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**What Optimizes Intercultural and Global Competency in
an Immersion Program:**

A Research Proposal and Rationale

Introduction

In 2008, the Longview Foundation gathered a group of scholars to discuss how to equip future teachers' intercultural and global competencies. The central question asked was how to better prepare students to participate and effectively engage with an interconnected and globalized market as well as contribute to peaceful and productive relations across cultures (also see Stromquist, 2005). One result from this gathering was the report, *Teacher Preparation for the Global Age: The Imperative for Change*, which called out:

> *"The critical role of teachers in internationalizing P-12 education has never been clearer, yet today's educators rarely begin their careers with the deep knowledge and robust skills necessary to bring the world into their classrooms."*
> *(Longview Foundation, 2008, p. 3)*

If we want to maximize our ability to develop students as globally and interculturally competent 21st century citizens able to peacefully address a wide assortment of challenges and productively engage with other peoples and cultures, then we need to intentionally teach and equip our educators with skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to intercultural and global competencies (Bastos & Araujo e Sa, 2014; Cushner, 2009; Cushner, 2012; Deardorff, 2006; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Mahon, 2007; Myers & Rivero, 2020; Shaklee & Baily, 2012; Valdivia & Montoto, 2017). In short, teachers cannot teach what they don't know (Sadruddin & Wahab, 2013; Santoro, 2014; Schneider, 2003).

This research proposal focuses on how to build intercultural and global competency among school leaders, particularly teachers, as part of the broader effort to internationalize education (see Cushner, 2012; Shaklee and Baily, 2012). Specifically, this exploration centers on immersion programs and their unique ability to serve as a vehicle to instigate and sustainably and positively increase intercultural and global competency among participants *when done well* – but what does "done well" look like? The core research question therefore asks: what components of an

immersion program optimize the development of intercultural and global competency among participants? Understanding and applying the necessary core components of an immersion program will help maximize the development of intercultural and global competencies among teacher participants; and as teachers increase their competency, so can their students.

Purpose Statement

An oft-cited vehicle to develop global and intercultural competencies is the use of international immersion programs, which can 'fast track' the development of intercultural and global competencies if such a program is intentionally designed and implemented explicitly to meet that objective (Che, Spearman & Manizade, 2009; Cushner, 2012; DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009). These types of programs can move participants to a new way of being and knowing – that is, a transformed ontology that facilitates the recognition and value of other epistemologies, and subsequently accepting, adapting, integrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes of intercultural and global competencies (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003). When teachers participate in these programs, they become better equipped to support their students' development in intercultural and global competencies, and consequently help facilitate the students' ability to positively engage with and navigate the global environment. The question is how to design and deliver an immersion program so that it optimizes learning these competencies among teachers.

Why focus on teachers?

Teachers convey more than a lesson plan. Their framing of questions, cultural assumptions, biases, approach to different genders, personal background, life experiences and a host of other factors form a lens, or framework, through which they teach. However, teachers generally are not aware of those frameworks (Gallavan, 2008; Gilliom, 1993). Further, teachers typically have

minimum training in intercultural or global competencies, including the alternative frameworks held by their students, many of whom come from different countries, cultures, traditions, and ways of knowing information (Cunningham, 2019; Gilliom, 1993; Schneider, 2003).

In order for our students to be interculturally and globally competent citizens, an examination of their teacher's competency is essential (Braskamp, 2009; Davies & Pike, 2009; Schattle, 2009). As Sutton (1998) notes in her historical overview of global education in the United States, the competencies and capacities of individual teachers will dictate how the classroom is internationalized and the strength of global citizenship taught in the classroom. Some researchers suggest schools and colleges of education are often the least internationalized divisions in U.S. post-secondary institutions (Schneider, 2003) and that consequently, the majority of teachers begin their careers with only superficial knowledge of the world (Longview Foundation, 2008).

When exploring different types of immersion programs, (faculty-led, short term, long term, study abroad, etc.), an example of questions to consider might be (Cushner, 2009; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josić & Jon, 2009): what is the background of the participants and the instructor? How long was the program? Where did they go? How did they define "intercultural and global competency"? What components were included? What was missing? What did pre-departure and post-return programming include? Did the participants (as indicated in the research) determine the program was effective, or not, and why? How was the program evaluated? What lessons were learned? Answers to these questions and other formative and summative assessments during a program, combined with an in-depth review of relevant research and studies, will contribute to the development of a framework containing the necessary components of an immersion program to optimize the embodiment of intercultural and global competency. The purpose of this research

proposal and rationale is to <u>identify the essential components of an immersion experience to optimize the sustained increase in intercultural and global competency skills, knowledge, and attitudes.</u>

Significance

Immersion programs can build intercultural and global competencies so that knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006; Reimers, 2009) are fostered, deepened, and sustained. The objective is to increase skills, spark and sustain behavior shifts, and deepen knowledge of others with the goal of increasing attitudes of empathy, curiosity, tolerance, compassion, and respect while reducing fear, prejudice, bias, and conflict.

Defining intercultural and global competency

My area of research aligns the definition of "intercultural competency" with the proposed definition offered by Deardorff (2006): "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 247). To understand "global competency," Fernando Reimers (2009) identifies the inclusion of affective, action-oriented, and academic components as part of developing students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes to "understand the flat world in which they live, integrate across disciplinary domains to comprehend global affairs and events, and create possibilities to address them…peacefully, respectfully, and productively with fellow human beings from diverse geographies" (p. 184). Closely related to the development of intercultural and global competency is peace or conflict-resolution education, which captures the "educational orientation" (Bar-Tal, 2002, p. 31) necessary to generate peaceful co-existence, non-violence, and humanization of the other (Bar-Tal, 2002; DeMulder, Ndura-Ouedraogo & Stribling, 2009; Harris, 2007). Peace education may be understood as an outcome of or integrated within intercultural and global competency education.

Examining research on immersion programs

To develop intercultural and global competency, research has reiterated the importance of direct personal engagement with other peoples, cultures, and contexts (Brendel, Aksit, Aksit & Schrufer, 2016; Cushner, 2009; Santoro, 2014). Further, the immersion program must be intentionally designed to develop intercultural competency (Crawford, Higgins & Hilburn, 2020; Cushner, 2009; Polat & Barka, 2014; Salmon, Gangotena & Melliou, 2017) and is a continual process involving multiple intercultural experiences leading to an evolving transformation in worldview structure and perspective (Brendel, Aksit, Aksit, & Schrufer, 2016; Deardorff, 2006; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Parkhouse, Tichnor-Wagner, Cain & Glazier, 2016;). Coursework alone will not develop intercultural competency (Cushner, 2009).

Santoro (2014) emphasizes the need to intentionally design immersion experiences with built in time for reflection; immersion programs must be intentional, well-planned, and structured specifically to build intercultural and global competency. Yershova, Y., DeJaeghere, J., & Mestenhauser, J. (2000) affirmed that intercultural competence; critical thinking; and comparative thinking are not learned automatically in traditional disciplines or by osmosis, and that they are influenced by the cultures in which they are practiced and taught (Also see Ari & Mula, 2017). Further, they found the teaching of intercultural competency is dominated by the "fix the problem" paradigm, which considers cultural differences an obstacle to be over-come. Affirming this research, Polat and Barka (2014) state that teacher training institutions must intentionally include intercultural coursework to develop interculturally competent teachers. The challenge is moving from theory to practice, as cited by Kerkhoff and Cloud (2020); their study reiterated the need to educate teachers on *how* to embed global competency, and to model consciousness to intercultural and global competency.

Immersion programs proposed domestically

Some research indicates an experience must be outside of a participant's home country (Cushner, 2009) and in a context significantly dissimilar from that home country (Che, Spearman & Manizade, 2009). Others suggest an in-person foreign immersion experience may not be necessary, and intercultural competency can be developed through technology and simulations. For example, Crawford, Higgins, & Hilburn (2020) looked at factors having the greatest influence on increasing students intercultural and global competency: (1) students designing a course themselves that incorporated global competency learning; (2) first-hand experience with other cultures through a 4-week asynchronous collaboration with a foreign school; (3) using documentary films as a source of learning; and (4) immersive storytelling. The latter two points centered on the role emotion plays in learning. From another perspective, Myers and Rivero (2020) examined simulations as a tool to build global competency among 24 social studies preservice teachers; their simulation focused on Nigerian oil and globalization during negotiations at a fictional UN conference. Myers and Rivero argued that experiential activities, such as a simulation, rather than memorizing facts, would increase students' global competency. The results of the use of simulations showed a marked increase in understanding global issues, such as the role of domestic politics; a generated shared vocabulary; a more systemic understanding of power; and the interconnections between actions, policies, and economies. For the purposes of this research proposal and rationale, the components offered by Crawford, et al. and Myers and Rivero's research serve as useful tools and insights, which may be integrated into in-person immersion programs; however, just as these researchers do not dispute the varacity and impact of the in-person experience, this proposal contends the optimization of developing intercultural and global competency occurs in the experience of the immersion.

Immersion experiences shift epistemologies

Valdivia and Montoto (2017) found participants in immersion programs often far overestimate their level of intercultural competency; developing intercultural competency among teachers is a social process "in which meanings are made through dialogue between the participants' ways of knowing" (p. 524). As such, understanding how we know what we know, that is, our epistemology and underlying ontology, is essential to raise consciousness to our perspectives, cultures, and blindspots (Ellerton, 201; Kuhn, 1970; Weinberger, 2013). McCloskey (2012) found the key to success is a highly competent instructor; explicit instructions on communication practices; and significant self-reflection before engaging online. Parkhouse, Tichnor-Wagner, Cain and Glazier (2016) noted the accumulation of experiences better leads to the incorporation of global perspectives and increased intercultural competency. Disorientating experiences, namely when engaging a new culture or environment; self-reflection and critical analysis; and student commitment make up a continuum of motivating teachers to develop their intercultural and global competency; their study, among others (Barrett, 2018; Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen & Meadows, 2014), also highlighted that teachers do not have access to intercultural training in their professional development.

Measuring intercultural competency

To measure intercultural competency, a useful tool is the Intercultural Communicative Competence Scale (ICCS), an assessment tool to measure pre-service teachers' perceived levels of intercultural competency in the classroom (Kazykhankyzy & Alagozlu, 2019). Another important assessment tool is Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which uses variables such as an initial baseline;

personal experiences; and integration of training in professional development initiative (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Hammer, 2011).

Summary of significance

Summarily, while several elements of an effective immersion program to develop intercultural competency have been suggested, scholars have not concluded how best to develop and sustain intercultural competency, and, more particularly, what specific approach should be implemented in an academic immersion program to maximize the impact of building intercultural competency (Deardorff, 2006; Knight, 2004). Both qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools exist to assess whether actions we take are meeting our objectives.

Future Research

This research proposal and rationale focuses on uncovering the key components of an immersion program to optimize the development, advancement, and sustainability of intercultural and global competencies. The next question, however, is how can we leverage these teased out components and apply them to domestic and local "immersion" experiences with the goal of achieving some or similar growth in these competencies? This question is key given the majority of students do not participate in an immersion program. Specifically, just under 350,000 American students participated in some type of study abroad program in 2018-2019, of which a mere 3.1% were students majoring in education, which is less than 11,000 future teachers (Open Doors, n.d).

Another future research area to examine is the organization of an immersion program itself. An immersion program is effectively a group, or organization, that contributes to the success of the experience and development of competencies. For example, what type of organization and leader offers an environment to optimally stimulate intercultural and global competencies, and can we

then create this type of "organization" within a classroom or local experience? To start, a way of approaching an organization is through the theory of systems thinking as a vehicle to develop intercultural and global competency (Schwiger, Stouten, & Bleijenbergh, 2018). Explaining systems thinking, Suchman (2011) contends that organizations are rooted in the principles of complexity or systems dynamics; context cannot be separated from organizational assessments; the inclusion of culture, diversity, and stories must be used to recognize patterns of how knowledge, attitudes and habits are developed and expanded. Teerikangas and Hawk (2002) also conclude a holistic and expansionist approach as found in systems and complexity theories reflects the "living nature" of an organization as its members embody and respond to changing cultures, contexts, and chaos (p. 11).

The follow-on question is the role of leadership in an immersion program. Seeing organizations as a series of conversations, reflecting patterns of meaning and relating, the role of a leader is to interrupt existing patterns to initiate change. Further, the role of the leader is to observe what is occurring, perceive differences, craft new relevant patterns, and help interweave the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes to help an organizational change emerge, be responsive, and be perceived as legitimate to its members and others (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Looking closely at leadership, Nkomo and Kriek (2011) examine how life stories reveal how leaders perceive, interpret and respond to change based on their attached meaning to their stories. Their study demonstrates how a leader's life story underlies his/her influence, response, and navigation to organizational change and re-creation as emerging culture, values, structures, people, and processes arise and intersect with the organization/group. Oreg (2007) looks at how to reduce resistance to change by addressing the change process. A lack of confidence in an organization's leader most strongly correlated with negative attitudes, behaviors, and cognition toward the

change. In addition, social influence – whether an individual is surrounded by advocates or critics of the change – has a significant impact on the resistance or acceptance of change.

Additional questions for future research might include:

- What type of leadership approach optimizes the development of Intercultural competency among students? Among students in an immersion group? In an immersion group internationally?

- What characteristics of a leader optimize the development of IC among students? Among students in an immersion group? In an immersion group internationally?

- How do life stories of a leader affect his/her leadership of an immersion group? If the students know his/her life story, to what extent does this information influence the group and the individual members of the group?

- What role does the power of indirect influence have on school leaders and immersion group organizations, such as the particular context/culture; the school's institution; the host institution (if relevant); and so forth?

Summary and Implications

Summarily, this research proposal explores the intersection between international immersion programs and human relations, organizational theory and approaches, leadership, and experiential education to identify the key components that optimize intercultural and global competencies. The target audience are teachers with an initial focus on pre-service teacher preparation programs and a second focus on in-service professional development. The growth of these competencies and associated characteristics can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively with the overarching goal to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of intercultural and global competency so that they can bring that background to their students. Ultimately our concern is to raise the next generation capable of navigating a global marketplace, engaging productively and peacefully with multiple cultures, and mitigating conflict based on bias, prejudice, and fear. In order to bring those skills to our students, our teachers deserve intentional,

well-designed training and experiences to bring forth their sense of selves, and how they are

interweaved into the tapestry of cultures and peoples that we are.

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