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Expanding the Goal of ESOL Teaching ESOL as Intercultural Competence

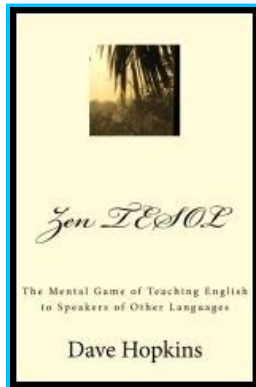
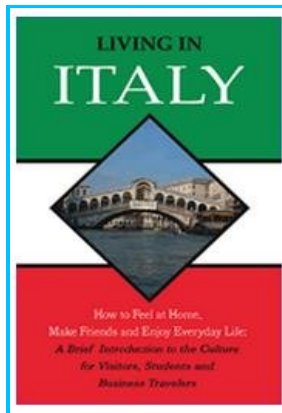
Alvino E. Fantini holds degrees in Latin American studies, anthropology, applied linguistics. A senior faculty member at the School for International Training since 1964, Alvino helped turn the Sandanona estate into the present **SIT Graduate Institute**. He has worked in language education and intercultural communication for over 40 years in the US and abroad, in intensive and extensive programs, in education and training, in field situations and academia, and with numerous languages and cultures.



He has conducted significant intercultural research and published widely, including Language Acquisition of a Bilingual Child (Multilingual Press, and New Ways in Teaching Culture (TESOL, 1997). [Editor's note: In a 1 of Dr. Fantini's original edition of "Language Acquisition of a Bilingual (Wendy E. Redlinger wrote: "The paucity of longitudinal studies dealt with developmental bilingualism, particularly from a sociolinguistic perspective, makes Fantini's work a welcome contribution to the literature....It is a carefully documented diary account of the Spanish/English bilingual development of the author's son, Mario, through age 5. Mario was addressed only in Spanish by his parents experienced minimal exposure to English until entering nursery school..." (**Language in Society, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 1980, pp. 133-135, Cambridge University Press**).]

Alvino served as an advisory member of a panel that developed the Nation Foreign Language Standards for US education, is a past president of the S for Intercultural Education, Training, and Research International (SIETA) and is a recipient of SIETAR's highest award, Primer Inter Pares. He currently serves as education consultant to **the Federation of The Experiment in International Living**, as director of the World Learning institutional architecture, occasional adjunct faculty and lecturer, and an international consultant. (Except for the editor's note, all of the biographical information abo

from Professor Fantini's [page](#) at SIT.)



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Now, more than a decade into the new millennium, the effects of globalization are widely felt. Today, more people around the world direct and indirect contact with each other than ever before. The effort of this present new opportunities and new challenges. Although intercultural transactions are conducted in many languages, English is pervasive around the world. This situation raises new issues for ESOL educators, who are especially well positioned to prepare students for both the opportunities and the challenges. As a profession, what should our response to these issues be and are we as ESOL educators assuming a proper role?

Despite many important advances in our field over the years, intercultural concerns remain primarily within special interest groups. A more effective response to these concerns, however, must involve collective efforts. As Sercu (2006) proposes, we may need to broaden our professional identity. For this to happen, however, we need to reexamine our goal and our role as language educators.

If our goal is to prepare students for effective, appropriate, and positive intercultural participation through effective communication, our students need not only to make themselves understood, but also to be accepted behaviorally and interactionally, especially because acceptance by others is more often strained by offending behaviors by incorrect grammar. This insight, in fact, prompted the development of the field of intercultural communication more than 50 years ago. In today's world, we need to rethink the design and implementation of language courses, given their potential to affect millions of people worldwide.

Curiously, intercultural educators who explore perceptions, behavioral, and interactional strategies mostly ignore the specific language of these encounters. And conversely, language teachers generally overlook behavioral and interactional aspects; after all, we call ourselves language teachers, not teachers of intercultural competence. Yet the latter is precisely what is needed to produce competent English language

learners.

Intercultural abilities have been identified by a great many names: intercultural competence, transcultural communication, and global intelligence, among others. No clear consensus exists among interculturalists about the meaning or their meanings. An extensive survey of the literature (over 240 publications), however, substantiates intercultural (communicative) competence (ICC) as the most widely used and most comprehensive

It is clear that ICC involves a complex of abilities that are necessary to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself. Whereas effective communication reflects a view of one's own performance in the target language-culture (LC2; i.e., an etic or outsider's view), appropriate communication reflects how native speakers perceive such performance (i.e., an emic or insider's view). The task, then, as ESOL educators is to help students recognize their etic distance while attempting to uncover the emic viewpoint. The aim is not necessarily that students will achieve native-like fluency, but that they will develop some degree of ability in communicating and interacting in the style of LC2 interlocutors.

Based on the results of the survey of the literature, I proposed a construct of ICC with multiple and interrelated components, as follows (described in more detail below): a cluster of characteristics, three areas, four dimensions, target language proficiency, and developmental levels. All of these components, however, are equally promoted through classroom work alone; direct experience with the LC2 greatly enhances their development. This observation led the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration and the American Council on International Intercultural Education to strongly endorse academic mobility and other intercultural experiences for all college students.

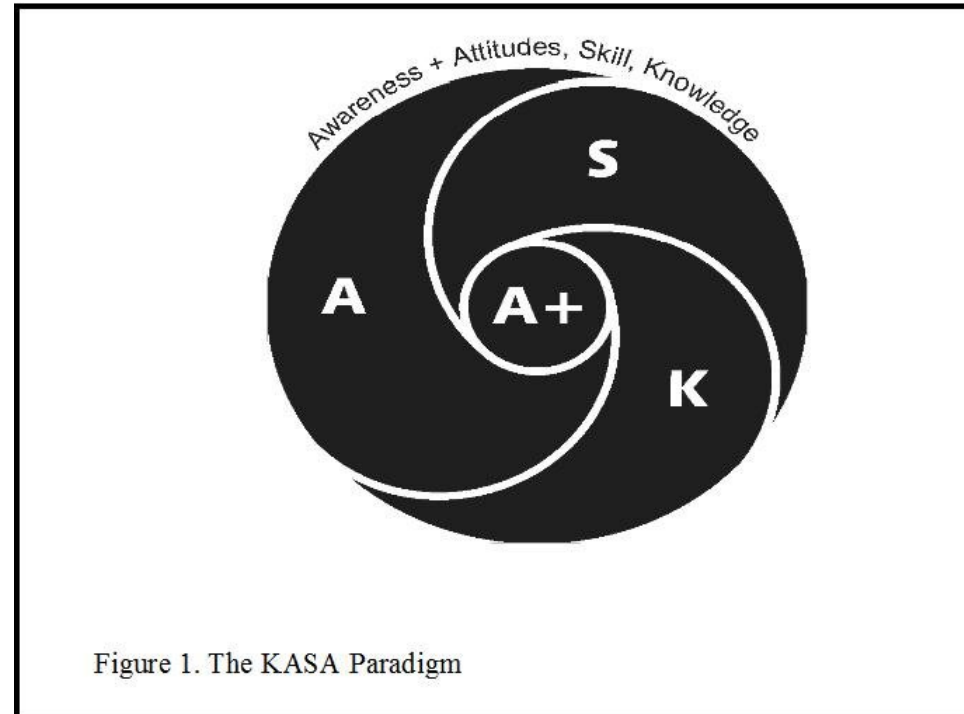
Nonetheless, ESOL classes initiate processes that often lead to intercultural experiences, and ESOL classes provide venues where students can process their experiences that occur outside the classroom. Both situations assume, of course, appropriate course designs and strategies.

Characteristics of ICC most commonly cited in the literature are flexibility, humor, patience, openness, interest, curiosity, empathy,

tolerance for ambiguity, and suspending judgments, among others.

The three interrelated ICC areas are the ability to establish and maintain relationships, the ability to communicate with minimal loss or distortion and the ability to cooperate to accomplish tasks of mutual interest and need. Each area is embedded within the others; no one area alone is adequate for ICC.

Consider also the four dimensions of ICC: knowledge, (positive) attitudes (or affect), skills, and awareness (shown below in the so-called KASA Paradigm). All four allude to both target culture (LC2) and one's native culture (LC1); this is especially true of awareness placed at the center. Awareness is enhanced through reflection and introspection comparing and contrasting the LC1 and the LC2. It differs from knowledge, focusing on the self vis-à-vis everything else in the world—things, people, thoughts—and ultimately elucidates what is most relevant to one's values and identity. Whereas knowledge can be forgotten, awareness is irreversible.



Language proficiency is central to ICC (although not equal to it) and, of course, central to our task as ESOL educators. Communicative ability

the target language enhances all other ICC aspects in quantitative and qualitative ways: Grappling with another language causes people to confront how they perceive, conceptualize, and express themselves; it promotes new communication strategies on someone else's terms; challenge aids in transcending and transforming one's habitual view of the world. Conversely, lack of a second language, even minimally, constrains people to think about the world and act within it only in the native system. Lack of a second language, then, deprives people of a valuable aspect of intercultural experience (suggesting why ESOL teachers must also be students of another tongue).

Implementing Cultural and Intercultural Exploration

Both ESL and EFL contexts present different possibilities for cultural exploration. In the ESL context, learners are immersed in an English speaking milieu and classroom work is naturally bolstered by continued exposure to English, even after classes are over. In the EFL context, however, English is often limited to the classroom itself, with fewer opportunities for real-life exposure. Nonetheless, in both situations cultural and cross-cultural exploration is essential for furthering students' development of intercultural competence.

The Process Approach Framework (Fantini, 1999) can help to ensure inclusion of cultural and cross-cultural activities in the classroom. This framework posits seven stages to guide lesson plan development; they are:

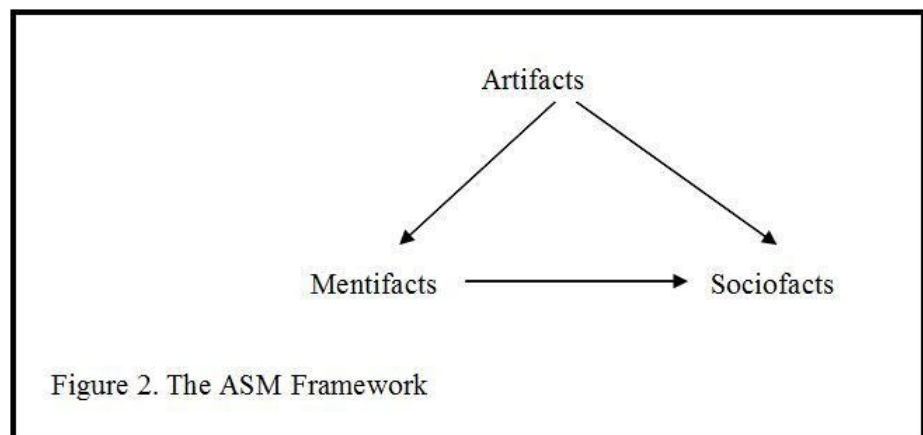
1. Presentation of new material
2. Practice in context
3. Grammar exploration
4. Transposition (or use)
5. Sociolinguistic exploration
6. Target culture exploration
7. Intercultural exploration

Whereas most teachers are familiar with stages 1–4, the latter stages are less common. But including these three additional stages ensures that language exploration is complemented by explicit attention to sociolinguistic, cultural, and intercultural aspects. Textbooks gener-

focus on language structure and, increasingly, communication (stage 4), but pay little attention to stages 5–7, and teachers must often develop such activities on their own (or not).

This framework establishes an explicit process that clarifies objectives and activities that are appropriate for each of the seven stages of a lesson unit. It also helps teachers select, sequence, and evaluate learning and teaching activities that are chosen because of their match with learning objectives. Most important, when developing the course syllabus and lesson plans, teachers are reminded that stage 5–7 activities form part of each lesson cycle. Of course, not all stages need to be covered in a single lesson; rather, together they form a unit of material in which the cycle from stages 1 to 7 is completed before going on to present new material. In the end, what remains important is that language, cultural, and cross-cultural exploration together form the integral parts of each unit and together enhance the development of intercultural competence.

A second framework that aids in cultural and cross-cultural exploration addresses relationships among artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts (B. Fantini & Fantini, 1997), a model adopted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages as part of the National Standards for Foreign Languages.



Based on a sociological concept, this framework interrelates three cultural dimensions: artifacts (things people make), sociofacts (how people come together and for what purpose), and mentifacts (what people think or believe). This scheme reminds us that whatever dimension one begins with, the other two are also present and available.

and their exploration helps deepen understanding of the target language–culture paradigm.

For example, if we consider any object or item (say, a sandwich), we investigate, first of all, what a sandwich is (e.g., lunch, snack, bread cold cuts); then what types of people use a sandwich, and how (e.g., working people, students, for picnics, bite size to accompany cocktails); and finally, what the notion of sandwich represents or means (e.g., portable, inexpensive, quick, common fare). This exploration goes beyond merely considering cultural items; it encourages the consideration of their social uses and significance. In addition, comparing the artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts of host culture with those of the learners' cultures (e.g., sandwiches with tacos or rice balls) permits cross-cultural investigation.

Many varied, interesting, and exciting activities exist to help address cultural and cross-cultural aspects of language. Some have been developed within the intercultural field yet fit nicely into stages 5–7. For example, *New Ways in Teaching Culture* (Fantini, 1997) contains 50 activities selected from submissions sent by educators from around the world and grouped according to their focus on sociolinguistic, cultural, or intercultural exploration.

Of the many possibilities, I will describe one class of techniques—operations—which are essentially ordinary activities from everyday life that reveal cultural information. One example is how to prepare a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, something that every young (and even old) American is familiar with.

Have students sit in a semicircle so that they can all witness the operation and provide some background or context for the event. Then, using real props, make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, explaining the process one step at a time. After completing the operation, ask students to recount what they experienced and to narrate the precise steps in sequence. Then have the class give instructions to a volunteer making a second sandwich. When completed, students can taste small pieces of the sandwich and comment on their reactions. Cross-cultural exploration can be accomplished by then having students discuss comparable snacks in their own cultures. Innumerable operations and variations are possible as follow-up activities.

Helping students develop intercultural competence is not only fun, also essential. Frameworks like the Process Approach and the ASM models can help teachers develop lesson plans that include activities explore cultural and cross-cultural aspects of English. These activities add new dimensions to the traditional language class while helping students develop the knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness that foster development of the competence they need for English-speaking contexts.

Developing ICC is clearly a challenge—for educators and learners alike—but its attainment makes room for exciting possibilities. It offers a chance to transcend the limitations of one's own worldview. "If you want to know about water," it has been said, "don't ask a goldfish." Intercultural contact is a provocative educational experience precisely because it permits people to learn about others and themselves. On the other hand, a lack of ICC can result in negative outcomes such as the misunderstandings, conflict, ethnic strife, and genocide that result from failed interactions across cultures.

Today, everyone needs ICC, and we as language educators play a role in this effort. Achieving this, however, requires a paradigm shift and an expansion of our professional vision.

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Article by Alvino E. Fantini, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus of Language Teacher Education
[The SIT Graduate Institute](#)
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