Do What Works: Using the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to Improve Student Perceptions of Their Own Intercultural Knowledge and Sensitivity

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Abstract

The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) invites professionals to examine their own classroom practice, record their successes and failures, and ultimately share their experiences so that others may reflect on their findings and build upon teaching and learning processes (Hutchings and Schulman 1999). SoTL involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, performance, or publications (McKinney 2006).

During the 2020-2022 academic years I was awarded a Fellowship from the Davis Educational Foundation. I participated as vice chair in a faculty learning community (FLC) with an interdisciplinary team of scholars to examine our teaching practices and how they impact student perceptions of their own intercultural knowledge and sensitivity. Our Collaborative FLC was comprised of a chair, vice chair, and four professors from various colleges at the university. The Davis Foundation supported our FLC to integrate intercultural knowledge and competence (as defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities IKC Value Rubric) modules into our course learning objectives to inform the greater University of Hartford community on ways to assist students in becoming more responsive regarding issues of diversity.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of intentional integration of Intercultural Knowledge and Competence focused course objectives on student perceptions and student learning outcomes. The ability to communicate and interact across cultures is critical to all disciplines and particularly vital to interpersonal professions including education, journalism, legal studies, and physical therapy. This study captured and assessed the change in students' perceptions of their ability to interact with cultures that are not their own. Additionally, data from course projects and assessments offers insight to students' growth.

For my particular class, Introduction to Performing Arts Management, I was interested in exploring the What Works question: Will introducing students to intercultural concepts through data, anecdotal accounts, and personal interaction increase their perceptions of their intercultural awareness?

To gather data on student attitudes regarding group project participation, we created a pre-project survey comprised of Likert scale questions (quantitative) and a post-project survey that included both Likert scale and open-ended questions (qualitative).

An initial (non-statistical) review of my class' data suggested that students reported a relatively high level of intercultural knowledge and sensitivity at the start of the semester that showed little change after exposure to intercultural concepts introduced into the curriculum as the semester progressed. However, this initial finding changed slightly towards greater expressed confidence once final data analysis was conducted.

Keywords: SoTL, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, IKC, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence

Background

During the 2020-2022 academic years I was awarded a Fellowship from the Davis Educational Foundation. I participated as vice chair in a faculty learning community (FLC) with an interdisciplinary team of scholars to examine our teaching practices and how they impact student perceptions of their own intercultural knowledge and sensitivity. Our Collaborative FLC was comprised of a chair, vice chair, and four professors from various colleges at the university. The Davis Foundation supported our FLC to integrate intercultural knowledge and competence (as defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities IKC Value Rubric) modules into our course learning objectives to inform the greater University of Hartford community on ways

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The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of intentional integration of Intercultural Knowledge and Competence focused course objectives on student perceptions and student learning outcomes. The ability to communicate and interact across cultures is critical to all disciplines and particularly vital to interpersonal professions including education, journalism, legal studies, and physical therapy. This study captured and assessed the change in students' perceptions of their ability to interact with cultures that are not their own. Data from course projects and assessments offered insight to students' growth. The study was aimed at informing instructors of effective pedagogical methods and possible impediments to students achieving essential learning outcomes. The study was approved and the FLC was initially formed in spring 2020, but the time frame was extended into 2021 due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

SoTL invites professionals to examine their own classroom practice, record their successes and failures, and ultimately share their experiences so that others may reflect on their findings and build upon teaching and learning processes (Hutchings and Schulman 1999). SoTL involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, performance, or publications (McKinney 2006).

The Davis grant supported faculty recipients in the design of a SoTL project to study effectiveness of new or revised course activities, assignments, assessments, and/or syllabi. Our FLC was tasked with introducing the high impact practices (HIP) of Intercultural Knowledge and Competence (IKC) into our courses. For a particular assignment or assessment to be considered an IKC HIP, the University of Hartford requires it to be embedded in a credit-bearing course and count for at least 25 percent of the final grade in that course. The assignment should explore complex issues of race, ethnicity, gender bias, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, disability, religion, human rights, freedom, empowerment, or the continuing struggles around the world for social equality. Additionally, students should have significant opportunities to reflect on diversity issues.

Our FLC used the definition of IKC as described by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) in the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value Rubric. Intercultural Knowledge and Competence is "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennett 2008).

Scope of SoTL Inquiry

The taxonomy of SoTL questions generally falls into four lines of inquiry. "What works" questions seek data regarding the effectiveness of different teaching practices and pedagogical approaches. "What is" questions seek to describe features of a particular event or phenomenon such as students' learning, students' prior knowledge, characteristics of a pedagogical approach, a problem a teacher has encountered in a classroom, etc. "Visions of the Possible" questions focus Inquiry on what might be in various scenarios or under certain conditions. "Formulating New Conceptual Frameworks" questions posit theory building questions seeking to build new conceptual frameworks that lead to new inquiry questions (Hutchings 2000).

As a group, our FLC explored the "What Works" question: "Does introducing intercultural material into the curriculum work to change students' perceptions of their own intercultural knowledge and sensitivity?" Our FLC replaced "competence" with "sensitivity" to acknowledge possible limitations of achieving universally agreed-upon levels of competence in cross cultural understanding.

Scope of Study

Our study consisted of 84 students across five classes that were offered in fall 2021. Students participated in pre- and post-IKC intervention survey administrations. We harvested complete data sets from 54 students. The courses involved were:

> MUM 120 - Introduction to Performing Arts Management
> LAH 201 - Introduction to the Legal System
> DPT 516 - Professional Practice II (Physical Therapy)
> EDE 339 - Elementary Mathematics Methods of Instruction
> CMM 583 - Entrepreneurial Journalism

Our FLC faced several limitations while conducting the study. Since the study was conducted among one section of an active course per instructor, we had a relatively small sample size. In turn, it was difficult to get a representative cross sample of all University of Hartford students. Additionally, the study was tied to classes being offered in fall semester, so some participating faculty were constrained by subject matter and essential learning outcomes present in the particular course. Lastly, differences between disciplines necessitated different types and numbers of interventions, so it's difficult to draw direct correlations between interventions and student responses among the five classes.

Class Makeup and Interventions

My class, MUM 120 Introduction to Performing Arts Management, is an entry-level course that serves as the prerequisite to all subsequent department courses. The fall 2021 class was comprised of 18 first-year students: 10 male, 7

female, and 1 nonbinary. Represented majors and minors included Performing Arts Management, Music Production and Technology, Musical Theater, and Dance. Six of nine students who completed both pre- and post-intervention surveys identified as a person of color. Demographic data was not required of students to participate. Some respondents in the larger study declined to answer demographic questions. All nine students who completed pre- and post-surveys in my class offered demographic data.

Students were exposed to intercultural and diversity topics by way of three interventions including lectures, guest speakers, and guest performances. In October 2021, the class attended a guest artist lecture and performance by LADAMA, an international touring group of four women of color from four countries who write and sing in three languages. Band members are from the United States, Columbia, Brazil, and Venezuela. They perform songs in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. The band members spoke with students about career and life issues they face as international musicians who are also women. Various songs and musical numbers were interspersed throughout the talk. Students provided oral reflections during the next class meeting after the guest appearance.

In November 2021, I presented an in-class lecture on diversity, equity, and inclusion statistics within the music business that was based on a 2021 study by the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (Smith 2021). Students were presented with recent data on the disparity between white males, white females, and BIPOC holding executive and managerial positions at mainstream music business corporations.

Also in November 2021, I presented a lecture on gender issues and sexual harassment in the performing arts industries. Students were informed of the existing pay gap between women and their male counterparts in the music business. Students also discussed the recent #metoo movement and high-profile cases of alleged sexual harassment and assaults.

Methodology

Participation in the survey was voluntary and students were given the opportunity to opt out if they chose. Although the assignments involved were graded, students were not graded on their participation, or lack thereof, in the survey itself. Students were given surveys by professors other than the professor for the course in which they were enrolled. A pre-intervention survey was administered during the first week of October 2021. The survey harvested student impressions of their own intercultural knowledge and competence prior to the three interventions. A post-intervention survey was administered on November 11, 2021, after the completion of all interventions. Data compilation was conducted during December 2021.

The IKC measure administered to students consisted of fourteen survey questions (which worked across disciplines) modeled from the AACU IKC Values Rubric. Survey design was adapted from the Purdue University Center for Instructional Excellence A.S.K.S Survey. The survey questions were:

1. I welcome and initiate interactions with people who are culturally different from me.
2. I reserve judgment during interactions with people culturally different from me.
3. I ask questions about other cultures different than my own.
4. I seek answers to questions about cultural differences.
5. I understand differences in forms of verbal communication in different cultures.
6. I understand differences in forms of non-verbal communication in different cultures.
7. I use a world view different from my own to interpret the views and actions of persons from different cultures.
8. I act in a supportive way that recognizes the feelings of other cultural groups.
9. I understand the importance of politics, history, beliefs, values, economics and communication styles to members of other cultural groups.
10. I differentiate the complex beliefs, values, communication styles, customs, politics, history and economics of other cultural groups.
11. I am aware of my own cultural rules and biases.
12. I can describe my personal cultural rules and biases.
13. I actively seek to improve my understanding of the complicated differences between cultures.
14. I am aware of how my own experiences have shaped my personal rules or biases about cultural differences.

Additional demographic questions on the post-intervention survey included:
1. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
2. What is the primary language spoken in your childhood home?
3. What is your gender identity?

We used a six-level, Likert items ordinal data ranking system of:
1. Not at all
2. Low degree
3. Somewhat low degree
4. Somewhat high degree
5. High degree
6. Very high degree

ATTITUDES, SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE SHORT SCALE — BEFORE EXPERIENCE

As you begin this experience, please respond to the following statements using the 6 point scale by rating the degree to which the statement represents your behaviors:

AS YOU BEGIN…	1: not at all — I am not aware of or do not recognize this behavior.	2: low degree — I am only aware of and recognize this behavior.	3: somewhat low degree — I cooperate or comply with this behavior if required by others.	4: somewhat high degree — I recognize the value of and prefer this behavior.	5: high degree — This behavior is an important priority to me.	6: very high degree — This behavior is natural to me, is habitual to me, and embodies who I am.
1. I welcome and initiate interactions with people who are culturally different from me.	O	O	O	O	O	O
2. I reserve judgment during interactions with people culturally different from me.	O	O	O	O	O	O
3. I ask questions about other cultures different than my own.	O	O	O	O	O	O
4. I seek answers to questions about cultural differences.	O	O	O	O	O	O
5. I understand differences in forms of verbal communication in different cultures.	O	O	O	O	O	O
6. I understand differences in forms of non-verbal communication in different cultures.	O	O	O	O	O	O
7. I use a world view different from my own to interpret the views and actions of persons from different cultures.	O	O	O	O	O	O
8. I act in a supportive way that recognizes the feelings of other cultural groups.	O	O	O	O	O	O
9. I understand the importance of politics, history, beliefs, values, economics and communication styles to members of other cultural groups.	O	O	O	O	O	O
10. I differentiate the complex beliefs, values, communication styles, customs, politics, history and economics of other cultural groups.	O	O	O	O	O	O
11. I am aware of my own cultural rules and biases.	O	O	O	O	O	O
12. I can describe my personal cultural rules and biases.	O	O	O	O	O	O
13. I actively seek to improve my understanding of the complicated differences between cultures.	O	O	O	O	O	O
14. I am aware of how my own experiences have shaped my personal rules or biases about cultural differences.	O	O	O	O	O	O

These are voluntary but add additional context to the study
1. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? _____
2. What is the primary language spoken in your childhood home? _____
3. What is your gender identity? _____

Unique ID:_____

This survey adapted from Purdue University Center for Instructional Excellence A.S.K.S Survey
Items 1-14 were adapted from the AAC&U Value Rubric: https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/intercultural-know
Developers: Horane A. Holgate, M.A., Charles A. Calahan, Ph.D, Heidi E. Parker, Ph.D.

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Figure 1. Pre-intervention survey.

Quantitative Results

Answers from pre- and post-surveys were compared to examine positive, negative, or no change increments after interventions. As of the time of this presentation, we have not conducted a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test to determine if there are statistically significant differences between pre- and post-intervention responses. Accordingly, we only have averages calculated thus far (see figures 2, 3, and 4).

I welcome and initiate interactions with people who are culturally different from me.	-0.11
I reserve judgment during interactions with people culturally different from me.	0.11
I ask questions about other cultures different than my own.	0.39
I seek answers to questions about cultural differences.	0.11
I understand differences in forms of verbal communication in different cultures.	0.02
I understand differences in forms of non-verbal communication in different cultures.	0.17
I use a world view different from my own to interpret the views and actions of persons from different cultures.	0.59
I act in a supportive way that recognizes the feelings of other cultural groups.	0.17
I understand the importance of politics, history, beliefs, values, economics and communication styles to members of other cultural groups.	0.28
I differentiate the complex beliefs, values, communication styles, customs, politics, history and economics of other cultural groups.	0.31
I am aware of my own cultural rules and biases.	-0.04
I can describe my personal cultural rules and biases.	0.04
I actively seek to improve my understanding of the complicated differences between cultures.	0.19
I am aware of how my own experiences have shaped my personal rules or biases about cultural differences.	-0.17

Figure 2. Average change across all classes.

	MUM04	MUM05	MUM06	MUM10	MUM11	MUM12	MUM13	MUM14	MUM15	
I welcome and initiate interactions with people who are culturally different from me.	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	4	6	**5.44**
I reserve judgment during interactions with people culturally different from me.	6	5	6	6	4	2	6	5	6	**5.11**
I ask questions about other cultures different than my own.	5	5	5	5	6	4	5	4	6	**5.00**
I seek answers to questions about cultural differences.	5	5	5	6	6	4	5	4	6	**5.11**
I understand differences in forms of verbal communication in different cultures.	6	4	6	5	5	5	4	4	6	**5.00**
I understand differences in forms of non-verbal communication in different cultures.	6	4	5	6	5	3	4	4	6	**4.78**
I use a world view different from my own to interpret the views and actions of persons from different cultures.	5	4	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	**5.00**
I act in a supportive way that recognizes the feelings of other cultural groups.	6	5	5	6	6	6	5	4	6	**5.44**
I understand the importance of politics, history, beliefs, values, economics and communication styles to members of other cultural groups.	6	5	6	5	6	6	5	5	6	**5.56**
I differentiate the complex beliefs, values, communication styles, customs, politics, history and economics of other cultural groups.	6	4	6	6	6	4	5	5	6	**5.33**
I am aware of my own cultural rules and biases.	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	4	6	**5.22**
I can describe my personal cultural rules and biases.	5	6	5	5	6	5	5	4	6	**5.22**
I actively seek to improve my understanding of the complicated differences between cultures.	6	6	5	6	6	5	5	4	6	**5.44**
I am aware of how my own experiences have shaped my personal rules or biases about cultural differences.	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	**5.56**
Questionnaire Average by subject	**5.57**	**5**	**5.5**	**5.57**	**5.5**	**4.71**	**4.93**	**4.36**	**5.93**	

Figure 3. Performing Arts Management pre-intervention scores.

	MUM04	MUM05	MUM06	MUM10	MUM11	MUM12	MUM13	MUM14	MUM15	
I welcome and initiate interactions with people who are culturally different from me.	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0.11**
I reserve judgment during interactions with people culturally different from me.	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	**0.56**
I ask questions about other cultures different than my own.	-1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	**0.22**
I seek answers to questions about cultural differences.	-1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	**0.44**
I understand differences in forms of verbal communication in different cultures.	0	-1	2	-1	-1	1	-1	0	0	**-0.11**
I understand differences in forms of non-verbal communication in different cultures.	0	-1	1	2	-1	-1	0	0	1	**0.11**
I use a world view different from my own to interpret the views and actions of persons from different cultures.	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	**0.78**
I act in a supportive way that recognizes the feelings of other cultural groups.	0	1	-1	0	0	2	0	0	2	**0.44**
I understand the importance of politics, history, beliefs, values, economics and communication styles to members of other cultural groups.	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	**0.44**
I differentiate the complex beliefs, values, communication styles, customs, politics, history and economics of other cultural groups.	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	**0.56**
I am aware of my own cultural rules and biases.	-1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**0.00**
I can describe my personal cultural rules and biases.	-1	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	**0.56**
I actively seek to improve my understanding of the complicated differences between cultures.	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	**0.33**
I am aware of how my own experiences have shaped my personal rules or biases about cultural differences.	0	0	0	1	-1	1	0	1	0	**0.22**
Questionnaire Average change by participant	**-0.29**	**0.14**	**0.43**	**0.71**	**-0.071**	**0.79**	**0.36**	**0.21**	**0.71**	

Figure 4. Performing Arts Management average changes.

Quantitative Results

Overall, most reported scores started considerably high at 4.29 or greater. This tends to suggest a somewhat high to high level of confidence among students in their own intercultural knowledge and sensitivity. Nineteen of fifty-four respondents who completed both pre- and post-surveys reported lower averaged total scores (reduced confidence) after intervention. Two of nine respondents who completed pre/post surveys in MUM 120 Introduction to Performing Arts Management reported lower averaged total scores (reduced confidence) after the series of three interventions. Across all classes, three of the fourteen questions yielded negative scores (reduced confidence) after interventions.

Demographic Data

Providing demographic data was optional and 12 of 54 (22%) of students who completed pre- and post-surveys declined to provide demographic data concerning race. Genders of respondents were reported as: female - 44, male - 9, and nonbinary - 1.

For the 42 respondents who provided data on race, the

responses were: White - 33, Asian - 2, Hispanic - 1, Black/ African American - 3 (all in MUM 120), and Multiracial - 3 (all Asian/White).

Considering the forty-two respondents who provided complete demographic data, the most diverse class recorded was MUM 120 Introduction to Performing Arts Management. Six of nine respondent identified as BIPOC and there was one male, one nonbinary, and seven females. The least diverse class recorded was EDE 330 Elementary Mathematics Methods of Instruction. One of fourteen respondents identified as BIPOC and all students in the class were female.

Findings and Data Interpretation

Overall, students expressed greater confidence in their own intercultural knowledge and sensitivity after experiencing the interventions. This is suggested by increased averages on eleven of the fourteen survey questions, with positive average changes ranging from 0.02 to 0.59. Respondents in MUM 120 Introduction to Performing Arts Management reported increased average changes from 0.11 to 0.78.

Respondents reported reduced confidence on three of the fourteen survey questions, with changes ranging from -0.17 to -0.04. However, a finding of a negative change isn't necessarily a negative outcome. The reported change could signify a revealed awareness of cultural blind spots or insensitivities among respondents. Additionally, a negative trend could offer insight into more effective measures to increase IKC content into course learning outcomes.

There were no qualitative assessments conducted. So, in cases where there were multiple interventions introduced into the curriculum, it's not possible to know which interventions were responsible for reported changes in student perceptions. Future studies such as this would require a post-survey to be administered after each intervention in addition to the final post-survey at the conclusion of all interventions.

Courses of Action

The current political environment surrounding Critical Race Theory and DEI in higher education has the potential to greatly impact how institutions may implement AACU IKC Values into curriculum. In some cases, administrators and teaching faculty will be required to devise culturally neutral learning activities that demonstrate object lessons through inclusive means. In other instances, only the direct approach will suffice.

There are various methods of course and program design which could effectively introduce IKC concepts into curriculum. Individual courses may feature specific lectures, activities, events, or object examples designed to expose student learners to cultures dissimilar to their own. In a content-based course, students could be exposed to IKC concepts through a designed DEI lecture or guest appearance. In a skills-based course, students could be exposed to IKC concepts through the use of diverse object specimens. For example, in a course on composing popular music, students can typically learn the same concepts just as effectively from dissecting a Stevie Wonder composition as they can from examining the Beatles.

Intercultural Knowledge and Competence skills are considered a high impact practice and therefore are expected to take time for most students to develop and master. Accordingly, the skill could be seen and treated like a program learning outcome that is threading into scaffolded courses over a four-year degree program. Scaffolding would ensure that students are exposed to the concepts and should aid in their retention of the material by presenting it in introduction, reinforcement, and mastery courses.

Rather than completely outsourcing IKC learning to other academic units, individual departments should design industry-specific courses for their disciplines. This would require departments to take some responsibility for developing cultural awareness and sensitivity in their students. It also conveys to students that the department is serious and sincere about IKC issues present in their industry.

In addition to developing IKC support courses within area curriculum, programs could require students to take a specified number of interdisciplinary courses that feature IKC content. This not only spreads the burden of IKC instruction across the institution, it also demonstrates to students how IKC concepts are present across different disciplines and how they are often interrelated.

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