Chapter 22
Towards Intercultural Literacy—A Literature Review on Immersive Cross-Cultural Experiences and Intercultural Competency

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*The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page.*

(Atributed to St. Augustine, 354–430).

*Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.*

(Mark Twain, 1835–1910).

*So much of who we are is where we have been.*

(William Langewiesche, b. 1955).

**Abstract** Owing to the expansion of globalisation, cultural interactions have brought studies into Intercultural Competence (IC) to centre stage (UNDP 2004; Bissessar 2018; Nelson et al. 2019). According to leading scholars and organisations, educational institutions have a vital role to play in helping their students develop the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes. This chapter provides a review of literature relating to the topic of IC, specifically focusing on the effects of short-term cross-cultural experiences on the development of IC in school and university students. To

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this end, it examines the meaning and importance of IC, the literary search methodology, and relevant findings that were synthesised from this review of the literature. Notably, few studies in the literature related directly to Australian high school students, and there is a compelling case to conduct more empirical research in this area. To this end, this literature review explores how existing knowledge gaps may be leveraged as opportunities for future quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods research. Finally, the research offers a brief outlook on the prospects of nurturing IC in a post-COVID-19 global context.

**Keywords** Intercultural competency · Intercultural literacy · cross-cultural education · Racial equity · Literature review · Youth With A Mission (YWAM)

### 22.1 Introduction: Research Background, Inception and Intended Contribution

The authors’ interest in this topic was sparked many years ago while working with the Christian mission organisation Youth With A Mission (YWAM). This involvement exposed the authors to a highly intercultural ministry context, which was characterised by both recurrent international travel and highly culturally diverse campus and ministry settings. One of the lead author’s main roles during her 3 years at the YWAM Darwin campus was leading the Mission Adventures (MA) program in Australia and into South-East Asia. The MA program is a short-term (usually about 2 weeks) cross-cultural mission model designed for groups of high school students, and many YWAM locations around the world still run this popular program (YWAM Woolongong 2019; YWAM Montana 2019). YWAM’s stated hope is that young people will grow in their Christian discipleship and develop empathy and a growing willingness to serve, partnered with the ability to confidently and casually share the love and gospel of Jesus (YWAM Montana 2019; YWAM Nanaimo 2019; YWAM Woolongong 2019).

During (and following) MA programs there appeared to be observable and sometimes stated changes in the attitudes of the young people who participated in these cross-cultural experiences. These changes included increased empathy, improved cultural sensitivity and understanding, a heart for the less fortunate, an idea of, or a change in, career direction or aspiration, and an overall expansive view of the world, or worldview. Upon much introspection, personal contemplation and critical reflection, this chapter’s lead author (and the leader of these MA programs) has formed the view that short-term cross-cultural experiences, despite being brief, can play a positive and immensely formative role in the lives of young people.

The same can be said of this chapter’s supporting author, who similarly trained for cross-cultural ministry, leadership and social development situations in the context of YWAM’s global University of the Nations (UofN), ultimately completing multiple international field assignments of 2/12/24 to 48-week duration. Having thus studied in eight countries on four continents with students from more than 100 nations, this
chapter’s supporting author can similarly affirm that these intercultural experiences have helped him to gain both ‘global vision’ and a deep and lasting appreciation for sociocultural, ethnolinguistic and theological diversity.

Furthermore, in many personal discussions that these two authors have had with numerous other professionals in this area, similar reflections were numerous expressed, which ultimately gave rise to the idea that more formal study of this phenomenon was warranted. Hence, this literature review was undertaken to broadly explore the following research question:

What effects do short-term cross-cultural experiences have on the inter-cultural competence (IC), emotional intelligence (EI) and career aspirations (CA) of Australian high school students?

Consequently, this research will attempt to synthesise, analyse and draw conclusions from a range of sources related to the impact of short-term, cross-cultural experience on the intercultural competence (IC) of Australian high school students. While this chapter is particularly interested in the Australian context, most findings similarly apply in other country contexts and are therefore believed to be widely, if not universally, applicable and relevant.

As massive recent racial protests have shown in countries around the world, racial inequity is perceived to be a ubiquitous contemporary crisis (Harmon et al. 2020), including in Australia (Anthony 2020; BBC 2020) and in ‘every corner of America’ (Burch et al. 2020). With many of the problems linked to both ‘systemic’ and ‘academic’ undercurrents (Harmon et al. 2020), there is a clear need for more IC-enhancing experiences and immersive or ‘embodied’ pedagogies (Buxton et al. 2021), which makes the contribution of this research both timely and important.

This chapter is organised as follows. Following this introduction to the study background and the authors’ joint interest in IC (Sect. 22.1), the chapter next covers the rationale for conducting research in this area (Sect. 22.2), a discussion of the manifold conceptual approaches to IC (Sect. 22.3), the methodology used for identifying relevant literature (Sect. 22.4), a synthesis of key findings (Sect. 22.5) with concluding reflections on the overall meaning and specific benefits of cultivating IC (Sect. 22.6), and finally, a brief postscript exploring prospects, options and implications of seeking to nurture IC in a COVID-19 world (Sect. 22.7).

22.2 Research Rationale: Contemporary and Theological Reflections

Until the emergence of COVID-19, globalisation and constant change have unequivocally occasioned a dramatic rise in cross-cultural interactions (UNDP 2004; Bissessar 2018; Nelson et al. 2019). In consequence, the growing importance and interest in the field of intercultural competence and literacy are widely reflected in the literature (UNESCO 2007; Monash University 2018; Klingenberg et al. 2020). It
is now apparent that students today\(^1\) live in the most diverse, multicultural, interconnected and rapidly changing time in human history (Luetz 2019a; Luetz and Merson 2019) and the ability to competently engage in this multicultural world has been described as the ‘literacy of the future’ (UNESCO 2013; OECD 2018). This is a new kind of literacy. By all accounts, to thrive in this modern world, humanity will do well to cultivate intercultural literacy (IC). Many scholars, educators, managers and social scientists increasingly consider IC just as important as reading, writing and numeracy (UNESCO 2013; cf. Unger and Luetz 2019). IC promotes skills in areas of global economics and trade, diplomacy, poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, human rights, social justice, emotional intelligence and empathy, among others. At the same time, IC has been shown to diminish or even redress ethnocentrism, xenophobia, racism, ignorance and discrimination (Tiessen and Epprecht 2012; Zamastil 2011; Kitsantas 2004; Potts 2015). Furthermore, research has found positive intercultural experiences to be a vitally enabling factor for the development of IC, academic achievement and career choice (Dwyer 2004a; Potts 2015; Zarnick 2010; OCED 2018; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012).

The relatively recent onset of intense globalisation has brought studies into IC acquisition to centre stage, and relevant education plays an essential role in its success (Deardorff 2011; Nelson et al. 2019). According to a report by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), schools ‘play a critical role in helping young people to develop global competence’ (OECD 2018, p. 4). Furthermore, developing a global and intercultural outlook is a process—a lifelong process—that education can shape (Barrett 2018; Mansilla and Jackson 2011; Deardorff 2006, 2011; UNESCO 2013; UNDP 2016; OECD 2018, p. 4). Therefore, it follows that course programs and curricula at educational institutions today must progressively reflect our increasingly complex and interconnected multicultural societies (UNESCO 2007; Nelson et al. 2019).

Relatedly, ideas of cultivating humility, teachability, striving for unity and harmony, and advocating for justice are themes that are strongly supported in the Bible. In 1 Peter 2:8 the Apostle Paul admonishes the community of believers as follows: ‘Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind’ (ESV). Similarly, the prophet Micah declares, ‘But he’s already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women. It’s quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don’t take yourself too seriously—take God seriously’. (Micah 6:8, The Message).

Other writings of the Apostle Paul seem to similarly underwrite the importance of IC: ‘I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings’ (Corinthians 9:23; NIV). In several places throughout the Bible, it seems that God works with His people in culturally sensitive and appropriate ways without requiring them to first ‘convert’ to another culture. God rather appears to take customs already in use and investing them with new meaning (Kraft 2002).

\(^1\)At least until the sudden and disruptive onset of COVID-19. This theme is developed in Sect. 22.7.
Furthermore, in the Bible, heaven is described as a place of multinational, multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic congress: ‘After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands’. (Revelation 7:9; NIV). According to Patterson and Scoggins (2002), this heavenly picture demonstrates the fact that true unity in Christ allows cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences to live together in loving harmony with each other. Importantly, this heavenly perspective affirms Biblical support for the idea that such diversity is not coincidental but rather inherently ingrained in the divine design for human community and that development of cultural literacy is therefore a key competence of timeless and transcendental value and significance. Relatedly, using Mission as a hermeneutic lens is not a novel approach. A solid body of scholarship supports the connections between Paul’s writing and the theme in Revelation to intercultural literacy (Wright 2006). As such, IC-related scriptures, here and elsewhere in this chapter, are not to be misconceived as serving purposes of deductive proof-texting but should be more appropriately understood as seeking to build on well-established traditions of theological interpretation (Brewster 1997).

Another pertinent example of this IC-related idea is presented in the parable of the good Samaritan, where the hero of the story is someone from a race and religion that is vastly different from the Jewish audience. Furthermore, there had been long-term animosity, even hate, between the Samaritans and Jews (Brindle 1984; Tabor n.d.; Maris 2015). Jesus concludes the story by saying: ‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him’. Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’ (Luke 10:37; NIV). Jesus is seemingly admonishing spiritual influencers that human cultural biases are irrelevant, but that care, empathy and intercultural and interreligious compassion are at the core of what it means to be human (Otaigbe 2016). This is conforming with the Biblical emphasis on justice, mercy, humility and teachability, which this chapter has already alluded to above (Micah 6:8, NIV). Furthermore, in his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul highlights the importance of synergy and working together as one united body:

There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so, we are formed into one body. It didn’t matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink. So, the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts... In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. All of them will take care of one another. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part shares in its joy. You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it. (1. Corinthians 12:12–14 and 25–27; NIRV).

Incarnationally, these Biblical ideologies seemingly translate into a mandate for Christians, especially those in education, to lead the way in the development and formation of IC. It is evident that education plays a pivotal role in developing cross-cultural competence, but education can only go so far. Kraft (2002) posits that the real solution comes from Christ. As such, this implies that Christian educational
institutions are unique as they can provide ‘theological tenets for an all-redeeming and all-transforming education that can theoretically free the mind and allow it to capture themes that liberate it from societal statuses and prejudices that confine and limit’ (Jadhav 2014, p. 97) while ‘developing a framework for cultural competence in order to work with others in a meaningful, relevant, and productive way’ (Jadhav 2014, p. 122). Therefore, figuratively speaking, Christian education institutions have a unique ability to lead the way in opening the eyes, hearts and minds of humankind to the benefits of living with each other in a united sense of humanity, and in turn, reap the blessings promised by God (Andrews 1998, cf. 1 Cor. 9:20–23).

Moreover, the notion to treat others the way one wishes to be treated is an explicit virtue in all major world religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, etc. (Armstrong 2012). The UNDP affirms this notion by stating that there is a universal ‘belief in the basic moral equality of all human beings’ (UNDP 2004 p. 90). Given that adolescence is a crucial stage of development (Allison and Higgins 2002; University of Rochester Medical Centre NY 2019), this literature search is mostly focused on and invested in scrutinising the benefits of cultivating IC in high school students. Curtis (2015, p. 91) asserts,

Adolescence is a dynamically evolving theoretical construct informed through physiologic, psychosocial, temporal and cultural lenses. This critical developmental period is conventionally understood as the years between the onset of puberty and the establishment of social independence (Steinberg 2014). The most commonly used chronologic definition of adolescence includes the ages of 10–18 but may incorporate a span of 9 to 26 years depending on the source (APA 2002).

According to the Swiss child developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, in later adolescence children develop the ability to think critically in a scientific manner. They are capable of forming their own ideas on ethical issues and are able to communicate and debate these perspectives effectively. They are learning to think for themselves and are engaging in global concepts, such as justice, history, freedom, liberty, politics, and patriotism without difficulty (Lewis 2018; Rochester Medical Centre NY 2019; Scott and Cogburn 2019). In a similar vein, Polisar (2015) recommends that cultural emersion/immersion should begin in high school. Taking cross-cultural trips during high school is also important because not everyone perceives the need or has the desire to attend university. Therefore, offering cross-cultural experiences only at the university level is insufficient as many will miss out (Polisar 2015). Further, intercultural experiences seem to inform and impact on students’ choice of study at university, wherefore cultural emersion/immersion should ideally occur prior to tertiary study. Relatedly, the American–German developmental psychologist Erik Erikson suggested that late adolescence is a stage of life where young people are exploring what is possible and are planning their future (Wallace-Brosious et al. 1994; Harvard University 2019; Stanford Children’s Health 2019). It is thus a preferential time to influence adolescents as they explore optional career choices (Lewis 2018). This will have a strong influence on their perception of how to attain happiness in life (Quak and Luetz 2020).

From a Christian worldview perspective, the wisdom literature of the Proverbs teaches: ‘Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they
will not turn from it’ (Prov. 22:6; NIV). From this verse and the foregoing discussion, a Biblical mandate may be deduced that envisions Christian educators to leverage their unique position of influence for the development of interculturally competent young leaders. In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul encourages his young protégé as follows: ‘Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity’ (1 Timothy 4:12, NIV). This theme of looking beyond individualistic concerns was similarly highlighted by Martin Luther King Jr., who encouraged the formation of transpersonal or even transnational perspectives: ‘An individual has not begun to live until he can rise above the narrow horizons of his particular individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity’ (King 1957 p. 250). He went on to stress, ‘the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character is the goal of true education’ (King 1947, p. 124). In synthesis, developing IC may contribute to preparing future generations that are more empathetic, compassionate and culturally sensitive and competent. Relatedly, such education may assist in developing global citizens who are not only interculturally competent, but also have the gift of self-less compassion.

Finally, there is much support in the literature for the notion that short-term cross-cultural experiences, in both the secondary and tertiary context, are on the rise in many western nations (Potts 2016; Ngo 2014; Gower et al. 2018; Campbell-Price 2014; Kitsantas 2004; Potts 2015; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). However, the literature also appears to converge around the view that there remains a lack of academic attention (and an absence of evidence-based data) surrounding such experiences (Allison and Higgins 2002; Campbell-Price 2014; Jackson 2015). This lack of hard data also supports the case that further empirical research will be beneficial in this area.

### 22.3 Conceptual Approaches to Comprehending IC

As discussed above, humanity currently resides in an interconnected, rapidly changing and multicultural era, and as a result of this unprecedented connectivity, intercultural human encounters have exponentially increased (OECD 2018; Nelson et al. 2019). Moreover, from an etymological perspective, this rapid change has spawned new terminologies and has thus given rise to a growing family of conceptual approaches to comprehending IC. The shortlist below, by no means exhaustive, identifies a plethora of available terms that have been excerpted from the literature:

‘intercultural competence’ (e.g. Bennett 2004; Deardorff 2006; UNESCO 2007; Potts 2016; Salisbury 2011; Moloney and Genua-Petrovic 2012; Miller and Tucker 2015; Zarnick 2010), ‘cultural competence’ (e.g. Gower et al. 2018; UNESCO 2006), ‘cross-cultural competence’ (e.g. Kitsantas 2004; Wang and Gu 2005; Greenholtz 2010), ‘global competence’ (e.g. OEDC 2018) ‘cultural sensitivity’ (e.g. Zamastil-Vondrova 2011; Commins 2010; Luetz et al. 2019), ‘cultural intelligence’ (Deardorff 2011) ‘intercultural sensitivity’ (e.g. Commins 2010; Zarnick 2010; Potts 2016), ‘intercultural development’ (e.g. Bennett 1986, 1993, 2004), ‘global development’ (e.g. Potts 2016; OECD 2018 ‘cultural awareness’ (e.g. UNESCO 2005; Gower et al. 2018; OECD 2018; Picardo 2012), ‘cross-cultural skills’ (e.g.
Kitsantas 2004; Gower et al. 2018), ‘cross-cultural perception’ (e.g. Zamastil-Vondrova 2011), ‘cross-cultural understanding’ (e.g. Tiessen and Epprecht 2012; Kim 2001), ‘intercultural understanding’ (e.g. Chayakonvikom et al. 2016; Guntersdorfer and Golubeva 2018; Zarnick 2010), ‘global understanding’ (e.g. Kitsantas 2004; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012; Potts 2016) ‘international understanding’ (e.g. Kitsantas 2004; Hadzic 2015; Commins 2010), ‘global mindedness’ (e.g. Zamastil-Vondrova 2011), ‘global citizenship’ (e.g. Tiessen and Epprecht 2012; Potts 2016; Lilley et al. 2015), ‘global civic engagement’ (Potts 2016) ‘global perspectives’ (e.g. Gower et al. 2018; Kim 2001) ‘ethnocentrism’ (Sumner 1908; Bennett 1986, 1993, 2004; Deardorff 2006).

Scrutinising the usage of these terms in the literature, it appears that many of them have a similar meaning and can seemingly be used interchangeably (Monash University 2018). However, ongoing terminological debates have made it hard for academics to agree on a universal nomenclature (Deardorff 2006). Nonetheless, Deardorff (2008), in collaboration with other leading scholars, reached a consensus on a definition and related concepts that encompass IC, which generated the first evidence-based framework definition for IC (Deardorff 2008): ‘Intercultural competence is the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions’ (Deardorff 2006, pp. 241–266). Another prominent definition of IC is offered by Fantini and Tirmizi (2006): ‘a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself’ (p. 12; emphasis original). Because of its prevalence in the literature and its use by leading academics in the field (e.g., Bennett 1986, 1993, 2004; Deardorff 2006, 2008, 2011), this literary study will use the term IC as its terminological concept of choice, along with the definitional approach espoused by Deardorff (2006; above).

### 22.4 Methodological Approaches: Identifying Literature for Review

In order to locate as many relevant publications as possible, educational, social science, psychological and other databases were consulted to identify studies on the effects of intercultural experience through intercultural visits. Following the advice of Creswell and Creswell (2018, pp. 32–34), the search expressly focused upon reports in refereed journals and university publications.

The first search for information on the cross-cultural competence of Australian high school students identified a lack of data and highlighted the need for more empirical studies on this subject. Given that the initial search revealed very little relevant research relating specifically to Australian high school students, the search scope was subsequently widened to include studies on both university students in Australia and high school students in other countries. This wider search was more fruitful and located a range of studies which underpin the findings presented below. In the words of Punch (2016), ‘Raising the level of abstraction of a specific topic
helps to show its connections with the literature’ (p. 71). ‘Good literature reviews are extremely valuable … Therefore, if you find a good literature review, my advice is to use it’ (Punch 2016, p. 74). [A previous literature review featuring digested knowledge on the nexus between IC and sustainable development (Nelson et al. 2019) had given the authors prior orientation about the state of the art surrounding this field of investigation.]

The relevant literature was then read and re-read carefully, with the aim of determining the key concepts of IC and how it is formed and developed. This review also included relevant literature on a Christian worldview surrounding the development of cross-cultural competence and why adolescence is a key age for immersive inter-cultural experiences. The literature was reviewed to identify agreements and consensus from multiple expert sources, and this information was then collated and used to further inform the selection of additional pertinent literature. Once a sufficient overview had been achieved, research findings were synthesised. According to Punch (2016), synthesising involves being critical, examining and critiquing research methods, the generalisability and transferability of the findings, reflecting on quality, consistency and cohesion within the data and in general, stating the known knowledge and defining where the knowledge gaps are, and finally, working towards a framework presentation of integrated thematic literature search-informed perspectives. The following section will present the findings of this search.

22.5 Synthesis of Key Findings

The literature survey illuminated several key themes, which surround cross-cultural experiences and their effects on participants. These key themes are discussed next and are organised as follows: (1) The benefits of cultivating IC; (2) The nexus between cultivating IC, emotional intelligence and academic achievement; (3) The benefits of IC on career aspirations and employability; (4) The duration and purpose of intercultural experiences; (5) Overview of instruments for measuring IC; (6) Ethical considerations; (7) Opportunities for future research.

22.5.1 The Benefits of Cultivating IC

The increasing demand for cross-cultural experiences seems to be overwhelmingly linked to the benefits that participants acquire through such experiences (Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). All studies supported the notion that cross-cultural experiences tend to impact positively on the IC of participants. Sample evidence has been excerpted from research conducted by Salisbury (2011):

Studying abroad significantly affects the positive development of intercultural competence. Furthermore, this effect appears to be general rather than conditional. This analysis found no evidence to indicate that the effect of studying abroad varies systematically between
Researchers Zamastil-Vondrova (2011) and Potts (2015) have similarly reported that cross-cultural immersive experiences spawn several benefits, including greater respect for cultural difference, tolerance and the advancing of attitudes, perceptions and the knowledge of multiculturalism. The OECD report asserts that global understanding ‘can teach young people the importance of challenging cultural biases and stereotypes’ (p. 4), potentially reducing ethno-cultural conflicts and increasing respectful interactions (2018).

These experiences are associated with the development of understanding in areas such as civic engagement, cultural identity, IC, diplomacy, global citizenship and global development (Potts 2016). Zamastil-Vondroa (2011) stated that participants had reported an increased interest in international affairs and news because of their experiences. Kitsantas (2004) recorded that such trips significantly contributed to an increase in cross-cultural skills and global understanding needed to effectively operate in our multicultural world. Potts (2016) affirmed these results, stating that learning abroad tended to foster holistic perspectives and global development prospects, with benefits accruing not only to the individuals themselves but also to national and global stakeholders. She further claimed,

> Australian students construct identity and move towards global citizenship through spending time in multiple contexts… when connected with the social context, these outcomes expand from individual to society as a whole (Potts 2016, pp. 12 and 19).

Language teacher Jose Picardo (2012), who facilitates international experiences for his students, claims:

> working with other people we learn about their cultures and become able to explore new ideas and prospects. Options that would not have occurred to us before stand out as obvious if we understand how other people experience the world… Global awareness and international collaboration during formative years results in more rounded individuals, encouraging our pupils to see things from different perspectives and helping them to make informed decisions, acquiring transferable skills that will be useful to them and will remain with them for life… This is why, I believe, it is so important for students to have a deeper global awareness and understanding of other cultures (para. 3 and 9).

In their study of Australian school students, Moloney and Genua-Petrovic (2012) provide evidence that cross-cultural trips assist students to explore their own culture and acquire techniques of analysis and comparison for other cultures. The study suggests that such intervention facilitates intercultural learning outcomes in students. Dolby (2008) asserts that Australian students who spend time in multiple learning environments and in ‘out of comfort zone’ experiences are more likely to develop a global outlook of comparative thinking and knowledge across cultural and interpersonal barriers that tends to increase their global networks and helps them to become more effective global citizens. According to Manning (2016), since adopting a cross-cultural learning experience into their degree programs, Susquehanna University has become more culturally diverse and culturally aware as a campus, and as a result of this, has seen an enrolment growth in ‘non-white and international students’ (para.
11). Importantly, a clear majority of studies found that IC cannot be fully grasped or acquired in classroom settings but needs to be enriched through processes of immersive experiential learning (Potts 2016; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012).

In summary, research overwhelmingly recognises the positive role that cross-cultural experiences tend to play in the formation and development of IC—immersive inter-cultural experiences encourage students to understand and engage competently with the world around them. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that such trips, in both high school and university settings, are on the rise in many western nations (Potts 2016; Ngo 2014; Gower et al. 2018; Campbell-Price 2014; Kitsantas 2004; Potts 2015; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). However, the literature also appears to converge around the synthesis that there is a paucity of evidence-based data surrounding such experiences, especially in the Australian high school context (Allison and Higgins 2002; Campbell-Price 2014). This dearth of empirical data supports the case for further research in this area.

### 22.5.2 The Nexus Between Cultivating IC, Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement

The literature search also revealed a positive correlation between intercultural experience and emotional intelligence (EI). More specifically, research has demonstrated that immersive cross-cultural experiences have resulted in the development of intrapersonal, interpersonal and cognitive capacity (Potts 2016). According to Mayer et al. (2008), ‘Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to carry out sophisticated information processing about emotions and emotion-relevant stimuli and to use this information as a guide to thinking and behaviour’ (p. 503). Fostering EI capacity is important for overall success in work and in life (Cherniss 2000). Studies also found that cross-cultural experiences can lead to higher levels of emotional resilience and growth in one’s ability to recognise ethical and moral issues. Hence cross-cultural travels were found to accelerate the development of open-mindedness, increase sympathy and patience and foster tolerance and empathy while concurrently reducing ethnocentric attitudes (Kitsantas 2004; Zamastil-Vondrova 2011; Potts 2016; Chieffo and Griffiths 2004; Hadis 2005; Fairchild et al. 2006; Zimmerman and Neyer 2013).

According to Zamastil-Vondrova (2011), most students admitted that prior to the intercultural experience they had misgivings and misconceptions about the nature of people from other cultures and overall aspects of certain regions. However, in a follow-up interview 8 years later, Zamastil-Vondrova (2011) reported a participant’s perspective as follows: ‘It was and still is one of the best things that has ever happened to me and has greatly shaped who I am and who I will become’ (p. 6).

Wagner and Christensen (2015) found that intercultural experiences provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on issues such as social justice and the environment as well as build their confidence to act on such convictions. Furthermore, such experiences seemingly cultivate participants’ commitment, not only to social
justice but also to moral development (Ehrlich 1997; Sax and Austin 1997). In the evocative words of Kraft (1997):

It is within cross-cultural settings within our own society and internationally that the most powerful, life-changing experiential learning can, and often does, occur. We may be shattered by culture shock, but if we persevere, the lessons can be overwhelmingly powerful and life-changing. I believe it is only when all of the cues which prop up our racial, gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural biases are knocked out from under us, that we can begin the process of becoming caring and compassionate people who can reach beyond the individual child in our own culture who is in distress, and begin to reach out to a world filled with millions of suffering and dying people (p. 162).

Moreover, one of the Tiessen and Epprecht’s (2012) participants claimed that the immersive experience essentially constituted ‘[a] unique opportunity for students to gain a deeper understanding of development work, that adds an irreplaceable and enriching dimension to a degree in development studies, and allows for personal and intellectual growth at an unprecedented level’ (p. 4). As shown, learning abroad not only promotes EI but also a sense of intellectual connection to the world (Luo and Jamieson-Drake 2014). Furthermore, Gower et al. (2018) found that students’ placement in other countries enhanced their academic outcomes, and Tiessen and Epprecht (2012) contended that such experiences enriched academic learning with practical, hands-on experience. Relatedly, McLeod et al. (2015) found that such experiences fostered an increase in participants’ internal locus of control compared with those who did not travel.

Finally, Zamastil-Vondrova (2011) also discovered that participants identified a multitude of skills that were strengthened because of this experience including confidence, adaptability, global perspective, leadership, map reading, effective communication, empathy, creativity, valuable travel skills, business etiquette and many more. This led to a more sophisticated interpretation and understanding of basic concepts taught in the classroom.

Not only did these experiences cultivate emotional and academic learning but many students also expressed that cross-cultural trips were the highlight of their education. As one participant stated, ‘[t]his is hands down the most influential, productive, life changing and, downright, best course DEVS has to offer’ (Tiessen and Epprecht 2012, p. 2). When surveyed by Zamastil-Vondrova (2011), 22 of 23 students reported that study abroad was ‘the defining moment of their education, the single most important aspect of their education, the best thing that ever happened to them and that studying overseas was unforgettable’ (p. 5). Notwithstanding these qualitative findings, there was nevertheless a sense that more systematic data collection and analysis would benefit the state of empirical research, especially in the Australian high school context (Allison and Higgins 2002; Campbell-Price 2014). In consequence, more empirical research is needed to build this field of investigation.

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2The Global Development Studies program (DEVS) was conducted at Queen’s University and ‘found overwhelming support for international work-study courses as a way to enrich their academic learning with practical, hands-on experience, and to help launch them into careers’ (Tiessen and Epprecht 2012, p. 2).
22.5.3 The Benefits of IC on Career Aspirations and Employability

In addition to the benefits discussed above, cross-cultural trips abroad also present a multitude of opportunities in furthering career goals and increasing employability (Dolby 2008). Results across several larger-scale studies found that ‘learning abroad influenced [participants’] decision to expand or change academic majors and 62% reported that learning abroad ignited an interest in a career direction’ (Potts 2016, p. 13). Relately, students rated their experience abroad ‘as worthwhile or very worthwhile for increasing their motivation and passion for their chosen career direction’ (Potts 2016, p. 13) and ultimately developed ‘a better idea what [they] want to do after graduation’ (Brandenburg et al. 2014, p. 110). Furthermore, Dwyer (2004b) found in his research across intercultural, academic, personal and vocational benefits that the largest reported difference was in career impact. This has already prompted several leading institutions to design courses and programs that combine career advising with a learning abroad experience (Potts 2016; Bracht et al. 2006).

In summary, several studies postulate that not only do cross-cultural experiences enrich study and help inform career pathways but they also increase employability by launching participants into careers, as employers rate cross-cultural acumen as a highly desirable attribute (Potts 2016; Zarnick 2010; OCED 2018; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). Notwithstanding this predominantly positive perception, there is nevertheless a sense that more systematic empirical studies are useful to further enhance understanding of the Australian high school context (Allison and Higgins 2002; Campbell-Price 2014). In short, building this field of investigation will require more empirical research.

22.5.4 The Duration and Purpose of Intercultural Experiences

With demand for cross-cultural experiences increasing, short-term programs have emerged as a popular alternative to longer term experiences. This can be attributed to making destinations more accessible, keeping down costs and decreasing demands on time (Potts 2016). This popularity is reflected in statistics, which show that in the USA 62% of all cross-cultural immersive experiences were short (Institute for International Education 2015), and in Australia around 55% of programs were under 10 weeks (Australian Universities International Directors Forum 2015).

Notwithstanding the apparent popularity of short-term trips, there remains an ongoing academic debate about the value of concise experiences in comparison to semester or longer programs (Potts 2016; Hartlan 2011). Nevertheless, across the areas of IC, EI, academic attainment, personal growth and career impact, ‘students in short-term trips reported significant and lasting effects up to 50 years later’ (Potts 2016, p. 7) and in some cases, short-term participants claimed stronger effects than
semester-length participants (Murphy-Lejeune 2002). According to The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE 2007), ‘[i]t appears that the amount of time one is abroad is not as important as whether a student has such an experience. This suggests that there is value in increasing the number of short-term cross-cultural or “study away” opportunities for students’ (p. 17).

In short, there is support in the literature for well-designed short-term experiences, which can have significant long-term benefits for participants (Dwyer 2004b; Shiveley and Misco 2015).

### 22.5.5 Overview of Instruments for Measuring IC

As intercultural educational programs continue to proliferate, the accurate measurement of competencies is a vital success factor for valid and reliable conclusions (Greenholtz 2010). Leading thinkers in the field of intercultural understanding have developed widely used and accepted models and instruments for measuring IC. An overview of popular approaches is summarised in Table 22.1.

### 22.5.6 Ethical Considerations

From an ethical perspective, intercultural learning experiences can also enhance moral development, understanding of ethical issues and commitment to social justice issues (Sax and Austin 1997; Potts 2016; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). In their research, Willis (2012) and Rennick (2012) discuss the significance of religion in the field of international live-learn experiences and how beliefs can drive the desire for such experiences. Both also highlight the need for closer examination of the specific motives and experiences of religious-based experiences. Epprecht warns of the power imbalance that can occur if the motivations of participants are purely about their own learning and the need to quench a moral desire (Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). Andreotti (2011) puts it crudely, warning that this notion can lead to an unintended ‘narcissistic approach to activism’ (p. 151). This concern is central to ethical dilemmas surrounding the topic (cf. Holliday 2012; Luetz and Havea 2018; Luetz 2019b). However, this is not the intention of most such experiences and drawing attention to this issue and the need for empowerment of host nations or communities is thus highlighted as far more profitable for the effective planning and implementation of such trips (Tiessen and Epprecht 2012).

Another major ethical issue is that the often-prohibitive cost of travelling abroad can make such an experience unattainable for some (Allison and Higgins 2002; Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). Therefore, of paramount consideration must be the safeguard to prevent these experiences from becoming ‘a rite of passage or holidays for the wealthy upper-middle class dressed up to be education to ease the conscience’ (Allison and Higgins 2002, p. 24).
Table 22.1  Overview of the key dimensions in IC-related research

Milton Bennett—Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

The DMIS looks at IC as a progressive and developmental process (Bennett 1986, 1993, 2004). The DMIS is based upon on a constructivist view and reflects how one’s world is formed in terms of understanding cultural differences between oneself and other distinct groups (Pedersen n. d.; see also Bennett 1986, 1993, 2004).

Mitchel R. Hammer—Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)

Based on the work of Bennett, Hammer developed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). It is “constructed to measure the orientations toward cultural differences described in the DMIS. The result of this work is a 50-item (with 10 additional demographic items), paper-and-pencil measure of intercultural competence” (Hammer et al. 2003 p. 421). Hammer (2012) states: “The IDI has been rigorously tested and has cross-cultural generalizability across both international and domestic diversity” (p. 117).

Geert Hofstede—Six Dimensions of Culture Model

As a leader in intercultural understanding Hofstede (2011) developed a model that consists of six dimensions of culture. He defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (p. 3). The six dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede 2011). For intercultural interactions, these six dimensions serve as a concise, accessible, and useful tool for developing an understanding of different cultures, values and beliefs.

Emotional Intelligence—Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Scale (MSCEIS)

The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) is an ability-based test designed to measure the four branches of El described in their model. The four levels of the MSCEIS are perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions (Salovey and Grewal 2005). MSCEIT uses the format of intelligence testing to measure the emerging scientific understanding of emotions and their function, specifically El. The MSCEIT consists of 141 items and takes 30–45 min to complete (Salovey et al. 2003).

Empathy—Toronto Empathy Scale (TEQ)

One of the leading measures of empathy is the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), developed by researchers Spreng, McKeown, Mar and Levine as a self-report measure to efficiently and reliably assess empathy as an emotional process. The finished product is the TEQ “a self-report style, uni-dimensional, 16-item, five-point Likert type scale developed to assess the empathy levels of individuals” (Totan et al. 2012, p. 179).

It is crucial that much thoughtful planning goes into the preparation for such trips (Tiessen and Epprecht 2012). There is currently a campaign for greater regulation and professionalisation of cross-cultural learning experiences as it is claimed that the potential accreditation of these trips could help mitigate ethical issues and contribute to the overall safety and quality of such experiences (Allison and Higgins 2002).
22.5.7 Opportunities for Future Research

In synthesis, as exposted by the literature search above, multiple knowledge gaps persist in relation to the IC of Australian high school students. This conclusion validates the need for further research in this area. There are several useful avenues for conducting future quantitative, qualitative and/or mixed methods research, and Sect. 22.5.5 lists popular quantitative data collection instruments. From a qualitative paradigm of research inquiry, phenomenology would appear to be one appropriate methodological approach as its design is chiefly ‘concerned with questions of how individuals make sense of the world around them’ (Bryman 2016, p. 26).

22.6 Concluding Reflections: The Timely Benefits of Cultivating IC

This literature search explored multiple themes, which emerged from the search criteria, including in areas of cultivating IC, EI, academic achievement, career choice and employability, duration, purpose and ethics. The findings suggest that short-term, cross-cultural experiences can help students to function as more enlightened, sensitised and responsible global citizens in this increasingly globalised, complex, multipolar and multicultural world (Luetz 2019a). Furthermore, it can be expected that as our world continues to globalise (should this be possible in a COVID-19 world; Sect. 22.7 below), the demand for IC-enhancing experiences, not only from students but also from employers, may continue to increase (Kitsantas 2004; Unger and Luetz 2019). Notwithstanding, the literature search also identified a lack of IC-knowledge relating specifically to the Australian high school context. More specifically, ‘growth in participation in these trips has not been matched by academic attention or analysis’ (Campbell-Price 2014, p. i). Consequently, with limited data available in the area of short-term intercultural experiences, especially in relation to Australian high school students, the literature search scope was ultimately widened to additionally encapsulate Australian university students and data from North American sources. In synthesis, the foregoing literature search converges around the finding that more empirical research is needed into the impacts of short-term cross-cultural exposure trips on the IC-formation of high school students, both in Australia and beyond. More specifically, the analysis presented above suggests fertile opportunities for future research to investigate the benefits of immersive cross-cultural exposure trips for adolescents, the development of cultural literacy, and how best to implement processes of experiential learning in different school settings. A better understanding of the linkages between immersive cross-cultural experiences, IC and Christian education holds the obvious promise that policymakers, educators, pastors and other relevant stakeholders and duty bearers may more effectively leverage such experiential learning for the betterment of inter-cultural human relations. As massive recent racial protests have shown in countries around the world, racial inequity is
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perceived to be a ubiquitous contemporary crisis (Harmon et al. 2020), including in Australia (Anthony 2020; BBC 2020) and in ‘every corner of America’ (Burch et al. 2020). With many of the problems linked to both ‘systemic’ and ‘academic’ undercurrents (Harmon et al. 2020), there is a clear need for more IC-enhancing experiences and immersive or ‘embodied’ pedagogies (Buxton et al. 2021). While conventional classroom education mostly conveys information and thereby overwhelmingly aims to ‘convert and convince the ‘head’ [rather] than enthral and enchant the heart’ (Luetz et al. 2020, p. 7), this strategy may no longer be adequate. In view of both persistent and pervasive racial inequities, there seems to be an increasingly urgent case for Academia to confront new perils with new pedagogies. The reason is that in today’s postmodern, post-fact and post-truth era, conventional classroom education seems to be ostensibly inept at promoting and sustaining inter-culturally attuned human behaviours, at least not to the extent that this appears to be needed. Immersive and ‘soulful’ educational experiences with, and importantly, in other countries and cultures, will invariably foster more IC, more inter-cultural literacy, and ultimately, more inter-culturally sympathetic human behaviours. This chapter has sought to gently, respectfully but insistently argue, both on the basis of the authors’ lived experiences and on the basis of the literature, that to thrive in this world, humanity must unite to proactively cultivate IC as a ‘new kind of literacy’ (Nelson et al. 2019), which has already been conceptualised as the ‘literacy of the future’ (UNESCO 2007; OECD 2018). This aspiration is supported by all of the world’s major religions (Armstrong 2012). In the words of a great Christian, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours’ (Tutu 1991, p. 35).

22.7 Postscript—Nurturing Intercultural Competency in a COVID-19 World?

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) a pandemic, thereby fast bringing disruption to both international travel and what had been (until then) the most interconnected and globalised society ever (OECD 2018; Nelson et al. 2019). At that time, this book chapter had been largely finalised with a pre-COVID-19 frame of the world. However, many changes since then have raised pointed questions about both the future of globalisation and the likely prospects of nurturing IC in an intra- or post-COVID-19 world (WHO 2020; Ducharme 2020; Enderle 2020). There is now a timely moment to take fresh stock of what the pandemic may imply, both for IC-development and its application to practice. Selected questions and implications are explored in this postscript.

Perhaps the challenge most pertinent to this discussion is the nearly complete disappearance of international travel (Gössling et al. 2020; Fitz-Gibbon 2020; Leal Filho et al. 2020). As a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the far-reaching physical distancing measures that have been implemented to contain it (Hsiang et al.
there are now fundamental global changes unfolding, which include the near-certain onset of a severe global recession, the possibility of peak or de-globalisation3, and the increased reliance on digital communications in place of interpersonal contact, among others (Díaz et al. 2020; Sułkowski 2020; Wells et al. 2020). Due to the varying responses of individual countries, at this stage it seems to be largely impossible to forecast the depth and breadth of future changes, albeit already the ‘[v]irtualization of communication seems to be an important change’ (Sułkowski 2020, p. 2). Evidently, COVID-19 travel restrictions have mostly put on hold prospects for the development of IC by ‘immersive’ cross-cultural experience, given that international air travel from and to many countries is presently impossible or even prohibited, including in Australia (Gössling et al. 2020; Besser 2020). At the time of finalising this postscript (June 2020), the Australian Government Department of Health has the following notice posted on its website: ‘There is a ban on all overseas travel, with few exceptions. Since 25 March 2020, all Australian citizens and permanent residents have been prohibited from travelling out of Australia unless granted an exemption’.4

In this context, the question arises whether virtual forms of communication can rise up to the challenge of the moment and purposefully engender cross-culturally immersive experiences? Relatedly, with ‘immersion’ currently limited to the two-dimensional size of a computer (or mobile phone) screen, can virtualisation usher in meaningful intercultural communication, given that this format tends to mask or conceal many of the vital clues, styles, mannerisms, voice intonations, etc. that typically characterise full-bodied interpersonal encounters? (Goettsch 2016; Holtbrügge et al. 2013; Zakaria et al. 2020). Social scientists are already seemingly concerned about how the increased use of technology may impact on ‘normal, instinctual’ forms of human communication (Morris 2020). The challenges are multifarious and include: constantly seeing an on-screen image of oneself, an obvious inability to read full-body language, a lack of real-time feedback, the digital divide eclipsing large parts of the global population, and the fact that many people are just seemingly not ‘wired’ to connect via screen or phone for extended periods of time (Morris 2020; Sander and Bauman 2020). The new terms ‘online meeting fatigue’, ‘zoom exhaustion’ or ‘video chat fatigue’ give an idea of some of the challenges involved (Digital Market Media 2020; Morris 2020; NSW Health 2020).

A relevant example is discussed by Uono and Hietanen (2015), whose research reported eye contact behaviour differing significantly between cultures. For instance, while maintaining eye contact during social interaction may be more culturally appropriate for Western Europeans, it tends to be less so for East Asians. More specifically, studies have demonstrated that Japanese people showed less eye contact than Canadians during face-to-face interaction (McCarthy et al. 2006, 2008). It would seem that a virtual communication context could make simple gestures or mannerisms,

3 ‘De-globalisation’ has been defined as the ‘reversing certain effects of globalization’ (Sułkowski 2020, p. 3).

4 https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-travellers.
including eye contact, far more prone to being misinterpreted. While the authors of this chapter cannot be sure how COVID-19 will ultimately impact on IC formation, it seems to be already clear that the use of digitally mediated interaction is seemingly adding an extra layer of analysis through which communication will need to be translated and deciphered (Zakaria et al. 2020).

If cross-cultural communication is to remain largely constrained to an on-screen format for the foreseeable future, it is an open question how effectively (mis)understandings may be engendered and managed (or missed). One possible outcome could be that virtual communication may establish its own norms, mannerisms, communication styles and subcultures, which may be altogether distinct from—or superimposed on—‘ethnic’ culture (Diehl and Prins 2008; Unger et al. 2021). While limited vision of the world (and other people) through a camera lens (or computer screen) is preferable to having no vision or interaction at all, it would seem that reliance on virtual conferencing can never be a complete substitute for true, immersive and full-bodied cross-cultural experiences. This principle is reflected in the famous scripture on love and partial knowledge, which this postscript has adapted for the contemporary COVID-19 context: ‘For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror [computer screen]; then we shall see face to face [in person]. Now I know in part [via audiovisual senses]; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known [via full-bodied meeting]’ (1. Cor. 13:12, NIV).

To conclude, while this postscript cannot exhaustively analyse (let alone answer) how a post-COVID-19 future may impact on IC-formation, the question remains how relevant research can be meaningfully carried out if international interpersonal contact remains enduringly curtailed in the wake of the (still unfolding) pandemic? (cf. Daoud 2020) This is certainly a significant challenge that future research projects will need to overcome. As authors, we dare not make a prediction. As the Danish physicist Niels Bohr (1885–1962) famously said, ‘[p]rediction is very difficult, especially about the future’ (cited in Brown 2008, p. 21).

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