

Chapter 31

Promoting Effective Learning in Diverse Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity in society, the workplace and classrooms is more or less is a global phenomenon. The multi-cultural classroom provides an opportunity for students from different cultures to bring their enormous range of experiences, knowledge, perspectives and insights to the learning – if the process is enabled. Many firms around the globe are expanding their businesses beyond domestic markets. These trends indicate that many individuals are likely to study or work in multicultural environments domestically and abroad. Research suggests that faculty and trainers adapt their teaching style and classroom policies to accommodate multicultural learners. Disconnections may arise, however, regarding the willingness to include these accommodations. This chapter explores various issues which faculty and students face regarding adjustments in teaching style, content, and policies to adapt to multicultural learners. Specific recommendations to meet the challenges of multicultural learning are also provided.

INTRODUCTION

According to Nahal (2005), a classroom where both faculty and students could benefit from each other's cultural experiences is the best classroom. Globalization is a reality for businesses and institutions of higher education. During 19090s, it was established that team compositions within organizations become more diverse and team diversity was expected to increase further in years to come (Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). A concurrent trend of classrooms becoming more culturally diverse or multicultural is evident within universities in many developed western countries (such as Australia, the UK, Canada and the USA). The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) stated that 5.1% (around 43,700) business schools undergraduates in the U.S. in 2009-2010 were international students. This number represented an increase of approximately 2% from 2005 (AACSB, 2011). The U.S. enrolled a record-breaking number of international students during the 2013-2014 school year, welcoming 886,052 undergraduates and graduate students at colleges and universities throughout the country. International

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students from China, India and South Korea now represent roughly 50% of all international students in the U.S. (Haynie, 2014). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics research showed that foreign-born workers increased from 14.8% in 2005 to 15.3% in 2006 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). In 2014, there were 25.7 million foreign-born persons in the U.S. labor force, comprising 16.5% of the total (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). In 2007, international students represented approximately 17.3% (around 36,500 students) of the total population of Australian university students (IDP Education, 2010). In May of 2015, the total number of international students in Australian universities increased to approximately 63,000 (Department of Education and Training, 2015). In UK universities, in 2007-8, 15% of the total population of UK university students (around 341,795 students) were international students (UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2010). Around 18% of all students, in UK higher education came from other countries in 2012-13 (Gil, 2014). In 2008-9, 7% of total national undergraduate population in Canada comprised of international students (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2010). The number of international students in Canada has increased by 84% over the last decade, growing 22.8% from 2011 to 2013 and 11% from 2012 to 2013 (ICEF Monitor, 2014). In 2010, business faculties in these four countries had the highest percentage of international students (IDP Education, 2010; UK Council for International Student Affairs, 2010). In various business classes, students from diverse cultural backgrounds are required to participate in group projects and group-based assessment.

Many firms around the globe are expanding their businesses beyond domestic markets. Consequently, business schools and organizations overall are becoming increasingly multicultural. More and more individuals are expected to study or work in multicultural environments domestically and abroad as expatriates. Business savvy people are cognizant that employees can have multicultural experiences that are global in scope while remaining in their home country. Around the globe, we see an increasing number of international students on business programs in universities. These students belong to a diverse range of countries and for many of them English is not the first language. For these students, the experience of tertiary education at a foreign university is very different. This situation brings many challenges for the faculty teaching large classroom with a student body that comprises of both local and foreign students. It is anticipated that the existing cohort of domestic and international students will continue to grow in both size and diversity.

Countries around the world (such as UK, USA, Germany, and France) are internationalizing the tertiary education bringing more and more international students to the classrooms. This increasing mix of domestic and foreign students in the classrooms is beneficial for the host countries because foreign education is a big business. In USA, foreign education is the fifth largest services export (Marginson 2002). The communities in many of these preferred countries for foreign education are culturally diverse but the Anglo-American content of their tertiary education doesn't take into account this cultural diversity. Most institutions continue to provide mono-cultural higher education. Such system of higher education is not in a position to address the unique challenges of teaching and learning of large and culturally diverse classrooms.

Many international students are willing to adapt to the new learning styles of the host foreign countries. However, unfamiliarity with the process used to facilitate their learning is one big obstacle in their learning (Pincas, 2001). The classrooms of tertiary educational institutions in these host countries use a wide array of western teaching and learning strategies. These strategies (such as case analysis, group-based learning, critical analysis etc.) are based on the concept of active participation of students. Many international students are unfamiliar with this concept. Their expectations are largely founded on educational practices of their own countries which greatly vary from the educational practices in western

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