

Professional Development for TESL Teachers: A Course in Transcultural Pragmatics

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Abstract

Awareness of transcultural pragmatics serves as the foundation for intercultural communicative competence. Explicit teaching of pragmatics in conjunction with intercultural communication training can contribute to the professional development of non-native English-speaking teachers. This article reports on an interdisciplinary attempt to develop a short-term professional development course for TESL teachers. The four-week course in transcultural pragmatics aimed to bring about efficient, learner-driven, experiential, and contextualized professional development through short-term immersion in an intercultural English-speaking environment. The goals of the designed course, introduced to TESL teachers from South Korea, were to (1) introduce pragmatics learning to teacher participants, (2) support participants' development of intercultural communicative competence during an immersion experience, and (3) facilitate preparation for teaching transcultural pragmatics. The authors conducted classroom research to evaluate the extent to which the course fulfilled the goals set forth. Nearly all of the twenty-five participating teachers self-reported an increase in pragmatics awareness and intercultural communicative competence by the end of the training. They also discovered new approaches for teaching transcultural pragmatics to their elementary students. This report concludes with insights for enhancing the effectiveness of a transcultural pragmatics course that fills a gap in English language teacher education.

Keywords: English language learning, teacher training, transcultural pragmatics, intercultural communication, communicative competence, immersion

Introduction

English, as a lingua franca in today's globalizing world, is becoming the language of transcultural mobility, the language of the third space, and a language of hybridity (see Bhabha, 1998; Holmes & Dervin, 2016; Kramsch, 1993; Yates, 2004). The challenge for English learners in today's intercultural contexts is that social rules are in constant flux; what is appropriate depends on the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors, and the specific context in which they are communicating (Baker, 2016). Misconceptions and communication breakdowns are often brought about by discourse differences as shaped by culture (Hwang, 2008; Scollon et al., 2012). Language teachers and learners need to "recognize the importance of the relationship between language and culture" (Bryam, 2012, p. 88). Thus, the goal of English language learning and teaching in today's world of endless and limitless cultural mixing has shifted from communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) to intercultural communicative competence (Bryam, 2009), which denotes "the ability of second-language speakers to mediate/interpret the values, beliefs and behaviors (the 'cultures') of themselves and of others and to 'stand on the bridge' or indeed 'be the bridge' between people of different languages and cultures" (p.12). In other words, intercultural communicative competence involves both English language skills as well as intercultural communication skills.

To address such emerging learning needs, Lynda Yates (2010) proposes integrating insights from multiple related fields, namely, interlanguage pragmatics, socio-cultural pragmatics, intercultural pragmatics, intercultural communication, and cross-cultural communication, into a new area of study—transcultural pragmatics. Transcultural pragmatics awareness is the ability to decipher how cultures, cultural mixing, and contextual factors shape language use and communication in intercultural contexts. Transcultural pragmatics implies a focus on interculturality. Interculturality is "a situationally emergent and co-constructed phenomenon that relies both on relatively definable cultural norms and models as well as continually evolving features" (Kecskes, 2011, p. 67). In the communicative process, cultural norms and models brought into the interaction from the prior experiences of the interlocutors are blended with some of the features created ad hoc during the interaction in a synergetic way (see also Holmes & Dervin, 2016). To attend to transcultural pragmatics, teachers and learners should no longer focus on the use of pragmatics norms in a second language and the foreign culture. Rather, trainers can "explicitly invite learners to compare and contrast the target culture with their own culture(s)" (Kelly, 2012, p. 413) and discuss how the differences and similarities shape each interlocutor's unique language use in specific intercultural communicative situations.

This inspiring new focus on interculturality prompts us to link not only language and culture, but also language use and the intricacies involved in the process of interacting with different people whose communication styles are shaped by a variety of contextual factors. Transcultural pragmatics awareness serves as the foundation for intercultural communicative competence. Some of the rising pedagogical questions are: how can professional development experiences help non-native English language teachers develop transcultural pragmatics awareness and intercultural communicative competence, and how can we equip them to teach transcultural pragmatics to their students in international English teaching settings?

Over the last three decades, “communicative language teaching” has been a frequently discussed topic in the field of English language teaching pedagogy. However, the teaching of communicative competence is not finding full expression in many English language classrooms (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; see also Kanter, 2013), not to mention the teaching of intercultural communicative competence (Baker, 2016; Jackson, 2014). To achieve communicative competence, pragmatics instruction is essential. In the case of South Korea, for instance, English language students are still entrenched in pragmatics inadequacy (Kanter, 2013). The root of the issue is that pragmatics is an area that is not adequately addressed by most English language teacher preparation programs (Vasquez & Fioamonte, 2011). Further, to achieve intercultural communicative competence, transcultural pragmatics awareness development is necessary. Thus, through the study reported in this article, we set out to explore how a professional development program that took place in an intercultural setting could prepare English language teachers to integrate transcultural pragmatics into their teaching.

This paper first presents the literature review findings from the fields of intercultural communication and instructional pragmatics. This review served as the foundation for the pedagogical design of a professional development course on transcultural pragmatics for a group of twenty-five English language teachers from South Korea. This professional development course took place at a university in the northwest of the United States. The organization of the course, course content, and pedagogical approaches will be described in this paper. The course evaluation results and participants’ post-training reflections of how they would integrate transcultural pragmatics knowledge and skills into their teaching will also be presented. Finally, we offer lessons learned and limitations of this project that combined competence development strategies from both intercultural communication training and English language education.

Interdisciplinary Foundation of Teaching Transcultural Pragmatics

Intercultural Communication Training

The key guiding question for intercultural communication training is—How do values, norms, and cultural beliefs shape behaviors? Storti (2009, p. 274) suggests the following training steps:

- Define culture and explain how it will manifest in interactions with people from a different culture.
- Identify the key values and assumptions of the participants’ own culture.
- Identify the key values and assumptions of the target culture(s).
- Identify the key differences between one’s own and the target cultures, the most common issues—challenges, surprises, problems—these differences cause, and offer strategies for dealing successfully with these issues.

Storti (2009) suggests guiding trainees to “analyze one’s own culture through locating one’s culture along continua of cultural dimensions,” in contrast to where one’s interlocutors coming from (p. 278). There are various cultural continua that can be applied for this purpose.

Our table below (see Table 1) serves to capture information abstracted from taxonomies developed by Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Robert House and colleagues' GLOBE Dimensions (see summary in Lustig & Koester, 2013).

Table 1. *Cultural Continua*

| One Extreme | | Cultural ←Continua→ | The Other Extreme | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Easy-to-Understand Term | Academic Term | | Academic Term | Easy-to-Understand Term |
| DIRECT | high context | | low context | INDIRECT |
| NONVERBALLY ORIENTED | high context | | low context | VERBALLY ORIENTED |
| FORMAL | high power distance | | low power distance | INFORMAL |
| ASSERTIVE | high self-enhancement inclination | | high self-critical inclination | HUMBLE |
| STATUS CONSCIOUS | high power distance | | low power distance | STATUS NEUTRAL |
| AGE CONSCIOUS | high power distance | | low power distance | AGE NEUTRAL |
| GENDER CONSCIOUS | low gender egalitarianism | | high gender egalitarianism | GENDER NEUTRAL |
| “WE” FOCUSED | collectivistic | | individualistic | “I” FOCUSED |
| LINEAR | low context | | high context | CIRCULAR |
| DEDUCTIVE | low context | | high context | INDUCTIVE |

These taxonomies represent a powerful, empirically tested tools for intercultural communication training. Traditionally cultural taxonomies often are (mis)used to describe static, dichotomous national cultural orientations and patterns and are seldom accompanied by directed discussion regarding the limitations and potential pitfalls of the implementation of the tools in this manner. As intercultural trainers move towards approaches that highlight the complex, multidimensional and dynamic nature of intercultural interactions in the global context (Deardroff, 2009), cultural taxonomies have been more fruitfully applied for self-reflection and situational comparative analysis instead of overgeneralization. Identifying one's orientation in contrast to another's provides a first step towards understanding differences and commonalities in intercultural encounters (Sorrells, 2013) and hence helps illuminate paths to effective communication.

Helpful comparisons are based on sensitive self-reflection and keen observation of another's communication behaviors and patterns. Carbaugh's (2005) ethnographic approach for deciphering "cultures in conversation" can help learners focus their observations in the field and reflect upon what they observe. The approach is easy to use regardless of linguistic and cultural background. It involves four steps: *discover*, *describe*, *interpret*, and *evaluate*. To *discover* is to look for and pay attention to specific conversational phenomena that are puzzling over regular occurrence. To *describe* is to observe and record such moments without judgment as they were created. To *interpret* is to hypothesize how cultural premises and rules are shaping the forms and formats of the observed conversations. To *evaluate* is to verify arising hypotheses. The ultimate goal of this approach is to understand the cultural meanings and significance of observed communication behaviors and patterns in context. Carbaugh (2007) proposes specific questions to guide learners to analyze the discourse and communication practices as they observe:

- The question of functional accomplishment: What is getting done when people communicate this way?
- The question of structure: How is this communication practice put together? What are the main cultural ingredients, elements, or features?
- The question of central sequencing or form: What act sequence constitutes this communication practice? Or, in turn, of what larger sequence is this act a part?

In sum, the emphasis of effective intercultural communication training is on facilitating "learning how to learn" as ethnographers in situ (see also Storti, 2009). In transcultural contexts, effective intercultural communicators are those who possess not only language skills, but also abilities to decipher and respond to how culture and cultural mixing impacts verbal and nonverbal interchanges on the spot.

Instructional Pragmatics

A frequently reported belief in the field of instructional pragmatics is that pragmatics learning leads to an awareness of how the target language is used in actual communication shaped by the socio-cultural contexts (Hwang, 2008; Yule, 1996; Zhu Hua, 2011). Pragmatics learning often includes development of abilities for dealing with speech acts, language functions, and linguistic politeness with an emphasis on real world relevance (Vasquez & Fioramonte, 2011). Thus, teaching based on the pragmatics-awareness approach tends to focus on teaching spoken English and dialogues from real-life situations and on discussing the similarities and differences between learners' mother tongue and the target language. Teaching pragmatics is to bring about a consciousness of "the secret rules" of language used in context (Yates, 2004). The three main characteristics shared by most pedagogical approaches reported in the literature on instructional pragmatics include explicit instruction, learners as ethnographers, and reflection involving comparison and sensitive discussion.

Explicit instruction. Pragmatics instruction usually builds upon explicit metapragmatic comments about authentic communication "through language (e.g., lexical items, syntax, or discourse), gestures, or silence" (Yates, 2004, p. 13). Explicit metapragmatic instruction involves teaching of speech acts such as requests, apologies, and complaints, the most

empirically explored speech acts in the cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; Vasquez & Fioamonte, 2011). Pragmatics learning activities typically aim at sensitizing learners to cultural differences in speech acts and make learners aware of available choices for speech acts in the target language. Learners need to know how to interpret and reproduce speech acts in a variety of English-speaking contexts (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). Therefore, an instructional focus is needed to teach the patterns, rules, strategies, and linguistic forms by means of which the important speech acts are interpreted and realized in different situations (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004). The debatable question is whether pragmatics instruction should be deductive or inductive. Glaser (2013) maintains that “lesson plans that allow for an inductive discovery process while fulfilling the condition of explicit rule provision seem very promising for pragmatics instruction” (p. 155). For instance, learners can identify target speech structures in role plays, peer work, small groups, semi-structured interviews, introspective feedback, metapragmatics assessment tasks, and exercises prompting comparison between speech acts in L1 and L2 (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004).

Learners as Ethnographers. Another key dimension of pragmatics learning is learning in situ. Training pragmatics learners as active researchers is an inductive teaching approach (Yates, 2004). It complements the deductive, explicit instruction on speech acts as explained above. Explicit instruction can be the first step and field research can follow. For instance, the instructional process involves first the instructor’s presentation of information on pragmatics issues through the use of examples of miscommunication and problematic intercultural interactions in films or other discourse forms. Then, students collect data from the field, namely intercultural miscommunication outside the classroom, and record naturally occurring speech acts (Hwang, 2008; Vasquez & Fioamonte, 2011). Noticing is a common learning activity for developing sensitivity to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatics features of authentic intercultural communication data (Yates, 2004). Collecting data as a participant observer parallels to how an ethnographer would conduct research, which is why “learners as ethnographers” is one of the features of instructional pragmatics. The goal of this pedagogical approach is to develop in learners the ability to research interactive practices for themselves (Yates, 2004).

Reflection, Comparison, and Sensitive Discussion. The step following observation and data collection involves learning to compare the speech acts in L1 with those in L2 (see Yates & Wigglesworth, 2005). Research indicates that L1/L2 comparisons effectively enhance learners’ awareness toward how to tackle issues of intercultural communication (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Once a learner has identified the communication problem and gathered information about it, one of the last steps in the learning process is to develop a plan of action and evaluate its result as part of self-development (Kelly, 2012). The evaluation process aims at the following learning objectives:

- 1 Developing awareness of sociopragmatics values and pragmalinguistics resources of L1 and L2 (see, for example, Louw et al., 2010);
- 2 Checking understanding through discourse completion tasks (DCT), which requires learners to come up with a speech act appropriate to the situation described in the classroom assignment and to compare their strategies with classmates (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010);

- 3 Experimenting different forms of speech acts in various contexts outside of the classroom (see, for example, Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005) or through role playing (Amaya, 2008);
- 4 Exploring personal reactions and likely community reactions to the use of various pragmatics features (see, for example, Brock & Nagasaka, 2005); and
- 5 Developing the ability to research interactive practices for themselves (Yates, 2004).

However, the pragmatics instructional approaches described above touch upon, but do not directly address, the “sphere of interculturality” (Kramersch, 1993, p. 205). The concept of transcultural pragmatics has prompted us to develop a training model that serves to shift the focus from developing communicative competence in a target culture to developing *intercultural* communicative competence. The course described in the following section integrates intercultural communication training into pragmatics instruction to help trainees develop the abilities to decipher ways in which, not only culture, but cultural mixing and contextual factors, shape language use and usage in intercultural contexts.

Research and Curriculum Gaps

Although pragmatic competence is a critical component of intercultural communicative competence, L2 pragmatics or transcultural pragmatics has not received much attention in the field of second-language acquisition (Kim, 2016; Zhang, 2017). A library database search yields few recent publications about this subject. Research concerning pragmatic instruction is still “in its infancy” (Kim, 2016, p. 453). Pragmatic knowledge is still under-represented in most TESL textbooks (Kim, 2016). There is a paucity of explicit metapragmatic information in English-language teaching/learning materials (Ren & Han, 2016).

As it is highly challenging for English-language learners to acquire pragmatics knowledge required for effective intercultural communication, “pragmatics instruction, particularly explicit instruction provided with metapragmatics explanation,” could facilitate learners’ development of intercultural communicative competence as previous studies have shown (Kim, 2016, p. 453). The findings of a recent study about learners’ perception of L2 pragmatics instruction reiterate the importance of integrating transcultural pragmatics into English-language teaching and learning. In this study, learners express that pragmatics instruction increased their motivation for language learning, facilitated their communication skills, enhanced their pragmatics awareness on intercultural differences, as well as instilled confidence in English interactions (Kim, 2016).

However, there is a lack of effective ways to raise students’ pragmatics awareness and competence (Ran & Han, 2016). For instance, in the case of South Korea, “formal education for English regularly lays emphasis on learners’ internalization of grammar rules and vocabulary, and majorly relies on the grammar translation method” (Kim, 2016, p. 452). Even though South Korea’s English-education policy focuses on the importance of communicative language teaching, the teaching of pragmatics does not take place consistently in South Korean classrooms (Jo, 2016). In a study about middle-school English teachers’ knowledge and practice on pragmatics in South Korea, the participants expressed that teaching pragmatics was important, but they perceived barriers to teaching pragmatics in class (Jo, 2016). The key barriers involve teachers’ lack of applicable knowledge of transnational

pragmatics and difficulty in gathering relevant teaching materials in EFL settings (Jo, 2016). To fill a gap between policy and current curriculum, teacher-training programs for developing the abilities to teach transnational pragmatics are needed (Jo, 2016; Kim 2016; Yook & Lee, 2016; Zhang, 2017). An insight emerging from the study of learners' perception denotes that the pragmatics instructional model should be designed based on experimental research (Kim, 2016).

The study reported in this article contributes to filling the research gap and the gap between policy and practice described above. The following section describes an innovative pilot program for helping in-service teachers develop transcultural pragmatics competence while preparing to integrate transcultural pragmatics into their own teaching. The pilot effort broke new ground in TESL by drawing on transdisciplinary research insights from both the field of English-language teaching and the field of intercultural communication training. Although the two related fields can fruitfully inform each other, especially in the area of intercultural communicative competence development, to date collaborations rarely happen (Jackson, 2014). Moreover, the results of the classroom research conducted throughout the program-piloting process provide timely insights for future endeavors in enhancing transcultural pragmatics instruction as part of professional-development overseas immersion experiences for in-service non-native English-language teachers.

A Professional Development Course on Transcultural Pragmatics

Participants

The twenty-five teachers who participated in the transcultural pragmatics course at a university located in the northwest of the United States in the summer of 2013 were part of a six-month professional development program for teachers of English sponsored by the government of South Korea. The participants were all experienced elementary-school teachers who had learned English as a foreign language in South Korea. They had applied for and been selected to leave their respective schools in different parts of the country to spend time as a cohort improving their English language proficiency and enhancing their teaching methodologies. The program involved a five-month intensive English language instruction at a South Korean university and a one-month immersion experience at a U.S. university. The immersion site (the site of this study) is a small university town with a mostly English-speaking population of about 90,000. The residents that participants interacted with were mostly European Americans who knew little about Korean language and culture. Most people in this place are friendly toward foreigners and open to interacting with non-native English speakers. During their immersion, the participating teachers worked in a classroom setting with an instructor for approximately three hours a day. Outside the classroom, the teachers participated in workshops with local educators, visited local sites of cultural interest, and engaged in service-learning activities at various locations in the local community, including the food bank, day-care centers, and senior centers. There were two strands of this four-week training. The first strand offered a more traditional teacher-training emphasis on methods, materials, and best practices for teaching English as a foreign language. The second was a course in transcultural pragmatics that served to help the participants connect their classroom learning to their real-world experiences outside of the classroom with the goal of developing

awareness of the situationally emergent and continually evolving features of interculturality. This first author instructed this course and the second author was the program administrator and liaison with the government sponsors.

In a pre-course survey, approximately half of the participating teachers rated their English language proficiency as “basic” and a quarter rated their English proficiency as “intermediate.” Only three indicated that they could communicate effectively in English overseas or in the United States, while seven indicated that they could communicate effectively in English in South Korea. For about half of the teachers, this was their first experience visiting an English-speaking country. Seven of the teachers indicated they had learned about pragmatics in their teacher training courses, and approximately half of the teachers did not. Only four indicated that they had taught pragmatics in their English classes in South Korea. Although most of the participants believed that English was used differently in different countries, few had prior instruction in pragmatics, taught pragmatics in their classes, or learned how culture influenced the use of English. A majority of the teachers indicated that they did not guide their students to consider how culture shaped English expressions.

Course Design

To complement the participants’ previous five months of intensive English language learning in South Korea, the authors, Phyllis Ngai (an instructor of intercultural communication for fifteen years) and Sandra Janusch (a specialist in ESL teacher training for twenty years), designed a strand of the four-week training to bring about learner driven, experiential, and contextualized professional development through immersion in an intercultural English-speaking environment. The value of immersion for language-teacher professional development rests in not only increasing language knowledge, but in developing knowledge about language (Janusch, 2007). Such an environment can offer multiple opportunities for the trainees to learn in situations where interlocutors’ communication behaviors are shaped by different cultures and allow learners to reflect on the intercultural nature of language use and usage (Kelly, 2012). The design of the transcultural pragmatics course purposefully tapped the immersion environment as a living laboratory, in which learners could gather, explore, and examine real-world intercultural communication experiences.

Integrating insights from the subfields of instructional pragmatics and intercultural communication training, the authors identified the following as key components of a transcultural pragmatics learning cycle and we developed Figure 1 to illustrate them:

- 6 Noticing: To develop the sensitivity and awareness of how socio-cultural factors and situational factors shape language use and communication.
- 7 Cross-cultural comparison: To develop an awareness of cross-cultural differences and similarities in English language use for various types of communication.
- 8 Real-world discovery: To learn as participant observers in real-world intercultural communicative situations.
- 9 Comparative analysis: To reflect on one’s own orientation, perception, interpretation as shaped by one’s culture in contrast to the orientation that surfaces in another’s

- communication style and language use in specific cultural contexts and intercultural situations.
- 10 Real-world application: To reflect on the extent to which one would and would not like to make adjustment to comply with the socio-cultural norms of the native speakers and practice making the desired adjustments in real-world interactions.
- 11 Reflection on learning and teaching: To reflect on how to transfer the newly-gained awareness, knowledge, and skills to one’s own students through teaching of transcultural pragmatics.

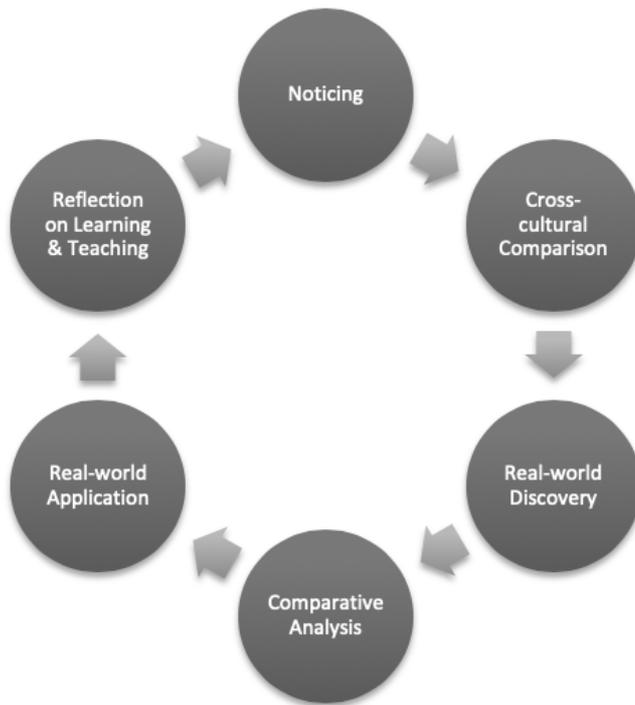


Figure 1. *Transcultural Pragmatics Learning Cycle*

Furthermore, the components of the learning cycle constitute steps that build onto one another toward developing transcultural pragmatics awareness. For instance, the second step builds on the first step, the third step builds on the second step, so on and so forth. The first step is “noticing.” The second step— “cross-cultural comparison” is based on what trainees have noticed and this step takes place in the classroom. Once an awareness of certain cross-cultural differences and similarities in English language use for specific types of communication, trainees are attuned to learning through “real-world discovery,” which is the third step. After trainees have some immersion experiences, they will be able to reflect on their own orientation, perception, interpretation as shaped by their own culture in contrast to the orientations that surface in another’s communication style and language use *in situ*. Thus, “comparative analysis” or contrastive analysis constitutes the fourth step, from which trainees develop an understanding of what is “my way” and what is the local way of communicating. Such an understanding allows the trainees to make conscious communication adjustments and apply newly-developed English language skills to achieve communication tasks in the

immersion context. “Real-World Application” is the second to the last step, from which trainees will gain practical knowledge that can be used for teaching purposes. Reflecting on how the knowledge gained and the skills developed from the immersion experiences can be used for developing teaching materials constitutes the last step of the learning cycle. And, the cycle repeats as trainees move onto other immersion situations.

The four-week course covered one new type of speech act each day and a different context each week. The four contexts selected for the course included *family*, *community*, and *school*, and *workplace*, which were determined by a needs assessment the participating teachers completed prior to their arrival at the training site. This needs assessment asked the teachers to identify the primary contexts in which they would use English. Through analyzing how context shapes speech acts, the participants worked toward increasing their knowledge about pragmatics, and sharpening their sensitivity of contextual factors that influence intercultural interactions. By integrating in-class learning about speech acts for different contexts and out-of-class immersion experiences, the learning process served to enhance intercultural communicative competence over the four weeks. Course plan designed by the authors is displayed in Figure 2. Participants experienced the full cycle of transcultural pragmatics learning when developing awareness of effective language use in each selected context. The learning cycle repeated as the course focus moved from the family context to the community context and then it repeated again when the focus moved to the school/workplace context. We used an upward spiral to illustrate the expected increased competence as the learning cycle is repeated in conjunction with lessons about different contexts.

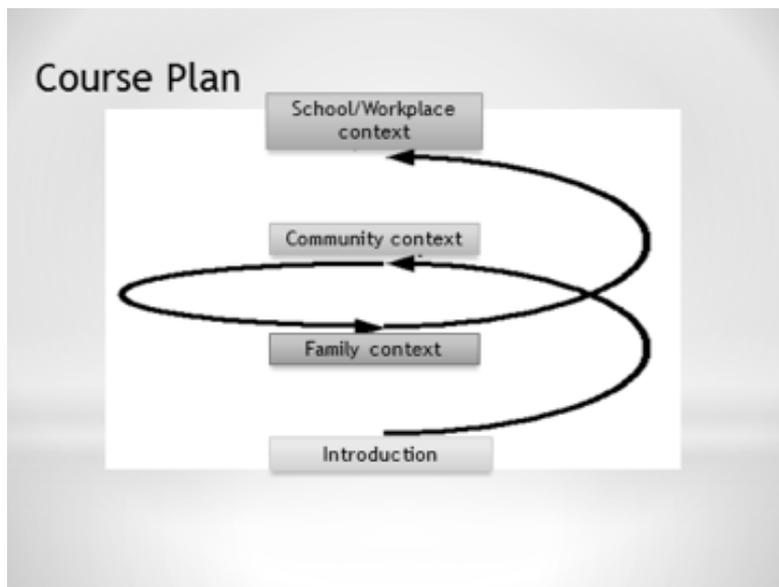


Figure 2. *A Contextualized Spiral of Transcultural Pragmatics Learning*

Course Content and Pedagogical Approaches

Speech Acts and Communication Patterns as Units of Analysis. In this course, speech acts served as units of analysis because they have an important role to play in L2 communication,

and they are teachable and learnable (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Also, they are among the most rigorously researched areas in pragmatics (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). The course instructor selected specific speech acts for each of the four contexts included in the course plan on the basis of a needs assessment and available research findings on speech acts. To help facilitate development of intercultural communicative competence, the instructor demonstrated various speech acts along with a range of relevant communication patterns. For instance, the instructor did not just teach speech acts for greetings, but speech acts for greetings as part of a social conversation pattern in specific intercultural contexts. For example, in the community context, participants did not just learn about speech acts for complimenting and responding to compliments, but also compliments and responses as part of conversational patterns among acquaintances as shaped by the U.S. cultural norms, meaning negotiation between interlocutors, and situational factors. This facilitated a greater understanding of the contextuality of language use in a “sphere of interculturality” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 205).

Table 2. *Examples of Speech Acts and Communication Patterns for Contextualized Transcultural Pragmatics Learning Covered in the Four-Week Course*

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Examples of Speech Acts</i> | <i>Examples of Communication Patterns</i> |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Introduction | Greetings, self-introduction, leave-taking, expressing likes/dislikes, initiating interactions, and thanking. | Social conversation patterns in the U.S. vs. in S. Korea; expressing friendliness in the U.S. vs. in S. Korea. |
| Family | Requests, responses to requests, compliments, affectionate addresses, criticism, complaints, praising, scolding, and expressing opinions. | Parents/children interactions in the U.S. vs. S. Korea; U.S. vs. S. Korean forms of directness and respectfulness. |
| Community | Giving advice, rejecting advice, use of softeners and intensifiers, expressing sympathy, invitations, refusals, and apologies. | Relational communication among neighbors, roommates, friends, and romantic partners in the U.S. vs. S. Korea. |
| Classroom | Compliments, turn-taking, questioning, making suggestions, providing feedback, thanking, and leave-taking. | Instructional communication, interactive learning activities, teacher/student interactions, and motivational expressions in the U.S. vs. S. Korea. |
| School as Workplace | Compliments, making suggestions, rejecting suggestions, providing feedback, requesting, refusing a request, thanking, inviting, and turning down an invitation or offer. | Expressing positivism as a cultural form in the U.S. vs. directness in S. Korea; workplace conversation patterns and professional communication styles in the U.S. vs. S. Korea. |

Learner-driven Course Content. Table 2 includes examples of speech acts and communication patterns discussed in class, but the syllabus allowed space for the participants to contribute to course content. Every day participants contributed to tailoring the course content to their needs and interests by bringing to class examples of speech acts that they noticed, discovered, and/or were puzzled or frustrated by when shopping, dining out, interacting with community members, conducting service learning, and so forth. The participants’ real-world discoveries served to elaborate, enrich, expand, and personalize the speech acts and communication patterns discussed in class. Class discussions about real-world experiences provided excellent teaching/learning moments for guided cross-cultural

comparisons that aimed to stimulate critical reflection on communicative choices in a sphere of interculturality.

In addition to making real-world discoveries outside the classroom, the participants also discovered speech acts and communication patterns of interest by reviewing authentic materials produced for native English speakers. Materials that the participants found useful for bringing about pragmatics awareness and intercultural sensitivity included clips of TV programs, popular movies produced in different English-speaking cultures, local newspapers, and advertisements produced for audiences in different English-speaking countries on YouTube and other websites. To practice the steps of noticing and cross-cultural comparisons in the classroom, the participants watched or read the materials selected by the instructor to illustrate speech acts/communication patterns designated for learning of the day. Often the participants would notice additional speech acts/communication patterns that they found puzzling or intriguing. All these discoveries, though made in the classroom, also served to personalize the course contents while meeting participants' learning needs and interests.

Including learner-driven content requires a flexible pedagogical approach; such pedagogical flexibility is essential for helping learners develop the awareness and skills required for contextually-effective communication. In particular, to notice and then to reflect upon various samples of discourse is to decipher "cultures in conversation" as Carbaugh puts it (2005), and are critical steps toward developing intercultural communicative competence through practice.

Focused Observation of Real-World Communication Events. During the professional development process, every day the participating teachers conducted observations as guided by the Transcultural Pragmatics Learning Cycle (figure 1). Without guided observation, immersion can easily turn into a "hit-and-miss" learning experience (Crew & Bodycott, 2005). Immersion in foreign contexts may be fun and provide interesting exposure to other cultures, but immersion without guided learning is likely to lead to shallow and limited learning outcomes (Bennett, 2009; Verde Berg, et al., 2012). Thus, the instructor (first author of this article) of the transcultural pragmatics course provided the participants with the following list of elements to attend to during observation of puzzling, frustrating, upsetting, or interesting moments of talk:

- Context/Situation
- Status of sender
- Relational distance between sender and receiver
- Intensity of the communication event
- Speech acts
- Nonverbal communication

Context is one of the key elements that shape language use and communication. To sharpen sensitivity toward the influence of contextual factors, the course plan focused on one context at a time.

Cross-cultural Comparison and Reflection. Transformative professional development results not from mere exposure and passive learning, but from analytical cross-cultural comparisons and thoughtful self-reflection that accompany intentional observation and pragmatics input. In other words, in order to develop transcultural pragmatics awareness and sensitivity, it is not enough to notice or know another’s communication patterns. More importantly, learners need to recognize the extent to which the observed patterns are different and similar to one’s communication style. Thus, reflective cross-cultural comparison is crucial in the process of developing intercultural communicative competence. In the transcultural pragmatics strand, the teacher participants used the Cultural Continua described in Table 1 as tools for various dimensions of the exchange and interaction of observed communication events. The instructor provided the participants with the cultural taxonomies in layperson terms to use for describing and analyzing their observation. When put in the form of continua, both ends of each continuum represent two extreme tendencies while limitless possible degrees of the tendencies exist in between. The continua assisted the teachers to map out how the cultures intersect and thus shape the observed intercultural communication and locate one’s place in a sphere of interculturality. The participants became more aware of how socio-cultural factors and contextual factors shaped language use and communication in specific intercultural communication situations. Within each situation, the interlocutors were similar in some ways but different in others. By mapping out the areas and degree of similarities and differences, the participants were able to figure out the causes of miscommunication and specific areas requiring negotiation and mediation by the interlocutors in order to achieve effective communication. Figure 3 is one such map produced by a teacher participant based on her observation of an intercultural communication event during the immersion experience.

From your perspective, communication in L2 is more or less (...) than communication in L1:

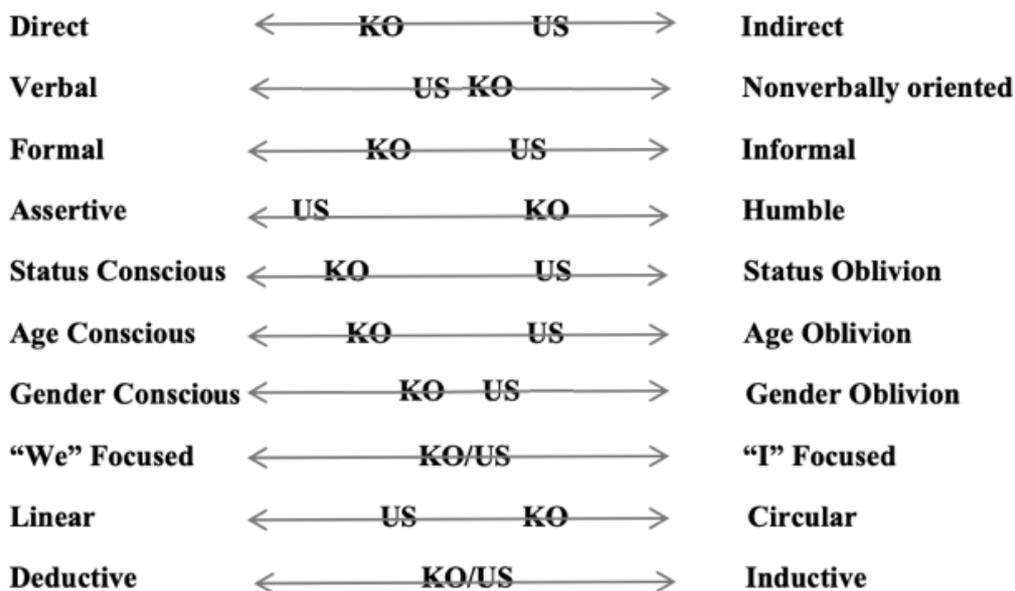


Figure 3. *An Example of a Teacher’s Advanced Cross-cultural Comparisons*

To facilitate application, the instructor included the cultural continua in a cross-cultural analysis template. In the transcultural pragmatics learning cycle, the participants first used the analysis template for analyzing miscommunication illustrated by critical incidents in print or in video. This in-class exercise prompted the trainees to reflect on how culture might have shaped one's own discourses and communication patterns and one's interpretation of the discourses and communication behaviors of others who are influenced by different cultures. Then, the participants used the analysis template a second time in the learning cycle to analyze communication events observed outside the classroom. This analytical step allowed the participants to identify communication gaps encountered in the "real world." Subsequently, this analytical step led to reflection on the sources of miscommunication or potential misunderstanding in intercultural contexts. The resulting realization formed the basis for the trainees' intercultural communicative competence development.

Real World Application. An immersion environment provides opportunities to test out newly gained pragmatics knowledge and intercultural communication skills. The important element of this step in the experiential learning process is to reflect on how one applies the newly gained pragmatics knowledge and intercultural communication skills to other contexts. The goal at this learning stage is not to learn to speak like a local or a native speaker, but to reflect upon whether or not and, if so, how and why, one has made adjustments in each of the ten cultural dimensions (as captured in Table 1) shaping discourses and communication patterns in order to achieve a specific communicative goal in a specific intercultural context. The main learning goal of the transcultural pragmatics course was not so much about developing skills for the specific immersion environment (the United States in this case), but was more about developing sensitivity toward the situationally evolving elements of transactional communication processes and an awareness of one's positioning in a sphere of interculturality during the immersion experience. A reflection template designed to be used in this part of the transnational pragmatics learning cycle included three guiding questions:

- Did I make any cultural adjustments in any of the ten areas (as captured in the cultural continua) in this intercultural communication event? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
- What insights about transcultural pragmatics have I gained from this intercultural communication event?
- What are some possible ways of teaching what I have learned to students in my English language classroom in S. Korea?
-

Connections to Teaching. In addition to facilitating the development of intercultural communicative competence, this pedagogical approach also prompted the trainees to explore how they would apply what they had learned from this professional development experience in their own English language teaching contexts in South Korea. For each observed communication event selected for analysis, the participating teachers documented their reflections on how they could transfer the newly-gained knowledge and communication skills to their students back home. Given that the participants were elementary school teachers, they had to consider the suitability of the types of pragmatics input, case studies, and real-world materials for the age groups of their own students.

We developed this course in transcultural pragmatics to address a gap in theory and practice of English language teaching. As we piloted the course, we conducted classroom research to evaluate the extent to which the course design served to fulfill the educational objectives set forth and to find ways to improve the pedagogical effectiveness in the future. The questions that guided the study are as follows:

- Did the course enhance participants' transcultural pragmatics awareness?
- Did the course enhance participants' intercultural communicative competence?
- Did the course enhance participants' abilities to integrate intercultural communication education in teaching English?

Classroom Research

We relied on three types of data, namely, (1) pre/post-project self-report data, (2) the final assessment outcome, and (3) ongoing learning assessment which amounted to 443 pages of data that allowed us to track changes over time within and among individual participants in terms of the following areas: pragmatics awareness, pragmatics knowledge, ability to conduct cross-cultural comparison, intercultural communicative competence, and potential ability to integrate intercultural communication education in teaching English. This article will report on an analysis based on the first two types of data, namely, pre/post-project self-report data and the final assessment outcome. We reported an analysis based on the ongoing learning assessment (the third type of data) in another article (see Ngai & Janusch, 2015). Before and after the course, the participants completed a self-report survey assessing their own level of transcultural pragmatics awareness. The survey questions were based on the definition of transcultural pragmatics awareness that denotes the ability to decipher how cultural and linguistic backgrounds, cultural mixing, and contextual factors shape language use and communication (see Appendix). Nineteen respondents completed the pre-course survey and twenty-four respondents completed the post course evaluations. Some of the questions were the same in the pre and post surveys while some new ones were added to the post survey. The additional questions asked in the post-course survey specifically addressed outcomes of the training and its relevance to the participants' future teaching.

Results

Table 3 summarizes the responses to both pre- and post surveys. Questions 1, 2, and 3 are indicative of transcultural pragmatics awareness. Although the course materials were mostly illustrated with examples situated in the United States in contrast to South Korea, the survey responses indicate metapragmatics awareness that is not limited to specific cultures or places. The participants showing understanding that English communication is not the same around the world rose from six to fourteen. Responses indicating understanding that English is used differently in different countries rose from seven to twenty-four. Questions 5 and 6 are indicative of intercultural communicative competence. The number of responses showing the participants' self-perceived ability to communicate effectively in English rose substantially after the course was completed (in South Korea 7 to 21; in the U.S 4 to 22; and in other contexts 3 to 17). Such increases indicate that the overseas professional development course

achieved its key learning objectives, and that the transcultural pragmatics course contributed – to the overall success of the immersion program.

Table 3. *Pre/Post Survey Response Comparison*

| Do you agree with the following statements? | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Don't Know | | Disagree | | Strongly Disagree | |
|--|----------------|------|-------|------|------------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|
| | Pre | Post | Pre | Post | Pre | Post | Pre | Post | Pre | Post |
| 1. English language used for communication is the same around the world. | | 4 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 12 | 1 | 2 |
| 2. English grammar is the same around the world. | 1 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 2 | |
| 3. English is used differently in different countries. | 2 | 11 | 9 | 13 | 5 | | 3 | | | |
| 4. I communicate effectively in English in S. Korea. | | 5 | 7 | 16 | 4 | 3 | 8 | | | |
| 5. I communicate effectively in English overseas. | | 3 | 3 | 14 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 2 | | |
| 6. I communicate effectively in English in the United States. | 1 | 6 | 3 | 16 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | |

Table 4 summarizes the responses to questions included only in the post survey. Twenty-two of the twenty-four respondents agreed that learning transcultural pragmatics was helpful for them and twenty-one agreed that it would be helpful for their students. All twenty-four respondents agreed that learning how culture influenced the use of English was helpful for them and for their students. The overwhelmingly positive evaluation of the helpfulness of learning transcultural pragmatics indicates the value of the course. In addition, the majority of the participants confirmed that their pragmatics awareness had increased. Most of the participants (20 of 24) planned to include pragmatics in their teaching while twenty-two planned to guide their students to pay attention to transcultural pragmatics in their English classes.

When asked about the most valuable gain from learning transcultural pragmatics in the open-ended parts of the post-course survey, six of the twelve respondents mentioned pragmatics awareness, four mentioned intercultural communicative skills, four mentioned pragmatics knowledge, and two mentioned improved teaching. When asked about the biggest surprise about the class on transcultural pragmatics, eleven of the thirteen respondents talked about their own pragmatics discovery through the immersion experience and two talked about the lack of pragmatics coverage in the Korean English language curriculum.

Table 4. *Post-course Survey Responses*

| Do you agree with the following statements? | Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| Learning transcultural pragmatics/ speech acts is helpful for me. | 13 | 9 | 2 | | |
| Learning transcultural pragmatics/ speech acts would be helpful for my students. | 11 | 10 | 2 | 1 | |
| Learning how US cultural influences the use of English is helpful for me. | 14 | 10 | | | |
| Learning how culture influences the use of English would be helpful for my students. | 14 | 10 | | | |
| Now I am aware of how my first language (Korean) may influence how I use English. | 10 | 13 | | 1 | |
| From now on, I will guide my students to pay attention to how culture and context shape English expressions. | 14 | 8 | 2 | | |
| From now on, I will teach pragmatics and speech acts in my English classes. | 10 | 10 | 4 | | |

A follow-up survey (see [Appendix](#)) conducted a year after the completion of the training provided some evidence indicating sustainability of these results although only five of the twenty-five participants responded. All five respondents indicated that they remained positive about the helpfulness of the course on transcultural pragmatics for their students. Four of the five respondents were using books and videos about different English-speaking contexts to guide their students to pay attention to how culture, cultural mixing, and contextual factors shape English expressions in a sphere of interculturality.

Lastly, the qualitative data based on a final assessment confirmed the self-report data. The results of the final assessment indicated an encouraging outcome of the professional development experience in the United States. This assessment required the participants to explore how they would apply what they had learned in their own teaching. For instance, the participating teachers were able to creatively integrate the learning cycles into some aspects of their own curricula that were guided by textbooks. They explored integrating contextual analysis of speech acts and cross-cultural comparisons into their teaching unit samples. As an example, in their final presentation, a team of participating teachers discussed using compliments as a form of greeting in the manner they had observed in the U.S. culture, in contrast to how they unusually used compliments in South Korea. They suggested teaching transcultural pragmatics to their students by using images to spark children's interest in selected speech acts, using literature to introduce common uses of the speech acts (such as apologizing), using examples from the Korean language to help students to discover differences across cultures, and then guiding exploration of the sphere of interculturality. As an exercise, they suggested giving three examples from English language sources and asking students to determine the appropriateness of each in a specific intercultural context. They suggested using a "situation card game" with each card graphically capturing a situation to practice expressions for different situations and then role playing the situations. In short, they recommended using supplemental materials beyond their prescribed English language textbooks such as video clips, storybooks, and teachers' own experiences to teach transcultural pragmatics.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

All in all, the course evaluation results indicate that the transcultural pragmatics course fulfilled its main goal of helping the participants to gain transcultural pragmatics awareness and to develop the abilities to connect intercultural communication and English language teaching. However, it is not certain that their interests and willingness in teaching transcultural pragmatics in their own classrooms continued, given that only a few responded to the follow-up survey. To more accurately assess how the participants' levels of English proficiency relate to the levels of transcultural pragmatics awareness resulted from the professional development experience, obtaining participants' scores of official English language tests completed before the course would be helpful. A comparison of the pre-project score with the post-project score would be revealing.

The course can be improved in a number of ways. Because the course was taught in the summer, there were few opportunities for the teacher participants to observe and practice real-world intercultural communication in a classroom or an authentic workplace situation. In terms of classroom learning, a demonstration of how to teach transcultural pragmatics specifically to elementary students could have been helpful. On the other hand, the final presentations that the participants gave served as peer demonstrations of the main concepts learned by the teachers. In particular, the more advanced learners in the class were able to inspire their classmates in terms of how to teach transcultural pragmatics awareness to young children through literature, games, songs, and videos. However, the ideas presented were not specific in terms of grade level or level of English proficiency. A helpful next step would be for each teacher participant to further develop teaching ideas presented at the conclusion of the course on the basis of the teacher's insights derived from trying out the ideas in his/her own target classroom after the professional development experience.

The group of participants enrolled in the course were at different English language proficiency levels. We found that the more proficient teachers were able to inspire their classmates because they were more able to make progress and apply their newly gained pragmatics knowledge in intercultural communication within a short period of four weeks. Those with greater proficiency demonstrated greater abilities to take notes of critical speech acts or communication events and to analyze the influence of culture, cultural mixing, and other contextual factors on encoding and decoding using the comparative approach covered in class. This finding seems to point to the conclusion that the transcultural pragmatics course described above may be more effective for advanced learners of English.

Additionally, it may be helpful to include a pre-course session to be completed by participants in their home country before the foreign immersion experience. This session could potentially help trainees become learners as ethnographers before starting the overseas professional development and thus allow for maximum use of the immersion experience for developing pragmatics awareness and intercultural communicative competence in situ. Furthermore, follow-up activities that support the teachers in implementing transcultural teaching into their schools upon return to South Korea may improve provide additional data and improve long-term transfer of learning.

Although the learning outcomes of this pilot course were positive, further testing of the course with a larger sample of teachers from different backgrounds is required for generalizing the results. For instance, evaluations of the course by additional groups of Korean teacher participants and teachers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds would be helpful for refining the general course design and for identifying specific aspects of the course that need to be adjusted for specific groups of participants.

Apart from English language teacher training, the reported transcultural pragmatics course can be adapted for different types of English language learners, such as university students and professionals in different fields. Alternatively, perhaps such a course could be used for enhancing intercultural communicative competence of teachers and learners of lingua franca other than English.

Conclusion

This study shows that explicit teaching of pragmatics, in conjunction with intercultural communication training can potentially equip non-native English-speaking teachers with at least some knowledge, skills, and strategies required for teaching transcultural pragmatics in the English language classroom. Such professional development can be effective if it is well integrated in the language teacher education program (see Kelly, 2012). The study results indicate that integrating a transcultural pragmatics course into a short-term immersion program in English-speaking environments can be helpful in terms of supporting teachers in developing transcultural pragmatics awareness and intercultural communicative competence. The learning outcomes of the professional development course that accompanied the immersion experience in this case indicate that the transcultural pragmatics learning cycle (see Figure 1) along with the contextual spiral of transcultural pragmatics learning (see Figure 2) that the authors developed can be beneficial pedagogical approaches for enhancing the professional development value of short-term immersion experiences. The transcultural pragmatics learning cycle can potentially help to shift the focus of English language instruction from learning to speak like a native to (1) developing sensitivity of how culture and cultural mixing shape language use and (2) how one's positioning influences negotiation and mediation over evolving forms and formats of communication in intercultural contexts.

The contextual spiral learning approach can help to guide the development of awareness and skills for dealing with the intricacies involved in the process of interacting with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in situations where unique communication styles are shaped by a variety of contextual factors. By deemphasizing the goal of acquiring the language of a target culture and focusing on guiding learners to attend to contextual influences on language use, the transnational pragmatics course promises to assist in developing communicative competence that is transferable across intercultural contexts. Such competence is increasingly valuable in the age of globalization where cultural boundaries are often blurred, interaction rules are in constant flux, and a variety of Englishes are emerging from the periphery.

In terms of English language teacher education, this study has illustrated an emerging efficient model for integrating transcultural pragmatics awareness development into a

traditional professional development program that combined in-country, in-classroom training and out-of-country, out-of-classroom immersion. Further investigation exploring possibilities of integrating a transcultural pragmatics course into pre-service teacher training would be a valuable contribution in the field of English language teaching. Lastly, more research is needed to shed light on what supplementary forms of professional development training are effective in helping English language teachers in non-English-speaking places develop materials and lessons for teaching transcultural pragmatics to specific age groups of language proficiency levels. Hopefully, the interdisciplinary initiative to integrate insights from both instructional pragmatics and intercultural communication training presented in this article will inspire further collaborations among researchers and practitioners of international English language teacher development.

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Appendix

Questions of the Follow-up Survey Conducted a Year after Completion of The Transcultural Pragmatics Course

| Do you agree with the following statements? | Strongly Agree | Agree | Don't Know | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|------------|----------|-------------------|
| Learning transcultural pragmatics/speech acts is helpful for my students. | | | | | |
| Learning how culture influences the use of English is helpful for my students. | | | | | |
| My students are aware of how their first language (Korean) may influence how they use English. | | | | | |
| I guide my students to pay attention to how culture and context shape English expressions. | | | | | |
| I teach pragmatics and speech acts in my English classes. | | | | | |
| I supplement the required textbooks with authentic materials for teaching pragmatics/speech acts. | | | | | |
| I use books or other printed materials written about different English-speaking contexts to teach. | | | | | |
| I use videos about different English-speaking contexts to teach. | | | | | |
| The summer course on transcultural pragmatics has improved how I teach English. | | | | | |
| If you are integrating transcultural pragmatics into your teaching, please share with us the teaching strategies you use in your classroom. | | | | | |

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