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Review of *Intercultural Communicative Competence in Educational Exchange: A Multinational Perspective*



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Intercultural Communicative Competence in Educational Exchange: A Multinational Perspective
by Alvino E. Fantini, New York/London, Routledge, 2019, 200pp., £96 (Hardback) £29.24 (eBook).
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The last two decades have witnessed an increasing interest in the range of outcomes produced by studying abroad, including the development of intercultural abilities. Several books, volumes of conceptual theorizing and/or empirical studies have been published to understand intercultural development and language learning in cultural immersion contexts.

Intercultural Communicative Competence in Educational Exchange by Alvino E. Fantini joins the intercultural literature which has since the turn of the millennium brought about multiple investigations across the contexts where this competence can be developed, including in study abroad. In Europe, among the early books exploring the intersection between intercultural development and language learning in education abroad, one can find *Intercultural Experience and Education* by Alfred, Byram, and Fleming (2003) and *Living and Studying Abroad* by Byram and Feng (2006). The common elements between Fantini's (2019) monograph and these two edited volumes are the evidence-based account of intercultural abilities within education abroad and the focus on language. What makes Fantini's monograph unique is the contribution to a multi-national perspective of "particularist" and universal aspects of intercultural contact through extensive empirical testing—conducted in five languages and spanning 20 years—among multiple sojourner groups. "Particularist" aspects in this book, therefore, refer to aspects of intercultural contact that apply to individual sojourner groups only, whereas universal aspects are common to all groups collectively (representing aspects that sojourners might share from the intercultural experience).

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Despite the time lag between *Intercultural Communicative Competence in Educational Exchange* and the two aforementioned publications, the work of Fantini can be traced back to 2006, by building on one of the first empirical studies to validate a model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (hereafter, referred to as ICC) among study abroad participants. To put things into context, all three efforts stem from the cultural orientation of western communicative approaches to foreign/second language teaching that developed in the late 1980s and 1990s on either side of the Atlantic. That is, the construct of ICC built upon consideration of the sociocultural aspects of communication that had come to be emphasised within language teaching. It is no coincidence that Michael Byram (1997) – in Europe – and Alvino Fantini (1995, 2006)¹ – in the U.S. – have both developed models of ICC that have roughly the same timing and intersect the same disciplines. Fantini's (2019) book comes, in fact, to revisit his (2006) model of ICC through a follow-up multi-national study with participants in study abroad programmes offered by the same study abroad organisation that commissioned the 2006 study (The Federation of the Experiment in International Living in the U.S. and its Member Organisations around the globe).

Conducted during two different periods of time (2005-2006 and 2015-2016) with over 2,000 sojourners and 200 host families and involving eight countries, the two longitudinal studies depicted in this book assess sojourners' intercultural development in situ – for the initial study; and the impact of the intercultural experience on their lives up to 20 years after programmes ended – for the follow-up study. Premised on the notion that *language, culture* and *worldviews* are inextricably linked, the two empirical studies feed the book's key argument—the need to promote bilingualism-biculturalism as two interconnected dimensions of intercultural contact in study abroad.

The book early chapters—Chapters 1 to 3—come to introduce this argument whilst contextualising the construct on which it is premised in the fields of foreign/second language education and intercultural communication. This includes a discussion about the role of educators in optimising intercultural communicative competencies in study abroad, and practical guidelines for assessing this kind of competency. Readers familiar with the intercultural literature from a language-education perspective will find in these chapters an excellent summary of its fundamental precepts and disciplinary evolution by one of the pioneers in this area of study in the U.S. For those readers interested in study abroad but not necessarily familiar with this disciplinary perspective, Chapters 1 to 3 offer a useful introduction to this body of knowledge, although the use of technical jargon may at times hinder the understanding of the chapters' key points.

Reading on, in Chapters 4 and 5 Fantini discusses the findings yielded by the two aforementioned longitudinal studies by ascertaining the aspects in intercultural development that were specific and common to the sojourner groups under scrutiny. The initial study, in Chapter 4, sets the nature and components of the construct under scrutiny in Fantini's book (i.e., ICC), further tested in the follow-up 2015-2016 study (described in Chapter 5). Both chapters respond to ten *a priori* assumptions with extensive quantitative and qualitative findings gleaned from the two longitudinal and multi-national studies. Rich and complex findings are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, offering compelling evidence of the language-culture nexus in intercultural development and the influence that specific study abroad programme design components (such as the homestay) can have in this development.

The practical implications and applications of research findings are summarised in the last and concluding chapter (Chapter 6), where the author revisits the ten original *a priori* assumptions underlying the two longitudinal and multi-national studies. Among key findings is the impact of host language learning and cultural (self-)awareness on the sojourn, with becoming bilingual (at least to some extent) posited as a necessary condition for sojourners' intercultural development abroad and to gain access to another worldview. Of the assessed programme design components, the host family homestay (while increasingly difficult to promote) emerges as a crucial feature in facilitating intercultural development by providing an effective way to enter the host culture and learn the target language.

While these assertions are substantiated in rich quantitative and qualitative data, the complex data sets that thread throughout the book make its reading difficult at times. However, they do also come to remind us that research in education abroad should inform practice. This is why Fantini finalises his book by pointing out six important areas to improve the quality of study abroad (i.e., participant selection, programme design, cross-cultural orientation, interventions, assessment, and post-programme follow-up) to those interested in this area of research and professional practice. And, it is precisely this practice-oriented concern that opens up the readership of the book from interculturalists to other scholars and practitioners who are interested in ensuring better study abroad.

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