



The Teacher's Cultural Competencies as a Driving Force of the Educational Process

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ABSTRACT: Today's classrooms are becoming more diverse. Every teacher who possesses skills, knowledge and attitudes, and appreciates the diversity of students, actually participates and contributes to the design of the education system. One of the main teacher's competencies is cultural competence, which, at the same time, is the main indicator of teacher effectiveness in working with students from different cultures. Cultural competence refers to human awareness of one's own cultural identity, as well as views and attitudes about possible differences in other cultures, as an opportunity to learn and build common norms of students and their families. The existence of group differences makes each student unique, and the classroom becomes richer. Working with students from different cultural backgrounds is in every way a positive and useful thing, as it is a way of approaching another culture, practices, values and beliefs, expanding views and knowledge for the other.

KEYWORDS: Awareness, Diversity, Culture, Knowledge, Sensitivity, Competencies, Education

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and diversity are an integral part of today's world. The interaction process, challenged by technology, is a daily and customary experience for cultures worldwide. Today, people have opportunities to communicate regularly across national borders. International cooperation is growing rapidly in the field of economics, but in many fields there is a growing need to work with people from different countries, both directly and indirectly. It is crucial the willingness of young people to be active participants in the society in this regard, which extends across borders and involves interaction with people of different backgrounds and cultures. [10] One of the main challenges in the

modern multicultural society is overcoming differences and living together in a peaceful and constructive way, developing a sense of community and belonging, and full development of students, primarily in school and later in society. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to have cultural competencies and teachers, who are qualified to develop them in students. [6]

Developing cultural competence is primarily a process, not a final destination. Like any other skill, the process of development and improvement continues throughout life. There are various ways to increase the capacity to interact effectively with others. Stereotypes, prejudices, and bias have negative effects on the individual, as well as on the wider environment, and their mitigation or to some extent reduction should be the first step in the development of cultural competence. [10]

II. DEFINING CULTURE AND CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

Culture is a complex social phenomenon and a very broad term. It represents one of the most important characteristics of man and society and is part of the basic concepts of modern social sciences and humanities. Culture usually implies the sum of all material and spiritual values of human work in nature and society. [9] Culture includes the shared traditions, beliefs, customs, history, folklore, and institutions of a group of people. It is shared by people of the same ethnicity, language, nationality, or religion. Culture is a system of rules that are the basis of who people are and influence their expression as individuals and as part of a group. We all develop in a certain type of culture. Our environment determines the rules for living with others, what we learn and how we learn it. Those rules are passed down from one generation to the next and are often adapted to time and location. Culture is a fundamental building block of



identity, and the development of a strong cultural identity is essential to an individual's healthy sense of it who he is and where he belongs. [7]

Culture in its conception includes the following four levels:

- Cultural knowledge refers to a person's overall knowledge of the cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviours of another ethnic or cultural group.
- Cultural awareness includes understanding other groups and being open to the idea of changing cultural attitudes.
- Cultural sensitivity refers to the fact that there are differences between cultures and those values of differences should not be attributed. Comparing cultures for better or worse, right or wrong, can easily turn into a conflict situation. Conflict can easily arise when the questioning of another culture is contrary to the idea of multiculturalism.
- Cultural competence represents a combination of the previous three stages and adds efficiency. Cultural competence implies the capacity to incorporate many different behaviours, attitudes, and viewpoints to achieve better results in any field. [1]

“Cultural competence involves understanding and appropriately responding to the unique combination of cultural variables- including ability, age, beliefs, ethnicity, experience, gender, gender identity, linguistic background, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Diversity is a reality in all walks of life. Through the increasing globalization of communications, commerce, and working practices, people are connecting and thus working and functioning. The changes that are happening in one part of the world are affecting people everywhere. Just because of the fact for increased diversity and interconnected problems, people work together to find the best strategy and solution to achieve their goals. Social and economic change is coming at a very fast pace, and therefore the need for cultural competence in all walks of life is understandable, but the educational process has a significant place. In terms of diversity, there are different types, some of which have greater influence and are of historical importance. The most common types of diversity to consider are listed in Table 1. [1]

Educational institutions should be leaders and exemplars of cultural competence. They are the most sensitive but also the most easily broken link in the chain of society. The educational institution is

status-that the professional and client/patient/student bring to interactions.“

Developing cultural competence is a dynamic and complex process requiring ongoing self-assessment and continuous expansion of one's cultural knowledge. It evolves over time, beginning with an understanding of one's own culture, continuing through interactions with individuals from various cultures, and extending through one's own expansion of knowledge” [2]

Cultural competence refers to the will and actions to build understanding between people, to have respect and openness to different cultural perspectives, to strengthen cultural safety, and to work toward equality of opportunity. Building relationships between people is fundamental to cultural competence and is based on the foundations of understanding mutual expectations and attitudes, and building on the strength of mutual knowledge, using a wide range of community members and resources. Cultural competence is the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence encompasses:

- being aware of one's own worldview
- developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences
- gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and world views
- developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures. [7]

the place where it all starts. The idea of having and always upgrading cultural competence in an educational institution brings with it several benefits. Diversity offers:

- a space for presenting more alternative ideas for achieving goals,
- opportunities for contact with people of all cultures and nationalities living and working in the institution or community,
- support in developing strategically validated solutions for changes in the school or the environment
- a source of hope and success in managing work and survival.
- a higher level of mutual respect and understanding among those involved.
- a higher level of creativity in problem-solving through new perspectives, ideas, and strategies.
- reduction of unwanted surprises that can slow progress.



- increased participation and involvement of other cultural groups.
- increased trust and greater cooperation.
- help and support in overcoming the fear of mistakes, competition, or conflict.
- promotion of inclusion and equality. [1]

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationality • Ethnicity • Gender • Mother tongue • Race • Sexual orientation • Spiritual beliefs and practices • Social class • Marginalized or socially excluded groups • Educational status • Family status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Health status • Physical and mental ability • Style • Skills and talents • Customs • Ideas • Military experience • National, regional, or other geographical area • Ownership of property • Occupational status • Socioeconomic status
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Table 1. Types of diversity by... [1]

IV. THE APPERANCE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN PRACTICE

The key to prosperity in culturally diverse classrooms and schools lies precisely in cultural competence. To better serve students, their families, and communities, it needs to be learned, practiced, and institutionalized. Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures different from our own. It implies developing a certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivity, increasing cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that are the basis of effective intercultural learning and culturally responsive learning. Cultural competence in teachers is not created as a result of one-day training, reading a book, or attending a course, but through daily practice.

Teachers who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing, and living, celebrating the benefits of diversity and the ability to understand and respect differences. In practical terms, it is a never-ending journey that involves critical thinking, learning to understand how people perceive the world, and participating in various systems of shared knowledge. Cultural competence is not static, and the level of cultural competence changes in response to new situations, experiences, and relationships. The three elements of cultural competence are: attitudes, skills and

knowledge. The importance of these elements spans three levels:

1. Individual level – knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals.
2. Level of service – management and operational frameworks and practices, expectations, including policies, procedures, vision statements, and the voices of children, families, and the community.
3. Wider system level – connecting and respecting the rest of the community, agencies, elders, and local community protocols.

Since there is no checklist to identify culturally competent teachers in the workplace, a picture can be built of their attitudes, skills, and required knowledge. Teachers who respect diversity and are culturally competent:

- have an understanding and respect for histories, cultures, languages, traditions, and the way of raising children
- value the different capacities and abilities of the individual
- have respect for differences in the home lives of families
- recognize that diversity contributes to the richness of our society and provides a valid evidence base for ways of knowing
- demonstrate an ongoing commitment to developing their own cultural competence in a two-way process with families and communities
- are involved in ongoing reflection regarding their cultural competence.



V. THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURALLY COMPETENT TEACHERS

As professionals, teachers are expected to demonstrate expertise in delivering the curriculum and structuring the classroom for optimal student learning. Only by acquiring the necessary awareness, knowledge, and skills, which are necessary for cultural competence, teachers will be able to actualize their professional commitment and ensure success for all students. Discrimination in education is not just about ignoring ethnically and racially diverse people in the curriculum, but also involves being unaware of one's own biases and being unaware of differences in cultural style, which can easily lead to miscommunication. Much of the materials taught in the programs are related to culture, and that is why it is of great importance:

- teachers' awareness of differences in cultural definitions of success,
- awareness of the existence of traditional cultural learning styles,
- awareness of the necessity of matching learning modalities with students' cultural styles, or adapting teaching to the specific cultural needs of culturally diverse students.

Each person has his own culture that shapes him personally and professionally. Culture is the set of experiences, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests represented by the diversity of students and adults in the school. In schools, it is often perceived as a celebration of important people, religions, traditions, and holidays, but also an appreciation of the customs of different groups. Culture includes people's everyday experiences, events, and behavioral habits that characterize the lives of students and teachers. It shapes a person's sense of who they are and how they fit into their family, community, and society. Understanding one's own culture is crucial in understanding individuals from different cultures. It is of great help for a clearer understanding of students and their families, in order to shape policies and ways that will help students succeed throughout their schooling.

There are five core skill areas for cultural competence. They apply to individual teachers, the schools they work in, and the education system as a whole. [4]

- Valuing Diversity. Accepting and respecting differences- different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values.

- Being Culturally. Self-Aware. Culture- the sum total of an individual's experiences, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests- shapes educators' sense of who they are and where they fit in their family, school, community, and society.
- Dynamics of Difference. Knowing what can go wrong in cross-cultural communication and how to respond to these situations.
- Knowledge of Students' Culture. Educators must have some base knowledge of their students' culture so that student behaviors can be understood in their proper cultural context.
- Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge and Adapting to Diversity. Culturally competent educators, and the institutions they work in, can take a step further by institutionalizing cultural knowledge so they can adapt to diversity and better serve diverse populations. [8]

Culturally responsible teaching generally refers to the way in which teaching staff (and schools) demonstrate - or implement their cultural competence. According to Geneva Gaya, culturally responsible teaching includes the use of cultural knowledge, previous experiences, different performance styles and the use of students' strengths with the aim of appropriate and more effective learning. [3] According to researchers at Brown University, culturally responsive teaching is characterized by:

- high expectations
- learning in the context of culture
- culturally responsible curriculum
- teachers in the role of process facilitators
- student-oriented teaching
- positive perspective for parents and families. [5]

VI. CONCLUSION

Cultural competence is the ability to recognize and use cultural differences as a learning resource. In fact, the initial assumption is that people can learn much more from each other when they differ from each other. Knowing the dimensions of cultural differences is significant support, but also a starting point in cultural communication. In the realization of the intention for a successful transformation of educational institutions, in terms of culture, through awakening the awareness of change, the educational staff has a central role.

Namely, the competencies that teachers should have for the successful implementation of intercultural dialogue in the educational process represent a factor that has a supporting role. Cultural competencies are primarily achieved through knowing one's own culture, as well as the



culture of others, and through having awareness and feeling for it. The teacher, who has simultaneously developed both dimensions (cultural awareness and feeling), can successfully incorporate the cultural dimension into the educational process.

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