Chapter 11

Core Competencies in Intercultural Teaching and Research

ABSTRACT

This chapter summarizes much of the previous chapters into a set of five core competencies, including assessment criteria for those seeking to do research or teach across cultures.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses two related and significant parts of intercultural professional communication: teaching and research. Although these areas seem broadly unrelated, both can be assessed the same way with the goal of making the curriculum effective and the research valid. It seems surprising that despite the growing body of literature that addresses the practices of intercultural professional communication and establishes the need to teach and research it, very little research and theory actually explore teaching methods and assessment. Recently, I developed with Kirk St. Amant a book on teaching intercultural professional communication, but this textbook focuses more on how it is taught around the world with little discussion of assessment and curriculum design (Thatcher & St.Amant, 2010). Further, a number of textbooks on intercultural professional communication have been developed (Bosley

2001; Andrews 2000; Varner & Beamer 2004), but sufficient research and theory are not available to guide and evaluate their use.

Further, as I explain more than a decade ago (Thatcher, 2000), very few scholars are addressing research issues in intercultural rhetoric and professional communication. At first thought, overlooking intercultural empirical methods might not seem that problematic because many research methods now assess US multiculturalism and the various social and cultural constructions of power in the workplace, all of which seem easily adaptable to intercultural situations. As explained in Chapters One and Two, however, these research methods are not designed to assess cross-cultural contexts, variables that move far beyond a US multiculturalism. Further, these methods seem derived from and designed for predominant US cultural and rhetorical values, especially those associated with US equality and individualism. Thus, these methods need to be critically adapted for intercultural studies.

This lack of assessment tools for evaluating teaching and research leaves us with a number of critical questions inadequately explored:

- How do we know that our teaching and research of intercultural professional is communication is not ethnocentric, using U.S. or western research values?
- How do we know that our research designs of intercultural professional communication are generally valid, that is, assessing what we plan to assess?
- How do we know that our conceptions of effective intercultural communication for a target culture are valid, ethical, and effective?

Obviously, these questions are comprehensive and adequately exploring all of them is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, this chapter sketches a broad framework of competencies and assessment questions that begin to address these problems of curriculum and research in intercultural professional communication. These core competencies are based on my 25 years of experience researching, teaching, and practicing intercultural professional communication as well as a strong body of literature available in general intercultural studies. I do not review theory, curriculum, and practice of teaching and research in rhetoric and professional communication, which I sketch out in Chapter Twelve; rather, I explore the core competencies that need to be added to an already effective curriculum or valid research designs.

This Chapter outlines five core competencies that are essential to good intercultural communicators and serve as criteria to assess curricula (programs, courses, and assignments) and empirical and theoretical research designs. The next Chapter Twelve exemplifies these competencies in an intercultural course I consistently teach at New Mexico State University.

The five core competencies discussed throughout this chapter are:

1. Accurately and ethically generalizing about other cultural and rhetorical traditions without falling into damaging stereotypes.
2. Connecting the common human threshold/value sets to rhetorical and literacy traditions.
3. Understanding the fit, reciprocity, and kairos of communication media and technologies to rhetorical and cultural traditions.
4. Connecting fit, reciprocity, and kairos to rhetorical purpose, audience-author relations, information needs, organizational strategies, and stylistic preferences.
5. Transforming "taboo" knowledge into effective and ethical rhetorical strategies

These core competencies become the reference points or criteria for assessing the other elements of intercultural curriculum and research. At the end of the Chapter, I describe a case study for modifying a website following these core competencies.

1. ABILITY TO GENERALIZE ACCURATELY WITHOUT FALLING INTO STEREOTYPES

One of the most difficult proficiencies for professional communicators is the ability to generalize accurately and ethically about other cultural and rhetorical traditions without falling into damaging stereotypes, a problem that I carefully outline in Chapters One, Two, and Three. This competency is particularly difficult for those from more individualistic and universalist cultures (like the United States) and for scholars who unreflexively embrace the prevailing approaches of critical cultural and post-colonial studies, poststructuralism, and New Literacy Studies. However, this proficiency is fundamental to all major theorists and researchers of intercultural communication. Milton Bennett,

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