Intercultural Reality and A Multiethnic Vision

Nancy Pine (U.S.) and Zhang Yafei (China)

The[1] global landscape is gradually but inexorably changing from semi-isolated nations with culturally dominant populations to an intercultural global community with multiethnic populations. This change will impact all members of the world community for decades. The vision of a global community enriched by the voices of its myriad cultural and linguistic groups is a profound and exhilarating one. The reality of ignorance that exists about intercultural dynamics and intercultural communication, however, are emblazoned in daily headlines. Hate crimes, anti-bilingual amendments, isolationist national policies are continuous reminders of how much the dream eludes us. Although individuals and groups have advanced in interethnic understanding and tolerance of differences, misunderstanding constricts the quality of interactions even for those with considerable cross-cultural experience.

Because each culture is uniquely complex, only occasionally can an "outsider" predict how a group member will react in specific situations. One of our own experiences provides a useful example. While visiting the United States Zhang Yafei saw a news program that showed the California lottery winner, a 50 year old of Chinese origin, being presented with a huge sample check of his winnings. The winner's name was written in bold red letters. Zhang Yafei's instant reaction was that this was a completely inappropriate display since names written in red usually indicate the death sentence. Indeed, the winner later expressed dissatisfaction about this to a Chinese newspaper, yet the European American and African American presenters had no idea that their gift might be offensive.

Those who have experience with interethnic communication recognize that despite goodwill and a desire to understand "the other," blunders occur. The question that lies ahead in this increasingly multiethnic world, therefore, is how do we become aware of misunderstandings and how do we learn from them? This is particularly important in the compressed multiethnic communities of the classrooms.

This paper, grounded in the authors' everyday experiences of cross-cultural research, suggests two methods for moving towards a vision of working productively in multiple cultures and the implications these methods have for classrooms.

We are both educators who have collaborated in Chinese/U.S. studies for the last decade, and during that time have uncovered two helpful techniques. We have discovered that our own ethnocentricity can become a lever for recognizing our limitations in given situations and for identifying cultural mismatches. In so doing, we have been able to illuminate unexpected or "unusual" patterns or ways of knowing in the other person's culture. Ethnocentrism has been the scourge of research for decades with researchers foisting their own cultural perspectives on their subjects as the norm for humankind. By using ethnocentrism as a tool, however, we have found that the person in control (researcher, teacher, professor, business manager) can begin to recognize cultural mismatches and work toward comprehension of "the other's" worldview.

In addition, the use of an analytical semiotic model can help identify specific cultural elements of a mismatch. This second technique, devised by C. S. Peirce for logic and word function (Nöth, 1990; Chen & Cui, 1989), has helped us identify specific cultural perspectives at various points within a mismatch. This model enables us to distinguish the elements of each mismatch from each of our cultural perspectives. By employing these strategies we find it possible to first identify and then unravel puzzling cultural interactions. By doing this we move forward in our ability to comprehend the complexity of cultural perspectives and to envision future possibilities.

We want to make it absolutely clear that we are discussing normal, everyday cultural differences and mismatches, not antisocial behaviors such as the intolerance of ethnic or racial groups. We are not talking about traditions that still linger in parts of the world that deprive individuals, for example, of fundamental human rights. Rather we are discussing subtle clusters of behavior that differ from cultural group to cultural group and which often impede learning for students whose teachers and professors come from groups different from themselves. The learning in these cases is not impeded because of malicious intent, but because the teacher does not recognize the students' learning styles and behavioral nuances that could be used to enhance learning.

The Problem

For the dominant group in any country such as the European American in the United States or the Han nationality in China[2], the tendency is to think that their way is the norm, that other styles of learning and behaving are "wrong" or at least "peculiar" or "quaint." When individuals cross into a culture not their own, they stumble on unfamiliar situations unless they are truly bicultural in those two cultures. Often, as in the lottery check example, they are not at all aware that they have blundered. Adults who are used to working in different cultures recognize that experiences are viewed through cultural lenses and they allow for errors. Although they may grumble—Why don't they look me in the eye and smile sometimes? Why do they hug each other in public? Why do they just stand there and stare at me?— their personal interactions with people of other cultures allow for the fact that when they are functioning in an unfamiliar culture they are never going to get it quite right. For adults not used to

crossing cultural boundaries angst increases when unfamiliarity is encountered and defensiveness or withdrawal often follow (Rosaldo, 1989; Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

Careful investigations such as those by Edward T. Hall have made us aware of different worldviews (e.g., 1966, 1983). His studies, especially of time and space, have provided major breakthroughs for understanding particular cultural phenomena. Nevertheless, others' experiences (see for example Au, 1980; Foster, 1994; Heath, 1983), as well as our own, suggest that Hall's extensive work merely uncovers the tip of the iceberg—the bulk of interethnic puzzles remain.

Our methods help illuminate those times when, whether experienced or not, a person is unaware of a cultural mismatch or, at best, suspects something is different but has no idea how to come to grips with the disequilibrium. For example, the U.S. author experienced a disconcerting feeling when she started to cross a busy street in a Chinese city. Standing on the sidewalk edge, she leaned forward ever so slightly in anticipation of crossing the street after a bicycle had passed. Her movement, which she was not conscious of, caused the bicyclist to stop rapidly, which in turn caused a reaction in other advancing bicyclists. For Pine it was embarrassing and puzzling, for the bicyclist annoying. But to neither participant in this mismatch was it obvious that the situation was caused by a trivial physical movement learned through years of acculturation.

How do we recognize that such a mismatch is occurring? Secondly, once we recognize this, how do we understand it so that we can comprehend more fully "the other's" perspective of the event and recognize the dynamics at play? The following methods, that have slowly emerged from our own cross-cultural work, may provide modest gains for others.

Method 1: Ethnocentricity as a Tool for Interethnic Understanding

The problems of being bounded by a particular cultural perspective have haunted research fields as well as classrooms for generations. Geertz (1973) to Giroux (1991) to Foster (1994) all deal with the liabilities caused by the ethnocentrism of those in powerful positions who view their own world perspectives as the ultimate truth, as the universal perspective. In the classroom, a long list of studies in the U.S. and Western Europe have turned up the unconscious valuing of one cultural way of knowing over another (e.g., Au, 1980; Darder, 1991; Heath, 1983). Teachers or professors from the dominant culture often overlook the learning strengths of their non-mainstream students. The intent of this paper is not to blame educators for their ethnocentric perspectives—which everyone has—but rather to understand how this "liability," this particular way of viewing the world, can be utilized to enhance awareness of multiethnic perspectives.

Our cross-cultural research has taught us that the "problem" of ethnocentricity can become a helpful tool for prying open our awareness. It can act as a tap on the shoulder that says, "Be alert. There's more than meets the eye in the dissonance or peculiar interaction that just occurred with that student." It enhances understanding and comprehension of both the other's culture and our own. It creates a productive disequilibrium. Piaget (1937/1976) and Inhelder (Piaget & Inhelder, 1948/1968) defined disequilibrium as a state of imbalance between new and old concepts and their opposing interpretations. As children encounter new ideas they try to assimilate them into existing cognitive structures, causing a resistance to change. As time elapses they eventually accommodate their outmoded knowledge in order to incorporate the new concepts. In our experience, ethnocentric concepts appear to behave like the child's outmoded concepts. Judging the other's "strangeness" through our own cultural lenses is much easier than coming to grips with it in new ways.

During our own research in each other's cultures—in the European-American United States and Han China—situations in "the other" culture have struck us as strange, unusual or frustrating. Things were not "quite right" and we found ourselves in a state of disequilibrium. The incidents occurred in unexpected ways, rather like walking through tall grass and stepping on an unknown object. They were not the obvious difficulties of learning to read a sign in a different script or use cumbersome eating utensils.

Nancy Pine in China reacted in an unexpectedly strong manner, for instance, when she was waiting to lead a seminar and her graduate student host began looking through her notebook of lecture notes. As the student leafed through the pages she wanted to grab them back and say, "Those are mine. They're private." Zhang Yafei, on the other hand, has found gift giving an exceedingly awkward and embarrassing experience with U.S. citizens. Why would they be so impolite and greedy as to open the gifts while he was present and exclaim over how wonderful they are?

We quietly carried these incidents and others around with us and wondered about them. Why would anyone do something like that? Had we done something wrong? Even though we both had vast experience in cross-cultural situations and, we thought, in intercultural communication, we were stymied—bothered—by these interactions.

As we joined our research efforts and as we slowly analyzed such cross-cultural puzzles, we realized that our ethnocentric perspectives were not a hindrance, but instead provided us with a valuable tool. Our noticing of such "strange" events was possible because of our cultural foundations, and this noticing opened up possibilities for insights about unfamiliar cultural ways. In turn, this insight illuminated our own cultural ways. We discovered that by being attuned to what we find unusual or uncomfortable, we can identify important cultural mismatches. Over time our ethnocentric grounding has acted as a metal detector to attract our attention to areas of fascinating difference between our cultures.

In the notebook situation, for example, it was Pine's visceral response to having her notebook taken that opened up insights about where the cultural mismatch lay. By saying this is wrong (for her) it was possible for her to begin identifying what was right (for the Chinese graduate student). It was okay, from the student's perspective, to take the notes—she was curious, wanted to read more and it is acceptable in China to look at something of someone else—even if it means (from a European-American's perspective) taking the item from another's hand or staring. In Zhang's gift giving experiences it is wrong and unpleasant (from his cultural perspective) to have a gift opened in the presence of the giver. Deference should be shown. By identifying what was wrong (for him) in these circumstances he could begin defining what is right (for the European American).

Method 2: A Semiotic Model as a Tool for Interethnic Clarification

The second method for advancing interethnic clarity is derived from Peirce's framework for interpreting the world of signs. Berger (1989), in an introductory semiotics book, describes signs as "things which stand for other things" (p. 3). They not only stand for something else (the word *dog* stands for the actual animal), but the signs mean something. Signs do not need to be words; they can be anything—a stapler, a vcr, or a set of cultural understandings. Although Peirce's work was primarily restricted to the realm of words and logic, others have extended it to semiotic systems such as gesture and facial expression (for example, Eckman & Friesen, 1969; Kendon, 1986). In like manner, we have extended it to cultural phenomena viewed cross culturally.

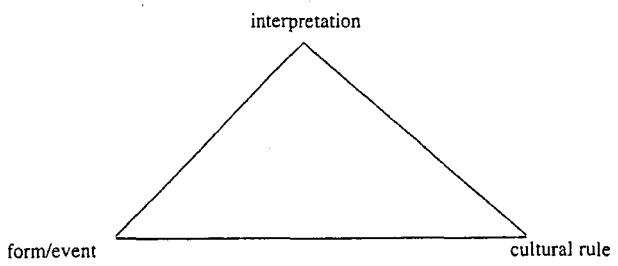

Figure 1.
Adaption of Pierce's model of the sign

Peirce saw a sign as having three components—the form which includes how an event, idea or object is represented for the moment; the interpretant which stands for the person or thing that interprets the sign; and "the object" or concept which encompasses the meaning of the sign, the object that is referred to or the rule (Nöth, 1990). The interpretant mediates between the form and the "object," and one person's interpretation of a word or event may be quite different from another person's. For simplicity's sake we have renamed the latter two components, "interpretation" and "cultural rule" (Figure 1).

Some examples from our data will illustrate how the Peircian triangle provides a second method for unravelling interethnic puzzles. Zhang Yafei, while in the United States, was bothered by a paper skeleton hanging over him in a restaurant. He knew that it was a decoration for a spirited U.S. holiday, Halloween, but it still bothered him. He wrote at the time, "I refrained from looking up at the skeleton as there was some intuitive uneasiness growing inside me while eating with a skeleton staring at me." Despite his understanding, his own cultural perspective made him uneasy.

In another situation, a U.S. researcher on our team was frustrated that during a school visit his hosts kept refilling his tea cup. After the initial cup, which he had accepted for politeness, he declined their offers. In spite of this they kept refilling it. To be polite, he kept drinking the tea; this in turn produced a refilled cup. During lengthy meetings this produced a very uncomfortable situation. His physical and emotional discomfort became strong clues that something was amiss between his cultural assumptions and those of his hosts. He was unsure what they were, but it was clear that his Sorcerer Apprentice's cup was a problem.

By analyzing these two events using the Peircian model we discovered that rather than just view such events with discomfort, we could identify the dynamics at work in each cross-cultural mismatch. We found that a simple chart of the three Peircian components for each culture (see Figure 2) was helpful in clarifying cultural perspectives.

Zhang Yafei had confronted a U.S. cultural tradition through his Chinese cultural lens. The U.S. form—a publicly displayed skeleton—caused uneasiness and he recognized this. Why would anyone hang up a skeleton in public? In order to give more definition to his reaction we looked at Chinese practices related to skeletons. By doing this he was able to find two cultural generalizations that illuminated the mismatches. In China skeletons are never displayed in public; and, in addition, skeletons represent bad luck and evil. Once the Chinese perspective was clarified, we returned to the restaurant display and identified that in the United States a skeleton represented a playful scariness for a fun-filled holiday. Finally, in discussing these cultural contradictions with others, we were able to clarify the simple underlying cultural rules that caused Zhang Yafei's initial uneasiness. In Han China, the skeleton symbolizes evilness; in the European American (and other) U.S. cultures, publicly displayed skeletons are a gleeful means for celebrating Halloween. When these two disparate uses came together in one person's experience, a strong reaction occurred. By understanding it, he was able to say, "Okay, I don't like it, but I not only understand why Americans do this, but I now know, specifically, what is causing my discomfort." The completed chart of the mismatch would look like the following:

China	United States
Event/Form: {Whole skeleton never displayed publicly}	Event/form: Publicly displayed skeleton
Interpretation (of U.S. form): Bad luck; evilness	Interpretation (of U.S. form): Fun; holiday celebration
Cultural Rule: Skeletons represent evilness	Cultural Rule: Skeletons can be used for gleeful celebration

Figure 2. Mismatch chart for restaurant skeleton analysis

In like manner we analyzed the tea drinking situation and identified the three components (event or form, interpretation, and cultural rule) for each culture. In so doing we were able to identify not only our colleague's distress, but also the misunderstandings caused by several other drink-related incidents.

Our colleague's ethnocentric perspective had alerted him to a mismatch, but what next? We began the analysis by first describing his experience (the event) from the Chinese hosts' perspective (see Figure 3). They offered a drink; our colleague said, "No, thank you"; they gave him the drink. We then discussed how this would play out in the U.S. among European Americans. It became immediately clear that if someone turned down a drink, the host would not give it to the guest. The next categories in the chart, interpretation and cultural rule for each culture, were more difficult to identify, and we found our ethnocentric perspectives helped at this point. From our colleague's perspective, he did not want the tea but felt he must drink it to be polite. Through reflection and discussion we were then able to clarify his cultural rule which read something like this—Don't force drinks on guests who do not want them. But what was the Chinese rule and interpretation? By observing other drink related situations and, eventually, by asking Chinese why they gave unrequested drinks, it became apparent that a Chinese host gives tea to a guest even if the guest protests. The key to this mismatch turned out to be that Chinese do not expect their guests to feel obligated to drink the tea. At this point the Chinese cultural rule became more obvious—One gives a drink whether or not a guest requests it; the guest can drink it—or not (Figure 3).

Although this is a complicated explanation for a trivial interaction, often clusters of seemingly simple mismatches cause cross-cultural rifts and misunderstanding that, if allowed to go unchecked, can fester into larger misunderstandings. We found that several other bothersome frustrations related to drink etiquette fell into place and became much less irritating for both cultural groups once we had unravelled this first one. The simplest of cultural habits can be the most hidden.

Implications for Education

Although these sample situations may seem far removed from classrooms, an important link exists. By recognizing an ethnocentric perspective in confounding interactions with their students, educators in multiethnic classrooms from kindergarten through university can begin to identify the assumptions that students are making. For example, if a student is resistant to making an artifact such as a skeleton, rather than attributing the resistance to stubbornness or recalcitrance, it might be helpful to identify the cultural foundations that child values. When students differ culturally from their teachers or professors they are often judged wrongly because of the educators' blindness to their own ethnocentrism. The downcast eyes of Latino or Filipino students are interpreted as disrespect, whereas they cast down their eyes to show respect. The artfully woven storytelling techniques of an African-American are interpreted as disjointed meandering by the European-American teacher (Cazden, 1988). A Chinese child's fascination with visual detail is considered overly fastidious by a U.S. teacher. An American child is chastised for his original

China	United States
Event/Form: Drink offered; respondent answers "No"; drink is given	Event/Form: {Wouldn't give drink if guest said "No."}
Interpretation: Give more tea to be polite; it is okay if guest l eaves it untouched	Interpretation (of Chinese event/form): I don't want it, but I must drink it to be polite
Cultural Rule: Give drink regardless of guest's response	Cultural Rule: Only give drink if the guest requests it

Figure 3. Mismatch chart for the tea-drinking analysis.

drawing because he did not follow the Chinese teacher's detailed instructions for replicating her drawing. The school board blames minority-group teachers for having difficulty passing a Eurocentric exam.

The incidents discussed in this paper arose among adults of equal status. Even so, they caused discomfort. As the power imbalance increases between the judger and the judged member of the other culture, consequences become more serious. In such situations children as well as older students are placed at risk. In the classroom, differences and mismatches can exist in subtle ways, and if misinterpreted, the consequences—especially consequences that accumulate over several years—can have considerable impact on students (Foster, 1994; Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981).

How would young Chinese children feel if their teacher insisted that they make a skeleton? How would children react if they were not thirsty but the teacher insisted they finish a drink because they had asked for it (from the child's perspective, out of politeness)? In many such situations they would be blamed for their lack of interest or their thoughtlessness. Historically their line of defense becomes one of acquiescence, shame or anger. In universities and colleges students' cultures are often excluded from academic knowledge by mainstream faculty. Non-mainstream graduate students, for example, often report that when they offer cultural examples familiar to themselves, the professor brushes them aside as idiosyncratic rather than as legitimate cultural patterns that raise questions about mainstream theory (Darder, 1991; Pine & Joshua, 1996).

We are ourselves life long educators immersed in multiethnic worlds, and the struggles described in this paper are our own as well as that of others. With few exceptions, educators work vigorously to provide better lives and education for their students, and in no way are we intending to lay blame for ethnocentrism.

Nevertheless, all educators, kindergarten through university, must be attuned to the "irregular behavior" of students from cultures different from their own. This means working toward an understanding of students' "puzzling" behaviors and trying to understand what they represent and the foundation from which they come. The first step in unravelling such puzzles can be to identify one's own ethnocentric assumptions. The chances are great for misinterpreting students' behavior and learning patterns. In the fast paced, demanding setting of classrooms, teachers must make rapid judgments about student responses, and when their students are from cultures different from their own, it is quite possible to undercut the students' cultural foundation for success.

The analytical methods that have grown out of our own cross-cultural work are offered as a beginning model for unravelling interethnic puzzles. For some events the model yields a transparency to previously strange interactions. The cultural mismatches become obvious although they were not when they occurred. When people react to signs or cultural events across cultures there is something new to be discovered using Peirce's classic model. When coupled with awareness of ethnocentricity and its concomitant disequilibrium, it helps define cultural uniqueness and difference in particular situations. In turn this type of analysis provides individuals access to the elements of cultural mismatches that often confound cross cultural interactions.

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[2] The Han nationality accounts for about 90 percent of the multimationalities in China. There are an estimated 53 nationalities.

A Study of the Functional Use of Language by Portuguese Bilingual Children in Bournemouth

Brenda Lawrence and Sandy Mealing

Summary.

The aim of the study was to examine the functional use bilingual pupils make of English and Portuguese at school. The study tried to ascertain whether literacy skills in Portuguese were being lost the longer the time these Madeira born pupils spent in English Education. It was thought that spoken English may become more dominant than spoken Portuguese. Proficiency in both languages was measured in terms of the errors made and the range of vocabulary used.

Language in Portuguese and English was generated by giving each pupil the same picture story book and asking them to tell the story in their own words, first in English and, on another day, in Portuguese. Recordings were made of the spoken language and the tapes transcribed. Comparisons were made between the total number of words spoken, the range of vocabulary and the kinds of errors made in each language.

The results of the study suggested that spoken English was not replacing spoken Portuguese. In fact, more words were spoken in Portuguese than in English. Similarly the total number of errors was greater in spoken English than in Portuguese. Whereas the use of spoken English may seem to improve the longer time spent in English education; spoken Portuguese appears constant. Further investigation into the functional use made of written language amongst the sample group would give an interesting comparison of proficiency in spoken and written language.

Introduction.

The study focuses on the children's functional use of language within a local primary school. The children in this study were born in Madeira and have recently been brought to Bournemouth by parents seeking work in the local hotels and catering industry. As a consequence, these migrant workers and their children are living in an environment which demands that they have access to two languages, their first language, Portuguese, and the unfamiliar second language, English. Thus, the study's main objective is to consider if literacy skills in Portuguese begin to diminish the longer these children spend in England , or whether proficiency in spoken English and Portuguese remain the same and is sufficient for them to benefit from them being bilingual. This in turn raises further issues, namely

- how can error analysis give us a better understanding of the use of language?
- how can English speaking teachers meet the needs of these pupils learning English without devaluing the first language?
- how can these pupils be given cognitively demanding work that does not depend on sophisticated use of language?

In order to address the above concerns, it was necessary to consider the unique nature of this community and the use made of both languages within a school context. Thus the first part of this study will consider the background and characteristics which identify this growing community. The second part will focus on the methodology, how the language samples were collected and analysed. The final part will discuss the results.

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