An Instructor's Experiment:
Adding Intentional Global Competency into a Pre-Existing Short-Term Study Abroad Program

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the pedagogical decisions made, the implementation hurdles which needed to be overcome and the students' learning outcomes, this white paper describes the instructor's efforts to add a one-credit "culture-general" certificate program to a popular six-week summer study abroad program in Florence, Italy. Designed by a team of noted intercultural scholars, the AFS Global Competency Certificate (GCC) is an 18-module video-based digital learning aid to developing intercultural competence. Effectiveness was measured via pre and post-program administration of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a widely used instrument of intercultural competency measurement. With the help of the GCC, the 2018 cohort of this 6-week program in Florence attained an astonishing mean increase of 13.54 IDI points, moving from Polarization (judging difference) well into Minimization (finding common ground). This is put into perspective via the use of comparison data from other Purdue 2018 short-term programs, some of which also used the GCC.

INTRODUCTION

When given an exciting new tool, consider what you are willing to break in order to put that tool to use! That was my challenge after serving as a newly trained facilitator of AFS' on-line Global Competence Certificate curriculum (further outlined in Appendix A) in support of students participating in semester-long study abroad. I held the reins of a long-running, well structured, popular, six-week summer program and suddenly found myself willing to throw a wrench into the whole thing. Like a suburban dad who had received a new weed-whacker for Christmas, I wanted to put the new toy to use ASAP.

CONTEXT OF MY PEDAGOGY CHALLENGE

I have the unusual role of overseeing a long-standing Purdue-originated summer study abroad program that does not include a full-time accompanying faculty member. The *Purdue Summer in Florence* program is set up much like any faculty-led program, but adjunct instructors in Florence are hired to teach the on-site classes except the “intercultural learning seminar” (the on-site cultural orientation). Each May, I travel to Florence with the students and stay one week. The brevity of my stay keeps costs down, which has contributed to the program running continuously every year for well over a decade. In past years, I made productive use of this week by arranging multiple events each day to help students quickly make their host-city into a home city. I have shaped their experiences by testing their navigational skills, posing spontaneous reflection questions, and offering opportunities to connect more mindfully with both Florence and Florentines. These exercises build upon concepts and activities that I had previously introduced to the students during pre-departure orientations sessions back on the home campus. The goal has been to support and challenge the students as they adjust and attempt to integrate; yet I have often felt constrained by my own and the students’ perceptions that such activities were “merely” co-curricular “extras.”

The program originated as a partnership between an on-site program provider and Purdue, with hopes that it would prove attractive to psychology majors and students on a pre-health track. It offers a standard course in Abnormal Psychology along with options to study Italian Language, Contemporary Italian Society and Renaissance Art History; thus helping students fulfill general education requirements in both the humanities and the social sciences. Over the years, it has enrolled students from a wide variety of majors, with the highest representation consistently coming from our School of Nursing. Students are housed in apartments, which requires them to grocery shop, cook for themselves and commute to and from classes; e.g. to live in ways comparable to a regular member of Florentine society. They also have the option to engage more closely with the local community through volunteer opportunities provided by the site partner. Yet, the challenge of earning six credits in six weeks has seemed to make it hard for some students to see the local culture as anything other than a recreational opportunity; e.g. an exciting new locale in which to relax from the stresses of academic life. Getting them to engage in reflective self-development has often been a struggle.

Increasingly, research tells us that simply being ‘in the vicinity of’ another culture while studying does not necessarily create intercultural development for students, even in semester or yearlong programs, without intentional and mentored reflection (Vande Berg, Paige and Lou, 2012). In fact, it was this research which motivated Purdue’s dean of international programs to pay for the GCC facilitator training which I referenced above, so that faculty and staff were equipped to mentor higher levels of intercultural learning from our semester-long study abroad offerings. Now, energized by the experience of having facilitated the GCC curriculum for a semester, my challenge was this: could I restructure the Florence summer program to maximize learning in a similar way, while not overloading my students and myself? To meet this challenge, I realized I must create a new program model, an unconventional hybrid that stretched the timeline of the typical short-term study abroad experience. Most importantly, I hoped to do it in a way that other short-term study abroad leaders program could easily replicate.

STEP ONE: THINKING AHEAD TO LEARNING OUTCOMES

If I was going to go to the trouble of re-designing the structure of this popular program, I definitely wanted to be able to demonstrate that it was worth all the trouble by documenting students’ learning outcomes! There is actually a good bit of documentation of learning built into the GCC curriculum. Each of the modules has a concluding quiz, which allows the student to confirm understanding of key concepts; as well as a required discussion forum where they reflect upon their own skills with peer learners and offer supportive feedback to one other. Each of the facilitated dialogue session scripts comes with an associated checklist by which the facilitator can both probe for clarity and track the group's understanding of these same key concepts as the discussion progresses. Yet, while I was confident that GCC gave me, as an experienced study abroad instructor, ample ways to monitor and support individual students' learning progress, I also wanted to persuade other instructors of short-term study abroad that it was valuable—and this is often more easily done with quantitative measures of student learning! For this purpose, I chose the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a short, but rigorously validated, survey (Paige et al, 2003; Wiley, 2016) which categorizes a learner's ability to interact effectively across difference, in accordance with a 5-stage developmental model (refer to Table One below).

Intercultural Development Continuum		
Stage	**Description**	**Attitude**
Mono-cultural [Ethnocentric] Stages		
Denial	Superficial awareness of cultural difference, generalized disinterest &/or avoidance of difference.	"There is no reason to know about cultural differences in my situation."
Polarization (Defense)	Uncritical view of own culture as more positive & ideal, also overly critical of other culture(s) values & practices.	"My culture is superior to other cultures in many respects."
Polarization (Reversal)	Uncritical view of OTHER culture(s) as being more ideal, also overly critical of own culture's values & practices.	"That other culture is superior to my birth culture in many respects."
Transition Stage		
Minimization	Cultural commonalities and universal values are highlighted. Differences are still a problem; taking notice of them is avoided.	"All humans have similar needs; so why can't we all just get along?"
Multicultural [Ethno-relative] Stages		
Acceptance	Appreciation of other cultures & acceptance that they include commonalities as well as differences compared to one's own.	"Differences are not a problem; I love humanity's infinite variety."
Adaptation	Capable of shifting perspective as well as adapting behaviors in appropriate and culturally authentic ways.	"When in Rome, I am careful to add Roman perspectives to my decision-making process and modify my behaviors appropriately."

Table 1: Stages of Intercultural Development

An advantage to using this particular survey instrument was that it was already in wide use at Purdue (and in the research literature on study abroad outcomes); thus, I would be able to benchmark my students' study abroad learning outcomes against a number of other cases. In addition, since facilitator materials for using the IDI come with differentiated instructional strategies and tips for learners at each stage of the model, using it as a pre-departure assessment would help me get a firmer handle on how to appropriately challenge and support a specific group of learners towards competency.

STEP TWO: OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLE OF TIME

The biggest obstacle I faced in fitting the GCC into the Florence program was a perceived lack of time: short-term programs are just that, short! At the time I started working on this teaching conundrum (early fall 2017), I was determined not to overburden my students. The Global Competence Certificate requires the viewing of online videos that total over two hours in running time. As learners make their way through each module, they have various tasks to complete. These include answering reflection prompts, taking quizzes, and responding to the Forum posts of others. Through its flipped classroom approach, students complete several interactive modules before coming together with others, plus a trained cohort mentor, for a Facilitated Dialogue Session (FDS). As initially designed, the GCC includes modules intended to be delivered prior to departure, others that accompany the student's time abroad and a few to be completed upon return; with the facilitated dialogues taking place roughly once a month or four times in total. This seemed like a lot of "co-curricular" learning to be added into six weeks!

However, any sound overseas program has numerous pre-departure orientation sessions; many also have a re-entry session or reunion. To enhance my student's learning by incorporating the GCC, I therefore chose to use these standard pre-departure meetings in a better way. I was aided in my quest by the fact that the semester-long version of the GCC had already been approved as a Purdue credit-bearing course in intercultural communication (COM 30301).

With a little luck, being able to offer a credit-bearing certificate instead of a series of required orientation meetings would change the value-proposition of the endeavor for participating students. First, however, I had to tweak the recruitment materials, course description and syllabus, so that potential participants would know what they were about to get into. The goal was to attract students who would see this “extra” element (e.g. the certificate program, for which they would earn an additional credit) as adding value to their Florence experience.

STEP THREE: PRE-DEPARTURE IMPLEMENTATION

My next step was to move the application deadline from March 1 to February 15, in order to allow more time for pre-departure learning. Since the application period had to be shortened, I ramped up promotional efforts. Despite this, the recruitment result was a slightly lower number of admitted students than in prior years. Twenty-three students from various Purdue colleges, ranging from freshman to a graduating senior made up the final program roster. Thankfully, I had planned for lower enrollments when setting the program budget and the smaller cohort meant I could ease into this instructional experiment with more attention paid to each learner.

By stretching the orientation period by two weeks, I gained more than enough time to have students engage with the GCC’s on-line pre-departure modules. An equally fundamental change was that, from the get-go, pre-departure meetings were not referred to as “orientations” – but as classes! I provided each applicant with a detailed syllabus upon submission of a program application, making it clear that they would be putting in work towards the course COM 30301 (Mentored Intercultural Communication) as they prepared for their time overseas.

Soon after deposits were paid, instructions to take the Intercultural Development Inventory were sent to each student; completing it served as their first class assignment for COM

30301. Once the IDI was completed, I became armed with the knowledge of where my students were in terms of their pre-existing intercultural effectiveness (see Table 2, below).

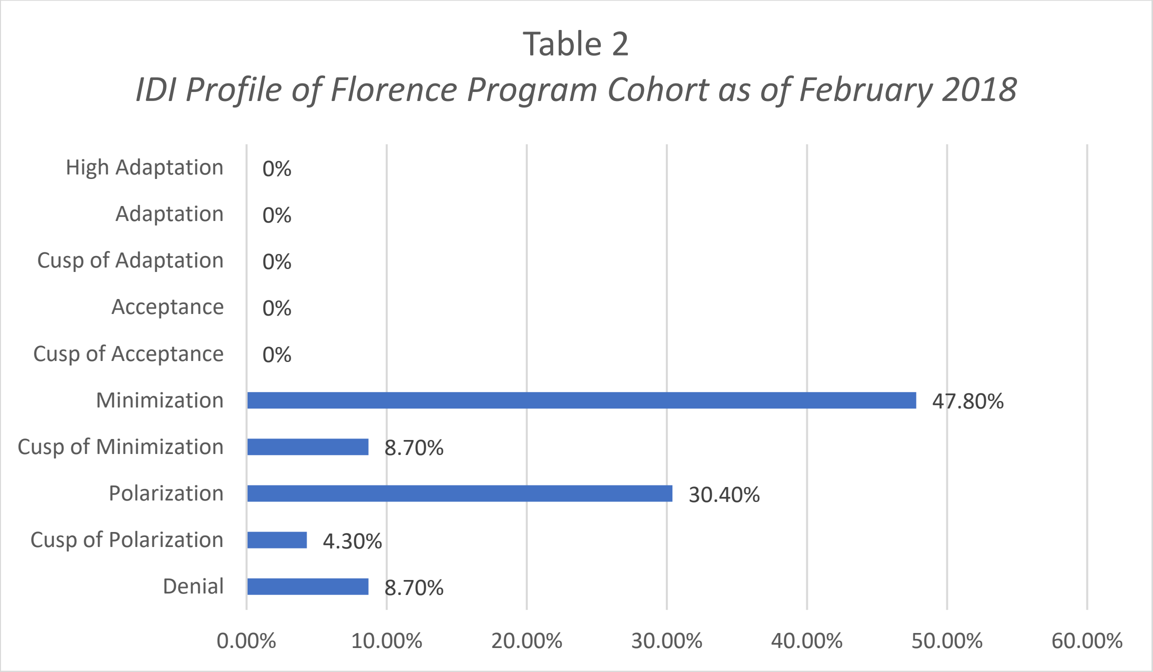

Table 2: IDI Group Debrief Percentages

This particular cohort of 23 students attained an initial mean score of 83.91 points; indicating that the group as a whole was not quite out of Polarization. To be specific, although the IDI showed that nearly 48% of the admitted group of students had the ability to find common ground across difference, the majority of this group was not yet developmentally ready to do so. Polarization is an important developmental stage in the journey to competence: a group or person in Polarization can easily identify how difference matters. However, as the name implies, in this stage there is no such thing as a neutral expression of cultural difference; a group or an individual in Polarization either loves a given cultural approach or practice (“This culture is so welcoming!”) or holds it in deep contempt (“This culture is disgustingly trusting and naive!”).

The correct pedagogical approach for Polarization is to support it by offering content on: the universality of ethnicity, previously unexplored differences among their in-group (e.g. learning styles, personality types, communication styles, etc.) and developing emotional resilience. The process for challenging groups to advance beyond Polarization is to focus curiosity on the culture of their own group, stress team building and cooperation, and allow structured opportunities to discuss concerns (Hammer, 2012). To begin to focus the groups' curiosity on their own culture, a debriefing of group IDI results was added to our first pre-departure class session. Other than this, the session content was the same as in the past; since it is common for a pre-departure orientation to address concerns about how to adapt to difference!

It became clear after this first gathering that I was on the right track. Not only did I tell the group what forms they must complete and when their payments were due (as one would do in a typical orientation meeting), but I also, by delivering the IDI group debrief of their intercultural competence stage, conveyed that they were a team collaboratively preparing for more than just a trip abroad. They knew, much earlier than Florence groups had in past, that they had begun preparing for what could only be described as an intercultural development journey, together.

Next, students were invited to log into the GCC network and complete modules 1-4 before arriving at COM class #2. Thanks to these videos, students entered the room already having an understanding of themselves as cultural beings, of the distinction between stereotypes & generalizations, and of various metaphors of culture (the onion, the iceberg, etc.) In previous years, the second orientation meeting focused on these basic intercultural learning concepts, delivered in face-to-face lecture mode. The "flipped" approach of using the GCC curricular modules allowed me to put the "go" in pedagogy, to take my instruction to a higher level, at a quicker pace. The major edit to the curriculum for this second orientation meeting from the previous year was to add the first Facilitated Dialogue Session (FDS), a discussion of the material students had covered in the GCC online video modules. As with any FDS, I acted as a moderator, calling on students to provide examples that would help us further explore and personalize the material. Based on my experiences working with the GCC online and in person, I am convinced that conducting the discussion session face-to-face enhances the bond between the mentor and their mentees, as well as setting a norm of learning-oriented group interactions.

Over the next month, students had to complete GCC modules 5-9, arriving at our third pre-departure class ready to discuss them. These videos covered cultural values, communication and conflict styles, and balancing challenge and support. Again, facilitated discussions enhanced the group dynamic, taking the cohort another step forward. A bit surprisingly to me, I received no pushback from students, although they were being asked to prepare more rigorously than their friends who had enrolled in other Purdue summer programs. Rather, the integration of the GCC into their orientation program, stretched out over numerous months, was well received. Students willingly engaged with the material; it made sense to them as a preparatory exercise. By departure date, this cohort of students felt far better prepared and much more cohesive than had my previous Florence cohorts.

STEP FOUR: IN-COUNTRY & BEYOND

I added an additional two formal COM 30301 class sessions to the in-country first week agenda, which had previously been fully co-curricular in nature. These included intercultural learning activities, debriefs, guided reflections, and two more Facilitated Dialogue Sessions; covering modules 10-12 and 13-14 of the GCC, respectively. As before, students were charged with completing the modules in their own time, arriving to each session ready to discuss. Now that students were on-site, experiences they had a few days (or even a few minutes!) before class could be unpacked to provide shared, cooperative learning for the entire group. By this time, due to our flipped-classroom pre-departure sessions, the students had become fully comfortable with me as a cultural mentor as well as feeling safe discussing cultural insights or uncertainties with peers. After my departure, I administered additional modules of the GCC content (e.g. the COM 30301 course) online while providing supplemental reflective field exercises through Blackboard; all of these latter exercises were tailored to the Florentine context and the developmental needs of this particular student cohort.

Upon their return home, the final two GCC modules direct students to evaluate their overall experience, as well as prepare to use the skills they developed to land a future job. Having a post-study abroad final meeting or final reflection assignment due is a relatively standard feature of Purdue faculty-led programs; moreover, in their focus on linking study abroad to careers, these post-travel GCC assignments mirror the focus of the study abroad re-entry workshops offered by many colleges and universities. Two weeks after the students completed their last GCC module, a post-experience IDI was administered —and I had finally implemented the new curriculum without student pushback and without killing myself!

PURDUE FLORENCE 2018 LEARNING OUTCOMES

So, what were the student learning outcomes of this instructional experiment, you may wonder? The group mean gain for the Florence 2018 group was 13.54 points. A full 82.6% of the cohort (almost double the percentage of the initial group profile) ended the program in Minimization or a higher stage of competence.

How do these results stack up against outcomes of other short-term study abroad programs and are these outcomes significant? Experts vary as to what is a “significant” change on the 90-point IDI instrument. There are those who have found in their intercultural coaching practice that an IDI change as small as four points is correlated to a shift in cognitive patterns (Anonymous, personal communication, April 25, 2019), while others have designated a seven-point IDI difference as marking the point of significant improvement (Anderson et al, 2016). Statistically speaking, analysis using the paired sign test, selected because of the relatively small size and non-symmetrical profile of the data set, found the pre/post results of the Florence program to be very significant (p =.003). The effect size of the pre/post change (d = 0.98) exceeds Cohen's (1988) suggested threshold for consideration as a "large" effect (d = 0.80) as well as Wolf's (1986) suggested baselines for indicating whether an intervention has either educational significance (d = 0.25) or therapeutic/clinical significance (d = 0.50).

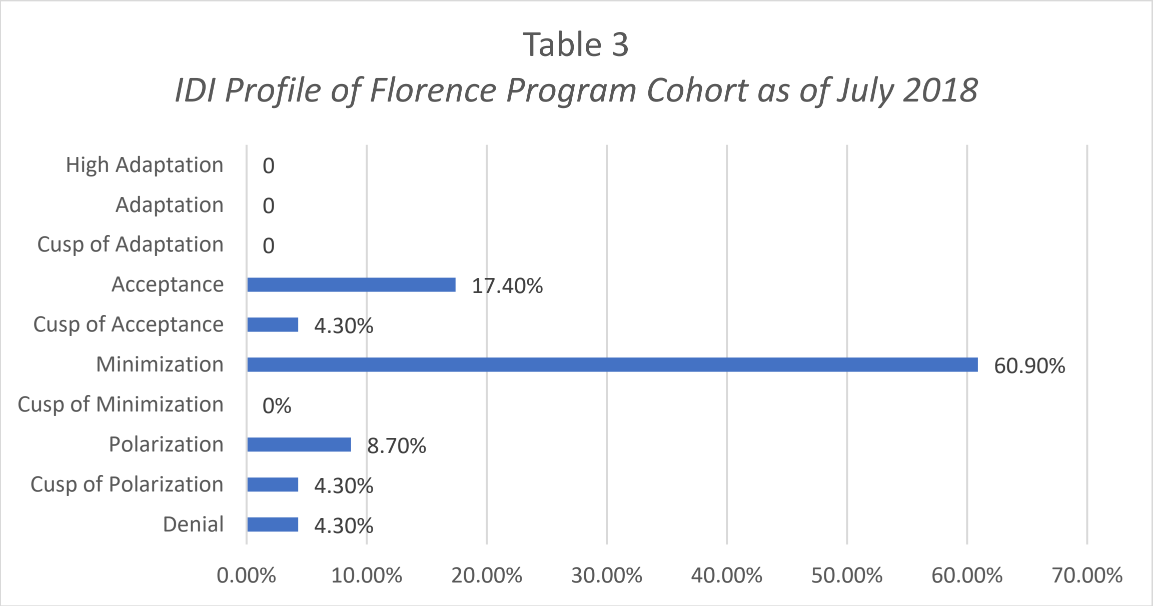

Table 3: IDI Group Debrief Percentages

The assumption that short-term study abroad can make a real difference in intercultural competence is somewhat unusual (Donnelly-Smith, 2009), and there seem to be only a handful of published studies, at present, which use the IDI to measure learning outcomes of short-term programs. At another Big 10 institution, a mean gain of 6.8 IDI points from short-term study abroad was observed (Anderson, 2016); while at an east coast private polytechnic university, an

8-week project-based overseas program for engineering students notched a mean gain of 5.28 IDI points (Demetry & Vaz, 2017). Most meaningful for me, as an instructor who more often facilitates short-term study abroad rather than semester-long experiences, has been the comparison to the research which uses the IDI to investigate outcomes of semester-long programs. This research has generally shown that an 8-13 point IDI gain might be expected from well-mentored, intentional semester long study abroad that includes cultural-general content (Vande Berg, Paige & Lou, 2012). The outcomes of my instructional journey with the Florence 2018 students suggest that a well-designed short-term program, with mentorship and leader engagement (in this case, made easier by using the GCC), can match or exceed the learning outcomes of a semester abroad**.** In other words, I found the re-design of this short-term program to have been well worth the effort!

BENCHMARKING THE OUTCOMES

A limitation of this case study, as with a lot of study abroad outcomes research, is that I did not have a control or comparison group as part of my program evaluation design; nor had I used the IDI instrument with prior Florence cohorts. In other words, I have no IDI data from this or prior years to support my assertion, as the instructor, that the 2018 Florence group outcome was significantly better by virtue of using the GCC. (Of course, I do have behavioral and written qualitative data which would support this conclusion.) Fortunately, Purdue's Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Effectiveness (OIRAE) houses an intercultural specialist who has been charged, since 2015, with providing an annual meta-analysis of the learning outcomes of Purdue-operated short-term study abroad programs. Drawing upon that data, then, the OIRAE specialist was able to tell me that, during either spring break or summer of 2018, there were six Purdue short-term programs that used a (non-GCC) cultural general approach along with intensive leader mentoring of students, and three programs other than mine that incorporated the GCC model I have described here. Table 4, following, depicts the learning outcomes of these programs in comparison to the Florence program. Note that the duration of these programs was about half the number of weeks of my Florence program, and all of these programs had the instructors accompanying the students for the full period of study abroad.

Pedagogy Approach	# of Students	Mean IDI gain
Culture-general but non-GCC	79	12.97 points
Florence 2018 Program (as described)	23	13.54 points
GCC + instructor on-site throughout program	52	15.36 points

Table 4: Benchmarking to Other Purdue 2018 Short Programs that Used Culture-General Approaches

Also during the spring or summer of 2018, seven Purdue short-term study abroad program leaders used no intentional intercultural mentoring curriculum, and their students' aggregate mean IDI change, with a sample totaling 85 students, came to -1.30 points (Stuart et al, 2019). Regression analysis on the full sample of 2018 pre-post student IDI scores indicated that the most meaningful predictor of gain on a Purdue 2018 short-term program was the student's beginning IDI score (e.g. students at the lowest end of the intercultural continuum grew more in part due to having more room to improve). The second strongest predictor of IDI growth was pedagogy; e.g. whether or not the instructor was trained in and used culture-general mentoring-based instructional approaches (Yngve, 2018), such as the GCC easily makes possible.

In other words, and in conclusion, the data from the bigger Purdue picture suggest that outcomes from my 2018 Florence experiment are probably replicable, as I had hoped. This suggests that should short-term study abroad leaders, who want to act as intercultural mentors, choose to replicate the design changes outlined here, they can expect to see meaningful gains in the intercultural development of their students.

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APPENDIX A: GCC CURRICULUM & MODULE SEQUENCE

Developmental

The **GCC educational goals** are derived from Vande Berg's four-step developmental framework shown in Figure 1:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Awareness about others
3. Emotional intelligence
4. Bridges to others

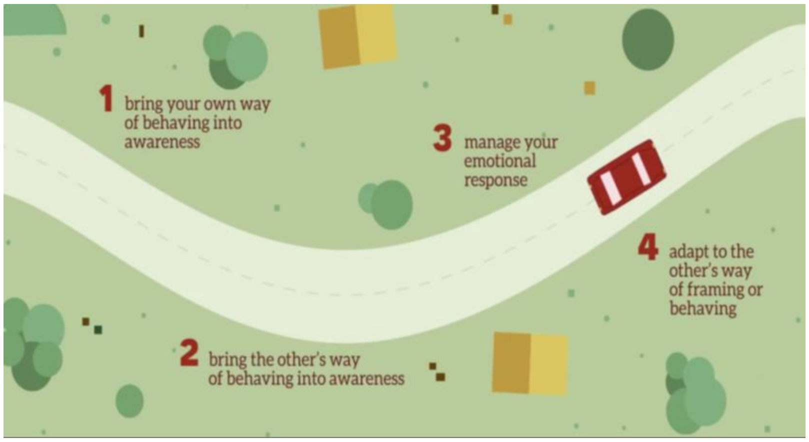
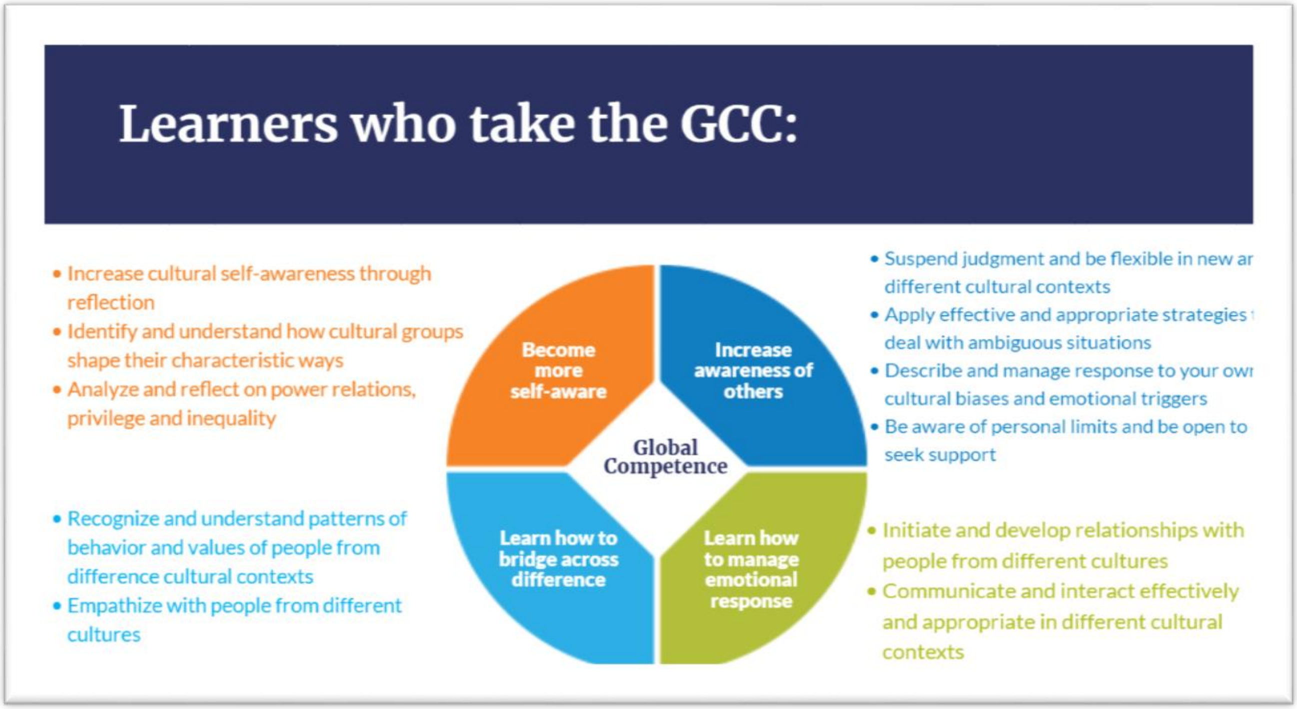

1 bring your own way of behaving into awareness
2 bring the other's way of behaving into awareness
3 manage your emotional response
4 adapt to the other's way of framing or behaving

Figure 1: Adapted from the work of Dr. Michael Vande Berg © 2019

Experiential

Designed to be used in blended and "flipped" learning contexts, the GCC engages learners across all four areas of Kolb's experiential learning cycle: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Active Experimentation. Participants can also share their thoughts in a global forum, react to others' comments and answer quizzes to validate what they have learned. Trained intercultural mentors engage each group in reflective dialogue four times throughout the learning journey to activate the full experiential learning cycle for all.

The 11 GCC Learning Goals



Learners who take the GCC:

- Increase cultural self-awareness through reflection
- Identify and understand how cultural groups shape their characteristic ways
- Analyze and reflect on power relations, privilege and inequality

Become more self-aware

Increase awareness of others

- Suspend judgment and be flexible in new ar different cultural contexts
- Apply effective and appropriate strategies deal with ambiguous situations
- Describe and manage response to your owr cultural biases and emotional triggers
- Be aware of personal limits and be open to seek support

Global Competence

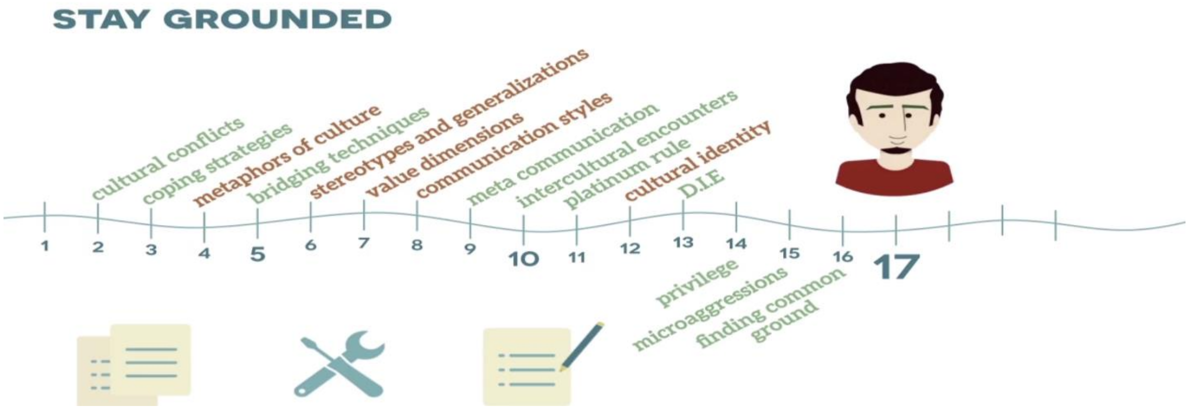
- Recognize and understand patterns of behavior and values of people from difference cultural contexts
- Empathize with people from different cultures

Learn how to bridge across difference

Learn how to manage emotional response

- Initiate and develop relationships with people from different cultures
- Communicate and interact effectively and appropriate in different cultural contexts

well as Wolf's (1986) suggested baselines for indicating whether an intervention has either educational significance (d = 0.25) or therapeutic/clinical significance (d = 0.50).



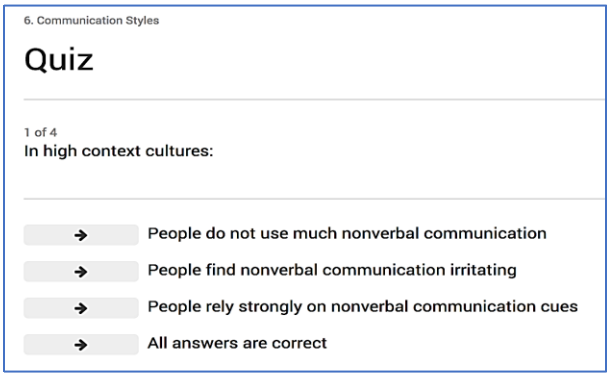
The full GCC curriculum is composed of 18 learning modules:

Preparation (Pre-Departure):
- Roadmap to intercultural learning
- Metaphors of culture
- "Me" as a cultural being
- Stereotypes and generalizations
- Cultural values
- Communication styles
- When cultures collide
- Balancing challenge and support
- How to cope with the challenges

Lived Experience:
- "Them" as cultural beings
- Cultural surprises and irritations
- Navigating culture
- Describe, Interpret and Evaluate: a framework
- More cultural values
- Dealing with conflict
- Power and privilege

Debrief (Re-Entry):
- Making sense of the experience
- Taking action

Examples of quizzes incorporated into the GCC learning modules:



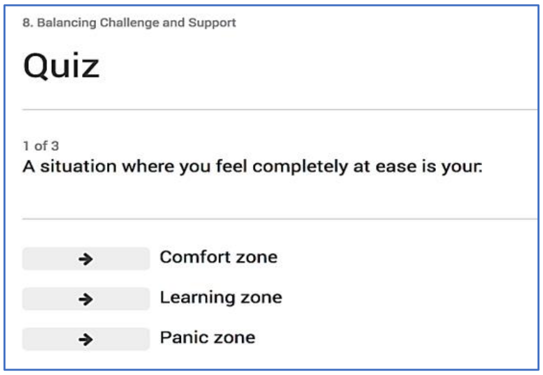
6. Communication Styles

Quiz

1 of 4

In high context cultures:

- ➔ People do not use much nonverbal communication
- ➔ People find nonverbal communication irritating
- ➔ People rely strongly on nonverbal communication cues
- ➔ All answers are correct



8. Balancing Challenge and Support

Quiz

1 of 3

A situation where you feel completely at ease is your:

- ➔ Comfort zone
- ➔ Learning zone
- ➔ Panic zone