WHY CULTURE MATTERS FOR REAL

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What is culture?

Think, Pair, Share.
Culture is.....

- a people’s way of life that is socially learned, shared, and transmitted from person to person and often across generations;

- a set of beliefs, traditions and values held by a group of people.
Our cultural foundations tell us what is...

- Right v. Wrong
- Logical v. Illogical
- Normal v. Abnormal
- Natural v. Unnatural
The Iceberg Concept of Culture
Like an iceberg, the majority of culture is below the surface.

**Surface Culture**
Above sea level
Emotional load: relatively low
- food
- dress
- music
- visual arts
- drama
- crafts
- dance
- literature
- language
- celebrations
- games

**Deep Culture**
Unspoken Rules
Partially below sea level
Emotional load: very high
- courtesy
- contextual conversational patterns
- concept of time
- personal space
- rules of conduct
- facial expressions
- nonverbal communication
- body language
- touching
- eye contact
- patterns of handling emotions
- notions of modesty
- concept of beauty
- courtship practices
- relationships to animals
- notions of leadership
- tempo of work
- concepts of food
- ideals of childrearing
- theory of disease
- social interaction rate
- nature of friendships
- tone of voice
- attitudes toward elders
- concept of cleanliness
- notions of adolescence
- patterns of group decision-making
- definition of insanity
- preference for competition or cooperation
- tolerance of physical pain
- concept of “self”
- concept of past and future
- definition of obscenity
- attitudes toward dependents
- problem-solving roles in relation to age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, and so forth

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“Deficit thinking exists when [we] interpret differences as deficits, dysfunctions, and disadvantages.”

– Donna Y. Ford
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Key Tenets of Culture

- We tend to see culture as straightforward, in reality culture is complex and intricate.
- Culture is socially constructed and transmitted across generations.
- When comparing two cultures, we’ll always see both similarities and differences.
- Culture lives in individuals, communities, and institutions.
  - While groups create and share culture, all individuals are cultural beings.
  - Individuals have an intimate relationship with their own cultural foundations.
  - All individuals are cognitively and behaviorally influenced by their culture whether or not they are conscious of it.
  - An individual’s preferences may not match his/her cultural foundations, and still s/he “knows the rules.”
- All of us experience cultural encapsulation to some degree which leads us to believe there is a single, morally acceptable way to believe and act.
- Culture has material impact throughout society and particularly in schools.
In short…..

- Our culture is a significant, but largely unnoticeable, determinant in our actions and judgment.
- Our cultural lenses influence our decisions in large and small ways.
- When we are in positions of power (i.e. teaching, leading) our decisions influence the trajectory of others’ lives in ways that have material impact; without consciousness, we create conditions that benefit those with whom we have cultural congruence and disadvantage those with whom we have cultural incongruence.
In practice...

How culture becomes material
How Culture Becomes Material
An Example: Communication Patterns

Pacing
How Culture Becomes Material

An Example: Communication Patterns

Pacing

Overlap
How Culture Becomes Material

An Example: Communication Patterns

- Pacing
- Pausing
- Overlap
5 Key Spectrums of Cultural Expression and Difference

- **Focus:** Task ↔ Relationship
- **Time:** Clock Time ↔ Cyclical Time
- **Orientation:** Individualistic ↔ Collectivist
- **Affect:** Restrained ↔ Expressive
- **Locus of Control:** Internal ↔ External
Reminders & Implications

- Our culture is a significant, but largely unnoticeable, determinant in our actions and judgment.
- Our cultural lenses influence our decisions in large and small ways.
- To develop equitable learning environments that embrace cultural difference, we must:
  - Respect cultural differences as equally valid (i.e. remove judgment); and
  - Provide, practice, and expect comfort and stretch from all members of the school community
Thank you!

Go well
Do well
Be well

Questions, comments?
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