"It's all Greek to Me"
Decoding Cross-Cultural Communication on Campus
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Background
Introductions
In the UAE, there are more expatriates than Emiratis
American University of Sharjah

American Curriculum

Around 4,000 students from over 90 nationalities

Located in Sharjah, the Islamic capital of the world

(Al-Issa, 2005)
Overview

- Warm-up
- Terminologies
- Activity & Discussion
- Next Steps
- Tool-Kit
- References
Warm-up
"We and They"
by Rudyard Kipling

Father, Mother, and Me,
Sister and Auntie say
All the people like us are We,
And every one else is They.
And They live over the sea,
While We live over the way,
But – would you believe it? – They look upon We
As only a sort of They

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015, p. 96.)
We eat pork and beef
With cow-horn-handled knives.
They who gobble Their rice off a leaf,
Are horrified out of Their lives;
And They who live up a tree,
And feast on grubs and clay,
(Isn't it scandalous?) look upon We
As a simply disgusting They!

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015, p. 96.)
We eat kitcheny food.
We have doors that latch.
They drink milk or blood,
Under an open thatch.
We have Doctors to fee.
They have Wizards to pay.
And (impudent heathen!) They look upon We
As a quite impossible They!

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015, p. 96.)
All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people, like Us, are We
And every one else is They:
But if you cross over the sea,
Instead of over the way,
You may end by (think of it!) looking on We
As only a sort of They!

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015, p. 96.)
Reflection

- What cultural elements are addressed in this poem?
- How do our cultural attitudes affect how we perceive people from different cultures?
- Reflect on an experience you have had that challenged your cultural assumptions.

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015, p. 96.)
Terminologies
Culture

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
Ethnocentrism

What you're wearing is not professional. You should be in a suit and tie to do business.

The belief in the intrinsic superiority of one's own culture, language and/or ethnic group
Cultural Patterns

Stereotypes?
Cultural Patterns

Stereotypes?
Cultural Patterns

Individualism

Personal time, freedom, and direction communication
Everyone looks after themselves
What might this look like in advising?
- student taking ownership over the learning process
- speaking their mind
- respectfully questioning authority or advice
- Chooses a major based on their personal interests

Collectivism


(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
Cultural Patterns

**Individualism**

- Personal time, freedom, and direct communication
- Everyone looks after themselves

What might this look like in advising?
- student taking ownership over the learning process
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**Collectivism**

- individuals see themselves as part of a greater group of people and prioritizes the goals of that group before themselves

What might this look like in advising?
- student sees their education as a way to improve their family's prestige or honor
- student's decision to choose a major may be strongly influenced by parents

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
Cultural Patterns

Low-Context Communication

Typically found in Western cultures
Words > Context

"Don't beat around the bush"

High-Context Communication

"Get to the point"

(Hall, 1976, as cited in Al-Issa, 2005)
Cultural Patterns

Low-Context Communication
Typically found in Western cultures
Words > Context

"Don't beat around the bush"

"Get to the point"

vs.

High-Context Communication
Typically found in Eastern cultures
Words < Context

How is your family?

(Hall, 1976, as cited in Al-Issa, 2005)
Typically found in Western cultures
Monochronic- a great emphasis on time

Cultural Patterns

M-Time

VS.

P-Time

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
Cultural Patterns

M-Time
Typically found in Western cultures
Monochronic - a great emphasis on time

VS.

P-Time
Typically found in Eastern cultures
Polychronic - time is flexible

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
an exchange between individuals who identify themselves as distinct from one another in cultural terms, such as underlying values, worldviews, and/or social organization

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
Proverbs

Activity
Proverbs Activity

"Time is money."

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
"The early bird gets the worm"
The sheep separated from the flock is eaten by the wolf.
Proverbs Activity

What value/values does each proverb represent?
What might this look like in an advising context?

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015)
Scenarios
Scenario 1

You advise a student named Maryam, who has high grades, but has not completed her required advising sessions. She emails you 15 minutes after her scheduled appointment and the email says the following:

“Hi Professor,
I won’t make it to our meeting today. Please send me the information I need for registering next semester. Your student,
Maryam”
You advise a student named Maryam, who has high grades, but has not completed her required advising sessions. She emails you 15 minutes after her scheduled appointment and the email says the following:

“Hi Professor,
I won’t make it to our meeting today. Please send me the information I need for registering next semester. Your student,
Maryam”
Maryam is a second generation American from an Iraqi family. Although she is a dedicated and organized student, her family always comes first. At 1pm on the day of the meeting, her aunt surprises her family with a visit. In order to honor her aunt and provide hospitality, Maryam runs upstairs to dress up and prepare tea. She is also asked to help watch over her cousins, while her aunt stays. After realizing she has missed the appointment, she resolves to send you an email. She doesn't provide an excuse because she feels a message that direct would show disrespect.

"Hi Professor,
I won’t make it to our meeting today. Please send me the information I need for registering next semester.
Your student,
Maryam"
Ahmed is a first-year student from Egypt studying Electrical Engineering. He is currently on academic probation after failing 3 classes in his first semester, Calculus, Statistics, and Physics. On the other hand, he did very well in his Psychology and Writing classes. His advisor is concerned about him continuing with Math and Science courses to finish the degree. The advisor instinctively suggests he consider an alternative major, in light of his strengths and interests. Ahmed thanks the advisor but withdraws and asks if the meeting is finished.
Ahmed is a first-year student from Egypt studying Electrical Engineering. He is currently on academic probation after failing 3 classes in his first semester, Math and Physics. On the other hand, he did very well in his Psychology and Writing classes. His advisor is concerned about him continuing with Math and Science courses to finish the degree. The advisor instinctively suggests he consider an alternative major, in light of his strengths and interests. Ahmed thanks the advisor but withdraws and asks if the meeting is finished.

Why do you think Ahmed withdraws? Could anything have been done differently?
Next Steps
communication is much more than the exchange of words, speakers must also be aware of the larger social picture of any interaction."

(Decapua & Wintergerst, 2015, p. 83)
"An isolated increase in knowledge without a consequent change in attitude and behavior is of questionable value."

Most of us take our own culture for granted and are not even aware of its tremendous hold on our behaviors.

Critical Self Reflection

- "Map" your Cultural Orientation
- Acknowledge the values behind challenging scenarios
- Consider the Proverbs
"Relinquishing the role of expert"
Attend an event or activity of an international group on campus
Lifelong Learning

Taking time to listen to the story of your students/asking questions that give insight into their background and family

• Admit to ignorance
• Go 5 deep
• Respect boundaries
Read

- *Foreign to Familiar* by Sarah A. Lanier
- "When the West teaches the East" by Ahmad Al-Issa
Thank You


  https://www.uwb.edu/globalinitiatives/resources/intercultural-competence-tool-kit#Bennett,%20Janet.%202011.
References

- Jeanne Batalova Emma Israel and Jeanne Batalova. (2021, February 2). International Students in the United States. migrationpolicy.org. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/international-students-united-states-2020#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20international%20students,1950s%20(see%20Figure%201).&text=International%20students%20also%20increased%20as,6%20percent%20in%202019%20D20.


Thank you

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Question & Answer