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Deliberations that offer lessons learned: A critique of "Deliberations on the development of an intercultural competence curriculum" by Katherine Punteney

Developing intercultural and global competency, often couched as key elements of twenty-first century skills, is increasingly identified as essential for students' competency to make effective social change, reduce conflict and misunderstanding, and effectively enter the global workforce (Cushner, 2009; Mansilla and Jackson, 2011; National Education Association, 2010; OECD, n.d.; Punteney, 2016; Reimers, 2009). The "how" to develop such competency, however, plagues academic systems in the United States with too often limited resources, competing priorities, lack of alignment between testing and intercultural competency curriculum, and even buy-in from administrators, instructors, and staff. These deliberations on how to create such intercultural competency was captured by Katherine Punteney, a professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MIIS) in Monterey, California, who co-chaired an 11-member team to explore how the context of MIIS and their deliberative process, and how those two factors interlaced, led to their intercultural competency curriculum. Three key factors are particularly relevant for future research: the recognition of needing intercultural competency courses at an institute where the majority of students have deep international experience; the process employed to develop intercultural competence (IC); and the leadership approach employed through the process. The resulting success of a new IC curriculum at MIIS offers a powerful example of how deliberations and an inclusive process can lead to the development of intercultural competency among students – and teachers.

The paper begins with the research problem articulated: *How did our institutional context and our deliberative process, and the intersection of those two actors, result in the existing ICC curriculum?* (Punteney, 2016, p. 137). Next, the article briefly describes the institutional context, followed by a review of the deliberations on intercultural competency. Following is a discussion of the curriculum on IC offered to students, and then concludes with a reflection on recommendations for future actions. The research question proposed – how the intersection of individual discussions of context and process lead to implementation in the realm of intercultural competency – is important to this growing field of developing IC for several reasons. First, the fact that these deliberations occur at a graduate school well-known for its commitment to practical, internationally oriented master's degrees invites other academic institutions to reconsider possible assumptions that their particular context does not "need" intercultural competency studies for their students and teachers. The typical student at MIIS speaks at least one other language, and nearly all students are either international students or have lived and/or worked out of their home country. Compared to future teachers, of whom only 5% speak a second language (Cushner and Mahon, 2009), MIIS students seem unlikely candidates to require a course in intercultural competency.

Notwithstanding this relatively unusual collective international experience at an academic institution, the need for specific courses in IC was recognized by many professors – but not all – as essential to elucidate theories to practice; gain critical distance from their cultures; and better leverage the current level of intercultural skills, knowledge, and attitudes of international students on campus. Key to this recognition is realizing the difference between experience and reflection, and theory and practice. While most students have international experience (or are international students), such a background does not equate to reflective understanding of their experience. Punteney notes the objective of developing intercultural competency, visualized on Bennett's

(1993) Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity scale, is a process of improvement, not achievement. Additionally, alumni are reporting a need to increase their intercultural competency skills given the multitude of cultures with whom they are engaging (Punteney, 2016). In other words, the skill of how to engage interculturally has not been developed sufficient to the global environment in which the students found themselves in the workplace—even among a student body with extensive international experience. As a result, the MIIS President set a policy requiring intercultural competency courses would be integrated into the majority (65%) of the master's degree programs at the Institute (Punteney, 2016).

In response, Punteney and the Provost co-chaired a committee of interested professors and two students, who met monthly from Spring 2012 for two years to determine the process of integrating IC courses into the curriculum. To begin, Punteney and the steering committee kicked off their curriculum design process with concentrated sessions at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication, interviews and information gathering from various stakeholders on campus (faculty, staff, students, etc.), focused discussions, literature reviews, and internal reflection over the course of a year. The result led to six queries that became the focus of their deliberations and future guidance for intercultural competency courses. These six included defining terms; establishing the need, specifically to identify ways to counter some faculty arguments that specific courses on intercultural competency would be redundant; dissecting appropriate teaching methods to best develop intercultural competency; examining the role of language learning vis-à-vis intercultural learning and integration into the curriculum; exploring the western bias in literature on the topic; and understanding power structures.

Throughout this first year, the co-chairs and the steering committee maintained a highly inclusive and focused dialogue with faculty, students and staff. New ideas were encouraged and

considered by the committee, and an approach to maintain sensitivity and adaptation to diverse stakeholders was considered a priority. At the same time, the committee was careful to maintain their objective to align efforts with the new policy set by the MIIS Administration. This focus and inclusivity eventually led to a set of criteria accompanied by a competitive proposal process to the faculty, who were invited to offer ideas of intercultural competency courses for students. The six criteria established by the committee included reflection, theory, experiential activities, power and identity, student diversity, and theme. All course proposals had to demonstrate how they would incorporate these set criteria. As a result, over twenty different courses were approved and offered to students.

To monitor whether these courses and the deliberative process that led to the six guiding criteria were effective toward building intercultural competency among students, the committee collected assessment data on learning outcomes using including open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. From this qualitative approach, early results demonstrate students are "finding value" in the IC courses; can "clearly articulate what they are learning and how it benefits them personally and professionally"; and hold a greater interest on "focusing on the application of theory" rather than the theory itself (Punteney, 2016, p. 146). Data collection will continue to grow with the goal of using this analysis to improve the courses and continually check if the criteria remain adequate.

Punteney outlines lessons learned in this process, such as allowing sufficient time to "develop an emergent understanding" among all stakeholders in the process; deeply understanding the objectives as well as the needs and wants of the students; defining terms; and maintaining a collaborative approach that continually advocates and promotes the needs of intercultural competency (2016, p. 147). With regards to this latter reflection, Punteney noted one outcome is to

conduct a needs assessment of the type of IC training and support needed around domestic and international fieldwork opportunities. An area not reviewed in this article, however, is the effect the deliberative process had on the steering committee members, including how they may have improved the process. Additionally, the article neglects to articulate exactly how hesitant or arguing professors either acquiesced or enthusiastically engaged with the idea of adding intercultural competency courses. Such information would be useful in replicating this deliberative process.

By illustrating the deliberative process, the method used in this process, the queries developed and resulting course criteria, and initial qualitative assessment information, Punteney offers a helpful context and framework for future efforts to establish an intercultural competency curriculum in an academic institution. Further, given the MIIS international context and the need for such a curriculum, a reasonable conclusion is that students and teachers who have limited or no international experience cannot be expected to hold the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective intercultural competency. Punteney and the steering committee's leadership approach provided sufficient time to increase stakeholder buy-in, which led to active faculty engagement and innovative course ideas. The follow-on assessments provide additional insight, gaps, and lessons for how to improve the types of courses offered as well as how to better meet the needs of the students. The presented framework offers an important method for leading deliberations on integrating the study of intercultural competency into an academic institution.

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