Cultural Differences in Teaching and Learning

FUHU conference on Education and Training in the Multicultural Classroom
Copenhagen, 8th May 2008
Geert Hofstede
3 meanings of “culture”

1. Literally: tilling the soil, cultivation
2. Training or refining of the mind: civilization
3. Collective ways of acting, thinking, and feeling: “collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another”
Levels of mental software

- symbols
- heroes
- rituals
- values
- practices
Values

Values are the stable core of culture. They are strong, unconscious emotions with a minus and a plus pole, like:

- evil-good
- dangerous-safe
- dirty-clean
- ugly-beautiful
- abnormal-normal

What is normal is a matter of values
When you're a kid, you don't have much variety of experience.

You live with your parents and that's all you know. You grow up thinking whatever they do is "normal."
Acquiring mental programmes

age
0
pre-puberty
10
post-puberty
20

place

family
school
work

unconscious, unchangeable values

conscious, changeable practices
Which culture is transferred when

age

0

10

20+

culture level

values

gender,
national

practices

social class,
occupation

business,
organization
Dimensions of national cultures

Culture’s Consequences, Hofstede 1980 and 2001

Same 5 problems, different solutions:
1. Inequality:  
   *Power Distance, large or small*
2. Need for security:  
   *Uncertainty Avoidance, strong or weak*
3. Relationship with others:  
   *Individualism or Collectivism*
4. Emotional gender roles:  
   *Masculinity or Femininity*
5. Time horizon:  
   *Long- or Short-term orientation*
National culture dimension: Power Distance

• Extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally

• Transferred to children by parents and other elders
National culture dimension: Uncertainty Avoidance

• Extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous and unknown situations

• Not to be confused with risk avoidance: risk is to uncertainty as fear is to anxiety. Uncertainty and anxiety are diffuse feelings – anything may happen
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SMALL PD, WEAK UA</th>
<th>LARGE PD, WEAK UA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NORDIC COUNTRIES</td>
<td>CHINA</td>
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<td>ANGLO CTRS, USA</td>
<td>INDIA</td>
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<td>NETHERLANDS</td>
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<td>BALTIC STATES</td>
<td>CZECHIA, POLAND</td>
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<td>HUNGARY, ISRAEL</td>
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Power Distance, teaching and learning

**Large Power Distance**
- Students dependent on teachers
- Students treat teachers with respect
- Teacher-centered education
- Teachers initiate all communication in class
- Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom

**Small Power Distance**
- Teachers treat students as equals
- Students treat teachers as equals
- Student-centered education
- Students initiate some communication in class
- Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths
## Uncertainty Avoidance, teaching and learning

### Strong Uncertainty Av.
- Students want to know right answers
- Teachers supposed to have all answers
- Emotions in class can be expressed
- Pressure among students to conform
- Teachers inform parents

### Weak Uncertainty Av.
- Students want good discussions
- Teachers may say “I don’t know”
- Emotions should be controlled anywhere
- Tolerance for differences in class
- Teachers involve parents
National culture dimension: Individualism vs. Collectivism

- **Individualism:** A society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone expected to look after self and immediate family.

- **Collectivism:** A society in which individuals from birth onwards are part of strong in-groups that last a lifetime.
National culture dimension: Masculinity vs. Femininity

- Masculinity: A society in which emotional gender roles are distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success, women on the quality of life; men’s culture prevails

- Femininity: A society in which emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and focused on the quality of life
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Collectivist, Feminine</th>
<th>Collectivist, Masculine</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand, Korea</td>
<td>China, Japan</td>
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<td>Costa Rica, Chile</td>
<td>Mexico, Venezuela</td>
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<td>Russia, Bulgaria</td>
<td>Arab World</td>
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<td>Spain, France</td>
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<td>Individualist, Feminine</td>
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Individualism/Collectivism, teaching and learning

**Individualist**
- Purpose of education is learning how to learn
- Students’ individual initiatives encouraged
- Students are expected to speak up in class when they need or want to
- Students associate according to interests
- Diplomas increase economic worth and/or self-respect

**Collectivist**
- Purpose of education is learning how to do
- Students’ individual initiatives discouraged
- Students only speak up in class when sanctioned by group
- Students associate according to in-groups
- Diplomas provide entry to higher-status group: are sometimes bought
Masculinity/Femininity, teaching and learning

*Masculinity*
- Brilliant teachers admired
- Best student is norm
- Competition in class
- Praise for good student
- Students over-rate own performance
- Competitive sports belong to curriculum
- Failing in school is a disaster

*Femininity*
- Friendly teachers most liked
- Average student is norm
- Over-ambition unpopular
- Praise for weak student
- Students under-rate own performance
- Competitive sports extra-curricular
- Failing in school is a minor incident
National culture dimension: Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation

- Long Term Orientation is the extent to which members of a society adapt themselves to reach a desirable future.
- Short Term Orientation is the extent to which members of a society take their guidance from the past and try to fulfill their present needs and desires.
Long/Short Term Orientation, teaching + learning

**Long term**
- Students attribute success to effort and failure to lack of effort
- Studying hard is norm
- High performance at mathematics
- Talent for applied, concrete sciences
- Children learn to save

**Short term**
- Students attribute both success and failure to luck and occult forces
- Enjoyment is norm
- Low performance at mathematics
- Talent for theoretical, abstract sciences
- Children learn to spend
Calvin and Hobbes

by Bill Watterson

**Calvin:** This bad grade is lowering my self-esteem!

**Hobbes:** Then you should work harder so you don't get bad grades.

**Calvin:** Your denial of my victimhood is lowering my self-esteem!
Academic book 1980 entirely re-written version 2001

- For researchers, not for teaching
- Published in USA by Sage Publications
- 2001 version reviews all uses of the 1980 edition (> 800 new references)
- Extensive validation of dimensions: > 400 significant correlations with external data
Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind

Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival

Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede

Kulturer & Organisationer

Overlevelse i en grænseoverskridende verden

Geert Hofstede • Gert Jan Hofstede


McGraw-Hill USA        Handelshøjskolens Forlag
Book for trainers 2002

- First author Gert Jan Hofstede
- Focuses on the multicultural classroom
- Exercises and simulations
- Published in USA by Intercultural Press
- Info on all books at www.geerthofstede.nl