

How alumni narratives of intercultural competence can inform the scholarship of teaching and learning of intercultural communication

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Abstract: Through email correspondence and interviews with former students the author explores how the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning can serve as a way to reflect upon philosophy and pedagogy in an intercultural communication course. Key lessons of intercultural competence from former students and how these lessons have impacted their professional and or personal lives are shared. The essay includes an assessment of how issues of diversity and intercultural competence from former students can be implemented in the classroom. Questions that draw from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning that challenge and sustain teaching and learning are posed.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Competence, Diversity, Narrative, Alumni

I. Introduction.

All faculty, throughout their careers should themselves remain students. As scholars they must continue to learn and be seriously and continuously engaged in the expanding intellectual world.(Boyer, 1990, p.36)

After years of teaching a particular course it is not uncommon for an instructor to become complacent. Other tasks and challenges scholarly, pedagogically, or administratively crowd out needed reflection on why the course has been a success or how it could be retooled. Too often, it is easier to stick with the status quo and not make inquiries or adjustments until immediate attention and decisions are required.

I teach an intercultural communication course, and have been doing so almost every semester since I arrived at my current institution 14 years ago. I enjoy teaching the course. Students are attracted to the course, with what I believe, goes beyond availability or whether or not I teach it. With globalization and the increased need for more awareness of other cultures, the intercultural communication course is an easy “sell” as a requirement for many of our majors or as an elective for other students across the university. Despite being well into my second decade of teaching intercultural communication I remain vigilant in not becoming complacent. I do not want to be accused by my students of referring to the same yellowed lecture notes. I welcome new and relevant content such as integrating current events representative of concepts and themes that need to get presented to students in an introductory undergraduate course. My students and I have together consulted internet news sources and in class debated the current cultural controversies. I have divided students into small groups where they consult on cultural

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case studies. They then post their case study responses via Blackboard online format where a blended classroom approach between traditional and online discussions can take place.

One consistency that guides learning in my intercultural communication courses is the use of the pedagogical lens of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence involves a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitude. Knowledge is the cognitive ability to be both aware of one's own communication as well as others' communication, and learning the ways to build better intercultural relations. The skills component depends on how the individual can apply or carry out what he or she knows. Attitude consists of one's motivation to gain more knowledge about intercultural communication, and taking opportunities of applying skills one has learned (Lustig & Koester, 2005).

A couple of years ago I began to take a more scholarly interest about teaching and learning in the intercultural communication course beyond adding new information or the "bells and whistles" of course delivery. I began by asking, what is a more systematic and scholarly way of assessing the course? In addition, how can I become more competent myself in order to make the course a satisfying learning experience? This paper focuses on my ongoing experiences with teaching the intercultural communication course and how the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning has allowed me to reflect on my own teaching as well as challenge and sustain teaching and learning for the future.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning consists of a "systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public" (<http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu>). Shulman (2004) writes, "Scholars don't engage in traditional research because they failed when doing it before; they do it because they have done it well and now want to learn more" (p. 21). Researching teaching and learning within the intercultural communication course did not mean that I was doing things wrong. Similarly, despite several years of successfully teaching the intercultural communication course, I had to rid myself of what Rosenzweig (1999) notes is a tendency for experienced teachers to believe they know the answers because they have been doing it for so long.

"In the scholarship of teaching, the teacher cares deeply about the discipline but, equally, about the learners and their connection to both the material, the discipline, and learning" (Theall & Centra, 2001, p. 42). As a way to learn more about teaching and learning within my own courses, I often turn to former students as collaborators. I do not expect these former students to have the answers. I believe that encouraging students to relate their journeys with intercultural competence can extend beyond the classroom, and can offer perspectives and potential for teaching and learning for future intercultural communication classes. Likewise, Darling (2003) states that the goal of the scholarship of teaching and learning "is not to abstract theoretic claims, but to offer contextualized accounts of our efforts to understand teaching better and to enhance student learning" (p. 48). Honoring former students' experiences assists in the process of understanding teaching and learning in the intercultural communication classroom.

A. Listening to Student Narratives.

Personal narratives consist of "stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 9), and bring together one's experience and identity (Hantzis, 1995). Sharing one's own story is important for self understanding, and according to Bateson (1997) "includes a dimension of justification, not only 'what I did' and 'what happened' but how and why I chose to understand it, and a readying of the self for the task that lies ahead" (p. viii). Goffman (1981) refers to narrative as "strips of personal experience" from the past that is "replayed" (p. 174). Narrative

functions not only provide a report of an experience, but also provides something to reexperience (Goffman, 1975, p. 506). “[This] reexperiencing is not only for the teller but also for the audience so that they can empathetically insert themselves into replaying, vicariously experiencing what took place” (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 39).

Elbaz (1990) writes that “story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape which we live as teachers and researchers” (p. 32). The study of teachers narratives—teachers’ stories of their own experiences—is increasingly being seen as central to the study of teachers’ thinking, culture and behaviour” (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 5). Likewise, narratives from students about their experiences of learning are “an important and powerful dimension in our pedagogical thinking” (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991, p. 187).

My journey into listening to student narratives began when a former student named Mindy emailed me reporting that she was in an intensive Spanish language program in Guanajuato, Mexico. Mindy added that the issues talked about in the intercultural communication course that she had taken with me in her senior year at college had helped inspire her to live and study in another country. I suspected that hearing narratives like Mindy’s would inform future teaching and learning in my intercultural communication courses. More specifically, I sought to hear from former students about their experiences with or understanding of diversity prior to taking my class; perhaps what sparked their interest in the course initially? I wanted to know from students their recollections of intercultural competence, specifically points of knowledge, skills, dilemmas or challenges as well as their attitudes about and motivations to learn about intercultural communication that each had experienced while taking my class. Moreover, I was especially interested in if and how former students encountered diversity issues after taking the course, and whether issues covered in the classroom became realities in their personal and/or professional lives. With such questions in mind, I set out to design my project.

II. Method.

A. Preliminary E-mail Contact.

The criteria I used for contacting former students as participants in this project included that each must have graduated, and that each had been a student in an undergraduate intercultural communication course that I had taught during the time period of Fall 1994 and Summer 2004, which constituted my first ten years of teaching the course. I wanted former students who had had a variety of personal and professional experiences with intercultural communication and diversity. Personal correspondence with several of my former students was also considered as a way to contact participants. I also used a snowball sampling technique where students and other colleagues recommended participants for the project. In order to obtain a participant’s correct contact information I utilized my Department’s alumni database.

I first contacted participants via email or phone and explained the project. I requested that if interested to send me back a “letter” e-mail their preliminary comments. First I asked each former student to provide a background on oneself that explains one’s experiences with or understanding of diversity prior to taking my class in intercultural communication. With this request I was specifically interested in the individual student’s story concerning first experiences with cultural difference. I then asked that each former student share points of knowledge, skills, dilemmas or challenges as well as any motivations to learn more about intercultural communication experienced within the intercultural communication course. Finally, I wanted

each participant to comment on how he or she encountered diversity issues after taking the course, and whether any issues covered in the intercultural communication classroom became realities in one's personal and/or professional lives. With a small but significant research grant from my University, my goal was to carry out correspondence with eight former students followed up by a personal interview.

B. Personal Interview.

Once I had received e-mail responses I arranged for a follow up interview with each former student participant to further explore the role intercultural competence plays in their experiences with diversity and intercultural communication. Although I did not use the term "intercultural competence" in the interviews, I specifically looked for elements of intercultural competence –knowledge, skills, and motivation – as a means to access what they related to me in their responses. The interviews were semi-structured in that some questions were asked of all former student interviewees with freedom allowed for interview participants to talk about other important issues. Extensive notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews and checked for accuracy by repeating back to the interviewee at the end of the interview questioning.

Data from the interviews were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method for themes and categories. Themes for the interviews were compared against themes acquired from the emails written by the students in order to insure qualitative research that is rigorous (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001).

III. Results.

Interviews with eight former students of my intercultural communication course were obtained. These eight students -- five females and three males -- were in my intercultural classes at different times over a ten year period (Fall 1994 semester through the Summer 2004 term). No two students shared the intercultural communication class together. I selected these particular former students, not only for reasons of accessibility, but also for the variety of life experiences they represented since graduation. At the time of interviewing five of the participants resided in the Midwest United States and interviews with these individuals were conducted in person. The remaining three participants lived on the East, West, and Gulf Coasts of the United States and were interviewed over the phone.

Participants were first asked to recall experiences growing up and their understanding of diversity prior to taking the intercultural communication course. All eight participants recalled vivid early experiences with intercultural communication and diversity or the lack of it. Most experiences occurred through school friendships. Mary recounted a "comical" early memory of one her elementary school friends:

I remember being at my black girl friend's house and seeing her mom putting oil in her hair, and I thought what was that all about?
My mom doesn't put oil in her hair. I don't put oil in my hair.
We're always trying to get the oil out of our hair and here they are putting on oil.

For Hans, as a U.S. American growing up in Germany during his first seven years his earliest memories were about being the "outsider." "I was the foreigner and the one who was speaking different." In another example, Hans recalled sharing the church building with time

designations for services. “At 9am the Italians met, and at 10 the Germans had the building for their services, and then at 11am we Americans had the building for our church services.” Stacy recounted, “There was a black guy we all knew that I went to school with and was my friend. But Joey was often personalized. He was separate from being black. He was just Joey.”

For Nora her earliest memory of interacting with someone from a different race was one where others immediately pointed out differences, but due to her youth and innocence she did not comprehend.

I lived in Flint, Michigan during my kindergarten year and my best friend was black. My aunts would say things such as, “Do you notice anything different between your friend and you?” They had to prompt me to acknowledge the skin color difference, but I was only five at the time.

Mindy noted that her first experience with someone from a different race was when she was best friends with an African American girl from the third through sixth grade. However, the friendship ended when each went to separate schools. Meeting and interacting with people from different cultures occurred throughout childhood and her teen years. “I was always intrigued with people who were different from me.” In fact, Mindy embraced being around others who speak different languages and dialects and are from other cultures. For example, shortly after my interview with Mindy she took a job with a different company and has transferred to Australia.

Kurtis was unique among the eight participants because of his previous military experience in Japan. Although Kurtis said that language proved a barrier to interacting much with the Japanese he was able to travel the country and recounted experiences with communicating with the locals. One time in particular, he and a friend were hiking near Mt. Fuji and were invited by a Japanese couple to a karaoke bar. “We got up there and sang songs from *Top Gun*² [film soundtrack]. The place went crazy. We had a really good time.”

For the remaining student participants sustainable diversity interactions did not occur until each had entered college. Christopher said that he traveled extensively with his family around the U.S. and Canada and even went on a class tour of Europe while in community college. “I knew on an intellectual level that there were people in the world much different than me. Even that knowledge, my daily contact was with people, who for the most part, had the same background and beliefs that I did.” For Marlo, similar to what she suspects was the case for many of her other contemporaries at her university, her first memorable accounts with diversity occurred after she had left the place she was raised. She shared that “my hometown [in Northwest Arkansas] was too small and rural for there to be a lot of diversity. It wasn’t until I went to college that I made my first black friend. Not to mention, my first Indian friend, and Asian friend.”

Another area of discussion asked the participants to share important points of knowledge, skills, dilemmas or challenges as well as any motivations to learn more about diversity and communication experienced within the intercultural communication course itself. Specific knowledge and skills were recalled from the course such as how language and culture are intertwined, different ways that nonverbal communication can be interpreted, cultural identity issues, identifying culture shock, masculine and feminine communication styles, and how cultures differ on a variety of distinctions including whether the needs of individual or the needs of the group are emphasized.

² Student reference *Top Gun* motion picture soundtrack; *Top Gun* was directed by Tony Scott and released 16 May 1986 (USA).

All eight students reported arriving to class with certain, but not similar expectations. They realize that culture is complex. For Nora, one of the main things she recalled from the course was how her views about diversity in the U.S. changed.

I do believe that the course was life-changing for me. Especially it made me question my assumptions about how/what I knew about the U.S. I had superficial ideas about intercultural communication before taking the course. I didn't have much understanding of U. S. American culture. It was too pervasive and I was a part of it, but the course challenged my notions of U.S. Americans. I hadn't comprehended the differences of cultures in the U.S. until I took the course.

Participants commented that the course served as a mirror reflecting back on one's own culture. For Kurtis, it required him to take a closer look at his own identity. "The military, I later learned in class, has a culture of its own and that I was a part of that culture." For Hans the course help prompt him to question his choices about not only his professional goals, but also the decisions he was about to make his personal life and relationships. Studying intercultural communication during her last year in college further confirmed for Mindy her goals of registering for a language immersion program and living in a foreign country.

The participants remembered specific lessons and points from the course. Marlo recounted a lesson from one of the first days in class for a lecture on the different metaphors for diversity.

The image that stuck with me all these years was that of a tapestry. Each person was a thread in the fabric, interconnected and creating the bigger picture, while still being affected complimented, overshadowed, or interweaving with threads of different color, texture, and feel. I remember this discussion vividly because the imagery was so easy to picture in my head. The world was a big tapestry of people, all individuals, but all connected and associated by the other people who surround us. I knew I would like the class after that first day.

Other participants also talked about what they specifically learned in the intercultural communication course, and how this continues to play a role in their current workplaces and professional lives. Mary acknowledged:

One thing that I recently recalled from intercultural class is that we are citizens of the United States; U.S. Americans and I thought about this the last couple of days working with the group from Canada (Barrage) who came through St. Joseph on tour and their performance last night. I just was more aware on how I interacted with them. It made me ponder, and I knew that they were happy to be back from their performance in Hong Kong, they were not quite home. The U.S. is not Canada. It just made me aware of differences and the way we interpret the world.

Christopher confirmed the importance of intercultural communication and the competency that goes with being a better communicator.

During that semester and long after the class was over, I slowly began to recognize people around me who were not only raised in

a different environment, but also recognized that they held viewpoints that were quite separate from mine. They held onto their beliefs—sometimes quite passionately—and yet I could still find common ground with them. If nothing else, the class began opening my eyes to the similarities we all share as humans.

In the final part of the interviews participants were asked to reflect on how their experiences and how their thoughts and actions specifically when it comes to intercultural communication competence played a role in their lives since graduation. As mentioned previously for Mindy the course helped contribute to her making up her mind to enroll in a Spanish language immersion program in Mexico. She also has had to monitor and adjust her communication style due to her work at an Export Company where a majority of her colleagues are from the Netherlands. Instead of communicating in an informal way, typical of many U.S. Americans, Mindy reported, “I had to learn that formality is important.” It was not just knowing this, but also being able to carry this knowledge out through a skill such as how to communicate effectively and appropriately through online and email interchanges. She has also had to effectively work through the stereotypes that Europeans have of U.S. Americans, especially females.

Nora remarked that through her position as the executive director for the county arm of a national political party that motivation to learn about the changing racial and social demographics in her community has been made significant by a growing Hispanic bloc of voters. This development has consequences not only for her own knowledge and skills of working effectively with this new voter demographic, it also has direct consequences in turning out the vote for Nora’s political party. Nora added, “I would like to think that the class and what I have learned thus far also has a positive impact on the way I treat anyone who comes from social categories different from my experience.”

After graduation, Kurtis was accepted to Officer Training School eventually making Second Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. The position requires not only deployment to other parts on the world, but more frequently communicating with fellow officers, superiors, and recruits from different parts of the country. For Kurtis meanings can dangerously be misconstrued, and the way one talks with people from other cultures as well as those individuals from one’s own culture is a persistent lesson of intercultural competence.

In communicating you must exercise patience and understanding.

They might misinterpret what we say. You have to keep this in mind. English is a hard language to understand, there are so many different meanings. It is important that we take the time to clarify ourselves about what was said and how we can make ourselves clearer.

While living in Los Angeles lessons of intercultural competence acquired by Hans consisted of learning about what he identified as “subcultures within subcultures.” When pressed with what he meant by this statement Hans explained, “Well in the Midwest, if they are Puerto Ricans, they are Puerto Ricans, but in LA there were groups within groups. These people talk with these people. And there were distinctions within racial, ethnic groups. It may depend on where you live—neighborhood, skin color.” Hans emphasized that categories cannot be assumed and that if he wanted to be successful as a salesperson he had to work through not only cultural affiliations, but also group membership, and a person’s own individual needs.

The knowledge, skills, and motivation required in communication and intercultural competence plays a role locally as well. Christopher remained in the area and is a recruiter for a massage training school. Multiculturalism is a part of everyone's life and learning to deal with diversity issues is a lesson of intercultural competence that one must face whether they are in another country, large U.S. American city, or a small Midwestern city that on the surface may not seem to have a lot of diversity, but does in its own way. Christopher commented:

The class did not equip me with the ability to deal with every type of human being on the planet. Rather, it was an introduction to the idea that people come from all different types of backgrounds and belief systems...When someone comes into my office and shares his or her life experience with me, those experiences may be drastically different than my own. I may or may not agree with that person or be able to understand where she is coming from. But regardless of where that person has been or what they believe, I can listen and learn something from him.

One interesting result reported by the interview participants was how social economic class became more of an issue for them especially in their lives for more than any of the former students had expected. For example, Stacy told how she was shocked when in her student teaching post in a small rural community how teachers were "idolized" because "the teachers in town were the only ones who could pay their bills." Stacy continued:

For a long time I always thought diversity was just a black/white issue, but it is more. One of the eye openers in my teaching experience is the culture of being poor." Students did not have a stable home life. They would go from home to home. Maybe mom would have a boyfriend and they would stay at his house for a while. At our school 80 percent of kids were either on free or reduced lunch. Again, teachers were idolized. The children were so needy. They would attach to you, perhaps because I seemed stable. I had great parents there, but the kids needed more.

Finally, regarding overall lessons concerning communication and the knowledge, skills, and motivation that contribute to intercultural competence, Hans added that in any culture it is probably important to "talk less than 50 percent of the time and just mainly listen."

People will tell you things. You just have to learn to shut up.

Even though we are so uncomfortable with silence in this culture, you have to allow them to talk and you listen. Also, realize that how different they may be, every other person has stories just like you. Try to learn about them, to understand where they are coming from. People have different experiences and stories, even if their lives seem to parallel yours.

When it comes to learning about communication and intercultural competence Hans could not have said it better.

IV. Discussion.

The results found in this research project confirm what Kohls (2001) maintains that one of the building blocks of diversity is to understand one's self and culture better. Participants were

quick to tell their personal stories about early experiences and understanding of diversity. Because it is essential for students to realize that they are already part of a multicultural world, there is a need to personalize one's participation in this multicultural world. Therefore, incorporating early in the intercultural communication course an assignment for students to safely talk about their early experiences and realizations of culture, communication, and difference is an effective tool for students to personalize issues. It is also a way for all to find common ground in that everyone has a culture and everyone probably has a story to tell about initial experiences with cultural difference. Likewise, hearing stories from others, especially those from different cultures and backgrounds, is an effective way to learn about diversity and intercultural communication. Sharing these stories are not only fun (childhood encounters often do result in amusing accounts), but also can be educational in discerning what lessons of intercultural competence (knowledge, skills, and motivations) can be learned from these stories.

Participants conveyed how the course provided them with a new perspective regarding intercultural communication, not only in relation to diversity found around the world, but also within the United States. What was intriguing was how each participant transformed what was talked about in the course and applied it to their own intercultural competence. Paul Ricoeur (1981) asserts, "Our deeds escape us and have effects which we did not intend" (p. 207). Not only do we interpret what we say and do, but others incur their own interpretations, and arrive at their own learning.

Marlo said she was significantly impacted early in the course with class discussions on how diversity could be visualized through different metaphors. Marlo especially liked the diversity metaphor of a tapestry where "each person was a thread in the fabric, interconnected and creating the bigger picture, while still being affected complimented, overshadowed, or interweaving with threads of different color, texture, and feel." This tapestry metaphor, according to Marlo, continues to provide a basis for her learning about diversity.

What I had thought of was a minor activity in the intercultural communication course was for Marlo the trigger for understanding what constitutes cultural diversity. In assessing my current teaching of intercultural communication, I realized I had dropped such discussions about metaphors of diversity, substituting other points and issues. Listening to Marlo has prompted me to reevaluate my teaching. Perhaps I should add back in these metaphors of diversity? Indeed, what may be trivial to the instructor may in turn serve as a powerful learning point for the student.

In the intercultural courses I have taught since undergoing this project I have required students to become more participatory and have encouraged them to complete in class projects that call upon each to share a story. Throughout the course, as well as on the final exam, I ask students to reflect upon the stories that were shared in class. Often students report that this is where learning about cultural identity and diversity is at its most vibrant. I have not done a thorough assessment yet to determine any particular learning outcomes, other than what is self reported by students. However, such activities do have potential for further questions and study regarding the scholarship of teaching and learning in the intercultural communication course.

Pedagogy on diversity and intercultural competence continues to evolve and these interviews have also led me to reconsider what new areas I should concentrate on more in my intercultural communication course. One of these areas is the topic of social class. Dealing with the issues surrounding social class became important for almost all of the participants whether it was in their personal or professional lives. In some cases it became a surprising issue of diversity

that they had never directly encountered before or even had anticipated. When asked what issue of diversity will need to be focused on in the future and likewise should be emphasized in intercultural communication courses, six of the eight participants put social class issues at the top.

Keshishian (2005) notes that “With respect to intercultural relations, it is entirely plausible that the homeless person in the U.S. will have more in common with another homeless person in Guatemala, say, than with the CEO of General Motors” (p. 215). This statement captures the sentiment, that even though two people may be from the same national culture, with the same skin color, who in other ways would be assumed to be similar, may in fact be worlds apart due to different social and economic class backgrounds.

Social class in my past intercultural communication courses has not received the same attentiveness as does other forms of diversity (e.g. race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability). Likewise, current textbooks in intercultural communication often do not adequately address social class issues. (Again, see Keshishian (2005) for an expansive critique on this topic). This new awareness regarding social class issues has made me “retool” my coverage and assignments in my intercultural communication courses, and I have added a section in my graduate level Communication and Diversity in the Workplace course that focuses on social class issues. Assigned readings include Brenda Allen’s (2004) book *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*, Alan Johnson’s *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (2006), as well as *Hidden Dimensions of Class in the Workplace* published in 2002 by authors Ruby Payne and Don Krabill.

Doubts about diversity and interacting with others from different cultures would not be part of one’s personal and professional life after graduation were quickly put to rest by all eight former students. Each was enthusiastic to share one’s personal story. Each had powerful lessons pertaining to intercultural competence. However, I felt guilty that I was the only one hearing them. To help with this I have shared these eight alumni experiences with diversity and intercultural competence by incorporating them into course lectures and discussions. It is clear that these former students in the spirit of the scholarship of teaching and learning had become my teachers and this education should be shared with current students in my intercultural communication courses. For example, here is a story from Mary about her current struggles with age diversity in her workplace that current students will likely soon identify with:

Age has become a real diversity issue in my job here. Everybody I work with is at least 30 years older than me. For example, later today I’m leaving for a conference in Indianapolis with two males who are 70 plus and I’m 22! I just can’t make age an open issue, but it is there. I was never treated like a kid growing up, never baby talked to, and I think this kind of helps me look at the world as an adult. The Conference in Indy—it’s my first one-- is where we choose the shows for the next season, meet with other presenters and artists, work out scheduling of tour dates, there are featured artists performing. It goes on for 3 days. Now back to the age issue – there is the issue of deciding what to wear for this conference. I mean I’m 22 and I don’t want to pack things that make me look like a teeny bopper, but then I don’t want to look too old, when I’m really not. I mean I’m not 40 and I can’t go out and get and wear a coordinating suit/pants outfit.

Mary and her fellow alums from the “real world” of intercultural competence have been invited back into my classroom to share their knowledge, their skills, and their motivations about intercultural communication competence with my current and future students. Some alumni have been able to make it back personally to talk with students during a departmentally organized “Communication Week With Alumni.” Often these interactions produce additional ideas for collaboration, internships, and instruction in courses such as the intercultural communication course. It is my hope that these interactions can become more frequent. Realistically, alumni lead busy lives and cannot personally be in the classroom on a regular basis. However, seizing opportunities such as interviewing and recording alumni on topic areas, to be later integrated in a class, is something that I anticipate doing. Once such a project is realized, further study could be conducted on how these interviews affect students’ learning outcomes.

One of this study’s strengths is that it allowed for personal in depth perspectives from former students. One on one interviews provided opportunities to probe for additional observations from the interviewee. In addition the interviews provided a format for reestablishing connections between the teacher and former students. Unlike what is traditionally requested of alumni--that is to provide financial support for their alma mater--this project asked students to give back to their alma mater through the sharing of their personal stories that can inform teaching and learning. As Diamond and Kashyap (1997) observed in their study of reasons why alumni make contributions, attachment to one’s university goes beyond supplying and meeting financial needs. Alumni want an attachment to their alma mater that also includes one’s time and expertise. Current students also benefit from learning from those who had sat at the desks and in the classes before them.

Limitations are a factor in every study, and this one is no exception. All of the interviewees were white. It would be expected that a minority students would have their own unique perspective about growing up, attending college where they are in the minority, and their experiences with intercultural competence after graduation. Another limitation is that the questions were formulated by the researcher/instructor with little consultation from former or current students. Soliciting questions from former students could provide a richer base for information on diversity and culture and how it is influencing one’s personal and professional life.

A. Implications for the Future.

Hutchings and Shulman (1999) propose, “A scholarship of teaching is not synonymous with excellent teaching. It requires a kind of ‘going meta,’ in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning” (p. 13). Questions for further study should be guided by a systematic inquiry or focus into student learning called for in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. These questions are: What is happening in the classroom? What would the student learning look like? What sort of evidence can I gather to document that student learning is occurring and providing proof it took place? Additional questions to consider include: Is remembering course content a measurement of learning. If students do not remember content does it mean learning did not occur? Do interviews and personal narratives provide enough evidence students have learned or do I have to see the evidence myself? How can we use these results of learning beyond the classroom?

Bass (1999) “The movement for a scholarship of teaching seeks first and foremost to legitimate a new set of questions as intellectual problems.” The current study has led the author

to consider what could be done in the future regarding alumni interviews, intercultural competence and the scholarship of teaching and learning that informs teaching and learning beyond the parameters of the current study. Some of these ideas have already been shared in this paper. One other suggestion is to broaden the scope of the questions asked of participants. This can be done by asking current students what they would like to know from former students who have been out of college, two, five, ten, and 15 years plus. What lessons did they learn? What advice would they give to a current student? This advice could be on issues of culture and diversity, but questions could also be about knowledge, skills, and other forms of competence important to being successful after graduation. Current students and alumni could engage in discussions about how it is like out in the “real world”. Both identify with one another due to similar interests, experiences in a major academic program, and careers. Discussion could be expanded to include how alumni juggle work schedules with pursuing further education, balancing job and family, and managing student loans and debt and how one’s personal and professional choices affects one’s daily life.

As has been noted each participant in this study was enthusiastic and willing to provide his or own story. The methodological form of narrative provides a way to interact with former students and capture their perspectives on intercultural competence. Additional interviews with other former students are needed. One suggestion for achieving this task on a broader level is to teach a methods course in narratives where current students can engage in interviews with former students who are now alumni of the university. In addition to being a valuable resource for learning more about the intercultural issues presented in this study talking with former students serves as a communication bond between alumni and the university that should be further tapped.

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