

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 132 620

CS 501 563

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TITLE Teaching Intercultural Communication on the Community College Level.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (62nd, San Francisco, December 27-30, 1976)
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Community Colleges; Course Content; Course Descriptions; *Course Organization; Curriculum Development; Educational Administration; Grading; Higher Education; *Intercultural Programs; Junior Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Intercultural Communication

ABSTRACT

Although intercultural-communication courses are increasing in universities in this country, very little interest in these courses is displayed on community college campuses. This paper presents and discusses procedures for community colleges to develop an effective course in intercultural communication. Consideration is given to the initial planning stage (where to start, an appropriate vehicle for offering the course, who should teach the course, and interdisciplinary approaches); course content (determining the type of course, general course content, interpersonal or historical approach, interracial or international approach, cognitive input or experiential activity, and method for determining grades); and administrative and student support. A bibliography is included.

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"TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
ON THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEVEL"

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Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention
in San Francisco, California December 27-30, 1976

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TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
ON THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEVEL

Speech communication's concern with improving communication between members of different nations, races, and cultures is demonstrated by the continued increase of intercultural communication courses in speech departments across the nation examples of which are listed in Syllabi In Intercultural Communication: 1974 (Prosser, 1975); by various SCA sponsored conferences such as the 1974 Summer Conference X in Chicago; and by the many new textbooks available in the area (Blubaugh & Pennington, 1976; Harms, 1973; Prosser, 1973, 1975; Rich, 1974; Ruhly, 1976; Samovar & Porter, 1976; Sitaram & Cogdell, 1976; and Smith, 1973).

Most of this interest in intercultural courses, however, is centered on university campuses. Seemingly, very little interest in intercultural communication courses is currently displayed in speech communication departments on community college campuses. For example, not one of the syllabi listed in Syllabi In Intercultural Communication: 1974 and none of the above mentioned texts have community college authors; also, of the 224 participants of the 1974 SCA Summer Conference X on Intercultural Communication, only seven community college participants, from five different colleges, were present.

Despite this apparent lack of interest, the community college environment seems to be ideal for intercultural communication training! The community college, free of traditional restraints, encourages innovative teaching methods (McCabe & Smith) and because of low fees and commitment to the Open Door Philosophy, attracts a more heterogeneous student body with greater variance in the student's age, race, and income bracket (Bushnell & Zagaris, p. 9).

So why aren't community college speech departments responding to this

great potential? Perhaps they are uncertain that the size of the college can support such a course, or fear that their faculty are not really qualified to teach the subject, or perhaps they are merely unsure where to begin in organizing such a course. The few community colleges that now offer courses in intercultural communication undoubtedly experienced these same uncertainties, but soon discovered, as any community college will discover when attempting to organize the course, that none of these fears are worthy of a second thought.¹ The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to allay these fears by presenting suggested procedures for developing, from "scratch," an effective course in intercultural communication for use on community college campuses. The following major areas will be discussed: (1) Initial planning stage, (2) Course content, and (3) Administrative and student support.

INITIAL PLANNING STAGE

Where Do I Start?

For a person who has done only minimal reading in the area of intercultural communication, the question, "Where do I start?" is critical. Time is an ever constant enemy of the community college instructor whose course load is typically five courses per semester. Therefore, the following sources, although not by any means exhaustive, should give the interested instructor enough knowledge to organize a productive course:

1. "An Approach to Teaching Interracial Communication," by Rich & Smith in The Speech Teacher, XIX, March 1970, no. 2 (pp. 138-144).
2. Crossing Difference...Interracial Communication by Blubaugh & Pennington.
3. Foundations of Intercultural Communication by Sitaram & Cogdell.
4. The Guide to Simulations/Games for Education and Training by Zuckerman & Horn.
5. Orientations to Intercultural Communication by Ruhly.

6. Intercultural Communication: Preceedings of the Speech Communication Association Summer Conference X edited by Jain, Prosser, & Miller
Note pp. 60-65, "Developing A Unit or Course..." by Huffman.
7. Intercultural Communication: A Reader by Samovar and Porter.
8. Interracial Communication by Rich.
9. Silent Language by Hall.
10. Syllabi In Intercultural Communication: 1974 compiled by Prosser
Especially note "Can Intercultural Communication Be Taught in the Classroom?" by Howell, pp. 1-13.

It would also be helpful to:

1. Write to SIMILE II, 218 Twelfth Street, P.O. Box 910, Del Mar, California 92014 for a copy of their simulation game catalog.
2. Subscribe to Simulation/Gaming/News, Box 3039, University Station, Moscow, Idaho 83843.
3. Join the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR) by writing David S. Hoopes, University of Pittsburg, Pittsburg, PA 15260.

Vehicle for Offering Course.

Adding a new course to the college catalog is quite complicated on many community college campuses, especially if the course is innovative and is not already in common use on the university level. Fortunately, however, there is no need to get official approval for a "new" course in order to teach intercultural communication. Practically every speech communication department has the perfect vehicle for such a course already in the college curriculum -- the one-hour, transfer course entitled Speech Workshop, Speech Activities, or Forensic Activities.²

There are several advantages to using the forensics activities course to teach intercultural communication. First, it is not necessary to justify adding a new course to the catalog when you can not prove it will be successful. Second, a one-hour course is the best way to attract the diversity of students essential for a successful course since most of the students will take the course as an overload. A one-hour overload is much easier

to obtain from the Dean of Instruction than a three-hour overload. Also, since many college laboratory courses such as biology and geology are worth four or five semester hours credit, many students need a one-hour course to fill out their schedules. Third, most forensic workshops include a lab which gives the instructors of the course two hours per week with the class! Last, most forensic activities courses allow the course to be repeated for credit. You will be surprised at the number of students that eagerly elect to repeat the course.

Who Should Teach the Course?

Choice of instructors is extremely important to the success of the course especially if you plan to delve into the really "gutsy" issues the students will expect. Coordinators of the course need to consider carefully the desired teaching abilities of the instructors, the necessary number of instructors, and the racial requirements of the instructors.

First of all, the people selected as instructors of a course in intercultural communication need to be the college's better instructors. They need to have a genuine interest in all students, enjoy innovativeness, demonstrate a mastery of the interpersonal skills such as openness, active listening, supportive responses, and have enough confidence in themselves and in their discipline to find team-teaching challenging rather than threatening.

Secondly, it will be much easier for the course to succeed if it is taught by a team of instructors rather than by a single instructor. As Rich and Smith (1970) note:

In these sensitive times, if the course is conducted by a black instructor alone, the instructor runs the risk of being accused of black partiality. He might also find it difficult to control the tendency of the classroom to become a black forum. If the class is conducted by a white instructor alone, the instructor most assuredly will be open to criticism on the grounds that he lacks a real understanding of black problems (p. 140).

And the students do have a point. No matter how objective we may think we are, our perceptions are affected by our cultural conditioning! Therefore, a team of teachers representing each of the major racial or cultural groups present in the class is essential for maximum course success. A racially mixed team is even more essential if the instructors have never taught this type of course before and/or have had minimal experiences with members of other cultures.

There are two important additional advantages to a racially mixed team of instructors. The first advantage is that of "modeling" (Rich & Smith, p. 140). The class will learn a great deal from watching the interaction among the team members. Modeling is even more important when the students in the course come mainly from one culture. The contact they have with team members may be the first personal contact they have ever had with persons outside their own culture.

The second advantage relates to student recruitment. Obviously, an instructor of a certain culture will generally have greater success in convincing students of that culture that the course is really valuable.

One obvious disadvantage to a team of teachers, of course, is how to finance a course with two or more instructors. A solution to this problem is discussed in the last section of the paper.

Interdisciplinary Approach.

Since the academic study of intercultural communication is truly interdisciplinary, the teaching of the course should be also. As Howell notes, "Keeping intercultural communication in one academic compartment is a cruel and unusual punishment that contradicts the nature of the enterprise" (Howell, p. 9).

Since the structure for the course, as described in this paper, is

based on the act of communication and therefore falls in the realm of the speech communication department, the coordinator of the course needs to come from the speech communication department. However, the knowledge and insight of other disciplines is invaluable to the success of the course.³

For speech communication departments staffed with only one or two instructors, as is true on the majority of community college campuses, the interdisciplinary approach is a must. Fortunately, it is generally quite easy to get instructors from other disciplines interested in teaching a course in intercultural communication. They are as intrigued by the course as the students who enroll.⁴

COURSE CONTENT

Determining the Type of Course.

The type of intercultural communication course depends, first of all, on the student taking the course. Although the community college usually provides an excellent mix of ages, cultures, professions, and levels of cultural experience, the course still needs to be altered each semester to reflect the needs and sophistication of the class.

The type of course will also depend on the selected course goals or objectives. Prosser (1975) and Rich (1974) are both excellent sources for a variety of objectives. The following objectives or goals, although not stated in behavioral terms, are suggested as worthwhile objectives for a one-hour course on the community college level:

1. To familiarize the student with general communication process and principles.
2. To increase the student's awareness of other cultures and of the special communication problems to be expected when communicating with members from other cultures.
3. To increase the student's awareness of his own culture.

4. To increase the student's self-awareness of personal values, beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices.
5. To increase the student's awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses when communicating with members of other cultures.
6. To help the student accurately diagnose cultural communication breakdown by applying his knowledge of the general principles of communication to various breakdown situations given in class.

Finally, the type of course selected will depend on the way intercultural communication is defined. For a community college course, it is probably advisable to define intercultural communication in the broadest sense as does Casmir:

Intercultural communication for the purposes of this course will be thought of as communication between individuals and small groups of individuals representing different cultural experiences and backgrounds, including subcultures within nations, and cultural groups from different nations (Casmir, p. 45).

Blubaugh and Pennington's definition of intercultural communication is also all-inclusive in their 1976 text:

Intercultural communication is a special case of interpersonal communication where the backgrounds, experiences, customs, beliefs, values, associations, and so forth are sufficiently distinct between the two communicators that they interfere with rather than facilitate communication (p. 12).

Such a general view of intercultural communication includes such terms as "contracultural communication," "interracial communication," "inter-ethnic communication," and even "international communication" when it refers to communication between individuals of different nations on a non-political, person-to-person basis (Rich, pp. 1-15). Cross-cultural communication would, however, be excluded (Harms, p. 41).

General Course Content.

One problem with a one-hour course is how to narrow the content without harming the thrust of the course. Although each ~~community~~ college will probably wish to organize the course content to reflect the needs of

its particular students, it is suggested that the course content include all or part of the intercultural variables listed by Samovar and Porter (p. 9):

1. Attitudes
2. Social organization
3. Pattern of thought
4. Roles and role prescriptions
5. Language
6. Use and organization of space
7. Time conceptualization
8. Nonverbal expression

One current text, Crossing Difference...Interracial Communication by Blubaugh and Pennington, not only covers Samovar and Porter's intercultural variables, but is also within the price range (under three dollars) and reading level of the community college student. Other possible texts might include Interracial Communication by Rich and Intercultural Communication by Ruhly.

Interpersonal or Historical Approach?

Regardless of the content of the course, the approach should be predominately interpersonal rather than historical for three reasons: (1) the historical approach is already used by such departments as sociology, philosophy, anthropology⁵, (2) upper class courses typically take the historical approach⁶, and (3) the interpersonal communication approach gives an excellent frame of reference for understanding intercultural communication barriers and tends to be more interesting and more easily adapted to the reading level of the community college student. One of the very first class sessions should cover definitions of communication,

examination of one or more general communication models and the major communication principles. The remainder of the course should continually stress improving intercultural communication.

Interracial or International Approach?

It is probably good to use both approaches. The study of interracial communication problems is probably more practical for the student; however, the study of international communication problems supplies added interest to the course. Howell states that "...students find exciting the discovery that some of our difficulty in relating to American Indians comes from our failure to understand that they subordinate the individual to the group much as do the Japanese" (p. 11). Also, since the student is not emotionally involved in the example, he will be able to view communication breakdown in a more objective manner. According to Howell:

The cross-over point when a student begins to accept a wide-range of values and sets of expectations seems to occur when he finds himself assuming that a contrasting culture has as much merit as his own, without thinking about it. This seems to develop through examining the local scene, where out-of-awareness prejudices get in the way... (p. 12).

Cognitive or Experiential?

Determining the quantity of experiential input is probably one clearest way to distinguish community college intercultural courses from those courses taught on the university level. Although university level courses tend to concentrate on cognitive materials⁷, the intercultural course on the community college level should be predominantly experiential -- an intercultural workshop. Of course, cognitive input is also important, but for every idea or concept presented, an experiential activity should be included to demonstrate or simulate the concept.

All the sources mentioned previously in this paper include various activities, roleplaying exercises, simple games, simulation games, and

group projects which help students put cognitive ideas into practical application. Jain, et al (pp. 61-63) lists fifty different classroom or laboratory activities. Also, Bafa Bafa and Starpower, two excellent simulation games, can be purchased from SIMILE II in California. You may also wish to require students to keep a personal journal of feelings and reactions to experiential elements of the course. Many students are amazed at the attitude change recorded in their journals.

Method for Determining Grades.

Students should not be graded on attitude change since such practice violates the concept in the course that "different" is O.K. Also, examinations are relatively ineffective in determining grades in a workshop course such as the intercultural course described in this paper. When grades are determined by exams, the student is pressured to answer in accordance with the instructor's beliefs regardless of his "real" feelings. The open atmosphere desired in the course could be harmed by grades determined, even in part, on examinations. Student participation in class discussions, in simulation games, in small group activities, in projects, in journal writing, and in simple class attendance are sufficient for a grade in a workshop course. Fortunately, the community college administrator is more amenable to such an approach than his university counterpart.

Suggested criteria for "A" and "B" grades are listed as follows:

Grade A

1. Regular attendance at lecture and lab sessions (No more than two absences allowed for an "A")
2. Participation in class discussions
3. Participation in class activities
4. Keep journal - write at least one journal entry per week

(personal reactions, reflections, and analysis of class sessions, laboratory exercises, and everyday happenings)

5. One self-initiated project or activity (group or individual)

Grade B

1. Regular attendance at lecture and lab sessions (No more than three absences allowed for a "B")
2. Participation in class discussions
3. Participation in class activities
4. Keep journal

Students who sign-up for an elective course such as intercultural communication, are generally not interested in anything less than an "A" and certainly nothing less than a "B".

ADMINISTRATIVE AND STUDENT SUPPORT⁸

Administrative Support.

One of the easiest things about organizing a course in intercultural communication will undoubtedly be gaining the support of your administration. As mentioned previously, administrators on community college campuses are always interested in innovative courses or programs. They are especially interested in programs which relate to a diversity of people (faculty, students, community members) as the intercultural course does. And, of course, now that Affirmative Action has come to the college campus, interracial communication has increased in priority!

Administrators on our campus were so impressed with the course that they encouraged faculty to take the course for professional development by offering them one hour credit toward advancement in rank. More importantly, they worked hard to find a procedure that would allow the course to be taught by three instructors (black, Chicano, and anglo) rather than

by a single instructor. Keep in mind that the course is only a one-hour course (or two contact hours when the lab is taken into consideration). The normal procedure for staffing a one-hour course is to assign a single instructor a one-hour paid overload. Therefore, their first suggestion was to credit each of the three instructors with a one-hour overload. However, this was unacceptable to the team teachers who pointed out that the course promotion, planning, research, and presentation was more than equal to the time spent for a three-hour course. In essence, anyone teaching the intercultural course in addition to a normal course load would actually be teaching the equivalent of six courses or 18 semester hours!

Our administration's final plan is truly innovative and expressive of their commitment to the course. The plan for each course is as follows:

1. Three sections of the course are scheduled. Each team member is listed as the instructor for one of the sections.
2. The three sections are scheduled for the same time period in the same room. In essence -- one course, three instructors.
3. The course is considered as part of each instructor's normal five course load. In other words, each instructor teaches four regular courses in his own department and the one-hour intercultural course in the speech department.
4. The cost for the additional two load hours for each instructor (a total of six semester load hours) is absorbed by the campus administration. Contact-hour funding lightens this load somewhat.

With this type of commitment and encouragement from the administrators, the instructors' task is made much easier.

Student Support.

Student support is even easier to elicit than administrative support. Today's enlightened students are, for the most part, genuinely interested in improving relations between races and cultures -- they just do not know how to go about it. As one anglo student commented in class, "I've always wanted to get to know a black person, but how could I? I would really

feel silly walking up to a black and saying, 'Want to talk?'" The blacks and Chicanos in the class expressed similar feelings. Therefore, the student views the intercultural communication course as a "meeting place" for interaction.

Students also expressed gratitude that their grade in the course was not based on the traditional examination. With this pressure out of the way, they could concentrate on the things that really interested them. Contrary to our expectations, the lack of graded exams seemed to improve student motivation and interest. Class attendance was almost perfect. Several students, who were not even enrolled for the course, found out about it through a friend and also attended regularly!

Student support for the course comes equally from anglo, black, and Chicano. Our campus is just now beginning to attract foreign students so only a few have been involved in the course. Perhaps part of our success in keeping racial balance in each course is due to the racial balance of instructors for the course.

Student interest seems to culminate at the end of the semester during our multi-cultural banquet. Students spend a great deal of time preparing food from their own culture and from other cultures and nations and in finding representative music from each culture. The end of the banquet (the last class meeting) finds students hugging each other, taking down addresses and phone numbers, and expressing reluctance that the course is over. Is it surprising that many of these students will schedule the course for the following semester?

Student support of this intensity will quickly attract the attention of community college administrators.

SUMMARY

This paper has presented procedures for developing, from "scratch," an effective course in intercultural communication for use on community college campuses by discussing (1) the Initial planning stage, (2) Course content, and (3) Administrative and student support.

The procedures discussed in this paper are by no means exhaustive. Many excellent sources on intercultural communication were not mentioned. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the information presented in this paper will not only encourage community college speech departments to offer a course in intercultural communication, but will also give these departments the necessary guidelines for implementing a truly successful course.

NOTES TO THE TEXT

¹In the spring of 1975 Tarrant County Junior College - Northeast Campus offered its first intercultural communication course with an enrollment of 45; this spring we are expecting a minimum enrollment of 70. Although our initial anxiety was great, we have been constantly amazed at the success of the course. The course seems to attract and excite not only the regular student body, but also administrators, faculty, and community members. There is no reason why our success should not be repeated on other community college campuses.

²TCJC lists the course as follows:

SPE 1611: Speech Workshop. (1-0-2). An elective course designed to allow a student to concentrate on a special interest area or to concentrate on removing a communication problem. Content of the course will vary from semester to semester and may be repeated for credit.

³At TCJC, so far, the major instructors for the intercultural course have come from the psychology, art, speech, English, reading, Spanish, and business departments.

⁴Our interdisciplinary team of six instructors agreed to teach the course for two semesters as an unpaid overload and never even complained about the five-hour planning sessions each week!

⁵A recent text for such a course in Sociology is The Minority Report: An Introduction to Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Relations by Anthony Gary Dworkin and Rosalind J. Dworkin and published by Praeger Publishers, 1976.

⁶A quick look at a variety of university syllabi for the intercultural course will substantiate this statement.

⁷This statement can also be verified from current university syllabi.

⁸Comments in this section of the paper are based on personal experience with administrators and students on TCJC's campus.

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