

Being a 'Whole Educator'

Written by Caitlin P. Collins

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CAITLIN P. COLLINS, DEC 7 2016

Teaching in today's modern and multi-cultural classroom is not only about guiding the students on their way to mastering the academic material presented in class, but additionally the instructor of a modern and multi-cultural classroom must view their role in the classroom as that of a whole educator. What does the term whole educator mean? It means that instructors of multi-cultural classrooms must branch out from the traditional instructor-student model and begin to devote some of their time to understanding their students as a whole. Instructors must use cultural, body language and other contextual clues in order to assess the needs of either an individual student or the class as a whole. Once these assessments have been made the instructor can then use those tools to stimulate the students on many levels.

These methods can be adapted to any type of classroom environment the instructor may be teaching in, but they are exceedingly crucial in a class with students from diverse cultural experiences as well as a wide range of professional and personal backgrounds. How can such a model be accomplished? While there are a number of options for achieving success in this area, one of the most viable options is to incrementally and strategically alter the educational model that we have come to rely on.

Many current academic disciplines have come to recognize that their respective fields and the experts who practice in those areas of study are not singular entities, but rather they are interrelated and in many cases both the field of study and the experts would benefit from a more direct and overall broader communication strategy with others in similar areas. Using this perspective to construct and implement a new approach to learning would allow us to create a learning culture that not only gives students the opportunity to learn about the theoretical mechanics of the subject matter that they wish to master, but in addition will create an environment where, upon completion of the course of study they will have gained invaluable knowledge that will prepare them to utilize the skills that they have learned in functional manner with real world applications.

Making changes to the time-honored system and establishing a structure that recognizes the benefits and importance of interdisciplinary study and collaboration would allow for the discipline of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to further flourish. As any instructor of language courses, but EFL instructors in particular will understand is the multiple variations the common student refrain of "we want to learn things that we will use in the future". This sentiment creates one of the biggest challenges for instructors in multi-cultural and linguistically varied environments. How do we teach the fundamentals necessary for productive language acquisition while helping the students learn "things they will use in the future?" Additionally, with the inevitability that each student's idea of what parts of the language will be useful to them in the future, there is no concrete way to determine how to supplement the fundamentals with what might be considered "useful language."

This is where a new interdisciplinary instruction method would be beneficial to the field. In this new interdisciplinary model, instructors would be able to draw on knowledge from linguists, educators from other academic areas, administrators, and sociologists along with a whole host of other academic disciplines. Engaging in this method of dialogue and instruction will not only provide a conduit for instructors to be able to discover their best way to become a whole educator, but in addition it will provide those in other fields or in other positions access to who are closest to the students, the ones who spend the most time with them and understand what the students want and need the best. Success in the modern and multi-cultural classroom will depend on amending the current educational system

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and interdisciplinary collaboration to create a whole educator system.

About the author:

Caitlin P. Collins is a student in the Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages Certificate Program at Teachers College. She has taught English as a Foreign Language both in the classroom and privately for the last five years specializing in grammar and accent reduction and pronunciation classes, and was voted the first Educator of the Month at Kaplan International. She is a Graduate of Mount Holyoke College (Bachelor of Arts in Asian Studies and International Affairs), and Columbia University School of International Affairs (Executive Masters of Public Affairs).