

Chapter 46

Cross–Cultural Learning and Intercultural Competence

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has increased the need to understand the nature of work-related adult learning and development across national boundaries. It is driving the demand for the workforce that possesses knowledge of other countries and cultures and affecting those who are responsible for developing international learning activities. The author of this chapter calls for adult education and Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals to learn how to apply adult learning theories in cross-cultural learning to help individuals with different cultural backgrounds. This would help these professionals acquire intercultural competence and become successful in international assignments.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization demands are transforming the boundaries of the world. This change is leading us into a worldwide global economy where national boundaries become blurred. In reality, the globalization of the workplace and workforce has been a fact of life for many organizations (Roberts, Kossek, & Ozeki, 1998). Workforces around the world have become more diverse, more educated,

and more mobile (Briscoe, Schuler, & Claus, 2009). Therefore, global mobility and global careers have emerged recently as the significant phenomenon for the global workforce (Lin, Pearce, & Wang, 2009). As a consequence, the challenge of developing and managing “global workforce” has received extensive attention (Briscoe et al., 2009; Tarique & Schuler, 2009).

In facing the challenge, international organizations, especially multinational corporations (MNCs) around the world have tried to seek new ways in order to survive in the competitive global

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1601-1.ch046

arena. Some succeed, but many do not, and the inability of their managers or expatriates to function successfully in their global assignments has been the primary cause of international business failures (Apud, Lenartowicz, & Johnson, 2003; Lee & Croker, 2006). The need of developing internationally competent workforce becomes increasingly important. In literature, it shows that the degree of one's intercultural competencies to another culture results in the successful international performance (Chuprina, 2001). Learning in a new culture is a prerequisite to obtain intercultural competencies. Ferraro (2002) asserts that the essential competency for success in managing the global organization is also based on learning. There is a great demand worldwide for high quality workforce practitioners and adult educators who can work effectively with cultural diverse adult learners in the workplaces and facilitate the cross-cultural learning (Chang, 2004).

The purposes of this chapter are to review the related literature of cross-cultural learning and intercultural competence; to explore the relationship between adult learning theories, cross-cultural learning, and intercultural competence; to offer feasible solutions and recommendations to the problems; and to discuss the future trends that help adult educators and HRD practitioners to facilitate meaningful cross-cultural learning programs for adult learners to be successful across cultures.

BACKGROUND

Globalization has increased the need to understand the work-related adult education programs across national and cultural boundaries (Chang, 2004). Most importantly, it is crucial to understand how adult learners function and learn across cultural boundaries. The cross-cultural learning and experience of adult learners can occur in many forms. One of the most dominant cross-cultural learning and experiences comes from the expatriation experience, which is the work-related adult learning

(Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). Without formal training or education in the cross-cultural interactions, the notion of cross-cultural learning has become the key for the expatriates to obtain intercultural competencies (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). A growing research enhances the notion that successful expatriate adaptation and cross-cultural learning depend on how well an expatriate can learn from experience in the international assignments (Porter & Tansky, 1999). Many studies have applied and utilized adult learning theories such as experiential learning and transformative learning to be the research theoretical framework to investigate the work-related cross-cultural learning (Chang, 2004; Chang, 2007; Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary for adult educators and HRD professionals to understand the nature of work-related adult learning programs in the intercultural settings and the need of developing intercultural competencies (Chang, 2004).

However, scholars, in the different disciplines, throughout the past 30 years have defined intercultural competence in a variety of ways. In the literature, the definitions of "competence" are theoretically and empirically inconsistent. There was no consensus in the definition of cross-cultural competence (Baxter Magolda, 2000; Lusting & Koester, 2003).

Intercultural competence as a concept has been explored and studied under different terms, such as cross-cultural effectiveness (Cui & Van Den Berg, 1991; Han, 1997, 2008), cross-cultural adjustment (Benson, 1978), cross-cultural competence (Ruben 1989), intercultural effectiveness (Cui & Van Den Berg, 1991; Hanningan, 1990), intercultural competence (Dinges, 1983), and intercultural communication competence (Spitzberg, 2000).

In developing cultural competent professionals, Campinha-Bacote (2002) has identified five components: (1) cultural awareness, (2) cultural skill, (3) cultural knowledge, (4) cultural encounter, and (5) culture desire. Similarly, Lister (1999) also has developed taxonomy for the cultural competent professionals. The taxonomy includes:

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