

of local resources and producing more sustainable outcomes.	and a LOT of scaffolding and differentiation.
Use and value diversity: Diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides.	The vast diversity of our community is our greatest asset. There are so many amazing stories to tell and skills to share.
Use edges and value the marginal: The interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system.	SIFE students and ELLs struggle with being marginalized by society. They are at the edge of creative change and are incredibly valuable towards the center.
Creatively use and respond to change: We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing, and then intervening at the right time.	This entire project was created out of a 15 foot by 15 foot classroom with no windows with the toughest kids in the NYCDOE. With creative permaculture, there is no limit to what our communities can accomplish.

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Things to be AWARE of When Facilitating Intercultural Programs

Hannah Hahn, Nichole George, & Shira Schieken

Introduction

Traditionally, institutions have expected international students to adapt and modify their communication style to the “American” way of interaction. Programs such as Conversation Partner Program, International Buddy Program, and Cultural Ambassador Programs are created to help internationalize the campus, create a welcoming atmosphere and help build friendships between international students and domestic students. However, these programs sometimes don’t always turn out as expected. Domestic students who visit English language classes may not know how to communicate with international students. International students may be disappointed when domestic students are not as outgoing as they expected. Both partners might simply not know how to sustain the relationship. In order for

programs to succeed, intercultural program facilitators must assist domestic and international students’ development of intercultural communication skills and actively and intentionally maximize the positive benefits of these programs.

A Different Framework for Effective Intercultural Programs

Gumperz and Hymes (1986) stated that:

Communities differ significantly in ways of speaking, in patterns of repertoire and switching, in the roles and meanings of speech. They indicate differences with regard to beliefs, values, reference groups, norms and the like as these enter into the ongoing system of language use and its acquisition (p.42).

Language is more than just words. Different communicative repertoires, people’s styles and manners of interacting, are incorporated when we engage in social interactions. We must not simply expect international students to adapt to a generic “American” style of communication. Unlike intercultural programs using traditional framework (figure 1.) which focus heavily on international students, we must broaden our focus to include domestic students equally in intercultural communication training.

The AWARE framework (figure 2.) is beneficial for everyone involved. For domestic students, it takes away the assumption that just because English is their primary language, they are masters of intercultural communication. For international students, the pressure to be good at communicating on an intercultural level is lessened. They, like their domestic peers, are learning intercultural communication from the same place: the beginning. This creates a more relaxed environment for the students to build better relationships.

Figure 1. Traditional Framework of Intercultural Programs

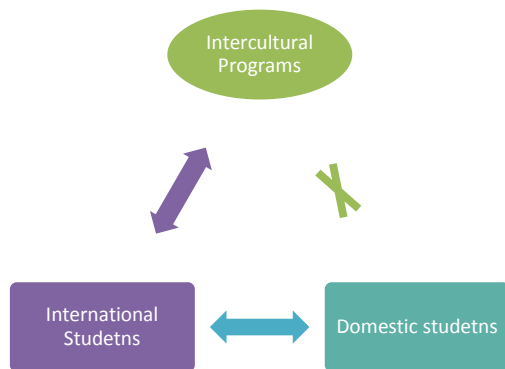
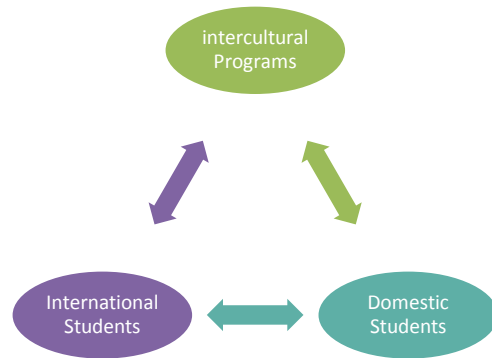


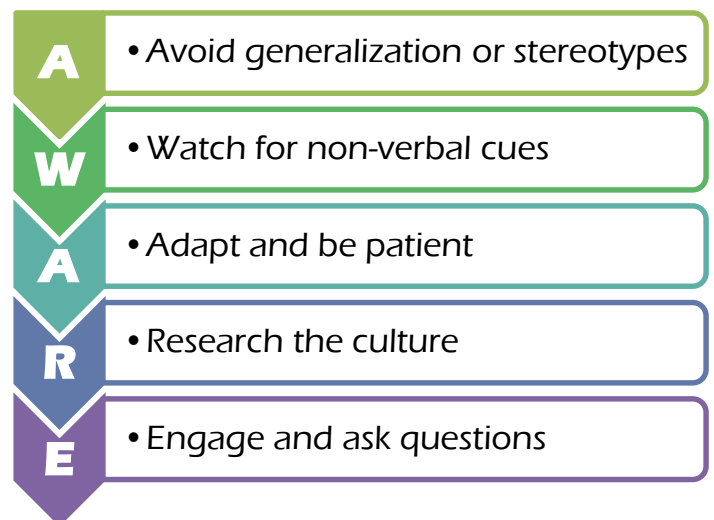
Figure 2. AWARE Framework of Intercultural Programs



Training Interculturally-Competent Students

To strengthen the programs that pair domestic and international students, facilitators should offer training sessions that introduce intercultural communication skills based on the multicultural competencies that culturally-alert counselors are expected to practice with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (McAulliffe & Associates, 2012). At VCU, we have adapted competencies in cultural self-awareness and multicultural knowledge and skills to foster stronger intercultural communication skills and build better relationships among domestic and international students. Our training program is designed to teach domestic participants to be AWARE when communicating with students from different cultural backgrounds and to model these skills for their international partners.

AWARE VISION STANDS FOR:



1. Avoid Generalizations and Stereotypes

In order to demonstrate cultural self-awareness, domestic student volunteers should be aware of the generalizations and stereotypes that affect the international students they are working with. This awareness will help students avoid conveying messages that might offend their international partners and lead them to respond to stereotypes in a defensive manner. Students that possess cultural self-awareness understand that their own cultural values impact the way they view other cultures. This is beneficial because it can help students avoid projecting their own cultural values on their international student partners.

2. Watch for Non-Verbal Cues

In order to demonstrate effective multicultural communication skills, students should enter their conversation partnerships prepared to utilize a variety of verbal and nonverbal responses in order to facilitate conversation. Students must understand that intercultural communication skills are subject to more than the actual words spoken. The manner in which these words are delivered and received by listeners is equally important. Students should be aware of the speed in which they speak, the tone of their voices, eye contact, facial expressions, and the body language they transmit. Students should also be prepared to watch for nonverbal cues that their international partners share. This might help the student recognize when to change the speed of the conversation, switch topics, or ask questions.

3. Adapt and Be Patient

Students can also demonstrate effective multicultural communication skills by exhibiting patience and a willingness to adapt in order to meet the needs of their international partner. Students from different cultural backgrounds have different styles of speaking and different non-verbal communication norms. It may take a few meetings for student volunteers to figure out the most effective way to communicate with their international partners.

4. Research the Culture

In order to demonstrate multicultural knowledge, domestic student volunteers should possess a basic knowledge of the cultural group they will be working with. This can be achieved by doing something as

simple as a quick search online. This helps volunteers demonstrate their interest in their partners' culture and provides fuel for conversations. Volunteers should also understand that the cultural background of their international partners has shaped their personality and the manner in which they communicate. This basic awareness may prevent uncomfortable interactions and misunderstandings from arising due to culturally-shaped behavioral and communication differences.

5. Engage and Ask Questions

Student volunteers should also be prepared to actively seek out information that will improve their ability to relate to their international partners as the relationship progresses. Once rapport has been established, international students may be more willing to share their own opinions and experiences with their partners. Seeking out information about topics that arise may help student volunteers add context to what their partners share and may help international students feel more comfortable.

Implementing the AWARE Vision in Your Classrooms or Your Programs

At VCU, we have found the following strategies helpful.

1. Facilitate training sessions for both international and domestic students. Provide clear and specific guidelines to all students in advance.
2. Use structured intercultural interactional activities.
 - a. *Topic discussion* is good for any level of students (Cheney, 2009). For less proficient students, facilitators can suggest situational tasks in which international students practice "survival" language. For more advanced students, discussion topics can be related to intercultural situations such as gender, religion, generation, and region. One thing that you need to remember is to choose topics from which both partners can benefit and discuss without offense.
 - b. *Journaling about different ways to communicate* is a beneficial activity for both groups of students. By reflecting what kinds of

communication style they observe from each other, domestic students will expand their intercultural communication skills, and international students will build confidence by understanding there are many ways to communicate in English.

- c. *Field trips on campus with assigned tasks* are also a great way to improve international students' communication skills (Cheney, 2009). Less proficient students may be assigned tasks that focus on basic communication skills, for example, visiting a book store. The domestic student is asked to model asking staff for help in finding a book. The international student will then practice a similar task. More advanced students may be tasked with going to the library and requesting help to find an article for a writing assignment.

3. Facilitate introductory group sessions. Small groups of international and domestic students meet together and play icebreaker games, lowering their affective filters. Subsequently, everyone will feel safer and more comfortable. It is also important for a facilitator to introduce each pair of students and support them in their first meeting.
4. To attract more domestic students, offer language exchange opportunities and ask experienced students to bring friends and talk about the program in their classes and student organizations.

Future Benefits of Being AWARE

Experiential learning activities that purposefully engage international and domestic students give them necessary skills to interact with people and cultures in a multitude of personal and professional settings. For international students, a positive experience with domestic students strengthens their resolve to continue in academic programs in the U.S., possessing better communication strategies to be used with their professors and domestic classmates. For domestic students, their training helps them handle group work with international peers and learn more about the

world. Upon graduation, both set of students will have intercultural communication skills to work in a globalized society and interact positively with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds. For the institution, the mission of internationalization is realized, having promoted a truly inclusive environment.

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