Increasing Intercultural Sensitivity through Cosplay for College Students

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Intercultural encounters have become an increasingly "common experience" in work place settings in an increasing number of countries (Morley & Cerdin, 2010, p.805). Many scholars started acknowledging the importance of intercultural competence - "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennette, 2011, p.3) - in college education related the current context of the global economy (Deardorff, 2011). However, scholars still believe that college education falls short to fulfill the need of the global economy to provide workforce with strong intercultural competence especially for those with less or little initial interests in exploring various cultures (Deardorff, 2011). Based on the previous literature, the purpose of this study is to introduce a curriculum to increase intercultural competence through a Cosplay showcase and its effect on the growth of intercultural sensitivity – an affective dimension of intercultural competence – for college students.

Intercultural Competence: Intercultural competence is performed through an individual system and is comprised of three components; cognitive (intercultural awareness), affective (intercultural sensitivity) and behavioral (intercultural adroitness) (Fritz, Mollenberg & Chen 2001; Graf, 2004). As a main dimension of intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity has increasingly gained attention in research because it allows people to move from a denial stage of cultural differences to an integration stage of a different culture (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Curriculum Development: One of the authors developed a set of learning activities based on Cosplay for a Japanese culture and fashion course. Cosplay is an activity originated from Japan where participants create and wear costumes, inspired by Japanese animation and cartoon, and perform in front of a large audience (Miller-Spillman, Reilly, & Hunt-Hurst, 2012). Students in the course performed a Cosplay showcase at the end of semester where they (a) created a 5-minute video clip of their Cosplay team, (b) displayed a theme board that introduced their Cosplay team, and (c) showcased their costumes during the Cosplay showcase. After the showcase, students submitted reflection based on the prompts related to their experiences in the course during the Cosplay project.

Methods: A mixed method approach was used to measure the effect of a Cosplay showcase on the growth of intercultural sensitivity for college students. Students completed pre and post intercultural sensitivity surveys that were based on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by Chen and Starosta (2000). ISS includes 24 items with five constructs, interaction engagement (6 items), respect for differences (6 items), interaction confidence (4 items), interaction enjoyment (3 items) and interaction awareness (3 items). For the post survey, the authors also included open-ended questions to capture a thick description from the students about the Cosplay showcase experience, which were analyzed qualitatively. To analyze quantitative data, the

authors used SPSS 24.0 to compare differences of overall means and means of sub constructs of the pre and post surveys. Total number of sample was 27.

Results: The pre and post survey results showed that the Cosplay course activities improved students' intercultural sensitivity (t= 3.11, p= 0.004) (Table 1). On a scale of 1-5 students' overall mean score increased from 3.86 to 4.05 between the pre and post surveys. Of the five sub constructs, only interaction confidence showed statistical significance between pre and post survey results (t= 3.61, p= 0.001). Although all other sub constructs also showed slight improvements in student scores, interaction confidence was the most improved with a mean difference of 0.35 between the pre and post surveys. The reflective comments from students also showed that students were able to increase all aspects of intercultural sensitivity (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of Intercultural Sensitivity Measure and Reflective Questions

	Mean Difference	**Student Comments**
Overall	b=0.19, t=3.11, p=0.004	*I think this class and this project helped me to better understand how to react and adjust to a new culture in general (Teri)*
Interaction engagement	b=0.11, t=1.48, p=0.150	*I will be able to have a relatable conversation and a better worldly view of not only Japanese culture but other views as well (Meri)*
Respect for differences	b=0.12, t=1.29, p=0.206	*Through this project, I learned to respect other cultures, forms of communication, dress and many other things (Nicole)*
Interaction confidence	b=0.35, t=3.61, p=0.001	*This project empowered me with the knowledge of Japanese culture (Margrett)*
Interaction enjoyment	b=0.20, t=1.48, p=0.151	*It was a lot of fun to see people who are not ordinarily Cosplayers get to experience Cosplay for the first time! (Rosy)*
Interaction awareness	b=0.27, t=1.99, p=0.058	*This project will allow me to be more open minded and understand individuals from Japan in order to communicate with them more effectively (Debera)*

Conclusion: From the results, that the Cosplay project improved intercultural sensitivity of the participating students in overall. Both quantitative and qualitative results showed that all of the constructs for intercultural sensitivity improved where the construct of interaction confidence had a statistical significance. This research provides pedagogical implications for educators to create learning activities using a Cosplay to increase intercultural sensitivity for students with less or little initial interest about different cultures.

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