Introduction

The presentation consists of the following:
• Sharing of experiences in relation to the topic
• Concept of cultural imbalance or differences in school partnerships (What it stands for and its causes)
• Component of cultural imbalance in a multi-cultural environment
• How cultural imbalances in school partnerships affect its objectives.
• Actions steps or what needs to be done.
• Conclusion.

Concept of cultural imbalance in school partnerships

A partnership is an agreement that enables individuals or groups to work together toward a mutual goal. For partnership to be effective, it is important that both sides of participants benefit in the agreed partnership. Educational partnership may include anyone or groups interested or committed to enriching their educational experience from different cultural settings. However, an imbalance can occur when both sides do not thoroughly prepare for divergence in cultures.

Cultural imbalance in school partnership is the variety of social, economic, ethnic-interracial factors, which impede students from realizing the full objectives of the exchange programme.

These are some components of culture which makes imbalance exists in school partnerships or excursions

• LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION STYLE

Language and communication style is where a variety of verbal and nonverbal patterns and behaviors are employed to convey a message.

In cultural settings, It may at times include social norms about who speaks to whom or how and when something is said. Sometimes the communications style of a particular culture alone can create cultural imbalance. This is because some participants outside that culture might interpret the style differently.

• SEXUAL ORIENTATION

This is a person’s sexual identity in relation to the gender to which one is attracted to; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

There is always sensitivity whenever this subject comes up in an environment where there are diverse beliefs. This creates bad impressions among mixed races.

• GENDER ROLES

Gender roles refer to what is considered appropriate and acceptable behavior for men and women in a particular culture. Though there has been tremendous changes over the centuries as a result of schooling, education and occupation, there are, still many deeply-held beliefs about which behaviors are feminine and which are masculine especially in homes. In most sub-Saharan African countries, for example Ghana, women are usually seen doing household chores, taking care of their kids among many other domestic work whiles men are expected to be “at work”.

• RELIGION

Religion refers to a specific set of beliefs and practices regarding the spiritual realm beyond the visible world, including belief in the existence of a single being, who created and governs the world. Rituals, prayers and other spiritual exercises are commonly part of religious practice.

Religious beliefs often provide guidance for behavior and explanations for the human condition. Religious beliefs in communities are often their sources of strength for cultural activities. Religion can provide a sense of community and a basis for cohesion and moral strength within a cultural group. Many Africans in African countries are culturally religious and therefore exhibit their religious beliefs openly even in official works.

For an illustration, a group of tertiary students from a Western country visited Ghana on an educational excursion in September 2015. In preparation to one of the tourist activities, the tourist instructor asked one of the Ghanaian students to say a word of prayer before the group commences the journey. One of the international students shouted, What is this nonsense. Clearly this is a case of cultural imbalance.

Racism

Racism is basically prejudice (being bias) and at times exhibiting power over a particular race. A discussion of racism and understanding of its effects on individuals and communities is essential for building cultural competence among exchange events and excursions.

How does cultural imbalance in school partnerships affect its objectives?

School partnerships are usually designed with the aim to introduce and prepare students to live and work as citizens in an inter-connected global community. Depending on the concepts, some combine language and cultural learning with personal development and leadership skills to help achieve the objective.

However, where there is cultural imbalance, participants who feel left out culturally turn to feel marginalized. Those who are not thoroughly aware of some practices in their host country, withdraw from the program.

For an illustration, there was a situation where a British student had to withdraw from a partnership programme in a rural community in Ghana due to the poor standard of living of the people in that particular community. She could not integrate into the community because she was not psyched enough on the settings of the community she was to visit.

Cultural imbalances sometimes make it difficult for students or participants to understand instructors.

In an interaction with some students on school partnership programme in Ghana, they attested to the fact that difference in culture slowed the progress of learning. Some felt left out as understanding became a challenge due to the background of the instructors as well as the local students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In an Environment where culture diversity exists in school partnership programmes, it should be designed in a way to take components of culture into consideration and accommodate participants’ background in terms of their ways of behavior. There should be also activities which portray similar culture of participants as well as that of the host country. It could be activities on food, way of dressing, beliefs or anything that will encourage cultural diversity to ensure balance.

It is therefore recommended that:

• Students should be thoroughly briefed about cultural diversity before embarking on any exchange programme.

• Exchange programmes should consider devoting the first few days of the programme activities on cultural exchanges before embarking on the main purpose of the programme.

• There should be also a room for one-on-one relationship between students and teachers with focus on cultural diversity.

• Discussions should be based on understanding participants’ cultures.