This is the Weekly Reflection podcast from Saint Louis University’s Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning. Each week, we focus on a topic that fits with our theme for the 2012-2013 academic year, Engaging All Learners. Each reflection loosely follows the five-part Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation). The goal of this podcast is to provide an avenue into a space for thoughtful reflection on complex issues, rather than to provide answers to these issues.

Week 3: Intercultural Competence in the Classroom

Context:
Ajay is a bright student in class. He listens to the lecture attentively and follows directions well. However, he is very rude when a classmate is speaking; at that time he either talks to his neighbor or checks Facebook. He never joins in any class discussions or group activities.

Minh is constantly texting during class. After class, the instructor asks her to stay a few moments for a little talk concerning this behavior. As the instructor explains to Minh that this behavior is a distraction to him and the other students in the class, the student looks off to the side and starts to smile. The instructor tries to establish eye contact to show her how serious he is and becomes angrier as Minh continues to look away and even giggles a bit.

Experience:
Surprising interactions between students and instructors happen every day, and as our classrooms increasingly become spaces where the world comes to learn, these surprises are likely to become more frequent. While we cannot prepare specifically for each different scenario that might unfold, we can begin to develop intercultural competency, which would help us think about situations in different ways.

In many of her publications, expert Darla Deardorff discusses intercultural competency as a process in which we move from the individual level to the interaction level by engaging in what she calls “cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, [and] sociolinguistic awareness” that leads eventually to “respect, openness, curiosity and discovery” (Deardorff, Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competency, 480, figure 28.2). It is through this process that we begin first to accumulate knowledge about different cultures and their approaches to teaching and learning, as well as other behaviors and social expectations. We then come to accept how those approaches, behaviors, and expectations might enter into our interactions with students as well as between students in our classes. What, for instance, could be the underlying cultural approaches, behaviors, and/or expectations that lead Ajay and Minh to act in the ways they do? Just as importantly, what is it about our own cultural approaches to teaching and learning, our own cultural behaviors and social expectations that cause us to view Ajay and Minh’s behaviors in the ways that we do? As we encounter intercultural competency as a process, we learn again, how to observe, question, and value all of those cultural dynamics that we often take for granted or see as invisible in our daily lives.

Reflection:
(Take some time to consider the following prompts. You may find it helpful to write or sketch your thoughts.)

Consider your own assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. How do these complex processes occur within the lessons of your classes? Why do they happen the way they do? Why do they not happen the way you expect? What are some of the big ideas or behaviors around teaching and learning that you take for granted or see as invisible?

**Action:**
Revisit your teaching philosophy, paying attention to the cultural approaches to teaching and learning embedded within it.

Now, choose one of your classes and compare your teaching philosophy to the course materials, activities, and projects of that class. Identify those places in which the structure of the class mirrors your cultural approaches and expectations, and consider ways that you might create alternatives for other cultural norms, or at least find ways to clearly articulate the cultural ideas and expectations underlying the choices you have made for the course.

**Evaluation:**
(The following questions are meant to be used at a later time after you have completed the Action, but may be used as a way to shape the action as well. It may be helpful to write or sketch your responses.)

With what intentions did you redesign or create the learning experience? How did those intentions present in the learning experience? Did the experience change the ways you see teaching, learning or the course?

How do you know if the change made a difference in student learning? For which students did the change make the most difference? Are there negatives for any students associated with the change you made?

What will you do next?

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Thank you for participating in this week’s reflection.

The next reflection will be posted on Friday, September 21. All reflections are archived for future use. For more information on this week’s topic, CTTL services, programs, or events please consult the website at http://slu.edu/cttl.