

# Building Bridges

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*When imbued with cognitive elements, the concept of “Internationalization at Home” has the ability to reshape the field of international education by bridging the gaps between campus and off-campus, theory and practice, curriculum and co-curriculum, and rhetoric and action.*

“**I**nternationalization at Home” (IaH) is a new concept developed by Bengt Nilssen at Malmö University and championed by the European Association for International Education. It refers to the practice of an integrated, conceptually coordinated and system-oriented approach to international education. It is such a powerful and timely, yet simple, idea that it is a wonder that institutions of higher learning have not begun to embrace it sooner. It is probably because the mindsets of international educators have been accustomed to seeing “us” and “them” as two distinct worlds in which international education was defined as programs designed for “us” to study “them.” IaH, known in the United States as “internationalizing the campus,” directly addresses an important aspect of international education in such a way that decades of focusing on student mobility could not. IaH goes beyond the narrow confine of a formal curriculum and incorporates all interna-

tional resources now abundantly available in most of our local communities because the world is indeed at our doorstep and “them” is “us” while “us” is also “them.”

## **The Old Way**

Most definitions of international education that floated in the literature are based on a dichotomy of “us” and “them” to accommodate the early view that international education was, like international relations, an affair of relationships among states. This was especially true in the United States in the programs of international studies and study abroad that are regarded as the “elite” programs designed to develop “experts” in international studies for the marketplace. This distinction has had serious social psychological consequences that affected motivation of people to study something that was not close to home. Globalization has changed these frames but our universities and educational systems have often been too slow to adjust to dramatic changes such as those we face today.





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The asymmetry between the small percent (some studies have indicated just 9 percent) of students who receive some kind of international education and the rest of the student population is only the tip of the iceberg. It is my belief that, based on applying learning theories to international education, even the small percent of these presumably internationally educated students do not receive the knowledge and skills needed in the future. At best their knowledge is fragmented, unintegrated, and incomplete; since they do not know what they should know and what intellectual skills they should acquire, they are being misled into believing that they leave their academic institutions well prepared to face the global environment. IaH makes it possible to educate internationally a much higher percentage of students. In addition, it is also capable of creating a different learning environment that will produce more of the desired learning.

We are seeing a great deal more research and publications about international education since September 11, 2001. However, this literature and research is equal parts promising and depressing. It is promising because more people are addressing the needs of the field; it is depressing because we have more studies than knowledge about the field. Many of these studies cite the small percentage of students who are considered to have even minimal international education. Researchers cite these figures to impress educators and policymakers in the hope that they will devote more resources and attention to this field. In spite of this, there does not seem to be any rush in this direction. Instead, study abroad has become the shorthand of international education that is being embraced by most undergraduate programs as *the* international education solution. “Send them abroad and they will be internationally educated,” seems to be the general mantra. At the same time, the universities do not appear to see the need to do much else.



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A new kind of publication has recently appeared and became popular. These “case study” publications tout the so-called successful or promising practices on specific campuses. I have read many of these publications, and visited some of the campus described in them. While a very few are indeed outstanding, most lack any sophisticated treatment of what elements make a program successful and how this should be evaluated. Many accept uncritically such evaluative

statements of study abroad participants that their experience was “life changing” or that the program was outstanding because the faculty leader has been abroad before. Most describe separate programs rather than an institutional integration of the field, and focus on projects. What is especially disturbing, however, is that none of these publications address what students are supposed to learn from their international education—and that is true even of the “successful practices” that have been translated into the curriculum. Yet the curriculum is supposed to be based on learning concepts.

### Reconceptualizing the Field

Cognitive concepts need to become a part of the discussion of IaH, in part to replace the theory-poor and instrumental paradigm of “competitiveness” that has come to dominate the scene in international education since the end of the cold war, and also to show how these learning concepts can make IaH more than an improvement of existing programs. With such a focus, IaH may help reconceptualize the field into one that is based on what people learn rather than on the projects they “do.” Briefly, this is the way it might work:

### Us and Them

Once the gap between “us” and “them” is eliminated, the possibility exists to create a larger and different learning environment within and outside of the universities in which people learn from each other, and transfer knowledge beyond the teacher-student relationship. Far more importantly, however, we can create new dynamic relationships that have been missing from the typical “academic” approach to learning.

Many learning theories suggest that all learning is relational, that trust is the “capital” that results from relationships, and that it helps create new knowledge. Time and space prevent covering all aspects of the cognitive sciences, but here are some of the topics one finds in the literature: arrival and processing of new ideas; importance of prior learning; importance of learning context; relevance of school learning to work; sustainability; transfer of knowledge; different kinds of knowledge; distinction between knowledge and skills; and whether learning leads to cognitive development or acquisition of skills. It is very unlikely that faculty people are familiar with these learning theories and even less likely that international education programs, such as study abroad, are based on them. On the other hand, most teaching faculty do have a simplified “theory-in-use” that they have acquired through their own academic socialization and that influences their own attitudes toward international education and non-classroom-related learning.

Here is a list of beliefs researchers identified as being part of the academic “theory-in-use”:

- ▶ formal curriculum dominates
- ▶ classroom is the only legitimate place where learning happens
- ▶ knowledge we convey is universally valid
- ▶ transfer of knowledge happens from teacher to student (if it happens at all)
- ▶ most knowledge transmission is knowledge that is already known

- intellectual skills are taught implicitly with the subject matter so they do not need to be taught separately
- with a few minor exceptions, transfer of academic knowledge to work-required knowledge is also implicit or weak
- international knowledge is juxtaposed rather than integrated with other learning
- content of the academic discipline of specialization is all important

I draw two implications from the foregoing. The first is that IaH would most likely wish to change each one of these attributes of the academic model. This is what the IaH internationalization model might look like:

- formal curriculum needs to be complemented with laboratory and community based non-formal curriculum
- in some areas students and teachers are both learners, and community resources are deputized to come to the classroom
- knowledge is perspective
- transfer of knowledge is from everybody involved in the process
- utilization of known knowledge is augmented with construction and production of pieces of knowledge already known
- intellectual skills (especially critical, creative and comparative, and cognitive complexity) as the search engines for the utilization of disciplinary knowledge will be moved to the core of teaching and become the higher order skills
- with the involvement of the community, work-related knowledge will become more authentic than is the case with most present-day programs
- special laboratory sections attached to regular courses will be designed to help integrate international learning
- while disciplinary content will continue to be important, it will be augmented with knowledge from several disciplines and based on theories of interdisciplinarity

The second implication is that cognitive sciences have made very little impact on the curriculum, especially in international education. David Senge, a critic of higher education, attributes the shortcomings to the

fact that universities are “learning disabled” by the way they organize knowledge, learn themselves, manage knowledge, develop people, and teach students to think. He also suggests that the predominantly analytical mode of problem solving simplifies complexity in the way it tells students “here is a problem” and “here is how you solve it.” Problems are isolated from their context, thus ignoring the probability that solutions to today’s problems will become future

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problems. In addition, universities encourage students to believe that they problem-solve, reason, analyze, diagnose, etc. when they are performing these functions as if on auto-pilot on low level of intellectual functioning. To move these skills into the “second order,” that of reflective and analytical thought, they have to be performed when we are aware of our thinking. Furthermore, students’ knowledge is fragmented so they do not know what there is to know; in effect what they do not know exists, does not in fact exist. This is a major problem for international education in which the need for multiple competencies arise when we become aware of our thinking, investigate it, and enhance it. Students will continue to need direction. They do not have an awareness of *what* they need to know.

Before we are too critical of our universities and students, we need to take into account several formidable difficulties that make international education one of the most complex educational undertakings. Although there is much contention among cognitive scientists, there is also some measure of agreement about certain concepts, which will be discussed below. Those concepts focus on the mental difficulties that

affect international education and offer IaH excellent opportunities to reconceptualize the field.

### The Gatekeeper

The first such concept relates to the functioning of the brain. As powerful an instrument as it is, the brain has one shortcoming in that it processes new ideas and information only if it recognizes them as similar to what is already coded. This code is very

powerful and is based on many years of socialization in school, at home, and in the culture at large. The code is “thick” and functions as a gatekeeper. This is a special problem for international education where many ideas are in fact different, and even if they sound similar, they may

mean different categories or indeed intellectual traditions. As result, these different ideas get either rejected, accepted and placed into the wrong categories, or simply are allowed to float without placement. I do not believe that international educators have recognized the need to provide the brain with new cognitive categories for new ideas that would become integrated with existing knowledge and permit processing of the dissimilar. I also believe that this phenomenon is responsible for the strong tendency of people to seek similarities in programs that are intended to teach a subject from a comparative perspective.

At a previous time, I thought to use the term “reprogramming the brain” but recognized that the term has many negative connotations and so settled for a different term: “cognitive enrichment.” I am familiar with the concept from my work with international students with whom a sort of cognitive therapy has been found useful in cases of academic problems where the problem was not intellectual abilities but cultural conditioning that made entry of new educational concepts difficult. IaH will have many opportunities to provide the same type of cognitive intervention if it finds a way of

involving people who are having to do a great deal of “mind-stretching” or who may have experienced cognitive problems of adjustment that they have resolved. Drawing on some cognitive scientists, the establishment of educationally sound relationship within these proposed programs will be a special bonus not available from a traditional counseling session or a classroom.

### Learning in Context

The second concept of consequence to international education is that learning tends to be context determined. Without special training, knowledge may not transfer from one context to another. I am always puzzled, for example, when grant agencies require applicants to provide elaborate evidence about how they will share the result of their grants. I had a few of these types of grants, have gone through the “hoops,” and have yet to this date to receive a single inquiry about the application of my work to

another setting. The same can be said about the current fad of “successful” practices. If learning is context based, the transfer that occurs in many situations is not of learning and knowledge but strategies and techniques. These leave the field even farther behind because while we are “doing” international education, we may not know why, when the learning is completed, and what we do with it in the end. International education is not the only field where such transfer is a problem. Even industry spends an enormous amount of time doing specialized training for highly placed executives on how to utilize knowledge obtained from other sources than those in which the knowledge was produced.

### Domain-Specific Knowledge

The third concept, on which there is a great deal of agreement, is that the brain is predisposed toward “domain-specific” knowledge, e.g. the academic discipline. Many international educators have been greatly frustrated by their academic colleagues’ inability to reach beyond their disciplines to explain complex relationships and issues from an international/global/intercultural perspective. Others, including myself, have more tolerance for the academic world that cannot be changed from forces within it to accommodate other knowledge. This may be a special problem in social sciences and humanities because in natural and technical fields such interaction is a commonplace. It may be necessary to utilize the structure such as the IaH to accomplish the interdisciplinary perspective not only for its explanatory power but also for its potential to create new knowledge. In time it may also be possible to influence a few social sciences to internationalize themselves. I have been studying such efforts but am convinced that what is labeled as international dimension of the discipline is an injection of a random content into a subfield of a discipline, or even a subfield of a subfield.

### Time-Specific Learning

The fourth concept is how to sustain an international knowledge. Take study abroad, for example. While we do not have many longitudinal studies, the few we do have suggest that many participants in sophisticated long-term programs do acquire knowledge that gets coded to provide the

cognitive enrichment, but it gets arrested to the time of the experience. To paraphrase the “context-specific” problem, we can call this the “time-specific” learning issue. Because of this phenomenon, transfer of knowledge may not occur—often because it was assumed to develop by osmosis and was not intended or planned—or learning and knowledge was not part of the objectives of the programs. Some cognitive scientists occasionally ridicule university programs on the ground that they are not “learning” but “work.” Students work on projects, complete assignments, and “do” study abroad.

Here we return to IaH and its relationship-based and greatly expanded educational philosophy. There are two ways of enhancing sustainability of knowledge—indeed its continued expansion. One of them is based on secondary socialization in relationships with people who had to “figure out the learning system” such as foreign students and immigrants, who had to learn “how to learn” (meta-learning), and the other is to use the same relationships to augment the understanding of trends in societies. In this way we learn to appreciate the changes that affect our knowledge of these societies and provide a corrective to the “snap shot” syndrome of the arrested experience in time.

### Etic v. Emic Learning

The fifth concept is the strong evidence that the entry point to another culture is the so-called “etic” perspective, which means that we see other cultures through the lens of our own knowledge and experience. As with the other concepts, one aspect of it is awareness of what amounts to an academic ethnocentrism. The other is that only sophisticated experiences permit one to make the necessary cognitive shifts from the etic to the “emic” way of thinking. (Emic thinking allows the observer of another culture to view it through its own internal logic.) The implication from this “dual knowledge” is staggering in foreign student and study abroad programs where sophisticated orientation programs are available but often ignored by the participants. But far more staggering are the combined problems facing the post-socialist countries, the developing countries, and now Afghanistan and Iraq. (*For more on Etic and Emic learning, see sidebar on this page.*)

### ETIC AND EMIC MEASURES: A DISTINCTION

The linguist Kenneth Pike has used the phonetic and phonemic distinction to propose “etic” and “emic” studies of culture. The etic approach consists of devising criteria that enable us to classify all cultural data according to a general and common framework. The emic approach consists of determining the structure or organization of each culture from the internal point of view of the culture. (Dwyer, David. 1999. Michigan State University, “Emics v Etics: Harris v. Pike.” <http://www.msu.edu/~dwyer/EmicEtic.htm>.)

Pike expressed the difference this way: “It proves convenient—though partially arbitrary—to describe behavior from two different standpoints, which lead to results which shade into each other. The etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien culture. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system.” (Berry, John W. 1990. “Imposed Etics, Emics, and Derived Etics” in Headland, Thomas N, Pike Kenneth L. and Harris, Marvin. *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*. Newbury Parks, CA: Sage.)

Many of these ideas can be implemented without too much difficulty by using existing structures and program ideas. Others could be initiated with the help of the expanded populations the IaH program will attract. For example, the “brain-enrichment” concept could be translated into a commissioned handbook in which this problem will figure prominently. For some people it may suffice to be told that their brains do not process things that are different. For others, interviews with people from other countries may be more helpful. There are several excellent books that show how governments, business, and academics have made serious errors when they ignored cross-cultural variables of mental productions.

Internationalization of the disciplines continues to be a major problem. Single domains simplify complexity and fragment the field. One does not have to know all about every academic discipline, but it is difficult to think about study abroad and foreign student programs without the help of selected concepts from some five to seven disciplines. Similarly to the suggestion above, a group of professionals could combine to produce a text about the contributions of a few social sciences to their international programs. A meaningful description and implications flowing from the “emic” and “etic” dichotomy could be a part of such text.

There are a few paradoxes and unresolved issues in international education arising out of the application of cognitive theories that need to be discussed and researched. One is the substantial difference between “learning” and “cognitive development.” Most liberal educational requirements are based indeed on the theories of cognitive development—as is the well-known Bennett scheme of cultural sensitivity. It assumes that students “develop” along several stages as they proceed through their higher education. The paradox is that most of their courses are based on theories of learning from individual academic disciplines whose aims, epistemologies, and practices are quite different. In Europe the “development” is supposed to result from an academic background of select secondary education, but the emphasis on “Europeneazation” or “Euroharmonization (whichever term is popular at a given time) is also being introduced into

professional education in higher learning institutions. The resulting confusion of different theories with different intellectual foundations affects the possibility of transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the students as well as from the host country to the home country; in addition it raises serious questions about the intellectual skills like critical thinking, that are supposed to be a part of both liberal and specific education. Similarly affected is the relationship between school and work. Professional associations should be encouraged to structure and promote special seminars about utilization of knowledge similar to what industry and governments do.

Several years ago I developed a “Learning from International Students Program” that still has a great potential for application to the kinds of programs that IaH might be developing. One aspect of that program that I have described in several places might be a series of “real laboratories” attached to regular courses of sympathetic faculty members in which students would actually work on projects that resemble the real work culture outside of the universities.

Needless to say, faculty development seminars and opportunities are crucial to the development of an expanded concept of IaH. Faculty can be encouraged to use many metaphors in lieu of cause and effect reasoning as a way of demonstrating the need for comparative thinking.

The time has come for this dimension of international education known as Internationalization at Home. It has the potential to bridge the gap between campus and off-campus, between theory and practice, and between rhetoric and action.

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