Teaching multilingual students: Perspectives and strategies

Ekaterina Arshavskaya, PhD
Donna Brown, PhD

Inclusive Excellence Symposium 2019
Outline

• What is culture?
• Multilingual students
• Common challenges:
  - undergraduate students
  - graduate students
• Intercultural learning:
  - perspectives
  - strategies
• Case studies: challenges & solutions
What is culture?
How language and culture affect the way we think

• *To have another language is to possess a second soul.* Charlemagne

• *What’s in a name? That which we call a rose By any other name would smell as sweet.* Shakespeare

Multilingual Students

- International, immigrant, refugee, generation 1.5 students
- Hidden identities in the classroom (Vandrick, 1997)
- “Fluidity” of culture and “identity as a process” (Dervin, 2015)
Challenges: Undergraduate Students

• **Listening** (lectures, class discussions, everyday conversations)

• **Reading** (academic texts, h/w guidelines, newspapers in English)

• **Writing** (academic papers, emails, job-related writing)

• **Speaking** (in & outside the class, presentation skills)

• **Socio-cultural** adaptation (formal/informal language & relationships, concepts & norms)
Challenges: Graduate Students

• Challenges:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvU-3B_nf2o

• Faculty advice:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEitliq4dHw
Intercultural Learning

• An intercultural mind is “a mindset capable of understanding from within and from without both one’s own and other cultures” (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003, p. 252).

• A shift from ethnocentric (where one’s own culture is seen as a norm) to ethnorelative stages (greater acceptance of differences)

• Intercultural learning vs. competence
Intercultural learning: A sociocultural perspective

• All learning is social (activity, social relations, tools)
• Dialectic unity of human mind and emotions
• Learning in communities of practice
• Often learning is informal
• Importance of informal social networks
Intercultural learning: An experiential perspective

• Learning by daily experiences
• To become meaningful, reflection is necessary
• Often informal, haphazard, often unconscious, and linked to the learning of others
• Can be self-directed/goal-oriented
Instead of conclusion...

• There **does not seem** to be only one theory that would comprehensively describe this varied process.

• “… intercultural competence is less related to specific skills and knowledge than it is comprised of a **holistic** approach to issues. It is perceived more as an **ethical orientation to people, life and diversity**, which guides a person’s thinking and behavior rather than an ability to perform something well in an intercultural environment.” (Jokikokko, 2010)

• “... people need to possess a certain kind of **interest and openness towards otherness and diversity** if they want to, for instance, develop their intercultural competences. A certain amount of **toleration of uncertainty and stress** is also a necessary condition for intercultural learning situations...” (Jokikokko, 2010, p. 34)
Intercultural Learning: Strategies

Our work in the IELI
(with Dr. Donna Brown)

1. To further student learning and observational skills through the process of slow looking
2. To engage learners in authentic language use while utilizing their funds of knowledge
3. To facilitate enriching learning experiences about culture and art
Art/Life, 1976
Wood, paper, wire, and pigment
Gift of the Kathryn C. Wanlass Foundation

In China, we prefer antique art. We have different kinds of art, but I personally like Western or European art. This desk looks old, that’s why I liked it. It also made me think about life and I learned something new; that was the most interesting part of this art object.

Life is like this desk. A half is new. The other half is covered by messy paint. One side of the desk is also nailed with slats for repair. However, this run-down side of the desk is full of a strong and courageous image. This suggests to the audience that the desk is like life, consisting of difficulties and gloss. In my opinion, this desk seems simple, but it requires us to think deeply and understand. Especially, it lets us reflect on ourselves in combination with the state of real life. Half of life is hard and bitter, and half is bright and colorful. Appreciating art is not just about the surface, but about the value of art itself. It reveals these truths.

Liangji Hao is from China. He is a Level III student in IELI 2310 Comprehending Authentic Discourse. He is currently majoring in Business at USU.
Project Outcomes

• Confidence
• Language Skills (writing/speaking/listening/reading)
• Collaboration/bonding
• Broadening cultural backgrounds for all students
Intercultural Learning: Strategies
My work in the MSLT

• Example 1: through ethnographic interviews

Instead of going out every night and spending time bonding, American students are more likely to go home and work on homework. This made Carlos feel as though relationships were “cold” and slightly unauthentic. ... I generally think of myself as nice and outgoing but my actions are not always viewed that way in the context of another culture (“critical cultural self-awareness”).
Intercultural Learning: Strategies
My work in the MSLT

• Example 2: through actual experience & reflection
  I remember feeling ... disillusioned as I left a language training center feeling confident with my Spanish only to later discover I couldn’t even understand taxi drivers ... feeling inadequate with the language and losing ... sense of identity ... physically and linguistically you don’t fit in and you just kind of feel dumb all the time. ... increased empathy ... having now for ESL students resonates deeply with me.

• Example 3: through videos
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcvclYO-3i0
Case Studies

• What is **challenging** about this classroom situation?

• What theoretical **perspective** can be useful (i.e., to explain **why** this happens and what **tools** can help)?

• What are the possible instructional **strategies** to respond to it?
Resources

• Link to: Teaching multilingual students at the UNC
  https://writingcenter.unc.edu/teaching-multilingual-students/

• Link to: ITAs guide at the Vanderbilt University
  https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/itas/
Instead of conclusion...

What are your takeaways from this discussion?
References


Session Title: Teaching multilingual students: perspectives and strategies

Summary: In this session, we will discuss the process of intercultural learning that both students and teachers who teach multilingual students go through. We will learn about ways to reach out to and use the strengths of multilingual students and share ways of promoting intercultural learning in a diverse classroom. We will end by examining several case studies involving multilingual students in your classroom and brainstorm the best strategies to respond to them.

Theoretical perspectives discussed in this session:\(^1\):

1. Sociocultural perspectives on intercultural learning
   - All learning is social (activity, social relations, tools)
   - Dialectic unity of human mind and emotions
   - Learning in communities of practice
   - Often learning is informal
   - Importance of informal social networks

2. An experiential perspective on intercultural learning
   - Learning by daily experiences
   - To become meaningful, reflection is necessary
   - Often unconscious, haphazard, and linked to the learning of others
   - Can be self-directed/goal-oriented

Case Studies

Case study 1: Plagiarism

a) An international graduate student submits a paper on Canvas. Turn-it-in detects several plagiarized excerpts from other students’ papers. In a face-to-face meeting with the instructor, s/he denies copying from online students’ papers.

---

\(^1\) Adapted from Jokikokko (2010).
b) An international graduate student uses PowerPoint slides from a student from previous years for his/her in-class presentation. In a face-to-face meeting with the instructor, s/he denies copying.

Case study 2: Unprepared students

An undergraduate student doesn’t know how to access Canvas and email. S/he also doesn’t prepare homework and if s/he ever submits homework, doesn’t fully follow the instructions/guidelines.

Case study 3: Academic haggling

Several undergraduate students in your class attempt to negotiate homework guidelines and deadlines. In addition, they negotiate grades and ask to cancel classes due to personal reasons.

Case study 4: Questioning teacher authority

A graduate student (older than you) appears very reserved and somewhat dissatisfied with your class. S/he also usually questions your rationale for certain class activities and answers to class assignments. When asked in class, s/he doesn’t want to explain why s/he behaves in this manner.

Reference