



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Innovative Approaches to Intercultural Education

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6. INTERCULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR AND THE, ACTUNG PEDAGOGY - AN ANALYSIS ACROSS THREE COUNTRIES

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This study investigated differences in classroom behavior and teaching pedagogy between the United States, Mexico, and Sweden. The study looked specifically at both problematic and desired behaviors exhibited by students, and common interventions that teachers use to both accelerate and decelerate both of these behavioral classes, respectively. The study also investigated methods used to teach appropriate social behaviors, those behaviors that teachers target for instruction, and the extent to which social skill instruction is integrated into the presentation of academic lessons. An analysis of differences across the three countries in these areas will be presented

6.1. Introduction

The notion that cultural differences impact not only student behavior in the classroom but the behavior of the teacher as well is certainly not new (Lahdenperd 1998). In terms of students' behaviors in classrooms, it has been shown that students from different cultural groups display different behaviors. (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy 1998). These differences can be seen as a result of different cultural expectations for behavior, and should be viewed as a significant variable in choosing an implementing classroom management procedures. From a teaching perspective, it has also been demonstrated, in the United States at least, that students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are more often singled out for referral to special education services (Kerr and Nelson 1998). Additionally, Lahdenperd (1998) found that Swedish teachers' perceptions of student difficulties was often attributed to either their characteristics, background, or parents according to her findings, teachers do not blame the curriculum, or method of instruction for problematic student behavior, but rather the student. Studies have also found that teachers tend to identify as problematic actin- out, externalizing behaviors much more frequently than withdrawn. depressed, internalizing behaviors. (Williams and Haring 1987; Walker, Severson, Hafirig, and Williams 1986). This, in part, explains the overrepresentation of boys with externalizing behavior problems in programs serving students with behavioral and emotional disorders in the United States

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6; Walker and Fabre 1987; Kerr and Nelson 1998; Whelan 1997). Additionally, Walker, et.al. (1986), and Lahdenperd (1998) found that teachers viewed students' problems as 'owned' by the student, rather than Something that is either shared, or owned, by the teacher. This view has certainly been true from an historical perspective in the United States. Our assessment processes have reflected this view, with an emphasis on searching for student variables which are the genesis for problematic behavior, rather than a view that other variables can impact student performance, both academically and behaviorally. This is now beginning to change toward a more ecological view of student behavior (Suga.i and Tindal, 1993).

If we look at the typical process of identification for special education services, some light is shed upon this problem. In the United States, the referral process begins with teacher. And, if it is the classroom teacher that singles out a student for referral, then how that teacher perceives the problem dramatically impacts those who are, and are not, identified as students with problems. Teacher perceptions and how they impact the management and identification processes thus becomes an important target of analysis.

Of particular interest then, given an emphasis on teacher perceptions as a critical variable in identifying students as problematic and in need of intervention, is how that teacher views student behavior, in particular problematic social behavior, and how they intervene to manage behavior. It is also of interest whether differences exist between teachers across different cultures along this dimension: Do teachers view student behavior differently given different cultural backgrounds, or do they have more in common than differences even through their cultural reference points are different? And, if there are differences, what can we learn from other cultures that will help us to more effectively manage student behavior in our own classrooms

A logical next step is to contrast methods of intervention across cultures. How teachers respond to student behavior (or misbehaviors) is also an important target for study. Research completed in the United States has consistently shown that teachers tend to focus on misbehavior (White 1975; Shores et. al., 1993; Walker 1995). Walker (1995) also found that the cumulative effect of this disproportionate teacher attention, as well as peer attention, directed toward misbehavior dramatically strengthened the very misbehavior teachers were @g to weaken. We certainly have, the technology to accomplish change in effective, 6fficient, and proactive ways. Whether we base our interventions on this technology is a good question. T'he extent to which different cultures address problematic student behavior in different ways may well enable us all to more effectively address effective management of our classrooms.

Whether differences are present across cultures in the ways that teachers instruct students in appropriate behavior also an interesting question. A proactive approach which emphasizes social scill instruction is seen as a more desirable and effective approach than an one which focuses exclusively on consequatina student behavior. Social skills and school survival skills are explicitly taught in this approach. We do have a highly developed technology for teachina social skills. Numerous textbooks highli-ht social skills instruction, and social skills curricula (Kerr and Nelson 1998; Oden and Asher 1977-, Mathur and Rutherford 1994). Of interest is how these skills are taught, and whether they are effectively taught. The model of choice for instniction in social skills is a direct instruction approach. This approach focuses on directly teaching target skills, providing students with models of the skill, and giving them opportunities to practice the skills under the guidance of the teacher (Kerr and Nelson 1998). Most often, this involves pulling student aside and instructing them in small groups on selected social skills. The overall effectiveness of this approach remains questionable, however, in terms of providing generalized and socially validated outcomes. Another approach is through integrated curriculum (Williams 1998; Reisberg 1999), This approach seeks to fully integrate social skills insuuction into academic lesson content. 'nis approach has proved effective in changing the perceptions of students toward levels of conflict and inappropriate behavior in their classrooms (Williams 1998).

In this study we wanted to gather information around three main points. First, are there differences in classroom behavior - as perceived by the teacher - across three countries; the United States, Sweden, and Mexico. Secondly, what specific behavior management strategies are used by teacher in these countries to both accelerate and decelerate appropriate and inappropriate behavior, respectively. Third, what approaches do teachers use to instruct

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ricula and instructional methodologies to accomplish that all of this was done in order to ascertain how different culture's approaches to classroom management and teaching pedagogy might help all of us to better manage and teach students in our classrooms.

6.2 Method

participants. Participants in the study were practicing teachers from three different countries Mexico, Sweden, and the United States. These teachers were selected from both elementary and secondary schools in the three countries. Some of the participants were selected because of their participation in graduate programs in education, some were selected because of their participation in workshops and other educational programs provided by the authors. The total number of participants was 93. 33 were from Sweden, 20 from the United States, and 40 from Mexico.

Materials. The material used was a questionnaire designed by the authors. This questionnaire was comprised of nine questions in the areas of perceptions of student behavior (four questions), management strategies used (two questions), and methods of teaching social skills (three questions). Several of the questions were constructed response format, several were selected response format. Copies of the questionnaire may be obtained by contacting the first author.

Procedure. the questionnaire was initially designed by the first author, and written in English. It was then translated into both Swedish and Spanish. The specific method of translation was back translation. In this process, the English version was translated into the other language, and then back to the first using an interactive process involving the authors. Through this process, we were able to ensure that regardless of language used, the same questions were being asked of the participants.

Subsequent to this activity, the authors then enlisted practicing teachers (as noted above) to complete the questionnaire. Teachers were contacted through their participation in classes, workshops, or through contacts with the authors in their work in schools. Graduate students were used on occasion to assist in data collection. The process involved sitting down with the participants, explaining briefly the intent of the study, and to then ask them to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire, because of its self-explanatory nature, usually did not require any further explanation on the part of the researcher to complete, but if questions were asked, they were answered as succinctly as possible. The questionnaire usually took about 30 minutes to complete.

6.3 Results

Question #1 asked respondents to identify the types of behavior that they find the most desirable. Responses were grouped into four categories: On Task (interest in scholarly tasks), Discipline (following directions, general compliance), Cooperation (getting along with peers and adults), and Order & Neatness in Assignments. Respondents from the USA indicated the first three categories of responses (On Task, Discipline, and Cooperation) were equally desirable, with each category scoring 13/20 responses. Respondents from Sweden indicated that On Task related behaviors were the most desired, with 20 of the 33 respondents noting these behaviors. Cooperation was noted by 16 of the 33 respondents. Discipline was noted by four of the 33 respondents. Respondents from Mexico noted that on Task behaviors were the most desired (19/40). This was followed by Discipline (12), Cooperation (7), and Order & Neatness in Assignments (2). Across all three groups Of teachers, On Task related behaviors received the highest ratings (See Table One).

Swedish teachers
On task behaviour
Cooperation
Discipline
Order and neatness
In assignments

Table 1. Desired etc

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ish, USA, and Mexican teachers

The second question asked respondents to note those classroom behaviors that they found most problematic. Respondents from the USA noted three categories of problematic behaviors; aggression (both verbal & physical) with 13 of 20 responses, lack of interest and motivation with 12 of 20 responses, and disruptive and attention seeking with 12 of 20 responses. Swedish teachers noted behaviors such as disruptive and attention seeking as the most problematic in their classrooms (25/33). Few of the teachers noted behaviors such as not being motivated, not concentrating on schoolwork, or not being responsible for their own learning. Swedish teachers did not note Aggression as being problematic in their classrooms. Mexican teachers noted that aggressive behaviors (28/40) were of the greatest concern, followed by lack of interest and motivation for completing assignments (13). This was similar to the US teachers' responses (See Table Two).

Teachers		
Swedish teachers	USA teachers	Mexican teachers
Disruptive / attention seeking	Aggression	Aggression
Lack of interest and motivation	Lack of interest and motivation	Lack of interest and motivation

Table 2. Problematic classroom behaviors as noted by Swedish, USA, and Mexican teachers

The third question queried teachers as to their perceptions on responsibility for providing moral and ethical guidance/education to students. A majority of the teachers from both USA (13) and Sweden (23/33) indicated that it is a shared responsibility between the home and school. This question was not posed to the Mexican teachers.

Questions four and five queried teachers about management strategies that they use to both decelerate problematic behavior, and accelerate desirable behaviors. Table Three notes responses made by Swedish, USA, and Mexican teachers in the area of decelerating inappropriate behavior. Swedish teachers use interviewing, talking to, negotiating with students and restating their expectations for behavior as the most often used methods. The only negative type of intervention mentioned was the use of mild aversives (verbal comments such as 'stop statements' delivered by the teacher). Teachers from the USA primarily used ignoring, modeling, emotional support and parent conferences to decelerate student problematic behavior. USA teachers noted the use of two negative interventions - time out and mild aversives. Mexican teachers, like their Swedish counterparts, use an interview, or talking with the student, as their first option. Then, similar to their US counterparts, will call for a parent conference. Mexican teachers tended to increase their positive statements directed toward the student, established goals for them, and used problem solving in their attempts to decelerate problematic behavior. Mexican teachers did not note the use of punitive interventions in decelerating behaviors.

Table 3. Most often used management strategies to decelerate problematic behaviors as noted by Swedish, USA, and Mexican teachers

Table Four notes responses made by Swedish, USA, and Mexican teachers in the area of accelerating appropriate behavior. All three groups of teachers listed increasing positive statements as a primary means of increasing desirable behaviors. Additionally, Swedish and USA teachers listed the use of extra privileges. Swedish teachers also listed, as their first choice for increasing behaviors, negotiating with students; this was listed as their primary means of intervening with problematic behaviors as well. All three groups also

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as well. The one intervention that Mexican teachers noted that the other two groups did not select was Talking to Parents.

Teachers		
Swedish (N=33)	USA (N=20)	Mexican (N=40)
Negotiate with students (20)	Increase positive statements (12)	Increase positive statements (12)
Increase positive statements (17)	Model desired behaviors (11)	Establish specific goals (10)
Extra privileges (10)	Extra privileges (10)	Talk to parents (13)
Establish specific goals (10)	Provide successful academics (9)	Provide emotional support (10)
Provide emotional support (10)	Provide emotional support (7)	Teach specific social skills (10)
Chart progress (9)	Ignore inappropriate behavior (4)	Restate rules & expectations (10)
Model & teach social skills (8)	Restate rules & expectations (3)	Extra privileges (8)

Table 4. Most often used management strategies to accelerate desirable behaviors : Swedish, USA, and Mexican teachers

There were three questions in the area of social skills instruction for students. A majority of the teachers from the USA (16/20) indicated that they do not explicitly teach social skills to their students. Comments about 'teachable moments', discussions with classes, conferencing one on one with students were mentioned by a few of the teachers. This question generated little response from teachers in Sweden as well, with only 3/33 teachers responding. Those three that did respond indicated a preference for discussion groups as a vehicle for instructing students in appropriate behavior. No Mexican teachers noted that they provide systematic instruction to their students in the area of appropriate social behavior. When asked to identify specific social skills/behaviors that they teach their students, teachers from the USA noted behaviors such as listening (14/20), sharing (12/20), and respect for others (12/20). Swedish teachers indicated being considerate (20/33), cooperating with others (14/33), self-responsibility (6/33), self-respect (4/33), and self-confidence (3/33). There were no data from Mexico for this question. Teachers were also asked as to whether they include social or affective skill objectives in their lesson plans. Twelve of the 20 (12/20) USA teachers indicated that they do not include affective or social skills in their lesson planning. Twenty-four of the 33 (24/33) Swedish teachers indicated that they do not include these objectives in their lessons. No teachers from Mexico 0/40 indicated that they include these types of objectives in lesson planning.

Another set of questions asked teachers to identify the most problematic behaviors that both boys and girls exhibit in their classrooms. Results from Swedish teachers are displayed in Table Five. These indicate that for both boys and girls, disturbing others was the most often noted problem behavior. Lack of responsibility was also in the top three for both sexes. The only difference in the, top three behaviors was that girls were noted to be 'uninterested' and boys were described as 'lacking responsibility'.

Table 5. Most problematic classroom behaviors as noted by Swedish teachers

Table Six notes those behaviors that teachers from the USA consider most problematic for both boys and girls. For boys, the two most frequently noted problematic behavioral class involved being off task and not engaged in school work (15/20), with aggressive behaviors (both verbal and physical) being noted as well (11/20). Relatively few of the teachers (4/20) noted apathy as a problem with boys. Teacher reported problematic behavior for girls focused on being rude and disrespectful (11/20), talking excessively (10/20), and lethargy (7/20).

vivors (I 5/20)	Rude/disrespectful (I 1/20)
Aggressive/confrontal (I 1/20)	Excessive talking (10/20)
Apathetic (4/20)	Lethartic (7/20)

Table 6. Most problematic classroom behaviors as noted by USA teachers

Teachers from Mexico were also asked to identify the most problematic behaviors exhibited by both boys and girls in their classrooms. As you can see in Table Seven, Mexican teachers noted that for boys, behaviors in the response classes of aggressive behaviors, and rude and disrespectful were most commonly mentioned. Girls are noted as lacking motivation and interest in school related activities, not following directions, being inattentive, and being off task.

Problem Behaviors

Boys	Girls
Aggressive	Lack of interest/motivafion
Rude/disrespectful	Not following directions
Destroy property	Off task/inattentive

Table 7. Most problematic classroom behaviors as noted by Mexican teachers

6.4 Discussion

In analyzing the results of this investigation, we are goine, to consider the three questions that we asked at the beginning of our study. First, are there differences in classroom behavior - as perceived by the teacher - across three countries; the United States, Sweden, and Mexico? Our results suggest that while there is agreement on the first listed behavioral response class, analysis indicates there are, in fact, differences across the three cultures. All three groups consider ‘on task’ as the single most important set of behaviors for students to exhibit. They also consider I cooperation’ as important. Of particular interest in terms of differences across cultures is that 65% of USA teachers consider that discipline, defined as following directions and general compliance with classroom procedures, as an important set of behaviors for students to exhibit. The teachers from Mexico also focused on this aspect of classroom behaviors as well, with fully 48% of the respondents agreeing with their USA colleagues Interestingly enough, teachers in Sweden considered this area of classroom behavior to be much less important, with only 12% noting this as a behavioral class that they consider ‘most desirable’. This seems to indicate an emphasis by these USA and Mexican teachers on ‘control’ and ‘do what you’re told” that is not present in the Swedish teachers’ classrooms. In terms of behaviors that these teachers found most problematic, USA and Mexican teachers focused more on aggression than did Swedish teachers. That could be because of several reasons; higher rates of aggression in the USA and Mexican teachers’ classrooms, or a greater sensitivity to those behaviors on the part of these two groups of teachers. In any case, it is consistent with the ‘most desirable behaviors’ noted above: USA and Mexican teachers are concerned with aggression (both verbal and physical), and their management procedures seek to control students to avoid these types of behaviors. All of the groups of teachers agreed that disruptive and attention getting behaviors were not desirable.

A related question asked teachers to specifically identify problematic behaviors exhibited by both boys and girls. Differences in this area are also apparent. Swedish teachers focused, for both sexes, on behaviors that can be seen as related to academic engagement. Disturbing others, not being responsible for their work, and not staying focused on schoolwork were noted. USA and Mexican teachers noted, for boys, such behaviors as being aggressive, confrontational, and off task as being problematic. This is, once again, consistent with the

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th aggressive behaviors. Predictably, these behaviors are assigned to boys rather than girls. For the girls, USA teachers reported a different set of problematic behaviors. Being rude and disrespectful was a concern, but the other top rated behaviors were excessive talking and lethargy. Mexican teachers also reported a different set of problem behaviors for girls versus boys. Not following directions and inattentiveness were their primary concerns with the girls across both cultures (USA and Mexico) the behavioral descriptors used for girls are much different than those used for the boys. Across both sexes, the descriptors noted by USA and Mexican teachers are much different than those reported by Swedish teachers. The behaviors of the former two groups of teachers did not focus, as did the Swedes, on behaviors related to academic achievement, but rather on social interaction.

Given these perceptions of classroom behavior, another question that we asked was what specific behavior management strategies are used by teachers in these countries to both accelerate and decelerate appropriate and inappropriate behavior, respectively?

In considering specific interventions used by teachers, differences across cultures is, once again, apparent. Whether it is to increase or decrease behaviors, Swedish teachers tend to talk to their students as a first strategy. They negotiate, interview, and restate rules and expectations. In fact, Swedish teachers most often identified negotiation as a means of intervening to not only decelerate, but accelerate behaviors as well. The strategies that teachers from Mexico use are similar. They will, as their first choice in decelerating student behavior, talk to the student - interview them - to gather information. Another strategy that they will use is to talk to the parents. USA teachers, will use this strategy as well. USA teachers' first strategy of choice, however, will be to initially ignore inappropriate behavior and model appropriate behavior. These interventions are more 'external' in nature than those used by teachers in Sweden - they are also consistent with a 'behavioral' approach to student and classroom management. Of interest is the fact that both USA and Swedish teachers noted the use of mild aversives in the form of verbal reprimands to decelerate behavior. Teachers from Mexico did not select this as an intervention. One difference that we noted was a willingness on the part of USA teachers to use time-out as a consequence for inappropriate behavior. Only two of the Swedish teachers and none of the Mexican teachers noted this as a means of management. For all groups, the use of group contingencies, point systems, metacognitive approaches such as problem solving, or consulting with other teachers were not frequently mentioned, if at all. Of particular interest is that none of the groups of teachers selected group strategies such as cooperative learning to manage behavior.

We also asked teachers about methods they use to increase appropriate behavior. As noted above, Swedish teachers highest ranked method used to increase behavior was the same intervention that was ranked highest to decrease behavior - negotiation. Both USA and Swedish teachers were similar in that they listed modeling, providing extra privileges, providing emotional support, and increasing positive statements as means for increasing desired behavior. Across all three groups, the strategy of increasing positive statements was noted by a majority of the respondents. A major difference between the groups was the aforementioned use by Swedish teachers of negotiation. This was not in the top seven methods noted by USA teachers, and was also not mentioned by Mexican teachers. Once again, of particular interest is that none of the groups of teachers selected group management strategies to manage student behavior.

The third area of questioning was what approaches do teachers use to instruct students in appropriate social behavior, and do they use structured curricula and instructional methodologies to accomplish that?

We found that very few teachers in any of the three countries explicitly teach social skills. They noted that it was mentioned in discussions with groups or individuals, but for the most part, actual direct teaching just is not taking place. Although teachers can identify what they want their students to do in terms of social skills, they do not actually teach those behaviors to them in any systematic manner. It is not surprising then, to note that less than 25% of teachers across the USA and Swedish groups include social or affective learning objectives in their lesson planning. None of the teachers from Mexico noted that they include these types of objectives.

Overall, we found some interesting differences across these cultures. First, we found that USA and Mexican teachers are more concerned with aggressive behaviors than Swedish

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ors, USA teachers tend to focus on controlling behavior(s) more than their Swedish counterparts. Swedish teachers tend to 'talk' to their students More, whereas USA teachers tend to focus on more external means of management.

We also found some similarities. All three groups, while wanting many of the same behaviors from their students, do not actually 'teach' those behaviors in any kind of systematic way. The inclusion of social skills objectives was also an unusual occurrence across these cultures. It would seem that all of teachers surveyed could learn from the adage 'what you teach is what you get, and where you teach it is where you get it'.

Further research in this area could focus on direct observation of student and teacher behavior in classrooms in these countries to ascertain actual rates of student classroom behavior, as well as a finer delineation of teaching and management methods. Additionally, an analysis of teacher education curriculum in the area of social and affective skill instruction and management would give us some insight into how teachers are being prepared to manage classrooms in both countries.

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