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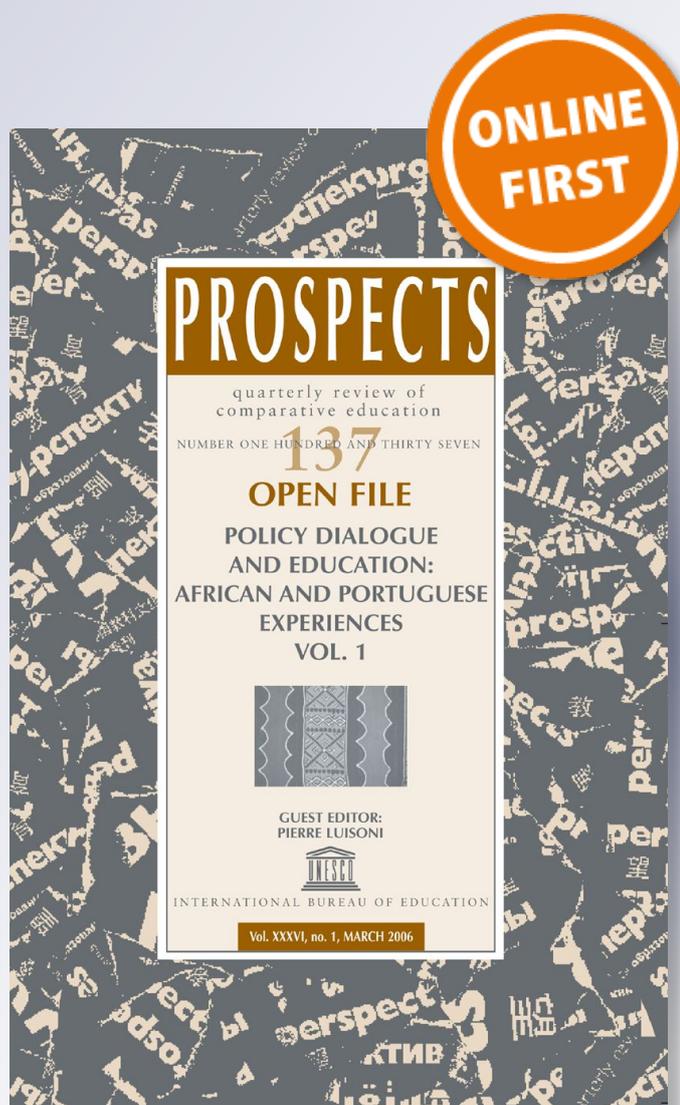
Hopes and hazards of transculturalism

Steven R. Van Hook

Abstract Educators of international students are frequently challenged by a clashing diversity of cultures in a global classroom. This study examines the sorts of themes and images that might resonate across nationalities and cultures, and could then be used to ease the way for students and educators in international classes. The analysis indicates that applied themes and images, including babies and children, animals, relationships, sports, life cycles, and self image, may help evoke a positive transcultural resonance that draws on a common base of shared experience. The findings are used to consider instructional applications for more effective learning in international classroom settings, and to identify the hazards of misapplying transcultural tools.

Keywords Transculturalism · International students · Cultural diversity · Curriculum · Pedagogy

In this study I address the research question: what sorts of themes and images might resonate across cultures, and could be used to ease the way for students and educators to develop stronger relationships in international classrooms? To that end, I discuss how I measured international university students' reactions to various themes and images presented through videos within global business courses. I conclude by considering how transcultural tools might be applied to course design, as well as the hazards that may occur through misapplications.

Educators of international students are frequently challenged to cope with a clashing diversity of cultures in a classroom setting (Van Hook 2011). Likewise, international students entering a new culture may face alien circumstances "tantamount to knowing the words without knowing the music, or knowing the music without knowing the dance" (Adler 2001, p. 99). A foreign environment that provides a familiar ambience through transcultural themes and images may not only reduce the pangs of isolation, but also help improve bonding between students as they become better able to relate to each other

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individually through common ground, and also enhance their integration within the entire class by finding common reference points within the group (Taylor et al. 2000).

Global enrollments in postsecondary education are forecasted to reach 160 million by 2025 (Irvine 2003). Given that the numbers of international students within traditional and customized programmes are increasing as institutions seek to expand their enrollments beyond national borders, curricula and pedagogies need to be adapted to accommodate a wider array of cultural and linguistic differences (OECD 2003). The transforming capabilities of technology are facilitating the rise of global universities, which can transcend national borders and draw together a wide range of student diversity in a virtual classroom setting (Levine 2003); the most successful of the educational institutions "will be those that can respond the quickest and offer a high-quality education to an international student body" (p. 19).

Juxtaposed with these circumstances is the combination of high demand for international education and the low numbers of teachers who have global competence (ACE 2002). Universities and colleges lack sufficient faculty in foreign language and international studies—especially in less common languages and nations. Meanwhile, faculty in professional disciplines such as "business, public health, law, and the environment, need greater international expertise", according to ACE, which explains that "Lack of priority, rising costs, and dwindling funds from all sources have eroded higher education's capacity to produce the numbers and variety of experts needed" (p. 12).

The framework governing this study combines four fundamental concepts and theories. First, significant variations exist between cultures and can be quantified; this means that cultural commonalities may also be measured (Hall 1989; Hofstede 1980; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998). However, certain themes and images may transcend cultural variations, such as those demonstrated through universal symbols, metaphors, archetypes, and mythologies (Campbell 1988; Jung 1968; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In turn, these themes and images may be effective in enhancing classroom resonance and effectiveness (Freire 1993; Meskill and Swan 1996; Meyer 2002). Finally, these transcultural themes and images may be better defined and assessed through both qualitative and quantitative measures, which were used in this study.

While it is essential to differentiate between culture and nationality, practical circumstances typically meld the two. The measures of culture are vast, including a rich spectrum of belief systems and social practices, while nationality is of a singular dimension. Of course, nations are made up of many cultural groups, which are in turn made up of many subcultures. However, in international realms of business, politics, education, and so forth, people are often categorized according to their nationality rather than their cultural heritage or identity. Therefore, in this study, I apply the narrower scope of reference: a predominant culture or the cultural mean of a nation. This is also the practice in many of the cultural studies I refer to here.

Cultural variations can range from different "ways of knowing" (Berrell et al. 2002; Masemann 1990), to clashes in managerial styles between Western and Asian joint-venture executives (Elashmawi 1998), to diametric and seemingly irreconcilable opposition in fundamental ethical values (Singhapakdi et al. 1999). These cultural conflicts may impede globalization, international business partnerships, the transfer of economic and social ideologies, and other critical areas of interrelations, even when all parties have a common aim of effective development in cross-cultural relations. The cultural differences may also disrupt cohesion in an international classroom. Though each of the studies I mention here may have reliably and validly examined cultural variations and the resulting problems in

international settings, they do not consider effective methods for addressing cultural clashes in ways that might both allow for the differences and serve to transcend them.

Some students of international relations may feel that assessing and assigning cultural dimensions is a demeaning, stereotypical reduction of the rich complexities in human diversity. However, the process need not be negative. Adler (2001) observed that while it may be unethical to label people from certain ethnic groups as *bad*, "grouping individuals into categories is neither good nor bad—it simply reduces complexity to manageable proportions" (p. 83).

Students of international relations may also find it hard to remain clear about their own belief system when they interact with people from entirely different foundations (Adler 2001; Calloway-Thomas et al. 1999). This may especially occur between individuals from national cultures with extreme differences in their attitudes about human relations and individual rights. As Adler (2001) points out, quite often it is only when travelers leave their own national culture behind that they begin to appreciate how profound and deeply rooted their cultural heritage might be: "In interacting with foreigners, we learn to recognize and value our fundamental humanity—our cultural similarities and dissimilarities" (p. 35). The cultural upbringing and identity we each carry bore deep into our attitudes and thought processes. Along with searching out ways to bridge cultural differences through common experience, educators may also seek ways to transcend those differences, and shared commonalities between students may help make cultural differences a secondary concern.

Research methodology

This study used a mix of qualitative grounded theory and quantitative methods to examine student responses to a series of marketing message clips that may or may not have contained transculturally resonant themes and images. Since 2001, more than 500 international students have taken my courses at an international programme provided through a California university. These students have come from some 35 countries including Austria, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Denmark, Ecuador, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela. The majority of students have come from Japan (25 %), South Korea (22 %), Germany (11 %), Turkey (8 %), Italy (7 %), Brazil (6 %), and Sweden (5 %). The students have been 55 % female and 45 % male, mostly in their early 20s through their mid-30s. They are often college graduates or current students in their home country.

The courses I have taught in international advertising, global marketing, and marketing communications were especially appropriate for laying the early foundations of this study. Over a single course, the participating students may view 100 or more television commercials and advertisements from around the world. Television commercials and most other forms of advertisement are efficient quantum packets of communication, as they are demographically resonant and necessarily concise. They are commonly-accepted expressions of relevant life situations and themes.

During classroom sessions, international students tend to sit in small groups of one to five students of the same nationality, depending on the size of the class and the national mix: Turks sit with Turks, Japanese with Japanese, Brazilians with other Brazilians, and so forth. It is common for the students to interact within their groups while video clips are playing, communicating among others in their own cultural group when a particular clip

interests them along linguistic or cultural lines. A transcultural response to a displayed video clip or image may become apparent when discussions among students extend beyond their seating group. A positive transcultural resonance to a presented image and/or theme may be demonstrated when the cross-group discussion is energetic, upbeat, and laughter-filled. A cross-cultural dissonance may become evident when discussions between seating groups turn confrontational and argumentative. Other indicators of student response to themes and images that transcend cultural differences include behaviours I have observed over repeated course sections: the entire class may focus on the screen in an intense and unified way. Or we may see unified and attentive silence, unified laughter, or unified chatter, or cross-cultural comments and questions, both within and outside of class, to particular themes and images.

The participants in this study completed a simple quantitative assessment form as they responded to various international marketing messages and video clips containing a wide array of themes and images. I used a classification formula with a 7-point scale to identify which themes and images may help to evoke a positive resonance within international and culturally diverse classrooms. To create the formula I combined two factors: one rates a clip's positive, neutral, or negative impression on the group and the other assesses the level of resonance or dissonance the clip evoked within the group. To ensure a clear division between negative, neutral, and positive reactions, I established a 1-point range on either side of the scale's mid-point of 4 that quantified a neutral response. Group responses with a mean ($\bar{x}$) greater than or equal to ($\geq$) 5 were classified as positive; those with a mean less than or equal to ($\leq$) 3 were classified as negative. Thus:

Positive: $\bar{x} \geq 5$.
Neutral: $3 < \bar{x} < 5$.
Negative: $\bar{x} \leq 3$.

To ensure a conservative division between the classifications of resonance or dissonance, I employed a variance (VAR or s^2) of S3 to indicate a dissonance. A reaction with a variance <3 indicated a resonance, whether that resonance related to a generally positive, neutral, or negative reaction to the clip. This scale enabled me to make a definitive distinction, allowing for a clear delineation of dissonance, but still provided an accommodating margin of disagreement within a resonant category. Thus:

Dissonance: VAR ≥ 3.
Resonance: VAR < 3.

The aim of this study was to identify themes and images within clips that may evoke a positive resonance in the classroom. The two factors described above allowed a number of possible combinations: the sought-after positive resonance, as well as positive dissonance, neutral resonance, neutral dissonance, negative resonance, and negative dissonance. Thus:

$\bar{x} \geq 5$ with VAR < 3 indicated a positive resonance.
$\bar{x} \geq 5$ with VAR ≥ 3 indicated a positive dissonance.
$\bar{x} > 3$ but < 5 with VAR < 3 indicated a neutral resonance.
$\bar{x} > 3$ but < 5 with VAR ≥ 3 indicated a neutral dissonance.
$\bar{x} \leq 3$ with VAR < 3 indicated a negative resonance.
$\bar{x} \leq 3$ with VAR ≥ 3 indicated a negative dissonance.

The descriptive analyses of the survey data also included a sum of the seven-point scale responses ($\sum x$), providing a raw rating of each clip. The maximum rating for any clip was the number of responses (n) multiplied by 7, the score at the high end of the scale.

A relatively high rating with a high variance indicated positive dissonance; a low rating with a high variance indicated a negative dissonance. A high rating with a low variance indicated a positive resonance. In addition, I gleaned brief comments from informal interviews with participants that allowed me to expand upon the quantitative data.

The group of participants for the quantitative study included university students enrolled in my global business courses with the university's international programme during the academic year 2004–2005, for a total unduplicated participant sample of 47 students representing 11 countries (18 from South Korea, 8 from Japan, 7 from Turkey, 5 from Brazil, 2 from Germany, 2 from Sweden, and 1 each from Austria, Norway, Switzerland, Taiwan, and Ukraine). The participants were 55 % female (26) and 45 % male (21). Though the average class size may have been small (ranging from 10 to 20 students per class), the diversity of the students was wide, typically representing vast cultural differences. My analysis allowed me to divide the themes and images into negative and positive groups.

Dissonant/negative/neutral themes and images

There were no surprises in the findings regarding what themes and images might create a neutral, negative, or dissonant reaction among international students, including the reactions to video clips with humour, sex, religion, and nationalism as central themes. These themes have long been anecdotal as taboo topics leading to discord at dinner parties, and findings in this study indicate significant cultural variations in participant response as well, especially in the thematic areas of nationalism (VAR = 3.3) and humour (VAR = 3.3).

Using the analysis algorithm defined above, I identified the following group categories as dissonant, or resonantly negative, or neutral. Faculty members might not ban all themes and images that could evoke culturally dissonant or negative reactions from use in international classrooms, especially as they may be valuable in stimulating discussion and debate. Still, they might approach them cautiously, understanding that the related topics may especially generate animosities and dissonance between cultures.

Humour

The survey data in Table 1 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of humour clips ($\bar{x} = 4.5$); these were compounded, however, by a relatively high level of dissonance (VAR = 3.3). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the humour category as having neutral dissonance.

Table 1 Descriptive analysis for humour group	Group classification: neutral dissonance
	$n = 235$
	$\bar{x} = 4.5$
	Median = 5.0
	VAR = 3.3
	$\sum x = 1{,}060$
	$p < .001$

An instructor of international students may discover vast differences in what various nationalities and cultures find funny. For example, Asian humour may be based on life anecdotes, while Russian humour may be grounded in historical and political affairs, and North American humour may be a little raw. So while humour may serve well when directed toward a specific demographic group in an appropriate cultural context, humour misapplied across cultures may create dissonance in the classroom. One student from Taiwan commented that she "understood the words, but not the thinking" behind American humour. Another student observed a danger in using humour: "sometimes people might think you are laughing at them" if one laughs at a joke or a funny situation from someone else's culture.

Nationalism

The survey data in Table 2 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of nationalism clips ($\bar{x} = 4.7$), with an overall level of dissonance (VAR = 3.3). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the nationalism category as having neutral dissonance.

The participants expressed special sensitivity to nationalistic positions, as capably summed up by one student: "You can get into a lot of trouble by celebrating your own nationality to others, when people are so different in their own celebrations". Other students expressed a general aversion to the "bad stereotypes" that can be perpetuated by nationalistic posturing.

Sex

The survey data in Table 3 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of sex group clips ($\bar{x} = 4.5$), with a resonant agreement toward neutrality (VAR = 2.3).

Table 2 Descriptive analysis for nationalism group

Group classification: neutral dissonance
$n = 141$
$\bar{x} = 4.7$
Median = 5.0
VAR = 3.4
$\sum x = 667$
$p < .001$

Table 3 Descriptive analysis for sex group

Group classification: neutral resonance
$n = 141$
$\bar{x} = 4.5$
Median = 5.0
VAR = 2.3
$\sum x = 632$
$p < .001$

According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the sex category as having neutral resonance.

Though this classification does not necessarily evoke a negative or dissonant reaction as do the humour and nationalism groups above, it compares with the religion group below, as a theme that may not successfully engage a positive and resonant international exchange in the classroom.

The sex used in advertisements is a consistent theme, but we noticed a continuum of sexual tone within the presented clips that ranged from muted to blatant, and affected the students' reactions. International students often reveal the profound cultural differences in what is considered appropriate for sexually-themed clips and images. Some students expressed discomfort with the sexual themes: "It's very different from what we see in Korea"; and "We wouldn't see such ads in Turkey". Others expressed interest in the sexual themes and even requested repeat showings. However, the most vocal participant reactions included comments such as "Some sexy commercials make the woman look like an object. I don't like that" (Brazilian woman), and "It's offensive to men as well as women" (German male). Others said that some countries make sex look "too easy—like they don't respect it very much" (Taiwanese woman).

Religion

The data in Table 4 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of religion group clips ($\bar{x} = 4.1$), with a resonant agreement toward neutrality (VAR = 2.3). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the religion category as having a neutral resonance.

The international students participating in this study came from a diversity of religious backgrounds. The South Korean students come from a nation that is about evenly divided between the Christian and Buddhist faiths. Some students come from Islamic nations, while those from South America come from predominantly Catholic nations, and many European students come from largely Protestant countries. Often the students expressed little knowledge about their own nation's religions, let alone those of other lands. Many said they are only nominal believers in their respective faiths, if at all. While they may be curious about religions, they expressed a sensitivity about and apprehension towards ignorant assessments and ridicule of others' religious beliefs. One said it may be best to avoid religious themes and images, because "it is such a personal issue and people react to it differently. For some people their religion is top priority. They value it higher than their own life". Another observed that older people may be especially sensitive to portrayals of their faith, though "younger people may be more open". Most students agreed orally that it was best to avoid ridiculing someone else's faith or giving an impression of picking on it.

Table 4 Descriptive analysis for religion group	Group classification: neutral resonance
	$n = 141$
	$\bar{x} = 4.1$
	Median = 4.0
	VAR = 2.3
	$\sum x = 580$
	$p < .001$

Table 5 Descriptive analysis of water group

Group classification: neutral resonance
$n = 165$
$\bar{x} = 4.4$
Median $= 5.0$
VAR $= 1.8$
$\sum x = 734$
$p < .001$

Water

The survey data in Table 5 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of water group clips ($\bar{x} = 4.4$), with a resonant agreement toward neutrality (VAR $= 1.8$). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the water category as having neutral resonance.

Water is another contextual category, in that it is more specifically an image than a theme. Students reacted positively to the water imagery, but may have been diverted by contextual factors within the category clips, for example, seniors swimming in a pool, or the classical music scoring an assortment of water images.

Positively resonant themes and images

Themes and images in several other categories were identified as positively resonant, according to the analysis algorithm defined above. The purpose of this study was to seek out these positively resonant themes and images, and quantify the magnitude of student responses to them so the findings might help instructors achieve more cohesion in classrooms with students of diverse nationalities and cultures.

Babies

The data in Table 6 demonstrate a positive participant reaction to the collection of babies group clips ($\bar{x} = 5.7$), with a resonant rating (VAR $= 1.7$). Of all the categories in the study, this thematic group received the highest ranking, with the strongest resonance. According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the babies category as having a positive resonance.

Both male and female students—especially females—responded affectionately to the clips with babies. "It's a baby!" and "Babies are so cute and innocent" were common

Table 6 Descriptive analysis of babies group

Group classification: positive resonance
$n = 141$
$\bar{x} = 5.7$
Median $= 6.0$
VAR $= 1.7$
$\sum x = 808$
$p < .001$

types of comments. The affectionate response was not unanimous, however. One male German student said, "Most people think babies are so cute, but I just think about diapers. It doesn't appeal to me at all".

Animals

The survey data in Table 7 demonstrate a positive participant reaction to the collection of animals group clips ($\bar{x} = 5.7$), with a resonant rating (VAR = 2.0). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the animals category as having positive resonance.

An advertising adage holds that the most successful commercials invoke the three *Bs* to attract consumer attention: beasts, babies, and beauties. In relative magnitude, the presented clips in the animals group tied with those in the babies group in earning the survey's highest scores, though they scored slightly lower in overall resonance.

Relationships

The data in Table 8 demonstrate that participants reacted positively to the collection of relationships group clips ($\bar{x} = 5.3$), with a resonant rating (VAR = 2.1). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the relationships category as having positive resonance.

As most of my international students are in their early to middle 20s and the great majority are not married, they are especially responsive to clips with the theme of relationships. Though the dynamics of a relationship may vary from culture to culture—in particular the respective roles and positions of the sexes—the students are especially attracted to clips that show a common tension between partners in a relationship, tensions of a type that go beyond cultural differences. For example, while watching a clip featuring

Table 7 Descriptive analysis of animals group

Group classification: positive resonance
$n = 141$
$\bar{x} = 5.7$
Median = 6.0
VAR = 2.0
$\sum x = 798$
$p < .001$

Table 8 Descriptive analysis of relationships group

Group classification: positive resonance
$n = 141$
$\bar{x} = 5.3$
Median = 6.0
VAR = 2.1
$\sum x = 754$
$p < .001$

a bickering husband and wife, one student commented that "Everywhere people get married. It's universal".

Sports

The survey data in Table 9 demonstrate a positive participant reaction to the collection of sports group clips ($\bar{x} = 5.5$), with a resonant rating (VAR = 1.8). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the sports category as having positive resonance.

International discussions of sports are frequently marked by rivalries between nations, yet a transcultural commonality appears in their love of the game. One young Brazilian woman described her reaction to the theme of sports as a shared camaraderie between competitors: "It's just a game, unless we're playing Argentina. We have fights with them, but just them. [Usually] it's a good feeling between the people when we're playing".

Self image

The survey data in Table 10 demonstrate a positive participant reaction to the collection of self- image group clips ($\bar{x} = 5.0$), with a resonant rating (VAR = 2.4). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the self-image category as having positive resonance.

This term refers to the ways we see other people, rather than to how we see our own selves. While everyone has a self image, we might also appreciate that others have their own self images, and even though we may not understand or relate to that image, we may have a transcultural interest in the self image of others. The follow-up interviews included participant comments on this theme such as "It's nice to see lots of different kinds of people"; "I like ads that show the masses"; and "Different cultures, different customs are interesting to me". One South Korean participant, however, commented after a session that some people might find the flags and national anthems of their historic enemies offensive,

Table 9 Descriptive analysis of sports group

Group classification: positive resonance
$n = 141$
$\bar{x} = 5.5$
Median = 6.0
VAR = 1.8
$\sum x = 776$
$p < .001$

Table 10 Descriptive analysis of self-image group

Group classification: positive resonance
$n = 188$
$\bar{x} = 5.0$
Median = 5.0
VAR = 2.4
$\sum x = 945$
$p < .001$

Table 11 Descriptive analysis of life cycles group

Group classification: positive resonance
$n = 141$
$\bar{x} = 5.1$
Median $= 5.0$
VAR $= 2.3$
$\sum x = 723$
$p < .001$

and some students expressed bewilderment over cultural contexts that are perhaps anti-thetical to their own.

Life cycles

The survey data in Table 11 demonstrate a positive participant reaction to the collection of life cycles group clips ($\bar{x} = 5.1$), with a resonant rating (VAR $= 2.3$). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the life cycles category as having positive resonance.

Regardless of our diverse national systems and cultures, all peoples have one fundamental experience in common: we are all born, we live, and we die. Participant comments on clips within this thematic group included "Birth and death—everybody has the same physical process", and "My career, my life, babies—I think a lot about those things".

The images and themes referred to in this study necessarily derive from the creative mindsets and incentives of international marketing and advertising. The industry produces audience appeals that cover much of the panorama of human desires, needs, and emotions. Yet, the images and themes presented are hardly representative of the great diversity of human experience in the potential realms of transcultural communications, especially in the loftier dimensions of psychology and intellect, heart, and spirit.

Transcultural hazards

Instructors in international programmes may well benefit from using transcultural tools in the classroom. Researchers have found that transcultural themes and images such as children, animals, life cycles, relationships, and sports can transcend cultural differences through a shared sense of reference in international classrooms, and this transcultural resonance may be used in traditional and online university classrooms to create common ground among people from diverse cultures (Van Hook 2011). However, before considering how transcultural themes and methods might be applied in appropriate circumstances, it would be prudent to consider ways that such tactics might be misapplied, either through unintentional misunderstanding or negatively intended design.

Efforts to apply transcultural tactics may well be derailed by failures of either method or intent. For example, faculty members could be seen as dismissively disregarding cultural diversity or thoughtlessly mixing up inappropriate elements of the educational process, or providing a pedagogical advantage to cultural imperialists. They could even be seen as creating schisms between students from developing and developed nations. A lesser worry is personal threats to successful proponents of education reform, as I describe below.

Conscientious educators should be clear about their intentions in developing a trans-cultural environment, as opposed to imposing a particular worldview on international classmates. Freire (1993) warned against a form of cultural invasion, in which misguided educators may "penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (p. 152). Established institutions offering education to other nations may frequently be insensitive to the characteristics of a local culture and the students' particular needs, according to Newman et al. (2004). They say that using English as the primary language of international instruction raises further questions "about cultural imperialism and homogenization" and they argue that "Developing countries would surely be ill-served if universities from the outside replaced local universities rather than supplemented them" (p. 28).

Such dominant cultural penetration may happen inadvertently or may be an intentional imposition of particular political or economic agendas through propaganda empowered by transcultural tactics. To protect against the imposition of alien agendas, many countries have closed themselves off from the influences of outside perspectives. According to the human rights organization Freedom House, at least 20 countries have restricted their citizens' access to alien influences, particularly through the Internet. Foreign educational efforts, whether online or on the ground, may be especially suspect. Education in particular has been jealously guarded in many nations and is carefully protected as a matter of nationalism and a solidifier of cultural differences (Irvine 2003). Educators using trans-cultural learning methods should be careful not to advance their own particular political or social agenda, not only because of the ethical issues it may raise, but also because it may damage the tenuous participation of nations that are already wary of outsiders' motives.

Providing culturally isolated peoples with access to a global collective of cultures is not necessarily a clear-cut end in itself; consider some of the pitfalls that occur in introducing connective technology to village life. Cotopoxi men in remote Ecuador used their aid-provided computer equipment to access online pornography rather than crop information, much to the dismay of Cotopoxi women. And when impoverished women of the Wapishana and Macushi tribes in Guyana began making "big" money by marketing their hand-woven hammocks over the Worldwide Web, it so threatened the male hierarchy that the traditional regional leadership took control of the organization and drove out the enterprising young women (Romero 2000).

Some educators who effectively employ teaching tools such as transcultural learning may find themselves the victims of their own methods. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire proved especially successful in adapting a teaching method and molding into it themes and images that resonated with his target students: the impoverished and illiterate workers of Brazil's villages and cities. In fact, Freire's techniques were so successful that within just 45 days, 300 workers in the city of Angicos had learned to read and write. Confronted by the opposition in Brazil's conservative circles, Freire was accused of "using his literacy method to spread subversive and revolutionary ideas", ultimately landing him in jail along with other leftist leaders following a military coup (Elias and Merriam 1995, p. 146).

Transcultural applications

The question now is how transculturalism might be best applied across cultural diversities in international classrooms. In the following examples I consider possible methods to promote learning in an international classroom for a course in global economics, and ways

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to apply the transculturally resonant themes and images identified in this study as supported through multimedia presentations. The thematic groupings of the suggested examples include the positively resonant themes of babies/children, animals, relationships, sports, self image, and the life cycle. A brief video that samples some of the clips I refer to, and offer possible educational applications, is available at http://wwmr.us/support/transculture/transculture.htm.

Babies and young children

Components of a course in global economics might address the social and economic costs of war, slave labour, trafficking in women and children, and so on. Issues related to human rights and social justice may make a deeper impression on the students and be more resonant if presented within the context of the impact made by clips involving babies and young children.

Animals

Teachers can illustrate the evolution of complex economic systems by employing the transculturally resonant application of animals. For example, cows can provide an affective illustration about the economic dynamics of technological development. Before refrigeration was developed, the only way to keep milk fresh at home was inside the cow. Once refrigeration became available, people could purchase milk from ever-larger dairy farms, where each cow in the herd represented one family that no longer had to have a cow. This development freed up human and natural resources for other avenues of personal and societal development.

Relationships

The economic cycle might be considered through a graphic of the sigmoid curve, and by comparing how economic cycles rise and fall in much the same way as personal relationships often do: they start low, peak, and then decline, before the economy—or the person—moves on to something new. Furthermore, the relationship theme can be used to demonstrate John Nash's theory of equilibrium to international students: a video clip from the popular movie *A Beautiful Mind* calls into question a fundamental principle of Adam Smith, that the driver of individual self-interest serves the common good. The clip portrays young men in a bar competing for the attention of a beautiful young woman, ultimately tripping over each other—and alienating the other young women in the room. It then offers a proposed mix of strategies, and allows students to see that individuals serve their own best interests when they also consider the good of the group.

Sports

The theme of sports may evoke a spirit of camaraderie in the classroom—a common bond even within a competitive atmosphere. The principle that economic drivers can be a mix of cooperative and competitive can be demonstrated through the resonant example of the racecar drivers interacting in the Daytona 500 race, in which drivers must attract aerodynamic "drafting partners" in ever-shifting patterns of cooperation and competition among rivals.

Self image

My analysis showed that students from all cultures are interested in the lifestyles and ways of people in other nations, cultures, and cultural subgroups. This resonant theme may be effectively employed as the global economics course considers related issues of business ethics, and various perspectives on wealth and value, as well as differing takes on the context of human socioeconomic interaction. One example is the Masai concept of value and beauty in others, as their word for physical appearance roughly translates as a person's goodness.

Life cycles

Both face-to-face and online discussions may be useful ways to address the larger economic and social issues that have an impact on students' daily lives. Stimulating discussion topics include common concerns related to unemployment, military spending, funding for education, support for health care, family planning, and so on. These discussions might be facilitated with topical questions about the life cycle. For example, what does someone do in your country when they lose a job? Is the birthrate in your country going up or down? What are your own plans for marriage and family?

Further applications

Transcultural teaching methods may apply in the face-to-face classroom experience, or in the increasingly rich online environment that unites students around the world in a common virtual classroom. Given the rapid advances in both hardware and software, new information technology could soon provide human interaction in a high-definition and three-dimensional telepresence, allowing for distance education that is comparable to a face-to-face experience (Duderstadt 2000). Already students can have experiences with the asynchronous distance learning process that are just as effective as the classroom experience in terms of learning and costs; in some technical ways the former may already be superior to regular courses (Bok 2003).

Educators who dedicate themselves to global access to education may well benefit from tools that better empower international learning through transcultural tactics, which help increase the amount of common ground and the positive interactions among students of diverse nationalities and cultures. Practical experience may demonstrate that many administrators in higher education are less concerned with such social goods, and more concerned with mundane issues of enrollment numbers and student retention. A transcultural approach to international education can help address those concerns, as well as the issues of greater social significance. As institutions improve the learning experience they offer to international students, they may enhance their competitiveness in the global education marketplace (ACE 2002). This is particularly true for American colleges and universities, which "cannot claim to have the best system of higher education in the world unless graduates can free themselves of ethnocentrism bred of ignorance and can navigate the difficult terrain of cultural complexity" (Green 2002). The application of transcultural tools can support students in this process.

Beyond the academic and programmatic benefits that might be gained from enhanced transcultural learning, strained global relations call for more effective communications within other international settings as well. Many of the international students studying

abroad could eventually assume top leadership positions in their home countries. Those who participate in effectively designed transcultural learning programmes may gain the knowledge and attitudes that ultimately let them contribute to a more informed cross-cultural leadership, leading toward a less conflicted world.

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