What is Culture?

Professor Geert Hofstede conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of how values in the workplace are influenced by culture. He defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others" (p.3). Hammond (2014) defines it as software for the brain's hardware. Native Hawaiian educators, Kana'iaupuni and Kawai'ae'a (2008) write, “Perhaps most simply, culture may be defined as shared ways of being, knowing, and doing” (p.71).

The Role of Culture in Education

Culture is an important factor in many aspects of education. Geneva Gay (2010), one of the progenitors of culturally responsive teaching, highlights the importance of culture in education:

"Culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment. Even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn (p.8)."

A person's ways of knowing or epistemology, is influenced by culture. Smith and Ayers (2006) note:

"Dunn and Griggs (1995) found that members of culturally defined groups tend to share common learning styles, and that these learning styles differentiate one such group from another....Membership in culturally defined communities is often associated with a delineated range of learning styles and cognitive processes (p.403)."

McLoughlin (2000) writes of cultural considerations to design learning environments that promote inclusivity and equity:

"Culture pervades learning, and in designing instructional environments there needs to be serious debate about issues concerning the social and cultural dimensions of task design, communication channels and the structuring of information if the needs of culturally diverse learners are to be met...the use of technology to mediate learning, may be imbued with cultural values and assumptions (p. 231)."

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Many researchers have used the framework of collectivist vs. individualist societies as a helpful tool for understanding how culture influences ways of knowing, ways of being (ontology), and values (axiology). While culture is a collective phenomenon, there are differences among individuals in the collective. This cultural dimension focuses on the extent to which collective or individual needs and interests are dominant. These are broad generalizations and one must be careful not to stereotype learners using this framework; there is great diversity among individuals within cultural groups.

The world in which you were born is just one model of reality. Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you; they are unique manifestations of the human spirit. – Wade Davis
Hofstede (2011) posits a model of national culture that includes an Individualism vs. Collectivism Dimension that is often cited in educational research and is described as follows:

*Individualism on the one side versus its opposite, Collectivism, as a societal, not an individual characteristic, is the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find cultures in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side we find cultures in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, and oppose other in groups...Table 3 lists a selection of differences between societies that validation research showed to be associated with this dimension (p.11).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Collectivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is supposed to take care of him- or herself and his or her immediate family only</td>
<td>People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I” – consciousness</td>
<td>“We” – consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right of privacy</td>
<td>Stress on belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking one’s mind is healthy</td>
<td>Harmony should always be maintained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others classified as individuals</td>
<td>Others classified as in-group or out-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal opinion expected: one person one vote</td>
<td>Opinions and votes predetermined by in-group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgression of norms leads to guilt feelings</td>
<td>Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages in which the word “I” is indispensable</td>
<td>Languages in which the word “I” is avoided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of education is learning how to learn</td>
<td>Purpose of education is learning how to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task prevails over relationship</td>
<td>Relationship prevails over task</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Nonwestern vs. Western World Views**

Smith and Ayers provide a similar framework in the table below.

"Table 1 presents a comparative list of the fundamental dimensions of Western versus non-Western cultural views. These are broad generalizations and encompass a tremendous amount of community and individual diversity (Sanchez & Gunawardena, 1998)" (p.403).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonwestern</th>
<th>Western</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize group cooperation</td>
<td>Emphasize individual competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement as it reflects group</td>
<td>Achievement for the individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value harmony with nature</td>
<td>Must master and control nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is relative</td>
<td>Adhere to rigid time schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept affective expression</td>
<td>Limit affective expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic thinking</td>
<td>Dualistic thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion permeates culture</td>
<td>Religion is distinct from other parts of culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially oriented</td>
<td>Task-oriented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: From Sanchez and Gunawardena (1998).*
The curricula employed in the United States, its territories, and former colonies in the North Pacific reflects and supports the western and individualistic philosophies of American culture. Smith and Ayers (2006) offer the following proposal

*We propose that the way in which members of Western cultures make meaning of their experience in the world is shaped in large part by an analytic, mechanistic world view in which decision-making is based on matters of expediency, efficiency, and cost-benefit considerations. To date this ideology dominates Western curricula, and has been given new vigor through the economic hegemony of advanced capitalism. In contrast, members of non-Western cultures tend to be more holistic in the way they make meaning of their experience in the world. Accordingly, decision making is more likely to take into consideration the interdependence of living things and the environment. Both natural and human elements—as well as their interrelationships—are incorporated in the construction of meaning and purpose (Chen, Mashhadi, Ang, & Harkrider, 1999) (p.404).*

In reflecting on her research with participants whose cultures prioritize communal identities, Merriam (2002) noted

*Much of the learning was in the context of a community; learning was seen as a social activity that provided a vehicle for interacting with others. Second, informants engaged in learning to be able to better contribute to the well-being of others (Kindle locations 826-828).*

**Culturally Responsive Education**

Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students" (p.29). Culturally responsive education involves an awareness of the dissonance between the culture of an educational institution and the cultures of its students. Of this, Gay (2010) states:

*The cultures of schools and different ethnic groups are not always completely synchronized. These discontinuities can interfere with students' academic achievement, in part because how some ethnically and culturally diverse individuals customarily engage in intellectual processing, self-presentation, and task performance is different from the processes used in school….Congruency between how the educational process is ordered and delivered, and the cultural frames of reference of diverse students, will improve school achievement for students of color (p.12).*

Hammond (2014) asserts, “When used effectively, culturally responsive pedagogy has the ability to help students build intellective capacity...the increased power the brain creates to process complex information more effectively. Neuroscience tells us that culture plays a critical role in this process” (p.16).

McLoughlin, in Culturally Responsive Technology Use: Developing an On-line Community of Learners, notes

*In tertiary contexts, Web-based instruction often appears to be tailored to the needs of a particular cultural group, recognising the specific learning needs, preferences and styles of a single, perhaps homogeneous, group of learners (p.231).*
This dominance of the western, individualistic aspects of culture in our schools and in our teaching creates dissonance for students from collectivist, nonwestern cultures. McLoughlin asserts that designing online courses for Indigenous learners must address "the need to recognise Indigenous identity, language, and social, political, and economic requirements in ways that affirm cultural traditions while simultaneously promoting students' ability to work within the dominant society" (p.237). Culturally sustaining pedagogy provides ways to provide online learning environments that support success of students from collectivist, nonwestern cultures such as native Hawaiians and other Pacific islanders.

Culturally Sustaining Education

The term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence (p.93).

Culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) promote equity and democracy in education. Paris and Alim (2014) write we believe equity and access can best be achieved by centering pedagogies on the heritage and contemporary practices of students and communities of color. CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling and as a needed response to demographic and social change....cultural and linguistic flexibility is not simply about giving value to all of our communities; it is also about the skills, knowledges, and ways of being needed for success in the present and future (p.89).

Indigenous Learning Theory
A leading US educator and advocate of culturally responsive education for native Americans, Four Arrows (2013), presents an Indigenous Learning Theory that can serve as the foundation for educators. This Indigenous Learning Theory is based on Native Hawaiian and Native American cultures and other information and can help teachers employ dialogic and Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning. Indigenous Learning Theory is about cultivating cognition and consciousness via spiritual awareness and reflection on lived experience. They direct us toward realizing that human awareness is a part of life’s web. They connect us to smaller and larger elements in the universe (p.65).

When applied to education, Indigenous Learning Theory weaves the empirical and the symbolic, nature and culture, self and community, power and love into a unified and unique vision of the world. It sees rituals, ceremonies, rights [sic] of passage, places and family histories and connections as integral and vital to the learning experience (p.65).

Culturally Congruent Teaching Practices
When implemented in schools, culturally responsive education shows positive results for Indigenous students; some studies note positive effects for non-Indigenous students as well. In a study of 40 Hawaiian language immersion and culture-based (HLCB) educators, Schonleber (2007) identified 10
Specific and well-defined teaching practices considered by many HLCB educators as culturally congruent and linked to increased academic self-efficacy, resiliency and cultural pride; teachers attributed these changes to their implementation of culturally responsive education. These strategies included:

1. encouraging student to be self-directed learners
2. use of demonstration and modeling
3. hands-on learning
4. mixed-age classrooms
5. connecting with nature
6. reality and place-based education
7. science-based integrated curriculum
8. teaching based on observation of students
9. step by step to mastery
10. storytelling (p.246-259).

The strategies were clearly related to Hawaiian axiologies such as responsibility to community and stewardship of the environment. Schonleber reports:

These strategies are connected to values and beliefs that are important to many Hawaiians, including the values of humility and patience as personal qualities, the value of harmony in relationships, and the belief that individuals have a responsibility to the community, the family, and the land. These values and beliefs were related to a worldview in which all things are interconnected, children have a kind of divine power participants described as mana, and the earth is to be cared for and respected as a living entity, “an elder sibling” (p.240).

Takayama (2008) performed a comparative analysis of academic achievement data from various school types in Hawai‘i – conventional public schools, western-focused charters and Hawaiian Language & Culture-Based (HLCB) schools and concluded:

HLCB school types may make a significant difference in the academic achievement of Hawaiian students; non-Hawaiian students also showed positive effects; there are no academic losses in Hawaiian-focused charters and Hawaiian language immersion schools for students of Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian ethnicities.

Takayama found the following:

- Non-Hawaiian students who may feel alienated by Western education systems may benefit from more relevant and applied learning environments as offered through HLCB schools.
- Culture-based education seems to parallel the principles of best practices while delivering instruction in culturally relevant and specific ways (Kana‘iaupuni, Ledward, & Takayama, 2009; Ledward & Takayama, 2008).
- HLCB schools are more effective than conventional public schools at moving students out of the Well Below proficiency status for reading at all grade levels and for mathematics in higher grade levels.
- HLCB schools are role models of educational reforms and racial integration that meet the needs of diverse students and increase the movement toward academic proficiency (p.271-272).

This research supports the notion that "Congruency between how the educational process is ordered and delivered, and the cultural frames of reference of diverse students, will improve school achievement for students of color." Hawaiian educators Shawn Malia Kana‘iaupuni and Keiki K. C. Kawai‘ea‘a (2008) define the pedagogy used in Hawaiian culture-based schools as follows:

Culture based education is the grounding of instruction and student learning in the values, norms, knowledge, beliefs, practices, experiences, places, and language that
are the foundation of a culture, in this case Hawaiian indigenous culture...culture-based education refers to teaching and learning that are grounded in a cultural worldview, from whose lens are taught the skills, knowledge, content, and values that students need in our modern, global society (p.71).

They highlight these critical skills for culturally responsive teachers:

To understand the impact of culture-based education, we must be able to articulate and understand the approaches and philosophies used by indigenous educators. To be able to promote, share, and develop culturally responsive educational strategies, learning approaches, and systems that presumably benefit all children, especially indigenous children (p.69).

Pedagogies and Procedures Checklist

Four Arrows offers this list which can "help teachers employ dialogic and Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning" (p.79). It echoes the work of Schonleber and others who support HLCB education.

1. field experience
2. cooperative learning
3. intrinsic motivation
4. student ownership of subject matter
5. critical reflection
6. honoring student pace
7. visualizations
8. using song and music
9. honoring place
10. using natural world as teacher
11. involving community
12. doing activism and serving others
13. remembering that everything is connected/related
14. using humor whenever possible
15. employing wellness/fitness considerations
16. using peer teaching
17. allowing for observation rather than participation
18. using storytelling prolifically and interactively that is related to the student's world
19. being aware of sustainability issues

In a review of studies done in Indigenous schools in the United States, including Native Hawaiian, Navaho, Blackfeet, Y'upik, and Ojibwe language schools, Demmert, Grissmer, and Towner (2006) offer this characterization of Indigenous pedagogy:

Pedagogy that stresses traditional cultural characteristics and adult–child interactions as the starting place for education (mores that are currently practiced in the community and that may differ from community to community). Pedagogy in which teaching strategies are congruent with the traditional culture as well as contemporary ways of knowing and learning (opportunities to observe, opportunities to practice, and opportunities to demonstrate skills) (p. 10).

Professional development and training for educators in the area of culturally sustaining education is critical for the success of our students. Schonleber (2007) notes,"Outcomes suggest that training in culturally congruent teaching strategies should be ongoing and systematic and that incorporating place-based curricula in public school settings could possibly increase the academic self-efficacy of Hawaiian students" (p.239).

It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences. –Audre Lorde
How do we achieve culturally congruent culturally sustaining pedagogy in distance learning environments? McLoughlin (2000) offers the following suggestions for designing instruction to support culturally diverse online students (408-409):

- Integrating culturally distinctive art forms, language and phraseology, social traditions, colors, and community relationships into distance-learning media.
- Afford learners the freedom to decide on personally and culturally relevant paths toward the achievement of learning objectives.
- Include a variety of tasks and projects designed to demonstrate achievement of learning objectives as well as authentic assessment of learning outcomes based on learner-selected criteria.
- Provide personal and group online workspaces that encourage both private reflection and cooperative support.
- Integrate multiple perspectives by eschewing teacher-directed pedagogies in favor of student-centered learning activities. Text should not be prescribed by the teacher. Using the constructivist approach, learners should actively identify new links to relevant, culturally appropriate websites. In this way, learners may enhance the learning experience by sharing culturally rich learning materials with their instructor and peers.
- Invite leaders and experts in the learners’ immediate communities to participate in course planning, design, implementation, and evaluation.

Resources


