

Why Interculturalize?

Thompson Rivers University has a unique student demographic; close to 10% of the population are Indigenous students from a variety of nations, and another 15% are international students from more than 85 countries around the globe. It is also very likely that immigration will increase in the Kamloops region; indeed, according to Statistics Canada (2009) by 2031 almost half (46%) of Canadians over the age of 15 will have been born outside of Canada or have at least one parent born in another part of the world. This culturally diverse population presents educators with both challenges and opportunities. The Centre for Student Engagement and Learning Innovation seeks to support faculty in culturally responsive teaching to more fully realize the successful learning outcomes of our diverse students. We believe that an intercultural approach in teaching and learning environments can support both educators and learners.

According to Bok (2009) the need for intercultural competence is felt nowhere as much as educational institutions and that globalization has created “a more urgent need than ever before for [Americans] to develop intercultural understanding and an ability to live and work productively and harmoniously with people having very different values, backgrounds and habits” (p. xi). Deardorff (2009) also urges higher education to prepare interculturally, and underlines the necessity for faculty professional development in order to gain more proficiency in guiding and modeling intercultural competence.

Even a cursory review of internationalization literature confirms what appears to be a unanimous sentiment: that internationalization cannot be achieved without the endorsement of faculty (AUCC, 2006; Bond & Thayer-Scott, 1999; Bond, 2003; Peterson, 2008; Schweitz, 2006; Stohl, 2007; Teekens, 2003). Nearly 30 years ago, Harari (1981) warned “In the last analysis [internationalization] is a function of faculty competence and commitment of institutional leadership” (p. 29).

Moreover, the number of Aboriginal students enrolling in postsecondary education programs continues to increase (Malatest, 2004), and since Aboriginal youth represent the fastest growing population, with almost half a million presently under the age of 20 (AUCC, 2010), higher education should be working to meet their needs in the classroom. As Nathan Matthew notes, “in order to attract and retain Aboriginal students, it is essential that TRU provides an inviting learning environment for Aboriginal learners.”(Handbook for Educators of Aboriginal Students)