

## **Developing Intercultural Competence in Higher Education: International Students' Stories and Self-Reflection**

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### **DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' STORIES  
AND SELF-REFLECTION**

Lily A. Arasaratnam-Smith and Darla K. Deardorff

In today's world, despite the abundance of knowledge and connectivity allowed by technologies, there is a growing problem of disconnection among people due to increased polarization and miscommunication. Higher education offers a chance to bridge this gap through the cultivation of intercultural competence. The book by Lily A. Arasaratnam-Smith and Darla K. Deardorff takes a unique approach that combines solid theories with personal stories of international students to make such a concept relatable and actionable. The authors provide practical guidance on enhancing intercultural understanding by emphasizing the need for intentional interventions. Their guidance highlights

respect, self-awareness, perspective-taking, listening, adaptability, building relationships, and cultural diversity. It is a valuable resource for educators and students to develop meaningful intercultural competencies.

The book comprises two main sections and numerous sub-sections. Part one consists of three sub-parts. The first sub-section, "Understanding the Intersection of Culture and Identity," describes how engaging with other cultures prompts a reflection on one's own identity, thus, contributing to one's intercultural learning. The first chapter discusses various personal stories known as story circle narratives, focusing on the transformative impact of intercultural experiences on individuals' self-discovery and understanding. These narratives highlight the complexity of identity construction, the impact of stereotypes, and the importance of effective communication in intercultural interactions. In Chapter Two, "Recognizing and reassessing stereotypes" highlights the role of stereotypes in social cognition and intercultural interactions, as well as explores ways to foster effective communication to avoid stereotypes. The chapter examines personal narratives of individuals who recognize and challenge stereotypes, and highlights the importance of conscious choices, dialogues, and immersive experiences. It showcases how personal interactions and education can lead to the reassessment of stereotypes and promote mutual understanding. However, it focuses primarily on the positive aspects of intercultural encounters and identity transformation without addressing potential challenges or adverse outcomes that could arise from such experiences. A more balanced approach would involve acknowledging potential pitfalls in intercultural encounters, such as cultural appropriation, tokenization, or the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. It would have been helpful if the authors had expanded their discussion on individuals' challenges when countering stereotypes. For example, they could have addressed the impact of the emotional and cognitive resistance from deeply ingrained biases or societal influences.

The next chapter is entitled "Navigating Cultural Differences." This section discusses various participants' experiences that illustrate the challenges and opportunities within intercultural experiences. It compares entering a new culture to entering a game with unfamiliar rules, emphasizing the natural missteps when adapting to new cultural patterns. Acknowledgment and acceptance of cultural differences are crucial for navigating the misstep effectively. This chapter also suggests avenues for improvement in cross-cultural communication and understanding, which entails open conversations about significance of recognizing, accepting, and actively addressing cultural differences through effective communication

In Part Two, there are four sub-parts. In Chapter Four "Using Self-Reflection to Develop Intercultural Competence" focuses on various participants' stories of intercultural experiences and reflections, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, empathy, and personal growth in cross-cultural encounters. It

provides valuable insights into the transformative power of reflection in intercultural development. While the passages effectively illustrate the impact of the reflection on intercultural competence, they lack an in-depth analysis of the broader structural and systemic factors that may have contributed to intercultural challenges. For instance, the narratives often focus on personal growth and individual perspectives, rather than the lack of a tolerant social encounter that may cause intercultural shock. These narratives might benefit from further exploration of how societal norms, power dynamics, and historical contexts shape intercultural interactions.

In Chapter Five, “Experiencing Support and Community,” showcases the key themes found in the international students’ story, including the intentionality in community building, the role of trust, the impact of support and kindness, the process of stepping outside comfort zones, the power of relationships, and the importance of reflective questioning. It concludes with thoughtful questions that encourage readers to consider ways to intentionally build supportive communities, show kindness, engage with the local community, reduce prejudices, and actively build bridges across cultural differences. A study conducted by Byram et al. (2001) observes that academic faculty should demonstrate these attributes within an educational environment. It becomes the responsibility of institutions to ensure that their teacher training and professional development initiatives cultivate the intercultural proficiency among educators. This perspective aligns with the broader themes discussed in this book which emphasizes the role of institutions in cultivating intercultural competence in higher education setting.

In Chapter Six, “Building Relationships Through Intercultural Competence,” emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence in fostering transformative intercultural friendships. These friendships often lead to personal growth, mutual support, and a deeper understanding of different cultures. Shared values, the willingness to challenge stereotypes, embracing one's identity, and continuous learning play pivotal roles in fostering an inclusive and equitable friendship. While the stories are inspiring, they might not fully capture the complexities of cross-cultural friendships, such as staying with roommates and family, and finding a true friend who have cultural differences. The last chapter in Part Two is called “The Stories That Shape Us: The Lifelong Process of Developing Intercultural Competence.” Empathy is vital for developing intercultural competence, bridging cultural division, and enhancing communication. This chapter portrays the increasing accessibility to diverse cultures through technology and the evolving nature of international education, especially in a post-pandemic world. The importance of building ongoing relationships, community, and support for international students is underlined. Finally, the book’s conclusion emphasizes the value of personal narratives and their potential contributions to intercultural competence development.

The book by Lily A. Arasaratnam-Smith and Darla K. Deardorff is a valuable resource for educators and students striving to cultivate meaningful intercultural competencies in international higher education. The participants' stories underscore the enriching potential of international education when approached with an open mind, self-reflection, and readiness to learn. The implementation of the story circle methodology promotes more inclusive and culturally sensitive practice in higher education setting. It also offers constructive recommendations for addressing potential challenges and complexities in the development of intercultural competency in international higher education. Further work is needed to further expand this approach as well as provide actionable methods for nurturing intercultural competencies in students, which would significantly improve the overall quality of international education.

### REFERENCES

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