

Implementing a cross-cultural teaching: issues to know

As people from different cultural groups take on the exciting challenge of studying or working together, cultural values sometimes conflict. But are classroom teachers adequately prepared to teach and interact with this culturally and linguistically diverse population? The purpose of this study is to examine the problems of cross-cultural teaching and find some ways of their solution.

If teachers are to become effective cross-cultural communicators, it is essential to understand the role that culture plays within the multi-cultural school setting. Lustig and Koester [4] define culture as "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people.

Speaking about intercultural communication during the educational process and its problems, we can imagine to ourselves different kinds of interaction forms. Misunderstanding in intercultural communication is a potential problem, which is based on cultural differences. It is necessary to try to overcome it, to closely monitor the reaction of the interlocutor and, noting inadequate, from our point of view, correct their behavior, their speech. Stella Ting-Toomey describes three ways in which culture interferes with effective cross-cultural understanding [1]. Firstly, it is what she calls "cognitive constraints." Secondly, there are "behavior constraints." Ting-Toomey's third factor is "emotional constraints."

Ethan F. Becker suggests a three-part fix for cross-cultural communication problems [2]:

1. Paraphrase. Repeat what others say in your own words to confirm your understanding.

2. Define terms. When it's your turn to speak, invest time in creating common definitions of terms; be patient, and plan for extra time for this.

3. Never assume. Don't take it for granted that everyone uses terms in the same way. Tone of voice may suggest understanding, but that isn't proof that both of you are on the same page. Always double-check.

Not all academics, nor students, would necessarily welcome cross-cultural interventions in universities. Inevitably, obstacles will arise, but these can be overcome. A number of models have emerged that could be usefully harnessed by tertiary institutions embarking on teaching and learning programs for staff and students. One such conceptual framework is that suggested by Leask [3], which allows for 'all staff and all students to be supported in similar ways to achieve incremental goals'. Leask's framework explains how it is possible to develop the international perspectives of both staff and students as 'intercultural learners' in 'intercultural conversation' while they manage their 'intercultural environment'.

Generally speaking, there are many things teachers can routinely do to facilitate the process of cross-cultural teaching and learning. The best solution is involving students in research through their participation in scientific student conferences, through the organization of competitions and contests, and other educational events.

Literature

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4. Lustig, M. W., and Koester, J. (2003). Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.