Chapter 1
Transculturality

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ABSTRACT

Students make meaning of the information and knowledge they receive based on their worldviews, prior life experiences, learning styles, personality, values, beliefs, as well their interactions with their academic and non-academic environments. Most of these factors are cultural and can be subject to broad assumptions about what the instructor perceives regarding the profile of any given student. However, making assumptions is not necessarily the smartest way to engage in meaningful interactions. This chapter argues that leaders, administrators, and faculty must not rely on assumptions, but should conceive, plan, and design culture-specific and customizable blended learning and teaching programs or courses, which will enable them to obtain quality learning outcomes and foster student’s transformational experiences. This chapter provides a conceptual framework that will enable to that end.

INTRODUCTION

Let me start with a necessary redundancy to remind that the title of this book is Transcultural Blended Learning and Teaching in Postsecondary Education. The purpose of the book is to help readers across nations and cultures strengthen their understanding of theories, models, research, applications, best practices, and emerging issues related to blended learning and teaching through a holistic and transcultural perspective. With two sentences only, the phrase “blended learning and teaching” was used twice. The term “transcultural” was also used twice. The preface has already provided a conceptualization for the phrase “blended learning and teaching,” so that when it is used in subsequent chapters the reader will know that it refers first of all to a mode of delivery that combines face-to-face and online support to facilitate a process of teaching and learning in postsecondary education.
education. Similarly, the term “transcultural” will be used in various chapters of the book. However, given the fact that the overall human experience might be considered as diverse or transcultural, the term “transcultural” might be subject to diverse interpretations or mutinous thoughts from various readers. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the transculturality aspects that may have implications for blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education, thus clarifying what “transcultural” means in the context of this book.

STARTING WITH A MUTINOUS THOUGHT: MULTICULTURALITY, INTERCULTURALITY, OR CROSS-CULTURALITY?

Starting with a mutinous thought is not a bad idea. Why does one need to use the term transcultural or transculturality? Aren’t “multicultural or multiculturality” or “cross-cultural or cross-culturality” or “intercultural or interculturality” expressing the same idea? In fact, “cross-cultural or cross-culturality” and “intercultural or interculturality” refer to a same idea of interrelations between or among two or more cultures or subcultures. However, multicultural or multiculturality and transcultural or transculturality refer to different conceptual understandings.

Culture

Most scholars in anthropology and sociology credit to Tylor, a British anthropologist of the 19th century, the first meaningful definition of culture, which is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Sardar & van Loon, 1997). In other words, culture includes the values, traditions, worldview, language, technology, symbols, and social and political relationships that are acquired, created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, or religion. Culture provides meaning and context. It is a filter through which people process their experiences and events of their lives. It influences people’s values, actions, and expectations of themselves. It impacts people’s perceptions and expectations of others. As Schutz (2003) argued, individuals construct their worldview from their life experience, personality, values, beliefs, and their socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions, thus making culture a vital element in human interactions. A blended learning and teaching course is one setting where human interactions can take place. Therefore, the role of culture is relevant in such setting.

Multiculturality

In a national context, multiculturality refers to the existence of multiple cultural traditions, identities, experiences, practices, or sub-cultures within one larger blended cultural experience, which is the culture of a nation-state. In other words, there can be one supposedly national culture through which people share a common history, heritage, national symbols, geographic territory, language, education system, and other cultural elements. However, one or several groups might have particular cultural elements (e.g. heritage, religion or belief, and language) that are not necessary shared or experienced by one or several specific groups within the borders of a nation-state. The culture of a specific group inside a national culture is a sub-culture. The existence of several sub-cultures within a nation-state points to a reality of multiculturality. In that context, many countries in the world can claim multiculturality. Table 1 provides examples of countries in the world that include different ethnic groups, historic heritages, religious groups, and languages that are blended or coexist within the national culture.

As Table 1 illustrates, there are ethnic, religious, and linguistic cultural realities inside single coun-
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