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# **Transformative learning for social integration: Overcoming the challenge of greetings**

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## **Abstract**

Many universities in different parts of the world are seeking to enhance the cultural diversity of their staff and student body and yet repeated studies have shown that good integration can be difficult to achieve. Although several studies have examined the reasons why such integration is difficult, there has been very little research into the actual process of social integration. This paper addresses this gap through a qualitative study of intercultural learning. Inspired by Molinsky (2013), students were asked to focus on a behaviour that was personally or professionally important to them but that they were having difficulty adapting to. The paper reports the varying, unfolding experiences of six of these students as they faced the affective, behavioural and cognitive challenges of adjusting to different greeting patterns and the strategies they used for gradually overcoming them. Drawing on both the literature and the findings, an intercultural growth model is proposed. The paper ends with a discussion of the implications of the findings for enhancing social integration at university.

Key words:

Social integration; intercultural learning; transformative learning; internationalisation; greetings.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years many universities in different parts of the world have been developing their internationalisation strategies and, as part of this, have been seeking to enhance the cultural diversity of their staff and student body. For example, the University of Nottingham's (n.d.) Global Strategy 2020 lists an increased number of international students as one of its goals. However, the strategy also points out that the University needs to ensure these students 'become a part of our university, sharing knowledge, providing the skills they need to become employable and creating opportunity for life-long relationships and networks.' (p.19) In other words, international and home students need to be socially and academically integrated in order for all students' social and learning experiences to be maximised. A recent British Council report explains this as follows:

Integration of all students is an elemental factor in the expanding concept of internationalisation [...]. Risks of separation to international students include at best, feelings of isolation that manifest in poor social and academic performance and at the very worst, risks to their personal safety. The positive effects and outputs of productive integration of international students not only affect the students and faculty, but the calibre of education itself and the long term promotion and marketing prospects of a university and a nation.

(British Council 2014, 4)

Yet a number of studies (e.g. Dunne 2009, Groeppel-Klein, Germelmann, and Glaum 2010) have demonstrated that good integration can be difficult to achieve. It is important, therefore, to investigate what can be done to improve it. This paper focuses on social integration and explores the role that intercultural learning can play in enhancing it, with special reference to greetings.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Social integration**

Building on the conceptualisation of social integration provided by Ware et al. (2008), I define it as follows: a process through which individuals develop and increasingly exercise capacities for interpersonal connectedness and citizenship. This definition draws attention to two important elements: the ongoing, process aspect of integration and the social connections that develop between (and among) both individuals and groups. In practical terms, in the higher education sector this means that students from diverse backgrounds take part together in social activities, chat and learn informally from each other in social settings, form friendships with each other, and discuss and learn both formally and informally from each other in academic settings. I refer to this as integration rather than inclusion, as the latter seems to suggest 'including' one group of people (e.g. international students) into another group (e.g. home students), whereas integration refers to the building of multiple links and connections by all people across a range of social boundaries.

Research within both the intercultural adaptation literature and the education literature on internationalisation/ international students links integration with three main factors: number and type of friendships, extent of participation in social activities, and perception of being an integrated member of the community. For example, classic work by Bochner (e.g. Bochner 1977) and by Ward and Kennedy (e.g. Ward and Kennedy 1993) has drawn attention to the important role that friendships play in the adaptation of international students. Ward and Kennedy (1993), for instance, found that the more international students interacted with local students and staff, the better was their overall adaptation to life in the foreign country, including fewer social difficulties and improved communicative competence. Educational studies have pointed to the link between social integration and retention (Tinto 1998) and student well-being (Sawir et al. 2008). Unfortunately, however, a number of studies (e.g. Dunne 2009, Rienties and Nolan 2014) have reported that home and international students do not mix well easily, and longitudinal studies (e.g. Rienties and Nolan 2014, Groeppel-Klein, Germelmann, and Glaum 2010) have shown that this does not improve over time. This raises the question of 'why', and so other studies (e.g. Gareis 2012, Sovic 2009) have researched the reasons why both home and/or international students experience difficulty in integrating well. A wide range of issues have been identified, including language and communication difficulties, different lifestyles, and lack of common interests.

Given the importance of social integration, many higher education institutions have taken a number of initiatives to help promote it. For instance, Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, and Williams (2014) include descriptions of twelve integration initiatives developed by different universities in the UK. Yet despite all these and similar studies, there have been extremely few that have researched students' experiences of integrating socially from a process point of view. As Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013, 550) point out, 'Despite the accelerating increase of international students on American campus, there is still a lack of in-depth understanding of how these individuals make sense of their

adjustment journey or how they construct meaning concerning their friendship development experience.’ This study helps address this lacuna by focusing on an element that can function as a gateway to friendship development and hence as a key route to social integration: greetings.

From a linguistic perspective, greetings are patterned routines that facilitate social relations. They comprise formulaic phrases and are closely associated with notions of politeness. According to Laver (1981, 304), they are ‘extremely important strategies for the negotiation and control of social identity and social relationships’. The forms that people use in greetings vary according to a number of factors, including context (e.g. the distance/closeness of the individuals concerned and/or the formality of the situation) and language and culture (e.g. Hu and Grove 1999, Krivonos and Knapp 1975). For instance, traditionally common greetings in Chinese are ‘Where are you going?’ and ‘Have you had lunch?’ – phrases that many English speakers may not initially interpret as greetings but that have a similar function to ‘lovely day, isn’t it’ in English. So for friendships to get off to a good start and for the process of social integration to begin, it is important for students to gain insights into different forms of greetings and the meanings associated with them. This entails a process of intercultural learning for everyone involved and so in the next section I review key models that focus on this.

## **2.2 The process of intercultural learning**

Despite a plethora of models of intercultural competence (e.g. for overviews, see Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009, Spitzberg and Changnon 2009), there are surprisingly few models of the process of intercultural learning. While a number of developmental models exist (e.g. Bennett 1986, 2004, Deardorff 2006, Glaser et al. 2007), none of them provide much detail on the actual process of developing intercultural competence. For example, Bennett’s (1986, 2004) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) identifies a series of stages that learners are said to move through with respect to attitudes towards difference. In one of his papers, Bennett (1986) outlines the changes in individuals that are needed in order for them to move from one stage to the next and suggests very briefly some ways in which learners can be supported and challenged to achieve this. For example, to move from the stage of ‘acceptance of difference’ to the stage of ‘adaptation’, he states: ‘The experience of adaptation is one of consciously shifting perspective and intentionally altering behaviour’ and he recommends providing learners with ‘opportunities to interact in previously unexplored cultural contexts’ and to ‘address deeper anxiety issues (e.g., “internal culture shock,” identity conflicts, etc.)’ (pp.9–10). However, he does not provide any more details than this.

Taylor (1994) also refers to the notion of perspective shift and, building on the work of Mezirow (e.g. 2000), he views intercultural learning as transformative learning. He identifies ‘cultural disequilibrium’ as the stimulus for growth, and suggests that a changed worldview or perspective emerges through thinking about the ‘problem’ and adopting learning strategies to understand them better. This process is illustrated in Figure 1.

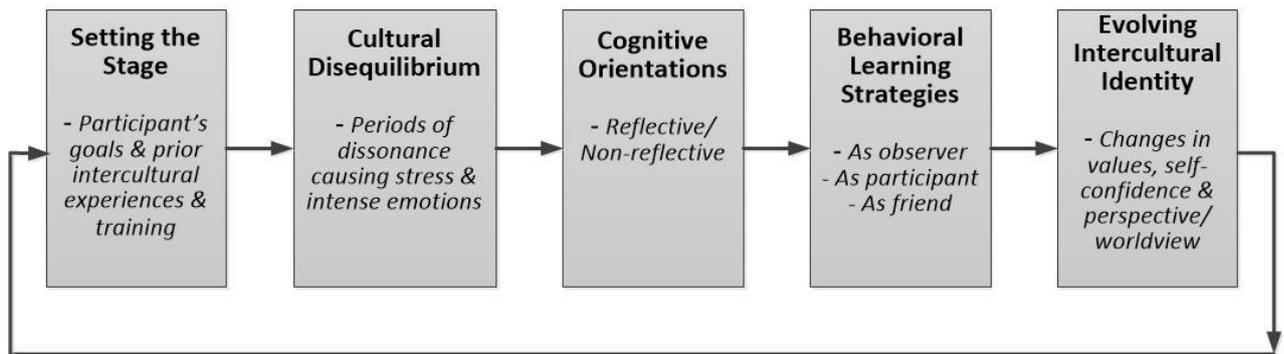


Figure 1: Taylor's (1994) conception of the process of learning to become interculturally competent (based on Taylor, 1994, p.162)

A similar approach is taken by Anderson (1994), who in addition points out that there are affective, behavioural and cognitive elements to the whole process. She also notes that people can respond to cultural disequilibrium in different ways and refers to 'returnees', 'escapers' and 'time-servers' as well as to 'adjusters' and 'overcomers'. However, while both theorists provide very helpful insights into the process of intercultural learning, including the importance of an initial disorienting dilemma, they do not make clear how learning and development takes place over time for individuals. For instance, despite identifying different types of reactions to challenge, Anderson (1994) provides no concrete examples of how intercultural adaptation may play out for individuals, nor what may lead some people to retreat from challenges while others overcome them. As a result, it is difficult to understand how intercultural learning and development occurs for individuals, which is necessary if we are to foster such growth effectively.

This study, therefore, is designed to gain deeper insights into the process of intercultural learning as it relates to social integration, with special reference to behavioural learning strategies (e.g. see Fig. 1 above).

The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do university students react to specific interactional challenges in culturally diverse contexts?

RQ2: What strategies do they use to adjust to the challenges?

RQ3: How successful are they in adjusting?

An overarching objective is to gain insights into ways in which transformative intercultural learning can be fostered. The paper focuses on greetings as an interactional challenge because of its potential importance for social integration and since it emerged as the most frequent issue identified in the study.

### 3. Methodology

The data collection method for this study was inspired by Molinsky (2013) in that it required participants to engage in their own personal action research type projects. According to Cohen,

Manion, and Morrison (2011, 347), action research is participatory: “It is research through which people work towards the improvement of their own practices.” In this case, the participants were 32 students on a master’s degree in intercultural communication at a British university and the goal was to encourage them to take specific steps to enhance their own skills in integrating with the diverse student population at the university. They were given the brief shown in Figure 2 and this formed a key part of their assessment for one of their modules.

### **1. Notice unsettling experiences**

Pay close attention to life around you, especially those elements that are different from what you have been used to or what you have previously experienced. Choose ONE of them to focus on that:

- is noticeably different from the way you would usually behave;
- makes you feel uncomfortable in some way;
- is personally or professionally meaningful to you to adjust your behaviour or your attitude towards that behaviour.

Record the following in your portfolio:

- ✓ Identify the practice and its context that you have chosen to explore and reflect on;
- ✓ Explain why it is personally or professionally important or meaningful to you to focus on;
- ✓ Describe carefully and systematically how the practice is carried out in the context you’re familiar with (for example, where you have lived, worked or studied previously);
- ✓ Describe carefully and systematically how the practice is carried out here (i.e. in the new context you’ve identified), drawing attention to similarities and differences;
- ✓ Explain why any differences make you feel uncomfortable.

### **2. Adjust your behaviour and/or your attitudes**

Find TWO occasions when you can try to adjust your behaviour and/or attitudes and record your attempts as follows:

#### **Attempt 1**

- Describe carefully and systematically your FIRST ATTEMPT at adjusting your behaviour and/or attitudes:
  - ✓ What you did to try and adjust your behaviour and/or attitudes;
  - ✓ What you were thinking when you tried to adjust your behaviour and/or attitudes;
  - ✓ How you felt when you tried to adjust your behaviour and/or attitudes;
  - ✓ How you coped with your feelings;
  - ✓ In your estimation, what others were thinking and feeling, and why;
  - ✓ Your overall evaluation of Attempt 1.

#### **Attempt 2**

- Describe carefully and systematically your SECOND ATTEMPT at adjusting your behaviour and/or attitudes:
  - ✓ What you did this time and any differences from Attempt 1;
  - ✓ What you were thinking this time when you tried to adjust your behaviour and/or attitudes;
  - ✓ How you felt this time when you tried to adjust your behaviour and/or attitudes;
  - ✓ How you coped with your feelings this time;
  - ✓ In your estimation, what others were thinking and feeling, and why.
  - ✓ Your overall evaluation of Attempt 2;
  - ✓ Your plans for future attempts.

Figure 2: Instructions given to module participants

The main aim in setting this task was to encourage students to engage personally and actively in the adjustment process, so that they could not only learn academically about intercultural competence but could also start developing valuable strategies for enhancing it. In other words, each student worked on improving a specific interactional behaviour that they wanted to enhance, and carried out action type research on their own behaviour by making two adjustment attempts and recording their experiences carefully, as explained in Figure 2. The assignment was set in October 2015 and the deadline for submission was in early January 2016. It should be noted that students' unsettling experiences could be with people of any nationality – it was not necessarily international students interacting with British people. The module cohort was made up of students from many different countries (e.g. British, Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Thai) and the host department had students from over 50 different countries, as well as of different ages. The broader university community was even more diverse.

All students completed the assignment and 28 of them gave permission for their work to be used for research purposes. 25 of them completed the portfolio part of the assignment, but the data for three of these were discarded because they explored either a company change issue or a personality issue, neither of which was the focus of this research. Of these 22 usable portfolios, the following interactional challenges were reported by more than one student: greetings (6), seminar participation (3), making appointments (2), and giving feedback (2). As explained above, the 'greetings' portfolios were then chosen for detailed analysis, given the frequency of this topic and its particular relevance to social integration. Choosing a specific focus in this way allows the learning process to be examined in detail and described in a rich manner.

The 'greetings' portfolios were imported into the qualitative data analysis software package, MaxQDA and initially coded according to time sequence: introductory comments, transformative trigger (i.e. initial unsettling encounters), first adjustment attempt, second adjustment attempt. Then each of those data sequences was coded in terms of affective, behavioural and cognitive reactions, responses and reflections (Anderson 1994, Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001). The findings are reported in the next section. As many quotations as possible from the informants are included (given word limits) so that their voices can come through very clearly, revealing the richness of their different perspectives and concerns, even though they were all attempting to deal with the same issue of greetings.<sup>1</sup>

## **4. Results**

Of the six students who chose to write about greetings, four were from the People's Republic of China (three females and one male), one from Norway (female) and one of mixed nationality (female of Italian-Australian dual nationality, who had lived much of her life in different European countries). They have been given the following pseudonyms respectively: Huang, Lin, Zeng, Ding, Ingrid and Cara.

### **4.1 Unsettling encounters as transformative triggers**

Four of the six informants, Ingrid (the Norwegian), Huang, Lin and Zeng (the three female Chinese students) all focused on the challenges they experienced in relation to initial greetings such as 'How

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<sup>1</sup> Grammatical or spelling mistakes in the students' writings have not been corrected.

are you?' or 'Are you all right?'. For Ingrid, the difficulty was restricted to service encounters, such as in shops, while for Huang, Lin and Zeng it applied to all contexts. The other two informants, Cara and Ding, were concerned about physical contact during greetings.

There were variations across students as to how these concerns were triggered. Some reported specific incidents that provoked an immediate reaction (e.g. Quote 1), while others reported a more gradual build up (e.g. Quote 2). This is in line with Taylor's (2000) more recent argument that transformative learning is not necessarily triggered by a single event.

#### **Quote 1**

*The very first time I found myself puzzled was on a school day, when one of my classmates came to me with a really caring look and said "Are you all right?" I was quite shocked for her asking me like that, I murmured and said "oh, no worry, I'm fine." Then for the rest of the day, I kept thinking why she asked me like that. Was I too pale today? Should I wear a lipstick and looking better? How did she know I'm in a bad mood today? Otherwise, why she said "Are you all right". Because for me, "Are you all right" is the sentence people use to show their care to the patients or people who are in trouble, "Are you all right? Do you need any help?" This is the conversation I expect and find it reasonable. [Lin]*

#### **Quote 2**

*After I came to UK, I recognize it ['hello, how are you?'] is the most common and frequently used greeting pattern in UK. It happens every day and everywhere in the dormitory, in the class and on campus. However, actually no one use the pattern I have been taught. The expected answers seem not be "I am fine" or "Just so-so." Most of time I ended the conversation with "I'm fine" and feel really embarrassed to ask "and you?" with a rising tone. The speaker naturally had no comments on my answer. Then my communication with my roommates, classmates and tutors was frustrated in this way. I am confused what the answer they want is. Moreover, I feel annoying being asked the same question several times one day and repeated the same boring answers. [Huang]*

All the informants commented on why they found initial greetings unsettling. They referred to confusion as to what was meant (e.g. Quote 1), and difference from the pattern they had been taught (e.g. Quote 2) and/or existed in their home country. It was an important issue for all of them, and Cara explained why it was important to her personally (quote 3).

#### **Quote 3**

*Meeting and bidding someone farewell might seem a superficial practice to focus on, however to me it is a fairly important one. I have grown up in countries in which physical contact is very important especially when greeting people. This has led me to be a person who needs some sort of physical contact when I start to know people more in depth. ... Not greeting or bidding someone farewell with one or two kisses is very strange for me and it made me feel lost and uncertain on how to deal with the situation. [Cara]*

Each of the informants described the feelings that the unsettling greeting experiences induced and Figure 3 shows the relative frequency of their different affective reactions, according to the terms they used.

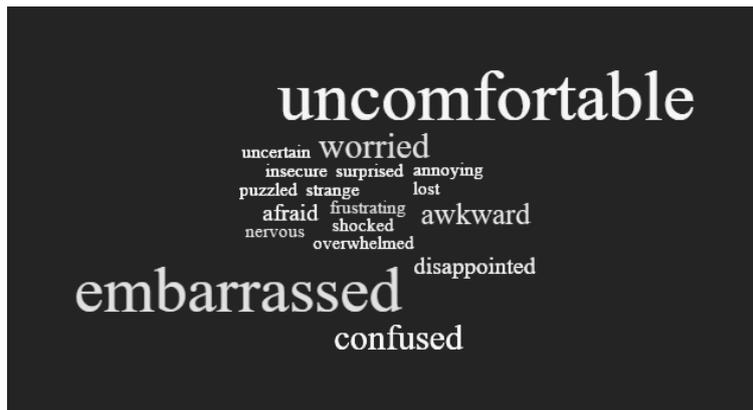


Figure 3: Terms used by informants to convey their disequilibrium  
(Word cloud format, 45 word instantiations)

As can be seen, ‘uncomfortable’ and ‘embarrassed’ were the most commonly mentioned feelings. Discomfort had cognitive and behavioural aspects, in addition to affective, as the following comments illustrate:

**Quote 4**

*A late afternoon, after spending all day with one of my course mates working on coursework, we bid each other farewell with a simple ‘goodbye’. I felt extremely uncomfortable as I did not know what was expected of me in that situation. My instinct would have been to give my course mate two kisses and leave; however her body language told me that that might put her in a difficult situation. [Cara]*

**Quote 5**

*In the first couple months here, I always felt overwhelmed by all the greetings, and was really embarrassed by didn’t know how to respond it properly. Among all these “How are you”, “How’s it going”, and other phrases, the “Are you all right” is the one making me most uncomfortable with and felt really confused at first. [Zeng]*

The behavioural uncertainty (not knowing what to do or say for the best), the emotional discomfort (e.g. feelings of embarrassment) and the cognitive confusion (not understanding what was meant) were often associated with other negative reactions, such as worry. This worry was partly associated with possible ongoing negative assessments of them personally and partly with the risk it posed for successful future friendship formation (e.g. see Quote 6).

**Quote 6**

*Personally, I think greeting etiquette is closely related to politeness which could greatly influence interpersonal relationships. [...] improper behavior could become an obstacle of intercultural communication and adaptation. For example, the embarrassment [I experienced] made me lose an opportunity to make a foreign friend and begin to doubt my social manner, which even made me afraid of greeting to foreign people in the next month. [Ding]*

In terms of the initial trigger then, students reported becoming aware of ‘difference’ in various ways, notably either through a specific incident or through gradually emerging awareness. Various

emotions were triggered as well as a range of reflections, including how their current experiences differed from their previous ones, its associations with (im)politeness, how others might be evaluating them, and how all this might affect their making of friends.

#### **4.2 First adjustment attempts**

In response to their initial unsettling experiences, all the informants tried a slightly different behaviour for their first attempt at adjustment. They then evaluated how it went.

For example, Ding decided not to use any physical touch at all when greeting people and he concluded that his first attempt had 'failed'.

##### **Quote 7**

*While greeting to people or receiving greets from others, I chose to remove all of the physical touches I used before in greeting to foreign people. By this attempt, I was thinking that physical touches could lead to unnecessary embarrassment so no embarrassment would appear if there are no physical touches. This idea focused more on my personal feeling and perspective. However, the attempt embarrassed me even more. Sometimes, foreign people would actively have physical touches, such as shaking hands, with me in order to cater to my culture. In this case, I often felt surprised and unprepared, so my reaction could be slightly bewildered and hurry, which could make the communication embarrassed. Besides, when I greet to my close foreign friends without physical touches, both sides could have a feeling of being distant, which could make our friendship fragile. To cope with the negative feeling and embarrassment, I often explained my "strange" behavior and consideration of "greeting etiquette" afterward to the person I greet to, however, it did not always work. [Ding]*

Interestingly, Huang used a 'planned experiment' for her first attempt. Although she thought there was still room for improvement, she felt that this 'planned experiment' had given her valuable insights for her second attempt at adjustment.

##### **Quote 8 'Planned experiment'**

*For the first attempt, I tried to greet my classmate first when we have eye contact. I ask them "How are you?" first and carefully listen to their answers. However, I did not feel at ease as they do the same greeting. I imitated the tone and expression they do and did it on the purpose of getting the expected answer. I just pretend to be calm and ask the question as naturally as I can. [Huang]*

#### **4.2 Strategies for adjustment**

After their first adjustment attempt, all the informants felt that their greeting behaviour could be improved, even those who felt it had gone quite well. They reported three main strategies for improving further, namely observation, reflection, and asking others (locals, co-nationals and other internationals).

##### **Quote 9 Observation and reflection**

*Meanwhile, I notice that local British people always respond to this question in a relaxed way with humour more or less, and continue to have a small talk through the question before*

*getting into real business. It makes me consider whether there is a routine or a much proper way of response instead of saying "Fine" or giving unnecessary details. [Zeng]*

**Quote 10 Reflection**

*By this attempt, I was thinking that physical touches could lead to unnecessary embarrassment so no embarrassment would appear if there are no physical touches. This idea focused more on my personal feeling and perspective. [Ding]*

**Quote 11 Ask others: Locals**

*After my first attempt I felt like I might need some guidance, and I talked to my English friend about how to proceed. He made me think about it not being a sign of politeness that needed politeness as a response, but as superficial small talk. He meant that I put too much into it, and that it was just something they were taught to say, not something I necessary had to adapt and reply to. [Ingrid]*

## **4.2 Second adjustment attempts**

Each of the respondents made further improvements with their second adjustment attempts. Huang drew on her insight from her 'planned experiment' (Quote 8) and from that she realised that she could build on the first word of the response to make an additional comment and hence extend the conversation. This was similar for both Lin and Zeng, who also became aware that they needed to find ways of building on the initial greeting. Cara reported becoming more accepting that a friendly relationship did not necessarily require hugs or kisses on the cheek during greetings. Ding became aware that physical contact during greetings was not completely taboo, but could vary according to the nature of the relationship.

## **4.3 'Final' evaluations**

How then did the informants evaluate their achievements after their second attempts? Huang, Zeng, Ding and Cara were all very satisfied with the adjustments they had made, with Zeng commenting, for example, that she was positively enjoying greeting people in this different way. Ingrid, on the other hand, felt she had overreacted to the explanation she had received from her English friend. She decided that she did not want to conform completely to practices in England, but rather to find a happy medium between what she would do in Norway and what was more common in England

Lin felt proud of her progress, but recognised the need to make her responses more natural:

**Quote 12**

*There are still things I need to work on. As I said, in China, traditionally, we don't greet others with "how are you", I don't have this conditioned response every time I meet an acquaintance or stranger, but only reply passively. Therefore, even though it's a teeny tiny thing, it's still not that easy. [Lin]*

All in all, the six students made evident improvement and were pleased with the ways in which their understanding and performance of greetings had improved.

## 5. Discussion

Greetings are often thought of as a 'simple' communicative act that everyone performs and that can easily be picked up. However, while the act itself is universal across languages and cultures, the way in which it is performed is not. The portfolio accounts indicate that for some students at least, greeting others appropriately can be quite challenging, even when the person is highly proficient in English (e.g. as was the case for Cara). All the students felt that greetings were important gateways to friendship development (e.g. see Quote 6) and they were unsettled by finding that such a supposedly simple communicative act was causing them difficulty (e.g. see Quote 5).

Over the course of the term, all the students learned new things about greetings, especially with regard to one or more of the following:

- The formulaic phrases that are used for greetings by different people;
- The different non-verbal behaviour that can be associated with greetings;
- The ways in which context (e.g. the communicative event and the nature of the relationship between participants) influences greeting behaviour;
- The danger of relying on prior learning;
- The ways in which conversations can be developed out of greetings;

Why then is this important? In terms of social integration, greetings are a gateway to friendships and so an important communicative behaviour that students need to be able to handle flexibly. As noted in the introduction to this article, integration is a key element of the internationalisation of higher education, and friendships play a crucial role in this. Spencer-Oatey, Dauber, and Williams (2014) report the critical impact of arrival experiences for friendship formation, and so it is particularly important that students do not lose their motivation during the first few months after arrival through discomfort and discouragement.

Students need, therefore, to develop confidence and competence in handling disorienting experiences – not just in greetings but in unexpected experiences of all kinds. How then can this transformative learning be conceptualised more broadly? This study demonstrates not only the vital role of disorienting encounters but also the importance of students engaging with them through a range of strategies, thereby fostering their personal intercultural growth. Combining the ideas of Taylor (1994) and Anderson (1994), I propose a revised model of intercultural growth (see Figure 4).

In this model there are three main components to growth: contexts, routes and manifestations, all of which are interconnected. Firstly, students need to experience and embrace difference, not shying away from it but being willing and motivated to leave their comfort zones (Lilley, Barker, and Harris 2015) and to engage with it. This engagement is vital for growth, and entails cyclical experiential learning through observation, reflection and accommodation. If students are too disoriented by their experiences, they will also need to develop strategies for coping. All of this provides the route towards growth in intercultural competence. The competence components shown in the model are based on the Global People framework (Spencer-Oatey and Stadler 2009), but other conceptualisations would be possible. This depiction of a growth model for global skills is in line with classic transformative learning processes, as well as with recent work on global citizenship development (Lilley, Barker, and Harris 2015).

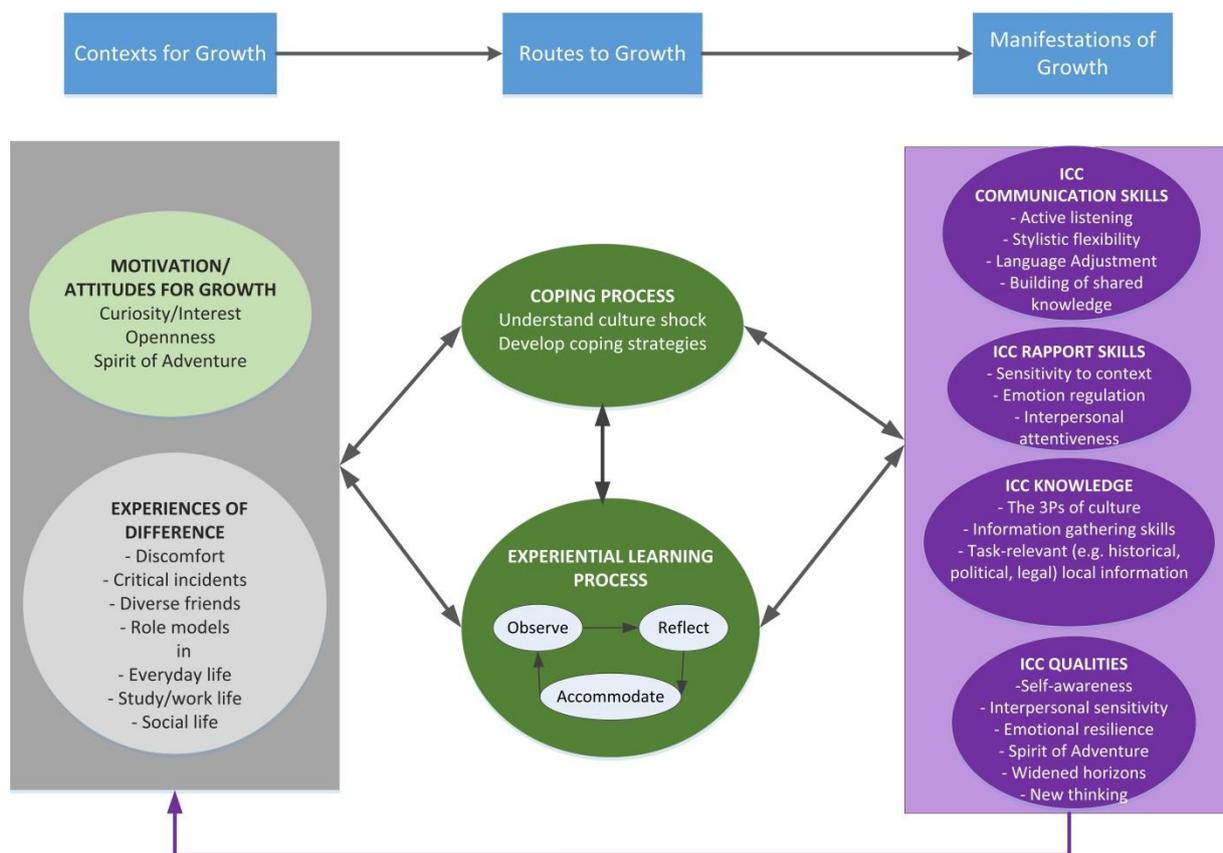


Figure 4: Global People Growth Model for Global Skills

## 6. Implications and concluding comments

What then are the implications for institutions in helping to promote social integration? The study indicates that students' personal adaptation issues may be very variable in that even for the same issue, such as greetings, people's specific difficulties were different. Given the wide range of interactional challenges people are likely to face, it would clearly not be practical to attempt to teach students how to handle the numerous different specific challenges they may face. What then can be done? The study shows that students were able to learn huge amounts by themselves, affectively, behaviourally and cognitively, by determining to work personally at an issue and by using key strategies to address them. Work by Molinsky (2013) is supportive of this. However, students are likely to need support in (a) identifying which issues to focus on, (b) developing their skills in observation and reflection, and (c) keeping motivated with regard to personal growth. They also need to understand what the development process entails, the challenges they may experience, and the strategies they could use, and all this is likely to require active engagement in a range of interculturally-related interactive activities.

As mentioned, a crucial element in this whole process is students' level of interest and motivation to adapt and integrate, and to persevere when difficulties arise. One major limitation of the current study is that students on the one hand were presumably particularly interested in integrating with others, since they were studying for a degree in intercultural communication. Moreover, they needed to carry out their action research type projects for credit. It is quite possible, or even likely, therefore that if it had been a voluntary task, far fewer would have participated so actively. So a

major issue that is left unresolved is how to keep students motivated to adjust beyond the initial honeymoon period. What is needed now is more studies of this kind, in different contexts and exploring different adjustment challenges, in order to learn more about students' personal journeys of intercultural transformative learning and ways of encouraging them to engage actively in this process.

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