

Learning to be More Interculturally Competent

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VSA has been re-accredited by CIS, NEASC and IB in Nov 2020. As a result of a new accreditation protocol, VSA, has created two important definitions, one is on high quality learning¹, the other intercultural learning².

As an accredited school by the three organizations, VSA is obliged to adhere to both CIS's global citizenship education and also IB's quest for international mindedness. Global citizenship³ is one of the four conceptual pillars of CIS accreditation system. International mindedness undergirds IB's principles and practices⁴. Regardless of our responsibilities to CIS and IB as an accredited school, VSA's current and past guiding statements both endorse the idea of intercultural capabilities. VSA's new guiding statements stipulate, "At VSA our mission is to develop passionate, healthy and also accomplished bilingual learners who are globally engaged."

However, the questions to ask and have not been asked or answered in many schools around the world are:

- 1) Since intercultural learning clearly is a present and future career and life skill, have we taught it and how to teach it systematically?

¹ https://www.vsa.edu.hk/en/High_quality_learning.aspx

² https://www.vsa.edu.hk/en/Intercultural_learning.aspx

³ <https://www.cois.org/about-cis/global-citizenship>

⁴ IB's characterization of international-mindedness is on Page 2 of the document below:
<https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/what-is-an-ib-education-2017-en.pdf>

- 2) Do we know the state of intercultural learning or how internationally-minded and inter-culturally-adaptive our students, teachers and leaders are?

To answer both questions, VSA sets out to conduct a systematic review of its curricula to map out curriculum connections with international-mindedness on the one hand, and evaluate for the first time the intercultural competence of its leadership team by using a world's leading instrument, Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI).

At its core, this instrument aims to measure intercultural competence, which is defined as such:

Intercultural competence is the capability to shift perspective and adapt behavior to cultural difference and commonality.

The IDI framework aims to measure a spectrum of knowledge/attitude/skill sets or orientations from mono-cultural mindset to intercultural mindset in five stages.⁵ The five stages are denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance and adaptation.

An IDI pilot with VSA's leadership team shows we resemble the patterns of many institutions in terms of intercultural competence in two ways:

- 1) People tend to overestimate their intercultural competence
- 2) Similar to many schools that embarked on the IDI for the first time, the pilot shows a typical mindset is minimization, the middle point of the spectrum, which is characterized below:

Minimization: An orientation that highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences.

In the true spirit of school improvement embodied by the extensive reviews and reflections during CIS/NEASC/IB accreditation processes, we've realized intercultural competence is an area for growth and will find ways to engage the entire school community on this timely and significant issue. A meaningful first step is flip open the two books recommended by IDI debriefers:

Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business*. Public Affairs.

Middleton, J. (2014). *Cultural intelligence: CQ: The competitive edge for leaders crossing borders*. A&C Black.

⁵ <https://idiinventory.com/generalinformation/the-intercultural-development-continuum-idc/>