

Using Short Films to Develop Cultural Intelligence in the Classroom

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The Asian Conference on Education 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper explores the use of short films as an innovative teaching tool to develop cultural intelligence (CQ) in classroom settings. CQ is defined as the capacity to effectively interact with and adapt to diverse cultural contexts. It is often described through three elements: knowledge of other cultures, mindfulness of cultural differences and personal biases, and cross-cultural skills. Weekly discussions centered around short films from various cultures enable students to deepen their understanding of other cultures and enhance their awareness of cultural differences. This paper outlines the theoretical foundation, activity structure, criteria for film selection, and examples of films used. Additionally, it discusses the pedagogical implications and recommendations for educators aiming to integrate this method into their teaching practices.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Short Films, Experiential Learning

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Introduction

Globalization has made cultural intelligence (CQ) an essential skill in education and professional settings. Understanding other cultures has become a critical ability not only in domestic contexts, where people from diverse cultural backgrounds often work together, but especially in global settings. In today's global business environment, it is common to be based in one country while interacting daily with people in other countries (Adler, 2008). Cultural intelligence has become a vital skill for professionals worldwide.

Thomas and Inkson (2017) define CQ as the ability to understand, respect, and adapt to cultural differences. They distinguish three components:

1. Knowledge: Understanding cultural norms, values, and behaviors.
2. Mindfulness: Awareness of cultural differences and self-reflection on biases.
3. Skills: Adaptation to intercultural situations and effective communication across cultures.

This paper proposes the use of short films from different cultures as a pedagogical tool to develop CQ. Films serve as windows into cultural contexts, offering students the opportunity to engage critically with cultural similarities and differences. The integration of weekly discussions of international films into the curriculum provides a structured and experiential approach to fostering CQ in diverse classroom environments.

The Activity

This activity was developed in an undergraduate course on Cross-Cultural Negotiation at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California. The course had two main objectives: to improve students' negotiation skills in cross-cultural settings and to foster cultural intelligence. The class met twice per week for two hours. The short films were shown at the beginning of the first weekly class session. The activity was conducted in the Fall semester of 2023 in a class of 32 students. It consisted of showing students a short film from another culture in the classroom as a springboard for discussing that culture and its differences from the students' own culture. The ultimate goal of the activity was to develop students' cultural intelligence. The activity is structured as follows:

1. Watching the Film: Students view a short fictional film from another culture (maximum 15 minutes) that reflects cultural nuances.
2. Cultural Analysis: Using theoretical frameworks like Hofstede's model or the GLOBE project, students identify and discuss cultural differences and similarities between their culture and the culture of the film.
3. Reflective Exercise: Students reflect on the cultural differences and similarities noted in the films through journaling, group discussions, or presentations.

This activity enhances both the knowledge and mindfulness components of CQ while encouraging critical thinking and meaningful dialogue. With strong knowledge and mindfulness of cultural differences, students are equipped with the necessary tools to perform effectively in cross-cultural settings (also developing the skills component of CQ).

Well-known analytical models that compare two or more cultures include Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980) and the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004). These models propose different dimensions along which cultures are compared to characterize leadership

styles. In this activity, we used the Hofstede Framework, mainly for its simplicity, scope, and accessibility.

The Hofstede Framework

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions model is one of the most widely used frameworks for analyzing cultural differences. Developed by Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede in the 1970s, it is a model for understanding cultural differences across nations and their impact on organizational behavior and management. Hofstede initially derived his framework from a study of IBM employees in over 50 countries, analyzing how national culture influences workplace values and attitudes. Today, the framework includes data from over 90 countries, making it one of the most comprehensive tools for comparing cultural dimensions globally. The framework includes the following six dimensions:

1. Power Distance: The extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect unequal power distribution.
2. Individualism vs. Collectivism: The preference for independence and self-reliance versus group interdependence.
3. Motivation toward Achievement and Success: The focus on achievement, competitiveness, and material rewards versus quality of life and care for others.
4. Uncertainty Avoidance: The degree to which people feel threatened by ambiguity and take measures to avoid it.
5. Long- vs. Short-Term Orientation: The emphasis on future planning and perseverance versus a focus on immediate outcomes.
6. Indulgence vs. Restraint: The degree to which a society allows free gratification of basic and natural human desires.

This model provides a structured way to analyze and discuss cultural differences, offering insights into how cultural values influence behavior and decision-making. For example, comparing China and the United States along the six dimensions reveals distinct cultural patterns that shape interactions and expectations.

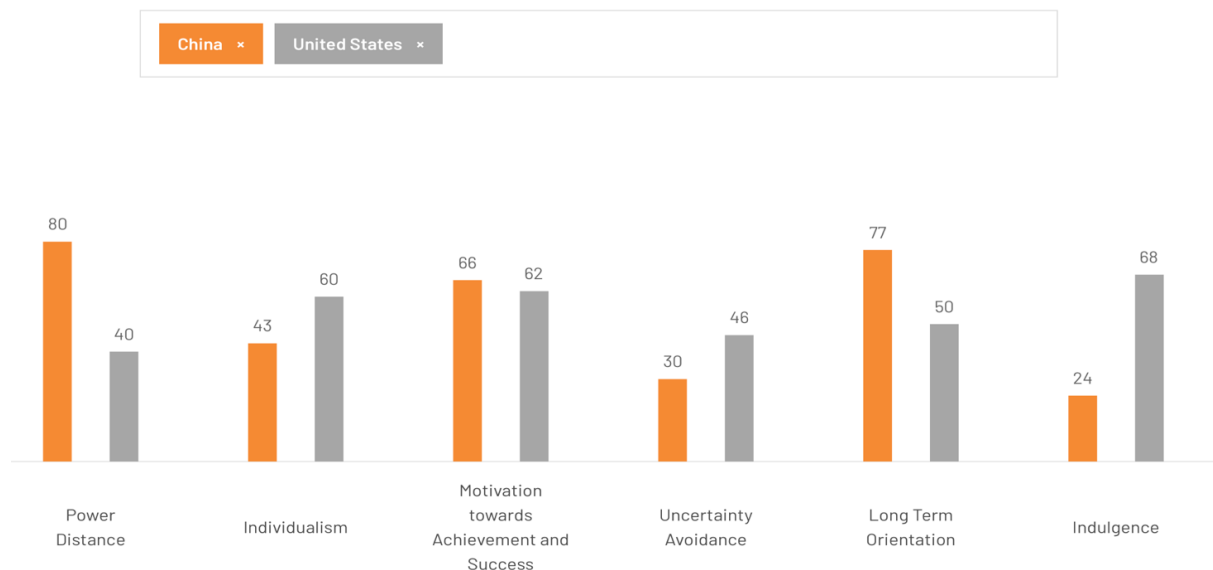


Figure 1: Hofstede’s Cultural Comparison Between China and the United States

Film Selection Criteria

To achieve the desired learning outcomes, films must meet specific criteria:

- Length: Short films (up to 15 minutes) maintain focus and facilitate concise discussions.
- Artistic Quality: Preference for award-winning films with rich cultural narratives.
- Cultural Context: Films should feature clear cultural elements, especially in workplaces or schools.
- Accessibility: Films in English or with subtitles, readily available on platforms like YouTube or Vimeo.

Online searches on YouTube and Vimeo could include keywords like “Short film from [Country],” “Award-winning,” “Oscar-winning,” etc. Filters to obtain films of less than 15 minutes can be applied. The American publication *The New Yorker* has a YouTube channel with recent short films of high artistic quality, offering an excellent source of short films from various cultures.

Table 1: Some of the Films Shown in Class

Film	Culture	Director	Year
Time	Australia	Liam Connor	2013
Cow Theory	France	Solal Moisan & Daniel Sicard	2016
Level 13	India	Samir Tewari	2019
Two and Two	Iran	Babak Anvari	2011
The Widow	Japan	Kenjo McCurtain	2018
La Madre Buena	Mexico/US	Sarah Clift	2016
The Funeral	Nigeria	Odiachi Ashimiedua & Godwin Nzekwe	2022
Final Exam	Singapore	Kai Xiang	2019
Stutterer	UK/Ireland	Benjamin Cleary	2015
La Inquilina	Uruguay	Raul Pierri	2019
Alternative Math	USA	David Maddox	2017
036	Spain	Juanfer Andrés & Esteban Roel	2011

Example and Discussion Points

An example of the type of short film that can be used in this activity is the American film *Alternative Math* (dir. David Maddox, 2017). This film could be used to discuss American cultural dimensions in a non-American educational context. This short film, with elements of satire, tells the story of a teacher who faces backlash from parents and the school administration after marking a student’s answer incorrect, despite following basic mathematical principles. Potential observations drawn from an analysis of the film based on the Hofstede’s framework could include:

- Low Power Distance: Egalitarian interactions between teacher and students.
- High Individualism: Accountability placed on the teacher rather than collective support.
- Short-Term Orientation: Immediate resolution of conflicts without long-term planning.

- Low Uncertainty Avoidance: Openness to unconventional methods, reflected in the idea of “alternative” math.
- High Motivation toward Achievement and Success: Competitive, assertive decision-making by school authorities.
- High Indulgence: A relaxed and informal classroom environment.

Other Pedagogical Implications, Student Experience, and Biggest Challenge

In addition to improving cultural intelligence, short films from other cultures create a more engaged classroom. They captivate students, offering a window into other ways of life. Furthermore, they provide opportunities to develop critical thinking as students compare and contrast their own culture with the culture of the film. Educators should prepare guiding questions, contextualize films, and ensure cultural sensitivity during discussions to maximize learning outcomes. For example, students may be asked to consider how their cultural biases shape their interpretation of the film.

Student evaluations of the course reflected positive feedback about the activity. Many students expressed enjoyment and noted how much they learned from the films. They appreciated being exposed to films from various countries and cultures.

The biggest challenge was selecting the films, a process that proved to be very time-consuming. We had to identify films of high artistic quality that were suitable for a classroom setting while also containing sufficient cultural elements. Additionally, the films needed to be subtitled in English, which further complicated the search for the right ones.

Conclusion

Short films are a powerful tool for developing cultural intelligence (CQ). They offer an engaging and reflective platform for students to explore cultural differences and enhance their intercultural competencies. By integrating theoretical frameworks like Hofstede’s model, the activity ensures a systematic approach to the analysis.

Future activities could be designed to expand this approach into diverse educational settings beyond business education. For example, in language learning, short films could be used to immerse students in the cultural nuances of a target language. In sociology or anthropology classes, they could serve as case studies to analyze societal norms and values across cultures.

Outside traditional classrooms, this method could be adapted for corporate training programs, where employees learn to navigate multicultural workplaces, or for community workshops aimed at fostering intercultural understanding. These activities could be tailored to specific audiences and contexts, making the use of short films a versatile and impactful tool for teaching CQ across disciplines.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

ChatGPT was used to assist with editing this paper.

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