

VicTESOL Webinar- Intercultural communication in the adult EAL classroom: Concepts and classroom practice

Skye Playsted
VicTESOL Webinar 2020



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Intercultural communication in the adult EAL classroom

*Concepts and
classroom practice*

► Creative pedagogies in
teaching adult EAL learners

*VicTESOL Professional Development
Webinar May 2020*

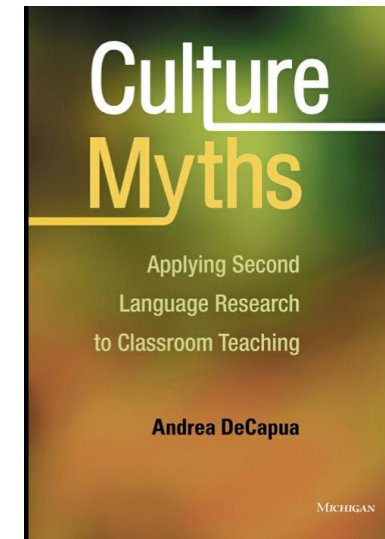
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Agenda

- Concepts and definitions
- Hidden aspects of culture
- Classroom applications
- Reflections, discussion, sharing scenarios

MAKING THE IMPLICIT EXPLICIT



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Myth 1: “We are all human beings so how different can we really be?”

Cultural lenses

Become aware of our “**cultural lenses**” (DeCapua, 2018, p. 12)



Big C and Little c - culture cognitive elements that are not as obvious (beliefs, norms, behaviours, worldviews) (Bennett, 1998)

Enculturation - “The ways we behave, speak and understand the world are shaped...by our culturally influenced prior learning experiences and practices” (DeCapua, 2018, p. 11)

The iceberg: Hidden influences

Cultural iceberg

We view, understand and act on **hidden** cultural elements in distinct ways

Figure 1.1: Iceberg Model of Culture



Time - polychronic vs monochronic

Language - honorifics in Korean, Japanese vs English social context understandings of language

Reflection

What 'little c' cultural differences have you come across in the classroom...in other contexts?

- Keep a journal and reflect
- Evaluate what cultural knowledge your students need to be successful in their setting
- Internet resources (ads etc – analysing cultural 'norms')
- Incorporate culture learning activities into all classes
- Start class on time, make provision for latecomers
- Provide opportunities for students to analyse culture

(DeCapua, 2018)

Myth 2: “The goal of education is to develop each individual’s potential”

Collectivism & Individualism



Belinda Liddell on how our brains are culturally wired (**W.E.I.R.D!**)

The **group** or "collective" is the centre point of one's identity **OR**

People primarily **identify** themselves in terms of who they are as individuals (DeCapua, 2018)

Reflection

Different values & views



“Choose the path your **ancestors** have trod, To neglect one’s ancestors will bring misfortune in life.” (Cambodian Proverb)

“The nail that **sticks up** will be hammered down.” (Japanese saying)

Individual performance, **individual** pathways, working independently, being an **autonomous** learner

- Other cultures may view participation of family members in school activities differently to you
- Avoid singling out individual students where possible

Myth 3: “Focusing on conversational skills in the classroom is overrated”

Conversational skills & culture

Each language not only has its own vocabulary and grammar, but also has its own **sociocultural norms** governing communicative interactions
(DeCapua, 2018, p. 54)



Small talk – how much? Which topics are appropriate when with different types of people? How turn-taking happens?

High/low context communication (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016)

Reflection

- Structured opportunities to practise conversational skills in class
- Encourage students to observe
- Listen to and analyse conversations
- Provide students with mini-scenarios (critical incidents). Explore reasons why these misunderstandings may have occurred and suggest alternative ways of conducting the conversation

(DeCapua, 2018)

Myth 4: “Not looking at the teacher shows disrespect”

Non-verbal communication codes

65% of our communication is non-verbal, a “shared code”, understood in its context

Gestures, eye contact, gaze, space, contact, emotions, silence...**learners are ‘listening’** to our non-verbal communication

High contact vs. **low contact** cultures



Myth 5: “How something is said is not as important as what is said”

Pragmatic competence

Making wrong **vocabulary choices**, sometimes because of one-to-one correspondence between English and L1 (e.g., must and should in German)

Pragmatic competence or pragmatic failure – more than vocabulary



Students might be **unintentionally demanding rather than requesting**, and this can anger a teacher who is unaware of the language-related difference

Myth 6: “Everyone knows what a good instructional environment is”

A 'good' classroom

In diverse classrooms, lessons that don't work can be the result of a **mismatch of teacher and learner assumptions** about what constitutes good learning

Making expectations **explicit** (e.g., hierarchy and authority)

Cooperative learning, small group work: better engagement of students in own learning process, space for questioning, wider participation? Or a waste of time?



Same class, different observers & views

(DeCapua, 2018, pp. 107-109)

Teacher A: classroom arranged in rows, teacher's desk and a lectern in the front. Students sit quietly in seats while the students listen to Teacher A. No interaction among students or between Teacher A and students.

Observer 1: It is good to see students so attentive to the teacher's instruction. We can see that they are truly learning from this teacher.

Observer 2: Why isn't the teacher engaging with the students? Why aren't the students asking any questions? How will the students show they are engaged or developing higher-order thinking?

Teacher B: classroom arranged in pods, four desks to a pod, teacher's desk on one side of the classroom. Noise level is high as students move about while working collaboratively on assignments in different groups and centres. Constant interaction among the students and between Teacher B and the students.

Observer 1: The teacher lacks control. Why isn't the teacher delivering instruction? How can these students learn much of anything? Students need to listen and learn from the expert.

Observer 2: This is a learner-centered classroom in which students are actively engaged in learning. Their teacher is observing, providing feedback, and conducting ongoing informal assessment. This is what education is about.

Reflect & Discuss

What do you think?

And why?

Role of student: active participants, voicing opinions, asking for clarification, making own judgments or asking teacher for help **OR**

Students are not qualified to question experts, and expressing an opinion could be seen as **disrespect**

Anxiety, face, wait time: what does a 'good' student do?

Plagiarism: intellectual property should be shared. Borrowing it shows respect to the author



Learning with our learners

Learning alongside the learner



“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes” (Proust, as cited in Newton, 2007, p. 1)

“Intercultural teaching relies on an intercultural teacher who models and indeed embodies intercultural values such as curiosity and openness and a willingness to learn alongside the learner” (Newton, 2016, p. 175)

Link to Workshop Handout



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Thankyou!

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