Theory Reflections: Intercultural Competence Framework/Model

       Successful intercultural interactions are at the heart of what international education is all about. So what does it mean to interact successfully with those from different cultures? This is the key question underlying the concept of intercultural competence, the focus of my research which led to the development of an intercultural competence framework, or model. Through my research, I worked with leading intercultural scholars in reaching consensus on a definition and elements comprising intercultural competence, resulting in the first grounded research-based framework, or model, of intercultural competence. The framework is comprised of the following:

Attitudes: Based on my study, several essential attitudes emerged, those of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery. Openness and curiosity imply a willingness to risk and to move beyond one's comfort zone. In communicating respect to others, it is important to demonstrate that others are valued. These attitudes are foundational to the further development of knowledge and skills needed for intercultural competence.

Knowledge: In regard to knowledge necessary for intercultural competence, intercultural scholars concurred on the following: cultural self-awareness (meaning the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity and worldview), culture-specific knowledge[1] , deep cultural knowledge including understanding other world views, and sociolinguistic awareness. The one element agreed upon by all the intercultural scholars was the importance of understanding the world from others' perspectives.

Skills: The skills that emerged from this study were ones that addressed the acquisition and processing of knowledge: observation, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating.

Internal Outcomes: These attitudes, knowledge, and skills ideally lead to an internal outcome that consists of flexibility, adaptability, an ethnorelative perspective and empathy. These are aspects that occur within the individual as a result of the acquired attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary for intercultural competence.   At this point, individuals are able to see from others' perspectives and to respond to them according to the way in which the other person desires to be treated. Individuals may reach this outcome in varying degrees of success.

External Outcomes: The summation of the attitudes, knowledge and skills, as well as the internal outcomes, are demonstrated through the behavior and communication of the individual, which become the visible outcomes of intercultural competence experienced by others. This then becomes the agreed upon definition of the intercultural scholars, that intercultural competence is "the *effective* and *appropriate* behavior and communication in intercultural situations." However, it is important to understand that this definition is predicated on the elements highlighted in this essay. It is also important to understand the implications of "effective" and "appropriate" behavior and communication: *Effectiveness* can be determined by the individual while the *appropriateness* can only be determined by the *other* person – with appropriateness being directly related to cultural sensitivity and the adherence to cultural norms of that person.

       These five overall elements can be visualized through the following model of intercultural competence, thereby providing a framework to further guide efforts in developing intercultural competence in our students. (*See model on pages following Bibliography*)

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[1] There are many definitions that have been used for the word "culture." For purposes of this discussion, "culture" is defined as values, beliefs and norms held by a group of people. Culture shapes how individuals communicate and behave, that is, how they interact with others.

Discussion of Intercultural Competence Framework

This framework illustrates that it is possible for an individual to have the requisite attitudes and be minimally effective and appropriate in behavior and/or communication, even without further knowledge or skills. Adding the necessary knowledge and skills may ensure that an individual can be more effective and appropriate in one's intercultural interactions. With the added flexibility, adaptability, and empathy, one can be even more effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.

This framework also illustrates that intercultural competence is a *process* – a lifelong process – there is no one point at which an individual becomes completely interculturally competent. Thus, it is important to pay as much attention to the development process – of *how* one acquires the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes – as one does to the actual aspects of intercultural competence and as such, critical reflection becomes a powerful tool in the process of intercultural competence development.

It is interesting to note that the intercultural scholars in this study could not agree on the role of language in intercultural competence development, citing that language alone does not ensure one's competency in the culture. Thus, language is a necessary but not sufficient skill for intercultural competence. Language, however, can be a noted vehicle through which to understand others' worldviews, which is crucial to intercultural competence development.

Intercultural competence unfortunately does not "just happen" for most; instead, it must be intentionally addressed. Intentionally addressing intercultural competence development at the post-secondary level through programs, orientations, experiences, and courses – for both our domestic and international students – is essential if we are to graduate global-ready students. Having a framework of intercultural competence such as the one discussed in this essay can help guide our efforts in ensuring a more comprehensive, integrated approach.

Implications for our Work

What are some applications of this intercultural competence framework for international educators? Since intercultural competence is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, we must be intentional about addressing this at our institutions- through curricular and co-curricular efforts. In utilizing such a framework in our orientations and intercultural programming, our efforts toward developing intercultural competence in our students can be included in a more comprehensive, integrated approach instead of through random, ad-hoc approaches that often occur at our institutions. It is also important that we assess our efforts – both to improve what we are doing to develop intercultural competence among students and to also provide meaningful feedback to students themselves that could aid them on their intercultural journey. Intercultural competence assessment is complex but doable, and absolutely essential in moving the field toward a greater understanding of intercultural competence development.

Other questions for us to consider in applying this framework to our work: How interculturally competent are we as international educators and what can we do to increase our own development in this area? How can we incorporate the *process* of intercultural competence development into our programs? Given that this framework represents a more US-centric perspective of intercultural competence, how do other cultures' perspectives of intercultural competence impact our work? What are the implications of the intercultural competence/global citizenship nexus? How can we *integrate* assessment of intercultural competence throughout our programs? And beyond international education, what are the broader implications and contexts of intercultural competence development? As we continually search for ways to get along together as human beings sharing this one planet, the need to transcend boundaries, to bridge and transform our differences, to be in relationship with one another, to join in the oneness of our humanity while accepting our differences - these needs will continue to drive us as we seek to overcome differences that may divide us. In the end, intercultural competence is about our relationships with each

other and ultimately, our very survival as humankind, as we work together to address the global challenges that confront us in this century.
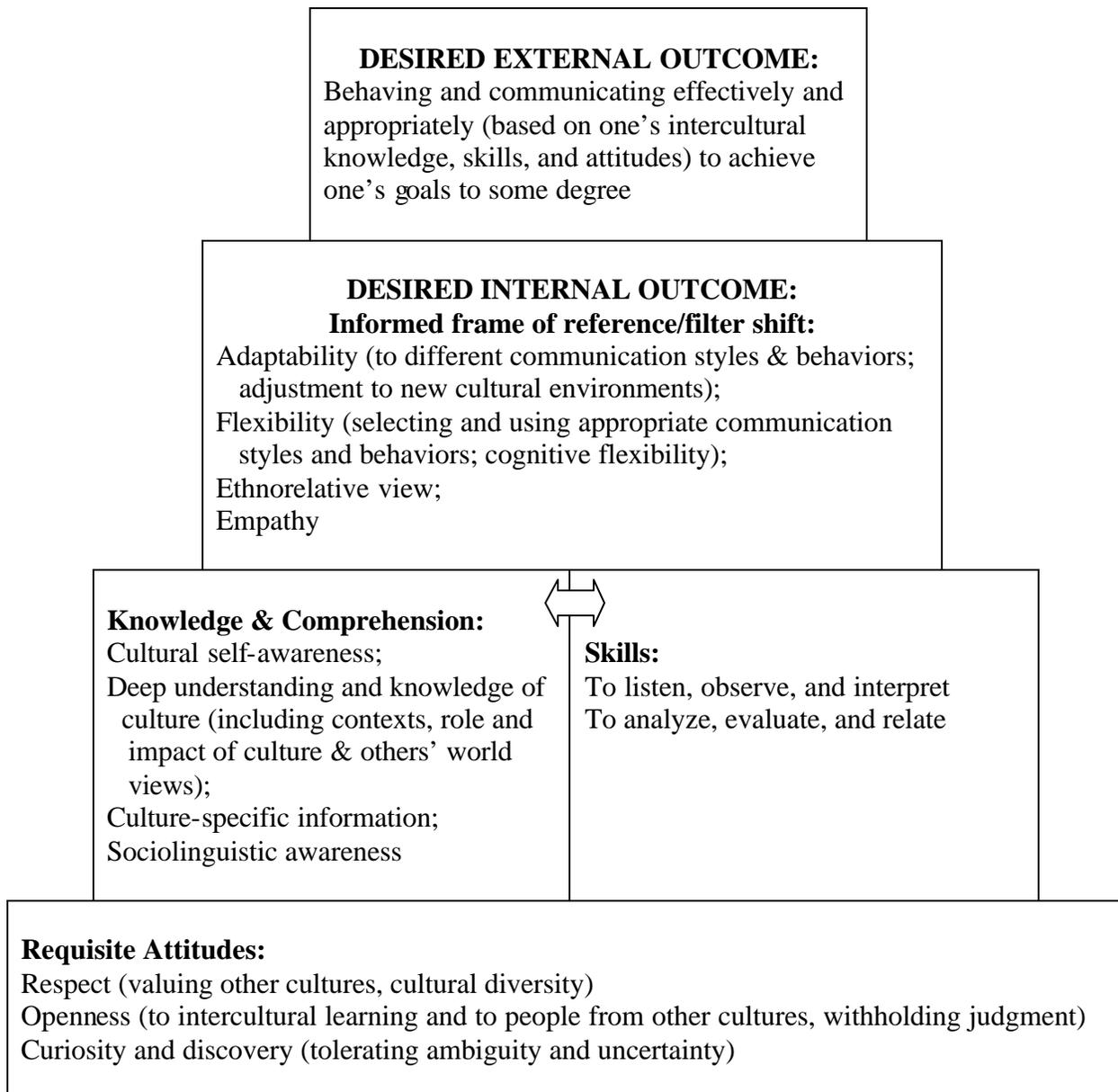
-    *Darla K. Deardorff*

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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE MODEL

From "The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States"

by Dr. Darla K. Deardorff in *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Fall 2006, 10, p. 241-266 and in *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, 2009 (Thousand Oaks: Sage).

Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006. 2009):

DESIRED EXTERNAL OUTCOME:
Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree

DESIRED INTERNAL OUTCOME:
Informed frame of reference/filter shift:
Adaptability (to different communication styles & behaviors; adjustment to new cultural environments);
Flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviors; cognitive flexibility);
Ethnorelative view;
Empathy

Knowledge & Comprehension:
Cultural self-awareness;
Deep understanding and knowledge of culture (including contexts, role and impact of culture & others' world views);
Culture-specific information;
Sociolinguistic awareness

Skills:
To listen, observe, and interpret
To analyze, evaluate, and relate

Requisite Attitudes:
Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity)
Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment)
Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty)
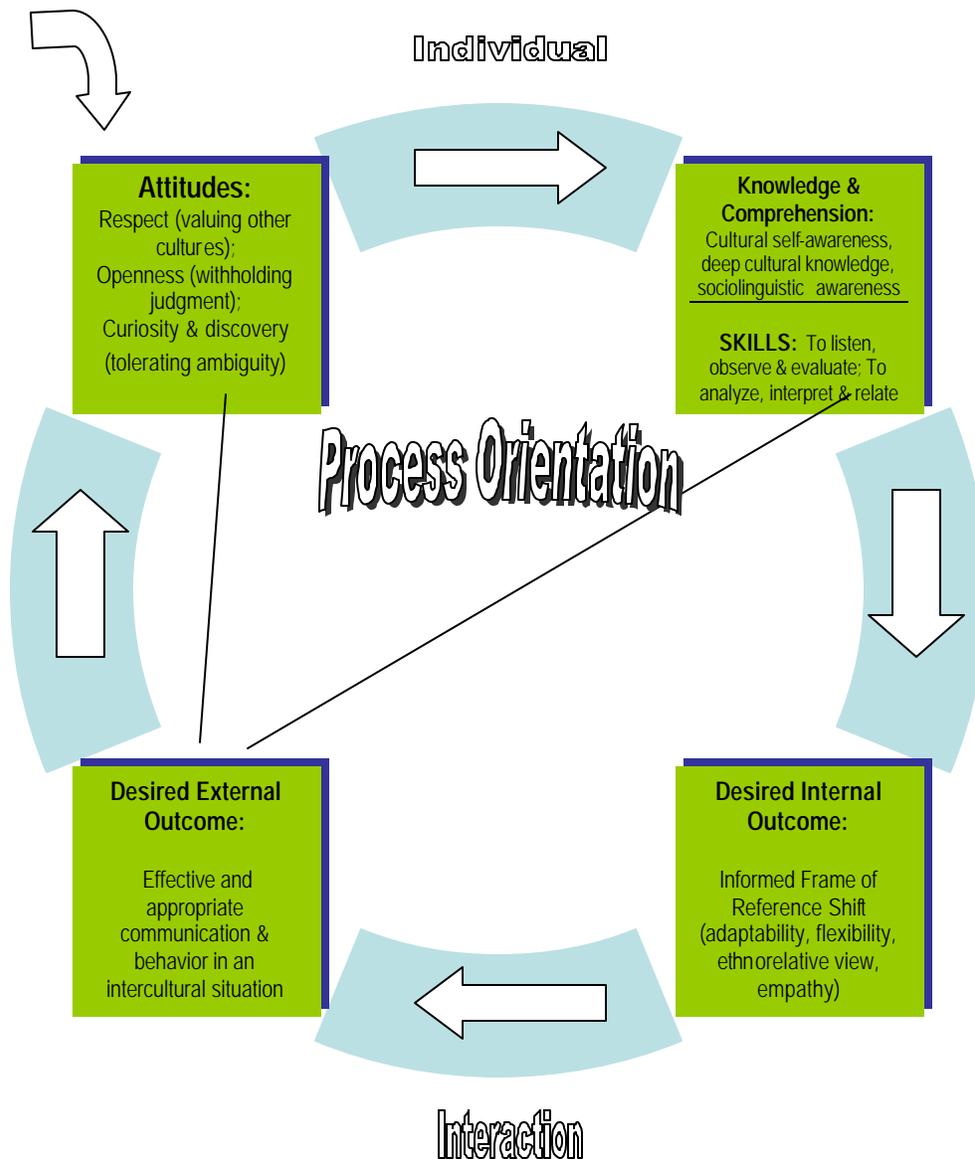
NOTES:

- *Move from personal level (attitude) to interpersonal/interactive level (outcomes)*
- *Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of underlying elements*

Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006, 2009):

Notes:

- *Begin with attitudes; Move from individual level (attitudes) to interaction level (outcomes)*
- *Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, and skills*   **Copyright 2006 by D.K. Deardorff**