

The Intercultural Classroom in the Digital Realm

Suggestions for Teaching

This handout is for instructors who are leading diverse classes and want to explore different ways of engaging diverse students.

The implications of different cultural dimensions on teaching

Information on differences in teacher / student roles across cultural dimensions adapted from: Wursten, H., & Jacobs, C. (n.d.). The impact of culture on education: Can we introduce best practices in education across cultures? Retrieved from, https://www.academia.edu/12349034/The_impact_of_culture_on_education

Dimensions of culture

All cultures exist on a continuum. Understanding dimensions of culture can help us understand in broad terms, the possible ways culture influences communication, remembering that cultures are not monolithic, and that individuals have complex cultural identities.

Power Distance

This refers to the extent to which a culture accepts inequalities as normal. High power distance cultures tend toward accepting a hierarchical order in which everyone has a place, for which no justification is needed. Low power distance cultures tend toward striving for equal distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities.

Collectivism versus Individualism

Cultures that are more collectivist in orientation tend to be more tightly knit. People think more in terms of 'we' rather than 'I' and saving face of the group is important. Cultures that are more individualistic in orientation tend to have a loosely knit social framework, and focus more on individuals being self-reliant, taking care of themselves and their immediate family.

Long Term Orientation

Long-term Orientation refers to the extent to which a culture demonstrates a, "future-orientated perspective rather than a near term point of view" (Wursten & Jacobs, n.d., p. 10). Cultures that get a lower score on this dimension tend to be dominated by monotheistic religions (e.g., Christianity) and people tend to believe there is 'one truth.' Cultures that get a higher score on this dimension tend to be dominated by polytheistic religions (e.g., Hinduism) and people tend to believe, "truth depends on time, context and situation" (p. 10).

For more information on dimensions of culture and how different countries compare, take a look at the following website: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>

Implications of Power Distance on Teaching

Low power distance	High power distance	Suggestion for Teaching	Suggestion for Teaching
Student-centered	Teacher centered	Alternate activities, e.g., provide a mini recorded lecture followed by a discussion board activity that students complete in groups.	Ensure written instructions for course requirements, tasks, activities, expectations for student engagement etc. are explicitly stated. Don't assume classroom norms are 'obvious.'
Teacher expects student to initiate communication	Student expects teacher to initiate communication	Give students different ways of communicating with you and post information/instructions on Blackboard Learn. Give students times they can meet with you via BlueJeans.	Post solutions on Blackboard Learn to common problems students are experiencing (without naming who had the problem). Use Jamboard (responses are anonymous) for online brainstorming activities / identifying concepts students are struggling with / chance for students to ask questions.
Teacher expects student to act autonomously	Student expects teacher to tell them what to do	Be clear about what you expect students to do for themselves. Give guidance as to where students can get help to learn to be more autonomous (e.g., the Learning Commons)	Remind students frequently about tasks/assignments and repeat instructions regularly, through course announcements on Blackboard Learn and via email.
Students allowed to contradict and criticize	Students not allowed to contradict or criticize the teacher	Put students in pairs/groups, so that any 'criticism' is coming from the group, not an individual (works for 'live' and 'offline' activities).	Create characters so that students are not answering as 'themselves' and create a character who they respond to (so they are not directly contradicting you).
Learning comes from two-way communication	Learning comes from having excellent teachers	Make it explicit what responsibilities you consider to be the student's and what are yours (or negotiate this).	Discuss with students their different experiences of education so that any potential areas of miscommunication due to differences in expectations can be addressed from the outset.

Implications of Collectivism versus Individualism on Teaching

Collectivism	Individualism	Suggestion for Teaching	Suggestion for Teaching
Students only speak up when called on by the teacher	Students speak up in response to general invitation by the teacher	Put students in pairs and call upon pairs to respond to questions (rather than singling people out) – in a ‘live’ class ask students to respond in the chat. In offline activities, put students in pairs/small groups so they can work together on responses.	Avoid calling on individual students until the class has been together for a while and students are more comfortable with each other. Let students know you may call on them and give those you know lack confidence, time to prepare their response, if possible.
Individuals only speak up in small groups	Individuals will speak up in large groups	Use small group and pair work at the beginning of a course to get students to come up with answers together (works in both synchronous and asynchronous environments, as above).	Use tools such as Jamboard, Padlet, and Google Docs to elicit student ideas/responses. Use survey tools such as Mentimeter and PollEverywhere to engage students in less direct ways. Creating games and quizzes using Kahoot also helps with engaging students in ways that makes them feel less put ‘on the spot.’
Formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times	Confrontation and challenge in learning situations can be brought into the open	Talk about these differences as a class, in preparation for group work. Draw on student experiences and help students come up with ‘group contracts’ to help them work well together.	Brainstorm ideas with the students as to what strategies they can use if there is a problem/conflict and perhaps come up with a class contract on how conflict should be handled.

Implications of Long-Term Orientation on Teaching

Low Score	High Score	Suggestion for Teaching	Suggestion for Teaching
Focus on asking ‘why’?	Focus on asking ‘how’?	Try to make sure you address both the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of what you’re teaching.	This essentially comes down to placing more value on theory versus more value on practice. Talk about these different cultural values and how they relate to your teaching/learning context.
Students want to find the one and only solution	Different answers possible – ‘many truths’	Highlight the different cultural perspectives in the classroom as an example of ‘many truths.’	Give students opportunities to practice dealing with ambiguity to expand their comfort zone