Culture has arrived in the classroom! Not the kind of "culture" we used to talk about, i.e., the niceties of one's social group which, when properly executed or enjoyed, made you appear just a little higher on the social ladder. Rather, we are becoming aware of our culture versus other cultures. Culture learning and culture teaching are very popular subjects of discussion, and federal funds are making the discussions and studies more and more possible in the United States.

However, even though culture is a popular subject, and many of us have been involved in attempts at culture learning or culture teaching and cross-cultural orientation programs in either a multicultural, bicultural, or pluralistic society — all of these terms have been so freely used in the last decade — many of us find ourselves lost as to exactly what we should be doing and how we should go about doing it.

**BARRIERS TO CULTURE PERCEPTION**

**Definition**

The reason for this confusing state is due to several factors. First, anthropology, the field which has defined culture and concerned itself with the study of different cultures, is a relatively new field. Anthropologists and social scientists have not, as yet, been able to properly define what they mean by culture. I'm sure that most of us have looked up the definition of culture, and, I venture to guess, have come up with at least a dozen definitions. Actually, it is possible to uncover over 450 definitions of the word or concept of culture. Just to add to the dilemma, let me include my favorite definition. It is "a system of communications that makes a human society possible." This system of communication is an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behavior of human beings with their verbal and nonverbal systems of expressive behavior.

**Affective vs. Cognitive Learning**

A second difficulty is the affective nature of culture learning. As teachers, we all agree that everyone of us has learned the values and behavior patterns of his or her own culture. However, it is very difficult for us to express cognitively the elements or values of our culture and be able to place them in their respective order of priority. The reason for this being — we learn our language. We learned our language affectively; not cognitively. Our cognitive awareness came later in childhood when we started to school and were taught the different sentence structures and parts of speech. However, and unfortunately, we learned our culture but were never taught its structure and particular patterns. Most of us, in fact, do not become aware of specific patterns until we meet a person from another culture who becomes a mirror to our patterns of behavior and makes us realize that our system of reference to the world of reality is not the same and does not hold true for all people and all cultures. Thus, the affective nature of culture learning itself makes it extremely difficult to teach culture in a classroom situation where the cognitive aspect of learning takes priority.

Now realizing the need for culture learning and culture teaching, we become sincerely interested in first learning more about our own culture and then about other cultures. But how does one go about learning his own culture? Should he ask the members of his own society and look for answers among his own peers and colleagues, or should he look to the research that is available on the subject as seen by "experts." Unfortunately, experts in the field of culture learning and culture teaching have found it much easier to study another culture than their own.

**Ethnocentrism**

As we continue our quest for accurate cultural perception, we discover a third barrier which prevents us from completely understanding other cultures — ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture is the best and that his interpretation of the world of reality is the most reliable and truthful. It goes beyond the acceptable limits of ethnic pride.

Ethnocentrism begins to rear its ugly head as soon as two individuals of two different cultures begin to compare each other's cultural values. I am reminded of an occasion where I had the opportunity to give a lecture on ethno-
centrism to a group of participants at the East-West Center. At the end of the lecture, as I was walking with one of the participants outside the building, she suddenly noticed that the tree we were standing under was an avocado tree. Her discovery was immediately followed by the remark, “Oh, your avocados here in Hawaii are so small! Our avocados in my country are much bigger.” I reacted to her comment by saying, “But you see, this tree is in a public place. It’s not cared for, not watered, not fertilized, and that’s the reason for the small size of the avocados.” She brushed aside my remark very lightly and said, “We have many varieties of avocados in my country.” I followed by defending our avocados further with, “We’ve got different varieties of avocados in Hawaii, too. We have all sizes, all shapes and many different colors; and not only that, but they also grow wild in the mountains and are available to the public.” And then we simultaneously realized what was happening and began to laugh at our ethnocentric behavior. One was the lecturer on the subject and the other the listener who accepted the lecture and agreed to it. However, as soon as we left the harmonious academic scene, we found ourselves tangling in our world of ethnocentric reality — defending our own avocados!

Prejudice and Prejudgment
Another barrier to perceptive culture learning and teaching that we might mention is prejudice or prejudgment. We have stereotyped other cultures and we make sweeping generalizations about other cultural groups. These stereotypes and generalizations come from our very limited contact with the other cultural groups, and also from the limited information which we acquire about other cultures. For example, when we hear Africa or Alaska, what are some of the words or concepts which immediately come to our minds? What are the connotations? Are they really facts? Didn’t we learn about them in some remote part of our lives and then froze the information without bothering to update it?

It has often been said that if one is informed of the particular values of another culture, then he will become less prejudiced and more tolerant of another’s point-of-view and cultural patterns; however, prejudice is a very real and difficult element to deal with.

For example, many of us prejudge the food of other cultures using our own standards of sanitation, taste and ingredients as criteria for evaluation. We realize, at times, it is best not to inquire about the ingredients of a particular food; and, if we study the ingredients, the food becomes even less palatable. We prejudge the fare, regardless of the ingredients, as food fit only for that particular group, and not for our consumption. The “cultural” label becomes the deciding criteria in our mind.

Too, if I were to ask you if you would eat a food containing tuna, carrots, onions, bell peppers, potatoes, Vitamin A, Vitamin B12, salt and pepper, I’m quite sure you would agree that these ingredients were acceptable for human consumption and that you would be willing to eat them — until you were shown the label on the can which read cat food! You would not eat it even though you knew the ingredients were fit to eat, sanitarily prepared, et cetera. We all learn to prejudge and, therefore, our judgment of that particular food is that it is for animals and not for humans. On the other hand, if you read the following label: pork kidneys, pork skins, pork hearts, pork liver, pork head, corn flour, salt and pepper, most likely you would not be willing to try this food since these organs do not happen to be in the average menu and diet in American society. However, you may be surprised to discover that these are the ingredients for scrapple, a Pennsylvania Dutch food item which is eaten regularly for breakfast.

Why are we ethnocentric and prejudiced? Human beings have a psychological need to categorize, classify and to order their thinking. They tend to describe and classify new experiences into old categories based on already learned and perceived knowledge. Even though we consider open-mindedness to be a virtue in our culture, and it is a virtue in many cultures, it is indeed very difficult for us to be open-minded because our filters or perception of the world of reality vary from culture to culture, even from individual to individual. We generalize and categorize, we prejudge and predetermine in order to make sense of, or give reason to our way of doing things and seeing things.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MULTICULTURAL TEACHER

What then is our responsibility as multicultural teachers or teachers in a multicultural classroom? What should our strategy be?

Beware the Stereotypes
Our first responsibility as teachers of multicultural students, or of intercultural studies, is to be scrutinizing
when examining the material available to us. Be especially aware of stereotypes. Unfortunately, since we ourselves are stereotyped, it is extremely difficult for us to notice generalizations made by others, especially those from our own culture. Some misconceptions about cultures come from stereotyped notions found in textbooks. Here are some examples of subtleties to look for: 1) a title of a chapter, “A Brief History of Asia.” This occupied only two pages and began with Marco Polo! 2) Another title, “India: The Land of Villages.” 3) A description in a history book: “The Asian Continent broods over the surface of this globe like some gigantic octopus, its outstretched tentacles being the south — pointing peninsulas and strings of islands.” Even though these are artistic and vivid descriptions, they nevertheless create stereotypes which will remain with our students throughout their lives.

Develop Cultural Awareness

Another responsibility for the culture teacher is to realize that since his own culture has been learned subconsciously and affectively, it is now necessary to become aware of and conscious of the different patterns of his culture, so that students can be constructively guided in their own adventure into discovering, perceiving and proving their unique values and patterns of behavior.

Begin with cultures which are present in your own school. Both teacher and students must learn to separate themselves from the cultural patterns of their shared environment and view such consistent and recurring patterns as meaningful elements of the culture under study. Students can look at their families and their daily routines, patterns and habits, then develop the freedom to share these findings with their peers in the classroom. (Young children are surprisingly perceptive to cultural patterns.) It is extremely important for the teacher to provide his students with experiences — new experiences, hopefully — which will help them identify certain aspects of their own culture.

The possibility of future travel for students and of coming in contact with other cultures is almost inevitable. Half of the students in your classroom will be involved in an interdependent world, working together in intercultural situations, trying to solve global problems. Their contact with other cultures is more than predictable. Therefore, we can no longer teach facts and figures on the geography and history of particular cultures and hope that they will suffice students wanting to gain a kaleidoscopic knowledge of other ethnic groups and nations. It is our responsibility instead, to provide them with a mechanism through which they can become cultural detectives, to provide them with a model for perceiving and learning about other cultures.

It is also our responsibility to help our students become “multicentric” instead of ethnocentric, to be able to see and perceive the world from many different points-of-view and be able to transport themselves from one center to another. It is so easy and so interesting to learn facts about other cultures. However, it is extremely difficult to be able to transport ourselves from our culture into that particular culture being studied and to be able to perceive the world of reality from that point-of-view.

It is a mammoth task indeed. However, we must prepare our students for a multicultural type of a world, and we cannot draw on the banks of experience from our own schooling and education. Teacher and student alike must learn to perceive on a multicultural level.

Stages of Cultural Adjustment

Having recognized some of the barriers to culture learning and culture teaching, and pointing out some of the responsibilities of the multicultural teacher, we can now proceed to analyzing some of the stages of cultural adjustment which a teacher must recognize in order to be able to assist immigrant or non-local students, as well as capitalize on the particular stages. Through my years of experience in the area of culture learning, culture teaching and cultural adjustment, I have concluded that most people undergo four stages while adjusting to a new culture, a new living situation or a new society. The four are: 1) the honeymoon stage, 2) the hostility stage, 3) the humor stage, and 4) the home stage. I will briefly discuss the symptoms and characteristics of each stage, hoping that this knowledge will assist culture teachers by providing them with a better understanding and a better “handle” or “label” for a particular common characteristic exhibited by their students.

The Honeymoon Stage. This is the stage of sheer exhilaration and excitement over the new. It is the beginning of a realization of a dream of living in a new culture and looking forward to many positive experiences. This is especially true for immigrant families who have dreamed of coming to Hawaii — planning for years — and then find their dream realized. During the honeymoon stage the new arrival has many buffers protecting him from the realities of a new culture. There are usually agencies, government officials, sponsors, and, in your case,
the teacher. As you receive a new student-arrival into the classroom, you will notice that he, in the initial stage, is cooperative, interested and excited in spite of his shyness. At the same time, you overextend yourself in learning to understand your student and in assisting him in adjusting to his new environment and to the other students in the class. You will also notice that the other students in the class, students from this culture, are more than eager to assist the new arrival. However, you will soon realize that this exhilarating and cooperative initial environment is short-lived. Subconsciously, due to cultural and linguistic barriers, they soon lose this cooperative spirit and withdraw from the new student. The teacher, as well, will no longer continue to accept the student as a guest or be overly tolerant about cultural misunderstandings, and begins to look at the new student as a new member of our culture and society and judges the student’s actions based on the norms and patterns of behavior of our own culture. The new student, in turn, begins to withdraw and to exhibit rather negative characteristics or aspects of his culture that are neither understood nor tolerated by our culture. This situation may intensify to the point where the other students will begin to jeer and ridicule the new arrival, and the teacher will ignore the complex situation in the hope that time will heal the infractions. This leads us to the second stage.

The Hostility Stage. At this stage the new arrival will proceed from exhibiting negative characteristics to displaying hostility towards the new culture. Some of the hostilities are translated to violent behavior, complete disregard for authority, frequent absenteeism, lack of interest, lack of motivation and, sometimes, complete withdrawal. This in turn is counterbalanced with the other students and teachers reacting to the situation in a similar manner. At this time the teacher begins to doubt his ability to handle a multicultural classroom and blames the administration for not supplying him with adequate material to cope with the situation. He also finds blame with the authorities for allowing a disproportionate number of immigrants and outsiders to come into our culture. The more aggressive students will begin to antagonize the new students and challenge them to physical encounters. This is a very difficult stage indeed, and should bring out the best in each culture teacher. The duration of this stage depends on the particular classroom and the old and new students, as well as the tolerance, understanding and continued willingness of the teacher to use such situations as stepping-stones. Of course, recognizing this stage and knowing its symptoms should be sufficient for the teacher to extend his patience and look optimistically toward the third stage.

The Humor Stage. This will be the stage when the new arrival begins to feel more relaxed in new situations in his new environment and begins to laugh at minor mistakes and misunderstandings which had previously caused him a great deal of headaches as he was going through the hostility stage. Now the teacher can humor the student and laugh with the rest of the class at some of the situations which seemed, in the past, to be so severe, but are now remembered as being funny. It is important for the teacher to be able to recall some negative classroom experiences and re-interpret them so they will produce laughter and humor, thus assisting the new student in moving completely out of the hostility stage and into the humor stage. An important stage, humor allows us to realize that living is not all serious work but a little bit of joviality and lightheartedness too.

The Home Stage. This fourth stage marks the period when the new student not only retains his allegiance to his old culture, but also begins to “feel at home” in his newly-acquired one. While at home he will continue to operate according to some of the patterns of his old culture and yet, while in school, he will be able to use some norms and patterns of the new culture. This is the stage of biculturality we all need to acquire and cherish. Unfortunately, this becomes the stage, especially for the young, when they move into a monocultural pattern and lose, almost completely, the cultural heritage of their parents and forefathers. During this stage, the teacher must be capable of enhancing the bicultural aspect of the classroom situation and accentuating the values of both cultures.

Conclusion
While the student is undergoing these stages, we must remember that his family is doing the same, and that the length of each stage will depend upon the personality of that particular family and its ability to move through it. The stages are easily recognizable; the difficulty is that delineations between the stages are not clear-cut and they overlap. Thus there is a bit of honeymoon mixed in with hostility, hostility with humor, and humor with home. In some instances, a person may move back and forth between these stages and confuse the teacher. However, when symptoms and characteristics from two stages are
being exhibited by one person, it, more likely, will be an indication that that person is in a transitional situation and that the next stage is close at hand.

I have found these four "labels" to be very effective in my dealings with persons from different cultures who are adjusting to ours, and also with orientation programs for Americans leaving for overseas assignments. It is very helpful to know that there are four "handles" by which we can carry the burden of adjustment.

The majority of normal human beings do undergo these four stages; however, there is a very small percentage who are so well adjusted to life and living that it is possible for them to move from one culture to another without exhibiting any signs of stress. On the other hand, there is also a small percentage of people who remain in one stage, such as the hostility stage, and life to them is a tremendous headache. These four stages are cyclic in nature, not linear, and a person will encounter periods of adjustment continuously as he moves from one situation to another.

Culture learning and culture teaching are very popular subjects of discussion, but many of us find ourselves lost as to exactly what we should be doing and how we should go about doing it.

Affective and cognitive aspects of culture learning, ethnocentrism, prejudice and prejudgment, and the lack of a precise definition of "culture" all seem to be barriers to cross-cultural communication and learning.

It is our responsibility, as educators, to be aware of these factors and to be able to develop a cultural awareness. Hopefully, the four stages of adjustment will be useful in your pursuit in this area.

We are gradually becoming aware of the need for cross-cultural teaching and learning. It is a necessity for the future if we are to prepare world citizens — "cosmopolitan nationals." We are all beginners in this field, but let us accept the challenge, build our knowledge and learn from each other in our pursuit.

**Bibliography**


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