

# Developing Intercultural Competence of Educators: Self-Regulated Learning Perspective

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## Abstract

With the increase in globalization, intercultural competence is considered a key proficiency for educators. While many theoretical frameworks of intercultural competence exist, none have explained the development of this competence from the perspective of a self-regulated learner. The self-regulated intercultural learning process capitalizes on the advantages of self-assessment, self-directed learning, and reflection on unique experience. In alignment with a research-based self-regulated learning model, a series of evidence based interconnected activities was developed to guide and assess the intercultural learning for educators. Each phase within the sequential self-regulated learning process is facilitated by purposefully selected readings and media and originally designed semi-structured activities that are subsequently augmented by guided reflections and self-evaluations. The adaptability and cost-consciousness of the series allows for integrating it as an efficient and effective component of intercultural pre-service coursework and/or in-service professional development, for both individuals and teams.

**Keywords:** intercultural competence, self-regulated learning, educator training, teacher preparation

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Importance of the Problem

Today more than ever, preparation for diversity is essential for all educators and service providers across various settings and populations (Celinska & Swazo, 2019; Keengwe, 2010; Lemmons, 2021; Miller & Fuller, 2006; Swazo & Celinska, 2021). Similar to other professional fields, educator preparation programs are charged with preparing culturally competent educators who have the knowledge, skills, and disposition to work with children and families from cultures and backgrounds different from their own (Celinska & Swazo, 2019; Celinska & Swazo, 2016; Celinska & Swazo, 2015; Miller & Fuller, 2006; Swazo & Celinska, 2018; Swazo & Celinska, 2014). Research has evidenced that educator and human service provider preparation programs with intercultural training components provide excellent opportunities for students to learn and develop intercultural skills that will be necessary in educational and human services settings (Celinska & Swazo, 2019; Celinska & Swazo, 2016; Celinska & Swazo, 2015; Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen & Meadows 2014; George, Richardson & Watt, 2018; Han & Thomas, 2010; Keengwe, 2010; Lin & Rime, 2008; Swazo & Celinska, 2018; Swazo & Celinska, 2014; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016, White-Clark, 2005). However, while the development of intercultural competence is a high value of many universities, there are few programs that explicitly teach this necessary competence (Celinska & Swazo, 2015; Ross, 2008; Swazo & Celinska, 2018; Swazo & Celinska, 2014). On the other hand, educator and counselor preparation programs with explicit and substantial intercultural training components equip students with a highly transferable set of interpersonal and collaboration skills that are sought in many educational and human services settings (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2009; Celinska & Swazo, 2015; Jones, Sanders & Booker, 2013; Keengwe, 2010; Miller & Fuller, 2006; Ross, 2008; Swazo & Celinska, 2018; Swazo & Celinska, 2014; Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016; White-Clark, 2005).

### 1.2 Theoretical Framework

While many theoretical models of intercultural competence exist, the self-regulated learning model constitutes a unique approach to the development of intercultural competence from the perspective of a self-regulated learner (Strohmeier, Gradinger, & Wagner, 2017). According to the authors "intercultural competence means that one's own knowledge, feelings, and actions are focused to act appropriately in intercultural situations." Within the self-regulated learning model intercultural competence is considered a key proficiency for many professions and educational institutions and a necessity

in all intergroup situations. For educators who will interact with diverse students, families, and colleagues, intercultural competence will be of utmost importance. Since intercultural learning is a lifelong process, self-regulated learning is critical for enhancing the potential of learner continuous development through goal-oriented actions and reflection on own learning experience. Intercultural learning progresses through three different phases: forethought phase, performance phase, and self-reflection phase. This model presents the development of intercultural competence as a lifelong process in which phases succeed each other as they are initiated, monitored, and evaluated. Following this model, a learner self-assesses and self-directs their own intercultural learning process, starting with setting own goals towards charting a pathway for lifelong learning. In an empirical study Strohmeier, Gradinger, and Wagner (Strohmeier, Gradinger, & Wagner, 2017) developed a self-report questionnaire capturing the three learning phases and explored the theoretical structure of the proposed intercultural learning process. Data were collected from 236 participants aged 18 to 47 years were analyzed using structural equation models (SEMs). The results revealed the following three components in the latent factor forethought phase: intercultural learning goals, intercultural self-efficacy, and intercultural intrinsic interest. The intercultural learning goals were evidenced to have a three-factor structure of knowledge, attitude and communication domains. The analyses yielded the following three components in the latent factor performance phase: self-monitoring, self-recording, and self-experimentation. In addition, mediation analyses provided initial evidence of the existence of two distinct learning cycles in the intercultural learning process. In the first cycle the forethought phase precedes the performance phase, with both being followed by self-evaluation and success attribution, both components of the self-reflection phase. In the second cycle the performance phase precedes optimizing future learning, an element of the self-reflection phase.

### *1.3 Purpose of the Study*

For decades research has affirmed that cultural differences between educators and students may negatively impact student achievement (White-Clark, 2005). Furthermore, a distinct gap has been identified between the preparation and experience of teachers who teach in low income schools and those who teach in more affluent districts. Professional development for educators designed to increase their intercultural competence and prepare them to differentiate instruction for diverse students is crucial to student performance and a key element in closing the achievement gap (Ross, 2008; White-Clark, 2005). However, many educators feel inadequate to embark culturally responsive approaches to the diverse needs of their students, to implement differentiated curriculum, and adjust their pedagogy accordingly (George, Richardson, & Watt, 2018; Lemmons, 2021; Liao, 2018). Thus, it is of utmost importance for educators to learn how to, and become confident in, experimenting with various strategies in order to best meet the diverse needs of their students. To facilitate this important undertaking, the author designed a series of activities to guide educators in acquiring and enhancing intercultural competence from the perspective of the self-regulated learning model discussed above (Strohmeier, Gradinger, & Wagner, 2017).

## **2. Method**

Utilizing the self-regulated learning model developed by Strohmeier, Gradinger, and Wagner (Strohmeier, Gradinger, and Wagner, 2017) as a framework the author designed a series of guided, semi-structured activities to facilitate each phase of the self-directed intercultural learning process. In the forethought phase these activities provide learners with guidelines to set own learning goals as well as to self-assess own intercultural self-efficacy and motivational beliefs necessary to initiate and plan an intercultural interaction. In the performance phase these activities aim at supporting learners as they self-assess competencies necessary during an intercultural interaction and their performance in intercultural situations. Finally, in the self-reflection phase these activities direct learners as they self-evaluate necessary competencies following an intercultural interaction and plan for future intercultural growth. The designed activities range from responding to open-ended, reflective questions and prompts, goal-writing and action planning, analysis of own and others' life events, compare and contrast diagrams, interviewing to researching professional resources to support intercultural learning tasks in a variety of educational settings.

The activities were designed based on a review of current literature and the author's previous research findings in the area of intercultural learning and training. The purpose of the literature review was to identify activities that have empirical evidence of increasing educator intercultural competence and align with the theoretical framework of the self-regulated learning discussed above. Such activities could be designed for implementation in coursework (on-campus and online) or on-the-job training and professional development, both for individual learners and collaborative teams. The activities that necessitate organizing and supervising extensive off campus field experiences (e.g., study abroad, faculty-led off campus experiences) were excluded. Utilizing the media and library resources of a comprehensive university, the review of literature was conducted by two assistants who are advanced graduate students in education or school counseling. Both assistants were thoroughly trained in searching databases in education and related fields (e.g., psychology, counseling, mental health) by a university librarian and the author. Subsequently, the assistants were continuously supervised by the author utilizing consultation techniques and author-led collaborative discussions. The graduate assistants conducted their searches independently of each other and consulted with a university librarian throughout their searches. The searches utilized the key

words of inter/multi-cultural competence(ies), cultural intelligence, diversity training/awareness, and anti-bias/anti-racism training/awareness. Upon the completion of the searches, the findings were compared to delete duplicate items and to compile the remaining items into a comprehensive repository of research articles. Based on the author's review of each article in the repository only articles that met all of the following criteria were included in the subsequent literature review: (1) published in a peer refereed journal, (2) published between 2000 and 2021, (3) contained a detailed description of original empirical data (qualitative and/or quantitative), and (4) provided empirical evidence of increasing the participants' intercultural competence. Next, the author analyzed the articles to select readings, materials and media (videos, short films, and websites) that aligned with the self-regulated learning model described above and were applicable to pre-service and/or in-service trainings for educators. Utilizing the selected reading, materials, and media, the author designed a series of semi-structured activities for each phase of self-directed learning. The author also developed the following prompts to guide learners' self-evaluation after each activity: (1) Did this activity enhance my reflections on my learning? (2) Did this activity lead to new insights? (3) Did this activity motivate me to get involved in new endeavors or meet new people? The outline and description of the activities across domains in each phase are provided in the Results section below.

The analysis of the readings, materials and media and the design of activities were guided by the author's expertise gained from own research related to intercultural learning and training. Several of the author's collaborative studies explored the effectiveness of various facets of intercultural training for enhancing intercultural competence of school-based and community-based service providers. One study compared self-reported openness and comfort in interactions with diverse populations across graduate students receiving intercultural training through two contrasting curricula designs (Celinska & Swazo, 2016). Another study utilized quantitative and qualitative methodologies and multiple measures of intercultural competence to compare learning outcomes for graduate students taught within the traditional on campus and international study-abroad course formats (Swazo & Celinska, 2014). Subsequent in-depth qualitative study of graduate students' perceptions of their intercultural learning in an intensive faculty-led international course along with the role of the course's curricular and instructional components in these outcomes was conducted, resulting in recommendations for expanding intercultural pedagogy strategies (Celinska & Swazo, 2015). Similarly, a large sample, survey-based study on the impact of the provider's use of culturally embedded language on their intercultural competence (Swazo & Celinska, 2021) along with the findings of studies on the language-based approach to cultural-linguistic competence training (Celinska & Swazo, 2019; Swazo & Celinska, 2018) formed a base for training recommendations to enhance cultural-linguistic competencies among human service providers.

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1 Forethought Phase*

##### **3.1.1 Domain: Goal Setting**

In this domain learners study the content of two comprehensive introductory level articles. The first article provides a comprehensive outline of intercultural competencies necessary for educator's leadership and advocacy roles and as such serves as an excellent springboard for goal setting activities (Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen & Meadows, 2014). The other article presents the theoretical and practical understandings about educator intercultural responsiveness illustrated by authentic classroom applications and followed by strategies to support professional growth and development in the area of intercultural responsiveness (Han & Thomas, 2010). Following the study of the articles learners respond to the following prompts: (1) Have your personal and professional experiences prepared you to become a culturally effective and responsive teacher, as described by the authors? Why or why not? (2) Self-assess on the Forethought Phase component of the self-report questionnaire (Strohmeier, Grading, and Wagner, 2017) and (3) Write a goal(s) for your own intercultural development and explain why and how the chosen goal will contribute to becoming a more culturally effective and responsive educator.

##### **3.1.2 Domain: Self-Efficacy**

In this domain learners study the content of an article that discusses intercultural self-efficacy as the motivational belief in one's ability to reach intercultural goals and to sustain effort in challenging intercultural situations (George, Richardson, & Watt, 2018). Following the study of the article learners watch three short films referenced in the article and respond to the following prompts: (1) What stood out to you from the videos you watched about the importance of understanding racial identity? (2) What are some manifestations of the speakers' self-efficacy and how do they contribute to their desired outcomes? and (3) How will understanding the perspectives of others make you a more intercultural competent educator?

##### **3.1.3 Domain: Intrinsic Interest**

In this domain learners study the content of the article that presents the author's experience in bringing intercultural education to a rural setting utilizing the art of self-reflection to describe oneself in specific social, cultural, and pedagogical settings (Liao, 2018). Through "following tales of the field" the author guides learners in gaining vital non-textbook

knowledge and deepening their intrigue in the unknown. Following the study of the article learners respond to the following prompts: (1) As you reflect on the author's experience, what are the major motivators and obstacles to their growth related to intrinsic interest? and (2) What motivators and obstacles have you experienced in your own intercultural intrinsic interest?

### 3.2 *Performance Phase*

#### 3.2.1 Domain: Self-Monitoring

In this domain learners study the content of the article that presents a longitudinal and comprehensive approach to achieving self-monitoring competence to check whether one's own actions are goal oriented or in accordance with the previous plan (White-Clark, 2005). In particular the article discusses strategies to facilitate monitoring own actions to ensure they are in alignment with the goals set during the forethought phase, checking that they are still meaningful, and modifying existing goals if necessary. Further, the article introduces the Reflection-Instruction-Collaboration-Supportive (RICS) professional development model which provides school leaders with a conceptual framework for professional development in the area of diversity. Self-monitoring is a necessary starting point in the performance phase of the intercultural learning process. In the RICS model, self-monitoring involves educators reflecting on their own perceptions and attitudes and modifying their behavior as a result. During the self-monitoring phase learners look back on the goals previously set in an effort to monitor whether their own current behavior as an educator aligns with these goals and is meaningful in the development as an interculturally competent educator. Following the study of the article learners respond to the following prompts: (1) Why is self-monitoring beneficial and important as you engage in career long intercultural learning? and (2) How do you envision yourself being involved in a lifelong learning process similar to the one described in the article?

#### 3.2.2 Domain: Self-Recording

In this domain learners study the content of the article that outlines the self-recording process that can be utilized in an effort to become more competent in self-recording their own intercultural interactions (Miller & Fuller, 2006). Self-recording is the competence that entails writing down or recording what is happening during intercultural situations. Learners who perform highly on self-recording are able to take detailed notes about the intercultural interactions they experience. The article involves educators leading an interview with someone from another culture and recording the similarities and differences between their own experiences. Based on the findings, a plan of action is developed for home-school interactions and communication to enhance parent participation and the learning of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Following the presented framework learners become familiar with how to self-record what is happening in intercultural situations in order to enhance future interactions with families from cultural and linguistic backgrounds different from their own. Following the study of the article learners complete the following activities: (1) Write an outline exploring important life events from your own history (e.g., education, family, religion, recreation, cultural traditions and values, personality, work, victories, and defeats), (2) Conduct an interview with a person from a cultural background different from yours to outline their key life events, (3) Create a Venn diagram depicting the similarities and differences between your key life events and those of the person you interviewed and (4) Reflect on the Venn diagram on how those similarities and differences inform your intercultural learning.

#### 3.2.3 Domain: Self-Experimentation

In this domain learners study the content of the article that presents self-experimentation as the competence necessary to attempt various strategies in order to find the most effective one for specific intercultural situations (Lin, Lake, & Rime, 2008). The authors explore different educational strategies educators may use to successfully implement an anti-bias curriculum within their classrooms which may serve as a springboard to reflect on how to use different strategies in order to reach one's intercultural goals. This step of the intercultural learning process takes learners back to the previously established goals and requires continued self-monitoring and self-recording to ensure the efficacy of self-experimentation. Following the study of the article learners respond to the following prompts: (1) What are some different examples that stood out to you as potentially effective methods to overcome cultural barriers? (2) What are some practical ways you could get parents more involved in their child's intercultural education? and (3) Self-assess on the Performance Phase component of the self-report questionnaire (Strohmeier, Grading, and Wagner, 2017).

### 3.3 *Self-Reflection Phase*

#### 3.3.1 Domain: Self-Evaluation

In this domain learners analyze their goal setting and planning completed during Forethought Phase, Domain: Goal Setting and respond to the following prompts: (1) Do you still consider your goals to be meaningful? Why or why not? (2) What have you learned as you have been applying different strategies to achieve your goals? (3) Did you change the initial plan you had to reach your goal? If so, how did it inform or enhance your learning? and (4) Do you still think this goal will

prepare you to become a more culturally effective and responsive educator? If so, in what ways?

### 3.3.2 Domain: Optimizing Future Learning

In this domain learners study the content of the article that follows recent graduates of a teacher education program into their beginning teacher placements as they seek to continue their growth as lifelong intercultural learners and educators (Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler, & Sonu, 2009). As the final step in the intercultural learning process, optimizing future learning is the competence to reflect on one's own actions for future learning in case of drawbacks. Educators who perform highly on optimizing future learning do not repeat the same ineffective or unsuccessful action but try out other behavioral alternatives if the intercultural interaction was discouraging. By reading this article learners begin thinking about their future intercultural learning, especially in the event of their classroom reality being discrepant from their expectations. As the teachers featured in the article share their struggles of enacting intercultural, social justice focused education in the classroom learners realize that such struggles are inevitable and prepare for the uncertain journey of intercultural learning. Following the study of the article learners respond to the following prompts: (1) What was encouraging about the experiences shared in the article? (2) What barriers do you anticipate in your future diverse classroom? and (3) How will their experiences impact your preparation to become an intercultural educator? and (4) Self-assess on the Self-reflection Phase component of the self-report questionnaire (Strohmeier, Gradinger, and Wagner, 2017). To further plan and prepare to become an intercultural educator learners explore the resources for teaching and learning available on the Teaching Tolerance website, plan to implement at least three resources into their future classroom and discuss how these resources will enhance the intercultural environment of their classroom.

## 4. Conclusions and Implications

Given that intercultural competence is of utmost importance for educators who commit to addressing the needs of diverse students, the author designed a series of interconnected, semi-structured activities to facilitate intercultural learning of educators representing a wide range of interests, expertise and experience. All activities are based on empirical evidence of increasing educator intercultural competence that emerged from an extensive review of current literature and the author's expertise in the area of intercultural learning and training. Because the activities are aligned with the theoretical framework of self-regulated learning that emphasizes self-assessment, self-direction and reflection on individual unique experience (Strohmeier, Gradinger, & Wagner, 2017), they establish an innovative approach to intercultural training in education. Considering that intercultural learning is a lifelong process, the framework of self-regulated learning plays a critical role in enhancing educators' longitudinal intercultural development starting with their preparation programs throughout in-service practice and professional development. As educators progress through each phase of self-regulated learning, they become increasingly capable of self-assessing and self-directing their own intercultural learning process, charting a unique pathway to achieve their own goals for lifelong intercultural learning. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the activities for advancing intercultural competence may be assessed using a research-based self-report questionnaire developed by Strohmeier, Gradinger, and Wagner (2017) since the sequencing and the content of the activities are closely aligned with this assessment tool. In the light of the activities being evidence-based, adaptable, and cost-conscious, they may prove efficient and effective approach to prepare culturally competent educators equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for supporting children and families from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Importantly, the implementation of the activities may be accomplished as a part of existing coursework and does not necessitate extensive, off-campus field experience. On the contrary, the activities are designed as a self-directed learning process with easily accessible materials and well established response formats. In conclusion, the proposed research-based series of activities has a potential to become an efficient and effective approach to prepare and support culturally competent educators as they acquire and expand their intercultural competence across time and training settings and to be implemented as self-paced training for both individual learners and collaborative teams.

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**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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