Chapter 1

Embracing Student Diversity: Developing Intercultural Competence With ICT

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ABSTRACT

With an increased focus on internationalization and the worldwide rising enrollment of international students, faculty are recognizing the advantages of transforming their curricula to meet the needs of a diverse student population. International students often experience academic and social dissonance in new learning environments. Information and communication technologies (ICT) offer alternative ways of interacting with students by increasing their engagement while facilitating cross-cultural learning experiences. In this chapter, the authors discuss how ICT can be utilized to support the experience of international students as they navigate the academic landscape and to provide all students with a more holistic education. Research-based best practices are discussed to illustrate the ways technologies can be utilized to facilitate active learning and enhance cross-cultural interactions, thereby allowing students to develop cross-cultural competencies. Examples of applications or tools that support these practices are presented.

INTRODUCTION

In view of the growing enrollment of international students, the need to provide effective, engaging, and welcoming learning environments for a diverse student community in higher education is increasing in importance. While structural diversity, defined as the numerical representation of diverse groups (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), is a necessary foundation for achieving internationalization, the quality of interactions among students is more meaningful. The importance of “incorporating principles of diversity and inclusion into pedagogic practices in order to create a culturally responsive learning environment”
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(Arkoudis & Tran 2010, p. 170) is a challenge faced by instructors. The goal of this chapter is to describe ways in which information and communication technologies (ICT) can be integrated into the pedagogical process to create a learning environment that supports the development of cultural competencies in conjunction with discipline-based knowledge. The strategies are relevant to accommodating all learners including those from other countries, diverse cultural backgrounds, and various ethnicities. The benefits students receive from interactions with diverse peers include the following:

- Enhancement of critical thinking and problem solving (Deo, 2011; Pitt & Packard, 2012)
- Decrease of risk related to stereotyping (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008)
- Increase of intercultural knowledge and empathy (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011)
- Better preparation for employment in a globalized world (Crosling, Edwards, & Schroder, 2008)

BACKGROUND

The internationalization of education has increased over the last several decades resulting in a reduction of cultural dissonance among host and international students (Crose, 2011; Stepanyan, Mather, & Dalyrymple, 2014). However, criticism aimed at higher education (Bok, 2006) challenges what it has achieved in preparing students to thrive in a globalized world. A recent report (Chun & Evans, 2016) notes that, in general, the development of intercultural competence in the undergraduate curriculum is overlooked. Conflicting agendas, confusion related to the terminology used in the literature, and the lack of a clear definition for what comprises cultural competence are issues (Schultz, 2007). The following terms synonymous with cultural competence appear in the literature: multicultural, cross-cultural, intercultural, transcultural, global competence, and global citizenship (Fantini, 2009). Although different in meaning, the terms internationalization and globalization often are used interchangeably. Globalization, defined as economic (e.g., worldwide business and industry) and political forces, compels higher education to advance its international initiatives (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Internationalization has no agreed upon definition, but in the context of this chapter it is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003, p.1).

The concept of global citizenship moves the narrative beyond internationalization policies and curriculum modifications (Clifford, 2014). A frequently cited article (Hanvey, 1982) provides a set of dimensions that characterize a global perspective including perspective consciousness, state of the planet awareness, cross-cultural awareness, knowledge of global dynamics, and awareness of human choices. Likewise, the African philosophy of Ubuntu emphasizes the importance of the unity of humanity and principles of empathy, sharing, and cooperation in the effort to resolve common problems (Kitano, 1997; Murithi, 2009). It is essential to develop “mechanisms to prepare people for intercultural encounters and to provide pathways to solutions for problems that arise” (Krajewski, 2011, p. 138). Liu (2007) writes, “A cross-cultural learning community can only be sustained successfully through sharing and understanding. Sharing means more than to offer one’s own values and thoughts, but in addition, to offer the willingness to listen and understand others” (p. 51). Incorporating activities directed toward the development of intercultural competencies challenges students to create new relationships, experience new cultures, and discover different forms of communication and new ways of relating to others (Krajewski, 2011).