Fostering Intercultural Competence through Problem-Based Learning: A Case Study of a Socioculturally Modified Curriculum in Japanese Higher Education

by

Jesse Russell Elam

Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction

University of South Carolina, 2018

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-methods action research dissertation was to expose six students studying Oral Communications 1 (OC1) at Japan’s Technical University (JTU) to a sociocultural component using the textbook *Mirrors and Windows* (Huber-Kriegler, Lázár, & Strange, 2003) over an eight-week period with the assistance of project-based learning (PBL). This dissertation used Mertler’s (2014) step-by-step process of action research to collect, document, and to analyze data concerning the students’ changes in intercultural competence. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using: (a) the IDI, (b) field notes, (c) reflective student journals, (d) worksheets from in-class tasks, and (d) a focus group. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was used as the primary quantitative source of data in addition to categorized quantified anecdotes from the qualitative sources using meta-inferences. A case study was constructed using the qualitative sources (field notes, worksheets, and focus group) through narrative analysis to further elaborate on the results from the IDI. Both quantitative and qualitative interpretations showed successful improvement in three participants’ intercultural competence—from Polarization Defense to Minimization—after the completion of the curriculum adjustment. Furthermore, analysis of the case study illustrated why some students
were able to transcend polarization defense while others failed. Through the action research process improvements to the sociocultural component, methodology, and theoretical framework for future studies are discussed.

Keywords: action research, developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), intercultural competence, intercultural development continuum (IDC), intercultural development inventory (IDI), intercultural sensitivity, project-based learning, sociocultural