

## **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING**

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*ABSTRACT. Teacher and student are an archetypal role pair in virtually any society. When teacher and student come from different cultures, such as in the context of economic development programmes, many perplexities can arise. These can be due to different social positions of teachers and students in the two societies, to differences in the relevance of the curriculum for the two societies, to differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations of the two societies, or to differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction. This paper focuses in particular on these interaction differences. It relates them to the author's 4-D model of cultural differences among societies, based on research on work-related values in over 50 countries. Differences in expected teacher/student and student/student interaction are listed with reference to the four dimensions of Individualism versus Collectivism, large versus small Power Distance, strong versus weak Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity versus Femininity. Some effects of language differences between teacher and student are also discussed. The burden of adaptation in cross-cultural learning situations should be primarily on the teachers.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

An American teacher at the foreign language institute in Beijing exclaimed in class, "You lovely girls, I love you." Her students were terrified. An Italian professor teaching in the United States complained bitterly about the fact that students were asked to formally evaluate his course. An Indian professor at an African university saw a student arrive six weeks late for the curriculum, but had to admit him because he was from the same village as the dean. This paper deals with the differences among societies that lead to this type of perplexity.

### **TEACHER AND STUDENT AS AN ARCHETYPAL ROLE PAIR**

The family, the school, the job and the community are four fundamental institutions, present in some way in virtually all human societies. Each of the four has its pair of unequal but complementary basic roles (except

the family, which has two role pairs)—as listed in Table 1. Many societies refine role systems still further (such as, older vs. younger brother, senior vs. junior student, line vs. staff at the job), but the role pairs of Table 1 are the archetypes of interaction between human unequals. In different societies, these archetypal roles are played in different ways. These ways are part and parcel of the culture of the particular society, which I defined elsewhere (Hofstede, 1980) by a convenience definition as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (p. 25). Role patterns in the four types of institutions interact, so that, for example, patterns of parent/child interaction in a society are carried over into teacher/student and boss/subordinate relationships.

Not only are these role patterns the products of a society’s culture, they are also the device par excellence by which that culture itself is transferred from one generation to the next, according for the remarkable stability of certain culture patterns even in the face of sweeping environmental changes (e.g., Inkeles, 1977).

### **PERPLEXITIES OF CULTURALLY MIXED TEACHER/STUDENT PAIRS**

As long as human societies have been in contact with each other, voluntarily or involuntarily, there have been cross-cultural learning situations: teacher/student pairs in which the partners were born, raised and mentally programmed in different cultures prior to their interaction in *school*. The first type of situation that comes to mind is that of migrant or refugee students—a situation responsible for a major part of the interest in intercultural communication in the United States. But all programmes for economic development of low-income nations use cross-cultural learning situations (at home and abroad), in which members of the richer nations play the teacher role and those of the poorer nations the student role. There are and have been many other exchanges between

**TABLE 1**

#### **Human Institutions and Corresponding Role Pairs**

Institution	Role Pair
Family	Parent–Child Man–Woman
School	Teacher–Student
Job	Boss–Subordinate
Community	Authority–Member

societies in which teachers go abroad to teach or students go abroad to learn, motivated not only by a desire for economic development, but by a desire for wisdom, beauty, strength or status, or by sheer necessity, on the side of the students, and motivated by religious zeal, charity, intolerance or imperialism on the side of the teachers or their sponsors. Nor have the militarily or economically strong always been the teachers and the weak the learners: history presents famous examples in which the conquerors went to school to learn from the societies they had conquered: the Romans from the Greeks, the Turks from the Persians and later from the Arabs, the Norsemen from the French. Today, rich Europeans and Americans go to poor India and Thailand to learn meditation.

As teacher/student interaction is such an archetypal human phenomenon, and so deeply rooted in the culture of a society, *cross-cultural* learning situations are fundamentally problematic for both parties. The problems can lie in the following areas:

1. differences in the social positions of teachers and students in the two societies;
2. differences in the relevance of the curriculum (training content) for the two societies;
3. differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations from which teacher and student are drawn;
4. differences in expected patterns of teacher/student and student/student interaction.

Some examples of each of the four problem areas will follow.

### *Differences in Social Positions of Teachers and Students in Society*

Societies differ in the way the school, as an institution, is related to the other institutions. From what types of families are students, and teachers, recruited? Are educational systems elitist or anti-elitist? A visiting U.S. professor in a Latin American country may only contribute to the continuation of elite privileges rather than, as he believes, to the economic development of the country (Cullinan, 1970). What is the role of employers in education? Traineeships in industry are an effective and respected alternative to a university education in Germany and Switzerland, allowing people to reach the highest positions, but this is not the case in most other countries. What is the role of the state or the church? Is there a private next to a public educational sector and what are their respective statuses? Does the government prescribe the curriculum in schools (France, USSR), or are teachers free to define their own? (Archer, 1979). Who pays for what education? The students, their parents, the

state? How well are teachers paid and how is their social status? In the Chinese Confucian tradition, “teacher” is the most respected profession; but a British lord is supposed to have said about his son’s private tutor “I cannot understand why Mr Jones cannot get along with Charlie – all the other servants can.” Such differences sometimes make it exceedingly difficult for a teacher – or a student – from one nation’s system to function well in another’s.

### *Differences in the Relevance of the Curriculum*

A Zaïrese friend, studying in Brussels, recalled how at primary school in Lubumbashi her teacher, a Belgian nun, made her recite in her history lesson “Nos ancêtres, les Gaulois” (our ancestors, the Gauls). However, much of what for example *management* students from poor countries learn at universities abroad is hardly more relevant in their home country situation. What is the usefulness for a future manager in an Indian company of mathematical modelling of the U.S. stock market? Or of a British Organizational Behaviour course literally replicated by a visiting Lecturer to the People’s Republic of China? The know-how supposed to have led to wealth in an industrial country is not necessarily the same that will bring wealth to a presently poor one. This point has long been made by people involved in development processes (e.g., ILO, 1966; Hofstede, 1983a), but there are strong forces that perpetuate the transfer of irrelevant knowledge.

There is often an unfortunate connivance between the ‘foreign’ management teacher . . . and the local professor, student or employee. The western ‘expert’ . . . is convinced he knows how to apply (his) rationality to local problem solving. . . . His partner . . . in the learning situation is convinced that management coming from the developed countries of the West brings ‘modernity’ and must be somewhat ‘scientific’ (de Bettignies, 1980: 302–303).

But even between developed countries, irrelevant curricula are exported. Berry (1971) warned already that Europeans were adopting the American Business School at a time when it went downhill in the United States itself, a theme recently echoed in a U.S. bestseller by Peters and Waterman (1982).

### *Differences in Cognitive Abilities*

“Our African engineers do not “think” like engineers, they tend to tackle symptoms, rather than view the equipment as a system” (British training manager, unconscious of his own ethnocentrism). Part of the “mental programming” that represents a culture is a way to acquire, order, and use concepts. Fundamental studies by Michael Cole and associates in Liberia (Cole et al., 1971; Cole and Bruner, 1971; Scribner and

Cole, 1981) have shown that our cognitive development is determined by the demands of the environment in which we grew up: a person will be good at doing the things that are important to him/her and that (s)he has occasion to do often. Cognitive abilities are rooted in the total pattern of a society. Differences in memory development can also be explained in this way (Wagner, 1981). In China, the nature of the script develops children's ability at pattern recognition; it also imposes a need for rote learning (Redding, 1980: 212).

Experiments have shown significant differences in the degree to which people from different societies process information and complement it with guesswork (Schkade et al., 1978). Academic learning in different industrial countries appeals to different intellectual abilities. "German students are brought up in the belief that anything that is easy enough for them to understand is dubious and probably unscientific" (Stroebe, 1976). Teaching to a student or student body with a cognitive ability profile different from what the teacher is accustomed to is evidently problematic; it demands a different didactic approach, for which the teacher may lack the proper cognitive abilities. At the same time, the surrounding environment usually reinforces people in their traditional cognitive ways and makes learning more difficult. There is no other solution to bridging this gap than increasing awareness, sustained effort on both sides, focussing on new abilities demanded by societal changes of the moment and patience.

### *Differences in Processes of Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction*

Differences in mutual role expectations between teacher and student, affecting the training *process* rather than its *content*, are probably the least obvious of the four problem areas listed above and it is to these that the remainder of this paper will be devoted. They are determined by the way the archetypal roles of teacher and student tend to be played in the actors' (sub)cultures, and they are guided by values rooted in these cultures. Values are "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others" (Hofstede, 1980: 19); they lead to feelings of good and evil, right and wrong, rational and irrational, proper and improper; feelings of which we seldom recognize the cultural relativity. Which means that cross-cultural learning situations are rife with premature judgements. Scanning the literature for information and advice for culturally mixed teacher/student pairs, I found amazingly little, in view of the frequency of cross-cultural learning situations and of the perplexities they generate. These perplexities do not only exist between teachers from rich and students from poor countries, but they are equally possible between pairs from nations at similar development levels.

Below, some guidance on mutual teacher/student and student/student

role expectations is presented, based on three sources of information: the author's earlier research on differences in work-related values across over 50 countries (Hofstede, 1980, 1983b), leading to a four-dimensional (4-D) model of cultural differences; personal experiences by the author and others in teaching and in trying to learn in different cross-cultural situations; and the author's experiences as a parent of school-age children attending local schools abroad. The relevance of the author's research, conducted in work settings, is based on the assumption that role patterns and value systems in a society are carried forward from the school to the job and back. Much of the personal experience was collected at IMEDE and INSEAD, both international management training institutes in Switzerland and France respectively, and at the ITP (International Teachers Programme), a summer course for management teachers conducted each year by an international consortium of business schools. Participants in the ITP, coming from many different countries, are a rich source of information on teachers' values and some of them have themselves taught in cross-cultural situations.

### THE 4-D MODEL OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The empirical base of the four-dimensional model of cultural differences has been described in earlier publications (Hofstede, 1980; 1983b). Using paper-and-pencil answers on 32 values questions by matched samples of employees of subsidiaries of the same multinational business corporation in 40 different countries, I studied the relationship between nationality and mean values scores. The total number of questionnaires available for analysis was over 116,000, from employees at all levels, managers and non-managers alike; most groups were surveyed twice over a four-year interval, so that the stability of differences found and trends over time could also be tested. Focussing on the relationship between nationality and mean values scores meant that the *country* ( $n = 40$ ), not the individual respondent ( $n = 116,000$ ) became the unit of analysis. Factor analysis of the 32 mean values scores for each of the 40 countries (an *ecological* factor analysis), showed that three factors together explained 49% of the variance in means (Hofstede, 1980: 83). Afterwards, for reasons to be explained below, one of these factors was split into two parts, so that four dimensions were created. Each country could be given an index score on each of these four dimensions. There is nothing magic about the number of four dimensions; the choice of the number of factors one wants to be drawn from a factor analysis is always rather arbitrary, and it also depends on the nature of the values questions that were used. The latter were a condensation of a larger list, composed from two sources: open-ended interviews with samples of employees in six countries, and interviews with experienced headquarters travellers about

inter-country value differences they had observed. All were more or less work-related, so it could be said that within the total field of values people could be supposed to hold, they have an action bias; purely intellectual or esthetical values were unlikely to be included. On the other hand, work is a very fundamental human activity, so that most human values will be somehow related to it. A main criterion for the choice of the four dimensions was that they should make theoretical sense, being related to fundamental problems of human societies, but problems to which different societies can be shown to have chosen different answers. The four dimensions defined below meet this theoretical criterion; all four were, in fact, fairly closely predicted in a review of the anthropological literature by Inkeles and Levinson (1969), originally from 1954, long before the data for the present study were collected. The second phase of my own research was devoted to the validation of the four dimensions on other data collected from other populations so as to show their meaningfulness outside the subsidiaries of this multinational corporation. I found about 40 other studies comparing conceptually related data from a variety of sources for between 5 and 40 of the countries involved, which produced quantitative outcomes that correlated significantly with one or more of the four dimension scores (op. cit.: 325ff). In a third phase, the data base was extended with subsidiaries in another ten countries and three multi-country regions; their scores fitted well into the existing dimensions; this brought the total number countries covered up to 50, plus the three regions (Hofstede, 1983b).

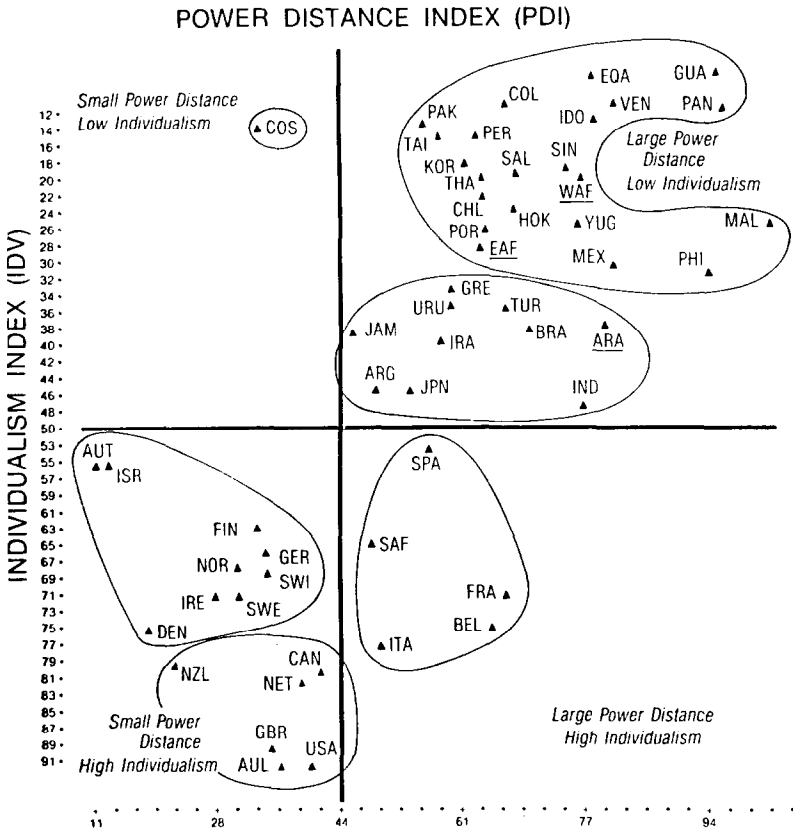
The labels chosen for the four dimensions, and their interpretation, are as follows:

1. *Individualism* as a characteristic of a culture opposes *Collectivism* (the word is used here in an anthropological, not a political sense). Individualist cultures assume that any person looks primarily after his/her own interest and the interest of his/her immediate family (husband, wife and children). Collectivist cultures assume that any person through birth and possible later events belongs to one or more tight "in-groups," from which he/she cannot detach him/herself. The "in-group" (whether extended family, clan, or organization) protects the interest of its members, but in turn expects their permanent loyalty. A collectivist society is tightly integrated; an individualist society is loosely integrated.
2. *Power Distance* as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal. Inequality exists within any culture, but the degree of it that is tolerated varies between one culture and another ("All societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others" – Hofstede, 1980: 136).

3. *Uncertainty Avoidance* as a characteristic of a culture defines the extent to which people within a culture are made nervous by situations which they perceive as unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable, situations which they therefore try to avoid by maintaining strict codes of behaviour and a belief in absolute truths. Cultures with a strong uncertainty avoidance are active, aggressive, emotional, compulsive, security-seeking, and intolerant; cultures with a weak uncertainty avoidance are contemplative, less aggressive, unemotional, relaxed, accepting personal risks, and relatively tolerant.
4. *Masculinity* as a characteristic of a culture opposes *Femininity*. The two differ in the social roles associated with the biological fact of the existence of two sexes, and in particular in the social roles attributed to *men*. My data show that the values associated with this dimension vary considerably less across countries for women than for men. I attribute this to the fact that the social roles of women vary less, as women in all societies are the ones who give birth to children and take care of them when they are small. The men's social role allows for more variation across countries than the women's role and this is what the data on their values confirm. The cultures which I labelled as *masculine* strive for maximal distinction between what men are expected to do and what women are expected to do. They expect men to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast. They expect women to serve and to care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak. *Feminine* cultures, on the other hand, define relatively overlapping social roles for the sexes, in which, in particular, men need not be ambitious or competitive but may go for a different quality of life than material success; men may respect whatever is small, weak, and slow. In both masculine and feminine cultures, the dominant values within political and work organizations are those of men. So, in masculine cultures these political/organizational values stress material success and assertiveness; in feminine cultures they stress other types of quality of life, interpersonal relationships, and concern for the weak.

Country scores on the four dimensions have been plotted in Figures 1 and 2, while Table 2 lists the countries and regions and the abbreviations used. Figure 1 plots Power Distance against Individualism/Collectivism. It is immediately clear that there is a statistical association of Power Distance with the Collectivist end of the I/C dimension ( $r = -.67$  across the original 40 countries). This association, however, is due to the fact that both Power Distance and Individualism correlate with national wealth (the country's per capita GNP correlates  $-.65$  with the Power





**FIGURE 1.** A power distance × individualism—collectivism plot for 50 countries & 3 regions.

Distance Index and .82 with the Individualism Index). If we control for national wealth, the correlation between Power Distance and Collectivism disappears. In the ecological factor analysis of 32 values questions mean scores for 40 countries, Power Distance plus Collectivism showed up on one factor. Their joint relationship with wealth and the fact that their intercorrelation disappears when we control for wealth, is one of the two reasons why I split this factor into two dimensions. The other reason is that Power Distance (inequality) and Collectivism (social integration) are conceptually two different issues: some countries, like France and Belgium, show that large Power Distance and Individualism can be combined.

Figure 2 plots Masculinity/Femininity against Uncertainty Avoidance. In this case there is no statistical association between the two dimensions (correlation across the original 40 countries  $r = .12$ ). These two dimen-

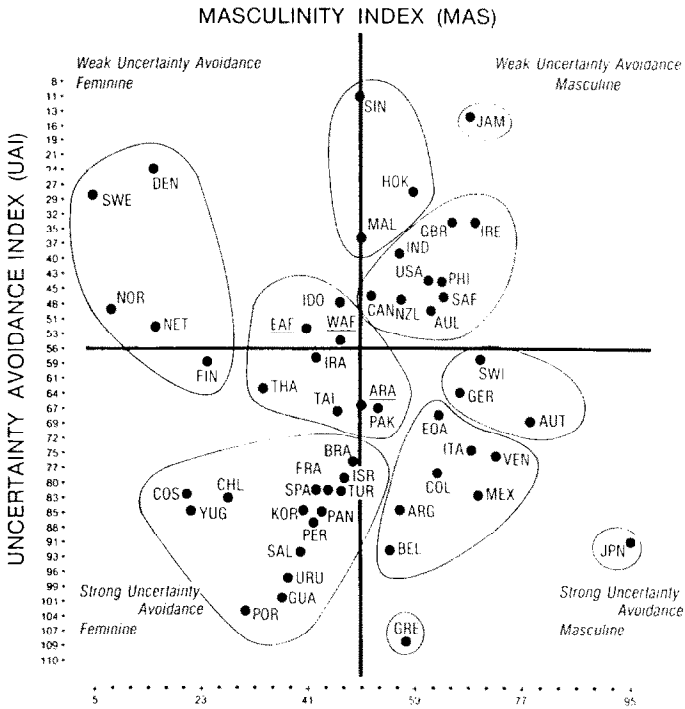


FIGURE 2. A masculinity-femininity x uncertainty avoidance plot for 50 countries & 3 regions.

sions are directly based upon two separate factors in the ecological factor analysis of 32 values questions mean scores for 40 countries. Because the joint association of Power Distance and Collectivism with national wealth, we tend to find in Figure 1 the Third World countries separated from the wealthy countries: the former in the upper right hand corner, the latter in the lower part of the diagram. However, Masculinity and Uncertainty Avoidance are both unrelated to national wealth, so that in Figure 2 we find both wealthy countries and Third World countries in all four quadrants of the diagram.

**THE 4-D MODEL APPLIED TO TEACHER/STUDENT AND STUDENT/STUDENT INTERACTION**

The cultural differences related to Individualism/Collectivism and to Power Distance are the ones that tend to distinguish wealthy, industrialized societies from poor, traditional ones (Figure 1, lower left to upper right). They will therefore be likely to account for most of the pitfalls in

teacher/student interaction in training programmes aimed at economic development. However, fairly large Power Distances are also found in some industrialized countries (like Belgium and France), and some poor countries like Jamaica and India score relatively individualist.

In Tables 3 and 4 I have listed suggested interaction differences related to Individualism versus Collectivism and to Large versus Small Power Distances, respectively. These tables are inspired by differences found in the work situation (Hofstede, 1980: 235 and 122). The tables describe extremes; the situation in many countries and schools probably lies somewhere in between these extremes, and some of the differences listed may apply more in some places than in others. However, the tables are meant to alert the teachers and the students to the role differences they *may* encounter.

Contrary to the differences listed in Tables 3 and 4, those related to Uncertainty Avoidance and to Masculinity/Femininity are unrelated to the economic development levels of the countries (see Figure 2). They can account for some of the perplexities of a German teacher in the Netherlands, or of a Thai student in India. I have listed them in Tables 5 and 6 (inspired by Hofstede 1980: 184 and 294). The same provisos apply as for Tables 3 and 4: the tables show extremes and reality is often in between these extremes.

TABLE 2

## Country Abbreviations

ARA Arab countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Lybia, Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, U.A.E.)	GER Germany	PER Peru
ARG Argentina	GRE Greece	PHI Philippines
AUL Australia	GUA Guatemala	POR Portugal
AUT Austria	HOK Hong Kong	SAF South Africa
BEL Belgium	IDO Indonesia	SAL Salvador
BRA Brazil	IND India	SIN Singapore
CAN Canada	IRA Iran	SPA Spain
CHL Chile	IRE Ireland	SWE Sweden
COL Colombia	ISR Israel	SWI Switzerland
COS Costa Rica	ITA Italy	TAI Taiwan
DEN Denmark	JAM Jamaica	THA Thailand
EAF East Africa (Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia)	JPN Japan	TUR Turkey
EQA Equador	KOR South Korea	URU Uruguay
FIN Finland	MAL Malaysia	USA United States
FRA France	MEX Mexico	VEN Venezuela
GBR Great Britain	NET Netherlands	WAF West Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone)
	NOR Norway	
	NZL New Zealand	
	PAK Pakistan	YUG Yugoslavia
	PAN Panama	

TABLE 3

**Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction  
Related to the Individualism versus Collectivism Dimension**

COLLECTIVIST SOCIETIES	INDIVIDUALIST SOCIETIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive association in society with whatever is rooted in tradition<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• the young should learn; adults cannot accept student role<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• students expect to learn how to do</li> <li>• individual students will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher</li> <li>• individuals will only speak up in small groups<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• large classes split socially into smaller, cohesive subgroups based on particularist criteria (e.g. ethnic affiliation)</li> <li>• formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times (T-groups are taboo)<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• neither the teacher nor any student should ever be made to lose face</li> <li>• education is a way of gaining prestige in one's social environment and of joining a higher status group ("a ticket to a ride")</li> <li>• diploma certificates are important and displayed on walls</li> <li>• acquiring certificates, even through illegal means (cheating, corruption) is more important than acquiring competence</li> <li>• teachers are expected to give preferential treatment to some students (e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or on recommendation by an influential person)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive association in society with whatever is "new"</li> <li>• one is never too old to learn; "permanent education"</li> <li>• students expect to learn how to learn</li> <li>• individual students will speak up in class in response to a general invitation by the teacher</li> <li>• individuals will speak up in large groups</li> <li>• subgroupings in class vary from one situation to the next based on universalist criteria (e.g. the task "at hand")</li> <li>• confrontation in learning situations can be salutary; conflicts can be brought into the open</li> <li>• face-consciousness is weak</li> <li>• education is a way of improving one's economic worth and self-respect based on ability and competence</li> <li>• diploma certificates have little symbolic value</li> <li>• acquiring competence is more important than acquiring certificates</li> <li>• teachers are expected to be strictly impartial</li> </ul>

1. e.g. Treviño, 1982

2. Lieh-Mak et al., 1984

3. Redding, 1980: 211

4. e.g. Cox and Cooper, 1977

TABLE 4

**Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction  
Related to the Power Distance Dimension**

SMALL POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES	LARGE POWER DISTANCE SOCIETIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stress on impersonal "truth" which can in principle be obtained from any competent person</li> <li>• a teacher should respect the independence of his/her students</li> <li>• student-centered education (premium on initiative)</li> <li>• teacher expects students to initiate communication</li> <li>• teacher expects students to find their own paths</li> <li>• students may speak up spontaneously in class</li> <li>• students allowed to contradict or criticize teacher</li> <li>• effectiveness of learning related to amount of two-way communication in class<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• outside class, teachers are treated as equals</li> <li>• in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the student</li> <li>• younger teachers are more liked than older teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stress on personal "wisdom" which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)</li> <li>• a teacher merits the respect of his/her students<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• teacher-centered education (premium on order)</li> <li>• students expect teacher to initiate communication</li> <li>• students expect teacher to outline paths to follow</li> <li>• students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher</li> <li>• teacher is never contradicted nor publicly criticized<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• effectiveness of learning related to excellence of the teacher</li> <li>• respect for teachers is also shown outside class</li> <li>• in teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the teacher</li> <li>• older teachers are more respected than younger teachers</li> </ul>

1. according to Confucius, "teacher" is the most respected profession in society

2. E.g. Faucheux et al, 1982

3. Revans, 1965; Jamieson and Thomas, 1974; Stubbs and Delamont, 1976

Of course, not all differences in teacher/student interaction can be associated with one of the four dimensions. Certain interaction patterns are particular to a given country or even to a given school; often differences may relate to other dimensions, not identified in my study. An example of differences at a high level of specificity are the ages at which a young person is supposed to show particular behaviours. In Japan, pre-school age children are allowed a greater freedom of emotional expression and drive gratification; from kindergarten to the university entrance examination, they are expected to be disciplined and competitive and at university again they are allowed to take it easy. The U.S.A has almost the reverse pattern: the pre-school child is already instilled with a sense of responsibility; kindergarten, primary school and high school are relative-

TABLE 5

**Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction  
Related to the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension**

WEAK UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE SOCIETIES	STRONG UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE SOCIETIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students feel comfortable in unstructured learning situations: vague objectives, broad assignments, no timetables</li> <li>• teachers are allowed to say "I don't know"<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• a good teacher uses plain language</li> <li>• students are rewarded for innovative approaches to problem solving</li> <li>• teachers are expected to suppress emotions (and so are students)</li> <li>• teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise</li> <li>• teachers seek parents' ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students feel comfortable in structured learning situations: precise objectives, detailed assignments, strict timetables</li> <li>• teachers are expected to have all the answers</li> <li>• a good teacher uses academic language<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• students are rewarded for accuracy in problem solving<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• teachers are allowed to behave emotionally (and so are students)</li> <li>• teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty</li> <li>• teachers consider themselves experts who cannot learn anything from lay parents—and parents agree</li> </ul>

1. Stroebe, 1976

2. Triandis, 1984

ly child-centered and easy-going, whereas the university study period is one of extreme competitiveness. Another source of problems in teacher/student interaction may be ethnic or colour differences per se, regardless whether these are accompanied by differences in mental programming; ethnic prejudice as such may affect behaviours.

### THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE

This paper on cross-cultural teacher/student interaction would not be complete without paying attention to the language factor. In many cross-cultural learning situations, teacher and student speak different native languages. I suggest that the chances for successful cultural adaptation are better if the *teacher* is to teach in the students' language rather than if the *student* is to learn in the teacher's language, because the teacher has more power over the learning situation than any single student. Language is the vehicle of culture and it is an obstinate vehicle. Language categorizes reality according to its corresponding culture. Together with a foreign language, the teacher acquires a basis of sensitivity for the students' culture. From personal experience I recall several striking examples of the influence of the course language on the learning process. In one multina-

tional company training programme, trainers estimated participants' future career potential. A longitudinal follow-up study of actual careers showed that they had consistently overestimated participants whose native language was English (the course language) and underestimated those whose languages were French or Italian, with the native German speakers in between (Hofstede, 1975: 46). In an international business school I taught the same executive course in French to one internationally mixed half of the class, in English to the other half, equally internationally mixed; often one group would be taught in the morning in one language, the other group in the afternoon in the other. It was remarkable that the discussion of the same case studies in *French* would regularly lead to highly stimulating intellectual discussions, but few practical conclusions; in *English*, it would not be long before somebody asked "so what?" and the class tried to become pragmatic. Nobody in the French-speaking group even asked "*et alors?*" (so what?); and the English language would hardly find the words to express the Francophone intellectual speculations. In the same course, we would use reading material originally written either in English or in French and translated into the other language. The comments of the class on the translated versions was almost identical in both cases: translated material was considered "unrec-

TABLE 6

**Differences in Teacher/Student and Student/Student Interaction  
Related to the Masculinity versus Femininity Dimension**

FEMININE SOCIETIES	MASCULINE SOCIETIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers avoid openly praising students</li> <li>• teachers use average student as the norm</li> <li>• system rewards students' social adaptation</li> <li>• a student's failure in school is a relatively minor accident</li> <li>• students admire friendliness in teachers</li> <li>• students practice mutual solidarity</li> <li>• students try to behave modestly</li> <li>• corporal punishment severely rejected</li> <li>• students choose academic subjects in view of intrinsic interest</li> <li>• male students may choose traditionally feminine academic subjects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers openly praise good students</li> <li>• teachers use best students as the norm</li> <li>• system rewards students' academic performance</li> <li>• a student's failure in school is a severe blow to his/her self-image and may in extreme cases lead to suicide</li> <li>• students admire brilliance in teachers</li> <li>• students compete with each other in class</li> <li>• students try to make themselves visible</li> <li>• corporal punishment occasionally considered salutary</li> <li>• students choose academic subjects in view of career opportunities</li> <li>• male students avoid traditionally feminine academic subjects</li> </ul>

essarily verbose, with a rather meagre message which could have been expressed on one or two pages.” The conclusion is that what represents a “message” in one language does not necessarily survive as a message in the other language; and this process of loss of meaning works both ways. “Information” is more than words—it is words which fit in a cultural framework.

### **BRIDGING THE CROSS-CULTURAL TEACHING GAP**

If one chooses to try to cope with, rather than ignore (as often happens), the perplexities of cross-cultural learning situations, there are obviously two possible strategies:

1. Teach the teacher how to teach;
2. Teach the learner how to learn.

In the same way as in the previous section (on language) I put the burden of translation preferably on the teacher, I would prefer (1) over (2) where possible. If there is one foreign student in a class of 30 with a local teacher, (2) is the obvious approach. If the number of foreign students increases (1) will very soon become necessary. For an expatriate teacher, (1) is imperative. Polycultural learning situations (I remember an ITP—International Teachers’ Programme—class in 1979 with 25 nationalities among 60 participants) are extremely difficult to handle, and demand a mixture of (1) with a heavy dose of (2); private or small-group tutoring of students. The focus of the teacher’s training should be on *learning about his/her own culture*: getting intellectually and emotionally accustomed to the fact that in other societies, people learn in different ways. This means taking one step back from one’s values and cherished beliefs, which is far from easy. In a study of the values of faculty and executive students at an international business school, I related values to gradings and showed that faculty unconsciously favoured the course work of students whose values were closest to theirs (Hofstede, 1978). It is possible that in order to be effective as trainers abroad, teachers have to adopt methods which at home they have learned to consider as outmoded or unpopular: usually much more structured than they were accustomed to. For example, (s)he has to *tell* a person to speak up in class. A creative solution to this problem was presented by a Dutch teacher with a mixed Asian adult student group. After each session, the students were expected to give an evaluation of what they had learned. The teacher at this time passed a pencil around, and whoever had the pencil was expected to speak. This was a nice symbolic way of institutionalizing the “speaking up” process.

This paper amounts to a plea for an anthropological approach to teaching, based on insight into cultural variety across the world. Good



intentions are not enough. In an insightful piece, Moran and Renwick look critically at the management training manual prepared by one U.S. multinational for use around the world. The manual provides do's and don'ts under the headings of "Performance Goals," "Managing Climate," "Active Listening" and "Questioning." Moran and Renwick analyse this material from a Middle East (Arab countries) cultural point of view and it falls almost completely apart (in Moran and Harris, 1981: 79-92). Another example I owe to Kraemer (1978). When in 1976 children of Vietnamese refugees went to regular schools in the U.S.A., the U.S. Office of Education issued an instruction for teachers "On Teaching the Vietnamese." Part of it runs:

Student participation was discouraged in Vietnamese schools by liberal doses of corporal punishment, and students were conditioned to sit rigidly and to speak only when spoken to. This background . . . makes speaking freely in class hard for a Vietnamese. Therefore, don't mistake shyness for apathy.

To most West-European and North-American readers, this instruction looks okay at first. However, it becomes more problematic when we look for all the clues about U.S. culture which the quote supplies, which are as many sources of bias. In fact, the U.S. Office of Education ascribes to the Vietnamese all the motivations of young Americans – like a supposed desire to participate – and explains their submission by corporal punishment, rather than, for example, respect. At a doctoral seminar I taught in Sweden, one of the participants (Ake Phillips) made all the essential points by reversing the statement – in the way the Vietnamese Ministry of Education might have instructed the Vietnamese teachers of American refugees in Vietnam (if there were any):

Students' proper respect for teachers was discouraged by a loose order and students were conditioned to behave disorderly and chat all the time. This background makes proper and respectful behaviour in class hard for an American student. Therefore, don't mistake rudeness for lack of reverence.

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### ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

Le maître et l'élève forment un couple qui existe en tant qu'archétype dans presque toute société. Du moment que ceux-ci viennent de cultures différentes comme il arrive à l'intérieur de programmes de développement économique les mésententes risquent de se multiplier. Elle seront causées par la position sociale différente du maître et de l'élève dans les deux sociétés, par l'intérêt différent du cours pour les deux sociétés, par des combinaisons disparates des facultés cognitives en vigueur chez les deux populations concernées, ou bien par des divergences dans les idées préexistantes sur l'interaction entre maître et élève et pour les élèves entre eux. L'article traite en particulier de ces différences interactionnelles. Il les rattache au modèle 4-D développé par l'auteur et qui décrit les différences culturelles parmi les sociétés, sur la base de recherches des valeurs liées au travail dans plus de 50 pays. Les divergences des idées préexistantes sur l'interaction entre maître et élève comme entre élèves sont décrites selon les quatre dimensions: de l'Individualisme vis à vis du Collectivisme, de la Distance Hiérarchique plus ou moins grande, du Contrôle de l'Incertitude plus ou moins forte et de la Masculinité vis à vis la Féminité. On discute aussi certains effets du fait que maîtres et élèves n'ont pas la même langue maternelle. Dans la formation interculturelle ce sont les enseignants qui devraient assumer en premier lieu la charge que constitue l'adaptation à cette situation. (Author-supplied abstract).

Profesor y alumno conforman un "par" arquetípico en casi toda sociedad. Cuando ambos provienen de diferentes culturas, como es el caso en el contexto de programas de desarrollo económico, pueden ocurrir muchas confusiones. Estas pueden deberse a la

diferente posición social que ocupan tanto profesores como alumnos en las dos sociedades, a las diferencias de relevancia en el curriculum para tales sociedades, a diferencias en perfiles de habilidades cognitivas entre las poblaciones de las dos sociedades o a diferentes expectativas de las interacciones profesor/alumno y alumno/alumno. Este estudio esta centrado en las diferencias de tales interacciones. Las mismas están relacionadas con el modelo de 4 Dimensiones de diferencias culturales entre sociedades desarrollado por el autor, basado en investigaciones sobre valores relacionados al trabajo en el que participaron mas de 50 países. Las diferencias de expectativas de las interacciones profesor/alumno y alumno/alumno se han listado en relación a las cuatro dimensiones de: Individualismo versus Colectivismo, mayor versus menor Distancia del Poder, Evitación de Incertidumbre intensa versus escasa Evitación de Incertidumbre y Masculinidad versus Femeneidad. Se discuten ademas algunos efectos de las diferencias de lenguaje entre profesor y alumno. El énfasis para la adaptación de las situaciones de aprendizaje trans-culturales debería ser puesto principalmente en los profesores. (Author-supplied abstract)