

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL TEACHING COMPETENCE

Intercultural teaching competence (ITC) refers to a teacher's ability to engage effectively in the classroom with students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including those different from the instructor's and from each other's ones [8, p. 459]. ITC involves the ability to communicate without significant loss or distortion, ensuring that students correctly receive and understand the instructor's intended messages. It includes a skill set that enables teachers to make meaningful connections with students, colleagues, and faculty members, fostering collaboration in achieving shared learning goals [1].

ITC empowers teachers to bridge cultural and linguistic differences in the classroom and to communicate effectively across disciplinary boundaries. The concept of ITC was developed by integrating elements from two distinct areas of research: models of intercultural competence [6] and intercultural competent teaching as discussed in the intercultural communication literature [4; 6]. It also draws from educational development, educational psychology on effective teacher behaviors, competencies, and inclusive teaching.

ITC shares similarities with general intercultural competence, which includes attitudinal components (e.g., tolerance of ambiguity, openness to difference), knowledge components (e.g., understanding cultural differences in classroom interactions), and behavioral components (e.g., using culturally appropriate feedback strategies). However, ITC goes beyond general models of intercultural competence by specifically identifying teacher skills, behaviors, and instructional approaches that facilitate learning in culturally diverse classrooms. The current body of research regarding teaching intercultural competent approaches has predominantly centered on classrooms within the social sciences. In these settings, educators take the lead in facilitating discussions surrounding matters related to identity, such as topics of race, privilege, class, and equity. This is notably observed in disciplines like history, sociology, or political science courses [2, p. 130].

The skills required of an intercultural competent teacher encompass a range of abilities. These skills include the ability to model and encourage perspective taking in the classroom, such as the ability to recognize when students are approaching global issues from monocultural or ethnocentric perspectives and to promote a diversity of perspectives by encouraging questions and the expression of diverse opinions.

In addition, an intercultural competent teacher models and encourages nonjudgmental approaches to discussing cultural, social, or other differences and motivates students to describe and interpret these differences before offering evaluations [4; 9].

These instructors adeptly foster dialogues among students who exhibit diverse communication styles. They can identify variations in how students take turns to speak, manage interruptions, and comprehend different communication approaches.

This includes an understanding of high-context and low-context communication styles, as well as recognizing the nuances between circular and linear contributions from students.

Creating an inclusive learning environment that acknowledges the barriers to participation that students may face, influenced by their home cultures, is another critical skill. This may include understanding that in certain cultures, women may not speak until men have finished, or students may only contribute when called upon.

Moreover, an intercultural competent teacher expects and accepts differences and appreciates variations in teacher-learner relationships across cultures, including different expectations about power dynamics, learner initiative, and attitudes toward rules and rule-following [7].

Providing feedback across cultures is essential, and effective facilitators adapt their feedback style to meet the needs of learners and to fit their cultural context and learning styles.

Tailoring messages to audiences with varying levels of language proficiency is essential, with a focus on avoiding jargon and colloquialisms that may hinder comprehension [5, p. 311].

Teachers in this category also excel at explaining the unspoken assumptions of their own culture and discipline to students from different cultural backgrounds, which may include mentoring during the transition to the academic environment, clarifying academic integrity, citation and referencing norms, or creating assignments that address the unique challenges students from Confucian educational backgrounds face when critiquing the ideas of others.

They create evaluation methods that acknowledge and endorse cultural variations in the way students write and communicate. This includes understanding the distinctions between employing inductive or deductive logic and applying circular or linear reasoning in their essays.

Modeling tolerance for ambiguity when students with different learning and communication styles contribute to class discussions is a key skill. Teachers can rephrase circular contributions for linear learners, show patience with longer or highly contextualized comments, and validate student responses [4].

Recognizing potential challenges for diverse learners is crucial, including concerns like preserving one's reputation, maintaining group identity, avoiding conflict, or the hesitance to share personal information linked to factors such as culture, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background [4].

They also create opportunities for learners to interact, allowing them to learn from one another, share different perspectives, and tap into the rich cultural knowledge they bring to the classroom [3, p. 228].

Finally, it is important to develop an awareness of one's own culture and cultural identity and to understand how these are perceived by individuals from other cultures. This awareness should extend to recognizing the potential influence of factors such as sexual orientation, race / whiteness, socioeconomic status, or language proficiency on cross-cultural interactions [9].

Intercultural teaching competence represents a critical dimension of effective teaching in today's diverse educational settings. Teachers possessing ITC skills can

bridge cultural and linguistic disparities within the classroom, adapt their communication to fit different cultural contexts, and create inclusive environments that acknowledge and remove participation barriers. As they model and encourage perspective-taking, nonjudgmental approaches to differences, and effective communication, these educators enable students to share their diverse perspectives and learn from each other's cultural knowledge. Moreover, teachers with ITC competencies exhibit a keen awareness of their own cultural identity and the potential influences of factors such as race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and language proficiency on cross-cultural interactions. Developing these skills, teachers can provide an enriching and equitable educational experience for students from all walks of life.

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