

**Master's Project
Defense**

An Exploration of Virtual Intercultural Learning Experiences for Undergraduate Students

**Jessica Steele
AEC/CALS
University of Florida**

Outline

- Introduction
- Operational Definitions
- Problem/Need
- Literature Review
- Project Overview
- Opportunities/Challenges
- Conclusion
- Acknowledgements

Introduction

Study Abroad

- International study abroad (SA) is an incredible opportunity that has been more readily available to certain student groups than others. ₁
- Barriers to SA have impacted students' participation in study abroad, primarily disadvantaging low-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities. ₁
 - Lack of access to information
 - Lack of funding
 - Lack of support/encouragement
 - Fear of negative stereotypes
- Only **1.6%** of U.S. higher education studied abroad for academic credit during 2016-2017. ₂

Cultural Intelligence

- SA students receive personal, academic, and professional benefits.¹
 - Cultural intelligence
 - Self-awareness
 - Leadership skills
 - Personal growth
 - Self-confidence/Independence
 - Problem-solving skills
- Emerging global leaders have been called on to develop **cross-cultural self-efficacy (CCSE)** and **cultural intelligence (CQ)** in order to effectively navigate an increasingly intercultural climate.^{2,3}
- CCSE & CQ can be developed via study abroad, self-reflection, and exposure to new/different cultures.^{2,4}

VIntLEs

- **Virtual Intercultural Learning Experiences (VIntLEs)** are a form of online/distance education that may provide an alternative for students without the means to study abroad.
- Through combining intercultural dialogue with digital technology, distance is no longer a barrier to exploring other cultures.₁
- VIntLEs have cultivated the development of employability skills.₁
 - Digital competence
 - Communication skills
 - Ability to work in a diverse cultural context
 - Foreign language competence.

Operational Definitions

Cultural Terms

- **Self-Efficacy** - one's belief in their own ability to accomplish tasks and achieve success₁; succinct, measurable improvement in varying aspects of cultural awareness including curiosity, confidence, and acceptance of ambiguity₂
- **Cultural Intelligence (CQ)** - the ability effectively navigate and respond to multicultural situations across a variety of contexts_{3,4}
- **Cross-Cultural Self-Efficacy (CCSE)** - a term describing self-efficacy within the context of global leadership, because self-efficacy is a predictor of cross-cultural adjustment levels and *cultural intelligence*₅

(Bandura, 1977)₁ (van der Velden, Millner, & van der Heijden, 2016)₂ (Schindler, 2019)₃ (Livermore, 2011)₄
(Javidan, Bullough, & Dibble, 2016)₅

Technological Terms

- **Distance Education (DE)** - education in which content is delivered via online/digital technology that is not confined to in-person classroom learning between the student and instructor _{1,2}
- **Virtual Exchange (VE)** – sustained, technology-enabled education in which interaction takes place between individuals/groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds ₃
- **Virtual Field Trips (VFTs)** – live-streamed, educationally-oriented experiences that remove the barriers of time, cost and location, making experiences available to all students (Online Learning Consortium, 2019) ₄
- **Virtual Intercultural Learning Experience (VIntLE)** - term developed by the project creator/researcher to most appropriately describe her integration of principles from VE, VFTs, DE, and online learning

Leadership Terms

- **Global Leadership** - the ability to influence and bring about positive change by leading within diverse organizational structures
- **Global Mindset** - a global leader's self-efficacy; the ability to influence dissimilar others in the complex, interdependent, and constantly changing global world
- **Intercultural Empathy** - the ability to communicate and connect, build emotional ties, and engage with people from other parts of the world to create collaborative solutions

Problem/Need

Problem

Lack of access to study abroad opportunities.

How can we make the learning of cross-cultural self-efficacies and intercultural leadership accessible to all students within academic learning environments?



Literature Review

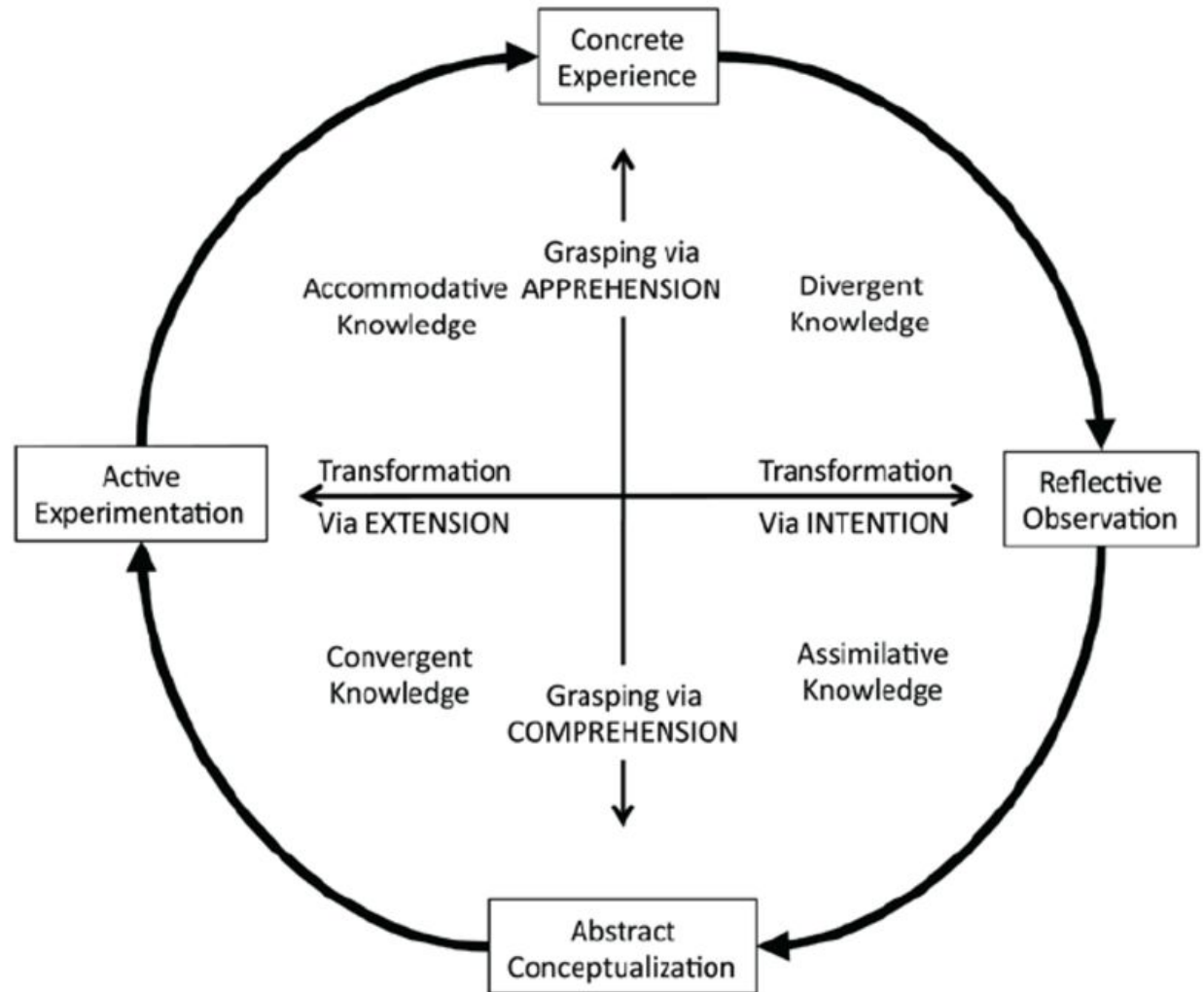
Theoretical Framework

- **Social Constructivism** posits that knowledge is active, adaptive, makes sense of one's experience, and is both a mental and cultural process. ₁
 - "social negotiation of meaning" (p. 6) ₁
- **Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)** is a process of knowledge creation through transformative experiences ₂; inherently social in nature; new, engaging experiences.
- **Vicarious** experiences allow a learner to see another person engaging in a way they would like to, providing a model of achievability to act off. ₃

(Doolittle & Camp, 1999) ₁ (Dewey, 1938) ₂ (Bandura, 1977) ₃

Model of Experiential Learning

(Kolb, 1984)



Previous Studies

- **Krakovka (2012)** - students experienced all four stages of Kolb's (1984) EL Module through in-person and virtual field trips.
- **Helm (2018)** - dates VE back to a Cold War Telecommunications Project of 1988; connect youth from the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.
 - VIntLE used within foreign language education, intercultural learning, conflict resolution, and facilitated dialogue.
- **Hagley (2016)** - language-learning VE (1,500 students from six countries) showed increase in students' overall cultural awareness
- **Schenker (2012)** - 12-week VE showed high student interest in cultural learning, language improvement, and development of intercultural awareness

Previous Studies

- VEs are comparable to study abroad in developing of cultural competencies and in increasing students' self-efficacy/CCSE and desire to learn more about other cultures.
 - **van der Velden et al. (2016)**
 - **Wang, Rechl, Bigontina, Fang, Gunther, & Fottner (2017)**
 - **Aristizabal & McDermott Welch (2017)**
- Intercultural awareness, global leadership, and self-efficacy are critical skills
 - **Park, Jeong, Jang, Yoon, and Lim (2018)**
 - **Tichnor-Wagner's (2019)**
 - **Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl (2009)**
 - **Klassen (2004)**

Project Overview

Virtual Intercultural Learning

- Developed a **Virtual Intercultural Learning Experience (VIntLE)** for undergraduate students in AEC/CALS to learn about intercultural awareness.
- **Six videos** ranging from 7-10 mins each created from footage filmed during AEC 3065 Summer C study abroad to Costa Rica.
- Providing access to cultural diversity through video technology.
- Agriculture from a global perspective.

Virtual Intercultural Learning

- Module 1: Costa Rican Culture
- Module 2: Animal Biodiversity
- Module 3: Rainforest, Plants, and Animals
- Module 4: Dairy Farming
- Module 5: Global Coffee Farming
- Module 6: Sustainability & Future

Online demonstration

Opportunities & Challenges

Opportunities

- Online learning continues to rise in popularity and prevalence; primary source of enrollment growth in higher education₁
- VIntLEs have incredible opportunities to continue gaining popularity and application₁; disability, illness accommodations
- “The proportion of academic leaders who report that online learning is critical to their institution’s long term strategy has grown from 48.8% in 2002 to 70.8% this year [in 2018]” (p. 4)₁
- Social, cultural, political, & economic integration have led humans to integrate at incredibly high levels; vitality of intercultural education₂

Challenges

- Dependant on technology, electricity, and internet connection in order to establish and maintain any virtual learning environment
- Critical assumption that technology reliably and consistently performs as expected
- Many Instructional Designers are still in the process of acquiring knowledge and training regarding DE, which poses a problem for instructors who need help transitioning to digital/online learning platforms₁

Conclusion

What I Learned

- Grad school is tough
- Resilience is key
- Preparation is fantastic
- Ambiguity is okay
- Change is constant
- Plans can fail
- I can do it!!!!







Acknowledgements

Thank you!!!

- My family - love, support, kindness
- My partner - encouraging me every step of the way
- My advisor - opening my mind to possibilities
- My committee - guidance & support
- CALS/UF - providing an incredible program
- And... To everyone watching, thank you for being here with me!

Thank you!

Questions?