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Developing Intercultural Competency in Public Speaking Classrooms: Strategies Through Mass Media Critical Analysis

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1. Intercultural Competency and the 21st-Century Workplace

In a 2017 article entitled “How the Liberal Arts Can Bridge International Divides,” NYU Vice Chancellor Alfred Bloom renewed a call for higher education institutions to foster intercultural competencies that develop graduates who are global citizens and “have a perspective that incorporates the world.” He stated:

The ability of liberal-arts education to produce people who engaged the world, to produce graduates who really have the ability to see across differences, understand those differences, but know that below those differences are universal factors that absolutely unite humanity and to draw on those and build on those universal factors in order to find common ground, common purpose, and lead a more cooperative and productive world. And I do think that that's something that liberal-arts education can and must incorporate in the way it looks at what its most important mission is in the 21st century. (Bloom, 2017)

The call for reforming education to respond to the growing diversity in the classroom with courses that reflect the needs of students and the rapidly changing global workplace is decades old (Banks & Banks, 2002; Friemer, 2009; Hooks, 1994; Phillips, Teel & Obidah, 2008; Scott, 2015; Stromquist, 2002). Indeed, Hooks (1994) famously wrote: “All of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to renew our minds if we are to transform educational institution—and society—so that the way we live, teach and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom” (p. 239). However, there is great urgency for higher education to heed the call as a growing body of research reveals student demographics in higher education have changed radically over the years, spurred by globalization, migration, and transnational environmental and political challenges (Freimer, 2009; 2016; Scott, 2015). For example, recent data shows that more than one million international students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in the 2014–2015 academic year, the highest in 35 years (Institute of International Education, 2015). A recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that since 2000, the number of low-income students, minorities enrolled in college has increased significantly. For example, the number of female, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American/Alaskan Native students has each increased 29 percent, the number of black students is up by 73 percent, and the number of Hispanic students, 126 percent. In 2015, 41 percent of college students were 25 or older. The NCES projects a consistent increase in older adult students through 2026 (NCES, 2017). As Whitaker noted in her 2018 article, the diversity on college campuses have “changed the professoriate—why we teach, what we teach, how we teach and where we teach” (p. 1).

A 2015 report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) noted that to be successful in the 21st-century workplace, students will need a broad range of competencies in 16 areas, including the basics: literacy and numeracy. They will also need scientific literacy, ICT literacy, financial literacy, cultural and civic literacy, critical thinking/problem-solving, creativity, communication, collaboration skills, curiosity, initiative, persistence/grit, adaptability, leadership, and social and cultural awareness (shown in Figure 1). In short, the 21st-century workplace requires employees who are adaptable problem-solvers who can function effectively and lead in a global and culturally-diverse environment.

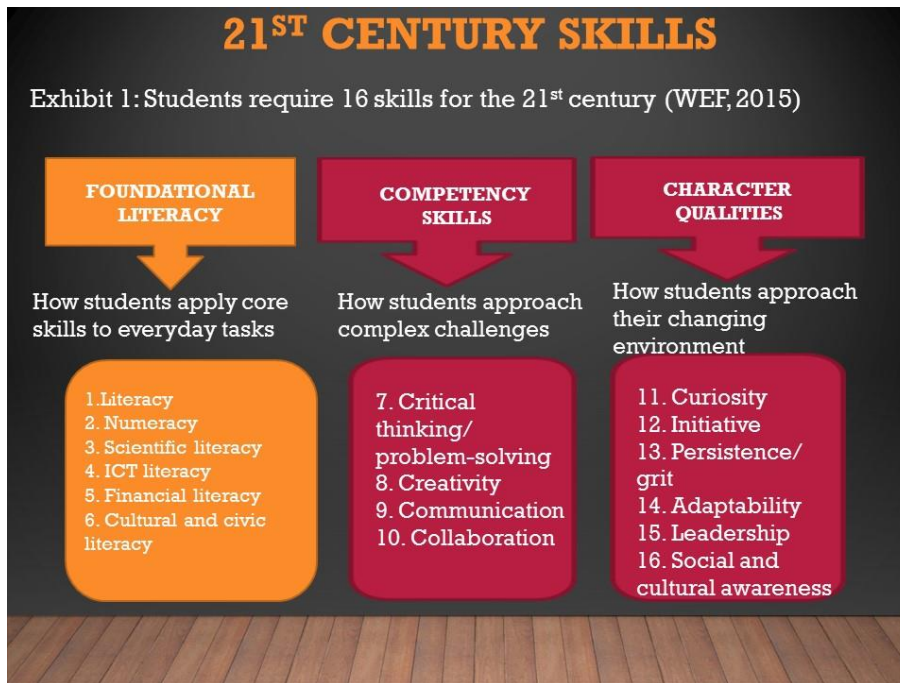


Figure 1. World Economic Forum: 21st Century Skills Requirement (Source: World Economic Forum report: The Global competitiveness report, 2015).

These skill requirements reflect the need for educators to ensure they provide a rich educational experience for students focused not only on technical skills and traditional academic learning intended to cultivate the mind, but also on broadening classroom experiences to encourage students to engage with each other, their communities, and the world in problem-solving, creative communication, and collaboration to produce innovative ideas and solutions.

The question is how well is higher education responding to this diversity and the new demands of the 21st-century workplace? What are educators doing to adapt their classrooms to prepare students to become critical thinkers and engaged global students with empathy for and understanding of each other? And, how equipped are educators to help foster classroom environments where students are encouraged to strengthen multiple literacies across cultural boundaries—technological, academic, and personal?

This article does not seek to answer these questions as they are beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the purpose of this article is to contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject by providing strategies for individual instructors to show how they can infuse intercultural competency skills in their courses using media analysis and speech communication to foster a rich intercultural dialogue. What is widely known and accepted is that change is difficult and can be overwhelming, even with the pressures of high dropout rates and pervasive student disengagement (Scott, 2016).

Many U.S. higher education institutions have made efforts to internationalize their campus and curriculum by emphasizing cultural diversity in hiring of staff and faculty and promoting study-abroad programs for students to learn about other cultures. Other activities may include programs and events to enhance the international perspectives and skills of students and cross-cultural understanding (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Internationalization is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural,

or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2015, p. 2). For example, at Bronx Community College/CUNY, where the student population is 60% Hispanic, 30% Black, and where more than 170 countries are represented, the campus reads one book together each year, and faculty are encouraged to use the book to explore intercultural issues in their courses as part of a campus-wide program called: Bronx Reads: One Book, One College, One Community initiative. This year-long program includes related multicultural activities such as lectures, art and musical events. The 2017-2018 academic year Bronx Reads: One Book selection, Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, raises important questions about the right of compensation for those who have faced injustice, in particular that caused by institutionalized inequality and racism.

According to Helms (2013) of the American Council on Education, “recognizing that faculty are crucial to internationalization is one thing—getting them involved is another. Faculty are extremely busy, and often feel pulled in multiple and competing directions...” (p.1). Other scholars, including Bond (2003) and West-Olatunji et al. (2008) observed that faculty are frequently hampered by limited resources, particularly in public institutions and smaller colleges with less generous endowments. Second, faculty cannot teach students intercultural competency skills that they themselves lack (Vassallo, 2014). Third, recalcitrant professors are locked into traditional methods of teaching. Fourth, already packed syllabi cannot accommodate new mandates. Finally, faculty are reluctant to embrace internationalization because they fear having to retool a tried and tested syllabus. However, these constraints aside, and regardless of the extent to which college campuses have committed to internationalization, few professors would argue that they could be doing more to embrace the diversity in their classroom and to incorporate many of the 21st century competencies into their teaching to promote global citizenship. Nevertheless, while many instructors are actively engaging with students to help them develop one or more of the 21st-century skills in their classroom, many more remain unwilling to venture beyond their scope of expertise. However, with a little creativity and planning, instructors in any discipline can incorporate many of the 21st-century competencies into their teaching to improve student skills development to develop global citizens. Incorporating intercultural competencies into a course can help to mitigate attitudes of cultural bias, develop a deeper understanding of global issues, prepare for effective participation in the world economy, and make relevant connections between global, national, community, family, and individual experiences. As Helms noted, incorporating intercultural competency skills in a course helps build a globally-focused curriculum from the ground up, starting in the instructors’ own classrooms.

Bond (2003) identified three approaches to internationalizing a course, depending on the constraints of time and the instructor’s level of interest and level of intercultural competence. The first is the “add-on” approach, which includes the use of occasional global issue-focused videos and/or discussion topics, and guest speakers. The second is the “curricular infusion” approach, which requires more preparation, infuses cultural components in the course, and could include a reading or assignment on global or intercultural issues. The third is the “transformation” approach, which requires considerably more time and effort as it involves the restructuring of the course to internalize it. One activity could include a study abroad program that requires students to immerse themselves in a foreign culture. In acknowledging that teaching intercultural

competency requires the instructor to have intercultural competency skills of their own, this article recognizes that many instructors may require professional development in intercultural competency before they feel competent enough to lead a class on global and multicultural issues. However, any approach would require the instructor's willingness to suspend his or her own biased perspective to listen to and consider others' worldview.

The following section illustrates how an instructor can use the add-on or the curricular infusion approaches in any course that includes a public speaking component to teach intercultural competence to build students' global understanding and intercultural competency. In line with the incremental approach advocated by Bond (2003) on internationalizing courses, this paper proposes small changes in the syllabus that foster discussions on current issues drawn from the media that expose students to taking action globally and inspire them to become engaged citizens.

An Incremental Approach to Develop Intercultural Competencies

Intercultural competence is defined by Deardoff (2006) as, "the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions" (p. 241). Introducing intercultural skills in a public speaking course using media analysis and web resources can help boost many of the competencies identified as necessary for the 21st-century workplace while engaging the students, many of whom already live on the Internet. Not only do students hone their public presentation skills, this strategy enhances students' ability to:

- Recognize, articulate, and apply an understanding of different perspectives
- Apply critical, comparative, and creative thinking and problem-solving
- Listen actively and engage in inclusive dialogue
- Select appropriate tools and strategies to communicate and collaborate effectively
- Foster greater respect and tolerance for others
- Provide opportunity for group work and to give constructive feedback

Public Speaking and Intercultural Competency Through Media Analysis

Courses that include public speaking provide an ideal platform for students to raise and discuss issues that matter to them and affect their lives. It is also ideal because public speaking aims to prepare students to speak effectively to a global audience, thus requiring both knowledge of speaking principles and an awareness of intercultural differences. As noted by Dhanesh (2011): "Any attempt at public speaking that is not sensitive to the plurality of the audience in such an increasingly diverse and multicultural world is almost certainly bound to fail" (p.16-2).

Using media analysis to engage students in discussion that opens their eyes to the world beyond their classroom builds critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Discussion provides an opportunity for students to question and challenge stereotypes and clarify misconceptions. To prevent unruly or uncivilized discussions, it is recommended that instructors state clearly that all discussions must be civilized—that is, no name-calling or insulting others whose ideas they may disagree with. Instructors should limit the discussion time, and, if possible, require that questions be prepared prior to the discussion.

While the use of visual media is sometimes viewed by some as a low-skill approach to teaching, it is important to remember that students consume a considerable number of videos in their everyday lives through YouTube and other social media channels.

Additionally, visual media has been found to be an effective way to engage students and provide an opportunity for students who may never take a media studies course to analyze and reflect on the influence of media on their lives. Videos are an entertaining way to teach content and raise issues. They keep students' attention much longer than any PowerPoint lecture. Furthermore, the instructor does not have to be a media expert to utilize some of these examples. Instructors might be surprised to discover how much they learn when they refrain from being "the sage in front of the class," and allow students to lead the discussions.

The following are possible activities and resources that even instructors with limited intercultural competency skills can use as an "add-on" or infusion approach to exposing students to global issues.

Preparing Students: Recognizing Uncertainty Avoidance

It is imperative that instructors inform students that the course will incorporate intercultural communication and competency skills at the beginning of class. This may create some anxiety for students whose cultural background might be different from some of their classmates. For example, some African-American students may feel anxiety discussing racial issues or resent being selected to be the spokesperson for the culture. To get students excited and more comfortable, instructors might consider beginning the semester with an exercise, short speech followed by a discussion on cultural differences. The following are examples of exercises that can be incorporated as an add-on to the course.

1. Purpose: Getting to know you/short self-introductory speech.

Type: In class or recorded outside of class for in-class review.

Time: Depends of class size (Each student presents a two-minute speech).

Process: Ask students to share a brief narrative about themselves, perhaps a positive or negative experience that changed them. Students could also be asked to share how a study abroad program or travel outside of the U.S. or to another region of the U.S. (if a student has not traveled overseas) influenced or changed them and the way they see the world. To help students feel more comfortable, the instructor might share an example of this type of speech before students prepare their own.

2. Purpose: Getting students accustomed to presenting opposing views.

Type: In class (preparation required outside of class).

Time: Varies.

Process: Open class with a discussion on an international event or critical global issue. Some of the more obvious include: climate change—the recent US decision to withdraw from the multinational Accord on Global Warming; health care, refugees, poverty, and its causes; education. There are so many issues worldwide that command our attention. Whether or not you have staked a position on an issue or you are still learning about it, a possible assignment would be to ask students to work in pairs to research global issues of interest and present opposing views/perspectives to class. This assignment fosters a learning environment where instructor and students educate each other, and where critical thinking is necessary. Of course, it is important that students are required to cite their sources during their presentation as well as in their written paper.

3. Purpose: Expose students to multiple perspectives on an issue; how media frames the same issue differently.

Type: Preparation outside of class. Presentation in class.

Time: Varies/depends on instructor.

Process: Assign students to listen to different news programs from around the world. Pick a current issue and ask students to record the ways in which different countries present coverage of the event. Students can present their findings in class.

4. Purpose: An extension of Exercise 2

Type: Initial showing (in class). Research and Analysis (outside of class).

Time: Varies/depends on instructor.

Process: Show a clip of an international or intercultural event. Students are assigned to groups to research the issues in depth and present their findings in one or two minutes to the class. Informational, not a debate.

5. Purpose: Virtual travel abroad.

Type: In class.

Time: Depends on length of video selected.

Process: Conduct a virtual tour of a select country—the Internet is a great source for such tours and videos. Then students should be asked to write a blog post (reflection paper) on an aspect of that country’s culture or a native celebration. The blog is posted on the LMS available for class comment. Student can choose to present in class if time permits). Professor can reference interesting points in the various blog to drive student traffic to the blog posts.

6. TedTalks:

TEDTalks is a daily video podcast of the best talks and performances from the TED Conference where the world’s leading thinkers and doers give the talk of their lives in 18 minutes. You may know that TedTalks are on a variety of topics, including Technology, Entertainment, Design, science, business, global issues, the arts, and much more, and address intercultural competency skills. For example:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009)

Description: Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

Lisa Bu’s talk on “*How Books Can Open Your Mind*” (2009)

Description: What happens when a dream you’ve held since childhood ... doesn’t come true? As Lisa Bu adjusted to a new life in the United States, she turned to books to expand her mind and create a new path for herself. She shares her unique approach to reading in this lovely, personal talk about the magic of books.

Mark Pagel: *How Language Transforms Humanity* (2011)

Description: Biologist Mark Pagel shares an intriguing theory about why humans evolved our complex systems of language.

Yassmin Abdel-Magied: *What does my headscarf mean to you?* (2015)

Description: Unconscious bias is a prevalent factor driving culture, causing us all to make assumptions based on our own upbringings and influences. Such implicit prejudice affects everything, and it's time for us to be more thoughtful, smarter, better. In this funny, honest talk, Yassmin Abdel-Magied uses a surprising way to challenge us all to look beyond our initial perceptions.

John McWhorter: *4 reasons to learn a new language* (2016)

Description: English is fast becoming the world's universal language, and instant translation technology is improving every year. So why bother learning a foreign language? Linguist and Columbia professor John McWhorter shares four alluring benefits of learning an unfamiliar tongue.

Possible question: Do you have to be in the country to really learn the language? Why not? What do we miss from learning a language from a textbook or Rosetta Stone? Often students will share experiences they have had learning English before coming to America only to find that they have difficulties understanding the idioms and expressions used. They might also share examples where a foreigner got into trouble for misunderstanding meanings or non-verbal communication.

Resources for bringing the world into the public speaking classroom

Whether you chose the add-on approach, which involves making small additions to your course, like a video or discussion, or you are seeking to infuse culture into your curriculum, the Internet has opened the world to those who are interested. There are many resources available to help instructors find appropriate material with lesson plans or discussion questions. Here are a few:

- **Globalcitizen.org**
Global Citizen is a community of people who want to learn about and take action on the world's biggest challenges. They provide original content and videos published every day to help people learn about critical global issues and how to take action.
- **<http://journeysinfilm.org/>**
Journeys in Film has been a leading force in global education for over a decade. They combine the power of moving and provocative films with the highest quality standards-based lesson plans to inspire and engage students in learning. The organization is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works in partnership with USC's Rossier School of Education. Rossier's (ross-EAR) mission is to improve learning in urban education locally, nationally and globally, and to prepare teachers, administrators, and educational leaders who are change agents.
- **<http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/>**
Global education promotes understanding of our interdependence and the importance of working for a just future in which all people have access to their basic needs and sustainability. Global education promotes understanding of social justice and human rights and the contribution they make to peace building and conflict resolution; as well as developing critical and creative thinking skills and ethical understanding and decision-making. Web resources include lesson plans and list of activities and discussion topics
- **<http://myhero.com/Stories>**

Stories, art, and media on heroes around the world. This project uses media, art, and technology to celebrate the best of humanity, one story at a time. Their award-winning programs raise awareness for the amazing work being done by heroes globally and at the grass roots level to address some of the greatest challenges of our time. The site includes instructor resources to help promote cross-cultural communication, human rights, environmental awareness, tolerance, media literacy, and the arts.

Other resources on Local television and Public Television stations include:

- **NYC Media Bare Feet** (<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/media/shows/bare-feet.page>). A show about people and culture nationally and internationally
- **Globe Trekker** (www.pilotguides.com/tv-shows/globe-trekker/). Globe Trekker is an award-winning travel TV show that takes the viewer off the beaten track, up close and personal to hundreds of destinations around the world.
- **CNN's Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown**. An American travel and food show on CNN which premiered on April 14, 2013. In the show, Anthony Bourdain travels the world uncovering lesser known places and exploring cultures and indigenous cuisine.
- **BBC World News Travel Show** (www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/n13xtmtp). This show explores the culture of some of the most exciting destinations from around the world.

Conclusion

Public speaking not only helps to build students' knowledge base, it also helps to develop their leadership skills and build social and cultural awareness to foster greater respect and tolerance for others. With a little creativity and planning, instructors can help students develop intercultural competency skills that will enhance their marketability in the workplace, their ability to develop necessary 21st-century competencies for today's workplace, and become global citizens without sacrificing the curriculum.

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