

Examples for Cultural Metaphors and Cross-Cultural Paradoxes in the Classroom

Martin J. Gannon

California State University, San Marcos

All the examples described personal experiences the authors have had in teaching cultural metaphors and/or cross-cultural paradoxes. In the following, I will describe some ways of teaching cultural metaphors that other instructors have explained to me.

Professor Maggi Phillips assigns the chapter, American Football, which is then discussed at length in class. She then asks her students to go to a public place such as a McDonald's restaurant and observe behavior. These observations become the basis of a paper on whether the cultural metaphor of American football helps to understand the behavior seen. The main divisions of the chapter (see Gannon, 2011; Gannon & Pillai, in press, 5th ed.) can be used as categories for separating various behaviors.

In 1998 the Western Academy of Management explored the Turkish culture and, in particular, its business culture in its semi-annual international conference held in Istanbul. As background reading, all participants read "The Turkish Coffeehouse" in Gannon (1994) and some additional material. In small groups they visited local businesses and prepared reports, which were presented to the entire group on the following day.

The book *Understanding Global Cultures* has been used in some doctoral programs in Education and Sociology, but its main audience consists of business students (undergraduates and MBAs) and students in courses in cross-cultural psychology, communication, cultural anthropology, and sociology. It has also been used in a number of management training programs to prepare managers for international work (see "Cultural metaphors and cross-cultural paradoxes" in unit 7.1 for one extended example).

Different instructors have used cultural metaphors and/or cross-cultural paradoxes in the Semester at Sea Program. Lois Olson, Lecturer at San Diego State University, found her semester at sea to be one of the most worthwhile in her life. She particularly enjoyed assigning the chapter on a specific cultural metaphor just prior to visiting a particular nation and discussing the metaphor and alternatives to it with her students. She also found the discussion involving nations for which no cultural metaphor was available but which her students were visiting to be exhilarating, e.g., Greece.

Several colleges and universities sponsor international experiences for their students involving trips extending from one week to a semester. Frequently course credit is given, e.g., having a ten-day trip during which students visit businesses and, after returning home, complete a paper. Frequently the students read all or some chapters from *Understanding Global Cultures*, which helps to provide a framework, in addition to other reading.

Finally, some instructors use the 70 exercises and case students provided in Gannon (2001), *Working across cultures: Applications and exercises*. This book is now

available free-of-charge on Gannon's website: <http://faculty.csusm.edu>. For example, Michele Gelfand of the University of Maryland has students develop a comparative profile of the strengths and limitations of both the dimensional approach and the cultural metaphoric approach (see exercise 4.8). Gannon and his associates have also completed a research study that provides some empirical support for the concept of cultural metaphors (Gannon, Gupta, Audia, & Kristof-Brown, 2005-6). Taking two nations at a time, and testing students from these nations, the survey has both paragraph descriptions – two paragraphs per nation, one of which does not mention the cultural metaphor explicitly – and the individual survey items. As six nations were involved, two nations at a time, there are three separate questionnaires (see the original article referenced above or exercises 4.1 and 4.2 in Gannon's book, *Working Across Cultures*).

In sum, instructors and students have employed cultural metaphors and cross-cultural paradoxes in a variety of creative ways, and the descriptions given above reflect only what I have learned through personal conversations.

References

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