East Meets West, or Vice-Versa: Exploring a Hybrid Pedagogical Approach to Global Instruction

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EAST MEETS WEST, OR VICE-VERSA: EXPLORING A HYBRID PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO GLOBAL INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

In an ever increasing multicultural classroom, a Confucian Socratic framework is used to highlight fundamental differences in learning approaches between Eastern and Western cultures. However, educators must also be aware of inherent similarities if best practices are to be gleaned and implemented with ingenuity in the classroom. Therefore, innovations and insights into the qualitative-quantitative continuum of contemporary research are offered as an analogue to help build a hybrid model of global instruction. A new Mobius Model of Global Instruction is introduced that emphasizes a multicultural perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are no longer in the business of “mass marketing”. They are becoming more responsible and accountable for effective global instruction. It would be difficult to argue that we are not living in an era of internationalization or globalization of business. Global sourcing is on the rise and the number of multinational corporations that employ workers with diverse cultures has increased substantially.

This phenomenon is also facilitated by the significant increase in the number of students crossing national boundaries to learn new business practices. According to Pang (2001), Asian Pacific Americans make up the fastest-growing minority group in the United States. From 1980 to 1990 the Asian Pacific American population numbered 7.3 million, representing almost 3 percent of the U.S. population in 1990. Ong and Hec (1993) projected that by the year 2020, the Asian Pacific American population will number from 17.9 million to 20.2 million, representing an increase of 145 to 177 percent.

One specific segment of the Asian population that is becoming more important to Western institutions of higher education is the Chinese student. Because of the intense competition for limited classroom space in China, the preference for Western higher education, and the ability of Chinese students to perform exceptionally well on entrance exams, this student segment is very desirable to Western universities (Chan, 1999).

However, two recent articles in the business press also are indicative of far-reaching developments taking place in this emerging Eastern student segment. First, Clay Chandler (2005) profiles Tsinghua University in Beijing, China, often described as “China’s MIT”. Here, professor Li Mingzhi’s Socratic approach to his competitiveness class is a radical departure from the “stuffy lectures and rote memorization” that remain the standard pedagogical approach in China. And second, Bruce Einhorn (2005) looks at Shantou University in China’s Guangdong province. Here, American-trained, Chinese educators want to forsake the traditional learning style - rote learning - and replace it with a new pedagogy to nurture students to “really be inspired to be creative, inquisitive learners”. In China, according to Einhorn, some educators are starting to refer to rote learning as “nianya”, the word for force-feeding a duck. Hence, there appears to be a reassessment of educational models in the East that should impact the West.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Given the globalization of business and education, Far Easterners, specifically the Chinese, are looking to the Western educational setting for creativity, discussion, and debate. The West is challenged to become more responsible and accountable to educate students with an international...
perspective. The ultimate goal of this paper is to contrast a "continuum" of educational thought - East and West - and develop a working educational model for global instruction. Specifically, this paper will: [1] compare and contrast distinctive features of education that are culturally more Chinese (Confucian) with those features that are culturally more Western (Socratic); [2] illustrate how an appreciation of these distinctive features can enhance student learning and teacher effectiveness by incorporating lessons learned from the qualitative-quantitative continuum in research; and [3] offer a new Mobius Model of Global Instruction (MMGI) that embodies an evolving global perspective.

Cultural Context of Learning

According to Cheng and Clark (1993), foreign students, as well as American faculty, bring to the classroom a set of internalized cultural values and beliefs that are second nature to them. These values and beliefs affect students' and faculty's communicative and social interactive competencies. Hence, students' learning competencies and faculty's teaching effectiveness have inherent cultural biases. It therefore becomes essential that faculty become more knowledgeable about their foreign students' native cultures and their learning and communication styles.

In an attempt to facilitate understanding and discussion of possible cultural differences within a classroom, key differences between Eastern and Western educational systems will be explored. Confucianism, the dominant philosophy in China, emphasizes the national importance of each member of society - for the benefit of society. Therefore, according to Chan (1999), the primary influence on Chinese learning is derived from Confucius, and as such, may be thought of as Confucian-oriented learning. Confucian-oriented learning inherently places the society before any one individual.

Let us contrast Confucius with Socrates in terms of origin of thought and purpose. Socrates has had a profound influence on Western philosophy (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). Given this, we may think of the culturally Western educational approach as Socratic-oriented learning. As such, Socratic teaching methods are individual by design, and personal by nature.

Much has been written on these two distinct approaches to life (Biggs, 1996; Dillon, 1998; Copeland, 2005), and it is useful to highlight key cultural differences in learning styles. In Table 1 the reader will find a brief overview, adapted from Chan (1999) and Tweed and Lehman (2002). The information highlighted in Table 1 will later be incorporated into an innovative model of global instruction.

SEEKING A HYBRID APPROACH IN EDUCATION

As illustrated by the two Chinese Universities - Tsinghua and Shantou - international educators are seeking new pedagogical approaches in the classroom. And with increased contact between China and the rest of the world, it becomes imperative that Chinese educators become more familiar with Western ways. Likewise, the high rates of examination success of Chinese students suggest that Westerners may benefit from an understanding of Chinese cultural values and how these educational practices can lead to high achievement. What follows are two central features of "Confucian" and "Socratic" learning, adapted from Leung (2001). They are presented in the form of dichotomies in order to provoke discussion and lay the foundation for a new hybrid approach in global education. As global educators, we need to become more sensitive to students' learning styles and cultural differences that may exist, assuming the goal is to maximize student outcomes.

Product versus Process

In China, there is an emphasis on the "two basics" - basic knowledge and basic skills (Leung, 2001). The most important Chinese goal in any learning task is to acquire and understand the distinctive knowledge structure, and the foremost task of the teacher is to help the student acquire the content. The Western view stresses more the getting hold of the ways that the body of knowledge is discerned. As a result, some have argued that there has been more of a focus on the "process of doing" rather than learning the content itself (Biggs, 1996).

Rote Learning versus Meaningful Learning

The Chinese have always stressed memorization as an accepted way of learning, even when memorizing pieces of information that are not totally understood (Liu, 1986). The dominant Western conception of learning is summarized by Leung (2001), specifically, that true learning is by definition, meaningful learning. Therefore, students should first understand before committing information to memory, if there is a need to memorize at all.
### Table 1
Cultural Influences on Learning Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally Eastern Chinese Emphasis</th>
<th>Culturally Western American Emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confucian – Oriented Learning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Socratic – Oriented Learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Approach</td>
<td>Individualistic Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Emphasize sense of belonging; group problem solving</td>
<td>* Emphasize independence; high level of competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Encourage compromise, harmonious relationships</td>
<td>* Value on self; personal achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Respect expertise of teachers</td>
<td>* Teachers are guides, not experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acquire Essential Knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Express Personal Hypotheses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Apply what “collective” considers essential</td>
<td>* Doubt, assert one’s “independence”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desire Structured Tasks</strong></td>
<td>** Desire Self-Directed Tasks**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Chosen by trusted peers, authority figures</td>
<td>* Find own way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Postpone Questioning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Overt Questioning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Less likely to speak out - ‘face’ (miun tau)</td>
<td>* Generate new ideas openly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Criticise at “end” of learning process</td>
<td>* Evaluate, doubt “during” learning process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Why the Need For A Hybrid Model
It is often assumed that Eastern and Western educational philosophies are somewhat linear in direction, that is, there is an expected or recognized goal. However, the means to reaching the goal is often debated. The essence of the East versus West controversy is a matter of focus. The East focuses on the “Ends”, and the West focuses on the “Means”. Yet ironically, both East and West desire the same characteristic in their future leaders – to be global in perspective and practical in function. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from the research field, where significant improvements have been made in both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

**Qualitative-Quantitative Research Models**

Newman and Benz (1998) have discussed the choices that confront qualitative and quantitative researchers. The authors explain that the research community has been immersed in a false dichotomy. Newman and Benz assert that it is not a matter of which model, but which method answers the question of interest and leads to the other. Simply stated, qualitative research findings should lead to quantitative studies and quantitative findings should lead to further qualitative study. Hence, it is a continuum, visualized as a circle, both feeding the other. Newman and Benz rejected the belief that one research method should be favored over another.

In 2003, Alicia Clegg reiterated the Newman and Benz sentiment in a special report to market researchers. She stated that the objective-quantitative and intuitive-qualitative approaches have traditionally worked separately, but it is now time to integrate the two. She reviewed how each type of researcher cannot identify with each other, often working in “parallel universes”. However, when the approaches are integrated, she concluded that more sophisticated research designs and interpretations are
possible. Moreover, Lund (2005) asserted that the differences between qualitative and quantitative research have often been exaggerated. The author summarized his feelings by stating that the research methods do not represent two paradigms but one, and should be combined into one common empirical research design.

The argument for combining qualitative-quantitative assessment models in research is pertinent to better understanding the trends in global education. The mindset should be one of incorporation, and not “cherry picking” the best of each model. Newman and Benz (1998) offer a circle as the conceptual model to build research. However, given the ever changing, developing, and connected world, a more adaptive model appears warranted in terms of global educational instruction. The current educational paradigm maintains two instructional models. However, they are in need of revision, given the realities of global education. Thus, lessons learned from the qualitative-quantitative debates in research have been revisited and modified.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MMGI</strong></td>
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**MOBIUS MODEL OF GLOBAL INSTRUCTION**

Throughout this paper, it was apparent that a new model of global instruction would be offered. The Mobius Model of Global Instruction (MMGI) is a conceptual effort recognizing that a university’s student base is world wide. Therefore, we must learn to communicate with efficiency and purpose. In Table 1 the primary characteristics of Eastern and Western thought were summarized with respect to educational practice. The MMGI is an attempt to reformat through cognitive restructuring the process of global instruction. Special emphasis is placed on the conceptual goal of education – to create leaders. The MMGI avoids the universal means versus ends debate; sidesteps the educational process versus outcomes trap; and eschews the use of two columns to distinguish one from the other. What follows is a brief overview of the proposed MMGI, illustrated in Table 2.

The Mobius Model of Global Instruction is a non-bounding cycle of classroom interaction that feeds back-and-forth between student, teacher.
testing, hypotheses, dialogue and instruction. The primary purpose of the MMGI is to break the conceptual dichotomies adopted by the East and West. The MMGI acknowledges the importance of instruction, dialogue, hypothesis development, and testing. However, all component parts are introduced as equal partners in global instruction. Moreover, there is no established beginning or ending point.

Since the MMGI has no real beginning or ending, an instructor is free to begin wherever he or she believes student needs will be best met. Therefore, it is completely appropriate to begin with a test; move on to instruction; and dialogue, given the individual or group testing outcomes. It is equally appropriate for an instructor to begin with hypotheses; offer the where, when, and how of a specific theory may be utilized; develop an open dialogue format where students can request specific instruction to which, the instructor will eventually test to determine if the concepts have been learned.

The Mobius Model of Global Instruction provides three key benefits: (1) enhancing both collaborative skills and individual development simultaneously; (2) providing the ability to explore self-derived hypotheses via structured tasks; and (3) providing flexibility in addressing questions either during the lesson of at its completion. The instructor is the guide or mentor, leading the student to self-enlightenment through group competition. A possible weakness associated with this approach is the omission of a critical component, like testing of key concepts.

**Applying the Mobius Model of Global Instruction**

Given the aforementioned "product versus process" debate, the MMGI would merge these contradictory philosophies and view them as complementary. All theory should have application, and all application should be driven by theory. For this reason, curriculum would not be developed as pure theory or application, but would encompass all that would be necessary to enhance a fuller understanding.

The other debate focused on "rote learning versus meaningful learning". When applying the Mobius Model of Global Instruction, blending rote and meaningful learning is possible if application exercises like labs and field experiences are provided and meaningful discussion encouraged. An important part of the meaningful discussion could focus on the "why" or "where" any rote learning of information can be applied.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The purpose of this paper was to illustrate the distinctive features of Eastern and Western educational paradigms, and stress that these features are an expression of underlying cultural values. However, it is important to note that the winds of creative destruction are blowing and it may be time for a new hybrid model to emerge.

Of course, caution must be exercised in examining any theoretical framework that oversimplifies the learning process. And there is no reason to assume that one culture of learning is superior to another. What was introduced in the Mobius Model of Global Instruction (MMGI) was more of a philosophical approach to viewing the educational process as not being linear on a true continuum - but rather functioning more like a complicated Mobius.

The functional Mobius strip "as a model" is a common analogy. For example, Demarest, et al. (2004) used the concept in organizational development to introduce a process that focuses on obtaining consensus in communication. The goal is to foster complementary perspectives, i.e., "cognitive spin", and eventually have participants recognize that they are expressing the same idea, albeit from a different point of view.

For clarification, the MMGI proposed in this paper differs from Demarest, et al. in two ways: (1) consensus or "cognitive spin" is not the goal - learning is; and (2) although Demarest, et al. used a Mobius, they employ the strip, therefore, a looped two-participant model. The MMGI presented in this paper is a four-function model, similar to the recycling model, that highlights the interaction between teaching and instruction in four unified parts (i.e., instruction, dialogue, hypothesis, and test). However, both models exhibit an underlying belief in respectful sharing.

What was neglected in this discussion was where it would be most appropriate to establish this "new" Mobius model as the standard means of instruction. No concept was introduced that could not be implemented in any university, college, or curriculum. Even the recognized major concentration of international-marketing strongly suggests a marriage between global application and content concentration.
As a caution, the Mobius Model of Global Instruction does not propose the elimination of testing or rote learning from the classroom. We believe this to be a mistake, even if substituted with more dialogue or instruction. Moreover, future research should explore other cultures like the Hispanic population, for global perspectives on educational initiatives or philosophy and assess if the MMGI is relevant.

In this paper, the East versus West paradigm was introduced as an illustration, and not to diminish or disparage other cultures. The East versus West analogy was a rudimentary attempt to segment or divide the world into two distinct halves. Realistically, it must be reiterated that there is wide variation within the East or the West. For example, teaching styles in the United States, Canada, or Europe vary substantially. As a final disclaimer or research limitation, the phrase “global instruction” was used more as a metaphor to stress conceptual points and not presented as an operational definition.

The purpose of this assessment was to recognize within conceptual limits cultural differences in the classroom and to offer suggestions that could complement the curriculum. In addition, it must be reiterated that individual and cultural differences do exist, but faculty often forget. The marketing profession has always been known for its innovation and insight into both their product and customers. It is in this spirit that suggestions were offered to improve the global educational experience.

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