

“What does a fish know about the  
water in which it swims all its life?”

—Albert Einstein

## Introduction to the Second Edition

Like fish that spend their lives surrounded by water, we understand little about the pervasiveness of culture—how it impacts our lives, our worldviews, and our behaviors. The goal of this second edition, like the first, is to develop cultural awareness by making the strange and inexplicable familiar and comprehensible.

In the decade since the publication of the first edition of *Crossing Cultures in the Language Classroom*, we received much praise for our book, along with many suggestions for change and improvement. During this same time period, the rapid pace of intercultural global contact continued to accelerate. According to the United Nations (2013), some 232 million international migrants are living in the world today. In 2010, in the United States, there were more than 11 million school-age children in primary and secondary schools either from immigrant households or themselves immigrants (Camarota, 2012). At the university level, in 2012–2013, there were 40 percent more international students than a decade ago, while Canada experienced an extraordinary 94 percent increase in international students studying there between 2001 and 2012 (ICEF Monitor, 2013).

Intercultural global contact has mandated greater cultural awareness at all levels, whether in education, health and social services, law, the business world, or in the political arena. At the same time, the amount of information readily available on the internet has grown substantially. Simply typing these terms “non-verbal,” “collectivism vs. individualism” or “stereotypes” into a search engine results in millions of hits that include websites, videos, newscasts and news articles, academic

journals, blogs, and books, among others. And this is not by any means limited to English. Speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, German, and other languages will find similar results in their searches.

It was with an eye to these factors that we chose to revise *Crossing Cultures in the Language Classroom*. We felt it was time to incorporate new research findings and information; to delete outdated or irrelevant information; to expand previous sections that readers had found insufficient; and to add new sections to enhance readers' knowledge. In addition, we too had continued to teach and pursue our research interests. Many of the revisions are based on contributions from our students and workshop participants as well as on our own research.

Although we have thoroughly revised this second edition to reflect the many suggestions of users of the text and the changing global world in which we find ourselves, we have maintained the overall structure of the book and have remained committed to linking theory and practice. In the spirit of the latter, we added a new section in each chapter on suggested projects. The idea here is to provide ideas for investigating and researching chapter topics in greater depth than possible through the activities section.

Specifically, in this second edition, readers will find that

- Sections and activities have been moved and revised to improve flow.
- References throughout the book have been updated without ignoring classics in the field. These timeless books were written by key figures in the field whose contributions are still relevant today.
- Activities have been revised for clarity and relevance.
- A new section in each chapter on Suggested Projects is now included.
- Suggestions for internet resources have been included.
- Five of the six chapter-opening anecdotes are new.
- More critical incidents have been added as springboards for discussion. They can be found in each chapter and in the Appendix.

- The Further Reading section in each chapter is comprised of almost all new or updated editions of previous selections. In the first edition, this section was separated into two parts, Articles and Books, which have now been combined.

As we continue to explore cross-cultural awareness, too 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 many North Americans. In addition, there is the tendency to oversimplify, to overgeneralize, and to essentialize unfamiliar cultures based on stereotypes, which result in a “single story” of a culture. As Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie argues in her 2009 TED talk “The Danger of a Single Story,” the critical problem of a single story is that it is only one small snapshot of an entire culture that then becomes the sum of that culture. This single story creates and perpetuates stereotypes while ignoring the myriad other stories, or cultural aspects, that comprise a culture. In her words, “They make one story become the only story” (12:57). In this book, we strive to prepare users for a global world, where no one culture or people consists of a single story.

It is our expectation that this second edition, used successfully, will allow current and future teachers to become 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. To this end, we see the text as being particularly applicable in three contexts:

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.

As with the first edition, the revised text attempts to strike a balance between theory and practice. The goals of the book are to:

- expand cultural awareness of one’s own culture and that of others
- achieve a deeper understanding of what culture is and the relationship between culture and language

- acquire the ability to observe behaviors in order to draw conclusions based on observation rather than preconceptions
- understand and implement observations of cultural similarities and differences
- develop an attitude of tolerance toward cultural differences and move away from the “single story.”

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 will enable users of this book to see how their particular ways of viewing and understanding, or “lenses,” influence 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 current and classic research 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. In each chapter, the practice section includes even more critical incidents, a particularly popular feature in the first edition, for promoting discussion for and reflection on differences across cultures. **Critical Incidents** are brief descriptions of events that depict some

element or elements of cultural differences, miscommunication, or culture clash. The purpose of critical incidents is to develop users' ability to analyze and understand how multiple perspectives of the same situation are rooted in differing culturally influenced beliefs, behaviors, norms of interaction, and worldviews.

A new feature to this second edition is the **Suggested Projects** section in each chapter. This section provides opportunities for users of the text to explore in greater depth an area and topic of interest. A variety of projects have been suggested to appeal to a diverse readership with different interests, pedagogical settings, and needs.

The section on **Further Readings** at the end of each chapter has been completely updated to include new material or revised editions of books cited in the first edition on the chapter topic; in certain instances we have chosen to retain classic articles and books. The readings can be used as starting points for more in-depth research.

This edition, like the first, links theory and practice by including activities that engage readers in active learning. The majority of the activities presented in the text are designed for next-day implementation—that is, they can be incorporated immediately into the classroom or workshop—while a few require minimal advance preparation.

The text is divided into six major themes, each of which is a chapter. Material has been revised and expanded, and much new information and research added. Users of the previous edition will note that some material and activities have been moved or deleted to improve the organization of the chapters and to reduce redundancy.

- Chapter 1 is concerned with the role 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 non-verbal communication and cross-cultural differences.
- Chapter 5 considers societal roles and expectations across cultures. 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.

Each chapter includes these sections:

- **Anecdote.** The purpose of this section is to capture the attention and interest of the reader by presenting a brief anecdote related to the chapter theme. Each anecdote is followed by a discussion of key issues it raises. Anecdotes and discussions encourage readers to reexamine their own assumptions and preconceptions about themselves and others.
- **Theory: What Research Tells Us.** This section reviews fundamental knowledge and research on the chapter theme and concludes with questions for discussion. The intent of this section is to provide readers with a theoretical base to facilitate participation in the chapter activities and suggested projects.
- **Practice: What Activities Show Us.** Here, readers have the opportunity to broaden their cultural outlooks through a variety of learning activities related to the chapter theme. Each activity is described step-by-step and revised in this new edition for additional clarity and relevance. The activity types range from those that can be done in the classroom to those to be done outside of class. The various activity types include observation activities, simulations, questionnaires, and critical incidents, among others.

- **Suggested Projects.** In this section, new in this edition, readers have an opportunity to explore chapter topics in greater depth. Projects allow readers to make more connections between the topics and their own experiences, whether in a new culture as sojourners or as immigrants, in the classroom as teachers or as students, or both. Some are long-range projects that require more time to complete, while others are of shorter duration. They can be undertaken individually, in pairs, or in small groups. We suggest, however, limiting groups to a maximum of four students.
- **Internet Resources.** In this section, new in the second edition, we offer suggestions for readers to search the internet for supplementary information relevant to the topics of each chapter. Rather than recommending specific sites and URLs, we have chosen to recommend search terms to help readers locate up-to-date information in the rapidly changing world that is the internet.
- **Further Readings.** A revised annotated bibliography of readings on the chapter topic concludes each chapter. The readings come from different fields, including communication, language teaching and research, anthropology, and linguistics. These readings are not meant to be an exhaustive list but rather a selection of key readings on chapter topics. Unlike in the previous edition, both articles and books are grouped together.

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 thoroughly familiar with the culture or cultures of the language they are teaching. In any situation, however, the overarching goal is to avoid the single story and to develop greater cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

We firmly believe that 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. Although much of the theory and practice herein has broad cultural applications, the text is focused on a North American cultural perspective and may therefore not be appropriate for settings abroad.