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Chapter 17: Intercultural communication

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CHAPTER 17: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Quotable quotes

"One does not make the wind but is blown by it."
Chinese proverb

"He who speaks has no knowledge, and he who has knowledge does not speak."
Japanese proverb

"Nothing done with intelligence is done without speech."
Greek proverb

"He who stirs another's porridge often burns his own."
Swedish proverb

"A single arrow is easily broken, but not a bunch."
Asian proverb

"The first man to raise his voice loses the argument."
Chinese proverb

"A friend to everyone is a friend to no–one."
German proverb

(Proverbs taken from Samovar & Porter (1995, p. 51).

A brief introduction to the field

The term **culture shock** was first used by anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960), to describe feelings of alienation and conspicuousness about being different that affects people when they enter an unfamiliar culture. These stages of culture shock are:

Stage One: *The Honeymoon*. Everything is new and different and people appear friendly. It's a stage of enthusiasm about the new culture.

Stage Two: *The Crisis*: You begin to notice the differences and feel how little you fit in and how good it would be to be in your own familiar territory where people behave according to your expectations.

Stage Three: *The Recovery*. If you survive the shock of the new culture you learn some of the language and ways of adapting and don't feel so inadequate.

Stage Four: *The Adjustment*. You come to enjoy parts of the way people in your new culture do things and begin to do them yourself and so your behaviour has adapted to fit into your new culture.

Team task

In groups of three discuss the meaning of the proverbs presented in the quotable quotes section and decide what it tells you about the culture from which it comes. Do proverbs encourage stereotyping?

Individual tasks

Write a paragraph about intercultural communication, beginning with one of the proverbs which begin this section.

Etiquette–the rules for what is considered proper and improper in "polite society"–is largely culturally determined. The rules that regulate social conduct in Australia are not necessarily the same rules that regulate social conduct elsewhere in the world. Fill in the following first yourself and afterwards compare your reactions with those of some one from a different culture, eg., Australian and Malaysian; Japanese and Indian; Chinese and Australian; male and female; city and country.

- *How do you begin a conversation with someone you have never met before?*

- *How long do you maintain eye contact when talking with someone? How long do you maintain eye contact when listening to someone?*

What are your culture's rules–

- *for using chopsticks?*

- *for indicating you have finished a meal with your knife and fork?*

- *about when to say please?*

- *about when to say thank you?*

- *about when to use the term "mate"?*

- *about whether it is OK to interrupt someone who is speaking?*

- *In groups of three draft a paragraph that sums up how we learn culture and how culture influences our behaviour*

Writing tasks

The tendency to judge the values, customs, behaviours, or other aspects of another culture "using our own group and our own customs as the standards for all judgments" is **ethnocentrism**. Unless we become consciously aware of our tendency to judge the familiar as good or right, we may judge others' unfamiliar ways of doing things as bad or wrong.

- Write a paragraph discussing the concept of **ethnocentrism,** giving an example of one time that you behaved in an ethnocentric way.

- Describe Hall's (Gudykunst, 1983) notion of high and low context cultures by giving detailed examples derived from a culture in each of his groupings. How does understanding Hall's idea help you in your relationships with people whose culture differs markedly from yours?
- Skilled communicators can adapt their communication style to communicate with people from other cultures and people with disabilities. Discuss in writing, giving examples.

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