

THE EDUCATOR AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Universities everywhere are seeking to internationalize themselves. However, many are doing so without fully understanding what this might entail. One dimension that often is misdirected by business schools is the individual educator and living and working in a foreign environment. This paper discusses this very timely topic and presents some guidelines for those who undertake a foreign assignment.

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Introduction

Internationalization and internationalizing are terms being used with greater frequency, and in some instances urgency, in the halls of institutions of higher education – universities, colleges and other types of institutions offering tertiary education. But, what do these terms mean and how are they internalized? Universities in the United States at least have seen an increase in the number of foreign students enrolling in regular programs. This also is true elsewhere as universities from Australia to Europe have sought out so-called “overseas students.” One advantage of these actions is that typically such students are “full-fee paying.” One effect of having foreign students is that educators are dealing with multi-culturalism in the classroom. This places a burden on the educator to develop cultural empathy, which goes beyond being able to recognize cultural differences. Cultural empathy also entails being able to understand others in a manner that permits effective communication and effective direction of human efforts in the direction desired. We need to help those from other cultures adjust into their new culture and assimilate into the educational system.

But, internationalization goes beyond simply having more foreign students. One obvious dimension is curriculum, which must be brought up-to-date to reflect the global nature of business, particularly the marketing activities of firms. Yet another dimension is to expose students to other cultures and educational systems through the

various types of exchange programs that exist. Finally, the educator himself or herself can become an active part of the internationalization process either through an exchange or unilaterally. It is this last dimension that is the main thrust of this treatise.

In my experience the best way to develop cultural empathy and fully understand the multiculturalism educators are finding in their classrooms at home is to live and work in a foreign environment. Attending seminars at home on such topics as “multi-culturalism in the classroom and how to adapt” at best defines some of the issues and maybe begins to scratch the surface. This is an approach many deans are inclined to use. If funds permit, deans also like to set up a so-called study tour for selected faculty, which may be funded by a grant from some government or nonprofit organization. A typical study tour can be characterized by “If it is Tuesday, this must be Belgium.” Most, not all, of these ventures do not achieve much by way of internalizing into the participants internationalization and cultural empathy.

The purpose of this paper is to present some thoughts about what it is to be an educator in a foreign environment. Education is a major dimension of culture. As such, formal education systems have developed to reflect the values, attitudes, etc., of those in a country. The educator who accepts a teaching/research assignment in a foreign country must always be on the alert to make sure that he or she does not apply the self-reference criterion (Lee, 1966) and make value judgments about an educational system on the basis of his or her own system. My comments will be based on working in a foreign educational environment having mostly—and in many cases totally – local students. I do not include an exchange program where one teaches students from his or her own country nor do I include so-called study trips, with or without students. Herndon (1998) provides some tips about the non-academic environment when teaching in Asia, discussing such issues as language and customs, food and dining, health, safety and politics and religion.

When starting an assignment in a foreign country, the educator has a transition period in which he or she must adjust to a new country, culture and perhaps legal/political system, a new academic culture, a new education structural system, a new class format, and so forth. In particular, language could be somewhat a barrier in terms of interaction with students, staff, and administrators as well as in everyday living.

In writing a paper of this type there is a high risk of presenting too much anecdotal evidence of the "war story" type. I apologize in advance for any of this. The comments I will make are based on teaching assignments during the period 1986-2000 that ranged from two weeks to several months in the following countries: New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, France, Denmark, Turkey, and Finland. These areas represent varying psychic/psychological/ cultural distance from my own, the United States. In most instances English was the language of instruction in the entire program while in a couple of instances it was used only for the course I was involved with.

SOME GUIDELINES

Following are some generalizations that can serve as guidelines for behavior in the unfamiliar environment the educator finds himself or herself for the first time and even subsequent times:

1. Borrowing from Nancy Adler (1991, p. 67), *assume difference until similarity is proven.*
2. *Expect the unexpected.*
3. *Be adaptable.*
4. *Be prepared to be frustrated.*
5. *Keep an open mind and learn.*

This is not intended to be an exhaustive set of guidelines or lessons but they do cover a wide range.

Different or Similar?

To a large extent, students are students throughout the world. In addition, educational systems and individual universities may appear to be similar, or logic might indicate they should be similar, in countries that are psychologically close and/or those coming from the same "womb." Often this is not the case. While the systems in New Zealand and Australia are similar in some ways with those in the United Kingdom, universities in the United States and Canada are not. There

appears to be a transformation going on with more and more business schools adopting features of the so-called North American model.

But, there are differences. Many non-U.S. programs are three years in length and are heavily business-oriented with little liberal arts education. Thus, students may be younger and not have the broad education background that we from the U.S. expect our students to have. In some cases, students may be older as secondary education lasts longer.

A major difference can be that students are used to listening. Thus, lecturing is what they expect. Attempts to get them into a discussion mode may shock them. Consequently, the case method may be difficult to implement, particularly when one approaches a case from the problem/alternatives/decision/defend-your-decision perspective rather than simply having students respond to specific questions. This can be true for graduate as well as undergraduate education. In short, a "cultural conflict" may arise over the discussion vs listen difference.

What to Expect

In the best of all possible worlds nothing unexpected would happen. Such a world would be totally deterministic. Higher education does not exist in this type of world. To illustrate the unexpected, there is a university where the student culture is such that when a major assignment is due in another class, most students quit attending all their classes for a few days before. In one instance, my marketing class with an enrollment of near 30 students had four people attend class; there was a case assignment due in a Finance class. The four who attended were not enrolled in the Finance class. This behavior was repeated throughout the term. Behavior like this is totally unexpected to the "outsider" from another culture and system of education.

The main point is that we all "grow up" in a system of higher education that puts certain demands upon us. We should not expect to find a teaching (and learning) environment that is the same as ours. Can we anticipate the unexpected? The answer is, only partially. If we do our homework and learn about the culture before we leave home we might be able to spot something as it is about to happen. Beyond that, we are engaged in a type of "on-the-job training," and we see things as they happen. This means that we must be adaptable

and prepared to be frustrated, have fun, and keep an open mind and learn from our experiences.

Be Adaptable

Being a university professor in a foreign country is interesting as there is a certain prestige attached to the profession in some countries. So, one must be adaptable to being looked upon with respect and admiration, something that is rare in the United States. At the same time, we must accept the fact that specific rank is a differentiating factor more so than in North America. A full professor in many European and Asian countries is the only person to be called Professor. Also, there is a distinction between a "regular" Professor and a Chair Professor (not necessarily endowed as in North America). In short, although the profession is "higher up" in the social order, there is a ranking-type class system operating within the profession.

Another example of the need for adaptability is in how a class is run – the discussion vs lecture approaches. When faced with a culture that is "listening" oriented we must adapt and lecture more than we like. At the same time, we should continue trying to develop a discussion mode of operation. By the end of a semester the strangeness of two cultures clashing usually has worn off and some discussion begins to evolve. Another technique that seems to work for case discussions is to have an oral presentation of the case by one or more class members. Then, the students will react to each other more so than to the "outsider" instructor. When asked a specific question a person will usually respond – perhaps the foreign instructor is viewed as an authority figure or there is respect for an elder being shown.

As with any human interaction, the parties must adapt to each other if the interaction is to be successful. Since there is communication between people from two cultures involved, the so-called Primary Message Systems (PMS) identified by Edward Hall (1980) come into operation. As the outsider, the educator must be willing and able to adapt to the culture that is being communicated through the PMS. And this must be done in spite of an often-stated comment by those hiring us – "we want you to do what you do at home." What this means is "do not lower your standards!" But, we often have to adapt our behavior to fit the host culture.

Adaptation in course structure, content and approach may also be necessary. Much of the

text, and research material, is published in the English language and is based on experiences from the U.S. The examples used involve companies and other institutions that are "foreign" to most of the students. Thus, as instructors we need to familiarize ourselves with local, national companies so our examples are meaningful to the students. In addition, the substance and concepts must be applicable. For example, in my first venture to Hong Kong. I was teaching the introductory Marketing Management course to MBA students. When the topic of Sales Management was being discussed, I was about to go over some models of sales force routing, when it suddenly hit me that in Hong Kong this was not a major problem given the size of the entity and its geographic structure. So, the topic was skipped! This illustrates the need for on-the-spot adaptation.

Another example comes from my teaching International Marketing in Turkey. One topic covered is means of payment for exports. Typically, I introduce bills of exchange (i.e., drafts, letters of credit) by starting with a normal, regular check, and then showing how the draft differs. While doing this, I noticed a class of bewildered students. It then dawned on me that being a strongly cash-oriented economy then, most – if not all students – had never had their own checking accounts. Again, on-the-spot adaptation was required.

Frustration

Being an educator anywhere can be frustrating at any time. Not only does the appearance of the unexpected and the need to be adaptable lead to frustration, but language as well can create some problems. Teaching in an English language program does not always mean that students can communicate easily in English. In business we often justify the need for using English as the language of instruction on the basis of it being the "universal" language of business. Local students come into our classes with varying levels of English skills. Some are very good while some are very bad. We should be used to this as we find a similar situation for our own native-language students; this, however, is a lack of ability to communicate properly rather than lacking understanding of the basic language.

Typically, students have to demonstrate their ability to handle English by passing some type of examination. Some language examinations leave "much to be desired," so we cannot always

assume that language is not a problem. Of concern is reading ability and oral and written communication. The latter is helped somewhat by the use of word processors. In Turkey, institutions with English as the language of instruction force students who cannot pass a language entrance examination into a one-year program in English.

Another aspect of the frustration that can arise is when the support staff do not speak English. This occurs with varying degrees of intensity. The worst that this causes, typically, is inconvenience as one might have to find a colleague – or a student – to help out or use a type of “sign language.”

Open Mind

As mentioned earlier, the educator who is going to teach in a foreign country must watch that he or she does not enter the experience by applying the self-reference criterion. This means keeping an open-mind and recognizing that perhaps there is something to be learned from another educational system. For example, in one European university in a program that is beyond the BA/BS but less than the MBA/MS one requirement is that each student prepares a seminar report which represents one school year's work. This paper is presented before a small group (10-12) of students with an educator/evaluator present. All people will have had the paper in advance. The “teacher” must in open seminar present his or her grade of the paper and defend the grade. Although this is illegal in the U.S. without the written consent of the student, it is most challenging to the educator, and definitely represents a learning experience. Naturally, there are other practices and procedures used in systems of higher education throughout the world that the “outsider” can benefit from. There is always something new that I learn with every foreign assignment that I attempt to use at home. Sometimes it works, othertimes it does not!

CONCLUSIONS

There are many benefits to be gained by teaching in a foreign environment, both professionally and personally. This essay has only scratched the surface. Living in a foreign environment is exciting. There are many new things and places to explore.

One thing that we all can do when teaching abroad is have fun. Try to relax and enjoy yourself. As educators, we all too often take ourselves too seriously and push our contribution to societal welfare way out of proportion. This is not to say

that what we do is unimportant. Rather, it means that we must realize that within the “big picture of life” our work is but a small segment or microdot. There is nothing written saying that having fun and educating people are incompatible.

Professionally, we often times have a chance to gain benefit from colleagues that we otherwise would not come into close contact with. There are seminars to attend and projects to develop. Personally, I make it a point to develop a research network within the country I am visiting, preferably with colleagues at the university I am at. Another potential benefit is the chance to visit other universities in different parts of the country or even neighboring countries. One can invite “himself/herself” to give a research seminar and/or lecture(s) and request only expenses as compensation. The worst that can happen is that a “no thank you” is given.

In closing, it can be said that working and living in a foreign environment teaching “local” students is a powerful, and perhaps the best way to internalize true internationalization and cultural differences within ourselves. By doing this we are much better able to adapt to and cope with the increasing multiculturalism we face in our classrooms at home. As stated by Hunt (1992, p. 310), marketing is a university discipline that aspires to be a professional discipline that has responsibilities to society, students, marketing practice, and the academy. This is what binds us to marketing and marketing education in other countries and cultures.

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