

Multicultural Competence in Teaching: A Guide for Graduate and Teaching Assistants

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Graduate students entering the teaching profession at the college level within the next decade will be faced with the opportunity and responsibility to teach the most culturally diverse student population in the U.S.'s history of higher education. Within the next 11 years, college students in the U.S. will be more diverse with respect to their race, gender, sexual identity, disability, age, religion, migration status/acclulturation, and native language. Between 1995 and 2015, universities and colleges in the United States will see an additional 2.6 million more students. The greatest increase (80%) will be of minority and older students (31%; Educational Testing Services, 2000). In addition, by 2015, racial/ethnic minority students will comprise the numerical majority in several states, including the District of Columbia, Hawaii, California, and New Mexico (ETS, 2000). In order to thrive in our increasingly multicultural country and in a global world, future college instructors need to become culturally competent in their instruction.

This chapter is intended for graduate students who, as part of their graduate assistantships or teaching assistantships (GTA), have direct contact with undergraduate students. Some of the issues discussed in this chapter may be more applicable for some GTAs than others depending on the GTAs' specific discipline, the course content being taught, the number of teaching responsibilities, and/or the GTAs' teaching philosophy and goals. This chapter is directed at GTAs who teach any course, not just at those who teach a specialized class on multiculturalism or diversity. It is hoped that this chapter will encourage GTAs to be aware of the culturally diverse students they are teaching and to remember that they, as instructors, also bring with them culturally-linked values. Thus, GTAs are strongly encouraged to integrate multicultural issues into their teaching. Although the information contained in this chapter focuses on teaching, it should also be applicable to other contexts where people from different cultures interact.

We will first discuss some of the myths associated with teaching and diversity and why it is vital that future college instructors learn culturally inclusive teaching skills. Next, we will examine each of the three components in which instructors need to become proficient in order to achieve multicultural competence: 1) To acquire knowledge about culturally diverse students' styles of learning and socio-cultural experiences, 2) To become aware of their affective, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to culturally diverse students, and 3) To enhance their teaching skills by integrating knowledge and self-awareness into their teaching practices. Finally, we will conclude by citing some of the available resources at Ball State University (BSU), on-line, and in the literature.

Teaching and Diversity Myths

"Teaching and diversity" is often associated with several misconceptions. First, some may equate it with having to make excuses or to create exceptions for students who have different learning needs. The objection stems from the belief that treating culturally diverse students differently is synonymous with giving them an advantage over others and thus instructors are somehow being unfair. GTAs are encouraged to think of fairness as ensuring effective learning for all students rather than standardizing their instructional methods (Noble & Mullin, 1999). In other words, it would actually be unfair for instructors to treat students as if they all have the same learning styles, the same strengths, and the same weaknesses because doing so would impede some students' learning. GTAs should try to use different strategies to impart knowledge, not only to ensure that students with diverse learning styles will have the opportunity to learn, but to also encourage students to expand their less preferred learning styles (McClanaghan, 2000).

Another misconception that some instructors have is to assume that teaching students who are cultural minorities (e.g., not young, verbal, able, independent, Westernized, English-proficient, and White) means

that the instructors would need to lower their standards. Noble and Mullins (1999) suggested that rather than focusing on the final outcome (e.g., grades), instructors should pay attention to the process of learning. In other words, GTAs should ensure that students who have different learning styles be given the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and acquired knowledge. For example, GTAs should try to use multiple methods of assessment (e.g., written exams, oral exams, group projects, individual projects, content-focused, and application-focused) to allow students a wide range of opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and learning. Hence, if the GTAs' objective is to assess students' learning, the students' mode of expressing or demonstrating that knowledge should not be penalized just because it does not coincide with the assessment method most often used by the GTAs.

Finally, some instructors may express ambivalent feelings, feel apathetic, or be resentful when they are asked to integrate cultural diversity or multiculturalism into their courses, perceiving them to be politically driven endeavors. However, as professionals, instructors have an obligation to ensure that they treat students fairly and as individuals, not as representatives of groups. It is our legal and ethical duty as instructors to impart knowledge and to teach our students, regardless of who they are or how similar or different they are from us. We are prohibited by our institutions, professional organizations, and/or laws from discriminating against people based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, age, and/or sexual orientation. Our job is to educate and to assess accurately whether students are learning. Furthermore, given the diversity of the student population, instructors who cannot effectively teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds will probably find themselves lacking the skills to gain or continue employment in the teaching profession.

Rather than seeing this as a legal mandate or a spurious mission, let us examine some of the benefits that a culturally inclusive college classroom environment can have on students and instructors. The diversity of cultures being represented by college students can add to the learning environment for all students. First, students not only learn from their instructors and from the course materials, they also learn from each other. Critical thinking is one of the

most valued skills instructors strive to teach their students. Having multiple perspectives represented in a classroom may encourage all students to critically examine multiple sources of knowledge and to evaluate their own worldviews. Moreover, having positive intercultural contacts may increase appreciation for diverse cultures for both instructors and students. Finally, students who have had positive intercultural contacts are more physically healthy, are more open to diversity of ideas, exhibit less prejudice, and thus are much more prepared to be productive, effective citizens of the global world (Littleford & Wright, 1998; Wright & Littleford, 2002; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000).

Multicultural Competence in Teaching

One of the tasks on which GTAs need to focus, if they wish to gain multicultural competence in teaching, is to acquire knowledge about the learning styles and socio-cultural experiences of different cultural groups. We will now briefly present the knowledge that all GTAs need to have when teaching a culturally diverse classroom.

Knowledge

Diversity in learning styles: Students often have diverse learning styles, and thus may respond to different teaching styles differently. To be successful in a culturally diverse classroom, GTAs need to be aware of the range of learning styles that their students may have and to be flexible in their teaching styles. For example, Grasha and Yangarber-Hicks (2000) proposed that learning styles can be categorized as follows: (1) competitive (like to be in the spotlight), (2) collaborative (like to work with peers and instructors), (3) avoidant (not show much interest in activities or learning), (4) participant (actively participates in class), (5) dependent (relies on instructors for information), or (6) independent learners (like to work alone). Others (see Anderson & Adams, 1992, for a review) have proposed that learning styles can be conceptualized as learning by doing (active experimentation), learning by thinking (abstract conceptualization), learning by perception (reflective observation), and learning by intuition (concrete experiences). Still others focus on preferences for performance versus verbal expression, visual versus auditory information, observing and imitating versus verbal instruction, spatial versus

sequential activities, cooperative versus competitive tasks, and group versus individual learning. See also Chapter 12, [Characteristics of Effective Teaching](#). Although there is evidence suggesting that some cultural groups have preferences for specific styles (e.g., women prefer collaborative whereas men prefer competitive learning activities; for a review see Adams, 1992), GTAs are encouraged to focus on increasing their repertoire of teaching styles rather than trying to categorize individual students' learning styles based on their memberships in cultural groups. Moreover, the students' learning styles may not relate to their cultural backgrounds. Also, cultural differences do not automatically equal divergence in thinking and cultural similarities do not necessarily indicate convergence in learning styles.

In addition, developmental factors may influence students' learning styles. Specifically, some first year students may approach knowledge in a dualistic manner, actively seeking concrete and clear-cut answers while being uncomfortable with ambiguity. As they progress in their education, students may shift their approach to viewing knowledge as more relative (Whitcomb, 2000). Thus, we hope that GTAs will remember that these learning styles are only indicative of the process by which students acquire and process information and not signs of innate, fixed capabilities to learn.

Although we presented the many ways in which students may approach learning, we do not expect GTAs to match every individual student's learning style. In addition, it is hoped that GTAs will be flexible in their teaching styles in order to foster learning in as many students as possible.

It is also vital that GTAs be aware of the cultural context in which their students' learning takes place, particularly the socio-cultural experiences that their culturally diverse students might have. Before discussing these experiences, however, we need to point out several caveats. First, although it is important that GTAs strive to learn about as many cultural groups' experiences and values as possible, GTAs should also remember that they cannot know all groups' histories and hence should be careful to not stereotype individual students. Second, it is important to keep in mind that within the same cultural group, there may be great individual differences, sometimes greater than the differences that exist between groups.

GTAs should treat people as individuals and remember that not all students have the exact same experiences just because they may be members from the same cultural minority group. Third, students may have multiple identities (e.g., a student who is older, female, lesbian, and White). Thus, it is not appropriate for GTAs to see students through only one cultural lens. Finally, although some students' minority statuses are visibly salient, others may not be as readily observable. GTAs should assume that all cultures are represented in their classrooms and be professional and respectful of all cultures. By modeling respect and appreciation for the culturally diverse, GTAs can send the message that differences in ideas, in worldviews, and differences in general are appreciated and supported in their classrooms.

We will now provide a brief overview of the socio-cultural experiences that may influence cultural minority students' learning. Most cultural minority students experience similar adjustments as those experienced by the cultural majority students, including adjusting to college schedule, financial stress, and loneliness. College age students also need to adjust to being more independent, moving away from home, losing the friendships and connections from high school, and homesickness (Chism, Cano, & Pruitt, 1989). In addition, cultural minority students may face other challenges that cultural dominant students may not. For example, there is ample research showing that if an individual is, or perceives that he/she is, one of the few members from her/his cultural group, that his/her performance may be negatively affected due to "stereotype threat" (Steele, 1997) or performance monitoring (Saenz, 1994). Steele explained that visible cultural minorities (e.g., African Americans and women) experience stereotype threat when they become concerned that their own performance would fulfill the negative stereotypes that others have of their cultural group. This anxiety causes them to perform less well on cognitive tasks. Saenz (1994) showed that even individuals whose minority memberships are not visually apparent experience on-going difficulties performing cognitive tasks when they are aware of their token status. Thus, being the only student with a hidden disability, the only ethnic minority, the only nontraditional student, the only student with a physical disability, etc., may impede one's learning. Consequently, these cultural minorities' academic performance may underestimate or not even relate to their actual abilities.

To reduce stereotype threat, GTAs should provide students with non-judgmental feedback based on high expectations while acknowledging and supporting students' ability to meet these standards (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999). In addition, GTAs should treat students as individuals, not as representatives of their group. GTAs should try to ensure that students do not perceive that their individual performance (positive and negative) reflect on their groups.

Many cultural minority students at BSU are expected to learn in an environment where they are the only one or one of the few members from their cultural group. In addition, these cultural minority students may have to deal with issues that their dominant culture peers do not. Being aware of these types of experiences and how students cope can be helpful for GTAs to understanding some of the challenges that students may face that could affect their academic performance and may influence whether they persist and graduate (Chism et al., 1989). We will now discuss a few of the experiences associated with cultural membership that some students may face on a regular basis.

Race/ethnicity: In 2003, of the 3,694 first-year students enrolled at BSU, 239 (6.5%) were ethnic minorities. Specifically within the incoming class, there were 134 (3.6%) African American, 18 (.5%) Asian American, 42 (1.1%) Hispanic/Latino American, 11 (.3%) Native American, 1 (.03%) Pacific Islander American, and 33 (.9%) bi-racial American students (BSU, 2003). See Chapter 13, [Using Classroom Assessment Techniques to Improve Teaching and Learning](#) for more information about the profile of Ball State students. Many Latino and Asian students are also first or second generation Americans, which means that they probably have experienced different cultural upbringings than students whose families have been in the U.S. for many generations. In addition, English may not be the first or only language that some cultural minorities speak. Ethnic minority students may face other challenges such as incongruity between their own cultural values and those of the university environment, lack of cultural support, feelings of isolation, and differential treatment from students, staff, faculty, police, and local residents, particularly if students appear visibly non-White (Littleford & Wright, 1998).

Just as not all cultural minority students experience these challenges to the same degree, the ways in

which they address them also vary. Some students may minimize their personal experiences with differential treatment to maintain perceived control and to protect their self-esteem (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddan, & Lalonde, 1990). They may attempt to protect their self-esteem by attributing feedback in ambiguous situations to their visible cultural minority statuses (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991). However, this strategy results in discounting both positive and negative feedback and in denying students the opportunity to use constructive feedback for improvement. Other students may cope by psychologically disengaging their self-esteem from their academic performance (Steele, 1997). However, Steele argued that this protection in self-esteem may come at significant costs for students because the results are the devaluing of, the disinterest in, and minimal effort toward academics.

Students who acknowledge that discrimination exists may adopt a self-protective, mistrustful, and hypervigilant stance to cope (Newhill, 1990). However, accepting that others treat them differently because of cultural membership may have negative effects including lack of perceived control (Crocker et al., 1991), increased feelings of hopelessness and depression, and poorer physical health (Littleford & Wright, 1998).

Gender: The 2003 class was comprised of 57% females and 43% males. Of the total student population, 55.8% are females (BSU, 2003). Although females are the numerical majority at BSU and in the U.S., they generally face more challenges and receive more negative differential treatments than do males. Summarizing their own previous work, Sadker and Sadker (1992), reported that instructors' behaviors foster inequitable participation in their classes. Instructors are more likely to call on White male students than minority males or White females to participate in class discussions. Males are eight times more likely than females to express their views without raising their hands or obtaining permission before speaking. However, instructors overlook the rule violations more often when committed by male students than by female students. Consequently, female and ethnic minority students tend not to take an active role in these intellectual exchanges as often as do male students.

GTAs should increase their wait time after asking questions and should make a conscious effort to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in class. GTAs should try to not always call on students who raise their hands first. Students whose native language is not English or students who may need to have a period of silence before interjecting their comments (to ensure that they do not interrupt others) will appreciate the longer wait time. GTAs may want to have students first write their responses and then verbally provide the answers.

Sexual identity: Currently, there is no demographic information on BSU students' sexual identity. However, the literature suggests that Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) individuals make up between 4% and 10% of the U.S. population (Norton, 1995 cited in Sue & Sue, 2003). Students' sexual identities are not visibly identifiable. For many reasons, some students may not want to disclose their sexual identity. However, having a cultural identity that is not visually apparent can place GLBT students at higher risks for isolation because culturally similar peers may not know about their shared cultural membership and thus be unaware of the potential for social support.

GTAs should not assume that their students are of a certain sexual identity. For example, when discussing issues associated with attraction, dating, or romantic relationships, GTAs should make sure that they include GLBT couples as part of the dialogue. In addition, GTAs should be conscious of the impact that their implicit assumptions and their seemingly harmless questions about romantic relationships might have on their students. For example, asking students to talk about their girlfriends/boyfriends may force GLBT students to choose between disclosing and hiding their sexual identity.

Disability: During the 2002-2003 academic year, 544 (3%) of undergraduate and graduate students are receiving services while 254 are in the process of establishing disability to receive services through the Office of Disabled Student Development (DSD, L. Markle, personal communication, January 13, 2004). The majority of these students (226) have a learning disability (which includes Attention Deficit Disorder and traumatic brain disorder). Students with learning disabilities may have difficulties with listening, thinking, speaking, writing, reading, and/or processing

information. However, because most of these students are just as intelligent as students without learning disabilities, most should be able to perform well academically if they are provided the appropriate opportunities to learn. Students who have been formally diagnosed may choose not to seek DSD services or to inform their instructors. Others may not even know that they have a learning disability thus they struggle academically even though they may put a lot of effort into their schoolwork (Chism, 1989).

Over the last 10 years the number of students with non-apparent disabilities has increased dramatically (L. Markle, personal communication, January 13, 2004). About 63% of students receiving services through DSD have non-apparent disabilities. Between January 2003 and January 2004, 1089 (7.14%) of undergraduates sought services from the Counseling Center and Health Education (CCHE). The most commonly cited issues that students experienced were relationship problems, mood disorders, and anxiety disorders. About 17% of the students seen at CCHE presented with problems associated with depression (R. Lett, personal communication, February 6, 2004). These students may have difficulties sleeping, concentrating, and maintaining high levels of energy, which may negatively affect their ability to perform well in their coursework.

GTAs should not attempt to diagnose or treat students' symptoms of learning disabilities or mental distress. Instead, GTAs should refer students to DSD and CCHE. GTAs are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the services that these offices offer so that they could make appropriate referrals when necessary. GTAs should also make sure that they not only state verbally in class, at the beginning of the semester, but include in their syllabi the following statement "If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. My office location and hours are..."

Age: About 7.4% of BSU's undergraduates are 25 years or older (BSU, 2003). Within the U.S., older people are stereotyped with negative traits. Indeed, some older students may experience age-related challenges that younger students may not face,

including poorer eyesight or hearing. In addition, they may expect instructors to respect their experiences and thus to teach material that is consistent with their knowledge of the world. However, older students may be more conscientious about their learning experience. They also have a lot of life experiences from which to draw and contribute to the learning environment. They also may be quite anxious about their abilities, whether they can keep up with the younger students in class (Chism, 1989).

If GTAs require group projects they should remember that some students may not live on campus and thus meeting group members in the evening can be difficult. However, it may be helpful to assign students to groups that ensure cultural diversity in the group and to grade based on equal contribution of every member. In addition, GTAs should consider appointing each student with a different learning component. Studies have shown that having each group member be responsible for teaching a specific part of the assignment to the entire group results in reduced biases and increased positive intercultural interactions (Aronson, 2002).

Religion: According to Wright (1997, cited in Keller, 2000), 5.5% of Americans identify themselves as Jewish, Muslims, Buddhists, or members of other non-Christian religions. Although information about BSU students' religious affiliations is currently not available, GTAs still need to be aware that for some students, religious beliefs and practices are integral to their identity. There are students whose holidays and cultures may not be known, let alone celebrated, by members of the dominant group.

GTAs are encouraged to attempt to reschedule assignments or exams to allow students who wish to observe other cultural or religious holy days that conflict with their class schedules, provided that students have shared these plans ahead of time.

Migration status/language: Of the total BSU student population, 6.9% of the undergraduate students were enrolled part-time. Of the incoming class of 2003, 8.5% were not from Indiana. Of the 390 international students on campus, 37% are undergraduates from many countries including: South Korea, India, Japan, China, Taiwan, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Thailand, or Turkey (BSU, 2003). The out-

of-state American students may have difficulties adjusting to being so far from home and not having their family and peer support within close proximity. This distance from close social support is even greater for international students. In addition, international students may be further challenged by language proficiency, climate, food, and other cultural differences. For example, many international students may have spent many years learning to become proficient at reading and writing in English. However, while at the university, they will be expected to understand the quick pace of native English speakers' speech and to express themselves verbally. Further, there will be limited opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings in their native languages. This may cause a lot of frustration and may also undermine their confidence in their ability to perform academically.

GTAs should encourage students to speak to them privately about their level of understanding of the course material. GTAs should consider allowing students to use a tape recorder, a dictionary, or other materials that would help students better understand the material. GTAs may also consider giving all students some time in class to write their thoughts, comments, or questions. GTAs may then either read the students' comments or ask the students to read their own written responses. Doing so will allow students time to articulate their ideas and will convey to all students that their thoughts and contributions to the class are valued.

Socioeconomic status: Some students are first-generation college students (they are the first in their families to attend college). They may not be able to turn to their families for emotional and/or financial support. First generation college students, or the first in their families to attend college, may not be able to draw support from family members because these relatives have never been in college. Financial stress may be an additional burden. Concerns about whether they are prepared or truly belong in college may be more pervasive than students who are from families with more experiences with college. These may be quite detrimental to their academic performance. For example, Croizet and Claire (1998) found that lower SES students who were concerned that their performance would confirm the expectations that others have about their cultural group performed less well on cognitive tasks.

GTAs should consider placing a copy of the textbook and other reading materials on reserve at the library. This will enable students who cannot afford to purchase all of their textbooks to have access to written course materials. In addition, GTAs should be aware of their own and their students' often erroneous assumptions about individuals from lower SES. For example, GTAs should not make negative comments about the motivation, work ethics, or intelligence of members of different SES.

Awareness

Although having the knowledge about cultural minority students' experiences and learning styles is important, GTAs need to also be aware of their own emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to students from diverse cultural backgrounds. In addition, they need to be cognizant that students will also be reacting to the GTAs' cultural background as well.

Emotional reaction: GTAs should try to be in tune with and acknowledge the emotional reactions they experience when they interact with cultural minority students. Studies have shown that individuals who interact with the culturally different experience anxiety and discomfort. In order to reduce the discomfort, these individuals cease contact as soon as possible or, if they have to interact, they magnify their normative affect and behavior. In other words, they may be extremely nice or overtly negative to compensate for their emotional discomfort (Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

In addition, most individuals in the U.S. culture have been socialized to experience negative feelings when they interact with people who are culturally different. However, Americans have also been raised to believe that all should be treated fairly and thus they should not discriminate (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). The conflict between negative feelings and egalitarian ideals and the tendency to seek confirmations of their egalitarian self concepts may result in a lack of awareness of instances in which individuals do engage in unfair treatment of those who are culturally different. GTAs need to be made aware that they will probably experience some level of anxiety when they interact with culturally diverse students. However, GTAs should remember that these feelings do not necessarily

indicate that they are prejudiced. GTAs are encouraged to look for opportunities to engage in interactions with culturally diverse individuals since more intercultural interactions may lead to more comfortable and genuinely positive feelings.

Cognitive reaction: Studies have shown that regardless of whether people personally endorse them, they are very aware of the stereotypes that are associated with different cultural groups (Devine & Elliot, 1995). In addition, when individuals interact with the culturally diverse, these stereotypes become automatically activated. When they are tired or lack cognitive energy to suppress these stereotypes, the activated stereotypes can sometimes unconsciously

influence the individuals' behaviors. Thus, GTAs are encouraged to examine the stereotypes that they have been taught about the culturally diverse and to explore the extent to which these internalized stereotypes might influence their interactions with culturally diverse students.

Another cognitive reaction that GTAs need to be aware of is the tendency to erroneously blame students' personality, internal traits, or lack of motivation for poor performance while discounting the influence of external factors (e.g., teaching style, difficult content, negative socio-cultural experiences). This bias may become even stronger when GTAs are exposed to a few cultural minority students who excel. Ho, Sanbonmatsu, and Akimoto (2002) reported that people who were exposed to cultural minority individuals who performed well were more likely to believe that other minorities have the same opportunities to succeed and thus should all be able to perform just as well as the "model minorities."

Behavioral reaction: GTAs may at times treat culturally diverse students differently without being conscious of it. For example, Sadker and Sadker (1992) reported that most instructors were quite surprised when shown videotapes of themselves providing more attention and opportunities to students based on race and gender. They were not even aware that they were treating students differently. Thus, GTAs need to examine their own behaviors, and more importantly, have others evaluate their behaviors when they interact with cultural minorities.

GTAs may unconsciously engage in the self-fulfilling prophecy when interacting with their students. In other words, GTAs may have expectations regarding students' abilities that may or not be accurate (e.g., international students are quiet and passive learners). Although not always within their awareness, GTAs' behaviors toward the students are influenced by these assumptions (e.g., GTAs do not attempt to engage international students in class discussions). The GTAs' behaviors then cause students to behave in ways that are consistent with the instructors' original expectations (e.g., international students do not speak in class because they are not given the opportunity to participate in class).

GTAs should also look for possible misinterpretations of nonverbal behaviors. For example, some people make eye contact when speaking but not when listening, whereas others engage in the opposite pattern. In addition, some people nod or use verbal utterances (e.g., "uh huh", "yeah") to indicate that they are listening while others may only maintain eye contact to convey their attentiveness (Feldman & Saletsky, 1986; Fugita, Wexley, & Hillery, 1974). In addition, to show respect, members from some cultural groups may maintain eye contact while members from other cultural groups may minimize eye contact. Smiling behavior and preferred physical distance between individuals may also vary (LaFrance, Henley, Hall, & Halberstadt, 1997). Thus, GTAs should remember that their understanding of the meanings associated with various nonverbal behaviors may not be shared by all students.

Professional development: Although some level of self-awareness can be achieved by being more cognizant of what GTAs and students do, deeper insights and meaningful self-awareness can be further facilitated by participating in formal professional development events (e.g., multicultural courses, workshops, conferences). GTAs are encouraged to take at least one multicultural course and to attend workshops and conferences that focus on diversity in cultures and learning. However, GTAs should remember that learning to become a culturally competent instructor is a life-long process and not something that can be achieved after only taking one course or reading one chapter from a book.

Skills

GTAs are strongly encouraged to engage in culturally inclusive teaching practices by integrating diversity into their teaching. Furthermore, GTAs should continually examine their teaching practices for possible biases. For example, Tweed and Lehman (2002) discussed the influence that our culture has on what we value in the learning process. For example, people from Western cultures may approach learning as an opportunity to develop skills to assert one's views of the truth, to question authority, to express one's views and to support one's opinions. In contrast, people from Eastern cultures may value learning that is more respectful, deferring to the expertise of instructors and not questioning information from knowledgeable sources because doing so would show disrespect. Western GTAs who are not familiar with the deep learning that Easterners achieve by memorization may devalue this strategy of learning, assuming that these students are not thinking or are only using "shallow" thinking.

In addition, many novice instructors find that their teaching methods match their learning styles as students. In other words, the way that some instructors teach directly benefits students who have learning styles that these instructors had when they were students. If they had learned best by listening to lectures they tend to lecture often in their own classrooms. However, not all students are going to learn the same way that instructors did; thus one teaching style will not benefit all students. In fact, studies have shown that each student also changes his/her learning styles during his/her college education (Whitcomb, 2000). It is important for GTAs to examine their teaching goals/objectives and associated practices to ensure that they use a variety of instructional methods. GTAs should have a large repertoire of teaching approaches and be flexible in their methods of instruction (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile, experiential, group, etc.).

Conclusion

The task of achieving multicultural competence in teaching entails acquiring a good knowledge base of different groups' cultural values, beliefs, and experiences; a willingness to examine and acknowledge one's own cultural assumptions, stereotypes, and biased behaviors; and the ability to

translate one's knowledge and self-awareness into specific teaching skills. Although this mission may seem daunting, GTAs should remember that success is achievable. Success does not mean that all interactions are positive or that there are no misunderstandings. Successful GTAs are those who are genuinely interested in and continue to work on being more culturally inclusive in their teaching, who are open to providing opportunities for students to learn, and who are willing to learn from situations that do not go well. More importantly, successful GTAs give themselves credit for doing the best they can to ensure that they provide their students with learning experiences that are supportive and affirming of the students' diverse cultural backgrounds and learning styles. Successful GTAs do not dwell on the few interactions that did not go as well as they had wanted, but rather they focus on what they have done that has been rewarding and gratifying, take some credit for that, and find ways to ensure that they continue to maintain these successes in the future.

GTAs are not expected to become effective multiculturally competent instructors overnight, or even by the time they obtain their degrees. This is a life-long process where things do not always work out perfectly and mistakes will invariably occur. Thus, when faced with difficulties and misunderstandings or when the appropriate behaviors are not easily identifiable, GTAs should remember that these temporary tough spots do not mean that they are not being successful or that they should not continue to try. Rather, these obstacles will help GTAs be much more informed and prepared for similar situations in the future.

It is hoped that this chapter has encouraged GTAs to consider culture diversity in their teaching and has given GTAs a starting point for their journey to becoming a multicultural competent instructor. Although we have made some suggestions for GTAs related to cultural knowledge and self-awareness, we have the following additional recommendations for GTAs who wish to integrate diversity into their professional activities.

1. View cultural diversity as a resource and respect diverse learning styles. Just because students do not learn the same way as an instructor does not mean that students cannot learn.

2. Teach from a culturally respectful and appreciative stance rather than a mere tolerance of differences.
3. Focus on creating opportunities for all students to learn and not on grades.
4. Examine course content and literature with a critical eye. Keep in mind whether the research studies, literature, philosophy, history, and other contributions being discussed represent culturally diverse groups. For example, most studies in psychology have included White, college students. Consequently, the results from these studies may not be representative of non-White individuals, those who are from lower SES, and/or those who did not attend college. And, when cultural minorities are presented, make sure not to portray their contributions as the exceptions.
5. Use language and examples that respect diversity. Although inadvertent at times, the language that a GTA uses conveys to students his/her worldviews, biases, and standards of acceptable beliefs and behaviors. For example, be careful to not refer to only White or European Americans as "Americans" since there are ethnic minority students who are also Americans. If using examples in class or on exams, try to have individuals in the examples represent diverse cultures. If discussing people and their professions, make sure to use females in traditionally male-dominated fields (and vice versa) and to do so in ways that do not suggest that they are the exceptions (for example, use "doctor" rather than "lady doctor", "nurse" rather than "male nurse").
6. Use multiple means of assessing effective learning. A good way to approach this is to think about what you would like students to learn (e.g., application, concepts, theories, etc.). Then, think about how learning has usually been assessed and whether these methods are inclusive of diverse learning styles. Finally, think about other ways that learning can also be assessed.
7. Do not assume that culturally different students will differ from those whose cultures you are familiar with. Also, differences are not inherently bad. Remember that students have multiple identities.
8. Invite a diversity team from CCHE to meet with you or your class to discuss cultural diversity issues and to encourage appreciation of diverse cultures.

Multicultural Competence in Teaching

9. Continually assess your teaching strengths and areas for improvement.
10. Have peers/supervisors examine possible biases in teaching practices. Videotape yourself. Seek feedback from students regarding their learning. See Chapter 14, [Evaluating and Improving Your Teaching](#) for more on evaluating and improving teaching.
11. Seek consultation from supervisor, mentor, professors, and/or colleagues.

Available Resources on Campus

- Tips for Faculty and Staff on Recognizing and Dealing with Students in Emotional Distress (<http://www.bsu.edu/students/cpsc/diversity/diversit.htm>)
- Counseling Center and Health Education (<http://www.bsu.edu/students/cpsc/>;
- 285-1736)
- Office of Disabled Student Development (<http://www.bsu.edu/dsd/>; 285-5293)
- Multicultural Center (<http://www.bsu.edu/mc2/>)

- Diversity Policy Institute (<http://www.bsu.edu/diversity>)

Available Resources On-line

- Diversity and ethnic studies virtual community
- (<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~savega/divweb2.thm>)
- Sexual orientation: Science, education, and policy ([Http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/index.html](http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/index.html))
- The National Center for Curriculum Transformation Resources on Women (<http://saber.towson.edu:80/ncctrw/welcome2.html>)
- Diversity Web: An interactive resource hub for higher education ([Http://www.inform.umd.edu/diversityweb](http://www.inform.umd.edu/diversityweb))

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