

Develop Intercultural Competence to Foster International Student Success

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“Increased domestic and global access to higher education,” writes Amy Lee in her 2017 book *Teaching Interculturally: A Framework for Integrating Disciplinary Knowledge and Intercultural Development*, has resulted in having “multiple diversities in any given classroom or academic program.”

Lee and her colleagues argue for developing an intercultural pedagogy to help us teach, respect, and value the contributions of all our international and domestic students: “we need intentionally developed pedagogical practices to engage diverse students effectively and respectfully within our classrooms.” This got me thinking: how prepared are faculty to help international students succeed?

Faculty who teach in disciplines such as ESL, global business management, or intercultural communication are likely well able to work effectively with international students. But what about the rest of us? How equipped are we?

If, like me, you have no prior experience living and working abroad, and no targeted intercultural professional development, you may feel ill prepared to teach international students. Yet I suspect that you, like me, want to help *all* of your students succeed, no matter their country of origin, differing communication styles, or behaviors and actions that may be unfamiliar.

For example, faculty at my university have struggled with a perception that some international

students seem to have a different understanding of academic integrity than they do. How do we help these students learn and succeed, without a shared understanding of this important aspect of teaching and learning?

I've been on a journey to increase my intercultural awareness, and more, my intercultural competence. Without building this ability in ourselves, it's unlikely that we will be able to help our students develop their intercultural competence. Lee and her colleagues rightly argue that we have an obligation to do so: "Education in the twenty-first century must prepare students for a world that is increasingly interconnected, interdependent and diverse." So how can we develop ourselves in order to develop our students?

Increasing our Intercultural Competence

Like all meaningful journeys, my quest for faculty professional development in intercultural competence has been far from linear. By meandering through various Google Searches I've discovered some really great places to start. More importantly, I've found that some institutions are offering extended opportunities such as learning communities and workshop series. Maybe the resources and suggestions below will help you begin or augment such efforts on your campus.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI): This tool is used by over 1300 organizations including colleges and universities, government agencies, non-profit organizations and corporations. Their website provides validation research as well as helpful ways to think about our individual phase of intercultural development.

The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™) model identifies a spectrum that moves from a 'Monocultural Mindset' at one end to an 'Intercultural Mindset' at the other, characterized by an Adaptation orientation: "The capability of deeply shifting cultural perspective and bridging behavior across cultural differences is most fully achieved when one maintains an Adaptation perspective." Although the IDI requires a financial investment, it is a robust methodology for measurably increasing faculty intercultural competence and therefore well worth considering.

Building an Interculturally Competent Faculty: Researcher and Internationalization scholar Darla Deardorff provides several guidelines and discussion questions to help faculty grow in intercultural competence. She identifies characteristics of interculturally competent faculty, including an understanding of the complexity of intercultural competence, course design that includes an outcome around intercultural development, and an ability to teach a diverse range of students.

Questions for self-reflection invite an examination of our:

- individual willingness to work with those from other "cultural, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds,"
- awareness of our own cultural values and biases, and
- ability to adapt our behavior and communication to "accommodate students from

different culturally conditioned communication styles.”

This article, though brief, offers a dense set of ideas and thought-provoking questions to foster growth in intercultural teaching.

Engaging Diversity in Undergraduate Classrooms: A Pedagogy for Developing

Intercultural Competence: This earlier resource from Amy Lee and her colleagues provides an excellent foundation for the 2017 *Teaching Interculturally* book. In this 2012 report, Lee, Robert Poch, Marta Shaw and Rhiannon D. Williams make a compelling case for the importance of developing our students’ intercultural competence as a core objective of twenty-first century classes. Among other valuable and practical ideas, the report offers several suggestions for implementing intercultural pedagogical practices. Here’s a condensed list from pages 84-89; for more explanation of each, see the report.

- Acknowledge anxiety and offer support
- Be mindful of different thresholds of anxiety
- Affirm students’ self-identity
- Model tolerance for ambiguity

Lee and her colleagues point out that the “mere presence of diversity in the classroom does not guarantee constructive interaction or skill development” (P. 89). Intentional pedagogy and course design is required to help students develop their intercultural competence.

This brings me full circle. Preparing our students to be effective and engaged citizens in today’s interconnected global society is of vital importance. One way of doing so is to foster international student success and effective interactions in our multinational classrooms. In order to do that, we ourselves need to be growing in intercultural competence. Might I suggest we bring the same intentionality to our own development as we do to our learning design?

References:

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