UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Intercultural Capacity

2122-2-F8701N067

Learning objectives

The course of intercultural relations is constituted by two interconnecting parts taught by prof. Ida Castiglioni and by prof. Milton Bennett, “Intercultural Communication”and “Intercultural Competence,”respectively.

The main objective of the Intercultural Competence course is to establish the relationship among perceptual development, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence. The intersection of these concepts explains and guides how people develop greater competence in dealing with cultural “otherness”. A secondary objective of the course is to establish a constructivist approach to ethicality that can be used by change agents in intercultural communication.

Contents

The course will explicate Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity in terms of constructivist perception theory and its application to exercising competence in intercultural relations. The model differentiates “ethnocentrism”—the denial of, defense against, or minimization of cultural otherness, and “ethnorelativism”– the acceptance of, adaptation to, or integration of cultural otherness. Movement through the stages is explained in terms of recognizing and reconciling dichotomies such as stability and change, and unity and diversity. The reconciliation of issues in ethnorelativism generates a form of ethicality that is well-adapted to intercultural and multicultural situations, which in turn is a necessary guide for personal development and change agentry in small and large organizations.

Detailed program

The course will initially present some prescientific and scientific paradigms to establish the epistemological basis of intercultural competence. Applications will be made to understanding the evolution of consciousness to enable intergroup relations, and the devolution of that consciousness in situations of xenophobia and intergroup hate. Additionally, students will learn to recognize the “paradigmatic confusion” that occurs when professionals of the third sector use conflicting epistemological paradigms to guide their intervention in multicultural and intercultural contexts. The epistemological discussion will culminate in the unfolding of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity as an application of constructivist paradigm. Structured exercises will provide the opportunity to “make experience” of every developmental position: the experience of perceiving cultural difference; the experience of creating categories; the experience of the cultural context; the experience of alternative cultural frameworks; and the experience of choosing one’s cultural frame.

The course will then focus on developing a viable ethicality for multicultural situations. The dichotomy to be addressed is that of preservation of cultural identity simultaneously with adaptation to multicultural living. The approach will offer an alternative to most ethical schemes that assume universal truths defined by a dominant culture. When these universalist systems are used by professionals in the third sector, they support ethnocentrism and disrespect for alternative values. Students will learn how to avoid this kind of unconscious ethnocentrism in professional situations while still maintaining their commitment to important cultural values.

Prerequisites

Course faculties encourage class attendance of both modules, as contents are strictly interrelated.

A basic knowledge of English language is necessary as this part of the course is taught in English.

Teaching methods

The course is organized through intial presentations and group discussions, followed by structured exercises. Every exercise creates the opportunity to apply different competences and to discuss implications both at a personal and professional level. Participants are encouraged to bring their own case studies to class in order to better understand the leverages to value cultural diversity and how to face natural resistance to change.

Assessment methods

Attending students will have intermediate steps of assessment with both faculties and will make a final essay in Italian or English, according to preference, agreed upon during class time Which will imply a small project or field research on the basis of the provided literature which will be discussed during the oral test.

Non attending students will sustain an oral exam in Italian or English, according to preference, in which they will have to demonstrate the understanding of texts and their application to concrete life experience.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

M. Bennett (2015) (a cura di),*La comunicazione interculturale. Paradigmi, Principi e Pratiche,* Franco Angeli, Milano.

M. Bennett (2013) Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Paradigms, principles, and practices. Boston, Intercultural Press

Non attending students must also read:

Bennett, M. (2017). “Constructivist intercultural communication.” In Y. Kim (Ed), *Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*. Wiley.

Bennett, M. (2017). “Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity.” In Y. Kim (Ed). *Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*. Wiley.

Bennett, M. (2013). “Stereotypes/generalizations.” In C. Cortes (Ed) *Multicultural America: A multimedia encyclopedia*. New York: Sage.

Bennett, M. (2013). “Ethnocentrism/xenophobia.” In C. Cortes (Ed) *Multicultural America: A multimedia encyclopedia*. New York: Sage.

all articles will be uploaded on the e-learning platform