

Chapter 8

Fostering Intercultural Competence Through Learning Communities in Colombian Higher Education: A Multiple Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents the results of a research study conducted by researchers from the Universidad del Norte (Barranquilla, Colombia) where the dynamics and interactions among faculty that participated in the teacher learning community ‘intercultural competence’ (TLCIC). The goal of this study was to analyze the effect of the learning community in strengthening the intercultural pedagogical practices of teachers, leveraging the interpersonal relationships established among the participants of the TLCIC. This study was based on an evaluative approach of participatory research, inspired by cooperative action research, in which professionals from various fields collaborated in identifying issues, conducting observations, reflecting on the findings, and, jointly, addressing contextual challenges. The study consisted of five stages as a holistic and reflective process that integrates analysis, design of the learning experi-

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ences, implementation, and evaluation. Some results of the research will be described in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter “Fostering Intercultural Competence Through Learning Communities in Colombian Higher Education: A Case Study” presents the results of research study conducted by researchers from the Universidad del Norte (Barranquilla, Colombia)—with the international advice of Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia in Spain—where the dynamics and interactions among faculty that participated in the Teacher Learning Community ‘Intercultural Competence’ (TLCIC).

The participants of the TLCIC consisted of professors who were interested in the transformation of their pedagogical practice, assuming the challenge of integrating intercultural learning environments in different areas of knowledge and from a transversal approach, promoting inter and intradisciplinary encounters and misunderstandings to strengthen global competencies.

The theoretical and epistemological contributions on which this study is based on consider the complexity represented by cultural diversity in Latin American contexts, suggesting a permanent and self-critical reflection of our cultural components, not only to effectively face the different perspectives and ways of understanding the world that can come into interaction in our society but also to overcome the risks of social exclusion and the joint construction under an intercultural paradigm of Education (Cano et al., 2016; Ricardo, 2018).

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the goal of designing intercultural learning environments to foster the development of intercultural competencies, in both students and educators while challenging stereotypes and prejudices in the classroom (Arroyo & McWilliam, 2002; Cano et al., 2022; Cano et al., 2016; Cano et al., 2015; Jordan, 2001; Pérez-Aldeguer, 2013; Rojas et al., 2018; Ricardo & Cano, 2015; Ricardo, Cano & Ruiz, 2023). To achieve effective intercultural education, educators must analyze their institution’s reality and context, understand their students, and challenge their negative feelings that can lead to discrimination (Díez, 2012). By accomplishing these goals, intercultural dialogue can be fostered, reducing the risk of social exclusion (Del Pozo & Peláez Paz, 2013; Gómez et al., 2017).

This chapter shares fundamental aspects of intercultural education and the competencies that should be promoted in both educators and students to create inclusive and intercultural educational settings within the context of higher education. This chapter also examines the design of intercultural learning environments that resulted from multiple reflective processes and transformation of classroom practices through pedagogical innovation—achieved via interactions within the studied teacher learning community.

In this study, intercultural education is integrated into the curriculum, permeating its development from the construction of the syllabus, and the definition of teaching and learning methods and materials, the characteristics of interactions, and evaluation mechanisms (Domínguez, 2006). Additionally, the authors share the result of the research study that aimed to analyze the effect of the learning community on the intercultural pedagogical practices of the participants, leveraging the interpersonal relationships established within the Teacher Learning Community ‘Intercultural Competence’ (TLCIC). Four case studies are analyzed: Intercultural Competence of a Professor of International Business and Competitiveness; Intercultural Competence of a Professor in Nursing; Intercultural Competence of a Professor in General Epidemiology; Intercultural Competence of a Professor in Interdisciplinary Scenarios in Higher Education.

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