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Cross-Cultural Educational Exchanges for Peace Through Common Humanity



Honors Thesis

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Abstract

How do human connections from cross-cultural educational exchanges promote peace and understanding? Authentic personal connections can lead to deeper cultural understanding and awareness. This type of human connection can lead to peace. Many cross-cultural educational exchanges, such as Fulbright, were created to promote peace and understanding. Cross-cultural educational exchanges now take on more forms due to increases in the ability to share knowledge which supplies more opportunities for conflict and misunderstanding or peace and understanding. Due to this, it is important to have students participate in cross-cultural educational experiences to create personal connections to understand cultural differences better. This experience can create global citizens who are able to understand and navigate the barriers of culture. Through literature review and synthesis of current work on peace, human connection is shown to be vital in creating peace and understanding across cultures.



**University of
Dayton**

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Why is it critical for students to participate in cross-cultural educational exchanges and establish personal relationships in order to understand and create peace thoroughly?

Purpose

This thesis aims to specifically define the advantages of human connections created through cross-cultural exchange rather than explaining the benefits of cultural exchange. Americans will be the groups referenced as having the experience, and the American point of view will be utilized. The thesis will outline a curriculum for students pre- and post-exchange so the experience can have a greater impact. This initiative has the potential to make a significant difference in closing existing cultural disparities. The goal is to help students learn how to accept and understand others while removing existing barriers between cultures. With expanding globalization, fostering understanding among students from various cultural backgrounds is crucial.

Definitions

For this thesis, it is essential to have an understanding of the following concepts in relation to the topic.

Cross-Cultural Educational Exchange

Cross-Cultural Educational Exchange is the sharing of ideas, customs, and knowledge between two or more different cultures, while using a structured curriculum to understand the differences in the host and home cultures.

Human Connection

Human connection is a deep bond between two or more people where they feel seen, understood, and valued.

Peace

There are many different definitions of peace. Peace in this thesis is defined through mutual understanding. It is the process of creating caring students to live well

together despite their differences. It is understanding how our culture shapes our differences and that neither is right or wrong. Peace is understanding, accepting, and respecting each other's differences.

Methods

To find literature related to Cross-Culture Educational Exchange that forms human connections to create peace, databases were searched using key terms such as "Cross-cultural exchange for peace", "Education for Peace", "Human connection creating peace", and "Human connections formed through cross-cultural exchanges". From here, peer-reviewed articles gave significant information on the topic, and more related articles were found through their references. These articles and books followed the themes of globalization, understanding culture, common humanity, and empathy. Additional articles were found throughout the writing process to fill gaps and aid the flow.

Literature Review

Throughout human history, conflict and cooperation between cultures have played a role in the creation of relations between nations. Such relations include economic, political, educational, and language exchanges. This has occurred not only with nations that are partners and allies but also those that are rivals. Although interactions have existed between different cultures for centuries it has never been as often and wide scale as it is today. Presently we have the technology to communicate with one another even with a language barrier. We also have people traveling for more than trade and fertile land. People are fleeing from war, persecution, economic uncertainty, and more. In addition to immigration, this technological rise means people can interact with other cultures, form bonds, or create hate without leaving their homes. The rise in technology and immigration creates a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multiracial society. For this society to run smoothly, the groups must work with one another and understand each other, this is where Cross-Cultural Educational Exchanges play their part.

Herodotus was a historian who lived in the fifth century B.C.E. His main goal being to preserve history especially that of the Greeks and Non-Greeks to show how they

came into conflict. He traveled to many places taking note of the culture, how people dressed, and bathed, what they ate, and more. A critical foundation of these observations was that he was not judging these cultures no matter how different than his own. He knew if he treated his culture as superior, it would not aid in bringing people together, as other cultures would think the same creating conflict. (Empathy in the Global World an Intercultural Perspective, Carolyn Calloway-Thomas)

According to UNESCO, in the past 20 years, cultures have been used for divisive purposes rather than to bring people together. With greater access to other cultures through travel, social media, and other forms of technology, it is crucial to have a greater understanding of culture as a concept to aid in our connection. However, with this we must be careful not to create a single story of another culture.

In Brené Brown's book *Braving the Wilderness*, she discusses how “Dehumanization has fueled innumerable acts of violence, human rights violations, war crimes, and genocides. It makes slavery, torture, and human trafficking possible. Dehumanizing others is the process by which we become accepting of violations against human nature, the human spirit, and, for many of us, violations against the central tenets of our faith. How does this happen? Maiese explains that most of us believe that people’s basic human rights should not be violated—that crimes like murder, rape, and torture are wrong. Successful dehumanizing, however, creates moral exclusion. Groups targeted based on their identity—gender, ideology, skin color, ethnicity, religion, age—are depicted as “less than” or criminal or even evil. The targeted group eventually falls out of the scope of who is naturally protected by our moral code. This is moral exclusion, and dehumanization is at its core” (Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* pg 234) By dehumanizing others we are able to do horrible things, to create a world of understanding we must learn about our differences so we can learn from each other rather than create a stronger divide. By forming human connections, we create our own images, and more accurate images of those from other cultures as we now have personal experiences with that culture and friends in that culture.

After World War II, countries worldwide worked to establish ways to avoid another world war. They saw the impacts of dehumanization and the devastation that

followed. Many countries saw horrible things and hoped to prevent future generations from experiencing the same. This led to the creation of the Fulbright Program in 1946, which was created to fund the promotion of international goodwill through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science. The Fulbright program is significant to the history of cross-cultural exchange. It has expanded over time to include many different disciplines and cultures while maintaining its goal of promoting international peace and understanding.

In 1948 the US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (also known as the Smith-Mundt Act) was passed "to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries ... [by establishing] an educational exchange service to cooperate with other nations in (a) the interchange of persons, knowledge, and skills; (b) the rendering of technical and other services; (c) the interchange of developments in the field of education, the arts, and sciences" (US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, 1948, §2(b)).

This act is essential as in-person exchange can have many benefits, and this act was created to make connections and increase understanding of the United States in other countries; by doing this, it also creates on a more individual level Americans gaining an increased understanding of American culture as well as the host culture. This help prevent dehumanization.

Fulbright said in 1976 at the anniversary of the Fulbright Program: "International educational exchange is one of the significant current projects designed to continue the process of humanizing mankind to the point we would hope that men could live in peace... eventually even to cooperate in constructive activities rather than compete in a mindless contest of mutual destruction. We must try to expand the boundaries of human wisdom, empathy, and perception. Moreover, there is no way of doing it except through education." (Fulbright, 1976, p. 24)

Analysis

When a child is born, they are brought into a society and culture. They are then socialized in the culture. People become accustomed to doing things a certain way. This

is because they are always looking through their cultural lens, frequently without realizing it. Imagine if you wore rose-tinted glasses but had never taken them off or been told you were wearing them. You would see the world a lot differently than someone in brown-tinted glasses.

As soon as we are born, we begin the socialization process. We spend many years learning our culture; however, it is taught in a different way than the English language or math, where every part is broken down and explained. You can explain how you learned how to spell and why it was important, and you can probably identify when you learned this. Can you identify the time when you learned about your culture? When was it? Culture is taught through socialization and as a way of being rather than a subject. It is seen as normal or how it is, rather than having an explanation. What kind of clothes do you wear? How close do you stand to someone when talking? How do you greet someone?

All are based on culture and are often unconscious because most people are doing the same as you (as a member of the dominant culture where you are).

We are socialized to understand ourselves and others. However, one thing that is often forgotten or pushed aside is other people in other cultures. We understand how we and others in our cultures act. We then create this idea of normal in our minds. We have many unstated rules that we might not recognize or are able to explain, but we get irritated when those from other cultures do not follow them. Americans tend to keep a mid-distance between them as they socialize. Stand too far, and something seems wrong. Stand too close, and it is irritating. You may not have been able to voice this if someone asked you about an unstated rule, but it is a rule Americans follow every day.

The difference can often be thought of as an irritant or flaw, an extra step that seems unnecessary by those of the dominant culture. By stepping out of this "be-like-me" mindset and stepping towards a mindset of understanding new perspectives, you are able to look at the difference through a lens of curiosity rather than a lens of frustration.

Once you add a lens of frustration, you begin to misinterpret actions and objectives from other cultures. This spirals into miscommunication. Learning about your culture and the culture you are interacting with are vital components of peace. With the media, we see many different cultures often without reflecting. We just see the difference and tend not

to understand how someone could think one way. By participating in a cross-cultural exchange, you are taught to see the culture you have been socialized by as well as the culture in which you are participating.

Culture is a powerful force. It is central to our lives. Every culture is different and can change one's perception when authentically interacting within it.

Here are three scenarios:

Scenario X: You see someone with beautiful skin.

Scenario Y: You meet a new colleague for the first time.

Scenario Z: You see a line forming.

The way we understand these scenarios is directly affected by our culture. In the American perspective for Scenario X, you may think this to yourself or make a comment to them. In Brazilian culture, you may comment on this while stroking the skin, even if it is a stranger. In Scenario Y Americans would introduce themselves with their name and title and share a little bit about themselves; they would also likely offer to help in the transition or to be a point person for questions. In Japanese culture it is likely that the new employee has been promoted from within the company and already knows their colleagues. It would be unusual for someone to be hired from outside the company. Americans would not think much of scenario Z. They will likely join the line keeping a foot or two behind the person in front of them. In India people may join the line but they will likely be so close that they are touching you, or they will try and cut the line, which is the norm. Often times lines are also more of a clump than a line with people doing their best to get to the front.

"Culture is one of the most powerful forces in our world. It's central to what we see, how we make sense of our world, and how we express ourselves. As people from different cultural groups work together, values sometimes conflict. When we don't understand each other, we sometimes react in ways that make a partnership ineffective. Often we're not aware that cultural differences are the root of miscommunication."

(Hynes & Chaumeton, 2016, p. 10) Understanding how people communicate is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other.

Misunderstanding

Misunderstanding is the cause of 90% of all conflicts. So simply giving the parties a chance to understand each other is vital. This means voicing what the assumptions are. "It also means doing all that you can to prevent misunderstandings upfront." ("Most Conflict is Because of Misunderstanding |Craig Freshley") When participating in an exchange keep questioning your assumptions about the "right way" to communicate. "For example, think about your body language; postures that indicate receptivity in one culture might indicate aggressiveness in another." ("Section 8. Multicultural Collaboration - Community Tool Box") As these can lead to further misunderstanding.

Showing Common Humanity

One outcome of cross-cultural exchange is revealing commonalities. It reveals human nature and the differences that develop due to culture. Culture shapes people's views, beliefs, and behavior. Different cultures can create opposing ideas and opinions. Participating in cross-cultural exchange shows the commonalities in the differences. "The basic logic of the common humanity perspective holds that although people come from various cultures and have divergent and even incompatible interests and views, we share many similarities that have the potential to build bridges and reduce tensions" (Cohen, 2018, p. 9)

Taranath discusses how important it is to learn and accept our differences. Many times, people create this ideal of being the same- or being more similar than different; however, it is more important and productive to realize and accept our differences. We must continue to be curious even when it creates some discomfort. In American culture, it is often uncomfortable to ask questions, especially as a white American in the majority- we have to think about how experiences differ between populations and in different cultures.

Implicit biases - Without even thinking about it, we tend to gravitate to people like us. This may be the way they look or where they are from. We as humans give more sympathy to those in our in-groups (people like you). By creating genuine connections

with those in other cultures, they can become part of your in-group. This can then translate to having a bigger in-group and creating an ability to have more sympathy for a larger group of people.

If someone comes up to an American and asks what religion they are or how much money they make, the American would be uncomfortable and feel uncertain; most likely, they will feel that the other person is rude. In other cultures, these are basic questions to get to know someone.

We often know little of the stories of people not like us. We learn a little about them or their culture and fill in the gaps using that knowledge rather than getting to know them. This has many consequences and repercussions in such an unequal world. If, instead of continuing in our culture of assumptions, we moved towards a culture of curiosity, we could learn more and relate to others more. (Taranath Beyond Guilt Trips)

So much learning takes place during a Cross-Cultural Educational Exchanges. You learn because you are in a different culture because there is so much you do not know. You learn how to show humility, how to cooperate, and how to navigate a system with which you are often unfamiliar. You are learning from the people you are living with and the community you are part of. All of these are fundamental skills that have applications in other environments. It may be uncomfortable and hard but that can strengthen your connections and lead to the ability to have more empathy.

Human connection

People create bonds when participating in cross-cultural exchanges, whether online or in person. These bonds help people relate to one another. Seneca and other stoics believed that human connection deterred anger in some ways.

Throughout history, people have stuck to their subgroups. However, in the modern age, subgroups are interacting more and more. Finding common ground and establishing a sense of similarity between people can aid in fostering empathy and community.

Relationships are powerful. Our one-to-one connections with each other are the foundation for change. Furthermore, building relationships with people from different cultures, often many different cultures, is critical in building diverse communities that are

powerful enough to achieve significant goals. (“Section 2. Building Relationships with People from Different Cultures”)

Friendship is powerful. It is our connection to each other that gives meaning to our lives. Our caring for each other is often what motivates us to make a change. Moreover, establishing connections with people from diverse backgrounds can be vital in making significant changes in our communities.

As individuals and in groups, we can change our communities. We can set up neighborhoods and institutions in which people commit themselves to work to form strong relationships and alliances with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. We can establish networks and coalitions in which people are knowledgeable about each other's struggles and are willing to lend a hand. Together, we can do it.

Taranath tells a story from her experience in India. On a cultural exchange, she and her students met and formed a bond with a local woman named Lavanya; she made incense for a living, taking a twig and rolling resin on it. She showed the students her work and her family and talked about the difficulties and necessities of being a working mother. After the students' visit, they learned that the resin that Lavanya used with her bare hands every day was quite toxic and most likely carcinogenic. Most workers were not made aware of this, so it is likely that she did not know the harmful affects her work could have on her in the long term. The students now had a personal relationship with someone directly affected by harmful working conditions and were now able to show empathy and make decisions based on this knowledge; some may go on to do advocacy work for people in Southern Asia for fair work environments and proper safety equipment for work such as Lavanya's due to this experience.

We must connect with others, even if it is in a small way. When we meet others that are somewhat like us, we create a sense of connection rather than being mired in our own lives. We feel a sense of duty to help this person as we can see a part of ourselves in them.

Empathy

Empathy is a core part of human connection. It is what allows us to feel an emotional connection; this is in part due to the evolutionary capacity of our brains.

Why do you care about those who are similar to you? Why do you feel for someone going through a situation you have been through?

Being empathic and patient with people can go a long way. You can help open their hearts by teaching them of your culture and listening and learning from theirs. When you form a close connection with someone you are able to apply that care to people like them. You are able to open your heart to a larger group.

We live in a vast and diverse world that has a lot of devastation and it can be hard to extend our heart to others, especially those that seem so far and so different. These Cross-Cultural Educational Exchanges help create and foster relationships with people different than us and open our hearts to more than our own culture.

Limitations

We must prepare ourselves for customs and values that differ from ours. We must understand that we each have customs that may seem foreign to others. When an exchange takes place there are hard points and they can fail.

Not everyone is open to the idea that their culture is simply culture and not the "right way". In the United States, some people say things such as "Go back to where you came from" or "This is America; speak English" This is because they do not understand. The first step to understanding is having an open mind. Another limitation is that people do not always create good bonds with one another. Some people grow to dislike each other, which could lead to a slanted or negative view of another culture.

Implementation

Students need cross-cultural exchanges to learn about other cultures and understand them. When students are given the opportunity to meet other students from other cultures, they are able to create bonds and then develop a stronger sense of care for the other culture alongside their culture. At the University of Dayton, we have a plethora of in-person exchanges. However, they are still limited to a higher socio-economic class. We need more accessible exchanges as well. On campus, we have a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic population, but they tend to stay within subgroups. We need to create more

opportunities for exchanges with the curriculum where culture is taught and understood before the exchange takes place.

What the University of Dayton needs is a course specific to cross-cultural exchanges meant to pair students together in a setting that allows them to be vulnerable and create a bond with one another. This can be in person here on campus or online with one of our partner schools across the globe.

The GIA (Global Intercultural Affairs) center hosts global coffee hours for students from different cultures can come together and answer a set of questions laid out while learning from others. However, this is voluntary, and students tend to go with their friends and stay with them. We see a lot of cultural misunderstands on campus. Americans are not educated on the differences between our culture and other cultures that are present on campus. With an exchange program, we could bridge this gap to create a stronger community; after all, our school is notorious for community.

Getting Started

Cultural misunderstandings are high because we often do not recognize what our culture is telling us or not telling the other party. The first step to addressing cultural misunderstandings is developing a better understanding of our culture and how it impacts us and our thought processes. Next, understand another culture through your lens or cultural difference, take note of how you feel in situations, and try and identify why. Next, learn about that culture. What prompted the actions that made you feel uncomfortable, that they were being rude?

Now sit down with a member of that culture and try and have these conversations to understand why they do these things. Ask how they perceive you.

As you get to know someone from another culture, you learn about their culture through a lens of friendship and love. This allows you to be vulnerable and ask questions. You will still have those gut reactions of something being rude, but it will soon be followed by the thought process your friend has taught you. You may even start seeing through that cultural lens and start thinking Americans are rude.

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