Exploring the Relationship between Intercultural Competence and Academic Success among English for Academic Purposes Students

by

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Abstract

The objectives of language education have evolved from focusing on linguistic outcomes to contextualized language use. Conceptualizations of communicative competence have further broadened beyond the language-specific and culture-specific skills of the target language community to recognize the need to communicate and function in a wide variety of social situations with diverse interlocutors. This requires intercultural communicative competence. This study applied mixed methods to examine whether this can be observed among students in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context. Students’ intercultural communicative competence was assessed using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), student self-reflections, and teacher feedback. Students’ academic success in the EAP program was assessed using course marks, teacher feedback, and students’ self-reflection. The findings suggest that students with high intercultural competence tend to have greater academic success in their EAP studies and identifies some characteristics of these students.
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Exploring the Relationship between Intercultural Competence and Academic Success among English for Academic Purposes Students

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between intercultural competence and academic success of English language learners. There was a time when this line of inquiry would have been seen as meaningless. Language learning was language learning, not other things, like culture learning or intercultural learning. Linguistic competence was the goal. Cultural context, communicative competence, and intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes were not even conceptualized until more recently as having anything to do with language learning. More recently, however, the goals of language learning have broadened. In this study, I trace the development of this broadening view and look at the rationale behind it. Earlier stages of this development introduced cultural context into language learning, but it was largely culture-specific; learning a particular language meant learning a particular culture. More recently, it has been recognized that cultural context is more complex than this and that language learners need to be able to communicate in diverse contexts with diverse interlocutors, something that requires more generalized intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills, which can be applied to new situations as they are encountered. This kind of intercultural competence can be considered culture-general since it is not narrowly focused on any one cultural context however it may be conceived. If this kind of competence is indeed a valuable and meaningful objective of language learning, if a definition of successful language learning includes the development of intercultural competence, then this competence should be manifested in measurable outcomes. The main purpose of this study is to explore some of these outcomes. It is an attempt to make a
contribution to questions such as ‘How does intercultural competence actually benefit language learners? How do we recognize intercultural competence in language learners? How can we foster intercultural competence among language learners?

Setting up the Conceptual Terrain

Since this study involves the use of several concepts that have various definitions, I would like to make explicit the definitions that I am working with.

In order to enter into a discussion about anything intercultural, we must first agree on a definition of culture. Culture can be viewed as objective culture or subjective culture. This differentiation goes back as far as the writings of the German sociologist and philosopher, Georg Simmel, who argued that the “objective intellectual manifestations”, such as “religious doctrines, literature, and technology”, of a “cultural community” must be understood in the context of “our categories for interpreting the world” (1911, p. 40). The former he called objective culture. The latter he called subjective culture, the culture that “comes alive in individuals” (p. 40). Brooks (1960) made a similar distinction but used the terms “Culture with a capital C” and “culture with a small c”, with the former roughly equivalent to objective culture, and the latter to subjective culture. The interculturalist, Milton Bennett, further explained these concepts and applied them to the field of intercultural communication. Objective culture refers to the institutions of a community or society, such as its art, music, system of government, economic system, or linguistic structure. Subjective culture, on the other hand, resides within the people of a community or society and reflects their common ways of thinking and seeing the world as well as the resulting common tendencies in their behaviour, including language use (1998).
Michael Byram, in his look at intercultural competence as part of language learning, (1997b) offers a definition of culture that makes explicit both the subjective and objective aspects: “The framework of ideas, values, and shared knowledge common to a particular social group and the manifestations of them in behaviour and artefacts” (p. 52). A key difference here in Byram’s emphasis on the division between the internal unseen and the external seen “manifestations” of culture is his inclusion of behaviour in the latter, along with artefacts including the various institutions of a social group (p. 52). Bennett’s emphasis, on the other hand, is between the “psychological features” of a social group and “the institutions they have created” (M. Bennett, 1998, p. 3). This places behaviour in the former category of subjective culture. In this study, it is subjective culture that is the focus rather than objective culture, and it is necessary to include behaviour here for this purpose, including language use (as opposed to linguistic structure). A useful simple working definition of culture used in this study then is “the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of groups of interacting people” (M. Bennett, 1998, p. 3).

When we discuss learners’ intercultural competence as it relates to their academic success as language learners, we are interested in their communicative competence, not just their linguistic competence (Hymes 1966). Communicative competence requires a knowledge of contextual factors, such as communicative norms, expectations, participants, setting, and purpose and is what determines how successfully language is used in real situations (Hymes, 1986). Canale and Swain (1980) used the term sociocultural competence to make more explicit the knowledge of sociocultural context in facilitating communication, especially in determining social appropriateness. Byram (1997) similarly argues that “teaching for linguistic competence cannot be separated from teaching for intercultural
competence” (p. 22). Intercultural competence has been defined by Mitchell Hammer, American interculturalist and the primary developer of the Intercultural Development Inventory used in this study, as “the capability to shift cultural perspective and adapt behaviour to cultural commonality and difference in order to successfully accomplish cross-cultural goals” (Hammer, 2007, p. 7). The word “shift” here emphasizes the ability to function effectively in diverse contexts. The emphasis here is also on specific goals. Intercultural competence can also be seen as less goal-oriented and more relationship-oriented, as Byram (1997) does in suggesting that it includes the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for “overcoming cultural difference and enjoying intercultural contact” (p. 70). However, establishing relationships across cultural differences can be seen as a goal in itself and so Hammer’s definition is suitable for our purpose.

Byram uses the term intercultural communicative competence to bring together the concepts of intercultural competence and communicative competence. It indicates an expanded notion of communicative competence that includes all of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary in the intercultural context in which it occurs. Likewise, it expands the notion of intercultural competence to include contexts that require and benefit from the use of a second or foreign language (1997).

Both intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (i.e. – whether including foreign/second language skills or not) can be seen as culture-specific or culture-general. Culture-specific describes the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable a person to function and interact successfully in a particular cultural context (M. Bennett, 1998; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2009). For example, a visitor or migrant to Japan may wish to learn about Japanese gift-giving practices or status-related
language conventions in order to prepare for a successful experience there. Culture-general competence, on the other hand, refers to a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be applied to a variety of cultural contexts and can help to facilitate successful interactions in new situations that may be encountered (M. Bennett, 1998; Paige et al., 2009). Examples of culture-general competence are awareness and application of general frameworks for cultural comparison and contrast (see for example, Hall, 1959; Hall 1966; Hall 1976; Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998), such as high and low context, power distance, direct and indirect communication styles. In addition, culture-general competence includes knowledge, attitudes, and skills, such as knowledge of one’s own cultural perspective and those of other people, curiosity about and openness to cultural differences, and sensitivity to other ways of thinking and behaving and an ability to account for and even adopt these in some form when seen as useful or appropriate (Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric, 2010). For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the former as culture-specific competence and to latter as culture-general competence. The interculturalist Janet Bennett aptly illustrates that while culture-specific competence is important, its limitation lies in its assumption of homogeneity within cultural contexts such that it becomes irrelevant in new cultural contexts or heterogeneous cultural contexts that are inevitably encountered (2009). Culture-general competence is meant to overcome this limitation through its relevance across a variety of cultural contexts (2009). I apply the term culture-specific competence in this study to refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to function and interact in a particular target language community. I apply the term culture-general competence to refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow a person to function and interact in a variety of cultural contexts.
This positions culture-general ICC as an important objective in language education, and it should be reflected in language learners’ relative success in communicating and participating in new contexts. A language learner with a high level of intercultural communicative competence should experience more success, and one with lower intercultural communicative competence less success, in communicating and participating in these new contexts.

**Overview of this Study**

The context on which I would like to focus in this study is that of international students in a Canadian English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program. These students receive conditional acceptances to Canadian universities, the condition being that they successfully complete the EAP program in order to meet the English language requirements for admission. For these students, success in communicating and participating in this context, which is both new and heterogeneous, requires culture-general ICC, and this success should mean that they progress well in their EAP studies and eventually that they do well in their university studies. This progress should be reflected in their grades, but also in feedback from instructors that may give a fuller account of how and why the students were successful or unsuccessful. It should also be reflected in how the students experience their own learning in this context.

In order to discern among the learners in this study some sense of their relative level of culture-general ICC, that is the general competence that enables people to communicate effectively across a wide variety of contexts (Byram, 1997), I will be deriving data from a survey, student self reflections, and teacher observations. The survey instrument used is the
Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003), which is a 50-item survey whose purpose is to give an indication of a person’s general orientation and response to cultural differences. A significant amount of work has gone into establishing the construct and face validity (for example see Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003 and Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, and DeJeaghere, 2003) and cross-cultural validity (see Hammer, 2011) of the IDI. It is based on Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (M. Bennett, 1993), which describes a continuum through which people typically move when they develop greater intercultural competence. The stages along this continuum as they are applied in the IDI can be seen in Figure 1, p. 60.

**Research Question**

For the purpose of this study, in order to measure the level of intercultural competence of EAP students, I would like to use a mixed methods approach combining several streams of data to address the following question:

Is there a relationship between the level of intercultural competence of international EAP students and their language learning success? Specifically, do international EAP students demonstrating greater intercultural competence also demonstrate higher levels of language learning success in their EAP program? Conversely, do students demonstrating less sophisticated intercultural competence demonstrate lower levels of language learning success using these same measures?
The interculturalist Milton Bennett has argued that “to avoid becoming a fluent fool, we need to understand more completely the cultural dimension of language” (1993 p. 16). His argument is informed in part by radical constructivist ideas that focus on people’s experience of “reality,” rather than on a “reality out there.” How people construe the world will determine their responses to it (Waltzlawick, 1984). Bennett (1998) points to language as an important lens that influences how people experience the world, a reference to a hypothesis developed out of the ideas of Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir, which essentially states that our perceptions and thought patterns are influenced by our language. Whorf suggests that “we cut up nature, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language” (1956 p. 213). Some scholars have characterized and criticized a “strong” version of this hypothesis to mean that language actually determines and therefore limits our perceptions and thought patterns (for example, Pinker, 1994). A “weak” form of the hypothesis, which states that language, thought, and perception are interrelated, has also been described and is generally more accepted and useful.

The importance for my purpose is not to delve into the debate about which is right and which is wrong, or even whether either one is right at all. As Pavlenko (2011) argues, criticism of the Whorf hypothesis tends to be based on a “strawman” characterization of “extreme relativism” and is not based on a careful look at the ideas expressed by Whorf and Sapir (p. 17). Moreover, she points out that the hypothesis itself as it is popularly cited in both its forms is largely a construction of later scholars. As she aptly puts it, “the [Sapir-
Whorf hypothesis], ‘as we know it’ is a phantom, if not a fraud, that has little to do with the questions and concerns that preoccupied Sapir and Whorf” (p. 299). Rather, the purpose here is to see past the debate and to acknowledge the ideas of Sapir and Whorf insofar as they have value in highlighting the effects of language on cognition (Pavlenko, 2014).

This has implications for language teaching and learning. Bennett states, rather strongly, that if language learning is seen as merely a question of “substituting words and rules to get the same meaning with a different tool”, this is when a learner risks becoming a “fluent fool” (1993 p. 16). Bennett defines a fluent fool as a person “who speaks a foreign language well but doesn’t understand the social or philosophical content of that language” and therefore may “overestimate their ability” and run into problems of misunderstanding and perhaps will “develop negative opinions of the native speakers of the language they understand but whose basic beliefs and values continue to elude them” (1993 p. 16). Bennett was not the first to point out the importance of the cultural dimension of language, but he expresses it rather poignantly. Throughout this literature review, I will trace some of the main themes in the development of the cultural aspects of language education. This development begins with language teaching and learning that is essentially acontextual, to a growing recognition of the inseparability of cultural context and language learning, and finally to more recent developments in an understanding of the complexity of the cultural aspects of language teaching and learning in today’s mobile and multicultural world.

**Acontextual Beginnings**

Culture is context. And this context has been treated differently throughout the history and development of language teaching methodology. In this section, I will start to
trace the development of language pedagogy from a time before context, let alone cultural context, was given real consideration. It was not all that long ago when approaches to language education were quite acontextual. Culture was certainly not a focus. The grammar-translation, direct, audio-lingual, and generative grammar methods ignored or regarded as secondary the contextual aspects of language, including culture.

Since a primary purpose of the Grammar-Translation method, at its height from the late 19th century up to about the Second World War, was to enable the reading of literary texts in the target language (Stern, 1983; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), it could be argued that this method does in fact place importance on culture. However, the distinction between objective and subjective culture noted above is important here. The focus on comprehension of literature, along with the lack of attention to communicative skills, indicates that it was clearly objective culture that was seen as relevant, not subjective culture. Literary texts were regarded as artifacts from the target language culture that were worth reading and understanding, much like texts of Latin and Greek had long been regarded. However, the clear reference point was the learner’s first language; instruction was entirely done in the first language, and the emphasis was on translation into and out of the first language (Stern, 1983; Danesi, 2003). There was no real attempt to gain any understanding or competence in the subjective cultural context of the language learners or of the target language community. For example, Stevick, in examining various language teaching methods, euphemistically declares that the Grammar-Translation method “offers freedom from the limitations of one’s own local and contemporary culture” (1990, p. 134).

It must be noted that Stevick’s objective here was to highlight how the method enables learner autonomy, and to that extent it is enlightening; however, the statement also
shows the blatant acontextual approach of this early method. The Grammar-Translation method, in its focus on linguistic forms, viewed language acquisition as primarily a linguistic problem, one which could be solved by focusing on the written word, grammatical forms, vocabulary lists, and translation exercises. I would also say that it is significant that this method thrived for a long time in classrooms of the classic languages of Greek and especially Latin. Latin, of course, is often referred to as a ‘dead’ language because it is no longer spoken by a language community today, so by definition it has essentially lost its cultural context, at least in the sense we give to this term in second language education research. Thus, an acontextual method like the Grammar-Translation method could possibly be justified, depending on the purposes of the learners. Aside from perhaps the historical Roman, liturgical, and scientific contexts, Latin has no subjective cultural context of a living community of language users. The purpose of teaching and learning Latin is not in order to communicate and function in a Latin-speaking language community. Therefore, in this case, a narrow linguistic focus might be justified. However, in the case of modern living languages, rarely is the purpose of language teaching and learning simply to engage in an intellectual exercise or to become versed in the literary texts of a target language community. As soon as one moves beyond these narrow objectives, cultural context becomes relevant (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). In this section, I have argued that the Grammar-Translation method represented a largely acontextual approach to language teaching and learning and that this had certain inadequacies if the objectives of learning a modern living language are taken into consideration. This leads us to early forays into the social context of language learning, which will be addressed next.
Early Steps to Contextualize Language Teaching and Learning

This section outlines some of the first tentative steps to contextualize language use in pedagogical approaches. As modern languages came to be added to the curriculum in the latter part of the 19th century, as Mitchell and Vidal point out, the classic Grammar-Translation method was simply transplanted and used without much modification (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). It was here that the need to consider context began to take form. Modern language learning was no longer viewed, at least by the growing number of critics of the Grammar-Translation method, as an intellectual exercise or as primarily a linguistic problem. Rather, there was an increasing need for people to be able to use the spoken language (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). Although there are cultural factors in the cases of reading and writing, it was easier to continue to avoid or ignore this context than that associated with the new demands for skills in spoken language. In fact, much of the rationale behind the opposition to the Grammar-Translation method around the turn of the 20th century derived from the recognition of how children seem to easily learn to speak their first language in context and from the desire to emulate this in the language classroom (Stern, 1983).

Although perhaps not often framed as such in the literature, this movement, and the resulting Direct Method, can be seen as an early step in contextualizing language learning. In Stern’s valuable review of language teaching methods, he skirts the notion of context in highlighting the influence of phonetics and on associating sounds with items in the observable surroundings (1983). Similarly, Danesi takes no special notice of context, but includes it as ‘situation’ in emphasizing that the “way in which the [Direct Method] interrelated the language, the teacher, the learner, the situation, and the actions of the classroom changed [second language teaching] in a radical way” (2004, p.7). In contrast to,
and in reaction to, the deductive approach of the Grammar-Translation method, the Direct Method emphasized an inductive approach that relied on exclusive target language input, emulation and practice of dialogues, and pattern practice (Danesi, 2003). A key concept was “heavy use of context and situation in order to grasp meaning” (Mitchell & Vidall, 2001, p. 28). I would suggest that such an inductive approach is by definition dependent on context, however contrived it might be, and that it is useful to see this as an important early development of our understanding of the importance of context to language teaching and learning. Furthermore, this may be seen as laying groundwork for later more sophisticated recognition of the cultural context of language teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, the contextual aspect of language teaching and learning using the Direct Method was very limited. Since the emphasis was on “direct association of language with objects and persons of the immediate environment, for example, the classroom, the home, the garden, and the street” (Stern, 1983, p. 459), the context was that of the learner, not that of the target language community. Furthermore, it seems to have been at a very concrete rather than abstract conceptual level. It may be possible to see tentative progress in this area in related approaches that began to develop. For example, although the pioneer of the so-called New Method or Reading Method, Michael West, pointed to the pragmatic benefit of a focus on reading, the energy spent on reading texts, both intensively and extensively (Stern, 1983; Danesi, 2003) would have offered much richer possibilities of context than the Direct Method depending on the selected reading repertoire. On the other hand, the Oral Method, or Situational Method (Situtational Language Teaching), returned the emphasis to speaking and listening, much like the Direct Method; however, similar to the Reading Method, it helped to develop our awareness of context, albeit not by focusing on reading texts, but by
“[introducing] the idea of ‘situational practice’ of new notions and structures” (Danesi, 2003, p. 8, 9). This was at least a slightly more sophisticated use of context than the simple sound-object associations of the Direct Method. These were some of the early, perhaps tentative, steps toward contextualizing language teaching and learning. Context, situation, and environment were discovered as relevant to language usage. In this section, I have offered an interpretation of methods that were responses to the perceived limitations of the Grammar-Translation Method that recognizes in these methods the introduction of social context into language teaching and learning.

One Step Back: A Retreat from Context

In this section, I look at the effects of Chomsky’s ideas and of the Audo-Lingual Method from the 1950s to the 1970s on the contextualization of language use in language teaching and learning. It was at this point that some of the tentative gains toward taking into account context, it seems, were undone in the scientist’s lab and the philosopher’s armchair. On the one hand, the new Audiolingual Method had strong foundations in the scientific fields of linguistics and behaviourist psychology. This lent credibility to the method and suggested a new standard of scientific rigour for the development of language teaching methods in general. However, the strong influence of the scientist’s lab also had an inherent weakness. A laboratory is by definition a place where all contextual factors can be eliminated, or at least controlled. In this case, learning was seen as a matter of conditioning and “reinforcement with an emphasis on successful error-free learning in small well-prepared steps and stages” (Stern, 1983, p. 465). Any vestige of context seen in dialogues or readings was incidental, the
real point being the language behaviour. Danesi goes so far as to suggest that this ignoring of cultural context was an important reason that the Audiolingual Method lost its appeal (2003).

On the other hand, the tenets of the transformational generative grammar model based in Chomsky’s philosophical criticism of the notion of language as behaviour (1967), and hence the Audiolingual Method, suggested that language was in fact more than just behaviour, but rather the creative manipulation and application of a grammatical system. Emphasis was placed on, “above all else, knowledge of abstract rules of syntax” (Danesi, 2003, p. 11), or as Stern puts it, on “control of the language in all its manifestations as a coherent and meaningful system” (1983, p. 469). The emphasis then was not on language behaviour but on language competence (Richards & Rodgers 2001).

It is useful to note that this emphasis on linguistic competence stemmed from Chomsky’s interest in reviving the notion of ‘universal grammar’ as an explanation of how children learn language so quickly and easily (1962). His focus was on the commonalities of all languages as reflective of this universal grammar which humans have a unique and innate capacity to learn and use (2000). Following this line of thinking, a second language learner needs to adapt to the particular constraints of the new target language, but the innate sense for universal grammar he/she possesses should provide general constraints that will help to facilitate this learning (White, 2003). It is this universal aspect of language that is important to Chomsky much more than the particulars or the diversity in language used across the world. This stands in contrast to the implication of the Whorf hypothesis mentioned above that language, thought, and perception are interrelated. In the case of the latter, it is precisely the particular properties of various languages that are of interest, along with their unique influences on how speakers frame their world and their interactions with one another. It has
been argued that the emphasis of universal grammar on the commonality of languages has unduly ignored the reality and importance of the diversity in language. Evans and Levinson (2009) call into question strong claims of universals in language by identifying several counterexamples and positing that “…languages differ so fundamentally from one another at every level of description (sound, grammar, lexicon, meaning) that it is very hard to find any single structural property they share” (p. 429).

It needs to be noted, however, that context was not completely ignored with the new Cognitive methods based in Chomsky’s generative grammar. Chomsky himself took exception to claims that his linguistic ideas “generally [took] for granted that grammars are unrelated to the social lives of their speakers” (1995, p. 49). Danesi points out that these methods introduced “contextualized grammar training” which “continues to be important because it impresses upon students that syntactic structures are not mere abstractions, but rather, components of real-life conversations” (2003, p. 11, 12). While this may represent quite a sophisticated statement on the importance of context, even cultural context, it is done in hindsight, after the contributions of later methods and ideas in the field. In fact, Carrol makes it clear that context was subordinate to structure.

The theory attaches more importance to the learner’s understanding of the structure of the foreign language than to [the] facility in using that structure, since it is believed that provided the student has a proper degree of cognitive control over the structures of the language, facility will develop automatically with use of the language in meaningful situations. (Carroll, 1965, p. 278)

This acknowledgement of language usage in ‘meaningful situations’ may be regarded as some measure of progress over the Audiolingual Method; being subordinate was perhaps a
step up from being merely incidental. In this section, I have highlighted the limited way in which social or cultural context was treated by the Audiolingual Method and the philosophy around Chomsky’s generative grammar.

**Communicative Language Learning: Integrating Cultural Context into Language Teaching and Learning**

It was not until the advent of communicative language learning in the 1970s and 1980s that cultural context came to be regarded as an integral aspect of language teaching and learning. In the next few sections, I will review some of the important milestones in this development.

Hymes argued as early as the mid 1960s that much more than merely grammar must be considered in order for language to be useful and meaningful. Language is meaningful in real life contexts in which it is used effectively in specific situations involving specific interlocutors, which implies not just linguistic competence, but what he called “communicative competence” (1966, p. 63). As Hymes sums it up, “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” (1966, p. 60); “the sharing of grammatical . . . rules is not sufficient. There may be persons whose English I can grammatically identify but whose messages escape me” (1986, p. 6). In addition to some measure of linguistic competence, knowledge of contextual factors, such as communicative norms, expectations, participants, setting, and purpose is what determines how successfully language is used in real situations (1986). Context, including what we might call cultural context, was not incidental or subordinate to a knowledge of structure, but rather was essential to making structure meaningful.
Developments in Communicative Language Learning: Recognition of the Importance of Context in the CALP/BICS distinction

In the next three sections, I discuss some important highlights in the development of communicative language learning theory. The first looks at discussion around Cummins’ proposed concepts of cognitive/academic language proficiency and basic interpersonal communication skills. The second looks at the differentiation of communicative competence to include sociolinguistic competence. The third discusses the influence of the social constructivist ideas of theorists like Vigotsky and Bakhtin.

As the concept of communicative competence developed, the understanding of context became more sophisticated. In the early 1980s, Cummins differentiated CALP (cognitive/academic language proficiency) from BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) to highlight the differing nature and demands of everyday ‘conversational’ language versus the nature and demands of the academic language typically required in schooling (1980, 1996). He soon suggested alternative terms for these concepts to reflect the importance of context – ‘context-reduced’ communication as opposed to ‘context-embedded communication’ (1996). He argues the former places higher demands on students because of its lack of context cues, or as he puts it, “as students progress through the grades, they are increasingly required to manipulate language in cognitively-demanding and context-reduced situations that differ significantly from everyday conversational interactions” (1996, p. 68). Context is recognized as important and as having a very real influence on communication. The clear implication is that proficiency in context-embedded communication occurs more easily and more quickly because its rich context cues help to facilitate the communication,
whereas context-reduced communication “relies primarily on linguistic cues to meaning” (1996, p. 67) and therefore requires a longer time to reach a high level of proficiency (1996).

One might question the assumption here that context cues facilitate communication since it is often contextual factors that contribute to miscommunication and misunderstanding. The playground, where much “everyday conversational interaction” takes place in school settings, is not a harmonious place with easy communication but often enough features conflicts, some of which may result from miscommunication and misunderstanding based in sociolinguistic or contextual factors (for example, race, dress, mannerisms, communication styles, values, etc). However, the point is not so much that BICS has context while CALP does not; rather, these are extremes on a continuum (Cummins, 1996) with BICS tending to incorporate more obvious and immediate “interpersonal and situational cues” (for example “feedback that the message has not been understood”) (p.67), and CALP relying on less readily accessible cues.

Cummins’ purpose is not to focus on the presence or absence of social or cultural context per se but simply to shed light on why students often appear to be competent in BICS but have not yet developed competence in CALP as measured by most school assessments. His argument is that apparent competence in BICS is not a valid justification to deprive students of the language support they need to succeed academically (1996). In fact, he suggests that privileged students come to the school learning environment with an ‘internal context’, cultural resources and skills developed from their life experiences, that tends to prepare them for the demands of CALP and the demands of school generally (1996). I would suggest that this is an explicit statement about the culturally learned knowledge, skills, and attitudes of these privilaged learners. Second language learners often do not come with these
advantages. I would argue, in other words, that these students face the challenge of dealing with the unfamiliar cultural context of CALP. Cummins argues, however, that rather than pinning everything on the student, schools and teachers need to take responsibility, not only for the ‘external context’ that they provide, but also for mobilizing students’ ‘internal context’ through policies and direct interactions with the students in order to facilitate their success (1996). I would put it this way: that schools and teachers need to engage students who come with diverse cultural backgrounds in order to equip them for the unique challenges of CALP with all of its culturally defined expectations and norms.

Thus, Aukerman’s (2007) point is useful that “CALP is no less dependent on social norms and interactions than BICS”; however, she overstates her argument that therefore the “CALP/BICS distinction seems decidedly fragile” (p. 630). Rather, it is more accurate to characterize the CALP/BICS distinction as more complex than it may first appear. The value of the CALP/BICS distinction lies not in simply noting an apparent presence or absence of a dependence on social norms or cues. Both are embedded in context, including socio-cultural norms and interactions, but an acknowledgement of the purpose of this distinction is necessary, as well as a carefully considered look at how both internal and external context can influence student academic success. BICS indeed appears to be more obviously context-embedded and CALP less so, and this distinction is relevant given its purpose. The more obvious social cues of BICS may enable a certain proficiency level to be quickly attained among some learners, while the more subtle social norms associated with CALP may elude these same learners or present greater challenges. Recognition of this by teachers and institutions can lead to teaching strategies and curricula that address these challenges rather than pretending they do not exist. My purpose here is to highlight the increasing appreciation
of extra-linguistic, and especially cultural, context in language teaching and learning over time, as well as to highlight how its conceptualization was becoming more sophisticated. In Cummins’ work, we can see that students and teachers/schools need to engage each other in ways that account for, and indeed capitalize on, internal and external context, or student-derived and academy-derived cultural norms and expectations, in order to reach the most successful learning outcomes. This requires knowledge, attitudes, and skills that, as Cummins argues, incorporate recognition of identity and that counter prevailing power relations (1996) that pretend these sociocultural factors do not exist.

**Developments in Communicative Language Learning: Sociolinguistic Competence**

At about the same time, Canale and Swain (1980) further sharpened the focus on extra-linguistic factors by defining ‘sociolinguistic competence’, alongside grammatical competence and strategic competence, as a primary component of overall communicative competence. In their terms, sociolinguistic competence included sociocultural rules and discourse rules, “knowledge of [which] will be crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning, particularly when there is a low level of transparency between the literal meaning of an utterance and the speaker’s intention” (p. 30). These relate to A) the appropriateness of utterances and interpretations “within a given sociocultural context depending on contextual factors such as topic, role of participants, setting, and norms of interaction” and B) “the extent to which appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form within a given sociocultural context” (p. 30). While it may have been enough to be able to manipulate the forms of a language in the relatively decontextualized (or at best, artificially contextualized) setting of a traditional (i.e. pre-communicative language
learning) classroom, this will not sufficiently define competence in real-world interactions. The value of learning language, according to this argument, lies in its usefulness to facilitate real communication, and in order to do this well it cannot be separated from its sociocultural context.

It is worth highlighting here, however, that sociocultural context did not displace grammatical competence. Canale and Swain are careful to clarify this and to avoid having their work interpreted in such reactionary terms. Grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence are very much seen side by side, both necessary to overall communicative competence (1980). Savignon similarly argues against the “impression that [in the communicative approach] grammar is not important”, but rather that “communication cannot take place in the absence of structure . . . a set of shared assumptions about how language works, along with a willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation of meaning” (1991, p. 268). The concept of communicative competence was formulated as an expansion of the narrow notion of linguistic competence to include sociocultural context as an integral component. Nevertheless, context, now recognized as cultural context or sociocultural context, was not seen as incidental or subordinate, but rather as central to language learning.

The shift in how culture was addressed in language education was further clarified by Fenner as a movement away from a focus on “knowledge of the target culture [as] . . . the sole focus in the foreign language classroom” and rather to an approach in which “students were required to use the language and develop sociocultural competence, being able to act and behave in the foreign language culture” (2006, p. 42). In other words, language was recognized as part of an expanded and integrated notion of communication that cannot be
separated from its cultural context. This line of argument serves as a rationale for cultural immersion, which is often seen to result in higher success rates among learners. It may even lead one to ask whether language learners must immerse themselves in the cultural context of the target language community in order to best learn the language. Danesi suggests that language learning involves learning, not only the language forms, but also how these forms relate to the conceptual system associated with the target language and that this is best accomplished within its “natural cultural context” (2003, p. 21). If students seem to demonstrate “conceptual unnaturalness” in their discourse, Danesi argues, it is because “rarely have students been exposed to the relation between linguistic and conceptual systems” (p. 21). Learning language is learning culture. The two cannot be separated in this view.

**Developments in Communicative Language Learning: Social Constructivism**

This growing recognition of the importance of sociocultural context in language teaching and learning drew upon much earlier social constructivist thinking, which continues to influence discourse and practice in language teaching today. Language learning is regarded as occurring through social interaction within specific sociocultural contexts. Vygotsky in 1930 suggested that this is how children are socialized into their cultural and linguistic communities (1930). Vygotsky calls this the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which results from learning that “awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers (1930, p. 83). As Kaufman describes it, “children’s thinking and meaning-making is socially constructed and emerges out of their social interactions with their
environment” (2004, p. 304). This environment of the learner fosters optimum learning when there are people who assist and support the learner to accomplish tasks that he or she could not do alone. In this way, the ZPD can be viewed as the space between the actual and potential level of development through social interaction of a learner (Brown, 2007). Bakhtin takes this a step further by arguing that “language lives only in the dialogical interaction of those who make use of it” (1984, p. 183), and it must “clothe [itself] in discourse” in order to have real world meaning (p. 184). Clearly, language for Bakhtin cannot be separated from its social and cultural context in which the dialogical relations take place. Thus, social constructivist thinking places language learning firmly within the context of social interactions and culture. Language is not separate from sociocultural context, and language learning is done within this context.

In the preceding three sections, I have discussed some key developments in the communicative approach to language teaching and learning. Cultural context came to be recognized as an integral part of learning a new language.

**Broadening the Scope: Recognizing a Need to Go Beyond Culture-Specific Competence**

The importance of cultural context as an integral element of language and language learning having been well established, the next steps beyond a culture-specific conception are reviewed in the next two sections. The solution, and the challenge, to the “conceptual unnaturalness” proposed by Danesi above is, as he argues, “to develop a pedagogical approach that interrelates the new language and the culture-specific conceptual system it reflects” (p. 22). This also resonates well with Canale and Swain’s concept of sociolinguistic competence, which we recall again refers to A) the appropriateness of utterances and
interpretations “within a given sociocultural context depending on contextual factors such as topic, role of participants, setting, and norms of interaction” and B) “the extent to which appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form within a given sociocultural context” (p. 30). It is important to note the terms “culture-specific” and “within a given sociocultural context” being used in these instances. On the one hand, they clearly situate language learning in a cultural context; language is, to use Cummins’ and Bakhtin’s terms again, ‘context-embedded’ and ‘clothed in discourse’. This places language learning in the real world and makes it meaningful, and in this regard it is a very important step forward. On the other hand, the argument that this context is culture-specific amounts to the suggestion that learning a particular language necessarily involves learning a particular culture.

Some important concepts that help us to understand how cultural context can be incorporated into language teaching and learning include language pragmatics and nonverbal communication. The assumption of language pragmatics is that intended meanings and the interpretations of these meanings are recognized as fundamentally influenced by the cultural context of the interlocutors (Kasper & Roever, 2005). However, again, the focus on context is culture-specific. The intended meaning and the interpretation of a particular locution is dependent on the particular cultural context in which it occurs. Similarly, nonverbal communication was given prominence in the late 1950s by Edward T Hall, who referred to it as the “silent language” because he recognized its great capacity to communicate meaning. This silent language is intimately connected to the cultural context in which the communication occurs, such that it is often here that misunderstandings take place (1959).
Again, we see knowledge of a particular cultural context, that of a target language community, as the primary focus.

More recently, in order to emphasize the extent to which language and culture are intimately interconnected and inseparable, Agar referred to language and culture as “a single entity”, “a languaculture”, which is full of interconnected “themes”, an understanding of which will lead to “coherence, the quest for the ties that turn separate examples [of language or culture] into a deep understanding of another way of talking, acting, and thinking” (1994, p. 232). Risager also proposes the usefulness of the similar term “linguaculture” but qualifies it by making the following argument:

. . . the strong emphasis on an intimate relationship between language and culture is problematic because it implies a risk that one cultivates an understanding of culture that is totally language-dependent. It presupposes that for every language there is a culture, and everything cultural that is not related to this particular language is put out of sight. The linking of language and culture to a national territory (a country or a region) moreover presupposes that the world should be thought of as a mosaic of territorially bound languages and their associated cultures. This picture of the world is not satisfying since it denies transnational processes related to internationalisation and globalisation, among them migrations of people carrying languages all over the world. (2008, p. 1)

This admonition is well-taken since such an extreme view of the connection between language and culture would indeed not reflect the modern day reality of increasingly mobile multicultural societies. However, this is not necessarily the conception of Agar’s
languaculture and other “language-and-culture” concepts. It is reminiscent again of the ‘strawman’ of ‘Whorf’s’ “strong” hypothesis regarding language and thought mentioned earlier. To say that culture is language-dependent is akin to saying that thought is language-dependent, and for a similar reason needs to be called into question. When Agar proposes that an understanding of the interconnected “themes” of a languaculture can lead to a “deep understanding of another way of talking, acting, and thinking (1994, p. 232), he is not suggesting that this way of talking, acting, and thinking is completely language-dependent nor limited in its expression by the domain of language. Rather, the suggestion is that of mutual influence and close connection, perhaps analogous to the “weak” version of Whorf’s hypothesis on language and thought or to Pavlenko’s acknowledgment of Whorfian effects (2014), and therefore Risager’s admonition seems to be overstated.

Furthermore, a conception, such as Agar’s, of language-and-culture need not imply a fossilized link to a territory. Particular languages, or languacultures, in fact do derive from particular social and geographical settings, and this is important from an historical perspective. However, Risager’s statement seems to be based on a rather traditional notion of culture. Traditional cultures are rooted in place and have close connections with language. However, simply because these cultures may become detached from their territorial roots does not mean they also lose their connection with language. The language-culture connection remains. The languaculture moves with the people; it lives on and further develops in new ways in new settings. Even single individuals will carry their languaculture with them when they move to new settings, and Risager acknowledges as much when she suggests the “need of a languaculture concept that is linked with the language of the
What is useful in Risager’s argument is its critique of the culture-specific focus that remains in much of language teaching today. Her purpose is to get past the traditional notion of culture in language teaching as simply that of the target language community and to take into account the modern day reality of complex mobile multicultural societies. She emphasizes a “personal linguaculture developing throughout the life-time”, which people carry with them wherever they go (p. 5). In her words, these people “have ‘feet’ in language and culture, not ‘roots’” (p. 5). The picture here is of a much more dynamic flow of people carrying various linguacultures coming into contact with one another in various settings. While there may have been a time in the past when “all students in a class had roughly the same qualifications and future needs as regards use of the target language, it was logical to work in relation to one particular standard norm for the target language” (p. 9), or the target linguaculture. The present reality, however, requires something quite different. Not all learners have the same needs and language backgrounds, nor can their future linguistic, or linguacultural, needs be accurately predicted. If anything, it can safely be predicted that learners will need to face a great diversity of interlocutors and settings, and so a simple culture-specific focus in language education will not offer adequate preparation.

In addition, with culture-specific approaches to language teaching, there is the problem of whose culture to teach. As Young, Sachdev, and Seedhouse argue, it has often been the cultures of “the economically and politically dominant cultural and linguistic groups” that have been taught and set up as models for language learners (2009, p. 151). They point to the work of various scholars to remind us that this approach also reduces culture to a set of
essentials, an overly simplistic characterization that often leads to stereotyping of the target language community (2009). Again, this amounts to the suggestion that learning a particular language necessarily involves learning a particular culture, and this is often superficial and narrowly focused. In this section, I have discusses some attempts to wrestle with the challenges of moving beyond a focus on the cultural context of the target language community or that of the learner to a broader approach that takes into account the diversity, complexity, and mobility of potential interlocutors.

Broadening the Scope: Embracing Culture-General Competence

To address the modern day reality of complex mobile multicultural societies, an approach to language education that recognizes the integrated nature of language and culture needs to prepare learners for the complexities of communication in diverse contexts. This section highlights some of the developments in this direction. Fenner (2006) notes that, while formerly it was common in language teaching to focus solely on the “culture of the ‘elite’”, the trend has been to include that of “the people” (p. 41), which introduces a new level of complexity to the notion of culture. Culture is not monolithic, static, or simple. It is not a set of cultural products, institutions, or other features that might be of interest to tourists, but rather this conception of culture, or linguaculture, can entail variation, including subtle variation, in the ways people see the world.

However, the argument is carried much further than this. Alptekin argues against the narrow concept of the native speaker as the ideal toward which language learners should aspire since this necessarily requires a definition, which by its very nature is restrictive and value-laden (2002). Likewise, he argues against an over-emphasis on target language culture,
especially in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, since this is becoming less relevant among users of English, who are increasingly likely to engage in “nonnative speaker-nonnative speaker interactions” (60-61). Rather, he maintains that “a new pedagogic model is urgently needed to accommodate the case of English as a means of international and intercultural communication . . . that will help learners become successful bilingual and intercultural individuals who are able to function well in both local and international settings” (2002, p. 63). I would suggest that, although English is uniquely situated to be an international lingua franca, there is no necessary reason to restrict the argument for enabling “international and intercultural communication” in language pedagogy only to English. On the contrary, since the learning of any language involves learning culture and culturally-based conceptual systems, it involves crossing cultures. This makes it an ideal opportunity to learn intercultural communication skills. And the movement we see starting to develop is beyond a simple culture-specific focus on the native speaker or target-language culture and towards broader intercultural communication skills that are applicable in a wide variety of settings.

This emphasis on intercultural learning, and not just cultural learning, is also suggested by Fenner. She argues that language learning should not “focus solely on the target culture”, but rather on the “interrelationship between two cultures: one’s own and the other” (2006, p. 45). This requires a certain cultural self-awareness, what Byram calls ‘savoir’, as well as skills in interpreting and relating to others, ‘savoir-comprendre’, and developing and maintaining positive attitudes toward oneself and different others, ‘savoir-être’ (Fenner, 2006; Byram, 1997). However, the implication here is still recognizably ‘culture-specific’ – specific to one’s own culture and that of the target language.
Cultural context needs to be seen in its modern day complexity. Communicative competence needs to include the ability to communicate effectively in a wide variety of contexts. Gradoll has concluded that in the case of English, it “is used more in multinational contexts by multilingual speakers than it is in homogeneous contexts of monolingual speakers” (as cited in Canagarajah, 2006, p. 232). If communication is ‘context-embedded’, the communication in which learners will engage is embedded in multiple and diverse contexts. If it is recognized that learning language involves learning a culture-specific conceptual system (in all its complexity), it must also be recognized that learners now need to be able to learn multiple conceptual systems, or better still, they need to learn how to learn new cultural conceptual systems as easily as possible. As Canagarajah argues, “it is not what we know as much as it is the versatility with which we do things with English that defines proficiency” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 234). Rather than strictly ‘culture-specific’, the intercultural communication skills acquired as part of effective language learning ought to include ‘culture-general’ skills, skills that can be applied in a broad range of diverse contexts. This involves “one’s awareness of dialect differences, identity considerations, contextual constraints, and cultural sensitivity . . . as one shuttles between diverse communities in the postmodern world” (Canagarajah, 2006, 237).

This conception of the cultural nature of language teaching and learning has led to the notion of the intercultural language learner or the intercultural speaker. Byram (1997) has argued that “teaching for linguistic competence cannot be separated from teaching for intercultural competence” (p. 22). The focus on communicative competence that recognized and incorporated cultural-specific competence was elaborated by van Ek (1986) in his “framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives” expressed in a model
of “communicative ability” (p. 35). In addition to the ideals of autonomy and social
responsibility, he proposes the following six competences: linguistic competence,
sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, socio-cultural
competence, and social competence (1986).

Byram argues, however, that the definitions of these competences place the native
speaker as the ideal, and ultimately this “places power in social interaction in the hands of the
native speaker (1997, p. 10, 11). He points out that van Ek’s definitions of learning
objectives demand that a learner strive to produce language “in accordance with the rules of
the language concerned,” language that carries “conventional meaning, . . . the meaning
which native speakers would normally attach to [it] when used in isolation” (p. 11). This
frames the language learner as “an incomplete native speaker” (p. 11). Instead, while Byram
takes much from van Ek’s model, he places importance on “discovery”, “interpretation”, and
“establishing a relationship” between speakers, and thus proposes adjusting van Ek’s model
to indicate negotiated meanings rather than meanings predetermined by the native speaker (p.
48, 49).

According to Byram, an intercultural speaker will demonstrate the capability of
“establishing relationships, managing dysfunctions, and mediating,” which distinguish this
person from a native speaker (1997, p. 38). These skills of negotiating meanings and
relationships are seen as important in allowing the intercultural speaker to communicate
effectively in a wide range of contexts with a wide variety of interlocutors with various
linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Linguistic competence alone will not enable a speaker to
do this. As Byram suggests, “the assumption that if everyone speaks English as a lingua
franca mutual comprehension will ensue is extremely unlikely to be true” (2008, p. 167). The
intercultural speaker, on the other hand, is able “to bring into relationship two cultures” and thus can be seen as an “intercultural mediator” (p. 68). This capacity as mediator implies an ability “to take an ‘external’ perspective on oneself as one interacts with others and to analyse and, where desirable, adapt one’s behaviour and underlying values and beliefs” to a variety of cultural contexts (p. 68). This mediation is not specific to one monolithic cultural context, but must be adapted to the multitudinous variations in cultural context with which a language user is confronted.

While earlier renditions of the communicative approach emphasized “communicative competence” that tended to focus on exchanging information (ex. - information gap), Byram calls for an approach that seeks to help learners develop as intercultural learners by promoting “plurilingual” and “intercultural” competence to live and work together, to dialogue and to interact with one another. ‘Plurilingual competence’ allows individuals to draw on the full complement of their linguistic repertoire, in order to function in a variety of contexts. This, he argues, is part of a pluricultural, or intercultural, competence that is necessary in today’s postmodern world (2008b). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages explains pluricultural and plurilingual competence as follows:

The ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw.

(p.168)
The picture is that of a speaker who is able to move through various linguistic and cultural contexts drawing variably on his or her linguistic and cultural skills (plurilingual and pluricultural skills) to negotiate meanings and manage relationships.

Byram argues that this should be the explicit goal of language education. The particular language being learned may in fact be secondary to the “acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge which are transferrable to situations both within and beyond national frontiers where cultural awareness and sensitivity is required” (1997, p. 28). Rather than focusing on representations of particular target language cultures, language education should “concentrate on equipping learners with the means of accessing and analysing any cultural practices and meanings they encounter, whatever their status in a society” (p. 18, 19). This view significantly enhances the value of language education to an important means of acquiring culture-general intercultural communicative competence needed in today’s complex multicultural world.

In this literature review, my purpose has been to explore the general trend toward a growing recognition of the importance of the cultural element of language teaching and learning and an increasing sophistication in how it has been conceived. From relatively acontextual beginnings, approaches to language education began to pay attention to the cultural component in earnest with the introduction of the communicative approach and the concept of communicative competence. At first the focus was largely restricted to culture-specific learning; the assumption was that the culture that needed to be learned was limited to that of the target language community. However, more recently the focus has broadened to include culture-general learning; efforts have been made to develop teaching and learning objectives and practices that enable the learner to become, not a “fluent fool”, but an
intercultural speaker who is able to communicate effectively across a variety of cultural contexts.

**Intercultural Communicative Competence and the EAP Context**

One context in which the demands of such intercultural communicative competence can be clearly seen is with international students studying in EAP programs in Canada. In this section, I will discuss some of the unique characteristics and challenges of this particular context. Students enrol in these programs in order to develop the language and (inter)cultural skills to succeed in university or college institutions and also often to meet the English entrance requirements to enter these institutions. For example, even though international students often have had instruction in English grammar, as well as in basic paragraph and essay structure and indeed have had a measure of success if they have passed an entrance test such as the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language),

for the most part, world majority students have never understood *why* a paragraph in English needs to be structured so precisely, except that it is the “right way”, or a “good” or “clear” or “coherent” paragraph, which, pasted together with four other similarly structured paragraphs, becomes the famous five-paragraph essay, which is also “clear” and “coherent” but which, stylistically, is not particularly interesting or elegant, or convincing, from their point of view. (Fox, 1994, p. 115)

Fox notes similar challenges with expectations around critiquing authorities, avoiding digression, avoiding plagiarism, and demonstrating critical thinking (1994). What needs to be learned is clearly much more than simple linguistic competence. Rather, these international students need to become competent in a rhetorical style that is valued in their new academic
context, a rhetorical style with deep cultural roots in the Western academic tradition. Furthermore, not only will they need to develop sensitivity to the particular requirements of the various university instructors, courses, writing genres, and disciplines that they will encounter, but also they will often need to switch back to modes of writing in their home culture and possibly other contexts as well. Other examples of the challenges faced by international students include how well these students are able to communicate effectively with diverse university instructors, as well as with diverse fellow students, both in informal situations to build relationships and for group assignments (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). This involves learning to adjust to a variety of non-verbal behaviour, ways of thinking, and communication styles and to find ways of engaging in the university community (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). It is the development of this “intercultural expertise” that will factor heavily in the success of international students in post secondary institutions in Canada (see for example, McLean & Ransom, 2005). Along with scholars like McLean and Fox, I would argue that in order to bring about the best possible outcome, intercultural communicative competence is not the sole responsibility of international students. It really should be a “360 degree” responsibility in which all parties participate – students, professors, peers, support and administrative staff, etc (McLean & Ransom, 2005; Fox, 1994). However, for the purposes of this study, the scope will be focused on the intercultural communicative competence of the students.

**Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Since an important part of this study involves the assessment of intercultural competence, I will next discuss some issues related to this. Any attempt to assess ICC depends on a working definition or conceptualization of ICC. As discussed earlier, one
approach is to focus on the culture-specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow one to participate in a particular target language community. Language pragmatics or pragmatic competence is a prime example of this, and it provides a very useful way to expand the language learning objectives beyond linguistic competence to address the influence of cultural context on intended meanings and their interpretations (Kasper & Roever, 2005). However, even with such an explicitly culture-specific approach, assessment is very complex and problematic. As Ishihara (2009) points out, the wide range of “pragmatic variability” within language communities makes its teaching and assessment rather difficult. This variability is due to the diversity of social backgrounds and personalities of interlocutors as well as the specific contextual factors of interactions, such as gender and social status. The suggestion offered by Ishihara is to assess “pragmatic language use” within real communication contexts “taking into account how they negotiate their message, identity, and cultural affiliation in [those] particular context[s]” (p. 447). This kind of assessment must be done in a variety of contexts in order to gain a composite picture of the overall pragmatic competence of a language learner.

Another approach, as already discussed, is to address the culture-general knowledge, attitudes, and skills that enable people to “[shuttle] between diverse communities in the postmodern world” (Canagarajah, 2006, 237). Rather than focusing, as Byram (1997) warns, on the language and pragmatic skills of a target language community or on the native speaker as an ideal, learning objectives should be aimed at the intercultural speaker, one who is able to negotiate meaning, build relationships, and mediate across a wide range of cultural contexts.
ICC viewed in this way, as Deardorff (2011) argues, should be framed within a model that is useful for identifying specific learning objectives to be assessed. One of the models that she mentions is Bennett’s DMIS, which is also the model on which the IDI, used in this study, is based. The DMIS continuum describes how people experience cultural differences and how this can develop and change. How people experience cultural differences, their intercultural sensitivity, influences how interculturally competent they are in interactions involving cultural differences – their cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses to these differences (M. Bennett, 2004). Development occurs generally as a person moves from a more “ethnocentric” to a more “ethnorelative" way of experiencing cultural differences.

“Ethnocentrism” is a well-recognized term that refers to “the experience of one’s own culture as ‘central to reality’ . . . [:] the beliefs and behaviors that people receive in their primary socialization are unquestioned; they are experienced as ‘just the way things are’” (M. Bennett, 2004, p. 62) and are applied as the standard against which all people are judged or evaluated (M. Bennett, 1998, p. 26). “Ethnorelativism” is a term coined by Bennett to refer to an experience of cultural differences that is in contrast to ethnocentrism and has both experiential and behavioural elements – “the experience of one’s own beliefs and behaviors as just one organization of reality among many viable possibilities” 2004, p. 62), as well as an acceptance of diverse “standards and customs and . . . an ability to adapt behavior and judgements” accordingly (M. Bennett, 1998, p. 26).

The DMIS is helpful in identifying and assessing specific learning objectives that enable further development of intercultural competence. An excellent example of this application of the DMIS is the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2010) (See Appendix
A). While the purpose for using the DMIS (and IDI) in this study is not to assess learning objectives, its usefulness is in offering a means to gain a sense of the relative developmental level of intercultural competence among EAP learners.

It has been argued that the learning of intercultural competence is personal, unpredictable, and complex, and it should not be viewed as linear, as the DMIS seems to do (See for example Tarc, 2013; Scarino, 2009). This is a very important point as ICC is indeed very complex and dependent, at least to a certain degree, on specific contexts as noted above. However, a high level of complexity is no reason to ignore the fact that some people tend to fare better than others when interacting across cultural differences. Some people are more likely than others to demonstrate greater ICC in a wider variety of contexts, and some people, more than others, appear to be able to improve their ability to communicate across cultural differences. The DMIS, as a developmental model, is an attempt to explain why this is (Bennett, 2004). Complexity and unpredictability certainly characterize intercultural development at a certain scale. However, at a higher level of abstraction, the DMIS suggests that general patterns emerge in people’s experiences of cultural differences, and there is a certain amount of predictability in these patterns as people become more sophisticated in their interactions across cultural differences (Bennett, 2004). In this section, I have discussed some of the issues and challenges around assessment of ICC.

Other Studies Assessing Intercultural Competence in Related Contexts

In this section I will give an overview of several notable studies that involve the assessment of intercultural competence, mostly using the IDI, in contexts related to EAP. Such assessment can take the form of a pre- and post-test and can be used to look at changes,
usually growth, in intercultural competence and to reach conclusions about the factors involved in that change. It can also take the form of a simple baseline assessment used to examine correlations between intercultural competence and other factors to gain insights into potential relationships between the two. The first group of studies I highlight below are of the former type. The first three of these look at intercultural competence and language learning among American university exchange students. The fourth study looks at the development of intercultural competence among post-graduate international students in Edinburgh and what factors contribute to that development. The fifth examines the factors that contribute to the development of intercultural competence among Chinese high school exchange students.

Engle and Engle (2004) report on the efforts of the American University Center of Provence (AUCP) to offer a study abroad experience for French language learners. The design of their study abroad program was meant to provide an environment that would maximize both language and culture learning. This was meant to be a response to an observed growing tendancy among study abroad programs generally to provide “less often a climate of challenge than one of comfort” (221). Engle and Engle sought to reverse this trend by focusing on the learning experience rather than simply on a comfortable travel experience. Engle and Engle used the Test d’Evaluation de Francais (TEF)¹ (tef: Test d’Evaluation de Français) to measure participants’ language acquisition and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to assess their acquisition of intercultural skills. In tracking student participants in their program, they found that TEF and IDI scores both increased significantly and that the overall group scores increased by similar amounts. However, a closer analysis showed that TEF score increases tend to diminish by the second semester,

while IDI scores tend to increase by the second semester, indicating a leveling off of language acquisition and an acceleration of intercultural skills acquisition over that time frame. They also note a wide disparity among individual IDI scores, which indicates the complexity of how different people respond to culturally challenging environments.

A well-known study that used the IDI to assess the development of intercultural learning of American university exchange students was the Georgetown Consortium study led by Michael Vande Berg (2009). A large sample of over 1300 students in a wide variety of exchange programs was studied to see what factors affected their second language oral proficiency and intercultural learning. Oral proficiency in the target second language was assessed using the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview, which incorporates standards from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Intercultural competence was assessed using the IDI. In particular, the focus was on whether institutional supports, or “interventions”, made a significant difference, or whether students developed intercultural competence and second language oral proficiency on their own simply by participating in the exchange program. The study found that in fact participants’ second language oral proficiency tended to increase more than that of non-participants, but there was a significantly greater increase among participants who had supports built into their program that facilitated meaningful interaction with members of the host culture. The study found an even stronger tendancy for development of intercultural competence. Participants without program supports tended not to show improvements in intercultural competence over time or even over non-participants. Those who had supports in place, such as structured interactions with cultural mentors, tended to significantly increase their intercultural competence. In both oral proficiency and intercultural learning, females participants fared better than male
participants. Both of these studies looked at language learning and intercultural competence outcomes in study abroad programs. However, neither of these studies looked at the relationship specifically between language learning outcomes and IC/ICC outcomes of participants. My study set out to look at this relationship.

A much smaller study by Pederson (2010) corroborated the findings, at least regarding IC outcomes. Three groups of American exchange students were compared. One group participated in an exchange program in England and also received intercultural effectiveness training. A second group participated in the exchange program but did not receive the intercultural effectiveness training. A third group voiced interest in participating in the exchange program but did not actually participate. The members of all three groups were administered the IDI about a month before the exchange participants departed. The IDI was administered again to the members of all three groups within a month of the exchange participants return, about 9 to 11 months later. The second and third groups showed no significant increase in IDI scores. However, the first group did show a significant increase in average overall IDI score. This suggests that the intentional intercultural effectiveness training was a factor in the growth of intercultural competence among these exchange participants as measured by the IDI. This study did not address language outcomes or their relationship with IC.

The next two studies also use the pre-/post-test format but look at international students coming to an English-speaking academic environment rather than outgoing American exchange students. Liu (2007) examined the intercultural competence of post-graduate students in Edinburgh, Scotland to determine whether they improved over the time they spent there and what might lead to that improvement. She relied on a self-made
questionnaire, interviews, and recordings of actual cross-cultural conversations. She suggests that an important factor in improving intercultural competence lies in how engaged students are in developing relationships with a diversity of colleagues. The group she studied appeared to be more engaged than most other groups of Chinese international students who have been observed, perhaps because they tend to have more life experience and maturity than other groups, who are mostly undergraduates. In a study like this, the IDI would have provided a useful tool to supplement observations made regarding students’ growth in intercultural competence since it is based on a developmental model and because its results are easily compared. However, the findings are interesting in that they recognize growth in intercultural competence in this group of students, but they also highlight continuing challenges they face based on observations and on self-reporting. In order to help Chinese students to be more successful in their studies abroad, Liu would like to see more emphasis on developing speaking competence, attention to learning about other cultures, and encouragement to engage in interactions with people from diverse cultures. This seems to reflect the findings in the studies above that point to the value of interventions to support the development of intercultural competence of participants. It also suggests that improved language skills may enhance their IC/ICC. This resonates with the aim of my study to examine the relationship between ICC and language learning success, though I am at least as interested in whether higher IC/ICC may contribute to better language learning outcomes.

Hao (2012) used the IDI and interviews to assess the effect of study abroad on the intercultural sensitivity of mainland Chinese high school students by comparing pre-departure scores with scores at the end of a one-year exchange program, as well as with the scores of students who remained in China. The results did not indicate a significant increase
in intercultural sensitivity in the exchange students; however, there were significant
differences noted between the study abroad group and the control group. Hao’s analysis
points to the amount of previous intercultural experience as the main predictor of growth in
intercultural sensitivity. It would have been useful, as Hao acknowledges, to follow up with
the participants to measure their intercultural sensitivity some time after the completion of
their study abroad to assess longer term effects. I would argue that, in addition, it would be
useful to know whether higher IDI scores were associated with positive practical outcomes,
such as better academic performance or a greater ability to develop relationships with a
diversity of people. A major premise of the IDI and the DMIS model on which it is based is
that greater intercultural sensitivity indicates the potential for greater intercultural
competence, which should be manifested in real outcomes. Any empirical support for this
would be useful and interesting.

In this section, I have highlighted a number of notable studies that applied a pre-/post-
test strategy for assessing growth or change in IC of outgoing American exchange students
and international students going to an English-speaking academic environment. The IDI can
be useful for this type of study, as long as it is used responsibly, since it offers a standard
measure that can be compared over time.

The next group of studies I highlight are of the second type mentioned above, in
which a baseline assessment is used to explore possible factors related to intercultural
sensitivity. The first of these studies examines the effect on intercultural competence of
students’ enrollment in an international school in Southeast Asia. The second explores the
factors affecting the intercultural sensitivity among counselors at an international school,
while the third involves a similar exploration for faculty members in a pathway program at the University of Qatar.

Staffron (2003) examined the assumption that students at international schools have high levels of intercultural sensitivity because of their exposure to a variety of cultures and their extended time away from their parents’ cultures. The IDI was used to assess the intercultural sensitivity of high school students at an international school in a large South East Asian city to determine the range of intercultural sensitivity of this population and any relationship it might have with the length of time students attend the school. A small subset of students, those with the highest and lowest IDI scores, were also elected for follow-up interviews. The findings support the assumption that students at international schools had high levels of intercultural sensitivity. The IDI scores were higher than those usually found in the general population, and these scores tended to be higher the longer students had attended the school. The qualitative data from interviews was consistent with students’ IDI results and with the assumptions of the DMIS. It would be useful to further inquire into what factors contribute to the higher IDI scores of these students. Do the higher scores relate more to prior experience similar to what the Hao study found above? Or are there certain elements of the students experiences at the international school that facilitate growth in IC? If so, what are those elements?

Steuernagel (2014) examined the factors affecting the intercultural sensitivity of counselors at international schools. He looked at a sample of some 334 school counselors from 39 countries working at international schools across 74 countries. Using the IDI, he was able to see the general tendency of this group to be operating at the Minimization stage of the DMIS, which depends greatly on a focus on commonalities as a way for dealing with cultural
differences. He found that counselors who had prior training in multicultural counseling, intercultural competence, or intercultural communication had greater intercultural sensitivity as measured by the IDI than counselors lacking this prior training. He also found greater intercultural sensitivity among older counselors and those who had more experience abroad, particularly among those who demonstrated greater cultural engagement in their experiences abroad. These findings seem to resonate well with the findings of other studies above in suggesting that support interventions as well as previous experiences seem to affect IC.

McKay (2013) used the IDI to examine the factors affecting the intercultural sensitivity of faculty members in the Foundation Program at Qatar University. This program is meant to provide students with the English language and mathematics skills needed to succeed in the academic programs at Qatar University. The IDI was administered to 94 faculty members, 23 of whom participated in focus groups to discuss the results. Similar to Steuernagel’s finding with counselors at international schools, the faculty members in McKay’s sample were in the Minimization stage of the DMIS. Many possible factors affecting their intercultural sensitivity were considered, for example, age, gender, education level, time overseas, and formative region where they grew up. However, the only two factors that seemed to be significant in this study were the “formative region” in which faculty members grew up (to age 18) and the length of time spent in Qatar. While the length of time spent in Qatar emerged as only a very weak factor affecting intercultural sensitivity, faculty who spent their formative years in North America tended to have significantly greater intercultural sensitivity than those who grew up in the MENA (Middle East/North Africa) region. McKay points to two other studies showing similar results. One is part of Staffron’s study mentioned above that was included in an earlier publication (2001), which found
higher IDI scores among international school students from Europe and North America than among students from Asia. Similarly, Helmer (2007) found that among teachers at an elementary school in Egypt, those from North America had higher IDI scores than other teachers. McKay suggests that findings such as these may reflect a tendency towards a greater cultural diversity in the social environments of North Americans than Asians. I would say that it may also be reflective of the particular conceptualization of IC that is measured by the IDI and based in the DMIS. After all, both were developed in the United States. A different conceptualization may show rather different results that would not favour North Americans. This is not meant to reject the value of these tools, but rather to situate them within a particular socio-political context that can critically inform their use and interpretation.

In this section, I have highlighted a number of studies that involve the assessment of intercultural competence in EAP-related contexts. These can be divided into two types, one using a pre-/post-test to assess growth in intercultural competence, and another using a baseline assessment to look for possible related factors. My study is of the second type since it measures students’ intercultural sensitivity using the IDI and looks at a number of other possible related factors in participants’ reflective writing and in feedback from their teachers.

Methodology

Study Participants

In this section, I will describe the sample participants in this study. A random sample was selected from the student population at a private EAP school that operates on the campuses of several post-secondary institutions in Ontario. All of these students have completed high school, mostly in their home countries with a small minority completing about one year of high school in Canada or another English-speaking country. The majority
of the students at this school, especially the Chinese students, are between the ages of 18 and 24, with a smaller number of more mature students, especially those from Libya and Saudi Arabia. Most of the students have conditional acceptances to one of the school’s university or college partner institutions. This means that the students must successfully graduate from the school’s EAP program in order to meet the English proficiency requirement to start their university or college studies. At the campus where the sample was taken, there were 185 students, approximately 60% of whom have conditional acceptances to undergraduate programs, 15% to graduate programs, and 25% have no conditional acceptance but are actively pursuing one. The enrollment at this campus at the time that the sample was taken was about 70% Chinese, 15% Libyan, 11% Saudi Arabian, with small groups or individuals hailing from Vietnam, South Korea, Brazil, Turkey, and Canada.

Since there is one prominent group with well-defined characteristics (Chinese) along with other smaller groups with different characteristics, it would not be valid to assume that we are dealing with a naturally distributed population. Nevertheless, since this study is examining the possibility and extent of a generalized relationship between intercultural competence and EAP language learning success applicable to all EAP students, a random sample of 50 students was used. The size of this sample, while too small to provide definitive results, was large enough to provide results that are meaningful and useful for an exploratory study. A purpose of this study is to explore whether it is worth further investigating the relationship between intercultural communicative competence and the academic success of language learners. The findings shed light on whether and to what extent further investigation should be directed to this area. If learners with greater intercultural communicative
competence also tend to be more successful academically in their language learning, it will be important to determine more conclusively how significant this relationship is.

Data Collection

In this section, I will describe the research methods used in this study. Data were collected to assess intercultural competence and to assess the academic success of students in their EAP program. Students’ intercultural competence was assessed using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), as well as interpretations from student self reflection and teacher feedback.

1. The IDI was administered to 50 randomly-selected students and used as a measure of their intercultural competence. (See the Introduction above for more information about the IDI.) Several points should be highlighted regarding the administration of the IDI:
   
a. This instrument is available in a traditional paper version and in an online version. The online version was used with all 50 participants.
   
b. The IDI has been made available in official translations into several different languages, and these were offered to participants in this study to allow them to work in their first languages in order to enhance understanding of some of the subtleties inherent in the instrument’s items. Strict back translation protocols were used to “ensure both linguistic and conceptual equivalence of the IDI items” (Hammer, 2013, p. 116).
c. The IDI was administered to participants from February 23 to March 16, 2015. See Appendix B for sample IDI items.

d. Participants were given an introduction to the overall study and the IDI prior to completing the questionnaire. This introduction took on average about 15 minutes. See Appendix C for the slide presentation used for this purpose.

e. It should be noted that only officially qualified IDI administrators are permitted to administer the instrument. The author is an officially qualified IDI administrator.

2. Students’ reflections were elicited through written responses in English to specific questions that supplement the IDI survey. These supplemental questions were provided as official translations in the students’ first languages, along with the English translation for their reference. This was meant to support their written responses in English. It should be pointed out here that the student population from which the participants were chosen consists of intermediate level students and above (ranging approximately from 4.5 to 6.5 overall IELTS\(^2\) band scores) and does not include beginner level students.

3. Teacher feedback derived from the feedback comments on students’ final report cards for their most recently completed study semester (December 2014). See Appendix D for a sample of a final report card.

Themes were examined in both teachers’ accounts of the students’ learning in the form of the final report card feedback comments and in students’ interpretations of their own

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\(^2\) International English Language Testing System (www.ielts.org)
experiences in their written reflections to the questions attached to the IDI about their experiences with cultural differences.

Students’ academic success in the EAP program was assessed using overall marks and teacher feedback. Students’ marks and teachers’ feedback were both derived from the final report cards. The report cards include the following:

- Final grade averages for each course,
- Final overall grade average,
- Final attendance figure (total number of missed classes in the term),
- Academic behaviour indicators – (pre-determined behaviours assessed using a Likert scale – See Appendix D),
- Teacher feedback comments (selected from a finite database of pre-written comments).

**Table 1**

**Summary of data sources:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment of Intercultural Competence</th>
<th>Assessment of Academic Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)</td>
<td>• Overall course average (from report card)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teacher feedback (report card comments)</td>
<td>• teacher feedback (report card comments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• student self reflections (written response to IDI supplemental questions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)**

In this section, I will discuss the instrument used in this study to assist with the assessment of ICC. Assessing intercultural competence is a complex task. Before one can begin, as discussed above, it requires a clear conceptualization of intercultural competence. The main goal in this study is specifically to explore the relationship between culture-general competence (culture-general ICC) and language learning outcomes. A key instrument I used for this purpose was the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which I will discuss in this section.

The IDI is a 50-item survey designed to give an indication of a person’s general orientation and response to cultural differences. It is based on Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (M. J. Bennett, 1993), which describes a continuum through which people typically move when they develop greater intercultural competence, moving from the ethnocentric end of the continuum toward the ethnorelative end. The stages along this continuum as they are applied in the IDI are outlined in Figure 1 below. Considerable work has gone into demonstrating the construct and face validity of the IDI (for example see Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003 and Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, and DeJeaghere, 2003) as well as its cross-cultural validity (see Hammer, 2011).
In the most recent version of the IDI, the terms “ethnocentrism” and “ethnorelativism,” used in the DMIS, have been replaced by “monocultural mindset” and “intercultural mindset” respectively (see Figure 1), but the concepts are still the same. As Hammer explains these terms, “perceiving cultural differences from one’s own cultural perspective is indicative of a more monocultural mindset. In contrast, the capability of shifting cultural perspective and adapting behavior to cultural context represents an intercultural mindset” (2011, p. 2, 3).

In this study, these concepts around intercultural sensitivity/competence are seen as useful in gaining insights into what Byram calls intercultural communicative competence (1997). As mentioned above, the stages in the DMIS describe how people experience, construe, or treat cultural differences – their intercultural sensitivity. On the one hand, it can be argued that, at least to a certain degree, intercultural competence expresses itself differently in different situations, depending on many contextual factors, such as the setting, the individuals involved, and the nature of the relationships among these individuals.
(Deardorff, 2011). On the other hand, patterns and tendencies should not be overlooked or ignored; certain individuals tend to experience more success than others communicating and interacting appropriately and effectively in the various situations they face involving cultural differences (Bennett, 1993; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). In fact, the orientation to cultural differences described in the DMIS seems to be fairly stable and consistent for an individual at a certain level of development when new cultural differences are encountered (Bennett, 1993), and it underlies intercultural competence. The greater a person’s intercultural sensitivity, or the more towards the ethnorelative or intercultural mindset end of the continuum a person’s orientation lies, the greater the potential and likelihood for IC (Hammer et al., 2003).

As discussed above, intercultural competence (IC) and communicative competence comprise intercultural communicative competence (ICC); intercultural communicative competence is intercultural competence that is explicitly facilitated through a foreign/second language (Byram, 1997). I would therefore suggest that the statement above can be aptly modified to say “the greater a person’s intercultural sensitivity, . . . the greater the potential and likelihood for ICC”. Thus, intercultural sensitivity can offer a reasonable basis for assessing ICC. By ‘reasonable basis’, I mean that it is reasonable to apply the conceptual framework of the DMIS to help gain insights into individuals’ intercultural competence or intercultural communicative competence. To be clear, it is important to note that this claim is not meant to say that there is a one-to-one relationship between intercultural sensitivity and IC or ICC. Conceptions, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours will indeed vary depending on contextual factors as noted above. However, the claim is that there is an increased potential and likelihood of advanced IC or ICC with advanced levels of intercultural sensitivity.
It would be a mistake, therefore, to view the DMIS, or any instrument based on it, as offering a precise measurement of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence can be conceptualized in various ways (see Sinicrope, Norris, and Watanabe, 2007 and Deardorff, 2011), and it is very complex no matter which assessment method or instrument is chosen. Furthermore, as Deardorff argues, because of this complexity, assessment should not depend on a single instrument but should incorporate multiple perspectives and methods (2011). For example, as Deardorff points out, a “learner can indicate to what degree he or she has been effective in an intercultural setting, but it is only the other person who can determine the appropriateness of behaviour and communication in the interaction” (p. 74). For this reason, I did not rely solely on the IDI survey to assess the intercultural competence of study participants but, in addition, drew from written responses of the participants themselves, as well as assessment feedback from their EAP teachers.

Findings

In this section, I will present the findings of the study organized by the sources of data outlined above. First, I will present the quantitative data based on the students’ IDI scores and EAP marks. Next, I will present the qualitative data based on teacher feedback on report cards and on students’ written self-reflections.

Quantitative Data Based on IDI Scores and EAP Marks

The quantitative data raw scores have been compiled in the table in Appendix E. This includes the following:

- IDI participant ID numbers
• IDI scores
• September to December 2014 term final overall grade and rank
• September to December 2014 term attendance data (number of missed class hours)
• Behaviour frequency indicators for specified academic behaviours
• January to April 2015 term final overall grade

Table 2
Summary of Quantitative Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>IDI Score*</th>
<th>Sept-Dec 2014 Final Overall Grade Average (%)</th>
<th>Sept-Dec 2014 Attendance (Class hours missed or late)</th>
<th>Jan-Apr 2015 Final Overall Grade Average (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>16.92</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>12.44</td>
<td>5.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>118.6</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Throughout this study, “IDI score” refers specifically to DO score, or Developmental Orientation score, which is the specific technical term used in IDI literature. I have adopted “IDI score” for the sake of simplicity.

It is important to note that the final overall grade averages are not normally distributed. This is due to the fact that there is a pass threshold around which there is a higher than expected distribution of grade averages. Figure 2 below illustrates the non-normal
distribution of final grade averages for the September to December 2014 term. The cause of this is likely related to a desire among teachers, students, and the institution to avoid failing marks. The effect is that there is a distortion in the distribution of grade averages in which some weaker students’ marks are higher than predicted by a normal distribution and thus likely higher than what is truly reflective of their EAP skills. The inflation of these students’ marks distorts the quantitative data to such an extent that statistical analysis that would depend on normally distributed data will not render valid conclusions.

Figure 2. Final grade average frequencies showing non-normal distribution – Sept-Dec 2014

Nevertheless, with this caveat in mind, here are the correlation coefficients for the IDI scores and the final grade averages for this sample.
Table 3

Correlation Coefficients for IDI Scores vs Final Grade Averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sept-Dec 2014 Term Final Grade Average</th>
<th>Jan-Apr 2015 Term Final Grade Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlation Coefficient</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These indicate a very weak correlation between IDI scores and final grade averages among students in this sample. However, as noted above, the distortion in the distribution of final grade averages means that a number of students have higher than expected marks.

As an alternative, the participants were arranged into ranked subgroups in order to diminish the effect of data distortion on the upgrouped data array while still detecting larger patterns. Table 4 gives a summary.

Table 4

Subgroups Ranked by Final Grade Average (Sept-Dec 2014) with Mean IDI Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup ranked by Mean Final Grade Average</th>
<th>Mean Final Grade Average</th>
<th>Mean IDI Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Half (n=25)</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Half (n=25)</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Third (n=17)</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>92.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Third (n=17)</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Third (n=16)</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. IDI score distribution by grouped final grade averages – upper and lower halves of sample. Sept-Dec 2014. Bisecting horizontal line indicates median IDI score. Plus sign (+) indicates mean IDI score. Dotted lines extend to 95th and 5th percentiles. Small circles (°) indicate outliers beyond the 95th and 5th percentiles (Altman, 1991).

When the sample is simply divided into upper and lower halves by final average (Figure 3), there is a notable difference in IDI scores. The subgroup with higher averages tend to have higher IDI scores, and the subgroup with lower averages tend to have lower IDI scores.
When the sample is divided into thirds by final average (Figure 4), the difference in IDI scores is still seen. The subgroup with the highest averages has the highest IDI scores. In fact, this group includes 8 of the 10 highest IDI scores of the entire sample. The middle third by final average had noticeably lower IDI scores. The lower third had lower IDI scores than the upper third, but higher than the middle third. This might partly be explained by the distortion in the distribution of final grade averages mentioned above in which a number of students have higher than expected final grade averages. It would be this lower third that would be particularly affected by this distortion.
For the sake of checking for stability of the results seen above, the IDI scores were also checked against the final grade averages of the sample for the following term – January to April 2015. Table 5 gives a summary.

Table 5
Subgroups Ranked by Final Grade Average (Jan-Apr 2015) with Mean IDI Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup ranked by Mean Final Grade Average</th>
<th>Mean Final Grade Average</th>
<th>Mean IDI Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Half (n=23)</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Half (n=23)</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Third (n=16)</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Third (n=15)</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Third (n=15)</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawals (n=4)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>83.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Four participants withdrew from the EAP program during this term and after the administration of the IDI. These students do not have final averages available and were excluded from these calculations.
Figure 5. IDI score distribution by grouped final grade averages – upper and lower halves of sample. Jan-Apr 2015. Bisecting horizontal line indicates median IDI score. Plus sign (+) indicates mean IDI score. Dotted lines extend to 95th and 5th percentiles. Small circles (°) indicate outliers beyond the 95th and 5th percentiles (Altman, 1991).

A similar pattern can be seen as with the 2014 averages. See Table 5 and Figure 5. If the sample is divided into upper and lower halves by final average, students in the upper half have higher IDI scores than those in the lower half.
Figure 6. IDI score distribution by grouped final grade averages – upper, middle, and lower thirds of sample – withdrawals noted separately. Jan-Apr 2015. Bisecting horizontal line indicates median IDI score. Plus sign (+) indicates mean IDI score. Dotted lines extend to 95th and 5th percentiles. Small circles (o) indicate outliers beyond the 95th and 5th percentiles (Altman, 1991).

When the sample is divided into thirds by final average, the trend is still seen, with the highest IDI scores among students in the upper third and with the lower third having a slightly higher mean IDI score than the middle third. See Table 5 and Figure 6. There were four students who withdrew from the EAP program during this term of study, whose IDI scores were comparatively low.
As a supplement to final grade averages, attendance data was also examined. Mean IDI scores were checked against attendance figures for these same ranked subgroups for the September to December 2014 term. As Table 6 shows, no obvious trend can be seen here.

Table 6

Subgroups Ranked by ID Scores with Mean Attendance Figures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup ranked by Mean Final IDI Score</th>
<th>Mean IDI Score</th>
<th>Mean Attendance*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Half (n=25)</td>
<td>98.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Half (n=25)</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Third (n=17)</td>
<td>104.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Third (n=17)</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Third (n=16)</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*# of missed class hours

In addition to final averages for individual courses, overall final grade averages, and attendance figures, the report cards for these students also include behaviour frequency indicators. These are one-word descriptors of behaviours that have been deemed important to the students’ success in the EAP program (See Appendix D). These descriptors run along a spectrum as follows: Never – Rarely – Sometimes – Often – Usually – Always. The behaviours are as follows:

- Participates in class and school activities
- Uses English in class and school activities
- Completes work on time
- Communicates with teachers for clarification and feedback
- Uses teachers’ feedback to improve
Mean IDI scores were checked for students grouped by assigned behaviour frequency indicator for each of the behaviours on the report card. This data are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7
Mean IDI Score by Behaviour Frequency Indicator for Selected Academic Behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour Frequency Indicator</th>
<th>Participates</th>
<th>Uses English</th>
<th>Completes Work</th>
<th>Communic</th>
<th>Uses Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>80.4 (n=6)</td>
<td>78.5 (6)</td>
<td>90.7 (16)</td>
<td>88.5 (8)</td>
<td>97.3 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>88.2 (7)</td>
<td>86.4 (21)</td>
<td>83.6 (22)</td>
<td>86.2 (11)</td>
<td>85.6 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>84.7 (9)</td>
<td>87.5 (6)</td>
<td>76.3 (6)</td>
<td>86.1 (10)</td>
<td>81.3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>85.8 (18)</td>
<td>86.8 (12)</td>
<td>87.1 (6)</td>
<td>85.1 (14)</td>
<td>80.0 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>86.4 (10)</td>
<td>84.1 (5)</td>
<td>n/a (0)</td>
<td>84.1 (5)</td>
<td>88.5 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>n/a (0)</td>
<td>n/a (0)</td>
<td>n/a (0)</td>
<td>70.5 (2)</td>
<td>78.2 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neither the Participation nor the Uses English behaviours show any obvious trend in relation to IDI scores. However, there does appear to be a trend with the remaining three. It appears that students in this group with higher IDI scores tended also to be assessed more highly by teachers for completing work on time, communicating with teachers for clarification and feedback, and using teachers’ feedback to improve. It could be that participation and the use of English in class and school activities may not be related to intercultural competence as measured by the IDI, even though these involve a certain amount of interaction across cultural differences and therefore may seem to benefit from intercultural competence. It may also be possible that these behaviours may be somewhat affected by
intercultural competence, but other factors weigh more heavily obscuring any possible relationship in this sample. The apparent trend for students with higher IDI scores to complete work on time may be surprising because this behaviour may seem to depend less on interaction with others and therefore to benefit less from intercultural competence. The trends for students with higher IDI scores to communicate more with teachers and to use feedback to improve seem less surprising because these behaviours require interaction with the teachers, which in all cases in this sample involves cross-cultural interaction and therefore would seemingly benefit from intercultural competence.

Assessments from Teachers: Insights from Report Card Comments

In this section, I summarize key findings from the report card comments for the study participants written by their teachers as part of their end-of-term assessment. The report card feedback for these students, while not focused on assessing their intercultural skills per se, does sometimes include comments that allow inferences to be made. Some of these reflect the trends in the behaviour frequency indicators above. The most noticeable trend is that students in this sample with lower IDI scores were more likely to have comments such as “. . . has some difficulty following instructions and using feedback from teachers” or “. . . occasionally demonstrates an unwillingness to accept feedback and apply it” or “. . . should use her teachers’ feedback to continue to improve her English skills”.

Another theme that emerged among students with very low IDI scores was a certain disengagement from the class. One student with a very low IDI score (47th out of 50) received the following comments:

He has experienced difficulty participating in small groups, which has limited his progress. He often gives very brief responses to questions in class and does not elaborate when necessary. He occasionally demonstrates an unwillingness
to accept feedback and apply it. He needs to elaborate more in his responses and speak more confidently. He should challenge himself to participate more often, so he can gain confidence using his English skills. He should continue to apply feedback to all of his work. He needs to contribute more to group discussions.

This student demonstrated strong linguistic skills, such as grammar accuracy, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and pronunciation. However, his academic success seems to be hindered by weaknesses in skills requiring interaction with peers and teachers.

Another student with a very low IDI score (48th out of 50) received the following comments:

She attends all classes, but she is not always prepared to participate in lectures and engage in classwork. She disrupts the classroom environment by often socializing in a small group, using her native language.

These comments suggest that, instead of engaging in the class as a member of a learning community facilitated by the teacher, this student tends to engage with compatriots in her first language. The former requires interaction across cultural differences, while the latter may be a retreat to the relative security and familiarity of one’s first language and first culture. Another student with a very low IDI score (49th out of 50) also received comments suggesting a certain level of disengagement from the class. Note the following excerpt:

She does not contribute enough to group discussions. By contributing to the learning environment, she can improve her own skills as well as help others. She should challenge herself to participate more often, so she can gain confidence using her English skills. She should take every opportunity to sit with classmates who do not speak her native language.

Again we see a reticence to engage in the class and to interact across linguistic and cultural differences. Similar comments reflecting a certain level of disengagement were assigned to the students with the 42nd, 43rd, and 44th ranked IDI scores in this group:

She is hesitant to contribute her opinions during group and class discussions (44th).
During class discussions, he rarely engages in topics and does not try to provide his opinion. He needs to make more effort to participate in class discussions. He must be more alert and engaged in class (43rd).

He has the capability to be an excellent student but unfortunately allows himself to be frequently disengaged. He does not apply himself or take his studies seriously. . . He must not let other things in his life become distractions that take his attention away from schoolwork. He must avoid using his cell phone during class as it is distracting to students and disrespectful to the teacher (42nd).

To be fair, there were a few students with notably higher IDI scores who received some similar comments, but there is a clear concentration of these comments among students with the lowest IDI scores. In contrast, among students with the highest IDI scores, these comments are largely absent. The one exception is the student with the 2nd highest ranked IDI score with the following comments:

She does not participate enough to help her to build upon her critical thinking skills. She often gives very brief responses to questions in class and does not elaborate when necessary. She should continue to build her vocabulary and improve her reading speed to help her understand and answer questions more easily. She should take every opportunity to sit with classmates who do not speak her native language.

While comments generally encouraging students to participate more in class discussion seem to be fairly evenly distributed throughout the sample, corroborated by the behaviour indicators for participation in Table 7, the comments that we have seen among students with the lowest IDI scores indicate a level of disengagement that forms a clear pattern that is absent among students with the highest IDI scores and is much less present even among students with more moderate IDI scores.

A few students with relatively high IDI scores received comments recognizing strong engagement with the interactive aspects of learning:

She possesses good work habits and often asks for help after class (5th).
He is able to share and support his opinions easily. He is an active participant in groups and works well with people of all cultures and backgrounds (16th).

She has taken initiative in her language learning by taking advantage of opportunities to speak English outside of class (18).

These behaviours, engaging with teachers to seek help outside of class time, working well with peers from various cultures, and seeking opportunities to use English outside of class time, all require the ability to engage others across cultural differences. These kinds of comments are absent among students with low IDI scores with one exception:

She has taken every opportunity to work with students from other cultures. She has strong oral skills, which enable her to add to class discussions with ease. She has the ability to be very successful; however, she has some difficulty following instructions and using feedback from teachers (37th).

Clearly this person has the interest and ability to engage with her peers from other cultures; however, as noted, she has some difficulty with her interaction with teachers relating to instructions and feedback.

One theme that is quite noticeable among students with the highest IDI scores is comments recognizing strong critical thinking skills. These comments were quite consistent among students with the highest IDI scores. The specific examples are as follows with their IDI score ranks:

X is focused and shows dedication in all of her classes. . . She demonstrates critical thinking in both her spoken and written work (1st out of 50).

X is focused and shows dedication in all of her classes. She can critically analyze concepts discussed in class . . . She demonstrates critical thinking in both her spoken and written work (3rd out of 50).

X is a diligent, responsible student who takes her studies very seriously . . . She demonstrates critical thinking in both her spoken and written work (9th out of 50).

X is focused and shows dedication in all of her classes. She has improved her use of academic vocabulary throughout the term. She demonstrates critical thinking in both her spoken and written work (8th out of 50).
X is a conscientious student . . . He demonstrates critical thinking in both his spoken and written work. (7th out of 50).

X is a hard-working and enthusiastic student who has demonstrated consistently strong skills in all aspects of our program this term. Her writing includes thoughtful arguments and relevant research, which demonstrates critical thinking (6th out of 50).

X is a responsible student who expresses his ideas well. He is an outgoing student who is always prepared to participate in class discussions . . . His ability to read critically and summarize academic text is excellent (10th out of 50).

Comments like these are largely absent among students with the lowest IDI scores. The one exception is the student with the 42nd ranked IDI score. This person received the following comments:

He demonstrates critical thinking in both his spoken and written work. . . . He does not apply himself or take his studies seriously. . . . He must not let other things in his life become distractions that take his attention away from schoolwork. He must avoid using his cell phone during class as it is distracting to students and disrespectful to the teacher (42nd).

However, as we have already seen above, even though the comments recognize strong critical thinking skills for this person, they also describe the theme of disengagement.

No other positive comments regarding critical thinking skills were assigned to students with the lowest 10 ranked IDI scores. In fact, outside of the those with the top 10 IDI scores, there was only one other student at all with a positive comment about critical thinking (30th).

Moreover, one of the lowest ranking students was assigned a negative comment:

He answers questions well, but he would benefit from having more critical thinking in his answers (41st out of 50).
Students’ Written Responses: Examining Students’ Thoughts and Experiences around Cultural Differences

While the previous section outlined themes in the report card comments written by the teachers of the students in the study sample, thus offering an outsider’s perspective, this next section outlines themes deriving from responses written by the students themselves. In order to elicit students’ thoughts and experiences around cultural differences, the IDI includes what are called “contexting questions”. These questions are designed to have respondents speak about their experience or involvement with cultural differences and their experience or observation of challenges involving cultural differences. Here is a list of the questions (IDI):

1. What are your experiences across cultures?
2. What is most challenging for you in working with people from other cultures (e.g., nationality, ethnicity)?
3. What are key goals, responsibilities or tasks you and/or your team have, if any, in which cultural differences need to be successfully navigated?
4. Please give examples of situations you were personally involved with or observed where cultural differences needed to be addressed within your organization, and:
   a. The situation ended negatively—that is, was not successfully resolved. Please describe where and when the situation took place, who was involved (please do not use actual names), what happened and the final result.
b. The situation ended positively—that is, was successfully resolved.

Please describe where and when the situation took place, who was involved (please do not use actual names), what happened and the final result.

The written responses of students were analyzed based on several factors. First they were assessed for depth and complexity, as well as any signs of attitudes, knowledge, or behaviours that indicate success in their studies. References points for this assessment were the academic behaviours listed on the report cards, as well as themes that appear in the report comments (both discussed above). In addition, specific themes around intercultural competence were identified based on the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. These themes are as follows:

- Knowledge: Cultural self-awareness
- Knowledge: Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks [of complexity and nature of cultural perspectives other than their own]
- Skills: Empathy
- Skills: Verbal and non-verbal communication
- Attitudes: Curiosity
- Attitudes: Openness (Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric)

Cultural self-awareness relates to their awareness of their own cultural perspective and how it affects their worldview, values, and behaviour. Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks relates to their awareness of the complexity, nature, and the implicit rationale of cultural perspectives other than their own. Empathy expresses an awareness of and an ability
to account for and even adopt differing worldviews as alternative interpretive frameworks when useful in facilitating communication or resolving conflict. Verbal and nonverbal communication refers to an awareness of cultural differences in communication styles and an ability to account for these and adopt these when useful. Curiosity represents a nonjudgemental desire to understand different cultural perspectives. Openness refers to nonjudgemental initiation of interactions across cultural differences.

Generally, in these written responses, there was a very high correlation between the complexity and depth demonstrated on the one hand and signs of attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour indicating success in their studies on the other. The least complex responses were incomplete or only included a few cursory words or short phrases that tended to be vague in meaning. Here is an example (21st ranked IDI score out of 50):

Question #1 (Q1): No
Q2: Language
Q3: Finishing work and dealing with different cultures
Q4: (blank)
Q5: (blank)

The most complex responses included more detail and depth, which can be seen in the following example (3rd):

Q1: I come from China and I lived in a big city Wuhan, which is located in the central part of China. There are a lot of university so that I can meet many students, who are around my age, come from different cities, even from different countries.

Q2: I think the most challenging part is that I am afraid to say or do something which may offend them without awareness. I don't know some cultures about people from other places, and I have no idea about taboos in their background. However, I want to show respect to others. Therefore, I always hesitate to say or do something I'm not sure while working with people from other cultures.

Q3: One important thing is to public our cultures to others while showing respect to other cultures. Giving people more opportunities to connect
people from other backgrounds is a positive way to understand different cultures and eliminate misunderstanding.

Q4: When I ran to a bus station, the bus just went. I waved hands and wanted to get on, but the bus passed. Long time after, I found that in London, if people wave hands to the bus, they may mean that they don't want to take this bus, and they just say hi to the bus driver.

Q5: Some friends from different countries went to a Chinese restaurant with me, and they don' know how to use chopsticks. Some waiters offered them forks and knives, but they also wanted to try chopsticks to adapt to my culture in a Chinese restaurant. Finally, they can use chopsticks to get food.

The ten students with the highest ranked IDI scores tended to have more complexity and depth in their written responses than the other students and tended to include signs of knowledge attitudes, and behaviours that suggest academic success. We can see this in the example above from the student with the 3rd ranked IDI score. This person expresses an awareness of subjective culture and the additional challenges and rewards this can bring to communication across cultural differences. All of the ten students with highest ranked IDI scores made some mention of subjective culture:

1st: I should realize what taboo is in their cultures because something may be right in my culture, but it's a bad thing in their culture. . . I should know more about other cultures, for example, their customs, their meanings of different gestures. Because if I can know more about their customs, I can know deeply about their cultures. Moreover, I should always keep in mind that same gesture in different cultures will have different meanings.

2nd: In my opinion, the biggest challenge is different thinking method. It is hard to make a totally agreement with people from other countries . . . I need to deal with the relationship between different culture, because I might work or study with different culture.

3rd: See above

4th: Sometime I can not understand my international friends' body language.

5th: I think the biggest challenge is the way of thinking . . . We also need to be a versatile person to fit that environment.

6th: [The biggest challenge is] religious beliefs . . . We need to respect other cultures . . . We keep speaking in English and work well together.
7th: The most challenging might be the different behavior and thinking style caused by different culture and education background. I usually need to work with people from different culture to finish one project, it required us to successfully navigate the cultural differences in order to improve our productivity.

8th: The most challenging thing is that there are different ways of thinking and speaking among people from different cultures. I think we should learn the customs and rules of a different country first in order to get rid of the unnecessary conflicts.

9th: We need to understand the culture difference in order to adapt the difference.

10th: The ways we solve and look into problems are different, and our world views are different. The first time I came to Canada, my homestay family ask me if I want some food. I said no, although I was hungry. They never ask me again. Then I realized that cultural differences are real. After that I speak out my true feelings while communicating with them.

There are comments about subjective culture distributed among some of the other respondents, but the concentration and consistency among students with the highest IDI scores is quite notable. These students address cultural differences in values and morality, ways of thinking, non-verbal communication, and general behaviour. There is recognition that these need to be explored and better understood in order to improve the students’ success studying and functioning in their new environment.

This kind of understanding reflects well on all of the criteria in the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric mentioned above. These students demonstrate a certain level of awareness of and ability to account for different cultural worldviews and communication styles. Their comments also indicate a level of curiosity and openness to these cultural differences, which bodes well for their continued development as intercultural learners.

In addition to these core areas of intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes, there are a few other themes in the data that are worth mentioning. One is the theme of unresolved
issues around perceived discrimination. It is interesting that this theme was raised by three students among the lowest 15 ranked IDI scores but not by any other students.

35th: This is happened every day som people don't like me because i am Moslem or because I am from meadll east.

43rd: Some native people may dont understand our cuntury.they may say a lot of discrimaination word. As a consequence,they may fight other cuntury people.

45th: In Canada, job opportunities are not enough, some company will choose native people rather than international students, the right should equal for all of people. . . Some people who come from developed countries look down upon these people who come from poor countries. The problem have to be solved. Discrimination has to be solved in the future.

It may be that these students simply experienced or witnessed discrimination more than others. However, it may also be that they are less equipped than some to seek alternative frameworks and interpretations or to negotiate relationships and resolve conflicts.

Overt stereotyping was generally not very evident in the written responses from this group of students. Perhaps this is evidence of at least a certain minimum amount of intercultural learning that they have experienced as second language learners in Canada. There was one clear instance of stereotyping by the student with the 44th ranked IDI score.

Once I was on a bus in Toronto, I accidentally stepped on a woman ‘s feet and I said sorry to her. But she replied me a lot of bad words. From her skin color she is probably from Africa. That negative experience made me think people from there are all rude.

Similar to the instances of discrimination above, this student’s low IDI score may suggest that he or she is not as well equipped as some others to generate alternative or more complex and critical interpretations than simple stereotypes.

Another theme that emerged was that of cultural advocacy. I use this term to refer to a desire to promote one’s own culture. For several students, this appeared to be the primary
objective of cross-cultural communication. Here are the instances of this in the students’ written responses:

9th: When I was in high school, I had a lot of foreign teachers from all over the world. They sometimes can not understand some Chinese custom and culture. We always explained it to them. They were able to understand.

12th: The Taiwan island should belong to China or is an independent country. We students from the mainland consider it must belong to China. However, my classmate from Arabic considers it should be selected by the people in Taiwan. We discussed a lot, finally we didn't persuade the opposite side. Even with some angry.

24th: Our duty is to spread our culture and to know other country culture.

27th: We are responsible to realize our dreams, develop and contribute our country and also show our culture and reduce misunderstandings of culture differences.

33rd: When I came to Canada for only 2 or 3 weeks, I was going to take the bus, the bus stopped and went for 3 times. I don't know why. The driver asked me whether I was came to Canada for a short time. I replied yes. He told me something but I can't quite understand. I'm still confused. Because I think if there are people standing at the bus stop, the bus should stop.

34th: The first goals is the religion I hope all people from another culture try to understand my religion very well.

35th: For me I need to show the world or people from different culture what my culture on good way.

36th: I am proud of my country, so it's my responsibility to show some traditional culture to others, such as, be polite to people, give a hand to someone in trouble and so on.

There is a slight tendency here toward students with lower IDI scores, which may reflect a lower ability to remain open and curious about cultural differences.

Discussion

In this section, I will offer my interpretation of the results obtained from this study. First, I will consider the results relating to ICC and grades, which will also involve a consideration of length of time spent in the EAP program. Second, I will address the
qualitative data from report card comments written by teachers and the self-reflections written by the study participants.

**ICC and Grades**

As mentioned above, the correlation coefficient for IDI scores and final grade averages did not show a significant relationship. However, it was suggested that the distortion evident in the distribution of these final averages will make this type of analysis less valid. Specifically, it can reasonably be assumed that a number of the averages are inflated due to the effects of the pass threshold of 75%. In addition, with a concept as complex as intercultural competence, any statistical tendencies observed in study participants should be treated with a responsible degree of caution. It is for these reasons that I have elected to reduce the degree of resolution, so to speak, (or increase the level of abstraction) to that of ranked sub-groups where possible, rather than to that of individuals. This grouping of data is meant to provide an alternative approach that enables an examination of overall tendencies while filtering out the noise of individual peculiarities in the data.

As noted above, when grouped by final average, students in the upper half tended to have higher IDI scores than those in the lower half. Students in the upper third had particularly high IDI scores, with eight of the ten highest IDI scores falling in this group. This may indicate a practical outcome of intercultural competence. To recap Hammer’s definition of intercultural competence that I am using for the purposes of this study, it is “the capability to shift cultural perspective and adapt behaviour to cultural commonality and difference in order to successfully accomplish cross-cultural goals” (Hammer, 2007, p. 7). As mentioned in the discussion earlier on terms and concepts, an implication of intercultural competence is that a person is able to accomplish certain goals that require communicating
across cultural differences, whether these be specific task-focused goals or more generalized goals such as building and maintaining relationships. Hammer (2011) conducted a study that looked at the diversity and inclusion staffing goals among recruiting teams at a large organization in the U.S. This study found that the teams with higher IDI scores were also the teams who were better able to meet the diversity and inclusion goals of the organization. In the case of the EAP students in my study, earning a higher final average can be seen as a goal that requires communication across cultural differences. In other words, it requires ICC, and this may be what is being detected by the differential tendencies in their IDI scores.

While there is a clear correlation in this sample between high final grade averages in this EAP program and high IDI scores, more study is needed to determine whether this is due to these students coming with certain characteristics that led to both, or whether the IDI is detecting greater ICC that contributes to their ability to succeed in an EAP program. If it is the former, then ICC may simply be regarded as an additional desirable outcome to target in an EAP program. If it is the latter, then development of ICC should be regarded as even more important since it directly helps to enable students to succeed in their EAP studies.

It should be noted again that the correlation between final grade averages and IDI scores is much lower among intermediate and low scores. It is assumed that the distortion of the data distribution noted for the final averages of participants makes the data in this range less valid and very difficult to interpret. We cannot assume, however, the absence of other factors at play that may also be contributing to the observed lack of correlation in the intermediate and low scores. For example, it could be that ICC needs to reach a certain threshold level in order to have a noticeable effect on students’ EAP success. It could also be that, as Engle and Engle (2004) noted above, language learning tends to slow down while IDI
scores tend to increase after a certain amount of time spent in a target language setting. It is interesting to note that in the group with the top third final averages, all students began their studies in the EAP program almost six months prior to doing the IDI with just three exceptions. All three of these started less than 4 months prior to doing the IDI, and, although earning high final averages, had some of the lowest IDI scores in this group – lowest, second lowest, and fourth lowest (of 17).

This data could indicate that length of time in the EAP context has an effect on IDI scores and ICC generally. Table 8 shows the mean IDI scores for all students grouped by length of time enrolled in the EAP program. The group studying for six months has a higher IDI score than the group studying for only four months. Students in the sample studying longer than six months are also noted. The data suggests that length of time may affect ICC as measured by the IDI, but more extensive sampling would need to be done in order to reach a stronger conclusion.

Table 8
Mean IDI score by length of time enrolled in the EAP program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subgroup ranked by length of time enrolled in EAP program</th>
<th>Mean IDI Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 months (n=11)</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months (n=34)</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 months (n=1)</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 months (n=1)</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 months (n=1)</td>
<td>82.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 months (n=1)</td>
<td>114.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 months (n=1)</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ICC and other Indicators of Academic Success

Aside from academic grades, other observations in this study help to give us a more informed picture of some of the behaviours, knowledge, and attitudes that may be related to the level of development of ICC among EAP students. The picture of a student with highly developed ICC that emerges is one who tends not only to earn high grades, but also one who is consistently able to complete assignments and tasks, interact and engage with teachers and peers, follow feedback, and demonstrate strong critical thinking skills. This student is aware of subjective culture and how it may affect people’s values, behaviours, and ways of thinking, and he or she is able to articulate well his or her experiences around cultural differences.

On the other hand, the picture of a student with relatively undeveloped ICC is one who tends not to earn particularly high grades, may have difficulty completing assignments or other related tasks, is disengaged from teachers and peers, especially peers from other cultures, tends not to follow up on feedback, and lacks what may be recognized as critical thinking skills. This person is less aware of subjective culture and is less able to articulate experiences with cultural differences. He or she may also be more likely to rely on cultural or racial stereotypes and may have unresolved issues around perceived discrimination. This person may also see intercultural communication as a chance, or perhaps a calling, to advocate for his or her own culture(s). Table 9 summarizes these patterns.
Table 9

Summary of observed tendencies among students with high vs low IDI scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High IDI score</th>
<th>Low IDI score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earns high academic grades</td>
<td>Earns low academic grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently completes assignments and tasks</td>
<td>Is less likely to consistently complete assignments and tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacts with teachers for clarification and feedback</td>
<td>Avoids interaction with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacts with peers from different cultures</td>
<td>Avoids interaction with peers from different cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates strong critical thinking skills</td>
<td>Either does not demonstrate strong critical thinking skills or demonstrates weak critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows awareness of subjective culture and is effects on behaviour and attitudes</td>
<td>Lacks awareness of subjective culture and is effects on behaviour and attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulates experiences well around cultural differences</td>
<td>Does not articulate experiences well around cultural differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see that at least some of these observations are in accordance with the theoretical assumptions of the DMIS upon which the IDI is based. A higher IDI score indicates greater intercultural sensitivity, which implies greater cognitive complexity around
cultural differences, an ability to “make finer discriminations among phenomena in a particular domain” (Bennett, 2004, p. 73). As this applies to the domain of cultural differences, this cognitive complexity manifests itself as an ability to “see a culturally different person as equally complex to one’s self” and an ability to “take a culturally different perspective” (p. 73). The characteristics noted above in a student with highly developed ICC based on observations in this study reflect this cognitive complexity in the tendency towards an awareness of subjective culture and its effects on social interaction and in the tendency to demonstrate strong critical thinking skills. Likewise, students with less developed ICC tended to lack these qualities.

The picture of these students also resonates well with the descriptors in the Intercultural, Knowledge, and Competence VALUE Rubric published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities mentioned earlier and which is partially based on the DMIS. For example, for the criterion of Attitude – Openness, the tendency of students with higher grades and higher IDI scores toward a willingness and openness to interact with both teachers and peers is reflected in the following statement from the rubric: “Begins to initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others. Begins to suspend judgment in valuing her/his interactions with culturally different others”. For the same criterion, the rubric does not have as appropriate a descriptor for students in this study with lower grades and lower IDI scores. These students tended to demonstrate a lack of engagement, while the statement on the lower end of the spectrum for this rubric criterion suggests a willingness to engage but with issues around unconscious judgement of differences (Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric).
Similarly, for the criterion *Skills – Verbal and nonverbal communication*, the tendency of students with high grades and IDI scores toward expressing an understanding of culturally different ways of interacting is reflected in the following descriptor from the rubric: “Recognizes and participates in cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and begins to negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences.” In addition, the tendency for these students to acknowledge an understanding of culturally different ways of thinking is reflected in the following statement for the criterion *Skills – Empathy*: “Recognizes intellectual and emotional dimensions of more than one worldview and sometimes uses more than one worldview in interactions”.

On the other hand, the descriptors toward the lower end of the spectrum for these two criteria may be appropriate for students in this study with lower grades and IDI scores, but the data from this study is inadequate to make such a statement. The descriptor for the former criterion is “Has a minimal level of understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication; is unable to negotiate a shared understanding.” The descriptor for the latter is “Views the experience of others but does so through own cultural worldview.” The data from this study indicates a clear disengagement from cultural differences among these students but does not indicate much regarding the understanding of cultural differences, the negotiation of shared understanding, or the cultural perspective from which differences are viewed.

We can see a similar alignment of observations from this study with the concepts from Michael Byram’s model of ICC. As we have seen, students in this study with high grades and high IDI scores tended to demonstrate what Byram calls ‘savoir être’: “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own”
Their engagement with teachers and peers also demonstrates what Byram calls ‘savoir apprendre’ and ‘savoir faire’: “ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and the ability to operate knowledge, attitude, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction” (p. 98, 99). Looking at the data in this way would suggest that somehow these students have found ways to overcome the challenges of interacting and engaging across cultural differences that tend to be obstacles for students with lower grades and IDI scores.

It is important to note that the most successful students appear not simply to emulate native users of academic English. This was Byram’s (1997) main criticism of van Ek’s model – namely that it set up the native speaker as the ideal to which language learners must aspire. This he saw as unreasonable, unattainable, and ultimately undesirable as an outcome of language learning. Rather, a language learner should be viewed as a social actor, an intercultural speaker, whose goal should be to be able to mediate between his/her own cultural perspective and that of his/her interlocutors regardless of the linguistic or cultural repertoires they bring to the interaction. As Byram puts it, an important teaching and learning objective ought to be an ability to critically examine interactions to enable “learners to see their role not as imitators of native speakers but as social actors engaging with other social actors in a particular kind of communication and interaction which is different from that between of native speakers” (p. 21).

If you ask them, the student participants in this study may well tell you that they are studying to become more like native users of academic English, and to a large extent this may be true. However, the skills demonstrated among the most successful of these students of critical thinking and an ability to navigate interactions with teachers and peers represent
both a certain level of success in their learning and a basis on which future academic success will depend. In becoming intercultural speakers, they have gained a great deal. As Byram argues, in their interactions “both interlocutors have a significant but different role, and the foreign speaker who knows something of the foreign culture and their own, is in a position of power at least equal to that of the native speaker” (p. 21). The most successful students in this study exhibited knowledge, attitudes, and skills that benefit anyone, native speaker and foreign/second language speaker alike – strong critical thinking skills, an awareness of subjective culture and its influence on ways of thinking and behaviour, and a willingness and ability to engage in interactions across cultural differences.

These are skills and attitudes that contribute to students’ academic success. As Jacob and Greggo have articulated, communicating effectively with diverse instructors and peer learners in informal situations and in study situations like group projects is an important skill set for international students in post secondary settings (2001). An openness and a willingness to engage culturally different others and what can be identified as strong critical thinking skills have served these students well and will no doubt continue to do so. Their success should continue to be measurable in the academic grades they earn but also in the successful interactions they are able to negotiate and relationships they are able to develop with the wide diversity of people with whom they will come into contact throughout their academic careers and beyond. Not only are these skills and attitudes successful outcomes for these students, but also markers of ICC that will enable further success in their future endeavours.
Recommendations for Further Research

This exploration of the research question mentioned above offers some insights into the qualities of what intercultural communicative competence looks like among EAP learners. It also suggests that the IDI can be a useful instrument in conjunction with other assessment techniques in gaining insights into the ICC of EAP learners and into how this ICC relates to their learning success. The insights gained also lead us to additional questions that could be explored. How do these findings contribute to the theoretical importance placed on notions such as context, sociolinguistic competence, or intercultural communicative competence? Can these findings be replicated beyond the EAP context? How would these findings compare to similar assessments done with international students who have moved on to their university studies? Would the same qualities of ICC emerge? Since more advanced ICC seems to characterize the most successful EAP students, can it be further demonstrated that an increase in intercultural competence makes it more likely that an increase in language learning success will also be demonstrated? If so, what can be done (curriculum, teaching methods, teaching styles, etc.) to enhance the intercultural competence of these EAP students? How significant is intercultural competence as a predictor of success in language learning or general academic success? How much energy should be invested in enhancing intercultural competence among learners? In addition, to what extent should culture-general (i.e. those assessed by the IDI and that help to deal with cultural differences in general), as opposed to culture-specific (i.e. – learning how to function within a specific target culture), skills be emphasized in the curriculum?

While many of these questions could be approached through additional quantitative studies, it would also be very useful to supplement this with further qualitative research that
would give insights into why students succeed, how successful students experience cultural
differences, how less successful students experience cultural differences, how they negotiate
their way in the Canadian academic context (or in any intercultural context) – how they
resolve or avoid conflict, resolve or avoid misunderstandings, deal with culture shock, adapt
to university life in Canada, interact with instructors, other students, etc.

In addition, it would be useful to explore whether level of intercultural competence is
related to academic success in the university studies of these students after they move on
from their EAP program. Is the influence or relationship of a learner’s intercultural
competence unique to their language learning, or is there also an influence or relationship to
their broader academic learning experience and success? One direction for further research
would be to follow up with the participants in this study after they graduate from the
CultureWork EAP program and once they have completed at least one semester in their
university studies. The question would be whether there is a relationship between the level of
intercultural competence of these EAP students (as measured in this study) and their general
academic success once they enter university. Specifically, do students in this EAP context
with greater intercultural competence also demonstrate higher levels of university academic
success in their first semester marks and in their own accounts of their learning? How does
this play out as they progress further in their university studies? Conversely, do students with
weaker intercultural competence also demonstrate lower levels of university academic
success using these same measures?

A further extension would be to use the data to examine demographic patterns in the
relationship of intercultural competence and language learning or university success within
the student population being studied. For example, are there significant differences based on
factors such as gender, cultural background, length of time studying in the EAP program, prior experience with cultural differences, or type of motivation for engaging in studies overseas?

**Conclusion**

The main research question for this study is as follows:

Is there a relationship between the level of intercultural competence of international EAP students and their language learning success? Specifically, do international EAP students demonstrating greater intercultural competence also demonstrate higher levels of language learning success in their EAP program? Conversely, do students demonstrating less sophisticated intercultural competence demonstrate lower levels of language learning success using these same measures?

The results of this study would suggest that the answer is that there is a relationship between the level of intercultural communicative competence of international EAP students and their language learning success. Those with high ICC as measured by the IDI tend to be more successful academically as indicated by grades, as well as by other factors such as the degree of success in their interactions with teachers and peers. Their success seems to be related to an openness and willingness to engage with a diversity of culturally different others, an understanding of how cultural differences can affect people’s attitudes and behaviours, and an ability to think critically that may be applied to intercultural experiences. There is some evidence as well that these traits can become more developed through time spent in an EAP program. More study with larger sample sizes would increase our confidence in these findings and enhance our understanding of the nature of the relationship between ICC and
academic success among EAP learners. Such an understanding could inform curriculum design, teaching techniques, and institutional policies for EAP programs.
References


Common European framework of reference for languages. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.


IDI web site: http://www.idiinventory.com/


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**Intellectual Knowledge and Competence Value RUBRIC**
Appendix B: IDI – Sample Items

Samples for Denial

It is appropriate that people do not care what happens outside their country. People should avoid individuals from other cultures who behave differently.

Samples for Defense

Our culture’s way of life should be a model for the rest of the world.

Samples for Reversal

People from our culture are less tolerant compared to people from other cultures. Family values are stronger in other cultures than in our culture.

Samples for Minimization

Our common humanity deserves more attention than culture difference. Human behavior worldwide should be governed by natural and universal ideas of right and wrong.

Samples for Acceptance

I have observed many instances of misunderstanding due to cultural differences in gesturing or eye contact. I evaluate situations in my own culture based on my experiences and knowledge of other cultures.

Samples for Adaptation

When I come in contact with people from a different culture, I find I change my behavior to adapt to theirs.

Samples for Cultural Disengagement

I do not identify with any culture, but with what I have inside. I do not feel I am a member of any one culture or combination of cultures.

---

3 These are sample items from the IDI. It has 50 items in total. A complete copy of the IDI cannot be published since it is strictly a proprietary instrument. In cases where it is used in academic research, and these sample items are provided by the IDI organization as a means of disclosing the kinds of items that appear on the IDI.
Appendix C: Slideshow – Introduction to the Study and the IDI for Participants

**Research Project – Invitation and Information**
Exploring Intercultural Competence and Academic Success among EAP Learners

**What is it?**
- Research project about language learning and intercultural skills

**Who is doing it?**
- Lead researcher: Derek Martin
- part of M.A. thesis requirements at the University of Toronto
- Thesis supervisor: Dr. Enrica Piccardo
- Professor of Educational Studies – University of Toronto

**Why is it being done?**
- Contribute an answer to the following question: What is the relationship between intercultural competence and academic success of EAP learners?

**Who is participating?**
- 50 CultureWorks students have been randomly selected
- It is voluntary -- Not mandatory

**What do we do?**
- Complete online questionnaire called the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)
  - 50 items, multiple choice (Likert Scale)
  - 4 questions with written responses
  - About 45 minutes
What is being looked at?
- Answers to the 50 IDI items
- Written answers to 4 questions
- Report cards from last term

What are the benefits?
- Volunteer experience (Put it on your resume)
- Certificate of Participation
- Contribute to scholarly research
- Contribute to CultureWorks’ understanding of the relationship between ICC and EAP success
  - Help CultureWorks to improve its program
  - Help you define learning goals

What about privacy?
- All data (IDI, written answers, report cards) are confidential.
- Data will be published in aggregate form (so individuals cannot be identified).
- Teachers will not know who participates.
- Your participation will not affect your marks.

Shhh!

Questions?????

Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)
- 50-item questionnaire
- Takes approximately 15-30 minutes
- Log-in here:
  - https://v3.3lassessment.com
- Also 4 written questions

4 written questions
1. What is your background experience with cultural differences?
2. What is most challenging for you in working with people from other cultures?
3. What are key goals, responsibilities, or tasks you have, if any, in which cultural differences need to be successfully navigated?
4. Please give examples of situations you were personally involved with or observed where cultural differences needed to be addressed within your organization, and:
   - The situation ended negatively.
   - The situation ended positively.
Appendix D: Sample Report Card

Final Report Card

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<tr>
<th>Student Name: Annie Student</th>
<th>Term: August to December 2014</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Student Number: 109263</td>
<td>Campus: Main</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Advisor: Elaine Wilson</td>
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### Evaluation

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* Important note: A passing average at CultureWorks is 75%.

### Academic Behaviour

- attends classes and school activities on time: Usually
- participates in class and school activities: Sometimes
- uses English in class and school activities: Often
- completes work on time: Always
- communicates with teachers for clarification and feedback: Often
- uses teachers' feedback to improve: Usually

<table>
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<th>Frequency Observed:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
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<tr>
<td>Often</td>
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<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
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</table>

### Feedback

Annie is a capable student who demonstrates a positive attitude towards her studies. She displays a strong vocabulary and applies this to her writing assignments and presentations. She can easily understand the author’s main idea and key supporting details. She is softspoken, and she often does not show confidence when expressing her opinions. Applying grammar concepts in her writing has been challenging for her. By contributing to the learning environment, she can improve her own skills as well as help others. She needs to focus on applying the grammar rules that she has learned in class to all of her written work.

---

Names of school and teachers used with permission
## Appendix E: Quantitative Raw Data

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ID: IDI participant ID number
DO: Developmental Orientation score from IDI
Final Ave: Final overall grade for this term
dropout: Student is at risk of dropping out

**Notes:**
- **Attendance:** Number of class hours recorded as absent for this term
- **Particip:** Behaviour frequency indicator for statement "participates in class and school activities"
- **Use Eng:** Behaviour frequency indicator for statement "used English in class and school activities"
- **Comple:** Behaviour frequency indicator for statement "completes work on time"
- **Communic w/ T:** Behaviour frequency indicator for statement "communicates with teachers for clarification"
- **Use Feedback:** Behaviour frequency indicator for statement "uses teachers' feedback to improve"
- **Behaviour frequency indicators:** Never -- Rarely -- Sometimes -- Often -- Usually -- Always
- **Jan-Apr 2015 Final Ave:** Final overall grade for this term