Internationalization of the Higher Education Classroom: Strategies to Facilitate Intercultural Learning and Academic Success

Brian Crose

The number of students studying abroad is continuing to grow, which allows for intercultural learning to take place while forming cross-cultural relationships. This intercultural understanding plays a vital role as businesses begin operating in the global marketplace where cross-cultural relationships and understanding are needed.

academic ability in the new environment (Kingston & Forland, 2008). This loss of confidence can stem from the introduction to new pedagogies that can be further accentuated by the reluctance of international students to ask for clarification or guidance when confronted with these new pedagogies (Gu et al., 2009). Another contributor to a loss of confidence can be the cultural differences that exist within the classroom. For example, in the Eastern philosophy of education, the teacher is the possessor of all knowledge and the student is in the classroom to absorb the knowledge being shared (Eaves, 2009). The classroom experience is also regimented since students are expected not to engage in dialogue unless invited to by the teacher. Otherwise, the student is viewed as challenging the intellectual authority of the teacher (Eaves, 2009). This contradicts the Western classroom experience in which students are encouraged to ask questions, engage in dialogue as part of the learning process, and challenge the teacher to garner further insight into the topic (Eaves, 2009). Faculty members in the internationalized higher education classroom should utilize host students as examples on how interaction should occur in the classroom, and they should provide positive feedback to the host students to set a tone of acceptability for students to dialogue and question in the classroom.

Creating an Inviting Classroom Environment

In order for any student to be successful, it is important to provide a classroom environment that is inviting and encourages students to be engaged in their own learning. This is even more vital when instructing students from another country who are already in an unfamiliar environment (De Vita, 2000). While faculty members should not stereotype students based upon their cultural background, a cultural awareness is important for professors when creating an inviting classroom environment. By being aware of the various cultures in the classroom, faculty can address cultural inequalities that exist in order to balance access to learning opportunities and equal engagement of all students in the classroom. By doing so, faculty members will avoid skewing the learning environment towards the host culture and students, effectively

could lead to cultural insensitivity (Carroll & Ryan, 2005).

When introducing a group activity to students, it is important for all students to understand the intended outcome of the activity and the value they will gain from completing the activity, especially any crosscultural lessons that are to be learned (Leask, 2009). Faculty members should be explicit in their directions and establish timelines so students can identify if they are on track for successful completion of the activity (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Leask, 2009). This will reduce the burden on the students attempting to identify what they are to accomplish, which will allow them to focus on the cross-cultural interactions and learning from the unique perspectives that each member brings to the group.

To successfully implement group activities in the internationalized classroom, it is important to allow students an opportunity to become familiar with one another before beginning any formal group activity (Gabb, 2006; Kingston & Forland, 2008). By using these informal group activities, students will begin to better understand each other, and they will begin to shape their social environment within the group (Gabb, 2006). Students can begin exploring how to properly pronounce names of each group member, identify how each individual would prefer to be addressed, and begin acknowledging the unique strengths and insights that each student brings to the group (Gabb, 2006).

Assessment Practices

Faculty members should be aware of cultural differences, in general, relating to how education and learning is approached by the different international students. By doing so, professors are better able to address the varying learning styles of students and provide an approach to assessment that will allow all students an opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge and new skills, regardless of culture. In the Eastern cultures, an emphasis is placed on academic success, as measured on standardized tests, which generates a climate in which a high test score is the main indicator of success and influences job selection, salaries, social status, and overall quality of life (Edmundson, 2007). Since Eastern students are accustomed to this emphasis on testing, being evaluated based upon thought process, creativity, and interactions with their fellow classmates and professor can create high levels of anxiety and stress. Professors must use a variety of assessment techniques in order to effectively assess all students in the classroom while not ignoring any cultural customs that may exist (Edmundson, 2007). This could even include providing students with a variety

of assessment methods and affording students the opportunity to determine what assessment they would like to utilize to demonstrate their mastery of the subject matter (Carroll & Ryan, 2005).

When designing assessments for the internationalized classroom, faculty m

focus on the actual assessment product and not the cultural context (Carroll & Ryan, 2005).

When evaluating student work, it is important for faculty members to provide formative feedback along the way, whether through classroom activities leading up to the formal summative assessment or through the submission of drafts for review (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Jones, 2010). This will allow students to identify if they are meeting the