Chapter 67
Understanding Social Identity Through Autoethography:
Building Intercultural Communication Competencies in Higher Education Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how instructors could use autoethnography as a course assignment to help students understand their cultural identities and build their intercultural communication competences in higher education classroom. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that helps people examine their relationship with a group or a culture. The chapter provides an overview of literature relevant to intercultural communication competences, social identity, and autoethnography and then describes the author's use of autoethnography in an undergraduate course "Social and Cultural Foundations of Education" taught at a large public university in the United States. In her class, the author uses this method to help students examine their cultural identity, or relationship with groups based on their religion, culture, nationality, ethnicity, or other groups relevant to the course.

The increasing diversity of cultures,
which is fluid, dynamic and transformative,
implies specific competences and capacities for individuals and societies
to learn, re-learn, and unlearn so as to meet personal fulfilment and social harmony.
(UNESCO, 2013, p. 4)

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, political, social, economic, cultural, and technological changes and advances have interconnected nations, cultures, organizations, and individuals. To successfully navigate in this

global environment, organizations and individuals strive to learn skills, attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, and competencies that could help them overcome barriers and achieve their goals. One of these qualities is the intercultural communication competence (ICC). Spitzberg and Chagnon (2011) define ICC as, "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent cognitive, affective, and behavioural orientations to the world" (p. 7). This interaction could include verbal and non-verbal exchanges (Ricard, 1993).

"The fact is that it is almost impossible to avoid ICC in the Western nations and increasingly impossible in the globalised communities of the globe" (Brighton, 2013, p. 17). Therefore, higher education classroom has a duty to prepare students to navigate in this global world, to know how to express themselves and respond to others, to unlearn stereotypes and suspense prejudice, to understand how their values and believes influence their behavior and how their culture influences their values, believes, and behavior, and how to adapt to a new intercultural situation (Graddol, 2007).

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how instructors could use autoethnography as a course assignment to help students understand their cultural identities and build their intercultural communication competences in higher education classroom. Identity, its formation and maintenance, is one of the key themes in research around intercultural communication (Arasaratnam, 2015). The chapter provides an overview of literature relevant to ICC, social identity, and autoethnography and then describe the author's use of autoethnography in an undergraduate course "Social and Cultural Foundations of Education" taught at a large public university in the United States. In her class, the author used this method to help students examine their cultural identity, or relationship with groups based on their religion, culture, nationality, ethnicity, or other groups relevant to the course.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

In simple terms, intercultural communication could be understood as interpersonal communication between two or more people (Gudykunst, 2002). Competencies, in turn, could be defined as a set of qualities and skills or an expertise that enables people to successfully perform in a given situation or to complete an assigned task (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990). Definitions, theories, and models of ICC vary but most include three elements:

- Affect,
- Behavior, and
- Cognition (Martin, 2015).

In other words, ICC implies two or more people who are different culturally achieve the desired outcome of communication by engaging in a conversation willingly and enthusiastically and displaying necessary behaviors, emotions, and knowledge. For example, Chen and Starosta (2000) suggest, "intercultural communication competence is an umbrella concept which is comprised of cognitive, affective, and behavioral ability of interactants in the process of intercultural communication" (p. 4). The cognitive aspect of ICC refers to one's understanding how culture affects how people think. The affective aspect includes one's motivation to understand and accept cultural differences. The behavioral aspect refers to one's ability to achieve the goals of communication in a given situation. Most definitions directly or

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