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“Share an example of what you are doing, within your domain/class, to engage students in order to enrich their learning journeys.”

In a meeting excerpt intended to surface discussion of different interpersonal and intercultural communication skills, I intentionally used a name that was not clearly male or female. This meeting participant exhibited highly assertive interpersonal communication behaviours.

Students automatically began referring to the participant as male, so, after a few minutes, I started to ask them questions:

“I notice that most of you refer to the participant as male. Why is that? What is there in the background and the meeting to make you think that? Is it because the communicative style is direct and aggressive? Is it because this participant interrupts many times?”

This to me was clearly a “teaching moment”. The class was silent for about 30 seconds, and I let it be. I would like to believe that the students’ cultural frame through which they understood and practiced communication was probably punctured. They were, in that moment of silence, perhaps re-evaluating their own beliefs about men, women, and communication in general.

This specific strategy is one of a range of strategies I deploy in my classroom. I call them INSERTIONS AND INTERRUPTIONS. They are simple (really minimal) insertions or interruptions in my lessons and activities which help students think critically about their own assumptions about communication. In other cases, I withhold information about people’s nationalities, or provide complex descriptions of speakers that defy stereotypical depictions.

In the process of helping them become able communicators of the future—which of late has meant equipping them with market-driven communication skills—I also help my students become more conscious of their own deep-seated beliefs through the cultivation of a greater sensitivity to nuances in communication. Thus on the road to becoming able communicators, our students hopefully develop their ability to simultaneously perform and question the communicative styles of the (profit-driven) market.