
“I hear and I forget; I see and I remember;
I do and I understand.”

Chinese proverb

Introduction

As a country we are apt to be guilty of great ethnocentrism. In many of our foreign aid programs we employ a heavy-handed technique in dealing with local nationals. We insist that everyone else do things our way. Consequently we manage to convey the impression that we simply regard foreign nationals as “underdeveloped Americans.” Most of our behavior does not spring from malice but from ignorance. . . . We are not only almost totally ignorant of what is expected in other countries, we are equally ignorant of what we are communicating to other people by our own normal behavior. (Hall, 1959:iii)

Written more than forty years ago, these words strike an all-too-familiar note. Although in many respects there is greater appreciation of the need for cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity training today, North Americans, used here to include the people of the United States and Canada, still too often blunder their way through cross-cultural situations. Not only do we continue to look at members of other cultures as “underdeveloped North Americans,” but often we forget that there might be other ways of “doing”—ways that people of other cultures consider “normal.” These different ways may seem alien and even incomprehensible to the average North American. As the world grows smaller through the increased expansion of transportation, commerce, and communication networks (including the Internet), there is even greater contact among people of different cultures. It is becoming rarer for North Americans to isolate themselves from the rest of the world and to have minimal contact with other cultures. Now that we have entered the 21st century and a new millennium, it is even more important than ever that we as North Americans

become aware of and sensitive to other cultures, or other ways of “doing.” Since teachers are the primary disseminators of knowledge, it is essential that they be both cross-culturally sensitive and cognizant of how to educate others in cross-cultural understanding. It is for these reasons that we have chosen to write this book. It is our expectation that this text, used successfully, will make teachers more aware of themselves as members of a particular culture and will equip them with the skills to better prepare others for living in a multicultural world.

This instructional text is designed for use in three areas:

1. General teacher education courses that address educational issues such as multicultural or ethnically diverse classrooms
2. ESL/bilingual/foreign language teacher education courses
3. Cross-cultural awareness workshops for practicing teachers

In other words, this text is intended for teacher-trainers in master’s programs, certification courses, and undergraduate education courses.

Information presented in the text attempts to strike a good balance between theory and practice. The general goals of the book are

- To expand cultural awareness of one’s own culture and that of others
- To achieve a deeper understanding of what culture is and the relationship between culture and language
- To acquire the ability to observe behaviors in order to draw conclusions based on observation rather than preconceptions
- To understand and implement observations of cultural similarities and differences
- To develop an attitude of tolerance toward cultural differences

The primary goal of this book is to help teachers become more culturally aware. The book is intended to facilitate the process of **culture learning**, which involves

- Learning about oneself, both as an individual and as a member of one’s own culture and subcultures

- Learning about the universal phenomena and specific elements of culture
- Learning about the interaction between culture and communication
- Learning about how to become more observant and more cognizant of culture factors influencing identity questions, behavior, and interaction patterns.

The theory and the practice sections in this book will enable teachers to see how their particular set of eyes influences their understanding of the world around them. Such awareness will lead to increased cultural sensitivity, which, we hope, will lessen instances of cross-cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding. The **theory section** in each chapter acquaints readers with relevant research and information on the chapter topic. Its suggested use is as assigned reading at home, followed by an in-class review of the content through the included questions for study and discussion.

The **practice section** in each chapter allows readers to take part in a variety of experiential activities designed to reinforce the information presented in the theory section of the chapter. The activities are clearly referenced in the theory section, and they should be done in class, following the suggested procedures. The majority of the experiential activities are intended for preservice and in-service teachers in courses or professional development workshops. Those activities adaptable for use in high school, college, and adult ESL classrooms at the advanced level or the intermediate level are signaled by this icon . We do not recommend any of the activities be used in K–8 settings. Suggestions for adapting these activities for ESL audiences and their recommended proficiency levels are indicated for each activity (A for advanced, I for intermediate).

The section on **further readings** at the end of each chapter presents key books and articles on the chapter topic. These materials lend themselves quite readily to research reports and further inquiry.

A principal proponent of experiential learning, Kolb (1984) developed a four-stage learning cycle involving experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This emotional as well as intellectual engagement leads to reflexivity, self-awareness, critical

reflection, and theory development. Since experiential learning is at the core of many teaching and learning situations, one goal of this book is to provide readers with **experiential activities** that engage them in the learning cycle. The majority of the activities presented in the text are designed for next-day implementation—they can be incorporated immediately into the classroom—while a few require minimal advance preparation. All of the activities included were field-tested on our students and in professional workshops nationwide.

We believe that this text will help teachers, both current and prospective, develop the abilities to discern which cultural elements affect communicative interactions, why they affect the interactions, and how they do so. Atkinson (1999:643) posits that “knowing students individually also involves knowing them culturally.” Thus, teachers “need to develop *appropriate pedagogies*—approaches to learning and teaching that dynamically respond to that knowledge” (p. 643). All cultural groups are made up of individuals who are products of their culture and language. In other words, to understand people, we must understand their cultural lives.

Each chapter of the book includes the following sections:

- **Anecdote.** The purpose of this section, which is comprised of a brief anecdote related to the chapter theme and a discussion of key issues raised by the anecdote, is to capture the attention and interest of the reader. The use of anecdotes often stimulates readers to recall or reconsider situations where there may have been instances of cross-cultural misunderstanding. Anecdotes encourage readers to reexamine their own assumptions and preconceptions about themselves and others. This section further provides readers with a brief overview for the experiential activities in each chapter.
- **Theory: What Research Tells Us.** This section reviews literature focusing on the chapter theme and offers questions for study and discussion. The intent of this section is to provide readers with a theoretical base for the chapter theme and for the experiential activities included in each chapter.
- **Practice: What Activities Show Us.** In this section, readers have the opportunity to broaden their cultural outlooks through experiential activities focusing on the chapter theme. Each activity is described step-by-step. The types of activity range from those that can

be done in the classroom to those to be done outside of class. The various types of activity include observation activities, simulations, questionnaires, and critical incidents, among others. Those activities adaptable for ESL audiences are signaled by an icon, and suggestions for use are provided.

- **Further Readings.** This section provides an annotated bibliography of readings on each chapter topic. The references are from different fields, including communication, language teaching and research, anthropology, and linguistics. The bibliography is not an exhaustive list of materials available under each topic but, rather, a list of major readings related to each chapter theme.

The text is divided into six major themes.

- Chapter 1 is concerned with the issue of culture in shaping our behavior, attitudes, and perceptions of the world. The chapter explores the definition of culture, different aspects of culture, and the relationship between culture and language.
- Chapter 2 continues the examination of what culture is and how culture influences people's behaviors, their social relationships, and their perceptions of the world around them.
- Chapter 3 examines culture shock, its roots, and its ramifications.
- Chapter 4 investigates various aspects of nonverbal communication and cross-cultural differences.
- Chapter 5 considers social roles and expectations cross-culturally. Some of the topics covered include family roles, religious beliefs, medical practices, and women's roles.
- Chapter 6 explores how speakers use language in social contexts and the relationship between language and culture.

An essential question in any book on culture is, which culture should be taught? In second language situations, the answer is generally clear. Students need and want to become familiar with the culture of the host country, including significant regional variations; thus, the role of the teacher is to act as facilitator. The question becomes of greater significance, however, for teachers in foreign language situations. For example,

should native speakers from one English-speaking country teaching in EFL situations be expected to impart cultural knowledge about the entire English-speaking world? Should these instructors limit their discussion only to the culture of their home country? Should they focus their discussion only on surface cultural aspects such as holidays and food? Such questions become particularly acute in foreign language situations where the students have limited exposure to the target language culture and where the teachers themselves may not be intimately familiar with the culture or cultures of the language they are teaching.

We firmly believe that the preservice and in-service courses and workshops that utilize this book will find users becoming more aware of themselves, their behaviors and actions, and the role of culture. They will also acquire important skills for developing cross-cultural awareness in others. Since the intended audience of this text is preservice and in-service teachers, the book's focus is on general cross-cultural awareness. Although much of the theory and practice herein has broad cultural applications, this text is focused on a North American cultural perspective and may therefore not be appropriate for settings abroad.