

Coping with Cultures in the Classroom-What every teacher should know.

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Abstract

Most teachers in the mainland United States are Anglo, monolingual English speakers without much experience teaching students from other cultures. Ogbu (1988) explains that cultural differences of teachers are often at odds with students from other cultures. Pajares (1992) found that teachers' cultural beliefs often clash with students' cultural beliefs, thus preventing learning. Conflicts can occur because the "way of life" of the students is discordant with the cultural values, beliefs, and norms of mainstream schools. As a result of research on culture and learning styles, advocates claim that the closer the congruence in the teacher's instructional styles and the student's learning style, the more academic success the student will have in the classroom. This paper illustrates overarching cultural behaviors, characteristics, and learning styles of students from Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Haitian Creole, Islamic, and African American

cultures. Although it is unwise to generalize an entire population, each culture has its own commonalities. We offer a glimpse of these traits so that teachers can modify and adapt their instructional techniques to address the needs of their students and offer more effective instruction. (With the exception of the African American section, cultural information is cited from chapters written by Eileen N. Ariza, Ed.D. in *Fundamentals of teaching English to speakers of other language in K-12 mainstream classrooms*, Zainuddin, Yahya, Morales-Jones, & Ariza, 2002, with the author's permission.).

Teachers can determine their students' preferred learning styles by daily observation and sensing what works best. Cox and Ramirez (1981, pp. 64-65) suggest that daily instruction techniques take into account the culturally reflected learning styles of the individual and offer a six-point plan to follow:

- Observe student behavior and note the changes from situation to situation. From this assessment, it is easy to determine the students' preferred way of learning.
- Design your teaching methods, strategies, incentives, materials, and situations so they complement student preferences.
- Evaluate the learning experiences by determining if instructional objectives have been met, but also in terms of student behavior and task involvement.
- Throughout the year, gradually plan and implement learning experiences that require behaviors that the students have previously shunned. Include one aspect of the unfamiliar behavior during each learning episode, focusing on the reward, the materials, the situation, or the task requirements. In this manner, the students have a scaffold to support the new learning experience

with prior experience.

Continue the effort to provide familiar, comfortable, successful experiences while gradually presenting new ways for the children to learn.

Cultural Backgrounds

Teaching and learning styles reflect cultural backgrounds. Students who have teachers from their same culture have little problem understanding the cues provided by the teacher. Students will already be familiar with the appropriate interactional behaviors expected in the classroom. Some students are from cultures with values that promote field dependence (a more community oriented style), while other cultures are inclined to be field independent, which encourages independence and competition. With proper instruction, field-dependent and field-independent students can learn to be bicognitive; that is, their learning styles can be expanded to function appropriately in any given situation. Teachers need to provide activities that incorporate all types of learning styles. If they are aware of their own cultural learning styles and preferences, teachers will be better prepared to recognize the learning styles of their students.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping can happen when false and exaggerated characteristics of a group are attributed to the individual, but *sociotyping* involves an accurate generalization about cultural groups as a whole. If teachers misinterpret the learning style data and make decisions based on incorrect assumptions, students can be hurt or limited in their school experience. Mainstream teachers are often at odds with their diverse students because they are unaware of the differing cultural values they bring to the classroom. To promote effective teaching, teachers need to plan curriculum and instruction to incorporate the

learning styles of their students. If students are uncomfortable in class, they may become bored, unresponsive, or test poorly (Felder & Henriques, 1995).

Classroom Interaction

Based on cultural norms, *participation structures* describe the interactions of students in the classroom, when and how to speak, and what to speak about. Teachers may misinterpret inappropriate or awkward classroom interaction, as every culture has individual norms that dictate proper classroom behavior and student-teacher interaction.

Directness in speech is valued in the American cultures. "Don't beat around the bush," "Get to the point," and "The bottom line is..." are indicators of the values placed on direct speech. "Indirect speech" is an objective of cultural patterns held by Asians, Native Americans, and many Latin American cultural groups. It is important to "save face" by not embarrassing others or shaming another person. High-context cultures (such as Japanese) do not have to talk much because the members of the society communicate with intrinsic knowledge of how others think, feel, and what they expect. Low-context cultures (such as American, Swiss and German) must be very specific and explain everything- what is expected, what the rules are, and how things should be done. These cultural expectations are mirrored by how people think and act.

Body Language

Miscommunication occurs during verbal interaction as well as through body language. *Kinesics* (the study of body language) includes facial expressions, posture, gestures, body movements, eye contact, or any ritual, that conveys messages or meaning for a culture. The Japanese bow is an example of kinesics. From the American standpoint, a bow is just a hello or good-bye gesture. However, to the Japanese (and

some other Asian cultures), a bow can be quite complex because a deeper meaning can be conveyed by the bow. The lower-status individual must begin the bow, and must bow lower than the higher-status person. When the individuals bowing are equals in society, the bow is simultaneous and of the same depth. It can be erroneous to attempt to read someone's behavior based on our own frames of reference.

Nonlinguistic Communication

Every culture has its own way of depicting the following domains of nonlinguistic communication:

- **Paralinguistics:** Sounds that accompany language and vocalizations that replace speech.
- **Kinesics:** The study of body motion, gestures, unconscious body movement.
- **Oculesics:** Eye contact and motion to indicate meaning. Individuals from some cultures show respect and interest by making eye contact (e.g. Americans) while other cultures show respect by not making eye contact (i.e., Haiti, and Puerto Rico).
- **Haptics:** Location, frequency, and contexts in which people touch.
- **Proxemics:** The unconscious use and organization of personal space.
- **Chronemics:** Perception and use of time.
- **Monochronic time:** Doing one thing at a time, in a linear fashion (e.g., American).
- **Polychronic time:** Doing many things at a time (e.g., Hispanic).

All cultures operate on their own systems of communication, and these beliefs will be manifested within the everyday context of the classroom. Knowledge of nonverbal communication specific to other cultures will help teachers to understand the students

they teach, and well as students' parents. Educators must be careful not to make the mistake of judging people's emotions by using their own cultural indicators. Not everyone shows grief, anger, happiness, and embarrassment, or other emotions in the same manner.

Students with teachers from their same culture have little problem understanding the cues provided by the teacher and the appropriate interactional behaviors expected in the classroom. Those children and teachers from differing cultures do not know the rules of each other's cultural rules and have difficulty interpreting correct teacher-student interactions. Although not the panacea to end all classroom problems, effective teaching is more apt to take place if both the teacher and student are aware of the benefits of integrating appropriate instructional materials that correspond with culturally congruent teaching and learning styles (Smalley & Hank, 1995.)

Knowing that cultural patterns drive behavior, teachers who are aware that their students have differing cognitive styles are able to adapt their classrooms to include activities that incorporate all types of learning in their teaching. The teacher will begin to understand why some students experience problems when their natural learning styles are incompatible with the teaching style of the teacher. Various researchers have pointed out that Asian students tend to be highly visual learners (Erhman & Oxford, 1995; Reid, 1995b). Hispanics are generally auditory learners, and non-Westerners are more inclined to learn through tactile and kinesthetic modes.

The following information is given as a general guide for teachers to better understand the needs and styles of individual students. Individual personalities will always preside over the overarching cultural characteristics, yet teaching will be more

effective and teachers can make modifications and adaptations to their curriculum and if they are aware of cultural differences.

Hispanics

Carrasquillo (1991) notes that Hispanic students are diverse due to different backgrounds, but they may share general experiences through family structure, religious beliefs, and general customs. Spanish-speaking cultures include people from many countries (including the United States) with unique characteristics. The common thread is the fact that they all speak Spanish, albeit with varying degrees of fluency, accents, intonation, verb structures (i.e. *tu*, *usted*, and *vos*) and certainly different connotations for similar words. These societal variations can be likened to the differences among the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Jamaica, and South Africa.

Culturegrams (produced by Brigham Young University) offer cultural information as an "aid to the understanding of, feeling for, and communication with other people."

Greetings:

- A handshake is shared at the very least, sometimes a full embrace. It is very important to greet everyone when meeting, and say good-by when leaving.
- Woman-to-woman and man-to-woman greetings are given with a kiss on the cheek, or both cheeks (Spain).
- People stand very close to each other while talking, sometimes touching a friend's clothing, hand, or arm.
- Family names and titles such as Señor (Mr.), Señora (Mrs.), or Señorita (Miss) are used to address elders or professionals. Don and Doña are used with first names to

show respect.

Gestures:

- The smile is an important gesture of good will.
- Much affection is displayed publicly.
- Hand, arm, and other gestures are often used in conversation.
- People say "salud" if someone sneezes.
- People are beckoned by waving the fingers or the whole hand, with the palm down.
- It is not impolite for men to stare and make flattering remarks to women they do not know.
- Yawning is impolite because it is a sign of hunger.

Some General Attitudes:

- Individualism and personal pride are important in these societies.
- A person's appearance is extremely important, and people strive to project an impression of affluence and social position. Styles and quality of clothing indicate status and respectability.
- People often feel it is their duty to correct or point out "errors" they see in others.
- Political power is often coveted.

Time:

- The individual is more important than schedules. Time is fluid. Punctuality is not expected in social affairs; it is not impolite to be late, and people usually arrive late.
- If a visitor arrives unexpectedly or someone suddenly needs help, people will drop everything, regardless of how long it takes or how long someone else is kept waiting.

Family:

- The family plays a role of utmost importance, and family members share good fortunes with each other.
- Although this custom is rapidly changing, the father traditionally provides for the family, while the mother is responsible for the home.
- Families often host members of the extended family for long periods, because family obligations are extremely strong.
- Traditionally men enjoy more social freedom than do women.

Ramirez and Casteñeda (1974) found that Hispanic students respond well to classroom strategies using techniques such as:

- Cooperative learning
- Personalized rewards
- Modeling
- Informal class discussion
- Concepts presented globally, rather than detail oriented
- Explicit classroom rules
- Personal interaction, and offering hugs and pats as personal rewards
- Humanizing the curriculum using humor, fantasy, or drama.
- Group projects
- Standing closer to the students while teaching
- Avoid the use of debates (as an instructional method) and question-answer format
- Short-term daily projects are more successful than long-term projects
- Stand closer to the students to enhance interpersonal understanding

- Students might find it difficult to study with members of the opposite sex
- Students might be accustomed to more authoritative educational systems with corporal punishment; democratic classroom expectations might be unusual to them
- Children may be accustomed to different desk configurations in the classroom
- Rote memorization, with less emphasis on critical thinking might be more familiar: American education might appear “easier” to Hispanic students from other countries
- Hispanic students might be expected to lower their eyes when communicating with elders
- PTA, guidance counselors, and special education teachers might be unfamiliar American educational expectations

Islamic Students

Islam, reported to be one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States and around the world, is practiced by Muslims. Many Americans consider themselves Muslims, and they are native speakers of English. Muslim students can be from any racial or ethnic background. Students from Algeria, Djiboati, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, North and South Yeman, Palestine, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Chad, and Tunisia (and other African countries) are usually Arabic speakers. Arabic is used in the Koran (Qur'an, Islam's book of scripture). However, most Muslims are not Arabic. They

come from diverse countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, China, Fiji, and Barbados, and do not necessarily speak Arabic. Public schools must formulate and implement policies to create a culturally sensitive academic environment for Islamic students.

Educators should be familiar with fundamental beliefs of Muslims and make allowances for religious holidays, days of fasting, dietary requirements, prayer time and its accompanying rituals, expressions of personal modesty, and curriculum issues. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects the religious rights of individuals, which signifies that the classroom teacher should know as much as possible to foster understanding toward the Muslim student. The fundamental religious aspects of Islam are reflected in the classroom, as are cultural aspects.

The Islamic perspectives highlighted are culled from the information disseminated from the Council on American-Islamic Relations in its publication *An Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices*. Also included are some general cultural characteristics as perceived by the Educational Service Staff of AFME (American Friends of the Middle East, or AMIDEAS, taken from its chapter "Cultural Clues to the Middle Eastern Student.") Because of the fundamental teachings of the Koran, characteristics of different ethnic groups that practice Islam might be similar, although the cultures might be very different. For example, Muslims from Malaysia are distinct from Muslims from Saudi Arabia, although they practice the same religion.

- Manners reflect the formality of the culture, which is formal in social customs and daily routines. Respect for one another is of vital importance. Personal relationships, family, and friendship are central to life. The

American ways of forming relationships quickly, but superficially, are seen as having little depth or significance. Male/female relationships are restricted and are governed by a rigid set of cultural rules. In some conservative countries, the roles of women are less prominent than those of men, as the culture is male dominated. However, in more progressive Islamic countries, women are allowed to hold high positions in public office.

Emotional Displays

- Arabs generally are conservative and are not comfortable with shows of affection in public.
- Traditional Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran may find cross-gender touching inappropriate, whereas more liberal societies may not.
- If an individual admires something an Arab has, it will be given to him or her. Arabs expect to pay for meals if they invite someone to dine. Gifts given are not to be opened in front of guests. Additionally, friendship implies that favors will be done for one another, and favors are expected to be repaid reciprocally.
- Arabs are non confrontational and will avoid arguments at any cost. They act humbly, are sensitive to others' feelings, and will never disgrace or embarrass others. Politeness will be shown to individuals at all times, even to one's enemy because the Koran dictates that "God loveth not the speaking ill of anyone in public." This includes writing about an

individual.

- Arabs prefer to have close personal interaction with one another and therefore have large spaces inside the home instead of walls. Physical privacy as Americans know it is nonexistent, and to be alone, Arabs will simply stop talking. They are very private inside their homes, and outsiders will not be invited into the home until they are very close. One can assume that an invitation into an Arab home is an honor that indicates deep friendship.
- The family is traditional in that the father is head of the household and the mother takes care of the children and home. Children are taught their roles early in life and are given responsibilities according to their age. The parents' word is final and elders are greatly respected. Academic choices of children will often reflect the wishes of the parents instead of their individual choice. The culture is paternalistic, and this authoritative familial pattern is evident throughout societal patterns.

Guidelines for Educators

Teachers need to be knowledgeable about how to respect the rights and beliefs of these students. Learning about the rights of Islamic students can be accomplished by adhering to guidelines set forth by the Council of American-Islamic Relations.

- Modesty is prescribed for post-pubescent boys and girls when dealing with the opposite sex. Shaking hands with the opposite sex, even if it is a teacher or administrator, for example, might be viewed as immodest, as well as co-ed

physical education classes and school dances. No pressure to participate should be exhibited, nor should students be penalized for refusing to take part in these mixed gender activities.

- Muslim children are prohibited from uncovering their bodies and are not allowed to participate in communal showers after sports. Private showers should be available, and if the class is scheduled late in the day, students should be allowed to skip the showers altogether and wait until they get home. Physical education clothing should be modified so that the girls wear full tracksuits, and the boys wear knee-length shorts.
- Mixed sex swimming classes are a problem for Muslim students. They should not be penalized for non-participation on religious grounds. Alternative outside certification can be an option if the school has mandatory certification.
- Schools should note Muslim holidays on their calendars as the students are obliged to take at least one day off from school, which should be without penalty.
- Muslims are careful about food and how it is prepared because they follow the protocol regarding consumption and preparation of foods. The Koran (or Qur'an) prohibits consumption of alcohol, pork (including by-products or derivatives), shellfish, and other objectionable foods such as:

Fish without fins

Pepperoni, sausage, and pork hot dogs

Bacon, alone or in foods

Animal shortening (vegetable shortening is acceptable) in breads,

puddings,

cookies, cakes, donuts, pastries, etc.

Gelatin in Jell-O, desserts, candies, marshmallows, chocolates, etc.

Lard in any form or product

Ingredients containing alcohol (vanilla extract, Dijon mustard)

- School cafeteria personnel can demonstrate respect for these religious observations by highlighting their menus with a visual clue when these food items are offered.
- Males are obliged to be covered from the navel to the knee, and some students cover their heads with a *kufki*. In public, females cover their heads and wear loose-fitting, nonrevealing clothing called *hijab*, or *khimar*.
- Wearing a head covering is a practice misunderstood by many and may cause problems in school settings. Teachers and administrators need to protect the student's personal and religious right to wear a scarf, and should prohibit and reprimand classmates who pull or remove a Muslim girl's scarf.
- Because Islam has its own specific set of teachings about human development and related issues, parents need the option to remove their children from any family life programs offered by the schools.
- Islamic believers must pray five times every day. The prayer times that fall within school hours must be observed, and students will need about 15 minutes to complete prayers. Muslims must wash their faces, hands, and feet with clean water (a restroom or any facility with running water will suffice) for about two minutes. According to the Qur'an, the individual will stand, bow, and touch the forehead to the ground and recite specific prayers. The

worshiper needs a quiet, clean room where he or she will face toward Mecca (usually northeast in America).

- Fasting is to refrain from eating and drinking from break of dawn to sunset. The exact dates that determine when followers should fast change throughout the full solar year. Students who are fasting can be excused from going to the cafeteria at lunchtime and from participating in strenuous physical activity. In an effort to support multiculturalism in the community, the teacher can seize this teachable moment by inviting guest speakers to teach the other students about the rituals observed in a variety of religions.
- Muslims take issue with their portrayal as the enemy in outdated social studies texts. Negative depictions can contribute to suspicion, harassment, and violence toward followers of Islam. Textbooks should be reviewed for religious prejudice and selected under the guidance of Muslim educators to ensure that history, geography, and social studies texts offer reliable information about the tenets of Islam.
- Conflicts in the traditional school setting are not saluting the flag, or refusing to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Muslim parents may teach their children to stand up, but perhaps not salute the flag when reciting the pledge because Islam discourages acts that are irreverent to God. This is not meant to be offensive or a symbol of disrespect to the symbol of the nation.
- Conscientious followers of Islam might ask to be released at midday on Friday, the day for congregational worship. This is called *Jum'ah* and it takes place at the mosque. Students might need to ask for an extended lunch period

to fulfill this obligation. If many Muslim students attend the same school, the prayers can be held on school property, which is a right upheld by the Supreme Court in 1990 as the Equal Access Act.

Suggestions for the Teacher

To embrace and enjoy interactions with new beliefs, cultures, and ideas, the Council on American-Islamic Relations offers the following suggestions for religious accommodations for Muslim students in the public schools.

- To note pork and pork by-products in lunches, mark items with a red dot or a picture of a pig.
- Schedule exams and other major events around holidays and do not mark them absent.
- During fast time, allow students to study in the library or elsewhere during lunch.
- Discuss clothing requirements with Muslim parents.
- Reschedule classes for students who prefer same-gender exercise environment.
- Do not extend your hand first for a handshake with a member of the opposite sex.
- Allow parents reasonable time to review any material dealing with "sex education."
- Allow children to opt-out from all or part of the family life program.
- Allow Muslim students to pray in unused rooms.
- Check textbooks for religious biases.

- Invite Muslim speakers to social studies and world religion classes.

Haitian Students

The Refugee Service Center at the Center for Applied Linguistics offers current information on ethnic groups so that educators can meet the needs of their students.

The information contained in this section can be accessed on the center's website at

<http://www.cao.org/RSC>.

- Haitian communities are flourishing socially, economically, and culturally in places such as South Florida, Boston, and New York. Their historical backgrounds offer richness to the multicultural fiber of the United States. Miami's Little Haiti is often the first stop for recent Haitian immigrants as they climb the ladder to self-sufficiency and eventual participation as citizens in mainstream American life. Recent immigrants often find that they do not relate to African-Americans because the two cultures are worlds apart. Unfortunately, Haitians have been the victims of inaccurate cultural misunderstandings and negative stereotypes that have inflicted great damage upon youngsters from this culture, causing them to deny their heritage. The lack of ethnic self-pride is manifested in the phenomenon of young, more assimilated Haitians claiming to be African-American, Caribbean-American, West Indians, or Haitian-Americans. They often deny that they speak Creole or claim to speak French when they cannot. Later, Haitians may assume the identity, lifestyle, language variations, and mannerisms of African-American youth to gain acceptance by their peers; hence, the rejection of the native cultures and a denial of knowledge of the native language (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

- The Haitian school system reflects the French system, which offers 14 years of education, 7 at the elementary and 7 at the secondary level, in the "elite" language of French. After much debate, and with much resistance, Haitian Creole became the language of instruction for the first four grades.
- Education is highly valued and schooling is technically "free," but many Haitians do not have access to it because the poverty level is too high to afford the uniforms, books, and supplies. Teachers who have Haitian students in their classes must ascertain the extent of their previous educational experience. Their educational backgrounds will depend on the socioeconomic status the students encountered in Haiti.
- As a result of different teaching and learning styles, students in Haitian schools are expected to learn more subjects in greater detail through rote learning and memorization. Haitian students will be unfamiliar with the American penchant for analysis and synthesis of material, and they will be confused by the number of correct answers possible in testing situations. Students will have to be taught explicitly how to think and discover for themselves, and exactly what is expected of them when being tested.
- In Haiti, grading and testing are formal and follow strict procedures. It is more difficult to get good grades and therefore, Haitian students will place importance on studying for quizzes, tests, and making high scores.
- Teacher-student relationships are formal in Haiti. The informality of teacher/student relationships in the U.S. school system may be perceived as a lack of respect for teachers. In the Haitian classroom, students are addressed by their

last name. The student speaks only when asked a question, and does not look the teacher in the eye. The teacher has total authority over the class. For Haitian newcomers to the American classroom, the idea of "democracy" in the classroom is foreign and is not understood. Haitians are used to having a teacher who is feared and respected. Corporal punishment by the teacher enforces discipline and is sanctioned by the parent.

- In Haiti, parent-teacher communication is formal; the only time the parent will hear from the teacher is when the student doing wrong. This communication will result in the parent inflicting corporal punishment upon the child for committing the transgression. Schools have no PTA; parents are not encouraged to participate in school matters. Papers, letters, and notices are not sent home with the child; parents are expected to go to the school to pick up report cards and such. In the United States, papers are sent home from school with the child, but they might not be returned to the school because of this reason. Thus, parents who react negatively to the request for parental involvement need to be educated about what is expected of them in their new country
- In Haiti, the teacher is the absolute authority, always knows best, and is not to be questioned. Haitian children in the United States may be confused upon seeing the apparent informality of the American classroom. Haitian students will be unaccustomed to the "democratic" atmosphere found in the United States and need to be gently reminded of expected behavior.
- Haitians possess a rich oral tradition that includes the art of storytelling, riddles, songs, and games. As a result, they may be stronger as auditory learners

rather than as visual learners.

- In Haitian schools, desks are not individualized; they are attached in rows and students sit side-by-side. Students might feel isolated when seated individually.
- Many Haitian schools are segregated by gender, and students will feel uncomfortable being in mixed classes. Additionally, the concept of playing together during physical education might be disquieting. It is culturally inappropriate for Haitian students to dress and undress in front of others, even those of the same sex. Arrangements should be made to accommodate the needs of these students.
- Haitians students might be unaccustomed to owning their own textbooks. In Haiti, they probably had to borrow a book and copy it by hand. In Haiti, audiovisual aids might be nonexistent; experiential learning is not an instructional method used; most schools have no laboratories to practice in; and learning is traditionally by rote, memorization, and recitation. Finally, due to the type of learning to which Haitian students are accustomed, they are uncomfortable with and initially will resist engaging in activities that demand critical independent thinking.
- Many Haitians are religious, maintain a strong work ethic, hold deep respect for authority, and revere education, because it is a means of social mobility. Parents demand obedience from children, and children are expected to help out by translating for them, shopping, taking care of siblings, and doing other household chores. Frequent absenteeism might result as a consequence of

familial expectations.

Asian Americans

Asians are not a homogenous group. They do, however, constitute a significant minority group in the United States. Asian Americans represent many distinct subgroups that speak different languages, worship through different religions, and practice different customs and beliefs. The main groups are East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, Korean), Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians (Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian), and South Asian (Indian and Pakistani). Threads of similarities may run through the subgroups, but they all have distinct histories, origins, and cultural roots. Among these groups, differences also exist within national groups, families, and individuals themselves.

Some Asians were born in the United States, while others come from abroad. Some are affluent and come with highly developed skills while others are barely literate (Brand, 1987). Regardless of success or acculturation, many Asians are stereotyped as the "model minority" because often the Asian student is often the one who is at the head of the class and is the valedictorian at graduation. Many people believe that the Confucian ideas that stress family ideals, respect for elders, deferred gratification, and discipline, (Brand, 1987) are the reason for high educational achievement. Studies show that Asian Americans are more likely to believe that success in life is connected to what has been studied in school.

- American schooling may contradict the fundamental cultural beliefs of Asians because it emphasizes individualism and competition, while the ethnic identity of Asian children is often based on their relationship to the group and allegiance to family (Trueba & Cheng, 1993).

- Academic achievement and upward mobility are viewed as an obligation for the maintenance of the family, which is the responsibility of all family members (Pang, 1990). Additionally, Asian parents teach their children to respect authority, feel responsibility for relatives, and show self-control. School failure is seen as a lack of will, and this failure can be alleviated by increasing parental restrictions.
- Baruth and Manning (1992) claim that Asian American children need reinforcement from the teacher, and work more efficiently in quiet, well-structured surroundings. These children appear to be more dependent, conforming, and obedient by placing the family's welfare before their own desires.
- Asians may be confused with the apparent teacher/student informality of the American classroom, and function better with structure and organization. (Baruth & Manning, 1992). Asian cultures also value the idea of humility and/or self-effacement. Children may not volunteer to participate in the classroom until specifically asked by the teacher. Drawing attention to oneself by virtue of misbehaving might cause great distress and result in "losing face" because children are taught to value silence, listen more than speak, speak softly, and be modest in dress and behavior (Feng, 1994).

The following suggestions are offered by Feng (1994) as a formula for teachers to address issues concerning the diversity of Asian American cultures. It should be noted, however, that these suggestions could be implemented for any ethnic group.

- Get to know the customs, values, and traditions of various cultures, and learn the conditions under which students came to the United States. Try to visit the students' homes and get to know the families.
- Learn a few words of the students' native language to set the tone for communication.
- Encourage native language use at home. Use English-proficient interpreters with parents.
- Try to learn the children's names and pronounce them correctly.
- Be careful not to encourage discord between home values and school expectations. For example, if the home expectation is conformity, don't encourage the child to challenge the teacher.
- Academic expectation should be based on ability rather than stereotypical beliefs.
- Peer tutoring can be used for children who are not yet proficient in English.
- Know who make decisions for the child and utilize the natural support system.
- Develop strong home-school links for communication.
- Avoid assumptions about children's prior knowledge and experience (e.g., not every child has experienced a birthday party).
- Discover what you can about Asian parent networks. The best way to remove a cultural barrier is to appear sincere.

Common Characteristics of Many Asian Cultures (Culturegrams)

Greetings:

- Bow or nod

- Individuals do not touch each other
- Little or no public display of affection
- Stand far apart (even farther than Americans do)

Gestures:

- Smiling and laughing often indicate embarrassment
- Little or no affection is shown in public
- It is impolite to speak loudly
- Hand and arm gestures are not often used in conversation
- People's sneezes are not usually acknowledged.
- People are beckoned by waving all the fingers with the palm of the hand facing down.
- Pointing is done with the entire hand.
- Japanese say no by shaking the hand from side to side with the palm forward, and point to themselves with their pointer finger facing their nose.
- People must sit erect with both feet on the floor; it is impolite to put an ankle on the knee.
- Yawning is impolite.
- Vietnamese men do not offer to shake hands with women.

General attitudes:

- Society is group oriented.
- Loyalty is to the group, the family, and to one's superiors as opposed to personal feelings.
- Humility and self-effacing comments are normal.

- It is essential to act similar to or in harmony with the crowd.
- People strive to conform in appearance (even when wearing the latest Western styles, people must try to look like everyone else).
- Reserve and modesty must be observed at all times.
- It is important to save face at all times, for self and others.
- People will often allow others to escape potential embarrassment with dignity.
- Goals and decisions are made with the good of the group in mind, not for the personal benefit of any individual.

Time:

- Being late is impolite.
- People are prompt or a little bit early (for social as well as business affairs).

Family:

- The family is extremely important.
- The family has a strong tradition of respect and loyalty.
- There is a strong sense of family reputation and family obligation.
- Elders are highly respected.
- Many members of the extended family (particularly in-laws) live together.

Native Americans

With over 500 Native American tribal groups, and about 2,200 different languages (Baruth & Manning, 1992), it is impossible to generalize the English language proficiency and acculturation of these populations. Language and cultural differences manifest themselves in the disparity of values found in the home and in the schools. Philips (1983) found that community norms and socialization practices influence the

classroom behavior of children. By understanding the values of Native American populations, teachers can adjust classroom situations to provide optimum instructional settings.

Although many tribal groups exist, the shared characteristic of being indigenous allows for some similarities despite differences in cultural styles. Some researchers have noted that many Native American students have the tendency to be field-dependent (Baruth & Manning, 1992; Brandley, 1984; McShane & Plas, 1982; Swisher and Deyhle, 1989; Tharp, 1989) while other researchers posit that Native American students can also tend to be field-independent. Ultimately, individual characters are the deciding factor regarding field dependence and field independent learning. The behavior of Native American children reflects the values of their culture. Diaz-Rico and Weed (1995) mention a research project that took place in several Sioux classrooms where the students appeared withdrawn and silent. American teachers, who are unaccustomed to prolonged periods of silence in their verbal discourse patterns, were met with students who only gave monosyllabic or nonverbal responses when questioned. The teachers were dismayed to learn that the students were purposefully shutting them out to avoid the teacher-student learning exchange. Once they discovered that that silence was a control issue, the teachers began to involve themselves in the community and daily lives of the students. The students began to participate more when the context was changed (Dumont, 1972).

- Socialization in the classroom is a direct reflection of life in the community. Teachers with typical Anglo values, expectations, and instructional methods will not be able to reach the child who prefers not to read aloud, speaks so softly that

he is inaudible, and feels more comfort with a lifestyle in which only one individual is directing and controlling all activity (Philips, 1972).

- Navajo children pattern their discourse after the adults in their society. Students speak at length, one at a time, while the other students wait politely until the end of the statement before beginning to speak their thoughts. Ideas are developed completely and might not have any relation to the thoughts of the previous speaker. Discourse is related to peers instead of being teacher-dominated. In this manner, the students are not silent or resentful.
- Writing styles also reflect cultural values. The American culture demands a linear writing form. The thesis statement is written, and the rest of the text must provide supporting facts. This trend reflects the American culture. In Native American discussions, topics are seldom addressed directly. The listener must make his own connections after points are made indirectly. This tendency is also reflected in students' writing. Writing styles that incorporate the ways of the people will produce more success than styles based on the "foreign" style of the teacher (Scafe & Kontas, 1982).

A compilation of findings suggest the following strategies be used for developing a successful classroom for American Indian learners (Boseker, 1991; Boseker & Gordon, 1983; Gordon & Boseker, 1984; Pepper, 1976):

- Small cooperative groups and peer learning are better than traditional large class grouping and oral questions and answers. Students need to feel as though they are part of the group.
- Use learning manipulatives and incorporate activities that allow students to feel

and touch to enhance learning through use of the senses. Information gained by visual, motor, tactile, spatial, perceptual, or auditory tasks/games is highly recommended.

- Use mental, non-verbal images to teach concepts rather than depending on word associations.
- Freedom of movement within the classroom is encouraged; allow students to sit on the floor, arrange desks comfortably, and permit a range of motion.
- Avoid highlighting individual students' success, accept silence, and de-emphasize competition.
- Don't use show-and-tell venues that require students to get up in front of the class and speak (Philips, 1972). Take time to let the child approach the teacher individually.
- Learning is best accomplished experientially, in natural settings, and by watching and doing instead of trial and error.
- Allow students to learn privately. Let them observe, listen, and take over parts of the task, in cooperation with and under supervision of an adult. Then let the child test himself (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 1993).
- Utilize holistic presentations, visual representations, and presentation of the whole picture before isolating skills into small segments.
- Conciseness of speech, slight variation of intonation, and limited vocal range are most valued. Silence is used for personal power, and for creating and communicating rapport with others.
- Do not force individual competition, although students may enjoy competing in

teams. Emphasis should be on the group. Native American children do not want to show themselves as superior, especially if it presents someone else in a poor light. Harmony within the group is desirable.

- Child rearing may be done by the extended family.
- In class, allow more response time so students can feel comfortable after considering responses. Allow them to practice their skills before expecting them to answer. Allow time for delay in responding answering questions.
- Students may ask for help silently by looking up from their work without speaking.
- Native Americans are spiritual and live in harmony with nature and natural settings. Incorporate instruction with this knowledge in mind.
- Know your Native American cultural groups and their value systems. What is innocuous to the American teacher might have deep spiritual significance for the students.

African American Students

Researchers describe Black life and cultural style as holistic in that all components of thinking, feeling, behaving and being are inextricably interdependent. Therefore, in a learning situation, a Black child's verve, spirituality, time perspective and expressive individualism are usually all involved. Learning styles of Black children tend to be more field dependent, as opposed to the more field-independent Anglo child. Field dependent learners are more people and teacher oriented, more spontaneous, flexible, and less structured in perceptions of people, thoughts, and events. Field independent learners are more accustomed to working alone, may be more competitive, are objective and task

oriented, and think analytically and in a linear pattern. (Hale, 1986).

Black culture descends from an African historical and cultural system, blended with the different kinds of issues within the Anglo-American culture. Patterns are transmitted through black community tradition, pressure to conform to mainstream society, and structure conditions as a result of being placed at the bottom rung of society's ladder. Historically, skills and language were transmitted orally from one generation to the next, resulting in a distinctive culture. Consequently, this myriad of social issues has contributed profoundly to the personality development, attitudes, behaviors, and psychological characteristics of Blacks. (Hale, 1986).

Implications for teachers of African-American students relating to learning styles and classroom behavior result in the following ideas. African-American people tend to:

- Prefer inferential reasoning to deductive or inductive reasoning
- Conceptualize in terms of the whole picture instead of its parts
- Approximate space, numbers, and time rather than focus on accuracy
- Focus on people and activities rather than on things
- Have a keen sense of justice
- Lean toward altruism
- Prefer novelty, freedom and personal distinctiveness
- Be proficient in nonverbal communication rather than "word dependent"
- Spend more hours with teachers than at home
- Feel disenfranchised in the classroom and may create "destructive resistance" because they feel no identification with the curriculum or the classroom

- Establish patterns of differential behaviors, which students then adopt toward each other
- Be aware of “labeling” of students

Implications

As a result of being aware of the aforementioned tendencies, teachers can plan more effective instruction by adopting positive practices. *Negative* ideas include:

- The idea of assimilation for all
- Relinquishing one’s culture in order to be accepted
- Exclusion of Black images in textbooks, etc.
- Equating Black identity with substandard intellectual status (Hale, 1986).

Positive ideas (according to Steele) include:

- Strongly accepting relationships between teacher and student
- Stressing Black students’ potential to learn
- Presenting difficult work to students in order to challenge them
- Involve students’ in cooperative learning with a shared understanding
- Understanding Black students’ “vulnerability” in the school atmosphere
- Valuing and challenging students’ so they may succeed
- Maintain racial integration
- Presenting particulars of Black life within the mainstream culture
- Parents must foster in their children a sense of hope and entitlement to mainstream American life

Positive Instruction for Black children

In sum, teachers can enhance their instructional practices and maximize potential

for African American students by integrating the following best practices:

- Teach globally
- Create memory for the sake of beauty and essence
- Use creative lesson plans
- Teach by connecting and integrating themes
- Be people focused
- Encourage and recognize divergent thinking
- Ensure relevant learning
- Adopt a holistic approach to experiences and learning.

Judicious use of the illustrious information found in this article will help ensure that linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse students receive ethical treatment, are taught with high academic standards, and are members of a culturally sensitive classroom.

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