

Chapter 94

Best Practices of Teaching Cross-Cultural Adults in Online Format

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ABSTRACT

Online learning is on the increase, as is the teaching of cross-cultural adults. Best practices of teaching cross-cultural adults in the online format are presented and discussed in this chapter. Online learning benefits are also discussed. Online learning needs to be regularly evaluated to ensure learning is actually taking place. Suggestions relating to the evaluation of online learning are presented. Additional references are included for further reading opportunities related to the best practices of teaching cross-cultural adults in the online format.

INTRODUCTION

Online courses are increasing in popularity at educational institutions as well in business organizations. In fact, according to Allen and Seaman (2013), 6.7 million students were taking at least one online course. The number of employees in business organizations who have participated in online learning is not as easily captured, but many business organizations use online learning for training employees. Online courses have become more popular in the US as well as throughout the world. “Developing countries in Asia, including China and India, have been the most attractive destinations for offering online degrees because of their rapid rise in economic development and enormous demands for higher education access” (Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka, 2010, p. 1).

Limburg and Clark (2006) stated, “a benefit of teaching online is that power and oppression dynamics that manifest in the ground classroom—related to race, gender, and socioeconomic class in particular—are ‘neutralized’ in the online environment because of the relative anonymity online interaction affords” (p. 49).

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They went on to say the following:

the same dynamics of privilege and disenfranchisement that exist when teaching multicultural education in three-dimensional space persist when teaching it in cyberspace. Even in courses where social identity is not the focus of the course content, social identity issues manifest. For example, student names lead—whether accurately or not—to assumptions about race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and gender by both faculty and other students. (p. 49)

College graduates of all majors are encountering the opportunities for cross-cultural work experiences. “For this year’s crop of newly-minted MBAs, being successful in the global economy requires knowing culturally-specific soft skills” (Molinsky, 2012, p. 1). In fact, “25% of prospective business-school students expect to work outside their country of citizenship” (Molinsky, 2012, p. 1). These prospective students come from many cultures and must learn to work and communicate with people from cultures different than their own. “This ‘cross-cultural code switching’—the ability to adapt behavior to accommodate different cultural norms—doesn’t come naturally” (Molinsky, 2012, p. 1). These students as well as others need to learn how to communicate successfully with those from other cultures. Research has suggested that cultural differences have an impact on student perceptions of online courses and also on student behaviors in online courses. Teachers/Trainers need to know how to best reach students from all cultural backgrounds.

Globalization affects every type of education institution and business organization. Most people have the opportunity for cross-cultural interactions; therefore, they need to know how to successfully interact in these situations.

According to Day and Frye (2011),

statistics suggest that U.S. born individuals are very likely to study or work in multicultural environments domestically and abroad as expatriates. Additionally, business savvy people are cognizant that employees can have multicultural experiences that are global in scope while remaining in their home country (p. 35).

People frequently have the opportunity to learn about multiculturalism and how to interact with people from different cultures in an online environment.

Online learning has become popular because of its potential for providing more flexible *access to content and instruction at any time, from any place*. Frequently, the focus entails

- Increasing the availability of learning experiences for learners who cannot or choose not to attend traditional face-to-face offerings,
- Assembling and disseminating instructional content more cost efficiently, or
- Enabling instructors to handle more students while maintaining learning outcome quality that is equivalent to that of comparable face-to-face instruction (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010, p. 1).

How does culture affect online learning? “Existing research suggests that cultural differences can have a negative effect on students’ participation in online courses” (Liu, Liu, Lee, & Magjuka, 2010, p. 177). “Shattuck (2005) observed that international online learners felt a ‘sense of marginalization, or,

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