Cultural Competence

A Presentation by
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Cultural Competence

“In the classroom, being culturally competent involves an understanding of how cultures differ under the surface and how cultures respond differently to similar situations”

(Pratt-Johnson, 1999)
Goals of Presentation

1) Show how the U of MN PAL program develops skills in cultural competency in their PAL leaders.

2) Experience several cultural competency skill building activities in the PAL program’s training.

3) Share with each other how you train your student SI/PAL leaders in cultural competency.
Purpose of Culture

Culture alone is neither good or bad

- Achieve strategic goals
- **Glue** (to integrate the members)
- **Functionality** (prescribed patterns of behavior)
Which Culture?

- **Ways of knowing** (evidence-based? Non-academic sources?)
- **Ways of solving problems** (cultures reason differently, based on values and beliefs)
- **Ways of communicating non-verbally** (eye-contact, smiling vs. straight-faced)
- **Ways of learning** (student-centered or teacher-centered)
- **Dealing with conflict** (Directly? Quietly?)
- **Use of symbols** (gestures, pictures,)

http://iteslj.org/Articles/Pratt-Johnson-CrossCultural.html
Which Culture?

- **Directness** (get to the point vs. imply the messages)
- **Hierarchy** (follow orders or engage in debate)
- **Consensus** (dissent is accepted vs. unanimity is needed)
- **Individualism** (individual winners vs. team effectiveness)


- **High-context vs. low-context communication**
- **Individualism vs. communitarianism**

[www.beyondintractability.org/essay/communication_tools](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/communication_tools)
Cultural Competency

- Culturally competent teaching and learning:
  - Reflects on one’s own cultural assumptions
  - Demands compassion, fairness, respect
  - Uses intercultural communication skills – elaborate, paraphrase, restate, listen
  - Requires intentionally structured environments – sensitivity to groupings

(C. Irish and M. Scrubb)
Eight PAL Principles

- Educational theory guides the PAL session
- Sessions have specific learning objectives
- PAL develops metacognitive skills
- Activities vary by learning tasks
- Students actively engaged in learning
- Multicultural competency is a learned and valued process

Dr. David Arendale
www.arendale.org/peer-learning-bib/
Eight PAL Principles

- Multicultural competency is a learned process and is valued for the way it improves the learning environment
  - Understand your own culture and know that culture exists as a set of overlapping and sometimes conflicting identities
  - Use active listening skills with sensitivity to the impact of culture on communication
  - Choose a wide variety of culturally sensitive activities in PAL sessions
Preparation

- PAL facilitators reflect on identity, privilege, and culture
- 10 min reflection; discuss in small groups
  - Briefly describe your culture
  - How does your cultural heritage fit in with your personal identity?
  - If you have more than one identity, do these identities overlap or conflict with one another?
Recall a time when you made a cultural assumption about someone else. What assumption was made and how did it affect your interaction with this person?

Recall a time when someone made an assumption about you based on their perception of your culture. What assumption was made and how did it affect you?

What powers and privileges has your cultural background given you?

How can recognition of these improve your competence when interacting with people of other cultures?
Training

- PAL Guide explores:
  - How culture influences classroom dynamics
  - Impact of stereotypes on academic performance
  - How culture impacts cognitive processing
  - Effective communication
  - How peer-learning programs can respond
PAL response:
- Create a welcoming environment
- Be aware of communication
- Select appropriate materials
- Strive for equality in the classroom

PAL is presented as:

Academic enhancement, not “remedial”

PRACTICE, not “help”
Training

- Partnered with International Student Services and Scholarship (ISSS)

ISSS INTERCULTURAL WORKSHOP SERIES

- Becoming Aware of Your Own Culture
- Bridging Cultural Differences
- Communicating with International Students
Objective: provide exercises that explore linguistic privilege and the challenges of intercultural communication

- Redundancia
- Instructions to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
- DIE exercise – describe, interpret, evaluate
Redundancia

What is it? New language to learn in 3 minutes
Speaker tells a story about what they did this morning after waking up.

- Speaker
- Listener
- Observer
Redundancia

Say two verbs with a similar meaning each time you use a verb in a sentence”

Example:
I got out of bed/rose and walked/stumbled to the kitchen.
Redundancia - debrief

Takeaway:
- Be mindful of slang - default to formal English
- If you say it, re-say it
- Speak slower and clearer - not louder
- Think, then talk - don’t think out loud
- Allow students a chance to participate by writing ...to reduce linguistic privilege of those “who think out loud”, or speak English natively.
Reactions from students:

I hadn't even considered something like "linguistic privilege" (though it seems obvious now in hindsight).

The toughness of playing this game reminded us to be patient with someone who doesn't speak fluently.

I felt like I had a new perspective on the experience of foreign students and about the ways they learn best and understand cultural norms.
PB & J’s

- Provide step by step instructions on how to make and peanut butter and jelly sandwich
- Goal: list the most steps in 5 minutes

1. Walk to the refrigerator.
2. Grab a hold of the door handle.
3. Pull the door open.
4. Pick up the jam from inside.
5. Push the refrigerator door closed.
6. Walk to the counter.
7. Set the jam on the counter.
8. Walk to the cupboard where the plates are kept.
9. Grab a hold of the door handle.
10. Pull the door open.
11. Pick up a small plate.
12. Push the door closed.
13. Walk back to the counter.
14. Set the plate on the counter.
15. Walk to the pantry.
16. Grab a hold of the door handle.
17. Pull the door open.
18. Pick up the peanut butter from the shelf.
19. Walk back to the counter.
20. Set the peanut butter down.
21. Walk to the cutlery drawer.
22. Grab a hold of the drawer knob.
23. Pull the drawer open.
24. Pick up 2 butter knives.
25. Walk back to the counter.
26. Set the knives on the counter.
27. Walk to the bread box.
28. Grab a hold of the handle.
29. Lift up to open the bread box.
30. Remove the loaf of bread from the box.
31. Walk back to the counter.
32. Set the bread on the counter.
33. Open the bread by untwisting the tie around the opening.
34. Remove 2 slices of bread.
35. Close the bread by twisting the tie back around the opening.
36. Set the loaf of bread aside.
37. Pick up the jar of jam.
38. Grab a hold of the lid and turn it counter clockwise to open.
39. Set the lid aside.
40. Pick up a butter knife.
PB & J’s - debrief

- **Takeaway:**
  - Even simple tasks can be “complicated”
  - We skip steps that we assume others know
  - Specific details in instructions are more inclusive
D.I.E.

Description - “What do I observe?”
Interpretation - “What do I think (about what I see)?”
Evaluation - “What do I feel (about what I think)?”

Goals:
- Establish norms of classroom discussion
- Become aware of value judgments
- Show the personal and cultural relativity of interpretations and evaluation
Groups get photo of another culture outside the U.S.A. and write a brief description of it (10 min).

Task:
- Agree on a single description
- Suggest two interpretations
- For each interpretation, suggest a positive and a negative evaluation
EXAMPLE:

- **Description:**
  I see an Asian woman covering her mouth.

- **Interpretation:** She’s burping, and trying to be polite by covering her mouth.

- **Evaluation:** It’s very polite of her to think about others.
Participants shared most difficult aspect of exercise

Keeping the original description free of evaluative terminology

What assumptions and evaluations are made about international students/ those outside of our identities?
TAKEAWAY:

- Processes we use to describe, interpret, and evaluate the world around us are culture bound, and limit our ability to understand other cultures.

- Holding off on evaluating is an essential prerequisite to intercultural communication.
D.I.E.

My students are lazy

They don’t ask questions or volunteer answers during group time

My students aren’t prepared for class

(Description)
Reflect: Think of a situation when you needed to address diversity in your session. What was the situation and what aspects of diversity were involved?

Anticipate: What strategies can you use to respond to the wide range of student identities in your sessions?
You are leading a PAL session for a course composed mostly of STEM majors. Everyone is male except one female.

- What challenges does this situation pose?
- How might you handle them?

A student confides that she is very frustrated. English is not her first language and she is having difficulties following the lectures.

- How could you make this a learning opportunity for the group?
Team Reflections

- How do your cultural traditions impact your verbal and nonverbal communication?
- What parts of your personal identity are most important to you? How do you express these aspects?
- What aspects of diversity are not visible in your PAL session?
- How can you learn about these aspects even though you cannot see them?
- Describe a situation in which you needed to or did address diversity in your session?
Conduct PAL in a Diverse Community

Clara
Learning level and speed would be one area where there is diversity in my session. So learning to create worksheets that could apply to each student would be beneficial. Some students want to ask more questions for clarification so being accessible and helpful in guiding them to help with questions is a way that the learning diversity can be addressed. Some students have asked for clarification on some international students, one was an international student who did need help.

Caroline & International Students
I had one international student in each of my PAL sessions, and I put them in groups, but they seemed very uncomfortable interacting with other students. After a few weeks, both students stopped attending. Perhaps I could have made it more clear that they weren’t required to work with other students. How can I make these international students more comfortable?

Ian
I have one student who just came from China and has already taken math courses, but the credits did not transfer. The session thus has diversity of cultural and learning backgrounds. To address this situation I try and play a more active role in directing group interaction.

Leila
I have a pretty diverse dynamic in my group, where the minority groups like working together, and the girls & guys will work in separate groups as well. I want to have them work with others in order to introduce diversity to them, but I’m not sure how to introduce them to feel comfortable.

Jane & Age of Students
In looking over the survey responses for this semester, I had a response that stated “I don’t feel like I am treated like an adult in a session...”. This made me realize that my sessions might favor younger students and neglect the preferences of older, non-traditional students. I need to address the differences in age learning preferences. I can do this by making my sessions “age neutral”... How do my activities make students feel?

Alec
I had a few international students who have expressed having difficulties figuring out some of the new problems we go over. I clarified each word they didn’t get in the session and recommended they utilize the SMART learning commons or online resources to get more on 1 on 1 feedback. Are there specific ESL or international student resources that I could refer them to instead in the future?

Khia
REFLECT: Diversity in learning progress. Students who have the same progress tend to group together right at the beginning. So group members finish faster than other group’s. - Observation of the progress of individuals, and then regroup them in a group that have a more diverse level of understanding of the material. That way will benefit every individual.
- ANTICIPATE: Observation, attention to each individual, then regroup students whose identity can be beneficial to each other... These strategies focus on interaction between students that can bring benefit into group work.

Non-content Discussion (Ian & Alec)
One strategy we want to implement more is having some non-math discussion in each session so that everyone gets to know each other as human beings. Usually we try to squeeze this in the five minutes before the session starts and the first couple minutes of the session by having casual conversation (where people are from, favorites...). This could address many aspects of identity, but usually sticks to more superficial topics.

Active Listening
Actively listen to students when they speak and “seek to understand” their perspective. Exercise empathy and be aware of how personal perspectives bias can impact communication and interpretation.

Lu & Personalities
Students in my session have different personalities: Some students are very talkative. While others are very quiet. I didn’t force them to reach the same level of communication, but I did give those students who are relatively quiet more chances to speak, for students who are very active and want to share their solutions many times, I usually first acknowledge their work, and say that we need to hear how others did the problem.

Mix of Learning Styles
Some students may prefer group work, some may prefer individual. We could plan time for both styles during the session in order to tailor to these diversities. Also, different students are at different levels of understanding coming in to the session. We could use a variety of problem difficulties to account for this.

Refract:
Think about a situation in which you addressed or needed to address diversity in your session. What was the situation and which aspects of diversity were involved?

Reflect:
Think about a situation in which you addressed or needed to address diversity in your session. What was the situation and which aspects of diversity were involved?
Team Reflections

I have a few international students in my sections who seem very uncomfortable working in groups, either because of cultural barriers or because of lower English proficiency. I want to be respectful and avoid making them feel uncomfortable. However, I also don't want to rob them of the PAL experience or make them feel alienated.

Carolyn
I would like to share my experience as an international student! I think especially international students who just started their college here might be super nervous (I really was during my first year!), especially when they work in groups and they need to contribute something.

Language is a huge issue: they might not understand your instructions very well, they are not confident with their English, they don't know how to communicate with the other group members, etc. Making sure they understand what you expect them to do is very important, and they are really willing to participate and make friends!
Team Discussions

Bi-weekly Hub posts

**Topic:** We list the following as good practices to developing cultural competency

- Understand your own culture and know that culture exists as a set of overlapping and sometimes conflicting identities
- Use active listening skills with sensitivity to the impact of culture on communication
- Choose a wide variety of culturally sensitive activities in PAL sessions
Team Discussions

Bi-weekly Hub posts

Writing assignment:

- What cultural differences have you noticed in your PAL sessions this semester?
- How have these differences impact communication or behaviors in PAL? Either between you and students, or between students?
- What cultural differences in PAL AND in your own courses would be good topics for future PAL training?
Team Discussions

Last semester I once made a statement about none of us having kids, and then I came to find out that one of my PAL attendees had two children! Not only was that situation embarrassing, but also forced me to acknowledge some preconceived ideas I have about what a "student" looks like.

I've also noticed that I feel a bit more anxious when leading sessions with older, non-traditional students; I fear I won't be respected or valued as a younger person.

In medical classes, there are often many acronyms, specific phrases, and abbreviations that I have become accustomed to. However, I tend to forget that students, especially those of different cultural backgrounds may not have any idea what these phrases mean. I really try to speak in full sentences in my sessions and explain medical jargon as it comes.

Libby - Nursing
Team Discussions

A lot of the international students come from different educational backgrounds and are used to different styles of teaching. For some, PAL is confusing because they relate it to TA office hours.

I have noticed that sometimes, apart from language barriers, there is also a level of comfort that needs to be achieved for students who are from outside of the country. For such students, it is important to understand that it is harder for them to ask questions and need to be allowed to ask questions at their own pace.

Abhiraj – Computer Science
Team Discussions

One of my Asian American students didn't speak up at all. Whenever I walked around the classroom, students would get my attention and ask me their questions, but this student rarely looked up from her worksheets.

As someone with a similar background as her--where we've learned to not make trouble for others, such as asking a teacher a question when there are other students who may need his/her help--I decided to initiate conversations with her. I've been in her shoes before, and this is what I wanted from my teachers. Thankfully, it worked; we were able to clear up the concepts she had been struggling with.

Duabci Thao - Calculus I
Team Discussions

Cultural differences and personal views were much more prevalent in my PAL sessions last semester. I had Muslim students as well as open Trump supporters and at the height of the election, there was absolutely tension in the class. Everyone was respectful of each other, which was fantastic, but I think that we were all on heightened awareness of every action that we made.

I also had students with drastically different cognitive skills and stress coping abilities. This influenced communication in the classroom because students were unsure how to approach each other. Certain students tended toward crying when they were stressed and others refused to participate when they felt overwhelmed. Communication had to be individually-based, not just by me, but by all students.

Laura - College Algebra
What Next?

For Future Trainings:

- Practice in adapting PAL sessions to different learning styles and teaching styles
- Better understanding of a student's cultural background. With so many cultural backgrounds, how can the PAL training help facilitators improve their understanding?
- Provide activities that accommodate students' learning differences as well as cultural knowledge and beliefs
Group Activity

Chalk and Talk

- What goals do you have regarding the cultural competency of your student leaders?
- What activities do you use to develop their cultural awareness?
- What topics would you add to this training for your student PAL/Sl leaders?

1st) Write ideas on note cards – 3 min
2nd) Share in small groups – 4 min
3rd) Report to the larger group one key idea
- Chalabi, Mona, The Guardian; 2/26/18; What is white culture, exactly. Retrieved from z.umn.edu/3hme
- prezi.com/m3xm_mizx8vx/culturally-competent-teaching-practices/
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Questions and Comments?

Request these training resources:
Guide for PAL Facilitators
Guide for Team Leaders
z.umn.edu/PALTraining

Feel free to contact me: mlilly@umn.edu
The following story recounts a challenging situation that a PAL facilitator experienced in her first semester leading PAL sessions. It is included as a possible activity to use in your peer leader (SI/PAL/PASS) training. While there isn’t one right answer, discussing the situation might generate a variety of ideas on how to manage this challenge with cultural sensitivity.

There were a number of students of Somalian descent and a number of non-traditional students. To communicate better, I would speak slower and try to pronounce things more clearly; however, most students still spoke English very fluently and it did not affect communication greatly. Occasionally, I would have to reword my explanations or redirection questions so that students were able to understand better.

These differences impacted my session because the Somali students would often speak Somali, which affected the group work and members who were not able to speak Somali. At first, there was a bit of a communication barrier between non-Somali speaking students and Somali speaking students, which led to a little bit of frustration in their group work. As sessions progressed, Somali students stuck together in groups so that they could work in both English and Somali, but I don’t think that this created division or isolation in the room because students would still interact between groups and I was able to communicate with all groups of students.

I think it would be very helpful to have training that talks about how to encourage cultural diversity while still promoting collaboration. In the situation first semester, I was unsure if I should just allow students to work with people who share their cultural background with what they are comfortable with or if I should encourage intercultural interaction more by dividing up groups so that students can build applicable communication skills along with reviewing the materials. I think learning how to strike this balance would be very helpful for PAL sessions.
Communication Tools for Understanding Cultural Differences

By
Michelle LeBaron

June 2003

Cultural Diversity

Montaigne said, "The most universal quality is diversity."[1] Given that diversity abounds, the project of understanding each other is both daunting and important. It is a journey never finished, because the process and the endpoints change constantly. The journey is bound up with communication and conflict, since misunderstandings and miscommunication can cause and escalate conflict. Effective communication is often the key to making progress in a conflict.

Progress through conflict is possible, and the route is twofold. First, self-knowledge and self-awareness are needed. Without these, our seemingly normal approaches to meaning-making and communication will never be
clear enough that we can see them for what they are: a set of lenses that shape what we see, hear, say, understand, and interpret. Second, cultural fluency is needed, meaning familiarity with culture and the ability to act on that familiarity.[2] Cultural fluency means understanding what culture is, how it works, and the ways culture and communication are intertwined with conflicts.

This may sound simple enough, but it actually requires significant, continuous effort. As Edward T. Hall writes in the introduction to his book, *The Dance of Life,[3]* for us to understand each other may mean, "reorganizing [our] thinking...and few people are willing to risk such a radical move." Communication theorists, anthropologists, and others have given us tools to develop awareness of our own lenses, and to facilitate the reorganization of thinking necessary to truly understand others whose starting points may differ from our own. Two of these tools are explored here.

**Communication Tools for Understanding Culture**

The tools we will examine here relate to communication and ways of seeing the self in relation to others. They are:

- High-context and low-context communication, and
- Individualist and communitarian conceptions of self and other.

Since all of these tools are used in the service of understanding culture, a working definition of culture is useful. Donal Carbaugh defines culture as "a system of expressive practices fraught with feelings, a system of symbols, premises, rules, forms, and the domains and dimensions of mutual meanings associated with these."[4] He also suggests culture is "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people."[5] In each of these definitions, culture is linked to communication and a wide range of human experience including feelings, identity, and meaning-making. Communication is the vehicle by which meanings are conveyed, identity is composed and reinforced, and feelings are expressed. As we communicate using different cultural habits and meaning systems, both conflict and harmony are possible outcomes of any interaction.

There is no comprehensive way to understand culture and its relationships to communication and conflict. The two tools outlined here give windows into how different groups of people make sense of their worlds. They are neither reliable guides to every member of a particular group nor are they fixed in nature, since culture is constantly evolving and changing as people within groups and the contexts around them change. These two sets of tools are the most frequently used classifications of cultures used by anthropologists and communication scholars. We begin with one of the most familiar sets of tools: high-context and low-context communication.

**High-context and Low-context Communication** refers to the degree to which speakers rely on factors other than explicit speech to convey their messages. This tool, developed by Edward T. Hall,[6] suggests that communication varies according to its degree of field dependence, and that it can be classified into two general categories -- high-context and low-context. Field dependence refers to the degree to which things outside the communication itself affect the meaning. For example, a request for a child to "shut the door" relies comparatively little on context, while a comment containing meaning other than what is on the surface relies largely on context for its meaning to be received. A high-context message of disagreement might be telegraphed to a spouse or a co-worker by the words chosen or the way they are spoken, even if no disagreement is explicitly voiced.
Hall says that every human being is confronted by far more sensory stimuli than can possibly be attended to. Cultures help by screening messages, shaping perceptions and interpretations according to a series of selective filters. In high-context settings, the screens are designed to let in implied meanings arising from the physical setting, relational cues, or shared understandings. In low-context settings, the screens direct attention more to the literal meanings of words and less to the context surrounding the words.

All of us engage in both high-context and low-context communication. There are times we "say what we mean, and mean what we say," leaving little to be "read in" to the explicit message. This is low-context communication. At other times, we may infer, imply, insinuate, or deliver with nonverbal cues messages that we want to have conveyed but do not speak. This is high-context communication. Most of the time, we are somewhere nearer the middle of the continuum, relying to some extent on context, but also on the literal meaning of words.

To understand this distinction between high-context and low-context communication, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I tend to "let my words speak for themselves," or prefer to be less direct, relying on what is implied by my communication? (low-context communication)
- Do I prefer indirect messages from others, and am I attuned to a whole range of verbal and nonverbal cues to help me understand the meaning of what is said? (high-context communication)

As will quickly become clear, most people can and do function at both ends of the high-context, low-context continuum. There are times when direct, clear communication is most appropriate, and times when it is preferable to communicate in layers of meaning to save face, spare feelings, or allow for diffuse interpretations. Most people rely on a whole range of verbal and nonverbal cues to understand the meaning of what is said. Even in the most direct, low-context setting, meanings will be conveyed that are not explicitly spoken.

The novelist Amy Tan describes the different starting points of English and Chinese this way: "I try to explain to my English-speaking friends that Chinese language is more strategic in manner, whereas English tends to be more direct; an American business executive may say, 'Let's make a deal,' and the Chinese manager may reply, 'Is your son interested in learning about your widget business?' Each to his or her own purpose, each with his or her own linguistic path."[7]

As people communicate, they move along a continuum between high context and low context. Depending on the kind of relationship, the situation, and the purpose of communication, they may be more or less explicit and direct. In close relationships, communication short-hand is often used, which makes communication opaque to outsiders but perfectly clear to the parties. With strangers, the same people may choose low-context communication.

Low- and high-context communication refers not only to individual communication strategies, but may be used to understand cultural groups. Generally, Western cultures tend to gravitate toward low-context starting points, while Eastern and Southern cultures tend to use high-context communication. Within these huge categories, there are important differences and many variations. Where high-context communication tends to be featured, it is useful to pay specific attention to nonverbal cues and the behavior of others who may know more of the unstated rules governing the communication. Where low-context communication is the norm, directness is likely to be expected in return.
It is less important to classify any communication as high or low context than it is to understand whether nonverbal or verbal cues are the most prominent. Without this understanding, those who tend to use high-context starting points may be looking for shades of meaning that are not present, and those who prefer low-context communication may miss important nuances of meaning.

The choice of high-context and low-context as labels has led to unfortunate misunderstandings, since there is an implied ranking in the adjectives. In fact, neither is better or worse than the other. They are simply different. Each has possible pitfalls for cross-cultural communicators. Generally, low-context communicators interacting with high-context communicators should be mindful that

- nonverbal messages and gestures may be as important as what is said;
- status and identity may be communicated nonverbally and require appropriate acknowledgement;
- face-saving and tact may be important, and need to be balanced with the desire to communicate fully and frankly;
- building a good relationship can contribute to effectiveness over time; and
- indirect routes and creative thinking are important alternatives to problem-solving when blocks are encountered.

High-context communicators interacting with low-context communicators should be mindful that

- things can be taken at face value rather than as representative of layers of meaning;
- roles and functions may be decoupled from status and identity;
- efficiency and effectiveness may be served by a sustained focus on tasks;
- direct questions and observations are not necessarily meant to offend, but to clarify and advance shared goals; and
- indirect cues may not be enough to get the other's attention.[8]

As communicators factor awareness of high-context and low-context communication into their relations, conflict may be lessened and even prevented.

**Individualism and Communitarianism** is the second dimension important to conflict and conflict resolution. In communitarian settings (sometimes called collectivist settings), children are taught that they are part of a circle of relations. This identity as a member of a group comes first, summed up in the South African idea of ubuntu: "I am because we are." In communitarian settings, members are rewarded for allegiance to group norms and values, interdependence, and cooperation. Wherever they go, their identity as a member of their group goes out in front. **Identity** is not isolated from others, but is determined with others according to group needs and views. When conflict arises, behavior and responses tend to be jointly chosen.

Individualist patterns involve ideas of the self as independent, self-directed, and autonomous. Many Western conflict-resolution approaches presuppose exactly this kind of person: someone able to make proposals, concessions, and maximize gains in their own self-interest. Children raised in this milieu are rewarded for initiative, personal achievement, and individual leadership. They may be just as close to their families as a child raised in a communitarian setting, but they draw the boundaries differently: in case of a conflict, they may feel more free to choose their individual preference. Duty, honor, and deference to authority are less prominent for those with individualist starting points than communitarian ones.

Individual and communitarian identities are two quite different ways of being in the world. They connect at some point, of course, since all groups are made up of individuals and all individuals find themselves in
relationship with various groups. But the starting points are different. To discern the basic difference, ask yourself which is most in the foreground of your life, the welfare, development, security, prosperity, and well-being of yourself and others as individuals, or the shared heritage, ecological resources, traditional stories, and group accomplishments of your people? Generally, those who start with individualism as their beginning tend to be most comfortable with independence, personal achievement, and a competitive conflict style. Those who start with a communal orientation are more focused on social connections, service, and a cooperative conflict style.

French anthropologist Raymonde Carroll, who is married to a North American, suggests that North Americans tend to see individual identities as existing outside all networks. This does not mean that social networks do not exist, or that they are unimportant, but that it is notionally possible to see the self apart from these. In the North American view, there is a sense that the self creates its own identity, as in the expression, a "self-made person." This view explains why it is unnecessary for North Americans to hide things about their past, such as humble origins. It also explains why the alcoholic brother of a president of the United States is seen as having no connection to the president's standing or ability. In a communitarian setting, identity is defined much more by the person's social network, and cannot be so easily separated.

One way to discern communitarian or individualist starting points is to listen to forms of greeting and address. Thomas Morning Owl, a member of the Confederated Umatilla Tribes in Oregon, reports that his response to the question 'Shinnamwa?' (Who are you?) would not be his name, but a description of his father, mother, and tribe, and the place they came from. Morning Owl reflects that individual identities are subsumed into the collective in his culture: "Who preceded you, is who you are."[9]

Members of communitarian cultures place less importance than individualists on relationships with outsiders, such as strangers or casual acquaintances. Boundaries around relationships tend to be less porous in communitarian contexts like Japan, where attention is focused on maintaining harmony and cohesion with the group. In the individualist setting of the United States, by contrast, "friendly" behavior is directed to members of in-groups and strangers alike. This difference can lead to misunderstandings across cultures, since the U.S. American behavior of friendliness to strangers may be seen as inappropriately familiar by those from communitarian settings, while U.S. Americans may find social networks in communitarian settings very difficult to penetrate.

No matter which starting point seems natural, it is important to keep the entire continuum in mind when trying to understand and address conflict. From each vantage point, it is useful to remember some things:

From an individualist starting point,

- achievement involves individual goal-setting and action;
- I am ultimately accountable to myself and must make decisions I can live with;
- while I consult with others about choices, I am autonomous: a discrete circle; and
- I believe in equality and consider everyone able to make their own personal choices.

From a communitarian starting point,

- maintaining group harmony and cohesion is important, and my decisions should not disrupt that;
- choices are made in consultation with family and authority figures and their input is weighted as heavily, or even more heavily, than mine. I am an overlapping circle amidst other overlapping circles;
- my decisions reflect on my group and I am accountable to them as a member; and
I notice hierarchy and accept direction from those of higher status than myself.

With these differences in mind, it is important for individualists to recognize the web of relations encompassing the communitarian party to a conflict, and to act in recognition of those. Similarly, it is helpful for those from communitarian settings to remember that individualists value autonomy and initiative, and to act in ways that respect these preferences.

**Combining Starting Points: High-Context/Low-Context and Individualism/Communitarianism**

As with any set of starting points, neither of these starting points exists in isolation. High-context communication often corresponds with communitarian settings, just as low-context communication often occurs in individualist settings. This is not always true, but it is worth exploring because it is frequently the case. Where communitarianism is the preferred starting point, individual expression may be less important than group will. Indirect communication that draws heavily on nonverbal cues may be preferable in such a setting, because it allows for multiple meanings, saves face, leaves room for group input into decisions, and displays interdependence. In individualist settings, low-context communication may be preferable because it is direct, expresses individual desires and initiatives, displays independence, and clarifies the meaning intended by the speaker.

Nobel Peace Laureate Jimmy Carter understood the importance of high-context communication with his counterparts from Israel and Egypt in the historic Camp David peace negotiations. In one example, Carter reports that Prime Minister Begin was about to leave the negotiations after several days, discouraged at having reached an impasse. Carter met Begin at his accommodations and presented him with pictures of the three heads of state, inscribed with the names of each of Begin's grandchildren. Prime Minister Begin repeated the names of his grandchildren out loud as he paused to look at the pictures, seeming to reflect on the importance of the peace negotiations to the grandchildren's futures.

Carter knew instinctively that no direct, low-context appeal would work to bring Prime Minister Begin back to the negotiating table. Perhaps low-context requests were already tried without success. Instead, Carter relied on a high-context reference to legacy, future generations, and the relations that Begin cared about. He invoked the communities each leader served by reminding Begin of his grandchildren. Through Carter's masterful, high-context appeal, negotiations resumed and peace was achieved between neighbors who had been in intractable conflict for many years.[10]

This example shows the importance of these two interrelated starting points, individualism/communitarianism and low/high context. While there are many exceptions to cultural patterns and all of us use different starting points depending on the context, noticing the intersections of ways of making meaning is often a useful window into conflict dynamics.


[2] This is closely related to the concept of *framing*.


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**Additional Resources**

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All communication is cultural -- it draws on ways we have learned to speak and give nonverbal messages. We do not always communicate the same way from day to day, since factors like context, individual personality, and mood interact with the variety of cultural influences we have internalized that influence our choices. Communication is interactive, so an important influence on its effectiveness is our relationship with others. Do they hear and understand what we are trying to say? Are they listening well? Are we listening well in response? Do their responses show that they understand the words and the meanings behind the words we have chosen? Is the mood positive and receptive? Is there trust between them and us? Are there differences that relate to ineffective communication, divergent goals or interests, or fundamentally different ways of seeing the world? The answers to these questions will give us some clues about the effectiveness of our communication and the ease with which we may be able to move through conflict.
The challenge is that even with all the good will in the world, miscommunication is likely to happen, especially when there are significant cultural differences between communicators. Miscommunication may lead to conflict, or aggravate conflict that already exists. We make -- whether it is clear to us or not -- quite different meaning of the world, our places in it, and our relationships with others. In this module, cross-cultural communication will be outlined and demonstrated by examples of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors involving four variables:

- Time and Space
- Fate and Personal Responsibility
- Face and Face-Saving
- Nonverbal Communication

As our familiarity with these different starting points increases, we are cultivating cultural fluency -- awareness of the ways cultures operate in communication and conflict, and the ability to respond effectively to these differences.

**Time and Space[1]**

Time is one of the most central differences that separate cultures and cultural ways of doing things. In the West, time tends to be seen as quantitative, measured in units that reflect the march of progress. It is logical, sequential, and present-focused, moving with incremental certainty toward a future the ego cannot touch and a past that is not a part of now. Novinger calls the United States a "chronocracy," in which there is such reverence for efficiency and the success of economic endeavors that the expression "time is money" is frequently heard.[2] This approach to time is called monochronic -- it is an approach that favors linear structure and focus on one event or interaction at a time. Robert's Rules of Order, observed in many Western meetings, enforce a monochronic idea of time.

In the East, time feels like it has unlimited continuity, an unraveling rather than a strict boundary. Birth and death are not such absolute ends since the universe continues and humans, though changing form, continue as part of it. People may attend to many things happening at once in this approach to time, called polychronous. This may mean many conversations in a moment (such as a meeting in which people speak simultaneously, "talking over" each other as they discuss their subjects), or many times and peoples during one process (such as a ceremony in which those family members who have died are felt to be present as well as those yet to be born into the family).

A good place to look to understand the Eastern idea of time is India. There, time is seen as moving endlessly through various cycles, becoming and vanishing. Time stretches far beyond the human ego or lifetime. There is a certain timeless quality to time, an aesthetic almost too intricate and vast for the human mind to comprehend. Consider this description of an aeon, the unit of time which elapses between the origin and destruction of a world system: "Suppose there is a mountain, of very hard rock, much bigger than the Himalayas; and suppose that a man, with a piece of the very finest cloth of Benares, once every century should touch that mountain ever so slightly -- then the time it would take him to wear away the entire mountain would be about the time of an Aeon."[3]

Differences over time can play out in painful and dramatic ways in negotiation or conflict-resolution processes. An example of differences over time comes from a negotiation process related to a land claim that took place...
in Canada. First Nations people met with representatives from local, regional, and national governments to introduce themselves and begin their work. During this first meeting, First Nations people took time to tell the stories of their people and their relationships to the land over the past seven generations. They spoke of the spirit of the land, the kinds of things their people have traditionally done on the land, and their sacred connection to it. They spoke in circular ways, weaving themes, feelings, ideas, and experiences together as they remembered seven generations into the past and projected seven generations forward.

When it was the government representatives' chance to speak, they projected flow charts showing internal processes for decision-making and spoke in present-focused ways about their intentions for entering the negotiation process. The flow charts were linear and spare in their lack of narrative, arising from the bureaucratic culture from which the government representatives came. Two different conceptions of time: in one, time stretches, loops forward and back, past and future are both present in this time. In the other, time begins with the present moment and extends into the horizon in which the matters at hand will be decided.

Neither side felt satisfied with this first meeting. No one addressed the differences in how time was seen and held directly, but everyone was aware that they were not "on the same page." Each side felt some frustration with the other. Their notions of time were embedded in their understandings of the world, and these understandings informed their common sense about how to proceed in negotiations. Because neither side was completely aware of these different notions of time, it was difficult for the negotiations to proceed, and difficult for each side to trust the other. Their different ideas of time made communication challenging.

This meeting took place in the early 1990s. Of course, in this modern age of high-speed communication, no group is completely disconnected from another. Each group -- government and First Nations representatives -- has had some exposure to the other's ideas of time, space, and ideas about appropriate approaches to negotiation. Each has found ways to adapt. How this adaptation takes place, and whether it takes place without one side feeling they are forced to give in to the other, has a significant impact on the course of the negotiations.

It is also true that cultural approaches to time or communication are not always applied in good faith, but may serve a variety of motives. Asserting power, superiority, advantage, or control over the course of the negotiations may be a motive wrapped up in certain cultural behaviors (for example, the government representatives' detailed emphasis on ratification procedures may have conveyed an implicit message of control, or the First Nations' attention to the past may have emphasized the advantages of being aware of history). Culture and cultural beliefs may be used as a tactic by negotiators; for this reason, it is important that parties be involved in collaborative-process design when addressing intractable conflicts. As people from different cultural backgrounds work together to design a process to address the issues that divide them, they can ask questions about cultural preferences about time and space and how these may affect a negotiation or conflict-resolution process, and thus inoculate against the use of culture as a tactic or an instrument to advance power.

Any one example will show us only a glimpse of approaches to time as a confounding variable across cultures. In fact, ideas of time have a great deal of complexity buried within them. Western concepts of time as a straight line emanating from no one in particular obscure the idea that there are purposive forces at work in time, a common idea in indigenous and Eastern ways of thought. From an Eastern or indigenous perspective, Spirit operates within space and time, so time is alive with purpose and specific meanings may be discerned from events. A party to a negotiation who subscribes to this idea of time may also have ideas about fate, destiny, and the importance of uncovering "right relationship" and "right action." If time is a circle, an unraveling ball of twine, a spiral, an unfolding of stories already written, or a play in which much of the set is
invisible, then relationships and meanings can be uncovered to inform current actions. Time, in this polychronic perspective, is connected to other peoples as well as periods of history.

This is why a polychronic perspective is often associated with a communitarian starting point. The focus on the collective, or group, stretching forward and back, animates the polychronic view of time. In more monochronic settings, an individual way of life is more easily accommodated. Individualists can more easily extract moments in time, and individuals themselves, from the networks around them. If time is a straight line stretching forward and not back, then fate or destiny may be less compelling. (For more on this, see the essay on Communication Tools for Understanding Cultural Difference.)

**Fate and Personal Responsibility**

Another important variable affecting communication across cultures is fate and personal responsibility. This refers to the degree to which we feel ourselves the masters of our lives, versus the degree to which we see ourselves as subject to things outside our control. Another way to look at this is to ask how much we see ourselves able to change and maneuver, to choose the course of our lives and relationships. Some have drawn a parallel between the emphasis on personal responsibility in North American settings and the landscape itself. [4] The North American landscape is vast, with large spaces of unpopulated territory. The frontier mentality of "conquering" the wilderness, and the expansiveness of the land stretching huge distances, may relate to generally high levels of confidence in the ability to shape and choose our destinies.

In this expansive landscape, many children grow up with an epic sense of life, where ideas are big, and hope springs eternal. When they experience setbacks, they are encouraged to redouble their efforts, to "try, try again." Action, efficacy, and achievement are emphasized and expected. Free will is enshrined in laws and enforced by courts.

Now consider places in the world with much smaller territory, whose history reflects repeated conquest and harsh struggles: Northern Ireland, Mexico, Israel, Palestine. In these places, there is more emphasis on destiny's role in human life. In Mexico, there is a legacy of poverty, invasion, and territorial mutilation. Mexicans are more likely to see struggles as inevitable or unavoidable. Their fatalistic attitude is expressed in their way of responding to failure or accident by saying "ni modo" ("no way" or "tough luck"), meaning that the setback was destined.

This variable is important to understanding cultural conflict. If someone invested in free will crosses paths with someone more fatalistic in orientation, miscommunication is likely. The first person may expect action and accountability. Failing to see it, they may conclude that the second is lazy, obstructionist, or dishonest. The second person will expect respect for the natural order of things. Failing to see it, they may conclude that the first is coercive or irreverent, inflated in his ideas of what can be accomplished or changed.

**Face and Face-Saving**

Another important cultural variable relates to face and face-saving. Face is important across cultures, yet the dynamics of face and face-saving play out differently. Face is defined in many different ways in the cross-cultural communication literature. Novinger says it is "the value or standing a person has in the eyes of others...and that it relate[s] to pride or self-respect."[5] Others have defined it as "the negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in [communication]."[6] In this broader definition, face includes ideas of status, power, courtesy, insider and outsider relations, humor, and respect. In many cultures, maintaining face is of great importance, though ideas of how to do this vary.
The starting points of individualism and communitarianism are closely related to face. If I see myself as a self-determining individual, then face has to do with preserving my image with others and myself. I can and should exert control in situations to achieve this goal. I may do this by taking a competitive stance in negotiations or confronting someone who I perceive to have wronged me. I may be comfortable in a mediation where the other party and I meet face to face and frankly discuss our differences.

If I see my primary identification as a group member, then considerations about face involve my group. Direct confrontation or problem-solving with others may reflect poorly on my group, or disturb overall community harmony. I may prefer to avoid criticism of others, even when the disappointment I have concealed may come out in other, more damaging ways later. When there is conflict that cannot be avoided, I may prefer a third party who acts as a shuttle between me and the other people involved in the conflict. Since no direct confrontation takes place, face is preserved and potential damage to the relationships or networks of relationships is minimized.

**Nonverbal Communication**

Nonverbal communication is hugely important in any interaction with others; its importance is multiplied across cultures. This is because we tend to look for nonverbal cues when verbal messages are unclear or ambiguous, as they are more likely to be across cultures (especially when different languages are being used). Since nonverbal behavior arises from our cultural common sense -- our ideas about what is appropriate, normal, and effective as communication in relationships -- we use different systems of understanding gestures, posture, silence, spatial relations, emotional expression, touch, physical appearance, and other nonverbal cues. Cultures also attribute different degrees of importance to verbal and nonverbal behavior.

Low-context cultures like the United States and Canada tend to give relatively less emphasis to nonverbal communication. This does not mean that nonverbal communication does not happen, or that it is unimportant, but that people in these settings tend to place less importance on it than on the literal meanings of words themselves. In high-context settings such as Japan or Colombia, understanding the nonverbal components of communication is relatively more important to receiving the intended meaning of the communication as a whole.

Some elements of nonverbal communication are consistent across cultures. For example, research has shown that the emotions of enjoyment, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise are expressed in similar ways by people around the world.[7] Differences surface with respect to which emotions are acceptable to display in various cultural settings, and by whom. For instance, it may be more social acceptable in some settings in the United States for women to show fear, but not anger, and for men to display anger, but not fear.[8] At the same time, interpretation of facial expressions across cultures is difficult. In China and Japan, for example, a facial expression that would be recognized around the world as conveying happiness may actually express anger or mask sadness, both of which are unacceptable to show overtly.[9]

These differences of interpretation may lead to conflict, or escalate existing conflict. Suppose a Japanese person is explaining her absence from negotiations due to a death in her family. She may do so with a smile, based on her cultural belief that it is not appropriate to inflict the pain of grief on others. For a Westerner who understands smiles to mean friendliness and happiness, this smile may seem incongruous and even cold, under the circumstances. Even though some facial expressions may be similar across cultures, their interpretations remain culture-specific. It is important to understand something about cultural starting-points and values in order to interpret emotions expressed in cross-cultural interactions.
Another variable across cultures has to do with proxemics, or ways of relating to space. Crossing cultures, we encounter very different ideas about polite space for conversations and negotiations. North Americans tend to prefer a large amount of space, perhaps because they are surrounded by it in their homes and countryside. Europeans tend to stand more closely with each other when talking, and are accustomed to smaller personal spaces. In a comparison of North American and French children on a beach, a researcher noticed that the French children tended to stay in a relatively small space near their parents, while U.S. children ranged up and down a large area of the beach.[10]

The difficulty with space preferences is not that they exist, but the judgments that get attached to them. If someone is accustomed to standing or sitting very close when they are talking with another, they may see the other's attempt to create more space as evidence of coldness, condescension, or a lack of interest. Those who are accustomed to more personal space may view attempts to get closer as pushy, disrespectful, or aggressive. Neither is correct -- they are simply different.[11]

Also related to space is the degree of comfort we feel moving furniture or other objects. It is said that a German executive working in the United States became so upset with visitors to his office moving the guest chair to suit themselves that he had it bolted to the floor.[12] Contrast this with U.S. and Canadian mediators and conflict-resolution trainers, whose first step in preparing for a meeting is not infrequently a complete rearrangement of the furniture.

Finally, line-waiting behavior and behavior in group settings like grocery stores or government offices is culturally-influenced. Novinger reports that the English and U.S. Americans are serious about standing in lines, in accordance with their beliefs in democracy and the principle of "first come, first served."[13] The French, on the other hand, have a practice of resquillage, or line jumping, that irritates many British and U.S. Americans. In another example, immigrants from Armenia report that it is difficult to adjust to a system of waiting in line, when their home context permitted one member of a family to save spots for several others.

These examples of differences related to nonverbal communication are only the tip of the iceberg. Careful observation, ongoing study from a variety of sources, and cultivating relationships across cultures will all help develop the cultural fluency to work effectively with nonverbal communication differences.

**Summary**

Each of the variables discussed in this module -- time and space, personal responsibility and fate, face and face-saving, and nonverbal communication -- are much more complex than it is possible to convey. Each of them influences the course of communications, and can be responsible for conflict or the escalation of conflict when it leads to miscommunication or misinterpretation. A culturally-fluent approach to conflict means working over time to understand these and other ways communication varies across cultures, and applying these understandings in order to enhance relationships across differences.


[5] Novinger, p. 31


[7] Ibid., p. 78.

[8] Ibid.


[10] Ibid., p. 67.


[12] Ibid., p. 68.

[13] Ibid.

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Assess Yourself 2: Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Form

Please give a qualitative evaluation of each of the ten factors by clicking the circle that represents the appropriate numerical score which in your judgment best represents your assessment of your performance on each factor. This is not an opportunity to assess your desires, wishes, hopes, dreams, or even your potential. 7 = outstanding (superb); 6 = excellent; 5 = very good; 4 = average (good); 3 = fair; 2 = poor; 1 = very minimal; 0 = no ability at all.

1. I listen to people from other cultures when they tell me how my culture affects them.
2. I realize that people from other cultures have fresh ideas and different points of view to bring to my life and to the workplace.
3. I give people from other cultures advice on how to succeed in my culture.
4. I give people my support even when other members of my culture reject them.
5. I realize that people outside of my culture could be offended by my behavior. I’ve asked people if I have offended them by things I have done or said and have apologized whenever necessary.
6. I realize that when I am stressed out I am likely to make myself and my culture right and another culture wrong.
7. I respect my superiors (boss, teacher, supervisor, group leader, etc) regardless of where he or she is from. I do not go over his or her head to talk to someone from my culture in order to try and get my way.
8. When I am in mixed company, I mix with everyone. I do not just stay with people from my culture, or only with people from the dominant culture.
9. I go out of my way to work with, recruit, select, train, and/or promote people from outside the dominant culture.
10. When people in my culture make jokes about or talk negatively about other cultural groups, I let them know that I don’t like it.


CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation, Arnhem, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT. Teacher and student are an archetypal role pair in virtually any society. When teacher and student come from different cultures, such as in the context of economic development programmes, many perplexities can arise. These can be due to different social positions of teachers and students in the two societies, to differences in the relevance of the curriculum for the two societies, to differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations of the two societies, or to differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction. This paper focuses in particular on these interaction differences. It relates them to the author's 4-D model of cultural differences among societies, based on research on work-related values in over 50 countries. Differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction are listed with reference to the four dimensions of Individualism versus Collectivism, large versus small Power Distance, strong versus weak Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity versus Femininity. Some effects of language differences between teacher and student are also discussed. The burden of adaptation in cross-cultural learning situations should be primarily on the teachers.

INTRODUCTION

An American teacher at the foreign language institute in Beijing exclaimed in class, "You lovely girls, I love you." Her students were terrified. An Italian professor teaching in the United States complained bitterly about the fact that students were asked to formally evaluate his course. An Indian professor at an African university saw a student arrive six weeks late for the curriculum, but had to admit him because he was from the same village as the dean. This paper deals with the differences among societies that lead to this type of perplexity.

TEACHER AND STUDENT AS AN ARCHETYPAL ROLE PAIR

The family, the school, the job and the community are four fundamental institutions, present in some way in virtually all human societies. Each of the four has its pair of unequal but complementary basic roles (except...
the family, which has two role pairs)—as listed in Table 1. Many societies refine role systems still further (such as, older vs. younger brother, senior vs. junior student, line vs. staff at the job), but the role pairs of Table 1 are the archetypes of interaction between human unequals. In different societies, these archetypal roles are played in different ways. These ways are part and parcel of the culture of the particular society, which I defined elsewhere (Hofstede, 1980) by a convenience definition as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (p. 25). Role patterns in the four types of institutions interact, so that, for example, patterns of parent/child interaction in a society are carried over into teacher/student and boss/subordinate relationships.

Not only are these role patterns the products of a society’s culture, they are also the device par excellence by which that culture itself is transferred from one generation to the next, according for the remarkable stability of certain culture patterns even in the face of sweeping environmental changes (e.g., Inkeles, 1977).

**PERPLEXITIES OF CULTURALLY MIXED TEACHER/STUDENT PAIRS**

As long as human societies have been in contact with each other, voluntarily or involuntarily, there have been cross-cultural learning situations: teacher/student pairs in which the partners were born, raised and mentally programmed in different cultures prior to their interaction in school. The first type of situation that comes to mind is that of migrant or refugee students—a situation responsible for a major part of the interest in intercultural communication in the United States. But all programmes for economic development of low-income nations use cross-cultural learning situations (at home and abroad), in which members of the richer nations play the teacher role and those of the poorer nations the student role. There are and have been many other exchanges between

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<th>Institution</th>
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societies in which teachers go abroad to teach or students go abroad to learn, motivated not only by a desire for economic development, but by a desire for wisdom, beauty, strength or status, or by sheer necessity, on the side of the students, and motivated by religious zeal, charity, intolerance or imperialism on the side of the teachers or their sponsors. Nor have the militarily or economically strong always been the teachers and the weak the learners: history presents famous examples in which the conquerors went to school to learn from the societies they had conquered: the Romans from the Greeks, the Turks from the Persians and later from the Arabs, the Norsemen from the French. Today, rich Europeans and Americans go to poor India and Thailand to learn meditation.

As teacher/student interaction is such an archetypal human phenomenon, and so deeply rooted in the culture of a society, cross-cultural learning situations are fundamentally problematic for both parties. The problems can lie in the following areas:

1. differences in the social positions of teachers and students in the two societies;
2. differences in the relevance of the curriculum (training content) for the two societies;
3. differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations from which teacher and student are drawn;
4. differences in expected patterns of teacher/student and student/student interaction.

Some examples of each of the four problem areas will follow.

**Differences in Social Positions of Teachers and Students in Society**

Societies differ in the way the school, as an institution, is related to the other institutions. From what types of families are students, and teachers, recruited? Are educational systems elitist or anti-elitist? A visiting U.S. professor in a Latin American country may only contribute to the continuation of elite privileges rather than, as he believes, to the economic development of the country (Cullinan, 1970). What is the role of employers in education? Traineeships in industry are an effective and respected alternative to a university education in Germany and Switzerland, allowing people to reach the highest positions, but this is not the case in most other countries. What is the role of the state or the church? Is there a private next to a public educational sector and what are their respective statuses? Does the government prescribe the curriculum in schools (France, USSR), or are teachers free to define their own? (Archer, 1979). Who pays for what education? The students, their parents, the
state? How well are teachers paid and how is their social status? In the Chinese Confucian tradition, “teacher” is the most respected profession; but a British lord is supposed to have said about his son’s private tutor “I cannot understand why Mr Jones cannot get along with Charlie—all the other servants can.” Such differences sometimes make it exceedingly difficult for a teacher—or a student—from one nation’s system to function well in another’s.

Differences in the Relevance of the Curriculum

A Zaïrese friend, studying in Brussels, recalled how at primary school in Lubumbashi her teacher, a Belgian nun, made her recite in her history lesson “Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois” (our ancestors, the Gauls). However, much of what for example management students from poor countries learn at universities abroad is hardly more relevant in their home country situation. What is the usefulness for a future manager in an Indian company of mathematical modelling of the U.S. stock market? Or of a British Organizational Behaviour course literally replicated by a visiting Lecturer to the People’s Republic of China? The know-how supposed to have led to wealth in an industrial country is not necessarily the same that will bring wealth to a presently poor one. This point has long been made by people involved in development processes (e.g., I.L.O., 1966; Hofstede, 1983a), but there are strong forces that perpetuate the transfer of irrelevant knowledge.

There is often an unfortunate connivance between the ‘foreign’ management teacher . . . and the local professor, student or employee. The western ‘expert’ . . . is convinced he knows how to apply (his) rationality to local problem solving. . . . His partner . . . in the learning situation is convinced that management coming from the developed countries of the West brings ‘modernity’ and must be somewhat ‘scientific’ (de Bettignies, 1980: 302–303).

But even between developed countries, irrelevant curricula are exported. Berry (1971) warned already that Europeans were adopting the American Business School at a time when it went downhill in the United States itself, a theme recently echoed in a U.S. bestseller by Peters and Waterman (1982).

Differences in Cognitive Abilities

“Our African engineers do not “think” like engineers, they tend to tackle symptoms, rather than view the equipment as a system” (British training manager, unconscious of his own ethnocentrism). Part of the “mental programming” that represents a culture is a way to acquire, order, and use concepts. Fundamental studies by Michael Cole and associates in Liberia (Cole et al., 1971; Cole and Bruner, 1971; Scribner and
Cole, 1981) have shown that our cognitive development is determined by the demands of the environment in which we grew up: a person will be good at doing the things that are important to him/her and that (s)he has occasion to do often. Cognitive abilities are rooted in the total pattern of a society. Differences in memory development can also be explained in this way (Wagner, 1981). In China, the nature of the script develops children’s ability at pattern recognition; it also imposes a need for rote learning (Redding, 1980: 212).

Experiments have shown significant differences in the degree to which people from different societies process information and complement it with guesswork (Schkade et al., 1978). Academic learning in different industrial countries appeals to different intellectual abilities. “German students are brought up in the belief that anything that is easy enough for them to understand is dubious and probably unscientific” (Stroebe, 1976). Teaching to a student or student body with a cognitive ability profile different from what the teacher is accustomed to is evidently problematic; it demands a different didactic approach, for which the teacher may lack the proper cognitive abilities. At the same time, the surrounding environment usually reinforces people in their traditional cognitive ways and makes learning more difficult. There is no other solution to bridging this gap than increasing awareness, sustained effort on both sides, focussing on new abilities demanded by societal changes of the moment and patience.

Differences in Processes of Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction

Differences in mutual role expectations between teacher and student, affecting the training process rather than its content, are probably the least obvious of the four problem areas listed above and it is to these that the remainder of this paper will be devoted. They are determined by the way the archetypal roles of teacher and student tend to be played in the actors’ (sub)cultures, and they are guided by values rooted in these cultures. Values are “broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (Hofstede, 1980: 19); they lead to feelings of good and evil, right and wrong, rational and irrational, proper and improper; feelings of which we seldom recognize the cultural relativity. Which means that cross-cultural learning situations are rife with premature judgements. Scanning the literature for information and advice for culturally mixed teacher/student pairs, I found amazingly little, in view of the frequency of cross-cultural learning situations and of the perplexities they generate. These perplexities do not only exist between teachers from rich and students from poor countries, but they are equally possible between pairs from nations at similar development levels.

Below, some guidance on mutual teacher/student and student/student
role expectations is presented, based on three sources of information: the author's earlier research on differences in work-related values across over 50 countries (Hofstede, 1980, 1983b), leading to a four-dimensional (4-D) model of cultural differences; personal experiences by the author and others in teaching and in trying to learn in different cross-cultural situations; and the author's experiences as a parent of school-age children attending local schools abroad. The relevance of the author's research, conducted in work settings, is based on the assumption that role patterns and value systems in a society are carried forward from the school to the job and back. Much of the personal experience was collected at IMEDE and INSEAD, both international management training institutes in Switzerland and France respectively, and at the ITP (International Teachers Programme), a summer course for management teachers conducted each year by an international consortium of business schools. Participants in the ITP, coming from many different countries, are a rich source of information on teachers' values and some of them have themselves taught in cross-cultural situations.

THE 4-D MODEL OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The empirical base of the four-dimensional model of cultural differences has been described in earlier publications (Hofstede, 1980; 1983b). Using paper-and-pencil answers on 32 values questions by matched samples of employees of subsidiaries of the same multinational business corporation in 40 different countries, I studied the relationship between nationality and mean values scores. The total number of questionnaires available for analysis was over 116,000, from employees at all levels, managers and non-managers alike; most groups were surveyed twice over a four-year interval, so that the stability of differences found and trends over time could also be tested. Focussing on the relationship between nationality and mean values scores meant that the country (n = 40), not the individual respondent (n = 116,000) became the unit of analysis. Factor analysis of the 32 mean values scores for each of the 40 countries (an ecological factor analysis), showed that three factors together explained 49% of the variance in means (Hofstede, 1980: 83). Afterwards, for reasons to be explained below, one of these factors was split into two parts, so that four dimensions were created. Each country could be given an index score on each of these four dimensions. There is nothing magic about the number of four dimensions; the choice of the number of factors one wants to be drawn from a factor analysis is always rather arbitrary, and it also depends on the nature of the values questions that were used. The latter were a condensation of a larger list, composed from two sources: open-ended interviews with samples of employees in six countries, and interviews with experienced headquarters travellers about
inter-country value differences they had observed. All were more or less work-related, so it could be said that within the total field of values people could be supposed to hold, they have an action bias; purely intellectual or esthetical values were unlikely to be included. On the other hand, work is a very fundamental human activity, so that most human values will be somehow related to it. A main criterion for the choice of the four dimensions was that they should make theoretical sense, being related to fundamental problems of human societies, but problems to which different societies can be shown to have chosen different answers. The four dimensions defined below meet this theoretical criterion; all four were, in fact, fairly closely predicted in a review of the anthropological literature by Inkeles and Levinson (1969), originally from 1954, long before the data for the present study were collected. The second phase of my own research was devoted to the validation of the four dimensions on other data collected from other populations so as to show their meaningfulness outside the subsidiaries of this multinational corporation. I found about 40 other studies comparing conceptually related data from a variety of sources for between 5 and 40 of the countries involved, which produced quantitative outcomes that correlated significantly with one or more of the four dimension scores (op. cit.: 325ff). In a third phase, the data base was extended with subsidiaries in another ten countries and three multi-country regions; their scores fitted well into the existing dimensions; this brought the total number countries covered up to 50, plus the three regions (Hofstede, 1983b).

The labels chosen for the four dimensions, and their interpretation, are as follows:

1. **Individualism** as a characteristic of a culture opposes **Collectivism** (the word is used here in an anthropological, not a political sense). Individualist cultures assume that any person looks primarily after his/her own interest and the interest of his/her immediate family (husband, wife and children). Collectivist cultures assume that any person through birth and possible later events belongs to one or more tight “in-groups,” from which he/she cannot detach him/herself. The “in-group” (whether extended family, clan, or organization) protects the interest of its members, but in turn expects their permanent loyalty. A collectivist society is tightly integrated; an individualist society is loosely integrated.

2. **Power Distance** as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal. Inequality exists within any culture, but the degree of it that is tolerated varies between one culture and another (“All societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others” — Hofstede, 1980: 136).
3. **Uncertainty Avoidance** as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations which they perceive as unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable, situations which they therefore try to avoid by maintaining strict codes of behaviour and a belief in absolute truths. Cultures with a strong uncertainty avoidance are active, aggressive, emotional, compulsive, security-seeking, and intolerant; cultures with a weak uncertainty avoidance are contemplative, less aggressive, unemotional, relaxed, accepting personal risks, and relatively tolerant.

4. **Masculinity** as a characteristic of a culture opposes **Femininity**. The two differ in the social roles associated with the biological fact of the existence of two sexes, and in particular in the social roles attributed to men. My data show that the values associated with this dimension vary considerably less across countries for women than for men. I attribute this to the fact that the social roles of women vary less, as women in all societies are the ones who give birth to children and take care of them when they are small. The men's social role allows for more variation across countries than the women's role and this is what the data on their values confirm. The cultures which I labelled as masculine strive for maximal distinction between what men are expected to do and what women are expected to do. They expect men to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast. They expect women to serve and to care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak. Feminine cultures, on the other hand, define relatively overlapping social roles for the sexes, in which, in particular, men need not be ambitious or competitive but may go for a different quality of life than material success; men may respect whatever is small, weak, and slow. In both masculine and feminine cultures, the dominant values within political and work organizations are those of men. So, in masculine cultures these political/organizational values stress material success and assertiveness; in feminine cultures they stress other types of quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and concern for the weak.

Country scores on the four dimensions have been plotted in Figures 1 and 2, while Table 2 lists the countries and regions and the abbreviations used. Figure 1 plots Power Distance against Individualism/Collectivism. It is immediately clear that there is a statistical association of Power Distance with the Collectivist end of the I/C dimension ($r = -.67$ across the original 40 countries). This association, however, is due to the fact that both Power Distance and Individualism correlate with national wealth (the country's per capita GNP correlates $-.65$ with the Power
Distance Index and .82 with the Individualism Index). If we control for national wealth, the correlation between Power Distance and Collectivism disappears. In the ecological factor analysis of 32 values questions mean scores for 40 countries, Power Distance plus Collectivism showed up on one factor. Their joint relationship with wealth and the fact that their intercorrelation disappears when we control for wealth, is one of the two reasons why I split this factor into two dimensions. The other reason is that Power Distance (inequality) and Collectivism (social integration) are conceptually two different issues: some countries, like France and Belgium, show that large Power Distance and Individualism can be combined.

Figure 2 plots Masculinity/Femininity against Uncertainty Avoidance. In this case there is no statistical association between the two dimensions (correlation across the original 40 countries $r = .12$). These two dimen-
sions are directly based upon two separate factors in the ecological factor analysis of 32 values questions mean scores for 40 countries. Because the joint association of Power Distance and Collectivism with national wealth, we tend to find in Figure 1 the Third World countries separated from the wealthy countries: the former in the upper right hand corner, the latter in the lower part of the diagram. However, Masculinity and Uncertainty Avoidance are both unrelated to national wealth, so that in Figure 2 we find both wealthy countries and Third World countries in all four quadrants of the diagram.

THE 4-D MODEL APPLIED TO TEACHER/STUDENT AND STUDENT/STUDENT INTERACTION

The cultural differences related to Individualism/Collectivism and to Power Distance are the ones that tend to distinguish wealthy, industrialized societies from poor, traditional ones (Figure 1, lower left to upper right). They will therefore be likely to account for most of the pitfalls in
teacher/student interaction in training programmes aimed at economic development. However, fairly large Power Distances are also found in some industrialized countries (like Belgium and France), and some poor countries like Jamaica and India score relatively individualist.

In Tables 3 and 4 I have listed suggested interaction differences related to Individualism versus Collectivism and to Large versus Small Power Distances, respectively. These tables are inspired by differences found in the work situation (Hofstede, 1980: 235 and 122). The tables describe extremes; the situation in many countries and schools probably lies somewhere in between these extremes, and some of the differences listed may apply more in some places than in others. However, the tables are meant to alert the teachers and the students to the role differences they may encounter.

Contrary to the differences listed in Tables 3 and 4, those related to Uncertainty Avoidance and to Masculinity/Femininity are unrelated to the economic development levels of the countries (see Figure 2). They can account for some of the perplexities of a German teacher in the Netherlands, or of a Thai student in India. I have listed them in Tables 5 and 6 (inspired by Hofstede 1980: 184 and 294). The same provisos apply as for Tables 3 and 4: the tables show extremes and reality is often in between these extremes.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Abbreviations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARA Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Lybia, Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, U.A.E.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARG Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUL Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUT Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEL Belgium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRA Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHL Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COL Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COS Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEN Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAF East Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EQA Equador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBR Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERM Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUA Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOK Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDO Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRA Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRE Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISR Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITA Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAM Jamaica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPN Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOR South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAL Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEX Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOR Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZL New Zealand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAK Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN Panama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PER Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHI Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POR Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAF South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAL Salvador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIN Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWE Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWI Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAI Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THA Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUR Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URU Uruguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VEN Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAF West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YUG Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLECTIVIST SOCIETIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• positive association in society with whatever is rooted in tradition¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the young should learn; adults cannot accept student role²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students expect to learn how to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• individual students will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• individuals will only speak up in small groups³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• large classes split socially into smaller, cohesive subgroups based on particularist criteria (e.g. ethnic affiliation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times (T-groups are taboo)⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• neither the teacher nor any student should ever be made to lose face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• education is a way of gaining prestige in one's social environment and of joining a higher status group (&quot;a ticket to a ride&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• diploma certificates are important and displayed on walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• acquiring certificates, even through illegal means (cheating, corruption) is more important than acquiring competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers are expected to give preferential treatment to some students (e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or on recommendation by an influential person)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. e.g. Treviño, 1982  
2. Lieh-Mak et al., 1984  
3. Redding, 1980: 211  
4. e.g. Cox and Cooper, 1977
### TABLE 4

Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Power Distance Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMALL POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES</th>
<th>LARGE POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• stress on impersonal &quot;truth&quot; which can in principle be obtained from any competent person</td>
<td>• stress on personal &quot;wisdom&quot; which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a teacher should respect the independence of his/her students</td>
<td>• a teacher merits the respect of his/her students¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• student-centered education (premium on initiative)</td>
<td>• teacher-centered education (premium on order)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teacher expects students to initiate communication</td>
<td>• students expect teacher to initiate communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teacher expects students to find their own paths</td>
<td>• students expect teacher to outline paths to follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students may speak up spontaneously in class</td>
<td>• students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students allowed to contradict or criticize teacher</td>
<td>• teacher is never contradicted nor publicly criticized²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• effectiveness of learning related to amount of two-way communication in class³</td>
<td>• effectiveness of learning related to excellence of the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• outside class, teachers are treated as equals</td>
<td>• respect for teachers is also shown outside class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the student</td>
<td>• in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• younger teachers are more liked than older teachers</td>
<td>• older teachers are more respected than younger teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. according to Confucius, “teacher” is the most respected profession in society
2. E.g. Faucheux et al, 1982
3. Revans, 1965; Jamieson and Thomas, 1974; Stubbs and Delamont, 1976

Of course, not all differences in teacher/student interaction can be associated with one of the four dimensions. Certain interaction patterns are particular to a given country or even to a given school; often differences may relate to other dimensions, not identified in my study. An example of differences at a high level of specificity are the ages at which a young person is supposed to show particular behaviours. In Japan, preschool age children are allowed a greater freedom of emotional expression and drive gratification; from kindergarten to the university entrance examination, they are expected to be disciplined and competitive and at university again they are allowed to take it easy. The U.S.A has almost the reverse pattern: the pre-school child is already instilled with a sense of responsibility; kindergarten, primary school and high school are relative-
TABLE 5
Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction Related to the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEAK UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE SOCIETIES</th>
<th>STRONG UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE SOCIETIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- students feel comfortable in unstructured learning situations: vague objectives, broad assignments, no timetables</td>
<td>- students feel comfortable in structured learning situations: precise objectives, detailed assignments, strict timetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teachers are allowed to say &quot;I don't know&quot;</td>
<td>- teachers are expected to have all the answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- a good teacher uses plain language</td>
<td>- a good teacher uses academic language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- students are rewarded for innovative approaches to problem solving</td>
<td>- students are rewarded for accuracy in problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teachers are expected to suppress emotions (and so are students)</td>
<td>- teachers are allowed to behave emotionally (and so are students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise</td>
<td>- teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teachers seek parents' ideas</td>
<td>- teachers consider themselves experts who cannot learn anything from lay parents—and parents agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Stroebe, 1976
2. Triandis, 1984

ly child-centered and easy-going, whereas the university study period is one of extreme competitiveness. Another source of problems in teacher/student interaction may be ethnic or colour differences per se, regardless whether these are accompanied by differences in mental programming; ethnic prejudice as such may affect behaviours.

THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE

This paper on cross-cultural teacher/student interaction would not be complete without paying attention to the language factor. In many cross-cultural learning situations, teacher and student speak different native languages. I suggest that the chances for successful cultural adaptation are better if the teacher is to teach in the students' language rather than if the student is to learn in the teacher's language, because the teacher has more power over the learning situation than any single student. Language is the vehicle of culture and it is an obstinate vehicle. Language categorizes reality according to its corresponding culture. Together with a foreign language, the teacher acquires a basis of sensitivity for the students' culture. From personal experience I recall several striking examples of the influence of the course language on the learning process. In one multina-
tional company training programme, trainers estimated participants’ future career potential. A longitudinal follow-up study of actual careers showed that they had consistently overestimated participants whose native language was English (the course language) and underestimated those whose languages were French or Italian, with the native German speakers in between (Hofstede, 1975: 46). In an international business school I taught the same executive course in French to one internationally mixed half of the class, in English to the other half, equally internationally mixed; often one group would be taught in the morning in one language, the other group in the afternoon in the other. It was remarkable that the discussion of the same case studies in French would regularly lead to highly stimulating intellectual discussions, but few practical conclusions; in English, it would not be long before somebody asked “so what?” and the class tried to become pragmatic. Nobody in the French speaking group even asked “et alors?” (so what?); and the English language would hardly find the words to express the Francophone intellectual speculations. In the same course, we would use reading material originally written either in English or in French and translated into the other language. The comments of the class on the translated versions was almost identical in both cases: translated material was considered “unnec-

**TABLE 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEMININE SOCIETIES</th>
<th>MASculine SOCIETIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• teachers avoid openly praising students</td>
<td>• teachers openly praise good students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers use average student as the norm</td>
<td>• teachers use best students as the norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• system rewards students’ social adaptation</td>
<td>• system rewards students’ academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a student’s failure in school is a relatively minor accident</td>
<td>• a student’s failure in school is a severe blow to his/her self-image and may in extreme cases lead to suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students admire friendliness in teachers</td>
<td>• students admire brilliance in teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students practice mutual solidarity</td>
<td>• students compete with each other in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students try to behave modestly</td>
<td>• students try to make themselves visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• corporal punishment severely rejected</td>
<td>• corporal punishment occasionally considered salutary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students choose academic subjects in view of intrinsic interest</td>
<td>• students choose academic subjects in view of career opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• male students may choose traditionally feminine academic subjects</td>
<td>• male students avoid traditionally feminine academic subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
necessarily verbose, with a rather meagre message which could have been expressed on one or two pages.” The conclusion is that what represents a “message” in one language does not necessarily survive as a message in the other language; and this process of loss of meaning works both ways. “Information” is more than words—it is words which fit in a cultural framework.

**BRIDGING THE CROSS-CULTURAL TEACHING GAP**

If one chooses to try to cope with, rather than ignore (as often happens), the perplexities of cross-cultural learning situations, there are obviously two possible strategies:

1. Teach the teacher how to teach;
2. Teach the learner how to learn.

In the same way as in the previous section (on language) I put the burden of translation preferably on the teacher, I would prefer (1) over (2) where possible. If there is one foreign student in a class of 30 with a local teacher, (2) is the obvious approach. If the number of foreign students increases (1) will very soon become necessary. For an expatriate teacher, (1) is imperative. Polycultural learning situations (I remember an ITP—International Teachers’ Programme—class in 1979 with 25 nationalities among 60 participants) are extremely difficult to handle, and demand a mixture of (1) with a heavy dose of (2); private or small-group tutoring of students. The focus of the teacher’s training should be on learning about his/her own culture: getting intellectually and emotionally accustomed to the fact that in other societies, people learn in different ways. This means taking one step back from one’s values and cherished beliefs, which is far from easy. In a study of the values of faculty and executive students at an international business school, I related values to gradings and showed that faculty unconsciously favoured the course work of students whose values were closest to theirs (Hofstede, 1978). It is possible that in order to be effective as trainers abroad, teachers have to adopt methods which at home they have learned to consider as outmoded or impopular; usually much more structured than they were accustomed to. For example, (s)he has to tell a person to speak up in class. A creative solution to this problem was presented by a Dutch teacher with a mixed Asian adult student group. After each session, the students were expected to give an evaluation of what they had learned. The teacher at this time passed a pencil around, and whoever had the pencil was expected to speak. This was a nice symbolic way of institutionalizing the “speaking up” process.

This paper amounts to a plea for an anthropological approach to teaching, based on insight into cultural variety across the world. Good
intentions are not enough. In an insightful piece, Moran and Renwick look critically at the management training manual prepared by one U.S. multinational for use around the world. The manual provides do's and don'ts under the headings of "Performance Goals," "Managing Climate," "Active Listening" and "Questioning." Moran and Renwick analyse this material from a Middle East (Arab countries) cultural point of view and it falls almost completely apart (in Moran and Harris, 1981: 79–92). Another example I owe to Kraemer (1978). When in 1976 children of Vietnamese refugees went to regular schools in the U.S.A., the U.S. Office of Education issued an instruction for teachers "On Teaching the Vietnamese." Part of it runs:

Student participation was discouraged in Vietnamese schools by liberal doses of corporal punishment, and students were conditioned to sit rigidly and to speak only when spoken to. This background . . . makes speaking freely in class hard for a Vietnamese. Therefore, don't mistake shyness for apathy.

To most West-European and North-American readers, this instruction looks okay at first. However, it becomes more problematic when we look for all the clues about U.S. culture which the quote supplies, which are as many sources of bias. In fact, the U.S. Office of Education ascribes to the Vietnamese all the motivations of young Americans—like a supposed desire to participate—and explains their submission by corporal punishment, rather than, for example, respect. At a doctoral seminar I taught in Sweden, one of the participants (Ake Phillips) made all the essential points by reversing the statement—in the way the Vietnamese Ministry of Education might have instructed the Vietnamese teachers of American refugees in Vietnam (if there were any):

Students' proper respect for teachers was discouraged by a loose order and students were conditioned to behave disorderly and chat all the time. This background makes proper and respectful behaviour in class hard for an American student. Therefore, don't mistake rudeness for lack of reverence.

REFERENCES


**ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS**

Le maître et l'élève forment un couple qui existe en tant qu'archétype dans presque toute société. Du moment que ceux-ci viennent de cultures différentes comme il arrive à l'intérieur de programmes de développement économique les mésententes risquent de se multiplier. Elle seront causées par la position sociale différente du maître et de l'élève dans les deux sociétés, par l'intérêt différent du cours pour les deux sociétés, par des combinaisons disparates des facultés cognitives en vigueur chez les deux populations concernées, ou bien par des divergences dans les idées préexistantes sur l'interaction entre maître et élève et pour les élèves entre eux. L'article traite en particulier de ces différences interactionnelles. Il les rattache au modèle 4-D développé par l'auteur et qui décrit les différences culturelles parmi les sociétés, sur la base de recherches des valeurs liées au travail dans plus de 50 pays. Les divergences des idées préexistantes sur l'interaction entre maître et élève comme entre élèves sont décrites selon les quatre dimensions: de l'Individualisme vis à vis du Collectivisme, de la Distance Hiérarchique plus ou moins grande, du Contrôle de l'Incertitude plus ou moins forte et de la Masculinité vis à vis la Féminité. On discute aussi certains effets du fait que maîtres et élèves n'ont pas la même langue maternelle. Dans la formation interculturelle ce sont les enseignants qui devraient assumer en premier lieu la charge que constitue l'adaptation à cette situation. (Author-supplied abstract).

Profesor y alumno conforman un "par" arquetípico en casi toda sociedad. Cuando ambos provienen de diferentes culturas, como es el caso en el contexto de programas de desarrollo económico, pueden ocurrir muchas confusiones. Estas pueden deberse a la
diferente posición social que ocupan tanto profesores como alumnos en las dos sociedades, a las diferencias de relevancia en el currículum para tales sociedades, a diferencias en perfiles de habilidades cognitivas entre las poblaciones de las dos sociedades o a diferentes expectativas de las interacciones profesor/alumno y alumno/alumno. Este estudio está centrado en las diferencias de tales interacciones. Las mismas están relacionadas con el modelo de 4 Dimensiones de diferencias culturales entre sociedades desarrollado por el autor, basado en investigaciones sobre valores relacionados al trabajo en el que participaron más de 50 países. Las diferencias de expectativas de las interacciones profesor/alumno y alumno/alumno se han listado en relación a las cuatro dimensiones de: Individualismo versus Colectivismo, mayor versus menor Distancia del Poder, Evitación de Incertidumbre intensa versus escasa Evitación de Incertidumbre y Masculinidad versus Femeneidad. Se discuten además algunos efectos de las diferencias de lenguaje entre profesor y alumno. El énfasis para la adaptación de las situaciones de aprendizaje trans-culturales debería ser puesto principalmente en los profesores. (Author-supplied abstract)
EXERCISE:

Purpose: To allow participants to practice an effective classroom exercise. To become familiar with the concept of description, interpretation, and evaluation. To establish norms of classroom discussion. To become aware of value judgments. To show the personal and cultural relativity of interpretations and evaluation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group size:</th>
<th>Ten to fifty people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time required:</td>
<td>Fifty minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials:</td>
<td>Whiteboard, or flipchart, and markers or blackboard and chalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Description, Interpretation, Evaluation” participant handout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Large pictures of “other-culture” scenes (one for each five participants) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two “ambiguous objects” **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The facilitator should select pictures of cultural scenes from cultures other than the culture of the participants. The best pictures are the most ambiguous ones, photographs which depict a form of interaction or a scene which is not familiar to participants. Old National Geographic or LIFE magazines often have such pictures. Captions to the pictures should be retained, since participants will be eager to know the “real” description after the exercise.

** The facilitator should select two “ambiguous objects” to use for the opening section of the exercise. Any object which is unknown to all participants can be used for this demonstration. Objects from unusual hobbies (lobster bait bags, pitons for mountain climbing, etc.), objects from other cultures (Japanese sword-cleaning items, or flower-arranging equipment, etc.), or unusual hardware or kitchen utensils may be good choices.

Room arrangement: Large group, informal; break down into small groups of five chairs for the small group interactions

PROCEDURE:

1. Select one of the ambiguous objects. Ask the large group to tell you something about it. The phrasing of this question is very important, otherwise it skews the answers. You should say, “Tell me something about this.” (DO NOT ask them what they “see” or to describe it.) Let them touch the object, keep it moving very quickly. (“What else can you say?”) Spend two-three minutes on this. Your assistant should be writing on a board in three columns those statements that fit description, interpretation, and evaluation. Do not yet write these terms on the board; simply have the recorder divide the responses into these three categories.

2. Explain description, interpretation, and evaluation. Show how what they said divides into three columns.

Use the second object, and ask them first to describe only what they see. Chart in the “description” column. Correct them if they make any interpretations or evaluations. Next, have them interpret, charting their responses. Finally, ask them to evaluate it, both a positive and a negative evaluation for each interpretation. Spend about five minutes.

3. Give each group a photograph and ask them to complete the form according to directions. Spend about ten minutes, but if they need more time, allow it.

Use the second object, and ask them first to describe only what they see. Chart in the “description” column. Correct them if they make any interpretations or evaluations. Next, have them interpret, charting their responses. Finally, ask them to evaluate it, both a positive and a negative evaluation for each interpretation. Spend about five minutes.

EXAMPLE:

Description: I can see a woman of Asian origin covering her mouth.
Interpretation: She’s yawning, so she must be bored.
Evaluation: That’s all right, I don’t blame her a bit.
Interpretation #1: She’s burping, and trying to be polite by covering her mouth.
Alternative Evaluation #1: I think that’s great, that she’s trying to be polite.
Alternative Evaluation #2: I think that’s too repressed, she should relax.
Interpretation #2: I think she’s surprised.
Alternative Evaluation #1: That’s a natural reaction to a shock.
Alternative Evaluation #2: She’s overdoing that reaction, no big deal.
Interpretation #3: I think she’s smiling because she’s embarrassed.
Alternative Evaluation #1: She shouldn’t be so concerned, smiling is nice.
Alternative Evaluation #2: She should be embarrassed for exhibiting so much openness in her smiling.

4. Reassemble the small groups for the debriefing. If the groups number more than four, go very quickly through only one description, two interpretations, and four evaluations for each, up to six groups. More than six groups should not be processed in the large group because it is too redundant. Relate the exercise to their experience. Frequently, the participants will be curious about the “real” interpretation of the picture. After each group’s report, the facilitator can share the photographer’s interpretation of the photo.

5. Reassemble the large group, and ask participants to share the most difficult aspect of the exercise. Usually, the response to this is that it is difficult to keep the original description free of evaluative terminology, and that it taxes the world view of the individual to create alternative frames of reference. The value of heightened awareness in describing before interpreting and evaluating should be stressed as an essential prerequisite to intercultural communication. The facilitator should note that the processes we use to describe, interpret, and evaluate are culture bound, and limit our ability to understand other cultures.

This entire process should be completed comfortably in fifty minutes.

DESCRIPTION, INTERPRETATION, AND EVALUATION
Cultural Objects

DESCRIPTION:
What I See (only observed facts)

INTERPRETATION:
What I Think (about what I see)

EVALUATION:
What I Feel (about what I think...positive or negative)

Your group will receive an object from another culture outside the U.S.A. After looking at the object, please fill in your own brief description of it.

The task for the group is:
1. to agree on a single description
2. based on the description, to suggest two interpretations
3. for each interpretation, to suggest both a positive and a negative evaluation

DESCRIPTION

INTERPRETATION #1
EVALUATION (POSITIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #1
EVALUATION (NEGATIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #1

INTERPRETATION #2
EVALUATION (POSITIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #2
EVALUATION (NEGATIVE) OF INTERPRETATION #2
Toward a More Perfect Union
in an Age of Diversity

Working on Common Cross-cultural Communication Challenges

by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Axner

- **Six Fundamental Patterns** of Cultural Difference
  1. Different **Communications Styles**
  2. Different **Attitudes Toward Conflict**
  3. Different **Approaches to Completing Tasks**
  4. Different **Decision-Making Styles**
  5. Different **Attitudes Toward Disclosure**
  6. Different **Approaches to Knowing**
- **Respecting Our Differences and Working Together**
- **Guidelines for Multicultural Collaboration**

We all have an internal list of those we still don't understand, let alone appreciate. We all have biases, even prejudices, toward specific groups. In our workshops we ask people to gather in pairs and think about their hopes and fears in relating to people of a group different from their own. Fears usually include being judged, miscommunication, and patronizing or hurting others unintentionally; hopes are usually the possibility of dialogue, learning something new, developing friendships, and understanding different points of view. After doing this activity hundreds of times, I'm always amazed how similar the lists are. At any moment that we're dealing with people different from ourselves, the likelihood is that they carry a similar list of hopes and fears in their back pocket.

-- From *Waging Peace in Our Schools*,
by Linda Lantieri and Janet Patti (Beacon Press, 1996)

We all communicate with others all the time -- in our homes, in our workplaces, in the groups we belong to, and in the community. No matter how well we think we understand each other, communication is hard. Just think, for example, how often we hear things like, "He doesn't get it," or "She didn't really hear what I meant to say." "Culture" is often at the root of communication challenges. Our culture influences how we approach problems, and how we participate in groups and in communities. When we participate in groups we are often surprised at how differently people approach their work together.

Culture is a complex concept, with many different definitions. But, simply put, "culture" refers to a group or community with which we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as gender, race, or national origin. It also includes groups we join or become part of. For example, we can acquire a new culture by moving to a new region, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly, we realize we all belong to many cultures at once.
Our histories are a critical piece of our cultures. Historical experiences -- whether of five years ago or of ten generations back -- shape who we are. Knowledge of our history can help us understand ourselves and one another better. Exploring the ways in which various groups within our society have related to each other is key to opening channels for cross-cultural communication.

**Six Fundamental Patterns of Cultural Differences**

In a world as complex as ours, each of us is shaped by many factors, and culture is one of the powerful forces that acts on us. Anthropologists Kevin Avruch and Peter Black explain the importance of culture this way:

...One's own culture provides the "lens" through which we view the world; the "logic"... by which we order it; the "grammar" ... by which it makes sense.

In other words, culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves.

As people from different cultural groups take on the exciting challenge of working together, cultural values sometimes conflict. We can misunderstand each other, and react in ways that can hinder what are otherwise promising partnerships. Oftentimes, we aren't aware that culture is acting upon us. Sometimes, we are not even aware that we have cultural values or assumptions that are different from others'.

Six fundamental patterns of cultural differences -- ways in which cultures, as a whole, tend to vary from one another -- are described below. The descriptions point out some of the recurring causes of cross-cultural communication difficulties. As you enter into multicultural dialogue or collaboration, keep these generalized differences in mind. Next time you find yourself in a confusing situation, and you suspect that cross-cultural differences are at play, try reviewing this list. Ask yourself how culture may be shaping your own reactions, and try to see the world from others' points of view.

1. **Different Communication Styles**

   The way people communicate varies widely between, and even within, cultures. One aspect of communication style is language usage. Across cultures, some words and phrases are used in different ways. For example, even in countries that share the English language, the meaning of "yes" varies from "maybe, I'll consider it" to "definitely so," with many shades in between.

   Another major aspect of communication style is the degree of importance given to non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication includes not only facial expressions and gestures; it also involves seating arrangements, personal distance, and sense of time. In addition, different norms regarding the appropriate degree of assertiveness in communicating can add to cultural misunderstandings. For instance, some white Americans typically consider raised voices to be a sign that a fight has begun, while some black, Jewish and Italian Americans often feel that an increase in volume is a sign of an exciting conversation among friends. Thus, some white Americans may react with greater alarm to a loud discussion than would members of some American ethnic or non-white racial groups.

2. **Different Attitudes Toward Conflict**

   Some cultures view conflict as a positive thing, while others view it as something to be avoided. In the U.S., conflict is not usually desirable; but people often are encouraged to deal directly with conflicts that do arise. In fact, face-to-face meetings customarily are recommended as the way to work through whatever problems exist. In contrast, in many Eastern countries, open conflict is experienced as embarrassing or demeaning; as a rule, differences are best worked out quietly. A written exchange might be the favored means to address the conflict.
3. Different Approaches to Completing Tasks

From culture to culture, there are different ways that people move toward completing tasks. Some reasons include different access to resources, different judgments of the rewards associated with task completion, different notions of time, and varied ideas about how relationship-building and task-oriented work should go together.

When it comes to working together effectively on a task, cultures differ with respect to the importance placed on establishing relationships early on in the collaboration. A case in point, Asian and Hispanic cultures tend to attach more value to developing relationships at the beginning of a shared project and more emphasis on task completion toward the end as compared with European-Americans. European-Americans tend to focus immediately on the task at hand, and let relationships develop as they work on the task. This does not mean that people from any one of these cultural backgrounds are more or less committed to accomplishing the task, or value relationships more or less; it means they may pursue them differently.

4. Different Decision-Making Styles

The roles individuals play in decision-making vary widely from culture to culture. For example, in the U.S., decisions are frequently delegated -- that is, an official assigns responsibility for a particular matter to a subordinate. In many Southern European and Latin American countries, there is a strong value placed on holding decision-making responsibilities oneself. When decisions are made by groups of people, majority rule is a common approach in the U.S.; in Japan consensus is the preferred mode. Be aware that individuals' expectations about their own roles in shaping a decision may be influenced by their cultural frame of reference.

5. Different Attitudes Toward Disclosure

In some cultures, it is not appropriate to be frank about emotions, about the reasons behind a conflict or a misunderstanding, or about personal information. Keep this in mind when you are in a dialogue or when you are working with others. When you are dealing with a conflict, be mindful that people may differ in what they feel comfortable revealing. Questions that may seem natural to you -- What was the conflict about? What was your role in the conflict? What was the sequence of events? -- may seem intrusive to others. The variation among cultures in attitudes toward disclosure is also something to consider before you conclude that you have an accurate reading of the views, experiences, and goals of the people with whom you are working.

6. Different Approaches to Knowing

Notable differences occur among cultural groups when it comes to epistemologies -- that is, the ways people come to know things. European cultures tend to consider information acquired through cognitive means, such as counting and measuring, more valid than other ways of coming to know things. Compare that to African cultures' preference for affective ways of knowing, including symbolic imagery and rhythm. Asian cultures' epistemologies tend to emphasize the validity of knowledge gained through striving toward transcendence.3

Recent popular works demonstrate that our own society is paying more attention to previously overlooked ways of knowing.4 Indeed, these different approaches to knowing could affect ways of analyzing a community problem or finding ways to resolve it. Some members of your group may want to do library research to understand a shared problem better and identify possible solutions. Others may prefer to visit places and people who have experienced challenges like the ones you are facing, and get a feeling for what has worked elsewhere.
Respecting Our Differences and Working Together

In addition to helping us to understand ourselves and our own cultural frames of reference, knowledge of these six patterns of cultural difference can help us to understand the people who are different from us. An appreciation of patterns of cultural difference can assist us in processing what it means to be different in ways that are respectful of others, not faultfinding or damaging.

Anthropologists Avruch and Black have noted that, when faced by an interaction that we do not understand, people tend to interpret the others involved as "abnormal," "weird," or "wrong." This tendency, if indulged, gives rise on the individual level to prejudice. If this propensity is either consciously or unconsciously integrated into organizational structures, then prejudice takes root in our institutions -- in the structures, laws, policies, and procedures that shape our lives. Consequently, it is vital that we learn to control the human tendency to translate "different from me" into "less than me." We can learn to do this.

We can also learn to collaborate across cultural lines as individuals and as a society. Awareness of cultural differences doesn't have to divide us from each other. It doesn't have to paralyze us either, for fear of not saying the "right thing." In fact, becoming more aware of our cultural differences, as well as exploring our similarities, can help us communicate with each other more effectively. Recognizing where cultural differences are at work is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other.

Learning about different ways that people communicate can enrich our lives. People's different communication styles reflect deeper philosophies and world views which are the foundation of their culture. Understanding these deeper philosophies gives us a broader picture of what the world has to offer us.

Learning about people's cultures has the potential to give us a mirror image of our own. We have the opportunity to challenge our assumptions about the "right" way of doing things, and consider a variety of approaches. We have a chance to learn new ways to solve problems that we had previously given up on, accepting the difficulties as "just the way things are."

Lastly, if we are open to learning about people from other cultures, we become less lonely. Prejudice and stereotypes separate us from whole groups of people who could be friends and partners in working for change. Many of us long for real contact. Talking with people different from ourselves gives us hope and energizes us to take on the challenge of improving our communities and worlds.

Guidelines for Multicultural Collaboration

Cultural questions -- about who we are and how we identify ourselves -- are at the heart of Toward a More Perfect Union in an Age of Diversity, and will be at the heart of your discussions. As you set to work on multicultural collaboration in your community, keep in mind these additional guidelines:

- Learn from generalizations about other cultures, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype, "write off," or oversimplify your ideas about another person. The best use of a generalization is to add it to your storehouse of knowledge so that you better understand and appreciate other interesting, multi-faceted human beings.

- Practice, practice, practice. That's the first rule, because it's in the doing that we actually get better at cross-cultural communication.

- Don't assume that there is one right way (yours!) to communicate. 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.
• Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because other people are on the wrong track. Search for ways to make the communication work, rather than searching for who should receive the blame for the breakdown.

• Listen actively and empathetically. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Especially when another person's perceptions or ideas are very different from your own, you might need to operate at the edge of your own comfort zone.

• Respect others' choices about whether to engage in communication with you. Honor their opinions about what is going on.

• Stop, suspend judgment, and try to look at the situation as an outsider.

• Be prepared for a discussion of the past. Use this as an opportunity to develop an understanding from "the other's" point of view, rather than getting defensive or impatient. Acknowledge historical events that have taken place. Be open to learning more about them. Honest acknowledgment of the mistreatment and oppression that have taken place on the basis of cultural difference is vital for effective communication.

• Awareness of current power imbalances -- and an openness to hearing each other's perceptions of those imbalances -- is also necessary for understanding each other and working together.

• Remember that cultural norms may not apply to the behavior of any particular individual. We are all shaped by many, many factors -- our ethnic background, our family, our education, our personalities -- and are more complicated than any cultural norm could suggest. Check your interpretations if you are uncertain what is meant.

FOOTNOTES


2. This list and some of the explanatory text is drawn from DuPraw and Warfield (1991), an informally published workshop manual co-authored by one of the authors of this piece. (Return to referenced text)


4. For example, for research on women's approaches to knowledge, see


   (Return to referenced text)

5. Avruch and Black, 1993. (Return to referenced text)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS
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Five Competencies for Culturally Competent Teaching and Learning

By: Cheryl Irish EdD and Monica Scrubb EdD

Today’s classrooms require that instructors possess competencies for teaching all students. Robust instructional strategies and culturally sensitive curricula are critical, but more important is an instructor who is sensitive and responsive to the unique differences of each student. Recognizing the need to strengthen specific competencies to reach and teach all students requires an understanding of new ideas and a willingness to view instruction through varied cultural lenses.

1. Culturally competent teaching and learning facilitates critical reflection. A critical analysis of one’s own cultural assumptions is foundational to culturally-responsive teaching and learning. Critical reflection on tightly held cultural assumptions is necessary to dislodge misconceptions and stereotypes. Culturally-responsive teaching engages students in self-awareness activities that lead to reflection on cultural assumptions. For example, in situations where beliefs about learning vary diametrically, there may be serious misunderstandings. When one student believes his learning is unrelated to timely arrival to class and another student views punctuality as a sign of respect, or when one student asks many questions and another quietly wrestles with issues in the content, each may struggle with respect or acceptance of the others. While all may be learning, each may view the others as lazy, disruptive, or disrespectful. Diverse instructional groupings allow students to learn about individual differences and to reflect on their own assumptions and beliefs.

2. Culturally competent teaching and learning demands respect for others. Every student possesses a unique cultural background. Experiences based on various traditions, norms, and values inform ways of knowing and learning. Learning communities with many ways of knowing and learning benefit everyone. When there is little diversity, the overwhelming presence of “whiteness” may be intimidating to students of color and English Language Learners (ELLS) and may serve to silence their voices. Culturally responsive methods such as inter-cultural communication stimulate respect for the needs of all learners and allow every voice to be heard.

3. Culturally competent teaching and learning involves accommodating individual learners. Respect for the learner is a critical component of effective teaching. In addition to pedagogical and subject matter knowledge, competent instructors relate well to their students and possess dispositions such as compassion, fairness, integrity and respect for diversity. Teaching that is respectful and learner focused will naturally involve individual accommodations.

Good teachers not only learn from, but learn about their students. Learning about the cultures and languages of individual students provides a foundation for implementing effective
accommodations that facilitate learning. Learning about students involves listening to them, interacting with them, and modeling for them. Effective accommodations for diverse students may include extra time on exams to accommodate the additional load on mental processing, exams in another room where students are able to write, read aloud, then revise their answers to test questions, or time to verbally elaborate on their written responses with the instructor.

4. Culturally competent teaching and learning requires the use of intercultural communication skills. Culturally competent instructors are willing to learn from their students; they recognize the potential of intercultural communication as a means for enhancing the learning of the entire learning community. Effective communication with others who are linguistically and culturally different includes the use of techniques like active listening, elaboration, paraphrasing, and restatement.

Active listening is a process where both the sender and receiver are fully engaged, the listener is focused and attentive, and distractions are minimized. Active listening strategies are especially important when participants speak different languages. Intercultural communication strategies such as active listening inform learning and facilitate critical reflection.

5. Culturally competent teaching and learning requires focused activities and intentionally structured environments. Perspective-taking behavior requires an understanding of norms, values, and traditions that have informed the other’s worldview and learning behaviors. Ranking the value of ideas such as tradition, religion, independence, education, work, health, respect, honesty, food, etc. and a review of personal rankings with other class members may lead to meaningful conversations. Such activities may encourage students to engage in critical reflection on deeply held assumptions related to values and beliefs. Intentional groupings of students with others from different racial groups have been shown to have a positive impact on students—especially white students. A study by Chang (1996) demonstrated that college students are more likely to discuss racial issues when they are part of a diverse student body and when they participate in racially diverse groups in class.

Dr. Cheryl Irish is a professor and the NCATE coordinator at the School of Educational Leadership, College of Adult and Professional Studies at Indiana Wesleyan University. Dr. Monica Scrubb is an assistant professor at the School of Educational Leadership, College of Adult and Professional Studies at Indiana Wesleyan University.

The impact of culture on education

*Can we introduce best practices in education across countries?*

Huib Wursten & Carel Jacobs

As a result of globalization, many people are becoming interested in ranking systems which show how their own countries compare with others on a variety of measures. The World Economic Forum publishes an annual ranking of countries on economic competitiveness; the United Nations a ranking on human development; the OECD publishes comparisons on the quality of healthcare systems. Even a ranking system for “happiness” can be found.

In this paper we will explore the outcome of ranking countries on the quality of education. In particular we will focus on a recent report “The Learning Curve” (2013) published by The Economist Magazine’s Intelligence Unit. In this report an attempt was made to look for “best practices” – approaches that systematically lead to higher quality education thereby enabling policy makers and practitioners in other countries to simply “copy and paste” and work towards educational reforms that have proven effective in raising educational achievement in some countries. The surprising conclusion from this report, however, is that almost no practices were found that could be implemented globally. The authors explain that while the inputs to education – like money, school choice, years in school, and teacher-pupil ratio’s – can be identified; and outputs can be compared looking at ranking systems on measures of literacy, numeracy, and educational attainment; what happens between input and output is very much a local issue. They describe this country-specific process as a “black box”, implying that there is no systematic way to describe how the differences in the teaching/learning process transforms inputs into outputs.

We will show that well-researched systematic differences in value preferences across countries are vital for understanding the way teaching/learning processes are handled. Using the seminal work of Geert Hofstede on cultural differences, we will show that the five culture dimensions he found provides an analytical tool for understanding the local differences in educational policy and teaching methods in school systems. Based on this cross-cultural framework, we ask a fundamental question: is it possible to find best practices that work worldwide in spite of these value differences?

In short this article attempts to:
Summarize recent rankings of educational performance across countries and the influence of culture on these ranking systems.

- Describe what culture is and how it influences the way we educate and learn.
- Analyze "best practices", i.e. can we export practices across cultures. Can we learn from each other while being so different?
- Enlarge the discussion of some key issues in education by incorporating a cultural perspective.

I. Ranking educational systems worldwide

In the field of education there are several systems used to compare educational quality across countries, including: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS); Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS); and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).(*1) These approaches focus on benchmarking the factors leading to achievement and, more specifically, trying to identify what specific factors differentiate the highest achievers. As professor Schleicher (OECD) (*2) says: “education debates are no longer about the improvement by national standards. Best performing countries now set the tone”.

Recently the Economist Intelligence Unit of the Economist Magazine published a new ranking system: the Learning Curve Data Bank LCDB: country performance in education.(*3) This report outlines the main findings from a large body of internationally comparable education data. In the report they provide an overall ranking (column 1) by comparing cognitive skills attainment (column 2) which combines the results from the PIRLS, TIMMS and Pisa systems, and scores of countries on the highest degree of education individuals complete: “educational attainment” (column 3) (*4).

The top 20 countries are shown below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Overall score</th>
<th>Cognitive Skills</th>
<th>Educational attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>[Rank 1]1.26</td>
<td>[Rank 1]1.50</td>
<td>[Rank 3]0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>[Rank 2]1.23</td>
<td>[Rank 4]1.24</td>
<td>[Rank 1]1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong-China</td>
<td>[Rank 3]0.90</td>
<td>[Rank 3]1.26</td>
<td>[Rank 17]0.20*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>[Rank 4]0.89</td>
<td>[Rank 5]1.04</td>
<td>[Rank 8]0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>[Rank 5]0.84</td>
<td>[Rank 2]1.39</td>
<td>[Rank 33]-0.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>[Rank 6]0.60</td>
<td>[Rank 12]0.50</td>
<td>[Rank 2]0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>[Rank 7]0.59</td>
<td>[Rank 7]0.72</td>
<td>[Rank 11]0.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>[Rank 8]0.56</td>
<td>[Rank 9]0.61</td>
<td>[Rank 9]0.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>[Rank 9]0.55</td>
<td>[Rank 8]0.71</td>
<td>[Rank 13]0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>[Rank 10]0.54</td>
<td>[Rank 6]0.72</td>
<td>[Rank 20]0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>[Rank 11]0.53</td>
<td>[Rank 16]0.42</td>
<td>[Rank 5]0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>[Rank 12]0.50</td>
<td>[Rank 17]0.41</td>
<td>[Rank 6]0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>[Rank 13]0.46</td>
<td>[Rank 11]0.54</td>
<td>[Rank 12]0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>[Rank 14]0.43</td>
<td>[Rank 20]0.26</td>
<td>[Rank 4]0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>[Rank 15]0.41</td>
<td>[Rank 10]0.56</td>
<td>[Rank 23]0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>[Rank 16]0.35</td>
<td>[Rank 15]0.43</td>
<td>[Rank 17]0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>[Rank 17]0.35</td>
<td>[Rank 14]0.44</td>
<td>[Rank 21]0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>[Rank 18]0.33</td>
<td>[Rank 13]0.46</td>
<td>[Rank 25]0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>[Rank 19]0.32</td>
<td>[Rank 25]0.16</td>
<td>[Rank 7]0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>[Rank 20]0.26</td>
<td>[Rank 19]0.29</td>
<td>[Rank 19]0.20*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most interesting result of the analyses, as summarized in this report, is "how few correlations there are". In order to explain this result, one observation is that in any number of surveys researchers measure what is measurable. Usually inputs are identified more than
outputs because they are simpler and easier to measure. However, the “softer” inputs of education tend to be left out. The authors conclude: “These inputs, however can be crucial, such as the cultural context in which education occurs.” The difficulty the writers admit is: “how do you disentangle deeply embedded cultural values from social and educational policies?” The quality and approach of teachers plays a big role in this. Teachers are key transmitters of cultural values. Much research has focused on: “what education systems can do to ensure that they find teachers who add value”. But even here the report concludes that “the rules tend to be country specific.”

The how and what of education is very much connected to the culture of the country at hand. A lot of different ideas exist about the role and position of the teacher as well as expectations around the “right” behavior of students. These key elements again are highly linked to cultural values. In the Economist report culture is discussed only in a very generic way. Education remains, in the words of The Economist, “a black box (*5) in which inputs are turned into outputs in ways that are difficult to predict or quantify consistently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Input ----&gt;</th>
<th>? ----&gt; Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spending per pupil</td>
<td>PIRLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class size</td>
<td>TIMMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>start age</td>
<td>PISA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school choice</td>
<td>Graduation rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>years in school</td>
<td>Literacy, employment, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the black box above, we believe that it can be opened. *We will outline how culture can be used as the key.* Culture, however, is a vague term and is used in very different ways.
II. What is culture? How does culture influence the learning process?

a. About culture: the research of Geert Hofstede

We will first delve a little bit deeper in this notion of "culture". As a starting point we take the results of the scientific research by professor Geert Hofstede. Hofstede is widely recognized as the one who did the most fundamental research on cultural differences(6,7,8,9). He defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others". Hofstede carried out fundamental research into the dominant values of countries and the way in which they influence behavior in organizations. Original data were based on an extensive IBM database for which 116,000 questionnaires were used in 72 countries and in 20 languages.

The results of his research were validated against about 40 cross-cultural studies from a variety of disciplines. Analyzing his data, Hofstede found five value clusters (or "dimensions") being the most fundamental in understanding and explaining the differences in answers to the single questions in his questionnaires. He measured the differences and calculated scores for 56 countries on these 5 dimensions. Later research, partly done by others have extended this to about a 100 countries. The combined scores for each country explain variations in behavior of people and organizations. The scores indicate the relative differences between cultures.

The five dimensions of national culture identified by Hofstede are:

- Power Distance Index (PDI)
- Individualism vs. collectivism (IDV)
- Masculinity vs. femininity (MAS)
- Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)
- Long Term Orientation (LTO)

Country scores on each dimension are ranked from low to high, i.e. from 0 to 100. Please note that the score of a country is not meant to imply that everyone in a particular society is programmed in exactly the same way. There are considerable individual differences. But when fundamental values of various societies are compared, 'majority preferences' are found to exist, which occur again and again as a result of the way children are brought up by their parents and the educational system. And when we
examine how societies organize themselves, these majority preferences turn out to have a modifying influence at all levels. They have an influence on the ways teacher and students are expected to behave. Even the ideas of the objectives of education are stated in different ways. For example in some countries the objective of education is: to develop a critical mind, which in other cultures is viewed as absurd. In these countries students are supposed to try to learn as much as possible from the older generation and only when you are fully initiated you may communicate to have ideas of yourself.

III. The five dimensions and their influence on Education

a. Power Distance Index (PDI)

**Power distance** is the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept that power is distributed unequally. In high power-distance cultures everybody has his/her rightful place in society. Old age is respected, and status is important. In low power-distance cultures people try to look younger and powerful people try to look less powerful. People in countries like the US, Canada, the UK, all Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands score low on the power-distance index and are more likely to accept ideas like empowerment, matrix management and flat organizations. Business schools around the world tend to base their teachings on low power-distance values. Yet, most countries in the world have a high power-distance index.
Implications of Power Distance on Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student centered. <em>Premium on initiative</em></td>
<td>Teacher centered. <em>Premium on order</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expects student to initiate communication</td>
<td>Student expects teacher to initiate communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expects students to find own paths</td>
<td>Student expects teacher to outline paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students allowed to contradict &amp; criticize</td>
<td>Teacher never contradicted nor criticized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of learning is a function the amount of two-way communication</td>
<td>Effectiveness of learning is a function of the excellence of teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)

In **individualistic** cultures, like almost all the rich Western countries, people look after themselves and their immediate family only; in **collectivist** cultures like Asia and Africa people belong to "in-groups" who look after them in exchange for loyalty. In individualist cultures, values are in the person, whereas in collectivist cultures, identity is based on the social network to which one belongs. In individualist cultures there is more explicit, verbal communication. In collectivist cultures communication is more implicit.

Collectivism vs Individualism (IDV) scores top 20 ranking countries

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>IDV Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Collectivist ← IDV → Individualist
### Implications of Collectivism vs. Individualism on Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students only speak up when called on by the teacher</td>
<td>Students speak up in response to general invitation by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals only speak up in small groups</td>
<td>Individuals will speak up in large groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times</td>
<td>Confrontation and challenge in learning situations can be brought into the open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither teacher nor student should ever be made to lose face</td>
<td>“Face consciousness” is weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers expected to give preferential treatment to some, e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or recommendation</td>
<td>Teachers expected to be strictly impartial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)

**In masculine** cultures like USA, UK, Germany, Japan and Italy the dominant values are achievement and success. The dominant values in **feminine** cultures are consensus seeking, caring for others and quality of life. Sympathy is for the underdog. People try to avoid situations distinguishing clear winners and losers. In masculine cultures performance and achievement are important. The sympathy is for the winners. Status is important to show success. Feminine cultures like the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands have a people orientation. Small is beautiful and status is not so important.
Implications of Femininity vs. Masculinity on Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use average students as norm</td>
<td>Teachers use best students as norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System rewards students’ social adaptation</td>
<td>System rewards academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s failure in school a relatively minor accident</td>
<td>Student’s failure in school a severe blow to student self image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students try to behave modestly</td>
<td>students try to make themselves visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students choose subjects out of interest</td>
<td>Students choose subjects for career reasons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

Uncertainty avoidance (or uncertainty control) stands for the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity. In cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance, people have a strong emotional need for rules and formality to structure life. The way people think and learn is influenced by this value. In High UAI countries like Korea, Germany, Russia, France, Iran and Brasil, the need is to know about what people in the past and present already said about a certain subject. It is a pre-requisite for “competence.” This results in high status of experts, as opposed to weak uncertainty-avoidance cultures, like the UK, the USA, and Denmark in which the views of practitioners are more highly respected.
Implications of Uncertainty Avoidance on Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students comfortable in Unstructured learning situations:</td>
<td>Students comfortable in structured learning situations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broad assignments</td>
<td>• Precise instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No timetables</td>
<td>• Detailed assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strict timetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers allowed to say “I don’t know”</td>
<td>Teachers expected to have all the answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers use plain language</td>
<td>Good teachers use academic language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students rewarded for innovative approaches</td>
<td>Students rewarded for accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers view intellectual disagreement as stimulating</td>
<td>Teachers view intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

e. Long Term Orientation (LTO)

The last element of culture is the Long Term Orientation which is the extent to which a society exhibits a future-orientated perspective rather than a near term point of view. Low scoring countries like the USA and West European countries are usually those under the influence of monotheistic religious systems, such as the Christian, Islamic or Jewish systems. People in these countries believe there is an absolute and indivisible truth. In high scoring
countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, for example those practicing Buddhism, Shintoism or Hinduism, people believe truth depends on time, context and situation.

Long Term Orientation (LTO) scores top 20 ranking countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on asking “Why”?</td>
<td>Focus on asking “How”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students want to find the one and only solution</td>
<td>Different answers possible. “Many truths”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong emphasis on education as obligation to parents and society</td>
<td>Perseverance rated as the most important virtue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. Best practices: can we learn from each other?

a. Best practices

In analyzing the results of educational measures, a term being used frequently in the last few years is “best practices”. As can now be understood from the framework just explained, even this term and approach for country comparison is culturally bound. Focus on
"best practices" is a very Anglo-Saxon approach. All Anglo Saxon cultures score low on Uncertainty Avoidance. This means that the focus is not on theoretical approaches and expert knowledge but on practices and the experience of practitioners, and the thinking style is inductive. As a consequence handbooks on all subjects in these cultures begin with a description of cases taken from practice. These cases are analyzed and lead to a statement about best practices. This approach values practical application over "academic" research.

This Anglo Saxon brand of inductive reasoning can be further understood by adding the influence of a high score on MAS: strong action- and achievement orientation. This way of thinking is called pragmatism. Pragmatists are unwilling to be involved in too much speculation on what is going on in the minds of people. Abstract argumentation is something for "academics." What counts is whether specific actions lead to desired observable behavior: “the proof of the pudding is in the eating.” ‘If we can work out what’s in the box – fine. It may help. If not – we’ll just do what seems to work. Even if we do work out what’s in the box and it doesn’t work – we’ll do something else.’

In contrast, deductive thinking is the norm in high UAI cultures. These cultures try first to get an understanding of what is known about a subject. The first step is always to look into what others, especially experts from the past and the present, have already said on a subject. Then a philosophy or "the principles of..." (management, leadership, marketing, education) can be formulated. The last step is application. In this approach philosophy and thinking is more highly regarded than the actions of practitioners that follow. As a result, people of these cultures experience “best practices” as “superficial.” They are more interested in the thinking that led to successful approaches.
b. Can we learn from another culture?

In the Economist report professor Stecher was quoted: "Schools are both recipients and creators of cultural patterns: over the long term they help to shape norms for the next generation". (2) Yes, they are recipients, but are also creators. And the question is if it is possible to create a "culture free" best school system which other countries can simply "copy and paste" what has been successful in another country?

The answer is that cultural values are deeply rooted and are very consistent over time. The ‘collective programming of the mind’ starts from the moment children are born. They learn from their parents to obey absolutely or to speak up. This programming continues at school as was described above how the five dimensions apply to learning situations. Are students expected to find their own path and are they allowed to contradict the teacher? Are they expected to compete with each other in class? This all depends on the country culture. It is this “context” that needs to be taken into account when looking at what has been successful in one country and whether or how those approaches can be applied to another country. It is shortsighted to expect countries to be effective in introducing new ideas if these ideas are not likely to fit in the context of their values.

These comments are not suggesting that we cannot learn from others. Of course we should keep an open mind about what is happening elsewhere. But it is naïve to think that a best practices in a certain specific culture can be automatically copied and pasted in another culture with different basic preferences. What is needed is a way to “translate” from one value system to another to make it work. Professionals working in an international environment should understand the different expectations of colleagues and students in the teaching-learning process. They should be trained to understand and to apply the different “rules of the game” according to the different norms of the society at hand.

V. Analyzing some key issues in education, within a cultural framework

The conclusion of “The learning curve” is that two issues were globally recognized as the core of understanding educational quality:

a. a supportive culture for education and
b. the need for a high status of teachers.
These two features of education are highly influenced by culture and therefore implemented in different ways in different countries. Some examples are provided below.

a. Supportive culture for education

In explaining the success of Korea and Finland, The Economist concludes that in both these countries there is a supportive culture for education. However, what translates as "support" is very different in these two situations. In the first instance, Korea is a high power distance country, where people accept top down policy decisions by a government. In fact it is seen as the task and privilege of a government. For example, South Korea made a "top-down" decision dating back 30 years to make the country more competitive in the global market. To do so they focused on the education of the future workforce. A lot of resources were allocated to make use of the full available potential. By comparison, low power distance cultures such as Finland, have a different approach to education policy. Because of the low PDI rating, power is decentralized in these cultures, so it is a necessity to involve all the stakeholders and to approach influencing from the bottom up..

b. High status of teachers

Another area where culture plays an essential role in defining the how and what of "status." For instance, in Finland a critical moment in education policy occurred when the Government decided that teachers should only be recruited from Universities to give the profession "high status." In other cultures an academic credential is not as highly valued. For example, in a May 2013 speech by the education secretary in the UK, Mr. Gove told his audience that he wants “…to sweep away the whole structure that has underpinned schools since the war. Schools themselves should conduct research into what produces great teaching and learning, rather than leaving such studies to universities, which he believes have offered little of practical value in terms of improving schools. Leaders should be trained within schools rather than being sent away to acquire abstract diplomas. Teachers should equally be trained within the schools themselves, rather than learning how to teach in university education departments. “(*10) Here we see credibility and status of academics conferred very differently between Finland, a country scoring 59 on UAI, and the UK, which scores 35.
VI Some other issues discussed in “The Learning Curve”

a. Autonomy of schools, testing and accountability

One of the important issues discussed in “The learning curve” is about giving schools autonomy in the teaching process while also making them more accountable for achieving results. ”Give the schools back to the professional” is the slogan. The secretary of education in the UK, Mr Gove in his May 2013 speech was promoting his idea. As one newspaper wrote: “No education secretary in the modern era has matched his vision of a largely autonomous education system in which individual schools, heads and teachers are given back their independence and creativity. Only by releasing dynamism in this way does he believe that British schools will be able to compete with the best in Shanghai, Singapore and Scandinavia” (*10). The autonomy he believes should be accompanied by accountability. To be able to hold teachers accountable there is a need for testing to see if the students are getting the quality they deserve.

In some countries the authorities try to establish and administer standardized test to all students. In the US as a result of the Bush initiative “no one left behind” in school year 2013/14 more than one million students in 22 states are expected to take the tests, in an effort to help develop a national exam modeled on the new standards, known as the Common Core. The big concern with this approach is whether this leads to “teaching to the test”. In other words, does the pressure coming from showing improvements through these tests cause teachers and students to discuss and study what is necessary to pass these tests? There are already warnings about this. In June 2013 the “Humanities Committee” a group of concerned educators in the USA sounded an alarm. “We are preparing students to be employable,” said Eduardo J. Padrón, a commission member. But without the humanities and social sciences, he added, “they are missing something important.” “People talk about the humanities and social sciences as if they are a waste of time,” said Richard H. Brodhead, the president of Duke University and a co-chairman of the commission. “But this facile negativism forgets that many of the country’s most successful and creative people had exactly this kind of education.” (*11)

It is not surprising that this "reductionist" approach is common in masculine countries where the motivation to compete and to achieve is high. In more feminine countries, however, the
focus on "quality of life" prevents schools from only offering subjects that are directly related to measurable results that lead to employability. These countries retain an emphasis on a broader curriculum, that retains the humanities, arts and social sciences as essential elements of education and preparation for adult life.

Again: autonomy and testing are very much cultural issues. Autonomy, the bottom up approach, is acceptable only in Low Power Distance cultures. Like empowerment in management theories it implies that authorities/managers dare to give the power to the lowest possible level without too many instructions and structural limits, also implies a low score for UAI. This combination, low PDI and low UAI, is in principle only found in the Anglo-Saxon countries, in Scandinavia and the Netherlands. This educational strategy can be adapted to fit other countries like Germany, Austria, Hungary and the Czech Republic, by adding more explicit rules and procedures when the autonomy is given. In High power distance cultures, empowerment and autonomy is not impossible, but it must take the form of clearly-defined delegation. The level of autonomy would be clearly defined and limited within a very strict set of mandates. If things happen that are not foreseen by their mandate, schools would not be allowed to act independently to respond to the new situation. They would be required to go back up the chain of authority and ask for instructions first.

Standardized tests and quantifiable objectives with consequences for pass/fail decisions and visible ranking is an approach suited to cultures with the masculine thinking style. In other cultures people are more hesitant to focus so heavily on achieving top scores and comparing students and schools on standardized tests. Finland, for example, with the top ranking in TLC, is a highly feminine country and does not use this kind of highly competitive orientation. Pasi Sahlberg, director general of the Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation (CIMO) in Finland has strong opinions on why Finland stands out in comparison with countries like the USA: “It [the education system] is run like a marketplace rather than a professional place,” Sahlberg says that five aspects of the Finnish system sets it apart. At the forefront, the Finnish system was built without trying to be number one. He emphasized that competition was never part of the system. Instead the focus has aimed at creating good schools for all children. Sahlberg points out that Finland’s approach is emphasizing collaboration instead of competition. The impact of competition has resulted in standardization and created immense expectations including that "everyone learn the same
and in the same way.” Instead, Finland has stressed personalization of education – where every school sets its own standards based on a national framework. He said this approach created a system where a student’s only competitor is him or herself. A direct result of standards in tests in countries like America is increased focus on accountability, particularly teachers. “Accountability is what’s left when responsibility is taken away,” he said. In Finland, the teaching profession operates as a trust-based responsibility. (*12)

Beyond the lack of emphasis on competition, Finland also has a culture that truly values education. The Finnish also trust public education. It is the second most trusted institutions in the country, next to police, earning 89 percent. This is in stark contrast to the United States, Sahlberg asserts, where only 29 percent trust the public education system. A fairly equal wealth distribution within Finland also impacts the education system. As a result, Finland continues to do well in many areas beyond education, like women’s empowerment, technological advances, child well-being, and prosperity.

Conclusion: the discussions on autonomy of schools, testing, and accountability is very much “loaded” with culture. What is seen as desirable in one culture is seen as unwanted in another.

b. Performance levels in East Asian countries. Strengths and weaknesses

Another interesting result to analyze from a cultural perspective is the successful performance of students in East Asian countries. The cultural side of this result can be understood by the 5th Dimension of culture LTO: the strong emphasis on education as obligation to parents and society:

Analysis of their education systems has pointed out however that these are steeped in discipline, rote learning and obsessive test preparation. Many educators say however that this strength is in education is also a weakness. In their opinion the education system is too test-oriented, schools stifle creativity and parental pressures often deprive children of the joys of childhood.

Jiang Xueqin, a deputy principal at Peking University High School in Beijing said in The Wall Street Journal shortly after test results were announced: “Chinese schools emphasized
testing too much, and produced students who lacked curiosity and the ability to think critically or independently”. (13)

As a result critics like Jiang Xueqin feel that “Chinese schools are very good at preparing their students for standardized tests. But for the same reason they fail to prepare them for higher education and the knowledge economy.”

One more issue of concern is that the stress to succeed makes that suicide rates among students are very high in countries like South Korea, China and Japan.

Mr. Zhang Chun from the Nanjing Suicide Rescue Hotline said: "Children nowadays are under too much pressure from middle school to high school. They don't have much time to go out and experience being in society. They have no other way of learning, and have no way of blowing off steam". (14)

In South Korea the most common cause of youth suicide is pressure related to the College Scholastic Ability Test.

VII Conclusion

We have shown that well researched systematic differences in value preferences per country are fundamental in understanding the way the teaching learning processes are handled. The 5 culture dimensions found by Geert Hofstede provide an analytical tool for understanding the local differences in the educational policy and school systems.

This brings us to conclude that:

1. A truly international approach to ranking countries on education should take cultural differences into account before “benchmarking” and describing the characteristics of good school systems and good teachers.

2. We can and should learn from each other. But we should also understand that to make a "best practice" work requires translation to a different culture / value system. Example: Finland is seen by some American educationalists as the example of how to improve the educational system. Analyzing the differences Pahlberg (12) concluded that the big difference is that in the USA the driving factor is competition while in Finland it is cooperation. This is not a coincidence, something that can be changed easily. No it is a
basic cultural difference between Masculine cultures and Feminine cultures. To be effective in looking for improvement this difference should be a leading element in the planning of change. (see 16)

The same applies to the discussion on the autonomy of schools. In high power distance countries (by far the majority of countries in the world) Autonomy will only be possible in a clearly defined and limited mandate that is given by the central power holders. It should be defined top down.

3. The 5 dimensions of culture provide a guideline for the translation

4. The quality of teachers is related to how country cultures are defining the role of teachers in the education process. It is a matter of effectiveness to accept this and to understand that results can be obtained in different ways. Look at the differences between the first two countries in the ranking system Finland and South Korea:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student centered education</td>
<td>Teacher centered education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of learning related to amount of two-way communication</td>
<td>Effectiveness of learning related to excellence of teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expects students take initiative</td>
<td>Students expect initiative from teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expects students find their own path</td>
<td>Students expect teacher to outline paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good teacher uses plain language</td>
<td>A good teacher uses academic language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as stimulating</td>
<td>Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face consciousness weak</td>
<td>Neither teacher nor student should ever be made to lose face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Planning and implementation of change in the educational field should take the country culture into account. For instance in high PDI countries it should be done top down, committing first the top of the educational field. In low PDI countries with a high score on UAI it is a must to commit first the recognized experts in the field, while in countries with low PDI and Feminity all stake holders must be involved from scratch.

6. About the authors (*17)

Huib Wursten (huib@itim.org)
Until 2007 Huib was co-owner and MD of the Institute for Training in Intercultural management ITIM. He is experienced in translating international and global strategies and policies into practical consequences for management. He has been working in this field since 1989 with Fortune 1000 companies, as well as with public and political organizations in 85 countries in all continents.

Carel Jacobs (carel@itim.org)
Carel is senior consultant/trainer for ITIM in The Netherlands and is Certification Agent for the Educational sector of the Hofstede Centre. After a career as MD of an international learning company and project manager in international business projects he concentrated on intercultural management in both the public and private sector in the area of education, organization development and management of change.

References

1. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international study of reading achievement in fourth graders. It is conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). "It is designed to measure children’s reading literacy achievement, to provide a baseline for future studies of trends in achievement, and to gather information about children’s home and school experiences in learning to read."

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the OECD in member and non-member nations of 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic
performance on mathematics, science, and reading. It was first performed in 2000 and then repeated every three years. It is done with view to improving education policies and outcomes. The data has increasingly been used both to assess the impact of education quality on incomes and growth and for understanding what causes differences in achievement across nations.

The **Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)** is an international assessment of the mathematics and science knowledge of 4th and 8th grader students around the world. TIMSS was developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to allow participating nations to compare students' educational achievement across borders.

2. As quoted in the LCDB. See 3.

3. The **Learning Curve Data Bank (LCDB)** – created by the Economist Intelligence Unit as part of the broader Learning Curve programme – is an effort to advance study in this area. It is purpose-built, substantial collection of data which includes more than 60 comparative indicators gathered from over 50 countries. Many of these indicators in turn rely on multiple pieces of information, so that, even with some inevitable gaps, the LCDB encompasses over 2,000 individual data points. These go well beyond traditional education metrics, such as teacher-student ratios and various spending metrics, to cover a broad range of educational inputs and possible outputs, from the degree to which parents demand good results of schools to the proportion of adults who end up in jail.

4. **Educational attainment** is a term commonly used by statisticians to refer to the highest degree of education an individual has completed

5. **Black box:**

In philosophy and psychology, the school of behaviorism sees the human mind as a black box. The mind cannot be opened to "look inside" and see how it works. What is possible is to guess how it works based on what happens when something is done to it (input), and what occurs as a result of that (output). The **black box theory of consciousness**, states that the mind is fully understood once the inputs and outputs are well defined and generally couples this with a radical skepticism regarding the possibility of ever successfully describing the underlying structure, mechanism, and dynamics of the mind
6. **Geert Hofstede**, (2 October 1928) is an influential Dutch researcher in the field of organizational studies. He played a major role in developing a systematic framework for assessing and differentiating national cultures and organizational cultures. His studies demonstrated that there are national values that influence behavior of societies and organizations.

He is considered to be one of the 20 most influential business thinkers. See below

![The Top 20
The most influential business thinkers, according to a Wall Street Journal ranking](image)


9. **Hofstede, Geert H.** (2001) Culture's Consequences. Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations (Sage publications)

10. **The Telegraph.** Monday 24 June 2013. Michael Gove is winning the hearts of state heads. By Anthony Seldon


12. **Askwith Forum on April 23, 2013.** Pasi Sahlberg, director general of the Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation (CIMO) in Finland. 5.
http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news-impact/2013/04/sahlberg-advocates-for-finnish-way-at-askwith-forum/#ixzz2RjorW06m

13. **The Test Chinese Schools Still Fail.** High scores for Shanghai's 15-year-olds are actually a sign of weakness. The Wall Street Journal 8 dec. 2010


15. **Education for all. The quality Imperative.** EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005

Published in 2004 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP


17. We are grateful for the editing suggestions of Ze’eva Cohen, Dinah Nieburg and Tom Fadrhonc

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### Implications of Power Distance on Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student centered. <em>Premium on initiative</em></td>
<td>Teacher centered. <em>Premium on order</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expects student to initiate communication</td>
<td>Student expects teacher to initiate communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expects students to find own paths</td>
<td>Student expects teacher to outline paths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students allowed to contradict &amp; criticize</td>
<td>Teacher never contradicted nor criticized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of learning is a function the amount of two-way communication</td>
<td>Effectiveness of learning is a function of the excellence of teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the box below, illustrate how this dimension of culture might come into play in PAL.

1. Describe 3+ ways PAL sessions can accommodate students who vary in this dimension.

2. In your personal experience, where do students most often fall in this dimension?
In the box below, illustrate how this dimension of culture might come into play in PAL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collectivist</th>
<th>Individualist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students only speak up when called on by the teacher</td>
<td>Students speak up in response to general invitation by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals only speak up in small groups</td>
<td>Individuals will speak up in large groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times</td>
<td>Confrontation and challenge in learning situations can be brought into the open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither teacher nor student should ever be made to lose face</td>
<td>“Face consciousness” is weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers expected to give preferential treatment to some, e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or recommendation</td>
<td>Teachers expected to be strictly impartial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Describe 3+ ways PAL sessions can accommodate students who vary in this dimension.

4. In your personal experience, where do students most often fall in this dimension?
In the box below, illustrate how this dimension of culture might come into play in PAL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use average students as norm</td>
<td>Teachers use best students as norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System rewards students’ social adaptation</td>
<td>System rewards academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s failure in school a relatively minor accident</td>
<td>Student’s failure in school a severe blow to student self image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students try to behave modestly</td>
<td>Students try to make themselves visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students choose subjects out of interest</td>
<td>Students choose subjects for career reasons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Describe 3+ ways PAL sessions can accommodate students who vary in this dimension.

6. In your personal experience, where do students most often fall in this dimension?
## Implications of Uncertainty Avoidance on Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students comfortable in Unstructured learning situations:</td>
<td>Students comfortable in structured learning situations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broad assignments</td>
<td>• Precise instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No timetables</td>
<td>• Detailed assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No strict timetables</td>
<td>• Strict timetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers allowed to say “I don’t know”</td>
<td>Teachers expected to have all the answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teachers use plain language</td>
<td>Good teachers use academic language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students rewarded for innovative approaches</td>
<td>Students rewarded for accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers view intellectual disagreement as stimulating</td>
<td>Teachers view intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the box below, illustrate how this dimension of culture might come into play in PAL.

7. Describe 3+ ways PAL sessions can accommodate students who vary in this dimension.

8. In your personal experience, where do students most often fall in this dimension?
## Implications of Long Term Orientation on Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on asking “Why”?</td>
<td>Focus on asking “How”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students want to find the one and only solution</td>
<td>Different answers possible. “Many thruths”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong emphasis on education as obligation to parents and society</td>
<td>Perseverance rated as the most important virtue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability rated as the most important virtue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the box below, illustrate how this dimension of culture might come into play in PAL.

9. Describe 3+ ways PAL sessions can accommodate students who vary in this dimension.

10. In your personal experience, where do students most often fall in this dimension?

Source:
Wursten, Huib and Jacobs, Carel, 2014; The impact of culture on education.
Communicating Cross-Culturally: What Teachers Should Know

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St. John's University (Queens, New York, USA)

This article looks at the need for teachers to be culturally responsive and competent as schools and classrooms become increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse. It highlights five points of cultural difference with which all teachers should be aware when teaching students of diverse backgrounds.

Introduction

English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing group of students in the United States today (Spellings, 2005). Today, one out of every nine students is learning English as a second language. That's about 5.4 million children—almost the population of Arizona, or Maryland, or Tennessee (Spellings, 2005). If this trend continues, current projections indicate that by the year 2030, 40% of all school-aged children in the United States will be speakers of a first language other than English (Duffey, 2004). Teacher demands and expectations today are far greater than they have ever been. But are classroom teachers adequately prepared to teach and interact with this culturally and linguistically diverse population? In classrooms where what is communicated, practiced, and perceived greatly affect and impact students, it is imperative that teachers learn how to effectively communicate cross-culturally in such diverse contexts.

If teachers are to become effective cross-cultural communicators, it is essential to understand the role that culture plays within the multi-cultural school setting. Lustig and Koester (2003) define culture as "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people." Similarly, Samovar and Porter (1991) explain culture as a medium that touches and alters all aspects of human life, including personality, how people express themselves (which includes displays of emotion), the way they think, how they move, and how problems are solved. Indeed, culture goes far beyond the climate, food, and clothing of a student's native country.

Culture, undoubtedly, is complex. It is multi-layered and multifaceted. Indeed, some have likened it to an iceberg of which only the top is visible while a massive part remains unobservable below the surface of the water. Others have compared culture to an onion with its many layers (Hofstede, 1991). As one layer is peeled, another layer lies beneath, waiting to be discovered. Both metaphors powerfully address the complexity of culture. In these complexities lies the challenge that teachers of ELLs face.

Cultural Competence in the Classroom

Competence in cross-cultural communication requires diving below the surface to see the rest of the iceberg, and it involves onion peeling, too: acquiring a corpus of deeper cultural information that might affect how a teacher instructs and how a student learns. While the iceberg and onion metaphors speak to the complex nature of culture, they also evoke an array of feelings. Running into an iceberg can cause an unexpected jolt, and an onion, as it is peeled, can cause the eyes to tear; likewise—to go from metaphor to analogy—the process of becoming culturally competent also comes with new challenges and experiences that might, initially at least, surprise, shock, or even offend. In the classroom, being culturally competent also involves an understanding of how cultures differ under the surface and how cultures respond differently to similar situations.
Acquiring cultural competence is a gradual process. It is achieved only after many observations, experiences, and interactions in the classroom and playground, with parents and with peers. However, the process can begin with the knowledge and understanding of six basic cultural differences that teachers are likely to encounter in the culturally diverse classroom. Familiarity with these differences will begin to aid teachers in understanding the complexity of teaching diverse groups of students.

1. Ways of Knowing

How do cultures come to acquire information? In some cultures, information is gathered through intensive research in libraries and on the Internet—for example, in the United States. These cultures appreciate evidence that can be measured and documented through such media.

On the other hand, other cultures acquire information through "non-academic" sources—for example, through elders, nature, spirits, or symbols. Some cultures do not have the same quantity and quality of experience with books or similar forms of research. These cultures may place greater value on information and knowledge acquired through oral tradition.

2. Ways of Solving Problems

Cultures have different ways of solving problems. It is surprising that given the same set of problems and circumstances, cultures can arrive at very different solutions. Cultures reason differently and arrive at solutions based on their distinctive values, philosophy and beliefs. One example is the variety of responses that members of different cultures provide to the following question:

Suppose you are on a boat with your mother, your spouse and your child. Suddenly, the boat begins to sink. You determine that you can only save one of the other passengers. Whom do you save?

According to survey results, 60% of Americans save their spouse, 40% save their children. The reasons typically offered run along these lines:

- Save Spouse: "My spouse is my partner for life and I can have more children."
- Save Child: "Children represent the future, so it is vital to protect them first. Probably, my spouse would support this decision."

However, among Asian cultures, or Americans of recent Asian descent, nearly 100% of respondents state that they would save the mother. The rationale I have heard offered is this:

- Save Mother: "My mother gave me life; I owe her my life. I can marry again; I can have more children, but I cannot replace my mother or otherwise repay the debt I owe her." (Texin, 2002).

3. Ways of Communicating Non-verbally

Cultures have different ways of communicating non-verbally, and it is crucial for teachers to be aware of these differences. In a class that is culturally diverse, any or all of the following might be observed in the classroom: children who will not make direct eye contact when talking to a teacher, because to do so would show lack of respect in their culture; children who smile not because they are happy but because they are embarrassed or do not understand and are afraid to ask questions; others who rarely smile, such as students from Korea: "In Korean culture, smiling signals shallowness and thoughtlessness. The Korean attitude toward smiling is expressed in the proverb, "the man who smiles a lot is not a real man"" (Dresser, 1996).

When teachers begin to recognize that cultures have different ways of communicating non-verbally, they will understand their ELL students better and be less likely to be offended or to misinterpret non-verbal clues to emotional, cognitive, or attitudinal states.
4. Ways of Learning

Generally speaking, different cultures also learn in different ways. In the United States students often work in groups and do collaborative activities in which they learn from one another. Classrooms in such cases can be student-centered, with the teacher as facilitator. In some cultures, however, the teacher is always the center of class activities, the sole authority figure. Sometimes, students do not even dare to ask questions, as to do so would challenge the teacher’s authority. There are no collaborative activities in such classrooms, and students are required to memorize pages and pages of information that they subsequently restate on written tests.

5. Ways of Dealing with Conflict

Conflict is a fact of life. It is in observing how people deal with and react to conflicts that we see clear differences between cultures. Some cultures view conflict as a positive thing, while others view it as something to be avoided. In the United States, conflict is not usually desirable; nonetheless, conventional wisdom in this country encourages individuals to deal directly with conflicts when they do arise. In fact, face-to-face encounters are usually suggested as the way to work through whatever problems exist.

By contrast, in many Asian countries, open conflict is experienced as embarrassing or demeaning. As a rule, these cultures hold that differences are best worked out quietly. Thus, written exchanges might be preferred over face-to-face encounters as a means of conflict resolution (Dupraw and Axner, 1997).

6. Ways of Using Symbols

In the multicultural school setting, symbols that are unique to various cultures should be correctly understood and interpreted. Otherwise, problems can arise. One case in point occurred in an elementary school in New York City. A math teacher asked her students to embellish their math portfolios by drawing pictures to accompany them. She was incensed when she saw her young student from India drawing what she thought was a swastika. Furious, she took the student’s "artwork" and ripped it in half in front of the whole class! Subsequently, she learned from another teacher at the school, a Hindu, that what had looked to her like a swastika was actually a sacred symbol of wisdom that Hindus throughout the world have used for thousands of years!

Discussion

The changing demographics of classrooms in the United States make it incumbent upon us as teachers to know our students’ cultures. In order to improve our cross-cultural interactions, teachers must learn not just the basic facts but even important nuances of their students’ cultures (Hodgkinson, 1991). There are many challenges in achieving cross-cultural communication. However, the more teachers learn about their students of diverse backgrounds, the better they become as cross-cultural communicators and the more likely they will be to contribute to optimal student learning outcomes. Banks concurs: "If teachers are to increase learning opportunities for all students, they must be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning" (Banks et al., 2001).

Yet cultural contexts are not easy to understand. In fact, such an understanding can often be reached only if teachers begin by practicing cross-cultural communication. The following are suggestions that teachers might find useful in increasing their competence in cross-cultural communication, thus allowing them to learn from culturally diverse members of the school community:

- Build relationships with students and their parents -- Relationships built on trust go a long way. Students must feel that they belong and are accepted. Politeness, friendliness, kindness, fairness, respect and empathy are important factors in establishing a sound teacher-student relationship.
Listen empathetically -- Teachers must listen actively and carefully to their students, putting themselves in their students' places and learning to read between cultural lines. Teachers might also listen to their students' conversations with their classmates. The things they talk about and ask teachers to discuss and explain are the areas that concern them the most.

Look for cultural interpreters in school or in the community who can serve as resources in assisting teachers to add to their cultural funds of knowledge. Teachers can ask such interpreters cultural questions and share with them their cultural concerns.

Take advantage of available resources: books, articles, films, music, audio recordings, and a variety of material from the Internet that might aid teachers in learning more about their students' cultures.

Conclusion

In the United States, with so much cultural mixing, teachers no longer have a choice as to whether they want to interact with diversity or not. They must become cross-culturally competent. To become cross-culturally competent in the classroom teachers must understand important ways in which cultures differ and how this affects the ways in which their students behave. Through studying the cultural backgrounds of their students, teachers can learn to avoid some of the problems that surface each day.

Living in a global society, teachers are called upon to instruct and work with students with very different ethnicities and beliefs from those to which they have been accustomed. Therefore, it is vital that teachers continuously educate themselves, discovering all that they can about their students and their backgrounds. In the process of developing their cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills, the five cross-cultural points of comparison and the techniques for expanding cultural knowledge discussed above can provide important guidelines for teachers. Ultimately, such an approach should help teachers to understand and respect diverse students and to guide these students more effectively toward academic and personal success and fulfillment.

References
