Preface

As we consider the culturally diverse classroom as the focus setting for this volume, it is necessary to define the parameters of the classroom itself. Generally, the notion of a classroom begins with the traditional description of a building in which there are a number of enclosed spaces with walls, desks, students, and teachers. But is a “classroom” restricted to this traditional description, or is the crucial, undisputable factor in the construct of “classroom” the fact that it is a setting—of indeterminate location—in which learning takes place? We argue that the classroom is not a room at all, but rather a broader learning space—whether physically or cognitively described—where participants expand their previously-existing schema, thereby developing a potentially ever-changing perspective on their role in reference to, in interaction with, and in collaboration with others.

It is important to realize that whenever and wherever we are engaged in interacting, collaborating, or listening to and speaking with others, we are communicating. Our communication with others, however, is not restricted to words. In fact, when we carefully choose and express words, we are attending to only a small segment of our interaction because, in reality, our communication is largely nonverbal. Our nonverbal behavior, including “gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, dress, body language, the rituals (such as courtesies) one observes,” (Novinger, 2001) imparts a message to others, and most often this message is, at least in part, wordless.

We have heard the adage that we are a “product of our culture.” Our culture has a deep and sustained impact on what we do. Our culture teaches us our behavior from birth, both through words and modeling. As we interact with significant individuals with whom we share our day-to-day social spaces—at home, at school, in houses of worship, at family gatherings or community events—we absorb the expectations and patterns of behavior of our cultural group. We incorporate these behaviors, and they become part of us.

When we examine this concept of communication, we realize that, in all interactions, we are communicating continuously, and often without deliberate thought and planning. However, this is not always the best practice. We must recognize the impact of intentionality—behaving and speaking in ways that we plan deliberately—in order to accomplish a particular purpose. We must carefully consider the ways in which we interact verbally and nonverbally when we are engaged in conversation: both when we speak and listen.

Reflecting first-hand on how utilization of culturally responsive materials and intercultural communication can make or break opportunities for effective and culturally appropriate interactions is key. However, even when the best intentions are present, this is not always an easy task due, first, to the frequent mismatch of cultural backgrounds between community groups and the facilitators of these interactions, and also to the wide diversity of cultural backgrounds and experiences among multiple groups participating in educational opportunities tailored to meet their needs.
Preface

We argue that meaningful interactions between facilitators of culturally responsive and intercultural interactions and communities that have often been underrepresented in educational efforts requires the incorporation of a set of dispositions and knowledge consistent with successful evidence-based practices that can be adapted based on individual and group needs. In addition, the concept of partnerships versus interventions, especially when working closely with communities that have been underrepresented, must be taken into consideration since creating an authentic partnership requires a dynamic between participants that goes beyond one group “fixing” a situation while the other group “adapts” to a specific condition shared or provided. How we develop partnerships and how educational efforts are framed is important. We argue that alignment between actions and knowledge must exist in order for learning spaces to truly represent an environment that welcomes diverse perspectives, meaningful learning, and opportunities for shared growth among all participants.

CHALLENGES

In order to connect research and practice related to both culturally responsive and intercultural communication, it is essential to welcome varied perspectives, to understand community needs, and to work toward a common mission. This kind of multi-faceted understanding requires all participants to communicate effectively and to be mindful listeners of shared perspectives while being willing to take risks to engage in discussions that may not always be easy. In addition, it is important to consider how, at times, the misconceptions and the perpetuation of myths about different communities create social and physical barriers influencing the way participants may think, share, or hear information. Combatting this requires the sensitivity to address needs in a safe, respectful, and flexible learning space. Even when these barriers are not present, a challenge remains: how to help all participants—both facilitators and community members—to become collaborators in a shared and common learning space in which specific dispositions and background knowledge can be acquired, practiced, discussed, and adapted as needed.

SOLUTIONS

Solutions to challenges related to communication, culturally responsive practices and intercultural communication between diverse groups participating in educational efforts begin with the willingness of facilitators to develop an action-oriented “learning space” blueprint in which multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives are welcomed and shared. The concept of a learning space blueprint for educational efforts allows for the necessary organization and structure to be in place with built-in flexibility to make ongoing and needed adaptations to current and future practices.

Another important consideration is the need to reject the “deficit” model when beginning educational efforts and instead treat each learning opportunity as a way to gain additional experiences toward the building of a much broader in-depth understanding of the strengths everyone brings to the experience. In addition, sensitivity and willingness to seek out support and the right resources is paramount.
ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book provides opportunities for readers to reflect upon specific examples of ways research in education, psychology, language learning, diversity, sociology, neuroscience, and education can provide strong frameworks for the incorporation of evidence-based practices to support the active use of intercultural communication and culturally responsive pedagogy in educational and community settings seeking to enhance culturally responsive practices.

By using an inter/multidisciplinary lens, readers will have the opportunity to focus on ways that evidence-based practices related to intercultural communication and culturally responsive practices can be adapted and generalized to a variety of settings using a collaborative, rather than an intervention approach.

This book is also suitable for those interested in ways group dynamics and effective communication practices can help support the way learning spaces are developed and sustained. Practitioners in the area of education (administrators, community members, and educators) will also find the book helpful as a source of reference for current and future work with families, students, and colleagues related to intercultural communication and culturally responsive practices.

The intended audience for this book includes in-service and pre-service teachers at various levels of their higher education studies as well as faculty members and staff in university departments working in different capacities to enhance intercultural communication between community members and students participating in field hours or service-learning experiences with diverse populations. Community leaders, faculty, and university staff may find the international and national perspectives a wonderful opportunity to learn about the work from researchers from around the world.

It is our hope that readers will find the chapters enlightening and will reflect upon ways their own educational practices can be reinforced or enhanced. Chapters focus on a range of topics, from theoretical frameworks to help readers consider possible foundations for their work to reflections on specific research and experiences leading to anticipated—or unanticipated—outcomes and areas for further consideration. Some of the authors’ own reflections about the impact of their experiences are also included, with global to local perspectives adding to the existing body of work.

The overall goal of the Handbook is not to have readers “reinvent the wheel,” but to provide readers with the opportunity to consider the impact of their work, and how being sensitive to the diverse needs of all participants might lead to intentional action that can enhance overall outcomes. Reflecting on the rationale for implementing certain practices, anticipated outcomes, actual impact of practices, how didactic practices and experiential learning intersect, the role of each member in the learning spaces created, and the ways in which learning and collaborating with others can help further this important work.

Although chapters flow smoothly from one to the next even when read out-of-order, they are organized into clusters with specific themes to assist readers in considering multiple perspectives related to similar work and focus.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1: In this chapter, the authors explore the components needed for planning and conducting a culturally responsive workshop specifically tailored to meet the needs of Mexican mothers participating in an early childhood literacy learning after-school program in the United States. Intercultural connections, strategies and techniques are also provided.
Chapter 2: The author shares pedagogues’ narratives as they reflect on their experiences in teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds and needs. The implications for teaching and learning in ways that recognize and honor cultural differences are also discussed.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 is a description of a culturally consonant approach to character education for youths of color. This approach focuses on enhancing academic self-efficacy, school belonging, and civic engagement as well as intercultural communication. The authors present an overview of a culturally sensitive framework that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of culturally consonant character programs.

Chapter 4: The author provides, from a neuroscience perspective, opportunities for readers to consider the implications of classroom environments that take into consideration students’ “homeostatic drives” and “states of equilibrium” to impact learning.

Chapter 5: The author provides a curriculum design focusing on culture that was specifically developed for undergraduate students in a teacher education program. Both the meaning of culturally responsiveness and ways the curriculum helped teachers consider their own culturally responsive pedagogy are explored.

Chapter 6: The authors describe the use of a cognitive framework for analyzing the strengths and challenges of a university-high school partnership focused on using an English Language Arts workshop. Implications of authors’ findings for a variety of stakeholders are also provided.

Chapter 7: The author describes the development and implementation of a school-home interactive curriculum for Spanish/English Dual Language Immersion Bilingual Program. Collaborative practices between educators and families are discussed.

Chapter 8: The author presents an analysis of the ways in which the public library services and programs impact the lives of Mexican mothers whose children attend United States public schools. The author explores current challenges in the provision of services and identifies suggestions for improving outreach efforts and support.

Chapter 9: As a result of changes in the Brazil National School system that increased the required number of years of elementary school from eight to nine years, grade one students from diverse cultural backgrounds were moved from a play-based preschool to elementary school settings. This resulted in curriculum changes that replaced the learning-through-play focus of instruction with a more structured grade-based curriculum that reduced opportunities for individualization. Concerns about these changes led to questions about the effectiveness of educating very young children in a typical school – like academically-focused setting.

Chapter 10: Chapter 10 focuses on ethical and cultural considerations that should be in place for when providing early intervention behavioral services for children with autism. The impact and outreach of a non-profit organization founded in Peru is discussed.

Chapter 11: This chapter explores the need for valid and reliable secondary-level vocabulary instruction. Since students at the secondary level currently lack vocabulary knowledge, specifically in content areas, the need to explore practical strategies that teachers can implement readily is essential.

Chapter 12: The author discusses a project for connecting communities in the United States and Mexico, bringing together migrant families following years of separation. The author focuses on the project's history, the individual stories of members who migrated and of those who stayed in their homeland, and the ways in which the details of this project provide an opportunity for classroom study.

Chapter 13: The author provides examples on ways Allport’s intergroup contact hypothesis was tested during a course for freshmen working with West African community. The impact of the experience is discussed and how it affected the development of meaningful relationships with the community.
Chapter 14: Chapter 14 follows the journey of an African-American teacher educator and her efforts to provide pre-service teachers with tools to reflect upon culturally responsive practices to meet the diverse needs of the 21st century learners. The author discusses some of the challenges she faced, her reflections on those challenges, and ways she adapted her course to provide needed experiences to impact the learning of her students.

Chapter 15: Policy guidelines in South Africa that require research and teaching to integrate community engagement have stimulated growth of service-learning. Chapter 15 discusses a research study that examined the level of reciprocal engagement experienced by students and community members during higher education placements and internships. The authors offer curriculum suggestions while carefully considering the interdisciplinary impact and the internationality of the experiences.

Chapter 16 examines a model for a first-year reflective tutorial that utilizes conversations and research about global cultural narratives as well as experiential observation and analysis. The model promotes the effective communication and diversity awareness needed to fuel students’ cross-cultural critical thinking both at the higher education level and in preparation for future endeavors.

Chapter 17 explores the ways in which a study abroad program combines three high-impact educational experiences—freshman seminar, service-learning, and global learning—to promote cultural sensitivity and communication in the classroom and abroad through experiential learning in the form of service-learning.

Chapter 18: The authors discuss the impact well-crafted study abroad and service learning opportunities can have on the experiences of pre-service teachers attending a Catholic University that focuses on social justice. Catholic social teachings are discussed.

Chapter 19 focuses on an international service-learning experience through which faculty and students from a US physical therapy program used problem-based learning to provide an educational workshop for their partners in Merida, Mexico. The use of Spanish-language materials and collaborative learning techniques provided support that essentially eliminated cultural and language barriers and enabled participants to benefit from the problem-solving approach.

Chapter 20: The authors discuss the implementation of Service Learning at their University and provide results of a questionnaire regarding students’ motivation, characteristics, and overall experiences.

Chapter 21: The author provides examples of ways a constructivist-based and learning style responsive pedagogy can impact competencies of 21st century learners. A discussion of global citizenship is provided.

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REFERENCE