

Developing Cultural Intelligence: Designs for Higher Education Courses

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Abstract

This paper presents the design of a course aimed at developing cultural intelligence among graduate students at an American university. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a frame for developing the cultural intelligence of students preparing for work as student affairs professionals. Student-centered in-class group learning activities primarily characterize the course format, which is further supported by synchronous and asynchronous online activities using the learning management system of Blackboard. Cultural intelligence development, expressed in the form of cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, and motivational factors were evaluated using digital storytelling and environmental audit course projects.

Keyword: cultural intelligence, digital storytelling, student affairs, instructional design

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Introduction: Student Affairs and Cultural Intelligence

As microcosms of greater society, colleges and universities are becoming more diverse due to changes in educational policy, migration, and greater global interdependence.

Consequently, emphasis on global, intercultural, and international competency development continues to be a current trend in instructional design and curriculum development literature across many academic disciplines (Erez, Lisak, Harush, Glikson, Nouri, & Shokef, 2013). There appears to be a growing consensus that the future workforce will need to understand and meet new challenges of working in such a dynamic environment. In particular, graduate programs preparing students for the Student Affairs profession frequently incorporate courses teaching cultural awareness, cultural identity development, or cross-cultural skills as part of the core curriculum.

Student Affairs is a “complex area of campus operations” responsible for promoting and enhancing student learning and development (Long, 2012, p. 1; Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, n.d.). Depending on the region of the world in which one resides, student personnel services, student services, and student success are sometimes used interchangeably with Student Affairs to describe the work done by these professionals. Regardless of the term used, the very nature of the work necessitates the development of cultural competencies and skills.

Pedagogical approaches identifying ways to create effective learning environments to maximize students’ cultural competency and skill development provide a wealth of information from which to select when designing a course. As an instructor of a core cultural awareness course, I frequently review the literature and consider how best to promote deeper understanding and appreciation for cultural differences among students, to prepare them for any cultural challenges that may arise within the profession, and to assist them in becoming more culturally intelligent. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how I use digital storytelling to assist in that effort. The paper starts with a

review of how culturally relevant pedagogy and cultural intelligence inform the course design. It then explores the intentional use of technology for the digital storytelling assignment. Finally, the paper concludes with reflections and recommendations.

Course Design: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Cultural Intelligence

In my cultural awareness course, I use Ladson-Billings's conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy as a framework for structuring course learning activities and assignments. Culturally relevant pedagogy is "an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995). From this pedagogical stance, the diversity of the classroom is integral to the learning process. Students' social identities and cultural heritage influence the content selected for the course, how the instructor engages knowledge construction, and the process for developing a critical consciousness in students. For the cultural awareness course, I am attentive to what is taught in the class, how it is taught, and the goals of the students in the course. The course begins with a group discussion about academic expectations and an orientation to the technology being used throughout the semester. Following that, students are given an opportunity to identify their learning goals for the semester. Between the first and second class session, I review the goals and made adjustments to the course schedule and content outline for the course. The class then reviews the adjustments and selects among them for integration into the course. During one recent semester, students completed a weekly formative assessment called Talking Points. For this assignment, they had to post a synthesis of the assigned readings to demonstrate what they learned and how they could

apply their new knowledge in the student affairs profession. Actively engaging the Talking Points provided an opportunity for students to create knowledge influenced by their own lived experiences. By incorporating Talking Points into the course, I have found that students are able to better articulate what they are learning and the importance of what is being learned.

Students engage in creating poetic representations and completing reflective writing activities (e.g. journal prompts) centered around better understanding their cultural background. Poetic representations are the platform or structure students used “to synthesize [their] experience in a direct and affective way” (Prendergast, 2009. p. 555). With both the poetic representations and reflective writing activities, I model transparency and self-disclosure by engaging in the activity alongside them so students can see the importance and value of their lived experiences. Additionally, I discuss the role my own experiences had in shaping my professional identity. I have found that this leaves students feeling affirmed in their social identities; they are then more considerate of others’ identities within the classroom. As their instructor, I also post comments on their reflective writing responses to encourage further reflection, seek clarification, or pose questions about their reactions and strategies.

Promoting the development of students’ critical consciousness has required me to educate myself and the students enrolled in the course on the personal and sociopolitical issues impacting college students, whether on campus or in their communities. To help in this effort, the course comprises three major areas of discussion: understanding culture, social identity categories, and the campus environment. The first area introduces students to the concepts of critical consciousness, cultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, social

inequities, power, and privilege. These concepts are revisited throughout the semester and encourage us to stay focused on their importance to the work of Student Affairs. The introduction of these concepts also creates an opportunity for me to encourage students to critically question social constructs and strengthen their understanding of how they could be agents of social transformation.

	Cognitive CQ	Metacognitive CQ	Behavioral CQ	Motivational CQ
Environmental Audit	Review of the university website and campus materials	Reflective writing activities and analysis of collected data	Engaging with multiple campus stakeholder communities	Groups selected area of campus to focus on for the audit; realization that research could be used by campus community
Cultural Immersion Docuseires	Review current literature about selected population	Reflective episode	Engaging in multiple immersion experiences	Students selected the student population of focus for assignment

Figure 1. Integration of CQ

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is integrated through the two major experiential learning assignments for the course, the Environmental Audit and the Cultural Immersion Docuseires (see Figure 1). CQ is a construct focused on one's ability to appropriately adapt to diverse cultural contexts (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015; Earley & Ang, 2003; Gelfand, Imai, & Fehr, 2008). It comprises four dimensions: cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral, and motivational (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Cognitive CQ reflects the actual knowledge that a

person has of other cultures (e.g., languages, norms), as well as knowledge of the economic, legal, and social systems of different cultures. The metacognitive aspect of CQ is the conscious awareness of one's interactions with those from different cultural backgrounds and the ability to strategize social responses in the new environment. Behavioral CQ relates to one's ability to enact desired actions according to culturally accepted rules (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015; Earley & Ang, 2003). Individuals with high behavioral cultural intelligence exhibit culturally appropriate language and nonverbal expressions that enable them to function effectively in a multicultural context. The motivational factor denotes an individual's propensity or willingness to move toward cultural learning and adjustment; the intrinsic motivation driving them to engage in interactions with people from different cultures (Gelfand, Imai, & Fehr, 2008).

The first experiential learning activity requires students to work in small groups of no more than four students to conduct an environmental audit of the university community. Students use interviewing, photography, and content analysis (i.e., website review) techniques to complete the audit. The goal of the assignment is to help students articulate the effect of the campus environment on college students' needs and experiences. Each group creates research posters to present during the university's research showcase at the end of the semester. The assignment provides an opportunity for students to develop in the cognitive, behavioral, and motivational areas of cultural intelligence.

For their second experiential learning assignment, students are asked to individually develop a 4-episode (4-5 minutes each) docuseries (i.e., digital story) to showcase their understanding and experience with a student cultural group to which they did not belong; as well as contribute to their audience's knowledge and understanding.

Students are given several approaches as examples of how to develop the *first three episodes*:

- a. consider the population in relation to their historical access to higher education;
- b. describe visible theoretical influences evident when interacting with the population;
- c. discuss relatable or confusing aspects about the cultural group;
- d. explore questions they had about the population; or
- e. discuss critical insights about the population and how existing literature describes the cultural group's experiences.

The *final episode* has to, at a minimum, answer the following: what the student learned about themselves after interacting with the student population; how will the insight(s) influence their professional practice (current or future); and what are the ways in which the population can be more included in higher education culture. Each episode also has to include a written description and overview of their process for creating the episode, as well as a list of their sources as end credits. This assignment encourages growth in all four areas of CQ.

Digital Storytelling

Although there are best practices for instructional design, there is no “one best” method for incorporating multimedia and technology into course design. Instead, the focus should be on how to effectively integrate them based on the subject matter and other course contexts (e.g., student demographics or skill level). For the cultural awareness course, I considered the content of the course, my pedagogical stance, and available technologies before

determining that digital storytelling was a better method for facilitating cultural intelligence development among all four areas of CQ in the course (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Robin, 2006).

Cultural intelligence is considered a malleable state that may change based on cultural exposure and experiences (Earley & Peterson, 2004; Gelfand, Imai, & Fehr, 2008). Because research suggests that CQ increases as a result of exposure to cross-cultural contexts throughout the semester, students are required to immerse themselves in the culture of a student population to which they did not belong. For example, if a student identifies as white, male, and heterosexual, then the student might connect with an LGBT student group on campus or a minority race student group (e.g. Black Student Union). The immersive experiences coupled with thorough reviews of student affairs literature about the selected student population provide a foundation from which the students begin to consider the stories of the population and how they fit within or connected to those stories.

Digital storytelling is an especially effective tool because students are able to create their own stories from their immersive experiences and the meaning they assign to those experiences. The digital storytelling format used for this project allows students to use digital graphics, text, recorded audio narration, recorded video, and music to present the narrative (Robin, 2006). As discussed in the previous section, each episode allows the student to add more context to the overall story being created. The process capitalizes on the creative talents of students as they begin to research and storyboard the narrative. It also helps them to develop enhanced communications skills and literacies (e.g., information, technology, media) (Brown, Bryan, & Brown, 2005; Robin, 2006). To better

illustrate students' growth, I am including excerpts from three students' reflections at the end of the cultural awareness course:

Student One Reflection: The most important thing that I took away from this course that I never had the opportunity to explore before were the different cultures of students that were brought in for the facilitations. I was not aware of so many of the discrepancies at this institution (and others) in regards to what religious holidays and occasions are observed, the access to (affordable) cultural and religious cuisines, and other aspects of individuals' identities that may not be considered or accounted for on this campus. One of the other aspects of this course that was extremely impactful for me was the class where we learned about physical spaces on campus, as well as the campus ecology model. I have been so conditioned to assume that diversity and inclusion revolve solely around individuals' identities when in reality, it can manifest itself in so many different ways. Research day was an incredible experience as I have never had the opportunity to present my own research, and to have space made for me to do so was a phenomenal feeling. I would not change anything about this course as it opens up students' minds and allows them to engage in dialogue that is often neglected in academia.

Student Two Reflection: This course challenged my thinking, specifically when considering views not similar to my own. I recognize the need to be open to differing views and opinions, and also being able to productive conversations when difference in opinions do exist.

Student Three Reflection: This course forced me to reconsider my own positionality. It helped to clarify both what my identity means to me, as well as how

individual components of my identity, such as race and gender, impact others' perceptions and reactions toward my own decisions and actions. I think in student affairs practice it is important to be cognizant not only of our own positionality, but also those around us. Specifically of our students and peers in order to ensure any disparities in identities of privilege present do not permeate in the relationship into unhealthy power dynamics. Especially in dealing with students, it is crucial to ensure they feel empowered in their own identity and supported to further develop that through their collegiate experience. Being a member of multiple privileged identity groups, this class helped me understand what that means for student affairs professionals and how to work toward bridging that in order to effectively support the students involved.

Other students shared similar sentiments in their reflections at the end of the course. Although no positivistic assessment tool was used to assess the growth and development of CQ, these reflective statements in the students' words indicate the meaning they have attached to their learning and identify the ways they have learned in the course. The publication of the digital stories, within the course learning management system, provided students with an opportunity to share their work with their peers, thereby promoting gains in emotional intelligence and social learning. The digital storytelling assignment fostered collaboration between the students and members of their selected student populations and enhanced the student experience through personal ownership and accomplishment.

Reflections and Recommendations

I approached the design of the cultural awareness course as an instructor, co-learner, and observer. I shared these roles with the students throughout the course, and the issue of how they could potentially use CQ to inform their student affairs practice was foregrounded in our learning as a class. As a member of the course community, I was learning along with them. This shared knowledge creation—the students were learning about their own intercultural capabilities and how these would inform their work with students, and I was learning about how they made meaning out of the materials provided— informed course discussions and set the context for the feedback on the students' work. Collaboratively, we engaged the course material and advanced the conversation of preparation within the larger discourse on cultural intelligence and student affairs practitioner–student relationships.

The existing literature discussing academic experiences leading to the development of CQ indicate single cross-cultural experiences (Lopes-Murphy, 2014) or experiences disconnected from course goals (West, 2012) are ineffective in developing cultural intelligence. Rather, students receive greater benefit from a variety of cross-cultural experiences purposefully incorporated throughout their academic careers to allow for the continuous and gradual development of CQ. Additionally, the quality of the experiences is a determinant for continued engagement. Disorganized experiences or experiences disconnected from the goals of a student's academic career may lead to unsuccessful cross-cultural engagement or may inhibit future engagement (Earley & Ang, 2003; Lopes-Murphy & Murphy, 2016).

To incorporate culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies, faculty must assess their own CQ abilities and recognize the value of diversity for their discipline or field of

study. It is through such recognition that faculty will be able to employ culturally intelligent instructional practices that will better prepare their students to be successful members of the 21st-century workforce and their chosen profession. Additionally, more empirical research incorporating quantitative and qualitative assessment methods are needed to examine students' growth in these dimensions over time. By systematically exposing students to culturally intelligent teaching practices, the academy can engage students in "experiences that gradually introduce them to, and provide practice with, culturally intelligent behaviors" (Lopes-Murphy, 2014, p. 293) regardless of academic discipline.

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