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# Modes and models for transcending cultural differences in international classrooms

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## Abstract

Educators of international students are frequently challenged to cope with a clashing diversity of cultures in a classroom setting. This study examined what sorts of themes and images might resonate across nationalities and cultures, which could then be used as transcultural tools for international educators. The study employed mixed qualitative and quantitative methods to identify and analyze transculturally resonant images and themes. International students viewed and rated a series of video clips presented in the context of global business courses. The study findings indicate that themes and images including babies/children, animals, relationships, sports, life cycles and self-image may help evoke a positive transcultural resonance. The findings were used to design models for more effective learning in international classroom settings.

## Keywords

cross-cultural, international, multicultural, transcultural themes

## Introduction

International educators and students are frequently challenged to cope with a clashing diversity of cultures in a classroom setting. One of the common shortcomings of international education is that instructors may often be unprepared for the diverse cultural variations and needs found among international students (Pinheiro, 2001), and require a better understanding of multiculturalism for classroom effectiveness (Fox, 1994). Though instructors may not be experts on the diversity of world cultures, they can become better skilled at finding methods to adapt to the challenge in a way that – while acknowledging cultural variations – seeks to transcend them.

If such tactics are further developed, international students could benefit in a number of ways, including the following:

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- an increased comfort level in a strange environment;
- improved bonding between students as they relate to each other on individual common ground;
- enhanced integration within the class by finding common group ground;
- improved course relevancy by seeking transcultural context for the materials; and
- application of resonant themes and images to better engage students' attention in the learning process.

## **Rationale**

The investigation addressed the following research question: What sorts of themes and images might resonate across nationalities and cultures that could be used to ease the way for students and educators in international classrooms? To that end, the study examined international university students' reactions to various themes and images projected through video presentations within global business courses. Data were collected through a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods including observation, interviews and a measurement instrument (see the Appendix), with sufficient safeguards to ensure reliability and validity. The study employed mixed qualitative grounded theory and quantitative methods to identify and analyze potential transculturally (culturally transcendent) resonant images and themes. The foundations of the study employed a qualitative grounded theory approach, seeking a theoretical context for researcher observations over four years teaching diverse groups of international students. For the quantitative element, a simple survey instrument provided a measure of participant reactions to the presented themes and images within courses comprising international students. The themes and images examined in the study were gleaned from multinational marketing video clips played in Microsoft® PowerPoint® presentations during global marketing and advertising courses for international students, with student reactions measured through observation, informal interviews and student assignments.

## **Conceptual and theoretical framework**

The framework governing the study was based on a set of fundamental concepts and theories. These include (1) significant cultural variations exist and can be quantified, thus cultural commonalities may also be measured (Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998); (2) certain themes and images may transcend cultural variations, such as demonstrated through universal symbols, metaphors, archetypes and mythologies (Campbell, 1988; Jung, 1968; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980); (3) these themes and images may be effective in enhancing classroom resonance and effectiveness (Freire, 1993; Meskill and Swan, 1996; Meyer, 2002); and (4) these transcultural themes and images may be better defined and assessed through qualitative and quantitative measures, as was undertaken in the current study.

While it is essential to discern 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 comprise many cultural groups and those cultural groups in turn comprise numerous sub-cultures. However, more so than cultural identities, peoples are frequently categorized according to nationality in international realms of business, politics, education and so forth, rather than according to their cultural heritage. So for the narrower scope of practical application, a predominant culture – or the cultural mean – of a nation is the base of reference for the current study, as is also the case in numerous referenced cultural studies.

Among the more interesting and applicable works on culture – especially relating to issues in international education – are the writings of Paulo Freire. Addressing the needs of Brazil's under-class, Freire (1993) proposed developing an educational curriculum that includes a group of themes that unites the educator and the student, using resonant themes, images, symbols and words. The educator, through structured research, would need to learn the 'peasants' manner of seeing the world', seeking out the themes and problems so ingrained in the peasants' way of living (Freire, 1973: 159). Freire (1993) identified resonant themes by a qualitative process of examining the students' lives, first considering some of the universal themes of life, then finding locally resonant themes through interviews and observation.

Other theorists have also specified themes and images that may resonate across differing cultures. For example, Jung (1968: 58) identified certain archetypes that transcend cultural differences and may 'reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world', such as the universal theme of a paradise or golden age. The universal resonance of certain themes and images may be found regardless of place and time, even when contributory factors such as transmission from ancestors or migratory cross-fertilization may be ruled out.

## **Assumptions, delimitations and limitations**

This study's framework included a presentation of themes and images, by way of advertisements and television commercials viewed by participating international students during the regular inclusion of materials in international advertising and marketing courses. A similar study might be conducted among international students relying on other thematic media such as art, music or literature, although those media may provide a more limited variety of themes and images from which to select and measure within the constraints of classroom time. Though certain forms of images presented in the classroom such as static photographs and paintings may fail to function transculturally and without regard for social contexts (Loizos, 2002), a benefit of using commercials and other advertisements is that they provide a near-globally recognizable and familiar medium (Mueller, 1996).

Television commercials and most other forms of advertisement are typically efficient quantum packets of communication; demographically resonant and necessarily concise. They are commonly accepted expressions of relevant life situations and themes. It could well be as British writer Norman Douglas (1921: 73) observed, that we 'can tell the ideals of a nation by its advertisements'.

The commercials and other advertisements used within this study were obtained through databases with vast collections of advertising messages gathered from around the world in different languages. To limit the impact of students' differing language abilities, the selected clips for the study mostly used little spoken or written language.

There was also concern regarding research methodologies that involve more in-depth interview and survey processes, which may have resulted in culturally skewed results based on a student's cultural proclivity to volunteer for such activity. To avoid this, the data collection process consisted of informal interviews during regular class sessions, with the researcher relying on less intrusive observations of classroom dynamics, comments, student interactions, and so on, as well as a linguistically simple measurement tool.

## **Research method**

This mixed qualitative grounded theory and quantitative method study examined student responses to a series of marketing message clips that may or may not have contained transculturally resonant

themes and images. The participants in the study included students from numerous countries enrolled in global business courses through a California university's international program. The clips in the study were selected according to an ongoing qualitative consideration of international student reactions to various themes and images displayed over several years of course presentations. The participants completed a simple quantitative assessment form (the Appendix) as they responded to various international marketing messages and video clips containing a wide array of themes and images.

It is no easy prospect to search for effective themes and images across multiple nationalities. It required a diverse group of international participants gathered over an extended period of time and exposed to numerous images and themes, comfortable enough in a cross-cultural setting to express viewpoints perhaps opposed to others in class; and a researcher/observer who might make some theoretical assumptions.

These combined challenges may explain why an extensive literature review turned up so few references on the topic. Numerous books have been written on how marketers may adapt their campaigns to address differing cultural dimensions, without getting into specific themes and images in transcultural messages (Anholt, 2000; de Mooij, 2010; Jones, 2000; Mueller, 1996). While some companies such as Coca-Cola® and McDonald's® have achieved global success with multicultural advertising campaigns, industry information on transcultural research may be restricted by a proprietary interest in keeping the tactics out of the public domain (de Mooij, pers. comm., 11 June 2010).

The current study had a happy intersection of all three requirements: the diverse nationalities of students attending a university international program; exposure to hundreds of themes and images through video clips presented in global marketing and advertising courses; and a researcher trained in international broadcast journalism with expertise in cross-cultural public education. With more than 200 international students viewing more than 100 video clips over each course prior to the study, it provided a rich pool of more than 20,000 impressions on which to base the research.

## **Setting and sample**

Since 2001, more than 500 international students have taken my courses taught at an international program 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 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 international students may view 100 or more television commercials and advertisements from around the world.

During classroom sessions, international students may tend to sit in small groups of nationality: Turks with Turks, Koreans with Koreans, Japanese with Japanese, Brazilians with other Brazilians and so forth. It is common for the students to interact within their groups during the playing of video clips, communicating among their own cultural group when a clip interests them along linguistic or cultural lines. A transcultural resonance – a mutually shared common

experience – to a displayed video clip or image may be evidenced when discussions among students go beyond their group seating. A positive transcultural resonance to a presented image and/or theme may be demonstrated when the cross-group discussion is energetic, upbeat, laughing; a cross-culture dissonance may be evidenced when the discussions turn confrontational and argumentative between seating groups. Other indicators of student response to themes and images that transcend differences may include: (1) entire class focus on the screen projection in an intense and unified manner; (2) unified and attentive silence; (3) unified laughter; (4) unified chatter; and (5) cross-group comments and questions during and outside of class in response to particular themes and images.

An example of resonant and dissonant interactions between culturally diverse students could be found in the following situation. One tense quarter in a global marketing course, the classroom interaction was impacted by ongoing hostilities between Turkish and Brazilian students – instigated in part by the rivalries during a World Cup soccer competition, and further intensified by conflicts over the expressive sensuality of the Brazilians grating against the conservative Turks. A diaper advertisement was presented during a class session, showing a baby presumably standing for the first time to the triumphant strains of a classical tune. Two fathers in the class – one Turkish, one Brazilian – shared stories with one another about the first time their own babies stood up, and how much they missed them back at home. For a time, the international rivalries and cultural differences between them diminished in a sharing of common ground.

Over repeated courses prior to the formal study, I had observed student reactions to more than 20,000 video clip impressions, and gained further insights through student comments on why they may have reacted in certain ways to the presented themes and images. Throughout the observations, student comments and review of their course assignments, I began to theorize categorical groupings for the themes and images that elicited and encompassed the classroom responses described above. Central topic categories that appeared to generate more harmonious discussions involved themes and images such as animals, relationships, babies/children, sports, water, life cycles and self image. Topic groups that created a classroom dissonance include humor, sex, religion and nationalism – mostly evident because of the heated arguments and disruption those topics may evoke.

Based on these general groupings, I selected a collection of multinational clips for the study that used little or no language to convey their message. The goal was to attempt a measure of which themes and images may best create a positive resonance – or a cordially engaged interaction grounded in mutual regard for one another. Some themes and images may create an antagonistic dissonance disrupting the educational flow, or may simply incur common indifference; so it is useful to identify those as well.

## **Quantitative research design**

### ***Sample***

The group of participants for the quantitative study included university students enrolled in my global business courses with the university international program during the years 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.

### Presentation

The student participants completed a simple assessment form as they observed marketing messages and video clips containing an array of themes and images. These clips were presented to the study participants as part of the regular context of materials within the course during normally scheduled class hours.

### Reliability and validity

The measurement instrument employed a reliability-tested simple seven-point summated scale, where participants rated their reactions to an assortment of video clips and images projected through a PowerPoint presentation. The instrument response choices ranged from *strongly dislike* to *strongly like*, with a *no opinion* option at the midpoint. The instructions and rating options were kept intentionally simple to accommodate the ranging English abilities of the students. By minimizing the intellectual filters of defined terms and detailed language, the study was able to focus more on the simple visceral reactions to the clips, reducing the inherent individual differences in assigning ordinal data.

Among the controls, the research methodology included informal follow-up interviews during regular class sessions conducted once the written survey had been administered. Open-ended interview questions sought further description of the students' reaction to the presented themes and images, probing for insights into the aspects of the themes and images that may contribute to transcultural resonance or dissonance. The interviews also questioned where sub-themes or other incidental factors (such as the music selection, cast of characters, or even a dog breed) may have influenced or subverted the participants' reaction to a primary theme.

### Data analysis

The presented video clips within the study were rated by the students according to levels of negative, neutral and positive reactions, and then assessed for the degree of resonance and dissonance among the participants in each instance. While the goal of the study was to identify positively resonant themes and images in a shared common experience, a clip may have ranked an overall positive score, yet with a level of dissonance among the students that could create tension between the extremes. A negative resonance implied that even though the students may have disliked a clip, they resonated in the shared common dislike, while the participants may also have resonated on their neutrality to a clip.

### Classification formulae

The aim of the classification formulae was to help identify which themes and images may contribute to a positive resonance within international and culturally diverse classrooms. The classification of clips was a combination of two factors: one, rating a clip's positive, neutral or negative impression on the group; the other factor, assessing the level of resonance or dissonance the clip evoked within the group. To ensure a clear division between negative, neutral and positive reactions, a one-point range on either side of the seven-point scale's mid-point of 4 quantified a neutral



response. Group responses with a mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) greater than or equal to ( $\geq$ ) 5 were classified as positive; those 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 classifications of resonance or dissonance, the study employed a variance (VAR) of greater than or equal to 3 to indicate a dissonance. A reaction with a variance less than 3 indicated a resonance, whether that resonance related to a generally positive, neutral or negative reaction to the clip. This scale enabled a definitive distinction, allowing for clear delineation of dissonance, but provided yet an accommodating margin of disagreement within a resonant category. Thus:

Dissonance:  $\text{VAR} \geq 3$

Resonance:  $\text{VAR} < 3$

The possible combinations of the factors described above gave 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  $\text{VAR} < 3$  indicated a positive resonance

$\bar{x} \geq 5$  with  $\text{VAR} \geq 3$  indicated a positive dissonance

$\bar{x} > 3$  but  $< 5$  with  $\text{VAR} < 3$  indicated a neutral resonance

$\bar{x} > 3$  but  $< 5$  with  $\text{VAR} \geq 3$  indicated a neutral dissonance

$\bar{x} \leq 3$  with  $\text{VAR} < 3$  indicated a negative resonance

$\bar{x} \leq 3$  with  $\text{VAR} \geq 3$  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 the clip. A maximum clip rating 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.

The sub-grouped clips were randomized on the measurement instrument to mitigate data skews possibly caused by initial responses with no comparative context, sub-group overlap, and participant fatigue. The measurement analysis provided descriptive data including median, mean, variance and raw score, as well as the clip classification the analyses indicated. The individual clip analyses were aggregated for the respective thematic group score.

## Results

Based on the methodology described above and further detailed below, the research data from this study indicate that certain themes and images may indeed evoke a positive transcultural resonance. These include babies/children, animals, relationships, sports, self image and life cycles. Themes and images that evoke a negative dissonance or a neutral reaction were examined as well, since international instructors may need to consider those factors in course design. Those themes and images include religion, sex, humor and nationalism.



Positively resonant themes and images

*Babies/children.* The survey data in Box 1 demonstrate a positive participant reaction to the collection of babies/children group clips ( $\bar{x}$  = 5.7), with a resonant rating (VAR = 1.7). This thematic group received the highest ranking with the strongest resonance of any category in the study. According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the babies/children category as positive resonance.

Box 1. Babies/children group descriptive analysis

Group classification: positive resonance  
 $n$  = 141  
 $\bar{x}$  = 5.7  
Median = 6.0  
VAR = 1.7  
 $\sum x$  = 808  
 $p$  < 0.001

Both male and female students responded affectionately to the clips with babies: ‘It’s a baby!’ and ‘They are so cute and innocent’ were common types of comments. The 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 Box 2 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 positive resonance.

Box 2. Animals group descriptive analysis

Group classification: positive resonance  
 $n$  = 141  
 $\bar{x}$  = 5.7  
Median = 6.0  
VAR = 2.0  
 $\sum x$  = 798  
 $p$  < 0.001

There is an advertising adage 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 the babies group in the survey’s highest scores, though slightly less in overall resonance. In the follow-up interviews as well as student response to other animal clips, dogs are viewed more favorably than cats or other animals such as cows, yet most all the animal clips in this study ranked in the positive resonance range.

**Relationships.** The survey data in Box 3 demonstrate a positive participant reaction 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 positive resonance.

**Box 3. Relationships group descriptive analysis**

Group classification: positive resonance  
 $n = 141$   
 $\bar{x} = 5.3$   
 Median = 6.0  
 VAR = 2.1  
 $\sum x = 754$   
 $p < 0.001$

As most of the participating international students were in their early to mid-20s and typically unmarried, they were noticeably responsive to clips with a 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 were 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, one student commented regarding a clip featuring a bickering husband and wife that ‘Everywhere people get married. It’s universal.’

**Sports.** The survey data in Box 4 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 positive resonance.

**Box 4. Sports group descriptive analysis**

Group classification: positive resonance  
 $n = 141$   
 $\bar{x} = 5.5$   
 Median = 6.0  
 VAR = 1.8  
 $\sum x = 776$   
 $p < 0.001$

International students appear to be more engaged with sports than their American counterparts, especially with the game of soccer (or football). International discussions of sports are frequently marked with rivalries between nations, yet there appears to be a transcultural commonality in their love of the game. The unifying theme of sports may be illustrated in the study’s positively resonant ‘Anthem’ clip ( $\bar{x} = 5.2$ ; VAR = 1.9):

Two raucous groups of opposing football (soccer) fans meet up at an alleyway intersection, and square off with one another in challenging stares. Suddenly a cell phone tone begins to play the Polish national anthem, and ‘in the spirit of the world cup’ they soften and hug in the realization that a kindred commonality transcends rivalries.

One young Brazilian woman participating in the study 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 Box 5 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 positive resonance.

**Box 5.** Self image group descriptive analysis

Group classification: positive resonance
$n = 188$
$\bar{x} = 5.0$
Median = 5.0
$VAR = 2.4$
$\sum x = 945$
$p < 0.001$

This grouping is a reference to how we see other people, rather than how we see our own selves. While we all may have a self image, we might also appreciate that others have their own self image, and even though we may not understand or relate to that image, we may have a transcultural interest in the self image of others. This concept is reflected in student interest in other students’ national anthems and flags as the symbols of their national identity, a popular component in some of my classes.

These clips featured themes and images particular to certain cultures and cultural sub-groups such as American or British youth cultures, or composites of multiple cultures. For example, the clip ‘Odyssey’ is set to a musical background:

A young man in a bleak and sparse apartment house opens a room door and begins running strongly and free, bursting through interior building walls. About midway through the run, a young woman joins in, also breaking through a series of walls. They pause a moment, exchange glances, then continue on with their run, through the last wall of the building, up a towering tree, then leaping free into open air.

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 may find the flags and national anthems of their historic enemies offensive, and some students expressed bewilderment over cultural contexts perhaps antithetical to their own.

**Life cycles.** The survey data in Box 6 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 positive resonance.

**Box 6.** Life cycles group descriptive analysis

Group classification: positive resonance

$n = 141$

$\bar{x} = 5.1$

Median = 5.0

VAR = 2.3

$\sum x = 723$

$p < 0.001$

Regardless of our diverse national systems and cultures, one fundamental trait all peoples have in common is that they are born, they live, and they die. Participant comments on clips within this thematic group included ‘Birth and death – everybody has the same physical process,’ and ‘My career, my life, children – I think a lot about those things.’ One of the starkest presentations of the birth-life-death cycle theme was in the clip ‘Champagne’:

A woman in a hospital delivery room, in a final push, expels her newborn through the hospital window with such force that it arcs across the sky, aging in extended flight as it goes, shooting through boyhood, puberty, manhood, into decaying old age as he finally lands with a crash into a gravesite. The marketing message from an electronic game company: ‘Life is short – play more.’

**Dissonant/negative/neutral themes and images**

The following group categories were identified as dissonant, or resonantly negative or neutral, according to the analysis algorithm as defined above. While themes and images that might evoke culturally dissonant or negative reactions may not necessarily be precluded from use in international classrooms – especially as they may be valuable in stimulating discussion and debate – they might nonetheless be approached cautiously, with an understanding that the related topics may especially generate animosities and dissonance between cultures.

**Humor.** The survey data in Box 7 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of humor clips ( $\bar{x} = 4.5$ ), compounded however by a relatively high level of dissonance (VAR = 3.3). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the humor category with neutral dissonance.

**Box 7.** Humor group descriptive analysis

Group classification: neutral dissonance

$n = 235$

$\bar{x} = 4.5$

Median = 5.0

VAR = 3.3

$\sum x = 1060$

$p < 0.001$

To ensure broader national representation in the analysis of applied humor, the humor group survey comprised a larger selection of component clips than the other group categories (five clips instead of three). An instructor of international students may find vast differences in what various nationalities and cultures find funny (for example, Asian humor may be based on life anecdotes; Russian humor may be grounded in historical and political affairs; American humor may be a little raunchy). One student from Taiwan commented that she ‘understood the words, but not the thinking’ behind American humor. Another student observed a danger in using humor since ‘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 Box 8 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of nationalism clips ( $\bar{x} = 4.7$ ), with an overall level of dissonance ( $VAR = 3.4$ ). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the nationalism category as neutral dissonance.

**Box 8.** Nationalism group descriptive analysis

Group classification: neutral dissonance  
 $n = 141$   
 $\bar{x} = 4.7$   
Median = 5.0  
 $VAR = 3.4$   
 $\sum x = 667$   
 $p < 0.001$

The nationalism group comprised clips providing adamant statements and displays of nationalistic patriotism. The participants expressed special sensitivity to nationalistic positions, as capably summed up by one student: ‘You can get in 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 ‘bad stereotypes’ as can be perpetuated by nationalistic posturing.

**Sex.** The survey data in Box 9 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of sex group clips ( $\bar{x} = 4.5$ ), with a resonant agreement toward the neutrality ( $VAR = 2.3$ ). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the sex category as neutral resonance. This classification compares with the religion group below – though not necessarily evoking a negative or dissonant reaction such as the humor and nationalism groups above – as a theme that may not successfully engage a positive and resonant international exchange in the classroom.

**Box 9.** Sex group descriptive analysis

Group classification: neutral resonance  
 $n = 141$   
 $\bar{x} = 4.5$   
Median = 5.0  
 $VAR = 2.3$   
 $\sum x = 632$   
 $p < 0.001$

Sex within advertisements is a consistent theme, yet the continuum of sexual tone within the presented clips ranged from muted to blatant, affecting the student reactions. International students often exhibit profound cultural differences in what is considered appropriate for sexually themed clips and images. The Asian students and the students from Turkey with a predominantly Muslim population expressed the greatest discomfort with the sexual themes: 'It's very different from what we see in Korea'; and 'We wouldn't see such ads in Turkey.' Other students expressed interest in the sexual themes and even requested repeat showings.

**Religion.** The survey data in Box 10 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of religion group clips ( $\bar{x} = 4.1$ ), with a resonant agreement toward the neutrality ( $\text{VAR} = 2.3$ ). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the religion category as neutral resonance.

**Box 10.** Religion group descriptive analysis

Group classification: neutral resonance  
 $n = 141$   
 $\bar{x} = 4.1$   
Median = 4.0  
VAR = 2.3  
 $\sum x = 580$   
 $p < 0.001$

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 Christian and Buddhist faiths. Turkish students come from a nation where most people practise Islam, while the students from South America come from predominantly Catholic nations, and many European students come from largely Protestant countries. Often the students express little knowledge about their own nation's religions, let alone about the religions of other lands. While there may be a curiosity about religions, the study participants expressed a sensitivity and apprehension towards ignorant assessments and ridicule of others' religious beliefs.

**Water.** The survey data in Box 11 demonstrate a neutral participant reaction to the collection of water group clips ( $\bar{x} = 4.4$ ), with a resonant agreement toward the neutrality ( $\text{VAR} = 1.8$ ). According to the data analysis algorithm, these results classify the water category as neutral resonance.

**Box 11.** Water group descriptive analysis

Group classification: neutral resonance  
 $n = 165$   
 $\bar{x} = 4.4$   
Median = 5.0  
VAR = 1.8  
 $\sum x = 734$   
 $p < 0.001$

Water is another contextual category, in that it is more specifically an image than a theme. Water as an image is a supporting character in the thematic presentation, so consequently the reactions to the water clips were complicated by overriding themes. 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.

## Discussion

The study findings indicate that certain themes and images may indeed evoke a positive transcultural resonance in an international classroom. These identified themes and images included babies/children, animals, relationships, sports, self image and life cycles. The findings also indicate that other themes and images may evoke a negative dissonance or a neutral reaction, including religion, sex, humor and nationalism. While images of water may pose an effective appeal for international students, the confounding themes employing the water imagery may have lowered the level of students ranking their response to clips in the water grouping.

### Classroom examples

The following examples consider possible methods to promote learning in an international classroom, and the means to apply the transculturally resonant themes and images identified in this study as supported through multimedia presentations. The thematic groupings of the considered examples include positively resonant themes of babies/children, animals, relationships, sports, self image and life cycles.

**Babies and young children.** Components of a course in global economics might address the social and economic costs of war, slave labor, trafficking in women and children, and so on. As demonstrated in Figure 1, issues regarding human rights and social justice may make a deeper and more resonant impression on the students if presented within the context of the impact on babies and young children.

**Animals.** The comparison of complex economic systems such as capitalism, socialism and communism may be assisted by employing the transculturally resonant application of animals, such as the family cow in the often-quoted cow's guide to economic systems (Figure 2). The economic dynamics of technological development might also be affectively illustrated with the resonant assistance of cows: Prior to refrigeration, the only way to keep milk fresh at home was inside the cow. Once refrigeration was invented, milk could be purchased from ever-larger dairy farms, where each cow in the herd represented one family that no longer had to have a cow, freeing up human and natural resources for other avenues of personal and societal development.

**Relationships.** The economic cycle might be considered through a *sigmoid curve* graphic, and comparing how economic cycles rise and fall much in the same way as personal relationships often do – starting low, peaking, then declining, before moving on to something new. Furthermore, employing the relationship theme to help demonstrate John Nash's theory of equilibrium, international students may benefit by a video clip from the popular movie *A Beautiful Mind* (Figure 3), calling 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 young beautiful woman, ultimately tripping over each other as well as alienating the other young women in the room. The clip illustrates a proposed mixed of strategies, where the best interests of the individual are served when also considering the good of the group.



## Babies/Children: Socioeconomic costs of war



A Palestinian boy waits for care after Israeli missiles struck Gaza city.



A wounded eight-year-old Iraqi girl in a hospital bed after her house was destroyed in an overnight US air strike, which killed both her parents.

*"They have to be carefully taught"*

**Figure 1.** Young children depicting social and economic costs of war

## Cows' Guide to Economic Systems

- **SOCIALISM** - you have two cows. The government takes them and puts them in a barn with everyone else's cows. The government gives you as much milk as you need.
- **COMMUNISM** - you have two cows. Your neighbors help you take care of them. You all share the milk.
- **CAPITALISM** - you have two cows. You sell one and buy a bull.



**Figure 2.** Cows help to demonstrate economic systems

## Relationships: John Nash's Equilibrium



***A Beautiful Mind***  
By Sylvia Nasar  
Universal Pictures 2001



***"Adam Smith Needs Revision"***  
Movie Clip :45

**Figure 3.** Film clip demonstrates John Nash's theory of equilibrium

**Sports.** The theme of sports may evoke a spirit of camaraderie in the classroom – a common bond even in the competitive atmosphere of sports. The principle of mixed cooperative and competitive economic drivers might be resonantly demonstrated through example of the Daytona 500 (Figure 4), where a racecar driver must attract a *drafting* partner in ever-shifting patterns of cooperation and competition among rivals.

**Self image.** This study indicated a transcultural interest in the lifestyles and ways of other nations and cultures, and cultural sub-groups as well. This resonant theme may be effectively employed as the global economics course considers related issues of business ethics, various perspectives on wealth and value, as well as differing takes on the context of human socioeconomic interaction. This might be illustrated by considering the Maasai concept of value and beauty in others (Figure 5); a rich perspective from one of the world's poorest peoples.

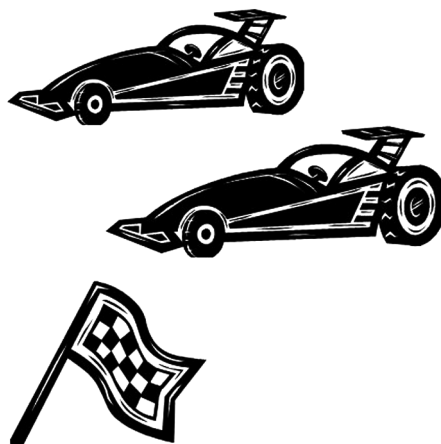
**Life cycles.** Both face-to-face and online discussions may be useful to address greater economic and social issues impacting the students' daily life, stimulated with discussion topics such as common concerns of unemployment, military spending, education funding, health care support, family planning and so on. As illustrated in Figure 6, these discussions might be facilitated with topical life-cycle questions.

## Conclusion

The possibilities of transcultural learning may be advanced by additional research into assessing the effectiveness of resonant themes and images in the classroom, including measures of any

## Sports: Daytona 500 demonstrates complexity theory and social networking.

- In stock-car races like the Daytona 500, the drivers form into multi-car draft lines for extra speed. A driver who does not enter a slipstream will likely lose. Once in a line, a driver must attract a drafting partner in order to break out and try to get further ahead in ever-shifting patterns of cooperation and competition among rival racers.



**Figure 4.** Daytona 500 demonstrates complexity theory and social networking

## Self-Image: The Maasai Aesthetic



The Maasai word for physical appearance roughly translates as a person's "goodness" and can also be used to describe their morality.



When describing a good-looking person, Maasai answers include friendly, well respected, disciplined, and brave.

**Figure 5.** Maasai perspective on beauty

**Unemployment rate:** Is it high or low in your country? Does the government provide unemployment insurance? What does someone in your country do when they lose a job?

**Military:** Is service mandatory in your country? Do they offer benefits and incentives for service? Is military spending a big part of your economy?

**Education:** Who pays the largest part for education in your country, private or public funds? Who should pay? Is there financial aid? How important is education to economic development?

**Health care:** How much does a visit to the doctor cost? A stay in the hospital? Who pays: private or government funds? Who should pay? Do you have private insurance companies? Is health care regulated? Should it be?

**Family planning:** What is happening with the birth rate in your country? Are people getting married later? Do you think the current state of the economy in your country is helping or hurting families? How? Has this impacted your own plans for marriage and a family?

**Figure 6.** Sample life cycle topics in classroom discussions

increased levels of student engagement, interaction and satisfaction in courses where transcultural themes have been applied. Physiological responses, such as heart rate and brain sector activity, to the presented themes and images may be used to provide a visceral measure of resonance and dissonance. Further research may also discover additional transcultural themes and images.

Perhaps among the most valuable aspects of transcultural messages are the benefits to be gained in learning about world problems that transcend national boundaries, as students from differing nations and cultures better share their experiences and perspectives with one another. Ironically, it is through the effort to find transcultural common ground that we may come to better appreciate our many varieties.

## Note

A brief video that samples clips referenced in the study is available at <http://wwmr.us/support/transculture/transculture.htm>

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### Biographical note

Steven R. Van Hook has taught international students at universities in the USA and abroad for more than a decade. He has a PhD specializing in transcultural education and distance learning technologies, and worked for several years in Eastern Europe with broadcast media and public education programs.

## Appendix: measurement instrument

Please rate your opinion of the video clips as presented on a scale ranging from ‘strongly dislike’ through ‘strongly like.’ Please also provide the demographic information to the questions below. As detailed in your consent form, all responses are confidential.

**Nationality:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Length of time in the United States:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### Clip 1: “Fish Love”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

### Clip 2: “Up & Go”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

### Clip 3: “Heads”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

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### Clip 4: “Headache”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

### Clip 5: “The Haka”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

### Clip 6: “Elevator Fantasy”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

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### Clip 7: “Pope”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

### Clip 8: “The Internet”

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 9: “Confused Dog”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 10: “American”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 11: “Quick Soup”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 12: “Swimming”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

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**Clip 13: “Sign Baby”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 14: “Whassup”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 15: “Seniors”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

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**Clip 16: “Marry Me?”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 17: “Football”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 18: “Odyssey”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

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**Clip 19: "Peanut Butter"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 20: "Love Kiss"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 21: "Priest & Nun"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 22: "Anthem"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 23: "Sprinkler"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 24: "The Rant"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 25: "Popping"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 26: "Snoring"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 27: "Rabbi"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 28: "Old Man"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 29: "Champagne"**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 30: “Proof”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

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**Clip 31: “Water”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 32: “Soccer”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_

**Clip 33: “Cry Baby”**

Strongly Dislike\_\_\_\_ Moderately Dislike\_\_\_\_ Slightly Dislike\_\_\_\_ No Opinion\_\_\_\_ Slightly  
Like\_\_\_\_ Moderately Like\_\_\_\_ Strongly Like\_\_\_\_