

DEVELOPING THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

Baranova L.N. (Ukraine) Email: Baranova59@scientifictext.ru

*Baranova Lilia Nikolaevna - Senior Lecturer,
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES,
STATE UNIVERSITY OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS, KIEV, UKRAINE*

Abstract: *this study explores how teaching development programs may facilitate the development of intercultural competence in graduate students and prepare them for communicating effectively in the global workplace after graduation. First, we describe the concept of intercultural teaching competence and examine the skills that graduate students may need to cultivate in order to communicate effectively in culturally diverse settings. Then, we discuss the findings of our qualitative study on the impact of teaching development programs enhanced with intercultural communication components. As a result of training, participants became more aware of cultural and disciplinary differences in communication, were able to adapt their communication style to audiences with different levels of background knowledge, and felt more prepared for interpersonal interactions across cultures with undergraduates. Finally, participants were able to transfer the skills learned to other areas of graduate study and used effective intercultural communication strategies when interacting with globally diverse peers and faculty supervisors.*

Keywords: *intercultural competence, Graduate Students, teacher, Canada, higher education, development programs.*

РАЗВИТИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ АСПИРАНТОВ

Баранова Л.Н. (Украина)

*Баранова Лилия Николаевна - старший преподаватель,
кафедра иностранных языков
Государственный университет телекоммуникаций, г. Киев, Украина*

Аннотация: *в этом исследовании рассматривается, как программы развития обучения могут способствовать развитию межкультурной компетенции у аспирантов и подготовить их к эффективному взаимодействию на глобальном рабочем месте после окончания учебы. Во-первых, мы описываем концепцию межкультурной компетенции преподавания и изучаем навыки, которые могут потребоваться для студентов-выпускников, чтобы эффективно общаться в различных культурных условиях. Затем мы обсудим результаты нашего качественного исследования о влиянии программ обучения преподаванию, улучшенных с помощью компонентов межкультурной коммуникации. В результате обучения участники стали более осведомленными о культурных и дисциплинарных различиях в общении, смогли адаптировать свой стиль общения к аудиториям с различными уровнями базовых знаний и почувствовали себя более подготовленными к межличностному взаимодействию между культурами со студентами. Наконец, участники смогли перенести приобретенные навыки в другие области аспирантуры и использовать эффективные стратегии межкультурной коммуникации при взаимодействии с глобально разнообразными сверстниками и преподавателями факультетов.*

Ключевые слова: *межкультурная компетентность, аспирант, преподаватель, Канада, высшее образование, программы развития.*

Analysis of achievements and publications. The research landscape and world of employment that graduate students enter after completing their degrees at Canadian universities is increasingly international and culturally diverse, involving collaboration with colleagues from around the world (Adler, 2008; Knight & Madden, 2010). In these globally connected work settings, new researchers and professionals need to demonstrate intercultural competence in order to succeed (Deardorff, 2006). In academic settings, intercultural competence may include the ability to present research or facilitate learning across cultures, speak with confidence to a variety of audiences, explain complex concepts clearly, and negotiate working relationships across cultural, social, professional, and disciplinary boundaries (Gilbert, Balatti, Turner, & Whitehouse, 2004; Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009). For example, graduates may be expected to participate in international research teams in which some group members may give feedback very directly while others prefer to communicate indirectly through implication. Graduates may also contribute to interdisciplinary dialogue and explain their research to colleagues who are unfamiliar with specialized technical discourse (Benninghoff & Sormani, 2008; Dimitrov, 2012). Further, they may be expected to navigate power structures and relationships in multinational organizations or multicultural communities respectfully and effectively (King & Baxter-Magolda 2005; Steers, Nardon, & Sanchez-Runde, 2013).

The main body. In this article, we argue that teaching development programs with intercultural communication components provide an excellent opportunity to foster the skills that graduate students will need after graduation. First, we examine the intercultural skills that graduate students may develop during their graduate studies. Then, we demonstrate the concrete benefits of fostering intercultural competence, by reporting the results of research on the impact of two teaching development programs at a large Canadian research university. We examine how students use their newly acquired intercultural skills in their work as teaching assistants, and report on how students transfer

these skills to other areas of graduate study, such as supervision and research. Finally, we examine how teaching development programs may contribute to the preparation of graduate students for the global workplace.

Why Develop Intercultural Competence in Graduate School? In their role as students in the international environment of Canadian higher education, master's and doctoral candidates interact across cultures daily with their peers and professors. Intercultural competence enables them to manage their workload, negotiate funding, identify mentors (Dimitrov, 2009), and resolve conflicts effectively when needed (Adrian-Taylor, Noels, & Tischler, 2007). In their role as teaching assistants (TAs), graduate students navigate cultural differences in communication in their classroom on a daily basis because students and TAs from different cultures may have very different expectations for teacher behaviours and communication styles (Eland, 2001; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Cultural differences are especially common in areas such as the power distance between instructors and students, expectations for participating in class discussion, preferred ways of critiquing others' ideas, or writing and reasoning style in a particular discipline (Brown, 2008; Crabtree & Sapp, 2004; Eland, 2001; Gorsuch, 2003; Hoekje & Williams, 1994; McCalman, 2007). For example, interrupting a speaker and adding one's own ideas to the conversation is a sign of interest and engagement in some South American and Mediterranean cultures, whereas in a Japanese or Korean classroom, interrupting the instructor may be perceived as disrespectful (Laroche, 2003; Wieland, 1991). Interculturally competent teaching strategies allow TAs to use cultural differences as opportunities for learning and to avoid misunderstandings with their students. Finally, when graduate students teach, they serve as role models for the undergraduate students in their class. For example, TAs may model global awareness when they teach about international or diversity-related issues. By modelling openness to different perspectives, they help their undergraduate students develop perspective taking, which is a key component of intercultural competence (Bond, Qian, & Huang, 2003). By creating an inclusive classroom where students can share a variety of perspectives and challenge mainstream approaches to research (Ouellett, 2005), TAs can encourage cognitive flexibility and critical thinking, or they can model how to encourage contributions from ESL learners and from students who may hold a minority opinion during a debate in class (Cushner & Mahon 2009; Harlap, 2008).

What Areas of Intercultural Competence Can Be Developed in Teaching Programs? The teaching development programs offered at many Canadian universities provide an opportunity for graduate students to enhance their intercultural and interpersonal communication skills. In these programs, graduate students typically give short teaching presentations and receive feedback on their performance. They engage in collaborative learning with peers from a variety of cultural, disciplinary, and linguistic backgrounds. In teaching development programs that include intercultural communication components, graduate students may develop a form of intercultural teaching competence (Dimitrov, 2013) through these learning activities. Intercultural teaching competence (ITC) is the ability of instructors to interact with students in a way that supports the learning of students who are linguistically and culturally different from the instructor or from each other and that is effective and appropriate in the context of teaching (Fantini, 2009). ITC includes the ability to communicate with minimal loss or distortion (Fantini, 2009), meaning that students receive and understand the messages and meaning that the instructor intends to communicate to them. It is a set of skills that allows TAs to establish meaningful relationships with students, peers, and faculty and enables TAs and their students to work together to achieve common learning goals (Fantini 2009; Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009). ITC enables TAs to bridge cultural and linguistic differences in the classroom as well as to communicate successfully across disciplinary cultures (Dimitrov, 2012). The ITC concept was developed by combining existing concepts from two distinct research literatures. ITC combines elements of intercultural competence models (Chagnon, 2009; Deardorff, 2006) and work in the intercultural communication literature on interculturally competent teaching (Bennett, 2011; Deardorff, 2009) with research in the fields of educational development and educational psychology on effective teacher behaviours (Brookfield 1995; Murray, 1997), teaching assistant competencies (Shannon, Twale, & Moore, 1998; Smith, 2001), and inclusive teaching (Ouellett, 2005). ITC is similar to general intercultural competence in the sense that it has attitudinal components (e.g., tolerance for ambiguity, openness to difference) as well as knowledge components (e.g., knowledge of cultural differences in classroom interactions) and behavioural components (e.g., the ability to use culturally appropriate feedback strategies; Deardorff, 2006). ITC goes beyond general intercultural competence models in that it identifies specific teacher skills, behaviours, and teaching approaches that facilitate learning in the context of the culturally diverse classroom. The existing literature on interculturally competent teaching has focused primarily on social science classrooms (Deardorff, 2009) where instructors facilitate discussions about identity involving topics such as race, privilege, class, and equity (e.g., in history, sociology, or political science courses). In this article, we examine ITC across all disciplines and also explore the skills that TAs need in diverse labs, tutorials, and classrooms in engineering, science, medical sciences, and other disciplines outside the social sciences. Based on the synthesis of the two research literatures above, the skills of an interculturally competent teacher include the ability to:

1. Model and encourage perspective taking in their classroom. For example, recognize when students approach global issues from monocultural/ethnocentric perspectives, and encourage students to consider the same issue from a variety of perspectives by asking questions and expressing a diversity of opinions in class (Bennett & Bennett 2004; Bond, Qian, & Huang, 2003).

2. Model and encourage non-judgemental approaches to discussing cultural, social, or other types of difference. For example, encourage students to first describe and interpret cultural differences in gender roles or health-care practices before evaluating them (Bennett, 2011; Harlap, 2008).

3. Facilitate discussion among students with a variety of communication styles. For example, recognize differences in turn taking; manage interruptions; and perceive and comprehend high-context and low-context, as well as circular and linear contributions from students (Hall, 1986; Wieland, 1991).

4. Create an inclusive learning environment that recognizes the barriers students face in participating. For example, in some students' home cultures, women may only speak when the men are finished talking, or students only contribute when they are called upon to do so (Eland, 2001).

5. Expect and accept difference, and appreciate differences in the relationships between teachers and learners across cultures. Such differences may include: differing expectations regarding the amount of power distance between teachers and students; or differing expectations with respect to learner initiative (Cryer & Okorochoa, 1999; Dimitrov, 2009), as well as differences in students' orientation to rules and rule following (Nisbett, 2004).

6. Provide feedback across cultures in a variety of ways. Effective facilitators adjust their feedback style to the needs of learners and recognize the way feedback is offered and received in the learners' cultures or learning styles (Laroche, 2003).

7. Tailor messages to audiences with different levels of linguistic ability and limit the use of jargon and colloquialisms that may interfere with a given audience's understanding (Cushner & Mahon, 2009).

8. Explain unspoken assumptions of one's own culture and discipline to students from different cultural backgrounds, and mentor them during their transition to Canadian academia. For example, articulate the value of academic integrity and highlight cultural differences in citation and referencing, or create assignments that take into account the discomfort that students from Confucian educational cultures experience when asked to critique the ideas of others (Watkins & Biggs, 1999).

9. Design assessments that recognize and validate cultural differences in writing and communication styles, such as the use of inductive or deductive logic and circular rather than linear reasoning in student essays (Eland, 2001; Fox, 1994).

10. Model tolerance for ambiguity when students with a variety of learning and communication styles contribute to class discussions, and help learners deal with uncertainty. For example, rephrase circular contributions for linear learners, demonstrate patience with longer or high-context comments in class, and validate student responses (Bennett, 2011; Paige, 1993, 1996).

11. Identify risk factors for particular types of learners. Examples of risk factors are loss of face, loss of group identity, conflict avoidance, and risk of self-disclosure related to culture, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background (Bennett, 2011; Paige, 1993).

12. Create opportunities for interaction among learners that allow them to learn from each other, share different perspectives, and share the wealth of cultural knowledge they bring to class (Arkoudis et al., 2013).

13. Develop an awareness of one's own culture and cultural identity, how these are perceived by cultural others, and how they influence cross-cultural interactions—for example, the potential influence of a perceptual lens created by one's sexual orientation, race/whiteness, privileged socio-economic status, or ability to speak a dominant language (Harlap, 2008).

Conclusion. There is significant overlap between the best practices of reflective educators who use learner-centered teaching approaches (Brookfield, 1995; McAlpine & Weston, 2000) and the best practices of interculturally competent teachers who model perspective taking, seek feedback, and revise their instructional approaches to meet student needs (Bennett, 2011; Deardorff, 2009; Paige, 1996). This overlap is one of the main reasons that teaching programs provide a wonderful opportunity for developing the intercultural competencies of graduate students. Teaching programs also allow graduate students to become part of a diverse community of instructors. The proportion of international students participating in teaching programs is very high (Boman, 2013), giving participants an opportunity to form lasting professional relationships with peers across cultures. The facilitation skills that TAs acquire as part of teaching development programs are also highly transferable. Giving feedback across cultures, clarifying expectations, and being mindful about others' need to save face are skills that they can use when they conduct collaborative research, take on a leadership role, supervise junior colleagues, or present their work at international conferences. It is important to emphasize here that teaching practices that promote interaction in diverse classrooms also improve learning for all. Thus, ITC is a developmental goal for all university teachers, not only for international TAs or domestic TAs teaching international students (Cooley, Dunn, & Kirova, 2005). The teaching strategies that benefit ESL learners, such as providing clear outlines for class, defining key concepts, or encouraging peer learning, also benefit students with a variety of learning styles and learning disabilities, or students who are new to the discipline or new to disciplinary discourse.

References / Список литературы

1. *Adrian-Taylor S.R., Noels K.A. & Tischler K., 2007. Conflict between international graduate students and faculty supervisors: Toward effective conflict prevention and management strategies. Journal of Studies in International Education. 11(1). 90–117.*
2. *Arkoudis S., Watty K., Baik C., Yu X., Borland H., Chang S., Lang J., Lang J. & Pearce A., 2013. Finding common ground: Enhancing interaction between domestic and international students in higher education. Teaching in Higher Education. 18 (3). 222–235.*

3. *Bennett J.M.*, 2011, February. Developing intercultural competence for international education faculty and staff. Paper presented at the Association of International Education Administrators Conference, San Francisco, CA. [Electronic resource]. URL: http://www.intercultural.org/documents/competence_handouts.pdf/ (date of access: 18.12.2018).
4. *Gilbert R., Balatti J., Turner P. & Whitehouse H.*, 2004. The generic skills debate in research higher degrees. *Higher Education Research and Development*. 23 (3). 375– 388.
5. Statistics Canada., 2008. Canada's ethnocultural mosaic, 2006 census. Ottawa.
6. Canadian Ministry of Industry. [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www12.statcan.ca/censusrecensement/2006/as-sa/97-562/pdf/97-562-XIE2006001.pdf/> (date of access: 18.12.2018).
7. *Smith K.S.*, 2001. Pivotal events in graduate teacher preparation for a faculty career. *The Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development*. 8 (3). 97–105.
8. *Strauss A. & Corbin J.*, 1990. *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.