Fostering Intercultural Competency: The Eye-4C-D Method

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Abstract

This paper describes an original method created by the author, with the main objective of improving learners' communicative abilities while fostering traits associated with intercultural competency. The Eye-4C-D method aims to enhance major components associated with intercultural competency such as: curiosity, empathy, perspective shifting, tolerance of ambiguity, active listening, mindfulness, and general communicative skills (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Fantini, 2009; Lynch, 2004; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Some of the features of this method are the ease of use, adaptability to various contexts and themes, and variety of challenges it offers learners. This paper contains a pedagogical description of the method with preliminary participant feedback, followed by brief discussion regarding further use and potential for the Eye-4C-D method.

本稿では、異文化間コンピテンシー能力を育成しながら、学習者のコミュニケーション力を向上させることを主な目的として、著者が作成した独自の方法について説明する。 Eye-4C-D メソッドは、好奇心、共感、遠近感、曖昧さの許容度、積極的なリスニング、マインドフルネス、一般的なコミュニケーションスキルなどの異文化間コンピテンシーに関連する要素を強化することを目的としている (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Fantini, 2009; Lynch, 2004; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012)。このメソッドは、使いやすさ、さまざまなコンテクストやテーマへの適応性にフォーカスして学習者に提供する。この論文では、試験的な参加者からのフィードバックを伴う教育的な説明と、それに続く Eye-4C-D 方法のさらなる使用と可能性に関する説明を行う。

As the world becomes increasingly intertwined in the 21st century, intercultural competency (IC) has received increased attention across disciplines and in a wide spectrum of fields. Intercultural education and training programs, along with intercultural/international exchanges, have flourished together with technological advances such as those offered by modern travel and the internet. Communication styles have also flourished and diversified; communicating in the virtual and online world is very different than communicating in-person with a native of a foreign land. IC is fast becoming an invaluable personal quality for all humankind, so much so that it is now viewed by many in business as a fundamental quality of global leaders (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012).

Some frequently mentioned traits of IC include: curiosity, empathy, perspective shifting, tolerance of ambiguity, active listening, mindfulness, and communicative skills (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Fantini, 2009; Lynch, 2004; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). In particular, *empathy* seems to stand out as an important trait to initially foster and may be a potential cornerstone for which IC attitudes, behaviors, skills, and some forms of cultural knowledge can be built upon (Gordon, 2009; Krznaric, 2014). Krznaric (2014) goes further, suggesting empathy is so important that it is "now acknowledged as an essential ingredient of human-well-being" (p. 34). The Eye-4C-D method may offer educators a time-effective technique for enhancing elements of intercultural competency, such as empathy, developed through repetitive face-to-face activities and authentic communication. This paper will provide a detailed procedural description of the Eye-4C-D method and discuss participant's shared experience with regards to the method and IC. A case will be made for further use and investigation of the Eye-4C-D method.

Literature Review

Intercultural Competency (IC)

Kawamura (2016) notes from a Japanese educator's perspective, "knowledge and skills that enable individuals to be sensitive to other cultures and modify one's viewpoints and course of action are necessary both in and outside Japan today" (p. 17). Indeed, there is mounting evidence that *intercultural sensitivity* plays a large role in intercultural competency (Bennett, M., 1998a; Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Kawamura, 2016; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). A hallmark of intercultural sensitivity is a mindful shifting of one's worldview from an ethnocentric perspective, to more ethnorelative frames of reference (Bennett, M.J., 1998b). Certain personality traits have also been associated with intercultural competency, such as being open-minded, curious, tolerant of ambiguity, knowledgeable, adaptable, and patient (Fantini, 2009; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

There also seems to be consensus among many intercultural researchers and practitioners that affective (attitudes), behavioral (skills), and cognitive (knowing) components are all involved in the process of IC (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Lynch 2004; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Bennett and Bennett (2004) offer a simple and general description of IC as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 149). Emphasis on the communicative component to IC has also given rise to a related concept of *intercultural communicative competency* (ICC) with more, or equal, importance given to the linguistic and communicative elements in intercultural contact (Byram, 2003; Fantini, 2009 Ting-Toomey, 1999). Aims of ICC involve reaching mutual understanding, valuing equity of each communicative participant, and the collaborative effort (Adler & Gundersen, 2009; Kim, 2002; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

With this ICC view, Adler and Gundersen (2009) point out "effective cross-cultural communication presupposes the interplay of alternative realities. It rejects the actual or potential domination of one reality over another" (p. 93). Perhaps harkening back to roots in cultural studies, both ICC and IC appear to contain an awareness of power dynamics, identity alignment, and struggle against the privilege of dominant groups, suggesting that there may be a social activist element to IC (Adler & Gundersen, 2009; Byram, 2003; Collier, 2002; Huber & Reynolds, 2014; Kim, 2002; Lynch, 2004; McIntosh, 2003; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013). M. Bennett (1998a) goes further and suggests "this intercultural competence may include the ability to recognize how power is being exercised within a cultural context, and some people may themselves be able to exercise power in ways that are appropriate to the other culture" (p.29).

More recent definitions see IC as an ongoing developmental process (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). As Fantini (2009) points out, the process is "one that normally evolves over a lengthy and continuing period of time, albeit with occasional moments of stagnation and even regression" (p. 200). Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) offer a contextual definition of *intercultural competence* as the "intentional integration of culture-sensitive knowledge, open-minded attitude, and adaptive communication skills in an intercultural encounter" (p. 304). From a counseling perspective Lynch (2004) provides a developmental definition of *cross-cultural competency*, similar to IC, as "the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build on ethnic, [socio-]cultural, and linguistic diversity" (p.43).

Empathy

Empathy can be simply defined as "the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that to guide your actions" (Krznaric, 2014, p. *x*), with *cultural empathy* defined as "the learned ability of the participants to understand accurately the self-experiences of others from diverse cultures and, concurrently, the ability to convey their understanding responsively and effectively" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 201). M. Bennett (1998b) states empathy differs from sympathy in that "through empathy, we at least can be aware of how others would like to be treated from their own perspectives" (p. 213). Empathy is viewed by some as the most desirable of personality traits, playing a leading role in personal well-being, social and emotional understanding, and maintaining social networks (Gordon, 2009). Gordon goes on to say "indeed, a plethora of empirical investigations have found that empathy inhibits, or at least mitigates, aggressive and antisocial behaviors" while also drawing attention to "the significance of empathy in enhancing or diminishing the quality of one's social relationships" (pp. 244, 245). Pedersen, Crethar, and Carlson (2008) advocate human service practitioners adapt a model of *inclusive cultural empathy* as a means of awareness into multiple worldviews and insight into other's internal discussions, thoughts, and feelings. With all this in mind, let us turn to the practical application of the Eye-4C-D method.

Pedagogical Procedure

Overview

The Eye-4C-D method combines one minute of eye contact, eight minutes of one-way communicating and intense listening, followed by a five-minute semi-focused discussion period. The entire method integrates important communicative skills such as: active listening, creative speaking, recognizing and managing facial expressions and body language, (foreign) language usage, and authentic dialogue. Briefly described as follows, the first step in the process is the random partnering of learners and deciding on the order in which they will speak (A & B roles). This is followed by one minute of silent eye contact.

Next, one partner speaks on a topic selected by the method facilitator, while the other partner listens carefully for two minutes. The roles are switched and the process continues three more times, with each partner communicating twice, and listening twice. The last step in the process is a relaxed five-minute discussion period prompted by the four topics previously given. While it is possible to work in triads with modification, the Eye-4C-D method is intended for dyads, leaving ample space between pairs so as to limit ambient noise interference. Other modifications to the method are possible as required, though alterations to the format (1- minute of eye contact, A communicates for 2- minutes, B communicates for 2-minutes, A communicates for 2 minutes, B communicates for 2-minutes, 5 minutes discussion) may vary the results.

The "Eye" is for Eye Contact

Empathy can be viewed as a skill, or even a craft (Krznaric, 2014), and therefore may be possible to develop through training. In the Eye-4C-D method developing empathy, particularly through the use of prolonged eye contact and mindfulness, is the first step of the process. Ting-Toomey (2015) reminds us "overall, a mindful intercultural communicator is an adaptive individual who has a strong present-in-the-moment orientation with cognitive, affective, and behavioral flexibility" (p. 12). One minute of silent eye contact provides opportunity for individuals to become more mindful of themselves, their partner, and their surroundings prior to conversing.

Overlooked facial cues can also come into focus during this initial step of the method, providing clues as to the state of emotion and mind of the individual observed. It is said that humans universally display six, perhaps eight, human emotions similarly across cultures, and they can be recognized through facial expressions (Ekman, 2007; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013). We can use the mnemonic *SADFISCH* to remember all eight emotions: Surprise, Anger, Disgust, Fear, Interest, Sadness, Contempt, and Happiness. The one minute of eye contact provides sufficient time to gather facial clues as to the state of another's emotions. Pedersen, Crethar, and Carlson (2008) advise professional counsellors "once you can perceive feelings and thoughts, the next step is to reflect back both sets of messages without stereotyping, judging or classifying" (pp. 155, 156), inferring the use of empathy as an initial means to understanding others. Although the importance of eye contact and how it is valued varies from culture to culture, it is almost universally desired in public speaking situations, and is an important element in active listening (Rogers & Farson, 1987).

Participants in this phase of the model stand face-to-face maintaining eye contact for one minute, timed by the facilitator, and (if necessary) guided by the facilitator. The participants are encouraged to use eye contact in an attempt to discover the feelings of their partner. In my experience, participants will often laugh and break silence during eye contact, techniques like reminding learners to keep *stone-faced*, or that initially *looking through* the other may be easier at first then *looking at*, or *looking into*.

Communicate (4C)

Following eye contact is the second stage of the Eye-4C-D method, communication, involving alternating two-minute intervals of one-way communication, and active listening, for a total duration of eight minutes. There is intentional additional pressure put onto the role of speaker so as to provide opportunity to practice managing stressful intercultural communication experiences as part of what Barna (1983) calls "stress inoculation training." During this stage, participants remain standing so as to make full use of the body to communicate, but also to add another level of discomfort to the situation. The facilitator announces the topic just prior to each communication task so as to appear spontaneous. For example, to introduce the concept of *SADFISCH* the facilitator may sequence and provide relative topics prior to each communication turn as follows: "speaker *A* talk about *reading*; speaker *B* talk about *faces*; speaker *A* talk about *happiness vs. sadness*; speaker *B* talk about being *surprised or scared"*. Another example is for the theme *domestic diversity*: "speaker *A* talk about *grey*; speaker *B* talk about *change*; speaker *A* talk about *borders and edges*; speaker *B* talk about *majority"* (see Appendix A for examples of sequenced topics).

Speaking twice for two minutes.

The first component of the 4C section, one-way communication, requires the speaker to continuously speak on a seemingly random topic assigned by the facilitator just prior to speaking. During this step the facilitator has an opportunity to creatively arrange topics or, in the case of foreign language instructors, *scaffold* (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) language for learners. Additionally, by surprising the learner with topics the facilitator can foster another IC trait in a stressful, yet controlled context, the learners' comfortableness with ambiguity.

For the speaker the task is challenging. It requires internal access to all known information and vocabulary regarding any given subject, a combination of communicative strategies to express oneself, an ability to articulate thoughts for a sustained time, and in some contexts, the use of a non-native language. The role of the speaker is heavily weighted on linguistic output and communicative expressiveness. The speaker is encouraged to constantly speak regardless of linguistic ability or subject knowledge. Utterances, repetition, or even fillers (interjections) are acceptable fringe strategies for completing the task. Added pressure is put on the speaker by the listener, who is directed not to give any verbal nor nonverbal feedback, but instead maintain an expressionless stare.

Active listening twice for two minutes.

Though the speaker's task seems daunting, it is the role of the listener that may have the more challenging task. Instructed not to nod, smile, laugh, or otherwise intervene in any form, the role of the listener seems passive but this is far from so. The listener must be mindful of their own emotional reactions, control them, and "hide their SADFISCH" while actively listening. The active listener must: listen with purpose, sincerity, and thoughtfulness; attempt to empathize; suspend value judgements; carefully observe body language and other non-verbal clues to understand the speaker's perspective; and listen for the real meaning (Rogers & Farson, 1987). All of this must be done in the context of the activity while outwardly portraying an emotionless facade. Furthermore, the listener must retain information throughout the process and reflect it back with some degree of accuracy during the next phase of the method.

The "D" is for Discussion

In the final stage of the Eye-4C-D method, participants engage freely in a five-minute topic-related discussion with their partners (or larger groups in method variations) with one caveat, guided by the process of active listening (Rogers & Farson, 1987) participants restate in their own words what their partner said before moving forward or giving a personal opinion. To release the pressure and stress felt during the 4C stage, both partners may be seated and are encouraged to "get comfortable" before the beginning discussions. As discussions progress, curiosity can take hold feeding further inquiry, interest, and common ground. Krznaric (2014) points out, "conversation and empathy are intimately intertwined: making the effort to comprehend another person's perspective can help bring an otherwise unremarkable dialogue to life, while conversation itself has the power to forge empathetic connection" (p. 98).

Participant Feedback

Over a thousand written feedback reports have been provided by participants of various backgrounds, differing contexts, and following multiple uses of the Eye-4C-D method in lessons and training sessions. These reports generally suggest positive outcomes with regards to heightened IC awareness, observed appearance of traits believed to be associated with IC, and increased communicative confidence among learners. Though it is too early to speak of significance, these reports point to self-assessed improvement in traits associated with intercultural competency, with noticeable trends across settings, cohorts, and over a period of several years. Many of the participants reported, following multiple method use, improved ability to sustain comfortable eye-contact, and increased ability to maintain sustained discussion on topics with little prior knowledge. Furthermore, the feedback also contained frequent accounts of increased confidence in speaking upon multiple usages of the method, and self-assessed improvement in listening skills, and ability to "understand" others.

A sampling of reoccurring comments illustrates the discomfort with tasks during the initial one or two experiences with the method; participants frequently make comments such as "eye contact was difficult" or that they "couldn't keep eye contact well," and "it was difficult talking with [the opposite sex]". However, there is a noticeable shift in comments following several more experiences with the method, as statements about not being shy and having greater confidence

speaking begin appearing. This could indicate some competency with the method and the tasks therein. Statements like "I could understand [my partner's feelings]," "I could do eye contact," "we had good communication," "today's speaking was [fun, exciting, difficult but good]" were often cited.

As for the facilitators, one professor who used the Eye-4C-D method for the first time in a university setting claimed:

> I used the Eye-4C-D method prior to discussion about ethical issues in international business and was amazed at how active and engaged the students were during this complex discussion. Usually, in my classes, a few students dominate but this method activated all the students' speaking skills and we had the liveliest discussion that day. I was honestly surprised at how powerful this method was!

Overall, feedback suggests the method provides possibilities of fostering traits presumed to be associated with IC. There also appears to be a general satisfaction with the method amongst those who have experienced the method as participants, and as facilitators.

Discussion

Beginning with silence and ending in discourse, the play on the Eye-4C-D method name suggests "I foresee discussion," and the model certainly delivers a communicative tool that results in discussion. Initial feedback points to the Eye-4C-D method as a plausible means of developing several traits associated with IC, thus raising several questions regarding efficacy and warranting further investigation. While early use of the method has been limited, it appears, particularly with multiple cycles of participation, the Eye-4C-D method could lead to heightened IC and improved communication with others. Systematic and rigorous studies of the method could shed light on value of the individual components, issues in sequencing and usage, participant IC development and/or regression, and general suitability as a communicative method for improving learners' intercultural competencies.

Questions related to facilitator competency also arise since the method encourages presiding facilitators to be hypersensitive to pedagogical, interpersonal, and intercultural issues. For example, an Eye-4C-D method facilitator in a Japanese context may have to navigate cultural considerations such as high-context communication styles, "respectful communication" and seniority, contextual proxemics, or even sustained eye contact because in Japan it could be mistaken for a sign of aggression or ill manners. The ability to navigate the discomfort of ambiguity is another frequently cited IC skill that could be developed out of the method for both the participant and facilitator. Lynch (2004) states "achieving cross-cultural competence requires that we lower our defenses, take risks, and practice behaviors that may feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It requires a flexible mind, an open heart, and a willingness to accept alternate perspectives" (p. 42). Given this description, the Eye-4C-D method holds promise for facilitators and the participants alike to isolate and improve aspects believed to be important to intercultural competency.

Conclusion

The Eye-4C-D method has demonstrated through early use, promise as a versatile communicative tool for fostering and developing IC in formal education settings, and training programs. The method isolates various components of nonverbal (eye contact, body language), and verbal (speaking, active listening, discussion) communication in a face-to-face, authentic, context. This allows for participants and facilitators to focus energy on improving specific traits associated with IC. The method encourages participants to empathize, be mindful, communicative, and curious of others, all meaningful personal traits in most social settings. It could be the method holds a new and effective way to encourage and nurture IC, particularly when used on a regular or semi-regular basis. Continued use in a wide variety of settings would provide valuable information for further investigation into method efficacy. Further use and study of the Eye-4C-D method at this time does seem warranted.

Bio Data

Jon Dujmovich has an M.A. in intercultural relations with a CELTA and has been in the field of intercultural communication training for over 25 years. He has been invited internationally and throughout Japan to give workshops on teaching intercultural communication in various contexts and has twice won The Best of JALT award for his workshops. < jon@intercultural.me>

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Appendix A

20 Example Themes and Sequenced 4C Speaking Topics

Theme	Speaker A-1	Speaker B-1	Speaker A-2	Speaker B-2
getting to know one another	your hometown	things you like	your family	your friends
concepts related to compassion	giving	accepting	sharing	agreeing
past-future tense (English)	tomorrow	yesterday	what you did last week	what you will do next week
beliefs & behaviors	good manners	bad manners	selfishness	fairness
basic needs	rest (sleep)	shelter	air	water
love	attachment	commitment	romance	compassion
communication	speaking & listening	reading & writing	direct vs. indirect	verbal vs. nonverbal
universal values	safety	security	health	family
traditions & customs	*national traditions	*local customs	*regional customs	your family traditions
seasons	spring	fall	winter	summer
notions of respect	your parents	your teachers	your heroes	your colleagues
obligations	what you must do for your school/work	what you must do for your family	what you must do for your friends	what you must do for strangers
cultural values	beauty	personal space	importance of time	modesty
places	your room	this room	your favorite place	places you want to go
emotions	things that make you happy	things that make you surprised	things that make you scared (frightened)	things that make you angry (upset)
general life	outdoors	indoors	city living	country living
compare & contrast	dogs vs. cats	running vs. walking	texting vs. talking face-to-face	masculinity vs. femininity
surface culture	festivals	fashion	flags	food
**national culture	**sports	** people	**symbols	**geography
seemingly random topics related to video or article to be used later	chewing gum	dancing	travel	making friends

* specify location   ** specify nation or culture