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Intercultural Communicative Competence: Literature Review

Lee F. Wilberschied Ph.D.
Cleveland State University, l.wilberschied@csuohio.edu

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Abstract

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is a cluster of capabilities that will become even more essential, not only to negotiate borders of many dimensions as globalization proceeds, but also to enhance the ability to maneuver one's way in a world that changes by the minute. The process of developing ICC prepares the learner to manage and appreciate border crossings on many levels. This brief review of the literature offers a summary of the components of ICC, how it is similar to and different from other competences, and recommendations on how to assess it. This overview may be helpful when considering the studies in this edition or as an initial guide to incorporating this component into one's philosophy and praxis.

Intercultural Communicative Competence: Literature Review

Lee Wilberschied
Cleveland State University

Abstract:

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is a cluster of capabilities that will become even more essential, not only to negotiate borders of many dimensions as globalization proceeds, but also to enhance the ability to maneuver one's way in a world that changes by the minute. The process of developing ICC prepares the learner to manage and appreciate border crossings on many levels. This brief review of the literature offers a summary of the components of ICC, how it is similar to and different from other competences, and recommendations on how to assess it. This overview may be helpful when considering the studies in this edition or as an initial guide to incorporating this component into one's philosophy and praxis.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, intercultural competence, ACTFL standards

1. Introduction:

Each day the world changes more rapidly, and there is more to keep up with, more borders to negotiate—finding information, planning, arranging, and maybe most important, maintaining relationships with those around us. Giroux (2005) views this as a positive aspect that brings us together, explaining that the borders "of our diverse identities, subjectivities, experiences, and communities connect us to each other more than they separate us, especially as such borders are continually changing and mutating within the fast forward dynamics of globalization" (p. 21). As all parts of the world become more and more accessible and societies become more diverse, the notion of those around us includes persons at increasingly greater distances and of more diverse backgrounds—linguistic, cultural, historical, religious, and more.
Ongoing development of one's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)—understanding and appreciating each aspect of diversity and developing and sustaining relationships that emerge from

such appreciation, and doing so in a foreign language (FL)—certainly makes this complex and metamorphosing life easier and more pleasant. Yet, more compelling reasons for engendering such proficiency are clear, on the personal, national, and global levels. Having developed ICC, individuals may benefit from stronger competitive factors in the job and business markets, easier negotiation of job duties, and enriched work and travel experience. These go beyond superficial or mechanical aspects of interaction because of the individual's insight, knowledge, and desire to continue self-growth, growth in foreign language proficiency, and growth of one's understanding and compassion. On a national level, promoting growth of ICC in individuals may contribute to more successful diplomacy, enhanced commercial trade, enriched cultural exchange, and improved security—in other words, border crossings on crucial levels. Further, the challenges we face on the global level become more and more complex. This is true not merely of political scenarios or terrorist acts resulting in tragedies. Challenges created as a result of poverty, global health issues and pandemics, environmental changes, and natural disasters require rapid and coordinated action by governments that employ respondents with strong ICC (NEA, 2011, p. 2). If the need for ICC is so timely and it has so many benefits, we need not ask why we should have it, but rather, what is it, how does it relate with other [inter]cultural constructs, and how do we know when we have it? This brief review of the literature addresses those three questions.

2. Components of Intercultural Communicative Competence:

Some consideration of Intercultural Competence (IC) must initiate the discussion, because IC provides a foundation upon which to build ICC. ICC builds other dimensions into Intercultural Competence, and, in doing so, synergy and expansion of the ICC model occur.

2.1 Intercultural Competence:

Moeller and Nugent's (2014) review of the research on ICC began with a search for a definition of Intercultural Competence, as one of the undergirding foundations of ICC. They conclude that "a precise definition of intercultural competence does not exist in the literature" (p. 4). They do, however, depict the theoretical bases for IC, which incorporate the work Bennett, Gudykunst, Byram, and Deardorff. These might easily be pictured as four legs of table that support the model, as would be depicted by a tabletop. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity describes the learner's internal progress along a continuum

beginning with ethnocentricity and ending with ethnorelativity. In the same year, Gudykunst published a model of anxiety and uncertainty measurement that designates self-awareness as the crucial element in establishing ties with other cultures. Soon after, Byram (1997) developed a multidimensional model of intercultural competence that considers the knowledge, values, and skills required to be successful in intercultural interactions. Lastly, Deardorff (2006) published a process model of intercultural competence that depicts the learner as working continually on internal outcomes, knowledge, and attitudes as well as external outcomes that have to do with Intercultural Competence. Despite the lack of consensus regarding a clear-cut definition, common threads exist in discussions of IC. IC involves developing students who are competent to engage and collaborate in a global society. Their development emerges from discovering appropriate ways to communicate and interact with people from other cultures. Yet, some of the discussions regarding IC do not emphasize or even include a foreign language component[1]

Intercultural Competence does provide a strong underpinning for ICC, but the two should not be considered equivalent. Individuals with ICC are able to manage interactions of a greater variety and complexity as a result of self-study, foreign language proficiency, and analysis of one's own culture and that of those who speak the target language. In fact, Byram (1997) did not even include foreign language proficiency in his discussion of IC when contrasting IC with ICC, saying that individuals with IC are described as having the ability "to interact *in their own language* [italics mine] with people from another country and culture" (p. 70). The additional elements of FL proficiency and reflectivity, among others, help to create a dynamic, multidimensional ICC model.

2.2 Additional Dimensions of Intercultural Communicative Competence:

Among several definitions and descriptions of ICC, Byram's (1997) is more popular. The cluster of skills requires acquired competence "in attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence while using a foreign language" (p. 71). Attitudes about the other are examined, a result of which transforms the learner. Students examine their preconceived ideas before entering into a process of discovery about the other in hopes of fostering willingness "to seek out and engage with

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[1] By extension, such a definition leads to questions such as, "To what degree can one be considered interculturally competent without knowing the language(s) of the target culture?" or, "How much greater depth is there to one's IC when one knows the language(s) of the target culture?"

otherness in order to ultimately experience relationships of reciprocity" (Moeller & Nugent, p. 7). In contrast to the IC model, individuals with ICC develop such relationships while using the foreign language in a way that is acceptable to all concerned. Further, they can facilitate interaction among persons of other cultures. For individuals having ICC, their language competence (including sociolinguistic and discourse competence) is integrated with their knowledge of and insight into the culture of the other. This integration also implies that they are aware of the nuances of the culture and the language on many levels, including semantics and values. And, because they have acquired these skills, they are better able to acquire additional languages and cultural insight. This is a complex construct that, according to Byram (1997), "does not therefore depend on a concept of neutral communication of information across cultural barriers but rather on a rich definition of communication and on a philosophy of critical engagement with otherness and critical reflection on self" (p. 71).

Part of the richness of ICC derives from reorganization or re-evaluation of knowledge and beliefs. This is similar to conscientization, as identified by Freire (1970/2000), according to Johnson and Nelson (p. 36-37). Freire said that, rather than have a teacher transfer units of knowledge, the process of conscientization requires interpretation, critical reflection, and raised awareness on the part of the student. Aids to these processes come from working on both communicative competence (Canale, 1983), especially the sociocultural element, and the acknowledgement, understanding, and appreciation of the diverse perspectives, practices, and products of cultures (ACTFL, 2015; ATESL, 2011; p. 8).

Ideally, the process of developing ICC includes the following components. Students would investigate similarities and differences between their own national and cultural identity and the target culture, including elements of history, geography, and social institutions. During these procedures, they would also be constructing associations with persons having backgrounds and languages different from their own. To do so, they would also need to establish and strengthen skills in interpreting and connecting with those others in the language of the other. A continual cycle of recognizing ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings as they relate to cross-cultural situations would develop students' ability to understand and explain the origins of conflict and mediate situations appropriately in order to avoid further misinterpretation (Byram, 1997). Giroux (2005) points out that "To take up the issue of difference is to recognize that it cannot be analyzed unproblematically" (p. 146), so examination of any misinterpretation is

perceived as a necessary element of growth. Ultimately, students would demonstrate appreciation of differences, including seeking out further and ongoing encounters.

As an affective segment of the model, the component of demonstrating appreciation for the language and culture of the other, is one of the more difficult for instructors to address. Lázár, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei, and Peck (2007) propose emphasizing development of the skills of observation, interpretation, mediation, and discovery. Skills development would be combined with work on attitude formation, including heightened respect and empathy, tolerance of ambiguity/willingness to suspend judgment, heightened interest, curiosity, and openness regarding persons of other cultures (p.9-10). This is a large order for both students and instructors; yet, this reflective/analytical/critical component is one that helps to set apart the ICC model. Houghton (2012) sketches the outcomes of such development, saying that learners

> hold themselves up to conscious analysis *by themselves,* suspending evaluation until the initial analysis is complete. Genuinely taking the perspectives of others into consideration while critically reflecting upon themselves can enhance the quality of learners' evaluations of self and other insofar as the standards of the base culture are not automatically and ethnocentrically applied without critical self-reflection coupled with the careful consideration of alternative viewpoints....personal development can be seen as...internalization of other cultural frames of reference through empathy, which can transform identity and equip people to mediate between cultures. (p. 45)

It is important to notice the reflective and critical elements as well as the transformative aspect. The above description and updated models of language proficiency help to highlight the ICC model and set it apart from other models currently used in the field of education and elsewhere. There are a few contemporary models that share elements of the ICC model, but they are not equivalents. The next section contains a brief identification of some similar models.

3. Other Competences that Coincide with ICC:

The growth of competency models appears to be occurring convergently and concurrently. The Intercultural Competence model followed Canale's Communicative Competence Model (1983). The IC

model provided a basis for the outgrowth of ICC, and both models shared certain aspects of Bennett's (1993) Intercultural Sensitivity Model. In addition, two other model share some aspects of the ICC model, Translingual Competence and Transcultural Competence. Molina (2011) explains that Translingual competence includes grammatical competence but also expects students to be able to function and perform between languages and to reflect, from the perspective of the foreign language and culture, not only upon themselves but also on the world. The elements of mediation and appreciation, among others, are not included. Transcultural Competence (Slimbach, 2005) calls for six areas of knowledge and skill, including foreign language proficiency at the threshold level. Both of these models receive more focus in the fields of literacy/writing and study abroad/business, respectively. They overlap the ICC model in several aspects, but the ICC model often goes beyond their dimensions, especially in the considerations of criticality, agency, and language proficiency.

The ICC model has evolved into a highly appropriate guide for the times as far as the field of world language studies is concerned; it concurs with recommended goals and proficiencies. Over the last several years, researchers have asserted that a communicative competence model has become less practical than other models that consider intercultural communicative competence or critical intercultural language pedagogy (Chao, 2013; Moeller & Nugent, 2014; Pegrum, 2008). Pegrum (2008) and others have stressed that the goal of nativelike ability in foreign language for students is unrealistic, not useful, and potentially harmful. Further, he described a growing emphasis on ICC rather than on the communicative approach. Current models call for preparing students for global citizenship by developing ICC. A similar tendency might be interpreted with the proficiency movement's emphasis on integrated performance assessment (IPA), discussed in the next section.

4. Assessment of ICC:

Assessment of ICC warrants careful consideration, especially because the construct is difficult to delimit. No holistic measure exists, and it may not be possible to test holistically. Even though there is no single appropriate "test" for ICC, a test, in its commonly understood form, would be inappropriate. Ideally, assessment would be conducted so that students have optimum ways to demonstrate what they know and can do (ACTFL, 2015) regarding the many facets of ICC. Because of such complexities, Sercu (2012) recommends multifaceted and cyclic assessment. This is a wise endorsement, because ICC does not develop in linear fashion, and growth in each aspect affects growth of the other aspects. In addition,

students must be given the opportunity to demonstrate what they have personally, individually experienced, what is personally meaningful to and developmental for them, instead of completing exams on standardized content. This manner of assessment requires content that is authentic[2] and student-sensitive—not only in order to distinguish the aspects of student learning that are personally unique for each learner but also to assure that the measurement is sufficiently transparent to provide signals for next steps and improvement (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2004). These elements come under the description of alternative assessment, which has at least one more vital component, that of student self-evaluation. Personal evaluation "is critical because of the importance, ultimately, of self-knowledge as the basis for all understanding" (Sercu, p. 55). In order to address issues connected with the multifaceted and complex models such as ICC, portfolios are often recommended, and Standards and rubrics offer means for evaluating portfolios as well as other measures of ICC.

4.1 Standards:

At least three sets of currently adopted national or international standards help to evaluate both instruction for developing ICC and its outcomes.[3] These have been compiled by American Council on Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL), TESL organizations, and the *Framework for 21st Century Learning* (P21) accepted in many states.

ACTFL's were one of the first national Standards (1996) and provided a model for many of the ensuing national Standards in other

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[2] Authentic materials, for the purposes of this review, is a term taken to mean cultural materials that are created by the speakers of the target language for other speakers of the target language and culture. Contrasting terms would include teacher-made materials, those created by an instructor with specific linguistic or cultural objectives in mind, or teacher-modified materials, which include materials that were originally authentic but might have been simplified, abbreviated, or otherwise changed in order to meet what the teacher perceives as the needs of the students. The use of authentic and unmodified materials is the focus of other research, which shows that these are more beneficial for developing students' proficiency. Authentic testing refers to having students complete tasks (with which they have had prior practice) that are similar to those that they might perform in real life. This term is usually used in conjunction with the idea of meaningfulness. However, these terms are mentioned but not extensively discussed in this review.

[3] For the sake of brevity, this review does not include discussion of highly respected standards such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning*, those of Education Services of Australia, or those of other nations.

content areas. Now in their fourth edition (2015),[4] these standards define the FL education content criteria of what students should know and be able to do in a FL and form the foundation of many state curricula. The latest edition aligns with several current initiatives, including Common Core State Standards, College and Career Readiness, and 21st Century Skills and is appropriate for all learners at all levels. Four of the Standards, or, four of the five Cs—Culture, Comparisons, Community, and Connections—are integrated with an overarching standard of Communication, which has three components or modes, Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational. The ensuing Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA), a research-based set of practices, involves developing proficiency in all three modes of communication through work with culturally and linguistically authentic materials and addressing the Culture standard.

The Culture standard encompasses three important components. Two of the three, practices and products, help us to identify, describe, discuss, and analyze the third component, perspectives of a culture. Proficiency in all three areas is necessary for development of cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence, and thus, by implication and extension, ICC. Van Houten (2015) says that the ACTFL standards reflect the newer focus on interculturality, particularly in the Cultures standards, which will aid students in developing intercultural competence that "goes beyond sensitivity to suggest a dynamic process of active participation or engagement in communication guided by the awareness and understanding of culture" (p. 163).

Another set of standards also gives priority to the growth of cultural understanding and appreciation, in conjunction with linguistic skills. The international organization of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) developed international standards shortly after those of ACTFL. Some organizations, such as Alberta Teachers of Second Language (ATESL) and Massachusetts schools have combined TESOL standards with elements that promote ICC. ATESL (2011) notes that, increasingly, TESOL educators and researchers recognize how important it is to develop both learners' linguistic skills and their intercultural communicative competence—which they define as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in the target language (TL) within a culturally diverse society. This particular organization outlines seven Standards, many of which align with portions of the ACTFL

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[4] American Council on Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL). (2015). *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*. Alexandria, VA: ACTFL. Available at www.actfl.org/publications/all/national-standards-foreign-language-education

Standards. These have been reformulated from the earlier versions of standards, specifically with the development of ICC in mind, and the aspect of self-evaluation and self-reflection are present in several of the standards.

- Analyze and describe diversity in the host culture
- Identify and describe significance of cultural images and symbols in the host culture and one's own
- Analyze everyday behaviors in the host culture and compare and contrast to one's own
- Identify culturally determined behavior patterns
- Examine own cultural adjustment process and the necessary personal balance between acculturation and preservation of their own cultures
- Recognize cultural stereotypes—favorable and discriminatory—and describe how they impact their own and others' behavior
- Compare and contrast differences and similarities in values and beliefs in their own cultures and the host culture (ATESL, 2011)

The seven standards are usually displayed in a graphic containing seven circles, to communicate the equal importance of each.

Equal importance given to four broad outcomes structures the *Framework for 21st Century Learning* (P21), which encompasses several interdisciplinary themes: Content Knowledge and 21st Century Themes (including Global Awareness); Learning and Innovation Skills; Information, Media and Technology Skills; and Life and Career Skills. P21, the group that developed this set of Standards, says that the demands and competition of the 21st century create an imperative for students to learn more than basic content. Students must go "above & beyond" by embracing the 4Cs (not to be confused with ACTFL's 5Cs) of communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. A website explains these components of the framework in more detail http://www.p21.org/our-work/resources/for-educators/1007 and offers a downloadable skills map that can aid in developing rubrics.

4.2 Rubrics:

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (n.d.) created a rubric for intercultural knowledge and competence, but it is intended for assessment at the institutional level in order to evaluate and

discuss student learning, not for grading. Notwithstanding, the organization states their expectation that the core criteria expressed in such rubrics would be articulated in the language of one's campus, discipline, or even course. The criteria assess various components of relevant knowledge, attitudes, and skills; these could be modified to suit the objectives of the course or the requirements of the assignment and could be incorporated into program assessment instruments. In addition, the rubric can provide a template for general evaluation of a portfolio. This particular instrument contains six criteria that are based upon the J. M. Bennett (1993) model for transformative training: Cultural self-awareness; openness; empathy; curiosity; knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks; and verbal and non-verbal communication. The fact that knowledge, skills, and attitudes are all included makes this a good guide for overall assessment.

Additional guidance appears in Adair-Hauck, Glisan, and Troyan's (2013) volume on integrated performance assessment (IPA). They offer discussion of research and numerous examples of rubrics for assessment at many stages of development. The instructor can shape these according to the course goals and the objectives of the assignments, including use of authentic films (Seret, 2011). Along with Adair-Hauck et al., Sercu (2012) endorses this use of authentic materials because they serve a double purpose; they act as authentic, meaningful input but then further serve as items during assessment. For example, students, after having viewed a film or film clip, can explain paralinguistic or extralinguistic cues[5] and discuss them as part of their overall understanding of the culture of the other. As part of an exam, they would do the same, but with a different clip from the same or a similar authentic film. Implementation of IPA aids in making assessment more transparent to learners, who, as a result, exhibit diminished test anxiety. In addition, such transparency promotes student reflection, self-evaluation, and goal-setting. It is more efficient, which is essential when working with the complex of elements in ICC; further, it provides meaningful materials, activities, and evaluation for students. A final advantage of this type of assessment is that it generates several types of artifacts that can serve as evidence in portfolios or other culminating assessments to demonstrate growth and progress in ICC development.

4.3 Artifacts

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[5] Roell (2010) notes that films are useful in teaching about paraverbal and nonverbal interaction, including proxemics, haptics, oculesics, kinesics—all of which figure into the development of ICC.

An added difficulty in determining growth in ICC is in learning whether there are ways to assess language development and intercultural development at the same time. One illustration of the problem, notes Sercu (2012) is that "lower language proficiency may impede the learner's high intercultural competence" (p. 19). Diaries, interviews, simulations, projects, and class activities provide viable artifacts as evidence to assess for the varied skills and proficiencies. In addition, Kumaravadivelu (2008) proposes that students learn how to carry out ethnographical investigations in order to conduct critical ethnographic and autoethnographic inquiry. These studies, he says, push students beyond the descriptive level and compel them to reflect on several aspects of their lives, so that they "probe the boundaries of ideological power, knowledge, class, race, and gender,"(p. 183) in order to investigate and then interpret those aspects critically and then articulate the multilayered meanings that derive from them.

Assessment of ICC thus requires assessment of several sub-competencies, including but certainly not limited to foreign language proficiency. One should also show ability to "read" and appropriately relate to and explicate foreign cultures, to organize cultural information systematically and integrate it with information about interculture in order to construct one's own cross-cultural and intercultural schema. Further, one would have to present evidence of social and interactional skills, critical thinking skills, and learning skills for all the above (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 24). It would be impossible to address each and every criterion in a single course, but the instructor can identify which criteria will receive focus and then determine the type of assessment.

The complexity of the model and devising ways to integrate assessment with the instruction needed to develop the elements of the model can pose challenges for some instructors, requiring changes in perspective and approach, but these are strong factors in aiding focus in planning and implementation, as well as richness to instruction. Additional implications exist regarding revision of focus, perspective, and implementation of instruction.

5. Implications and Recommendations:

Implications exist regarding promotion of ICC at all levels, from the individual instructor to the profession itself. Perhaps the more obvious implication is that of the need for the profession's support of further research in clarifying the factors of the model; continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of assessment procedures; and developing even more robust

assessment. World language, literature, and culture programs would need to participate in program self-studies, curriculum review, assessment, and coordination of any and all efforts, instructional and otherwise, to engender ICC.

One of the stronger implications this review illustrates is that some instructors may be challenged to change their focus and develop a revised notion of what it means to acquire a foreign language, rather than a definition that focuses on linguistic outcomes. Other implications may include revision of one's methods and assessment. Ultimately, we may need to begin by individual self-assessment, not only of our praxis but also of our own ICC and whether it aligns with our teaching philosophy and approach.

Students cannot successfully achieve ICC merely through focus on acquiring native-like fluency. In addition to ability to communicate in another language, they must develop knowledge about the target culture, intercultural awareness and negotiation skills, accommodation strategies for effective interaction, self-understanding of their identity in intercultural settings, appreciation of perspectives of the other, a desire to develop relationships with members of the other, and skills in criticality and mediation (Byrum, 1997; Chao, 2013; Houghton, 2012; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Moeller & Nugent, 2014; Pegrum, 2008; Sercu, 2012).

Challenges to instructors can involve anything from an update in educational philosophy to collaborative work on modernizing curriculum. Some may feel challenged in seeking appropriate materials or methods to address development of the many facets of ICC. Others may feel uncomfortable with the self-evaluative roles and responsibilities given to the student or in the skills needed to guide students' growth in the affective portions of the competence. In relation to all of these instructional challenges are questions of assessment that appropriately showcases and evaluates what students know and can do and then guides them in understanding the next steps that they need to take (ACTFL, 2015). The most apparent point of departure to meet such challenges involves the additional task of reflective self-assessment, not only of one's own ICC but also of what steps the instructor needs to take in all the above areas. These imply psychological, philosophical, and professional journeys through borderlands. "Such borderlands should be seen as sites for both critical analysis and as a potential source of experimentation, creativity, and possibility" (Giroux, 2005, p. 151).

6. Conclusion:

Giroux (2005) sees the very notion of borders as facilitative in that it "provides a continuing and crucial referent for understanding the co-mingling—sometimes clash—of multiple cultures, languages, literacies, histories, sexualities, and identities" (p. 2). The notion of ICC is also a facilitative construct for guiding instruction for our students as they negotiate the world to come. The increasing emphasis on the need to promote the growth of ICC in students requires educators to reexamine their own focus, philosophy, goals, curriculum, praxis, and methods.

Historically and even today, traditional methods of foreign language instruction have accentuated the importance of practice of language structures, pronunciation, and vocabulary with the goal of producing nativelike speakers. However, focus on the creation of nativelike speakers may actually be programming many students for failure (Moeller & Nugent, 2014, p. 8). Such practices implicitly require students to detach from their own culture and accept the fact that the power in any interaction belongs to a native speaker. Integrating such a perspective into one's identity can inhibit growth toward intercultural communicative competence, not only because the learner lacks equal opportunity to bring personal background into the conversation, but also because such a dynamic devalues that background. Instead, we can guide our students to work toward using language that facilitates new discoveries about the other and about themselves. Then, instead of focusing on communicating in nativelike fashion and without error, they can work from a standpoint of open communication to build relationships. In the process, they become more self-aware and more aware of their world and those who share it. In that way, they become world citizens who can thrive instead of survive in a foreign culture. Harnessing the transformative potential of ICC development is a reflection of the instructor's agency as well as an investment in our students.

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Lee Wilberschied, Ph.D., is co-editor of *Cultural Encounters, Conflicts, and Resolutions*.