

## Essential to students' intercultural learning abroad? Faculty intercultural development as key to leverage effective pedagogies

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### Abstract

In the realm of international education there are many calls to increase and improve faculty development to make study abroad experiences more intellectually and interculturally enriching, for both faculty and students (Anderson et al., 2016; Gillespie, 2019; Gillespie et al., 2020; Johnstone et al., 2020; Layne et al., 2020). In this study we analyze a particular faculty development structure as a model of effectiveness. Part of a larger study examining student learning on Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) programs, this article analyzes 22 educator interviews, specifically grouping and categorizing their stated pedagogical tactics, and found that this organization's intentional, highly mentored, relationship-rich faculty development program—centered on their own intercultural learning and growth—helped educators leverage pedagogies to effectively foster students' intercultural learning. We argue that faculty's intercultural learning is the key to empowering faculty's successful leveraging of dynamic pedagogies, not vice versa. Our study, thus, demonstrates the need for investment, expansion, and mentorship of integrated faculty development programming, particularly with regard to educators'

own intercultural growth, in order to implement effective pedagogies that activate and expand students' deep learning, especially while studying abroad.

**Keywords:** faculty development, mentoring, intercultural growth, transformative learning, pedagogical practices

### **Essential to students' intercultural learning abroad? Faculty intercultural development as key to leverage effective pedagogies**

Faculty development programs at U.S. higher education institutions, as well as in other countries' university systems, have gained prominence in the last decades because of a growing recognition of the connection between pedagogical skill and student learning (Condon et al., 2016). Faculty development professionals, networks (such as POD), and published research in the field actively explore how to impact the culture of teaching and learning at an institution (Gillespie et al., 2010). As a result, faculty development is fast becoming a vital pillar in the higher education landscape. Austin and Sorcinelli (2013) astutely asserted, "faculty development constitutes a strategic lever for institutional excellence and quality, and a critically important tool for fostering institutional readiness and change in response to the array of complex demands facing universities and colleges" (p. 95). Specifically in the realm of international education, there are many calls to increase and improve faculty development to make study abroad experiences more intellectually and interculturally enriching, for both faculty and students (Anderson et al., 2016; Gillespie, 2019; Gillespie et al., 2020; Johnstone et al., 2020; Layne et al., 2020). In this study we offer the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE; <https://www.ciee.org>), a study abroad provider, faculty development structure as a model.

Our discussion will focus on the intentional, systematic, and protracted professional development and mentorship for instructors that

accompanied the roll-out and implementation of a special course dedicated to developing students' intercultural learning. The aim of the course is students' intentional intercultural development; likewise, the organization's professional development is focused on faculty's intercultural development. In fact, faculty experience the course firsthand as learners, along with mentoring and ongoing intercultural development, before they teach the course to students. The results of our larger study indicate that faculty intercultural skills are tied to students' intercultural gains (Gibson et al., 2023). In this article in particular, we analyze how faculty apply their intercultural competence to effectively leverage pedagogies that enhance students' learning.

A dominant piece of faculty development is helping educators learn teaching skills that foster student learning via student-centered, engaged learning approaches. Approaches vary depending on context, needs, and changes faculty face, but the tendency is to focus on general pedagogical skills that faculty can acquire, apply, and practice in any discipline (Beach et al., 2016). New research is acknowledging success in discipline-specific pedagogies (Yoshinobu et al., 2023), coaching and mentoring models (Bloomberg, 2022; Carpenter, 2022), and book/topics-based learning communities or pedagogy circles (Carpenter, 2023). Calls are also being made to firmly root faculty development in transformational learning models in the Mezirow (1991) tradition so as to disrupt thinking and fundamentally change the status quo regarding teaching and learning (Ultsch et al., 2022).

An important strand of faculty development is rooted in adult education theories, Cranton's (1996, 2006, 2016) and Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) theory of authenticity being one of them. Cranton and Carusetta defined authenticity in teaching as being genuine, developing self-awareness, showing consistency between values and actions, relating to others in such a way as to encourage awareness of others and their needs, showing awareness of context and how it impacts self and others, and engaging in deep critical reflection that leads to changes in pedagogical practice (p. 7). LaBelle et al. (2023) expanded on Cranton and documented how faculty communicate authenticity

via language that demonstrates openness, a growth mindset, humility, connection, student empowerment, and course content illustration.

It is logical that as faculty develop interculturally, they in turn can better guide students' intercultural development. Nevertheless, as Cranton and Carusetta (2004) stated, "It is more common for people to look for standardized principles of effective practice than it is for them to turn inward and examine how it is that they as social human beings and individuals can develop their own way in the world of teaching" (p. 21). Despite the tendency of faculty development to overly stress teaching skills to improve pedagogical effectiveness and increase student learning, we argue for a more holistic approach, in line with Cranton, that roots students' learning in intentional faculty intercultural development and growth. As we found, faculty intercultural learning is the key to empowering their successful leveraging of dynamic pedagogies, not vice versa. Therefore, our study demonstrates the need for investment, expansion, and mentorship of integrated faculty development programming, particularly with regard to educators' own intercultural growth, in order to implement effective pedagogies that activate and expand students' learning while studying abroad.

## **Our Study**

To expand on the Georgetown Consortium (Vande Berg et al., 2009), we set out to analyze potential impacts on students' intercultural learning while studying abroad. In order to do so, we used pre- and post-Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) data from 1,858 U.S. undergraduate students studying at CIEE programs in Latin America, Asia, Europe, and Africa who took the optional Intercultural Communication and Leadership (ICL) course between 2014 and 2019. We collected demographic information via student surveys; had a control group of 109 students who did not take the ICL course; assessed student assignments; looked at educator IDI scores; and, in 2018–2019, held hour-long, semi-structured interviews with 22 educators from

across CIEE centers. The educator interviews, and how educators' apply their intercultural skills (as a result of intentional faculty development) to impact student learning, are the focus of this article.<sup>1</sup>The authors would like to thank CIEE for their cooperation and support in providing access to data, training materials, and instructors teaching Intercultural Communication and Leadership.

The main quantitative findings from our entire, large study indicate two factors that strongly impact students' intercultural learning: (1) active engagement with unfamiliar cultural contexts in non-traditional destinations and (2) highly experienced educators who act as cultural mentors to help students process the disorienting dilemmas in living abroad (Gibson et al., 2023). Importantly, students who took the ICL course had greater IDI Developmental Orientation (DO) score changes (ICL group average DO change = 5.71; Non-ICL group average DO change = -0.846), supporting the idea that students benefit from intentional, guided interventions to increase their intercultural skills (Gibson et al., 2023). In the present article, we further coded, anonymized, and analyzed the 22 educators' interviews, specifically grouping and categorizing their stated pedagogical tactics. In the end, we found that CIEE's intentional, highly mentored, relationship-rich faculty development program—centered on instructors' own intercultural learning and growth—helped educators leverage their intercultural learning and thus pedagogies to effectively foster students' intercultural learning in the ICL course.

## **The Intercultural Communication and Leadership (ICL) Course and Educator Training**

CIEE is one of the largest study abroad program providers in the United States, serving more than 10,000 study abroad students each year. CIEE programs aim to help people gain understanding, acquire knowledge, and develop the skills needed to live in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world. Inherent to their mission, the

focus on promoting intercultural learning is evident in both their extra-curricular and co-curricular programming as well as their commitment to offering the ICL course across the majority of their numerous academic programs in 45 countries. Furthermore, their commitment to intercultural learning extends to supporting and fostering staff and faculty intercultural competence via a carefully designed and implemented professional development program.

CIEE has historically invested in its employees' intercultural development—including administering an employee intercultural development program across all the organization's divisions (not just study abroad). The connection between professional development and intercultural growth has been evident in its organizational culture, and this has naturally extended to include centering the ICL course as a high-impact learning experience for both the student and instructor.

To effectively run the ICL course across a wide variety of cultural and program contexts, CIEE must hire competent, highly qualified instructors to teach a course that has strong potential for high-impact learning experiences. In most cases, the ICL course is taught by contract, local adjunct faculty members with teaching experience and a master's degree in a related field at minimum. Often, veteran CIEE resident directors and qualified full-time staff members teach the ICL as it is a highly sought after course to teach, for both its developmental approach and highly varied course activities that take place both in and outside of the classroom. To teach the ICL, instructors typically participate in extensive training and professional development.

The ICL content and approaches to teaching and learning were built to align with Paige's (2006) intercultural learning dimensions. The course description, that faculty take as part of their professional development program and students take as an elective to enhance their learning while abroad, includes:

In this class, students will develop skills, knowledge, and understanding that will help them communicate and engage more appropriately and effectively in [program location] as well as in other intercultural

contexts. Students will explore various topics in intercultural communication in the context of the study abroad experience and will practice intercultural learning processes to apply when working across difference in a wide variety of contexts. (CIEE, 2024)

Tied directly to the description are the learning objectives that focus on four key pillars: increasing cultural self-awareness, deepening understanding of both intercultural communication and key intercultural learning concepts and theories, increasing one's ability to recognize and bridge cultural gaps, and developing a leadership practice centering on competence. The through line of these outcomes is students' acquisition of a set of skills that supports an individual navigating cultural differences—within both a specific cultural context and a broader, more general understanding of key frameworks that can be applied to all cultural patterns and behaviors. The course development was informed by experts in the intercultural learning field, including direct collaboration with the original course creators Michael Vande Berg and Tara Harvey; Barbara Schaetti of the Personal Leadership practice; and Dianne Hofner Saphiere, creator of Cultural Detective.

One of the major contributors to the evolution of the course was the participation of the CIEE instructors providing their own culture-specific resources and articulating their perspectives on dominant and non-dominant cultural groups within the host context. In collaboration with the Academic Director of Intercultural Learning (formerly Tara Harvey, Elsa Maxwell, and Whitney Sherman), instructors regularly provided input on culture-specific content, offering both anecdotal evidence in the form of critical incident narratives (as part of intercultural communication theory) as well as key case studies, academic and non-academic articles, blog posts, podcasts, and other media found within the host context. The ICL instructors helped shape the development of the course, demonstrating the significance and value of their roles as faculty. Furthermore, the course is regularly augmented in alignment with best practices of teaching and learning in higher

education as well as updated with relevant curricular approaches, including adopting Brave Space Pedagogy (Sherman et al., 2019) and DEI-focused concepts such as unconscious bias, power and privilege, and concepts of stereotypes.

Providing holistic ICL instructor training is a crucial component of the CIEE experience. In addition to receiving and collaborating on teaching materials, regular one-on-one coaching, and support with CIEE Academic Affairs staff, instructors engage in both internal and external opportunities for intercultural learning-focused professional development. For instance, between 2009 and 2016, 20 CIEE instructors attended the Summer Institute of Intercultural Communication (SIIC) in Portland, Oregon, while 10 were trained as Qualified Administrators of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). In 2014 to 2015, 12 instructors attended a 5-month virtual training course led by Barbara Schaetti, co-author of *Personal Leadership: Making a World of Difference* (Schaetti et al., 2008). When budget allowed, certain instructors also attended Harvard Graduate School of Education seminars and workshops in-person. While external training opportunities shifted depending on the offerings and funding, newly hired ICL instructors were enrolled in a 6-week asynchronous virtual instructor training program offered three times each year via Canvas LMS. The training program enabled each instructor to experience the course content firsthand, experiment with different facilitation strategies both in-person and in virtual contexts, understand CIEE academic standards, and deeply focus on their own intercultural development as preparation to teach the ICL course.

There were also consistent opportunities to attend virtual and in-person teaching workshops centering on best practices for teaching and learning in study abroad and higher education contexts. Topics included Facilitating Difficult Discussions, Leveraging the IDI in the Classroom, ICL Updates, New Instructor Check-Ins, Supporting Underrepresented Students, among others. The Academic Director of Intercultural Learning often co-facilitated these sessions with veteran ICL instructors. While the workshops were not required, most instructors



typically attended the virtual sessions. Recordings and presentation notes were provided for all ICL instructors, for later reference, via the Intercultural Learning Collective, an online, Canvas-based community. Created specifically for ICL instructors, this digital community was also a repository for course facilitation guides, slide decks, and mandatory and suggested readings, as well as a regularly monitored online discussion board for teaching-related questions and ideas. The virtual community setting encouraged collaboration, discussion, reflection, and even course concepts such as cultural self-awareness activities among instructors, modeling the major pedagogical approaches of the course.

The training emphasized educators' own intercultural development and aimed to impart a solid understanding of CIEE's approach to intercultural learning. Utilizing a train-the-trainer model, instructors completed the training from a student perspective, completing many of the same student assignments and activities themselves. Activities they were to facilitate in class were applied to a virtual format mostly via written and video discussion boards on Flip, a digital tool used to share and record video responses. For instance, the main activities during Week 1 of the training course emphasized cultural self-awareness, mirroring what students experienced during the early weeks of ICL. Educators engaged in Describe-Interpret-Evaluate, a foundational introductory activity of looking at images and doing the discrete steps of the title (describe, interpret, and evaluate) to contest held notions and assumptions. The activity explores cultural identity, self-awareness, global-local community, interdependence, and intercultural praxis, among other interrelated themes. The virtual discussion board format provided an impactful learning moment for educators.

Another major component to training instructors was a formal mentorship program with assignments and engagement embedded into the 6-week ICL instructor training Canvas-based course. The instructor training program encouraged the cultivation of instructors' intercultural growth, with each instructor participating in several one-on-one intercultural coaching sessions with the Academic Director of Intercultural Learning. In addition, new ICL instructors were matched with

experienced ICL instructors across cultural and physical boundaries. Pairs or triads would meet a minimum of two times the semester prior to when the new instructor would commence teaching. Conversations included open-ended time but were also scaffolded with suggested questions, for both the mentee and mentor, such as:

- What is the most gratifying aspect of teaching the ICL course? What motivates you to teach it?
- What is the most challenging aspect of teaching the course? Did (or do) you struggle with any aspects of it?
- What was it like teaching it for the first time? What made you nervous? What felt intimidating at first but now feels easy or second nature?
- What does debriefing mean to you? (Or in other words, how would you define debriefing?) Why is it important in your teaching practice? How did you learn to become good at it? What makes a good debriefer?
- Share what you do for the cultural engagement activities. How do you incorporate debriefing into them?
- What other tips, advice, or suggestions might you have for me?

Upon meeting with their mentors, the mentees reflected on their conversations via a discussion board as part of their virtual ICL instructor training during Weeks 4 and 6. Participants in the instructor training were encouraged to read the reflective summaries and comment on their peers' insights as a way to expand the dialogue happening outside of the training. Engaging in this mentorship experience was beneficial from the teaching perspective, but it also encompassed cultural mentorship as an intercultural intervention, again mirroring the ICL student experience. Certain ICL assignments require students to engage in cultural mentoring and exchange so instructors also had the opportunity to embody that cultural mentorship.

Leveraging ICL pedagogy for CIEE instructors and staff was only the beginning. The overlap in using ICL content to strengthen instructors'

intercultural development was also used via other in-house training and professional development. Around 2014 to 2020, CIEE invested in the company-wide Employee Intercultural Development program. This initiative used many of the methodologies and concepts featured in the ICL course and aimed to increase the intercultural development of *all* participating staff members, including both CIEE onsite and U.S.-based staff. Intentional, strategic cultivation of intercultural skills has clearly been a priority for CIEE.

Educators' increased their own intercultural development via all the opportunities offered by CIEE instructor training, cultural mentoring from seasoned colleagues, one-on-one coaching with the Academic Director of Intercultural Learning, and total engagement of ICL material from the learner's perspective. These factors all led the interviewed educators to vocalize how they implemented effective pedagogies, from an intercultural frame, that activate and expand students' learning while studying abroad.

## **Effective Pedagogies Stemming From Educators' Own Intercultural Growth**

The interviews, led by three of the four researchers of this study, indicated common teaching tactics that educators implemented to effectively enhance student learning, which stemmed from their intentionally mentored and supported intercultural development via both the CIEE Employee Intercultural Development training and the ICL instructor training and mentoring.

The 22 educators who volunteered to be interviewed admittedly did so because they were excited to talk about teaching and learning, and, as such, a strong collective profile of common teaching tactics emerged from the interviews. Educators adapted the curriculum, were responsive to students' needs, infused intercultural learning in all interactions, leveraged their social networks to create cultural exchange events for students, and constructed intentional opportunities for

students' application and integration of learning. Importantly, the interviews also highlighted educators' perspectives, mindframes, or worldviews that likewise spurred learning—that of their students and their own. The educators demonstrate a dedication to constant growth and exploration and actively apply their intercultural skills to bridge with students. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the pedagogical tactics that came out of the interviews; below the figure are the concrete details and explanations, with direct quotes from the participants.

The visualization in Figure 1 demonstrates how these specific pedagogical approaches interconnect through a dynamic and holistic approach to supporting faculty intercultural development, which in turn invokes student intercultural learning and growth. As the figure indicates, most foundationally, offering peer and explicit mentorship opportunities to faculty illustrates the core of our qualitative research: continuous investment in faculty via intentional and integrated training is central to both their intercultural development and, consequently, the intercultural growth of students. The focus on faculty engaging in their own intercultural learning through mentorship and training opportunities empowers them to translate their intercultural attitudes, skills and behaviors into effective pedagogies that develop students' intercultural capacities. These pedagogies are interconnected, stacked, and layered, as demonstrated in the concentric circles. As faculty implement these pedagogies, the practice fosters their own intercultural development, which spurs leveraging more and better pedagogies in a continuous, overlapping feedback loop.

### ***Adapting Curriculum to Context and Student Needs***

Instructors vocalized the many ways in which they assessed the situation and then flexed and adapted to bridge with the curriculum and the students. This section reflects on the instructors' efforts and skills in tailoring teaching methods and learning content to support students.

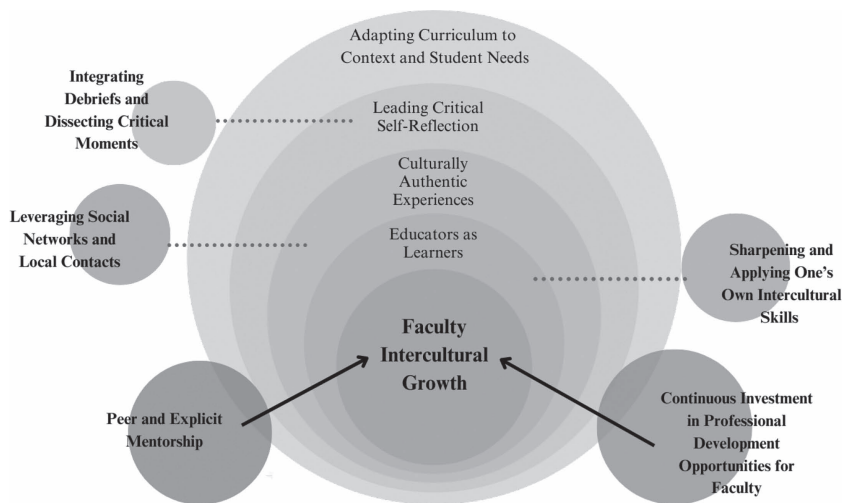


Figure 1. Effective Pedagogies and Practices as a Result of Supported Faculty Intercultural Development

*Making the standardized curriculum culturally relevant and “theirs”*

While a part of the intentional internal mentoring, effective CIEE study abroad educators make small changes to the course activities and assignments that make the course “theirs.” This is an important step in using a constructed, standardized curriculum that is, admittedly, still grounded in U.S. perspectives and approaches. They find culture-specific examples to demonstrate and allow students to apply the culture-general concepts. For instance, educators noted they find authentic cultural realia such as TED talks, YouTube videos, news articles, movies, foods, cultural partners, etc. to provide concrete examples from their country and cultural contexts. They find ways to remain authentic to themselves and their cultures by adapting the materials yet staying true to the core concepts of the intercultural learning-focused course. As one instructor states,

In my case, for instance, when we did the Cultural Detective I found it to be a little too panoptic and generic and I did not feel that was the

most effective way of teaching culture and culture differences and approaches to cultural sensitivity, for example. The culture values, the “Cultural Detective” ones, I don’t teach it. But I find at least the graphic on the value lenses to be useful. So I use that as an illustration, as a tool, to help students think in a more focused way about some of the values that have helped shape them. So I do a lot of adaptation, actually. (Participant E3)

In another example, an educator wove the Personal Leadership (PL) framework throughout the course instead of having it as a discrete unit because they felt the students needed more time to practice PL skills. Importantly, the educators find agency and ownership in adapting the materials to their particular cultural contexts and make changes so that students learn more.

#### *Responding and adapting to students’ needs*

Related to adapting the curriculum, effective educators are responsive to students’ learning and holistic needs. They repeatedly speak about flexibility in pacing of activities based on students’ interests, questions, experiences, etc. For instance, when they note students are dragging or in the downswing of the W-curve, they have class outside or in the university cafeteria to question the construct of a traditional classroom. As one participant notes, an educator’s attitude guides this adaptation, flexibility, and responsiveness: “I think the professor also needs to have the right attitude to reach the students. It’s not a formula that you can apply that is good for all students. Different students need to be stimulated differently” (Participant E2). Other tactics mentioned include adding assignments that intervene on a lacking skill or behavior; reading responses when students do not read critically enough; a visit by a local expert on digital storytelling to improve final projects; critical analysis or research papers to push their thinking skills further; providing much more concrete examples to a quiet class to get discussion going but holding back on those examples with a

more talkative class so students generate the examples; using pre-discussion prep questions or reflections to support robust discussions; and sharing journals when group dynamics are fraught or active participation is low. Yet educators also move forward with the course curriculum and provide an important roadmap for student learning by focusing on the course's core concepts and practicing of intercultural skills. Educators adapt their pedagogy and/or assignments according to students' needs, which means they have to be responsive, nimble, flexible, and adaptive to differing individual students and group dynamics: "So I find a way to be in class and they understand my way but can change according to their needs also" (Participant A2).

Instructors demonstrated confidence and agency in highlighting key course concepts—achieving the learning objectives but also serving as both cultural stewards and active agents of learning. They recognized students' varying needs while also bringing the cultural context and authenticity into their teaching.

### ***Leading Critical Self-Reflection***

Key to fostering deeper learning is teaching primarily U.S. students to make observations about another country and cultural context, to question their perceptions, and to generate multiple perspectives in interpreting those observations. Educators ask students questions instead of providing answers and they push students to constantly ask *why* and not just stay at the observation stage. Critical incidents and debriefs (Appendices A and B) are integral to that process. Educators use critical incidents, no matter how minor, to help students process and apply concepts; debriefs are so integral and consistently practiced that students by the end of the term are leading them themselves and after an activity automatically respond to the debrief questions. Moreover, educators have students constantly connect course materials to their daily interactions and life/lived study abroad experiences. This section demonstrates the instructors' commitment to pausing and reflecting on their own intercultural journey, sharing and leveraging

their own critical moments. Instructors relied heavily on debriefs where they would check in with students, pausing their formal lessons and course content delivery to listen, question, and support students as they described key learning moments.

### *Questioning assumptions*

Most educators interviewed noted that intercultural learning was interwoven in each and every interaction with their students, whether in or out of the class, which allowed them to intervene and question students' emotional responses and interpretations of situations with the target country cultures. As one educator states, "it's questioning, questioning, questioning students and trying to get them to self-reflect that for me seems to be one of the most important pieces" (Participant A1). The constant questioning helps students explore the why of their own reactions (and better see their cultural lenses and biases) as well as the target culture's reasons for behaving the way they do. Educators lead students through discernment via activities, questions, and reflection, making the process of discovery just as important as the ending understanding, if not more so. For instance, educators often embed experiential activities into the class period: go buy ice cream now and let's talk about it when you get back or go sit at a café for 20 minutes (without looking at your phone!) and watch local student-to-student interactions. Students then unpack their observations and construct knowledge in community, helping generate more possible interpretations and learning how to question and check them.

### *Integrated debriefs and dissecting critical moments*

Two essential tools that educators rely heavily on are the critical incidents and debriefs post engaged learning, experiential activities; both help students apply and integrate their learning (see Appendices A and B). Critical incidents (sometimes called critical moments or critical moment dialogue) are a moment of internal pausing where



we choose to disconnect from our automatic response, consider the cultural perspective(s) at hand, and ultimately engage our intercultural competence as we discern the right action to take in the cultural exchange (Schaetti et al., 2008). Critical incidents can be shared orally or in written form, individually or as a group, and are an important piece to develop self-awareness and multiple perspective-taking skills: "So every time a critical incident comes, I make them see it from the other perspective. As you, as an individual, take a step back, process it, look at it as you, as a person, and necessarily consider the other person's reaction, whether it was negative or positive. Work on you first" (Participant C1). Most educators said that an important piece was allowing fellow students to generate alternative interpretations as well as providing examples of critical incidents and discernment from former students (with prior permission, of course). Feedback from educators as well as peers and cultural mentors (host family, cultural and/or conversation partners) was essential in students developing the habit of questioning and deeply analyzing their interpretations. As one educator highlighted:

Okay, they start asking themselves the WHY rather than just making a statement about what's happening, to start thinking about the why things are the way they are. I always keep telling them, it's not a question whether you like or not like, but what's around you, you just need to understand why it happens and there's a reason why this is like this and if you go through that process that is going to help you have a better understanding and enjoy the experience [of living abroad]. . . . [T]hat's what I like about the class—helping them go through that process. (Participant D3)

Debriefs are equally important to the process of developing self-awareness and critical analysis. A series of specific, intentionally crafted questions created by a notable intercultural educator and based on the "Kolb-Thiagi" method (see Appendix A), this style of debriefing creates a space for facilitators to engage critical reflection after an

activity (Vande Berg et al., 2012). Again, the educators repeatedly mentioned that debriefs were, and had to be, an integral part of any activity to guide students' reflection and understanding of a concept; the debriefs become a habitual way of thinking and processing—a nod to the importance of metacognition to the process of deep learning. As one participant asserted, "we do debriefs so often that they're already trained, they already know and I can sit there and just, like, say nothing during the class. They will contribute and every time they get comments and they are, to me, very enlightening . . . so kind of hearing how they take things and how they process them and how they unpack them" (Participant B2). The engaged, embedded activities, plus integral questioning and reflection, whether oral or written, are tactics educators leverage in order to deepen their students' learning processes, which then students internalize via all the practice in and out of the classroom.

### ***Culturally Authentic Experiences***

Instructors regularly offered cultural realia and authentic experiences as prime opportunities to consider cultural behaviors and values to help students adapt to key cultural situations. Instructors identified what might be happening beyond the classroom as an opportunity for students to digest, explore, and engage with the cultural context at hand.

#### *Leveraging social networks and local contacts*

Another repeated tactic educators rely on is cultural exchange activities; importantly, educators leverage their social networks and local contacts to spur student growth. These engagements can take many forms:

- asking students to engage with locals (prompted discussions with host families about a particular topic, structured conversations with

other university students in the cafeteria, language exchanges, extracurricular activities such as sports clubs, interview four locals about a topic and get their perspective sort of assignment, weekly buddy or cultural partner programs, etc.);

- attending local events (university or community-wide ones);
- inviting guest speakers to class or visiting specific people (experts on a particular topic or to see real-world examples of intercultural communications); and
- tours with trained guides (or the educators themselves) that emphasize core course ideas, experiential learning, and provide locals' insight.

For a particular example, multiple instructors ask local students studying at the same university to come to particular classes so that both groups of students hear about some aspect of cultural theory and unpack specific case studies. The local students often hear things about their culture and think about it for the first time, and the collective unpacking of it offers a multitude of perspectives that both groups can then compare and contrast. Educators asserted that students needed these intentional cultural exchanges to expand their perspectives; they likewise needed integrated reflection writings or discussions to make sense of the learning prompted by the exchanges. Vitally, educators noted the extra time commitment necessary to maintain relationships and organize such activities and engagements but saw it as absolutely necessary for students' depth of learning.

### *Integrating students' learning*

Application and integration of learning was foremost on educators' minds as they designed daily lessons. They provide students with examples from their own intercultural interactions, from their own study abroad experiences, from former students' experiences, from former students' assignments, etc. as a way to illustrate concepts. They provide authentic cultural materials (songs, videos, articles, TV

shows, etc.) that, again, demonstrate general culture or theoretical concepts with culture-specific examples. Educators also ask students to provide examples from their lived experiences in the target country and to connect them to course concepts:

Every week, on the weekends, I ask them to relate things that happened to them, people they met or situations with the concepts that we've seen in class. I'm trying to relate their daily life with what we do in class. I ask, "Why do you think it is like this?" Why and asking and asking and trying to get them to reach intercultural competency, that they think of it. That they come to realize something. (Participant D2)

Many stated that they are constantly exploring ways to make students articulate connections, whether in class discussions or in assignments: "I put more emphasis on, please, when you are journaling, try to explain or tie whatever you're doing to something we've done in the class—concepts, topics, etc." (Participant D4). Educators ask students to apply ICL course concepts and integrate their learning into other realms (daily life, conceptualizations of self, actions, perspectives, practiced skills, etc.).

### ***Educators as Learners***

Notably, educators spoke about the importance of certain attitudes toward their own and students' learning and that to be effective they integrate and apply intercultural learning and ICL course concepts to themselves, their teaching, and their interactions with others. They have a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) that guides a constant cycle of course improvements and adaptations based on students' needs. They model curiosity and thirst for learning. They commit to their own self development and growth, as humans, as pedagogues, as relational beings. They likewise position themselves as facilitators of learning instead of transmitters of knowledge: "I tell them from the beginning. You know, I am still learning. This scenario is where I'm

learning constantly with you and through you in a way. So that's my role, learning with them" (Participant A4). Educators firmly articulate they believe all *can* learn and grow and that their role is to foster that growth, in any way they can, in themselves and others. The approach of educators as learners enabled faculty to embrace a growth mindset where they embodied curiosity and demonstrated a continuous desire to evolve as learners themselves. This is directly related to the notion that intercultural competence is developmental and dynamic as it requires effort to sharpen and apply such a skill set.

Ultimately, educators apply their own intercultural skills to constantly bridge with students and are cognizant of such application. Since the majority of CIEE educators commented that all interactions with students, whether in class or outside of it, are moments for intercultural learning and development, they must practice their own skills to navigate these moments. As noted, they apply ICL course concepts to their own intercultural development and share those "aha moments" with students:

It's about knowing yourself, understanding yourself, understanding some of what makes up you, what are some of the identities, what are the influences, how do I respond in a particular way to certain situations. For me, it's around self leadership. It's about creating a vision for yourself and then also an awareness of self in response to the other. (Participant E1)

I try to apply what I teach in the ICL to myself. . . . I don't think you need to leave your culture in order to put into practice what you have learned. So I try to apply most of the things from communication to frame shifting to personal leadership. I apply all the knowledge of those concepts into my own life. So I try to make meaning and that is something that I sometimes share with my students. (Participant C4)

Furthermore, educators listen intently, suspend judgment, analyze the situation critically, generate multiple perspectives, attend to emotions,

tap into self-awareness, act mindfully and foster mutual understanding. They do so as they analyze and adapt the ICL course, as they decide how to structure daily classes, and as they interact with students, all with the intent of fostering their own and their students' learning and development. Their own intercultural learning, practice, and application—fostered by CIEE's various intercultural professional development training and mentorship programs—lead educators to choose and implement teaching strategies that effectively develop students' intercultural learning. Educators' enhanced intercultural pedagogical effectiveness stems from their increased intercultural development.

### **Implications for Education Abroad Programs and Faculty Development**

As the results of our interviews illuminate, professional development and mentoring programs that foster faculty intercultural learning lead to increased pedagogical skills used to bridge with students and increase learning. These findings offer key implications for other education abroad programs and contexts.

First, it was clear CIEE invested heavily in financial and human resources during the first few years of rolling out and expanding the ICL course locations. Initially, there were numerous external and internal trainings and, what became, a full-time director overseeing all aspects of the ICL course and its instructors. Unfortunately, however, the number of external trainings decreased and the focus became on virtual in-house opportunities, when duties allowed. As study abroad in a post-pandemic context rebuilds, our study indicates that heavy investment in faculty development, both within the organization and funding external opportunities, highly impacts the teaching and learning that happens on the ground. Not only should this training investment be adopted within the program provider context but also across the education abroad field, including the institutional realm. Heavy investment in faculty training, coaching,

and mentorship inherently supports student intercultural growth, as evidenced by our data.

Relatedly, CIEE started with a clear intent to develop *all* faculty and staff intercultural development in the organization, thus leading a cultural transformation in their workforce and institution. And over the past decade, CIEE has adapted its organizational mission to highlight its commitment to intercultural learning. Nevertheless, decreased funding has provided fewer training and mentorship opportunities and, overall, less emphasis on holistic and targeted faculty development. Thus, this notion of full cultural transformation geared toward interculturally competent staff and faculty may not have fully taken root. For a cultural shift to happen—that all faculty and staff are constantly learning and growing interculturally—a new pathway needs to disrupt and replace prior socialized values, beliefs, and behaviors (Harro, 2000). Financial investment in faculty development therefore needs to be *sustained* over time to allow faculty to internalize, practice, and apply their intercultural capabilities in the pedagogical realm.

Second, the data from our larger study and the interviews expanded upon here support the growing evidence linking faculty development and student learning. For decades researchers have slowly documented, in various ways, the relationship between faculty capacities and student learning (Bass, 2020; Condon et al., 2016). Again, our larger study (Gibson et al., 2023) documents the significance of faculty in student learning. Though we only interviewed 22 faculty who went through intentional, mentored, intercultural training and both experienced and taught a course designed to develop intercultural learning, the educator interviews detail the pedagogical techniques used to elicit such heightened student learning. Clearly, more faculty interviews would expand our understanding of the ways in which educators apply their interculturality in a pedagogical context; nevertheless, the present group further elucidates the connection between faculty skill and student learning. As demonstrated, developing faculty intercultural capabilities and mentoring them through the application of

their own intercultural learning in the (study abroad) teaching context has a direct impact on advancing students' intercultural growth. Thus, institutions, organizations, and the field should commit to sustained, holistic, mentored faculty and staff intercultural development.

When connected, the development and mentored application of intercultural learning, which elicits enhanced intercultural learning, fosters a continuous cycle of growth. Faculty apply their intercultural learning skills to be better cultural mentors and pedagogues; when they see the results, via unprompted debriefs or strong faculty-student relationships for instance, that feedback encourages educators to continue to interculturally bridge with the curriculum, students, and themselves. Student learning becomes the affirmation and motivation for continued faculty intercultural learning. Furthermore, the unpacking and processing of experiences is important; educators themselves need to experience the unpacking via debriefs during their training and mentoring. When they practice debriefing as a learner, they gain greater skill and confidence to lead students through the debriefing process. When instructors experience the debriefs themselves, this creates a strong foundation of shared experience and effective implementation. Thus, again, there is a need for intentional, sustained, mentored faculty and staff intercultural development.

Another major implication of this study is that as individuals build a foundation of strong intercultural competence that is rooted in deep self-awareness work, cultural bridging activities, and critical moment dialogues, they are better primed to engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. The educators we interviewed were learners on their own journey and as such became more and more aware of their own and others' culture, perspectives, behaviors, attitudes, and identities. Future training opportunities that are intentional and strategic could leverage this foundation of intercultural competence work, propelling participants to address and respond to issues involving oppression and privilege and ultimately changing



systems and structures that perpetuate inequity. The pedagogies and practices that support faculty intercultural growth, which are identified in this study, could arguably enhance the deconstruction of bias, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism, creating awareness of microaggressions and practices that ignore or disrespect others' backgrounds (López-Rocha, 2023).

In sum, our study, and in particular the educator interviews, illuminate that when instructors were intentionally trained and mentored successfully, they were able to leverage their own intercultural learning skills to effectively and impactfully develop their students' skills via pedagogical interventions, as evidenced in increased student IDI scores (Gibson et al., 2023). Providing holistic faculty training and coaching enhances student learning via instructor empowerment. When time, space, and commitment are prioritized, educators own the pedagogy and optimize the classroom experience. Specifically, they adapt the curriculum to the cultural and group context while demonstrating responsiveness to students' needs. Using the host culture and context, these faculty constructed intentional opportunities for students to reflect, apply, and integrate their learning. Furthermore, this dedication to exploration and curiosity was intrinsically tied to their own intercultural skills, used to productively bridge with students. Again, faculty's intercultural learning and growth are the key to empowering their successful leveraging of effective pedagogies that deepen student learning; when faculty go through a mentored, critically reflective process of analyzing perspectives, questioning assumptions, negotiating identities in multiple contexts and with diverse audiences, navigating emotional responses to disorienting dilemmas, and bridging with difference, they can better leverage those skills to teach their students how to do so as well. We urge an intentional, systematic, and sustained investment, expansion, and mentorship of integrated faculty development programming, particularly with regard to educators' own intercultural growth, in order to expand students' learning, especially while studying abroad.

## Biographies

**Whitney Sherman** is a scholar-practitioner in the field of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) and intercultural learning spaces with experience overseeing education abroad initiatives at CEA CAPA, the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), the University of Southern California, and Boston University. She has taught in the intercultural competence specialization at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey and has lived and worked in Niger, France, Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania. Her past publications focus on intercultural training, impacts of intercultural learning, expanding access in study abroad, and nonformal learning.

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**Annie Gibson** is the Director of Study Abroad and Administrative Associate Professor at Tulane University. She teaches courses in Intercultural Learning, Social Innovation and Practice, Latin American Studies, and Spanish and Portuguese. Her areas of research and publication include Cuban and Brazilian performance cultures, immigration, travel and tourism studies, and intercultural development during study abroad for both students and faculty.

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## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest.

## Data Availability

The data reported in this manuscript are available on request by contacting the corresponding author.

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## Appendix A. Debriefing Guide

The following debrief approach is based on Thiagi's approach (adapted with permission from the author; see <https://www.thiagi.com>).

### How to Debrief an Activity or Exercise

Thiagi's six-phase model to structure debriefing questions. Here are some guidelines for each phase of this model.

#### ***Phase 1: How Do You Feel?***

This phase gives the participants an opportunity to get strong feelings and emotion off their chest. It makes it easier for them to be more objective during the later phases.

Begin this phase with a broad question that invites the participants to get in touch with their feelings about the activity and its outcomes. Encourage them to share these feelings, listening actively to one another in a nonjudgmental fashion.

#### ***Phase 2: What Happened?***

In this phase, collect data about what happened during the activity. Encourage the participants to compare and contrast their recollections and to draw general conclusions during the next phase.

Begin this phase with a broad question that asks the participants to recall important events from the training activity. Create and post a chronological list of events. Ask questions about specific events.

#### ***Phase 3: What Did You Learn?***

In this phase, encourage the participants to generate and test different hypotheses. Ask the participants to come up with principles based on the activity and discuss them.

Begin this phase by presenting a principle and asking the participants for data that supports or rejects it. Then invite the participants to offer other principles based on their experiences.

#### ***Phase 4: How Does This Relate To the Real World?***

In this phase, discuss the relevance of the activity to the participants' real-world experiences.

Begin with a broad question about the relationship between the experiential learning activity and events in the workplace. Suggest that the activity is a metaphor and ask participants to offer real-world analogies.

#### ***Phase 5: What If?***

In this phase, encourage the participants to apply their insights to new contexts. Use alternative scenarios to speculate on how people's behaviors would change.

Begin this phase with a change scenario and ask the participants to speculate on how it would have affected the process and the outcomes of the activity. Then invite the participants to offer their own scenarios and discuss them.

#### ***Phase 6: What Next?***

In this phase, ask the participants to undertake action planning. Ask them to apply their insights from the experiential activity to the real world.

Begin this phase by asking the participants to suggest strategies for use in future rounds of the activity. Then ask the participants how they will change their real-world behavior as a result of the insights gained from the activity.

## **Appendix B. Critical Moment Dialogue (with permission from authors)**

For additional information on the critical moment dialogue (CMD), including a long-form version, please see chapter 10 of Barbara F. Schaetti, Sheila J. Ramsey, and Gordon C. Watanabe's *Personal Leadership: Making a World of Difference* (FlyingKite, 2008, pp. 131–145).

### **Critical Moment Dialogue (CMD) Short-Form Mindmap**

#### ***Engaging the CMD***

This is a moment of choice. You are choosing to explore for yourself the essential truth of a particular situation or experience rather than rely on your habits and the way you usually act, speak, or interpret the world around you. Working through the CMD process supports you to access your full intelligence and return, over and over again, to offering your highest and best to your colleagues and clients, to your families, and to your communities.

#### ***Keys to Success***

Take a few deep breaths and relax. Bring your attention into your heart area. Breathe in and out from your heart area until you feel calm.

#### ***Listen Deeply***

Place all your expectations, desires, and ideas about what to do into the background so that you can really listen deeply to your own inner wisdom.



### ***Be Honest***

Be utterly honest with yourself about all your judgments, your personal feelings, your physical sensations, and what these mean to you.

### ***Value Surprises***

Allow and value surprises and insights that are completely unexpected. When these show up, you know you are moving beyond automatic pilot and "life as usual" into new understanding.

### ***Observe Yourself***

Engage your observer self, your witness, so that your reactions to the outcomes of this CMD as it unfolds do not block you or stop you. In this way you can follow the inner dialogue to its full completion.

How do you know the CMD is really complete? Observe your inner sensations. Notice whether you're feeling diminished, heavy, and confused or energized, light, and alive. When you feel lighter, calmer, and more alive, you can trust that the CMD is complete . . . for now!

### ***And Remember***

Using the CMD makes possible an embodied shift into inspiration and aliveness even when beginning at your most resistant. Whether or not you ever discuss this with others, this shift within yourself enhances the creative potential in all your relationships.

# Critical Moment Dialogue (CMD) Short-Form Mindmap (visual)

**CRITICAL MOMENT DIALOGUE (CMD)  
SHORT-FORM MINDMAP**

<p><b>Aligning With Vision</b> How does my experience align or not with my vision? How can I strengthen that alignment?</p>	<p><b>Describe Your Something's Up</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Attending to Judgment</b> What are my positive and negative judgments about myself, others, and the situation? What am I assuming?</p>
<p><b>Engaging Ambiguity</b> What do I not know? What more can I not know?</p>		<p><b>Attending to Emotion</b> What are the positive and negative emotions I am having, and why do I care so much?</p>
<p><b>Cultivating Stillness</b> As I take a breath, what insights come?</p>		<p><b>Attending to Physical Sensation</b> What are my physical sensations and what are they trying to tell me?</p>
<p><b>And Then ...</b></p> 		
<p><b>Discerning Right Action</b> What, if anything, is the right thing for me to do or say?</p>		
<p><b>What have I learned from this reflection?</b> In what ways am I more able to adjust my behaviors to suit the unique moment?</p>		

