CULTURAL STUDIES AND INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

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Why cultural studies?

Cultural studies approach + Intercultural Curriculum = Intercultural growth

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What is cultural studies, exactly?

• 1960s post-war Britain
• University of Birmingham, Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CSSS)
• Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall
• Interest in studying “contemporary cultural forms” or “mass culture”
• Breakdown of high/low culture
• Relationship between power, culture and society
• Later focus on race, ethnicity, postcolonialism, identity theory, diaspora, gender
• Concept of culture
  • Everyday practices, rituals, beliefs, values, arts, institutions, communicative practices
  • Interest in the symbolic realms of cultural and process of making meaning
  • Culture as a process of articulation, constantly subject to change, and movement
  • Theories of cultural difference: recognition of difference, not its erasure

• Some areas of study
  • Popular culture, youth culture, racial identities, systems of representation, media, national identities, (post)colonialism, sexuality, gender...
  • Contingent, contextual practice
CIEE’s Seminar on Living and Learning

• Semester long intercultural learning course taught onsite, optional
• Based on experiential, developmental and holistic learning models
• Instructor and students are co-learners in the construction of knowledge (cultural mentor role)
• Culture general and culture specific content

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Cultural studies and culture-specific content

- Student evaluations: “we thought this course was supposed to be about Chilean culture”
- Challenge of delivering of “culture specific” content
- How to deliver this content without telling students, “this is how Chileans are, this is what they value...”
- How do we empower students to explore these questions and develop hypotheses on their own?
- Learner-centered approach (Weimer)

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‘Cultural Connections’

- 45 minute presentations on any aspect of Chilean “culture”
- distributed among students and instructor
- Choose, describe and connect cultural phenomena to intercultural theory (values, cultural dimension, etc)
- Intentionally left “culture” vague
- Some of the topics shared: 1980s Chilean rock music, hip hop artists, student movement, wine culture, Mapuche medicinal herbs and spirituality
- Benefits for instructor/resident staff

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Learning Outcomes

• Deeper and more diverse understanding of Chilean culture(s)
• Shared responsibility of exploring & describing host county’s culture(s)
• Increased enthusiasm for course, in class and on final evals
• IDI results (percent growth from pre and post tests)
  • 1st semester: +15.26 (5 students)
  • 2nd semester: + 22.44 (9 students)
Conclusions

• Working with popular culture in its modern manifestations (social media, apps) to maximize student learning

• Speaking to students in their own language, meeting them where they are at

• Making intercultural course content relevant to students’ everyday lived experience
Bibliography

- “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities” (1990) Stuart Hall
- Learner Centered Teaching (2002) Mary Ellen Weimer

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