Introduction

Why Focus on Intercultural Skills?

In recent years, the number of international students studying in the U.S. alone has grown substantially, from more than 560,000 in 2001–2002 to a high of more than one million in 2019–2020 (Institute of International Education, 2020). Globalization and an increase in mobility (pre-coronavirus pandemic) have introduced new opportunities for intercultural experiences worldwide. Even in the midst of the pandemic, U.S. higher education institutions have prioritized recruitment of new international students and remain committed to welcoming these new (and returning) students on campus and online. For some international students studying in the United States, these intercultural opportunities often require them to enhance their English proficiency while they work toward their academic and/or professional goals; for all international students, however, such opportunities necessitate the development of critical intercultural competencies that will equip them to contribute to a global marketplace in valuable ways. For these reasons, we propose that, in addition to the development of language skills, intercultural competence is also an important goal for English language learners.

Intercultural competence is the ability to switch cultural perspectives and adjust behaviors appropriately in response to cultural differences (Hammer, 2008). Unfortunately, intercultural competence is not developed unconsciously by experience alone. And, although student populations at many institutions of higher education have been diversifying, an increasingly diverse student population does not automatically lead to intercultural interactions between students. In fact, without intentional curricular planning by faculty, students may be very limited in experiencing

intercultural interactions due to varying degrees of disinterest, discomfort, or anxiety, and the experiences they do have may be superficial. These challenges could be addressed and potentially mitigated by an intentional intercultural skills curriculum that complements and enhances English language instruction.

Theorists have shown that *when coupled with opportunities for reflection, discussion, and feedback,* experiences with cultural differences can lead to the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). Intentional intercultural skills development can help international students adjust to living in a new culture as well as better understand and meet expectations within an unfamiliar academic culture. When students experience greater intercultural understanding, their social interactions and academic experiences may also improve. Furthermore, when international students are more effectively equipped to navigate intercultural interactions with domestic students, their adjustment process can be positively influenced.

For more about using this content, instructors are referred to the instructor's manual.

Special Features of This Book

Although traditional ESL/EFL textbooks have primarily introduced cultural topics at a knowledge level only (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011), this textbook is designed to create meaningful opportunities for students to reflect on and practice intercultural skills in ways that are relatable in their daily lives. In this textbook, students will be introduced to various definitions of culture and will have the opportunity to consider their own definition of culture, as well as identify values they hold that may be culturally constructed. Weaving this topic of culture throughout the textbook makes it possible to cover themes such as culture and socialization, cultural adjustment, verbal and non-verbal communication styles, academic culture, intercultural relationships, and intercultural sensitivity. Each unit in this textbook is

designed to foster development of students' *intercultural skills in action* so that they can experience greater satisfaction in their academic, social, and cultural experiences. With a focus on building intercultural skills, this textbook offers students a means to build on previously learned language skills by reading content on an academic topic, identifying new vocabulary words, responding with short reflections and longer reports, and practicing oral skills in pair and small group discussion. The sequence of the units builds from concrete to more theoretical concepts, but the units are written as stand-alone modules so that instructors may vary the sequence. Instructors who wish to provide students with the opportunity to complete an intercultural assessment may find it valuable to start with Unit 5: Developing Intercultural Competence, which explains stages of intercultural competence.

Other features include:

- **Discovery Activities**: Every unit begins with a discovery activity that serves as a springboard for the unit and introduces the topic in an engaging way. As students reflect on their own knowledge and assumptions in these introductory activities, they will also have the opportunity to learn from other students' cultures and experiences.
- **Interactive Readings**: With a focus on building intercultural skills, students will be encouraged to expand previously learned language by reading challenging academic content and identifying new vocabulary words. Every unit includes multiple Pause and Reflect boxes so that readers can review what they have learned and apply it to their own intercultural experiences. These are opportunities to pause, reflect, and make sure that students have processed the information before moving on to the next section. Instructors might also find these points helpful for recapping an assigned reading by asking students about their experiences or reactions to the texts.

- **Intercultural Skills-Building Activities:** Each unit contains multiple skills-building activities that allow students to apply their cultural knowledge and lived experiences in new ways. By expanding on what they have read in the units, these activities ask students to respond with short written reflections and practice oral skills through discussion in pairs and small groups.
- **Connecting to U.S. Culture:** The last activity in each unit connects students to U.S. culture outside of the classroom. This section of the unit requires students to use higher-order thinking skills to create, evaluate, and/or analyze cultural information gathered from college and university settings in the form of surveys, interviews, observations, or internet research, and report on what they have learned to the rest of the class
- **Unit Glossary:** The end of each unit includes a list of vocabulary words related to the concepts of cultural values and beliefs, intercultural communication, and intercultural competence and their definitions, which can be used as a reference. These words appear in boldface.

Intended Audiences for This Book

The intended audiences for this book are international students studying in Intensive English Programs, in university bridge or pathway programs, or at colleges and universities in the United States. It may also be used by new-student orientation programs or by student services offices that provide intercultural training for students, staff, and faculty who work with international students.

The recommended English proficiency levels for this content are students at the high-intermediate or advanced levels. In terms of test scores, these would be students scoring 46 or higher on the TOEFL® iBT and 5.5 and higher on the IELTS.

References

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *10*(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002

Hammer, M. R. (2008). The intercultural development inventory (IDI): An approach for assessing and building intercultural competence. In M. A. Moodian (Ed.), *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Understanding and utilizing cultural diversity to build successful organizations* (pp. 245–259). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Institute of International Education. (2020). *International student enrollment trends, 1948/49–2019/20. Open doors report on international exchange.* Retrieved from www.opendoorsdata.org

Shin, J., Eslami, Z. R., & Chen, W. C. (2011). Presentation of local and international culture in current international English-language teaching textbooks. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *24*(3), 253–268. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2011.614694