

Cross cultural communication in the BE classroom

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The globalisation process seems to be impossible without relevant cross-cultural communication, which requires an entire set of social and cultural skills that has never been as important before in human history as now, and this is central in preparing future specialists for their successful functioning in business environment.

An American researcher in the area of cross-cultural education Gail Robinson (1985) distinguishes three interrelated categories: products (literature, folklore, art, music, art-crafts), ideas (beliefs, values, institutions) and behaviour (customs, traditions, habits, food, leisure). These components require students to reflect, think critically, and make connections to their own lives. The traditional approaches of having students read, telling them what they need to know, viewing videos, etc. is not enough. Certainly the basics are absolutely essential to lay the ground work through direct teaching and practice and they have been very effective. But encouraging students to develop the attitudes, beliefs and values associated with cultural understanding demands a more active teaching and learning approach. It can be incorporated in BE course through case studies, role-playing, simulations and culture awareness projects, which provide opportunities for students to interact in small cooperative groups in order to learn diverse beliefs from each other, to reason out issues and make decisions, to “step into the shoes” of people with different attitudes in simulated situations, to collaborate to solve real life problems of people representing diverse cultures.

The students benefit from this approach by developing personal qualities that reflect their commitment to cultural awareness and understanding. These include being comfortable in different environments, being able and willing to change their own ideas, having a commitment to learning about and exploring other cultures. The ability to communicate across cultures can help our graduates avoid problems stemming from misinterpretations, effectively work with people despite their differences, tailor their experience to the demands of the international marketplace.