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Reflecting on Culture, Discipline, and School Disciplinary Sanctions

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Abstract

Classroom management and school disciplinary sanctions are variables influencing the individual success and failure of students, teachers, and school administrators. This paper reviewed studies applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions to bridge educational gaps stemming from classroom management and differential and disproportionate school disciplinary sanctions. Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) cultural dimensions, individualism and collectivism and power distance are examined as a way to improve student-teacher interactions, students' attitudes toward school, teachers' attitudes toward students, and most importantly, a means with which to decrease differential and disproportionate school disciplinary sanctions. Data analyzed revealed the existence of a continuum between individualism and collectivism dimensions, while also identifying, according to Gift (2003), variations within the same cultural dimension. The studies used in this research depict minority students' and teachers' experiences with what Gift (2003) describes as a cultural mismatch regarding communication. Among the recommendations found to address classroom management and decrease differential and disproportionate school disciplinary sanctions are: Hambacher's (2013) culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM), culturally relevant teacher care (CRCTC), and two national programs described by Kaemingk (2006) and known as Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) and Prevent, Act, Respond (PAR).

Keywords: Hofstede's cultural dimensions, classroom management, school discipline

Reflecting on Culture, Discipline, and School Disciplinary Sanctions

The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate the value of understanding and applying Hofstede's (1980) IBM study to resolve conflicts arising from cultural differences in teachers' expectations of student behavior in the classroom. The application of Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) cultural dimensions —individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance—can assist teachers in discerning between a student's true cultural behaviors and those that are resistant to authority or are inconsistent with school guidelines. Hofstede et. al. (2010) provide a cultural framework from which to enhance classroom management and decrease differential and disproportionate school disciplinary sanctions.

Immigration as a Factor

The social demography of the United States has changed over the last two centuries. Immigrants are not assimilating as fast as in previous decades and the majority of immigrants are not from Europe. According to Zong and Batalova (2016), the percentage of immigrants entering the U.S. has increased since 1970, from 9.6 million to 42.4 million in 2014. Using 2014 figures, Zong and Batalova (2016) identify the top five states with the largest immigrant population to be California (10.5 million), Texas and New York (4.5 million each), Florida (4 million), and New Jersey (2 million). Currently, Zong and Batalova (2016) state that immigrants and their U.S. born children account for approximately 26 percent, 81 million, of the overall U.S. population (322 million in 2016). Furthermore, the Pew Research Center (2016) projects that by 2055 there will not be a single racial or ethnic majority. Even though the notion of no single racial or ethnic majority sounds positive, according to Hofstede et al. (2010), the presence of

regional, ethnic, and religious minority groups forming at the crossroads of where the dominant culture meets these minority cultures will continue to exist. Therefore, the presence of culture as an influence will not disappear. The increasing number of immigrants and their future U.S. children will not only affect population growth, but will pose new challenges in the field of education.

Immigration, Culture, and Multicultural Education

Ferbes (1999) notes that population changes generate a new consciousness of diversity and highlights the educational needs of minority students. According to Ferbes (1999), the United States prides itself on individuality, but fails to address it within the cultural diversity of its citizens. Early attempts at addressing the issue of multicultural education, Ferbes (1999) notes, began in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to a policy of assimilation of immigrants into the already existing European-dominated culture in America. Ferbes (1999) denotes multicultural education as deriving from the perspective of "what" and "how" a lesson was taught. Karen Bohlke (2013) describes how schools closely mirror America's social environment and serve as a reflection of the inconsistencies and a lack of cohesion that exists in society. Since the immigration trend is expected to continue, Bohlke (2013) emphasizes that the added increase in the number of students living in depressed socio-economic conditions adds yet another layer of culture—another life style or belief system—thus, interfering with teacher-student interactions. She also points to the unintended consequence of schools' focus on accountability and outcomes, which leaves the field of education ill equipped to address not only multicultural education, but also disciplinary sanctions.

Culture is "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from other" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6). Culture also encompasses

a broader scope than the familiar evident differences of race and ethnicity, particularly when culture transcends into "…any part of life or society…in the workplace, schools, personality, government and literature…" (McFeeters, 2003, p. 15). McFeeters' (2003) use of Hofstede's (1980) study to compare student decision-making in learning situations highlights a significant tool for teachers and school administrators to address an array of issues ranging from differing reading comprehension levels to the application of discipline. From this premise, Bohlke (2013) contends that education is the life-blood of democracy and schools should incorporate cultural pedagogies and classroom management styles that support the eradication of racial and cultural divides.

Becoming aware of the various cultures and subcultures co-existing daily in a classroom would require a type of "…a neutral vantage point, a position of cultural relativism", (Hofstede et. al. 2010, p. 25). When teachers are faced with an array of classroom challenges, having an understanding of cultural relativism may ameliorate tensions in the classroom. For example, cultural relativism "affirms that one culture has no absolute criteria for judging the activities of another culture as 'low' or 'noble'…every culture can and should apply such judgment to its own activities, because its members are actors as well as observers" (Hofstede et. al. 2010, p. 25). Incorporating this concept into a classroom may be helpful not only to individual educators, but for school leadership when striving to create and maintain an environment of mutual respect, learning, and safety. Ferbes (1999) and Bohlke (2013) contend that failure to acknowledge the uniqueness of immigrant cultures subjugates American principles and expands educational gaps. The presence and influence of culture has already been identified by Hofstede et al (2010) and by House's et al. (2008) GLOBE research project. Both studies highlight the impact of culture and stress the urgency to develop culturally competent leaders able to meet the challenges of

globalization. Bass and Bass (2008) stress that both leaders and teachers need to identify disruptions in follower performance to understand what disturbs individuals, or students, from minority backgrounds. A path to bridge civic engagement gaps, leadership gaps, educational gaps, and maintain the American competitive edge, according to Forbes (1999), McFeeters (2003), Bohlke (2013), and Hofstede et al (2010) strongly emphasize the application of cultural dimensions—individualism vs. collectivism—to diminish the distorted threat that multicultural education generates. Furthermore, the use of cultural dimensions provides teachers and school leadership with a tool from which to assess the composition of a classroom, improve teacher-student interactions, and decrease the disproportionate disciplinary sanctions stemming from ethnocentrism.,

Individualism and Collectivism in Education

The biggest impact of Hofstede's cultural dimensions—individualist and collectivism—play in a classroom is in "establishing a class climate which is conducive to learning can be influenced by the cultural origins of the teacher and students" (Gift, 2003, p. 11). Bohlke (2013) asserts that in the absence of intercultural training and cross-cultural pedagogy, teachers have to discern between the latest fads in teaching methods, learning styles, and classroom management, which may not take into consideration the impact of culture.

In a study examining the effects of individualism and collectivism on students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness and immediacy, Gift (2003) found that cultural value dimensions play a role in intercultural communication. According to Gift (2003), Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) asserts that human beings have certain expectations for every situation and these expectations can be further classified into the following:

(a) Socially normative patterns of behavior applicable to an entire speech community or subgroup or the way one expects the majority of people to act in normal situations

(b) Person-specific knowledge related to another's typical communication patterns or the way one knows specific acquaintances, like friends and family, normally behave

Gift (2003) explains that a communicator's reactions to expectancy violations differ depending on the person's cultural background as well as on the type and degree of violation. For example, in proxemic violations, Gift (2003) indicates that an individualistic person will react with hostility whereas a collectivistic individual will react with withdrawal. Being aware of these reactions, according to Gift (2003), is of great relevance in education because it points to intercultural miscommunication stemming from differing cultural backgrounds—i.e., differing values, beliefs, and norms. These miscommunications, according to Gift (2003), will appear when members from individualistic or collectivist cultures have differing expectations for depicting proper student or teacher behavior—the judgment depends on who is on the receiving end.

Within the realm of education, Gift's (2003) explanations provide an interesting lens from which to assess the state of the U.S. education system, particularly since the majority of outcomes, goals, practices, and disciplinary sanctions derive from an individualistic approach, which derives from the dominant Western European culture. Furthermore, Gift (2003) identified that classroom standards, educational goals, and teacher effectiveness measures, which include aspects of culture, have not always been fitting for culturally diverse students. The glitch between them occurs when, according to Hambacher (2013), a student's behavior does not abide with the mainstream norms. When such a mismatch occurs, Hambacher (2013) contends that

students may be subject to misinterpretation by teachers who make decisions about discipline from a dominant culture perspective.

Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) demonstrated the use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions by identifying a theoretical and empirical link between individualism and collectivism and increased economic activity. In their 2011 study, Gorodnichenko and Roland discovered that cross-cultural psychology goes hand in hand with growth and innovation. In their 2011 study, Gorodnichenko and Roland present a lucid contrast between individualist and collectivist cultures, highlighting culturally different learning styles and consequently identifying a matching learning and teaching style and culturally matching disciplinary actions. For example, Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) matched the dominant Western European culture that dominates the United States with individualism and the minority cultures with collectivism; the differences are clear. First, Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) describe individualists as analytical, who classify items based on a specific rule; whereas, a collectivist classifies according to contextual or functional relationships. Second, in grammar, for example, Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) identify individualistic children as learning nouns first, whereas collectivist children learn verbs first. Third, there is a difference in how an individualist and a collectivist perceive failure. For example, in Gorodnichenko and Roland's (2011) study, they reveal a number of behavioral differences that derive from the different cultural perceptions of the self.

Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) found that collectivist cultures perceive failure as resulting from a lack of effort, which stimulates more effort to achieve success. Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) describe students taking more college remedial courses in response to low grades. On the other hand, in an individualistic culture the perception of failure, according to Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011), is linked to the individual's ability. As a result, the authors

contend the individualist culture will look for an alternative task or occupation that is better suited to the individual's innate talents.

Cultural Dimensions and School Discipline

Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) add another phenomenon thought to be universal, which is the fundamental attribution of error. In their study, Gorodnichenko and Roland (2011) stress individualist cultures tend to make immediate conclusions, as well as explain behavior excessively by someone's intrinsic attributes rather than situation. In other words, individuals from an individualistic culture will focus on the final action, not the cause of that action, whereas a collectivistic individual will focus on the entire situation that led to the final action. This description links cultural dimensions to school discipline. From this premise, Hambacher (2013) describes school discipline as having two goals: (1) creating and maintaining a safe and positive environment conducive to learning, which often requires teachers and schools to address challenging behavior; and (2) to teach and promote self-discipline. Kaemingk (2006) describes the school discipline as onerous for teachers who face acts of disrespect and verbal abuse. Furthermore, Kaemingk (2006) indicates that like students, teachers who feel afraid will not perform at the same level as teachers in safe environments.

In a study examining the influence of school discipline (overnight suspension, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and recommendation for expulsion), race/ethnicity, and gender, King (2011) found that school discipline predicts attitudes toward teachers and the variance in attitudes towards teachers could be explained by school discipline. King (2011) also found that school discipline predicts motivation/self-regulation. Since the majority of schools in the United States are influenced by the Western European culture, Hambacher (2013) may help

explain some of the disproportionate rates of school disciplinary sanctions because misinterpretation of behaviors may be at play. For example, Hambacher (2013) explains that when teachers interpret student behavior through dominant sociocultural norms, behaviors that may be viewed as culturally normal for the student may be perceived as inappropriate to the teacher.

From this premise the use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions is helpful because, according to Hambacher (2013), power distances (PD) may be a contributing factor to a teacher's perception of a student's behavior as problematic. In separate studies, Hambacher (2013), Gift (2003), Kaemingk (2006), and Rosen (1997), describe the presence of the traditional teacher/student power distribution in the classroom, in addition to the presence of a culture of power in the classrooms, as originating at the crossroads of where the individualistic and collectivistic cultures meet.

Two separately independent studies by Rosen (1997) and Hambacher (2013) describe how cultural mismatch could potentially contribute to differences in cultural and academic expectations and communications, resulting in a misinterpretation of various cultural contexts and disciplinary sanctions. Hambacher (2013) adds that cultural misunderstandings coming from power distance are transferable from the classroom, causing miscommunication between parents and teachers during a parent-teacher conference. According to Hambacher (2013), some behaviors that may be perceived as a challenging by a teacher may be subject to interpretation and inextricably linked to teacher's perspectives and ethnocentrism.

Hambacher's (2013) study represents the disparities that exist between the rates of punitive school disciplinary sanctions between White, Black, Hispanic, Asians, and Native Americans throughout schools in the United States. In her 2013 study, Hambacher found that

about 1 in 5 Black students are suspended compared to 1 in 10 White Students. Among Hispanics, Hambacher (2013) identified via parent surveys that 20 percent of Hispanic students in grades 7 to 12 had been suspended or expelled at least once. Hambacher (2013) identified this as a higher rate than that experienced by White students who are only suspended at a rate of 15 percent. Another example in which the use of cultural dimensions may be helpful is in the perception of what is considered to be loud. In her 2013 study, Hambacher found that Black students were subject to higher rate of office referrals for more subjectively defined behavior such as "excessive noise".

Hambacher (2013) points to collectivist behavior pattern, which describes the Black Culture as rhythmic, highly charged in regionalisms and feeling as well as highly expressive. Additionally, Hambacher (2013) describe Black culture as relying on oral communication and "Signifying", which is often misunderstood or feared by teachers with differing cultural backgrounds. Since the majority of teachers are influenced by the European American culture bias for individualism, Hambacher (2013) states that teachers use this as a personal yardstick, which works against students who live and breathe a collectivist culture at home. Hambacher (2013) indicates that teachers expect all students to behave according to the school's cultural standards of normality, influenced by the European American culture model. When a student fails to meet the norms of the dominant school and societal culture, Hambacher (2013) indicates those students are labeled as problematic.

One challenge to the intended goals of school discipline, according to Hambacher (2013), is an inconsistency in the approach to discipline that often occurs from classroom to classroom and from school to school. Hambacher (2013) found that this inconsistency prevents the development and application of school discipline goals. Yarrell-Harris (2003) explored teachers' perceptions

of the role of culture and behavior and found that most of the teachers had clear views of expected classroom behavior. Behaving in class meant being quiet, conforming, and not creating controversy. Yarrell-Harris' (2003) observations also revealed that African-American teachers understood communication and expressions of their African-American students and non-Hispanic White teachers often opt for the color-blind approach in an attempt to not appear prejudiced in class. Kaemingk (2006) and Hambacher (2013) found that, pertaining to school discipline, schools primarily advocate a reactive approach to discipline, which more often than not is zero tolerance.

Murphy (2011) found a significant difference in the way teachers view diversity by grade level and found that elementary school teachers discipline less than high school teachers. According to Murphy (2011), this change in disciplinary actions appears to take place at a point in time in which teacher perception of behavior begins to shift, adding to the disproportion reported among Black students in high school years, which may also be applied to other minority students.

Hambacher's (2013) study revealed that the majority of schools in the United States have opted for zero-tolerance policies, which unfortunately are now considered universal, but do not fit the multi-cultural model. According to Kaemingk (2006), zero tolerance in schools correlates with the United Sates' high rate of minority incarceration. Additionally, Kaemingk's (2006) study found that the "get tough" approach creates the opposite effect—rebellious, defiant students -- and fails to deter unwanted behavior. Furthermore, Kaemingk (2006) found that zero tolerance policies limit the flexibility of school administrators to be objective about less serious offenses (e.g.: loudness, facial expressions, avoiding eye contact, nervous laughter, or intense stares). In addition to the lack of flexibility instilled in zero tolerance policies, Kaemingk (2006)

indicates that individual teachers are left to develop their own classroom rules based on their own experiences, which leaves students having to respond to a different system as they move from classroom to classroom during a regular school day. Kaemingk (2006) also indicates that teachers have little preparation or instruction on how to discern and handle disciplinary issues in their classrooms.

In considering the application of Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a useful tool in the classroom, Gift's (2003) study found various significant results deriving from individualistic vs. collectivistic cultures. First, highly collectivistic and highly individualistic students perceived immediate instructors as highly effective. Second, Gift (2003) describes the more individualistic a student rated him/herself, the more collectivistic that student rated him/herself. Third, Gift's (2003) findings also depict a strong cultural identity among students high in individualistic and collectivistic tendencies. According to Gift (2003), these highly individualistic and collectivistic students were able to adapt and appreciate differing communication styles more than students low in individualistic and collectivistic tendencies.

Consequently, Gift's (2003) study also described that male instructors were perceived to be higher in immediacy and effectiveness than were female instructors and explains that this may stem from the fact that in the U.S., most leaders are male and students still perceive a difference in gender value tendencies. Finally, Gift (2003) found significant correlations between educational level and teacher immediacy, as well as between age and perceptions of teacher effectiveness.

Recommendations

Among the recommendations found to address classroom management and decrease differential and disproportionate school disciplinary sanctions are the following: Hambacher's

(2013) Culturally Responsive Classroom Management (CRCM), Culturally Relevant Teacher Care (CRCTC), and what Kaemingk (2006) describes as two national programs known as Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) and Prevent, Act, Respond (PAR). Murphy (2011) and Yarrell-Harris (2003) each recommend cultural awareness for both teachers and students.

Yarrell-Harris (2003) found the presence of unrecognized biases among White and Black teachers and recommended school leadership to consider in-service training, paid workshops conducted by colleges or universities or private consultants to assist teachers in deepening their understanding of cultural behavior as well as cultural behavioral interventions. Additionally, Yarrell-Harris (2003) recommends school leadership to consider creating focus groups to assist teachers with a comfortable venue to discuss sensitive cultural interpretations and differences and help them explore their own perceptions of the cultural divide.

Hambacher's (2013) culturally responsive classroom management style (CRCM), brings culture and diversity to the forefront. Among its main points are the following:

- Recognition of one's own ethnocentrism and biases;
- Knowledge of student's cultural backgrounds;
- Understanding the broader social, economic, political context of our education system;
- Having the ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management;
- Commitment to building caring classroom communities

Through the use and application of the CRCM, Hambacher (2013) emphasizes that teachers will become consciously aware of their personal ethnocentrism and begin to acknowledge the presence of diversity. With CRCM, teachers will learn to include the socio-economic status and children with disabilities in their view of the classroom. With the use of the CRCM, Hambacher (2013) stipulates teachers will have a better vantage point from which to

assess their classrooms, work with parents and students, and address disciplinary situations with a more objective approach. Finally, Hambacher (2013) believes that with training, teachers will further enhance their teaching styles, keeping them free of the colorblind policies and discourage them from avoiding issues of race and culture.

Hambacher's (2013) culturally relevant teacher care (CRCTC) describes the development of a pedagogy emphasizing the needs of Black children, but the approach can be adapted to fit other minority students. Hambacher (2013) describes CRCTC as deriving from Care Theory, Critical race theory, and Black teacher pedagogy. According to Hambacher (2013), the CRCTC will assist non-Black teachers to diminish unrecognized biases, stereotypes, and other cultural challenges because it emphasizes the "no excuses" teaching approach that has proven to be successful in addressing discipline gaps present in the classrooms.

Kaemingk (2006) recommends the use of proactive approaches like Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) and Prevent, Act, Resolve (PAR), as well as programs that mirror similar approaches like The Paycheck Program, and We Love Children Program. According to Kaemingk (2006), schools using these programs incorporate a proactive approach and, through continued application, have enabled them to discern defiant and obstructive behaviors from mild behaviors. The PBS and PAR strategies used are as follows:

- Use existing discipline data to identify times and areas of inappropriate behaviors;
- Use existing data to classify students in need of secondary and tertiary treatment;
- Issues of defiance or disorderly are assessed and matched with social skills lessons;
- Unified and consistent school-wide discipline approach;
- Identify trouble spots like transition between classes, cafeteria, and playgrounds;

- Teachers receive staff development training whenever new strategies or programs relating to school discipline are adopted;
- School administration seek root of misbehavior and work with student to better handle future similar triggers;
- Schools also adopt a view that student behavior can be modified by positive reinforcement;

Kaemingk (2006) recommends the Paycheck Program as a system of rewards, incentives, and punishments. The program Kaemingk (2006) indicates helps track and modify student behaviors with the added benefit of improving communications with parents. Finally, Kaemingk (2006) describes this program as assisting in viewing expected behaviors and inappropriate ones.

Kaemingk (2006) recommends The We Love Children Program as an early intervention system helping children with mild to moderate discipline problems stemming from adjustments to school environment. According to Kaemingk (2006), it focuses on grades kindergarten to third grade, identifying children via a screening process. Kaemingk (2006) states that parents and teacher aides work together, creating a lifeline of communication along the way that allows the teacher aide an opportunity to guide and encourage the improvement of the child's behavior in the classroom.

Finally, Murphy (2011) recommends the development of cultural awareness to help teachers discern between true cultural behaviors and those that are resistant to authority or are inconsistent with school guidelines. Murphy (2011) also recommends teachers and school leadership to update their teaching philosophies and/or mission statements as their understanding of cultures deepens.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the value of understanding and applying Hofstede's (1980) IBM cultural dimensions to bridge educational gaps stemming from classroom management and differential and disproportionate school disciplinary sanctions. The studies reviewed presented the use of Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's (2010) cultural dimensions —individualism vs. collectivism and power distance—as a means with which to address inconsistencies in classroom management and disciplinary actions. Each of the recommendations described present the benefits of acknowledging the presence of diversity and of incorporating cultural awareness among the teaching profession. Additionally, this article demonstrated the benefit of developing multicultural classrooms, pedagogies, and elevating cultural awareness as useful tools for educators to better assess culturally based behaviors from those behaviors inconsistent with school guidelines. It is the authors' belief that the incorporation of cultural dimensions as a foundation for the field of education will decrease the differential and disproportionate school disciplinary sanctions among minority students.

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