

Beyond Celebration: International Professors and Cultural Hybridity in the Classroom

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This study is a preliminary attempt to bring the voices of international faculty to our discourse on cultural diversity, re-inserting cultural tolerance and inclusiveness as a must in the classroom. Based on interviews with international faculty and their reflective thoughts on teaching from a communicative perspective, this study identifies dilemmas and choices of international professors in the classroom and the levels of privilege and perceived priority they ascribe to. The paper also examines challenges to cultural hybridity, a concept that embraces different modes of discourse.

In the last several decades, U.S. higher education has seen a dramatic increase in the number of students and professors who come from other parts of the world. Faculty with international backgrounds bring rich cultures and diversity to the classroom, optimizing their students' educational experiences. Despite genuine efforts to promote and appreciate diversity on campuses, international professors remain in a disadvantaged position when it comes to the assessment of their teaching effectiveness. In general, they receive lower student evaluations than their peers (McCroskey, 2002). An impressive number of studies from a broad range of fields such as communication, education, psychology, language, and sociology have shown that a myriad of factors, including widespread prejudices towards people from other cultures, perceived lack of communication skills due to international faculty's accents and use of English as a second language, and perceived inapproachability due to foreign professors' different physical traits and other non-verbal behaviors, may have contributed to the disparity in evaluations.

Arguably, the most compelling evidence of students' prejudices towards professors and their relation to teaching evaluations comes from an experiment conducted by Donald Rubin (Gravois, 2005). In the experiment, students in two sections of one course were presented with the same recorded audio lecture that was intentionally attributed to two culturally different speakers—one being a Caucasian and the other being an Asian. Students in the two sections reported significant differences in their evaluations of teaching effectiveness and information recall. While studies like this help educators and administrators see utility as well as unintended problems associated with teaching evaluations from the students, unfortunately, very rarely have studies challenged the cultural bias embedded in the construction of what constitutes an effective teacher and thereby in the current model of assessment. Strangely absent in almost all these studies are the views and thoughts on cultural issues from the international faculty themselves, whose own concerns and feelings have hardly found expression amidst the dominant interest in satisfying the "needs" of students.

To fill the knowledge gap, this study is a preliminary attempt to bring the voices of international faculty to our discourse on cultural diversity, re-inserting cultural tolerance and inclusiveness as a must in the classroom. Based on interviews with international faculty and their reflective thoughts on teaching from a communicative perspective, this study identifies

dilemmas and choices of the international faculty in the classroom and the levels of privilege and perceived priority they ascribe to. The paper also examines challenges toward cultural hybridity, a concept that embraces different modes of discourse.

The Effective Teacher as a Cultural Construct

The Effective Teacher

When we mention an effective teacher, we visualize an individual who is well liked by students, speaks perfect English, and delivers materials in a clear and organized manner. An effective teacher therefore is the one who “produces positive outcomes in any or all of the domains of learning and/or establishes a positive relationship with the teacher’s students” (McCroskey, 2003, p. 78). Conversely, an ineffective teacher is the one who “is not lively or animated, does not signal enough attentiveness or friendliness, and does not have a very precise style. In addition, the ineffective teacher is not very relaxed and does not use a dramatic style” (Norton, 1983, p. 236-238).

To operationalize the *effective teacher*, researchers have identified a set of observable and often quantifiable constructs such as immediacy, clarity, and socio-communicative styles (as defined by assertiveness and attentiveness). Each of these areas boasts a large body of literature. In the area of immediacy, for example, studies have suggested that the teacher’s verbal and non-verbal communicative behaviors create perceived closeness with their students, which influences their evaluations (e.g., Andersen, 1979; Best & Addison, 2000; Christopher, 1990; Mehrabian, 1969). For students, immediacy behaviors indicate liking, while non-immediacy behaviors reflect disliking (McCroskey, 2003). As to clarity, researchers examine both the structure and verbal characteristics of instructional presentations. As Chesebro and McCroskey (2001) note: “To be clear, teachers need to make their organization of content explicit so students are able to integrate lecture material into their schemata effectively. Clear teachers also speak fluently, stay on task, and explain effectively” (p. 62). Closely related to the immediacy and clarity constructs, the concept of socio-communicative style examines a teacher’s tendency and ability to initiate, sustain, and guide conversations in the process of reacting and adapting to the students’ communication (e.g., Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994). This ability has been found to be positively related to teaching effectiveness as well (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1992; Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997; Teven & McCroskey, 1996).

Cultural Construct

Without question, the effective teacher is culturally constructed. In her review of the studies on communicative styles of domestic and foreign instructors, McCroskey (2003) repeatedly stressed cultural specificity of the established constructs used to define an effective teacher. A general understanding of intercultural communication would lend credence to this observation since it is self-evident that different cultures define communication effectiveness differently. One need not look too far for a convenient explanation: from the framework of Edward Hall’s (1976) high- and low-context cultures, the communication style of an individual from a high-context culture might be perceived as lacking clarity since much

information is to be filled by contextual knowledge; by the same token, the communication style of an individual from a low-context culture might be seen as too redundant, repetitive and therefore not efficient when judged by someone from a high-context culture. Likewise, studies on non-verbal communication suggest distinct preferences for communicative styles across cultures in the use of space, eye contact, and posture. These non-verbal communicative styles have a direct impact on the perception of immediacy and ultimately the perceived competence of the speaker. A person utilizing his/her cultural tendency not to initiate good eye contact while speaking might be viewed as ineffective in the U.S. cultural context.

Consistently, findings from empirical, cross-cultural studies support the argument that different cultures favor different communication styles and the norms by which to judge effectiveness differ (Martin & Nakayama, 2007). Chaidaroon (2003), for example, argued that Thai communication competence differs from the American or Western counterparts in the areas of motivation, cognition, and performance. In a comparison of the African and European Americans, Hecht, Ribeau, and Albert. (1989) found that European Americans are more likely to project passivity on their conversational partners, whereas African Americans tend to assume a more active involvement by the other. Using the same research design, Hecht, Ribeau, and Sedano (1990) identified similar differences in communicative styles demonstrated by European and Mexican Americans. More recently, in a comparison of speech patterns between the Germans and Britons, House (2006) reported that German subjects tend to interact in ways that are more direct, explicit and verbose, more self-referenced and content-oriented; they are also less prone to resort to verbal routines than English speakers.

Studies have also suggested differences in the classroom because of different cultural traditions. Examining styles in compliance gaining in the classroom in China, Lu (1997) suggested that Chinese instructors, in comparison with their U.S. counterparts, place more value on "authority," "morality," and "modeling." Lee, Levine, and Cambra (1997), in an investigation of resisting compliance in the multicultural classroom, found that different strategies are used by students of different value orientations: "Collectivists may use more dispositional strategies because others are expected to comply in order to maintain the relationship, while people from individualistic cultures may use more contingency strategies because the targets are assumed to be governed by self interest" (p. 33). Focusing on immediacy cross-culturally, Gao (1997) reported that Chinese instructors do not engage in verbal immediacy behaviors such as small talk as much as American instructors do. Confirming Lu's and Gao's observations, Myers, Zhong, and Guan (1998) found that Chinese and American instructors demonstrate different immediacy behaviors in classrooms.

Not surprisingly, what seems to have prevailed in the U.S. classroom is privileging the American norm in theory and following the American way in practice. Not only are the items on the current model of assessment designed to measure and indeed to reward the communicative styles conforming to the U.S. cultural tradition, but researchers are also enthusiastic about providing guidelines for improving the effectiveness of teaching:

It is clear...that the way to improve the quality of instruction of foreign instructors in the U.S. is the same as the way to improve the instruction of domestic instructors in the U.S.—teach them to employ the kinds of instructional communication behaviors

that have been found to be effective in the U.S., such as assertiveness, responsiveness, immediacy, and clarity. (McCroskey, 2003, p. 93)

Foreign professors seem to have followed these suggestions. This is partially supported by recent research conducted by Sellnow, Liu, and Venette. (2006), who followed Lu's (1997) study on the compliance-gaining strategies employed by Chinese instructors. Since Lu's subjects were instructors in the Chinese classroom, Sellnow and his associates wanted to see whether Chinese professors in the U.S. classroom demonstrate similar strategies out of their cultural preference. Their findings suggest otherwise: the American college students perceived no difference in the use of compliance-gaining strategies by American and Chinese professors. To the researchers, the findings are encouraging "because it signals the successful adaptation by new Chinese teachers in U.S. classrooms in terms of compliance-gaining strategy use" (Sellnow, Liu, & Venette, 2006, p. 262).

Concerns and Research Questions

As studies have shown and the author has argued, these verbal and non-verbal "predictors" of effective teaching are culture-bound. It is disconcerting that not only are international professors subjected to judgment by students using a set of instruments suspected of a single cultural bias, but they also have so far been excluded from the discourse on effective teaching in the majority of the studies. Several important questions arise: How do the international faculty describe their experiences teaching in the U.S. classroom? Do they consciously or unconsciously employ some of their own cultural traditions in the process of explaining a concept or making an argument? Are there cultural differences when it comes to how they organize and present their course materials? Are there cultural differences in the expectations on their students? How do they hold onto their own cultures? Do they "give up" the cultural traditions to follow the American way?

The Cultural Privilege

Research Design and Data Collection

To answer these questions and to acquire a general knowledge about views on cultural issues and practices, a questionnaire was sent via e-mail to a group of international professors, who taught in colleges or universities in the U.S. and whose native language was not English. The list of these faculty members came from three sources: through the author's personal connections, through recommendations of individuals who participated in the survey, and simply through a random selection of individuals whose background information was available on their respective college websites and who appeared to fit the criteria of this study. Out of 50 international professors who had been contacted, 38 returned their surveys. The participants represent a diverse group: they hail from a dozen countries and areas including Brazil, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Japan, Korea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, and Russia. These international professors are junior (non-tenured) and senior (tenured) professors as well as adjunct faculty and their areas of specializations span from humanities to social sciences to natural sciences. The universities or colleges where they

teach span wide geographic areas in the United States including Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida, Louisiana, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Texas, Colorado, California, Oregon, Washington, and so forth.

Before proceeding to the “findings,” the author feels obliged to say a few words about the research design, which is clearly not “scientific” in the traditional sense. Although the survey method was used, there was no interest in designing an instrument that measures certain aspects of cultural differences and subjecting the data to certain statistical tests. Rather, open-ended questions were asked, inviting the international faculty to share their thoughts and feelings about teaching in the U.S. classroom. The study therefore provides a venue for international professors to provide “their side of the story” while stimulating meaningful conversation about multicultural issues in the classroom context. This research is an ethnographic study (e.g., Hymes, 1974) that incorporates both an interpretive and critical approach.

Cultural Differences

International professors are keenly aware of the cultural differences in a wide array of areas such as language skills, organizational preferences, and communicative styles. At the linguistic level, participants all indicated that their English was affected in varying degrees by their first languages. One professor reflected:

I definitely think that the structure of my first language (Chinese) has an effect on my English (especially with speaking). For instance, in Chinese, we don't have the article 'the,' so for me, that is something I have to constantly watch out for.

Another participant from India expressed similar thoughts: “English is my second language, Gujarati, an Indian subcontinent dialect being the first. Certainly, the grammar, sentence structure, and thought-process, all are affected by the mother-tongue (sic).” The participant offered an example of different sentence structures of a particular statement:

Intended sentence: This flag is red but that flag has torn.
 [Hindi sentence]: Ye Jundha lal he, lakin vo jundha tootgya hay.
 Literal translation: This flag red is, but that flag broken has.

From the reflections of the participants, there appeared to be a speech pattern that is uniquely “international”: the foreign faculty tend to repeat certain words or use different perspectives. In both cases, students perceive them in less favorable terms. Two participants commented:

I think my mother tongue structure has greatly interfered my English, such as the tenses of verbs, the usages of prepositions, the structure of sentences, and so forth. Sometime, I corrected my sentences that I just said because I realized the mistakes I made...I believe that these are the major factors that contribute to students' perceptions in a negative way.

...Some students in my evaluations have said that I may be too wordy...I gather that I try to cover complex topics using multiple angles, so that at least one of the approaches may fall within the learning experiences of students. Another critical explanation for the student evaluation may be that my wordiness may be the result of lack of effective communication, i.e., that I use too many words to fill class time because I may be unsure that my second-language skills in English are sinking into the student brains.

Quite a few participants identified communication differences that can be readily explained from frameworks developed by Hofstede and Hall. According to Hofstede (1980), the tolerance for a certain level of uncertainty is a salient cultural dimension. The level of uncertainty as a result of communicative styles is directly related to Hall's (1976) explication of high and low-context cultures. It is reasonably expected that an international professor coming from a culture with a higher degree of tolerance of uncertainty might demonstrate different communication styles accordingly. This seems to be true. One participant noted:

Here [at our university], we have to tell the students "exactly" what to do, what exercises to study and not improvise anything. I learned in my culture to be more "independent" as a student.

Some faculty members also addressed the difference in organization:

In my culture, we value indirectness. Over the years, I have found that I tend to elaborate on contexts—building foundations—while American students want to "get to the point." They seem to be goal-oriented, using a linear logic, while I tend to move from contexts to the center.

In addition to different patterns of oral communication, international professors must also deal with socio-communicative styles that are culturally shaped. A significant number of faculty members identify the lack of "respect" for professors in U.S. culture and indicate the difficulty it brings to intercultural communication. Maintaining certain notions of authority can make, the professors appear less caring and less immediate. One participant shared his experience:

I am not too active in the interaction with the students, especially when it is students' responsibility to reach out. I think as a professor I should maintain some authority. Being active in the interaction with the students weakens the authority.

The participant recalled an incident in which a student needed to take a make-up exam. After several email exchanges, communication stopped. Perceiving the professor as less caring, the student made a complaint about the participant, who was very upset: "I think it is the student's responsibility to reach out to me and schedule the time for the exam."

It is not difficult to understand that these speech patterns are indicative of communicative styles of a great number of international faculty. Judged by current evaluation standards, these

styles would be perceived as lack of clarity, immediacy and other characteristics that constitute effective teaching in the Western sense.

Additionally, consistent with findings from other empirical studies, international professors often expressed a frustration with students who use their instructors' accents as an excuse for their own poor performances. One participant commented: "Sometimes my students blame my accent for their low grades. Usually these are the students that have low grades in courses taken with American professors, too."

Cultural "Consequences"

In their reflective thoughts on teaching, however, a majority of the participants chose to conform to the American way while keeping their own cultural traditions in a supporting role. There is a widespread concern that presenting their own cultures might negatively impact the perception of their teaching in different ways. The following comments were from two participants worried about negative consequences on over-reliance on their own cultures:

Sometimes I use examples from my own culture consciously to show cultural differences, especially when I teach intercultural communication. I do not know whether that has affected their perception of my English proficiency, but it might affect their perception of my knowledge of the communication field. That is why I do not use too many examples from my own culture.

Sometimes, I use examples related to my home country or culture to illustrate certain concepts we learn in class, and I see mixed reactions from students. Some are intrigued by the information or examples, others do not see the connection or relevance to their current lives. This might not affect the way they perceive my English proficiency, but affects their interest in my class.

Most participants also expressed concerns over the students' perception and attitudes toward other cultures. Some, discouraged by their futile efforts to promote multicultural understanding, appeared even cynical. One frustrated professor wrote:

...I first explain to the students my own way of teaching so as to reduce the tension between us, but it usually does not work. Students think I am just too negative. It shows how much they listen and learn from some of us that are foreign born.

One particular question in the survey pertains to different expectations. The assumption of this question is that different expectations lead to different communicative choices. For instance, in some cultures, instructors tend to motivate students by using criticism or "punishment-oriented" strategies, while in the United States, instructors are more positive, showing a preference for "reward-based" strategies (Lu, 1997). Surprisingly, almost all of the participants decided to "follow the American way." One participant noted: "I use positive approach and adapt myself to the mainstream of American culture in my interaction with my students." Another participant simply stated: "I have been here long enough not to do that [criticizing students]. I have acculturated." It appears that international professors consciously

aligned their instructional styles with the mainstream as they progressed in their careers, as one participant explained:

In my earlier years of teaching in the U.S., I tend to “criticize” their work more. I have adapted over the years. I have learned to say something positive before offering my critical comments. It is easier for them to accept my comments that way.

For the international faculty, it might also be the real fear of being punished if they make decisions based on their own cultures, as one participant stated: “[G]rades obtained in tests are public in my culture, not a secret. You know how everyone else is doing in the class. I wanted to hand in the graded tests in my courses from best to worst and got in trouble.” An incident like this could put a young struggling faculty member’s career in jeopardy.

Although it lies out of the scope of this study, it does appear that college locations and classroom contexts make some differences in students’ attitudes toward cultures: “Many here on the east coast take accents and non-standard English as a fact and part of the life here, because America is diverse, with a lot of the linguistic and cultural variations.” To offer support to this view, another professor from a regional university where diversity is not as pronounced observed: “Most students here do not have much international or different cultural exposure. It is hard to appreciate [different cultures] without good understanding.”

Attitudes Toward Cultures

Despite the overwhelming choice of following the American way, international professors see tremendous value and responsibility to expose students to diverse cultures and traditions, as one professor expressed:

All foreign professors should consciously employ their cultural traditions and values in their classrooms when necessary (I emphasize this—when necessary). Most American students are uninformed about other cultures. They are extremely ethnocentric. It is our moral imperative to expose them to different cultures.

Moreover, professors argue that students will be more open to different points of views if they are exposed to different cultures. As another participant insisted:

The students need to understand the reasons why different cultures, different perspectives, and even different kinds of English should be appreciated. Once they know the reasons, they will tolerate and even value the differences.

A few participants choosing to incorporate different cultures in the classroom are encouraged by the positive responses they have received from students:

Often times, I will use my culture to compare with American culture in my stories and examples. I think my students really appreciate the fact that their professor is able to help them see things from a different perspective and angle, and their appreciation is reflected in their course evaluations.

I am from Japan where people tend to have a circular way of storytelling or explaining facts that is different from European/U.S. styles. Since I teach film, I find that it is my advantage indeed because any way of storytelling is acceptable in cinema. I believe my students can be intrigued by my style of lecturing.

The faith and the creative practices in fusing distinct cultures in the classroom heralds a paradigmatic shift to the role of cultures as well as a significant commitment to redefine what constitutes an effective teacher on multicultural terms.

Cultural Enactment

Findings from this preliminary survey shed new light on issues of cultural understanding and positioning in the classroom. The established and unchallenged constructs of “the effective teacher,” codified in the evaluation instrument with clear implications of punishments and rewards, are largely responsible for the decision of most international faculty to conform to the mainstream cultural expectations by downplaying their own cultural values and choices. Granted, that the international faculty adapt their teaching to the cultural expectations of the host country, from a traditional point of view, does not appear problematic. The argument in favor of such an adaptation would be quite simple: since traits such as immediacy, clarity, and assertiveness and responsiveness are *proven* qualities of an effective instructor in the Western context, and since in a democratic educational environment a good teacher should center his or her teaching on the students, the foreign professor should follow the adage: “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Just as one participant responded: “Good instructors will have to base their teaching activities and assignments on their students’ demographics and backgrounds or resources.” In this regard, there seems nothing wrong with customizing instruction to the needs of the students.

Ethnocentric View on Culture

Such a position, however, produces logical difficulties in the current multicultural climate. The oddity in the endorsement of the current assessment cannot be ignored: on campuses everywhere today, we see efforts to celebrate cultural differences and promote tolerance for these differences. A philosophy, theory, or cardinal principle underscoring these efforts is that cultures do not advance as societies do and that cultures ought not be prioritized. In a typical intercultural course, for instance, cultural differences in communication are introduced without being prioritized or debased. So here lies the irony: on the one hand, in theory, we constantly remind ourselves and students that different cultures should have an equal footing and be judged on their own terms; yet, on the other hand, in practice, when two or more cultures are in contact, the assessment of the performances in the multicultural context is based on one cultural tradition, which in essence, places cultures in a covert hierarchy.

Thus scrutinized, the current model is ethnocentric. As the author argued in the review of studies on teaching effectiveness in the previous sections, the “effective teacher” is constructed around a set of norms and protocols of the Western cultural tradition. The concept of immediacy, for example, relates to verbal and non-verbal aspects that are better defined in

direct, assertive, and responsive communicative styles, and in a set of body languages that creates a rapport between the professor and students. From the findings of this preliminary study, the international faculty run the risk of being perceived as less caring or likable if they foster relationships and interactions with their students from the standpoint of their own cultures. To be evaluated positively and to survive in the U.S. educational environment, international professors have to change their behaviors, or “are not effective, if they do not” (McCroskey, 2003, p. 93). Culturally speaking, in order to survive and succeed, international faculty are expected to be disenfranchised and assimilated into the mainstream.

Moreover, the current model of evaluation, being reinforced by mainstream studies, lacks a recognition of an emerging paradigm that takes into account communicative patterns of other cultures. An increasing number of scholars (e.g., Ayish, 2003; Chang, 2007; Chen, 2006; Dissanayake, 1989; Gordon, 2006; Miike, 2007) are making a serious push for a new model inclusive of diverse cultural patterns. For instance, in his exhortation of a paradigmatic change, Gordon (2006) argued: “My belief is that Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and other Asian scholars have significant contributions to make in bringing about a significant shift within our communication discipline, especially in the areas of interpersonal and intercultural communication studies, a shift from mechanistic and message-centered models and methods” (p. 17). In his survey of the trends in modern rhetoric and communication, Chang (2007) also called for attention to the commendable endeavors in the West to challenge and de-construct the Western tradition on speech and discourse that has historically privileged instrumental reason and one-sided rationality. Chang specifically argued that behind the construction of the questions in a typical evaluation form used to assess teaching effectiveness “is a Western mind trapped in the old tradition” (p. 79).

To address the flaws of the current model of assessment might justifiably lead to genuine concerns: in the absence of an agreed-upon evaluation model, we might slide into a kind of relativism that sees no merit in any good instruction. Without a “common ground,” what is the basis for good judgment of instruction and teaching effectiveness? To avoid both an ethnocentric model and relativistic thinking, a new perspective on cultural practice in the classroom is needed.

Culture as Enactment

A new perspective on culture opens up possibilities for true cultural acceptance beyond celebration. For the sake of analysis, cultures so far have been treated as discrete categories as a way of explaining differences and similarities as well as relationships. There are two pitfalls associated with this approach: one is the conceptualization of culture as being fixed and static; the other is the treatment of cultural interplays as amalgams of different cultures and as inanimate combinations in a “yes or no” dichotomous relationship. A different conceptualization of culture, on the contrary, allows us to see culture, first and foremost, as a process rather than a ready-made, static entity. Culture in this sense takes on a fluid form obtaining a character of transformability and being emergent and enacted through “dialogue” (Tedlock & Manheim, 1995) or through “communication” in an ideal speaking situation (Habermas, 1984). This conceptualization of culture resonates with the dialectical approach (Martin, Nakayama, & Flores, 2002), which emphasizes *processoral* and *relational* aspects in

intercultural communication. Accordingly, a new paradigm in understanding different cultures is on the horizon.

When people of different cultural backgrounds interact, it is important to note that a *new culture* emerges. Distinct cultures only exist as tendencies or ingredients for a set of new communication practices that arises out of a particular context. It is in this sense that Verschueren (2008) insightfully posits the notion of “avoiding the plural form cultures,” rejecting what he describes as an “essentialist” view, which regards culture “as being the undetachable, deep-seated, essence of a group of people” (p. 24-26).

Consequently, this new approach to cultural practice in the classroom recognizes that an international professor is not only a knowledge-provider or a facilitator of discussions that lead to knowledge, but also a crucial component of a culture-defining process in which meanings are generated and “cultures” are negotiated, transformed, and sustained unique to the context and constitution. In other words, as an international instructor comes into the classroom, a new context emerges, and with it a new culture. It is not based on fixed, structured relationships that proscribe dominance and marginality, but on far-ranging negotiability that is available on an equal basis to all cultural reifications, thus remaining valid and indispensable to that particular situation.

Invariably, this new approach to cultural practice leads us to the notion of cultural hybridity, a notion that has demonstrated tremendous usability in a broad range of discourses on cultural politics nationally and globally. Extending beyond the notion’s biological focus to discussions about culture and identity construction within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequality, Bhabha (1994) contends that hybridity emerges out of the interweaving of different cultures and norms in defiance of the validity and authenticity of any essentialist view of cultural identity. It is the very spirit of mixing and intermingling different elements that renders the notion of cultural hybridity productive and promising in our discussion of multicultural issues in the classroom. That heterogeneous as well as homogeneous elements can contribute to the formation and meaning of a new entity is fundamental in the Bakhtinian (1981) concept of dialogism grounded in polyphony. In discussing the treatment of culture in the classroom context, Wolf, Milburn, and Wilkins (2008) also acutely point out: “It is through the dialogue about this situation that culture becomes meaningful for the participants, that is, the students and instructors” (p. 179).

Once equal rights and opportunities for all cultures in the classroom are secured conceptually and theoretically, the onus is on international faculty to make the best use of all their cultural resources to enrich students’ educational experiences. It is a moral imperative for international professors—and for all professors—to ascend to a higher level of *culture* by exposing and incorporating cultural resources available at their disposal. In so doing, we can address the *real* needs of the students, which can be met in a classroom that truly celebrates cultural hybridity where different cultures are not only embraced but also constitutive of the educational experience. There is an important difference between what students *want* and what students *need*. Unfortunately, we often confuse the two and the current model of assessment that carries a Western cultural bias seems to measure students’ “wants” instead of “needs.” It is therefore a moral imperative as well for institutions of higher learning to recognize these needs on multicultural terms and fashion new assessment models that reward rather than penalize communicative choices integral to various cultural traditions that serve as agents welcoming and empowering the international faculty members.

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