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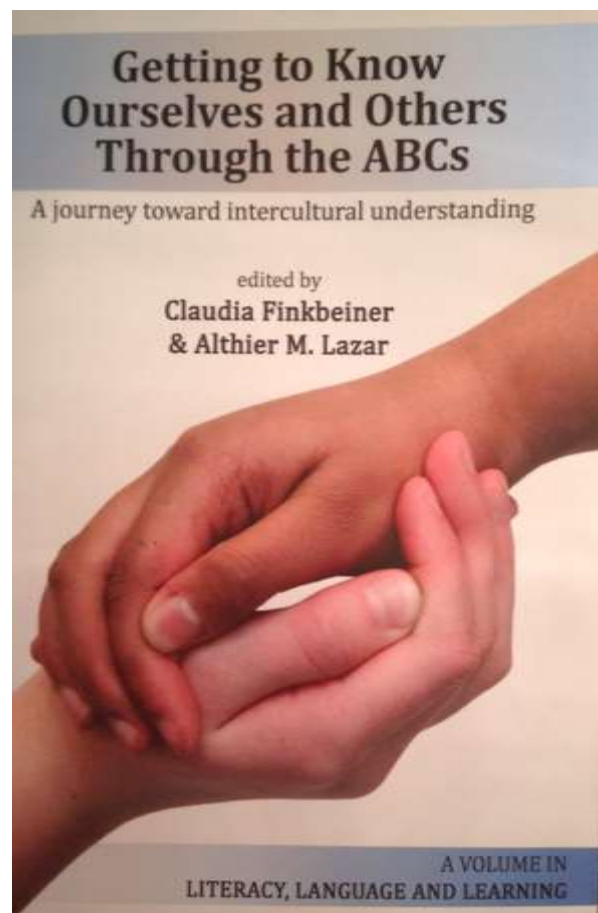
Finkbeiner C. & Lazar, A. (2015). *Getting to know ourselves and others through the ABCs: A journey toward intercultural understanding*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

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Getting to Know Ourselves and Others Through the ABCs: A Journey Toward Intercultural Understanding is an excellent resource for educators and other professionals in search of cross-cultural awareness development and communication. Experts in the field of teaching, intercultural communication, and language and literacy, Dr. Claudia Finkbeiner and Dr. Althier M. Lazar draw on trans-Atlantic research conducted in the United States, Canada, and Europe concerning the implementation of the ABCs model of Cultural Understanding and Communication. “The ABCs model includes the writing of an autobiography, interviewing people from other language, economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, analyzing life stories with an emphasis on understanding differences, and creating culturally responsive literacy ideas across the curriculum.” (p. 3) This model has been successful in the sense that current and prospective teachers, who use and experience it, undergo an increased understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, which



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benefits both teaching in multicultural classrooms and connecting home, school, and community for literacy learning. After self-analyzing their own successes and sufferings in their lives and the cultural influences and environments that shaped them, teachers at all stages of their career seem better prepared to serve and be more empathetic toward their future students. Refined through the TRANSABCs, *Dissemination and Adaptation of the ABCs of Cultural Understanding and Communication* (Finkbeiner & Lazar, 2015), an international project involving more than a dozen researchers, the model in this volume examines related topics, such as identity, culture, power and inequality, literacy, intercultural communication, curriculum, and culturally responsive teaching. By the use of introspective narratives and other instruments, such as the Transcultural Competence Scale (TCC), the book inspires readers to initiate—or to continue—and promote personal journeys toward greater cultural understanding and sensitivity. The stories, reflections, findings, and conclusions in this book will help teachers and professionals better understand diversity and will provide a starting point to plan culturally responsive lessons that meet both individual needs and public demands.

The number of publications related to linguistic and cultural diversity is expanding exponentially. Michael Byram, in his particularly pertinent foreword to the volume, points out that “it has become almost ritualistic to introduce such books by reference to globalization and internationalization” (p. ix). Previous works of considerable relevance including Verhelst, Van Avermaet, Takala, Figueras, and North’s *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2009), and Sercu and Bandura’s *Foreign Language Teachers and Intercultural Competence: An International Investigation*, (2005), are now complemented by this publication. Additionally, Sercu’s *Professional Identity* (2006) also delves into the characteristics of the intercultural competent teacher and the concern about the common

lack of such competence in the foreign language teaching field. This publication constitutes an important contribution to the field of intercultural awareness and communication.

This book starts with a clear and concise justification and explanation of the components that comprise TRANSABCs’ research study, which was carried out in college and university campuses in Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and Spain in Europe, and New York, California, Michigan, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania in the United States. The editors take the reader on a journey into the rationale and context behind the methods and instruments employed, as well as into the findings and discussions emerging from studies conducted by over a dozen researchers. Each of them draws on different perspectives around the ABCs model, connected by the main thread of the book: diversity. Evidence of the effect of the project can be seen in the participants’ narratives, which have been pertinently quoted throughout this edition and strongly suggest growth processes in awareness of and appreciation for other cultures. Their contributions are filled with words such as *differences, perceptions, judgments, assumptions, similarities, common interests, understanding, appreciation and cooperation*. The construction and organization of the book facilitates a broadened study of the ABCs model through 14 neatly parceled chapters, each written by different researchers, composed of several defining parts that maintain a sense of continuity throughout the volume.

A brief introduction and the first two chapters frame and explain the intentions of this international study, rooted in the various applications of the ABCs model, and discuss validation issues and the role of language in the project. A subsequent third chapter that includes an exemplary ABCs project opens the gate for an account of teacher explorations of various issues, such as a foundation for culturally responsive teaching, power and inequality, otherization and non-otherization

strategies, identity, literacy, action in the world, teacher understanding of different cultures, critical intercultural development, literacy coaching, and gender concerns.

The content of the remaining chapters of this volume is based on adaptations of the ABCs model made by committed scholars across the world who participated in the project. Each researcher has utilized the model through his or her own theoretical or practical lens, and generated distinctive data, which subsequent analyses have drawn particular conclusions. Not surprisingly, each researcher connected his or her perspective to a particular purpose that the ABCs model helped serve. Nevertheless, at least three themes can be identified in these unique chapters.

Chapters four to thirteen show how the ABCs model, can be used, on the one hand, to explore and improve teachers' cultural competence and communication with home, school, community and literacy coaches; and on the other, how the model can be utilized to actually improve their culturally responsive teaching methods and resources. In addition, reflections upon the impact, benefits and limitations of the ABCs model can be found in the conclusion of every chapter. These chapters challenge readers to reflect on questions such as "What does it imply to teach intercultural competence and extend it to world citizenship?" and "Why should teachers teach intercultural competence?" Additionally, critical pedagogy and critical literacies are suggested as instruments to help transform/translate social inequalities into instructional practices that help develop students' critical consciousness.

The last chapter of the book summarizes the contributions from the chapter authors and provides ideas for possible adaptations of the ABCs model. This final chapter reinforces the idea of the responsibility of teachers to promote cultural understanding and communication as a means of resolving cultural conflict. It reminds the reader of the rich multilingual and multicultural funds of knowledge (Moll,

Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) that are often unrecognized and undervalued in schools. Most importantly, it strongly advocates for the enormous value of the ABCs model of Cultural Understanding and Communication's potential for cross-national implementation. This last section also discusses the models' limitations, future directions and challenges, and reflections that convey a tone of trust and belief that something can be done to better this world through intercultural understanding.

Limitations of the ABCs model include factors related to the participants' language choice in their assignments, and the fact that the model does not train students to challenge the status quo in their analysis papers, nor does it provide instructions on how to engage participants in critical explorations. While the book's acknowledgement of model's limitations is noteworthy, future edition should include a set of selected lessons developed by teachers that have taken part in this project. Similarly, a clearer answer would be appreciated to the following research question:

After experiencing the ABCs of Cultural Understanding and Communication in their one-semester course work, would present and future teachers as well as students targeted for the workplace know how to implement culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms, schools and the workplace? (p. 37)

Readers would benefit from further explanations and examples of how teachers actually implement culturally-responsive teaching after having gone through the program. An appendix with selected data might quantitatively highlight the transformation undergone by so many teachers in the program and accentuate the effectiveness of the ABCs model. Finally, diagrams that help explain the main concepts

of this publication, such as the scope of the research, culture, identity, or the otherization/nonotherization tension inherent to the ABCs model might also be useful.

To summarize, this book responds to the formidable educational challenge that the 21st century, with unstoppable, large-scale migration taking place throughout the world, poses by promoting reflection about cultural diversity and intercultural understanding and communication. A compilation of scholarly research papers, this book provides the reader with a number of insights and examples of intercultural contacts, educational applications, and implications.

Today, we live in a world that has broken down the traditional notions of nation-state and citizenship. Increasing numbers of

people choose to “communicate” with (and be recognized by) other people “like them” across the globe. Thanks to modern technology, individuals might possibly feel as if they share more in common with people far from them than they do with those closer by (Reich, 1992), people with whom they used to feel a sense of “co-citizenship” (Gee, 2000, p. 114). By presenting trans-Atlantic research stemming from applications of the ABCs model of Cultural Understanding and Communication, this volume points the way to deeper reflection on the position and purpose of teachers and students in today’s multicultural world, a world where living and working together seems more and more necessary and inevitable.


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About the Reviewer

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