

Chapter 46

Opening the Classroom to the World:

A Grounded–Theory Study of Student Perceptions of Integrating Intercultural Competence Into Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Most curriculum internationalization studies have been focusing on international students and study abroad programs, which has excluded the majority of non-mobile students on American campuses. In addition, the existing studies have been conducted from administrator and faculty perspectives. This chapter generates a substantive theory of intercultural curriculum and teaching methods from the experiences of students who have taken intercultural classes in American classrooms. Active interview theory and grounded theory were utilized for data collection and data analysis. Based on the pure voices from both domestic and international students, this chapter has identified three core categories and eight sub-categories representing student-preferred internationalized curriculum. These categories or themes offer new angles to look at curriculum internationalization.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era of globalization, higher education institutions are more important than ever as mediums for continuous global flows of people, information and images, investments, and knowledge at an unprecedented pace and scale (Appadurai, 1996; Friedman, 2005; Rizvi, 2008). American Council

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of Education published a preliminary report *Internationalization of U.S. Higher Education* claimed that “if we fail to become effective global citizens” with the ability to “move seamlessly between different nations, cultures, and languages,” the United States may find itself falling behind the other major players in the world (Hayward, 2000). Therefore, the international dimension of higher education is becoming increasingly important (Knight, 2004). A widely accepted definition describes internationalization of higher education as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003, p.2). This definition implies that the curriculum plays a key role in university internationalization as it is “the backbone of the internationalization process” (Knight, 1994, p.6). Several researchers have suggested to place curriculum at the center of any attempt to higher education internationalization (Bond, 2003; Knight, 2004; Paige, 2003). The faculty of the Department of Advertising at the University of Texas-Austin pointed toward the need of developing curriculum that are “truly global and less ethnocentric” (University of Texas, 2000, p. 37). The emphasis on the importance of internationalizing curriculum raises some interesting questions: whose knowledge, systems and procedures form the basis for internationalization, and what the power relations are that underpin this (Tribe, 2005)? Who should be the decision maker of the scope, activity, teaching methods of the internationalized curriculum? Who would be the judge to push the “yes” or “no” button pertinent to the curriculum content and how it will be delivered?

Although the goal of internationalized curriculum is mainly to increase global awareness of students, they are usually not the decision makers on what and how the curriculum should be taught. As Bond (2003) stated, it is problematic that the course content and instructional approaches are determined by authority in the university has been accepted norms. She found that most curriculum reform papers were written from an administrative perspective and a few from a faculty perspective. The researchers have identified that it was a weakness of evaluating the course construction and teaching methods from only solid perspectives of administrators. How do students feel about the impact the course has on their intercultural development? What do students have to say about the course content that necessarily benefit to them? Are students receptive to the course delivery approaches? Since students are the receivers of the curriculum, it is necessary to conduct a research of the topic centering on student opinions, beliefs, and experiences.

The purpose of this study was to discover general elements and categories from the selected subject areas, and eventually generate a substantive theory of intercultural curriculum and teaching pedagogy from student perceptions. To achieve this goal, the qualitative method Grounded Theory (GT) first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), later refined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), was utilized. According to Klenke (2008), qualitative research values personal voice and informal speech in data collection and is subject to the phenomenon of emergence of categories, patterns, meanings and theories. The participants of this study were students who had finished classes with embedded intercultural components in two undergraduate programs and two graduate programs at two different universities: undergraduate Business Administration (BA), MBA program, undergraduate Leadership Minor (LEAD), and graduate Educational Leadership (EDLD) program. Although there are multiple elements that make up international education, this study solely focused on the areas of *internationalized curriculum* and *internationalized teaching* as they were cited as the most confusing yet most critical concepts in curriculum internationalization (Bond, 2003; Olson & Green, 2003). The following questions were explored:

1. How do students perceive the content of an intercultural course?

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