

Pedagogies that Foster Undergraduate Students' Intercultural Sensitivity Development: A Case Study in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This paper reports on a qualitative study on pedagogies that foster intercultural sensitivity development in a general education course in a tertiary institution in Hong Kong. Interventions of Hofstede's (2001) five cultural dimensions and multiple teaching strategies, such as narrative writing, group learning, movie watching, etc. were applied to stimulate undergraduates' intercultural sensitivity development. Undergraduate's self-reported learning outcomes and their perceptions of the impact of the teaching strategies were then collected through individual interviews. It was found that: 1) these interventions have resulted in a higher level of intercultural sensitivity among undergraduates; 2) narrative writing is an effective teaching strategy to encourage undergraduates to reflect on their own cultural values and essay writing is very useful in stimulating students to think deeply and actively on cultural difference issues; 3) the intentional combination of strategies in the stage of minimization and acceptance is imperative to motivate students' development, so is the sequencing of strategies based upon Bennett's model (1993).

Keywords: Intercultural Sensitivity Development, Undergraduate, Pedagogies

Introduction

We are living in a multi-cultural society where people from different cultures have diverse social norms, values, religions and ways of thinking, etc. At the same time, communication and exchange among people from different cultures should be regarded as ‘intercultural’, meaning that ‘differences and similarities are taken in consideration, brought into contact and bring about interaction’ (Portera 2008). The research on intercultural sensitivity development is exactly responding to the issue of interaction among different cultures. Intercultural sensitivity is defined as ‘the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences’ (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman 2003) and is associated with greater potential for exercising intercultural competence, i.e., the ‘ability to think and act in inter-culturally appropriate ways’ (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman 2003).

Different ways of conceptualizing intercultural sensitivity have been recorded in the literature (Helms 1984; Bennett 1986; Lopez *et al.* 1989; Helms 1990; Bennett 1993; Banks 1994; Chen & Starosta 2000) and measurements based upon these conceptions have also been developed to probe into the status and development of people’s intercultural sensitivity. For example, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is a broadly used instrument, which is developed based on Bennett’s Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman 2003). In contrast to the abundance of studies conducted on the status and development of people’s intercultural sensitivity, only a few studies reported the factors that influence the development of intercultural sensitivity (Ukpokodu 2002; Yuen & Grossman 2009; Ukpokodu 2009). The current study attempts to fill this gap by examining pedagogies that stimulate students’ development of intercultural sensitivity, and provide views from the ‘demand side’ of such pedagogies, i.e., undergraduates.

Intercultural Education in Hong Kong

Hong Kong was formerly a colony of the British Empire. Despite her colonial status, the education system had remained ‘mono-cultural within its own distinctive identity’ (Yuen 2004). Intercultural education became an issue only after the transfer of the sovereignty of Hong Kong from Great

Britain in 1997 when she became a Special Administrative Region of China. Since then, Hong Kong schools have been admitting an increasing number of newly arrived students (NAS) from Mainland China. Although NAS and Hong Kong students are of the same race, they are endowed with very different regional cultural values (Yuen 2004).

Most of the existing studies on intercultural education in Hong Kong focus on student teachers' or in-service teachers' intercultural sensitivity status. For example, a survey on pre-service teachers from Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore found that student teachers in these three cities tend to 'see just one community rather than multiple cultural communities', and in comparison, student teachers from Hong Kong showed the least sensitivity to cultural differences (Yuen & Grossman 2009). Studies on in-service teachers reported similar findings in which Hong Kong-born Cantonese-speaking teachers were found to have little interest in and are resistant to cultural pluralism (Yuen 2010). Some teachers of immigrant students were even found to deny that cultural differences exist in education. They are 'resistant to the adoption of effective pedagogical practice in diverse classrooms, and tend to block innovations in teaching' (Yuen 2010).

Facing the challenges of an increasingly diverse student population and a teaching force with a level of intercultural sensitivity that leaves much to be desired, there is a pressing need to discover solid knowledge on how to develop teachers' intercultural sensitivity. Yet, few teacher education programmes in Hong Kong contain intercultural education components in their curricula. This reality has necessitated the development of culture-related courses that are designed to equip prospective and in-service teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for successfully working with diverse student populations.

Trends in the Literature

Models of Intercultural Sensitivity Development

Different approaches were used by scholars to depict and conceptualize the development of intercultural sensitivity. Chen and Starosta (2000) developed the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale to examine status of individuals' intercultural sensitivity. The scale consists of five dimensions: (a) interaction engagement, (b) respect for cultural differences, (c) interaction confidence,

(d) interaction enjoyment, and (e) interaction attentiveness. On the other hand, some other conceptions of intercultural sensitivity are guided by a developmental perspective, which tend to view individuals' intercultural sensitivity as a number of developmental stages. For example, Lopez, et al. (1989) had developed a four-stage framework on psychotherapist's intercultural sensitivity, and Helms (1984; 1990) focused on stages of race-specific development. Also, Banks (1994) constructed six stages of ethnic development of people's intercultural sensitivity and align his work with schools and curriculum in multicultural education.

These developmental approaches have the strength in providing a frame to examine and evaluate the growing complexity of intercultural sensitivity. Indeed, one's intercultural sensitivity is not static and the progression into subsequent developmental stages often suggests possible personal growth (Mahoney & Schamber 2004). However, it is quite difficult to apply some of these models to other societies and cultures. For example, Lopez and others' model is profession-specific, Helms' terminology is race-specific, and Banks' model is centered on the broadening of ethnic identity. Unlike these models, Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) was selected as the analytical framework of the current study for it is an appropriate tool that is applicable to different cultures (Yuen & Grossman 2009).

In the DMIS, Bennett (1993) had constructed a continuum of increasing sophistication regarding how people deal with cultural difference, moving from stages of ethnocentrism to stages of greater recognition and acceptance of difference referred to as 'ethnorelativism'. In order of increasing awareness of the difference, the three ethnocentric stages are: 1) Denial; 2) Defense; and 3) Minimization while the three ethnorelative stages are 4) Acceptance; 5) Adaptation; and 6) Integration (see table 1). In the first stage of denial, people repudiate the existence of cultural difference. People in the defense stage differentiate three forms of polarized perceptions of 'us versus them', i.e., denigration, superiority, and reversal. In the minimization stage, people maintain that 'human similarity seems more profound than cultural difference' (Bennett 1993). Moving on to the ethnorelative stages, people in the acceptance stage recognize that 'one's own worldview is just a relative cultural construct and also begin to see alien behavior as indicative of profound cultural difference' (Bennett 1993). In the stage of adaptation,

people develop skills for relating to and communicating with members of other cultures. Finally, in the integration stage, people engage in the dynamic process of constantly redefining their cultural identity through integrating different cultural patterns into a new whole while remaining culturally marginal (Bennett 1993).

Bennett' DMIS has been broadly applied in various contexts to investigate the levels of intercultural sensitivity of participants. For instance, how students change their intercultural sensitivity when they study abroad (Anderson *et al.* 2006; Bennett 2009; Barron & Dasli 2010; Pedersen 2010) , how principals experience and interpret issues of difference and diversity in schools from the perspective of DMIS (Hernandez & Kose 2012) , how pre-service teachers perceive cultural teaching in the language curriculum (Cubukcu 2013) and develop their intercultural competence (DeJaeghere & Zhang 2008), what is the relationship between leaders' levels of intercultural sensitivity and followers' ratings of Leader-Member Exchange (Matkin & Barbuto Jr. 2012). In order to explore the impetus of intercultural sensitivity development, the impact of service-learning (Westrick 2004), classroom training (Rahimi & Soltani 2011), religious affiliation (Ameli & Molaei 2012) etc. are discussed in the literature.

Pedagogies Adopted in Intercultural Education

Pedagogy, as 'the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques, a time and space for the practice of those strategies and techniques, and evaluation purposes and methods' (Giroux & Simon 1989), is crucial to the successful development of students' intercultural competence (Ukpokodu 2009). There is abundant literature that discusses equity pedagogies or culturally responsive teaching in the school setting. Numerous studies have also been conducted to probe into the characteristics of effective teaching methods commonly used in intercultural education, for instance, reflection (Banks 1994; Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol 2001; Ukpokodu 2009), role-playing (Mahoney & Schamber 2004), community inquiry or provision of opportunities for self-generated knowledge (Tatum 1992; Mahoney & Schamber 2004), group and cooperative learning (Volet & Ang 1998; McAllister & Irvine 2000; Slavi 2001; Banks 2003; Ippolito 2007), dialogical relationship or small group discussion (Mahoney &

Schamber 2004; Ukpokodu 2009), narrative writing (Ukpokodu 2009), experiential activities (Ukpokodu 2009), positive learning environment or climate (Tatum 1992; Ukpokodu 2002; Mahoney & Chamber 2004), and cultural therapy (Bennett, 2001), etc. Although most of these studies were conducted with the intention of promoting school students' intercultural sensitivity and competence, they could nonetheless serve as good reference for devising strategies that nurture and promote intercultural sensitivity among pre-service and in-service teachers.

These pedagogies, when guided by process-oriented models that describe how people progress in terms of their cultural identities or worldviews, can assist educators in three areas, they are: 1) understanding teachers' behaviours; 2) sequencing course content; and 3) creating conducive learning environments (McAllister & Irvine 2000). The DMIS is one of these models. Bennett (1993) suggested developmental principles and strategies on organizing teaching activities to promote students to subsequent levels of intercultural sensitivity (see table 1).

Table 1. Principles and development strategies in various stages of the DMIS (Bennett 1993)

Stages of Intercultural sensitivity		Sub-categories in each stage	Principles and developmental strategies to promote to subsequent stages	
			Principles	Strategies
Ethnocentric Stages	Denial	1. Isolation 2. Separation	To create more differentiation among general categories of cultural difference and to avoid premature discussion of really significant cultural differences	Cultural awareness activities such as international night, multicultural week, history lectures, discussion of political topics
	Defense	1. Denigration 2. Superiority 3. Reversal	To emphasize the commonality of cultures, particularly in terms of what is generally good in all cultures (to discover that everyone is just human)	Rope course

	Minimization	1. Physical niversalism 2. Transcendent Universalism	To generate cultural self- awareness through discussion, exercises, and other modes of discovery	Simulations, reports of personal experience, use members of other cultures as resource persons
Ethnorelative stages	Acceptance	1. Behavioral Relativism 2. Value Relativism	To emphasize the practical application of ethno-relative acceptance to intercultural communication, to add personal relevance and usefulness, and to put ethno- relativism into action	Cross-cultural simulations
	Adaptation	1. Cognitive Frame- shifting 2. Behavioral Code-shifting	To provide opportunities for interaction, activities should be related to real life communication situations, to bring on an identity crisis by the internal culture shock generated by multiple worldviews	Dyads with other culture partners, multicultural group discussions, interviewing people from other cultures

In the current study, the course lecturer attempted to organize her teaching based upon the DMIS and focus on using Bennett's suggested developmental strategies to promote students' cultural sensitivity. Both strategies of reflecting on individual's cultural values and those of investigating other cultures were adopted, which were used as a mirror to look into the self and others.

Methods

The study was situated in an education-focused tertiary institution in Hong Kong, in which most of the graduates will take teaching as their future career. The researcher taught a general education course entitled 'Ideas, Behavior, and Identity - Intercultural Comparison'. The course lasted for one academic term (around 4 months).

Pedagogies that Foster Intercultural Sensitivity Development

In order to nurture student teachers' intercultural sensitivity, structured interventions in terms of course content and pedagogies were applied. For the intervention on content, Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions of cultural differences, i.e., power distance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term and short term orientation, are introduced as a frame to compare and contrast cultural difference. Going beyond mere awareness and general recognition of the fact that nations and ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in various ways, detailed information about the cultural characteristics of specific nations and ethnic groups and related historical and social backgrounds are supplemented. For the intervention on pedagogies, the following teaching strategies were intentionally adopted by the researcher: case studies of cultural conflict events, movie watching and discussion, narrative writing, group presentation, and essay writing. The arrangement and sequence of strategies correspond to the developmental stages of Bennett's DMIS model.

The current study is reporting on the study of the third cohort of students and the interviews were conducted in the summer of 2011. When the course grade was released, the researcher invited all students of the course to take part in the interviews. Eight students gave favorable reply (see table 2). These students were also representative of the student population in terms of sex and regions¹. All eight students had not taken any courses on cultural difference prior to the current course, and some of them have travelled overseas in the past.

Table 2. Gender and origins of the 8 interviewees

1. Tin	Female, from Hong Kong
2. Yu	Female, from Hong Kong
3. On	Female, from Hong Kong
4. Cheng	Male, from Hong Kong
5. Xu	Female, from Mainland China

¹ In the third cohort, 36 students (2 males and 34 females) took the course. 10 of them were from the Mainland and received their basic education there. The remaining 26 are Hong-Kong-born students.

6.	Wang	Female, from Mainland China
7.	Yang	Female, from Mainland China
8.	Chen	Male, from Mainland China

The researcher captured participants' perceptions on their personal intercultural sensitivity development and the interventions mainly through individual interviews after the course. The interviews were semi-structured and were guided by the following questions:

- 1) What have you learnt and achieved in the course? How do you evaluate your awareness of and attitudes to culture's difference before and after the course?
- 2) If your views on cultural difference have been changed, what are the influencing factors? How have the course content and teaching strategies brought about the changes?
- 3) Which part(s) of the course do you think the lecturer need to improve in future so as to better promote students' awareness of and attitudes towards cultural difference?

Six individual interviews and one group interview with the two remaining students were subsequently arranged and each lasted for 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were well-recorded and transcribed verbatim by research assistants.

Findings

Development of Students' Intercultural Sensitivity

Students reported that their views on cultural difference have changed after the course. Before the course, all eight students showed an orientation to the stage of denial. After the completion of the course, five demonstrated a change to that of acceptance, two of them manifested an understanding of cultural difference at the minimization stage, and one participant showed a strong orientation to the defense stage.

Prior to the Course

Before committing to the course study, all eight students manifested similar patterns of viewing cultural difference and were lack of knowledge of that difference. They either paid little attention to cultural difference issues, identify cultural difference superficially, or only hold broad categories of cultures. For example, student Yu told the researcher, *‘I always had no special views on cultural difference issues and I used to think that it was very common that different countries and societies owned diverse cultures’*. Meanwhile, student Cheng and On maintained wide categories of cultural difference. *‘Before making in-depth investigations into Japanese and Korean cultures, I thought both of these countries and China shared common philosophical values rooted in Confucianism, so people from the three countries should hold very similar worldviews’*. (On)

Given that they grew up in a homogeneous culture (either Mainland China or Hong Kong) and are used to the mono-cultural school life, it was understandable that all of these eight students hold views corresponding to the developmental stage of denial. As Paige *et al.* (2003) explained, ‘persons in the denial stage have generally grown up in culturally homogeneous environments and have had limited contact with people outside their own culture group’. Indeed, though locally-born participants have easy access to information about different cultures, they seldom have direct contact and communication with people from other countries in their family and school life. As student Tin stated, *‘I had no chance to interact with Mainland students directly and had no concrete ideas about them’*. Even if participants had ever studied with classmates from other regions in China, they were not well-informed about how to properly deal with cultural difference issues. Student Cheng told the researcher, *‘I did not attach much importance to cultural difference between local and Mainland students though some of my classmates are from Mainland China’*. This finding is also consistent with Yuen and Grossman’s (2009) study on pre-service teachers’ intercultural sensitivity in Hong Kong.

After the Course

It is observed that the course learning has made a difference to all eight

students and students' awareness of cultural difference and intercultural sensitivity was enhanced.

Five out of the eight students showed their advancement to the acceptance stage and they had learnt to consider 'alternative beliefs about what exists in reality and the value which may be attached to those phenomena are respected' (Bennett 1993). For instance, student Xu told the researcher, *'after completing the course, whenever I observed and thought of cultural difference phenomena, my first response had been why it was happening instead of whether I liked it or not'*. In addition, she started to consider cultural difference issues with reference to their specific social and historical contexts. For student Cheng, it was more important that he now distinguished finer categories of cultures and was more aware of the existence of diversified cultures. *'I used to classify cultures as either of the East or of the West, now I have more specific categories and I think smaller cultural groups should not be ignored'* (Cheng). These favorable changes are believed to be brought about by the introduction of a large number of examples about different cultures in the course, including minor cultural groups in remote areas whose particular cultural values and practices have been preserved. For Cheng, 'the existence of difference has been accepted as a necessary and preferable human condition. (Bennett 1993)', and he started to acknowledge and respect cultural difference internally.

On the other hand, students Wang and Yang intended to look for similarities or to construct commonalities among various cultures. *'I like reading Japanese comics, US movies, and Taiwanese TV dramas. In the past I only knew that they present their stories with different focuses, but I didn't know why they produced TV, movies or comics that way. Now I understand that they are influenced by their underlying cultural values'* (Yang). Instead of exploring specific differences and the profound origins of movies and dramas produced in different countries, these two students expressed an orientation to minimize the difference by explaining it in terms of 'culture'.

In contrast, student Tin's first ever direct encounter with Mainland students in the course had left her so disappointed that she subsequently avoid taking courses that Mainland students love to enroll. It is clear that when Tin was exposed to an environment where a different behavior pattern was exhibited by others, instead of standing aside and analyzing possible reasons, she expresses overt hostility, demonstrated denigration and inten-

tional separation toward others with a different cultural background.

Impacts of Pedagogies

Effective Teaching Strategies Identified by Students - Narrative Writing and Extended Essay

Narrative writing was recognized by the students as an effective strategy to promote their cultural self-awareness. In this study, students were first required to narrate their personal stories, and then find meanings of these stories through the lens of Hofstede's concepts and dimensions. They were also asked to interpret the reasons behind such meaning within a micro context and explore their origins within a broader social and historical background.

Engaging students in narrative writing in this study were found to have positive impact on them in the following ways. Firstly, students were prompted to re-examine common social phenomena and norms and make sense of personal experiences such as personal roles in family and school, rituals in daily life, communication styles, power relationship with parents and teachers, etc. Secondly, students learn to interpret their experience by asking what these experiences are and how they were shaped. Some even trace their current experience back to their childhood, school life, peer relationship, media influence, etc. For example, during the interview, student Xu told the researcher, *'since writing stories about unequal power relationship between my parents and me, I have started to understand why similar incidents happened again and again in my family'*. Thirdly, by sharing personal stories with other students in class or online, students realized that what they personally experienced is shared by many others. Their personal experience is thus representative of that of others in the group, and culture is a commonly shared experience. For example, student Cheng reported that narrative writing had urged him to reflect on his identity as a member of a community, as he stated, *'my own worldview is only a relative cultural construct'*. Lastly, though these stories were experiences of the past, the process of giving meaning to these experiences helped students construct their life meaning in the future.

As far as the process of the change from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stage is concerned, Xu said, *'it seemed that you understand what and why something happened all of a sudden. Actually I have begun to observe cultural difference events from the perspective of an outsider unexpectedly'*. The sudden broadening of horizons reported by Xu represents a stimulation of perspective transformation, which is the process of becoming 'critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world' (Mezirow 1991).

Gaces (1982) pointed out that comparing to teaching strategies that focus on stimulating students' understanding of other cultures, the simultaneous use of reflective appraisal and social comparison can help students formulate the concept of the self and develop the ability of self-judgment during their investigation of issues of cultural difference. The current study has proved that by telling and analyzing their own story and experience through narrative writing, students could figure out how their past life experience had shaped the person he or she is today. During the process, students examined his or her personal history from a different perspective and past experience looks different now and personal stories thus became a mirror to construct their personal identities. (Ford 1999; Kerl 2002)

Apart from narrative writing, writing extended essay is also regarded by all participants as a very effective strategy to explore cultural difference issues deeply. Students were instructed to prepare for their essays independently. They searched for relevant literature and engage in dialogues with authors holding various views, and finished the essay by themselves. As student Yu said after she wrote a paper on employees' behavior in Jewish corporations, *'essay writing was very helpful, because I need to know some historical and social background of Israel, and the relationship between Jewish cultural values and their success in business. I even need to relate their success to people's behavior and ideas in a corporation'*.

When the students began to work on the essay, they were allowed to freely select a topic that matches their personal interests. Then they immersed themselves in the relevant literature and information that they had searched for and engaged in dialogue independently with the literature. The flexibility of topic selection, the choice of an essay topic that matches with students' personal interests, and their immersion in the independent dialogue

with the literature all contribute to successful learning during the process. As student Chen mentioned, *‘I like essay writing because it was flexible for me to choose a topic, which matched with my personal interest and my motivation was also a little stronger then’*. Some also noted on the benefits they got from independent learning. As student Wang said, *‘when I was working on the individual paper, I had to depend on myself, searching for materials, considering the analysis and organization, clarifying confusions, etc. The more responsible I am with my own learning, the more learning I could achieve’*.

From the observation of the researcher, there is another reason why essay writing could promote self-regulated learning: the weight of the essay towards the final grade. The essay was a high-stake task which contributed 50% of the final grade. From the knowledge of the researcher, Chinese students always display a performance-based orientation and attach more importance to and invest more efforts in high stake tasks.

Perceptions of Strategies Used to Present Cultural Differences

Movies and cases of cultural conflicts were presented in class so as to enrich students’ knowledge about other cultures and the realities of cultural conflicts.

Using movies is a common practice in intercultural and multicultural teaching. Movies in the course in this study were selected according to three principles. Firstly, the movie should demonstrate concepts and cultural dimensions introduced by the lecturer, for instance, concepts like power distance, individualism, etc. Secondly, the movie is culturally typical. Thirdly, a number of diverse cultural groups should be introduced in the movie. Students’ comments proved that these principles are crucial for their learning.

For example, student Chen expressed the importance of presenting typical cultural characteristics with reference to Hofstede’s dimensions, *‘I think the movie ‘Happy Wedding’ was wonderful, because cultural difference and conflict between Chinese and American cultures could be easily identified in terms of power distance and individualism or collectivism’*. In addition, the inclusion of unfamiliar cultural rituals and practices could

stimulate students' curiosity and active thinking, as student Tin talked about her response to a movie, '*I was shocked to get to know the sexual culture of the Sambia through the movie. I was impressed by the presentation of their sexual rituals and the construction of masculinity, which is so different from that of Hong Kong*'.

Cases of cultural conflict were also presented to demonstrate substantial cultural differences and to help students understand the consequences of intercultural misunderstanding.² Student Chen stated, '*I think the case studies we discussed in class are very typical, they informed possible consequences of cultural conflict when the difference hadn't been well aware of*'. Similar to the selection criteria of the movies, it is crucial that the cases should be illustrative of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In addition, since the cases reported what has actually happened, students' were instantly attracted to inquire into the issues involved.

It should be noticed that not all students held positive comments on the strategies of movie watching and case study. Four of the students reported that they were not impressed by these activities. As far as cultural conflict case studies are concerned, it is also interesting to note that the four Hong-Kong-born participants just regarded case study as an ordinary teaching practice, while the four Mainland students commented favorably on the strategies.

Mis-arrangement of Issues-based Discussion

Controversial issues, in particular those that highlight the disagreement between Hong Kong and Mainland China, were presented in class. They were used by the lecturer to illustrate different standpoints. Students were encouraged to discuss the underlying reasons behind the controversy that involve different cultural values and reflect on their own hidden beliefs.³ It was observed that locally-born students and students from the Mainland hold very different opinions on the impact of this strategy. To the Hong Kong

² For example, Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: the story of success*. Ch7. The ethnic story of plane crashes. New York : Little, Brown and Co.

³ For example, national identity of Hong Kong people, the June-fourth event, etc.

students, however, this discussion was not at all impressive. In fact, only one of them gave moderately positive comments for the activity.

The four Mainland students highly appreciated the approach and were deeply engaged in the class discussion. For them, discussion on controversial issues motivated their thinking and deep involvement. One of them (Yang) stated, *'discussions on controversial issues stimulated my thinking. When I heard a viewpoint from other classmates, it was natural for me to offer my comments. It is from these discussion and exchange that I develop my own views'*. Besides, student Chen identified substantial differences between Hong Kong and Mainland students through the discussion. He mentioned, *'if we had never discussed those issues, I have no chance to know what Hong Kong students truly think, which was so different from Mainland students like us. I think this is very important because it is a mirror for us to get to know the Hong Kong society and its values.'*

On the contrary, three of the four Hong Kong students had no particular feelings about issues-based discussion. Tin actually told the researcher her bad impressions on Mainland students. *'I am strongly impressed by their desire to express their personal views. They always insist on their own standpoints and do not show respect for different viewpoints. They will not change their views after listening to others'*. Subsequently, Tin tried to keep a distance away from Mainland students.

Several reasons may explain Tin's disappointment. Firstly, the lecturer did not properly control the progress of the discussion. Discussion was still allowed to go on even if the discussants had wandered off the topic. *'The instructor should have stopped the discussion and gone to the next topic'*, said student Yu. *'I have a feeling that the instructor didn't intervene in the discussion. It seems that the discussion had not been controlled well'*, mentioned student Tin. Secondly, the timing of using the issues-centered approach should have been better planned. In the current study, issues-based discussion was introduced twice to stimulate students' learning interest in the first and fourth sessions. However, it is quite risky to introduce discussion on controversial issues in the initial sessions of an intercultural course when students are underprepared for such discussion. On the one hand, it could motivate students, such as Xu and Chen, to learn, but it could also stimulate ill-feelings among discussants as Tin has demonstrated. It is imperative to consider students' developmental stage when planning such discussions.

They should be introduced at a time when students have already constructed basic ideas of cultural difference and know how to avoid making value judgment before deliberation.

Limited Impact of Group Learning

Group learning is widely recommended as an important approach to help students develop intercultural sensitivity in the literature (Volet & Ang 1998; McAllister & Irvine 2000; Slavin 2001; Banks 2003; Ippolito 2007). In the course in the current study, the researcher intentionally asked students to present in groups to provide thick description of one or two cultures and compare them with their own. Group learning has the advantages of reducing individual member's workload, inspiring more ideas during group work, and encouraging students to analyze cultural characteristics of individuals, such as other group members, during the close collaboration with one another.

Positive impacts of group learning were reported. For example, student Wang said, *'you need to have a clear concept about which dimensions would be used, select appropriate behavior and ideas in one or several cultures, and think about how to conduct an analysis logically, critically, and accurately. I think this process do help me learn something'*. Another student opined, *'When I searched for cases and examples, I got to know more about other cultures (Chen)'*.

However, the expected collaboration among group members was not evident. Students were found to simply distribute the task evenly among group members and reported on individual parts when presenting their findings. This distribution of tasks destroyed the wholeness of learning and it is impossible to achieve the original goal that students may develop more specific and deeper understanding of group members through close observations and collaboration, in particular the understanding of the difference between Hong Kong and Mainland students.

Though group learning was conducted outside the classroom, the researcher provided the following facilitations to help students achieve the learning objectives: 1) She provided students with instructions on the presentation, such as a list of appropriate topics, and examples of past student assignments; 2) apart from providing instruction on the tasks, the

lecturer helped students form groups and let them sit closely during discussion so as to encourage them to get familiar with one another ; 3) she offered consultation for the groups one week before the final presentation. Students reported that the consultation was very helpful in terms of providing useful comments on the draft work, clarifying the concepts, helping with the organization of the presentation, and pushing group members to work together.

Conclusion and Implications

As there may be a relationship between the type of intervention and the changes in participants' attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge, the structure of the interventions, such as the content and pedagogy, must be more closely examined (McAllister & Irvine 2000). The current study applies Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions as content intervention and uses multiple teaching strategies structured upon the DMIS as pedagogical interventions. The findings show that it is possible to promote the growth of students' intercultural sensitivity from the ethnocentric stages to ethno-relative stages within a short period of four months through a synergistic use of content stimulation and multiple teaching strategies which were intentionally designed corresponding to the stages of minimization and acceptance in the DMIS. This paper mainly reported on the impacts of multiple teaching strategies.

For the teaching strategies, the intentional combination of diverse strategies in the stages of minimization and acceptance is imperative to stimulate the development of students' intercultural sensitivity. Bennett (2003) suggested that teaching strategies should focus on understanding the self and culture that he or she owns if a person is in the stage of minimization. In the current study, narrative writing is used to encourage students to investigate their self cultural awareness. As reported, this strategy was well recognized as an effective approach to encourage students' learning. It is also imperative to consider students' development stages when arranging teaching methods and presenting academic content.

According to the developmental principles at the stage of acceptance in the DMIS, strategies should 'provide a substantial amount of information regarding subjective culture and its categories (particularly value

orientations), cultural context (situation, time, place, persons) and how it shapes cultural choices and decisions' (Bennett 1993). In the current study, these aspects were explored by students in such teaching and learning activities as case studies, movies, group presentation, and extended essay. Essay writing is found to be the most useful activity for the students to promote their learning.

In sum, the synergy of using multiple strategies to inspire self cultural awareness and to engage students on deep exploration of other cultures is found to be an effective strategy to stimulate students' intercultural sensitivity development and promote it to the stage of acceptance within a short period of time.

For the organization of multiple strategies, in the current study, some strategies were arranged as classroom activities and the others were planned as assessment tasks for grading. The sequencing of the three assignments, i.e., narrative writing, group presentation, and extended essay, reflects a progressive strategy of first developing students' self cultural awareness, then their understanding of other cultures, and finally their ability of independently investigating cultural issues. This sequence echoes on the developmental sequence in the stage of minimization and acceptance as proposed by Bennett (1993). From the observation of the researcher, narrative writing helps students clarify key course concepts and the various cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2001) and to conduct an examination of the self cultural awareness. Based upon this, students also conducted a study on the other cultures and made a comparison between their own and other cultures. The results were presented in groups. The final assignment tests students if they understand social events or cultural difference issues with an ethno-relative disposition. This sequence is important to help broaden the horizons of students.

On the other side, classroom activities are sequenced in line with the developmental stages of Bennett's model. For instance, warm-up activities were always coming first to stimulate students' consciousness⁴ that cultures

⁴ For example, in the session of Individualism and Collectivism, two psychological experimentations were used to differentiate students' orientations; in the session of uncertainty avoidance, several unexpected situations were presented to test students' preference.

are different (development principles at the stage of denial), then the lecturer started to introduce concepts and use examples to illustrate the meaning of content knowledge (at the stage of defense). In addition, one or two case studies are arranged for students to apply the new learnt concepts into concrete situations, which require students to interpret social phenomena or to investigate a culture deeply (at the stage of acceptance). This sequence reflects a growing development of intercultural sensitivity at the stage of denial during warm-up activities to a combination of minimization and acceptance stages at the end.

The current study is a trial to nurture student teachers' intercultural sensitivity in a university general education course. It echoes to the research on the intentional intervention to promote students' intercultural sensitivity, such as Rahimi and Soltani's (2011) findings that students' intercultural sensitivity can be enhanced with intentional training. This study also confirms the importance of learning cultural knowledge (Paige & Madden 2013), i.e. Hofstede's construct. This timely study will provide implications on the course and teaching development of intercultural education in Hong Kong, where it is underdeveloped in the literature about intercultural education in the Chinese society. In addition, the discussion on the Bennett's developmental principles may provide reference to intercultural education in other places.

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Pedagogies that Foster Intercultural Sensitivity Development

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