

# HOW<sub>TO</sub> TEACH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A practical teaching guide for universities and colleges

REVISED & UPDATED  
FIRST EDITION



Paul J. Kurucz

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colleges

Paul J. Kurucz

Revised First Edition

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Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

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# About the Cover



## **Three international students who are ready to take on the world!**

(From left)

N. Adam Diallo from Senegal earned her undergraduate degree in the United States and went on to complete her U.K. credentialed MBA in Canada.

Sweetpal Singh from India and Chi Song from China both earned their undergraduate degrees in their home countries before coming to Canada like Adam to complete their U.K. credentialed MBA degrees through a Canadian institution.

All three have very bright futures as international leaders, managers, and entrepreneurs. With the powerful set of skills and experiences they gained through their international learning experiences, they are ready to take on the world!



# Dedication

*Dedicated to my family and to my students who together have provided me the support, the opportunity to learn, and the impetus for writing this book.*





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## Foreword

### To the Revised First Edition

*“Sir, can you please tell me what will be the format of the mid-term exam? Will I have to memorize terms that are in the textbook?”*—A first year international student at a college.

These might be fairly normal questions from any student, international or “local”, right? I would think so. Well, the questions were not so shocking, but the *context* and the *timing* of the questions were shocking. They were asked of me a few minutes into an experiential class exercise in my marketing course. I am running around to different groups in the class getting them focused and working on a live case study (the person in the case study with us in the classroom as a guest) when one student from a small clustered group of Chinese students calls me over. She is obviously anxious. Her 2 compatriots lean in with the same looks of intent when she asks these questions to me: *“Sir, can you please tell me what will be the format of the mid-term exam? Will I have to memorize terms that are in the textbook?”*

So, here I am, trying to hustle all the groups to be focused on analyzing the case situation so that they can give some intelligent feedback to our guest and I get these questions, completely out of *context* of the focus of the class. I am trying to get the momentum of the case study exercise going and these students are seemingly oblivious to what we are doing. Instead, they are anxious for some reason about the future mid-term exam and need, right then and there, to know the answer.

At least they asked me in-person and not out loud in front of our guest.

How do I feel when I am this situation? What do I do? How do I reply? All important questions.

As this scene unfolded I sensed a variety of emotions in myself, including bits of frustration, anger, disbelief, shock, disgust, distaste, sadness, pity, care, and compassion. Here I was, a supposed “expert” on teaching international students, and I was getting these kinds of unbelievably disconnected questions from international students. (Note that this experience so far is all about *me* here. I will get to what the students were possibly thinking in a moment.)

Next, some possible responses flashed through my mind, ranging from plain information dissemination to outright anger:

"The mid-term is a case study and no, you don't have to memorize terms from the textbook." (Read: If I just answer the question they will get on with their task)

"Please come and talk to me at the break or after class about this." (hint: the timing of your questions is inappropriate so please ask them in a more appropriate time)

"I appreciate you are anxious about the upcoming midterm—please make an appointment and we can chat about it." (Read: I sense your emotions and would like to help make clear how you can be successful grade-wise.)

"Who gives a hoot about the midterm!!!! Why don't you get on with this learning opportunity I set up for you and then maybe, just MAYBE, you will learn something and then the format of the midterm will be irrelevant because you will have learned something that you can use on the midterm!!!"

That's right: The author of this book, a supposed expert on international students, had those thoughts flashing through his mind.

Which one did I choose?

The first choice: Just tell them real quick and maybe then they will focus on the case we are doing that I worked so hard to stage.

The result: Immediate relief washing over the faces of the students and their shoulders fell in tandem as a further sign of relief.

However, a rapidly rising wash of new anxious looks immediately came over their faces, followed by:

"So the format will be a case study?"

Me: "Yes."

"OK." (uncertainly written on their faces) "So, how do I study for a case study mid-term?"

Me: "By doing case studies, like the one we are doing right now . . ."

## **Different worldviews, goals, and methods**

What happened in this situation? Well, there were two really important things that took place, one related to the students and one to me.

First, the students were obviously feeling really disconnected from the *learning process* I had set up. Here was an opportunity to learn from a real-life marketing

problem ( an “authentic exercise”), interact with a real-world business guest (presentation skills, communication skills), and get feedback on ideas (motivation, self-confidence, deep learning of marketing concepts, communication etc.) These Chinese students, however, were disconnected from this kind of learning process—it was alien to them because in China there are few, if any, opportunities to learn in this manner. In this instance there was no memorizing, no listening to the teacher lecture (the master imparting knowledge to the student), and instead there was an unfamiliar process unfolding that was not clearly linked to the midterm exam, which was where the all-important grades would be earned.

Second, I was having to deal with an out-of-context interaction with students when my focus and energy was elsewhere. I wanted a successful outcome from this live case experience (including for my ego perhaps), and to not deal with such questions at such an inappropriate time. I had a range of emotional reactions (kept inside for the most part) and a realization that just because I thought I knew a lot about teaching international students, I still able to get blind-sided.

And I realized later that I could have avoided this situation.

How?

I had forgotten that international students are here in our institution studying for perhaps different reasons than many local students are here for (Chapter 1). I had also forgotten that many Asian students are strongly process oriented (Chapter 3), they are not typically familiar with non-lecture approaches (Chapter 4), and I had not been as careful as I should have been to ensure that I had addressed all success orientations and learning styles (Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

(Sigh) So much for being the “expert” on international students! Well, at least I recognized what was happening and I could now continue building into my teaching approach methods, processes, and the care required to help ensure all students could learn affectively in my course, whether they be a local or international student(Chapter 7).

### **Where this book comes from**

This book is the culmination of some 17 years learning with, and then teaching, international students. I first started learning with international students while doing my MBA program at the University of Western Ontario Ivey School of Business in 1989. I vividly remember the very few international students in my section of 60 students. One in particular stands out: A Chinese student, who sat tall and straight in his top row seat. He didn’t speak often, but when he did, his

difficult-to-understand English, his long speeches, and total lack of shame at his poor English stick in my mind to this day. I had ignorant questions going through my mind at the time, such as:

- Why was he here?
- Why did “they” let him in when he could not (in my opinion), speak English at an adequate level for a graduate level program?
- Why didn’t he just keep silent and try to improve his English and let us native English speakers do the talking?
- Why did he do long speeches? Why didn’t he just get to the point and let us get on with the case study we were working on?

I later found out that this student was an ex-minister of telecommunications in China. After graduating with his MBA, he went on to negotiate major telecom deals in China for one of the largest telecommunications firms in the world. He was likely more successful financially in his first 5 years of work than I will be for the rest of my career. As a human being, he had more poise, grounded self-clarity, and positive energy than I certainly had then but wish to have now!

And needless to say, I shake my head in retrospect at my youthful ignorance, immaturity, and provincial frame of reference.

I went on after my MBA to exciting business and management experiences followed by a teaching, administrative and academic leadership career in colleges and universities.

Where and with whom did I end up enjoying working the most?

In post-secondary institutions with international students.

And I wouldn’t wish it to be any other way. Because working with international students is a constant learning experience for me. It has been richly rewarding, refreshing, frustrating, insightful, and exasperating, at times. And a lot of fun, too.

Maybe this book will help other teachers and faculty get to the point I am at in my teaching career—the point of loving the richly rewarding work I do with bright, diverse groups of students.

In this Revised First Edition the scope of what post-secondary institutions as a whole do for international students is addressed. The role of ESL teachers, counselors, residences/home stays and the general institutional services are newly examined. A couple of more commonly faced scenarios are added and others

fleshed out. Depth of understanding is added throughout. Oh, yes, and those pesky spelling and wording mistakes that we always click our tongues about when we read student work? I have fixed most of them, too, I believe.

The goal? To provide a more powerful primer for any teacher working with international students—and working with a diverse student body in general—to move rapidly forward in their own continuing journey towards excellence in teaching.

My sincere and humble hope is that this book helps you in your journey.

*Paul Kurucz*

*Victoria, BC, Canada—April 2008*



# Acknowledgments

Writing a book on teaching is not something that can be done in a vacuum. Teaching being a science, a skill, and an art form means that something must be experimented on, practiced and expressed. These “some-things” are the students who graciously and most often unwittingly let teachers, like me, learn how to teach with them as my practice subjects. A big thank you to my students over the years!

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## *Introduction*

Why would someone write a book on how to teach international students? What is so different about this group of students that would require such an effort?

The reason is that there are lots of differences between “local” students and “international” or “foreign” students, as they are sometimes called. There are so many differences, in fact, that these students are almost a unique group of learners entirely. And the differences can be a big challenge for western teachers.

“Has the mix of students in western institutions changed that much? What happened to classes full of western (read: “white”) students?”

In fact, education in English language universities and colleges located in western countries is vastly different today than it was even 20 years ago. And it will never be the same again. The days have passed when all students in western institutions were “white”, “born here”, “native English speakers”, “locals” or “normal”.

Teachers in post-secondary institutions now face a diverse mix of students of different:

- Skin colors
- Shapes
- Sizes
- Accents
- Clothing styles
- Hair styles

- Language abilities
- Technological abilities
- Ages and generations
- Genders
- Sexual orientations
- Interests and hobbies

These students come from countries many people didn't even know existed. And from cities with names they never heard of - and can't pronounce. Or perhaps some of the students aren't from so far away, but from a local native group or subculture of a local society that is not highly visible in the community.

Some important questions are raised by these visible changes in the composition of classrooms in post-secondary institutions:

- What has changed?
- Where did all these "international" students come from?
- Why do we have this diversity in our institution and your classroom?
- Why are they so different from our "local" students?
- What value do they bring to our country and our institution?
- How the heck do I teach them?

### **All important questions.**

When the shift to attracting large numbers of international students happened in the 1980's and then accelerated in the 1990's, teachers and faculty were not

ready for the changes. Departments were not ready. And whole institutions were not ready. Even our societies were not ready. But the shift happened and is continuing to happen. And likely the “good old days” will not be back.

So we had all better get used to diverse groups of students.

When teachers find that 10% of the number of students in their classes are international students this fact might be of little concern to them. These teachers might think:

“These international students can either sink or swim in my class. Achieving success is their problem—not mine. 10% of a class is not even enough students to affect student ratings of my teaching performance if these students don’t like how things are done in my course.”

But what happens if the classroom is now 25%, 50%, 75% or even 100% composed of international students? Teachers can no longer ignore the uncomfortable fact that teaching a mixed group of nationalities, skin colors, accents, and ways of seeing the world isn’t a simple process to deal with. They can’t just lecture using complex English backed up with textbooks written in stuffy academic lingo. Lectures and textbooks are generally considered to be not very effective when trying to teach “local” students, but they are really and truly ineffective in a classroom with international students who need to learn more than just information.

What can be done in a situation where tried and tested teaching methods simply fail to do much for international students? On the other hand, what can be done when changing teaching methods is quite simply a daunting and steep hill for many teachers to climb?

### **Are they “international” or “local”?**

One manager of a college international student department expressed his frustration that immigrant Asian students, who had been through the local high school system and were highly qualified on all counts, were being treated like they were newly arrived international students by faculty. “You can’t judge by facial features and accent whether they are capable students or not!”

### **Are international students any different from local students?**

“But Madam, I spent 100 hours on this paper! I worked until 2:00 am on it! And last week my grandmother in India died, too! Please help me pass your course, Madam!”

Anguished cries heard from an international student who had just failed his assignment.

Chapter 6 of this book looks at how to deal with common challenges faculty deal with.

There is lots that can be done. Dealing tactically with some common challenges teachers will face when working with international students is a start (Chapter 6). Then taking the time to work on the deeper foundations of learning experiences can set teachers up for exciting teaching modes (Chapter 7).

Before we look at “how” to make the changes, we need to address more fundamental questions. Questions such as what we, teachers in universities and colleges, are really supposed to be doing now. Are we researchers teaching students to research? “But they can’t seem to read in English at a post-secondary level, so how can they even start to do research?” is a question often spoken in frustration. Chapter 2, entitled “Teaching, learning and research: What are we all about?” looks into this question.

Another question we need to answer is: “How do I even begin to understand these students? Where do I start?” Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on these questions.

## Chapter 1

# Where Are All These Students Coming from and Why Are They Here?

### The Rush to be Educated in Western Countries

The world outside of western countries is in a rush. A headlong rush to better itself economically and culturally; to catch up to the perceived wealth and fame of those societies that offer freedom, social services, and luxuries for all.

And the peoples of all hundred or so countries in the world *outside* of western countries are prepared to work hard to make it happen. They are willing to save carefully in order to send their children overseas. To send them to places like the UK, the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia or a very select few other places in order to get a degree or two. These are educations that will help family businesses export to the same rich countries the children went to for their learning. These are educations that will help the families to immigrate to these rich countries. And educations that will help their children rise up in their own home country societies, improving their country as they rise.

This hunger is scary to many comfortable citizens of “have” countries. “Why do our own children not work as hard at their educations as foreign students do?” is a commonly heard complaint. Another complaint: “It’s a crime that our own students can’t get into college when all the spaces are full with Chinese students who get 99% averages.” In the minds of these citizens are a lot of fearful thoughts of invasions of “our country” by

#### “Western Countries”?

The term “western countries” is used in this book to mean Canada, the United States, the UK, western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. The principles in this book, however, apply equally to all countries, even though the focus is on “western countries”

#### “Foreign” students or “International” students?

The word “foreign” carries a sense of being something different and alien. It carries connotations of “different is bad”. The word “international” is used in this book to describe students who are different from your local norm because this term does not carry negative connotations.

In reality, both terms could be replaced with “heterogeneous”, but the term doesn’t sound quite right when attached to “students.”

these foreigners—"Our lovely country is being culturally and economically overrun by foreigners! And Chinese writing on our street signs!"

But the reality is really quite flattering, if you look at it differently. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then these peoples are really just trying to be as successful as those people who they see as having high quality living standards. They admire the perceived happiness and wish to live in the same nice homes as westerners live in. And wish to work in same nice office towers. And wish to buy the same nice things we can buy.

So they send their children to western countries to be educated by western institutions. Because everyone knows that the best way to success is through education. Westerners must have achieved their success in this way. So if they let westerners educate their children, goes the logic, their children will be as successful as us. Good logic. And generally true.

### **Why Do We Let Them into Our Colleges and Universities?**

There are a lot of reasons for the rapidly expanding number of international students in western colleges and universities. Some of the most often quoted reasons are:

- By letting foreign students study here, we are exposing our local students to different ways of doing things. We are getting them ready to work in a global economy as they learn to interact and work with international students.
- Through education, we are sharing with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> worlds the essential tools needed to raise themselves up economically and socially to our stature.

- By mingling with international students on our campuses we are breaking down cultural, social, and racial barriers that are the foundation of racism, war, inequality, and greed the world over.
- We want the money international students bring to our institutions.

The first three are wonderful reasons to open college and university doors wide open. Enlightened self-help, altruism, and actively working for a better world are always good reasons to do things.

The fourth reason—coveting the piles of cash international students pay to get into our institutions—is the biggest reason for *administrators* of western institutions who must balance the books while still trying to grow the institution. It is the deal maker. It is the powerful force that is like a sexy person you can't keep your eyes off. It is the "way out" for administrators of all those nasty budget issues institutions face as their average faculty age rises, salaries increase, and benefit packages get deeper and deeper. Make no mistake: Internationalization of the student body in western colleges and universities is primarily being driven by money. The rest is just "icing on the cake".

A cynical viewpoint? Not really. Administrators need to make the institution work financially. That is their job. But just because many administrators of post-secondary institutions value the revenue international students bring does not mean that the other value-added benefits don't exist or occur. They do! And post secondary institutions in western countries are not about administrators—they are about students and the process of helping them learn. They are therefore not about money but about instructors and students. Those same value added benefits that are incidental to *administrators* can be very enriching, rewarding, and



**Some typical statistics**

University tuition:

Local students: \$4,214

International students:

\$12,587

(government funding is far less than the difference)

As a college or university which desires more money, where would be an easy source to get it from?

From more international students, of course!

**The truth upsets some . . .**

One Dean of International Education got quite upset by the way (some) administrators are portrayed when she reviewed the draft of this book.

Interestingly, around the same time an article appeared in her city's local newspaper that prominently included the following: ". . . international students revenues fund 17 sections of local students . . ."

And for the record: This is a dean who is also a very strong leader in encouraging value-added benefits.

stimulating benefits for *instructors*! Keeping a focus on what post-secondary institutions are designed to do keeps the role and impact of international students in a more balanced perspective. Post-secondary institutions are not supposed to operate like businesses. They are supposed to operate like places of learning. Learning that supercedes vested interests, dogma, racism, discrimination, personal philosophies, zealotry, and many other societal and human ills.

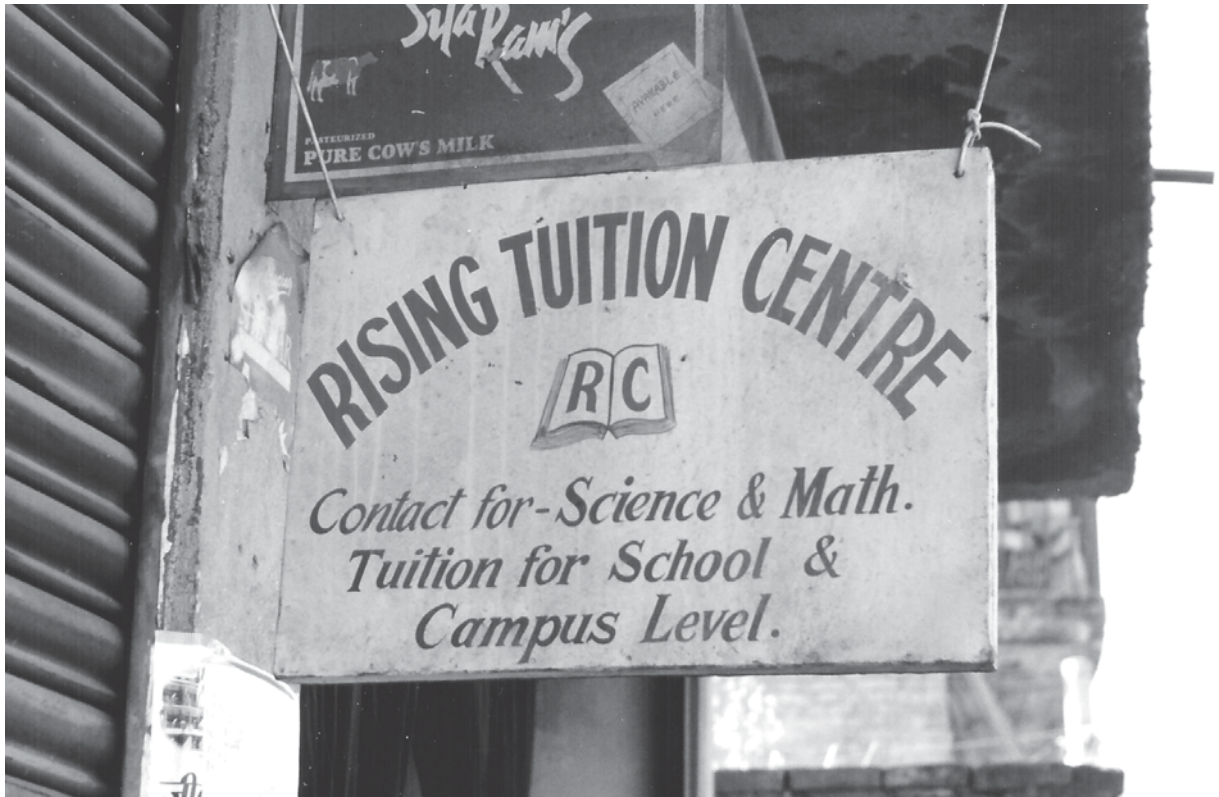
Administrators know this. Instructors know this. And students know this. Which is why western post-secondary institutions are really very good places to teach and learn in.

**English Language Education—a Competitive Edge**

There is an old saying that goes something like:

"French is the language of diplomacy. German is the language of engineering and science. Italian is the language of love. Spanish is the language of passion. And English is the language of business."

This old adage holds true today. English is the most coveted language for international students, particularly those who want to work in international commerce. The French, for example, have a strong desire to preserve their language and culture. They can spend all the time they want wailing about the potential demise of their language in the international arena and they can spend huge sums of money promoting French language training. The reality is, however, that business being done internationally is based on a British/American/Canadian English language model. We are experiencing globalization being pushed by primarily



This tiny school, located in the back streets of Kathmandu, Nepal, caters to poor Nepalese who want an English language education for their children. With English, the parents hope that their children can have a chance at a better life economically. The word “rising” is humorous in that native English speakers might interpret this as “rising tuition” while it is meant to be: “by attending this school you will rise in society”.

A grim reminder that improving living standards is a struggle for most of the population of our world. Education is one of the very few ways “out” of a cycle of poverty.

American corporations. As a result, in many places in the world, English language education is seen as a premium quality education.

There is also an implied credibility of English language-based teachers. They are viewed as academically tough and not easy to bribe for higher grades.

### One student's reflections

"when i lived in china, i found that Canada have higher standard in life and education. therefore, i came to canada. when i arrive in canada, i realized the lifestyle between canada and china are very different. for example, Canadian like brush the teeth after the breakfast while chinese enjoy brush the teeth before the breakfast. if i haven't brushed my teeth, i feel nauseated when i eat the breakfast. i think the canadian have the same feel when they see chinese people eat chicken feet. as chinese people say "when you arrive at a new place, you'd better change you lifestyle to be the same as the locals people." therefore, i change my lifestyle. i don't eat chicken feet in the public areas now. i did try my best to accept the canada culture because the canada can offer me more opportunity for jobs and i can earn more money here than in china."

—quoted verbatim from a blog entry of a Chinese student, April 2008

While bribery and corruption are often seen as necessary for day-to-day survival, most people in the world do not condone it and would love to get rid of it. Situational ethics may be the *modus operandi*, but when offered the chance to have their children study in institutions with firmer ethical foundations, many parents jump at it. After all, their children are their hope for the future. No one feels good bending their ethics to the wind. Perhaps their children, if built tough and smart enough, won't have to. It is these hopes that help feed the desire of parents and students to find institutions they can trust.

Lowering of academic standards, if we can call it that, takes place not at the teacher-student interface in Western post-secondary institutions, but more likely at the administrative level of institutions. This is the level at which international students fees are highly coveted as a means to make budgets balance in a time of government cutbacks. This desire to retain and grow international student fees sets up pressure indirectly, or in some cases directly, on faculty to "pass" the students. After all, these students have paid huge fees for their education. Their degrees are "bought and paid for". Administrators who want a steady flow of these funds to continue in the future are in a catch-22 situation. They can push to maintain rigorous academic standards for the long-term good of the institution and for the principle of doing so, but risk scaring off many foreign students who are worried their English language or other academic skills might disadvantage them grades-wise. These students are sometimes from weaker academic backgrounds as well, compounding their fears. On the other hand, Administrators can loosen entrance and academic requirements to accommodate international students. By doing so, the insti-

tution gains short-term revenue increases, but puts the institution's reputation at risk by doing so.

### **Too Many People with Degrees—the Rush for Graduate Educations World Wide**

Another relevant trend that impacts on the growth of international education is the rise in the number of people with bachelor level degrees in the world. The baby boom generation coming through the world's job market has put a lot of competitive pressure on individuals to have top credentials in order to compete effectively for high paying jobs. There are only so many management jobs to be had. If you want one, you have to have experience, the right connections, a good relationship with your peers, and increasingly, the right educational qualifications. In the past, a bachelor degree was seen as a passport to the good life. "College educated" Americans, for example, are often quoted as having higher salaries than those who didn't, on average. This belief is world-wide now. A bachelor degree from a western university is a highly coveted qualification.

The stakes have gone up, however, as a result of the number of people with bachelor degrees world-wide. The competitive edge now is to have a *graduate* degree. An MA, MBA, or even better, a PhD. These qualifications will give you an edge on older, more experienced peers who only have bachelor degrees. Since you are all competing for a few scarce management jobs, a graduate degree will help. It might also open you up to new career choices, such as that ultra-good teaching and research posting at your local university. University faculty make good money, are well respected and have good summer holidays—everywhere in the world.

## **The Hunger for Economic Growth**

Very clear patterns of country development occur over time. One common pattern is the economic development trend. People generally want to improve their economic lot in life and are willing to work hard to do so. If a people as a whole feel this way, opportunities for economic growth occur and whole societies focus on making the changes needed to begin developing wealth. Agricultural-based economies develop into industrial economies that later move into service economies and most recently, into information and knowledge centered economies. Western countries are generally in the service and information/knowledge modes currently, though still bemoaning the loss of the industrial mode as it is simpler and seems to generate clear wealth patterns. Second world countries are generally in industrial and service economies and third world countries are in the range of agricultural to service economies, with a heavy emphasis on agriculture.

Post-secondary education modes tend to track these country economic development modes. This is not an empirically proven statement, just an observation of seeming trends:

### **Phase 1: Foreign educations.**

Send young people elsewhere to get an education as we cannot provide it in our own country and/or we specifically want different ways of thinking and skills/experiences/knowledge from more developed countries.

### **Phase 2: Develop institutions at home with foreign teachers.**

Some 10-20 years after these young people return upon completion of their foreign education, they begin considering their own children's educations and the



value of having high quality institutions in their own country. Local high quality education institutions open, staffed primarily or largely with foreign teachers due to a lack of good local instructors and a lack of available candidates for entering a teaching track (the booming local economy is soaking up the best people). Local instructors are hired as they become available with the goal of them developing careers in education. Care is often taken to break societal trends such as these jobs being given to instructors based on relationships, bribery for grades, student relationships with instructors—grades, fake degrees, etc. Over time, the best local students come to consider these institutions a viable option for their education as they come to trust these institutions to be working in their best interests rather than being just plush places for incapable, well-connected local incompetents.

### **Phase 3: Local high quality research and teaching institutions with local teachers.**

Phase 3 begins 20 years or so after phase 2: New institutions emerge with primarily local instructors and researchers who themselves have a mix of foreign and local educations. Foreign teachers are still hired, but are the minority now. These institutions are integrated fully into the country's economy and society and are considered destinations of choice for local students. Throw in government subsidized lower tuition rates and they become powerful local generators of economic growth and societal change.

The implications of these three phases are that students from different countries and regions come to western institutions in differing numbers at different points in the development of their country's economy and society in general. Over time, western institutions see more students from one country or region and then

**“Why don’t I get the same salary as a Western instructor?” . . .**

Said in a bitter tone to the author by an Arab instructor in Dubai.

. . . “I have 2 Masters degrees! And I got both of them in one year!”

At first, I thought this person was kidding. Two Masters degrees in one year?!

She was not kidding.

It takes a long time to develop good instructors; those who can see their own strengths and weaknesses and be able to work effectively to help others learn.

The process oriented instructor quoted here equated credentials and the achieving of more degrees with the ability to teach and the rewards that should naturally result from her education.

**In China, parents call the shots . . .**

I represented my institution at a post-secondary educational fair in Beijing in early 2006. Hundreds of people visited our booth in the 2 days the fair ran. I found it most interesting that the main visitors at the fair were *parents* of students. The parents alone came to the fair and researched countries and institutions for their children, who were not even present at the fair!

Further, the parents made painstaking efforts to ask detailed questions about the experiences their child would have, the reputation of the institution, the costs, and much more.

How many parents of western students go to such lengths to research and choose an institution for their children?

this seems to drop as countries move into different phases. Overlapping this trend are demographic trends in both local and western countries. Waves of young people enter and leave post-secondary institutions in fairly predictable patterns based on demographic trends. All of these trends should be deeply researched by institutions involved in teaching international students, if for no other reason than to understand when the tides of revenue from international students will flood in . . . and when they will recede.

### **What International Students Want from a Western Institution—the Student Perspective**

Educators tend to see students in general as a homogeneous group, particularly if they all look the same. This is human nature, not some fault of educators in general. “They want a degree and a good job after graduating.” This simple belief certainly is true of most post-secondary students world-wide. It is too general a statement, however, to be of use in understanding why international students come to western institutions.

Noted earlier was the parents’ perspective—what the parents want for their children. Since in most non-western societies families are far stronger entities than in western countries, parents have a larger influence on where teenagers are educated and on their career choices than those in western countries. Throw in the payment factor—the parents are most often paying or contributing heavily to the international education, and you have a powerful influence on where international students end up studying and what they study there.

Young adults are not dumb, however. They often know more about what places are good to go to for fun than their parents. They talk to each other and when

they hear that their peers are going to Boston College, for example, young people quickly assess whether that is somewhere they want to go to as well. A string of well thought out rationales arise from the teenagers' minds and as a result, parents often accommodate their children's wishes in school and location choice.

Here is a list of common factors and reasons international students choose a particular western institution:

**Some strategic reasons:**

- A "name brand" institution that is easily recognized internationally: i.e., Harvard, UCLA, London Business School, Oxford, University of Sidney, University of Toronto, McGill University. "Any employer in my home country will recognize these and be impressed by the name."
- "The institution is recognized as offering a valuable degree that will get me a good job"—In India, for example, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, engineering, and computer science degrees from a good university are all seen as passports to good jobs. Most students would not choose an international liberal arts degree. The cost of an international degree and the pressure from parents to see a payback discourages many (most?) of that group who might choose a mind-widening degree over a career focused one.
- "A university degree from University X will land me a better husband/wife than one from University Y". International students are working with some very different cultural variables than typical western students.
- "University X is in city Y, which is one of the target cities I want to look for work in after I graduate. By getting a job with big company Z, in city Y, I can



**Fact can be funnier than fiction!**

A true story:

I always ask my international students why they chose this particular institution—the one I am teaching in—to do their degree. The answers never cease to amaze me:

Me: “Why did you choose to come to this university to do your degree?”

Student: “Because my travel agent told me it was in Vancouver.”

(laughter from the whole class)

The worst part? The travel agent was mistaken: The university in question was some 3 hours by car and ocean ferry from Vancouver!

immediately apply for citizenship and have my application expedited because I am in highly demanded profession W and now working in my field for local big company Z.”

- “City Y is more tolerant and worldly than most other cities. I won’t be discriminated against or at personal risk in city Y. My nationality and skin color are not as welcome in other places.”
- “My home country is really backwards. I want to study and hopefully live permanently in a modern western country so I can be free of old family and cultural traditions and make a lot of money. A degree from this institution, and just being here for a number of years, will provide opportunities to find ways to stay. It is my best chance to not have to go back to my home country. It is my ticket to a better life in the west.”

**Some tactical reasons:**

- “My brother goes to University X. I don’t want to go there because {I won’t be as free to have fun with him watching my schedule and reporting back to my parents whenever I go to a party} and/or {My parents would compare our grades} and/or {I want to be seen as different from him} and/or {I want a different degree and his institution is focused on computer science} and/or { . . . }.”
- “If I go to University X I am farther away from home. I will have more freedom to party and have a good time. My parents can’t afford to visit me and keep an eye on me all the time as this place is far away from our home country.”
- “I couldn’t get into University X. So University Y is for me. They don’t have as tough entrance requirements.”

- “University X will allow me to finish my degree in 1 year and not 2 as in University Y. And University Y requires me to do a “foundation” program to get me ready for studies there. It may be good for me, but it is more time and money out of my pocket. University X has no required foundation program.”
- “University X is cheaper than University Y by several thousand dollars per year. And accommodation is much cheaper, too.” Total cost of education is just as important to international students as tuition fees alone. After all, to their parents, it is the total cost of flights, accommodation, food, telecommunication costs, transportation locally, tuition fees, text books, etc. that is the focus. Not just tuition, as it might be with local students who can live at home with their parents.
- “My friends are going to University Y. If I go there too, they can help me with my work as I am worried that my English is not good enough.” It is always more comfortable to be with what is familiar in life. Students, about to radically change their lives, often choose some comfort features for their international experience. Friends and comrades going the same institution can be a big source of comfort.

There are many other factors international students use to make institution choices, but the important point is that international students have many different variables to work with than domestic students. Recognizing and unearthing these variables is one important step every instructor of international students should undertake, every time they meet a new cohort of students. And I stress “every time”—different mixes of students come to different institutions over time.

In finding out the factors that affect student choice of your institution, you will not only make a personal connection with students by expressing interest in them and their situations, but the responses will also open your mind to the dynamics of the heterogeneous group you are working with.

Finally, International students are unsure about the expected culture of the learning process in your classroom. They need to understand your teaching style. You may want to teach using a tried and true teaching style you have perfected with relatively homogeneous student groups, but when working with a very mixed international group, you won't be able to do so effectively. Rebuild your style using building blocks of process you have already, but never use a static style with different groups of international students. Show your students that your style can fit with theirs. That you are there to help them learn and not to force rigid processes on them.

### **International Students Don't Want to Be in Kansas (or Karachi, or Shanghai or, . . .) Anymore**

Remember Dorothy in the movie "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" being startled and a little shocked at not being in Kansas anymore when she arrived in the land of Oz? Well for most international students, your country, province/state, city and institution are "Oz" to them. Everything may be different. They may have chosen to come to your institution for the one reason of wanting this new experience of living and studying in a western country. But just because they chose to come and "experience" your country doesn't mean the experience is any *easier* for them. It is at times uncomfortable, awkward, scary, and lonely for them. All their cultural cues and habits of comfort are broken. They

are out of their element and unsure about many things. They will be somewhat disoriented for at least the first full year of their time in your country.

This disorientation will directly affect their behavior in the classroom.

### **“Us” and “Them”**

An important assumption is made consciously and unconsciously by teachers and students alike. The assumption is that all white first-language English speakers are alike. And that all ESL English speaking international students are alike.

Neither of these assumptions are true, of course!

First-language English speakers are certainly not all white, nor are they all from the same cultural background. A first-language English speaking British student might look just like a student from India. In fact they might originally be from India but have grown up in the UK. But this student is a native English speaker. This student certainly has many differences from a first-language English speaking white student who grew up and never traveled far out of his local area of Kentucky, USA.

An International student from an urban area of China will likely be a substantially different student than one who grew up in a rural area. There are huge differences in most aspects of their lives, including the dialects they speak.

This book makes the assumption that there are enough similarities between first-language English speaking students who grew up in relatively rich western countries (Canada, UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, western Europe) and who attend western universities and colleges to call this group “us”. And that there are enough differences between this group

as a whole and the rest so that we can call that group “them”. Note that this assumption is never relied on as the basis for any conclusions. Almost all the tools, techniques, and insights noted in this book can be applied to any student from anywhere, including “local” first-language English speakers from western countries.

## Practical Teaching Technique

Each time you meet a new group of international students take 15 or 20 minutes to ask them why they are at your institution. This works with groups of up to 40 students in size. Here's one way to do this have used successfully for many years:

1. Sit down on a desk/table in a relaxed manner and smile as you focus on each student in the class, one at a time. Say slowly, calmly, and clearly at the beginning: "I would like to know something about you. Would you share with me, please, your name, where you are from, and why you chose to come to \_\_\_\_\_ college/university to do your \_\_\_\_\_ degree?"
2. Wait patiently for each student to answer. Look each in the eye throughout their answer and thank them slowly in turn for sharing their answer with you and the class: "Thank you for sharing your reasons. And welcome to my course. (pause) Next person, please . . ." Do this for every student. Don't miss one or shorten or change your "thank you" sentence at all. Do not make notes of their replies as this may imply you are making marks against their name based on their response. Body language is important here. Sit relaxed. Do not distract them by shifting your seat. Be a focus of their attention during this exercise.
3. Thank them as a group at the end and express your delight at the main reasons given for wanting to study at your institution. Repeat those main reasons in summary and tell them that their responses will help you understand their needs better.

After the first few students state their reasons and the whole class sees that they are not going to be penalized in any way for speaking up, the rest often give you the full truth, some of which may be quite humorous. (Note: Never laugh at the international student who says something funny unless they laugh at themselves—this may cause a loss of face, which is a bad thing).

By the time you have gone through each student in a slow, steady, equal amount of time each, and with a respectful manner, you have already achieved three powerful things:

- A. You have received insights into why they are in your institution and program which helps you understand the different motivations for them being there. These insights will help you in dealing with them one-on-one and as a group.
- B. You have sent the powerful message that you care about them individually. They are not just walking international wallets of money or a homogeneous group of "foreign students". Now each one is validated as being important.
- C. You have also laid the foundation of trust. They already feel that you will not ridicule, scorn, or dismiss them due to strange accents, gender, or for their reasons for being there. In their minds, they breathe a sigh of relief: You are someone they can trust and who they do not have to be nervous with. You respect them and are interested in them. This is the message they get from you through the process of the exercise. And this is a message of trust is a powerful message indeed!

P.S. If you are in the middle of a term with a group of international students, stop for 30 minutes and do this exercise with them. Tell them that you regret not taking the time to get to know them earlier in the term but wish to do so now. It doesn't matter if you don't do this at the beginning of a term. Just do it! And then watch the almost immediate change in attitude of your students towards you, your class experiences, and toward each other.



## *Chapter 2*

# **Teaching, Learning, and Research— What Are We All About?**

As noted earlier, this book focuses primarily on English speaking post-secondary education institutions—those in the U.S., Canada, UK, Australia, and New Zealand. There are some significant differences between how post-secondary systems operate in each of these countries, but for the most part they are similar at all levels in their approaches to educating students.

### **Some differences between post-secondary institutions in western countries:**

- Canada's college and university system is based more on the UK system than on the U.S. system. For example, Canadian universities are primarily publicly funded, with education seen as a valuable goal in and of itself. In the United States, private colleges and universities comprise roughly 1/2 the number of the educational institutions, and include Harvard, for example, in their ranks.
- U.S. universities have moved to more commercial-university linkages than in Canada or elsewhere.
- How colleges versus polytechnics versus universities are seen by people in each country varies. In Canada, a college or polytechnic education carries a stigma of being trades related—something for the “working class”. This is a funny leftover quirk related partly to Canada's British heritage. It pushes many high school



students into universities when they would thrive in polytechnics and colleges. In the United States, an Ivy-league university like Harvard is desirable, but going to “college”—a generic term describing colleges and universities—is desirable over not going at all.

### **Some similarities between post-secondary institutions in western countries:**

- Faculty have transferable credentials between most universities among English speaking countries.
- Most colleges and polytechnics focus on the same thing, namely preparing students for careers.
- Most universities have a mix of teaching, research, and community connections as their mandates. The actual percentage mix of these three factors varies by institution and has been the subject of debate amongst faculty and administrators for decades and even centuries in the case of some institutions.

### **Western University and College Faculty Perspectives**

What faculty think higher education is all about—and should be all about—impacts on how international students are perceived in institutions, the process they are put through, and how they learn and thrive (or not).

Some viewpoints that are commonly used in discussions about the role of higher education:

- “Canadian colleges and universities are publicly funded—they should be for Canadian students only.”
- “Universities are places for students to learn. Therefore, teaching (as generally defined as time spent with students helping them learn) should be the most important focus of a university.”

- “Universities are places for students and faculty to do research. Research should be the most important focus of a university.”
- “Universities need to be free to explore ideas, concepts, and unpopular viewpoints without fear of censure. Therefore, they need to be separate in terms of laws, and regulations, and not connected too closely with the community around them.”
- “Universities and colleges are part of the community. A two-way symbiotic relationship should exist between local, regional, and national communities and a university or college.”
- “Students from other countries must adapt to our system. That is their job. Our system is fair, open, and designed to provide students with the opportunity to learn without fear of censorship, mandated bias, or negative repercussions resulting from examining the truth. It is up to the students to take advantage of this opportunity. We shouldn’t change to suit them—they should change to suit our system.”
- “Students from other countries have different needs and viewpoints. Our system could be enriched if we adapted ourselves somewhat to the needs and ways of international students. We need to change how we do things to better help international students learn at our institution.”

Obviously there are a variety of often conflicting viewpoints among faculty. An optimist would say that this kind of conflict is exactly what higher education is all about. Enlightened, reasoned debate is what allows people to balance more than one viewpoint in their minds at the same time, finding the best of each

### **Yale University**

“The course of instruction which is given to the undergraduates in the college, is not designed to include professional studies. Our object is not to teach that which is peculiar to any one of the professions; but to lay the foundation which is common to them all.” The Yale [University] Report, 1828.

This report was produced by Yale in response to critics who wanted universities to be more practically focused.

Debates about what colleges and universities should be doing have been going on for a long time—with no consensus in sight for the future!

viewpoint and integrating these best features into decisions and actions.

A pessimist would say that a lack of focus and commonly agreed upon educational processes and goals simply waters down an institution's focus. Rather than being excellent at some things, institutions are poor at all things.

Whose view is right? The optimist or pessimist? Everyone has their own opinion! But that is not the focus of this book. The focus here is to understand how to teach international students. With the diversity of viewpoints on the role of higher education and how it should operate, it is no surprise that there is no consensus on how faculty view international students and how they should be taught.

### **The Results of Faculty Having Varying Viewpoints**

International students are exposed to often conflicting viewpoints and implementations of the teaching and learning process. Sometimes this exposure is a good thing and sometimes it is bad, depending on the support the international student receives for dealing with the differences.

In order to accommodate different faculty viewpoints on how teaching and learning should take place, the course "subject" model of dividing teaching is rigidly enforced and maintained by faculty and administrators. For example, a faculty member lecturing in a finance course is very separate from an experiential, student-focused marketing course. In fact the two instructors could be teaching the same group of students and only once in a term say a cheery "hello" to each other as they pass in a hallway. Where integration of subjects could, and perhaps should, take place to enhance learning, it typically does not take place. This separation is really very much at odds to the real world,

where no “subject”—such as the production and shipping departments in an organization—are divorced from each other. There is a mosaic and layering of knowledge, skills, and interaction in any organization, work related or social. In this, then, the “vertical knowledge pipe” structure of teaching in most post-secondary institutions is an artificial construct that does not mirror what happens outside these institutions.

International students are alternatively encouraged to learn through processes or to learn through research, depending on the viewpoint, wishes, desires, fears, and hopes of different faculty members.

How students perform their work varies depending on which faculty member’s subject they are trying to master. Sometimes a highly academic paper is required, sometimes an experiential exercise must be engaged in. Sometimes an open-book case exam is given, sometimes a closed-book multiple choice, computer card-read exam is given. This variation is likely more good than bad. Flexibility is almost never a bad thing to learn.

International students are sometimes outright disliked by faculty simply because they are present. Or because they do not interact the same way as local students to the faculty member. Sometimes international students are honored, respected and happily welcomed by faculty. Their differences are a source of enjoyment to the faculty.

In summary, the differences between faculty viewpoints and processes have a huge impact on the experiences international students have at an institution.

### Lectures Versus Learning—Who is the Center of Attention?

How international students should learn is beyond debate in this book. Absolutely without a doubt a

#### This perspective is not new

. . .

“You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him discover it within himself.”—*Galileo Galilei*

“I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.”—*Albert Einstein*

“The biggest enemy to learning is the talking teacher.”—*John Holt*

“What I hear, I forget.  
What I see, I remember.  
What I do, I understand.”  
—*Kung Fu Tzu (Confucius)*

Summary of structures and processes:	
Limited Learning Potential	High Learning Potential
Lectures	Experiences
Textbooks	Finding and creating information
Large class sizes	Small classes
1 hour class times with 3 topics	1 week projects
Rows and columns of desks and chairs	Varied learning environments
Multiple choice exams	Problem-based or constructivist challenges
Sage on the stage	Guide on the side
Focus on knowledge	Focus on questions

“learning approach” is far superior to a “teaching approach”, for any student—international or not. This is the “what should be” section of this chapter. Neil Postman and many others have done admirable jobs of making clear that lectures, multiple choice exams, textbooks, and 500 students in a class structures are (terrible, sad, regrettable)—you choose the word that works for you. I recommend Neil Postman’s works highly for those looking for the reasons behind this harsh indictment of a “teaching” approach.

Shockingly, students are still exposed to “bad” processes to a great extent, perhaps even for the ma-

majority of their experiences in many institutions, even though “good teaching” practices and principles have been understood and written about ad nauseum for decades and even centuries. Obviously, there is a difference between “knowledge” of how learning should happen and the practice of helping make it happen.

But once again, it is not the focus of this book to push how to make a change from bad to good processes, but to highlight that for an international student, bad processes add another layer of difficulty or barrier to their learning. On top of cultural acclimatization, language differences (most often), and environmental changes, they must also deal with weak classroom and process experiences at times.

A focus on learning for international students is essential if they are to achieve significant progress in developing their abilities, skills, knowledge and attitudes. Faculty, therefore, must be chosen, trained, led, and rewarded only not for their subject knowledge, but for their ability to focus on student learning as the center of their “teaching” lives.

And sadly, this is generally not the case.

### **Research as a Means to an End or Research for Its Own Sake?**

The whole research versus teaching question is a difficult one to address from an international student perspective. If we assume that institutions should have a strong focus on student learning and a learning approach is applied in a program, then research becomes a natural part of an international students’ experience. And it should be! This is “research as a means to an end”.

#### **The western concept of research is quite alien to many international students**

What western educators consider research to be is very different from other education systems. Self-directed learning, discovery, constructing, primary data gathering, aggregating, analysis, critique, creating new insights and implications etc is what many international students consider the job of their “masters”—those who are the leaders in a field.

Much of Asia works with this structure:

- First you learn all you can from the Master (teacher lecturing).
- Next you become a Master.
- Then you build on what your Masters taught you.

Immediately can be seen why many Asian students have no clue how to research western-style. They have never had to! “First you learn all you can from the Master . . .”

If we assume that institutions should be research oriented—(research for the sake of research) then international students may simply face too many barriers to learning for most of them to be able to succeed. The gap is too big for them to cross, particularly if they come from education systems in their home countries that have a focus on “knowledge-delivery-to-student”. And this is the case with many K-12 schools and undergraduate programs around the world.

In summary, research is tied closely to the system in place at a particular institution. If the focus is on student learning (“teaching”) rather than research, then paradoxically research can benefit international students. If the focus of an institution, or a group of faculty in a department, is on pure research for its own sake, then international students will likely experience significant challenges.

### **What International Students Think About Research**

What do international students think about the long-standing debates, discussions, differences, and various opinions on what colleges and universities should be doing and how they should operate?

For the most part, international students don’t think about these issues. Educational structures are taken for granted as being “right” the way they are. Students are generally focused on what the output will do for them in the real world—what type of job, status, honour, respect, etc. will derive from their credential. These students are typically not even aware there are significant differences of opinion in how education should happen. They are not dumb, but simply not really self-aware about how their own learning happens or doesn’t happen.

As noted earlier, students generally consider post-secondary higher education from different viewpoints:

- “How will a degree from this institution help me get a (job, good career, marriage partner)?”
- “Is it fun there?”
- “Is it hard there?”
- “Are my friends going there?”
- “Do they have the program I want?”

If we think of all college and university students as “customers” (special kind that they are), we see that they are not fully educated customers but rather ones who go somewhat blindly into the institutional process. Sadly, unlike many organizations who take great pains to educate their customers on what they are buying, post-secondary institutions don’t take much time to help their customers understand the nature of the “product”. Given that post-secondary entrants are some of societies’ best and brightest, what learning is and how to learn should be mandatory subjects!

### **How to Get International Students to Understand and Buy into Your Process**

Again, international students generally have very different goals than educators. They want outcomes in the form of degrees, jobs, earning potential, and social and professional status that derives from an education in a foreign country. Instead of focusing on the “plane” they want “to get somewhere”. Instead of focusing on “learning” they focus on getting a “degree”. This viewpoint should not be a problem for educators—in fact it should be more fully understood by them! However it does highlight the gap between a focus on “show me the money” and “I want it all right now” mindsets and a focus on much deeper learning processes that are



**Self-assessment prior to teacher assessment is critical to learning**

Brian Grover, the first editor of this book, suggests that student self-assessment of a work should happen before a teacher does their assessment. A teacher should deduct marks when a student does an insincere self assessment.

Some practical ways to implement this:

- A rubber stamp that the teacher stamps on the cover page of a paper—some simple assessment points the student must complete.
- A self-assessment form that the student includes as part of their submission.

During the 2-1/2 years of the writing of this book, I have embedded more and more self-reflection and self assessment into my curriculum with ever increasing payoffs in terms of increased abilities in a range of academic and affective domains.

not immediately attainable, but must be worked very hard at.

Note: Some international and domestic students truly understand the value of a liberal arts education and their experience at your institution in a new culture is what they are aiming at immersing themselves in. These students do exist and should be commended for their bravery in stepping into the unknown for the sake of learning.

### **How to Help International Students Understand What Higher Education is All About**

There are some simple steps that can be taken to help the majority of students understand the role and function of higher education and what learning is all about:

#### **1. Help them learn what learning is about.**

Have them turn a proverbial mirror onto themselves so that they must reflect on what learning is and how they have learned in the past. Most students have never had teachers who spent time working them through how learning works and how higher education can help them learn better, more, and deeper.

There are many tools available to help international students work through learning about learning, including:

- Making them teachers for a day.
- Getting them to assess their own work routinely and regularly.
- Journaling—individual self reflection as a regular process. Blogs are wonderful tools for learning.

- Time spent discussing what the institution is and how it works.
- Getting the students to model the perfect learning facility and learning process (constructivism).
- Doing various reflection exercises like Learning Styles Inventories.
- Working through success orientations (see chapter 3 of this book).

## **2. Orient them at the outset to how institutions work.**

Real orientations that include experiential exercises and not just tours of the campus and lectures about rules.

## **3. Create powerful communities of alumni.**

Make alumni an integral part of mentoring incoming and potential students. Most institutions view alumni the same way they view international students: Wallets to be plundered for the next capital building project on campus. This is a terrible tragedy and miss-use of alumni goodwill. Alumni should first and foremost be encouraged to help new students learn, model behavior, and be mentors.

## **4. Mentors!**

Mentoring is a fantastic process that builds depth in understanding and trust between students and institutions. The following mentoring systems should be consciously and fully implemented for all international and local students:

- Alumni to senior student mentoring.
- Senior student to junior student mentoring.
- Faculty to student mentoring.

### **The Value of “Foundation” Programs that Try to Get Students Ready for Your Process**

Foundation programs are an attempt to prepare international students for the processes and rigors of the institution. In other words, these programs are an attempt to enhance the likelihood of the students passing their future courses. They also aim to help these students through culture shock and cultural acclimatization following their arrival in the foreign country and alien environment where the institution is located.

How affective are these programs? Some important factors:

#### **1. Length of the program**

A one weekend foundation program will obviously be of little or no benefit. The huge leap that most international students must make in terms of academic processes, language, and culture cannot be significantly aided by a one or two weekend course. On the other hand, a six month or one year preparatory foundation program will be much harder to “sell” to potential international students. It may be in their interest, but remember that since much of the institutional mindset about international education is about “students on seats generating revenue”, longer foundation programs are a hard-sell both ways. Students want the fastest credential for the least amount of money and institutions want to deliver the fastest program for the most amount of money and the least cost. Long programs for institutions mean more faculty and support costs. Length of program, then, is constantly being scrutinized for “how short can we make it for the most money?”.

#### **2. Content of the programs**

What happens in these foundations programs is another big variable. If the program is lecture-based—

telling students all the rules and regulations, for example—then it is useless. Perhaps worse than useless as it turns students “off” before they actually get into their main program of study. On the other hand, if the foundation program is experiential, working consciously through many layers of the culture and environment, then it can be quite effective. Examining cultures, investigating how institutions work, and working students through self-reflection exercises would motivate them for an exciting entrance to their main course of study.

### **3. Location of the programs**

Where the foundation programs happen is important as well. Often these programs are run in the summer when an institution is at minimum staffing. Students, then, don’t interact with many people who could help them acclimatize. And those who are there are wishing they were out in the sun on vacation. Also, contract staff are hired to operate the programs—because faculty are on vacation—and in order to make these programs “fun”, a lot of unconnected leisure activities are introduced both on and off campus. Recreation and socialization are fun and often useful experiences, but what these students need are wide ranging groups of local people to interact with, a carefully crafted intense experiential program, and an environment that supports their integration into their main course of studies.

### **The Value of Homestays, Residences, and Integrating into the Local Community**

Language is rooted in culture. While you can learn a language in a classroom, to really be able to use it in everyday life and business you have to immerse yourself in

the culture that underlies it, so that you gain an understanding of the metaphors, common usage, and the intricacies of subtle meanings. For success in an academic institution where faculty, staff and students are all using different local idioms, international students must gain a rich understanding of the local culture and the language particular to their field of studies.

The best ways for students to get this immersion is through homestays, living in residences and by integrating into the local community as much as possible. What is the reaction of most international students when in a new and challenging environment? They bunch together and insulate themselves from the local culture as much as possible. This is human nature. Any institution that helps international students gain the integration that will help them learn the cultural roots of the local language will improve international student learning, grades, and satisfaction with their experiences at the institution.

### **The Value of English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs**

One of the most underrated but over-achieving groups in most post-secondary institutions is the ESL department. These people are often hired on contract, usually at the whim of numbers of international students that term, have the unenviable task of getting ESL students “ready” for an academic program of study, and are treated as a commodity by many institutions. Not so! They are a key link in helping international students prepare for their whole academic “coming out” experience, and when they do a great job building relationships with these students, retention is very high—the international students stay for many years, most often right through to their terminal diploma or degree.

ESL departments, then, play a key role in ensuring the success of international students and should be more fully integrated into the whole academic picture of an institution. With diversity increasing, perhaps the role of ESL departments will become more of “bridging” on a wider scale, helping all students find common ground in language and culture.

### Conclusion

Post-secondary institutions and the learning that takes place in these places are not fully understood, agreed upon, or clear to most members of society, students, many faculty, and many administrators. The benefits of the process are believed in, but these benefits are most often not clearly quantifiable.

For international students, this lack of clarity represents another barrier to their integration and learning as they enter a foreign environment and learning institution. And the lack of clarity represents another layer which these students have to work to achieve success. This extra layer and the lack of clarity and consistency are certainly not insurmountable problems, but they must be consciously and carefully prepared for (including good funding and staffing) to ensure that students can not only succeed in the institution, but so that they become educated “consumers” who can clearly and enthusiastically participate in their own learning process. And then after graduation they can share this understanding in their communities and with potential students.

Why is this word of mouth so important? If institutions want to attract regular or growing numbers of good international students who pay high fees then a good reputation is essential. A good reputation is a guarantee of future revenue potential for the institution.



## Chapter 3

### Success Orientations

Behavior theorists and philosophers have been struggling to unlock the workings of the human mind for thousands of years. They have developed a wealth of theories and models from their research. Many of these theories have led to tools and insights that can help teachers understand how students *think*. These tools and insights can also help to make clear why students *behave* the way they do in certain situations. Developing an understanding of the way students think and behave is extremely useful in figuring out how they *learn*. If teachers can better understand how students learn, perhaps this will lead to better tools, techniques, and methods for helping the students go about this learning.

In the last hundred years or so, several macro models have been developed that are useful as general tools for understanding and predicting how and why people do things under certain conditions. By “macro” I mean models that seem to indicate certain predictable patterns despite covering wide range of variables. A few common and useful ones most teachers know about are:

- Maslow’s hierarchy of needs
- Meyer’s Brigg’s personality types—MBTI
- Learning Styles Inventory—David Kolb
- Multiple intelligences—Howard Gardner
- Emotional intelligence quotient—Daniel Goleman



These models provide different insights into human motivations and behaviors. And they generate these insights reasonably well because they are simple and intuitive tools. The models and theories can be understood quickly and seem logical. Users of these models and theories can often see anecdotal evidence from their own lives and experiences to support the models and theories. Further, over time and through much testing, the tools even seem “scientifically provable”.

Each model can give you one kind of insight into the potential human behavior of an individual or a group of individuals. When these models are used together they begin to sketch out a more coherent picture of an individual—how the individual might be expected to behave, learn, and feel about things under certain conditions. If the goal of teachers is to help students learn, then the use of these tools becomes another asset in achieving that goal.

Another tool that can be used to help understand student motivations and behavior is the “success orientations” model.

### **The Success Orientations Model**

In teaching international students in Canada and abroad over a 15 year period, I developed a model I find very useful in working with students who come from different cultures and backgrounds. This model can also be used to help understand motivations and behaviors of any individual in any country, but for the purposes of this book I will limit the application of the model to understanding international students. And in particular, how international students from different cultural backgrounds go about:

- the process of learning

- the process of interacting with teachers
- the process of achieving success in their educational goals at your institution.

The application of the model is particularly useful for an international context because different cultural groups have different general motivational and behavioral tendencies as a whole. One major barrier to successful interactions with international students can be aided by learning about these behavioral tendencies—the difference between a teachers' personal motivational and behavior patterns and those of their students. I call this model the success orientations model.

The word "success" is used to title this model because of all the things human beings want in life, an overall driving force is the desire to be *successful*. They want to achieve many things, including being successful at the big things in life:

- Making their parents happy with them and their choices in life.
- Completing an education.
- Achieving a successful career.
- Finding a partner to spend life with.
- Having and raising children.

People also want to be successful at the hundreds of day-to-day, week-to-week, and month-to-month challenges that face them. Such smaller challenges as:

- Getting the dishes washed after dinner.
- Finding something good to eat in the refrigerator.
- Finding car keys before going out of your home.

- Achieving a good grade on a research paper next week.
- Getting the rent check paid by the end of the month.
- Earning enough money to pay for tuition that is due in January.

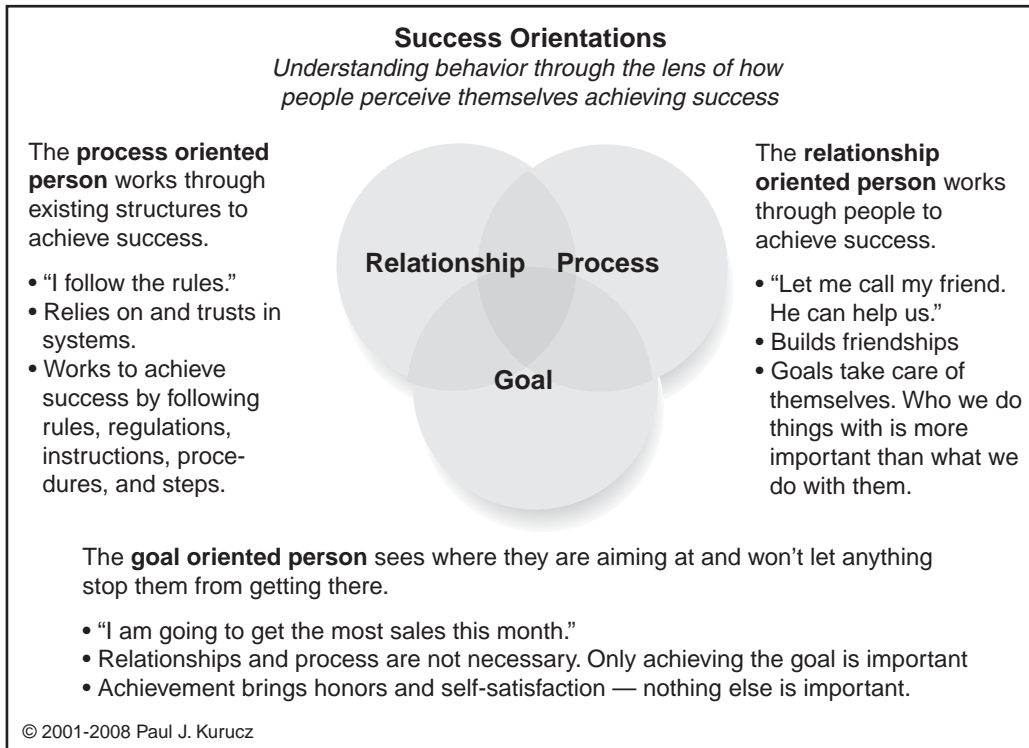
What differs between people is *how* they go about achieving these large and small successes. This focus on how people actually go about achieving success is crucial in understanding the model. A person is naturally oriented toward one particular orientation or a mix of two different ways of accomplishing things. In rare cases they can do things in 3 different ways equally well. They may want to do something in a certain way, think it is the best way to do it, but may actually do it in a different way. This different way is the result of a natural and powerful orientation that they have toward achieving success.

### The Three Success Orientations

**Relationship**—Other people are central to success and happiness of a relationship oriented person. Those who are oriented towards relationships have an expectation that friendships, associations, and interactions with other people will most often or always be the route to success in life.

**Process**—Instructions, directions, policies, rules, and steps to follow are needed for success and happiness. Process oriented individuals look for and follow processes that have a high probability of generating a successful outcome. The goal may not be fully understood, but the process is trusted to achieve success.

**Goal**—The shining light in the distance is the goal to be focused on with unwavering attention. Some people focus almost exclusively on goals to be achieved



and let nothing get in the way of their success in achieving those goals. They can define their goals with utmost precision and direct all their personal energy toward achieving these extremely specific visions in their minds.

The diagram on the previous page illustrates how these three “success orientations” fit together.

### Some Important Notes About this Model

#### **This is just a behavioral model.**

The success orientations model is just that—a model. It can **not** be used as a model for understanding whole human beings, who are vastly too complex

**“Everyone has ‘goals’. Isn’t everyone ‘goal oriented’?”**

Do all people have goals? Certainly most people do. However, when asked what those goals are, most people will be hard pressed to define them clearly and fully. And if asked how they will achieve those goals, they will probably not be able to fully answer the question in a detailed manner.

This model uses the term “success” carefully—people in general want to be successful in many different aspects of life. However, some individuals have a very specific goal burning brightly and clearly in their minds—things they put all their energy and focus into achieving with often unwavering determination. We call those individuals ‘goal oriented’. A clear separation between these people and those who generally want to be successful is made.

Interestingly, this question came from a very goal oriented student. She could not fathom how other people could not have very clear and specific goals all through their lives!

to be boxed by one model. However, just like a doctor uses x-rays to see the state of a person’s bones—just that part of their body—the success orientations model can be used to get some insights into how people go about accomplishing success in the world. In the context of this book, international students tend to have some very different ways of accomplishing success, resulting in some unique challenges for them, their peers, and their teachers when they come to study at western post-secondary institutions.

**Success orientations are not mutually exclusive.**

While I have not done a mass population study, I figure that 99% of the people in the world tend to have more than one orientation—one strong or dominant tendency and one lesser or secondary tendency. For example, a person may be primarily relationship oriented, but have a lesser process orientation as well. Some people have a balanced, three way mix. We used to call such a person a “well rounded person” or a perhaps a “well-balanced person”. Socially this meant the ability to get along with everyone (relationships), achieving great things (goals), while breaking few important social, cultural, or organizational rules (processes).

**No orientation is “good” or “bad”**

This is a macro model that simply predicts how people go about accomplishing things as they go about trying to be successful at life. All orientations can lead to happy, productive, meaningful lives. What differs is that some people may be “good” at certain tasks in life and “bad” at others based on how they go about trying to be successful. Good at some jobs and bad at others. Good at learning in some modes and bad at learning in other modes.

### **The model's foundation: basic human needs**

This model is useful because it originates from basic needs—human needs that are genetically driven and encouraged by parents from birth. Most of the other models noted earlier, like Maslow's hierarchy of needs, are similar. They are intuitive and feel valid because they build on basic needs of survival, reproduction, and human growth. They are not trying to model high level symptomatic behavior patterns, but rather provide broad behavioral indicators from the underlying causes, which are basic human needs.

### **Orientations are partly genetic and partly learned**

Orientations are partly learned and partly genetically driven. The learned part starts at birth. For example, babies learn how to be successful in getting their mother's attention and on-demand access to their mother's breast by trying different methods when they are hungry. Some babies scream and that gets mom's attention. Some cry. Some whimper. Some smile and move to be close to mom. Whatever works. Once they latch onto a way that works, they repeat this method. Early repetition of a successful method begins an imprinting of that method as a way of achieving success at other things. Another factor, perhaps, is birth order, which is recognized to have a big impact on personality and interaction methods. A middle child is often seen as a relationship oriented person, one who is good at mediating disputes in the family, for example.

But people seem to have a natural or genetic success orientation tendency as well. Often you hear people say: "Oh she must be an Aquarius—she is such a \_\_\_\_\_ person." Many people use the zodiac signs to help figure out each other's personalities and ways of doing things. More study is needed on the mix of learned

and genetic orientation tendencies in individuals, but the model generates enough replicable evidence to be useful in helping determine potential behavior patterns related to how people go about achieving success in life.

### **No-one is stuck with an orientation for life**

Recognizing your own success orientation(s) is the first step to understanding how you can use other orientations in different situations in order to achieve success more easily. Learning to use other orientations may not feel natural. It may not even be enjoyable. However, it will often be very useful—if not necessary—to achieving success in some situations. If any normative statement can be made about success orientations it is that every adult citizen of a country should have the goal of being a balanced individual, one who can choose to use any of the three orientations throughout their day as the need arises. For example, a person should consciously choose to respect laws (processes), while making an effort to communicate well with their co-workers (relationships) and help all their customers effectively that day (goals).

People who are strongly oriented toward one way of achieving success will likely feel strongly that their way is the best way. For example, a person who likes to follow processes in achieving success—filling out forms, following instructions, steps, procedures, reading text books, etc.—will get frustrated and angry at a relationship oriented person who tries to get to the goal by having someone help them. They call this “cheating”. A truly relationship oriented person will call a heavily process oriented person “cold” and a “bureaucratic paper pusher”. “They don’t care about people—just the stupid rules”. A person who is highly goal oriented will find anyone or any rule that slows

them down to be a frustrating waste of time. A lot of miscommunication and hostility has arisen in the history of humanity because of different orientations towards the right way to achieve successful outcomes in business, politics, religion, and simply “life”!

There are two underlying assumptions when considering the success orientations model:

1. Teachers want to understand how students think and do things.
2. Teachers then want to use this understanding to adapt their modus operandi.

These two assumptions are not necessarily true! Some teachers actually resent students being different from the cultural norms of the country they are in. They believe that students should either “fit in or get lost. If they don’t have what it takes to learn my way and from my lectures, they should go back to where they came from”. This is not a direct quote, but a general feeling that is exuded and expressed in direct and indirect ways by some teachers. Thankfully, there are only a few of these teachers in each institution. These teachers are not generally considered “good” teachers by peers and students anyway, but it is important to note that there has to be at least an interest in improving how to help students learn for this model to be of any use to teachers.

### **The Relationship Oriented Person**

The relationship oriented person sees other people as the best way to achieve success. In an extreme case, almost everything such an individual does in life must involve other people.



**Tribes: relationship orientation factories**

Arabs from the Bedouin tribes of Rub Al Khali—the empty quarter desert of Arabia—are extremely relationship oriented as a whole. Simply surviving in this barren and hostile land in the past was so tough that only by banding together for every aspect of their lives could survival be assured. Loners died of thirst, enemies, or by not learning desert survival techniques from others.

Over the millennia mutual need led to tribal relationships that governed and continue to govern every aspect of their lives. Every decision and action has someone who must be consulted with, leading up to the tribal chief (“Shaikh”) who has the most wisdom, knowledge and experience . . . and the most responsibility for ensuring the survival and success of the whole tribe!

A viewpoint that is the antithesis of the American ethic of individualism! What appears as dictatorship to Westerners—a Shaikh's power—is on the other hand extreme responsibility for ensuring the success of the whole tribe.

**Some general factors that describe a relationship oriented person**

- When faced with a problem or a new situation, the first instinct for a relationship oriented person is to contact a friend or family member who might be able to help solve the problem or explain how to deal with it.
- This person does not like to be alone. Almost all activities must have a social element, even such simple tasks as doing the dishes, walking the dog, or working in the garden.
- A weekend is not complete unless at least some parts have a social element. A quiet Friday night makes a relationship oriented person uncomfortable—unless by quiet you mean going out to a friend's house for drinks and a chat.
- Formal group settings, positive team spirit and a sense of camaraderie are all things that enliven a relationship oriented person.
- Recreational activities are in and of themselves not important—only the social element of the activity is important. Almost any activity is fun if there are friends along and as long as the focus is on the social element and not on the activity itself (an important distinction).
- Finding out about other people is a natural instinct for the relationship oriented person. How people “fit” together—who is who's friend, for example, is extremely important to relationship oriented people.
- There is a hierarchy for relationship oriented people: One person to share a meal with is good; two is better; three is even better; four or more is best. Adding people to an activity midstream, like asking someone

to join a lunch or meeting, is completely acceptable and even makes the whole experience even livelier for the relationship oriented person.

- Verbal communication skills and body language awareness are the highest of any orientation. Verbal skills are naturally developed from infancy through the intense desire for interpersonal interactions. A relationship oriented person can sometimes be seen actually repetitively practicing speech patterns, mimicking people they have strong bonds with, and reveling in verbal handshaking.
- As a group these people are also very aware of body language and sensitive to personal “energy”.
- Relationship oriented people are irresistibly attracted to each other in social and work settings. Of course in romantic love opposites are said to attract, but in a general social setting, relationship oriented people will gravitate to each other very quickly. This is not true in all cases, however, as relationship oriented people are fascinated with people in general and see others who have a goal orientation, for example, as particularly fascinating. “I met \_\_\_\_\_, the Olympic athlete, today!” might be something a relationship oriented person would get excited about.
- Relationship oriented people who are not self-aware consider the other orientations “boring and cold” (process oriented people) or “greedy, selfish, and self-centered” (goal oriented people). Caveat: These thoughts don’t last long if these other people show a modicum of real sociability. All can be (nearly) forgiven if someone is friendly.
- Homework or studying of any kind only works for relationship oriented people if there are other people around to do the homework or studying with.

### **A relationship oriented person?**

“Can you do me a favor?”

“I owe you one.”

“You scratch my back and I will scratch yours.”

“Log rolling”

At first glance, these can seem like the words of a truly relationship oriented person.

And perhaps they are.

But when you get someone who really makes things happen with this approach—who is known as the person you go to in order to resolve a tricky situation—then you are likely dealing with a goal oriented person, not a relationship oriented one. Goal oriented people use relationships and processes to their advantage and tend to be the best at these “working relationships” and processes . . . before turning their attention elsewhere after the goal is achieved. This turning away from “friendships” can be painful for the other party in the friendship.

- Solitary, individual, no-talking exams are an abomination to the relationship oriented person. Group projects with lots of time for social interaction are a delight.

### **Things you will hear a highly relationship oriented person say**

- “Let me call my friend—he will know the answer.”
- “Call me tonight. I will be doing my ironing, which is totally boring. We can chat while I do it!”
- “I want to start running again. Do you want to do it with me?”
- “Skiing? Sounds great! Who else is coming??”
- “Let’s go out to lunch together.” (I never eat alone!)
- “Come and join us for lunch! This is great . . . Jane, meet my friend Anne. Do you remember yesterday I mentioned Anne has a friend who works at . . .”
- “I know that person. Hey Jim!! How are you doing!?!?”
- “Let’s study together tonight.”
- “Let’s work on a project together” or “Can we do this project in teams?”
- “May we take the case study home the night before the exam so we can have more time to read it?” (Not just to read it, of course, but to work on it together.)
- “Sir, may I come to see you for help on my paper.” (Help in this case means hoping that a friendly teacher will mean hints on how to get an “A”.)
- A relationship oriented primary school teacher: “That child plays so nicely and is so friendly with the other children. What a good child!”

## Spaces a relationship oriented person enjoys being in

- Coffee shops—the ones where you can see everyone. Loud spaces are good, because you can hear other people's conversations—a good thing for relationship oriented people.
- Bars—grouping around a table for drinks and chatting or sitting at the bar—but only sitting at the bar if the bartender is friendly and likes to talk.
- Open street cafes—where you can hear other people's conversations and watch who is going by. (You might see someone you know!) Open cafes are great places where others can see you, too. Then they might come over and join you for a chat.
- Restaurants that have an open floor plan where everyone can be seen clearly, particularly where the door can be watched to see who comes in.
- Wide open fitness clubs where you can watch other people.
- Wide open public spaces with lots of people walking around who you can see, hear, and where you might meet someone you know. Beaches, public walkways, and shopping malls are examples.
- Movie theatres, stadiums, and outdoor events where lots of people gather for a purpose. These are great places for seeing, hearing and spotting people you know while they are engaged in viewing an activity. These places are also great because in them people are not actually focused on doing the activity and can therefore engage in discussions with you.
- Classrooms. "If you want to meet new people, take an evening course at your local community college" is an

### Some factors in the environment that combine to encourage a culture-wide relationship orientation:

- Overcrowding
- Scarcity of resources
- Harsh geographic environments
- Autocracies
- Institutionalized corruption
- Fear of losing a unique belief or cultural identity
- A strongly feminine and maternal culture

**The myth of the American “old west” tough, independent loner is just a myth**

The American old west loner who always survives is seen in western culture as the archetype of all settlers.

Oh sure, a bunch of these people really existed, but they were the rare exception to the rule. If you wanted to survive in the American old west under harsh conditions, you grouped together with other people—in other words, wagon trains, encampments, supporting police/military troops, settlements, etc.

Relationship orientations mean a higher chance of survival in harsh conditions—not a loner goal orientation!

American cultural mythology is littered with ideological battles between a pure goal orientation as the “right” orientation and the rest lumped into a general category called “communists” and “wrong”.

old dating maxim. The best classes for a relationship oriented person are the ones which are not rigidly controlled, but open to discussions and lots of before and after class chatting. These classes are a wonderful forum for socialization. Learning through discussion in close proximity to other people is a pleasure for the relationship oriented person.

**Some cultures that demonstrate strongly relationship oriented tendencies**

**Important caveat:** In every culture there are many individuals who do not fit the general cultural tendency. Stereotyping is not the goal of this section. Stereotyping of cultural success orientations can lead directly to racism, which is evil. However, cultural success orientation tendencies are useful when dealing with an individual or group whose behavior you are trying to understand. Understanding can lead to adaptation of your interaction—a bridging of cultural and communication gaps. From this viewpoint, cultural orientation tendencies can be very useful to understand.

- **India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh**—the “Indian subcontinent”. Here is a non-scientific explanation of why these places encourage extremely strong relationship orientations: A combination of high density populations, scarce resources, powerfully centralized governing structures, corruption, and constant change have meant that the only reliable way to ensure success is through the people you know. You can’t rely on process—it keeps changing at the whim of the leaders or when those charged with enforcing it are corrupt. You can’t be too goal oriented because there is no one to protect you when you make a mistake—which will likely be fatal. When faced with one resource and 10 people who want, and have an equal right to it, you have only one option: Be friends

with the person who controls the one resource. By doing so, you increase the chance you will be the one who gets the one resource over the other 9 people.

- **Italy, Spain, Latin America.** Cultures that are higher on the “femininity” scale. Indications of these are the focusing on female figures of reverence, such as the mother of Jesus, and on female icons. Mothers in these cultures are more revered than in other cultures and have a powerful influence on family relationships.
- **Iran, Arab, and other middle eastern countries.** As in the case of countries in the Indian subcontinent, middle eastern countries have resource limitations. Overcrowding, invasions, and autocracies are also factors. But one of the biggest challenges is posed by the geography itself. Most of these countries do not have vast biological wealth in terms of arable land, bountiful fresh water, or a variety of mineral wealth (except oil). And there are vast empty deserts and treacherous mountain areas that must be traversed to get from place to place. Add heat that reaches 50° Celsius in the summer and you have a powerful impetus for people to help each other survive under these harsh conditions. Typically nomadic tribes became the dominate mode of social organization. Relationships were the glue that kept the tribes together under these tough conditions.
- **Other countries.** These are just a sample of some of the areas and countries that have a high relationship orientations. There are many others.

### Careers that attract relationship oriented people

Extreme relationship oriented people are rare. Most people are a mix of two orientations, with one being dominant. A lot of people fall into this second group: A dominant relationship orientation and a lesser

#### A humbling teaching experience:

I publicly confronted an open and blatant case of “cheating” on an in-class exercise with a group of Arab students in Dubai. The culprit, with a look of confusion and incomprehension as to why I was upset, said to me:

“But sir, he is my friend. I must help him. Why is it wrong to help my friend?”

I experienced a paradigm shift at that point. Those three sentences stopped me cold and speechless. They were so simple and clear.

What was wrong with his helping a friend?

Nothing.

This shocking conclusion was an epiphany that forced me to spend the next few years examining everything I knew to be “right” about teaching and learning. And led me to an understanding of what a “relationship orientation” is.



**Interpersonal interfacing and “first impressions”**

Relationship oriented people feel very strongly about making positive first introductions to others. This critical moment sets up long term feelings—hence the stress we have on “first impressions” and in real estate terms, “curb appeal”.

Process oriented people also take first meetings seriously. Greeting protocol is a sensitive point with them. Proper introductions, hand shaking, eye contact, and proper phrases are required. And who (status, title) they are greeting is important—they don't want to get the wrong greeting for the wrong title/position/role/status!

On the other hand, goal oriented people may skip introductions completely if you and they are working towards the same goal. Later, they may actually ask your name. Needless to say, a goal oriented person's interpersonal style may be very disconcerting to a highly relationship or process oriented person!

process or goal orientation. Those few people who have a very strong or extreme relationship orientation tend to favor certain careers. If they are not in these kinds of careers, they find themselves unhappy in their working lives. Some typical careers for relationship oriented people:

- Sales—particularly where relationships are important—car sales, real estate sales, financial sales, business-to-business sales—any selling situation where interpersonal relationships play a role.
- Politics
- Religion—particularly those focused on building community
- Public relations
- Dating services
- Recruitment firms
- Relationship banking

**Summary—implications for teachers of international students**

Understanding your relationship oriented students is useful because:

- You will know how they will try to interact with you. This will be primarily by trying to build a friendship with you—a “connection” they can trust to help them achieve success in your course. The goals you may wish these students to achieve is of lesser importance to them. They are more focused on getting to know you. In their minds, good grades will flow from their relationship with you, not from their own individual

efforts. Nor from their success or lack of success on a particular exam or assignment. To these students, test/assignment grade outcomes are not clearly linked to their efforts in achieving the correct/best answers/paper. In some extreme relationship orientation cases a few students may actually believe they should not be linked!

- If you know your own success orientation tendencies, you will be able to communicate more effectively with relationship oriented students. For example:
  - You can adapt your “handshaking” style to make them more comfortable when you need to discuss something with them.
  - If you know a student is strongly relationship oriented, you can spend more time getting to know them before starting in on the issue you meant to discuss with them. This will make your students more relaxed and open to ideas, input, and guidance from you.
  - Ensuring that feedback—particularly constructive feedback—is received in a manner that leads to change relies on a positive open relationship with another person.
- You can provide learning experiences that help relationship oriented students learn more effectively. Some examples:
  - You may set up your classroom seating arrangement in a way that encourages social interaction.
  - Your lesson plan may include discussions and other modes of learning that relationship oriented people love.

### **The Fox Hunt**

British Royalty loves the fox hunt. It is a recreation activity that speaks of tradition, rules, honor, established dress codes and a grand way of life in the service of ridding farmers of foxes who steal hens.

Clearly the thought that the fox may not like being the hunted and killed by hound dogs does not come into the picture.

Nor does the fact that the goal is not important—in this day and age there are very few thefts of farm animals by foxes. The original goal of the hunt no longer exists.

Fox hunts are really about following a long established and much loved process. The process itself is now the goal for British royalty.

Underlying this strong focus on process is the belief that it is the rigid following of established protocols, traditions, and rules that keeps a civilization together. By rigidly “holding steady” a society keeps from falling into anarchy is the line of thinking.



## Practical Learning Experience:

### “What is your success orientation?”

Since you have likely been considering your own success orientation as you read this chapter, why not do a more comprehensive self-analysis to find out if you are a strongly relationship oriented person? You can determine your own success orientation(s) very easily by honestly answering a set of questions. By honestly I mean answering them based on how you really are, not how you wish you were.

The value of this exercise is simple: If you know your own success orientation, you can better understand everything you do as a teacher. Examples:

- How your interactions with students are sometimes enjoyable . . . and sometimes frustrating.
- Why you do things in the classroom the way you do—structure, seating layouts, lesson plans, test formats, textbook choice, etc.
- How your own viewpoint is biased towards students and ideas that fit your natural success orientation(s).

This self-awareness raising exercise is very useful for improving your ability to develop positive learning experiences for students who have different success orientations from yourself.

The questions and guidance on interpretation of the results are included in the appendix of this book.

- Exercises, case studies, examples, videos, etc. may be designed and chosen with social elements in mind. Instead of third person narration in case study video, for example, you may choose an acted out situation, where the people are the central focus and the situation unfolds through their experiences.
- Team work can play a part of your plan for learning and assessment.
- Your examination instruments may include examples of, or be based on, situations that include social interactions.

## The Process Oriented Person

The process oriented person sees working within existing structures as the best way to achieve success. Governments, businesses, religions, and even nature itself have all provided structures that lead to success. Why not simply work hard and follow the rules of these structures? Doing so ensures a high chance of success at clear, attainable, well-established outcomes.

### Some general factors that describe process oriented people

- When faced with a problem or situation, the process oriented person searches for the nearest relevant set of steps, policies, instructions, guidelines, rules, or regulations. In the absence of established processes, this person feels lost, as if in the wilderness. The “trail” is all-important. Without it, there seems to be no way of achieving success for this person.
- Process oriented people feel most comfortable as long as they are enmeshed in a structure—a clearly defined job, a religion which provides clear guidelines for behavior and protocol, a social circle which is clearly defined, a community in which people follow the rules, and a social circle with each person’s attitudes and intentions clearly defined.
- Weekends need to be planned with a clear structure of events, activities, and interactions with people established ahead of time. A couple of free flowing hours are fine, but within a short time this person begins to feel uncomfortable if a structure is not present to allow them to understand what is coming next.
- Meetings are satisfying when there is a clear agenda, a strong process oriented chairperson who follows

### Switzerland . . .

Switzerland is known as the land of precise watches, trains that run on time, and safety and security. Switzerland is a process oriented person's dream country!

Switzerland also has one the highest suicide rates in the western world among men. Slavish adherence to process forces many people into roles they do not fit and as a result, negatively affects their mental health.

Just as sadly, those countries where very few processes are established or followed have extremely high suicide rates as well. Continuous change and anarchy play particular havoc on the process oriented person's psyche.

**Two different ways of thinking about how things are done . . .**

**Teacher:** “Ying, for this challenge you must demonstrate that you can independently plan, do research, analyze your findings, and recommend a best approach for the problem.”

**Ying:** “Yes, thank you, teacher. But what must I do for this project? What steps must I take? Can you give me a list of instructions?”

Clearly, there are two different success orientations here.

This is a real example of one of the most common types of non-connecting communication that frustrates teachers of international students (and local students too!). It is just as frustrating to the student who thinks that the teacher won't help him achieve success!

(See Chapter 6, common challenge #15 for some background and suggestions on this situation.)

commonly understood protocols, a clear start and end time, and a clear sense that the process will generate the desired outcomes. Getting to the goal is not urgent if the process and procedures are not being followed. Structure becomes more important than preconceived goals. In the extreme, preserving and supporting structure and protocol becomes the goal itself.

- Recreational activities can be joyful for the process oriented person. After all, what could be more fun than an organized 10km marathon with the route clearly marked, timing of how long you take, set prizes, an organized starting position, and every runner being numbered? Any recreational activity with clearly defined procedures, rules, regulations, steps, and instructions is an activity that is fun for a process oriented person. Following the rules of the recreational activity is all-important. In an extreme process oriented person, the outcome (win/lose) or feelings of those involved are completely irrelevant. Simply knowing that the process and protocol are being followed means the activity is “good”.
- Rankings, titles, and social hierarchies are extremely important to a process oriented person. Having lunch with a person in your department and at the same job status is a good thing. Going to lunch with a few people is OK, as long as the process of “who is sitting with who” is clearly established, everyone knows each other, and their titles and rankings are clearly understood. Process oriented people are distinctly more comfortable in “high power distance” organizational structures. Socially they are likely to feel a deep affinity with Royalty and feel that heredity of title and rank through birth is the way things should be. Organized social structures are more comfortable places

to make life decisions in than letting messy and unprocess-like Darwinism rule your life!

- Structured communication skills are a strong part of the process oriented person's tool kit for life. A process oriented person can be very sensitive to incorrect protocol in written communications. They prefer written communications over verbal as there is a definiteness and certainty that written instructions, policy, and procedures have that verbal communications don't have. Process oriented people develop a clear understanding of what is to be said in different interpersonal contexts and how you should behave physically in these different contexts. Process oriented students are the favorites of process oriented teachers, of course!
- Process oriented people are both attracted to, and repelled by, other process oriented people. They are attracted to others of their kind in work and general social situations. However, deep in their minds, process oriented people find incongruity between the structures they live within and the natural messy conditions of life. The instinct to have those messy things called children often drives process oriented people into the arms of relationship or goal oriented people! Power that goal and relationship oriented people often wield can be an aphrodisiac to process oriented people.
- Process oriented people who are not self-aware consider the relationship oriented people "lazy—they are always socializing and not working" and goal oriented people frustrating because they are "arrogant rule breakers who think they can get anything they want without following the rules".

- Homework or studying for a process oriented person is better done alone by working through a textbook and set of instructions given by the teacher. Or quietly with other process oriented people who can confirm on a regular basis with each other that they are all following the right process.
- Solitary, individual, no-talking multiple choice, true-false, knowledge or process repetition exams are a joy to a process oriented person. Group projects done together with non-process oriented people are awful to process oriented people. Open ended analysis exams, unstructured projects, and unstructured “live” challenges or verbal exercises are frightening and frustrating to this person. Process oriented people like to know exactly what is expected and how to do something.

### **Things you will hear a highly process oriented person say**

- “Where’s the map?!”
- “I am starting a running plan. Every day I will run 5 km. I will follow a set path. If you want to join me at 8:00am every day to run this route with me, that would be fine.”
- “Skiing? When are you thinking of going? Where do you plan to go? Who are you inviting—do I know them? How much will it cost? When will you be back? How are you planning to get there? How long will you ski for in the day? . . .”
- “I am going for lunch at 12:00 noon. If you would like to come with me to the cafeteria, we could sit together. But I will have to be back at 12:30 pm sharp for a meeting.”

- “Let’s sit at this table. I don’t feel comfortable sitting with those people from engineering at that table and there are managers at the other one.”
- “I know that person. She is the vice president of marketing at XYZ company.” Or: “I know that person. He is the son of the Duke of Blinkerton.”
- “Do you understand what is required on the project? Do you want to get together tonight to compare notes and see if we both understand how to do this project properly?”
- “Professor, may I work on this project alone? I know exactly what is required and can get it done very quickly on my own.” Or: “Professor, may we work on this project together? We can help each other ensure that we are doing the right things that need to be done.”
- “May we take the case study home the night before the exam so that we have time to understand it properly (time to figure out the structure and instructions perfectly, that is!)?”
- “Sir, I don’t understand what is expected of me. May I come to see you in your office at 3:00 pm so that you can explain exactly what you want me to do?”
- A process oriented primary school teacher: “That child is so polite and sits quietly waiting for instructions from his teacher. What a good child!”

### **Spaces a process oriented person will like to be in**

- Restaurants where the seating process of patrons is clear, a reservation and/or clear queue for getting in exists, and where tables are separated and clearly

delineated by patron. Relating to the food offered, process oriented people prefer that the menu is posted and/or printed, details of what comes with each entrée explained well, prices posted and clear as to what is included in a price, no ambiguity exists as to what the food is, and the process of serving and paying is fully understood up front. Their group's being served in the same order of who was seated first is something process oriented people notice. If another table gets their food first, a process oriented person will notice. Process oriented people will often choose a restaurant they know over a new one they haven't tried due to the comfort of knowing their favorite food. "I know what I like and like what I know" is often an well followed mantra of a process oriented person.

- Bars where the process of ordering drinks is clear. Where you can sit with one person and if you are close to others, the protocol of non-interaction is clearly understood by all.
- Closed coffee shops rather than open cafés. Where the process is understood and there is little chance of not being served by a server in a timely manner.
- Fitness clubs where there are a lot of structured programs (fitness classes), a structured layout of machines, a clear protocol of movement between machines during a "set", and full details of policies, instructions, and rules posted on the walls of the club.
- Public spaces with sidewalks, signs, regulations, rules, and routes to follow and be within. Streets that are well signed, clearly organized, and logically laid out.

- Movie theatres with clear queuing at the ticket stand, refreshments counter, and for the movie itself. And movies that start on time. Shopping malls and stores that are laid out in an organized way, with an immediately evident clear structure to guide the shopping process.
- Classroom experiences with:
  - a high degree of structure in the curriculum, such as lesson plans.
  - activities that are highly scheduled.
  - activities that are structured, such as worksheets, with clear instructions and outcomes expected.
  - reading of textbooks favored over discussions, debates or other open-ended exercises.
  - a set path for progression and completion of activities leading up to assessment milestones based on the summary points in the process.
  - clear assessment structures that directly assess what was stated in the process, such as a summary knowledge test at the end of each chapter of the textbook.
  - adherence and support for organization and structure by the teacher.

**Factors in the environment that combine to encourage a culture-wide process orientation:**

- A high percentage of the population has received formal, process oriented schooling.
- Scarcity of resources and a strongly communal ethic in the culture that arose from millennia of tradition.
- A dominant religion
- A strong desire for fairness, equity, and decency in the society.
- Enjoyment from the achievement of efficiency and timeliness.

Many times process oriented cultures are also relationship oriented ones. The two orientations often support each other on a societal level.

**Some cultures that demonstrate strongly process oriented tendencies**

- **Germany, Switzerland, Austria**—The Germanic cultures have traditionally put a high value on process. This is reflected in their approach to all aspects of life, from their efficient transportation systems to how they raise their children. Outlets to escape from the



stifling nature of process can be seen as well. Germany, for example, has one anomaly to logical, efficient process: Autobahns (highways) with no speed limits where people drive wild and fast as a mental release from the rigidity of their daily lives.

- **China, Taiwan, Japan, and other Asian countries—** With large populations, millennia of history and shared traditions, and a philosophical desire for harmony, these countries have naturally adapted process orientations. Relationships are a secondary and supportive partner to processes in these cultures. Relationships are useful when the process does not ensure you will be successful. In such a situation, you need the little extra boost of having a friend in power to help ensure the process favors you. Japan is particularly known for its intricate protocols, both in business and in interpersonal interactions.
- **Other countries . . .** There are other countries that are generally process centric. They are usually cultures that have a long history and an isolation from other cultures, both in business (trading) and in marriage.

### **Careers that attract process oriented people**

Authority figures are comforting symbols of order and procedure for the process oriented person. A lot of process oriented people prefer uniforms, clearly defined authority, and responsibility. They gravitate to jobs with just such attributes. Credentials, years of experience, and specific experiences are all critical to a process oriented person if they are in the position of hiring someone else.

Some typical careers process oriented people prefer:

- Banking
- Bookkeeping and accounting

- Security
- Government—particularly bureaucratic areas.
- Teaching—particularly in rigid teaching environments that encourage strict behavior codes, dress codes, being on-time, the 3—R’s, the “fundamentals”, etc. For a process oriented person, there is a “right way” to teach and it is highly structured, linear, and progression oriented (steps, grades, etc.)
- Medicine—nursing assistants, unit clerks, etc. where procedures are well established.
- Technicians of all kinds—electrical, mechanical, lab, dental—where the job is very organized and clearly laid out.
- Religion—particularly strict ones that promote one right way of living.
- Military
- Air traffic control
- Cooking at a set-menu restaurant
- . . .

### **Summary—implications for teachers of international students**

Understanding your process oriented students is useful because:

- You will know how they will try to interact with you. Some aspects of their interaction patterns with you:
  - They will ask about established protocols for dealing with you—such as following your office hours stipulation carefully.

#### **How to determine if someone is strongly process oriented?**

##### **Taxes**

A process oriented person not only does their personal income tax return on time, but knows the income tax regulations, refers to line numbers on a tax return, and often, if they are in any financially related field, does many other people’s tax returns.

A relationship oriented person has a friend in a financially related field who does their taxes for them.

A goal oriented person pays someone to get it done and maximize the refund due.

(this is meant as a bit of a joke but ask around about tax returns and watch and enjoy the reactions from different individuals in the context of success orientations!)

- These students are most likely to call you “sir” or “professor” because use of titles and respect for authority are key parts of a process orientation.
- They will have trouble opening up to you in terms of their feelings, desires, or concerns, particularly if these are outside of the process they perceive as being necessary for a good grade in your course.
- They don’t talk a lot or ask questions in the classroom or even when dealing one-on-one with you. If they do ask questions, they will ask you for clarification of instructions, exact steps required for them to follow, expected outcomes, and how they will be assessed.
- They will often ask their friends about the process and instructions to ensure they are doing the right thing. This secondary relationship orientation is used to support and enhance their primary process orientation.
- If you know your own success orientation tendencies, you will be able to communicate with your process oriented student more effectively. For example:
  - You can use a higher degree of protocol when greeting process oriented students, showing respect for their desire for formality. Working hard to pronounce and use a Chinese name properly is delightful to Asians, for example. You are showing respect not only for them, but the culture of process as well. A great way to break down communication barriers.
  - If you know they are process oriented, you can spend more time establishing your expectations, clarifying your instructions, and learning their pre-

ferred ways of doing things. This will make them more relaxed as they will feel more comfortable that they are working correctly within the required process. They will then be more open to ideas that are outside their “box”.

- If you wish to give feedback that is constructive, link the feedback to the process as much as you can. Show your students clearly in the feedback where they could have followed the “correct” process and where they needed to consciously move away from their established processes.
- Working with students who rely heavily on process means that you will inevitably bump up against learning situations where there is little or no process to guide them. Knowing that this will be painful for these students can help you prepare them for these experiences. By default, if the process disappears, these students will likely fall back to a relationship orientation. You will need to resist the pressure to assure them that your relationship with them will carry them to success and help them see that in the absence of process they must create their own. If you have established a good rapport with these students through other established processes, you should have the opening you need to help them see that they must often establish their own processes in a complicated world. Most won’t know how to do this, of course. So you can help them develop a process for generating processes on their own. A very powerful tool for process oriented people.
- You can provide learning experiences in your mix of teaching that help process oriented students learn more effectively. Some examples:

#### **How do we learn to think analytically and creatively?**

##### **Teacher:**

“You need to analyze the situation and come up with some creative ideas that could be used to solve it.”

What is the process for learning to think analytically and creatively?

Is there one?

Perhaps there is a method?

## The Author's Bias

You have read through two of the three success orientations so far. Have you noticed any differences between how the first two orientations have been described? Perhaps you have noticed some bias? I am biased towards my own particular mix of success orientations. This bias comes out in many ways:

- I explain my natural orientation(s) more clearly.
- I favor my natural orientation with more positive choices of words. Instinctively I write about my natural orientation as being the "right" one.
- I use more positive examples for my natural orientation(s).
- I have a different tone of writing for my natural orientation(s).

This bias is human nature. I could choose to go back and agonize over word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and page to ensure they are written exactly the same way as in the other orientations. If this was a formal textbook, I might do so.

In this particular instance I will choose not to do this agonizing. Instead, I will leave the orientations written just as they are as an example of how we are biased when we don't intend to be. Your understanding of success orientations shouldn't suffer too much from my bias. Please take this caveat into account as you read this chapter. There is no such thing as a negative success orientation. There are only those people who think their naturally strongest orientation is the right one. And of course, they are wrong!

Is bias just something we must live with?

What I can do, and will do, is ensure that any decisions I make that affect others be done with care, so that the decisions are not overly biased towards my own natural success orientation(s). My own self-awareness, then, is important, as is stopping regularly to reflect on my decisions and actions. Only by looking at ourselves regularly can we, as teachers, really see our students as they truly are, and respect, celebrate, and support their unique abilities and mixes of success orientations.

We cannot eliminate bias, but we can make our biases clear so that others can understand our intentions and processes. From this clarity and transparency they can decide for themselves if our intentions and processes suit their needs and desires.

- You may set up your classrooms in a way that helps process oriented students feel more comfortable. For example, clearly laid out seating plans, with name tags in the first session, make for happy process oriented students.
- You may have (should have?) a lesson plan and may choose to communicate it clearly with students up front, highlighting time frames, steps, and instructions.
- Readings, worksheets, practice exercises, and linking to assessment outcomes are all elements that will support your process oriented learners.
- Team work is good for process oriented students, as long as they can choose who their partners are. They will inevitably choose other process oriented students, and likely those from their own culture. This may or may not be a problem, depending on what you are trying to achieve with a particular learning experience.
- Assessments that are comforting to process oriented students are those with clear instructions, directly linkable to exercises done in class, preferably known ahead so that these students can prepare their processes. Case studies are acceptable, as long as they are pretty much the same as cases done in class. Open ended assessments that can generate a variety of outcomes are frightening to process oriented students.

### **The Goal Oriented Person**

Goal oriented people can see the outcomes they are trying to achieve clearly and vividly in their minds.

**Words, words, words . . .**

Important language differences between the orientations:

## Relationship orientation:

- management
- teams
- friends
- party
- flow

## Process orientation:

- administration
- work group
- co-workers
- meeting
- instructions

## Goal orientation:

- leadership
- partnership
- partners
- competition
- method

Sometimes the goal is so vivid in their minds that they think they can even feel, taste, hear, and sense the emotions of their success when they achieve their goal—before they achieve it. The people and processes around a goal oriented person are just resources for achieving the goal. The process of getting there and the people who help along the way are useful, but ultimately not important if they are not necessary to achieving the goal.

### **Some general factors that describe goal oriented people**

- When faced with a challenge, the goal oriented person assesses the attractiveness of the goal and seeks the easiest and most direct path to that goal. An extremely goal oriented person can have chameleon-like behavior patterns, taking on and dropping process and/or relationship orientations at will in order to further their ambitions.
- Goal oriented people feel most comfortable when there is a goal to accomplish and they can work independently and competitively to achieve this goal with the outcome visualized as themselves as the winner. Highly organized structures frustrate the goal oriented person. Long winded conversations and emotional bonding with no deliverable outcome drives the goal oriented person crazy.
- Weekends for this person are best organized around a number of challenges to achieve: Get the gardening done, read 5 chapters of a text book, finish a project, run 10km on Sunday, etc. Preferably in a competitive arena or with small team of equally capable or better partners. Goal oriented people prefer “partners” to “team mates” as they are “partnering” in order to ac-

comply something, rather than just having social team mates.

- Meetings are best run with specific goals to be accomplished at every meeting. A short, to the point, efficient meeting is best. A sense that everything is decided, finished, and achieved leaves the goal oriented person happy. Social chit-chat and careful adherence to protocols irritates this person. A meeting where relationships were enhanced and/or process followed but few solid outcomes achieved leaves the goal oriented person bitter and angry: "That meeting was a waste of time!"
- Recreational activities are exciting to the goal oriented person because there are myriad opportunities for individual goal setting and achievement in a variety of challenging, difficult modes. Mountain bike racing, kayaking around an island in a day, cycling 50km, or hiking to the top of a mountain are all wonderful activities for this person. Anything that is highly structured or with a primarily social focus is avoided by this person.
- Goal oriented people will only support rankings, titles and hierarchies if they are the ones who can achieve the top position. Otherwise they despise such irritations. They are generally low-power distance individuals, caring only with meeting and learning from other goal oriented people. Having lunch is a competitive or accomplishment-oriented affair. Going out for a lunch with an interesting goal oriented person or someone who can help their career is a lunch worth having. Group lunches and free-flowing social environments are good as they provide an opportunity to find new people who can help them achieve their goal or help them learn how to do so themselves.



- Bluntness, directness, and intensity are hallmarks of a goal oriented person's communication style. They don't care for verbal protocol and most often only seek clarity in communication when the definition of the goal is in question.
- Goal oriented people are often loners. They are attracted to others of their kinds for partnerships and to learn from but can be equally comfortable alone as with others. Relationships are goals in themselves. To meet someone for an intimate relationship is to do so for sexual gratification, marriage and/or children. It is not for the sole sake of friendship. Power over others is often wielded flippantly and joyfully by this person often without respect for protocol or the emotional impact on others.
- Goal oriented people can be the most self aware of their own success orientation as they often see the paths to goals more clearly than others. They are also made most aware of their style by the people of the other two styles who dislike or envy the freedom the goal oriented person espouses. Goal oriented individuals can see relationship oriented people as "lazy talkers" and process oriented people as "bureaucrats who never achieve anything and hide behind rules and regulations to cover their own incompetence".
- Homework or studying is done alone and with goals in mind rather than just for the sake of learning. The highest grade, top of the class honor, a scholarship, and/or entrance to the best program at the best university are examples of goals this person sets their mind to achieving. They are the most likely of the orientations to latch onto a charismatic teacher or leader and emulate this person.

- Individual assessments where goals are accomplished are the best type of assessment for the goal oriented person. They resonate with any learning or assessment process that is practical and has a deliverable. Solving a case study problem is a wonderful challenge for a goal oriented person. So are constructive projects with clear, visible results.

### Things you will hear a highly goal oriented person say

- “What’s the fastest way there?!”
- “I plan to be able to run 10km in 11 minutes by July 1st. And then place in the top 10 runners in the marathon in August.”
- “Skiing? Sure! I want to beat the double black diamond run this year. I never could do it. Do you want to race the long blue run with me? Let’s see who is faster!”
- “I can’t go for lunch with you today. I am meeting with Jim for lunch. We are going over our plan for meeting our sales target.”
- “There is Susan. Let’s sit with her. I have to talk to her about getting me a new computer for my office.”
- “I will have the project done by noon tomorrow.”
- “Professor, my partner and I will finish the project by Friday. It will be an A+ project, you wait and see!”
- “I will read the case and do the exam in 3 hours tomorrow. I don’t need it ahead of time. I am busy tonight finishing another project.”

### **“Aren’t ‘success orientations’ and ‘goal orientations’ the same thing?”**

“Everyone wants to be successful Isn’t that the same as saying they are goal oriented?”

No. They are defined differently for this model. Everyone wants to be successful. There is an underlying biological need to be successful built into our genes. But ask people at random to describe in detail their goals and they will have trouble doing so.

A goal orientation, on the other hand, describes how a person goes about achieving success—how they go about accomplishing or fulfilling their needs and desires.

Goal oriented individuals see the outcome intensely in their minds before they achieve it—the goal is a clear beacon they focus on with almost unwavering dedication. A goal oriented person can clearly define and describe their goals, and even reflect the feelings they would have upon achieving that goal.



Which of these students might be goal oriented? The Caucasian?

Which might be process oriented? The Asian?

So the Indian student is relationship oriented, right?

No—think again.

Success orientations can not be determined from skin color or facial features.

In order to get some understanding of a person's success orientations you have to talk to them and figure out how they go about accomplishing success in their life.

In this photo, the Asian student may be the most relationship orientated of all. The Indian student may be the goal oriented student. And the Caucasian? His suit might be a tipoff that he is an accounting student - process oriented people love the structure, organization and certainty of accounting...

- “Professor, can you tell me right now what comprises an A+ grade on the project?”
- A goal oriented primary school teacher: “That child gets all her work done so quickly and so well! What a good child!”

### Spaces a goal oriented person will like to be in

- Restaurants that have great food—the goal being to have a great tasting meal. Also, restaurants that are linked to success and achievement: “If we win tonight, we are going to XYZ restaurant to celebrate!” Celebrations that mark successful outcomes are joyous occasions for goal oriented people.
- Bars that are linked with goals, such as going for a drink after the conclusion of a successful sales deal. Or to celebrate a victory. Or to pick up a date for the night.
- Coffee shops for buying coffee. Not for sitting and chatting.
- Fitness clubs with success ladders, peers to compare to and gain tips from, tougher role models to aspire after, and a competitive atmosphere. The goal oriented person is not generally there to meet new people or follow a process, but to accomplish something.
- Open spaces where they can physically see goals in the distance (mountain tops to climb, lakes to cross) and where they can be physically independent to challenge themselves (open running trails, open water).
- Shopping malls that are easy to get in, get things done and get out of. Shopping for the sake of shopping is a waste of time. Better to order things online and avoid the hassle and waste of time of a shopping mall.

#### Scooters in Asia

In much of Asia can be seen a lot of scooters and motorcycles on the streets. Crowding and lower income levels make two wheeled transportation effective and inexpensive.

Another reason two wheeled transportation is so popular is that it offers a form of “solitary freedom”.

In Thailand, for example, you will see lots of young women riding scooters and motorcycles. Big smiles fill their faces as they zoom around the streets by themselves. Perhaps this indicates something more than just happiness at getting from one point to another. It could very well be that this group of goal oriented individuals is enjoying the freedom from rigid social structures and relationships that bind their everyday lives in this culture. For a brief period they can be free to decide where they go, how fast they go, and they can do it by themselves with almost no rules to follow.

- Classroom experiences with:
  - A clear focus on accomplishment of constructive projects or solving of specific, real problems.
  - Activities that have little structure but are focused on achievement of an outcome.
  - Non-social, loosely structured activities that are for individuals or partners to work on.
  - Accomplishment of the learning required as soon as possible. Once done, moving on to new challenges.
  - Achievement of the clearly stated goal as 100% of assessment value. No “wishy-washy” grades for process or how nicely you did the work. “The end justifies the means” for the extremely goal oriented person, so process (rules, regulations) that were used (or ignored) and people who were used on the way to the goal are not important.
  - Recognition for superior performance and achievement. Release from structure and awarding of credentials as soon as goals are reached.

### **Some cultures that demonstrate strongly goal oriented tendencies**

- **USA** (surprise, surprise!)—The ethos of the lone ranger, gunman, lawman, soldier, tough man, tough woman, independent leader, business leader, etc. runs through the culture on many levels.
- **Australia** is another country with a cultural tendency toward goal orientation. Australia’s Olympic prowess in water sports is an indicator of their cultural ethos. Considering the relatively small population of the country, Australia turns out a lot of Olympic champions.

- **Other countries** . . . have goal oriented individuals and pockets of individuals, but not many cultures have an overall extreme goal orientation such as the United States seems to have on many levels in their society.

### Careers that attract goal oriented people

Leadership in general is attractive to a goal oriented person. This is in contrast to “management” which might be a word best used by a relationship oriented person or “administration” by a process oriented person. Leadership implies that there are goals that someone has achieved and that are worth achieving—someone to look up to and strive to be equal to or better than. Someone who stands out of the crowd as an individual example of excellence and strength.

Some typical careers goal oriented people prefer:

- Olympic athletics and athletics in general.
- Leadership in business.
- Leadership the arts—music, dancing, acting, etc.
- Sales of big ticket items that require one individual to take a lead and make the deal happen.
- Lawyer—a grandstanding litigator as opposed to a person who “dots their i’s and crosses their t’s”.
- Engineering—building big and cool things.
- Architecture—designing big and cool buildings.
- Science—mysteries to unravel and scientific goals to achieve.
- Medicine—particularly doctors and researchers.
- Pharmaceuticals—particularly research and leadership.

### Factors in the environment that combine to encourage a culture-wide goal orientation:

- A high percentage of the population that believes in individualism.
- Abundant resources, freedom of movement and open spaces.
- Low religious impact.
- A strong desire for personal freedom, self-reliance, self-determination, and personal wealth in the society.
- Enjoyment that is derived from being rich, #1, free, and an individual.

- Military—specialist roles like general or special forces.
- Exploring, mountain climbing, . . .

### **Summary—implications for teachers of international students**

Understanding your goal oriented students is useful because:

- You will know that they want you to lead and support them in achieving their goals. Some aspects of their interaction patterns:
  - They will clarify goals and seek to bypass team work, processes, and rules and regulations when they get in the way of timely achievement of the goals. In the best case, a goal oriented student will strive for a full understanding of a problem, situation or subject.
  - These students are most likely to call you by your first name. This is the fastest way of getting you to clarify goals with minimum chit-chat and hierarchical barriers in the way.
  - Goal oriented students are open about their feelings and experiences. They interrupt and ask questions whenever something is not clear. Goal oriented students have a low tolerance for wasted time and meandering discussions and will become visibly restless and frustrated when a class session digresses into social arenas or plods unnecessarily (seemingly to them) through a dogmatic process.
  - They will not trust peers for clarification on the required outcomes but will approach the source (you) either alone or with partners. Goal oriented

students will most often have minor relationship and process orientations. This can be seen if they are good at getting through processes or enjoy helping other students finish their projects, for example.

- If you know your own success orientation tendencies, you will be able to communicate with the goal oriented student more effectively. For example:
  - You can cut to the point very quickly and clearly state your exact expectations. Goal oriented students will be delighted with this approach.
  - You can discuss your own goals and past accomplishments. This will garner respect from students with a goal orientation.
  - Using action words is very effective with goal oriented students. They understand action rather than relationship or process. Examples: Achieve, finish, run, jump, pass. Using adjectives and adverbs that enhance action and states of achievement are also good tools for communicating with goal oriented students: fast, best, highest, quickest.
  - You can show an interest in the students' future goals and help them plan for achieving those goals. You take more of a mentorship role in this mode, a role goal oriented students understand and respect.
  - You can set up faculty and student competitions, challenges, and goals. Aligning interests with goal oriented students is a wonderful way to connect with them.
- If you wish to give constructive feedback to a goal oriented person, be concise, exact and pointed in how their actions or lack of actions resulted in not



achieving the goal. Help them understand what it will take for them to achieve the goal next time.

- Students who have a very dominant goal orientation will inevitably get irritated at teaching to the middle of the normal distribution of a group of students. Their attendance will decline, they will hand in projects early, and will only contact you when they have a problem or did not get the high grade they wanted. However, teaching to this group will leave the other process orientations behind. Goal oriented students are the most capable of being autodidactic and should be recognized and allowed to get on with their own learning as much as possible.
- You will sometimes find a general disrespect for the other students in the class and a lesser or greater flaunting of process and rules. Engaging these students in discussions and clarifying important “why we need to do things this way” talks can work, but only if the “why” you are espousing is really sound and clearly useful to the goal oriented person. Following authority just because the authority demands it is not acceptable to goal oriented students.
- You can provide learning experiences in your mix of teaching that help goal oriented students learn more effectively. Some examples:
  - You can free them up to get on with their own learning by clarifying the learning goals for your course and letting them work at their own pace and in their own way toward achieving those goals.
  - Resources can be indicated for goal oriented people to draw on as they need. You are a resource. Making yourself available to students on an as-needed basis by telephone, email, on-line chat and in-

person will be a big help to goal oriented students. They are likely to want you to clarify a goal on a just-in-time and as-needed basis.

- Partners who are similarly driven to achieve goals are good for goal oriented people. They help each other stay motivated and focused on the goal. They

## “Rules, Rules, Rules! Too Many Rules!!!”

The cry of the goal oriented person when faced with procedural obstacles to their success.

**Policies** are barely tolerable to goal oriented people, but much better than rules and regulations. Policies create discomfort for highly process oriented people as they are too “vague”. Relationship oriented people like policies as they don't get in the way of relationships—unless they do, in which case they are “too restrictive”.

**Guidelines** are worse than policies for goal oriented people, but much better for process oriented individuals . . . though still not concrete enough for them. Guidelines are good for relationship oriented people because they are just . . . guidelines—not something that will get in the way of relationships.

**Regulations** feel restrictive to goal oriented people if they get in the way of achievement of success. Process orientated people feel quite comfortable with regulations. Relationship oriented people point at them and say “there is nothing I can do—it is a regulation” and begin to feel uncomfortable if the regulations impact on relationship obligations.

**Rules** are frustrating for goal oriented people, particularly if there are lots of rules. Process oriented people love them—rules define clearly what should be done, by whom, when, and where. Relationship oriented people try hard to ignore rules and get on with relationship building.

**Instructions** are nirvana to process oriented people and normally ignored by goal oriented people. Relationship oriented people don't even try to follow instructions—they just call their process oriented friend over to sort out and deal with instructional barriers to success!

The challenge for teaching international students is that these terms mean something different to each of them, depending on how they are used in their home country and depending on their personal mix of success orientations.

Of course this can be very frustrating for teachers!

Perhaps class time spent with international students exploring the different meanings and implications of these terms is time well spent?

## Practical Learning Experience: Meetings

Most educators spend lots of time in meetings. Meetings of faculty. Meetings related to activities. Meetings to decide spending of PD funds. Meetings, meetings, meetings.

A fascinating practical learning experience is to observe participants in meetings and try to determine their success orientation(s). In the next 2 or 3 meetings you attend, put yourself in the mind frame of an observer and look for these indicators in other people's behavior:

### A. Look for those people who exhibit relationship oriented behavior:

- Where do they sit? And who do they sit with?
- Before the meeting starts, what are they doing? At the end?
- During the meeting, what do they contribute to the discussion, if anything?
- When do they seem happiest?

### B. Look for those people who exhibit process oriented behavior:

- Where do they sit? And with whom?
- What do they do before a meeting? As a meeting ends, what do they do?
- When do they get most frustrated?
- What do they contribute to the meeting process?
- Who do they look at during the meeting? (Important!)

### C. Look for those people who exhibit goal oriented behavior:

- When do these people look happiest?
- What is their body language saying to you?

### D. How does the success orientation of the chairperson affect the meeting?

- What orientation(s) does the Chair seem to be? How does the flow of the meeting go based on the orientation of the chair? How long/short is the meeting?

### E. Finally, how do you behave in meetings?

- Use the same questions as in A, B, & C. above and apply them to yourself.

There is no right or wrong outcome from this exercise, just a lot of fun insights into people's behavior. Don't be surprised to find yourself laughing out loud at the behavior patterns you witness in meetings!

also help train each other and try to model each other's behavior. Team work with other orientations often leads to frustrations for goal oriented students.

- Assessments that award accomplishment and excellence are what goal oriented students thrive on. Assessments that reward structure, protocol, format, and information retention are not.

### Teaching a Mixed Orientation Class

It should be no surprise that each group of students includes a mix of all three success orientations, even if the students are all from one culture. While there are cultural tendencies in different societies, each region, country, city, village, and family produces a mix of orientations. If you have many process oriented students you also have at least a couple of goal oriented students and a few relationship oriented ones. Whether you have a class of 10 or of 100 students, there will be a mix of success orientations.

As a teacher, this presents an obvious challenge. Firstly, you—the teacher—have your own orientation tendency. This tendency will be reflected in how you structure and teach your classes. For students with the same tendency, you will be speaking their language, so to speak. For students of other orientations, this will not be so good. What, then, can you do to help all of your students learn all they can with you?

Some strategies for setting up effective learning environments, experiences and interactions with you, the teacher:

**1. Understand your own success orientation(s) as thoroughly as possible.** Do a self-analysis and reflect deeply on yourself (see the appendix for a self-analysis exercise).

#### Typical success orientation mixes in classes

I encounter varying mixes of success orientations. In a class of 30 international students from a mixed group of countries studying at a western institution, the breakdown of student orientations will typically be something like:

- Strong relationship with a minor process orientation: 40%
- Strong process with a minor relationship orientation: 40%
- Strong goal with minor relationship and/or process orientations: 10%
- Extreme orientations of any kind: 10%

This will vary somewhat depending on the countries that tend to be more or less represented at your institution, but expect to see some clear groupings based on the particular mix of cultures in your class.

See how your success orientation tendencies impact on . . .

- . . . your choice of classroom setup. How the chairs and tables are set up. Are you process oriented? Do you naturally set up your class in neat rows of desks/tables? Or in a circle to encourage relationship building? Or . . .
- . . . your preferred “delivery” of the classroom experience. Do you lecture from a highly structured set of notes with backup textbook homework? Or do you encourage a lot of exploratory discussion and teamwork? Or perhaps you set up a variety of interesting authentic challenges for students to accomplish? You will see a natural tendency to set up experiences that you understand well.
- . . . how you interact with students. Do you get frustrated by requests for specific instructions? Or do you think that these questions are from dedicated, thoughtful, careful students? Do you enjoy spending time getting to know students or do you wish they would simply get on with the tasks at hand and save the chit-chat time?

**2. Share the success orientations model** and other simple learning concepts with your students, one little bit each class. It never ceases to astound me that teachers (myself included until recent years) spend so little time iteratively examining the learning process when this process itself is so core to how, why and what we choose to learn. At the end of this chapter is a practical experiential exercise that you can do to get students to construct their own understanding of the success orientations and how they impact on team work. This exercise also begins students’ reflection and self-examination of their own success orientation tendencies.

**3. Design all three types of orientations into each class session you run**—i.e. 30 minutes for open discussion (for relationship oriented students), 30 minutes for group worksheets (process oriented students), 30 minutes for an individual contest/challenge work (goal oriented students). Or some such mix.

Changing the modes will mean that all students get an opportunity in most classes to engage in the learning process they feel most comfortable with. Since most people are a mix of two success orientations, one stronger and one less so, by mixing up your class challenges in the three modes, two thirds of the time all your students will either be fully engaged or at least partly engaged through their natural success orientation modes. This is a better mix than an all or nothing situation, particularly if students are becoming aware of their own success orientations and why you set up learning experiences the way you do (which you will explain to them, of course!)

**4. Design assessments to have elements that each orientation can thrive in.** One group project (relationship oriented students), one test that is structured and asks for closed-ended questions (process oriented person), and one challenge that is competitive and highly goal oriented.

**5. Under pressure, students will default back to their strongest or most dominant success orientation:**

- When they feel the need to defend themselves.
- When success is not certain.
- When success is threatened.

Defaulting to a primary success orientation is a defense mechanism built into the human brain, both through genetic and environmental influences. Just when you have students excited about success

orientations and demonstrating that they can use other ones, an outside project deadline (perhaps in another class) will come up and suddenly they are no longer balanced students, but slaves to their dominant orientation. “Being goal oriented is interesting and nice, sir, but I have to finish this project by tomorrow! Tell me the steps I have to do to finish it, please!!!”. Or, “I tried to work on this myself, ma’am, but I needed to get it done, so we all worked on it together!”

This can be very frustrating for teachers trying to get students to balance their use of different orientations and see beyond the artificial emergency of the procrastinated academic moment. But the knowledge of their own orientations will be a seed that you sow for later years that will germinate and grow into a broader self-awareness. This is true of all real teaching anyway, but it is good to state that this will happen when working students through their success orientations.

**6. Some students may not like being one particular orientation.** They may actually feel bad about their natural orientation. American culture continually denigrates relationship and process orientations and celebrates goal orientations. The British in India left a legacy of white, royalty, process orientation superiority as being infinitely better than the natural relationship orientations in India. Before they were shamed and forced out of India, the British did terrible damage to the self-esteem of Indians to the extent that even today Indians prefer British processes, language (English), and even a light skin tone.

To overcome this form of cultural warfare, celebrate the different orientations with your students. Help them understand that one is not better than the other, just different and equally good. Earlier noted techniques related to greeting, running the learning experiences, and ways of interacting interpersonally with students will garner you a lot

of respect from your international students. By showing respect for their differences you are showing them that you respect their learning needs. From this respect comes trust and the chance to help them do some real learning . . .

Teaching a mixed orientation class is a permanent part of what every teacher does. This will not change whether you are teaching young students, graduate students, local students or international students. What can change, however, are your attitudes, perspectives, and methods. And from these changes can come changes in how well students learn with you.



## A Practical Experiential Exercise to Use in Class

Introduce the following little case study to your students on a presentation slide or on a white/chalkboard:

Gita, Hong, and Fernando were working on a project together as a team. In a meeting with each other, here is a short conversation they had:

Gita: "My friend Ajit says that we have to do an introduction for our report."

Hong: "The instructions say to do an executive summary, not an introduction."

Fernando: "Let's just get the paper done! Who cares about those little details?"

The three members got very frustrated with each other and ended up coming to their teacher for help. "We can't work together. We don't agree on anything. Please put us on different teams with people we can work with."

What should the teacher do?"

Many of your students will nod, laugh and shake their heads in resigned disgust at this case. Most international students have been in this situation before!

The students will come up with a variety of possible solutions ranging from failing the team to dividing them up and putting them in different teams. Document these options on a whiteboard and work through a process of elimination with them until you get to the two or three options the teacher could reasonably take without too great a consequence to the classroom process.

In the end, however your students are not likely to diagnose the different success orientations that the three team members have. Highlight that so far, you have been the doctor considering different prescription options to treat the symptoms of the problem.

But the problem is that the three students have radically different success orientations! Explain the model and then ask the students how a teacher could use the model to help the students achieve success together.

I won't go any further: You can take it from there. By the time 30 minutes is done, you will have students who have just had their perspectives on team-work, learning, culture, and teaching opened up to new vistas . . . and potentially a solution or set of solutions to a common team-work problem among international students.

## *Chapter 4*

### **Learning Styles and Other Oddities**

In the 1980's and 1990's, much about the art and science of how humans learn came into wider publication, with such ideas as "learning styles" for example. Much of the research and findings printed in publications actually existed in different forms much earlier—the 1960's, 1950's and back to the beginning of the century. Even further back comes evidence and writings of how humans learn—as far back as Roman, Greek and early Chinese times. The evidence and lessons about how to support learning have been around, then, as long as there have been teachers. However, only in recent decades has much of the information, learning, and reflected wisdom been widely accessible.

Despite the wide availability of this information, most faculty in colleges and universities are not required to demonstrate insight into how people learn nor demonstrate skills for helping others learn. The professional focus of these institutions is still on what knowledge a faculty member has in a particular academic specialty and on the prestige of the faculty member's research. Knowledge, then, is seen as the precious commodity that faculty bring to the institution and classroom. Compounding this problem, the current system of hiring and promotion in most colleges and universities is primarily based on subject expertise, not on teaching ability.

Imagine how a faculty member feels when she comes into a classroom of international students who do not exhibit the same understanding, ability and behaviors in relation to subject expertise that the faculty member

expects or is used to? Imagine how international students feel when they are faced with a faculty member who shows increasing frustration and inability to help them learn?

A lose-lose situation happens.

Besides the success orientations model, other useful tools can help teachers understand how their students learn. Some of the common ones were mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3:

- Meyer's Brigg's personality types—MBTI
- Learning Styles Inventory—David Kolb
- Multiple intelligences—Howard Gardner
- Emotional intelligence quotient—Daniel Goleman

Each of these can easily be researched on the internet or via the writings of the originators mentioned above. This book won't go through each one and explain it in detail. Instead, the approach taken to understanding them in an international student context will be to look at how students are taught in their home countries, applying these models selectively as we go along. This is not an exhaustive look at the applications of the models, but some taste of how a mix of the different models can aid a teacher in understanding how to better help international students learn.

### **Differences Result in Barriers to Meaningful Interactions**

The problem for teachers working with international students is that each student has a unique mix of learning style, success orientation, intelligence, strengths, etc. Compound this mix with personality

quirks, cultural differences, and culture shock effects and you have a potentially huge set of barriers to successful interaction between teachers and international students.

These barriers can never be completely removed. Nor should they! The barriers are reflections of the individual student's uniqueness. However, the barriers can, and should, be worked through and around when they become barriers to learning.

Here is a process for achieving meaningful interaction with students. Following the detail of the process is a visual representation of it:

### **A Three-Step Method for Breaking Down Barriers to Communication:**

(written in a one-to-one interaction mode, but applies to one-to-many as well)

**Step #1:** A teacher meets a particular international student for the first time.

- At first, a variety of barriers exist and a teacher finds limited success in communicating effectively with the student, and vice versa.
- The teacher does not try to accomplish a specific goal with the student unless the situation is extremely urgent (regardless of whether the teacher or the student initiated the conversation).

**Step #2:** The teacher works hard to understand a particular student's frame of reference.

- The teacher consciously opens her mind to try to understand the bigger picture of the student's motivations, culture, learning style, personality, success orientation, etc.

#### **Angelina . . .**

A male western faculty member was personally flattered when Angelina came to his office a few times over a period of two weeks to say how excited she was about his classes, to discuss her progress in the course and to ask what she needed to do to get an "A" grade. These meetings also included Angelina touching the faculty member on the arm or leg when she felt strongly about something she was discussing with him.

While Angelina may have been offering a sexual relationship in exchange for high grades in the course (these things do happen sometimes!), most likely she was simply being herself—a naturally outgoing, goal and relationship oriented person with a kinesthetic learning style—one who enjoyed the teacher's classes and wanted to get a high grade in the course.

By using a variety of tools and models, we can get a clearer picture of what underlies student behaviors and interactions with faculty.

- By asking questions related to the student's background and how they go about life in general, she gains insights into the barriers of communication between them.
- She also helps the student understand her (the teacher's) background, making it clear to the student that communicating together to solve a problem is 50% the responsibility of the student.

**Step #3:** The teacher finds that the barriers to meaningful interaction don't disappear, but can now be worked through with much less effort.

- The student, seeing the teacher make an effort to understand his world, begins to trust the teacher and be-

## **“NO WAY! I Don't Have Time!!”**

I have 60 students. I don't have time to sit and try to understand every student.

Some faculty will angrily recoil at the thought of this process. Their greatest concern, as expressed to the author many times over the years, is that they don't have the time to undertake this kind of student interaction.

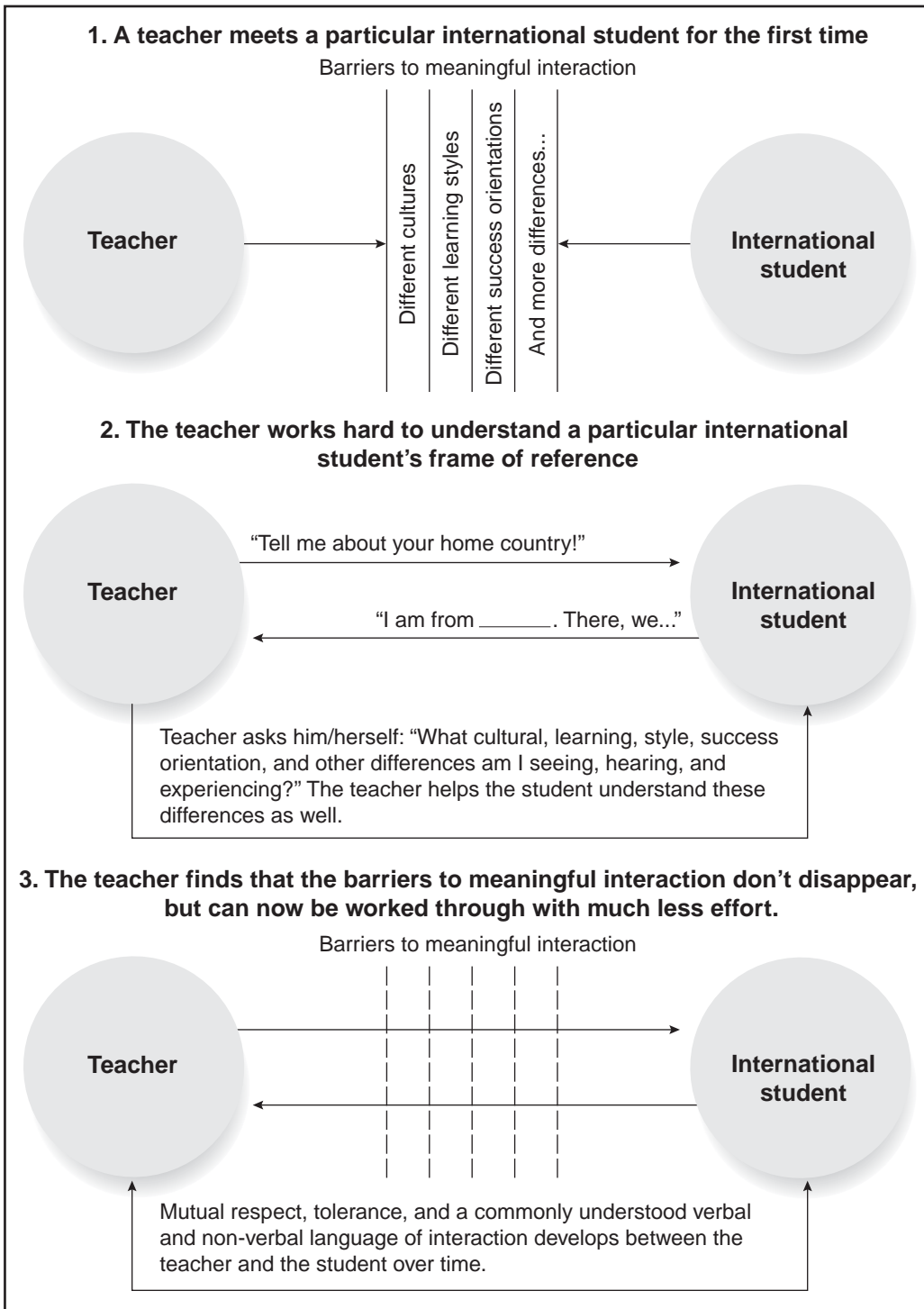
My response: The magic of this kind of process is that there won't be many students that require this kind of interaction. If you have 60 students, you will find that only between 4-8 students will ever come to see you with barriers and interaction issues. And even better, you will find that small groups from the same culture come all at once to see you. Many times you can work through this process with such groups.

Supporting international students is not a “time pit” but a powerful process that only takes 5–15 minutes of your time with each student/group. And the process will only be needed for a few individuals and a few groups of students.

Once they try this process, most faculty love it! After becoming a student centered teacher, a former Irish colleague of mine said to me, with a smile on his face:

“Thanks, Paul. I am ruined for a regular [lecture] classroom. Now what am I supposed to do?!”

(See Chapter 7 for an answer)



**Why do teachers love to lecture?**

1. They personally prefer to learn that way. And because the world doesn't have enough jobs for assimilators, they tend to go into teaching!
2. The belief by many teachers that their main job is to impart knowledge rather than encourage integration and skill development.
3. Lecturing is easy. Staging high quality learning experiences for students is hard work.
4. Being strong in front of a group of students and controlling the process with an "iron fist" is very satisfying to many men, particularly those in patriarchal cultures and societies. Blind obedience that can come with power over the students provides an adrenaline rush to them.

Justification for this? They feel satisfied and know that they are doing something good by driving knowledge into their students' minds.

cause of the teacher's effort, makes an effort himself to meet her "half way" in trying to break through the barriers to communication, understanding, and learning.

- Both the teacher and the student now find that though major differences in *modus operandi*, personality, learning styles, and success orientations still exist, they have established a level of trust and respect between them that allows them both to ignore many of the barriers. They can now relax a bit more with each other and focus on each other's messages and not get frustrated by the barriers.

The barriers do not disappear, but each party is now sensitive to them and respects the differences. The ability to "get things done" is now greatly enhanced. One thing the teacher will likely note at the end of a conversation is relief and happiness on the part of the student. The student now feels that they are not being penalized for their differences from those of the host culture. Rather, their differences are respected. Again, the student has now gained trust and respect in the teacher and the teacher has gained new insights and abilities to communicate with this student and perhaps others with a similar background.

### **What International Students' K-12 Education Looks Like**

Public K-12 educations in non-western countries are based on simple principles: Teach the foundation knowledge and skills. Anything more is really for colleges and universities to deal with . . . if the students get there. Overseas top private schools can be different, however. Often these top schools are funded by the wealthy and powerful in a city, region or country

and have much broader educational goals than just the foundation knowledge and skills. But of course, these schools represent only a miniscule fraction of the world's population, so will not be considered as the norm of K-12 educations of students coming from other countries to western institutions.

### Foundation knowledge and skills

The foundation knowledge and skills taught to students varies greatly by country, region, and even city. Some examples:

- Some areas consider the Koran to be the sole source of knowledge and instruction for all things in life—memorize the Koran and that is all you need to know to live a successful life.
- Some consider reading, writing, and math as the most important things to learn in the K-12 years.
- Some think that history and philosophy are the most important aspects, more important even than the basics of reading, writing, and math.
- Some rare places consider the building of “citizenship skills” as the core learning that young people need to develop into full citizens and human beings (Sadly, this is not a world-wide goal!) These places consider colleges and universities to be the place to start focusing on certain specializations or to gain work related skills.

Most K-12 educations in the 2nd and 3rd worlds focus on oral and written delivery of a very carefully controlled body of knowledge from wise teachers to ignorant students. The basis for this is primarily political, following the old adage:

#### What are playgrounds for?

At a playground in Dubai, I witnessed an Indian mother holding her son back from playing on the climbing structure with his friends until he had recited his multiplication tables to her correctly.

Strongly encouraged process orientations and a focus on rote memorization of mathematics have a very powerful impact on millions of Indian children. Through this continued “pounding away” at learning using a narrow set of teaching modes, Indian children are internalizing only one “best” way to learn. Sadly, the other modes are highly disregarded.

For those who view self-directed play as a foundation for building all intelligences, this scene evinces a wince and a sense of sadness for the child.



### Goal oriented Indians come to America?

One of my students from India forwarded to me a 103 slide PowerPoint file entitled “India—Truth alone triumphs”. All 103 slides illustrate India’s wonderful achievements, contributions to science, art, and literature, and accolades it has received from famous people.

Slides 15 and 16 talk about how many highly successful Indians live *outside* India and run huge American corporations. Slide 16:

“38% of doctors in the USA,  
12% of scientists in the USA,  
36% of NASA scientists,  
34% of Microsoft employees,  
28% of IBM employees,  
17% of INTEL scientists,  
13% of XEROX employees,  
. . . are Indians.”

Assuming this information is correct, could it be that highly goal oriented Indians fled the country to find success elsewhere due to the extremely strong cultural focus primarily on relationships and secondarily on process?

“Give me a child for the first seven years, and you may do what you like with him afterwards.” (attributed to a Jesuit saying)

Children are recognized as being the raw clay, which, if molded early into a certain form, will stay true to this form for the rest of their lives. K-12 education in most countries is highly controlled as a result.

Regardless of what they think is important for children to learn, it is rare that teachers around the world employ different teaching methods from each other. Delivery of knowledge from one person to the next—a teacher or author to students—is still the foundation of most education systems. This approach is mostly highly structured, encouraging a process orientation as a result.

The impact of this one predominant teaching style is that one learning style is forced on students over all the rest. This learning style is the “assimilating” mode, which builds on a student’s reflection and abstract conceptualization skills.

The problem is that while most students can force their minds to work this way, the majority of people in the world are disadvantaged by not being natural learners in this mode. For many, this method is pure torture. For most, it is a difficult and inefficient way for them to learn.

### Implications:

- International student learners, with tendencies toward the other three learning styles in Kolb’s learning styles matrix, have to struggle to understand and excel when taught in a manner that emphasizes lectures and the reading of books. Perhaps assimilator learners, naturally successful in lecture-based systems, come to western countries in greater numbers than

those with other learning mode strengths. This might even lead to assimilation learners representing a large portion of the whole group of international students at a western institutions. I have not tested this for validity, but it is an interesting hypothesis.

- Students come expecting a highly process oriented higher education system. When faced with challenges that do not build on the assimilation mode of learning, they become frustrated, upset, and fearful they will not succeed.
- Faculty find working with many international students frustrating when they see these students struggling with more independent, real-time, kinesthetic, and goal oriented challenges. They incorrectly assume that the students are “weak”. Rather than weak, these students are simply “trained” to only work in one learning style. They cannot at first move about through different learning styles as easily as western students, who have definite learning mode preferences, but at the very least have exposure to the different styles from their K-12 education.
- Building multiple intelligences is more widely encouraged in western countries than internationally, for a variety of cultural reasons. A wide range of experiences both in and outside the classroom allows multiple intelligences to be strengthened. In most countries in the world, however, only a small set of intelligences are strengthened. Some factors:
  - In India, for example, a strongly and widely held belief is that the best route to success financially and socially comes from being a doctor, scientist, professor, or other upstanding professional. Education systems in India, therefore, have a heavy focus

### **Long baby fingernails**

In countries ranging from India to China I have seen a strange sight many times: Young men who have a 2 or 3cm long baby finger fingernail on one hand.

At first I thought it was a hygiene thing—they forgot to clip that fingernail on that hand.

Then I noticed how prominently they displayed it and how carefully they kept it from breaking. Being as long as it was, breakage must certainly be an issue.

I finally asked one of my students. They told me that it is a sign that the person does not do manual work, which is what lower class people do. Instead, they are of a higher class who doesn't have to do manual work.

An interesting cultural tidbit that may have had historical impacts on learning style strengths and discrimination over the ages?

on science and math through process oriented modes of instruction.

- Socially, using certain intelligences is seen as a lower class function. Being unable to do physically related tasks, for example is seen as a good thing—you are too high class for mundane physical work. As a result, kinesthetic learners, particularly, are socially disadvantaged in many cultures.
- Rural versus urban educations encourage different intelligences. Most international students in western institutions come from urban settings due to the typically high expense of sending and enrolling them in expensive overseas educations. Urbanites are typically more wealthy than their rural cousins. As well, they tend to be more worldly. In terms of intelligences, the urban-raised students might have stronger factual, linguistic, and interpersonal intelligences while rural-raised might have stronger analytical, spatial, practical and physical intelligences. These are, of course, only trends and not universalities.
- Other important aspects of learning, such as developing emotional intelligence (Daniel Goleman) are outright ignored. As most of the world is still dominated by masculine and patriarchal rule and ideology, developing emotional intelligence—a stronger feminine aspect—would likely be scorned outright by educators and administrators. Certainly teaching processes primarily based on authority teaching (the teacher at the front of the room is the knowledge and process authority—a masculine aspect) would not incorporate emotional intelligence as a tool for helping students learn.

## **Why Individual Work and Independent Thinking Is so Important in Western Institutions**

Individualism versus collectivism is one of the biggest differences western educators face when helping international students learn. The impact of this seemingly simple difference is huge . . . and very frustrating to western teachers.

### **Some Common Symptoms:**

- “Why won’t the students do their own work?! They keep plagiarizing!”
- “Why do these students always come to see me as a group?! I hate that!”
- “Why do they always want group projects?!”
- “Why do they always work together even when I tell them they won’t learn anything by doing the task together?!”
- “Why won’t they just get on with their own learning?!”
- “This student needs to learn statistics. Why won’t she just go and do it?! She keeps wanting a group session on it and wants to get her friends—who don’t need it—involved?!”

Western teachers, typically with advanced degrees they earned completely independently of parents and family support, see the benefits of individualism more as a “best way” rather than as an “option”. This is a tremendously difficult viewpoint to change because it is deeply rooted in most teachers’ egos and cultural underpinnings. Accepting that other ways of learning can and do take place is a personal journey that cannot

**Emotional intelligence**

The ability to be sensitive to the emotional impacts of the learning process is extremely important. Great teachers around the world understand this and are quite sensitive to the emotional states of their students. These teachers work to shape experiences with certain emotional impacts and design emotion generating experiences to encourage learning.

These teachers also provide some emotional support for those students who find the learning process overwhelming.

All teachers have the potential to be great teachers: Isn't it interesting how virtually all teachers (including the author) seem to be able to encourage positive emotional experiences in their students just before student reviews of the teacher are done?

be taught, but must be actively walked by each teacher individually. You can be told 10 times in a training session about individualism, but until you embrace the possibility that different systems of learning can be effective, this frustration will not go away.

**The perceived value of individualism and independence:**

- Individuals who have their own thoughts can each contribute unique ideas to the solving of a problem, for example. If there are 10 individuals, then there is the possibility of 10 or more ideas, of which 3 might be excellent and the one best idea would be superb. The alternative is that a collective of same-thinkers might generate 3 ideas, none of which might be “good” and the one best might simply be “bad”.
- New ideas are created by individuals who internalize learning by themselves and in their own unique way. Nothing creative comes from sameness or group work.
- Adaptation to a harsh world comes from individuals who can stand on their own and take responsibility for making things happen and not waiting for a group to agree and act together.

There are many truths to the above. But these views are only one-sided, as every successful leader in business, government and society will tell you. The problem with the individualism view is that extreme individualism only works in specific contexts. Many situations in work, society, and in personal life don't rely on individualism. Given our interconnected, complicated and challenging world, many or even most

situations actually rely on team, group and collective efforts. Could a group of independent individuals wanting to do their job independently of others run a major airline? More importantly, would you want them to?! Certainly not. You want consensus on who is going to fly the planes, how the processes of managing passengers is going to happen and you want strong collective coordination of thousands of people to ensure you get to where you are going comfortably, safely, and quickly (with luggage).

### **The value of collectivism:**

- Once a decision is reached, each person works towards the same agreed upon and understood goal.
- A common set of behaviors, processes, skills, and knowledge can be brought to bear on large, complex logistics challenges, leading to extremely high quality and highly efficient processes. Japanese high quality vehicles are an example of the output of a collectivist culture. Do you want individualism on a vehicle production line? “Ummm. . . . no.” You would end up the notorious American vehicle quality problems of the 1970’s and 1980’s.
- Harmony. If individualism brings new ideas and fresh perspectives, it can also often bring discord. Emotional and cultural harmony has its benefits for individuals, for groups, and whole societies.

The frustrating academic collusion between students that western faculty so dislike, when seen in another light—one of building a cohesive team of like-minded people all working toward one goal—can have advantages.

**Informal settings . . .**

A campus coffee shop or cafeteria is a place where students hang out. Joining them for coffee on a regular basis for 20 or 30 minutes will very quickly send the message that you are approachable, which can be one of the foundation pillars of trust.

Your students will also provide you with some valuable insights into themselves and into how their learning as a group is progressing. This kind of feedback is invaluable for improving your teaching processes . . .

## **Individualism and Collectivism— Context and Balance**

Is there a right and wrong—one is good and one is bad situation here? No, of course not. Some natural conclusions for teachers from an acceptance that both individualism and collectivism have merit:

- **The context is all important.** What is the context of a particular learning experience? Are you trying to encourage and build an individual skill or ability? Or are you working to encourage team work to ensure a common focus on a situation?
- **Balance is all important.** Encouraging both individual and collective learning experiences will build stronger, more flexible and more teamwork-capable members of society. If people can thrive by thinking independently and by contributing productively in a team to a commonly understood goal, the goal will likely be attained quickly and with a high quality output. As a teacher, why not encourage both independence and group skills in your students?

## **Sounds Good, But How . . . ?**

Chapter 7 details how to put all this knowledge together into setting up powerful learning environments and experiences. But here are some general ideas on how to build on both individualism and collectivism as a teacher:

- **Projects:** Make them a combination of team and individual assessment modes. Make clear what parts are common work and assessment and which are individual.



- Presentations and interviews, while time consuming, are powerful tools for encouraging and assessing individuals in group efforts.
- Weight the assessment according to the importance of team work versus individual work for this particular project.
- Classroom exercises: Build in a mix of individual and group challenges throughout the term and even within a particular class.
- Problems: Problem-based learning is one of the very best ways to learn in any subject or field. Mix case study and other problem-based situations in your teaching plan. Also, mix group solving and individual solving of these situations, depending on the context of the problem.

### **How to Bridge the Differences Between Different Systems**

“Again, all this sounds nice, but how do I even start bridging the gaps between these different systems? This whole thing sound very complicated. I don’t know where to start!”

There is one very effective way to start bridging the gap between what you are used to and what your students are used to. And it has nothing to do with your knowledge, number of degrees, or even for that matter, teaching experience.

To start bridging the gap, you need to built trust between you and your students. If you think of your students as just as uncertain about the process of learning from you as you are of helping them learn, you can realize that trust can bridge the gap between you both.



Students need to trust that you . . .

- . . . will not actively or passively discriminate against them because of accent, English/local language ability, skin color, sex, sexual orientation, race, religion, age, or any other reason.
- . . . will be fair in your assessments of their work and skills. They do not take this for granted because in some parts of the world assessments are based on monetary payment to under-paid teachers!
- . . . will take the time to listen and respect their thoughts and ideas.
- . . . will support them through their acclimatization to your culture, institution, and institutional processes

Sounds simple? Just because you are the appointed faculty member at the front of the classroom does not mean you have earned their trust. If you make the effort to earn your students' trust, you can start to rely on your students to . . .

- . . . come to class more regularly.
- . . . listen when you ask something of them.
- . . . work hard at challenges you give them, both within and outside of the classroom.
- . . . seek out specific help that you suggest they could benefit from (i.e. writing, researching, using the library, etc.)
- . . . work individually on the tasks that you explain will help them significantly by being done alone.
- . . . work hard to please you.

. . . overcome barriers between themselves and other nationalities in the classroom if you make a “safe” environment in which to make this happen.

Trust building exercise: See the end of Chapter 1 of this book for a simple and effective trust building exercise. There is more on building trust through the whole process of working with your students in “Chapter 7—Putting it all together . . . ”

### **Conclusion**

Most faculty in western institutions are the product of western culture and schooling. Most international students coming to study at western institutions are not the product of western culture and schooling. Understanding the differences and building trust with students can go a long way to helping them learn better. And understanding and building trust are personally and professionally rewarding experiences for you, too!



## Chapter 5

# Assessing International Students

Assessing students is a challenge. The first challenge is to get over the idea of assessing *students*. Do we really want to assess the student? Don't we want instead to assess the student's *abilities, performance, attitudes, skills, output, etc.*?

Right away as we starting thinking about assessment there is the need to focus our minds very carefully. We realize that this assessment stuff is not easy. In fact, assessing a student's capabilities and performance accurately in an authentic learning context can be devilishly difficult. There are most often several ways of solving most problems in the world—not one “right” way. Further, what a student writes on paper may not be an accurate reflection of their abilities because their handwriting ability, a text-based medium, and a paragraph/ essay mode may all be barriers and distortions to what they really know.

And we don't just want to assess, because assessment by itself is worth very little besides an artificial bench-marking milestone in the continuous learning path of a student. More importantly we want to assess in order to provide *feedback* that helps the learner improve their capabilities. We also want the student to see *learning* as the important goal, not “getting a good grade” and focusing on the assessment process itself.

Creating useful assessments that do not distract students from learning and that provide rich amounts and forms of feedback is the goal.

### A typical question:

“But sir, I came to see you 3 times. Why didn't I get an 'A' on my paper?”

This relationship and process oriented student saw his path to success as a process of spending time with you, the teacher, demonstrating his earnestness and commitment to your course—and to you personally.

To deeply relationship and process oriented students poor grades are often unfathomable when they have built up a relationship with you and followed the stated process for the work required in a course . . .

A challenge in any educational context! Now imagine how hard it is to do excellent assessments in the context of cultural variations and with different success orientations, personality types, learning styles, language differences, and more in your group of students. The levels of complexity for performing accurate, fair, and useful assessments goes up dramatically. The complexity has always been there, but now it is clear that the old essay exam, research project, or presentation exercise is not as simple and useful a tool as you assumed it was.

And by now the following quote should be clearly unacceptable. Hopefully it has becoming embarrassing and repulsive to the reader of this book:

“It is their problem to adapt to our way of doing things. If they don’t understand how to do an exam then they can fail or go back home. I don’t have time to coddle them along. I am busy with my research and the 800 students that I must lecture to (and sell my textbooks to).”

This chapter will look at:

- How assessments are viewed by many or most faculty in western institutions.
- What defines good assessments anywhere
- How assessments are seen by students from different cultures
- How to assess a mixed success orientation, mixed culture class.
- Avoiding unconscious assessment bias.

## What We Mean by Assessment in Western Universities and Colleges

All teachers—and I mean all—want students to succeed. No teacher that I have ever met wanted students to fail. I have heard that there are teachers running some bizarre weeding-out courses designed to filter large numbers of students who want into a limited space, high demand program (medicine, dentistry, optometry, veterinarian school, etc.). But I can't attest to their existence as I haven't met these strange teachers.

Assuming, then, that all teachers generally want all their students to succeed, it would logically follow that all teachers would generate learning processes and assessments that lead students naturally to successful outcomes.

Correct?

Unfortunately, despite the best intentions of faculty, learning processes and assessments fall far short of the goal of all students succeeding and being assessed in a manner that judges their true abilities.

### What is being assessed?

My most amazing assessment experience took place a number of years ago with a Master's thesis student I was advising.

This Asian student had challenges—her written thesis submission was a borderline fail for a range of structural, logical, and writing reasons.

My instinct, was that there was an assessment mismatch.

The MBA Program Director and I invited the student to an oral defense of her work.

In a one hour session, the student proceeded, in her strongly accented voice, to astonish us with not only the depth of understanding of her topic, but her ability to draw inferences, project future implications, and explain bias in her data.

Wow! Needless to say, the student was successful in her thesis.

And I have not been comfortable with assessments of written work since that day.

## Some Reasons Why Typical Assessments in Western Post-Secondary Institutions Don't Provide an Accurate View of Student Abilities:

### 1. Lack of reasonable access to teachers

Due to funding formulas and organizational resource allocations, most students in post-secondary institutions do not have reasonable access to teachers. By reasonable access I mean small enough student-teacher ratios that the teachers have time to do a variety of assessments to ensure that all students have had a fair chance to demonstrate their abilities.

## **2. Process oriented assessments dominate in large student-teacher ratio situations**

Due to the typically large student:teacher ratios, assessments become very process oriented. The goal is to put all students through an identical set of challenges. This way, they can be easily assessed in large numbers. The result is normally some form of multiple choice test, short answer or other knowledge testing assignment.

Sole reliance on this kind of assessment is a travesty of true teaching and learning. The underlying assumptions in this system are that:

- All students are alike in their abilities to physically and mentally complete these kinds of tests.
- Students have identical ways of learning and these tests assess these identical ways of learning equally.
- Knowledge—repeatable, memorized knowledge—is what should be assessed
- Students should “come out” with an identical set of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Of course these are not true! A process oriented student typically prefers process oriented modes of assessment, for example. Those students with a natural relationship or goal orientation will not.

For the process oriented student, rote-memory true/false, multiple-choice, fill in the blanks, short answer knowledge-testing exams are “good”. These assessments fit their process orientation perfectly. Read a book, memorize the information, and then you are ready to recite back the information. By doing so you have “learned” what there is to learn. No messy ques-

tions that require unique, creative answers such as problem-based cases. This is a travesty of the true meaning of the word “learn”, of course.

### **3. Good assessments are irritatingly difficult do to**

It is irritatingly difficult to assess students. Really. There is no simple way to do really excellent assessments of deep student learning and skill abilities. Therefore goes the thinking, the easiest way to get through the assessment irritation is to use the simplest assessment mode possible. This, no surprisingly, is also typically the same mode in which teachers *themselves* were assessed in their formative years.

In all fairness to most teachers, however, using the simplest assessment tools is not their preferred choice. They actually feel bad using them but justify their choice based on workload issues. They simply don't have the time to do really good assessments given that they have up to several hundred students in a class. In order to make themselves feel better, they use another justification:

“I know grades are not true indicators of human potential and ability. And since grades have little use as indicators of student success after graduation then it doesn't really matter if my assessments are simple. The grades won't be used by anyone later so it doesn't matter if I use too simple assessment processes now.”

Sadly, the issue is not that grades are not used after graduation (they generally are not) but that grading systems are really detrimental to the human potential of students. How do a large percentage of students feel about their own abilities and themselves in general when they receive a “C” or an “F” on their exam or



**Plagiarism?**

Plagiarism seems to be a plague in post-secondary education today. Technology and “changing values” are often cited as the problems.

These may be factors, but there are many others, including:

- a lack of authentic, learner-centred assignments.
- pressure on students to get high grades for entry into prestigious programs.
- large class sizes and little attention from teachers, leading to a disassociation of the learner from the learning goals and human support.
- a focus on “outcomes” and not the “development of learners”.
- many international students were taught that repeating what their teacher and other “masters” wrote respects and honours them and shows that you have learned from them.

Plagiarism is here to stay unless teachers and institutions make “learning” the goal of their work. It is a symptom of underlying problems, not the problem itself.

course? They feel they are failures, when really it might be the primitive assessment scheme that is at fault in not providing a realistic assessment of their abilities.

Or how does an “A” student feel who doesn’t understand why she can’t succeed in a complex work environment after graduation? “I got ‘A’s on all my multiple choice exams! Why can’t I be successful in this job?”.

So the real issue is that typical grading processes and schemes in place in post-secondary systems do more harm than good. Some students legitimately cannot achieve success in learning at some levels of learning complexity. This is a fact. But most are capable of succeeding. And when they are graded using assessment schemes that are just plain bad, the motivational messages that they get from these assessment schemes are deeply counter-productive. The goal of all education is to develop human potential. It is a shame that this is not reflected in most assessment processes.

#### **4. The term “assessment” means different things to different people**

There is no common understanding of what the term “assessment” means. It varies by culture, education level, years of teaching experience, institutional assessment biases, and more. Most faculty have never delved into the full meaning and implications of assessment processes and as a result likely don’t understand the impacts the process has. And since the focus of hiring and promotion in universities is based on specialized knowledge and production of knowledge, the real goal of all education—to develop human potential—is not understood in the assessment process.

## What Do Good Assessments (Anywhere) Look Like?

Good assessments have certain defining features, regardless of the subject, program, course of study, type of student (international or local), etc.

Features of good assessments:

- Good assessments allow individuals of all learning styles to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- Good assessments look at a wide range of knowledge, skills and abilities and not just at a “slice” of one layer of knowledge. Bloom’s taxonomy is one framework from which a wide range of assessments can be developed. It is a useful framework because it illustrates the wide and deep varieties of assessment variables available to teachers.
- Multiple modes of expression are encouraged, allowing students who communicate better in one particular mode the opportunity to use that mode to demonstrate their abilities. Modes of expression can be physical, spoken, written, visual, produced, acted, demonstrated, etc.
- Time-based testing is flexible enough to allow students with different reading, writing, and speaking abilities enough time to complete the assessment. Students with a reflective learning style are allowed the time to reflect when the assessment is testing a situation where a person would have this time in the real world. Only situations that require a person to “think on their feet” should be assessed in this manner.
- Process is assessed and not just outcomes.
- The assessment process is transparent to students. Transparency in assessments encourages students to

concentrate and focus on learning and achievement and not on grades.

- Assessment is relatively continuous, reflecting the real world. More over, it is tailored to student readiness and at the completion of significant milestones, again reflecting how assessment in the real world takes place.
- Assessments inherently reflect that students will come out of a learning process with different knowledge, skills and abilities—and this is a fully acceptable outcome. Since they entered your educational institution as different individuals they will naturally come out as different individuals. Rather than “cookie-cutter” graduates, a rich mix of human beings emerge. This is heresy to many process oriented educators and administrators of post-secondary institutions. Well, not heresy, perhaps, but for many or most it is difficult to come to terms with heterogeneous graduates as a goal.
- The results of assessments are qualitative and not quantitative. Again heresy to many who firmly believe in “separating the wheat from the chaff”. Underpinning the grade mentality is the fundamental belief that one student is better or worse than another and we need to identify which is which with a painful and unrealistic number or letter grade system.

An alternative viewpoint is that students have different strengths and weaknesses. By identifying and building on their strengths instead of hammering away at their weaknesses we can help these individuals grow into fully functioning members of the human “teams” in our societies. Respect, celebration, and encouraging of individual abilities.

## The Benefits of Good Assessments

- Students know and feel that learning is the goal rather than the assessment being the goal. They feel empowered to get on with learning rather than receiving mixed messages about what is important (learning or grades).
- Strengths are highlighted, not weaknesses.
- Faculty feel that they are able to fully engage in the development of their students.
- A realistic picture of a student's development over time and their exit capabilities is painted by the assessment process. This rich picture is useful for the graduate, the institution, and potential employers. It is a portfolio of abilities and achievements.

## The Costs of Good Assessments

- Good assessment processes are time consuming and therefore expensive for institutions, which budget based on "student contact hours", "student-teacher ratios", and "class sizes". I won't gloss over this fact in a naïve manner. Nor will I just say that bad assessment processes are something we have to live with because I don't believe that is true.

Under-funding of student access to teachers for learning and assessment is a fundamental flaw of most post-secondary institutions. This under-funding is a result of the shifting of resources from undergraduate programs, for example, to speciality and graduate programs in order to provide tiny student-teacher ratios for students in these programs. This neglects those younger students who really need the support and good assessment processes to help them improve. Incredibly, this type of shifting of resources

### Some teachers can't do good assessments

I have a sad finding to report: Some small percentage of teachers in post-secondary institutions cannot make the shift to human-based assessments and student-centered support in general. These individuals are so "anti" human interaction that the thought of "soft" processes for interaction and assessment makes them reject the whole teaching job.

One extreme example: A highly process oriented accounting faculty member identified so strongly with a quantitative approach to assessment and there always being one true answer that he violently and angrily rejected any change of teaching and assessment methodology.

The problem was not that debits and credits don't need to balance in accounting, but rather that he could not make a shift of focus to helping students (human beings) develop the skills and ways of thinking necessary to be good accountants. The mechanics of accounting were the most important focus for him.

takes place with the justification that students should be independent learners capable of taking charge of their own learning processes. It is the exact opposite which is true! Post-graduate students should be the ones who should be capable of being autodidactic. It is the younger students who need more support!

- Teachers need to explore and work through the meaning of assessments and in most cases be trained in methods for doing holistic, rich, process and outcome focused assessments. Most teachers would find this exploration and learning frustrating (indicating learning taking place), reflective (forcing them to look at their own past learning) and just plain difficult at to do at first (which it is).
- Assessing holistically is a skill which requires development. Since most teachers in post-secondary institutions are hired for their knowledge alone, forcing them through this kind of exploration can result in distaste, offense, and responses like this kind of learning is “against the union rules and rights of teachers”.
- Good assessments are naturally human-focused. For teachers who are strongly process and/or goal oriented, a high level of human interaction with students will not always be a comfortable experience. In extreme cases (a small percentage of teachers in colleges and universities) they may outright reject the thought of changing to more human focused assessments due to their sense of discomfort or potential discomfort.

### **What “Assessment” Means in Different Cultural Contexts**

Up until now in this chapter the focus has been on assessment processes in general. Good assessments from

a pedagogical viewpoint apply to all students, anywhere in the world. However, there are differences between how students internationally understand assessments and how students in western countries understand them. This leads to special considerations in how to best set up good assessments for international and local students alike.

Some differences of understanding between international and western students:

### **Process oriented K-12 education results in a grades focus**

Given our earlier look at how K-12 schooling systems are set up in non-western countries, it is no surprise that grades are a dominant factor. Process oriented educations led by a “sage on the stage” lead to “A-B-C-F” systems, “grade point averages”, “percentiles”, and “%” grade systems. Therefore, in most cases international students are generally not even aware that different, perhaps richer, and more qualitative assessment systems are available. This is in contrast to western students, who at the very least should be aware of alternative systems. They gain this awareness through their K-12 exposure to challenges that really pushed them out of their natural ways of doing things. Field trips, a variety of teaching styles, a wide range of required course, and more personal freedom all contribute to this learning.

### **A grades focus continues at post-secondary levels**

Chapter 1 looked at why international students come to western educational institutions. With the intense pressure for success of whole families based on one student going overseas, for example, the focus of many international students is, not surprisingly, on grades when they come into a western system because they provide clear, quantifiable milestones. These students

view high grades as the sole method for getting into specialized programs and institutions like Computer Science at MIT, for example. And they are somewhat correct: Grades are one guaranteed way to get into a top school (but they are not the only way).

Much gnashing of teeth by western students and citizens takes place when they see “Chinese students who have no life or human skills getting 99% on multiple choice exams and taking our spots in medical school”. This stereotypical outcry is based at least partly on truth. The kind of students who are able to venture overseas tend to be at least partly process oriented, meaning that the other 2 success orientations are less likely to be strongly represented in the international student body in universities in western English speaking countries. These students gravitate to educational processes that will allow them to work as hard as they can to achieve quantifiably high outcomes if the educational processes allow them—which most do. Pressures to succeed are very high for many international students, whose parents most often have a tough time affording a western education.

Again in contrast to most international, many western students have a broader view of life and as a result are not focused as highly on grades as many international students (unless they are extremely goal oriented), resulting in a wider educational experience but lower grades when the system they are learning in is grades focused. Some people want to change the mindset of western students, perhaps for the worse?:

“When I was growing up, my parents used to say to me, ‘Tom, finish your dinner. People in China and India are starving.’ Today I tell my girls, ‘Finish your homework. People in China and India are starving for your jobs.’ ”

(Thomas Friedman of the New York Times being interviewed by Ellen Pearlman and Dan Briody, <http://www.cioinsight.com>, March 25, 2005)

### **Trust is a big factor in assessments**

Trust is a big factor. Given that many cultures in the world are quite strongly relationship oriented, many international students base their focus on what a teacher says and does. If the students trust the teacher, the teacher can help guide even the most ardently process oriented students through learning experiences and assessments that are learning and not grade focused. Trust, as stated earlier, is an important factor when working with international students. International students, if they are to be led through really powerful learning processes need to trust that:

- They will be assessed fairly
- They will have an equal chance to understand and succeed in assessments
- They will be given support in preparing for assessments
- There is transparency in assessment processes
- There is reasonable recourse with higher authorities in case of transgression of the trust by the teacher.

### **How to Assess a Diverse Class of Mixed Orientations, Learning Styles and Cultures**

Two things to do well in assessing mixed classes:

1. Communicate excellently
2. Provide a variety of assessment opportunities and modes



### 1. Communicate excellently

In real estate, the maxim for success is “location, location, location”. In education, it should be “communicate, communicate, communicate”. And by communicate I do not mean “talk”, but rather:

- Listen
- Question
- Observe
- Carefully formulate what you are going to say and how you are going to say it



Source: Flickr.com. Member: “A is for Angier”. Accessed June 3, 2006. Photo available for commercial use under the Creative Commons “Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0” license at this date.

- Stage student-focused discussions carefully.
- “Say what you are going to say, say it, and then say what you said”
- Repeat important ideas and instructions several times, in words, video, recordings, written word, pictures, slide shows, on web pages, in blogs, and via any other medium you can muster up.

Communication builds trust. Notice that the first item on the list was not “tell them” but rather “listen”. Students are naturally looking for people to trust at your institution and in your locale. When they express concern about something, listen hard and try to determine what the real cause of the concern is. With international students, there are so many layers and differences between your life paradigm and theirs that the real causes of their concern are in all likelihood much more complicated than might appear from what they say. Careful interpretation of what and how they speak is critical.

When it comes to assessments, good communication is absolutely imperative. If you are going to give your international students their first case study exam ever, for example, here are some tips for minimizing their concerns and maximizing their success:

- Do lots of smaller warm-up case studies in-class to help the process oriented students become comfortable with the process of case studies. You may find that many international students in your class have never seen a case study before in their life! For the relationship oriented students in your class, warm-up case studies make it clear to them that their learning is a serious business and that their relationship with you won’t carry them through if they can’t reasonably

address the case situations. For goal oriented students, regardless of the culture, the goal will not be doing the case study successfully, but rather how they can get the top grade!

- Give your students a practice case study that is comparable to the exam version one week before your case exam as a take home preparation. Hold a special review session (just 30 minutes) for any students who would like to review the practice exam. Who do you think will show up? Largest group: Your most process oriented students. Second: Some of your relationship students. This review session will help the process students in particular feel more comfortable with an open-ended assessment challenge.
- Logistics of the exam are important:
  - Give them lots of time for the case exam. 3-4 hours is good as it allows students the time to read the paper carefully. I prefer shorter case exams (less reading, not time) so as to not disadvantage the slower ESL readers. Communicate the time frame to them clearly. Write it on a whiteboard or show it in a computer presentation. Reading time is a major stumbling block.
  - Have washroom breaks allowed (one student at a time outside). As students leave, smile and reassure them that it is OK to take a break. As most international students have been in highly controlled educational environments in their earlier years, the idea of leaving an exam to go to the washroom will in itself be disconcerting to them. "Wow! I am trusted to go to the washroom in the middle of an exam!".
- Make sure the case exam is open-book and encourage students to bring a dictionary, their textbook, notes,

presentation printouts, and any other resource (besides a communication device!) that may help them. Reassure them by helping them understand that in the real world there are almost never closed-book challenges.

- Be in the exam room for the whole exam period and be available for any questions students may have. A few questions you may not be able to answer as they are too content focused (the students want you to answer a test question for them). But many questions you will get simple process questions. These questions are not because the student is not capable of figuring out the process, but because they want the reassurance that they are on the right track. These are largely your relationship oriented students asking. The odd process oriented student will ask a question, but these students will have worked hard to sort out the exam process before the exam so won't need to ask any questions—they are process oriented, after all! Your presence is communication as well—it demonstrates a commitment to be with your students through their learning process. Another trust builder...
- After the exam, have a debrief in your next class period and help them understand that there is no right and wrong answer on a case exam, but rather well-supported and not so well supported answers. This debrief is an important part of the communication and trust building processes.
- Communication is absolutely essential to helping students through assessments that go beyond the usual "multiple-guess", short-answer format. For international students who have been intensely focused on grades, a high level and quality of

**Transparent and integrated learning experiences . . .**

Assessments should be transparent and part of the learning process, not separate. Here are some excellent learning processes that also provide a variety of assessment opportunities for students with different learning styles, success orientations and cultures:

- case studies (written, video, audio, live)
- presentations
- constructivist and analytic projects
- simulations
- role playing challenges
- video, verbal, and/or text journaling/blogging reflection
- games (individual, group, iterative, and/or competitive)

communication will go a long way to helping them work through more powerful and useful assessments.

**2. Provide a variety of assessment opportunities and modes**

Understanding learning styles and goal orientations should immediately indicate to a teacher that students will naturally do better with certain assessment formats. In a class of mixed orientations, learning styles, and cultures the only way to give students a chance to demonstrate their true abilities is to provide them with a variety of assessment modes and opportunities

Even better, if you can provide them with a choice of assessment modes, they will naturally choose the ones they feel they can best use to demonstrate their abilities.

Again, this will seem like heresy to many teachers. Some common arguments against such an approach:

- A. "Offering a choice of assessment modes to students is too much work to implement and operate."
- B. "Such an approach is potentially "unfair" and inaccurate. How can you compare students' results and abilities if they do different assessments?"

**Responses to these concerns:**

A. I once put the following on a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) recruitment web page for a new bachelor degree program I was leading. I ended up with a lot of dedicated, hard-working teachers in the program:

Question: "Will I have to work harder in the E-Commerce Program than if I teach in other programs?"

Answer: If you have to ask this question, please don't consider teaching in the E-Commerce Program. Thanks.

Teaching is hard work. Trying to minimize your efforts in teaching is like trying to arrange a 100 guest wedding by phoning McDonald's to see if you can have them do the whole event in their party room.

B. One assessment process nails the concerns about different assessments being unfair, inaccurate and incomparable: "criteria-based assessment". The concept is so simple, logical, and rational that it is a wonder that we still have bell-curving, student rankings, quartiles, and even traditional grade systems at all. Criteria-based assessments quite simply means that students need to meet certain criteria in order to succeed. Set up reasonable criteria, and students will find different ways to achieve them and different ways of demonstrating they have achieved them. There is a lot of material on the Internet, in books, and in other literature on the theory and practice of criteria-based assessment so I won't go into any more depth on it. It is a powerful method for trying to create good assessments of learning.

The other related concept, again difficult to get your mind around at first, is that of different outcomes for different students. During a 3 day faculty training session I was helping to facilitate, I led the faculty to a stunning conclusion for them:

*Different learning and assessment processes can lead to different graduate outcomes.*

*And different graduate outcomes are OK!*

Public K-12 education systems in western countries were set up in the late 1800's not for the betterment of

the human race, but to train workers to come on time to factories, do rote manual labour, and not ask questions. See the works of John Taylor Gatto for more on this. The results, however, of such a mechanistic view of preparing human beings is that they should come out of a system looking and acting exactly the same!

This is ridiculous and in-human in today's societal and human context. And it doesn't fit our post-industrial economies to boot! Why does Ahmed need to be the same as Jill? They don't. One can have strengths in interpersonal relations, political science and enjoys dancing. The other can be highly skilled at mathematics, be in a local drama club, and spend their free time cycling.

A really powerful, transformative learning and assessment process will naturally turn out heterogeneous graduates and not homogeneous ones.

### **Summary: Assessments—Not Multiple-Choice Exams**

Assessing students is hard work. Performing really good assessments is harder. Assessing international students in a class with a unique mix of learning styles, success orientations, and cultures is a even more challenging. The best way to assess in this complicated mix is to use wholistic and authentic assessment tools and methods and criteria-based systems. To implement these approaches you will have to use your communication skills to their fullest extent. In combination with proactive, conscious communication, a variety of assessment opportunities and modes can ensure that your students feel empowered to demonstrate their abilities to their fullest extent, regardless of how different the students are from each other and from you.



## *Chapter 6*

### **Common Challenges**

Teaching international students means that you may experience some challenges that most teachers face. Often these challenges repeat with every new group of students you teach or even repeat within a term with a current batch of students. Irrespective of how often these challenges occur, knowing that you may face them at some point is the first step in being prepared for them. Having at least one “off-the-shelf” technique that you can immediately use when faced with a challenge gives you the opportunity to reflect, consider, and respond much more effectively when faced with some of these problems. It takes the pressure off you for having to think through every single issue that arises. Of course prescriptive solutions for every situation do not exist, but for some common repeating challenges there are some techniques you can have ready to use in addressing these challenges.

Listed in this chapter are some of the most common challenges teachers face when interacting with international students. Each challenge is provided with at least one possible technique you could use to deal with it. There are, of course, many ways of dealing with these challenges, but at least one is suggested here.

Exploring these techniques for dealing with symptomatic challenges will help relieve the pressure on you during your day-to-day interactions with students. However, it won’t always address the underlying causes of the challenges. Chapter 7 of this book presents a more holistic method that could help you



avoid many of these challenges by building experiences and learning environments that help alleviate the underlying causes. Enacting a really powerful set of learning experiences in a rich learning environment takes a lot longer—typically many terms and years for a teacher. While working on building such experiences and challenges, it is useful to be able to deal tactically with many of common symptomatic challenges you may face with international students right now.

### **Specific Challenges Dealt With in this Chapter**

1. “Why don’t the team projects I assign work out the way I intended?”
2. “How do I get international students to talk to me?!?!?”
3. “How do I get students to participate in classroom discussions?”
4. “Must they negotiate everything?”
5. “What they think the word ‘fair’ means is different from what I think the word ‘fair’ means!”
6. “Why won’t they make an appointment?”
7. “Are English abilities important?”
8. “Why won’t my students read?”
9. “Why do they write their essays the same way they chat on-line?”
10. “Should I say that in class?”
11. “Why do they keep using: ‘My grandmother [uncle, aunt, . . .] died’ as an excuse for not completing an assignment on-time or for missing an exam?”

12. "Should I socialize with my students?"
13. "Why are some students continually late for class?"
14. "My local students refuse to work on teams with my international students."
15. "Why won't the international students just do the assignment? Why do they keep asking for detailed instructions?"

### **1. Why Don't the Team Projects I Assign Work Out the Way I Intended?**

Team projects are one of the first things all teachers think of when looking for more enriching learning experiences for students. The vision that comes to mind is how the teacher sees herself participating in the project:

"I would engage myself fully into the project with the other members, discussing the big issues excitedly, splitting the work equally based on the interests and strengths of each member. Then the members would come together, sharing and intermingling their parts of the project, building a cohesive final product that is fully understood by all members. Throughout the process there would be peer teaching and mentoring and a rich interpersonal environment that would bring a glow of learning insights, reflection and happiness to all."

Wow! If all my team projects could just be like that one, I would be the best teacher in the world. Unfortunately, this vision is hard to achieve. Three reasons why:

1. People don't naturally work the "ideal way".
2. Students don't view learning as eagerly and excitedly as most teachers do.

How a western teacher might see project learning	How a western student typically might see project learning	How a process oriented international student (for example) might see project learning
A chance to learn from peers.	A chance to get the assessment “over with” more efficiently by splitting the workload.	A guarantee of success as there is strength in numbers. “In the group I can be sure someone will know what to do.”
An exciting, engaging learning process.	More enjoyable than listening to a lecture and more freedom to structure the project for easy completion by all.	A comfortable setting in which those with the most knowledge and/or authority will lead the project to a successful conclusion.
An equal sharing of tasks.	The one smartest person should do most of the important stuff.	The smartest person will do the whole project and ensure the rest of the group is included in their success.
All members will understand all aspects of the project well.	The rest of the team will read the whole project when it is done and will have a basic sense of the whole.	“I am not the smartest member of the group. I will let ____ tell us what to do and what the results are because she is clearly the smartest in the group.”
A constructive learning experience that builds skills as well as knowledge.	An efficient way to get good grades without the stupid risk and pressure of an exam.	“This is childish. Why aren’t we learning (receiving lectures). This is a waste of time.” OR “This is interesting. I’ve never done anything like this before. I’ll just play along as the others seem to know what we are supposed to do.”
A building of a rich set of interpersonal skills.	A chance for conflict between members if the team is not put together properly—i.e. students need to choose their own team of cohesive members.	Shy student thinking to herself: “I hate this Pedro. He always dominates the conversation and I can’t get a word in. The others never listen to my ideas.”
The outcome of a team effort is more than the sum of the efforts of the individuals involved (synergy).	A chance to work and socialize with friends and still get the task done efficiently.	The one smartest person will produce a successful project to the benefit of all. “Wang will get us all an ‘A’ grade.”

3. Team projects mean different things in different cultures.

A useful contrast is to see how teachers view projects versus how western students view them versus how process oriented international students (as an example) view them. The following table is not all encompassing, but will highlight typical discrepancies that can cause projects to at best limp along, and at worst, fail miserably as useful learning experiences.

Note that strong stereotypes are used here for the purpose of illustration of potential differences. Reality certainly does not reflect such extremes.

This table is loaded with differences. For a team project to be successful from a teachers' point of view—to be successful even to a modest extent—some of these differences need to be overcome. Structuring a good project learning experience, then, requires teachers to put some thought into how to overcoming the differences before the project starts.

### Some specific techniques that can help build a more successful project when international students are involved

- **Small teams only**—2-3 students in size. Never 4 or more students. Maximum 3 students for very big projects. Smaller team sizes helps to avoid the “one person does it all” syndrome.
- **Team members should not be from the same nationality.** If you are teaching a more homogeneous group of international students then use an alternative: Team members may not already know each other and may not have worked together before in this course or in other courses. You might choose to use both of these requirements. Breaking down hierarchies and

#### Should students get frustrated?

I believe strongly in *moderate* levels of student frustration as a necessary condition for learning. Frustration indicates that students are facing something new. Frustration is the necessary pre-cursor to their minds “waking up” and focusing on finding a solution to the challenge at hand.

Students most often associate frustration and discomfort with bad teaching (sometimes true!) but it is not the case when frustration is necessary for new ways of thinking to form. Continuous communication, along with some emotional intelligence on your part, can go a long way to getting students to “buy into” and tolerate a moderate level of frustration. Their trust in you, the teacher, will help carry them through the experience.

Note: Too much frustration is bad. Too high of a leap in learning means students will outright reject the process. As a result, not only will they miss the learning experience, but they will likely suffer a blow to their confidence—another bad outcome.

social networks is essential to ensuring learning takes place. Members who are familiar and comfortable with each other and their respective strengths results in less learning happening.

- **Presentations are required.** All members of the team must present an equal part of the project and all members must answer questions about any part of the project. This requirement causes much consternation with students, but makes clear to them that simple division of labor or the one-smartest-student-does-it-all process is not acceptable. Even when you tell your students ahead of time that during the “question and answer” part of the presentation you will be specifically asking each student about different parts of the project, some will protest when faced with a question about an area of the project they weren’t intimately involved in: “But madam, I didn’t do that part, \_\_\_\_\_ did! He can answer the question better!” Egalitarianism and really integrated, synergistic team work is so alien to many students—or at least not within their range of experiences—that they simply don’t understand it. In some cases, they may not think such an approach is fair. (hint: A cultural issue here that you may have to deal with!)
- Each student must write a personal reflection document that will form part of their individual grade. A 1-2 page document is sufficient, outlining specifically:
  - What parts he/she did in the project.
  - What he/she learned from the project about the subject being studied.
  - How he/she felt the team learning process went and how it could be improved.

You should be clear to your students that this personal reflection will be questioned in the presentation and that it will form a significant percentage of their grade.

**Important:** Personal reflection is not part of most international students' experience. In collective cultures it is not only alien, but potentially threatening and offensive. So some preparation of your students with warm-up reflection writing before the project is highly recommended. Enjoy watching real learning happen during these exercises!

- Each member will receive an individual grade on the project, based on their presentation, their personal ability to answer questions about the whole project, their personal reflection and partly from the whole project itself. You can see from this requirement that the heart of simple "splitting of work" and one-person-does-it-all processes are being targeted here.

These requirements add to the teacher's workload associated with projects. However, instead of a "4-person-team-will-write-a-3000-word-essay-and-hand-it-in" project that results in very little learning for most students, these requirements will help enrich the learning experiences all the students will have, albeit more painfully and frustratingly for some!

## 2. How Do I Get International Students to Talk to Me?!?!?

Power distance refers to the barriers that exist or don't exist between different levels of authority in an organization or team. Power distance is not an issue for most teachers in western education institutions. If you are asked to meet with a dean, principal, department head,

### "So what?"

"International Students are polite and respectful. I like the fact that they respect me as a teacher. I don't get the same respect from my western students!"

Do not confuse support for the power/authority structure with real respect. Real respect for you, the individual person as their teacher, is something you *earn* from your students, not something you get from a title.

Narrowing the power distance with international students as much as possible is essential to really engaging them in learning and therefore in you moving from a "wise sage on the stage" to a powerful agent for their learning. Then you begin to earn their trust.

VP or the President of your institution, you might feel some slight concern about the topic and process, but generally you would handle the meeting with aplomb. After all, you are all working together for the betterment of students. What is there to worry about in meeting with someone higher up the authority structure? And you have professional rights, union contracts, laws and the personal strength necessary to stand up to anyone in the organization. You are a professional teacher with nothing to be afraid of.

**IMPORTANT:** This is not the case with most people in the world!

Most societies and cultures in the world work on carefully built and strongly maintained hierarchies of power. These hierarchies are integrated with their politics, religion, customs, laws, and deeply part of the very psyche of members of the society. They are most often based on fear and these hierarchies are jealously guarded by most members, including to a great extent, those at the bottom of the structure who need to “know their place”.

Many or most of your international students will be firmly grounded in such structures, both culturally and educationally. One of the most overt indications of this is that many of your international students will have a problem talking openly to you about important issues. Or they will do so in a formal, roundabout manner that is frustrating to you because it is more like a story than a discussion of something important. There are a lot of power-distance issues going on in this situation, making the student and you squirm as you try to understand the student’s problem. While you are doing this, your student is trying to express himself in a manner that won’t reveal his inner self

and cause him to “lose face”. As a western teacher who is most likely not from such a cultural and educational background, understanding and relating to your students’ viewpoints may be hard for you.

Students from high power distance backgrounds have the following difficulties:

- Interacting with you informally and openly. They call you “professor” or “sir” and “madam” as a protocol barrier that clearly defines the authority structure and makes clear to you that they don’t want to interact with you informally.
- Asking questions in class.
- Physically coming to see you on their own initiative for a 1:1 consultation.
- Openly discussing issues with you (there are likely other reasons they have trouble discussing issues with you, but power distance may be one contributing factor).
- Going to a higher level in the teaching hierarchy (to the director, dean, etc.) about a positive or negative issue even when you, the teacher, encourage them to do so.
- Going outside the vertical hierarchy to another one, such as to see the registrar, librarian, another department head, etc.

These are not necessarily personal confidence issues for students nor are they intercultural conflict issues, but really are symptoms of an underlying high power distance orientation. Many international students won’t feel comfortable opening up and talking to you or to other authorities in your organization because this would be crossing a very clear boundary in the power hierarchy.



**Have you been there?**

One of the best way to improve your abilities to help international students learn is to travel to some of their countries and learn first-hand about their culture.

Strap on a backpack and take a digital camera with storage for a zillion pictures. The pictures are not for your photo album, but for your use in the classroom! Using pictures of their home country will help students “connect” to you. You are demonstrating that you know something about them.

In the classroom, tell your students about the delightful and interesting things you learned while in their country. Ask them questions about things you didn't understand while there, and ask about where they live and work. Watch the faces light up as they describe places and events from their lives in their home country to you.

You will find that you “connect” better with your students by having some first-hand experience with their home country and culture.

Here are two steps you can take to help break down hierarchical barriers:

### **I. Learn how such high-power distance structures work and how it feels to be forced to live in one.**

To truly understand such structures, where participants have little or no recourse from the impacts of the structure, you must remove your western power distance lens and immerse your mind in one of their cultures. You must learn how it feels to be a participant in a high power distance structure, because the feelings have a huge impact on how international students behave. You must understand these feelings if you are to understand their behavior.

How?

One way is to go and live in a country with a high power distance, particularly one that is poor and crowded. This is the hardest but best way to really understand what it means to think in a high power distance way.

A lower cost way, with many of the learning benefits of living in one, is to travel (not “vacation”, but “travel”) through one. By traveling I mean slowly moving through the society, interacting with as many levels as you can, eating the food, learning the customs, speaking with the people—generally removing the western “lens” that you see the world through and trying to understand the paradigm in which the people of that society live their lives. Such travel is best done alone, without the comforts of a friend or family member to instinctively turn to when you get uncomfortable or frustrated with something you don't understand or like. Having a friend or family member with you will only shield you from the experience.

Finally, an even lower cost method, albeit with less impact than living or traveling in one, is to immerse

yourself temporarily in a high power distance structure right in your western country (again, without family or friends—you are aiming to learn, not to be comfortable!)

Some ways of doing so:

- Spend a weekend with a highly controlling religion in a revival retreat, bible camp, or other very intense experience. Or join a de-programming experience for those who are coming out of cults.
- Do a weekend or week-long military or police training camp type experience.
- Find a highly controlled rehab, prison, or other secure facility and voluntarily put yourself in a participant role for a short period of time.
- Locate an experiential weekend or week-long workshop that specifically targets releasing fear and stress. Fear and stress are core symptoms of being low on a power hierarchy, be that hierarchy one of family (fear of abuse from your mother, father, etc.), one of work, or a hierarchy in a controlling structure people belong to. Of course fear and stress can come from many sources, but there are sadly many workshops for people who are victims of family or organizational abuse.

## **II. Build into your personal teaching style an understanding of the feelings that are intrinsic to high power distance structures.**

This step should be obvious if you have come to understand how it feels to be low on the hierarchy in a high power distance situation, particularly under difficult living conditions.

In order to deal constructively with the teaching issues noted earlier, you must first remove the fear of

repercussions that students feel about breaching the levels of the educational authority hierarchy.

**Some techniques for getting rid of fear:**

- Build trust between your students and yourself in the classroom. This is an essential step. Use simple trust building exercises like the one noted at the end of Chapter 1. Listen carefully and respectfully to your students when they ask a question or indicate a concern. Your reaction to the first few questions and concerns in your classes will set the tone for all your students. They are watching you carefully to see how they should interact with you, the next level up in the authority hierarchy. If you indicate that there will be no repercussions from questions, concerns, or disagreements, then you are moving one big step forward in breaking down power distance barriers. Warning: If your manner at first is abrupt, cold, curt, or disapproving, you will slam down a barrier that you may never be able to remove with that group of students for the duration of their time with you.
- If high-power distance issues are a real problem with your group of students, specifically require that students meet with you 1:1. Use these sessions to build trust and a spoken or understood personal agreement with each one that you are not there to harm them. Remove their fear!
- Keep an enthusiastic, supportive demeanor at all times when interacting with students—in the classroom, in the hallways, in your office, by email, telephone, etc. A consistent interaction style will ensure that you are seen as a consistent person. Nothing scares a high power distance student more than an inconsistent authority figure.

- Discuss power distance with your students in the classroom! Explore how learning happens and the need for a low power distance in an open, friendly and supportive forum (it helps everyone learn). Many or even most may not understand their own behavior. Don't assume that because you see power distance issues, students do as well. They are most likely just working in their own *modus operandi*, oblivious to issues you see.

The result? By building trust and removing fear you will naturally open the door to real interaction with students. By helping them become more self-aware you help them build confidence in their own ability to question, approach, and interact with different levels in your organization, including with you as their teacher.

Another reason: This kind of learning helps develop a two or three cultural viewpoint, one of the reasons international students are studying overseas. Learning to interact and succeed in different cultural environments is a very useful skill to gain in life.

### 3. How Do I Get Students to Participate in Classroom Discussions?

Frustrating to many teachers of international students is the lack of student contribution to discussions from students of some nationalities. Asian students, for example, usually come from a K-12 classroom environment which is authoritarian and one-way: The teacher lectures to the students. Interrupting with questions, criticisms, or requests for clarification would lead, in the words of one of my Asian students, to "the teacher getting very angry and throwing chalk

#### **International Students are not self-aware!**

Good teachers are by nature more self-aware than the general population. How can they not be? If teachers are to understand their students, they must also understand themselves in order to have a frame of reference to compare their students to!

But most students, like most young people, are not self-aware. They experience things, but do not immediately see the big picture or implications of those experiences.

Taking time through classroom experiences to help students become self-aware is time well spent for breaking down power distance and learning process barriers of all kinds.

Examples of self-awareness building experiences include the use of personal reflection writing, role playing, and debriefing discussions after exams or projects.

at me!” Visions of 19th century one-room rural classrooms in western countries come to mind when we hear such anecdotes. This type of learning environment is not what we consider our typical classroom situation in our modern western educational institutions to be like! What we expect is student interaction in the classroom—verbal interaction between students and between students and the teacher. Interaction that helps all students in the group learn.

### **Good contributions, not pandering to the teacher**

Care must be expressed about what constitutes good student contribution and interaction in the classroom. In this age of consumerism, many or even most parents of K-12 students want to see results—their children achieving high grades is one of the results parents want. Smart kids know how to get high grades from most teachers. They have figured out that a combination of good reports handed in, colorful presentations, good test scores and an all-important factor, constant verbal interaction with the teacher, spells an “A” grade. Eagerness to answer questions even if the student doesn’t know the correct answer, but is eager to answer anyway, makes many K-12 and post-secondary teachers feel happy. Eager students makes the teacher feel they are running an interesting and exciting class. It makes them feel they are doing a good job. “Look at my eager students! Am I not a good teacher?!” A happy teacher will then share the happiness in the form of higher grades. Who do the higher grades go to? The students who were most eager to send the message that the teacher is running an exciting class. Human nature at work—and smart students.

What I want as a teacher is not eagerness and the excited throwing up of hands from a few students who

are striving for top grades, but substantive interaction with students. Interaction that helps students transform their thinking.

Examples of meaningful interaction and contributions to the classroom experience:

- Questions put to the teacher that students really want to know the answer to.
- Contributions to a discussion that are well considered and directly relevant to the issue under consideration.
- Anecdotal and authentic evidence based on students' real-world experiences.
- Critical examination of issues from all sides and perspectives.
- Open, respectful discussion and critical argument between students themselves.

### **Accents can frustrate smooth discussions**

One problem with class discussions can be with basic understanding what other students are saying. ESL students have a variety of accents. They get used to your accent and those of your fellow faculty, who likely have similar accents to you. Class discussions, however, include all students and a wide variety of accents. Some of these accents will make it hard for many other students in the class to understand what is being said by another student.

This is no reason, however, to revert to lecturing! I suspect that many teachers find themselves lecturing for just this reason. But just because there may be some challenges with language does not mean that lecturing is a better method of helping students learn

Three simple techniques can help overcome accent barriers:

- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly. Encourage all students to do the same. Speaking slower allows for longer interpretation times.
- Repeat back to the class key ideas that a student says if this student's speaking voice is not clear. This helps to reinforce and validate that you respect the speaker and what they are saying, too.
- Write responses on the whiteboard so others can read what was said.

### **Techniques for getting students to contribute to discussions**

The following 4 techniques may be helpful in getting international students from varied learning backgrounds and with varied success orientation mixes to contribute well to classroom discussions.

#### **I. Sex, politics and religion**

When I was teaching in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a conservative Muslim country undergoing tremendous cultural change, our supervisors told us three things we were not allowed to talk about in the classroom:

- Sex
- Politics
- Religion

What were the three things students wanted to talk about? You guessed it:

- Sex

- Politics
- Religion

## **Sex**

Students want to talk about those things that are important to them and their lives. All good teachers anywhere know this. Most young people in western countries are interested in the topic of sex, being in their peak sexual years. Those students from more conservative countries may find the topic embarrassing, but they are often the most attentive and engaged listeners when the topic arises in the classroom.

If you are not a prude, use a bit of sexuality in your classroom discussions to get conversations going. Almost any subject can build on some aspect of sex to get to important lessons.

### **Examples:**

- **Marketing 101:** If you are talking about the relative importance of advertising versus other promotion methods of goods, use advertising of women's fashions in magazines versus the use of fashion shows as an example. Use lots of visuals, like magazine ads, video clips from fashion shows, etc. Most of your international female students, regardless of the country they come from, won't take long to start contributing to the discussion. If you are a male teacher, play dumb and ask naïve questions about women's fashions or make innocent wrong interpretations, asking the students if they agree. Regardless of their nationality—Chinese, European, Latin American or Canadian—most of your female students will get involved, even if they have never spoken out in a classroom ever before in their lives. Try it. If you have already set up a safe classroom environment that students trust, you will have a great time seeing some of your previously



silent female students open up and eloquently contribute to the discussion.

What about the male students in your class? Is this a sexist topic that should be “neutralized”? To conservative teachers who strive toward political correctness, bland comparisons between “widget” advertising strategies would be a wholly more appropriate example than women’s fashions. But those kind of teachers aren’t likely to be reading this book, are they? Probably not. So back to the question: What will male students get out of a discussion of women’s fashions? Rest assured, they will be attentive, interested, and in many cases contributing to the discussion right along with the women. Particularly if some of the fashions are risqué . . .

- Geography 101: What if your course is not a marketing course, but instead, something completely different: A geography course? Well, comparing the colors and styles of men’s and women’s fashions in different areas of the world is another starting point in which to get at important learning about “geography”.
- Electrical Engineering 101: If you are teaching the fundamentals of electrical engineering, you can also use sexually related topics very effectively to get discussions going and learning happening. How about using the wiring of a fashion show stage to teach various possible ways of calculating total loading of a transformer. Don’t fashion shows use a ton of high wattage lights and other gear? Well, you need to show some video to get this discussion started. What about heat and electrical safety? Those lights that flood the runway where models strut their stuff generate tons of heat. How does this affect electrical safety?

You get the idea: Almost any topic can be made interesting with a dash of risqué in the context to liven things up. Use it. What can it hurt? As long as it isn't blatantly sexist or outright unethical or illegal, you have a valuable discussion-generating tool in your pocket. And you can bet that most of your students will perk up at a context that is of personal interest to them.

### **Politics**

Politics is an absolute winner for getting some male and female students talking. I love seeing how some of my Chinese students open right up when you can bring politics into the discussions. It seldom fails. They feel strongly about politics in their own country and world-wide. Once they know your classroom is a safe environment to discuss things openly, politics gets some students who never spoke before engaged in discussions. And if they get really fired up, they contribute to future classes on their own accord. Another benefit.

One of the best cross-subject political discussions you can have with your international students is about corruption in governments. Tips, payment for favors, bribery, or "baksheesh" as it is called in parts of the Middle East and Indian subcontinent, is extremely frustrating to many students. Some students will flip-pantly state that giving bribes is just part of everyday life and necessary to get things done. But they will also strongly disagree that bribery is a "good" thing. Most would love to get rid of bribery and live in a fair and just world where bribery was not necessary.

Again, almost any subject can use this topic as a way into other learning. Electrical engineers could be faced with a safety and quality of service question: "If you have to bribe the contractor who wires your transformer to get the job done fast, how sure are you that they did

a safe, high-quality job? What short cuts would they like take? What problems would result later?” A more direct political question for engineers: “What are building codes more designed to protect? The safety of customers, jobs for highly paid trades people, or the government from litigation?”

Other wonderful political topics that can get students engaged in the classroom:

- Geopolitics, such as China and Taiwan, Japan and their history with China, United States versus Europe, Russia versus the break-away republics in the south, Canada versus the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United States, the UK versus France.
- Former government leaders who are judged as bad dictators/thieves (i.e. Hitler, Stalin, Benazir Bhutto, Nicolae Ceausescu, etc.)
- Democracy versus autocracy—what do multinational businesses prefer? I am sure you know the answer, but many international students will be shocked to hear the answer.

## Religion

Religion is the touchiest of the three subjects that can get students engaged in classroom discussions. You need to be careful with this one because unlike sex and politics, beliefs about religion form the core of many international students’ lives. If you could be playful and have fun with sex and politics as discussion topics, you must be the opposite with religion: Careful, considerate, and sensitive to beliefs. Not out of any legal obligation beyond perhaps the issue of discrimination, but out of respect for the depth of feelings that some students have about religion.

I cringed several times in my teaching career when I heard some teachers being flippant about religion in one context or another. In the classroom they make it clear what they feel about religions in general or about one particular one. This is a big mistake. Making some students feel that their religious beliefs are being attacked or that their religion is worthless is akin to slapping them in the face. It is the opposite of setting up a comfortable, respectful tolerant classroom in which discussions can safely take place. Instead, such behavior destroys respect, raises tension, and makes the classroom a dangerous arena in which students feel that their best approach is to say nothing.

Assuming you wish to carefully use the subject of religion in your class, it can be a powerful tool for engaging students in discussions. It can light up conservative international students if they feel that they can contribute some information about their religion into a respectful, tolerant discussion. Perhaps this discussion is on the subject of marketing, and how advertisers have to craft television and print ads to be sensitive to beliefs in conservatively Muslim countries. Or in science, looking at how a religious group has contributed to the scientific knowledge base of the world. This is wonderful topic as some international students from religions that are not mainstream in western countries will love the way you respectfully talk about the best parts of their religion.

Again, be warned: Religion is a great discussion topic, but it must be engaged in very respectfully, in a non-comparative manner and focused on supporting a learning goal. If in doubt about how to use it effectively, skip it. With this one topic, if you are not comfortable working with the topic of religion, the cost of failure is higher than the loss of this one topic as a discussion prompting tool.

## II. Tell us about your country

A lovely angle for getting students talking is to include country specific examples and challenges in your discussions. For example, throw into your discussions such provocative questions as:

- “In North America, we consider blond women to be beautiful. What about in your country? How is beauty defined?”
- “I heard that \_\_\_\_\_ is a really dangerous place to live! Is that true?”
- “There are tons of problems in Africa with poverty. Why do western countries keep piling debt on African countries that can’t afford to pay it off?”

Create “wake up” questions (not insulting ones, however!) that get at national or cultural specific issues and that might be close to hearts of students who don’t contribute to your classes.

## III. Enthusiasm

“Enthusiasm is the best protection in any situation. Wholeheartedness is contagious. Give yourself, if you wish to get others.”—David Seabury (1885-1960), famed psychologist,

When describing the classroom discussion environment, a good analogy is that you are the conductor of the orchestra and your students are the musicians. A calm conductor with gentle movements encourages quiet, slow music. A conductor, who “feels” the music coming alive inside himself and physically radiates energy and enthusiasm as he encourages the musicians to play powerfully, gets more from the musicians in the orchestra. He gets fast, alive, loud, strong, and powerful music.

If you want to get students to contribute to the classroom experience in an open, enthusiastic way, you have to be open and enthusiastic. You have to demonstrate that you love the process of examination, debate, comparison, analysis and discussion. Doing so will get students to “wake up” and see what you are doing as something they can get excited about. Enthusiasm is highly contagious. Wave your arms, shout with joy at an accomplishment, laugh, and cry. Not as an actor, but because you find the issues, problems, and topics really interesting. Be authentically enthused and watch your students come alive.

Enthusiasm is important for any classroom environment, but is particularly important when you are working with ESL students. Most international students take body language queues from you more than local students do. For someone for whom English is not their native language, listening in the classroom is highly augmented by watching and interpreting the teacher’s body language. This is because their mind is struggling to translate your words. Another part of their brain tries to help. Their eyes soak up body language and feed it to this other part of their brain. Two interpretations are compared in the brain. If what is translated by the language translator matches what is interpreted by the visual translator, then meaning is generated. If there is a mismatch, meaning is lost and confusion sets in. A resetting of the brain occurs and a new attempt to understand what the teacher is saying takes place. Being clear and expressive with body language can be a powerful technique for aiding ESL learners in interpreting what you and other students are saying.

One caveat: All this presupposes, of course, that you love what you are teaching. If you don’t love your subject or area then perhaps it is time to shift into an area

that you are interested in. Or time for a break from teaching. Or time to quit teaching altogether.

#### **IV. Validation, celebration and encouragement—a virtuous trio**

Validation, celebration, and encouragement are important techniques with any teaching situation, but are particularly important when working with international students. International students are facing an incredible set of challenges adapting to:

- The local culture
- The culture and processes of your organization
- Your teaching style

They are having a lot of emotions going through their minds over the course of this adaptation process. Validating international student ideas and emotions, celebrating their successes, and giving them regular encouragement are all extremely important things to do—publicly, in 1:1 sessions, and in group meetings.

If positive, proactive feedback is not normally your style, try to change this. Positive energy and enthusiasm directed at validating, celebrating, and encouraging are extremely important tools in every good teacher’s teaching tool kit.

#### **Summary:**

The classroom experience is one of the few things that makes an in-person educational experience different from an on-line, self-taught, or autodidactic learning experience. It is also one of the most important factors separating good institutions from not so good ones.

A “rich” classroom experience allows students to:

- Hear questions they hadn’t thought of.
- Hear viewpoints they hadn’t heard before.

- Create synergies that result in a range of ideas and solutions that one person could not generate alone.
- Learn in different modes.
- Practice learning in a variety of ways with a low potential penalty for trying new things that result in failure.
- Develop better interpersonal interaction abilities and styles.

In order for students to get the most out of a classroom experience, they must at some point engage other students verbally in some form of interaction. Regardless of their learning style and success orientation, interaction is a valuable and arguably necessary experience for a classroom to “work”. Encouraging students to contribute in your class, therefore, is an important practice to undertake. There are many ways to make contributions happen.

#### 4. Must They Negotiate Everything?!?!

“Argghhhhh!!!!” Another negotiation:

“Sir, the paper is due on Friday. Can we have until Monday to hand it in? After all, this past week we had an exam in our \_\_\_\_ class and many of us had to attend that meeting set up by the program head. We need more time . . .”

It seems that some international students want to negotiate everything:

- When their projects should be due.
- How the project is structured.
- How the project will be assessed.

#### Teaching is like conducting an orchestra!

A good teacher is far more like a conductor of an orchestra than like a parent, for example.

Parents have it easy: Some things are just plain right and wrong. Absolute love for their children drives parents' decision making, even when the decisions will be very unpopular.

Teachers, on the other hand, must orchestrate student commitment to their own discomfort and frustration as necessary conditions for learning. At the same time, teachers must give students the feeling that they are in control of the process and decisions that are being made.

Finding this balance is very hard to do!

(Which is, of course, one reason teachers need summers off in order to rejuvenate energy and focus).



- The exam date and time.
- What is on the exam and how it is run.
- The class start time.
- The class end time.
- How long the break in the middle of a 3 hour class is.
- . . .

On the good side, the fact that many students want to negotiate constantly with you is a sign that they trust you enough to negotiate with you. They know that their negotiations won't have repercussions against them personally. And as a good teacher, you want to have some flexibility in your approach to the learning process. If students have some control over the schedule and how things are done in your course then they will feel more ownership of the learning process—a good thing, of course.

On the bad side of negotiations, however, too many attempts at negotiating by students means that you can be seen as weak, un-sure of what you are doing, and not a strong, professional teacher. After all, you keep changing things whenever a student or group of students asks for a change. You may actually be losing student respect by negotiating too much. Too many negotiating attempts by students may also indicate that you are communicating insufficiently with your students as to the reasons behind decisions you made and processes you initiated.

How can you avoid spending time every week negotiating with students and at the same time remain flexible enough in your approach so that students can have some control of the learning process?

**Some techniques for finding a balance between being open to student input and retaining some order and certainty in your planned processes**

**Make sure students to have input into some of the big decisions**, like when an exam is to be held. Have the students negotiate with each other in the open forum of the classroom, with you moderating the negotiation process. Encouraging them to have this input means that they will be less likely to come back and try to negotiate a change. If there is any question later, you can simply turn it back on them and say: “You chose this exam date! Everything else that we have to do is organized around it. Sorry, we have to stick to it.” Negotiations with you will typically close at this point with no further attempts to change the date. When you reflect the fact that your students have control you are also indicating that they have responsibility for making good decisions. And if they want to change the date they must have made a bad decision in the first place, not what any student wants to hear . . .

**Communicate clearly and regularly with your students about the integrated nature of the learning experiences you have constructed.** Students who understand and have committed to an integrated learning process will be less likely to want to mess up the process with negotiated changes. An integrated learning process is one that is like a relay race of experiences that dovetail together. Each experience builds on the other. The more students see the big picture of the learning process the more comfortable and engaged in it they will be. Particularly if you have set up the learning process with lots of variety, important and engaging milestones, and a final goal. It works even better if you are demonstrating leadership of the process with a sense of enthusiasm and urgency in accomplishing this course’s mission of learning.

**When students decide everything:**

**“Teaching Nirvana”!**

In a perfect learning process, near total control of learning by self-aware students is the goal. It would be incredible to have learners who decide everything that can be decided and are fully engaged in the process—one that they initiated and set up (with your help when you were asked). These same students are self-aware enough to iterate and adjust the process of their own learning as it unfolds.

Given the reality of how people learn and our imperfect world, achieving this teaching Nirvana is a mythical goal that we can get close to, but never quite achieve.

However, close is a very, VERY good place to be!

**Sometimes there is nothing you can do . . .**

Sometimes you just can't change student behavior. You can do all the leading, guiding, explaining, and experiential exercises you want—and students simply won't change behavior patterns.

Like with time management. Short of micro managing their lives for them, many students simply will not manage their time.

Sometimes the reason for this is cultural, sometimes personality, sometimes organization skills, sometimes laziness, and sometimes because they simply don't want to manage their time. Period.

**Pre-empt individual negotiations and even class-based negotiations by anticipating situations where negotiation might take place.** If you know students have 3 or 4 assignments all coming due in a particular week, identify this situation ahead of time with them and help them plan their out-of-class work schedules so they can accomplish it. 5 minutes spent discussing proactivity, techniques for time management, and ways of working efficiently can pay big dividends. Particularly if this 5 minutes is injected right as student stress levels are rising rapidly. Let them know you know of their pressure but that the conditions of your assignment are not negotiable at this point.

**Be firm with your students.** Not angry, harsh, grumpy, or curt—firm. Listen to their opening negotiation bid, consider it carefully, and unless it is a really compelling argument, say no. Not “yes”, but “no” as a default response to negotiation attempts. If you have not thought through your course planning decisions then you might feel compelled to say yes. Assuming you had good reasons for your decisions and these reasons are fundamentally valid still, saying no more than yes will discourage negotiations in the future. The side benefit: Your firmness will contribute to student trust in you. All teachers, and human beings in general, want to be “liked”, but student respect and trust in you are far more powerful tools in your teaching toolkit than being liked. And liking can come from real respect and trust, but can real respect and trust come from liking?

Negotiating is natural in many cultures. It is not as natural in western countries and certainly not a natural part of the modus operandi in most western educational institutions. Students coming from other cultures can learn very quickly what they can and cannot negotiate with you. With a few simple techniques you

can eliminate almost all the negotiating attempts that you might face.

### **5. What They Think the Word ‘Fair’ Means is Different From What I Think the Word ‘Fair’ Means!**

“But sir, it’s not fair that I got a ‘B’ on my paper! I worked for 50 hours on that research paper!”

Fairness is a big issue with students. By engaging in a formal learning process they are putting their egos on the line, opening themselves to criticism and potential failure, and exhibiting a fundamental statement of hope. They hope that by working hard at learning they will better themselves and the world they live in.

Western education institutions are held in high regard internationally. After all, they must have helped create the wealth, comforts, opportunities and rights that citizens in western countries generally have. As part of this high regard, students lump in a lot of other beliefs about western institutions. One is that the process—and the people working in the process—are fair.

What does the word “fair” mean? Fair has many different definitions in English, including a description of the color of hair. But in an educational context, we can use the dictionary definitions as something that is “just” and “free from bias” and “consistent and logical”.

Here is where the situation gets messy when dealing interculturally. In our quoted example above, the student was equating the grade he got (‘B’) with the number of hours he put into producing the paper. Not the quality of the paper, but the number of hours. If we go back to success orientations, this student is equating the process he went through with the grade. If the

process was good he should have gotten an 'A'. This sounds like a process oriented student talking. And in fact, the quote above is very real. I have heard this line many times over the years from very process oriented international students. I have also heard it from some relationship oriented students who equated number of hours of work for me as a sign of their loyalty to me. Loyalty in their mind should result in a high grade.

Fairness, then, is not an absolute concept, but a contextual and culturally rooted perception. How can you, as a teacher from a different culture than most of your international students, make them understand what fairness means in your educational institution and in your class in particular?

### **Some techniques for maximizing student feelings of fairness**

**Be absolutely open, clear and transparent about assessments.** Students should know ahead of time the nature of the assessments you will be doing and exactly how they will be assessed. Communicate this information repeatedly, regularly, and proactively. Better still, have your students contribute to the design of the assessment process. Best: Have them design their own assessment processes. How can an assessment process be unfair if they set it up? You cannot change all cultural foundations to feelings of fairness. The factors are simply too many and too varied by culture. But you can minimize the chance that your efforts are seen as unfair by engaging students in designing their own learning and assessment processes.

**Turn concerns about fairness back to the student.** "OK, you think this situation is unfair. What would you do if you were in my situation?" Often, when students have to think through the other person's position on an issue they will start to see that their original

perception of fairness may not have been the whole picture. And once they see your position on the issue, they may not even be able to say the situation is unfair, particularly if everyone in their class is being treated equally.

**Spend some time in class exploring what the word “fair” means,** if fairness becomes an important issue for your students. Often fairness will become an issue not because of something you did, but because of what one of your colleagues did! Students come into your class upset and unload their perceptions of inequity taking place in that other course. Since it is not really your problem, you can choose to ignore the issue . . . or take the opportunity to do some deep learning with your students. Clark McKowen, in his book “Teaching Human Beings—The Role of Language in Education” makes a strong case that the deep study of any discipline is really the study of the roots of the language it is taught in.

And learning about the roots of language come from learning about life itself and the important things about life like “what is fairness” and “what is learning.” If you have students look at what fairness means, you will be getting them to see their own cultural underpinnings of how the feelings of something being fair or not arises in them.

Then your students will be on the way to a much more critical way of thinking about whether something is fair or not. Which leads to them being more capable of deciding if a perceived “fairness” situation can and should be addressed by the other teacher.

Finally, since fairness is at least partly rooted in a student’s natural success orientation(s), exploring success orientations with them is one good way to help them see how feelings of fairness and unfairness come from.

### **Are your students upset about something?**

Address it immediately. If you don’t, two bad things will happen:

1. Not immediately addressing a situation means emotions will fester and potentially go septic into a full-blown crisis. A crisis will take forever to overcome, even if the cause of the crisis is not really your problem.
2. You won’t be able to get your students to focus on anything you want them to focus on in your class if they are really upset about something.

Fairness is a very touchy and important issue for teachers and students. Often fairness issues, and how you handle them, make the difference between a good student experience in your class and a bad experience. A few proactive and timely techniques and interventions can avoid most fairness issues from arising in the first place. Learning is hard work, frustrating and even painful at times. Emotions can run high under these conditions. Fairness, being as much an emotion as a condition, needs to be managed if it becomes an upsetting issue for your students.

### **6. Why Won't They Make an Appointment? . . .**

" . . . They just show up at my office any time and expect that I can help them when they need it. Don't they realize I am busy and have other commitments? I gave them my email address and phone number! All they have to do is contact me and set up a time to meet!"

### **A couple of different perspectives on this challenge**

- Depending on your success orientation and that of your students, your frustration may be rooted in a mis-match between orientations. To a process oriented person, office hours are the "rules". A process oriented teacher will be the most likely to be frustrated when students don't adhere to office hours and come to see them outside of posted hours. Process oriented students will follow the office hour rules. And surprise, surprise! If you are a process oriented teacher, you will feel warmer feelings toward those students who follow your stated processes.



But recognize that to relationship oriented students, coming anytime to see you is just part of the human interaction process. Making regular unscheduled interpersonal connections with you is the goal, not some silly office hours rule that they didn't read or listen to, anyway.

A goal oriented student is focused on a goal they are trying to accomplish. If you are in your office and they need something, your distemper at being disturbed is only a minor issue—a bump in the road on the way to their reaching their goal. Something they can live with—if the goal is achieved. So they will not adhere to office hours either.

- Learning is not linear. It does not take place at certain hours or in-step with a planned curriculum. Different students understand different things in different ways at different times. As a teacher, are you there to support your students, whenever mental lights go on and they understand or need something from you? Or are you there to dispense a certain dose of knowledge, wisdom and support for very short periods of time?

You might think that I will advocate the former—you being available anytime to support your students. “To heck with office hours, they just get in the way of student learning.” Not so! As a good teacher you need to be accessible to students—much more than 2 hours a week of office hours allow. 2 hours per week is way too few and far too fixed. On the other hand, you have other commitments and you are only human: Constant interruptions means you can't get anything done and in the end, you get stressed and even a bit neurotic! So you need to find a balance.



### Office hours and human nature

Of all the feedback I get from students, one of the most negative relates to my availability in-person. Even though I go to great lengths to specify office hours and make myself really easy to make an appointment with outside of those hours on or off-campus, I still get some students rating me poorly on availability.

Why?

I believe this is human nature. If you are not in your office and available at exactly the time a student is stressed and desires to make you part of the solution to their problem, they feel you are not available and the memory sticks around until instructor assessment time.

I have helped this situation a lot by making myself available via instant messaging odd evenings in a week when I am working on my computer. However, it does not eliminate the issue completely.

Human nature—shrug it off.

## Balancing accessibility to students and meeting your other commitments without going crazy!

- **Don't be in your office** if you need to concentrate on marking, research, meeting with other faculty, or be engaged in any other activity that requires concentration. Go to a place you won't be disturbed.
- **Schedule different kinds of work in your office for when students are typically around . . .** and when they are not around. For deep thinking that requires concentration and lack of disturbance, early mornings are usually better. Students in general stay up late and disdain early mornings. All the better for you if you want to work on something that requires concentration. Of course if you are a later-in-the-day kind of person who also dislikes mornings, then planning on working in the evening in your office is a quieter time. Later in the morning students will drop in on you for quick questions and the afternoon is a time to sit with you and “shoot the breeze”—social time. In some cultures this is actually firmly rooted in their society. A big lunch time meal is followed by relaxed socializing and resting. So plan on short activities in the early afternoon in your office so you won't be upset about drop-in chats. Do activities at that time like checking your email, handling administrative details, chatting with colleagues, etc. Then student drop-ins will not be disturbing.
- **Use various communication tools** to help you control the time and method of student interaction with you. Don't be in your office all the time. Instant messaging, something most students now engage in, is a useful tool. Some students actually prefer this method of communication over interpersonal interaction or email contact. IM does not have to be instant. You can

have a student try to “chat” and you can choose not to reply immediately. Time delayed chatting is really like email. But since the students are not physically seeing you, they don’t know you are at your computer working at the moment and choosing not to respond back immediately.

The goal, then, is a balance between being accessible and being productive. Teachers need to do more than just interact with their students 24x7. Removing yourself from your office, scheduling your different types of work at different times of the day, and using different communication tools can all help you find a balance that works for you.

## **7. Are English Abilities Important?**

**(Yes and No!)**

“Their English is at a band 6.5 (IELTS) or a score of 600 (TOEFL). But they can’t really get the subtleties of our in-class discussions. As well, their written work shows a lack of clarity and focus. I can’t tell if it is because they don’t know the subject or because of their English level. Maybe we should set higher English entrance standards.”

This is a tough issue because there are good arguments for both higher English scores and for scores not being so important:

**Viewpoint : Higher English entrance scores lead to higher scores in content courses**

Higher English scores do correlate into higher grades in content courses. Over the years I have found that English as a Second Language (ESL) students have to overcome a language barrier to reach a higher

level of mastery of a subject and/or to demonstrate their abilities in a way that can be assessed.

A group of ESL students with mixed language abilities seems to fit into a bi-modal distribution of grades on content course assessments (not on English assessments). This bi-modality is a skewing from normal score distributions, I believe, because a certain benchmark ability in English seems to be required for students to be able to understand a subject, master content and skills, and demonstrate knowledge and ability. As academic programs tend to be so heavily oriented toward text-based teaching and learning, this bimodality is very pronounced.

Here is what typical scores of a mixed language ability class looks like for a content course:

In courses with international students who have English as a second language, assessments are at least partly testing language abilities and cultural “knowledge”. This is true for all assessments, including those for native English speaking learners, and has been a long-time criticism of IQ tests, for example. But this skewing is quite pronounced for ESL learners and can imply that higher scores on English will result in the demonstration of higher competence or mastery in non-language courses.

**Viewpoint : All students are developing their language skills on a continuous basis. The goal of all education, at all levels, is to help students learn. If we cut out students with not-so-strong English abilities, we are in effect cutting out those students who could benefit most by our program!**

This is valid viewpoint as well. Certainly we are here to help all students learn. As long as the students can understand our course process and can learn, why should we exclude them? As well, learning is not lin-

ear. Many students with weaker language abilities will make big leaps in their learning in very short period of time when under pressure to do so. Rather than giving students the lowest common denominator of challenges, let's give them something to strive for!

### **The “Yes” and “No” parts:**

#### **The “No” part**

For developmental level programs—K-12 to the end of bachelor's degrees—English language learning is a regular part of communication development. So the “developmental” viewpoint has a lot of merit. Human development should be the goal of every teacher. Most education up to the end of most bachelor degrees is really general enough to allow students with weaker English abilities to make big leaps in learning and benefit from a challenging learning environment.

Caveat: It is best not to “dumb down” courses to meet the “lowest common denominator” or to focus on the lower group in the bimodal distribution. At the very least, classes with bimodal distribution scores must be taught at the exact middle or even more toward the higher group. There are many ways to support a bimodally distributed lower group but few ways to challenge the upper group if the focus is on the lowest common denominator.

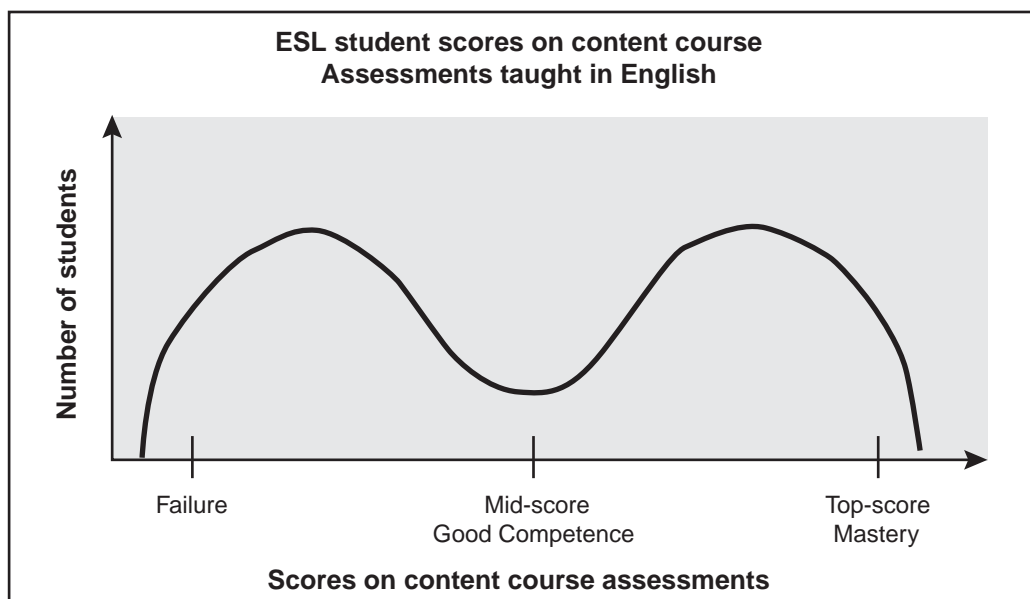
#### **The “Yes” part**

For some specialized bachelor degrees, many technical college programs, and most post-graduate work, stronger English levels would allow for a higher level of mastery. Much of the work in these programs is reliant on higher language abilities and the means with which to communicate complex ideas and concepts with peers and faculty. A strong case can be made for ensuring that students in these kinds of programs

#### **Chinese students . . . with smart parents!**

While representing my institution at an education expo in Beijing, I got to talk to many Chinese parents. I heard again and again the question: “How many Chinese students study at your institution?” Several parents made a point of explaining to me that they didn't want their son or daughter speaking Chinese. The parents wanted them to practice English and learn about the local culture, not socialize with other Chinese students.

At the end of a class I told my Chinese students this story. They stopped talking to their Chinese friends, looked at me for a moment, spoke a few sentences in English, and then continued speaking in Mandarin to their friends . . .



have better language abilities (note here that I mean “language abilities” in general—not specifically equal reading, speaking and writing abilities.) Teaching to the lowest common denominator is not normally an option at higher levels and in specialized technical programs.

### 8. Why Won't My Students Read?

“Why won't my students read? They sit there in class and won't read the article I have placed in front of them. And they won't read the chapter of the text I assigned to be read before class. They come to class unprepared because of not reading!”

Ahhhh . . . the written word. The foundation of knowledge and learning transmittal for most teachers. A symbol of our rise above the rest of the animal kingdom. Learning to read is like rising from the dim si-

lence of swimming underwater to the vibrant sounding environment above the pool surface. It is like color compared to a black and white picture. Like intelligence compared to ignorance.

So why don't many international students want to read?

A few reasons why reading is an issue when teaching international students:

- Most international students will naturally find reading in English difficult. Besides it being a second language for them, English is also a really messy language to understand. Unlike German, Spanish, French, or Italian, for example, English is a particularly complex mash of different linguistic influences. German, for example, is far more consistent and rule-bound than English.

So reading in a difficult second language like English is a chore. A particularly unpleasant one for many or most international students . . .

- Many countries in the world are extremely poor. When I visited Nepal I learned that foreigners were buying pens and pencils and donating them to local schools because many of the children and schools in Nepal could not even afford writing implements. My visit was in the 21st century, not the 18th century.

Poorer societies have not developed an affinity for the written word to any great extent. People in these cultures spend a lot of their day working on producing a subsistence living. They don't have the luxury of time and money for reading. So instead of a written mode of learning, they have an oral tradition.

Verbally-based students from primarily oral cultures are very frustrating for western teachers. Almost every teacher I know, regardless of success

### Case in point: Lihui Chang

Lihui Chang is an international student from China. Studying in a graduate degree program, she is finding class experiences, peer interaction, and assignments a challenge due to weaker English listening and speaking skills.

Compounding the problem of weaker English abilities is a learning style that requires deep reflection, resulting in time delays for her to be able to demonstrate her knowledge and abilities. She is highly intelligent, but has trouble communicating it promptly.

Should Lihui have been required to have stronger English abilities before starting her graduate course of study?

**Arab Poetry**

The Bedouin tribes of Arabia never developed a strong written and reading culture. The only book they typically had access to was the Koran.

How could a written/reading culture evolve from a desert where there are almost no physical materials from which to make paper?

Instead, and hand-in-hand with a strong relationship orientation and a migratory life, the Arabs created a rich spoken language. The most vivid artistic output of this language is beautiful poetry that expresses the Bedouin experience in the harsh and beautiful desert world they lived in. The poetry and stories they created also served as a way of passing down their history.

Unfortunately, it is hard for western teachers to integrate oral poetry recitals into most classroom experiences.

orientation, reads—and reads a lot. So when students won't read as preparation for classes or before meetings with a teacher, they are not prepared for the next step in an exercise, experience or generally for learning the “next thing”.

- Which success orientation typically reads the most? Can you guess? Probably you guessed “process orientation”—and correctly so. Isn't it interesting that your most diligent students are those who read the chapter in the text book the night before your class? Or who sit in your class with bowed heads reading the article you placed in front of you. Seeing this makes you feel good, doesn't it? The bowing of their heads as they read is not just a sign they are focusing, but an ancient sign of respect. You are at the front of the classroom and they are bowing their heads in respect. What ‘good’ students, they are, right?

I used the word ‘diligent’ because that is what process oriented students are—diligent at following the process you set up. And books are very process oriented—they have chapters with the content all nicely organized in a linear fashion.

**Important: Do not confuse “diligent reading” with “good students”**

This is a very difficult thing not to do. Consider this statement:

If *learning* is the goal, then being a good and diligent reader is not a necessary condition for learning, *nor is it the best way* for most students.

This statement may be startling to some and heresy to others. But think about it: Reading is a useful and important tool for learning in higher education institutions, but is it really a necessary condition for learning *in general*? It is necessary to an academic credential, but is it necessary for *learning*? Of course not!



Hundreds of millions of people in the world are very successful at learning, without being able to read. But of course they won't get an academic credential!

The point, however, is that perhaps we place too much emphasis on reading in higher education institutions. Are we as teachers so limited in our abilities and resources that we must force all our students, regardless of their success orientation, learning style and other differences, to learn primarily through reading? What is the alternative? Are there alternatives? Yes! More on this below in the strategies section.

Which success orientation would typically include the worst readers? I suspect you would guess "relationship orientation". It sure is! This orientation is all about verbal communication and physically present interpersonal interaction. Not about words in a book. Books are no fun and certainly not 'warm' and 'human'! There is no 'energy' in books—not like when you get into a really good conversation with someone!

So far, the above section has looked like rationales and rejections for why reading should not be important for many or most international students. Not so. Reading is a useful and important tool for learning, even with those international students who are strongly verbally oriented. A multi-skilled graduate, who can learn, work, and interact in many modes is an important outcome of any post-secondary educational program. I am not suggesting a rejection of reading, but an attempt to put reading into its proper context as one, and only one, tool for learning that teachers should focus on.

## Techniques for overcoming reading barriers

### I. Use succinct materials

Use articles, books, and texts that are succinct, don't have a lot of complicated jargon, and are clearly writ-

### **"Students must learn to read authentic academic articles and books."**

I have heard this argument over and over again through the years. However, I am sure that learning is not all about reading complicated books written by academics.

This is not to say that academics don't have important and original things to say in their writing, but that the way they choose to say it is generally not accessible to most learners.

If the goal of academics is to perpetuate an "ivory tower", then fine. They can do so by using subject specific language and complicated passive wording.

If the goals of academics are to help people learn and to build new knowledge for the world to use, then making information as clear and simple as possible to access can only help these goals.



ten in global English. If you haven't heard of the concept of global English, research it on the Internet. A good resource book is "Global English for Global Business" by Rachel McAlpine (Longman: New Zealand, 1997).

Why use a complicated 25 page case study when the same learning could be accomplished by a simpler 5 page case study, written in clear language? Rather than waste precious classroom and learning time with long readings that many international students won't be able to work effectively through, consider using shorter, clearer, more focused readings.

## **II. Encourage reading circles among students in your class.**

Have them read and help each other understand tougher reading materials.

## **III. Use multiple media in your courses.**

That's right: Denigrate reading from paramount for learning to one option for students to use in their learning. Use a mix of the following:

- Videos in the classroom that are complemented with parallel written materials. Videos are great for visual learners and relationship oriented learners where people are present and interacting in the video.
- Case studies: Use video case studies along with written parallel text. Bring physical examples and do field trips to allow kinesthetic learners to feel, touch, manipulate and interact with real things. They learn much better and more deeply by this method.
- Bring guest speakers in to talk about a topic. Not only will you be getting real-world insights, but your relationship oriented and process oriented students both will be benefiting.

- . . . there are lots of ways to help those with different learning styles and different success orientations to learn. If you think of reading and written material as only one way, then you will start to see other methods, modes and media as at least as useful and important.

## **“Books are dead! Video rules!”**

What is incredible is the rate of change in how students learn. In just a few years young people have shifted from text-based sources to video-based sources for learning that they used to access written materials for. Now they go to Youtube and other video sites to learn how to solve a Rubik’s Cube, get insider tips on how to act in a social situation, or learn “how good teams work” for their assignment due next week.

On the other extreme of this picture are classrooms with overhead projectors, teachers putting tiny-sized, fully packed overhead slides one-by-one of the projector, and lecturing in words from the text-based slides.

While most instructors now integrate some video into their classroom experiences, this is just a start. The visual and interactive era has just begun and it is already revolutionizing education at all levels. The revolution is not coming from the teachers or administrators, however. It is being almost entirely driven by the students.

Isn’t that how a revolution always works?

Three ways for teachers to begin converting to a more visual teaching method:

1. Use relevant videos to introduce, set the stage, enhance, or summarize the main learning thrust of each class. Example: Use episodes of “The Office” to humorously highlight organizational behavior challenges.
2. Use video blogging (reflective) and the creation of video documentaries and case studies (constructivism) as part of your required curriculum. You may balk now at this but in a few years you will be badly outdated if you don’t embrace it now (remember when computers first hit the classroom? Embrace or get out!)
3. Research is now not about books and peer-reviewed journal articles. It is about a cornucopia of visual, auditory, corporate, popular, and random bits of information, cross-referenced for accuracy, authenticated by multiple sources, and presented in a variety of creative and importantly visual (not text) methods. This is like the advent of color TV! Love textbooks and essay format? Hmmm . . . how soon do you retire?

**On-line text chatting is really not popular with many people!**

Even the editor of this book noted to me that in the first draft of the book I mentioned on-line chatting with students 3 or 4 times and that I should downplay or remove the focus on chatting.

It seems that we are once again facing a very big gap between generations. On-line chatting and the evolution of English is one of the icons, or artifacts, of this gap. Instructors born before 1980 +/– generally dislike online chatting. People born after 1980 either use it as a natural form of communication or are at least ambivalent towards it.

#### **IV. Educate your students on the role of reading.**

Finally, on the topic of “good readers” and “good students”, putting reading in its rightful place as a useful and important tool means also educating your students on the role of reading. Take time in an early class with each group of your students to look at the role of reading. Have them explore other ways of learning the same lessons and information. This process will help you see readers with different proficiencies in a new light: As excellent learners—just in different ways!

Summary: Reading is a difficult issue. As academics and teachers, we rely heavily on the written word in our teaching and learning (and of course, I wrote this book using primarily text as the mode of communication because teachers are my intended audience!) However, reading is just one tool for learning. And since our international students in many cases are severely disadvantaged by reading, it behooves us to provide a rich set of learning modes, media, and experiences that allow all our students to learn well however they can do so best.

#### **9. Why Do They Write Their Essays the Same Way They Chat On-Line? (spoken with anguish)**

When I ask groups of teachers if they have observed students chatting on-line and what they think about students using on-line chat systems like MSN Messenger, Yahoo Instant Messenger, etc. I always get the same reaction. Instantly looks of horror and revulsion come over many of their faces. Often these looks are accompanied with gasps and vehement outbursts of “NO!!” Disgust, distaste, and mortification are not too strong words to describe what is written on their faces. Almost no-one in these groups has ever said to me that

on-line chatting is in any way good. It is simply “all bad” to them.

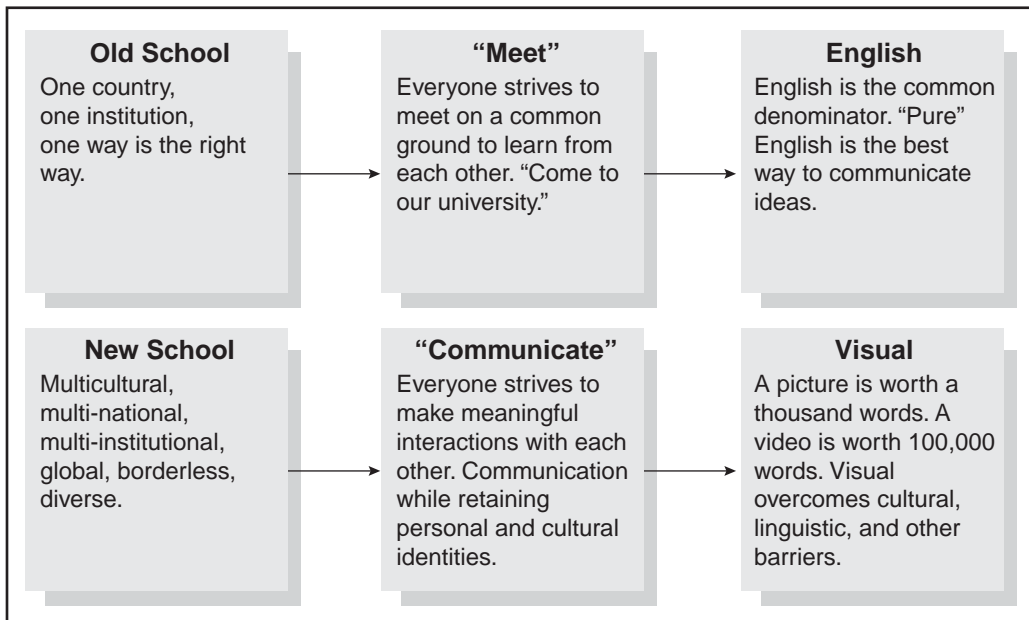
When I first got this reaction I was puzzled. So I did what I usually do when I get puzzled: I kept asking the same question of other teachers and groups of teachers. The more I asked, the more I got the same reaction. Of course my next step was to try to figure out why teachers in general are so vehemently opposed to on-line chatting.

### **How I learned about online chatting:**

I first started chatting online after seeing my male students using chat systems in earnest in 1997 while I was teaching in Dubai. Looking over their shoulders in a computer class one day I witnessed a fascinating mix of text “icons”, Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, and English words being typed into a chat line on one of the now popular online chat systems. When I asked the students what they were writing, and to whom, they replied: “Sir, we are not allowed to socialize in-person with girls in our culture. Here we are chatting with girls at the women’s college.”

Wow! I was instantly fascinated: “What is this linguistic Creole the students are using to communicate with girls?” I asked myself. “And they were so fast at typing it in, too”, I thought to myself. This type of communication has been going on for a while. Whole streams of meaning were passing between students at different colleges—communication that I had no clue about.

Shortly after this introduction to chatting, I tried it myself. After just a short time working with on-line chat systems I realized the power of this new mode of communication. I was not just witnessing a linguistic anomaly on the chat systems, but rather a whole new vehicle for the incredible evolution of language that was taking place as students were chatting in their



new linguistic Creole. I came to the following conclusion:

*Young people are evolving the English language into something new—a mixture of languages, writing styles, and meanings that reflects the craziness of the times they are growing up in. They are inventing a 21st century language that reflects their lives in the 21st century!*

**No wonder most educators over 25 years old are so upset by chatting!**

What is being typed into chat systems by young people is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg of what is going on in youth cultures of today. Like every major shift in cultures, a whole new group of generations is building a groundswell of change that will sweep through all societies in the world in the coming decades. Whether we “old people” like it or not, the English language will be very different in usage in 20 years time. And the vehement rejection of this change

is exactly what I hear in the voices of teachers today. I suspect it is the same vehement rejection that occurred when parents in the 1950's were horrified at rock and roll. The same as the generations before them who were horrified at the swinging 20's. The same as the generations before them were horrified at . . .

Possible signposts of change in the next 20 years:

- capitalization will be less and less common, except for some formal documents (much punctuation as we know it will disappear, too, like the rigid use of periods)
- New words that represent longer words and phrases will appear. Like “lol” (“laughing out loud”) in chat language.
- The English language (should I start now by writing “english” instead?) will continue to evolve and will include a vast number of new terms and phrases, taken from Japanese, Mandarin, Hindi, Spanish, and other languages. This intermingling is happening faster than at any time in history thanks to instantly available entertainment and the ability of people to communicate with each other virtually without cost over the Internet.
- Music will finally change from the now antiquated “rock” and “pop” forms. Exciting new forms of music are being cooked up as you read this sentence as reflections and because of evolving cultures.
- Radio and other antiquated forms of broadcast will fade to minor forms of media, typically used only by seniors. Young people use the Internet to get their music or get it from their friends. And broadcast itself will fade to a minor delivery mode—young people don't want someone else choosing what they listen to!

### **An evolving language = a healthy culture and society**

An evolving language is actually a healthy thing for societies.

Just as pressure builds for change in the crust of the earth, released in mighty bursts called earthquakes, so do revolutions burst forth when cultures are rigidly controlled and not allowed to change by the old guard.

Better we have a constantly evolving society with little pressure for massive revolutionary change than one that risks anarchy through an explosion.

Our evolving language is the barometer of this evolution.

- TV will evolve—or die. Young people prefer downloading of video entertainment and are willing to pay for it—“without commercials, if you please!”

### **“Pure” English is a dead language**

Academic English—the form of “pure” English that most teachers of English-speaking Western academic institutions wish their students to use, is, like Latin did in the past, going to fade or become a dead language if it does not change. No language can withstand the tides of change that sweep through cultures. At the beginning of the 21st century we are reaching the cusp of another evolutionary tide of change in our societies. Our changing language will be a barometer of the state of these changes.

### **Should we just give in and all learn on-chat Creole?**

Am I saying that we, as teachers, should simply let students produce any kind of writing, like their chat Creole, for our assessment purposes?

No.

I am not saying that a chat Creole is acceptable for a formal, rigorous project submission, for example. But on the other hand, I personally find stiff academic writing a challenge—I always did. I can’t write that way and I can’t read the material easily either. When a student hands in a paper written in this way I have trouble staying awake.

So there must be a different way of looking at this problem.

### **Riding the wave of change in communication**

If a wave of change is coming to the English language, where should we, as teachers be? Perhaps the best place to be is on top of the wave—not dipping too deeply into it, but surfing on top of it, occasionally get-

ting wet, but being able to see the form, shape, and size of the wave. And helping shape it ourselves as we go along, nudging it in directions that encourage clear communication. Maybe we need to focus more on ensuring “universal understanding” and not “pure English”.

How? Some thoughts for your consideration:

- Do not rigidly enforce English writing standards. In your assessments include some significant weighting for “readability, clarity of presentation of the ideas, and good communication of conclusions and their support.” By saying this, you reward the students for

## **"OK. I want to ride the wave of language change. How do I do that?"**

### **One powerful tool: Blogs**

Definition: “blog”—a personal on-line and public journal or diary.

Blogging is not a new idea—self reflection journals, biographies, and personal essays have been around for a long time. But not in the form of blogs and not with some new twists. By having your students—and yourself—“blog” (a new verb) ongoing learning and teaching experiences, many good things will happen:

- You get regular insights into what students are thinking and learning. They finish the learning cycle by reflecting on what they think and feel about their experiences.
- You see how they are writing—and how they are including pictures, video, symbols, graphics, art, and more.
- Students read and view your blog (yes, you should blog, too!) and through this reading and viewing you set a leadership tone on communication for them.
- You become a continuous learner alongside your students. No more a “sage on the stage” but now a “guide on the side”.

Using blogs is one tool you can use to “ride the wave” of language change!

New to blogs? Just search on the Internet for “blogging” and you will quickly get up to speed on the topic.



**Don't use too many culturally relevant sayings!**

Example:

"Holy cow!"—from the Hindu (Indian) reverence for cows—is used in North America when confronted with something surprising and unexpected. The phrase is somewhat superseded by "holy shit" as a more vivid derivative.

In either usage, the saying "holy cow" may be difficult for students to understand and may even be offensive. They will get the implication from the emotion you display when speaking it, but the true meaning of the phrase may allude their understanding.

All languages are peppered with culturally relevant sayings. Be careful to use only very commonly used ones or take time to explain to your students the not so common ones that you use in your communication.

getting the ideas across to you in a way that you can clearly understand—be it by using pure English, a mix of "commonly used" English, and/or by mixing video, audio, presentations, role playing, acting, diagrams, or other forms of expression. Can you see my goal orientation showing through in this recommendation? I just want students to achieve their communication goals in a manner that gets their messages across clearly.

- Be sure to discuss the changing English language with every group of your students! This is such a critical and important topic that every program in every discipline should devote time to working on how communication can, and should, take place. The "should" part would best be implemented if students were the ones who decided on the criteria of what constituted good communication!
- Educate your students on the age-old process of targeting communication and adapting messages for different audiences:
  - Publishing a formal study/report/article in a formal written media? Use pure English or a clearly understandable form of English.
  - Doing a business report? Use fast, simple English with action words/phrases, diagrams, pictures, videos, and other support visuals and audio components.
  - Communicating with a co-worker via email? Use the organization's culturally adapted form of English.
  - Chatting on-line with a friend? Use a fast chat-language version of English or a Creole of languages you both use.

- Using your phone to send an instant text message? Use a highly abbreviated form of English or an almost pure iconic language. Better still, send them a video message and skip the written/iconic part.

*Choose the right mode of communication for the right recipient at the right speed.*

So why do teachers get so upset? No generation likes giving up their much loved ways of doing things. Nor do they like seeing new generations changing the way the world works. Change on such a fundamental scale is very threatening to earlier generations. It always has been. Likely it always will be.

## 10. Should I Say That in Class?

When dealing with international students, teachers are at first hesitant to say certain things to students for fear of insulting or offending them. This is natural. After a while, however, some teachers get frustrated with the difficulty of being extremely careful and end up swinging to the opposite end of the spectrum and start being too free with their language and thoughts!

Somewhere in the middle is the goal. Why? Here are some factors to consider:

- International English as a second language (ESL) learners will not understand your use of many English sayings, phrases, idioms, analogies, and metaphors. These uses are culturally sensitive. Try to be careful to explain any sayings you have that are not really well known.
- Religion as a topic or example can be intimidating, but remember that 99% of all those who consider themselves religious in the world are quite moderately religious. Only a few extremists in every major

religion of the world cause trouble when others talk about their religion. As long as you are not flippanant, negative, or scornful about a religion, you can use religious topics or examples in your teaching. For some cultures, religion is completely intertwined with all aspects of life. So you may actually be able to build a line of understanding with a hard to reach student if he or she is from such a culture.

- Different laws, protocols, power distances, customs and other culture specific influences will come into your classroom. For example, some cultures are strongly against younger women challenging older men verbally. Younger female teachers who are aware of this when they have such students can walk the fine line of standing up for their right, authority, and self-respect in the face of this while at the same time not alienating older male students. Gentle humour, clarity of intent in communications, respect for all students, and good listening are all tools that build respect between students and teachers of different cultures.

Another example is of female students from Asian countries who are not used to speaking up to older male teachers. Again, a considerate, respectful interaction with these students can breach or even eliminate these communication barriers altogether.

### **11. Why Do They Keep Using: ‘My Grandmother [Uncle, Aunt, . . .] Died’ as an Excuse for Not Completing an Assignment On-Time or for Missing an Exam?**

As teachers, we are here to help students learn. When extenuating circumstances arise for students so that

they cannot participate in the learning and/or an assessment process we are forced into a different mode of thinking. Instead of thinking as coaches, facilitators, mentors and guides we must now think as police, managers, and administrators. Not a mode most teachers enjoy.

When an international student comes to you, after missing some important learning sessions or an assessment, and states that they did so because their grandmother in India died and he was bereaved, what do you do? There is no reasonable way of proving that she did not die nor that the student wasn't bereaved. And as human beings, we as teachers do not want to imply that our processes are callous and inflexible to human concerns. On the other hand, there seem to be a lot of grandmothers dying with some students. Everyone has only 2 grandmothers. Both of them dying in the same academic term is statistically unlikely. And it seems to happen with a suspicious regularity sometimes.

### **Some insights into the “my grandmother died” situation**

- Grandmothers do die and many international students are genuinely deeply bereaved. In relationship oriented societies a grandmother is often a much loved and respected matriarch whose role in the family was pivotal to a grandchild's life. In tribal societies such as those in Arabia, it seems that an Aunt, Grandfather, or even a distant relative dies every week and students must be away from studies when a passing away occurred. I once checked on this and found that for most tribes, dozens and sometimes hundreds of relatives will pay their respects and be truly bereaved by the death of a family member. This closeness of extended

family members is alien to most westerners but is normal for strongly relationship oriented societies.

- Lying—saying to you that they missed your deadline because their grandmother died—is ethically OK for some students. In the extreme, some religious zealots even say it is OK to kill someone who is not from their religion. Their doctrines and writings say that infidels should be wiped from the Earth. This is of course, simply a form of hatred and nothing else. Officially, all major religions abhor violence, lying and other major sins. And the vast majority of all their members would be horrified at the extremists. So lying is simply that: Lying. It is wrong and not acceptable anywhere on Earth as an excuse for missing an educational deadline, for example. You might be able to make a case that lying is acceptable if your life is in danger, but not for a trust-sensitive process like learning. Lying is therefore something that must be strongly discouraged, as should missing deadlines without any good excuse.
- Those students who miss learning sessions and assessments tend to be consistent in their weakness. I used to get concerned by a student who missed classes and assessments and had lots of excuses as to why this was. I am now not unconcerned, but after finding that 9 out of 10 times the student also missed other teachers' sessions I am not immediately upset anymore. I try to dig deeper instead of getting upset. Most often that student had other personal issues or some real weaknesses in their abilities to learn in the program. Lower grades were the result and stress on the student because of these issues caused them to miss classes, bend their normal human integrity, and

more. A compounding of symptoms caused by the original real problem.

Because of the 1 out of 10 really sad and difficult student cases, I always approach student difficulties with sensitivity and care. I just don't often get personally upset anymore in most cases. Just with the ones that are really sad.

### **A Technique for dealing with dying grandmother issues**

A very simple technique for dealing with students who must diverge, or choose to diverge, from your academic processes is to raise the seriousness of the implications for the student as a result of their absence.

Example: Bapu missed a deadline for the submission of an assignment. Since some aspects of the assignment were reviewed and discussed in class (I always debrief assessments) after the deadline, the original assignment, as it was originally set, could not be accepted after the fact from Bapu. Bapu came to my office and told me his "grandmother dying" story. I sympathized and told him the implications of his missing the deadline, which were that I required a new assignment, with some fairly rigorous challenges and wider requirements. In effect, there was more work and harder work required.

Some teachers may balk right away at what I did because it sounds on the surface to be unfair to this student. Shouldn't this student be given an exactly equivalent assessment? Because the student had the benefit of the class debrief, access to peers who could share insights into their work after the assignment deadline, and generally more time to learn and do the work, I don't see this as an equity issue. More work and harder work would not be unfair in this situation.

The result of me presenting this larger challenge was surprising: Bapu quietly accepted the new challenge, established a new deadline with me and ensured that he would meet the new requirements. At this point I concluded our meeting with my regrets for the passing of his grandmother and some gentle questions about the details of the family situation. Bapu later turned in a very good assignment and graduated from the program later that year.

If Bapu had gotten upset and had said the new challenge was unfair, too much work, etc. I would have known that his grandmother did not likely pass away and that there were other issues going on. In this case I would express regret that the new challenge was more difficult but would not bend on the requirements. In fact I would be even harder and state that missing any of the new requirements would result in an immediate failure. I would not be completely insensitive, however, and would try to expose the real underlying issues. At worst I would flag this student to fellow faculty who taught him and to an administrator for counseling.

Summary: Grandmothers do die. And students do, on occasion, lie. In some cultures lying seems to be more acceptable than others. But it is really not acceptable anywhere—all cultures recognize lying as “bad”. Lying is lying everywhere, regardless of your culture. Some people are better at the art of lying and some are worse. As teachers, getting into mind games with students is not our job nor a lot of fun. It is much better to make clear that extenuating circumstances will result in challenging implications. Then it is up to the student to deal with those challenges. True bereavement will most often result in students shouldering new challenges without serious complaint. Lying will result in negotiation, anger, and further attempted ma-

nipulation. Easier in the long run to not play mind games with students!

## 12. Should I Socialize With My Students?

“My class of international students really want me to join their group events—dinners out, parties, etc. I have typically kept a professional distance from students so that I don’t run into conflict of interest issues or accusations of bias if I get to know a group of students well. But these students seem to almost need me to join their activities. Perhaps I will join in on 1 or 2 activities this year . . .”

There is a mythical “going for a beer” event with students that breaks down the barrier between students and faculty and allows for a free mingling of ideas and people. In our busy academic and personal lives this quasi-social type of interaction has almost disappeared. There seems to be a stigma against socialization. Perhaps getting chummy with students could lead to harassment charges if a male teacher meets with a female student in a non-public place—or so the popular fear runs. Throw in larger class sizes, a heavier teaching load than in decades past, real and imagined pressure to “publish or perish”—with a naturally increased writing workload, and you have a larger “distance” between faculty and students than existed in the past.

This distance is growing at exactly the same time as tuition costs are skyrocketing and students are becoming more aware and demanding consumers of post-secondary education. They rightfully want and demand more access to faculty and services for the often huge debts they are incurring to get their educations.



International students are particularly hard hit for tuition fees. They almost always pay substantially more for their education than local students and are most often the students in greatest need of professional and social/informal interaction with faculty. This need arises because international students are going through a tremendous evolution. Besides the learning changes they are experiencing, they are going through culture shock, separation from friends and family, and the new-found need for personal and professional mentorship. In most cases a new-found need that never existed before in their lives.

Guess who they want to turn to for guidance in the face of an onslaught of changes?

You!

What does your institution do in response to the perceived need? They hire “staff” to help international students with their “issues”. But staff are paid workers, not “leaders” of learning like faculty are. This is not to say that many staff don’t do a superlative job helping international students, but the staff are not integrated in the learning experience the international students are going through. They are not going through it with the students, as faculty are. And typically most staff who are locally hired have not personally been through massive learning/cultural evolutions themselves. Many faculty have been through these kinds of changes and can relate directly to the student experience, on top of being with the students as they go through it. So ultimately, hired staff cannot truly fit a mentorship role as faculty possibly can.

What am I leading to? As a teacher of international students, if you have any empathy for the truly challenging experiences your students are going through, get involved with them in group activities. By doing so, you will not only be showing them that you un-

derstand the pain they are going through but you will also be sending a clear message that there is someone they can turn to for help when life gets “down”.

Is this kind of commitment scary? It need not be. What is being described here is simply a couple or a few outings with your students and being accessible outside of the class time to discuss life issues with them occasionally. Give a little of yourself personally and you will be surprised at the payback you get from your students. International students are fascinating people you can learn a lot from!

Teachers can truly be some of the best mentors available anywhere for students who are striving to improve their lives. Be one of these mentors and you will get a real reward knowing you are helping a student in need!

### **13. Why Are Some Students Continually Late for Class?**

I won't spend too much time on this problem because it has been very well studied and explained elsewhere. There are many contributing causes to this problem and few solutions:

#### **Causes**

- Students in western countries generally consider less than 5 minutes as not seriously late. In Arabia, for example, up to 15 or even 30 minutes is not really late. In other parts of the world, the “party” doesn't get started until 1 or 2 hours after the stated start time. Time sensitivity varies around the world depending on the culture.
- Lack of time management: Many students have a very difficult time managing their private and professional lives and schedules.

- **Priorities:** Procrastination is human nature. Coming late to class is the result of juggling too many last minute priorities.
- **Importance:** Coming to class is simply not important. Some international students are “here for a good time, not a long time” and plan to make use of every minute enjoying themselves. Class attendance is optional. Some are from a wealthy personal situation and when they go “back home” they will just slide into a family business or not have to work at all. Others have been up half the night studying, chatting online, or socializing. Coming to a morning class is of lower importance than sleep. Finally, some students don’t feel they need classes—at all. If your course is primarily knowledge-based, there is likely little need for class attendance for more autodidactic students if they can get what they need from a textbook. Assuming this is not the case (your classes are rich learning experiences), these students are wrong: They should be in your class, but think they know it all and don’t need to be.
- A very tiny percentage have a legitimate reason for coming late to class. These students are the first to come to talk to you about their reason and apologize for being late.

### **Possible solutions**

Regardless of the cause, late arrivals to class are disruptive. There is no one solution to this problem, but several ways to minimize the disruptive impacts of late arrivals:

- Briefly acknowledge late arrivals. Make a small joke like “ahhh . . . now we can get started. \_\_\_\_\_ is here. We were waiting for you!”

- Post a note on the door handle a couple of weeks in a row saying “Class in progress. Please do not disturb!”
- Discuss attendance when you do have a full class. Don’t bother talking about it when 1/2 the class is present as you will be only talking to the converted!
- Access students via some other method, like via email and prompt them to be on time for class.
- I prefer a “carrot” over a stick approach: A day or two before every class I contact the whole group by email and send them a “this week in \_\_\_\_\_ (our course)!” message. In the message I include the following elements every time:
  - Some aspect of what we will be doing that directly impacts on their upcoming project, exam, etc, with the clear implication of: “Miss this class and you will miss something important for your project!”
  - Some interesting topic or item you will be working on with them.
  - A video, guest speaker, experiential exercise or other engaging activity.
- Another technique you could use is to invite those who are continually late to a meeting in your office to discuss attendance. This conversation will usually yield some good insights and behavior modifications—at least for the short run.

### **NEVER do the following:**

- Never embarrass students for being late. “Loss of face” in some countries is a very bad thing. Making a light joke is one thing, if you know the student can take it, but serious jokes or chastisements that embarrass

will only result in sullen behavior, disruption, a negative energy in your classroom, and ultimately terrible student reviews of your teaching.

- Never ignore the problem outright. Otherwise students will treat your class like a fast-food restaurant.
- Never spend too much time on attendance (or any other administrative issue). If you focus too much on it you are focusing too much time on process. This generally indicates you are focusing on delivery and control rather than focusing on learning. Student learning is not about process, it is about relationships being used to leverage goal accomplishment. The focus needs to be on the students themselves, not the process.

#### **14. My Local Students Refuse to Work on Teams With My International Students**

The first time I heard this statement was from a mature local student several years ago. She approached me at the end of my first class of the term and outright refused to be on a project team with international students.

“They just want me for my English skills. I will do all the work and they will get the A grade!”

I was outright shocked. Never before had I been exposed to such an attitude and such a strong grades oriented goal orientation.

She eventually did have to be on a team with international students because learning to work with students from different cultures was part of the learning outcomes for the course, but she was never happy about it.

This same situation has happened again and I have witnessed an almost desperate tone in the voices of some local students who feel the added challenge of

working with international students is “unfair” when they are trying so hard to get high grades.

Not surprisingly, many teachers are faced with this challenge and it is important to manage it well. The costs of not managing it well include appearing judgmental, biased, racist, and playing favourites. None of these are, of course, what any teacher wants.

A few important perception considerations:

- The local student is feeling that either he/she will be “dragged down” in grades, have to do all the work for the team, or will be used only for his/her English skills.
- Any international students hearing this will alternatively not understand the concern, feel that the local student is not a team player, he/she doesn’t like international students, or will feel the local student is a racist.
- How you manage the situation will directly affect the respect and trust you gain (or don’t gain) from your class.

### How to deal with this challenge

There are a few possible ways to deal with this situation positively:

- Be clear to the local student that they are expected to learn from the team interaction and this is one of the requirements of the course (be sure to make this one of the requirements before you get into this situation!) Repeating the reasons why this is a great learning opportunity and why in the working world they will not have the choice whether or not to work with other cultures will usually deflate the local student and though they may grumble, they will get on with the task and make it happen.

#### **Some challenges are not yours to solve**

3 Mexican students, 1 Russian, 1 German, and 1 local student were assigned to a team together for an intensive experiential course. The 5 international students came to see me the next day with the following comments:

“I can’t understand why he [the local student] wouldn’t want to join our team.”

“We were all working together and then he said ‘I will go to the library to work’ and just left?!? He didn’t want to work with us!”

At first I thought this was case of success orientations not matching, the local student being goal oriented and the others relationship and/or process.

Upon investigation I found out the local student had a long history of interpersonal challenges related to strongly held beliefs and anger issues.

Not every problem is one you can fix. Some challenges are not yours to solve.

- Ensure that there is a large individual assessment component for each student in the team. Have each student do a reflection on what they did in the project and include these reflections with any submissions they do for assessment. Be clear with the class that these reflections may result in differing grades for team members. Local students are largely pleased with this approach.
- When assigning team projects or assignments that are graded, do so randomly, so that local students who are of the mindset that working with international students is a challenge will not feel it was “done to them” on purpose. Be clear that they understand it was a truly random assignment.
- A powerful tool developed by a now retired business instructor at Camosun College in Victoria, BC, Canada is a document each team creates together at the start of a project, called a GRIP—Group Roles Implementation Plan. In this plan, students are required to detail the purpose of their project, meetings they will have (time, place, agenda), group member tasks, roles, and expected behaviors, and most importantly, a very detailed set of criteria for disciplining team members who do not contribute appropriately to the team. When signed by all team members and reviewed by the instructor, this powerful tool helps team members ensure that they are all contributing appropriately.

Though this comes with some stress, these GRIPs have resulted in teams “kicking off” members of the team who do not maintain the agreed upon contributions and behaviors. Instructors have to deal with the resulting orphaned team members, but the price in terms of sense of empowerment for the rest of the team is a very useful educational outcome. Projects

from teams that have removed poor performing members are usually very high quality.

In terms of international students and the issue under consideration, GRIP documents go a long way to helping local students feel empowered when going into team work situations.

In summary, maintaining the integrity of the course, establishing trust, being perceived as fair, and retaining neutrality are essential to a good learning environment. Instructors must stay “above” this issue, never sinking to any form of emotional or intellectual resonance with local students who complain about having to work with international students. Keeping your responses and actions positive and focused on learning will almost always dissolve tension and resistance.

### **15. Why Won't the International Students Just Do the Assignment? Why Do They Keep Asking for Detailed Instructions?**

You assign a loosely defined research project to your class. One international student chooses this topic from a long list of potential topics you offer to the class: “Determine potential implications of global warming on political structures around the world.” The student comes to you the next day and asks you for detailed instructions on how to do this project. He is very puzzled and concerned when you won't tell him “how” to do it. You have assigned basic formatting requirements for how the submission is to look, but he seems to want you to tell him “how” to do the work! “This is university level work—he should have learned “how” to do it way back in high school!”

This is a common situation not only when working with some international students but with some local



**An awakening experience**

I recently had to work with another faculty member on a graduate level course. This teacher was from Japan originally.

In discussing the course, he presented me with a template he gave to his students for a written assignment. The template was “fill in the blanks”. It had all the formatting done, the titling, and the topic-based subtitles for each section. He explained proudly that he even told the students which journal articles to read to do the project, how to go about putting what they read in the articles into each blank subtitled area, and how and what to write in each area. He went on in a pleased tone of voice to tell me how his students (mostly Asian) really enjoyed his class.

I was speechless! This was not the kind of teaching I expected to see at a graduate level.

Faculty in your institution have different educational philosophies . . .

students as well. The source of this challenge lies in the makeup of a student, their personal level of development, and their previous educational experiences:

- First, this challenge can most often be seen when working with process oriented students of any culture and nationality. By nature and nurture process oriented students prefer clear instructions, steps, and a well-defined path to success. A more open challenge, where the goal is clear but the process undefined can challenge these students on a personal and functional level, particularly those who are strongly process oriented.
- Many students are quite capable of achieving goals independently, but due to not having had to do so in life much before this point, they simply don't have a repertoire of possible methods, steps, or processes to access yet. In today's high pressure world of competition, many parents limit their children to highly structured learning and living experiences, in order for them to stay focused on the goal (one the parents typically choose). High math scores, “top of the class” achievements, and sports awards result from this way of thinking, but unfortunately it also tends to lead to young people being great at a few things but very weak at independently solving problems.
- Previous educational experiences also encourage process oriented thinking and the achievement of high grades over independent learning, developmental learning, and the making of mistakes that lead to learning. In many educational structures around the world it is the job of the “master” to give the student a clear set of steps to solving problems. And not doing so would be “bad teaching”. Asking students to come up with their own way of doing things might

even result in laughter of disbelief from teachers and other adults:

“How could a mere student create what it took a master years to learn? Why would you insult the intelligence of the master and risk embarrassment and loss of face of the student and the teacher by assigning a project that didn’t have very clearly defined steps?”

From an independent thinking and learning philosophy of development/teaching, this is of course a challenging situation to face. Most western university and college educations are not based on the “learn from the master, become the master, then add to knowledge and skills of the master” method. This system is certainly a form of honouring and respecting your elders, but does it lead to creative thinking, the ability to learn quickly and develop a range of problem solving skills? No. On the other hand, working towards mastery in a structured approach can lead to a deeper understanding of how and why a process works well and can help to avoid the repetition of previous mistakes!

In the end, the goal here is not to debate which system is potentially better, but to highlight that students coming from a philosophically different system can be very challenged when trying to succeed in a western system of education.

### **How to deal with this challenge**

There are some constructive ways of dealing with this challenge:

- Take time with the student to determine their particular situation—a strong process orientation, development level, and/or educational philosophy difference. If you don’t have time to help students one-on-one with this kind of challenge, take 20-30 minutes of

your class when you assign the first project of this nature and open it up to a discussion of how to go about doing such a project.

Some teachers may balk at this, saying “I have so little time in the course to address all the knowledge I have to give them—this is such a waste of time!” Looking at how people go about solving problems, raising self-awareness about where students are in their personal growth level, and exploring philosophy of learning is never a waste of time! In fact these three are the core of what teaching should be about! Again, this may be challenging to some teachers who are still working with a “delivery of knowledge” paradigm and feeling pressured by meeting knowledge-based learning outcomes. See chapter 7 for more on teaching and learning philosophies.

- One way of breaking down a nebulous problem is to provide a method (not instructions) on how to attack it. Not unique to anyone is the fact that our brains have trouble dealing with large, undefined problems. Taking time to help students develop a simple method for going about doing a project will help all of them feel more comfortable. Breaking the problem down into a set of methodical steps (again, not instructions) helps the brain feel that the overall problem is manageable because each step is more discrete. Encouraging students to take each step and break this down further into their own sub-methods or processes is where important learning can take place.
- Part of the challenge of dealing with this problem is addressing the emotional impact for students. Often students will become emotionally blocked in getting started on a project because the method and process are not clear and they get a sense of being overwhelmed, frustrated, and scared. These emotions

then, become the real block that you are faced with first. Again, some teachers may feel that they are “not here to be a counselor and deal with students’ emotional problems!” True. Where students have emotional issues that are personal in nature and beyond the scope of your classroom, they are generally not yours to deal with. However, in this particular situation, you assigned the project and the way in which you do so is quite a bit your responsibility! Supporting student learning is your job. If you can work with a richer definition of ‘teaching’, you can see how supporting and working with student learning development is integral in helping students achieve success in your course, the program of learning, and their success in the institution as a whole. Taking time to help them develop a method of attacking your project in a way that removes emotional triggers is time well worth spending with your students.

In summary, this can be a challenging issue for teachers, rooted in process orientations, development levels, and educational philosophy. Addressing it will seldom be an easy thing to do, but is worth doing as it is perhaps one of the defining issues that separate “lecturing” from “supporting learning” and “knowledge delivery” from “human development” perspectives.

### **Summary—More Challenges**

This chapter provides a good sampling of the common challenges teachers of international students run into. There are many more, and variations of the above, that could fill a whole book on their own. But that would be useless. The goal is not to continually be dealing with symptoms as they arise, like many doctors just keep throwing different medications at patients’

symptoms until hopefully the patient is cured or stops coming to see them. Instead, use these and other techniques you find to help you deal with symptoms of typical problems—then spend time building powerful educational processes that help you eliminate the causes of many of these symptoms!

## *Chapter 7*

# **Putting It All Together: Setting Up Powerful Learning Experiences and Environments for International Students**

Up until now we have looked at the hows and whys of international student behavior. Success orientations, in chapter 3 for example, can help us understand how students go about achieving success. In chapter 6 many typical challenges teachers of international students face were identified and addressed with some possible techniques suggested for overcoming those challenges.

In this chapter the goal is to create a whole picture—ways of building a coherent, integrated approach to interacting with international students. If you can use some or most of the following principles, putting them together in your own unique fashion with your own variations and additions, you will find a dramatic increase in your effectiveness in helping international students learn.

Here are some very specific principles that need to be implemented in an integrated approach. None of them should be a surprise—they were mentioned or covered earlier in the book and are really quite logical:

**Principle #1: Understand your students**—Learn about your students and by doing so, come to understand them in multiple ways, including their learning styles, success orientations, and cultural peculiarities.

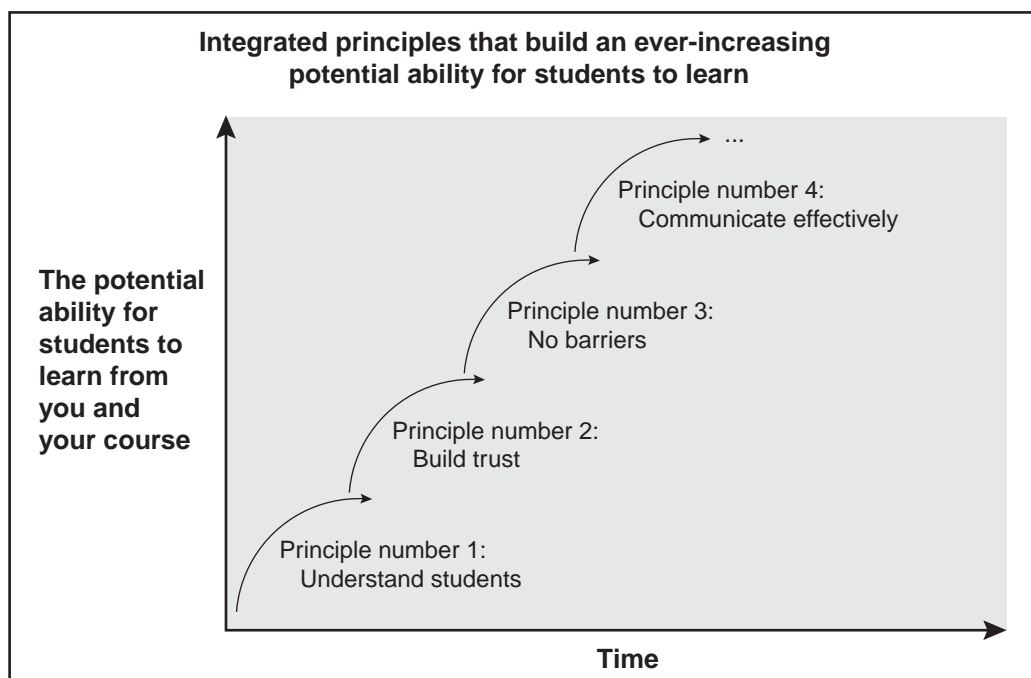
**Principle #2: Build trust**—Build trust between you and your students.

**Principle #3: Break down barriers to learning**—Build a learning classroom and build processes that help students learn.

**Principle #4: Communicate effectively**—Listening, speaking, different modes, and different methods.

**Principle #5: Focus on the roots of things**—Drive your classroom focus toward the roots of learning in every subject you teach. Get away from a “content” focus and aim at a “human development” focus.

**Principle #6: Challenge students in different ways**—Use a variety of learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom. This variety will allow students of all learning styles and success orientations to have an opportunity to use their strongest learning style and success orientation modes.



There are many other principles that define excellence in teaching, but these are 6 of the more important ones to consider when teaching international students. All these principles are interlinked with each other. For example, by understanding your students (Principle #1) you are already building the foundations of trust (Principle #2). By communicating effectively (Principle #4) you are helping to challenge them in different ways (Principle #6). By implementing an integrated set of principles into your teaching practice you create a virtuous cycle: Success with one principle will build on success in another. Students will begin making bigger leaps in their learning and demonstrate more and more their interest in continuing to do so.

### **Principle #1: Understand Your Students**

“Know thy student!” should be a mantra of every teacher. Unlike a more homogeneous group of local students, a mix of international students can have an extremely complicated mix of behaviors that are the result of cultural differences, varying mixes of learning styles, unique combinations of success orientations, and more. Sometimes the mix seems totally unwieldy, but there are natural groupings that form which allow you to tailor your modus operandi to maximize the learning of all.

#### **Some ways to learn about your students**

**I. Interact with them.** Take time for discussions as a group and for 1:1 interactions in your office about the really important issues in their lives. We are all busy faculty. I am not suggesting spending all your scarce hours socializing with students, but a few hours over the first weeks in a term will pay huge dividends in

#### **Transferring your understanding of one student onto another . . .**

One important caveat: Human nature will dictate that the second time you meet a student from China, for example, you will subconsciously transfer your understanding and behavioral expectations from the first student from China you met.

**DON'T!** Consciously stop yourself from doing this! A rural Chinese student will likely be a very different person than an urban Chinese student. A student from Mexico City will be a vastly different person from a student originating from the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. Over the years you will come to see some common cultural traits, but there will be huge variances within cultural groups as well.

Take a literal or proverbial “summer off” and clear your head before starting with a new group of international students. Approach each new group and each new individual student fresh and with an open mind.



**An astonishingly rich set of resources available**

I often forget the astonishingly rich set of resources our post-secondary institutions have available. I am so used to the internet and “googling” everything I want, or just checking with wikipedia, that I forget the vast collections of books, journals, magazines, and videos available.

Some of my learning about international students has definitely been done through these kind of resources which were just a few clicks and a hundred yards away at my campus library.

your understanding of the individuals and the group you are working with.

**However:** Do not treat your students like test subjects or people applying for a job! Handing out personality tests, administering learning style inventories, and running them through a battery of questionnaires will not pay big dividends, and is really unethical, to boot. Your international students are not there to be experimented on for your own learning. They are your students. Which means you can interact with them, observe them, teach them, coach them, and mentor them. But not experiment on them! Learning about your students must be done in a human, non-mechanical, non-scientific manner—the hard way, in other words, through informal class discussions, small group social chats and 1:1 meetings.

**II. Study their cultures,** both in-person by traveling and/or living there, and by reading and watching videos about their country or region.

Traveling or living in another country is not as easy as taking a couple of hours and reading about a particular culture. Of course traveling or living will build vastly greater understanding, but reading and viewing videos on different cultures is a good start.

Another related technique is to build opportunities in your classroom discussions and formal learning experiences for students to share insights into their cultures with you and their peers.

**III. Meet with and discuss cultures with immigrants to your country** who arrived years or decades ago. These people will have deep insights to share with you.

An easy way to do this: I do not know of a college or university that does not have a variety of immigrants from other countries. And as these people are teachers,

they will naturally be more self-aware and able to explain their insights. Network with them, meet them socially and be open about your intention to learn from them about their culture. You may be self-serving in your interest in them and what they can share with you, as long as you are honest. If you approach them with consideration, then at the very least they will flattered that you are asking and will most likely be willing to share their insights. At the very most, your discussions will lead to new friendships . . .

### Principle #2: Build Trust

Trust is essential to the education process. I remember entering my Master's degree program long ago and having to consciously suspend my typically critical mode and just "buy into" the program. I had to take a chance and trust that the time and energy that I was committing to this degree, these faculty, and this institution would pay off. I really wanted to learn. Could these people and this process help me?

Imagine an international student, before they leave their home country, considering your institution. What concerns would they have?

Lots!

They might be thinking and feeling:

- "This is too big a leap for me—I am personally not ready to be on my own in a foreign country."
- "Will I be physically safe there?"
- "Will I lose my friends by being away from here for \_\_\_ years?"
- "How will I help my mother when I am away?"

#### Trust = Responsibility

As every caring parent knows, children are a wonderful gift. They provide meaning to your life, teach you lessons that can't be learned any other way, and provide opportunities to experience love in ways you never imagined.

However, parents will also refer to children as a "labor of love". This is because the child has absolute trust in their parents for their every need. And this trust puts a burden of responsibility on parents that is the hardest work of all at times.

International students can be as needy as children. Teaching them will sometimes, therefore, also be a labor of love.

No wonder some teachers find teaching international students a tough job! If these teachers are stuck on teaching "knowledge" to their international students there is a massive lack of "fit". A shock for the teachers when they come face to face with the strong support and trust needs of many international students!

- “Is this a good institution and program? I don’t really know—it’s not an “Ivy League” school, so how do I really know it is any good?”
- “How do I know the teachers will be helpful?”
- “Their teaching processes are different. Can I adapt to them?”
- “Will I get good grades? I don’t want to shame my family.”
- “Will I be lonely? Who will I live with? Will I like the food? Is it . . .”

The questions go on. A lot more questions than a local student might have, going to university, for example in a nearby city. “Wahoo! I am off to \_\_\_\_ . My friends are going, I know the city, I know that the institution has a good reputation . . .” An easy decision and a relatively easy move for local students compared to international students.

Therefore, the leap of trust that an international student must make is far greater than one that a local student must make. This larger leap means that international students will be looking to you, the faculty, their primary formal and leadership contact in their new country, as someone they want to trust. You become the focus of their desires to have someone they can trust to help them get through their huge transition and the huge risk of failure they are taking.

But it goes further: Remember that you are dealing with many students who come from high power distance countries. In chapter 6 we talked about the challenge of getting students to talk to you. High power distance affinities were noted as one of the main barriers to communication.

Another side of a high power distance affinity is that these students respect authority and look to authority (you) with an expectation that you are trustworthy. Moreover, you are expected to look after the needs of those who have put trust in you. With international students this trust responsibility is a heavier burden—it includes a much longer and varied set of expectations and needs than with local students.

You don't like having international students put such a trust load on you? Tough! They will do it whether you like it or not. Well, this is not true. If you spurn their needs, they will give you terrible teacher ratings—not because you are the worst teacher necessarily, but because they equate you accepting their burden of trust with good teaching and not just with your “knowledge” and your interest in lecturing to them.

### **How to build trust with your students**

There are some very simple ways to build trust between you and your international students. They are not necessarily easy ways, but are very powerful:

#### **I. Listen to your students.**

Not “listen-and-reply”, but “listen . . . and consider carefully . . . and consider some more . . . and then reply and take action”. Consciously consider not just the overt message your students are sending you—the words they use—but how they say it, their choice of words, their body language, and their emotions. Since you are dealing with them through a number of cultural filters you must adjust the focus of your understanding to see through the out-of-focus interaction you are having with your students. And when you commit to doing something for your students, do it as promised, when promised. Another important aspect to listening carefully is addressing their concerns promptly with action. Conscious, active listening

#### **“Course” or “Program?”**

By now you see how student-faculty interaction is a challenge. But how can faculty learn to trust each other if they themselves don't speak the same language?.

Many years ago I ran into a communication problem: My British colleagues called everything the students studied in 3 years the “course”. Us North Americans called it the “program”. Complicating it further, our “course” was a British “module”. Much gnashing of teeth took place as our highly process oriented British colleagues insisted on their way of things.

This was many years ago. Working with a British University again recently I ran into the exact same experience with the exact same exasperation and frustrations all round.

Communication between faculty is a challenge at times just as communication between international students and faculty can be!

and following up with agreed-upon actions are powerful ways of building trust.

## **II. Take time to explore the nature of their experiences.**

Again, a difficult job for teachers stuck on transferring their knowledge to students, but absolutely essential to building trust. At the end of chapter 1 is an exercise you can do with your students that helps to build trust while exploring who your students are and where they come from. Another technique: When a student says something that reflects their personal experience in their own country, use this opportunity to expand to other students' personal experiences in their countries about that topic. Here is how you can jump on the opportunity:

“Thanks, Jittima, for sharing your personal experiences in how that is done in Thailand. Ahmed, how would that take place in Egypt?”  
(Wang, in China?—Obella, in Kenya?—Vadim, in Russia? . . .)

Students generally love sharing their personal experiences from their home countries, even when they are shy and not yet fully in trust mode with their fellow students or you. They are far less afraid of speaking on a topic they know personally and intimately—like how things are done in their home country.

## **III. Be consistent in your behavior, processes, rules, and conduct.**

In this crazy world of continuous change they find themselves in, international students gravitate to those people who are consistent. “The devil you know is better than the devil you don’t” is a maxim that applies. If the students know you are going to be consistent, they will give you a measure of trust. They might not

like what you are consistent about, but they will trust you. Consistency also contributes toward your image of fairness, another aspect that contributes to trust.

Note: Many teachers are “people-people”, or relationship oriented as I call them. Unfortunately, some of these teachers don’t see that many of their students are process oriented and don’t attach importance to consistent, predictable, reliable behavior and processes.

“I am just like that! I love my students and that is all that is necessary. I don’t need to be organized, keep schedules, or be consistent. My classroom experiences are warm, ever-changing happenings.”

Not quite: Being warm, loving, supportive, and “there for them” is fantastic, but being consistent, predictable, and reliable is essential for trust.

#### IV. Be honest.

Never lie, bluff your way out of a question you don’t know, or denigrate a student’s question because you don’t know the answer. Students everywhere have built-in “bullshitometers”. They can figure out very quickly if you are lying or don’t know the answer and are trying to hide your lack of knowledge.

If you don’t know something, be honest right way:

1. Tell them you don’t know
2. Set up an action for finding out
3. Find out
4. Follow up with your students on the answer.

Honesty with consistent resulting action or follow-up builds trust.

#### **Trust allows students to take new steps . . .**

A useful benefit of building trust: You can use it to get students through tougher classroom learning experiences that they might not understand before going through them.

They look to those people they trust for some sense that new experiences will have a payoff.

## **V. Communicate prodigiously.**

Repeat important administrative information three times and in many different ways (paper, word, email, in-person). Tell your students what you are going to do in a class, do it with them, and debrief them at the end about what you did with them. NEVER skip this last step. Give them as much information about the process as they can handle.

I remember a dean I once had who continually sent out information on all kinds of subjects to her directors, faculty, and staff. Some of her people would complain “why does she send us all this stuff to read!?” One reason she did had to do with trust. By being transparent in her work by proactively and openly sharing her information with her staff, they were absolutely clear that she was “on their side”. No lies, no holding back information, no games being played. More of a burden on her employees to read and accept a measure of responsibility for their own learning and change, but trust-building as well.

The same principle holds true for students:

- Be transparent in your assessment processes.
- Give them everything that you know about everything administrative.
- Post your PowerPoint presentations, notes, research, etc. on your web site for them to access at any time.
- Be proactive in your communications so that your students won’t have unpleasant last minute surprises.

Open, continual, repetitive (at times), complete communication is another tool you can use to build trust.

In summary, there are many ways to build trust with international students, but these five behaviors will take you a long way.



## Respect

I used to get frustrated as a teacher when students called me “sir” before they even knew me. “I haven’t earned your respect, so don’t call me sir!” is what I would say to them. “If I do earn it, then you may call me sir.” I would say this grudgingly as I don’t like power distance and authority barriers getting in the way of my interaction with my students. However, I now recognize that with some international students the only way to get them to communicate openly with you is if they can open a channel with an authority they respect and trust.

Respect goes arm-in-arm with trust. But like trust, respect can also be a barrier to learning. What this means: If students put too high a burden of trust on you, and they have such a high respect for you that they feel intimidated, then they won’t feel responsible for their own learning—they make their learning your responsibility. So you must encourage enough trust and respect to allow you to lead your students through tougher learning experiences, but not so much that students are intimidated.

### **How to build respect with your students:**

This is probably the simplest question to answer:

Respect your students and they will respect you.

Treat every interaction with them as an opportunity to be respectful and you will very quickly find your students being very respectful of you.

### **Principle #3: Break Down Barriers to Learning**

There are two organizing patterns taking place in every educational institution:

1. A mechanical, process oriented pattern
2. A human, learning, evolutionary, changing pattern.

The first is how management, staff, and some faculty work. Schedules, rules, grades, classes, student-to-teacher ratios, budgets, etc. These people focus on the running of the physical and logistics aspects of the organization. To them, this is the “correct” way of doing things. For some faculty, an organized, mechanical process turns out students who are also organized and mechanical and that is what the world needs more of, they believe.



The second is how most faculty do things or at least believe things should be done: A focus on students and student learning as the center of everything that the institution does. Designing, changing, and adapting spaces, layouts, times, and experiences to meet the just-in-time human learning needs that human students have. Flexibility is the key word. Learning is the key focus.

The problem? The two patterns often don't mesh. In fact they often directly conflict.

An example: You have a class that ostensibly runs for 2 hours. As your class hits the 2-hour mark on the clock, your students are deep into a discussion on an important subject. It has taken you 2 hours to get their minds "into the groove" of the topic and they are now intrigued to see where the discussion is going to lead to. What do you do? Keep going to 2-1/2 hours or even 3? As a good teacher, you don't want to stop the flow. You want to keep going. As a process oriented classroom scheduler or faculty, you want to cut off the discussion at this point and say "we will continue this next week".

Do you see the problem? If you cut off a good discussion based on a process oriented clock-based mindset, you lose the learning opportunity. You will likely never regain the intrigue your students had to see the conclusion to the discussion. You send an unconscious message to the students that a clock deadline is more important than their learning and their following of an important thread of thinking to its natural conclusion(s). Learning is secondary to the administrative process. The idea that learning is not as important as playing the process "game" is pushed, day after day, week after week, and month after month. Repetition of rigid process generates a set process oriented mindset.

This is not a trivial issue!!!

This is a major problem that results from a high institutional process orientation rather than a focus on students and the best way to help them learn. Of course those who believe in military schools will not agree as they see process as more important than anything. But when attempting to grow minds, spirits, and individuality, as opposed to shrinking them—as military schools work hard to do—you need flexibility and focus on human needs, not a high process orientation.

It is a relief, then, that faculty in colleges and universities have a lot of control over most of the variables of the educational process. Most don't know they have the control, but they do.

Here are some practical ways to take control of the process as it affects your students :

## **Setting up classroom experiences to break down barriers and maximize learning opportunities**

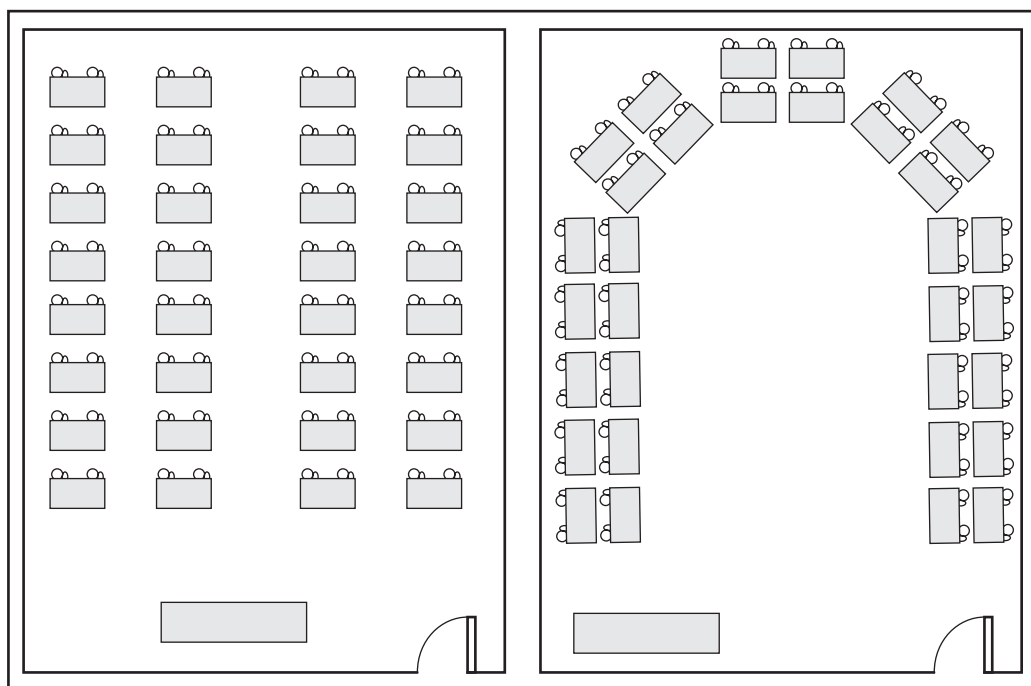
### **I. Layout of the classroom**

What is the difference between the following two classroom layouts?

The classroom on the left is set up with a process orientation. Neat rows, military-style order, one behind another. This structure encourages a focus on the front of the room, towards the teacher, who in this structure becomes the deliverer of knowledge—the authority figure.

The classroom on the right is set up with a student orientation. The students face each other and the focus is on a central learning point. This structure encourages interaction and learning, not a focus on a knowledge and a deliverer of knowledge. Even better, make the classroom on the right a full oval or circle.

Consider setting when you look at breaking down barriers of learning. If you want students to interact



with each other, for example, help them do so by having them at least face each other!

Every morning you may find that the institution's cleaning staff or another teacher will have moved your oval shaped room back into neat rows. There is nothing you can do about this except perhaps leaving a note on the whiteboard asking them not to reset your configuration. Over time, you may find the configuration "sticking" . . . change can happen!

## II. Schedules

How do you schedule class times to maximize learning?

Some students learn better in the morning and some at night. All humans have their own peculiarities. Some need lots of time to work through new ideas and

some understand new ideas immediately and then impatiently want to “move on” to the next idea. Sometimes a discussion, as noted earlier, needs to run over 2 hours. Sometimes you end up finishing a discussion early.

From long experience I have found some time patterns that work better than others:

- Morning classes are generally more effective than afternoon ones. Most students learn well from 9:00 am–12:00 noon. Afternoon classes are harder work for most as they have a full stomach from lunch and/or are ready for their “siesta”—their afternoon sleep—a common living pattern in non-western countries in hotter climates.
- A second time slot that works well is 7:00–9:00 pm +/- at night.

Important: Regardless of how you request class times, ensure that the space you have for the class is not scheduled for at least 1 hour before and after your class. This gives you the flexibility to meet with students and set up your gear before class, and run classes longer if you need to, or the students want to, after the appointed deadline. Most institutions have this flexibility, though in some, there is not enough “physical plant” (classrooms in admin lingo) for all the scheduled classes. In this case, find a way to run some of your classes in alternate, off-site locations, in a field trip mode if you have to.

In summary, carve out “time space” for your students’ learning so that you have the ability to create full learning experiences that are not rushed or focused on clock time, but rather on the goal of accomplishing full, uninterrupted learning.

### III. A 'safe' learning environment

In western countries we take for granted the rights and freedoms of students to discuss anything they wish in an open forum. This precious freedom comes and goes, unfortunately, over the decades as the alternating tides of conservative and liberal thinking wash through our societies, governing structures and educational institutions. But on the whole, western countries have a lot of freedom of speech. Faculty and students can say and discuss pretty well anything in public and in most private post-secondary institution classrooms.

But in most other places in the world there is limited freedom to speak openly about many subjects. Doing so in many places will at best lead you to be ostracized and at worst, imprisoned, tortured and killed. There should be no shaking of heads or "that isn't so" type statements about this. It is true of dozens of countries in the world, including many of the largest and most powerful.

International students coming to western countries to study are very conscious of their risks when speaking openly about sensitive subjects. In your classroom, this careful consideration leads to a quiet classroom that is focused on "safe" knowledge-based teaching—not an open forum that focuses on learning.

One goal, then, is to set up a safe learning environment in which students can feel they can openly discuss sensitive things about themselves, their cultures, religion, politics, and more. And they want to feel safe—they want a 'safe harbor' in which to relax their guard a bit and talk and puzzle through things that bother them or things they don't understand. Or things they are frustrated about and have been considering for years. Things that cannot be safely discussed openly in their home country.

Setting up a safe learning environment is an essential part of a classroom with low barriers to learning.

### **Some techniques for creating a safe learning environment:**

**I. Close the door.** This simple but powerful action tells the students that what is in the classroom is ‘safe’. This action tells them that you want to have an internal environment that is private. It is not really perfectly safe, of course, but the message is clear that it should be. What is discussed in the classroom should stay in the classroom in terms of public repetition to others if it is highly controversial or threatening.

**II. Discuss the issue of openness with your students.** And discuss freedom of speech and their ability to talk openly about things. I often play a really controversial video documentary early in a term. Often these documentaries are banned in other countries. After the documentary, I share a tidbit of my thoughts on the video and ask them their opinions. By showing the documentary, you demonstrate that your classroom is ‘open’ for controversial subjects.

**III. Never censor, ostracize, ridicule, or reject a student when they have a strong belief.** Take time to honor them for sharing their belief with the class in a respectful way. Moderate differing opinions and be sure to end a surprisingly intense subject with a strong statement of respect between any opposing viewpoints and groups.

**IV. Set up the rules for discussions if they repetitively touch on really controversial subjects.** Be clear that mutual respect means that what is discussed in the classroom stays in the classroom. Be absolutely

#### **Even classrooms can be dangerous places for students to speak out!**

One of my international teaching experiences included having young government secret police in my classes undercover in the role of mature students.

It would have worked because the rest of the class was mature students. Except that in this tribal culture everyone knew everyone else. So when I asked my students quietly who the undercover agents were, they happily and openly pointed the police out to me—in front of all the other students and the agents themselves, who would cheerfully pipe up and say hello . . .

firm but unemotional about your role. Never take sides on an issue. Be neutral—you are the moderator now, and your job is simply to ensure an open, respectful discussion. Don't become part of one side! If students hear from you that you are strongly biased toward one side of a controversial subject, they will not consider your classroom 'safe' anymore.

These kinds of behaviors on your part send a clear message to your students that your classroom is a safe place to openly share and discuss controversial subjects.

### **V. Break down power distance between you and your students**

Power distance was discussed in Chapter 6 under "How do I get international students to talk to me?!?!?". In order to break down barriers to learning between you and your students, they must be able to communicate openly with you..

### **VI. Hammer away at "learning" versus "grades" with your students**

Hopefully this book won't leave you with the message that teaching international students is easy or that there is one proven method for doing so—teaching is never easy and there is no one "right" way of doing things.

One of the more frustrating things about teaching is that you often have to hammer away at severe process orientations in some or many students. One big piece of evidence that this severe orientation exists is a student focus on grades linked to instructions. This focus is so severe in some cases that learning—real learning in the classroom or independently—is not even in these students' minds. They simply and wholeheartedly only want to follow some set path that will lead to "A" grades and a piece of paper at the end that says "de-

gree” on it. Remember, most have been through 12 or more years of process oriented education! They were subjected to 12 or more years of having process patterns trained into their minds. This severe process orientation can be a very big barrier to learning.

A 30 minute discussion on learning versus grades will not by itself break down this barrier. However, an integrated set of behaviors on your part (as discussed in this chapter and in this book) coupled with learning experiences that are really engaging, will go a long way to shifting student focus in your classroom towards their own learning. But you have to keep hammering away! It is not easy and you are working to break long traditions. Of course it helps if other faculty who teach your students have the same mind frame, but this is wishful thinking. For the most part, you will find yourself fighting the battle almost alone or with a small handful of like-minded faculty.

## **VII. Use students to help students**

Teachers have a lot of credibility with international students, but so do other students—particularly those who have graduated already. One successful technique you might choose to use is to engage the help of senior students or alumni to reinforce key skill or behavior traits you are working to build in your current group of students.

This can be done in a variety of ways:

- Set up formal or informal mentoring of junior students with senior students and/or recent graduates.
- Have a teleconference where a graduate talks about how they were successful—the skills and habits they used to get to where they are now, how they went about their studying, what they did before graduating and immediately after graduating, etc.



- Use graduating students, who are still fresh and excited about their experiences, to run orientation experiences for your students.
- Consciously group students together for in-class and formal projects. Use stronger students to help weaker ones. Sounds good, but this will take some convincing of the brighter students, of course, and can only be used sparingly. But if done so, it works well.

Summary: Breaking down barriers to learning is a challenge. It would be nice to expect a perfect classroom where all students are open to discussing anything and are self-aware and ready to take control of their environment and learning processes, but we can't. Instead, we have to expect hard, often repetitive work with each new group of students, for at the first few days or weeks. But there are dividends from this hard work later in our teaching terms and ultimately for all your students through the years. See chapter 8 for some of the “payoffs” for you, personally . . .

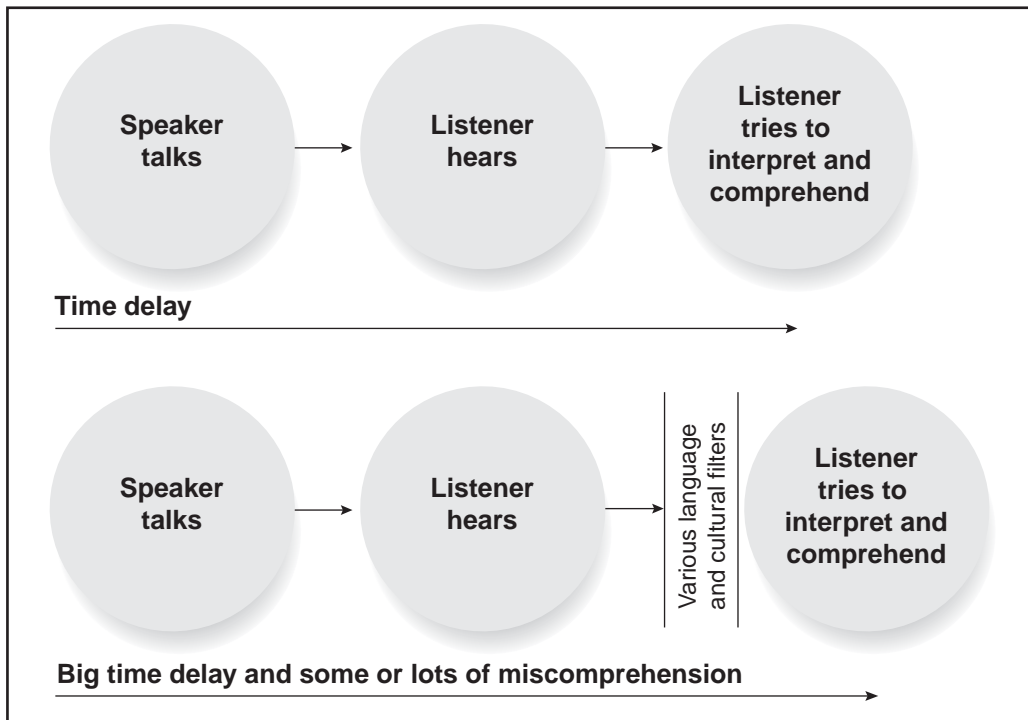
### **Principle #4: Communicate Effectively**

Effective communication means much more than just talking clearly at your students. It means a higher level of focus, patience, and comprehension. It means listening more than talking and observing more than doing.

Communication has been discussed at various points in this book. Here we look at it from a couple of more aspects to highlight the value of a highly proficient communication style.

#### **I. The comprehension gap**

You may have seen this visual explanation before, in the context of public speaking. In that context, the rationale for speaking slowly and clearly was the time



delay between when a speaker says something and when a listener comprehends what is being said:

Instead of just a time delay, as it is when someone is speaking to you, international students have a time delay AND language and cultural filters. So taking your time to speak clearly using “global English” will help them. As well, since there will be some misunderstandings no matter how clearly you state things, be sure to write on a whiteboard the key points of what you and your students say so that all students can read and confirm their understanding. The process of you writing key points on a whiteboard is a valuable comprehension resource to students as it slows the pace of the class a bit. Further, it is a validation tool, building comfort and trust with and between students.

**II. Communicate with students in multiple modes.**

The more options for communicating with you that you can offer, the more likely some international students will be of availing themselves of the opportunity to communicate with you. Students in general—not just international students—have different mixes of communication modes they prefer to use and feel comfortable using. For example, I have some students who prefer to email me. I have others who prefer to instant message (IM) me using one of the popular systems. I have others who insist on inter-personal contact. While this may seem confusing and too much work, having a variety of different modes of communication open to students means they may avail themselves of one or more methods—which is ultimately better than them not communicating with you at all.

Some of the different modes to use in communicating with students, both inside the classroom and outside are:

- In-person—office hours that you can be visited during.
- Phone—have a voice mail system ready in case you don't wish to answer calls at a certain time.
- Email—your formal work email address.
- Instant messaging—Yahoo IM, MSN Messenger, ICQ, Skype and others are all useful systems. New options will develop in the future that will replace or enhance these systems.
- Video chat—using a video camera on your computer.
- Voice chat using a computer voice system—Skype for example.

- Physical notes that students write and leave for you in your mailbox.

Again, the more modes you make yourself available through, the more likely your students will initiate lines of communication with you. And good communication with your students is a good principle to work on if you wish to affect learning in a positive way.

### **III. Transmit information in different modes—at the same time!**

Different learning styles have different ways of interacting with information. Some (a small minority) actually like lectures as a way of receiving information. Others prefer reading. Still others are naturally inclined towards constructive or problem-based methods for constructing understanding.

In order to help all your students learn, use multiple modes of transmittal and interaction at the same time. Here are some ways:

- When working in class, use overhead slides (Microsoft PowerPoint or the equivalent) for any administration information you need to transmit or background material for case studies, etc. International ESL students who find listening comprehension difficult may find reading on the overhead at the same time as listening a valuable aid to their comprehension.
- Use pictures, diagrams, and charts to help illustrate complex ideas that international students might stumble over—not because they are not smart enough, but because the language might require them to go over the words carefully. Often a visual representation will help. “A picture is worth a thousand words” goes the old adage. It might read for some

international students: “A picture is worth a thousand incomprehensible words”!

- Use videos liberally—documentaries for example. International students can pick up from body language and other cultural cues the impact or sense of complex ideas or situations better via video than from reading, listening, or even from still pictures and diagrams.
- I used to spurn textbooks in favor of more constructivist and problem-based approaches. I don’t do that any more, not because textbooks are better than constructivist and problem-based approaches to learning (these modes are superior in most respects to textbook learning) but because texts can be a valuable addition to an international student’s learning modes. And for highly process oriented students, textbooks are a security blanket of sorts. If the student believes that their text represents a “backup” plan in case the classroom experiences don’t work, they will be more likely to stretch themselves into new ideas and ways of doing things, assured that their trusty text is waiting in case they fail to understand some learning.
- Discuss complex ideas with your class. Have one or more students recite back to the class what they believe they understood about the ideas. Often, students can put the words into a grammatical structure that make more sense to other students than you could have.

In summary, a highly practiced and consciously applied set of communication tools is priceless to teachers of international students. Listening skills are the most important, as they help you understand your students. But your ability to use multiple modes of communication and information transmittal are also ex-

tremely valuable. If you are not comfortable with certain communication tools and techniques, target a weekend of free time and use this time to try out the new tools and techniques. Or better still, get your students to show you how to use some of the new tools and techniques!

### **Principle #5: Focus on the Root of Things**

#### **Explore the learning process with them.**

One of the most incredibly illuminating realizations I had a few years ago was that most students never explore the nature of learning itself. Because we start learning the instant we are born—or even while still in the womb—learning is part of our everyday life. The first few years of our lives are critical, as we go through infancy and toddler hood. All parents know this and do their best to provide all the love, attention, care, and freedom a baby needs to develop in those early years.

Then, around the ages of 4 and 5, parents plop their children into a completely different environment for a big chunk of the day. For the next 10 years the children will be in increasingly rigid time and process structures. Children are not given control over what they learn, where they learn nor how they learn. Education experts (teachers) are paid to control these variables for children. Most children, as a result of this lack of control, never once question the whole concept of their own learning, the learning environment they are in, or how to learn. They are taught to read and write, but not generally what it means to learn in different ways as they grow up.

Later, when they reach their senior years of their K-12 education, many “fail” because the work assigned to them by their teachers requires more independent

thinking and learning. When the students reach college and university, even more drop by the wayside as they must take almost full responsibility for their own learning. Finally, as they reach their senior years of post-secondary, most are still unaware of their own learning styles, the nature of learning, how educational structures impede or enhance learning, and how to take control of their own learning agendas. It is incredible but true that even senior post-secondary students are to a large extent just followers of process. They are seldom encouraged or rewarded for being anything but followers of someone else's stated processes!

Are you still wondering why "learning about learning" is important?

A simple, well-known phrase says it all:

"How can you see the forest for the trees?"

In other words, in order to be a truly proficient learner, you must learn about learning itself. You must learn how learning happens differently for each individual, how to take control of your own learning, how to put yourself in learning modes, processes, and institutions that work for you, etc. This kind of foundation self-evaluation, insight, and ultimately empowerment is absolutely essential in post-secondary education, critical in secondary years, and highly useful in junior years.

### **A common query about time spent on learning about learning**

". . . But sir, why are we spending time talking about "life" when you are supposed to be teaching us differential calculus?"

An interesting question that comes up repeatedly. A clue to the answer: One of the most prominent computer scientists (math being the foundation of computer science) in the United States keeps a bin of Legos in his office. He plays with them often. Why?

Another clue to the answer: Pixar studios, known for their leading-edge computer animated films (computer animation being based on math), has a variety of settings in their building (cafeteria, games rooms, lounges etc.) that encourage creative thinking, constructive play, and informal interaction—interaction aimed at helping their employees do . . . what?

The answer: Smart organizations know that employees who are too deeply immersed into their jobs (processes) do not end up acting on the best interests of the whole organization from a creating, thinking, and learning point of view. In order for employees to create, innovate, and iterate effectively, they must be able to self-reflect. They must see and be able to understand how things work on a more fundamental scale. On the other side of the scale picture, employees must also see how the whole organization works—the big picture of what they are doing in the context of their fellow employees.

If learners in secondary and post-secondary institutions are to develop into independent, continuous learners, full citizens, productive professionals, and intelligent parents, they must learn about the nature of learning—for every “subject” they are in. How do you “learn” math? Well a differential calculus course is just as good a place as any for learning this. Of course, it would be much better if this kind of discussion took place in earlier years and at great length, but some must also take place in senior years of education.



### **Some great topics on “learning to learn” that you can use with your students**

Take 30 minutes at the beginning of a 3 hour class, for example, and try generating a class discussion with some of these topics, getting students to answer as much as possible about them as they can. Try something even more important: Never answer any part of this discussion—only ask questions you don’t know the complete answer to. Do not denigrate these discussions to the end of class “if we have time”. Put them right up front and center of your agenda, when you and your students are fresh. And watch your students’ minds come alive . . .

- Why are you here? (to learn to ask the right questions?)
- What will happen when you enter the work force—will you have text books, essays, Harvard referencing, etc.? (therefore you should learn by doing, case studies, problem solving, etc. in post-secondary institutions?)
- Success orientations—what is your natural orientation?
- Short term vision version long term—why do humans forget what they have learned? (and how do you remember?)
- Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.
- “Comfort”—what we know is more comfortable than what we don’t. Our tendency is to stick to the comfortable. Why?
- How do we learn to think creatively? (Breaking habits—the key to thinking creatively?)

- Patterns—what patterns exist in our lives and how do we use them? Should we use them rather than reinventing the proverbial wheel each time? (Constructivist learning?)
- Data versus information versus knowledge (what is the difference?).
- Learning styles.

In summary, learning about learning is essential to any student, anywhere. To international students, many of whom have not even begun to explore the nature of their own learning, these topics will be fascinating, insightful, and liberating. I know from years of experience doing this kind of experiential exploration with my students that several students in each group will have learning epiphanies during these discussions. Insights that they can immediately use, and will use, to make significant changes in the way they learn, work, and live.

These teaching experiences have been the most exciting and fulfilling parts of my teaching career.

## **Principle #6—Challenge Students in Different Ways**

### **Vary learning experiences to help all students learn.**

Learning styles inventories are a popular and useful tool for understanding the different ways students learn. The inventories show that some students learn best through physically doing things. Others need to see concrete examples before they understand theory. Some can actually learn from a lecture (a tiny percentage only!) The important idea here is that most students won't have the same learning style mix as their teachers have. If their teachers choose to teach exclusively using methods that they personally learn best

through—then the teachers are putting most of the students at a learning disadvantage.

Is putting most students at a learning disadvantage what teachers intend? No, of course, not! Almost all teachers at a post-secondary level wish the opposite: “How can I make the learning experiences I set up in the classroom more effective for most of my students?”

Sadly, teaching in post-secondary institutions is still seen by many educators as a process of disseminating information and many or most teachers do not really understand much about learning itself. Classroom experiences that are narrowly focused on one learning style are still the norm in post-secondary education.

To break out of this mold, internal reflection and change by educators is necessary as a start, perhaps using such tools as success orientations and learning styles. These same reflective and transformative changes need to be led by teachers and worked through by students.

Following this reflection we can answer the difficult question: “How can I make learning experiences in the classroom more effective for most students?”

Some ways to help most students learn through their natural styles and success orientations are presented on the following Practical Teaching Techniques page:

## Practical Teaching Suggestion

### Designing balanced classroom experiences

Create a table, like the one below, of the different types of classroom experiences you could set up, the different learning styles they support, and the success orientations they favor. Treat your table like the menu at a restaurant. For each classroom experience or group of experiences you plan, ensure there is a "balanced diet"—most learning styles and success orientations have an opportunity to access the learning at least once in each session you plan. Note: The list below is only a partial list of possible types of experiences!

<b>Classroom experiences</b>	<b>Learning Styles/Modes Favored</b>	<b>Success Orientation(s) Favored</b>
Lectures	Auditory, conceptual, non-spatial, independent, pragmatic.	Process (weak). (bad for most students)
Worksheet exercises—individual.	Visual, conceptual, non-spatial, individual, pragmatic	Process (strong), Goal (weak).
Open class discussion around a question or problem.	Auditory, conceptual, spatial, social, creative.	Goal (strong), Relationship (weak).
Case study analysis—individually with teacher led "take-up" at the end.	Visual, applied, non-spatial, independent, pragmatic.	Goal (strong), Process (weak).
Case study analysis—small group discussions with group led reporting of results.	Auditory, applied, spatial & non-spatial, social, creative & pragmatic.	Goal (strong), Relationship (strong).
Video with before and after class discussions.	Visual & auditory, applied & conceptual, spatial & non-spatial, individual & social, creative & pragmatic.	Goal (strong), Relationship (weak).
Role playing—individual students taking specific roles, rest of class as observers.	Auditory, conceptual, non-spatial, individual or social, creative.	Relationship (strong), Goal (weak), Process (weak)

**“Teaching”, “lecturing”,  
“facilitating”, “staging”,  
and “acting”**

Too many words and not enough focus on what they mean.

Each “teacher” should take a look at what they mean to him/herself.

To me, “teaching” is really helping students learn.

“Lecturing” is talking at students, however I recognize that other faculty see this as a generic term for “teaching”.

“Facilitating” to me is helping students learn—it is a powerful teaching tool!

“Staging” is a term I use regularly. I “stage” experiential learning opportunities for my students whenever possible. These are the most powerful learning experiences I can set up.

“Acting” is something that we, as teachers do not need to do. Certainly we need to personally engage our students, but really we need to set the stage for their “acting” out learning experiences, not us acting out our teaching!

**Some important notes to this process**

Since there are a variety of learning styles and success orientations in each class, every individual classroom experience or group experiences that you set up should include a variety of teaching methods and tools, if possible. This is a simple technique, but one that really makes a difference.

Your natural learning style and success orientation will be a powerful influence on what you choose to do in the classroom. Setting up learning experiences outside of your personal *modus operandi* will be hard to do, at least initially. Teaching using multiple methods and modes is harder work than just using your one natural style. In order to be successful at setting up varied experiences, you must “script” or “stage” the classroom experiences you set up. Note: We are not talking about scripting the information you want the students to know, but rather the experiences that students will go through in your classroom, from which they will gain certain knowledge, skills, and insights.

**Conclusion**

Putting together a powerful set of learning experiences for international students is not easy to do. It is hard work to put into practice principles that you know intellectually are the right things to do. Not just hard work in actually doing them, but hard work in carving out time and mental space to even get at these challenges. It is much easier to just lose your way in the daily challenges of schedules, meetings, marking, “prep” and let’s not forget: our personal lives as well.

With the challenge of carving out time and mental space in mind, consider making one improvement in each class you plan. Or make one improvement a day. Or try one new technique or discussion in each ses-

sion. Set small, step-by-step goals for yourself rather than feel overwhelmed by the thought of making radical change all at once. As you take these small steps, one after another, you gain momentum and insight into what works and doesn't work. The momentum builds and you find the changes spilling over into all your classes. You feel yourself gaining confidence in your own abilities to take risks and try new ways of doing things. Your students notice the changes and new confidence too, and take more interest in you and your classes.

Take the first step: Make a positive change today in how you work with your students.

Finally, on the following two pages are my personal teaching creed. I have printed them out and even put them on a poster for my office and classroom so that they are "in my face" on a daily basis.

The first page is my creed in positive statements—things I will strive to do. The second page is my creed in negative statements—the things I will strive to avoid. I use my creed to help my self-reflection, help me avoid getting into habits and to remind myself that I have a long way to go in the continuum of teaching experience.

This creed is something I have worked on for many years. It is not presented here as a creed for you to follow. This is my personal creed. However, you might consider making up your own creed, in your own words and with concepts and principles you will strive to follow and adhere to as best you can . . .

# My Teaching Creed

- I will only ask questions I don't know the answers to.
- I will only use real world learning tools to help my students learn.
- I will always stage meaningful learning experiences.
- I will always be prepared for my classes—even if I carry nothing into them with me.
- I will always lead my students to considerations of underlying philosophies.
- I will only assess student performance while they are engaged in real world learning experiences.
- I will always use assessment criteria that is understood and agreed to by my students.
- I will have my students regularly assess my mentoring, coaching and facilitating performance and the quality of the learning experiences I stage for them.
- I will always have students assess their own learning experiences.

Paul Kurucz

# My Teaching Creed

- I will never ask a question I already know the answer to.
- I will never use textbooks, worksheets or other artificial teaching tools.
- I will never lecture.
- I will never come unprepared to lead, guide or stage meaningful learning experiences to a group session or an individual student meeting.
- I will never teach "content".
- I will never have my students do an artificial test, exercise or project for any reason, including assessment.
- I will never use assessment criteria that the students don't understand or approve of ahead of time.
- I will never do my job without regular feedback from my students.
- I will never assume students have learned anything.

Paul Kurucz





## Chapter 8

# What's in It for You: The Rewards from Teaching International Students

### A Career “Edge”

Teaching international students is big business. Over half a million foreign students study in the United States in any one year, for example. 130,000 typically study in Canada, and around 270,000 in the UK in that same year. Many more study in other Western countries. All these students have teachers, faculty and/or thesis advisors. They have special departments of counselors, support staff, administrative staff and management focused on their needs.

And the above numbers do not include the opportunities for western teachers to teach in western-model private and public post-secondary institutions in non-western countries! Some foreign post-secondary institutions have literally hundreds of western faculty and staff working with thousands of international students!

Clearly, specializing in teaching and supporting international students is a big career field. And it is a big opportunity for teachers, particularly if they make this group their focus. With stiffening competition in post-secondary education, experienced faculty and support staff who can help both in the marketing and delivery of quality education programs are in increasing demand. With the increased competition has also come the beginnings of a “professionalization” of the support and teaching of international students. Supporting the learning of international students is different

#### Question:

“How do I find a balance between my professional responsibilities and my friendships with students—particularly those who are highly relationship oriented and who expect that friendships will result in high grades?”

#### Answer:

Communication, communication, communication.

State your boundaries and responsibilities openly in your classroom and in 1:1 sessions that seem to be developing into friendships. And state them repeatedly as necessary throughout the year. Don't hold them up continually like a shield as such an action will build a barrier between yourself and your students—however, gently but firmly state and reiterate them as required so that students will understand and respect your dual role.

than supporting the needs of a more homogeneous group of local students. Many institutions are recognizing this fact and putting more time, resources, training, and focus into building the people and systems needed to compete for international students.

### **Relationships with Students that Bridge Many Rivers**

Personal relationships with international students can be very stimulating. Besides what they bring to a friendship in terms of life experiences, international students also have an unquenchable thirst for learning from other people, regardless of their success orientation. In other words, travel, living, and studying overseas is an addictive learning process. Once many students start on their path to learning from other places and other people, they find it hard to stop. For teachers, this trend can lead to friendships where students share ideas, thoughts, and experiences that are unique, insightful, exciting, and life-enriching.

How close should you get? Many faculty believe that professional distance is better than intimacy and friendships with students. There is some truth to this statement: Teachers must clearly define their professional and personal boundaries with their students, particularly with those students whom they form friendships with. Teachers are, after all, trusted authorities in their official role. Stating and upholding a clear professional separation of official duties and responsibilities from interpersonal friendships is important for ensuring an ability to assess student abilities objectively, for example.

### **Daily Insights—Another Big Reward**

I ascribe to the following teaching maxim:

“Learn as much from your students as they learn from you.”

If you set up your classroom experiences to be true learning opportunities for your students (rather than lectures aimed at disseminating knowledge) you are bound to find that insights pop up in each and every session. They are natural occurrences and are often highly illuminating. Celebrate these insights with your students. Show them that you are a continuous learner. Set an example of your own learning for them to follow...

### **A Full, Rich, and Rewarding Life—the Biggest Reward**

As a final thought for this book consider what you want from life. Why did you choose to be a teacher? For some of you, it was because of the steady paycheck and generous amount of time off in the summer. For most—and probably for you, the reader of this book—the reason was because you enjoy filling your life with interesting people, experiences, and ideas.

Teaching international students is one way you can achieve a full, rich, and rewarding life, full of fascinating new ideas, interactions, and insights.

Enjoy!



*The author at the end of a stint leading and teaching in a degree program in the United Arab Emirates.*

## *Appendix*

### **What Is Your Success Orientation?**

#### **A Practical Self-Assessment Learning Experience**

This is a success orientations self-assessment for you, the reader of this book.

This assessment is culturally focused on adults who grew up with English as their first and primary language of family interaction and within their social group. If you are not from this group, be aware that some of the questions may not be as useful in determining your orientation.

As you go through the assessment, circle the option you would **most likely do** for each question. Be careful not to circle the one you wish you would do or should do, but the one you **really do** most of the time. Like all questionnaires, being frank with yourself will ensure the best results

- 1. When walking down a street, what do you naturally and normally look at:**
  - I. Other people, to try to see if you know anyone and to see interesting people.
  - II. Signs and writing that helps confirm you are on the right path.
  - III. The goal at the end of the street that you are aiming at. You even visualize what you will do when you get there.
- 2. When answering the phone, do you:**
  - I. Become delighted to hear that it is a friend or acquaintance. You enjoy spending some time hearing about how they are doing and explaining your personal feelings and state of being.
  - II. Focus on the process of the greetings and on getting to the point of the conversation. At the end of the call you are sure to do a properly polite and courteous ending of the phone call.
  - III. Cut right to the purpose of the call early in the conversation: "So, what's up?"

### **3. What do you prefer:**

- I. People to drop by your home whenever they want. Unexpected visitors are a delightful surprise, regardless of why or when they come.
- II. People to phone ahead and set a time for the visit, including an end time.
- III. People to come over only if you and they have something to accomplish or there is a specific activity that you will achieve with them.

### **4. When looking for a store to buy a particular item from, do you:**

- I. Phone a friend to find out if they know where you might buy the item (and possibly inviting them to join you in going to the store)?
- II. Use the yellow pages, following a set of key words that you know describe the item, locating the category, and then phoning the stores one-by-one to find the first that has the item. You might then try all the rest in the category to compare prices, find out store locations, or find out store hours before deciding on the best one and going there.
- III. Find the first store that has the item, using the simplest method of figuring out which one, and then go there immediately by yourself and buy the item.

### **5. In a meeting, when do you feel most happy and satisfied:**

- I. When a meeting is fun, with a splash of social interaction such as flirting, jokes, plans for social activities, stories about experiences being shared, time to chat with people sitting beside you, etc.
- II. When a meeting has a clear process and the chair follows the process carefully and clearly, leading to an agreed upon end time for the meeting. You prefer issues to be discussed carefully and fully within a consciously stated or assumed interaction protocol.
- III. When a meeting has some clear goals to be accomplished and the goals are accomplished quickly and effectively. You like when meetings result in successful outcomes. You like them even better when they accomplish things and finish on-time or earlier.

**6. While waiting at the doctor or dentist's office:**

- I. You spend a bit of time chatting with the receptionist and engage others in the waiting room in conversation.
- II. Clarify the process with the receptionist, including what will be done, by whom, how long it will take, and when you will get in to see the doctor or dentist.
- III. Push to get the appointment finished and all the work or tests completed fully in the one visit and as quickly as possible. You detest having to come back for more tests, for the doctor or dentist to finish a job, or when you have to wait a long time to get in.

**7. At a government office or bank:**

- I. You chat with people around you who are also waiting for service. You typically ask these people about the process involved if you need to know. When your turn comes to talk to a person offering service, you enjoy getting to know them a bit before coming down to business. You have a short chat about the weather, their health, or other pleasantries. You are particularly happy when someone you know is in the office as a customer or better still, works there.
- II. You are first careful to identify the process you need to follow to get your business done at the office. You hate when there are unclear signs or instructions posted on the walls. Once you understand the process, you then line up diligently and don't usually chat with people in line. When you get to talk to a person offering service, you first clarify the process you need to go through. Then you carefully follow it with them, seeking confirmation as you go along.
- III. You identify the quickest way to get your goal accomplished. If there are line-ups, you get into line immediately, figuring out the process while you are lining up. You talk to people about the process and any tricks you can do to get through it quickly. You put up with social chit-chat but never lose sight of the goal.

**8. When conversing with a colleague, coworker, or boss:**

- I. You begin with a joyful social interaction that can go on for 5 minutes or more before coming down to business. You prefer to end a conversation on a social topic.



- II. You follow a clear protocol of interaction. You prefer to end a conversation with a clarification of any future processes that you and that person will undertake together.
- III. You get to the point of the conversation quickly and end the conversation with a conclusion about the goal accomplished by the conversation.

## **9. When looking for a job, you:**

- I. Spend time networking in your local gym, club, employment office, with your Rotary group, friends, and professional peers. You attend industry trade shows, and association events in your field. You make sure everyone knows you are looking for work and make a point of asking them if they know of any jobs available in your field. You set up appointments with managers or other people of influence in your field of interest just to get their thoughts on what might be available.
- II. You look for jobs that are posted on-line or in a newspaper. When one comes up that fits your knowledge, education, and experience, you carefully follow the application instructions exactly. You diligently send your curriculum vitae and any required supporting documents and wait for a response from the organization.
- III. You focus on the exact kind of job in the exact industry you want to be in. Then you craft yourself, physically and mentally to be the person that would do the job best. You network, apply, follow-up, and generally do what it takes to get that position, never losing sight of your goal.

## **10. When someone asks you for help, you:**

- I. Become delighted. Here is your chance to help a friend or if they are just an acquaintance then here is a chance to make a new friend! Helping friends is what you do best and makes you feel you are doing something worthwhile with your time and your life. You are not really Machiavellian about it either: It would be nice if they would help you out in the future if you need help, but they don't really have to pay you back—it is enough that you enjoyed helping them.
- II. Feel a tightening in your stomach and instinctively draw in your breath. You feel trapped by the request, not wishing to give offense, but feeling uncomfortable with the request. "Why don't they just follow the process and they will get what

they want?” you ask yourself mentally. Your typical response is to explain to them how they can get what they want through one or more processes which you are pleased to explain to them.

- III. Assess how helping this person will help you, now or in the future. Sometimes you feel guilty about thinking this way, but really: You have your own problems and goals to achieve. “Why should I help this person” goes through your mind. “I don’t really have time to help this person. Why don’t they just do it themselves?” is the frustration you feel.

**STOP!** Did you circle the options in the questions above describing *what you would actually do*, not what you *would like to do or should do*, but what you actually do? There is no “good” or “bad” answers—be honest with yourself!

If yes, then use the guide below to assess your success orientation(s). If you are having trouble being honest, have a family member or close friend ask you the questions and challenge you when they feel your answer is not what they perceive to be what you would think or do. Being absolutely honest in self-assessment is tough because we all want to be “better” people with often different ways of doing things than how we do them now. Get someone to help you if you can’t be sure of your answers.

### Interpreting Your Responses

Add up the number of questions you answered “I”, “II”, and “III” to.

Use the following table to determine your personal mix of orientations:

Responses	# of I. answers	# of II. answers	# of III. answers
You have a strong <b>relationship orientation</b> if:	You answered 6 or more questions with an "I." choice		
You have a strong <b>process orientation</b> if:		You answered 6 or more questions with an "II." choice	
You have a strong <b>goal orientation</b> if:			You answered 6 or more questions with an "III." choice

**“I have a strong \_\_\_\_\_ orientation. What about the ‘leftover’ questions that didn’t fit my strong orientation?”**

Most people have one strong orientation and one lesser or secondary one. For example, if you have a process orientation (lots of “II” answers), you might also have a few relationship orientation answers (“I’s”).

If you have an almost equally mixed set of all three orientations then you do things differently in different contexts or you feel that you might have chosen more than one answer for each question. You are a “balanced” and likely quite self-aware person who adapts your way of doing things to the different situations you find yourself in. You might be called “well-rounded”. You enjoy people, like when processes work well, and work hard to accomplish goals.

**Regardless of your results, read chapter 3 of this book carefully to gain further insights into your success orientation and those of your students!**

## Bibliography

**Author's note:** There are literally hundreds of books, articles, and other works that have contributed in some major or minor way to this book. Many contributed formatively to my thinking and development as a teacher over the years. Producing an exhaustive list would be of little value other than authenticating that the book includes references to other writers and is therefore academically sound. Instead, I have included here an annotated list of major influences and directly referenced writings that may be of value to readers who wish to explore further the ideas and concepts contained in this work

### Books:

*Understanding Your International Students—An Educational, Cultural, and Linguistic Guide.* Flaitz, Jeffra, Editor.(2003) University of Michigan, Ann Arbour, MI, USA.

- An excellent resource book that gives tight, clear overviews of each source country student profiles. Some practical problems/solutions given for each culture. Wonderfully accessible information on how education takes place in different countries. “Accessible” as it is written largely in point form with clear subtitles.

*Teaching Human Beings—The Role of Language in Education,* McKowen, Clark. (1999) Laurel Mountain Press, Ligonier, PA, USA.

- This book is a great general teaching guide from a long experienced master teacher, but is particularly focused on the role of language as the root of all subject study.

*Do What You Are—Discover the Perfect Career for You Through the Secrets of Personality Type,* Tieger, Paul D. & Barron-Tieger, Barbara. (2001—Third Edition) Little, Brown and Company, New York, NY, USA.

- Using Meyer's and Brigg's research into personality types the authors have come up with a variety of applied insights into fitting your personality strengths into appropriate work settings and types.

*Teaching as a Subversive Activity,* Postman, Neil & Weingartner, Charles. (1969) Dell Publishing Co., Inc. New York, NY, USA.

- Take the “red pill” by reading this book and you might choose to leave the “Matrix”. Take the “blue pill” and not read it and carry on lecturing. This book is the handbook for anyone wanting to be a *real* teacher (I am still working on it).

*Managers Not MBA's*, Mintzberg, Henry. (2004) Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, CA, USA.

- Another “break out of the Matrix” book, this time looking at MBA degrees.

*The Empty Raincoat*, Handy Charles. (1994) Arrow Books Limited, London, UK.

- A book about thinking, life, and how we construct our institutions. A must read for anyone considering how education fits into our lives.

*growing up digital [sic]*—*The Rise of the Net Generation*, Tapscott, Don. (1998) McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, USA.

- The coming generations will carve out their own way of life, much to the chagrin and teeth grinding of older generations. Don Tapscott provides a clear window into behaviors and thought patterns of newer generations.

*Culture Shift—The Employee Handbook for Changing Corporate Culture*, Pritchett, Price. (1993) Pritchett & Associates, Dallas, TX, USA.

- From process oriented bureaucracy to goal oriented money making machines. That is how Price Pritchett sees corporations changing. Many or even most seem to be tracking his predicted changes—and changing society along with them.

*New Work Habits For a Radically Changing World*, Pritchett, Price (1994) Pritchett & Associates, Dallas, TX, USA.

- How to change yourself to be more goal oriented and less process oriented—all in order to be successful in the new order of ultra-competitive organizations.

*being digital [sic]*, Negroponte, Nicholas. (1995) Coronet Books, Hodder and Stoughton, London, UK.

- More glimpses into how people will work, live, and think in the future as a result of the changes taking place in the realm of the digital.

*The Teenage Liberation Handbook*, Llewellyn, Grace. (1991) Lowry House Publishers, Eugene, OR, USA.

—Sadly, most teenagers in North America are forced through rigid, process-oriented institutions whose major output is stupidified young adults. Grace Llewelly provides a glimpse at an alternative reality where young people can really learn and grow . . .

*An Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, Rand, Ayn. (1990) Penguin Books, New York, NY, USA.

—Ayn Rand's philosophy is one of the underlying structures of the American goal oriented archetype. Reading any of Ayn's philosophical fictions is recommended, including her famous stories *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, for example.



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