



Interpreting culture: Pre-service teachers taking control and making meaning across cultures

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INTRODUCTION

The following research describes and analyses how a group of pre-service teachers, from Tasmania, dealt with cultural differences during a five-week school experience and rural homestay exchange in 1998. In particular it is an explanation of how they dealt with instances of what may be referred to as 'cultural mismatch' (Pine, 1998).

As the two staff involved most directly with the management of this program, we were committed firstly to the teaching and learning outcomes of the exchange program and secondly to enhancing pre-service teacher education practice. During the implementation and evaluation periods of the program, it became clear that there was value in analysing the theoretical aspects of the exchange and being able to develop a conceptual framework for viewing cultural mismatches. We describe below our application of Pine's model (adapted from Peirce) (Pine, 1998) to analyse the cultural mismatches occurring with our students as they entered (and functioned within) the other culture. Also described are our interpretations as to the origins of these cultural rules as well as the strategies used by our students to 'cope' (immediately and for the long term). We then suggest ways future groups of teachers can learn to 'cope' when encountering cultural mismatch in the future.

BACKGROUND

The Australia-Indonesia Rural Areas Education Scheme (AIRAES) program was a two-phase program funded by the Australia-Indonesia Institute in Canberra, which enabled two groups of pre-service teachers from both Indonesia and Australia to travel to each other's country, experience the

language and culture and undertake a rural school experience for a number of weeks.

The aims of the AIRAES program were to provide:

- a program for trainee teachers to experience the diverse nature of the other society and to broaden these teachers' perceptions about the other country through education;
- assistance to teachers in rural settings in each country by giving them and their students access to native speakers who are training as teachers;
- rural school children in each country with access to native speakers for brief periods; and
- the opportunity to develop ongoing linkages between the institutions (The Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania and the IKIP Teacher Training Institution in Padang, West Sumatra).

Phase 1 of the exchange (Indonesians to Australia) took place during February and March 1998 and Phase 2 of the exchange (Australians to Indonesia) took place during November and December 1998. The focus of the remainder of the description below centres on Phase 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The pre-service training of teachers is one of the major areas where planning for future educational needs can be focussed. For education which will '...expand beyond national borders' (Lo Bianco, 1998, p. 1), future generations will not only rely on educational opportunities inside the classroom, but also what will be available via flexible delivery. To encourage education which will produce '...deep effects in thinking about knowledge and how it is assembled and imparted...' (Lo Bianco, 1998, p. 1), a special kind of teacher will be needed.

The pre-service teacher training period is the time and place to begin to sow the seeds of inquiry and thinking for future educational imperatives and to plan for this 'special' kind of teacher, as teachers plan their career development over their career lifetime. Melnick suggests that '...more knowledge and radically different skills for teachers...' will be needed in future. Teachers must be prepared for '...languages, cultures, exceptionalities, learning styles, talents and intelligences, therefore requiring a rich variety of teaching strategies' (Darling-Hammond et al, in Melnick and Zeichner, 1998, p. 88).

As well, another consideration for those planning pre-service teacher education curriculum and for the new teachers themselves, will be to focus

on making connections between the students we teach in K-12 classrooms and people around the world (Tyson et al, 1997, p. 73). For otherwise, how else will the world learn about intercultural dynamics and intercultural communication (Pine, 1998, p. 1)?

The common assumption is that within pre-service teacher curricula, which are focussing on creating these new special kind of teachers, there is a necessity to provide enriching school experience sessions, providing classroom experiences which are critical in enabling these new teachers to link theory to practice as well as develop initial teaching competencies. The purpose of the school experience is to provide prospective teachers with classroom experience practice in a supportive environment, allowing gradual assimilation of responsibilities.

If it is this field experience/school experience which becomes an agreed meaningful part of pre-service teacher preparation, ‘...alternative enriching ways of preparing teachers for their multiple roles and teaching contextual complexities of life in schools and for careers as inquiring professionals...’ (Knowles and Cole, 1996, p. 648) should be identified and developed.

More than ever before, due to increased global mobility, future teachers for new times will need to be planning for new challenges, such as multiple-ability classrooms and bilingualism. Grant and Secada (in Wiest, 1998, p. 358ff.), reviewing the research on preparing teachers for diverse learners, conclude that ‘experiences with representations from diverse populations’ are the best and most worthwhile field experiences. In providing school experiences which focus on expanding the students outlooks, Wiest found that ‘...short, more informal, intensive cultural immersion experience...’ can strongly influence pre-service teachers and have far-reaching effects. With such experiences, their later teaching may well be affected in a positive way, causing them to develop programs which will in turn improve their students’ understanding of diversity through multicultural education immersion programs.

According to Stackowski, student teachers must spend time in the local community ‘outside school doors’ to be fully experiencing the authentic context of the school experience. It is not enough for teachers to ‘imagine’ how the authentic context might be. In the Northern Arizona Navajo Indian program student teachers were immersed in the Navajo culture and this heightened their awareness of cross-cultural and linguistic barriers to teaching and learning (Minner, 1995). Outcomes of the Navajo experience were that the pre-service teachers were more culturally sensitive and better informed educators (Stackowski, 1998, p.162).

For our students in classrooms to be able to understand, interact with, and learn from people different from themselves, they must develop... knowledge that our worldviews are not always the same as others, and cross-cultural awareness is how ideas can be viewed by others. The teachers who facilitate the learning of these ideas must have been exposed to such data themselves. In-country school experience programs (such as the one which will be described below) target such learning (Tyson et al, 1997, p.73).

The value of in-country school experiences for cross-cultural understanding is, as Pine says, that teachers can firstly, ‘...clarify situations by identifying cultural foundations of situations’, secondly, work towards understandings of students’ puzzling behaviours, and thirdly, try to understand what they represent and the foundation from which they come’. The school experience needs to focus not only on cross-cultural aspects but also exactly the same types of generic aims of pre-service teacher education such as: ‘inquiry orientation, gaining broad views of teaching, encouraging collaborative links.’ (Knowles and Cole, 1996, p. 649).

It is important to become aware of others’ ways of knowing (Pine, 1998, p.1). In the process of these pre-service teachers working ‘within’ and ‘on the perimeters of’ the ‘other’ community, they have viewed themselves as ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. Merton (in Banks, 1998, p.6) spoke of ‘insiders only’ being able to *understand* a culture and ‘outsiders’ *understanding it to a degree* by viewing it objectively. An in-country school experience should theoretically provide both.

Being ‘inside’ and ‘on the perimeters’ of a new situation can help pre-service teachers learn to function outside their own comfort zones and in novel situations. Such learning is important to pre-service teachers developing their abilities to teach diverse learners. Pre-service teachers gain a heightened awareness of a common humanity and interpersonal skills due to the amount of cross-cultural interaction going on. As well, there can be an ‘...enhanced ability to look at a situation from another’s perspective...’ acquiring an increased sympathy for feelings people experience when outside of their more dominant culture (Wiest). Sleeter (in Wiest, 1995, pp. 358ff) found her students began to confront their own fears, misconceptions and ignorance after spending some time in another socio-cultural group. Despite their uneasiness in adopting a minority role in an unfamiliar culture, (those) who have participated in immersion programs endorse them for removing biases. ‘Critical reflection on firsthand experience is crucial for learning to mesh behaviour and beliefs to achieve the important goal of acting with understanding’ (Wiest, 1998, pp.358 ff).

CULTURAL MISMATCH

‘Stumbling’ on unfamiliar situations, pre-service teachers undertaking in-country school experience programs are adults who are ‘...not used to crossing cultural boundaries...’ and they may experience feelings of awkwardness or confusion because of unfamiliarity. This can also be termed ‘cultural mismatch’: where upon entering the ‘other’ culture, we suspect something is different but have no idea how to come to grips with the ‘disequilibrium’ (Pine, 1997, p. 1).

Reactions to cultural mismatch can be defensiveness or withdrawal: indicators may be varied and include such behaviours as confusion, silence, unusual or awkward body language/facial expressions, verbal reactions, hilarious laughter, loss of eye contact or termination of the action currently underway. MacNeal points to this mismatch occurring because of ‘...the cultural gulf’ that allows the two cultures to say and do the same thing, but mean different things, and to say and do different things, but mean more or less the same thing...’ (MacNeal, 1995).

Pine’s analytical model (adapted from Peirce’s model - a model for describing and analysing puzzling, naturally occurring events) was not originally cross-cultural, but adapted by Pine to suit cross-cultural analysis. It was based on semiotics, that is, the understanding that ‘... all consciousness is sign-consciousness’ (Houser and Kloesel, 1992, p xxxvi). To make meaning, we must have an ‘object’ and an ‘interpretant’, ‘...otherwise you have no sign.’

Pine’s analytical model is seen in Figure 1 below.

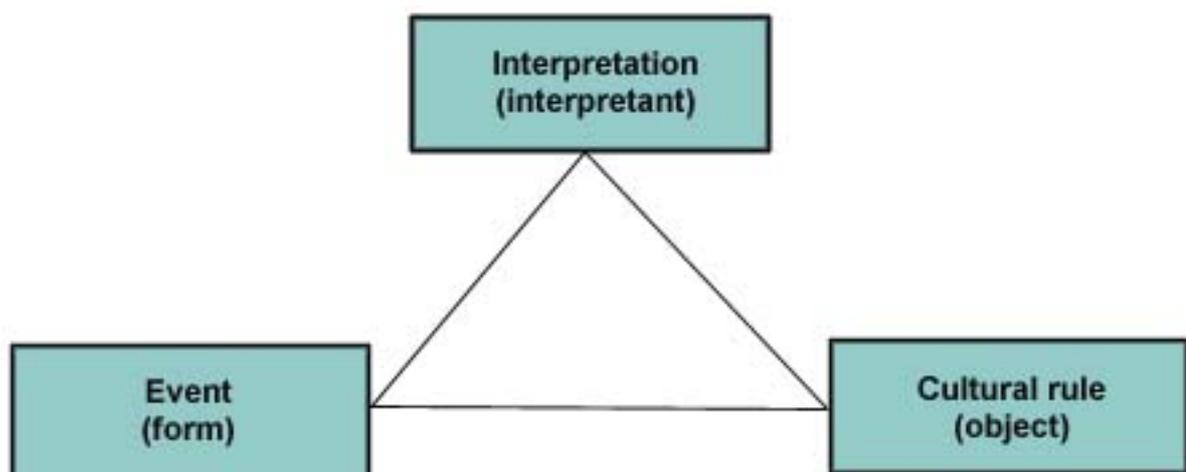


Figure 1: Pine’s analytical framework for interpretation of cultural mismatch (1993, p. 665; 1997, p.4);

'THE SIGN - OR, MEANING-MAKING'

Pine's was a two-stage analysis process: firstly, the recognition of an awkward, confusing or uncomfortable events plus the identification of where the strangeness lies. Secondly, there is the employment of the Peirce model to analyse the cultural mismatch as regards the event/form, the interpretation and (analysing from both cultures), the cultural rule.

Cultural mismatch is actually different to culture shock and arises from shock felt when we are confronted with different concrete events in the 'other' culture where differences are strikingly great. Physiological reactions to culture shock as compared to cultural mismatch can be seen as extreme, such as non-eating, crying, hysteria, having appeared from something which was obviously different. Cultural mismatch appears in our feelings and our mixed emotions and arises from something which ostensibly looks 'normal'.

For pre-service teachers who have invested their time and energies to immersing themselves in a cross-cultural, in-country school experience, the chances of experiencing cultural mismatch are high. For students to have strategies to overcome problems associated with experiencing this feeling of awkwardness or uncomfortability, the events and cultural rules are best analysed in order to shed further light on these situations and we better prepared for the future. What follows are descriptions of various events which occurred during a visit of eleven pre-service teachers in a school experience program in West Sumatra in November-December 1998.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The AIRAES program succeeded the AIREP program which had been designed to promote greater mutual understanding between teacher education students in Indonesia and Australia in rural communities (Hill & Thomas, 1997, p.1). It is not only the appreciation of the 'other' which is sought with such programs. There is '...value in teachers being able to value their own perceptual landscapes' - there is value in allowing teachers to name the new and the old experiences and practices and listen to others name theirs (Pine, 1992, p.667).

The AIRAES program participants from Phase 2 of the program in November/ December 1998 also reported having experienced situations that they would term 'cultural mismatch'. What was interesting to us were the mechanisms and strategies put into operation by the AIRAES students to be able to solve the problems created by cultural mismatch before the extremes of defensiveness or withdrawal or even shock occurred.

Of particular interest to us was not the actual recognition that a mismatch had occurred, but also that once our students had realised the mismatch, what strategies they used to comprehend it and deal with it, as Pine described (1997, p.3). For these pre-service teachers, their personal interpretation of these mismatches which often took them by surprise, were central to their ultimate meaning-making. Our pre-service teachers initially brushed the incidents aside, presuming the awkwardness felt was due to the others' 'strangeness' (Pine, 1997, p.2).

Our work takes this further where we also parallel the analysis of cultural rule against the coping strategies (identified by our students). Initially coping represented 'brushing the incidents aside' due to 'the others' strangeness' (Pine, 1997, p.2). We were particularly interested in how the students later rationalised the situations to be able to assimilate 'the imbalance' into their existing cognitive structures, that is, what meaning they made: hoping also to have developed workable strategies for pre-service teachers in future exchange programs.

CULTURAL MISMATCH: EIGHT EVENTS

The pre-service teachers taking part in the school experience program noted the following situations as having made them feel awkward or uncomfortable in their new situation. The first three observations were made by pre-service teachers reflecting on instances of cultural mismatch surrounding meal times and eating customs.

Observation 1. Although in a house bustling with other university students, this pre-service teacher often found herself eating alone at the evening meal table. Not even the host mother would join her to eat. This pre-service teacher felt awkward and uncomfortable eating alone and secretly questioned herself whether she was so different that she should be singled out.

Observation 2. After having been invited to share an evening meal in a local restaurant the pre-service teacher was settling down to enjoying a coffee and the possibility of singing karaoke only to be disappointed by the fact that the hosts finished the meal and left the restaurant immediately, leaving him uncomfortably confused about whether to drink and sing, or leave with the guests.

Observation 3. This pre-service teacher felt confused about the fact that the family disappeared after dinner to leave her alone with no explanation as to why their attentions to her ceased immediately after the evening meal.

If viewed from the Pine/Peirce framework, the observations can be discussed in the following ways.

| Australia | Indonesia |
|--|---|
| Event 1 | Event 1 |
| Pre-service teacher was required to eat the evening meal alone. | Family and other students left the pre-service teacher to eat alone. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| Confusion/awkwardness as to whether she was so different that she had to eat alone. | Leave her alone to eat to get on with the task of eating without disruption. |
| <i>Cultural rule</i> | <i>Cultural rule</i> |
| Never leave an honoured guest alone at the meal table. | Polite to leave an honoured guest alone to eat at the meal table. |
| Event 2 | Event 2 |
| Indicators that after dinner at a restaurant, coffee served and karaoke would begin. | Meal is over and no reason to remain at the meal table. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| Confusion as to whether to drink the coffee and sing karaoke, or leave with the hosts. | The guest has been served the meal and the purpose of the evening (to eat) is now complete, so leave the table. |

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Cultural rule</i> Evening meal table at restaurant is not only for eating, but also for dialogue , entertainment and relaxation. | <i>Cultural rule</i> Evening meal table at restaurant is purely for the purpose of eating the evening meal. |
| Event 3 Pre-service teacher left alone after dinner is complete in the evenings. | Event 3 Leave the pre-service teacher alone after the evening meal. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> Confusion as to why they seem to be so attentive at most other times, but not in the lonely end-of-the-day period. | <i>Interpretation</i> It is time to leave the guest alone to her own devices in the after-dinner period. |
| <i>Cultural rule</i> Spend family time together after the evening meal. | <i>Cultural rule</i> After dinner is personal time, tying in with the evening prayer period. |

The pre-service teachers in events 1, 2 and 3 were all expecting that the evening meal would be a time for family sharing/togetherness/camaraderie as it is in their own Australian culture. All the indicators were present in the environment to lead them to believe it would be so: that is, fine food served, plenty of people nearby, feelings of relaxation towards the end of the day. However, after analysing the two cultures' interpretations of these events, it is clear that the cultural rule is where the Australian culture seeks company, but the Indonesian culture seeks personal space and time alone.

Further 'cultural mismatch' occurred for other pre-service teacher causing feelings somewhat stronger than awkwardness, perhaps almost a feeling of anger, as follows:

Observation 4: One of the pre-service teachers asked a colleague in her staff room to process a film. The next morning she was horrified to find the staff members looking through her processed film without her permission.

Observation 5: A pre-service teacher returned back to her homestay one day only to find that her cupboard, which she had inadvertently left unlocked, had been opened and her private papers and belongings had been gone through. Although nothing was missing, she knew everything had been touched and was angered and confused as to what to do.

| Australia | Indonesia |
|--|--|
| Event 4 Pre-service teacher asked teacher colleague to have a roll of film processed for her. Processed film opened and shared with whole staff. | Event 4 Pre-service teacher asked teacher colleague to have a roll of film processed for her. Processed film opened and shared with whole staff. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> Anger at having had private belongings | <i>Interpretation</i> Teacher colleague presumed that it |

| | |
|--|---|
| opened for everyone to see. | would be alright also to share the processed film around the staffroom. |
| <i>Cultural rule</i> | <i>Cultural rule</i> |
| Never access/open another person's belongings without their permission. | It is alright to access another person's belongings as long as they are not locked. |
| Event 5 | Event 5 |
| Belongings stored away in room out of sight in an unlocked cupboard. | Belongings stored away in room out of sight in an unlocked cupboard. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| Anger at finding that member of household had accessed/gone through these personal belongings. | Access guest's personal belongings as cupboard not locked. |
| <i>Cultural rule</i> | <i>Cultural rule</i> |
| Never access/open another person's belongings without their permission. | It is alright to access another person's belongings as long as they are not locked. |

The pre-service teacher in event no. 4 had simply intended to have a friend process her film. She was angered when the next morning the staff were looking at her photos, as she felt this was a clear violation of her rights to remain in charge of who has access to her property. In event no. 5, the angered pre-service teacher had also had her property accessed without her permission. In Australia the custom is never to open/access the property of another person without their permission. The Indonesian cultural rule is that it is allowable to access another person's property. (Thus the need to lock and keep locked.)

The third set of observations occurred for our pre-service teachers around the theme of personal relationships and feelings of embarrassment.

Observation 6: For many weeks this pre-service teacher had observed the custom of males holding hands or hugging shoulders to outwardly express their close (heterosexual) friendship, but was taken aback and embarrassed when the offer was made to hold hands and hug shoulders with his new Indonesian friends.

Observation 7: As this pre-service teacher became acquainted with the family routines, she felt comfortable sitting down after school with the children and servant (female) and mother to watch television. She was taken aback when the sitting-next-to soon became 'touching, stroking of hands and knees'.

Observation 8: After sitting down with her host family for the first time the pre-service teacher directed a question to the elder daughter regarding her boyfriend. This was greeted by hilarious laughter from both parents and

especially from the daughter herself. The pre-service teacher felt severely embarrassed by this reaction to a seemingly innocent question.

| Australia | Indonesia |
|---|--|
| Event 6 | Event 6 |
| Friend of same gender sought to hold hands with pre-service student when walking along the street. | Understanding that their friendship had become close, sought to hold hands with pre-service teacher in public. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| Embarrassment and confusion as strategies sought to understand the situation. | Holding hands a clear intention to show close friendship. |
| <i>Cultural rule</i> | <i>Cultural rule</i> |
| Heterosexual males do not show close friendship by touching in public. | Heterosexual males can show close friendship by touching in public. |
| Event 7 | Event 7 |
| Sitting watching television next to servant and children in family. | Sitting watching television next to servant and children in family. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| Embarrassment and confusion as servant sought to touch/stroke hands and knees of pre-service teacher. | Feelings of closeness to the guest can be shown by touching/stroking hands and knees. |
| <i>Cultural rule</i> | <i>Cultural rule</i> |
| Closeness to new friends can be shown by verbal communication. | Closeness to family members can be shown by close touching. |
| Event 8 | Event 8 |
| Seemingly innocent question asked in front of parents about eldest daughter's boyfriend. | Question asked in front of parents about eldest daughter's boyfriend. |
| <i>Interpretation</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| Embarrassment and confusion at hilarious laughter which followed. | Severe reaction to such a frank taboo question. |
| <i>Cultural rule</i> | <i>Cultural rule</i> |
| Innocent questioning regarding relationships is allowed. | Taboo to ask about relationships in front of parents. |

In events no. 6, 7 and 8, the pre-service teachers presumed that the 'getting to know you' context when first meeting friends and family members would necessitate the same behaviours regarding significant people as regards friends and family as it would in the Australian context. This, however, was not the case.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The pre-service teachers who had reported experiencing cultural mismatch during or surrounding meal times, also reported that the strategies they used to 'cope' with their confused feelings were firstly to remain very quiet and

seek out any visible indicators as to what should be their next course of action. None sought the immediate opinion of either the host or friends. They purely decided on the spot to internalise their feelings, not wanting to take any further action in case that made the situation worse for them or for the hosts. Later, however, these pre-service teachers reported 'comparing notes' with friends, if only to compare whether the same was occurring for them as well and to find out what action should be taken, if any.

The pre-service teachers reported experiencing cultural mismatch when someone had accessed their personal belongings without permission. They also reported that, against the conflicting feelings of anger which welled up inside them, they remained quiet and only during the evaluation period at the completion of the program did they share this information, and then only with the program coordinator. Like the meal-time group, they sought to remain calm and quiet for fear of the consequences which may have been worse should they have made a fuss.

The third group of students who reported experiencing cultural mismatch when 'closeness' was translated as close touching, used the initial strategy of remaining quiet. This was to hide their embarrassment as much as anything. Neither of those students attempted to pull away from the touch/hand-holding for fear of offending. The pre-service teacher who caused the hilarity with her question regarding the boyfriend, reported joining in the hilarious laughter as well, if only to hide her embarrassment and wanting to join in with whatever was the joke. None of these pre-service teachers sought the opinions of their colleagues.

With 'one-off' events such as the photo-processing and the unlocked cupboard, the students did not seek to share these events in the public arena, as the decision was taken that they could remain 'in control' by not allowing such events to re-occur. These pre-service teachers were centring the control of the situation on themselves.

It appears that with the daily events, such as meal times, the students used the delayed strategy of sharing their stories with friends in order to make some sense of the mismatch which may well have continued as because of the routine nature of daily meals. The pre-service teachers had to seek the solace of friends as they may well not have control over events at subsequent meal times.

However, with the 'touching' events, the pre-service teachers did not seek to share their cultural mismatch with staff or friends in these situations which may possibly re-occur beyond their control. It appears that the closeness in the 'touching' nature of the events made the situations too indescribable for

these pre-service teachers who internalised all feelings in order to let time and space intercede before they could make meaning from the events.

The three groups of events above show that the pre-service teachers face the awkward events in the following ways. They either remain quiet, discuss with friends, report to the lecturer, or purely accept things as they are.

Remaining quiet while waiting for others to act is a dominant reaction by the pre-service teachers. They remained quiet as they didn't know what other's reactions would be if they reacted first. Should the pre-service teacher who observed her photos being shared around the staffroom have shouted out, or ruthlessly grabbed at her possessions, her anger and coarse actions may have caused further confusion on all sides.

Although their inner feelings were discontent and confused, they dared not take concrete action because that may cause another far worse situation. Actually if they had just asked why the events had occurred, perhaps they would have received a clear explanation to be able to understand the customs of the people around them. Should the pre-service student who caused the hilarity when asking about the boyfriend have stopped her hosts and asked 'What's wrong, why are you laughing?', she may have been given a very clear explanation.

These pre-service teachers were 'within' the other culture. Remaining quiet, still feeling they were operating 'within' their own culture, was actually making the situation worse.

As foreigners, we must appreciate that 'asking' is wise if we are to avoid interpersonal misunderstandings. By 'asking', each side can clarify their respective positions based on their interpretation of the event, because according to Peirce '...sign often lends itself to multiple interpretations,... one person's interpretation of a sign may be quite different from another person's.'

For the pre-service teacher, what was initially 'different' will snowball and eventually seem shockingly different if feelings are constantly suppressed. But if the pre-service teacher chooses to talk or ask questions, both sides may eventually see each other's point of view, although the cultures will remain different because the cultures themselves will not change and the event is likely to occur again. Should the pre-service teacher who ate alone night after night have simply asked the host parent 'Why don't you eat with me?', she may have had the situation clarified on the spot and not have had to endure many a lonely mealtime.

Remaining quiet can cause stress it seems. In leaving the problem at a hidden/suppressed level, or somehow stifled in this way, there is more chance of the individual avoiding any further interpersonal contact for fear of causing more problems.

The second dominant reaction was to share these feelings with friends. They shared with close friends to be able to release some feelings of tenseness. This kind of action was only undertaken after experiencing the awkward/uncomfortable event. Compared with the action above of remaining silent, sharing with friends seems a wiser action.

These were not instances of culture shock. Culture shock was expected, encountered, recognised and dealt with in other ways. The pre-service teachers had completed a large amount of reading in order to prepare for their in-country experience. On the contrary, the cultural mismatch events were situations where the pre-service teachers had no idea what was wrong or barely knew that there was a problem at all.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The special and focussed nature of a school experience cross-cultural exchange, which was surrounded by a wealth of information and documentation about cultural misunderstandings and culture shock, prepared this group of pre-service teachers for differences. What was not expected was the 'unexpected/out of my control' nature of the cultural mismatch events which occurred.

During the course of the routine parts of easing into another culture, these unexpected events caused the pre-service teachers to experience feelings of awkwardness, confusion, embarrassment and even anger. Not once was the action answered by aggression or anger in return, which showed that the pre-service students were in fact realising that they were experiencing some kind of cultural difference. Their decisions to remain initially quiet were part of the strategy to bide their time and wait until they could make some more meaning of the events, standing back and observing whether they could take control in future or whether help was needed. The routine events, it can be said, required the students to dialogue their dilemmas and seek strategies from friends. There were events which remained taboo for these teachers for the out of control nature they experienced.

How to encourage these pre-service teachers to ask questions straight away is the problem to be answered. It is perhaps a task for the orientation period when the group enters the local culture.

All pre-service teachers evaluated the AIRAES program as being extremely valuable for them personally and professionally in their early teaching careers as future foreign language teachers. As program coordinators involved with implementing these cross-cultural teacher exchanges on a semi-regular basis, we would highly recommend the strategies adopted by the AIRAES pre-service teachers as being suitable to suit the cross-cultural/mutual understanding aspects of the exchange as follows:

- recognise that cultural mismatch will occur at the most inconvenient and unexpected times;
- remain calm and quiet initially (unless dangerous or of extremely serious nature) and recognise that this event may well be cultural mismatch;
- ascertain, after the event, whether there is an element of ‘control’ in the situation:
 1. if, indeed, the individual is in a position to take control and not allow the event to reoccur as before, that action should be taken and no mention needs be made to others
 2. if the individual is in no position to take control in routine situations, dialogue should begin amongst ‘significant others’, avoiding, like in the AIRAES situation, possible offence or loss of face to the hosts. Asking for clarification is the key.

The knowledge and teaching competencies able to be gained from a cross-cultural exchange such as the AIRAES are many and rich. For the sake of understanding that cultural mismatch will unexpectedly occur, it is easy to put these easily implemented strategies into place, knowing that time and space will be needed before meaning can be made from the event.

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