

Chapter 6

Cultural Considerations



Learning from Each Other

Cristy from Mexico and Yumi from Japan were staying with the same host family for the year. They became very close friends. They realized how much they would miss each other when they returned to their respective countries. Cristy asked Yumi if she could visit her in Osaka. Yumi assured her that she would be welcome to visit.

Cristy asked, “Could I stay at your home?”

Yumi answered, “We don’t have a very large home.”

Cristy replied, “Don’t worry ... I can sleep on the floor.”

Yumi looked quite perplexed as she stated rather matter of factly, “Cristy, in Japan everyone sleeps on the floor.”

(Story courtesy of Max Lindstrand, Battle River Regional Division No. 31)

Canada is a country of immigrants and, as a result, Alberta—and by extension its education system—is culturally diverse. Students and educators come from various parts of the globe and from numerous ethnic backgrounds. Add internationalization and an increasing number of cross-border interactions, and suddenly intercultural competence becomes basic and requisite. To effectively manage classroom diversity and international education programs, educators must understand how culture influences behaviour and expectations.

This chapter provides administrators with an introduction to the concept of culture, cultural patterns and cultural adaptation. Administrators may wish to share this information with school authority staff.

Culture and Cultural Patterns

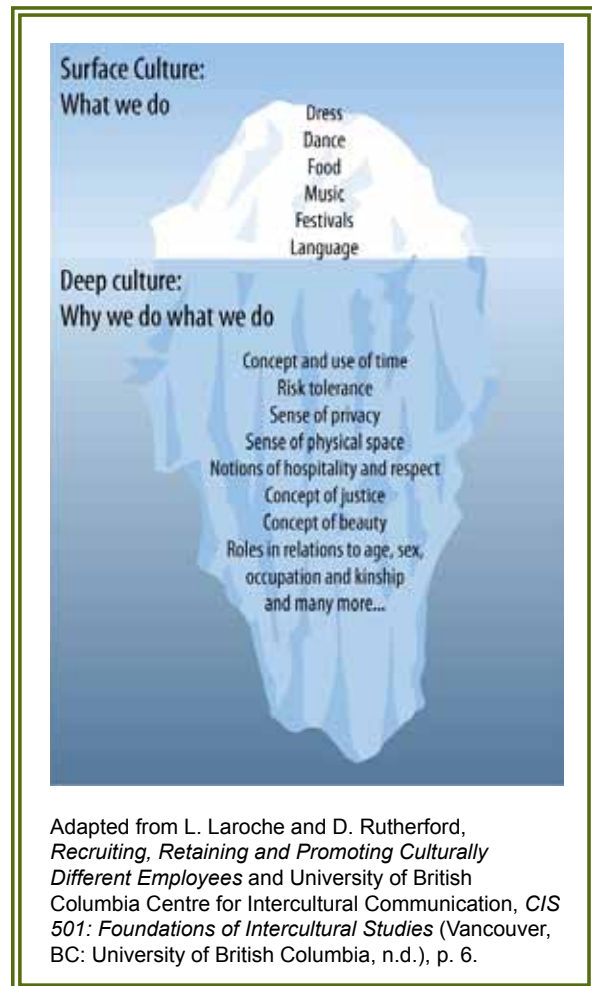
What Is Culture?

When people think of culture they often think of “surface” culture; e.g., food, dress, dance, music and/or rituals of particular cultural groups. However, culture includes less visible elements, such as the assumptions, values and judgements that govern how people understand the world and manage human problems. These elements of culture are ingrained at such a deep level that individuals raised within the culture may not even be able to articulate them. It is often at the level of “deep” culture, where cultural misunderstandings occur.

The first step toward intercultural understanding is to recognize that:

- your international colleagues, partners and/or students have cultures
- you have a culture
- some things in their culture[s] will be similar (or may seem familiar) to yours
- some things will be different.¹

A basic understanding of the differences between cultures is necessary for you to communicate effectively and build relationships of trust with your colleagues, partners and/or students.² While you may be familiar with the nuances of one or two other cultures, it is impossible to master the nuances of all the cultures that you will encounter in your work. General cultural patterns can help to highlight common cultural variables that can be used to analyze intercultural interactions.





The contact hypothesis

A popular misconception is that individuals of different cultural backgrounds will better understand one another if they are put together in the same place and encouraged to interact.³ The truth is that individuals must be prepared to communicate with one another. Research indicates that encouraging “spontaneous” interactions can actually reinforce prejudice and stereotyping. Intercultural training can help students and teachers to effectively interact with people from different cultures. For more information on intercultural training, see Chapter 5: Professional Development.



General Cultural Patterns

General cultural patterns are cultural tendencies that span across cultures and can, therefore, be applied to a variety of interactions, regardless of the cultural groups involved. General cultural patterns can help educators identify cultural values when they are not familiar with the norms of a specific culture (for culture-specific resources, see the recommended reading list on page 82).

Some of the most common cultural patterns are:

- individual and collective orientations
- high and low power distance
- indirect and direct communication styles (also referred to as high context and low context cultures)
- nonverbal communication cues.

These patterns are not meant to encourage the absolute categorization of cultures; i.e., “Culture A is individualist and Culture B is collectivist.” Instead they are a tool to help compare cultural tendencies and predict the outcome of intercultural interactions. The following descriptions and examples will describe what the above cultural patterns look like and how they may be accommodated in a classroom setting. In Appendix C: Cultural Considerations, three of the cultural patterns have also been correlated with particular countries and regions.

A proviso

*The following patterns and examples are **cultural generalizations** and, although based on substantive research, will not hold true in all situations. Because culture is dynamic and complex, there is variation in the degree to which individuals from a particular cultural background accept or resist broader cultural norms. In addition, while culture plays an important role in governing behaviour, universal needs and desires (such as the need for food or the desire to belong) and personality also play a role. Being cognizant of these influences will help prevent **cultural stereotyping**.*

Unless otherwise indicated, all of the following patterns and examples were adapted from Lionel Laroche’s (2003) *Managing Cultural Diversity in Technical Professions* and Alan Cornes’ (2004) *Culture From the Inside Out: Travel and Meet Yourself*.

Individual and Collective Orientations

Cultures with an individual orientation view individuals as self-contained entities, whereas cultures with a collective orientation consider individuals as part of a larger entity.⁴ Because their frame of reference is the individual, individualistic cultures value personal freedom and autonomy. Collectively oriented cultures use groups as their frame of reference and place greater value on group harmony and loyalty.

What It Looks Like:

In cultures with an individual orientation , people will:	In cultures with a collective orientation , people will:
understand themselves to be an individual entity (e.g., “My name is ... I like to ...”)	identify themselves with the group to which they belong (e.g., “I work for/belong to ...”)
value and protect personal privacy	combine work and social life
assign individual responsibility (e.g., Joe is responsible for ...)	assume collective responsibility (e.g., the maintenance department is responsible for ...)
share information on a “need to know” basis	share information regularly and update one another on their progress
devote time and energy to achieve goals	devote time and energy to build relationships

In the Classroom

Individual or collective orientations are noticeable during group work. Students from an individualist culture will divide the responsibilities and tasks relatively quickly. Each student works on and is accountable to the group for his or her part of the project. Students from a collectivist culture spend more time learning about their team members and discussing the tasks necessary to accomplish the goal. They often work collaboratively on tasks and help their team members when they think they are struggling, even if help is not requested.

Canadians, as a group, have an individual orientation. Students with a collective orientation may be frustrated by the group’s lack of rapport and planning. They may also consider their teammates to be unhelpful because they do not provide unsolicited assistance. Similarly, Canadian students studying in a collectivist culture may be frustrated by their team’s extensive discussions and the interference of team members in their work.

For examples of how the interaction of individual and collective orientations can create cultural misunderstanding, see the Culture Points in Chapter 16: Hosting International Visitors. Appendix C: Cultural Considerations also ranks countries according to their individual or collective orientations.

If you are working with students from a collectivist culture:

- find out what is important to your students (i.e., family, hobbies, etc.) and inquire about it periodically
- clarify who “we” includes when students use the term.

If you are preparing students to travel to a collectivist culture, encourage them to:

- take time to develop personal relationships
- reassess their expectations for privacy and personal space
- consider how their actions influence their host families and teachers.

High and Low Power Distance

The term “power distance” is a measure of hierarchy. It measures the “psychological distance” between subordinates and superiors and the degree to which inequality is accepted.⁵ Cultures with high power distance are organized in a hierarchy and its members informally associate only with their strata of society. Cultures with low power distance actively try to combat inequality, and various segments of the population associate informally with one another.



What It Looks Like:

In a low power distance culture, students (or subordinates):	In a high power distance culture, students (or subordinates):
interact with their superiors in an informal manner (e.g., students joke around with their teachers)	interact with their superiors in a formal manner (e.g., students address teachers as sir, ma'am or miss)
are willing to critique and debate the opinions of their superiors (e.g., question the perspectives put forth by teachers)	are unwilling to disagree with or contradict the opinions of their superiors (e.g., expect that teachers have the answers)
ask questions to clarify the parameter of the assignment (e.g., expect to have some interpretive freedom in the direction of projects)	ask questions to understand what the final assignment should look like (e.g., expect that their superiors will provide detailed and explicit directions)
take initiative	ask for permission
believe that teachers (or superiors) should recognize their skills and abilities and support their initiative	believe that their teachers (or superiors) have an obligation to look after them

In the Classroom

Because Canadian culture has relatively low power distance, Canadian students interact relatively informally with their teachers. Students are allowed to and are even encouraged to challenge the wisdom of their teachers. Students from a culture of relatively high power distance (e.g., Japanese culture) might have a hard time adjusting to a Canadian classroom because in their culture teachers are an authority, they are higher up in the hierarchy and, therefore, students should honour—not challenge—what they say. Likewise, a Canadian student attending school in Japan could unknowingly insult a teacher by questioning his or her knowledge, opinion or authority.

If you are working with students (or subordinates) from a culture of high power distance:

- encourage students to make decisions “by giving them explicit responsibility for [the] decision” (e.g., give instructions like “I am not sure what the answer is. I want you to weigh the pros and cons, decide which is better and then tell me what you have decided.”)⁶

If you are preparing students (or subordinates) to travel to a culture of high power distance, encourage them to:

- regularly communicate with and ask permission of their teachers or host families before taking the initiative to do something
- pay attention to a person’s position and show deference to people in positions of

For an example of how differing concepts of power distance can create cultural misunderstanding, see the Culture Point in Chapter 13: International Student Programs. Appendix C: Cultural Considerations also ranks countries from high to low power distance.

Indirect and Direct Communication Styles (also referred to as high context and low context cultures)

Cultures with an indirect communication style (also referred to as high context cultures) communicate implicitly and expect the listener to “read between the lines” in order to understand the message. In other words, the context surrounding the conversation is just as, if not more, important than what is being said. Cultures with a direct communication style (also referred to as low context cultures), on the other hand, are very explicit and expect the speaker to convey the message clearly using precise language.

What It Looks Like:

In cultures with direct communication styles , people:	In cultures with indirect communication styles , people:
use words to overtly express meaning (e.g., look for meaning in what is said)	provide context so that meaning is self-evident (e.g., look for meaning in what is not said)
prefer to confront conflict and resolve it openly and honestly	prefer to avoid conflict or deal with it in subtle and tactful ways
are outgoing and have visible reactions	are generally reserved and do not show their reaction
point to external factors or variables when things go wrong	accept personal responsibility when things go wrong

In the Classroom

Canadians have a mix of communication styles. We have a direct communication style in that the speaker is responsible for delivering the message clearly. For example, when a Canadian teacher checks in with his or her students to see if the students understood the lesson, the teacher is assessing how clearly he or she communicated the message. If the lesson was confusing, the teacher encourages students to ask questions or takes other steps to clarify it.

Students from a culture with an indirect communication style (e.g., many African cultures) think that, as listeners, they are responsible for understanding the lesson and assume the teacher will provide all of the information necessary to make sense of it. When confused, these students may struggle for some time before they ask questions. Once the meaning has been explained, they may feel frustrated that the teacher did not offer (what they consider to be) complete information on the subject.

On the other hand, Canadian students studying in an indirect culture may feel frustrated that their teacher does not “get to the point.” They may be confused about why the teacher provides the class with unnecessary background information and ends the lesson without a clear direction or conclusion.

There are times when Canadians communicate indirectly, particularly when they are trying to be polite. This can be confusing for visitors who come from cultures with direct communication styles (e.g., German culture). For example, students from Germany may be understandably confused when their Canadian peers suggest “getting together sometime” but then never arrange to meet.

For examples of how differing communication styles can create cultural misunderstanding, see the Culture Points in Chapter 10: International School Partnerships and Chapter 11: Student Exchange Programs. Appendix C: Cultural Considerations also ranks countries according to their tendency toward high or low context communication.

If you are working with students from a more indirect culture:

- consider the student’s nonverbal cues in your assessment of the situation
- increase your use of gestures and body language and be aware of what your nonverbal cues might be communicating
- highlight resources where students might be able to get more information
- take care not to be too blunt.

If you are preparing students to travel to a more indirect culture, encourage them to:

- consider nonverbal cues in their assessment of the situation
- provide their teachers and host families with context about themselves
- try not to be blunt.

If you are working with students from a more direct culture:

- be explicit about your expectations
- try not to take offense to statements or conversations that seem blunt
- give students “an estimate of the probability that what you say is actually going to happen.”⁷

If you are preparing students to travel to a more direct culture, encourage them to:

- be explicit about their needs and desires
- try not to take offense to statements or conversations that seem blunt.

Nonverbal Communication Cues

All cultures utilize nonverbal cues to communicate meaning. Consider how many meanings the phrase “sit down” can have depending only on tone. It can be a command, an invitation or a plea. When you are part of a culture, you understand how the intonation of the word changes its meaning but when you are new to the culture you may not pick up on these subtleties. Tone and other nonverbal cues, such as those listed below, often reveal more about the exchange than words. Effective cross-cultural communicators are aware of what their nonverbal cues are saying to their partner and what their partner’s nonverbal cues are saying to them.

Other common nonverbal cues include:

- **Personal space** – Refers to the size of the “bubble” that surrounds a person and marks the territory between him or her and other people.⁸ In some cultures, usually collectivist ones, the personal space is relatively small. It is desirable to be close to other people, even strangers. In Canada, personal space is relatively large. Only people who we know well and trust (e.g., family and friends) are allowed into our bubble.

In the Classroom

Proximity in a classroom can be easily misinterpreted. When entering a classroom, Canadian students will often choose to sit in the middle or at the back of the class. A teacher from a culture of close proximity (e.g., Mexican culture) may find this insulting and assume that students are snubbing him or her. Similarly, a student who is seated at a distance from other students may feel like he or she is being excluded.

In contrast, Canadians who interact with people from a culture of close proximity might feel like their personal space is being invaded. In some cases, they may misinterpret the closeness as flirting.

For an example of how differing concepts of personal space can create cultural misunderstanding, see the Culture Points in Chapter 13: International Student Programs.

If you are working with students from a culture of close proximity:

- express your discomfort in words rather than by stepping away from the student
- highlight situations in which physical contact is appropriate and model this for the students; e.g., handshakes of congratulations.

If you are preparing students to travel to a culture of close proximity, encourage them to:

- expect and try to accept incursions into their personal space
- think of physical contact as a polite gesture rather than a sexual innuendo.

- **Eye contact** – When (and for how long) it is appropriate to maintain direct eye contact varies from culture-to-culture. In some cultures, averting one’s eyes is a sign of respect while in others it is interpreted as disinterest, boredom, unhappiness or guilt. Eye contact also varies within cultures according to age, gender, status, sense of security and so on.

In the Classroom

Canadians, perhaps with the exception of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, consider it polite to make periodic eye contact. It is not polite to stare nor is it polite to constantly look away. When Canadian students and teachers encounter visitors that hold eye contact for a prolonged period of time (i.e., Arab cultures), they may interpret the behaviour as aggressive. In turn, Arab visitors may consider the Canadian hosts to be disrespectful and untrustworthy.⁹

For an example of how differing concepts of eye contact can create cultural misunderstanding, see the Culture Point in Chapter 14: English as a Second Language Program.

If you are working with students from other cultures:

- resist the temptation to immediately interpret the intentions behind varying degrees of eye contact
- observe the eye contact patterns of the student; e.g., talk to other educators about their experience
- research the culture of the student; e.g., is it considered polite for them to make eye contact with you?
- create a safe learning environment by praising students for their contributions.

If you are preparing students to travel to a new culture, encourage them to:

- research their host culture; e.g., is it polite for them (as young male or female Canadian students) to make eye contact? If so, when and with whom?
- observe and learn from interactions between people from the host culture
- seek out a cultural informant who they may contact if they have questions; i.e., teacher, host family, exchange partner.

- **Silence** – Culture often governs if, when and for how long it is appropriate to respond to another person with silence. In some cultures, people attempt to minimize silence. They think it signifies rejection or disengagement, or consider it to be “dead air space.” In other cultures, silence is a valuable part of the conversation. It shows that the listener is thoughtful in his or her response.¹⁰

In the Classroom

Canadians tend not to value silence. We turn music on in our cars, we wear MP3 players while we walk, and we leave the television on while at home. Background noise is comfortable. Popular television shows, where characters are scripted to banter back and forth, are particularly telling of our cultural norms around silence. We like noise, but we like structured noise. For example, Canadians expect only one person to speak at a time. To interrupt or to speak over someone is considered rude.

In a Canadian classroom, silence in the middle of a conversation usually means that students don't understand, don't care or disagree with the speaker. When silence arises, speakers feel compelled to further explain or move on. In some cases, they may become nervous and embarrassed. However, students from cultures that value silence (e.g., Asian cultures) may consider a silent response to be respectful. It shows that they are taking time to think through what the speaker just presented.

Misunderstandings can also arise when students from cultures that value dialogue (e.g., Italian and Greek cultures) study in Canadian classrooms. In these cultures, it is not uncommon to interrupt someone or to have multiple conversations occurring at one time. The students may interrupt or speak at the same time as the Canadian speaker, not knowing that the Canadian speaker considers this to be rude and disruptive.

If you are working with students from a culture that values silence:

- give students time to digest information and think about their response
- be patient; e.g., refrain from moving on when the student does not respond immediately (students from Asian cultures will often wait for a prolonged pause before speaking).

If you are preparing students to travel to a culture that values silence, encourage them to:

- take time to consider their words before they speak
- wait for a prolonged pause before speaking
- incorporate silence into their lives.

If you are working with students from a culture that values dialogue:

- explain why interrupting or talking over somebody is considered rude in Canada.

If you are preparing students to travel to a culture that values dialogue, encourage them to:

- try not to be offended if they are interrupted or if others speak over them
- take initiative and join the conversation rather than waiting for their turn to speak.

Individual and collective orientations, high and low power distance, indirect and direct communication styles and nonverbal communication are only four of many general cultural patterns. The recommended reading list on page 82 contains more information on general cultural patterns.

Speaking with Non-native English Speakers

Alberta school authorities are increasingly in contact with non-native English speakers. In some cases, these individuals speak better English than many Anglo-Albertans and are able to converse with students and staff without any trouble. In other cases, limited proficiency or heavy accents can make conversations more difficult. In these situations, school authority staff may employ the following strategies to communicate more effectively with non-native English speakers.¹¹

- 1. Use simple terms** (e.g., “many” instead of “numerous”) and basic sentence structures (e.g., “I teach students to play sports” instead of “In my class, students learn to play a variety of sports.”)
- 2. Speak slowly and pause generously between sentences.** This gives the listener time to digest what you are saying and to form his or her contribution to the conversation.
- 3. Face your colleague and use body language or props,** if necessary, to convey your message.
- 4. Do not shout or raise your voice.**
- 5. Be genuine.** It is very difficult for someone learning a language to pick up on sarcasm.
- 6. Avoid contractions, jargon and acronyms.**

Handling Cultural Misunderstandings

When people experience cultural misunderstanding, they have very emotional reactions. They may be frustrated by their inability to communicate or angered by the seemingly nonsensical response of the other person. When you find yourself reacting like this, ask yourself “could this be a cultural misunderstanding?” Try to separate your thoughts into description, interpretation and evaluation. This thought process ensures that you are not making a judgement without analyzing the interaction first.

- 1. Description –** Describe the situation in concrete terms. Who was involved? What was said? What did the interaction look like?
- 2. Interpretation –** Why did you behave or react the way you did? What values or norms underlie your behaviour or response? Why might other people have behaved or reacted the way they did? What values or norms underlie their behaviour or response? Consider the cultural patterns outlined above. Try to think of more than one possible interpretation.

3. Evaluation – How did the interaction make you feel? What did you learn or what would you like to better understand? How might you gather more information? What assumptions might you have made if you had not stopped to describe the interaction and consider multiple interpretations?

Cultural informants—people who are familiar with the norms and expectations of a culture and can explain the behaviours to you—are also tremendously helpful in alleviating cultural misunderstandings.

Helping Students to Separate Description and Interpretation

Many people, students and adults alike, interpret a situation and describe it as fact. For example, a person may say “I asked him a simple question and he became angry with me” instead of saying “I asked him a question and when he responded, he raised his voice and spoke very rapidly.” When we consciously separate description (i.e., what we saw or heard) from interpretation (i.e., what we think about what we saw or heard), we are open to multiple interpretations of the situation. This openness is extremely important when communicating with other cultures that may have different behavioural norms.

Teachers can encourage openness amongst their students by exploring the difference between description and interpretation. The following lesson plan is one way to highlight the difference between the two.

Observations versus Judgements

From AFS Intercultural Programs USA, “Observations vs. Judgments Lesson Plan,” http://www.usa.afs.org/usa_en/view/7819 (Accessed August 5, 2010).

Ask students to collectively brainstorm the characteristics of a designated subgroup; e.g., “How would you describe rock stars?” Write down everything you hear. Try to accumulate 20 to 25 characteristics.

Ask students to put themselves “in the shoes” of the chosen subgroup. How do they feel about their brainstorming results? Do they agree or disagree with any of the observations?

Highlight the difference between observations (statements about others informed primarily by your empirical senses) and judgements (statements about others informed primarily by your interpretations). Point out that judgements are not necessarily negative (as often perceived). We frequently make positive judgements about other groups.

Return to your list of characteristics and ask the group to identify the characteristics that are observations and those that are interpretations. Encourage students to realize that it is important to understand the difference between observations and judgements and that, when interacting with people from other cultures, they need to observe, gather information and consider multiple interpretations before interpreting what is happening.

Being able to communicate effectively and form relationships across cultures provides innumerable benefits. Intercultural relationships increase our exposure to different ways of thinking and enhance our ability to analyze and solve problems. Diverse groups are also able to draw upon the variety of communication and problem-solving strategies that their members bring. So while intercultural communication can be confusing or challenging at times, in the end it is worth the effort.

Communicating across cultures is particularly difficult for the individual who, immersed in another culture, is simultaneously coping with cultural misunderstandings and the symptoms of cultural adjustment. The following section will explore the process of cultural adaptation so that school authority staff can effectively prepare students, teachers and staff to go abroad, as well as welcome students, teachers and staff from other countries.

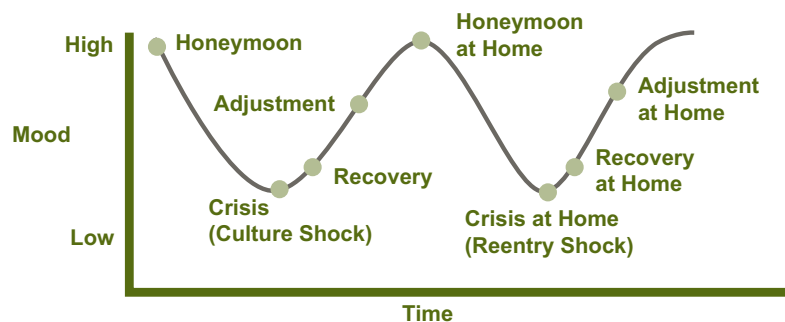
Cultural Adaptation

What Is Cultural Adaptation?

(From University of California, Berkeley International Office, "Cultural Adjustment," http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/multiple_use/cultural_adjustment.php) (Accessed August 5, 2010).

Cultural adaptation is a process many travellers experience, particularly if they spend a significant amount of time in a foreign culture. When properly prepared and supported, travellers can adapt relatively well and experience minimal culture shock.¹² (Resources to help prepare for and manage cultural adaptation are available in the recommended reading list on page 82.)

The cultural adaptation process is often illustrated as a *W* curve (see diagram above). Initially, travellers experience elation or excitement about being in new environments. This initial excitement can deteriorate into a state of sadness or confusion, generally as travellers become aware of less-desirable cultural characteristics and/or feel unable to function effectively in their host cultures. Over time, most travellers recover to a place of cultural understanding and functionality.



A similar process occurs during re-entry or when travellers, who have been away from their own cultural context for a substantial period of time, return home. While away, many travellers romanticize “home” and are excited to return. However, home can feel foreign or overly mundane. Travellers may be frustrated with the rules or lifestyle of their home countries or feel unable to relate with their friends and families. Again, with time, most travellers adjust to life in their home context. (Resources to help minimize re-entry shock are available in the intercultural resources list in the recommended reading list on page 82.)

The *W* curve provides a basic framework from which to understand cultural adjustment; however, not all travellers experience this predictable pattern. Recent research suggests that the cultural adaptation process can be more or less challenging based on “intensity factors”¹³ such as:

- the degree of cultural difference between the home and host culture
- the extent to which the traveller is immersed within a culture and the length of time in which the traveller is immersed
- the extent to which the host culture welcomes outsiders into the community
- the traveller’s prior intercultural experience
- the traveller’s ability to function in the language of the host culture
- the accuracy of the traveller’s cultural expectations.

Indicators of Cultural Adjustment

(From J. Martin and T. Nakayama, *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*, p. 211; University of Wisconsin-Madison, “International Engineering Studies & Programs – Culture Shock,” <http://international.engr.wisc.edu/preparing/cultureshock.php>)
(Accessed August 5, 2010).

Honeymoon phase:

- excitement
- apprehension/nervousness.

Culture shock:

- confusion/disorientation
- frustration and irritability
- suspicion and stereotyping of host culture
- crisis of identity
- romanticizing home culture
- struggle with simple, everyday activities
- feeling like an “outsider”
- withdrawal from host culture
- insomnia or excessive sleeping
- digestive problems
- uncharacteristic weight fluctuation
- deterioration in appearance (dress and grooming)
- out-of-character behaviour with others; i.e., family, friends, colleagues
- complete adoption of host culture; e.g., surrendering own identity.

Recovery and adjustment:

- sense of mental well-being
- comfortable and competent when engaging with the host culture
- able to complete everyday tasks with ease
- able to articulate likes and dislikes of both home and host cultures
- capable of problem solving.

Significant preparation and support is necessary when travellers are expecting transitions of great intensity. If someone with little intercultural experience is travelling to a place of considerable cultural difference for a lengthy duration, the ability to adapt would be enhanced if he or she learned some of the local language and researched the host country and culture before departure.

One cannot expect to escape the anxieties of cultural adaptation; it is, by nature, a challenging and uncomfortable learning process that most travellers go through. Travellers who do not experience any of the indicators of cultural adaptation (see side box on page 80) have generally been isolated or shielded from the host culture. For example, tourists often remain in the honeymoon phase.

Learning to adapt to another culture can reveal a great deal about one's personal values and identity. This kind of personal exploration can be challenging and scary but has tremendous benefits. Travellers emerge from this transformational process more comfortable with their personal and global identities and more confident in their ability to manage change.

Recommended reading on culture

- Alberta Education. “Appendix 2: Understanding Cultural Differences in Student Behaviour” in *English as a Second Language Kindergarten to Grade 9 Guide to Implementation*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, 2007.
- Cornes, Alan. *Culture from the Inside Out: Travel and Meet Yourself*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc., 2004.
- Gochenour, Theodore. *Beyond Experience: An Experiential Approach to Cross-Cultural Education*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993.
- Hansel, Bettina. *The Exchange Student Survival Kit*. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Intercultural Press, 2007.
- Hofstede, Gert Jan, Paul B. Pedersen and Geert Hofstede. *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2002.
- Kohls, L. Robert and John M. Knight, eds. *Developing Intercultural Awareness: A Cross-cultural Training Handbook*. 2nd ed. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc., 1994.
- Mikk, Barbara Kappler et al. *Maximizing Study Abroad: An Instructional Guide to Strategies for Language and Culture Learning and Use*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2009.

Culture-specific References

- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. “Cultural Profiles Project.” <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/index.html>.
- CultureGrams. <http://www.culturegrams.com>.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada Centre for Intercultural Learning. <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/cfsi-icse/cil-cai/>.
- Kwintessential. “Country Profiles – Global Guide to Culture, Customs and Etiquette.” <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>.
- Morrison, Terri and Wayne A. Conaway. *Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More than 60 Countries*. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2006.
- Cultural groups within the local community.

Conclusion: Creating a Culture of Our Own

If culture is considered to be the assumptions, values and judgements that govern how people understand and manage the world, how might Alberta school authorities and schools go about creating a culture of their own? How can they build a culture of understanding, acceptance and worldmindedness? ¹⁴

Worldmindedness often begins as global awareness and grows as individuals begin to appreciate the viewpoints, experiences and worldviews of others, especially those quite different from themselves. It develops along with intercultural skills in communication and prolonged experiences in cross-cultural interaction. We know we are worldminded when we form the habit of thinking about the effects of our decisions on people across the planet, when we care about how others perceive our nation, and when we use “us” to mean people from many places and not just our neighbourhood or nation.

Some obvious synergies exist between international education and character or citizenship education. Both promote respect for diversity, intercultural dialogue and a responsibility to humanity.¹⁵ For example, a student who studies abroad learns first-hand what it means to be an outsider and knows what it is like not to understand the cultural patterns that govern behaviour. He or she may even know how frustrating it can be to communicate in another language. These experiences enable the student to empathize more sincerely with newcomers to Canada and to be more patient, more understanding and more willing to help. The intercultural communication skills that the student developed while abroad may also help him or her to interact more effectively with individuals from other countries and cultures, thereby serving as a role model for other students.

International education programs that exist in isolation, however, can have only limited impact on the student body and school culture. Developing a culture of acceptance, understanding and worldmindedness requires that “the world” is constantly represented in Alberta schools. For example, students are thinking about the world and it shows on the bulletin boards that display their work; culturally diverse events are held in the school; international partnerships are established, recognized and celebrated; and overseas visitors are welcomed and their wisdom is valued.

These are just a few of the myriad of things that school authorities can do to build a culture where multiculturalism, diverse worldviews and global perspectives are valued. To ensure that meaningful learning is happening in each instance, educators should connect international education initiatives to curriculum outcomes. These connections are explored in the following chapter.

You may find the following sections in this handbook helpful:

- Chapter 5: Professional Development
- Chapter 10: International School Partnerships
- Chapter 11: Student Exchange Programs
- Chapter 13: International Student Programs (in Implementing the Program section and Supporting the Transition to Alberta section)
- Chapter 14: English as a Second Language Program
- Chapter 16: Hosting International Visitors (in Long-term Visitors section)
- Appendix C:
 - Cultural Considerations (in Intercultural Competence: Key Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes section)
 - Cultural Considerations (in Studies on Cultural Patterns section)

Endnotes

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