Three dominant narratives: Our community’s ”stories” about learning across cultural gaps[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Humans learn through exposure to cultural difference
2. Humans learn by being immersed in different types of cultural difference
3. Humans learn and develop:
   1. by being immersed in cultural difference,
   2. by reflecting on how they & others frame experience,
   3. and by re-framing their experience

First story: students learn when they are exposed to the unfamiliar culture “out there”

* Students learn through exposure to the new and different in privileged places.
* Students learn when educators describe, talk about cultural-specific differences.

The first story is hierarchical: Students encounter sophisticated, “civilized” people & places

* With the Grand Tour—this story’s signature program—learning occurs through exposure to the new & different in privileged places, and through modeling and imitation

With story one, we learn to cross cultural gaps through imitating external models

* To learn, we climb up. . .
* And when we slide down. . .

Second story: Cultural relativism undermines the assumption of cultural hierarchy

* Our common humanity binds us together, and no culture is superior to any other

Second narrative: immersing learners productively through social engineering

The Contact Hypothesis[[2]](#footnote-2): several “Conditions” need to be present if groups separated by deep differences are to change attitudes about each other:

* Equal status
* Common goals
* Intergroup cooperation
* Authority support
* Friendship potential

Second Story: educators foster learning through “immersing” students in difference

Types of differences educators teach before immersing students:

* Non-verbal communication
* Communication styles
* Learning styles
* Cognitive styles
* Value contrasts

Second story: our community’s core immersion assumptions and practices

* Maximize duration of experience
* Enroll students in host institutions
* Improve second language proficiency
* Maximize contact with host nationals
* Carry out “experiential” activities: Internships, service learning, field work, etc.
* House students with host families or host students

Evidence supporting first and second stories

Most frequently cited: “Study abroad transformed me”

Convergence of disciplinary evidence challenges the positivism of stories 1 & 2: “Constructivism”

* The History of Science (Kuhn)
* Cultural Anthropology (Hall, La Brack)
* Experiential learning theory (Kolb, Osland)
* Developmental theory (Piaget, Perry, Belenky, Kegan, Baxter Magolda)
* Intercultural Communication (Hall, Bennett, Bennett, Hammer)
* Psychology (Lewin, Kelly, Savicki)
* Linguistics (Sapir, Whorf, Deutscher)
* Cognitive Biology (Maturana, Varela)
* Neuroscience (Zull)

Recent research findings also challenge first & second story assumptions about learning

* In the Georgetown Consortium study[[3]](#footnote-3) 1,159 study abroad students enrolled in 61 separate study abroad programs; 138 control students did not study abroad.
* On average, students abroad did not make significant gains in intercultural competence: “a student is all too often in the vicinity of Shanghai without having a Shanghai experience.”
* While learning gains of female students were not large, they did, on average, learn & develop significantly more—interculturally and linguistically—than did males.

Core Georgetown Study findings[[4]](#footnote-4): To what extent do traditional “immersion” practices foster intercultural learning?

* Send students abroad for longer periods: Limited impact
* Take steps to improve SL proficiency: No impact
* Maximize contact with host nationals: No impact
* Enroll in host school classes: No impact
* Doing Internships, service learning: No impact
* Maximizing contact with host nationals: No impact
* Being housed in home stays: No impact
* Pre departure cultural orientation: Yes—some impact
* Home stays: Yes—when students engaged with host family
* Cultural mentoring at sites abroad: Yes—the highest impact practice in the study

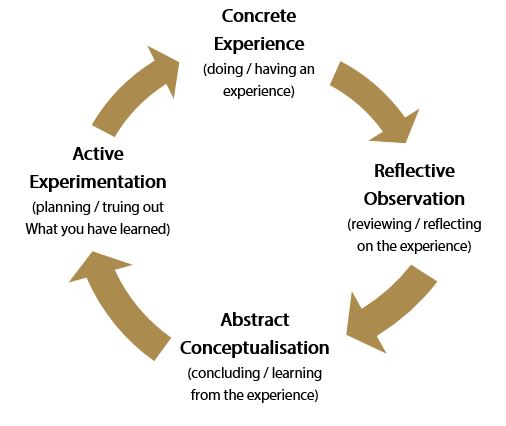
Third Story: how each of us frames an event determines what it means

* We *begin* to learn interculturally as we become aware of how we and others typically *frame* our experiences:“ We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.” (Anias Nin)

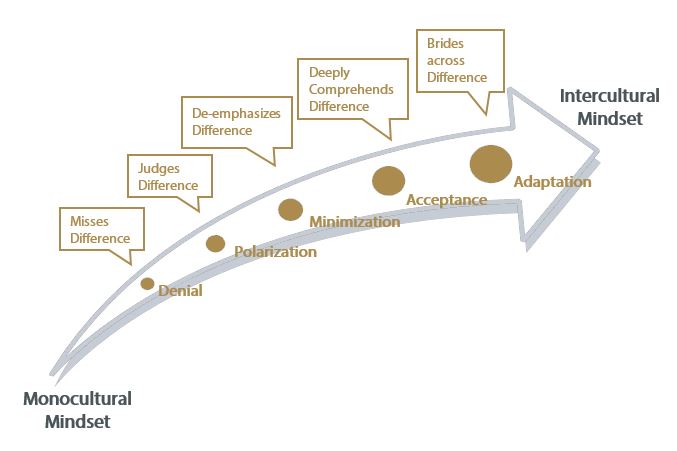
Third story: Since most students abroad don’t develop on their own, educators need to intervene

* Educators help students learn to interact more effectively and appropriately in unfamiliar cultural contexts through:
* Helping immerse students in difference—*part of the time*
* Helping students learn to reflect—and thus to become aware of the ways that they and others characteristically frame experience
* Helping students learn to re-frame—that is, to shift perspective and adapt behavior to other cultural contexts

An influential third story learning theory: Learning is experiential, developmental and holistic

[[5]](#footnote-5)

An influential developmental theory: the Intercultural Development Continuum



Facilitating intercultural development through study abroad: 4 current approaches to intervention

* Faculty or staff living at sites abroad train students through required or elective courses
* Home campus faculty accompanying students train them at sites abroad
* Faculty and staff train students before and after study abroad through required training courses
* Faculty or TAs at home campuses train students, on line, while students are abroad

Assessing Intercultural Development: Comparative Program Data (IDI=90-point scale[[6]](#footnote-6))

SA without facilitation at program site: IDI Gains

* Georgetown U. Consortium Study (60 progs.)[[7]](#footnote-7) +1.32

SA with facilitation across program: IDI Gains

* U of Pacific training program +17.46
* AUCP training program (Aix, Marseille) +13.00
* CIEE training program (20 programs, fall 2012) +11.34

Four core intercultural competencies: Helping students learn to interact more effectively and appropriately with culturally different others means:

* + Helping them increase their cultural and personal self-awareness through reflecting on their experiences;
  + Helping them increase their awareness of others within their own cultural and personal contexts;
  + Helping them learn to manage emotions in the face of ambiguity, change, and challenging circumstances & people
  + Helping them learn to bridge cultural gaps—which is to say, helping them learn to shift frames and adapt behavior to other cultural contexts.

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3. Vande Berg, M. (2009). Intervening in student learning abroad: A research-based inquiry. (M. Bennett, Guest Ed.) *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, pp. 15-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. Kolb, A. & D. Kolb. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education,* Vol. 4, No. 2, 193-212. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI): [www.idiinventory.com](http://www.idiinventory.com/); Hammer, M. (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hammer, M. (2012). The Intercultural Development Inventory: A new frontier in assessment and development of intercultural competence. In Vande Berg, M., Paige, R. M. & Lou, K. H. (Eds.). *What our students are learning, what they’re not, and what we can do about it*. Sterling, VA: Stylus. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)