
Diller, Jerry V. and Jean Moule. *Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators.*

Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth, 2005. ISBN: 0-534-58416-0.

Jerry Diller and Jean Moule have produced a most important work to help all educators teaching in a new cultural milieu. Education in the U.S. has had to deal with different ethnic groups and questions about how to teach them for centuries. However, most educators have traditionally tried to ignore cultural differences and ethnic diversity and taken some kind of middle road that usually privileged a particular group of students and their culture or privileged the teacher's own culture. In the majority of the U.S. this would be a white Northern European heritage culture. But this same situation would also be found in a class where the majority of students were African American. Students who might be considered "black" (from Africa or the Caribbean) would find their culture and experience ignored as would other students of color. Historically, this approach to teaching to the majority has been repeated in most classrooms throughout the United States.

Although there are exceptions, most American teachers simply are not trained to deal with diversity in the classroom in a way that explains the differences among cultures and attempts to provide appropriate methods to address them. In our ever more diverse nation, this situation is no longer acceptable. Even parts of the country that are predominantly rural are experiencing growing levels of

ethnic diversity. Teachers should be on the front line in working to understand diversity and how to teach it. Other professions began to address this issue years ago. As an example, New York City police had diversity training already in the 1970s to teach them about Puerto Rican culture, and especially Puerto Rican body language. NYPD officers did not understand that Puerto Ricans males often smile and appear aggressive in body movement when they are afraid and/or embarrassed. The officers were interpreting this body language as aggressive behavior that needed to be dealt with in an extremely firm manner. The Puerto Rican males would then respond in kind, leading to a “situation.” Yet, when I tell this story to education students, they are surprised and do not understand this kind of cultural difference. Imagine, then, how they would react to a smiling Puerto Rican student who was actually embarrassed and fearful. Again, this shows how far behind teachers often are in their understanding of cultural diversity.

It is clear that cultural awareness training is necessary for both practicing teachers and those who are still doing their teacher training. Although this training is certainly something that all teachers should undergo, it seems to make sense for (foreign) language teachers to take this kind of training most seriously in order to become leaders in this effort. Why? First and foremost, (foreign) language teachers are already trained in understanding at least two cultures, i.e., their students’ native culture(s) and the target culture of their language instruction, and language teachers are charged with the teaching of this target culture. In this respect, language teachers are already at least one step ahead of other teachers in cultural awareness training. In addition, language teachers are often those whose personalities would likely be most sensitive to concerns about cultural diversity and the cultural “other.” Many language teachers go into language teaching to promote understanding and communication. Thus, they should welcome a role as diversity training leaders. Using this book by Diller and Moule would help them grow in their role as leaders.

Cultural Competence is first and foremost a book accessible to current students but also addresses the changing needs of veteran teachers. It does include some theory and research findings, but takes great pains to keep its level of jargon low. It uses anecdotes and case studies quite frequently to provide variety and a change of pace. It also provides a convenient summary at the end of each chapter and prepares its reader for the chapters to come. In many ways, this is like a good teacher who knows how to summarize a class session and then look ahead to the next day’s class. From the outset the authors also clearly state their own ethnicity (one is a male Jewish American and the other is a woman of color who has biracial children). These circumstances, I think, confer a measure of authority on their work.

It is clear that the targeted audience for this book is primarily white teachers of northern European descent, from a Catholic or Protestant background. Since this group represents a majority of American teachers, this assumption makes sense. Although more and more culturally diverse teachers are coming into the profession, they are still a minority. As the authors state in Chapter 1, the purpose of the book, in addressing this white majority of teachers, is to sensitize them to the complex issues involved in cross-cultural education, since only routinely available competent cross-cultural teaching will allow students to reach their full

potential (2). The authors define the terms they use in the book next and then address the question of which cultural groups they will target.

In Chapter 2 the authors look at what it means to be culturally competent and explain that to them it is the ability to teach effectively cross-culturally. They present changes in demographics in the U.S. and reactions to it. They point out that cultural competence is not something to be learned in a day and must grow out of a basic attitude of empathy for others. Culturally competent teachers must be very aware of others and accept differences. They must have self-awareness, understand dynamics of difference, have knowledge of their students' culture, and be able to adapt their teaching skills appropriately. They must be prepared to face their own prejudices and fears honestly and be prepared to work hard to understand others on their own terms. The authors give guidelines on how to do this, offer a cultural competence survey to help focus ideas about teachers' cultural competence and finish the chapter with a note of encouragement.

In Chapter 3 the authors try to help teachers understand racism and prejudice. They review different types of racism and prejudice, offer anecdotes and stories that illustrate them, and provide a number of exercises to help elucidate them. Implementing these exercises in a methodology class would be very useful.

Chapter 4 is a nice complement to Chapter 3. This chapter attempts to help teachers understand how whites have been privileged in American culture and what kinds of racial consciousness occur among whites. This chapter is a powerful and useful one, especially for students who come from all-white or nearly all-white backgrounds, and especially for those who are upper class or upper middle-class. On page 55 the authors quote Peggy McIntosh, who gives thirteen examples of how whites are privileged in the U.S. They include such things as: "When I use checks, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial responsibility;" "I can be pretty sure if I ask to talk to the person in charge, I will be facing a person of my own race;" and "If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area I can afford and in which I would want to live" (55). People of color, as the authors point out, have the opposite experience in the U.S. They next consider models of racial attitude types, a model of white racial-identity development, identity development in the college classroom, implications for white teachers, and then reflection questions and a technique for solving problems.

In Chapter 5 they look at understanding culture and cultural differences. They return to the question "What is culture?" which they answer in a variety of ways, insisting that humans create culture and that cultural paradigms represent reality for all groups. They quote Brown and Lundrum-Brown's dimensions of culture (70) and, more anecdotally, discuss cultural dimensions such as time orientation, people relations, work and activity, and human nature. They then present an example of cross-cultural miscommunication, discuss whether educational theories are culture-bound, and examine both conflicting values in educational theory and conflicting strategies about multicultural education. They again end the chapter with reflection questions and a technique for solving problems before summarizing and presenting the following chapters.

Chapter 6 looks specifically at children, parents, and families of color. Since this is one of the largest minorities in the U.S. and often considered problematic, this chapter is the center of this book. It begins with children and looks at all of their stages of development, discussing how being a person of color affects this development. After discussing parents of color, the book turns to bicultural couples and children. This is a very important chapter and presents both historical research and current research in a very readable manner. It concludes by showing the diversity of the experiences of this group and the complexity of their situation. It advises teachers to be even more careful not to lump everyone in this group together and reminds them of the conclusions reached in the chapter.

Chapter 7 turns to psychological and educational issues, including racial identity and group belonging, assimilation and acculturation (presenting many ethnic groups' experiences), stress, and psychological support in the classroom; the authors then return to specific problems of people of color, such as the isolation of students of color, the isolation of teachers of color, and interaction with parents of color. In this reviewer's opinion, the structure of the book breaks down a bit in Chapter 7. The first part of this chapter could have been included in Chapter 5 and the second part added to Chapter 6.

Again, in Chapter 8, the structure of the work is not apparent. The authors here consider bias in the classroom and in the curriculum. However, one wonders if this chapter could not have been included earlier. The material is valuable but could have been discussed earlier in the book. Furthermore, some of the material included in this chapter could even have been omitted, since parts are repetitive and parts are too generic to be useful for a work that targets cross-cultural teaching.

Chapter 9 returns the book to an even keel in its discussion of critical issues to be considered in working with culturally diverse students. There is a welcome return to issues of cross-cultural teaching and classroom work, including a discussion of bilingualism and immersion programs. The anecdotes and examples are well chosen and enlightening. The last five chapters each target a particular ethnic group and make special mention of its demographics and its family and cultural values, and then provide an interview with an educator who gives insights into how teachers should teach to his or her group. The groups chosen are Latino/Latina, Native American, African American, Asian American, and White Ethnic (Jewish). There is no concluding chapter. However, there is an excellent bibliography and a useful index.

Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators is a very good book and worthy of inclusion in teacher education programs, as well as serving as a foundation for teacher development workshops that address issues of diversity and cultural competence (as defined by the authors). Foreign language teachers should be leaders in the effort to provide training and help for other teachers in becoming culturally competent, since their content area should have sensitized them to issues of cultural competence. This book will certainly help them in their efforts to become leaders in diversity training. Yet, this book is not perfect. Its lack of content coherence in the second half needs to be addressed, and a concluding chapter that would pull together the concluding summaries of all of the previous chapters would be extremely welcome. However, the book's examples, anec-

dotes, accessibility, and readability, along with its thorough use of appropriate research and theory, mitigate those shortcomings. As such, I wholeheartedly recommend it to all teachers.

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