

## Book reviews

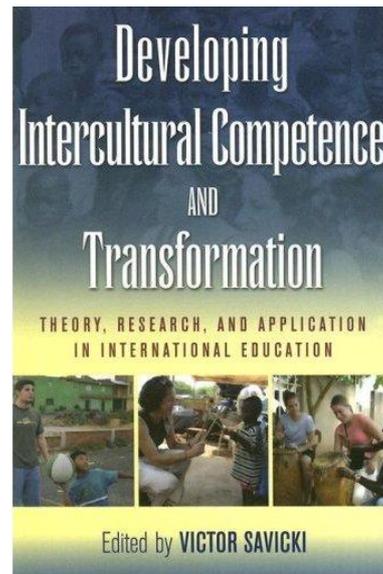
Reviewer Patrick Schmidt, SIETAR member

Author Victor Savicki (ed.)

Title Developing Intercultural Competence and Transformation: *Theory, Research, and Application in International Education*

Publisher Stylus Publishing

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As international education programs become more and more popular (and more and more necessary), those who construct and conduct them have to do their homework. The field is rapidly evolving, new ideas every day; how to marry them with the tried-and-true?

How to take the best of a myriad of methods, approaches, exercises and form your own unique forum? Intercultural competence is about personal growth and that of the teacher is what maximizes that of his or her students.

Dr. Savicki has done a wonderful job of synthesis here. His book provides not only ideas for curriculum, but also the theory and research which back them up. Compiling the experiences of no less than 17 top international educators, he divides their work into three sections: theories for intercultural growth and transformation, research, and applications. Savicki's goal, as his editor puts it, "is to help international educators create study-abroad experiences that reach their goals by design, not chance."

Among other things, international educators have to understand "intercultural competence" and "transformation" as non-tangible processes which will always remain elusive in terms of grading. The thread emerges that cross-cultural fluency is based on the development of subtle, almost intuitive skills. Difficult to measure, sometimes frustrating to teach, they are also incredibly rewarding once mastered.

Perhaps the most basic is the ability to "objectively"--or, as I like to say, *non-subjectively*--observe and interpret one's own day-to-day experiences. Facilitators agree that students who keep a DIE journal (describe, interpret, evaluate; please see "*Germans don't smile*" on page x) greatly accelerate their appreciation of the extent to which reality differs according to the eyes and ears of the perceiver.

Another important point: students need to be guided on how to work through culture shock. If not, and without even realizing what's happening to them, they risk being overwhelmed. The teacher, as both counselor and confidant, must focus on their emotional state so as to slowly transform confusion and anxiety into intellectual demystification and empathetic comprehension.

A good look at specific moments which seem strange or feel uncomfortable usually does the trick. Reconstructing a scene and interpreting it through a well-documented filter of basic cultural differences goes a long way toward finding peace of mind in what is, for them, a "new land".

Closely related is the sharing of experiences among students, often an amusing collection of misconceptions. (In-group/out-group distinctions can be made to encourage a wider perspective and ease the way for frame-shifting.)

In the end, as I like to tell my students, an educator promotes *strong attention to self-reflection*. Like it or not, that's the ultimate hurdle. Assimilating a culture means establishing a healthy rapport between *who* you are and *where* you are. It begins with a good look in the mirror.

Dr. Savicki's case studies, narratives, and class techniques lay the foundation for a solid international-education program in the Age of Obama. And the book has the added benefit of coming out just when there are more and more teachers--not to mention students--who can definitely use it...