

DEARDORFF'S MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract. Deardorff (2006) presents a model to visualize the components and desired outcomes of intercultural competence. This model is created from the list of components of intercultural competence and visualizes them in a framework with different levels, or a hierarchy of needs, to process the skills required for intercultural competence. In both Byram's and Deardorff's accounts of intercultural competence, attitudes are the fundamental starting point to acquisition.

Keywords: input, including skills, knowledge, comprehension, cultural self-awareness, deep understanding, knowledge of culture, culture-specific knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness.

Introduction

As the definition of intercultural competence has been defined in countless ways, Deardorff (2006) published an article in which she presented her results from extensive research to develop consensus regarding the definition of intercultural competence. The participating teachers and scholars agreed upon 22 specific components (Deardorff, 2006). The results from this research were categorized and presented in a model that lends itself to further development of detailed, measurable learning outcomes. The categories are broad (attitudes, skills, knowledge (and comprehension, desired internal outcome, desired internal outcome), but narrowed down into more measurable outcomes and indicators (e.g, attitudes: respect, curiosity and discovery, openness) (Deardorff, 2006). The model shows that intercultural competence is not something you can attain or reach; it is an ongoing process, and it is important that learners are given an opportunity to reflect upon their own development during this process (Deardorff, 2011).

Deardorff (2006) states: "The degree of intercultural competence depends on the acquired degree of underlying elements [attitudes, knowledge (and comprehension), and skills]". However, in this thesis, we will often refer to the developed, rather than acquired, degree of attitudes, knowledge (and comprehension) and skills, as I find this describes the ongoing process better.

While the models we present take into account both the input and the outcome of intercultural competence, we will only be addressing the input part, as I can only observe the input that the teachers present to their learners, as I am using classroom video data. While the first model presents the different components of intercultural competence and the complexity of acquiring the full picture, the second model presents the process. The most fundamental component that was agreed upon, attitudes, serves as the basis of this model as well. The fundamental attitudes are a prerequisite to acquiring any form of intercultural competence. The important attitudes serve as a starting point, making it possible to gain the right to knowledge and skills on an individual level, to facilitate the desired internal outcome, which, through interaction, can result in a desired external outcome (Deardorff, 2006).

The process model shows that it is possible to altogether skip the desired internal outcome to get to the desired external outcome, by either just having the attitudes as input, or including skills, knowledge, and comprehension. When not completing the full cycle, however, the degree of competence in the external outcome might not be as complete as if the cycle had been completed and restarted (Deardorff, 2006).

The form of the process model, a cycle, implies that there is a continual process of improvement of intercultural competence; it also implies that the process is never complete. One can never be fully 'interculturally competent'. Again, the basis for both of these models (and most other research on the subject) is the basic attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery. Though no one might ever be fully competent, working on developing these attitudes seems to be a key aspect.

Components of intercultural competence

The pyramid model allows for degrees of competence, as the more components acquired and developed, the more the probability of intercultural competence as an external (and internal) outcome (Deardorff, 2006). The model embraces both specific and more general definitions of intercultural competence. As I cannot make any inferences about the desired outcome, neither internal nor external, I will focus on the first part of the model: attitudes, knowledge (and comprehension), and skills, which I will describe in greater detail below.

Knowledge (and comprehension). Deardorff's (2006) model divides Knowledge (and comprehension) into four codes: cultural self-awareness; deep understanding and knowledge of culture; culture-specific knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness. To shift perspective and understand others' worldviews, which are some of the key aspects of intercultural competence, there is a need for deep cultural knowledge that goes beyond surface-level knowledge (Deardorff, D., 2011). As knowledge and facts about the different cultures themselves become less important than knowing how to use knowledge in an intercultural way, the learners are given the skills to understand different societies (Bok, 2006).

Historically, there has been an emphasis on high culture, such as knowledge about a nation's history, arts, and institutions, when teaching culture in language classes as a ticket to the highly educated society of the target language country (Kramersch, 1993). However, as the object of language teaching has changed from not only catering to the higher classes, a debate about what culture is relevant to teach in the English subject has emerged, and whether general information on different countries, such as Britain and the US, even have a place in English language classrooms. The question of why learners should learn cultural information and when they will use this knowledge is important.

Defining the cultural component of the English subject is increasingly difficult, as a Norwegian learner is just as likely to use English to communicate with a Spaniard, an Englishman, or an American (Lund, 2012). Being a lingua franca, the English language cannot be defined by any one set of cultural knowledge, as that would undermine the whole idea of the language as a global language. Byram (1997) suggests, however, that the American and British parts of culture or communication styles can serve as examples of how the English language can be used and perceived differently (Lund, 2012). To shift perspective and understand others' worldviews, which are some of the key aspects of intercultural competence, there is a need for deep cultural knowledge, such as knowledge of why people do what they do, that goes beyond surface-level knowledge, such as knowledge of what people do (Deardorff, 2011). This is important as knowledge and facts about the different cultures themselves

become less important than thinking in an intercultural way, and giving the learners the skills to understand different societies (Bok, 2006).

Skills. According to Deardorff's (2006) model, the skills needed to develop intercultural competence are 'to listen, observe, and interpret', and 'to analyze, evaluate, and relate' (UDIR, 2021, n.p.). In explaining the importance of these skills, she emphasizes the importance of process and of engaging in active reflection, both on the teaching practice and in intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2009). To attain the aim "to communicate across cultural differences", the skills of using the target language are essential. In all English as a second language teaching, a vital part of the skills taught are the linguistic aspect of the language. However, understanding and mirroring behavior in a constructive way to avoid offending people from a different cultural background proves to be equally as important in order to communicate across cultures (Corbett, 2003; Lund, 2012). Discourse in the classroom is creating its own culture as the teacher addresses the learners. The teacher presents information, and to communicate, the learners have to interpret the information (Kramsch, 1993). Although learning about different ways of communicating within and between different cultures is beneficial in order to communicate with someone from that specific culture, a more effective way to be aware of differences is to make learners aware of their own way of communicating based on their background and how they act. This can be further extended to trying to interpret why others act as they do.

Conclusion

The pragmatics of language, like formality and degree of politeness, are examples of culturally-related factors that are useful when communicating intercultural (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Making the learners aware of how the Norwegian society and culture shape their view of the world could help them to understand how other people from different parts of the world can see it differently based on their own starting point and culture (Lund, 2012). As culture is seldom as linear as nationality, knowing how Britons in general communicate might not be the best basis of intercultural competence, as this might reinforce stereotypes, rather than meeting someone with the intention of trying to understand that individual. Critical-thinking skills play an important part in how the learner develops and evaluates the knowledge presented (Deardorff, 2011).

Reference:

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