Developing Cultural Intelligence for Global Leadership Through Mindfulness

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Understanding how businesses function in relation to cultural and societal influences is critical for today’s business leader who wants to interact competently across borders. However, developing and evaluating such competence is a challenge. One concept that provides a holistic conceptualization of intercultural competence is the notion of “mindfulness” or the ability to use reflection as a connection between knowledge and action. To facilitate the intercultural learning of a group of MBA students studying global leadership during a cross-cultural immersion experience in China, a model of cultural competence was introduced during their predeparture sessions. In order to demonstrate their understanding of intercultural competence, student papers were analyzed using a coding scheme for reflection. Data show that, overall, students increased their level of “mindfulness” and became more reflective, and in our hopes, more culturally sensitive as a result of this cross-cultural immersion program. Implications of this study can be used for teaching international business and improving study abroad assignments through reflection.

Keywords: Cultural intelligence, Mindfulness, Intercultural communication competence, Business education, Global leadership development, Global mindset, Study abroad

1. INTRODUCTION

In graduate business education today there is a significant mandate to prepare students for global leadership. Global leaders are required to readily adapt to change and deal with the complexity of interpersonal relationships in order to flourish in an environment of ambiguity comprised of cultural differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Global leadership requires that a person possesses intercultural competence, also known as CQ, or cultural intelligence (Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003; Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009a, 2009b). This includes the ability to understand key cultural norms of a counterpart’s culture; to be ready to listen, observe, and alter one’s behavior or communication preferences; and to be open and flexible to reflect and change interaction strategies and expectations depending on the situation and the context.

Helping students develop CQ is certainly a challenge given the small amount of time allotted for culture-specific instruction in most MBA study abroad opportunities (Tuleja, 2008). Assessing the learning outcomes of students is even harder. If so, how can educators teach intercultural competence and then determine what has been learned? What is the assurance that graduates of...
business school are ready to take on the complexity of human interaction that is necessary to perform the needed functional business tasks across borders? This article utilizes the work of early theorists in the area of CQ (Ang et al., 2007; Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003; Ng et al., 2009a, 2009b), and specifically focuses on a model by Thomas (2006; Thomas et al., 2008; Thomas & Inkson, 2009)—the “components of cultural intelligence”—for its simplicity in grounding a group of MBA students participating in a cross-cultural immersion experience in China. This model posits that intercultural competence can be nurtured by gaining the necessary knowledge for cultivating successful intercultural competencies, but it is the concept of mindfulness—focused observation and critical reflection—that provides the vital link between one’s knowledge and behavior when leading across cultures.

The research study explicated in this article examines the intercultural learning of a group of MBA students during their global leadership training before a cross-cultural immersion experience in China, and then through a writing assignment after they returned. First, it reviews the literature relating to CQ and mindfulness. Next, it scrutinizes the Thomas and Inkson (2009) model of the components of cultural intelligence followed by an examination of the study in terms of its research question and methodology. Then, it analyzes a set of student writing based upon a coding scheme that is specifically designed for writing assessments (Kember, McKay, Sinclair, & Wong, 2008). Finally, it discusses research findings and implications for teaching international business and developing intercultural competence. Implications of this research add to the conversation regarding curricular and pedagogical choices as well as assessment opportunities that can provide strong learning opportunities for business students’ global understanding (Aggarwal & Goodell, 2011; Kedia & Englis, 2011; Kedia, Harveston, & Bhagat, 2001; Kedia & Mukherji, 1999; Witte, 2010).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural communication competence or CQ (cultural intelligence) has its roots in interpersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1983) and also in social/emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008) which is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions both in ourselves and in others. Goleman’s (1995) findings indicated that emotional intelligence contributes 80 to 90% of the competencies that distinguish outstanding leaders from average leaders. These competencies include the ability to have self-awareness and other-awareness—to be attuned to both one’s emotions and those of others. Emotional intelligence also means that one has self-regulation, or the ability to control emotions and actions under pressure, as well as the motivation to delay gratification in order to achieve long-term goals. Additionally, it means that a person is able to exhibit empathy toward others and use social skills to communicate it.

Cultural intelligence takes this self- and other-awareness even further. CQ is a person’s ability to function skillfully in a cultural context different than one’s own (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ng et al., 2009a, 2009b). This means that a culturally intelligent person is someone who is not only able to empathize and work well with others, but can acknowledge differing values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in order to anticipate, act, and react in appropriate ways to produce the most effective results, and then to reevaluate and try acting or reacting in a different way (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne, & Annen, 2011). Earley and Mosakowski contend that:
[While] a person with high emotional intelligence grasps what makes us human and at the same time what makes each of us different from one another... a person with high cultural intelligence can somehow tease out of a person’s or group’s behavior those features that would be true of all people and all groups, those peculiar to this person or this group, and those that are neither universal nor idiosyncratic. The vast realm that lies between those two poles is culture. (p. 140)

Earley and Ang’s (2003) seminal theory of CQ comprises three critical elements necessary for effective intercultural interaction: cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. The cognitive aspect is needed to conceptualize and process new information. This is more than simply having knowledge about a culture, but the ability to transfer learning to differing cultural contexts. The motivational aspect is needed for adapting to differing cultural norms and values. However, it is more than just adapting to an unfamiliar environment; rather, it means that a person possesses the interest and curiosity—the drive—to respond to ambiguity. The behavioral aspect is needed in order to engage effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004).

The work of Van Dyne and colleagues (Ng et al., 2009a, 2009b) extends the original CQ theory and focuses on the process of cultural intelligence, which takes into consideration the experiential aspect of what one learns and re-learns after reflecting on the experience. Van Dyne has identified four factors of CQ which include CQ strategy, knowledge, motivation, and behavior. CQ strategy involves how a person acquires and then uses knowledge of other cultures—which includes contemplating assumptions, deciphering actions, and adjusting perspectives about the situation. CQ knowledge means that a person knows what she knows, but also knows what she doesn’t know. Knowledge includes understanding about specific norms and behaviors, worldviews, values; and even historical, political, and governmental aspects of people and their culture. CQ motivation is a person’s interest in engagement with people and the culture itself—the CQ motivated person enjoys learning and applying what she has learned with interest and confidence—she is comfortable with herself and with the ambiguity that comes when crossing cultures. CQ behavior is the person’s ability to engage with others through language and nonverbal behavior that is developed through trial and error. In essence, the culturally intelligent person is highly motivated and interested in interacting with people from other cultures and is successfully able to assess a situation, scan for cues, and then act accordingly—this is also known as the concept of “mindfulness.”

Mindfulness is a metacognitive strategy that the culturally intelligent person must practice if she or he is to be successful in cross-cultural interactions. Mindfulness requires reflectively paying attention through monitoring personal feelings, thoughts, and actions. It allows people to make sense of cultural situations, events and actions within one’s frame of reference by removing a rigid or fixed mindset, also known as “cultural sense-making,” which is the terminology used in certain global leadership literature (Bird & Osland, 2006). Bird and Osland define cultural sense-making (which will be discussed later in this article) as a cognitive approach that helps us to organize and interpret information—a way that we can make sense of our perceived social reality—it is a form of mindfulness.

Mindfulness originally stemmed from Eastern spiritual traditions of meditation, which prompts a person to consciously observe and change one’s mental habits. This form of mindfulness takes into account mental, emotional, and physical states, which helps an individual be in touch with internal thoughts and feelings in relation to external conditions. The goal is to focus on the present moment and be aware of those intuitive notions or ideas that come to mind and open up new insights (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). For example, if you
are having negative thoughts and you want to rid yourself of the manifestations of those negative thoughts, you identify what might be causing the negativity and then focus on having positive thoughts about that subject. Even breathing can be developed as a tool to help control negative distractions and build positive concentration (Hanh, 1975). This enables you to become aware of such negativity in order to mindfully transform your thinking. In brief, you monitor what you are thinking and how this is affecting emotional, attitudinal, or physical well-being in order to respond and act in an appropriate manner.

The construct of mindfulness has attracted significant attention in a variety of academic and professional fields. Mindfulness was introduced to the field of psychology by Langer (1989), then carried over to the field of interpersonal communication (Burgoon & Langer, 1995) and eventually found its way into the intercultural literature (Ting-Toomey, 1999) as well as in the area of global leadership (Mendenhall, Osland, Bird, Oddou, & Maznevski, 2008). In the field of education, the construct of mindfulness is often referred to as the reflective practice (Kember et al., 2008; Schön, 1983) and in business education, as the reflective leader/manager (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003; Gray, 2007; Hedberg, 2009; Looman, 2003; Mintzberg, 1975; Pavlovich, Collins, & Jones, 2009; Roglio & Light, 2009; Schmidt-Wilk, 2009).

To this end, the opposite of being mindful is mindlessness, like being on auto-pilot (Burgoon & Langer, 1995). With mindlessness, there is no need to think about what you are doing because it comes naturally and is accepted and expected—you certainly don’t need to question your assumptions because you expect everything to happen the way it always has (Thomas & Inkson, 2009). This is ethnocentrism, which blinds us to the multiple reasons and possibilities behind any situation or interaction (Triandis, 1990). When someone only perceives the world from one framework, that person is exhibiting mindlessness.

The trend of mindfulness in the literature is nothing new but it is definitely noteworthy. However, this concept of mindfulness, or reflection, has been eschewed in business practice because of its affective versus its cognitive nature (Mintzberg, 2004). In a similar vein, business school curriculum may exhibit some mindlessness by having only one—typically a U.S. American—perspective on business. Thus, business schools may be ethnocentric from a perspective of global business. But, in developing global leaders it is imperative to remember that business learning does not necessarily equate cultural learning. For example, knowing how to navigate through the process of creating a joint venture is not the same as being able to successfully interact with counterparts on an interpersonal or intercultural level. Past and current research into cross-cultural communication in management suggests that we first must know ourselves before we can know others, and then attempt to create bridges between what is known and what is not known—cultural intelligence (Appelbaum, Roberts, & Shapiro, 2009; Rottig, 2007). This concept of mindfulness, or reflection, is critical to the development of a leader who wants to be culturally intelligent and successful in any multicultural setting.

3. THE CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE MODEL

The cultural intelligence model as construed by Thomas (2006; Thomas et al., 2008; Thomas & Inkson, 2009) demonstrates that having knowledge, mindfulness, and skills (also acknowledged as competencies) working together in concert helps a person to achieve CQ (see Figure 1). Culturally intelligent people are able to use their knowledge to understand multiple aspects of
Mindfulness in Global Leadership Development

One develops intercultural communication competence by practicing mindfulness, which means reflecting on one’s knowledge of any given situation and then trying to figure out the meaning of the events.

- Business learning does not necessarily equate culture learning.
- Functional expertise does not guarantee intercultural success.
- We first must know ourselves before we can know others.
- We can develop a repertoire of responses that are appropriate in different intercultural situations.


cultural phenomena that come their way; they use mindful cognitive strategies that both observe and interpret any given situation; and they develop a repertoire of skills which they can adapt and then demonstrate appropriate behaviors across a wide range of situations (Thomas & Inkson, 2009, p. 22). These are the skills most needed in global business today.

3.1. Knowledge

Knowledge means recognizing some fundamental principles of behavior (customs, practices, rituals, greetings, language, etc.) and/or understanding something about a culture’s history, politics, economy, or society. One may understand how a particular culture varies from one’s own, how that culture affects behaviors, what are some of the basic tenets of this culture’s belief system, or even some of the fundamental principles for how to interact with people in that culture. This is definitely favorable to lacking knowledge about a particular culture; however, simply knowing about the practices of people, society, or government is not enough. Human interaction is complex and countless cultural intricacies and sensitivities abound, so simply having cultural knowledge—however notable this is—is not a predictor of competence. For example, even being fluent in another language is no replacement for being sensitive to people’s beliefs and behaviors, although it is a step in the right direction. We’ve all heard of the person who may be linguistically competent, but culturally incompetent (Bennett, 1986; 2004). Just because one is fluent in another
language or several languages does not mean automatic aptitude for interacting thoughtfully and respectfully with people from another culture.

Additionally, experiencing cultural contact—no matter the length of that contact—does not necessarily mean that a person will become culturally competent. A recent study analyzing the learning outcomes of students’ academic pursuits abroad showed that it was not the amount of time spent in-country nor the simple act of being abroad that predicted change. Rather, it was the active and conscious effort of the students to reflect on what was happening—in real time—and then actively adjust their behaviors accordingly that made a difference. Students were able to develop this skill-set through the intervention of educators who pushed them to think about what was happening and why it was happening (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, & Paige, 2009). This is what mindful learning about cultural differences is all about, because left to our own devices we may not push ourselves to figure out the “why” to the “what” (Tuleja, 2008).

For example, the theatrical metaphor of “front-stage/back-stage” culture (Varner, 2001) is helpful in explaining this phenomenon. When we view a theatrical production, we are merely passive spectators observing the illusion of real events as portrayed by the actors on stage. While this can be enjoyable and entertaining, we miss out on all of the action going on behind the curtain. Perhaps we have read up on the playwright beforehand or know something of the play’s theme and meaning. This understanding will surely help with the overall enjoyment of what is happening. But this is not the full view. If we have any curiosity about theatrical workings, we might choose to go backstage after the curtain call and steal a glimpse of all of the props and mechanical devices that go unnoticed throughout the production. Or, we might have the opportunity to become stage hands ourselves and learn all of the inner workings of how the production is fabricated—in essence, we are able to understand not only what is happening, but why it is happening because of our insider’s view of what is going on behind the scene. By going backstage we have become active participants rather than passive spectators. This leads to the next part of the model, mindfulness.

3.2. Mindfulness

Mindfulness in Thomas’ model (2006; Thomas et al., 2008; Thomas & Inkson, 2009) indicates that the transformational difference in crossing cultures is to actively pay attention to the subtle cues in cross-cultural circumstances—then to tune into one’s prior knowledge, thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions to what is going on. The person practicing mindfulness is aware of one’s own assumptions and perceptions and the emotions and attitudes attached to them. This person will also attempt to pay attention to the other person’s actions, both tacit and explicit. Mindfulness could be described in terms of another cultural intelligence model, cultural sense-making. This model suggests another way to envision how the culturally intelligent person can move beyond assumptions and stereotypes by actively seeking enculturation, which moves us away from ethnocentrism. The cultural sense-making model provides clarity for the metacognitive process that occurs when one is mindful.

Cultural sense-making involves reframing and changing one’s script rather than restricting oneself to rigid, standard scripts (Bird & Osland, 2006). It is about changing perspective and opening up to new opportunities and ways of looking at the world. There are three steps to this process: framing, making attributions, and selecting a script. The first step, framing, involves
the expectations we have about a situation. Before, during, or after a situation, we think about what we know—we observe and scan for cues that might confirm our hunches. Based upon that, we create a frame for the situation. In the second step, making attributions, we analyze those cues and try to match them to schema, or mental patterns that we create. These schemas are cognitive frameworks that help us to interpret unfamiliar information and experiences—and cognitive psychologists will assure us that it is a natural way of learning about the world (Piaget, 2001) by making attributions that are affected by our background and experiences, our beliefs, and our attitudes. The third step is selecting a script, which we make based upon the frame we create and the mental patterns (schema) that we have created—this script becomes our road map to navigate the unfamiliar territory. Our script is often influenced by our previous experiences and we then draw similarities or differences between what we know and what we don’t know.

For example, let’s say you are going to a Chinese banquet where you know that there are certain foods that you do not care to eat. In framing the situation, you set the stage, so you might think about how you have handled situations like this before—you don’t want to insult your host, but you also don’t want to eat something that is distasteful to you. You imagine the scene in your mind—your host offers you a delicious morsel—you refuse; the host offers it again—you refuse. When you make attributions you analyze the cues of your host—he will probably smile and continue to offer you the food—at the same time, you will be trying to maintain a pleasant look on your face as well as tone while you continue to decline the food. You know that this particular culinary delight upsets your stomach, so you naturally think about how it has affected you in the past. But you also know how important formality and graciousness is within the Chinese culture—you certainly do not want to offend your host. Finally, you will select a script, which might be a strategy of saying how delicious such a delicacy is and how you are honored by your host’s selection of such a treat; but you also politely state that you are watching your cholesterol, so for health reasons you must unfortunately decline.

This is the process of cultural sense-making. Sense-making is a way of “enculturating” a situation—where you are mindful of the situation, the ramifications if you misstep, and how you take other people’s feelings into consideration. You plan ahead to frame the situation by setting up your expectations, you then analyze the situation based upon any previous experiences or hunches regarding what you should do, and then you create a script for how to proceed—you script it out in your mind. This leads us to the final portion of the components of cultural intelligence, skills (competency), which are demonstrated through behavior.

3.3. Skills/Competency

Being skillful means that a person is able to choose appropriate behaviors (based upon developing knowledge and experience) suitable for a given intercultural situation. Thomas and Inkson (2009) state, “Retaining this knowledge also requires the ability to transfer knowledge gained from a specific experience to broader principles that can be used in future interactions in other settings” (p. 29). If one has developed knowledge about the culture and how it affects behaviors, then one should be able to carefully reflect on it in order to figure out its meaning. At that point, the culturally competent person’s aim is to figure out how to apply that knowledge by putting it into appropriate actions. Knowledge that is reflected upon deeply can result in effective behavior.
For example, the culturally intelligent person appreciates that it’s not enough to simply know that formality is important in Japan and that bowing is a key cultural practice. One must discern the different situations and degrees of bowing as well as aspects of the bow, such as its depth and length, the person’s rank, and so forth. Also, should one bow to greet, to thank, to apologize, or even to congratulate someone? As a foreigner, you may not be expected to bow, but if initiated, then you need to understand the intricate nuances of this form of communication—it is symbolic; it is ritual. Knowing who should bow first, how low, and how long and why this should be done this way in the first place involves having prior knowledge. In addition, one must assess that knowledge through a cognitive process, and then behave accordingly, reassessing what transpired based upon the nonverbal cues communicated by the other parties (e.g., Did you do it correctly? Was there subtle body language that might have signaled dissatisfaction? Could positive body language—e.g., facial expressions such as a smile—mean success or could this possibly mask disapproval?). Skillfulness requires constant attention and redressing the “what” and “why” of every situation. Thomas (2006; Thomas et al., 2008; Thomas & Inkson, 2009) posits that the concept of mindfulness is the critical link between one’s knowledge and one’s behavioral skills when leading across cultures. One must build upon knowledge and go beyond merely learning facts, then analyze one’s behavior and reflect on it in order to build that repertoire of skillful behavior. Without this mindful, reflective practice, knowledge is empty and results in difficulty developing the competencies needed for intercultural interactions.

4. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In order to test this notion of mindfulness and its critical link between knowledge and behavior, the cultural competence of a group of MBA students was examined before and after a cross-cultural immersion experience in China. The study analyzed the mindfulness, or reflective practice, of their prewriting and postwriting essays in order to assess their level of change. The objective of this immersion experience was to go beyond merely learning about what businesses do in China by offering pertinent cultural information as the foundation for why people do what they do. It was important to plant the seeds for a mindful experience—one where the students would be alert, receptive, and responsive to the external stimuli; where students would move beyond accepting the status quo; and where students would be encouraged to step outside of their ethnocentric viewpoints in order to gain a deeper understanding about the intersection of culture with business. Through the predeparture lectures, discussions, and readings, the attempt was to foster a more holistic world view that used elements of culture as the foundation for doing business in China; and the goal was for students to have a basic understanding of China’s history, society, philosophy, and politics so that when they met with their business contacts, they could put “doing business in China” into context.

The research question asked was: “In what ways does student writing reflect their deepening intercultural understanding (the ability to make connections between cultural practices and business practices based upon their personal experiences) as a result of their predeparture learning, their in-country experience, and their postimmersion reflection assignment?” Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the writing samples of MBA students (a business school in the Midwest, United States) who participated in a 2-week China Immersion Program (N = 71 students and N = 141 papers) based upon their predeparture reading/writing assignments; in-country business meetings and cultural excursions; and postimmersion writing assignment. As required for
qualitative research methods using “human subjects,” it was necessary to go through the appropriate channels to ensure proper permission from the students. The model of cultural intelligence was presented to the students and discussed during the predeparture lectures. Prior to departure, students were asked to write a short one-page reflection paper based upon the following prompt: *What are some specific things you might need to know about working in China?* Upon their return, students wrote another reflective essay several pages in length that aimed to connect their personal insights regarding how cultural practices affect business practices. The postimmersion writing prompt was: *You have just graduated with your MBA and accepted your first work assignment, which will position you in Shanghai for at least two years. What do you specifically need to know about working in China? Please use specific examples from the business meetings, the school and factory visits, as well as cultural tours, etc., to support your points.*

To analyze the degree of mindfulness of student responses, a coding scheme was used to assess the level of reflection in writing based upon work done by Kember et al. (2008). Kember’s coding schema was chosen because he takes a metacognitive approach similar to Thomas’s mindfulness construct of cultural intelligence. If metacognition is the ability to assess one’s own skills, knowledge, or learning, then in writing it can be applied to gauge the transfer of learning to the written page. Based upon the work of Mezirow (1981) which appraises the quality of reflective thinking through a rather elaborate process, Kember created a simpler four-category coding scheme to measure the level of reflection in written work (Kember et al., 1999, 2008). These four categories include nonreflection, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection (see Table 1). The purpose

| TABLE 1 |
| Kember Four-Category Coding Scheme for Reflective Writing |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonreflection</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The answer shows no evidence of the student attempting to reach an understanding of the concept or theory which underpins the topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Material has been placed into an essay without the student thinking seriously about it, trying to interpret the material, or forming a view.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Largely reproduction, with or without adaptation, of the work of others.</td>
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<th>Understanding</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Material is confined to theory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There is evidence of understanding of a concept or topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There is reliance upon what was in the textbook or the lecture notes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Theory is not related to personal experiences, real-life applications, or practical situations.</td>
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<th>Reflection</th>
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<tr>
<td>• There will be personal insights which go beyond book theory.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The writer takes a concept and considers it in relation to personal experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Concepts relate to other knowledge/experiences and then personal meaning is attached.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Situations encountered in practice will be considered and successfully discussed in relationship to what has been taught.</td>
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<th>Critical reflection</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Evidence of a change in perspective over a fundamental belief of the understanding of a key concept or phenomenon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Critical reflection is unlikely to occur frequently.</td>
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of the reflective practice compels the learner to demonstrate depth of learning by connecting what she or he has learned to personal experiences (hence, the connection to mindfulness). Kember et al. (2008) define reflection in that it “operates through a careful re-examination and evaluation of experiences, beliefs, and knowledge” (p. 370).

Using this four category schema provided a road map for making such determinations. Each preessay and postessay was independently read by three raters. After completing all coding, the raters compared individual results, and when they didn’t coincide, a discussion ensued until the raters came to a consensus. This was essential because the qualitative nature of the study lent itself to individual interpretations of meaning based upon each of the rater’s personal experience, knowledge, and level of expertise (Patton, 1980). Interrater agreement was reached after three re-reads of all preessays and postessays. The four codes reflected a direction of nonreflection, understanding, reflection, and critical reflection.

The first code is nonreflection and is when a learner follows instructions without giving specific thought to them. There is little attempt to reach an understanding of the theory, concept, or idea that has been presented. Therefore, the learner has made no attempt to understand the principles or meaning behind the concept—this equates surface learning. Understanding is when the learner does try to reach some sort of understanding of that theory, concept, or idea—there is a search for underlying meaning; however, the concepts are simply understood as theory and the learning is not placed within one’s personal experience. Reflection takes that theory, concept, or idea and contemplates it in relation to one’s personal experience. As a result, the learner then relates to other experiences that she has had or knowledge that she has acquired, and she naturally attaches personal meaning to it. The learning goes beyond book-learning and applies personal insights that broaden the scope of the learning process. Critical reflection (although happens infrequently) is when a learner shows a dramatic change in perspective regarding a fundamental belief, value, or attitude (Kember et al., 2008). “To undergo a perspective transformation it is necessary to recognize that many of our actions are governed by a set of beliefs and values which have been almost unconsciously assimilated from the particular environment” (Kember et al., 1999, p. 23).

5. STUDENT WRITING SAMPLES

The following are some examples that demonstrate the four categories of the level of reflection. Each rater was instructed to read and evaluate the essence of the paper’s entity by sticking to the initial impression. For example, perhaps a student exhibited good reflection (connecting knowledge with personal experience, such as a trip to a factory, and then describing what it meant to him or her) within the beginning of the essay, and then discussed only understanding/knowledge for the rest of the paper (e.g., talked about the emerging economy of China and other issues learned in the business appointments). That paper would be considered overall reflection since the student mentioned reflection at some point. What mattered was the paper’s message as a whole. We kept in mind that these categories were fluid, not rigid, due to the nature of qualitative assessment, so we did not force categories onto any given piece of writing; rather, we used a transition code (TR) to signify the direction in which the reflection was moving. For example, in the second sample of writing that will follow, the student was in the nonreflection stage, but the raters agreed that, while the student basically listed facts without much thought, throughout the paper there were hints that this student might be able to transition to actually understanding the reasons behind these customs.
5.1. Nonreflection

Nonreflection happens when a learner follows instructions without giving specific thought to it. There is little attempt to reach an understanding of the theory, concept or idea that has been presented. Raters categorized the following essay in the nonreflection stage. The essay appeared to be written in a stream-of-consciousness style—basically listing one thought after another in the same paragraph, making no attempt to reach any sort of understanding:

As far as living in Shanghai, I think it will be more expensive than I initially thought. Apartments will likely be more expensive than what I’m used to, and I don’t know if water is potable . . . although food is fairly inexpensive (and pretty good) . . . I don’t know if I’ll have to learn Chinese. In Shanghai, Chinese is the second language behind Shanghainese, so I don’t know how much good it will do to learn either . . . the expats that we met seemed to get by just fine without knowing any more than basic Chinese, so I’m sure I’d be just fine.

This student appears to show little understanding of the importance of learning a language when working abroad and there seems to be a defeatist attitude of “why bother?” that hinders this writer to even contemplate learning basic survival language skills. The following is also an indication of nonreflection but it hints at a possible transition to understanding:

If I were working in China my major concerns would be similar to working anywhere else in the world. Working in China [sic] is a great opportunity that has a lot of potential, but I would initially be concerned with security, career development, pay, location and communication. My primary concern would be communication in China. This is one part of the world where I see a lot of potential struggle. What is considered normal can be very different from what I consider normal. I appreciate the differences; however the concern I have is in the preconception Chinese people have of me. I have experienced these situations in other parts of the world that I have visited. What often happens is that the people in the foreign culture I visit do not fully comprehend that I do not understand their comprehension of normal behavior. They then proceed to behave as though I do understand and this creates confusion.

The student’s perspective appears rather ethnocentric, viewing Chinese people as the “other” and that they do not understand him; there is little effort to try to see things from someone else’s viewpoint. However, this student at least demonstrates the potential of “knowing what he doesn’t know” and is considered to be transitioning to understanding. At least he mentions that “what is considered normal can be very different from what I consider normal,” which hints at the possibility of openness to learning new things.

5.2. Understanding

Understanding happens when a learner tries to reach some sort of understanding of that theory, concept, or idea—there is a search for underlying meaning. The learner is able to grasp and retain specifics about a theory, concept, idea, or situation—understanding is good and it is what we want our students to do; however, the theories, concepts, or ideas are simply understood as theory and the learning is not placed within one’s personal experience for it to be considered reflection according to Kember et al. (2008). The following essay, however, attempts to understand something about doing business in China by analyzing the customer base:
Mr. Smith [name changed] from Beijing Global Strategy Consulting stated that a number of global corporations have attempted to expand into China without first evaluating what the Chinese consumer really wants. They assume that they can simply do business as usual in China without adjustment. A great example is Best Buy. Mr. Smith said that Best Buy thought that marking up their products and educating consumers on the value of good service would resonate with the burgeoning middle class, but this was not so. In the end, the Chinese consumer culture won out, and Best Buy has since been forced to retreat.

This student demonstrates an understanding of marketing practices that are currently being used in China—and this is good. But she has relied on what someone else has told her—the concepts are understood as theory (which is good) but the theory is not related to personal experience. This student has an understanding of general business practices in China, but there still is no grasp of why this is important and how it might affect her as a visitor or as an expat working in China. Had she written something about a personal interaction with a salesperson at a store and how it made her feel or the thoughts she had in conjunction with that experience then this would have extended to reflection.

The next student seems to have more understanding than the previous one in that it starts to explain trust; however, it stops short of making the critical connection to one’s personal experience (that mindful “turning over” of information as it relates to oneself):

Just like any relationship, working relationships require trust to flourish. As you can imagine, this can cause big problems. Few people have that kind of time to build trust and need employees to perform from day one. Foreign managers in China must overcome this barrier and be able to find ways to get production out of their employees from the get go. As one manager described to our group, trustworthy bosses are essential to a successful Chinese operation. While there are many competencies one can leverage throughout the Chinese workplace, very few can be capitalized on without the presence of trust.

While this student’s understanding is good, it could go deeper to uncover the reasons for why something is the way it is—and how the person’s personal values, beliefs, and attitudes can affect how she construes meaning of concepts such as trust. This student writer needs to be able to place herself within the context of another’s point of view and be inquisitive. To move from understanding to mindfulness would ask the question—“Why is this so?” And, the mindful person would have the self- and other-awareness to ask “What are my biases around what the meaning of trust is to someone of another culture?”

Another way of thinking about mindfulness is the idea of “embodiment.” In a similar manner, Bennett and Castiglioni (2004) use the idea of “embodiment” as a way to become more mindfully competent: “To counter ethnocentrism with cultural self-awareness, it is insufficient merely to know the values and common patterns of behavior of one’s own culture. It is also necessary to become sensitive to the feeling of appropriateness that accompanies those patterns” (p. 249). This means that there is an “intuitive grasp” of what is happening within the context and the situation—and that intuition tries to grasp the meaning from the other’s perspective. An intuitive grasp means that the culturally sensitive person is taking in information in a deep and personal way—one that shows insight and sensitivity to the differences of the situation, context, and interaction—a "mindful embodiment."
5.3. Reflection

Reflection takes that theory, concept, or idea and contemplates it in relation to one’s personal experience. As a result, the learner then relates to other experiences that she has had or knowledge that she has acquired, and as a result, she attaches personal meaning to it. The learning goes beyond book-learning and applies personal insights that broaden the scope of the learning process.

The following essay demonstrates reflection because the student internalizes what he saw and experienced at the acrobat performance in Shanghai and begins to make connections to possible working styles and expectations of Chinese people; it attempts to show decent understanding of the importance of establishing trust in relationships:

The acrobat show was amazing and entertaining. However, there was one aspect that was interesting to me and by the end I felt it took away from the show. It was interesting that after every individual stunt the acrobat would look at the crowd and expect or ask for applause. I didn’t notice this at first but after a while it became very interesting to me... I had never been to an acrobat show before so I cannot compare to an American show. However, I have a hard time imagining Americans looking to the crowd after every stunt and asking for applause. That may be the case but I have a hard time seeing it—it seems that Americans don’t expect to receive applause or an ovation.... I think that the acrobat show works as a sort of parallel from what I remember being mentioned in the Chinese workplace by one of our speakers—that one of the biggest adaptations of working in China might be being conscious of a more praise-oriented culture....

Then the student goes on to discuss feedback expectations of how he understands U.S. American employees and then wonders how Chinese employees respond to personal feedback from expat managers. While this student talks about what one of the speakers had said, he tries to connect it to personal insights (being at the show and then pondering how performers would behave in the United States) that go beyond mere theory or facts—explains what is learned and applies to personal experience and wonders why things are the way that they are. Such an essay shows the connections between experience, what he is learning (knowledge), and what might be (projecting possibilities—engaging in cultural sense-making.

The following essay is also insightful and falls into the reflection category because of its personal connection to insights learned:

However, as I learned on the trip by talking to locals, Chinese people are largely positive about the actions of their government. I never stopped to consider, before visiting the country, that this might be the case.... Although I majored in Chinese in college, the trip was eye-opening in that, though my Chinese was better than I could have imagined, I still have a long way to go towards conversational proficiency. In the business world, language skills are invaluable....

This student changes insight based upon new experiences and is able to realize and admit that he is aware of what he still doesn’t know. There is humbleness to the tone of his essay because in fact he did speak fluent Chinese and Arabic, yet was willing to reflect on how challenging the language was. This student was teachable and didn’t take for granted just how valuable language skills are in the business world.
5.4. Critical-Reflection

Critical reflection requires a person to undergo a transformation of perspective. Kember et al. (2008) declare:

Many of our actions are governed by a set of beliefs and values that have been almost unconsciously assimilated from our experiences and environment. To undergo a change in perspective requires us to recognize and change these presumptions. To undergo critical reflection it is necessary to conduct a critical review of presuppositions from conscious and unconscious prior learning and their consequences. (p. 374)

While this happens infrequently, it is exciting when a student reveals a significant change in thinking:

I will attempt to expose a philosophical matter versus discussing the intricacies of China’s nascent but exponentially growing corporate bond market. Of philosophical importance is China’s culture of corruption—and what has become my perception of it. Generically, when looked at through Western eyes, the pervasive Chinese system of corruption could be perceived as a practice perpetuated by a country with less moral sophistication. I once held this belief but, oddly enough, after sitting through the speaker’s discussion at the German bank International, I cannot claim to hold the same conviction.

This student then goes on to reason and asks why corruption is prevalent in China—based upon his understanding of China’s feudal days (in quite detail); then, goes on to compare it the beginnings of life and culture in the United States and draws some inferences that he leaves open to future investigation. This student concluded:

This revelation got my own gears turning. It got me thinking about what the American equivalent to this metaphoric Chinese lubricant is. To my surprise, I noticed that they might not be so different. They may in fact be two sides of the same coin. A stretch you might say, well maybe, but allow me to humor you with a fictional yet completely plausible example.

It gets even better since he makes another analogy (that is explained in great detail) and then asks:

So why would any of this be relevant to my new position in Shanghai? Well, in all of my working years, I have had the good fortune of never being asked to participate in an activity that fell outside of my moral comfort zone. I’d like to think that if I took a position in Shanghai that my lucky streak would continue. However, if I was not so lucky, how would I react if confronted with a situation that is truly morally gray? Should I be willing to sacrifice the proverbial battle to win the proverbial war? Knowing that I’ll be a stranger in a strange land, with what will seem like an even stranger moral compass, what would you do, if you were me? What value system would you default to? Chinese? American? Which would be the right choice? I am not sure.

This reader’s metacognitive process is fascinating and his insights are perceptive as he wrestles with how to make sense of living, working, and interacting in a cross-cultural environment unlike his own. This writer has undergone transformation by experiencing a change in perspective.
TABLE 2
Results of $N = 141$ Student Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-immersion essay</th>
<th>Non-reflection</th>
<th>Trans</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Trans</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Trans</th>
<th>Critical Reflection</th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Post-immersion essay</th>
<th>Non-reflection</th>
<th>Trans</th>
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<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Trans</th>
<th>Critical Reflection</th>
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Note. This Table reflects whether students moved from simply understanding (book knowledge) to reflection (applying knowledge to personal experience). A chi-square test of independence revealed significant differences between Time 1 (Preessay) and Time 2 (Postessay) with $\chi^2 (6, N = 141) = 12.57, p = .05.$

6. DISCUSSION

Once all of the papers had been coded and discussed among the three raters, it was time to draw some conclusions. Many of the themes of student papers dealt with language learning, the emerging economy, and governmental influences. In looking at the movement from Understanding to Reflection from the preimmersion writing to the postimmersion writing (see Table 2), there was an increase from about 26% (above the Understanding level = TR and Reflection) to 46% (above the Understanding level = TR and Reflection). A chi-square test of independence revealed significant differences between Time 1 (Preessay) and Time 2 (Postessay), $\chi^2 (6, N = 141) = 12.57, p = .05.$ Overall, most of the students showed moderate to strong understanding about the important concepts of Chinese history, politics, social issues, and cultural practices. The evidence that most students understood culture as an influence on business practices: societal, political, historical, and cultural, is important. The goal of this particular cross-cultural immersion program was to help students understand that culture drives business and not the other way around—in essence, to move beyond the “study tour” model of having an experience in-country and hoping that students would learn about culture and societal impact on business through osmosis. Therefore, the predeparture lectures and discussions that covered, albeit briefly, the important historical, cultural, societal, and political issues that affect “doing business in China” seemed to have provided a foundation for learning about culture (see Table 3).

Ultimately, at the end of the day when educators ask themselves, “so what?” it is necessary to think about the outcome of learning on students—have students merely skimmed the surface or have they allowed what they learned to sink in deeply and effect change on their values, attitudes,
TABLE 3
Course Objectives and Reading List for China International Immersion Course

The following are excerpts from the course syllabus that include the course objectives and the required reading for predeparture preparation.

Course Objectives:
Three predeparture sessions will help to prepare you for the critical issues you will face during your cross-cultural immersion experience. Our course objectives are:

- to learn about the latest political, economic, and social developments in China from experts operating in China;
- to have a contextual experience of being in China;
- to help build awareness, understanding, and competence regarding effective cross-cultural communication in business.

Primary Reading:

Additional Reading:

and behaviors? Additionally, it is essential to find practical, useful, and accurate ways to assess student learning regarding intercultural competence (Arevalo, McCrea, & Yin, 2012). It is encouraging that many of these students gained a solid foundation about the connection of culture and business in China as demonstrated in their final essays. Many students demonstrated a move from the Understanding category toward the Reflection category, which indicates the ability to understand the why and not just the what regarding cultural differences (Tuleja, 2008). However, a 2-week study program in another culture is not adequate—in most cases—to move students from the understanding level to one of mindful reflection that indicates intercultural competence. This takes time and repeated exposure to situations and contexts that are different than what one is used to.

7. LIMITATIONS

In order to determine any generalizability of using such a study, it would be necessary to analyze the predeparture preparation and then postlearning outcomes of a variety of student groups over time. While two writing assignments can never reveal the whole picture of what is going
DEVELOPING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

on inside a student’s mind, other forms of assessment would be necessary, such as journaling or engaging students in both informal and formal group discussions while in-country, or exit interviews upon return. Additionally, it would be necessary to re-think the methods of delivery—in the assessment model used for determining a level of critical reflection, any indication of how to teach the students to actually get to this stage was lacking. To this end, it is necessary to do a better job at good teaching—to provide a road map for how to teach reflection in order to show and not just tell students about reflection, but to demonstrate how to engage in focused observation and critical reflection (Thomas et al., 2008).

Another critical question would be how can students move from one category to another? What are the antecedents for cultural understanding and what compels a person to move from simply understanding to reflection and then from reflection to critical reflection? How do such transitions take place and what are the critical factors that influence movement? What is that critical moment, or tipping point, that creates the “aha” moment in an individual’s experience? This could be the next phase of research—not just for study abroad but for all teaching related to developing cultural intelligence.

The challenge in business education today is that given the many competing curricular constraints, how can educators help students develop the necessary skills for cultivating a deeper intercultural competence? Even so, with the amount of time allotted it was possible to include the purposeful and intentional intervention through preimmersion lectures and discussions, in-country discussions, and postimmersion essays that have proven to be essential for intercultural understanding (Vande Berg et al., 2009). Using the components of intercultural intelligence enabled us to give our students a hands-on model to first create the need for awareness, then to provide a platform to understand, and then—for many—the desire to use mindful reflection in order to develop the critical skills for communicating and interacting across cultures.

As educators, it is essential to know what our students are getting out of the cross-cultural immersion experience and one way is to assess this by what they are thinking as demonstrated through their writing. In a nutshell, we are building global leaders by developing cultural intelligence by acknowledging that basic understanding is not enough. To be a successful global leader one must move from simply understanding the cultural aspects of doing business across borders to engaging in mindful reflection of how to communicate with people from very different cultural backgrounds. We would be bold enough to posit that those who are critically reflective will fare better in a cross-cultural setting than those who are not. And, we should find ways to achieve this in a higher percentage of students participating in this type of program. In the future, it would be necessary to also measure how long-lasting this effect of critical reflection lasts. Given that they are students, when they take a job or are given the opportunity to work in another culture, it would be useful to know if that same reflection continued and how has it helped them to be successful?

8. CONCLUSION

In developing intercultural competence for students who aspire to be global leaders someday, the goal is to move from simply having knowledge to developing mindfulness that affects behavior. Mindfulness is the thoughtful reflection about the nature of what has happened and why it might have happened. As this study indicated, the students showed solid understanding about
the important aspects related to doing business in China—such as social, political, historical, and cultural issues. While it is good to be able to articulate the economic and business matters involved in doing business in China and even better to understand how culture informs business practices, at the end of the day, it is important to propel students to be changed by their personal experience—and this ultimately comes from reflection and integration of their experiences in a personal and meaningful way. The ultimate goal is to achieve personal insights that are deep and meaningful to help point these future global business leaders in the right direction toward becoming interculturally competent throughout their careers—whether being challenged by the cultural diversity in their home country or by working in a different country.

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