civilizations such as the Mayans, Egyptians, and Greeks contributed to our understanding of planets and other celestial bodies, highlighting the intercultural transmission of scientific ideas. And in mathematics, students from different

countries approach mathematical problems differently. Making sense of the various approaches applied, and how culture influences these approaches, can be used to deepen mathematical understandings (Sorge et al., 2023).

## What is the Relationship between Intercultural Understanding and 21st Century Skills?

Research on 21st Century skill development for deeper learning suggests that learners acquire five types of knowledge: facts, conceptions (i.e., schemas, models), procedures, strategies, and beliefs. According to the National Research Council, “the learner acquires an interconnected network of specific facts, automates procedures, refines schemas and mental models, and refines cognitive and metacognitive strategies, while at the same time developing beliefs about learning” (NRC, 2012, p. 85). This process enables knowledge transfer. More specifically, as a learner comprehends and retains facts and procedures, they begin to connect them to broader concepts, strategies, and beliefs. Collectively, as these types of knowledge develop and deepen within a domain, they can be transferred to address novel problems and make sense of new experiences. The distinct concepts, strategies, and beliefs that influence knowledge transfer are what we call 21st Century skills.

Like intercultural understanding, definitions of most 21st Century skills vary, as do the broader categories in which these skills fall. For example, The Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) organizes 21st Century Skills<sup>3</sup> into one of six skill categories: cognitive, interpersonal, intrapersonal, metacognitive, civic and citizenship, and digital literacy (Foster & Piacentini, 2023). OECD categorizes intercultural communication under civic and citizenship. For comparison, NRC (2012) organizes 21st Century skills into one of three categories—cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—and labels *appreciation for diversity* as an intrapersonal skill. OECD’s expanded categories since the early 2000s arguably reflect the growth in the number of skills labeled 21st Century skills. OECD’s additional categories also reflect an increased priority on teaching and learning essential skills that promote civics and citizenship, metacognition, and digital literacy.

The individual skills that make up intercultural understanding can be grouped within cognitive, metacognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skill categories. For example, *developing knowledge of cultural dynamics, and understanding how those dynamics shape intercultural dialogue and relationships* is a cognitive process. *Reflection*—analyzing and evaluating one’s assumptions, biases, and experiences in relation to another culture—relies on several metacognitive processes. Finally, *developing an appreciation of cultural similarities and differences* involves empathy, open-mindedness, and respect for diverse perspectives—which are inter- and intrapersonal skills (NRC, 2012).

To cultivate intercultural understanding, of course, educators must attend to the skills that make the development of intercultural understanding possible. For example, instruction that focusses on skills such as open-mindedness, empathy, and reflection is essential for cultivating intercultural understanding. Similarly, educators can use students’ knowledge of culture and cross-cultural similarities and differences—intercultural understanding—as a means for promoting these same skills.

Instruction that focusses on skills such as open-mindedness, empathy, and reflection is essential for cultivating intercultural understanding.

<sup>3</sup> The ACARA intercultural understanding learning continua can be found here: <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/media/1075/general-capabilities-intercultural-understanding-learning-continuum.pdf>



As suggested above, skills represented under the 21st Century skill umbrella are interconnected and facilitate knowledge transfer. Notably, the research literature explicitly relating the development of these cognitive, intrapersonal, and metacognitive skills to the development of intercultural understanding is sparse (Byram & Wagner, 2018, p. 146). Most research literature examining the development of intercultural understanding makes two assumptions that are yet to be empirically established: (a) intercultural understanding is only possible through the development of these related cognitive, metacognitive, and intrapersonal skills; and (b) these related skills can be developed by focusing on intercultural understanding.

## DEVELOPMENT

### How Does Intercultural Understanding Develop?

Numerous models propose how intercultural understanding develops (OECD, 2019; Sabet & Chapman, 2023; Singh & Qi, 2013). Three prominent models are considered below. No one model fully captures the nuanced theories of how intercultural understanding develops; collectively, however, these three models provide a well-rounded view of accepted developmental principles.

#### Developmental Models and Progressions of Intercultural Understanding

The intercultural communicative competence model (ICC; Byram et al., 2002) comprises three components— knowledge, skills and attitudes—and is supplemented by five competencies: (a) intercultural attitudes, (b) knowledge, (c) skills of interpreting and relating, (d) skills of discovery and interaction, and (e) critical cultural awareness. These five major intercultural competencies are strongly interrelated. Byram claims that the attitudes (e.g., curiosity and openness) of a person interacting with people of another culture are foundational for developing intercultural competence. Without this basic competence, the other four cannot authentically develop.

Like Byram’s model, the process model of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2012) posits attitudes as being essential prerequisites for developing intercultural competence. Attitudes such as flexibility, adaptability, and empathy for other cultures enable individuals to understand perspectives of others and treat others as they wish to be treated. As these attitudes develop, an individual can apply intercultural knowledge and skills for effective and appropriate intercultural interactions. Additionally, the intercultural competence model emphasizes that the development of intercultural competence is a *lifelong process*.

The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS; Bennett, 1993) concentrates on the essential role of attitudes and affective characteristics in developing intercultural understanding. This model describes six progressive developmental stages. In the first three stages—denial, defense, and minimization—individuals are “ethnocentric”: They view their own culture as central to reality. In contrast, the last three stages—acceptance, adaptation, and integration—are “ethno-relative”: In these stages, one views all cultures as alternative ways of organizing reality. Individuals move through these latter three stages when they are motivated to develop competence in communicating outside their own social context. When that motivation is strong enough, an individual will build more complex perceptual structures to make sense of complex issues that arise through cultural differences. Additionally, as individuals progress through the latter three stages, they integrate multiple cultural perspectives into their own identities. 2 shows the DMIS and associated milestones.

**Table 2. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)**

| ETHNOCENTRIC ORIENTATIONS   |   |   | ETHNORELATIVE ORIENTATIONS  |  |   |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| Denial  | Defense   | Minimization  | Acceptance  | Adaptation   | Integration   |
| Individuals do not recognize cultural differences and may be isolated from other cultures, viewing their own culture as central to reality. | Individuals begin to perceive cultural differences and move to an “us vs. them” mentality. Others are perceived more fully, but often in stereotyped ways | Individuals minimize cultural differences and assume that their own experiences are shared by others. They tend to stress unity by overemphasizing shared values and beliefs. | Individuals are curious about cultural differences; however, limited knowledge and experience with other cultures makes it difficult to appropriately adapt their behavior. | Individuals shift perspectives and experience the world through other cultural lenses. They struggle to reconcile shifting perspectives with their true cultural identity. | Individuals shift in and out of different cultural worldviews with fluidity. They integrate many cultural perspectives into their identities. |

Government agencies and education organizations have used these models to create developmental continua for the primary and secondary grade span. These continua articulate the knowledge and skills a student demonstrates in a particular grade span when they have mastered key dimensions of intercultural understanding. These continua are designed to support teaching and learning of intercultural understanding in developmentally appropriate ways. For example, the U.S. Department of Education and Australia (ACARA) have grade-span competencies to advance global and cultural competence and intercultural understanding, respectively.<sup>4</sup> The international organizations OECD (2019) and UNESCO (2013) have also developed developmental frameworks to support knowledge and skills representing global competence and intercultural understanding.

### Limitations of Developmental Models and Progressions

There is limited research evidence to support the validity of these developmental models for supporting instructional decisions. These models are based on theory and provide insufficient detail regarding how intercultural understanding develops (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; Perry & Southwell, 2011). Neither Byram’s nor Deardorff’s models incorporate levels that address the development of intercultural understanding. And although the DMIS comprises six developmental levels, it conceptualizes intercultural sensitivity as a linear progression—an assumption lacking strong empirical support (Perry & Southwell, 2011). Moreover, some experts believe the DMIS to be too simplistic, as it forces individuals into stages without allowing for the possibility that they can express multiple, complex, and conflicting aspects of intercultural sensitivity that don’t bind the individual to a single stage (Perry & Southwell, 2011). These limitations make it difficult to support classroom instruction (Hoff, 2020) and evaluate student learning (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017).

Additionally, models and developmental progressions of intercultural understanding were primarily developed from a Western cultural perspective. Some experts question whether these models are transferable across cultures, particularly in non-US and non-English speaking cultures (Greenholtz, 2005).

These models also have been criticized for overemphasizing the role of language in intercultural competence development. To be sure, language is an important vehicle for understanding other worldviews; but language alone does not ensure one’s competency in the culture. Language is a necessary, but insufficient, skill for intercultural competence (UNESCO, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> The ACARA intercultural understanding learning continua can be found here: <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/media/1075/general-capabilities-intercultural-understanding-learning-continuum.pdf>. U.S. Department of Education framework for global and cultural competency can be found here: <https://sites.ed.gov/international/global-and-cultural-competency/>

Finally, the vast literature concerning intercultural understanding and similar constructs crosses many disciplines. Theoretical definitions and developmental trajectories of intercultural understanding and related terms have both overlapping and distinct characteristics. This paper establishes a clear definition of intercultural understanding; however, more research is needed to support developmental progressions of intercultural understanding as a distinct construct (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020).

### Is Intercultural Understanding Malleable as a Result of Instruction?

Research on intercultural understanding suggests it can be developed through formal instruction (Deardorff, 2020). For example, knowledge and appreciation of cultural similarities and differences can develop by observing others engage in competent intercultural behaviors and by participating in service-learning activities, study abroad programs, role play, case studies, simulations, group activities, and coaching (OECD & Asia Society, 2018; Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020; Celio et al., 2011; Liu, 2019). Intercultural knowledge and appreciation can also develop through informal daily experiences by interacting with those who differ in age, gender, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation, and other characteristics (OECD & Asia Society, 2018; Deardorff, 2020).

Research on intercultural understanding suggests it can be developed through formal instruction.

OECD (2020a; 2020b), too, suggests that attitudes necessary to develop intercultural understanding are malleable. Attitudes like empathy, openness, and respect may develop through formal instruction of intercultural understanding. Additionally, frequent application of intercultural understanding can in turn be a conduit for developing such attitudes, suggesting a reciprocal relationship. This study used results from a questionnaire in the Programme for International Student Assessment global competency assessment, involving roughly 450,000 15-year-old students from over 50 countries.<sup>5</sup> Findings showed that students who reported greater exposure to intercultural education practices also reported higher levels of student belonging, life satisfaction, and positive affect. However, these relationships were small (effect sizes ranged from .02 to .21), nor was causality addressed. Further, this study did not examine effects of specific interventions, which clearly should be investigated in future research.

Despite these limitations, the OECD study points to a positive relationship between (a) formal instruction in intercultural understanding and (b) attitudes and dispositions that cultivate intercultural understanding. As Figure 3 illustrates, instruction to develop intercultural understanding may, in turn, improve students' sense of safety, satisfaction, and well-being.

The ability to reflect critically on one's own culture—another core component of intercultural understanding—has also been shown to be malleable. Critical reflection develops through formal instruction (Singh, 2021). As students learn to reflect, they develop the ability to test theories about what they know (or think they know) and accommodate existing schemas, or ways of thinking, into new and expanded schemas. They consequently can deal effectively with new cultural experiences (Bennett, 2017). A growing body of research points to the impact of reflective interventions on general academic achievement. Through reflective interventions, teachers encourage students to consider, revisit, and revise their beliefs and presumed knowledge. For example, the Zhai et al. (2023) meta-analysis reported an overall large effect of reflective interventions on academic achievement. These interventions were most effective when they incorporated explicit instruction on how to engage in reflective activities.

<sup>5</sup> The samples included in analyses ranged from 412,801 to 451,846 students and 54 to 58 countries.

## Limitations of Research Supporting the Malleable Features of Intercultural Understanding

Research establishing *how* intercultural attitudes and skills develop remains sparse. There is a plethora of theory linking specific instructional methods to intercultural understanding, but empirical support of these theories is limited. Moreover, the studies that have been conducted rely primarily on self-report surveys, qualitative methods, and small samples. Few large-scale experimental or quasi-experimental studies have examined the effectiveness of specific instructional approaches on the development of intercultural understanding in primary and secondary schools. And most studies are specific to geographic regions, report results using a variety of outcome measures, and include samples limited to postsecondary students (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020; Perry & Southwell, 2011).

Additionally, studies supporting the use of critical reflection pertain to general academic achievement, not the development of intercultural activities. Two literature reviews established a potential link between critical reflection and the development of intercultural understanding (Zhang & Zhou, 2019; Shadiev & Sintawati, 2020). These studies relied on qualitative methods, however, so conclusions regarding causality cannot be made. Additionally, most studies did not include standardized outcome measures or comparison groups. Finally, these studies included secondary and post-secondary (undergraduate) students, limiting the results' generalizability to the primary grades.

## What Might Be Distinct about Intercultural Understanding Across Contexts and Cultures?

Most of the academic work on intercultural competencies has originated in North America and Europe (UNESCO, 2013). UNESCO's *Intercultural Competencies* (2013) was one of the first documents to synthesize regional perspectives on intercultural understanding from around the world. Although UNESCO developed these competencies over a decade ago, much work remains to be done in understanding intercultural competencies from a variety of perspectives (Deardorff, 2020).

Formal models and instructional approaches for cultivating intercultural understanding are overwhelmingly generated from Western countries and may not be appropriate in non-Western settings (Ping et al., 2023; Deardorff, 2020). More research is needed to understand how these and other instructional approaches influence intercultural understanding in non-Western settings and, further, among those who have less access to formal educational experiences.

Formal models and instructional approaches for cultivating intercultural understanding are overwhelmingly generated from Western countries and may not be appropriate in non-Western settings

## INSTRUCTION

### What Are Some Instructional Tools, Activities, and Approaches for Teaching Intercultural Understanding?

Bennett (2013) summarized three epistemological paradigms that influenced the evolution of teaching and learning about intercultural understanding. The first paradigm is positivism, which is rooted in the assumption that culture is static and can be observed, measured, and classified. The second is relativism, which assumes that all cultures are equal—that no culture or perspective is inherently superior to another. And the third paradigm is constructivism, where culture is viewed as a dynamic and socially constructed

phenomenon. Moreover, constructivism holds that our understanding of cultural similarities and differences is grounded in the meaning we make through our interactions with the world and with others.

Each paradigm has implications for teaching intercultural understanding (True North Intercultural, 2021). For example, cultures differ in how people relate to time and nature, communicate with each other, and worship (Hofstede, 2011). From a positivist paradigm, information is taught as cultural truths. A teacher may even attempt to distinguish between cultures in value-laden ways.

From a relativist paradigm, teachers highlight differences among cultures, emphasizing that no culture is superior to another; cultures are just different. Relativism stops short of making judgments about cultural similarities and differences. Moreover, relativism is not concerned with how these similarities and differences influence an individual's cultural identity or the corresponding implications for citizenship, social justice, and equal rights.

From a constructivist paradigm, teachers share information about cultural groups and, further, act as facilitators to help students (a) explore their values and cultural perspectives, (b) critically examine how these values and perspectives compare with other cultural groups, and (c) consider how any perceived differences may relate to such ideas as cultural privilege, equity, or fairness. Importantly, this process is followed for the purpose of appropriately interacting with other cultures, negotiating differences, and building cultural bridges to benefit humanity.

Instructional approaches that promote intercultural understanding tend to emphasize a sociocultural theory of learning. Sociocultural learning theory and constructivism share the foundational belief that learners actively construct knowledge (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Socio-cultural theory, however, extends constructivism by highlighting the role of interaction and cultural context in knowledge development. Specifically, learners develop their cognitive and affective capabilities and ways of being through interaction in their social and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, sociocultural theory attends to student identity and sense of belonging as a key part of the academic learning process. As a consequence, all students—regardless of cultural or linguistic background—cultivate a sense of self-worth and belonging and, further, confidence that they have access to meaningful postsecondary pathways (REL Pacific, 2022).

Instructional approaches that promote intercultural understanding tend to emphasize a sociocultural theory of learning.

Sociocultural teaching methods incorporate elements of peer collaboration, scaffolding, and responsive teaching practices (Shepard et al., 2020). More specific pedagogies and teaching methods, which derive from sociocultural theory and are widely cited in the research literature, are discussed below. From their interviews with school leaders and teachers around the world, the Asian Society and OECD (2018) argue that these methods can support intercultural understanding through their integration into content-specific courses, such as language, literature, science, social studies, mathematics, and foreign language studies. These methods can also be adapted for various grade-levels, ages, topics, and themes (OECD & Asia Society, 2018).

Sociocultural teaching methods incorporate elements of peer collaboration, scaffolding, and responsive teaching practices.

### **Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies**

Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies are rooted in sociocultural learning theories (Algava, 2016). These pedagogies incorporate strengths-based instructional approaches that consider students' cultural

and linguistic identities, experiences, and ways of knowing as being central to the learning process (Paris & Alim, 2017). A central goal and distinguishing feature of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies when compared with other sociocultural teaching methods is that the former are designed to foster linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism (Paris, 2012). Specifically, cultural pluralism is advanced as students critically reflect on policies and cultural practices that perhaps marginalize those in the minority. For example, students may engage in a problem-based task where they critically examine, and devise solutions to, real-world problems that perpetuate social inequalities (Shahrokni, 2023).

### **Problem and Project-Based Learning Pedagogies**

Problem- and project-based learning approaches frequently are cited for promoting intercultural understanding. They share many instructional design criteria and strategies, such as open-ended tasks and activities, that require students to apply knowledge and skills to novel situations. For example, a teacher might ask students to identify a problem—say, climate change and its impact on communities—and explore how it might be viewed by people with different values or cultural perspectives. Students may be asked to consider how their own cultural norms influence how they approach the problem, arrive at a solution, and communicate that solution to others. Students also might be asked to present to community members having different beliefs about the problem, how it should be addressed, or even whether they see it as a problem at all.

### **Discussion and Debate**

Teachers also use structured discussions and debates to promote intercultural understanding. Organized discussions allow students to voice their differences, biases, and cultural beliefs. To simulate discussion of a cultural issue, a teacher typically begins with a thought-provoking video clip, a controversial image, a piece of literature, or a current event in the news. Students may then be asked to develop a point of view that can be supported by evidence. As a student shares their perspective, the teacher asks the other students to suspend judgment and listen for understanding. The teacher can then guide a discussion to address specific learning objectives, such as how cultural diversity can cause conflict. The teacher also may ask students to reflect on the various viewpoints presented and, in turn, consider how their original perspective may have changed as a consequence.

A story circle is another activity that uses collaborative discussion as a means for developing intercultural understanding. Story circles are structured group activities where participants share personal stories related to a specific theme, often focusing on cultural experiences and perspectives (Deardorff, 2020). Providing a safe space for open dialogue and reflection, a facilitator guides a discussion to foster mutual understanding and respect among participants from diverse backgrounds.

### **Learning through Play**

Playful learning entails organized activities that are joyful, meaningful, engaging, and socially interactive (Zosh et al., 2017). In formal school settings, elements of play are integrated into active learning pedagogies such as problem-based, project-based, and experiential learning (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). For example, children in lower primary grades may be asked to research specific aspects of an assigned culture. Following their research, students create distinct cultural areas in the classroom and are invited to visit each other's areas, engage in activities, and share their experiences. In older grades, students may volunteer with organizations that work with diverse cultural communities or engage in language exchange programs. These cross-cultural experiences may be used to reflect on cultural differences, consider the roots of cultural conflict, and present ideas for bridging cultural divides. Role-playing scenarios, interactive storytelling, and conflict resolution scenarios are other examples of playful learning activities.

Play also can be used outside of school settings to promote intercultural understanding. For example, the organization Play for Peace (2024) uses play to promote peace in areas of violent conflict. Through cooperative games and critical reflexive activities, Play for Peace facilitators encourage people to consider peaceful resolutions to conflict.

### **Service Learning**

Service learning occurs when students participate in, and reflect upon, an organized activity to benefit their communities. Conceptions of service-learning typically emphasize a reciprocal relationship (Smith, 2020). For example, the community partner provides meaningful service opportunities and support for students to contribute to the partner’s objectives or needs. Students reciprocate by developing resources or providing services to meet the stated goal. Throughout the service-learning project, students learn about the cultural norms, values, and skills that are important to the partner, the partner’s mission, and the people for whom the partner serves. By doing so, the student develops knowledge and appreciation of another culture, and the community partner receives important contributions from the student to support their mission.

Examples of service-learning activities include community engagement activities, advocacy campaigns, and direct services to community members such as tutoring in schools and visiting the elderly (OECD & Asia Society, 2018). Service-learning projects often happen through school-community partnerships. For example, students may provide mathematics tutoring services for younger children through a school’s partnership with a local cultural center. To become a service-learning project, the cultural center director would provide important background about the community and the people the center serves. The director would then teach student tutors effective ways to interact with the children they tutor. During formal instruction, for example, the students’ mathematics teacher might ask student tutors to document reflections on their experiences tutoring younger children. At the end of the project, the teacher might also ask student tutors to present what they learned about children’s cultural norms and learning preferences and, in turn, how those norms and preferences influenced their approach to teaching mathematical concepts.

### **Study Abroad**

Study abroad is a type of experiential learning activity where students live and study in another country ([IES Abroad, 2024](#)). Study abroad programs range in scope and duration. For example, some are designed to cultivate intercultural understanding by having students fulfill course requirements, improve language skills, or participate in organized cultural activities. Other programs are embedded in specific courses (e.g., Northern Ireland Conflict) to fulfill specific course requirements. Study abroad programs can range from a few days or weeks to a semester or full academic year. Many allow students to earn college credit for graduation. Although these programs are most popular among postsecondary students, they are also available for students in late middle school and high school ([CIEE, 2024](#)).

### **Foreign Language and Multilingual Instruction**

Foreign language and multilingual instructional approaches often are used to cultivate knowledge of, and appreciation for, other cultures. The primary objective of language learning is intercultural competence (Atay et al., 2009). Moreover, virtually all foreign language courses worldwide include learning standards for cultivating intercultural understanding (Deardorff, 2006b). In most parts of the world—Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia—foreign language learning begins at a young age, with increasing intensity through high school (Kassteen, N.D.).

In North America, foreign language learning typically starts later, though language programs can be found in some primary schools. For example, dual language programs—a form of multilingual education where

students are taught literacy and content in two languages—has quadrupled since 2010 (Carr, 2023). There currently are more than 3,600 dual language programs offered in the U.S., with the top five languages being Spanish, Chinese, French, Japanese, and German (Shulman, 2023).

### Information and Communication Technology Tools

Tools that incorporate information and communication technology (ICT) are useful for supporting intercultural understanding. Although ICT does not constitute a specific teaching method, it enables students to authentically collaborate with students from other cultures. Additionally, ICT often is used to support culturally relevant and sustaining teaching and assessment methods (Chiper, 2013). Apps and websites provide learning activities for students across age levels. For example, National Geographic, Google, and Newsela<sup>6</sup> offer apps allowing students to read about current global events, research how people from different cultures live and interact, and study how geography influences ways of living.

Digital and communication platforms also are used to enhance project-based and experiential learning (OECD & Asia Society, 2018). For example, videoconferencing tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams allow synchronous audio-visual and non-verbal communication through real-time chats, messaging, and face-to-face engagements. Students may use these tools to work collaboratively on projects and in problem solving. iLearn<sup>7</sup> is a project-based platform, having over 150 teacher-developed projects that schools can use to cultivate their students' intercultural understanding. With iLearn, a classroom enters an online forum to meet students from other cultures and collaborate on a common project.

### What Do We Know About the Effects of Instruction on the Development of Intercultural Understanding?

This review critically evaluated the strength of empirical evidence supporting how intercultural understanding develops and, in turn, how it should be taught and assessed. To inform his conclusions, the author used the “ESSA tiers of evidence” framework established under the United States Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (REL Midwest, 2019). This framework considers five factors for appraising the extent to which a body of research supports important claims about the effectiveness of programs and interventions in education: (a) study design, (b) study results, (c) findings from related studies, (d) sample size and setting, and (e) match, or the extent to which studies reflect similar populations and settings.

Informed by this framework, conclusions about the strength of evidence in this report were classified as being largely theoretical, promising, moderate, or strong.

- **Theoretical evidence** represents studies that include a well-defined logic model (or developmental model) and also are designed and implemented well; however, research findings are largely based on qualitative studies and small sample sizes. The corpus of studies under review tend to rely on varying definitions of intercultural understanding, are informed by different developmental models, and use different outcome measures. These design variations make it impossible to assert broad generalizations or conclusions about the effectiveness of a program and practice, or to establish a validity argument for a particular developmental model across populations and settings.
- **Promising evidence** represents studies that are designed and implemented well and include quantitative results suggesting positive effects on relevant outcomes. Multiple studies may have similar design features, but they generally involve small samples. Research designs generally rely

<sup>6</sup> A more comprehensive set of global and cross-cultural education tools is available at <https://www.common sense.org/education/lists/best-global-and-cross-cultural-education-apps-and-websites>

<sup>7</sup> Information about iLearn is available at <https://i learn.org/about>



on pre-post measures when reporting outcomes and do not include a comparison or control group. Combined, this serves to temper the conclusions one can make regarding the effectiveness of a program both within and across student populations and settings.

- **Moderate evidence** represents studies that are quasi-experimental or experimental trials that show positive effects on relevant outcomes; several of these studies include large samples (at least 350 participants). These research designs report results in relation to a counterfactual condition: That is, what would have happened in absence of an intervention? However, results from these designs lack replication studies to provide corroboration and, further, these studies often are limited to specific populations or settings.
- **Strong evidence** similarly represents quasi-experimental or experimental trials based on large samples and show positive effects on relevant outcomes. Moreover, the body of evidence from these studies is substantial, reflects similar samples and settings, involves replication studies, and yields similar outcomes using the same outcome measures.

Studies examining intercultural understanding largely fall into the theoretical and promising evidence categories. Specific limitations are described below.

### Research Limitations

Systematic literature reviews are helpful because they synthesize findings from multiple studies, revealing what is known and unknown about the effectiveness of programs and practices. There are several recent literature reviews regarding intercultural understanding and related terms. These reviews incorporated search terms such as *intercultural understanding*, *intercultural competence*, and *intercultural dialogue*, yielding hundreds of research articles (Bagwe & Haskolar, 2020; Elias & Mansouri, 2020; Liu, 2019; Su, 2023; Zhang & Zhou, 2019). Despite this plethora of research, the field's understanding about the effectiveness of programs and practices for improving intercultural understanding is extremely limited.

First, as suggested earlier, there is no universally accepted definition of intercultural understanding. Although concepts such as global competence, intercultural competence, and intercultural understanding share overlapping skills and dispositions, they nonetheless have their differences (Elias & Mansouri, 2023). Moreover, conceptual and theoretical disagreements persist among researchers, particularly among researchers in different fields, such as business, psychology, and education (Liu, 2019).

Second, the vast majority of studies on intercultural understanding are either theoretical or descriptive (Elias & Mansouri, 2020). Informed by prior research, theoretical studies produce conceptual models that comprise components and processes concerning the development of intercultural competence. In contrast, descriptive studies ascertain teachers' and students' perceptions of interventions designed to cultivate intercultural understanding. These studies typically involve small samples, data that are narrative and difficult to quantify, and findings that cannot be generalized to other populations and settings (Elias & Mansouri, 2020; Bagwe & Haskolar, 2020). Moreover, these studies do not permit conclusions regarding the *effectiveness* of programs or interventions designed to promote intercultural understanding (Elias & Mansouri, 2023; Su, 2023). Indeed, quantitative studies that can be rare in this field (Sabet & Chapman, 2023; Ping et al., 2023). For example, in a recent systematic literature review of intercultural competence, Elias & Mansouri (2023) found only 11 of 351 total articles reviewed included a quantitative survey.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, only a few studies that incorporated quantitative measures included a comparison or control

<sup>8</sup> Elias & Mansouri's (2023) systematic literature review did not indicate how many of the 11 studies utilized quasi-experimental or experimental methods. However, only two studies focused explicitly on students.

group. Without a strong comparison, it is impossible to establish whether changes in outcomes were due to the intervention/practice being studied, or whether such changes were the result of other factors (e.g., motivation, prior knowledge and dispositions).

Finally, the investigated outcomes, and the assessments used to estimate these outcomes, vary widely across studies. Further, while studies often focus on how an intervention may have changed individuals' attitudes about other cultures, these studies neglect other important skills such as whether individuals acquired knowledge of another culture, demonstrated changes in such dispositions as empathy or respect, or improved their ability to critically reflect on cultural differences (Liu, 2019). Collectively, these conceptual and methodological issues limit the field's understanding about the effectiveness of programs, interventions, and practices regarding intercultural understanding; for whom they work; and the conditions that mediate their successful implementation. These limitations apply to most practices described in the section above. Although studies have established that these practices show promise for improving skills and dispositions associated with intercultural understanding, they are far from definitive.

### Summary of What is Known

Instructional approaches such as project-based learning, discussion and debate, reflective activities, and service-learning can improve general student engagement and academic achievement outcomes (Celio et al., 2011; Condliffe et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Zhai et al., 2023). However, there is almost no literature establishing the relationship between these practices and intercultural understanding.

Although evidence remains sparse, recent research sheds some light on the efficacy of a few instructional approaches on intercultural understanding: (a) service-learning, (b) study abroad programs, (c) foreign language learning, and (d) the use of information and communication technology tools. Research also has highlighted the potential role of motivation and levels of teachers' intercultural competence as mediators of students' intercultural development. This research is summarized below.

#### Service Learning

Research on service-learning provides promising evidence of effectiveness for improving intercultural understanding, provided certain conditions are met. Service-learning experiences have been associated with many desirable outcomes, including those representing key aspects of intercultural understanding. For example, Celio et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 62 studies comparing a service-learning experience with a control group.<sup>9</sup> This meta-analysis revealed significant gains for service-learning participants in five areas: self-attitudes, learning attitudes, academic performance, civic engagement, and social skills. Moreover, Holsapple (2012) reviewed 55 studies on the impact of service-learning courses, finding that 32 of these studies reported a reduction in students' stereotypes about diverse populations, facilitated by positive relationships between service-learning participants and those served. Additionally, 28 studies reported increased knowledge about the served populations, including such considerations as their cultural

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<sup>9</sup> The article indicates that "31% of studies used randomized designs and 41 studies (66%) included pretests" (p. 171).

background and the nature of their marginalization. Students in service-learning courses also reported an enhanced appreciation of cultural diversity, especially when working with international and immigrant populations, as well as with primary and secondary students. Finally, students who are given ownership and choice in their service learning projects have shown an increase in their self-concept and tolerance for diversity (Morgan & Streb, 2001).

Across the studies reviewed, reflective activities were associated with better outcomes (Celio et al., 2011). Additionally, the most common source of data in the studies reviewed included students' assigned written reflections, suggesting that reflective activities may be an essential component of service-learning activities when a goal is to develop intercultural understanding.<sup>10</sup>

Certain conditions are necessary for service-learning to cultivate intercultural understanding. Previous research cautions that, when poorly implemented, service-learning may result in such unanticipated outcomes as increased prejudice among students toward the very groups intended to benefit from the former's service (Conner & Erickson, 2017). Service-learning interventions may do more harm than good when the service-learning experience is short-term (e.g., several days or a few weeks), superficial, and absent of deep mutual engagement (Conner & Erickson, 2017; Houshmand et al., 2014). Additionally, the research evidence suggests that service-learning and other experiential programs, such as studying abroad, are insufficient to develop intercultural understanding (Deardorff, 2014). Rather, these programs must be coupled with high-quality curriculum and instruction that focuses on basic knowledge about a culture and intercultural concepts, facilitates sense-making of cross-cultural differences, and affords time for students to critically reflect on their experiences.

Little is known about the specific factors that influence effective implementation and outcomes of service-learning across contexts and grade spans (Celio et al., 2011). Also, most of the studies included in these literature reviews recruited college undergraduates. In the Celio et al. (2011) meta-analysis, 74% of the studies reviewed involved undergraduate or graduate students, while only 26% involved elementary and secondary students; all studies in the Holsapple (2012) review involved college undergraduates. Additionally, among the quantitative studies, most outcomes were student self-reports, which is susceptible to social desirability bias and, further, fails to capture actual student behaviors in intercultural contexts.

### **Study Abroad**

Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) found 17 studies that examined the impact of study abroad programs on intercultural competence, using the Intercultural Development Inventory. These programs were found to be most effective when they included formal mentoring from a professor or a structured program to support cultural meaning-making. For example, one experimental study found that students who studied abroad with carefully timed supervision and scaffolding showed significantly higher levels of intercultural competence when compared with a control group.

Perhaps surprisingly, language capability was not related to gains in intercultural competence in the studies reviewed. However, when language acquisition was a deliberate component of a study abroad program, it was instrumental in increasing intercultural competence. Duration of the program was also important: Students who attended programs lasting 13-18 weeks experienced the most increases in intercultural competence.

Notably, the studies included in Bagwe and Haskollar's review overwhelmingly represented college and university students, thus compromising the generalizability of findings to the earlier grades.

<sup>10</sup> For example, in Holsapple's (2012) review, 36 of 55 studies included written reflections.

## Foreign language learning

In a literature review of intercultural communication competency (ICC), Liu (2019) reported that intercultural understanding has become an important goal in foreign language courses. Moreover, short stories emerged as key practice to facilitate intercultural understanding in foreign language courses. Students often used short stories to make connections with people from other cultural backgrounds and to appreciate culturally-influenced viewpoints and practices.

The reviewed studies generally reported increases in students' awareness of, and positive attitudes toward, aspects of intercultural understanding. These studies examined only narrow aspects of ICC, however, and they used different outcome measures as well. Consequently, Liu could not draw generalized conclusions about the effectiveness of practices to develop ICC in foreign language courses.

## Information and Communication Technology Tools

Shadieff and Sintawati (2020) identified 25 studies in which technology was an essential tool to support the intercultural learning process. Collectively, these studies involved undergraduate and secondary school students from 82 countries. This body of evidence showed that instructors most often used videoconferencing and email to facilitate lessons for promoting intercultural understanding among students from different locations. In most of the studies reviewed, students introduced one another and discussed their local culture (e.g., their traditions, holidays, significant places). These introductions typically were followed by collaborative projects in which students engaged in general intercultural training, domain-specific learning activities, and reflective activities.

Although most of the 25 studies concluded that activities were beneficial to intercultural outcomes, the majority used qualitative methods, and none included a comparison group. As a result, Shadieff and Sintawati were unable to make generalizations about the relationship between specific technology programs and learning activities and subsequent outcomes regarding intercultural learning.

## Mediating Factors

Two mediating factors of intercultural understanding emerged from these studies: motivation and the instructional quality. In their literature reviews, Ping et al. (2023) and Bagwe and Haskollar (2020) found that students who demonstrated high engagement in intercultural instructional activities tended to show higher gains in intercultural competence than those who did not. Additionally, at least two studies found that students' intercultural development increased when they were part of programs in which teachers provided cultural guidance and regularly helped students process their experiences (Vande Berg et al., 2009; Yuen, 2010).

# MEASUREMENT/ASSESSMENT

## How is Intercultural Understanding Typically Measured or Assessed?

Common methods for measuring and assessing intercultural understanding include capstone projects, performance tasks, standardized measures, critical reflection papers, self-report surveys, and interviews (Deardorff, 2015). Educators use rubrics to review and score student products, papers, and performance tasks. Similarly, educators may apply one or more rubrics to score a body of student work included in e-portfolios.

Assessments of intercultural understanding are either direct or indirect assessments (Sinicrope et al., 2007; Deardorff, 2011). Direct assessments elicit evidence when

- students engage in tasks or produce products that allow them to *demonstrate* they have achieved the desired outcomes, and
- a certified instructor or expert uses objective criteria, such as a rubric, to evaluate student learning.

Common examples of direct assessments are OECD’s global competency assessment; student work samples (e.g., essays, videos, presentation slides) from project-based learning activities; and performances, such as an authentic exchange with someone from another culture.

Indirect assessments elicit evidence when

- a “proxy” measure is used to determine outcome (e.g., a self-report survey is used as a measure of student learning) performance, and
- the student decides what, and how well, they learned.

Common examples of indirect assessments are self-report surveys and reflective papers.<sup>11</sup>

Given the complexity of the intercultural understanding construct, assessing it typically requires both direct and indirect evidence (Kusano et al., 2015). Also, because intercultural understanding is a developmental process, assessing it over time is a better approach than assessing it only once (Deardorff, 2015). Below are examples that can be used to support instruction or determine a student’s overall level of intercultural understanding.

### **Standardized Measures**

The research literature describes over 100 standardized measures of intercultural understanding, having varying reliability and validity evidence (Deardorff, 2011). The vast majority are self-report surveys (Deardorff, 2014; Fantini, 2009) and, therefore, only capable of indirectly assessing specific aspects of intercultural understanding. Moreover, validity and reliability evidence is based largely on undergraduate and graduate school populations. Although a few measures have been adapted for use in secondary schools (e.g., see Schwarzenhal et al., 2019), most measures provide limited evidence of reliability and validity below the postsecondary level. Table 3 summarizes information on commonly used direct and indirect assessments of intercultural understanding and related constructs.

Given the complexity of the intercultural understanding construct, assessing it typically requires both direct and indirect evidence.

The research literature describes over 100 standardized measures of intercultural understanding.

<sup>11</sup> Reflection papers are often, but not always, indirect assessments. In a typical reflection paper, students describe their thoughts, feelings, and insights gained from their experiences, which provide valuable information about their understanding and attitudes but usually does not directly measure specific competencies or skills through objective tasks.

**Table 3: Assessments of Intercultural Understanding and Related Constructs<sup>12</sup>**

| ASSESSMENT TOOL  | AGE RANGE    | FORMAT                                      | DIMENSIONS MEASURED              |
|--|--------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC; Fanitini & Tirmizi, 2006)         | 18 and Older | Indirect Self-Report                        | Knowledge<br>Attitudes<br>Skills |
| Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI; Kelley & Meyers, 1995)            | 18 and Older | Indirect Self-Report                        | Knowledge<br>Attitudes<br>Skills |
| Cross-Cultural World-Mindedness Scale (CCWMS; Der-Karabetian & Metzger, 1993). | 18 and Older | Indirect                                    | Attitudes                        |
| Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS ; Ang et al., 2007)                           | 18 and Older | Indirect Self-Report                        | Knowledge<br>Attitudes           |
| Global Perspectives Inventory (Braskamp et al., 2024)                          | 18 and Older | Indirect Self-Report                        | Knowledge<br>Attitudes           |
| Intercultural Competence Attention-Focusing Tutor (ICCAT; Ogan et al., 2008)   | 18 and Older | Direct Self-Report and Cognitive Assessment | Knowledge<br>Skills              |
| Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer, 2011; Hammer et al., 2003)   | 15 and Older | Indirect Self-Report                        | Knowledge<br>Attitudes           |
| OECD Assessment of Global Competency (Piacentini, 2017)                        | 15-Year-Olds | Direct Self-Report and Cognitive Assessment | Knowledge<br>Attitudes<br>Skills |

### Performance Rubrics

Performance rubrics are useful for scoring direct evidence of students' intercultural understanding through capstone projects and performance tasks. Rubrics may also be useful for assessing knowledge, skills, and attitudes exhibited in reflective activities (e.g., reflective papers), portfolios of student work, and observations of student interactions. Table 4 provides examples of rubrics to guide direct assessment of intercultural understanding.<sup>13</sup> Like the standard measures described above, these rubrics have been used primarily with undergraduate and graduate students.

Performance rubrics are useful for scoring direct evidence of students' intercultural understanding through capstone projects and performance tasks.

<sup>12</sup> Table adapted from Sinicropo, C., Norris, J., & Watanabe, Y. (2007). Understanding and assessing intercultural competence: A summary of theory, research and practice. Technical report for the foreign language program evaluation project. University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

<sup>13</sup> Table adapted from Kusano, S.M., Conger, A.J., and Wright, M.C. (2015). Development and assessment of intercultural engagement. Engaged Learning: Transforming Learning for a Third Century, Paper #32. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan.

**Table 4: Rubrics & Learning Continua for Intercultural Understanding**

| PERFORMANCE RUBRIC  | DIMENSIONS MEASURED   |
|---|---|
| Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Global Learning | Defines global learning as the analysis of global systems and their implications for people’s lives and the earth’s sustainability. Dimensions include global self-awareness, perspective-taking, cultural diversity, personal and social responsibility, understanding global systems, and applying knowledge to contemporary global contexts.   |
| AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence                              | Defines intercultural knowledge as the cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that support cultural interactions. Dimensions include cultural self-awareness, knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks, empathy, verbal/non-verbal communication, curiosity, and openness.   |
| Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2021)    | Defines intercultural understanding as the knowledge and skills needed to reflect on culture and cultural diversity, engage with cultural and linguistic diversity, and navigate intercultural contexts. Dimensions of the ACARA learning continua include recognizing culture and developing respect, interacting and empathizing with others, and reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility.  |
| Steglitz (1993) Coding Scheme   | Used to evaluate student discussions included in the ICCAT assessment (see Table 3). The ICCAT defines intercultural competence as developing insight on native perspectives, opinions, and values; reflecting critically and engaging with otherness” (Ogan et al., 2008, p. 1). In the ICCAT, students watch a clip of an interaction between two individuals. The clip pauses and asks the student to respond to three open-ended questions. The Steglitz coding scheme codes responses into one of three levels: no cultural explanation, unspecified cultural explanation, and specific and elaborated cultural explanation. |

### Critical reflection

Critical reflection is an important dimension in the assessment of intercultural understanding (Deardorff, 2015). Journaling, blogging, and reflection papers are useful tools to collect data regarding student learning. To push students beyond descriptive reflection, educators can use questions such as “As a result of this learning, what will you do now?” (Kneffelcamp, 1989), and prompts such as “I learned that... This is important because... As a result of this learning, I will...” (Clayton, 2010). Through effective reflection, students can examine their personal opinions, identity, attitudes, relationships with others, and day-to-day interactions in society (O’Grady, 2000).

Combined with other data sources, reflection provides insights into the process and development of intercultural competence. Critical reflection often is used as an indirect measure of intercultural understanding, as it asks students to share their perspectives and insights broadly and without the constraints of a structured prompt and coding scheme. That said, educators may choose to use reflective activities to elicit evidence of intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This can be done by using structured simulations and response prompts, and by using performance rubrics and coding schemes to assess quality of response.

### Portfolios

Many higher education institutions have adopted portfolios to collect direct evidence of students’ intercultural and global learning (Deardorff, 2015). A portfolio assessment is a collection of materials that are either produced by a student or represent scores from various assessments, or both. These portfolios include artifacts such as reflection papers, term papers, photographs, videos, and other documentation of

student learning. Portfolios enable students and teachers to monitor development and track specific learning outcomes over time. Online tools such as Google Slides, Flipgrid, and Seesaw are available and becoming more widely used as a means to support digital e-portfolios (Hertz, 2020).

Rubrics play a crucial role in evaluating these portfolios. For instance, the Association of American Colleges and Universities collaborated with faculty members across the United States to develop rubrics for assessing student work for intercultural understanding (see Table 4). Many American universities have adapted these rubrics to fit specific contexts and course requirements.

Portfolio assessments and associated scoring methods vary (Griffith et al., 2016). It is also challenging to standardize the various work products that students submit and to ensure interrater reliability in scoring this student work. Moreover, it is difficult to capture attitudinal components of intercultural understanding in a portfolio of student work—something that standardized measures can do efficiently and effectively. This is why it is often best to use multiple sources of evidence beyond student work when the goal is to elicit comprehensive evidence of intercultural understanding across knowledge, skills, and attitudinal dimensions.

### What are the Measurement/Assessment Issues Related to Intercultural Understanding?

Some experts question the validity of existing measures of intercultural understanding, to the point of arguing that intercultural understanding is not even measurable. Hayden and Thompson (2013), for example, doubt the likelihood of validly assessing anything relating to attitudes of mind, or behaviors arising from those attitudes. Here, five issues concerning the assessment of intercultural understanding are addressed.

Some experts question the validity of existing measures of intercultural understanding.

First, there are a variety of definitions and developmental models regarding intercultural understanding that guide assessment development and use. For example, this literature review synthesized the definitions of intercultural understanding across 30 studies into a single definition. Moreover, there are over 20 prominent models of intercultural understanding and related constructs (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). As a result, assessments of intercultural understanding vary in the knowledge, skills, and abilities they target. For example, most definitions of intercultural understanding incorporate knowledge and dispositions, whereas many assessments only measure awareness or attitudes (Liu, 2019).

Second, research suggests that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of intercultural understanding are malleable and develop over the lifespan (Deardorff, 2020), yet there are no explicit developmental trajectories of intercultural understanding that have a strong empirical basis. For example, many frameworks assume that openness, empathy, and respect must develop first, before critical reflection can effect a genuine appreciation of cultural similarities and differences. But this, and other developmental assumptions, remain conjectural. High quality assessments of intercultural understanding should ideally be based on empirically-based developmental theories about how knowledge, skills, and attitudes interact; how these constructs are related; and how they collectively influence increased levels of intercultural understanding over time. Lacking a robust empirical basis of development, these assessments provide limited instructional information to inform growth.

Third, assessments of intercultural understanding tend to be culture-specific, making it difficult to assess the construct holistically (Deardorff, 2015). For example, cultural knowledge is often situated within a specific culture and may require specific language skills or knowledge of cultural norms. Thus, assessing intercultural understanding with items that reference a specific culture may not be feasible outside of specific language courses. On the other hand, it may be preferable to assess culture-general knowledge that



is useful in interpreting, coping with, and adapting to a variety of cross-cultural interactions. In this case, the purpose of the assessment would shift from (a) assessing an individual's knowledge about the norms and practices of a particular culture to (b) a more culture-general assessment of the individual's understanding that a new situation may be influenced by cultural differences.

A culture-general assessment likely would require simulations and scenario-based items. These types of assessments are costly to develop and require substantial time to complete. The Situated Judgment Test (SJT) is a cost-effective alternative to simulations, where the individual selects an appropriate response option based on a hypothetical situation. The Steglitz coding scheme, used in the ICCAT assessment, is an example of a SJT. Because of their multidimensional nature, however, most SJT items have low internal consistency. Also, correct responses often are determined by consensus and can be contested, which may potentially bias the test (Griffith et al., 2016).

Fourth, individual measures capture distinct aspects of intercultural understanding but fail to assess the full range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes represented in the construct. Additionally, most measures are indirect: Results are based on self-report information as opposed to direct evidence elicited through applied knowledge and skills (Rapanta & Trovao, 2021). Moreover, intercultural understanding requires accurate and comprehensive assessment of attitudes and behaviors across a variety of contexts. This suggests the need for authentic assessments, such as observations of performances in real-life interactions. These types of assessments are rare and often lack strong evidence of reliability, validity, and fairness in primary and secondary school settings (Deardorff, 2015). They also are more time intensive and susceptible to faking and social desirability bias (Griffith et al., 2016).

And fifth, although measures of intercultural understanding have strong evidence of validity and reliability with respect to postsecondary students, such evidence at the primary and secondary grade levels, and across cultural populations, is extremely limited (Deardorff, 2015; Griffith et al., 2016).

## What are the Implications of Research for Assessment Design and Use?

This literature review allows several important implications for the assessment of intercultural understanding, which are considered below.

### Assessment Design

- **Base assessment decisions on a clear definition of intercultural understanding.** Intercultural understanding is a complex and multidimensional construct that overlaps with many intra- and inter-personal skills, such as empathy, openness, metacognitive thinking, and collaboration. As a result, definitions of intercultural understanding vary widely. Valid, reliable, and fair assessment begins with a clear understanding of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that compose intercultural understanding. Moreover, a reliance on any subset of these components when developing the assessment will underrepresent the construct and, consequently, cause users to believe students have mastered intercultural understanding more than they actually have (Marion & Domaleski, 2024).
- **Utilize principles of evidence-centered design.** The most useful assessments elicit observable evidence and allow students to demonstrate the highest forms of intercultural understanding, whether in a specific cultural context or a general learning context. Evidence-centered design (ECD) is a process for developing assessments of such hard-to-observe constructs as intercultural understanding. Rather

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than seeking validity evidence after administration, ECD incorporates validity arguments into the design process. ECD views an assessment as an evidence-based argument, using things that students say, do, or create to make inferences about the extent of their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Mislevy & Haertel, 2006). In this way, ECD is especially relevant when designing items or performance tasks that target intercultural understanding as an outcome. Through the ECD process, assessment developers delineate types of evidence—bearing on an interrelated set of knowledge, skills, and abilities—known to reflect a construct or competency. Rubrics or scoring guides can be designed to capture the intended evidence (e.g., knowledge, reflective thinking, empathy, respect, and openness) and the weight of that evidence, toward measuring the overall competency. Iteration cycles typically are needed to refine the rubric.

- **Ensure assessments align with curriculum goals and learning outcomes.** Evidence suggests that intercultural understanding is a malleable construct that can be influenced through high-quality curriculum, instruction, and learning opportunities. Assessment results can be useful for addressing instructional or evaluative claims, such as providing immediate feedback to students or determining whether a program of study influenced higher levels of intercultural understanding. However, such claims assume that the curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities are aligned. That is, course-specific assessments should accurately measure knowledge, skills, and attitudes that were represented in course activities and explicitly identified as essential learning outcomes (Gergesen-Hermans & Pusch, 2012). For example, if the goal of a course is to develop students' knowledge of a specific culture and cultural norms, then an assessment should incorporate items that elicit evidence of that knowledge. Similarly, if the goal is to improve empathy and openness of cultural practices, then assessment activities should include items or tasks that elicit sufficient evidence of these attitudes.
- **Account for content, language fluency, and context.** Content (including language proficiency) and context affect which knowledge, skills, and attitudes a student must access and how they are to be applied. As described above, cultural knowledge can be assessed in culture-specific and culture-general ways. Assessing intercultural understanding in the context of a specific culture may require that students have achieved a minimum level of fluency in the reference culture's language. In this case, the assessment may need to account for language fluency. On the other hand, assessing general cultural understandings may require that students have sufficient exposure to people and policies from many different cultures. Here, students need ample opportunity to practice skills required for engaging in interactions with people having a variety of cultural backgrounds and in a variety of settings. In either case, an individual's ability to demonstrate intercultural understanding will be influenced by their depth of content knowledge, prior experiences, and ability to transfer skills to novel situations. Thus, when designing assessment tools and activities for intercultural understanding, designers should be clear about the claims the assessment is intended to support.

### Assessment Use

- **Use multiple assessments to evaluate and cultivate intercultural understanding.** Standardized measures of intercultural understanding fail to capture, with fidelity, the construct's range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Rather, a variety of direct and indirect assessments are needed to comprehensively assess intercultural understanding. Self-report surveys can provide indirect evidence of students' knowledge and attitudes. And depending on how they are designed, self-reflective tasks can provide both indirect and direct evidence of student learning. To fully capture a student's competency in intercultural understanding, however, simulated or authentic

performance tasks are required, such as observations of students' exchanges with other cultures. This latter implication is discussed in more depth below.

- **Incorporate authentic performance tasks and reflective practice into assessment experiences.**

Although research evidence is sparse and mostly theoretical, study abroad and service-learning programs nevertheless show potential for developing intercultural understanding. Moreover, qualitative studies demonstrate the power of digital communication technology for facilitating authentic

cross-cultural interactions and enhancing intercultural understanding. These programs and tools have a common thread: They facilitate *authentic* exchange among people from different cultures. There is growing evidence that authentic learning experiences are an essential component in developing intercultural understanding. Moreover, these experiences enable direct assessment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes through observation and self-reflection of meaningful and real-time intercultural exchanges.

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Intercultural understanding has been presented as a developmental process across the lifespan (Deardorff, 2006). Further, development of intercultural understanding occurs through critical reflection as one evaluates their own cultural assumptions, biases, and experiences in relation to other cultures. Therefore, assessments that incorporate reflective activities—free-writing reflections, journaling, responding to scenario-based prompts—are useful strategies for addressing the *process* of intercultural understanding rather than just its results (Deardorff, 2006, 2015). These types of assessments allow students to articulate their thinking narratively. They can provide rich information for instructors to scaffold instruction through ongoing and targeted interactions with individual students by, say, questioning a student's assumptions or inviting students to test their thinking. That said, structured prompts can also be used in combination with performance rubrics or coding schemes to support summative evaluation of students' intercultural understanding.

- **Provide frequent opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate intercultural understanding.** Developing intercultural understanding takes time, and improvements often are small and incremental. Moreover, repeated exposure to diverse cultural phenomena is necessary for significant growth in intercultural understanding (Rapanta & Trovao, 2021). Formative assessment practices are important, as they offer timely feedback, which allows students to reflect, identify areas for improvement, and refine their approaches (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Educators can use such strategies as peer feedback, self-assessment, and structured reflection to support the skills and attitudes that intercultural understanding requires. By investing in formative assessment, educators foster an environment in which students can develop their intercultural understanding through ongoing and targeted practice and reflection.

- **Use assessment to improve environmental conditions to support intercultural understanding.** Myriad environmental factors influence how students process intercultural experiences and develop intercultural understanding. There is a strong relationship between a positive school climate—e.g., inclusiveness, safety, supportive relationships—and the skills and attitudes needed for enhanced intercultural understanding (Thapa et al., 2013). Moreover, educators with greater cultural knowledge tend to express fewer deficit beliefs and are better equipped to create inclusive learning environments (Nelson & Guerra, 2014), which underscores

the importance of professional development opportunities for teachers to develop their own intercultural understanding. By regularly evaluating the school environment and making necessary adjustments for educators and students alike, schools can create a supportive atmosphere that promotes the development of intercultural understanding.

## CONCLUSION

Intercultural understanding is an essential competency in our globally connected world. It is a multi-dimensional construct representing (a) knowledge and appreciation of cultural similarities and differences and (b) skills for critically reflecting on own's own culture in relation to others. Definitions and developmental models of intercultural understanding and related competencies are abundant in the research literature; however, strong empirical evidence supporting developmental trajectories and instruction and assessment practices are sparse. Although core elements of intercultural understanding are widely regarded as malleable, empirical research has yet to establish a strong body of evidence for informing pedagogical principles across the elementary and secondary grade span.

That said, a strong *theoretical* basis exists for many of the instructional and assessment practices described in this report. Moreover, several recent literature reviews synthesized decades of mostly theoretical research on the development of intercultural understanding (e.g., Bagwe & Haskolar, 2020; Elias & Mansouri, 2020; Liu, 2019; Su, 2023; Zhang & Zhou, 2019). These reviews offer clear direction to address knowledge gaps and inform future agendas.

Theory also has informed the design and implementation of practitioner-based resources to support school-based instruction of intercultural understanding. Governments and organizations around the world have developed learning continua, curriculum guides, and instructional resources to guide formal instruction and assessment in schools. Decades of research studies on service learning, study abroad, and technology-based tools suggest that these and similar practices may hold promise for developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes represented in intercultural understanding.

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## APPENDIX A

**Table 1A: Prominent Definitions of Intercultural Understanding and Related Terms<sup>14</sup>**

| SOURCE                          | REFERENCED TERM                        | DEFINITION   | NOTES   |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| OECD, 2018                      | Global Competence                      | The capacity to <i>examine</i> local, global, and intercultural issues; to <i>understand</i> and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others; to <i>engage</i> in open, appropriate, and effective interactions with people from different cultures; and to <i>act</i> for collective well-being and sustainable development (emphasis added).                                 | OECD's assessment of global competence focuses on cognitive skills and attitudes related to intercultural understanding. Definition accessed from <a href="https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/global-competence/pisa-2018-global-competence.html">https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/global-competence/pisa-2018-global-competence.html</a> |
| Lustig & Koester, 2010, p.46    | Intercultural Communication            | A symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings.  |   |
| Arasaratnam-Smith, 2020, p. 21  | Intercultural Communication Competence | Effective and appropriate communication between people from different cultures.  |   |
| Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 149 | Intercultural Competence               | The ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts.   |   |
| Byram, 1997, p.35               | Intercultural Competence               | A diverse set of skills and attitudes, including the knowledge of contents about the others' cultures, the skills to interpret and relate, the skills to discover and/or interact, the attitudes of being with others, and the attitude of critical cultural awareness, which refers to 'relativization of one's own [meaning], and valuing of others' meanings, beliefs and behaviors.' | Definition retrieved from Maine & Vrikki (2021).  |
| Deardorff, 2006, p. 248         | Intercultural Competence               | The ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes   |   |
| Fantini, 2009, p.12             | Intercultural Competence               | A set of skills required to communicate effectively and appropriately with those who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself.   |   |

|                              |                                  |  |   |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Hammer et al., 2003, p. 422  | Intercultural Competence         | The ability to think and act in intercultural appropriate ways.  |   |
| Harvey, 2018, p.3            | Intercultural Competence         | The ability to communicate and act appropriately and effectively across cultural differences. Effectively means we achieve our aims. Appropriately means we do so in such a way that any other parties involved feel respected.  |   |
| Jackson, 2014, p. 9          | Intercultural Competence         | The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes.   | Definition retrieved from Wells (2019). |
| Johnson et al., 2006, p. 530 | Intercultural Competence         | An individual's effectiveness in drawing upon a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes in order to work successfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad.  |   |
| Perry and Southwell, 2011    | Intercultural Competence, p. 453 | The ability to effectively and appropriately interact in an intercultural situation or context.  |   |
| UNESCO, 2013, p.13           | Intercultural Competence         | Having adequate relevant knowledge about particular cultures, as well as general knowledge about the sorts of issues arising when members of different cultures interact, holding receptive attitudes that encourage establishing and maintaining contact with diverse others, as well as having the skills required to draw upon both knowledge and attitudes when interacting with others from different cultures. |   |
| Whaley & Davis, 2007         | Intercultural Competence         | An individual's ability to function effectively across cultures.   |   |

<sup>14</sup> Definitions are organized alphabetically by term and author.

|                                |   |   |  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Council of Europe, 2008, p. 15 | Intercultural Dialogue                      | A process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.  | 'The objective of intercultural dialogue is to learn to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Intercultural dialogue can also be a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law' (Council of Europe, 2008). Quote retrieved from Opreescu & Lungosi (2017).  |
| European Commission, n.d.      | Intercultural Dialogue                      | The exchange of views and opinions between different cultures.  | Definition retrieved from: <a href="https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/intercultural-dialogue_en#:~:text=Definition(s),of%20mutual%20understanding%20and%20respect">https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/intercultural-dialogue_en#:~:text=Definition(s),of%20mutual%20understanding%20and%20respect</a> . |
| Elias & Mansouri, 2020         | Interculturalism and Intercultural Dialogue | An approach that prioritizes interaction among individuals from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Normatively, it seeks to achieve the goals of fostering social cohesion through 'exchange and interpersonal relations, using...the technique of positive interaction" to ensure a favorable public environment for intercultural contact. | See also Zapata-Barrero (2016, p. 155).  |



|                         |                         |  |  |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| Council of Europe, 2024 | Intercultural Education | <p>To give learners, during their school education, language and intercultural competencies, which will enable them to operate effectively as citizens, acquire knowledge and develop open attitudes to otherness. <b>Plurilingual and intercultural education is guided by the following founding principles:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity</b> as guaranteed by Council of Europe conventions;</li> <li>• <b>everyone's right to use their language varieties as a medium of communication</b>, a vehicle for learning and a means of expressing their affiliations;</li> <li>• <b>every learner's right to gain experience and achieve a command of languages</b> (language of schooling, first language, foreign language etc) and the related cultural dimensions according to their personal needs and expectations, be they cognitive, social, aesthetic or affective, so as to be able to develop the necessary competences in other languages by themselves after leaving school;</li> <li>• <b>the centrality of human dialogue</b>, which depends essentially on languages. The experience of otherness through languages and the cultures they carry is the precondition (necessary but not sufficient) for intercultural understanding and mutual acceptance.</li> </ul> | <p>Definition retrieved from: <a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education/the-founding-principles-of-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education">https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education/the-founding-principles-of-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education</a></p>  |
| Odina, 1996             | Intercultural Education | <p>A combination of specific and general skills that facilitate the formation of a citizenry, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultivating a positive attitude towards cultural diversity and expanding one's understanding of the traditions and beliefs of others.</li> <li>- Fostering verbal and non-verbal communication skills that will facilitate effective communications in contexts where two or more cultures are in contact with one another, learning to recognize and negotiate the tensions that arise from ambiguous intercultural situations.</li> </ul> <p>Developing the ability to understand one's own culture through action and reflection, and to carry out a critical assessment of one's own culture.</p>   | <p>Odina's (1996) definition was accessed from Cardenas-Rodriguez &amp; Terron-Caro (2021).</p> <p>A practice, a way of thinking and doing that understands education as cultural exchange and cultural creation. It promotes educational practices geared towards each and every member of society as a whole. It puts forth a model of analysis and implementation that impacts all dimensions of the educational process. The objectives of this education are equality in opportunities, overcoming racism, and the acquisition of intercultural skills (Odina, 2003).</p> |

|                               |                         |   |  |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| UNESCO, 2006, P. 20           | Intercultural Education | Developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence ... in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding, peace and cultural diversity ... the learner needs to acquire knowledge, skills and values that contribute to a spirit of solidarity and co-operation among diverse individuals and groups in society.   | UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education.  |
| Harvey, 2018, p.3             | Intercultural Learning  | The process of developing one's intercultural competence, which involves increasing the complexity with which one experiences cultural differences. This is very much a developmental process. It requires not just learning about another culture or cultures, but developing understanding and skills that can be applied in a wide variety of intercultural experiences.   |  |
| Jin & Cortazzi, 2013, p.1     | Intercultural Learning  | How we come to understand other cultures and our own through interaction, how we learn and communicate in cultural contexts, and how we learn culturally.   | Definition retrieved from Maine & Vrikki (2021).   |
| Shadiev & Sintawati 2020, p.1 | Intercultural Learning  | The process of acquiring intercultural competence, [which represents] the cognitive knowledge, communicative skills, and values and beliefs that are necessary for appropriate and effective interaction with members from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.   |  |
| Heyward, 2002, p. 16-17       | Intercultural Literacy  | The highest level of intercultural literacy includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understandings include showing 'awareness of how culture(s) feel and operate from the standpoint of the insider';</li> <li>• competencies include 'mindfulness, empathy, perspective-taking, tolerance, and communication';</li> <li>• attitudes are 'differentiated, dynamic and realistic' and demonstrate 'overall respect for integrity of culture(s)';</li> <li>• participation includes 'well established cross-cultural/transcultural friendships and/or working relationships';</li> <li>• language proficiencies are 'bilingual or multilingual'; and identities are bicultural, transcultural, or global, while individuals can 'consciously shift between multiple cultural identities'.</li> </ul> | Definition retrieved from Williams-Gualand (2015).<br><br>For Heyward (2002) intercultural understanding does not, and is not, meant to replace a sense of nationhood with something "bigger" and "better." Rather intercultural understanding is used to build a sense of one's own national identity to understand and work with the national identities experienced and felt by others (in Singh & Qi, 2013). |

|  |                             |  |   |
|--|-----------------------------|--|---|
| International Baccalaureate, 2019, p.2                                   | International Mindedness    | A multifaceted concept that captures a way of thinking, being, and acting characterized by an openness to the world and a recognition of our deep interconnectedness to others.  | Develops by (1) reflecting on our own perspectives, (2) engaging with diverse beliefs, and (3) learning to think and collaborate across cultures and disciplines.<br><br>Done with the intent of making progress towards a more peaceful world (IB PPT Presentation, 2024). PPT presented at kickoff meeting.   |
| Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2024 | Intercultural Understanding | Involves students developing the knowledge and skills needed to reflect on culture and cultural diversity, engage with cultural and linguistic diversity, and navigate intercultural contexts.   | Definition retrieved from: <a href="https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-general-capability/intercultural-understanding">https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-general-capability/intercultural-understanding</a><br><br>In this definition (as others below), intercultural understanding encompasses cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills. |
| Corapi & Short, 2013, p. 4   | Intercultural Understanding | Involves dialogue at the cultural level. [Intercultural understanding] extends beyond nationality and politics to include informed problem solving and social action activities that necessitate an appreciation of the full range of issues, including the values and beliefs of everyone involved. Intercultural understanding creates the potential to move from curiosity about a culture to a deeper understanding of others that allows us to live and work together as global citizens. |   |
| Habecon, 2015  | Intercultural Understanding | An understanding of the social <b>positions, practices</b> and <b>power relations</b> of sociocultural difference understood by individuals or groups within a society.  | Definition retrieved from UBC Blogs: <a href="https://blogs.ubc.ca/interculturalu/author/aldenhabacon/">https://blogs.ubc.ca/interculturalu/author/aldenhabacon/</a>  |
| Hill, 2006, p.12   | Intercultural Understanding | Awareness of one's own culture, other cultures, and the similarities and differences between cultures. Intercultural understanding...also embraces the affective domain of empathy and respect and being sufficiently open-minded to acknowledge the 'existence and necessity of a range of perspectives (paraphrased).  | Definition incorporates both cognitive and affective domains.   |
| IES Abroad   | Intercultural Understanding | Seeking to understand someone fully, including their cultural background, beliefs, and values.   | Definition retrieved from: <a href="https://www.iesabroad.org/news/keys-career-success-cultural-understanding-intercultural-competence">https://www.iesabroad.org/news/keys-career-success-cultural-understanding-intercultural-competence</a>  |



# A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING



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