Intercultural Competence in Extension Education: Applications of an Expert-Developed Model[1]

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This article summarizes results of a study designed to identify essential intercultural competencies for Extension professionals. Recommendations are provided for Extension administrators—including district and county directors—to inform recruitment and professional development decisions in the broader effort to provide relevant and responsive programming for multicultural audiences.

Introduction

Among the barriers to Extension's continued impact in the 21st century, three consistently identified challenges include responding to rapidly diversifying stakeholder and clientele populations, effectively meeting the needs of historically underserved and marginalized communities of color, and adapting programming to meet the unique service needs of youths with non-conforming gender or sexual identities, or youth with disabilities (Cochran et al., 2012; French & Morse, 2015; Harris, 2008; Soule, 2017). According to the Pew Research Center, a record 44.4 million immigrants (accounting for approximately 13.6% of the nation's population) resided in the United States in 2017 (Radford & Noe-Bustamante, 2019). Diaz et al. (2019) claimed this immigration trend is "…expected to continue in the United States, with Hispanics accounting for the largest proportion of growth" (p. 1). Such rapid ethnic and cultural demographic shifts represent a potential challenge for Extension educators and have prompted emergent efforts to incorporate culturally responsive methods to engage stakeholders and clientele (Diaz et al., 2019; Flores et al., 2019).

In addition to the need to address new immigrant audiences, there also remain opportunities to reconcile Extension's institutional history of discrimination against, or neglect of, communities of color (Harris, 2008). Growing awareness of Extension's relationship with historically underserved communities has informed emergent inclusive programming models, as well as broader frameworks for reimagining

ways to measure and articulate Extension's community outreach commitments (Franz, 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2020). Finally, expanding social awareness and understanding of youths with non-conforming self-identities (e.g., those related to gender or sexuality) or youths with physical or mental disabilities have prompted a growing recognition within Extension of the need to commit to inclusive outreach (Soule, 2017).

To address these challenges and the potentially significant differences in cultural norms, values, and learning needs across client audiences, a growing body of research suggests an increased need for Extension professionals to become interculturally competent (Deen et al., 2014). While culture is a complex and evolving concept, Deen et al. (2018) defined culture as people's shared experiences, which encompasses their language, values, beliefs, and customs, as well as their worldviews and ways of communication. Similarly, multiple definitions of intercultural competence have been developed and applied within corporate, public service, and non-profit sectors. Notwithstanding, intercultural competence can broadly be described as "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world" (Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009, p. 7). Across industries and professional organizations globally, intercultural competence frameworks have been adapted into professional development trainings to emphasize the importance of cultural awareness, cultural responsiveness, and other competencies deemed important for intercultural career preparation (de Guzman et al., 2016; Deen et al., 2014).

Current Intercultural Competence Training Efforts in Extension

The overall growth of intercultural competence development in various industries and fields has prompted Extension institutions to follow suit. Extension systems and programs across the country have begun to incorporate intercultural competence curricula into administrative planning and professional development trainings for staff and personnel to better address the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele (Deen et al., 2014; Nieto & Bode, 2020). Two prominent examples of competence frameworks adapted to the Extension context include *Coming Together for Racial Understanding and Navigating Difference*, initially developed from the Cooperative Extension Service Rapid Response Team and Washington State University, respectively (ECOP Rapid Response Team, 2017; Deen et al., 2014). While these and other competence training

programs have successfully applied a diverse set of theories and concepts from the intercultural competence literature, certain competencies may have been drawn from other disciplines and may not be best suited for Extension's non-formal education context (Deen et al., 2014).

Previous efforts and scholarly recommendations indicate the importance of developing contextually grounded competence frameworks. Therefore, our recent study aimed to reach consensus on intercultural competencies deemed most relevant for Extension personnel across career phases (Diaz et al., 2021). The sections below summarize findings and provide recommendations for the application of the Intercultural Competence Model for Extension.

Building Consensus on Intercultural Competencies

We applied a three-phase Delphi approach to leverage the insights of 35 individuals across the United States who were included on our panel based on their expertise in intercultural competence capacity development and administration (Diaz et al., 2021). Panellists included diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) specialists, directors of access, inclusion, and compliance offices, managers of Hispanic/Latino outreach and education programs, and regional community development educators. The Delphi method is a research-based process that can facilitate structured anonymous discourse between stakeholders to deal with issues related to policy, practice, or organizational decision-making (Birdsall, 2004; Brady, 2015). During the three-phase process, the expert panel identified and refined a list of competencies they perceived most essential for the development of interculturally competent Extension professionals. The experts then designated the career phase in which each competence should be developed. The Delphi technique enabled the formulation of the first representative and specialized set of intercultural competencies for Extension's non-formal education context. This process to build group consensus to determine priorities and policies is crucial in today's complex and diverse Extension environment (Warner, 2017). More information on utilizing the Delphi process can be found in our recommendations.

Results and Recommendations

The Delphi panel came to consensus (based on an *a priori* definition of consensus as ⅔ of the panellists selecting "Strongly Agree" or "Agree") on 54 competencies deemed necessary for successful intercultural engagement in the workplace and in educational programming with clientele. We outline below the competencies and provide

recommendations for how intercultural competencies could be developed for agents across career phases as well as the implications the development of those competencies may have for improving inclusive and equitable outreach support to communities.

Within the First Year of Employment

Table 1 outlines the competencies that the panel agreed should be developed within or by the first year of an Extension professional's career. This includes six personal traits and attitudes, two knowledge areas, and six skill areas. These competencies should be addressed through formal education programs (Extension preparation and preservice programs), educator recruitment, onboarding, and in-service training programs.

Formal Education of Future Extension Professionals

There is an opportunity to begin developing Extension educators' intercultural competence prior to their entry into the field. Formal Extension education programs at the undergraduate and graduate level play an important role in realizing this opportunity (Bodycott et al., 2014; Janeiro et al., 2014). These promote the development of new Extension professionals with a foundation for success while also lessening the burden of onboarding and in-service training programs. Development strategies may include deliberately integrating intercultural development into new and existing academic programs, creating new academic programs that solely focus on intercultural development (e.g., Intercultural Competency Certificate) (Janeiro et al., 2014), and creating internationalized curricula (Bodycott et al., 2014). Research suggests that combining the tenets of intercultural competence with an internationalized curriculum improves "cross-cultural mixing, intercultural competence development and adaptation to different higher education contexts" (Bodycott et al., 2014, p. 1). While there is the opportunity to consider all competencies that came from this study for this approach, it is important to prioritize the competencies that are expected within the first year.

Job Descriptions, Recruitment Materials, and Hiring

Since the ability to work across cultural differences is a core competence for Extension educators (Harder et al., 2010; Scheer et al., 2011), it is important that Extension programs prioritize the recruitment of individuals who may have already developed these competencies through prior experiences. The competencies outlined for the first year provide a starting point for thinking about what to include in a job description. This prioritization allows Extension to better communicate expectations for new professionals and provides opportunities for productive interview discussion in these areas.

There is also the opportunity to leverage assessments that evaluate the personal traits, attitudes, knowledge, and skills among new candidates to better inform hiring decisions. According to Graf and Harland (2005), these competence assessments are a critical component of the screening and selection process when a professional is expected to work across and within the context of a multicultural setting. Administrators can use existing instruments that evaluate intercultural decision quality in an intercultural organizational scenario, but it is important to integrate the competencies from this study within these instruments (Graf & Harland, 2005).

Onboarding Programs: Understanding the Role of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

While there may be the opportunity to recruit and hire educators who already have some or all of the aforementioned competence, not all hires will have the necessary competencies. This means that onboarding programs are important. According to the University of Wisconsin Office of Talent Management (2015), there are three goals for onboarding programs: (1) accommodating, (2) acculturating, and (3) accelerating. Onboarding programs typically last one year, which makes the first set of competencies an ideal fit for an onboarding program. We outline how using these competencies will help meet each onboarding goal below.

- **Accommodating:** The list of cultural competencies within the first year provides a reference for strategically adapting trainings, tools, and resources to help build and advance these core competence areas.
- **Acculturating:** These competencies will also help to develop an enhanced understanding of organizational culture. Using organizational examples and scenarios while building these competencies is a useful strategy.
- **Accelerating:** Building intercultural competencies from the outset will minimize the time before new employees become productive members of the culturally diverse workgroups in Extension.

Within Years 1–3 of Employment

Tables 2.1–2.3 outline the competencies that the panel agreed should be developed within the first three years. These include three personal traits and attitudes, 13 knowledge areas, and 20 skill areas. The competencies in this section should primarily be addressed through in-service training programs.

In-Service Training: Cultural Awareness, Cultural Knowledge, and Cultural Skills

The competencies outlined within years 1–3 provide a framework for moving new employees from completion of an onboarding program to their engagement in initial in-service trainings. The competencies in this career phase involve the awareness of various dimensions of culture and an understanding of how culture impacts one's lived experience. Competencies in this early career phase also center on building the skills among Extension professionals to navigate cultural difference constructively and learn to apply communication, listening, and self-awareness techniques to better understand points of contention based on issues of racism and oppression. The competencies identified here can be explicitly integrated into professional development goal-setting exercises (i.e., competencies can serve as proxy outreach, relationship building, and needs assessment goals) for employees and can be used as development benchmarks in performance reviews where appropriate.

Within Years 2–7 of Employment

Table 3 outlines the competencies that the panel agreed should be developed within years 2–7 of an Extension professional's career. The competencies in this section should be addressed through in-service training programs in facilitation, relationship building, and community development. The panel consensus coalesced between two career phase designations, resulting in overlap with the previous phase. This includes four skill areas.

In-Service Training: Community Development and Relationship Building

The competencies in this career phase are crucial to promote meaningful and effective community development. These competencies suggest the educator should work to become part of the community and facilitate activities that allow for effective and honest exchanges in both policy and educational discussions. These competencies expand previous models that focus on relationship building as a core competence (Harder et al., 2010; Scheer et al., 2011),

and move towards a new community development role for Extension (Gallardo et al., 2018). As with the primary competencies within years 1–3, the competencies for years 2–7 could serve as target professional development goals and may be used as benchmarks within performance reviews.

Evaluation Considerations and Recommendations

The volume and diversity of tests, tools, surveys, and techniques have massively expanded with the growth of intercultural competence research. Fantini (2009) identified 44 such instruments to assess different measures of cultural competence. This includes commercial assessments such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which is proprietary and likely cost-prohibitive for widespread adoption by county. While the IDI and other similar models reflect a degree of consensus on primary intercultural competencies, any effort to adapt the model for the purposes of assessment should be grounded in the recognition that competence development is an ongoing process and that certain factors will be more or less important at any given time and within particular contexts (Deardorff, 2009). Deardorff (2009) explicitly calls upon researchers to take appropriate measures to ground the model in their chosen context.

Given the variety of conceptualizations of cultural competence (i.e., models and frameworks) as well as assessment techniques/strategies (e.g., externally developed commercial test instruments, internally developed instruments), Extension leaders should aim to support emergent research efforts to generate very specific measurable outcomes/indicators within the Extension context (i.e., they should seek to apply a related Delphi consensus-building method).

Preexisting models may not be appropriately tailored to assess competence in an Extension context. Deardorff (2009) offered a series of questions assessors should ask themselves when deciding on a model or assessment tool to leverage:

- Is the tool compatible with your goals and objectives?
- Does it improve your overall assessment plan?
- Is it based on a theoretical foundation?
- Does it have a cultural bias?
- Is it appropriate for the age level and developmental level of those involved?
- What logistical aspects are involved in administering the tool (cost, time, etc.)?

- For whom are the results intended?

Conclusion

Extension professionals increasingly work with diverse clientele. Thus, it is important for administrators to expand opportunities for employees to build intercultural competencies as a measure to provide relevant and responsive programming for and with multicultural audiences (Deen et al., 2014). There is a pressing need to introduce this first set of intercultural competencies developed for and by Extension professionals and experts. The skills, knowledge areas, and personal attributes discussed in this article can be integrated into hiring interview questionnaires, trainings, professional development curricula and programming, goal setting exercises, and performance reviews. These outputs can be used to assess the ways in which skills and knowledge have been strategically utilized within programming, outreach, curricula development, and hiring practices. Ultimately, enhancing the capacity of Extension programming to account for clients' cultural differences can boost overall program effectiveness and address the needs of a broader audience (Nieto & Bode, 2020).

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Table 1. Competencies that the panel agreed should be developed within the first year.

Personal Traits and Attitudes	Knowledge Area	Skill Area
• Open-minded • Respect • Humility • Empathy • Trustworthiness • Honesty	• Understand the importance of diversity and inclusion • Understand that cultural issues may generate emotional reactions	• Ability to appreciate diversity and inclusion • Ability to seek and find the humanity in every individual • Ability to see self as an educator/facilitator and not an expert or savior • Communicative ability • Ability to be accountable • Ability to acknowledge "not knowing" when one does not understand and seeks clarification when appropriate

Table 2.1. Personal traits and attitudes the panel agreed should be developed within years 1–3.

Personal Traits and Attitudes
• Willingness to challenge one's own attitudes, preexisting beliefs, and cultural assumptions • Desire to be a lifelong learner around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion • Inclusivity

Table 2.2. Knowledge areas the panel agreed should be developed within years 1–3.

Knowledge Area
• Self-awareness including one's cultural/social identities, assumptions, values, norms, biases, stereotypes, preferences, experience of privilege and oppression, and how they shape one's worldview • Knowledge of how to build trust with people who are different from themselves across race, class, disabilities, gender, sexual orientation, and other human differences • Understand the barriers for diverse cultures to engage in Extension programs and services including the impacts of previous interactions and engagement with programs • Understand the multiple dimensions of diversity • Knowledge of the impacts of race and racism on various aspects of today's society • Understand white supremacy, its basic functions, and how it may manifest in the workplace or classroom • Knowledge of the target community's composition and how it relates to county, state, and national demographics • Understand how culture, class, gender, age, experiences, etc. affect individuals and their decisions, reactions, and interactions • Recognition of the importance of diversity in the educational team • Knowledge of cultural blindness: inability to understand how particular matters might be viewed by people of a different culture because of a rigid adherence to the views, attitudes, and values of one's own culture or because the perspective of one's own culture is sufficiently limiting to make it difficult to see an alternative • Knowledge of the history and culture of the Land Grant system, and its relation to the local communities it serves • Understand how anti-Blackness exists, operates, and manifests in society • Understand the centrality of whiteness within the culture, values, mission, and history of 1862s, which often reinforces Western-dominant perspectives/ideologies and approaches

Table 2.3. Skill areasthe panel agreed should be developed within years 1–3.

Skill Area
• Ability to ensure equitable participation where all voices are heard
• Openness to giving and receiving constructive feedback
• Ability to recognize the role of power in the potential dynamics arising from the discourse
• Ability to create safe space for learning, dialogue, and discussion
• Ability to identify their own ethical commitments and responsibilities
• Critical thinking ability
• Champion for diversity, equity, and inclusion in Extension
• Ability to step outside of comfort zone and embrace or be comfortable with discomfort
• Ability to look beyond self and acknowledge the worldviews and perspectives of others
• Self-reflective: The ability to assess one's own cultural norms, values, beliefs, behaviors, biases, prejudices, and perspectives in addition to any potential positions of power and privilege based on group membership or social identity
• Ability to remain fully present during conversation to be able to observe and respond to what is actually happening in the moment (mindfulness)
• Ability to identify unconscious and conscious biases
• Ability to remain nonjudgmental or suspend judgement
• Ability to be proactive instead of reactive
• Ability to build trusting relationships with a diverse set of individuals and groups
• Ability to practice active listening: the ability to focus completely on a speaker, understand their message, comprehend the information, and respond thoughtfully
• Ability to evaluate over-generalization and stereotypes
• Ability to demonstrate a positive perspective towards others including parents, families, and communities
• Ability to create and maintain personal boundaries
• Ability to measure parity in program participation to understand efficacy in reaching the various cultural demographics within their community

Table 3. Competencies that the panel agreed should be developed within 2–7 years.

Skill Area
• Ability to identify and build relationships with cultural guides/brokers to help connect with and navigate culturally different communities
• Ability to develop strategic alliances or partnerships with non-traditional groups
• Ability to provide a participant-centered learning environment that helps to create new knowledge through dialogue, debate, and the application of analytical tools and frameworks
• Ability to manage the facilitation role appropriately by remaining neutral, interjecting with questions/comments appropriately, and summarizing key points