Enhancing Cultural Intelligence through International Course Category Classes: A Content-Based Approach

Sean O’CONNELL

Abstract
In 2012, Nanzan University introduced the International Course Category to its university-wide curriculum. This category was established to create subjects ranging from liberal studies to specialist courses in English only for students. The overall aim of the introduction is to provide an environment in which students are able to obtain the basic skills to become people who can be active in the international community. This paper examines two classes within this category with a specific investigation of how content-based instruction in English to facilitate the acquisition and enhancement of cultural intelligence among students. Evaluation results obtained through a student questionnaire conducted in two content-based classes are analyzed to shed light on how students can be motivated to acquire and enhance cultural intelligence. As a conclusion, suggestions and implications for further investigation in similar contexts will be discussed.

Keywords: Content-based instruction, International Course Category, Cultural intelligence, Intercultural communication

Introduction
In today’s borderless society, students studying a foreign language for practical purposes such as work and overseas study need not only to be able to speak foreign languages such as English, but also to understand the culture, ideologies and behaviors of people from other cultures. As Albright (2013) suggests, for students looking to use their foreign language skills, having a high level of cultural intelligence is a key to competing to an ever-competitive global workforce. Cultural intelligence, as defined by Earley and Ang (2003: 59), is “a person’s capability to adapt to new cultural contexts.” Butcher (2008) elaborates in a development sense by suggesting that building cultural intelligence should be viewed as something that is continuously improved upon. As such, it is vital that the awareness of one’s level of cultural intelligence and cultural
understanding is achieved.

One approach to increasing students’ cultural understanding and, in turn, their cultural intelligence in a university context is through content-based instruction (CBI). As Grabe and Stoller (1997) claim, a CBI approach to student learning brings with it numerous benefits. Not only does CBI allow students the opportunity to explore and gain new knowledge of core-content, but at the same time, language-based activities centered on the core-content stimulates their language development. However, when discussing CBI, the question of what qualifies as ‘content’ cannot be ignored. In the context of this study, which focuses on two classes taught under the International Course Category (Kokusai Kamoku Gun) at Nanzan University—Event Planning and Negotiation and Intercultural Encounters: Intercultural Business Communication and Understanding, the definition provided by Curtain and Pesola (1994) best fits. As they concisely explain, content in CBI simply refers curriculum concepts that are taught through foreign language. In other words, it is important for the language-based activities to properly integrate with the context.

With these considerations in mind, this paper first introduces the structure of the International Course Category introduced into Nanzan University’s curriculum from 2012. It then describes the two courses taught by the author that are used as the focal point for exploration of how cultural intelligence is stimulated and enhanced. In particular, it uses anonymous evaluations by students enrolled in the two courses to shed light on the synergy of language and cultural intelligence development through content. In the conclusion, suggestions are offered on how to reflect on the use of CBI as a means of going beyond language acquisition in order to stimulate awareness and use of cultural intelligence.

**International Course Category at Nanzan University**

At Nanzan University, the International Course Category (hereafter referred to as ICC) was introduced on April 1, 2012 (Nanzan University, 2013). All students from the first to fourth year can choose from approximately 60 elective courses ranging in theme from liberal studies through to specialist subjects such as intercultural understanding, migration issues, operations research and economics. If students successfully pass 24 credits from the ICC curriculum, they are then able to obtain the *Nanzan International Certificate* to show that they have gained international skills.

The impetus for the introduction of ICC subjects came from an overall aim to provide an environment in which students are able to obtain the basic skills to become people who can be
active in the international community. With all ICC subjects being conducted in English, Nanzan University seeks to also further extend students’ logical and critical thinking, intercultural understanding and language skills. Known for its comprehensive network of universities abroad at which students can study on six-month to one year programs, the ICC subjects are also seen as an avenue through which Nanzan students can gain the above-mentioned skills in order to prepare effectively, even in the case where students lack confidence in their English language ability. Furthermore, these courses aim to also provide an opportunity for students returning from overseas study to maintain their language skills as well as to polish them (Nanzan University, 2013).

The next section will focus on the two ICC subjects taught by the author to Faculty of Policy Studies students at Seto Campus. Specifically, it will focus on an explanation of the course outlines and goals with regards to the use of CBI to enhance cultural intelligence.

**Main Study: Two ICC Subjects at Seto**

The two ICC subjects—*Event Planning and Negotiation Skills* (spring semester class) and *Intercultural Encounters: Intercultural Business Communication and Understanding* (fall semester class)—taught by the author are the main focus of this study. Both subjects are one-semester only courses with their curriculums both spanning 15 weeks. As their titles suggest, the content taught in each course is different. However, they both share common goals of stimulating and enhancing the students’ cultural intelligence on top of increasing knowledge related to the respective fields through CBI. As Grabe and Stoller (1997) stress, a CBI approach should provide ideal conditions for students to not only learn and use the target language, but also for them to gain knowledge related to the content. In an effort to use CBI effectively, both courses are learner-centered.

For example, in the spring-semester *Event Planning and Negotiation Skills* course, students are required to prepare for each class through pre-reading tasks of content ranging from event-planning fundamentals, ideology, skills, event-related case-studies through to negotiation methods effective in event implementation. Using new knowledge gained from the reading, students then have to analyze the content through their own cultural lenses and share their interpretations in pair or small group discussions and through individual weekly journals. For half of the course, students are exposed to a number of case studies written in English that are related to event planning and implementation both within Japan and around the world. Once enough knowledge is gained of the fundamentals, students shift their attention to negotiation
skill acquirement. Again, several case studies are used, but with a focus on simulating event negotiations through role-plays in which students have the opportunity to use the language and techniques learned. As more knowledge and simulation experience is gained, the students begin to create proposals for their own events that are aimed at culturally diverse audiences. By creating this framework, students are encouraged not only to acquire language skills and cultural knowledge, but also to learn to internalize these new skills and knowledge as one way of increasing their cultural intelligence.

As for the fall-semester ICC subject—*Intercultural Encounters: Intercultural Business Communication and Understanding*—students begin with a focus on learning two communication-related theories: communication accommodation theory (e.g. Gallois et al., 1995; Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991) and cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003). These two theories are used to analyze cases of encounters and communication in intercultural business contexts. The students are also required to define culture, its role and link to communication within these contexts. Once the students have built a basic working knowledge of the two above-mentioned theories and definitions, they are presented with pre-class tasks such as reading cases studies of intercultural interaction between foreign and Japanese business people from prepared reading sheets or through the own sourcing on the Internet. In class, the students are then led into pair or group discussion in a similar way as the above-mentioned Event Planning class.

In groups, students share their interpretations and findings in English before presenting a summary to the class. As is the case with the Event Planning and Negotiation Skills class framework, the class is structured so that students have the opportunity to improve their linguistic and critical-thinking skills as they negotiate class content. In line with the course goals, students that apply themselves should be able to equip themselves with basic analytical skills to interpret intercultural business encounters as well as the ability to describe problems and suggest solutions to mis-communication arising from cultural and/or communication differences in the cases studied.

As Omaggio-Hadley (1993) argues, a synergistic approach to language use and content is paramount so that students can use their language proficiency in English to explore the content with the end result of obtaining new knowledge and skills. To that end, the descriptions presented above are two examples of how the language and content components are synergized.
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Student Responses to a CBI Approach

To ascertain the level of conscious enhanced cultural intelligence among students in these two ICC courses, the author conducted a completely anonymous open-ended questionnaire among all 41 students in the two courses. Accordingly, this section turns its attention to the student responses by first explaining the questionnaire design and then by discussing some of the responses gained.

The questions focused on two main points: 1) an evaluation of the course content and language level and 2) a self-evaluation of enhancement of cultural intelligence by taking the course. From a curriculum planning perspective, the questionnaire was also conducted with the goal of assisting future ICC curriculum initiatives. The students were asked to first evaluate the course content and level of language at which both ICC courses were conducted considering that they both fell under the ICC category. In terms of student response, the following quotations are representative of the participating students’ responses:

• “I think the language level was challenging but a level which I could understand the content.” (Student 2)
• “The specialized terminology was difficult at first, but because we used them all the time in reading and discussing the content, the language level was appropriate.” (Student 10)
• “Learning the right language to talk about the class content was very important and helpful.” (Student 24)
• “The language was very challenging, but it made me work harder. The more we used the language to talk about the content, the deeper I understood.” (Student 35)

As for the second focal point—a self-evaluation of enhancement of cultural intelligence by taking the course—the following responses represent the consciousness of the students:

• “By the end of the course, I felt I knew more about intercultural business, especially how to adapt communication style to the culture of the other person when necessary.” (Student 12)
• “I strongly feel that I have increased my level of cultural intelligence through this course. Knowing how and when to adjust behaviors and styles of communication to the host culture is an important skill to have.” (Student 5)
• “The culture of event-planning differs depending on the culture. I learnt that culture can be generational as well as national. So, for me, this course helped me to understand how I should approach each culture when planning and implementing events” (Student 41)
• “My cultural intelligence increased because we were able to look at many different cases and discuss the differences. The next important step for me is how to use my new intelligence.”
These comments are encouraging as they clearly show a conscious awareness among the students. Furthermore, their responses also support the framework of the ICC curriculum in regards to the university’s overall aims of creating learning opportunities for students by which they obtain skills that can be used in international, multicultural contexts. Finally, the comments themselves succinctly convey logical and clear intercultural understanding, which are also fundamental aims of the ICC framework.

**Analysis and Future Development**

In an overall analysis of student responses from both ICC courses, a number of points for consideration have become apparent. Firstly, as the representative responses highlight, Nanzan’s implementation of the ICC framework to its curriculum has begun successfully with the encompassing aim of equipping students with skills and knowledge for international arenas. In fact, a high level of conscious growth and development is clearly evident from the student’s responses. They point to clear content-based concepts and use their knowledge in the responses using keywords such as “intercultural business”, “adapting to the host culture”, “cultural intelligence”, and “communication style” to describe what they are learning. Interestingly, students have shown that by following and investing in course goals and tasks, they are able to feel an ability to intertwine English language skill and intercultural knowledge through the ICC classes described here.

More importantly, these comments and the structure of both courses strongly support the advantages of CBI claimed by Peachey (2003), which include: 1) increasing student interest in content, 2) usefulness when teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and 3) facilitating critical thinking by encouraging students to obtain information from multiple sources.

Nevertheless, analysis of the student questionnaire responses coupled with observations by the author of student interaction and participation in class have also highlighted issues for future development of the two courses’ goals within the ICC framework. First, more regular monitoring of student development of cultural intelligence is needed. One limitation of the present study lies in the questionnaire timing itself. The questionnaire was conducted at the end of both courses by which time the students had developed a workable knowledge of the content and in turn had clearly enhanced their cultural intelligence. To both monitor and adjust course flow so that the opportunity for higher levels of cultural intelligence, more interaction through questionnaires and interviews is required in the future. Additionally, development of a
focus on cultural intelligence skill testing beyond the analysis of case studies is necessary. One way to achieve this could be an increase in role-plays that require students to take their acquisition of new skills to a more production-focused stage than now. As a result, additional development of the two ICC class curriculums could boost more intertwining of content with practical and language skills that also allow for the use of critical thinking.

**Conclusion**

This paper began by presenting a canvas of this study based on current research that suggests the coupling of CBI with a focus on cultural knowledge and intelligence building. The growth skills and knowledge beyond language can equip students with a strong base in intercultural contexts. As Dlaska (2003) strongly claims, extrication of content from language brings with it the risk of impeding simultaneous linguistic and academic achievement. In that regard, both ICC classes can be said to have successfully synergized the language and content components.

This paper has attempted to shed light on how an equal balance between language and cultural stimulation can be achieved by using a CBI approach. More importantly, the use of cultural intelligence as a central focal point to measure student development within the ICC framework, as shown by the description of course content and responses of students in this study, offers one method of gauging the extent to which the aims of the International Course Category are being achieved.

In an effort to further develop a clear framework, the limitations mentioned in the analysis of this study will be tackled in future research. Other teachers of ICC classes are also encouraged to use this study and test it in their relative class contexts. Only then, through comparison of all ICC classes in terms of the results of integrated learning of content through the use of English language, can we begin to accurately gauge to what extent students’ intellectual curiosity world knowledge are stimulated and enhanced.

Finally as this paper has shown, the strong pedagogical elements of content-focused, independent learning and critical thinking offer a model for further development of the International Course Category classes as a whole. In conclusion, it is hoped that continued evaluation of student consciousness of their skills; knowledge and output with provide opportunities to improve the ICC framework.

**References**


国際科目群授業における異文化対応力の向上
—内容重視型アプローチを用いて—

Sean O’CONNELL

要　旨
南山大学は2012年度から「国際科目群」という選択科目を全学カリキュラムに導入している。教養科目や専門科目を英語だけで学べる環境を提供し、学生が語学力、異文化理解力や論理的思考力を伸ばし、国際人としての基礎スキルを身につけることを趣旨としている。
本稿では、著者が担当する2つの国際科目群授業を通じて、英語による内容重視型言語教育法によって履修学生の異文化対応力（cultural intelligence）修得と向上がいかに高まるかを検証する。特に、両授業にて実施したアンケートの回答分析結果を基に、履修学生が異文化対応力の修得及び向上を促すには必要な要素は何かというところに焦点を当てる。最後に同様な授業体系にどのような意味をもつかについて述べて、1つの実践モデルとしての可能性について示唆する。

キーワード：国際科目群、内容重視型言語教育法、異文化対応力、異文化間コミュニケーション・スキル