

Best practice in the intercultural classroom

Intercultural competence needs to be learnt and is a lifelong process

A. The attitude, knowledge and skills required by teachers in the School of Medicine to provide effective intercultural teaching.

1. Attitude. The 3 key attitudes are: openness, respect and curiosity
 - How truly open am I to those from different cultural, socio-economic and religious backgrounds?
 - Do I make quick assumptions about a student? Do I prejudge students or situations, or do I withhold judgment while I explore the multifacets of the situation?
 - Do I measure a student's behaviour based on my own culturally conditioned expectations or do I try to understand a student's behavior based on his or her own culturally conditioned background?
 - Do I value those from different backgrounds? How do I demonstrate that I value my students, even when I may disagree with their beliefs and opinions?
 - Am I eager to learn about different cultures and, specifically, am I eager to learn about my students' backgrounds and experiences? Do I make an effort to learn more?

2. Knowledge. Includes cultural self-awareness, inter-cultural field experience, deep understanding of world views, historical contexts and other influences on culture. In summary this means understanding the world from others perspectives

- Can I describe my own cultural conditioning? For example, what cultural values impact how I behave and communicate with others? What are some of my core beliefs and how have they been culturally influenced?
- How would I describe my worldview?
- How would I describe some of my students' worldviews? How might these differ from the ways in which I see the world?
- How much do I know about my students' cultural backgrounds? What information am I missing – especially in terms of specific cultural knowledge – and how can I get that information?
- How can I incorporate my students' worldviews into my course materials?
- What worldviews are demonstrated through the course materials I currently use? How can I enhance course materials so that other worldviews are represented?

3. Skills. Listening, observing and how to integrate the knowledge about other cultures. This occurs through active reflection on your teaching practice and intercultural interactions

- How much do I really listen to my students?
- Do I engage in active observation in my classroom, paying attention to subtle nuances and dynamics among my students, and in my interactions with my students?
- Do I engage in active reflection on my teaching practice and on my interactions with those from different cultural backgrounds?
- In conflict situations, do I seek to understand why something occurred and what lessons can be learned from the situation? Do I invite others' to share their stories and experiences to increase my understanding of the situation and the deeper underlying reasons for the conflict?
- Do I know how to evaluate interactions and situations through an intercultural lens, seeking to understand the underlying cultural explanations for what occurred?

B. Measuring your effectiveness as a teacher in an intercultural environment

1. Internal outcome. Extent to which you are flexible, adaptable, empathise, and truly see from multiple worldviews

- Do I know how students want to be treated or do I assume they want to be treated by my cultural standards?
- Am I able to adapt my behaviour and communication style to accommodate students from different culturally conditioned communication styles?
- Am I able to be flexible in responding to students' learning needs, seeking to understand those needs from their cultural perspectives?
- Can I easily view knowledge, cultural artifacts, a situation, or issue from multiple perspectives?

2. External outcome. Appropriate and effective behavior and communication in intercultural interactions

- How culturally appropriate have I been in my interactions with my students? And in my teaching? How would my students answer this question?
- Was I able to meet my teaching goals in an appropriate and effective manner?
- What could I do differently in the future to be more appropriate and effective in my communication and behaviour; both in my interpersonal interactions and in my teaching?

3. Stock take on your level of intercultural competence : Self reflection plus feedback from others. Table 1.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: SELF-EVALUATION

PART ONE. The items listed below are invaluable in developing intercultural competence and in interacting effectively and appropriately with persons from other cultures. Please rate yourself on the following:

5 = very high // 4 = high // 3 = average // 2 = below average // 1 = poor

Respect (valuing other cultures)	5	4	3	2	1
Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures)	5	4	3	2	1
Tolerance for ambiguity	5	4	3	2	1
Flexibility (in using appropriate communication styles and behaviors; in intercultural situations)	5	4	3	2	1
Curiosity and discovery	5	4	3	2	1
Withholding judgment	5	4	3	2	1
Cultural self-awareness/ understanding	5	4	3	2	1
Understanding others' worldviews	5	4	3	2	1
Culture-specific knowledge	5	4	3	2	1
Sociolinguistic awareness (awareness of using other languages in social contexts)	5	4	3	2	1
Skills to listen, observe and interpret	5	4	3	2	1
Skills to analyze, evaluate, and relate	5	4	3	2	1
Empathy (do unto others as they would have done unto them)	5	4	3	2	1
Adaptability (to different communication styles/behaviors; to new cultural environments)	5	4	3	2	1
Communication Skills (appropriate AND effective communication in intercultural settings)	5	4	3	2	1
PART TWO. Reflect on situations requiring intercultural competence -- what helped make you more appropriate and effective in your interactions? Now reflect on how you can continue to develop your intercultural competence, especially areas you rated as lower. (You can write down your reflections on the back of this paper if that is helpful.)					

Table D 3.5-1 Intercultural competence self-reflection tool (Deardorff, 2006, 2009)

C. Practical tips for addressing intercultural competence in the classroom:

- Go beyond cultural products (eg literature, music, food) to subjective culture (exploration of cultural values, beliefs etc)
- Utilise the cultural differences in the classroom by learning from each other, including different perspectives on issues
- Get resources from outside the classroom – community groups, community resources

Action steps

1. Begin dialogues on what makes for successful intercultural competent teaching. This may involve bringing in an external speaker to help spark such dialogues or reading existing literature on this topic. Develop an ongoing plan for addressing this topic of intercultural competence development with teachers.
2. Have teachers utilize the reflection questions in this paper for their own critical self-reflection, a key tool for intercultural competence development.
3. Be aware of cultural differences in the classroom and utilise those differences to further intercultural learning of all students
4. Encourage the development of intercultural lifestyles through daily learning about other cultures, building relationships with those who are from different backgrounds, and continually seeking new intercultural knowledge and experiences
5. Incorporate materials that reflect multiple cultural perspectives in the curriculum
6. When possible, teach more of the 'subjective culture' so that the curriculum goes beyond addressing only 'objective culture'
7. Identify allies, both within the university and in the broader community, who can help provide resources to enhance intercultural learning both for the teachers and the students (i.e. foreign teachers, exchange students at the university, student groups, immigrant communities, etc.)

Reflecting on how teachers can specifically develop students intercultural competence:

- How can teachers specifically incorporate students' cultural perspectives into the course?
- How can teachers allow space for students to reflect on their own intercultural competence development?
- What role can teachers play in mentoring students in this development?
- What role can others in the broader community play in developing students' intercultural competence?
- What role can technology play in students' development of knowledge and skills in relating to those from different backgrounds?
- How can teachers help students demonstrate respect (in culturally appropriate ways) and openness to other ways of viewing the world?
- How can students work together effectively and appropriately in small groups or teams during the course?
- How can teachers move beyond 'objective culture' in the classroom to pushing students to learn more about 'subjective culture' which impacts on the ways in which students actually interact with others? How can teachers help students develop an 'intercultural lens' through which to view the world?

Reference:

Deardoff, D (2009) *The AAGE Handbook of intercultural competence*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage