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This article examines the experiences and professional insights of two educators working in very different settings: one coming from a British education background looking at a university located in the southern United States, and the other looking at K-12 schools on an American-Indian Reservation in Arizona. The authors hope that this wide-ranging conversation will help to expose the dimensions of complex issues while holding together both the objective and the subjective without allowing either to overwhelm the other. In this article the intention is to show, using interpretive analysis of concrete situations of practice in schools on Indian Reservations as well as in universities, how normative practice of teaching requires a practical anthropology or hermeneutics of practice.

Hartley's line, "The past is a foreign country they do things differently there" (Hartley, 1953), is useful when asking students studying history to engage in the "unnatural act" of

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historical thinking; namely the drawbacks of using the attitudes and knowledge of the present to examine the past (Wineberg, 2001). The statement is also applicable to those who have not only changed jobs, but changed countries. When the first author moved to the United States in 2008 from the United Kingdom, America was deemed familiar territory because of their shared history, plus the author had visited it on a yearly basis for well over two decades. Experience and reflection suggests that this was a case of familiarity breeding misconceptions and surface understandings. In other words "they do things differently there" is more deeply appreciated. When asked what is missed most about the United Kingdom, the answer is always that apart from friends and family, "I miss the feeling of knowing exactly where I am."

Similarly, when the second author moved from the Midwest to Arizona to work on a Navajo Indian Reservation covering 27,000 square miles over a three-state area, she experienced a similar uneasiness associated with moving away from that which was familiar. Although exposed to numerous cultural and social issues surrounding the Navajo Reservation and people, there was no moving away from preconceptions regarding societal schooling practices, multicultural education, and meta-cultural cohesion. This is meant not only in terms of geographical space, but also in terms of the cultural nuances and niches that we develop almost unknowingly when growing up in a particular culture---- what Gordon (2007) terms the comfort of the cultural competency that we take for granted. Through these two views, we throw light on socio-cultural issues and their relationship to the complex, confusing, and dynamic educational world around us.

Perspectives from a U.K. educational background

Fitting in

The first author's research in the United Kingdom centered on inclusion and diversity in history education specifically how best to teach emotional and controversial topics. Focused on ethnic minorities, the work particularly examines British African-Caribbean Middle and High School students and their mothers, their expectations and experiences of formal history. Comparisons were made of what different ethnic groups thought history was for, and how they used it. One of the key findings was that minority ethnic groups saw history as affirming identities, giving or taking away pedigree and teaching people how to act toward each other. Ethnic majority mothers and students tended to accept history as "theirs" and saw it as useful in terms of helping to aid other subjects such as English, or teaching children to "listen" (Traille E. K., 2006). Parallels can be drawn with these findings to aspects of working in new places, trying to fit in, and to survive and thrive without the comfort of the invisible main cultural history that is second nature to those brought up in it. Employees in new marketplaces soon realize that they cannot ask the right questions if unaware that they should be asking them or more importantly what the questions are. They may also fail to "cover" because they have no idea of the unintended negative consequences of an action (Yoshino, 2006). In short, difference does matter (Allen, 2011).

Challenges facing the US and the UK educational sectors

The American education system is a complex one and not wholly alien to the senior author who has taught international students in the UK, many of whom were Americans; in certain aspects, the challenges educators face in both countries are similar. Charter schools in the UK are heralded by the popular media as saviors of education standards by some and as sucking the life blood out of state education by others (*Guardian*, March 4, 2010). In the US, similar arguments abound (*Washington Post* May 23, 2010). Budget cuts and challenges of funding the education sector in troubling economic times are also endemic on both sides of the pond (Guardian newspaper, 18, July 2011). Arguments about teacher effectiveness and failing schools are part and parcel of British and American education debates (De La Torre, Rubalcava, & Cabello, 2004; Richardson, 2005).

Tenure

Personal experience of the first author suggests that some aspects of American university life produce a steep learning curve, chief of which is the notion of *tenure*. This system as practiced in the US does not exist in the UK. A faculty member may be employed on a short-term contract, but in the first author's experience this sword of Damocles does not hang overhead. It is a difficult concept for those unaccustomed to the system to realize why tenure is so important and how quickly it engulfs the academic life of junior professors. They may find themselves swamped with committee and service work, and teaching general education classes with large number of students to the detriment of their writing life (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008). This is only one perspective; junior professionals in competitive fields --- including medicine and finance--- are expected to produce at exemplary levels. In the case of university culture in the U.S., this expectation has been the case at research 1 university settings; the difference is that since the 1970s, non-research 1 university settings have also begun to hold this expectation. Another factor is that doctoral programs have become numerous and many do not prepare their students for rigorous scholarship, research and publication. In the UK, the phrase "Publish or Perish" is well known, but "she's got more articles than the Church of England" is a tongue in cheek quip that acknowledges in the first author's opinion, the absurdity of the endless, sometimes meaningless, race under the guise of academia. That said, perhaps the first significant hurdle the first author encountered was one of linguistics.

Semantics

Language competence and "articulating the silences" of a particular culture are extremely important if we are to function effectively (Levstik, 2000). The first author's understanding suggests that in the US university system one can find oneself lost in cultural euphemisms. An unsettling term for the uninitiated was the use of the word "urban." Growing up in inner-city London left the first author with the belief that urban meant concrete landscapes. It is therefore not surprising that confusion reigned when asked to serve on an urban school initiative designing a new curriculum for pre-service teachers in an urban area with the help of a federal grant, to find that the schools involved in the endeavor were situated in very

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green spaces. The realization dawned that in America "urban school" is a euphemism for an institution with a large minority student disadvantaged population struggling against a general lack of resources, poor student performance and probably further hampered by the impact of drugs and crime in the area (Kozol, 1991). We in the UK call these sites "inner-city schools" (which is in its own way just as euphemistic as the American term "urban schools"). For the first author, one of the most disturbing statements from an American student when asked to write about the diversity of her placement school wrote: "There is no diversity." The word "diversity" appears to be another euphemism for ethnicities that are non-European in heritage and in the author's limited experience often short-hand for a "color-bound designation". One of the roles of the first author is to promote the necessity of student teachers developing greater cultural competency toward the children they teach. However, in the first author's US experience it is a skill that a few trainees do not see the need for. Student teachers in classes taught by the first author readily see the reasons for eliciting higher order thinking skills, and catering to multiple intelligences and, to some extent, differentiation, however, they fail to understand the impact their "sins of ignorance" may have on children they may teach as the author's work in the UK has illustrated (Traille K., 2007).

Grading issues

Grade inflation in the US is a hard anecdotal truth voiced around UK academic circles of which academicians in America are well aware (Rojstaczer & Healy, 2010). The fiction that an "A" grade is given often for very little in the US is a gross exaggeration, but there is a huge difference in the cultural collateral of grades in the US system when compared to the UK. In Britain, the transcript as a document of verified educational achievement is virtually non-existent, and it is difficult to explain this to prospective US employers and academic institutions (as the senior author underwent when applying for her present employment). Therefore, the power of the individual grade is much reduced.

Introducing global educational discourses plays an important role in educators preparing their students to cooperate and compete efficiently in a globalized world and to teach in multicultural environments. One of the exercises practiced in the first author's US social studies student teacher methods class is to host a discussion between prospective teachers and professors that have experience in teaching and of growing up outside of the US. The personal experiences of what African, Asian and European education regions accept and expect from students are recounted. Students are made aware that to the first author's knowledge a student in the UK would probably not automatically think of approaching a professor and challenging his or her grade, and that failure is viewed in many cultures as a personal failure. An explanation of a typical UK grading scale adapted from Manchester University gives students a better understanding of why the notion of an "A Grade Student" is not as common in the UK (See Table 1 for grading scale). In 2006/7, only 13 percent of students in the UK achieved a First Class undergraduate honors degree (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2008).

Table 1 Grading Scale UK

Grading Scale adapted from the University of Manchester UK		
A + First Class undergraduate Degree	80-100	Outstanding, Distinction
A	75-79	Excellent
A-	70-74	Excellent
B+	67-69	Very Good
B	64-66	Commendable
B-	60-63	Commendable
C+	57-59	Good
C	54-56	Competent
C-	50-53	Competent
D+	47-49	Satisfactory
D	44-46	Satisfactory
D-	40-43	Satisfactory
E+	37-39	Marginal Fail
E	34-36	Fail
E-	30-33	Weak Fail
F+	20-29	Very Weak Fail
F	10-19	Very Weak Fail
F-	0-9	Very Weak Fail

The realization is made that an “A+” grade is rare and exceptional, that a “C+” indicates the work is average and is an acceptable grade. Students also better understand the first author’s amusement when a colleague in the UK would say as the first author struggled to find something redeeming about a poor piece of work, “well give them a “D” for encouragement”, knowing full well that this might work for British students but would not have the desired effect on most of her students from the US.

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Processes and day to day mechanics in UK universities

Other process differences in the management and delivery systems of British university education probably make for fewer appeals from students. The practice of cross-marking students' work by members in the same department (blind grading), and external examiners further assessing on a regular basis although time consuming seems to work well in the UK. Examination papers, essay questions, and syllabi are also scrutinized by colleagues and external examiners for quality assurance (Finch, 2011). A regular meeting of departments to establish overviews of student work requirements, to avoid log-jams was personally encountered and individual modules automatically had specific word limit requirements. It is accepted that due to the structure of American degrees not all of these practices are feasible although it is noted that some aspects of the above are probably followed in some form by American institutions.

Students' perceptions of their history classes

Although it is impossible to generalize about students' attitudes concerning their classes, the first author has encountered similar likes and dislikes in both countries. In the first author's previously mentioned research the following question was asked of university students to ascertain what they enjoyed and disapproved of in their history classes, "Think of a history lecture when you felt uninvolved or switched off, what was it about the class that made you feel this way? The respondents mentioned issues such as: "if someone just lectures from the textbook with no concept of argumentation it makes me angry, so I just can't listen" (Female, 19-24, Canada), "The lecturer seemed uninterested in the subject, I felt like I was in a traffic jam" (Male, 19-24, United Kingdom). "When I have no concept about what is being talked about I tune out" (Female, 19-24, USA). In comparison, a recent evaluation of an American History class included this comment:

I really enjoyed the in class discussions and the interactions among students and professor. It was always interesting to see different people's viewpoints and opinions. For instance the class lecture and discussion on the "Salem Witch Trials" was both enlightening and interesting. The power-points were also useful for learning about the historical facts and politics of the era. Let us not forget the walk up Kennesaw Mountain; the walk engaged the class in a "hands on" experience" (May 2011).

A student in the first author's UK study commented about what made him/her feel involved during history classes:

It made me feel involved if I had had time to prepare myself for the lecture sufficiently and intensely and I could take part in discussions and express my own opinion. It made me feel involved if I could imagine vividly what the lecture was about and I could learn something from it for the present.

Although it is impossible to generalize, these statements suggest that there are similarities in what makes for a well-received class in the UK and the US.

Issues of a Quality and Fair Education for American Indians

An Indian Reservation is an area that the United States Government has reserved for American Indian bands, tribes, or villages to use and live under the Bureau of Indian Affairs with tribal sovereignty (Sutton, 1991). There are approximately 310 Reservations in the U.S. and, according to the U.S. Census Bureau there are 4.9 million American Indians, a number which constitutes 1.6% of the U.S. population. The schools on Indian Reservations, much like their inner-city counterparts, experience, as John Kozol (1991) termed, "savage inequalities." Indian Reservation schools, like inner-city schools, serve low socio-economic and culturally marginalized students who typically struggle on the standardized tests that are enforced by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Some of the issues surrounding this underachievement are less per-student spending (resulting from NCLB), demands of teaching to the test (also resulting from NCLB) with not enough emphasis on progress, deficiencies in resources for ELLs, lack of teacher training for working with ELLs, discipline problems, high teacher turn-over, and lack of computers and books at home (Wright, 2010). As a result, according to the American Indian Education Foundation, while 62% of all U.S. high school students go to college, only 17% of Native American high school students do so. Some additional factors that are specific to reservations are degree of peer and parental high expectations, lack of electricity in many homes that may hinder students from completing homework after dark, and dirt roads that prevent students from attending school regularly (Benzel, 2007). These challenges, which have been largely eliminated in most parts of the country, unfairly impact the quality of education that American Indian students receive. As a result, the dropout rate for American Indians is 8.4% compared to their Anglo counterparts' dropout rate of 2.7% (Benzel, 2007).

Studies have shown that one way to decrease dropout rates is to create meaningful learning through igniting students' background knowledge, connecting the learning to the students' lives and cultures through relevancy, and, as a combination of both of these practices, building off of the students' schemata (Echevarria, Vogot, & Short, 2008). Most curriculums cater to the suburban, middle-class students, who share similar backgrounds, experiences, and schemata. Furthermore, as most teachers come from the same suburban, middle-class population, teaching a similar group of students a curriculum that is specifically created for them may not be very challenging. However, in the case of American Indian students, most teachers and curriculums share or include little to no experiences with these populations and, therefore, struggle to build off the students' schemata. Although most curriculums do not incorporate aspects of reservation life, too few teachers supplement their curriculum with literature and activities that tap into their students' schemata and empower the students' identities and learning through relevancy. By supplementing the curriculum and providing meaningful opportunities for students to engage in authentic learning, teachers can dramatically improve the academic successes of their students (Wright, 2010).

Not only do teachers and curriculum struggle to adequately present relevant learning opportunities for American Indian students, but standardized testing also tends to fall short

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of considering American Indians' needs to generate valid test results. One such consideration is that most American Indian students are English Language Learners (ELLs) because their primary language, even if it is English, is impacted by another language (Office of Civil Rights, 2010). Although there are perhaps 400 different languages spoken by ELLs of different races and ethnicities in the United States, states have provided minimal accommodations for these students during the required high-stakes standardized tests enforced by No Child Left Behind Act are due, in part, to fiscal interests (Mihai, 2010). These standardized tests are not only high-stakes for students, but also for schools. If a school fails to make its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years, the school is identified as requiring school improvements. Failure for three consecutive years results in corrective action to be undertaken within the district. Finally, if a school does not make AYP for four consecutive years, the school is subject to state take-over (Wright, 2010).

As a result of the consequences assigned to "failing" schools, most schools that serve underprivileged students often enter into the cycle of "failing" and funding cuts. A study conducted by The Education Trust discovered that "poor and minority students tend to be segregated in the most overcrowded and underfunded schools" and that the United States spends approximately $900 less per year on each student in the schools with the poorest students than in the school districts with the fewest poor students (Wright, 2010). Empirically, the biggest predictor of college success is success in rigorous high school courses. As Antonio Flores, president of the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities rightly observes: "Money does matter, especially in lower-income communities (such as on the Indian Reservations) that lack the staffing to offer the rigorous courses needed for colleges." Furthermore, ELL students are particularly segregated as the language services they require entail additional funding (Wright, 2010). As a result, the cycle of underperforming schools not receiving the necessary funding to adequately provide for their students feeds into itself. Without sufficient funding, schools struggle to increase their students' authentic learning because of a lack of resources. Due to the lack of resources and subsequent lack of authentic learning opportunities, these schools continue to be labeled as "failing" as they are not able to sufficiently prepare their students for the testing standards (Wright, 2010). The final big picture of the effects of NCLB and its enforcement of the pressures and direction of testing will continue to result in marginalized students and schools being left behind.

Some Indian Reservations are actively taking steps to change and improve educational outcomes. A case in point is the Promise Neighborhoods Program, modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone, underway in the Northern Cheyenne Nation in Montana. Given the location of many Indian Reservations, technology (online classroom instruction, web-based training) can be a valuable platform to bring distance learning and distance health care to students in these remote areas. In general, teaching on Indian Reservations, much like teaching in inner-city schools, requires teachers to bring an existential-phenomenological perspective to bear upon the structure and reality of the school and students.

Conclusion

The first author is often asked about working in the UK and working in America, "So, which do you prefer?" Immediately, the first author is forced to make comparisons between the well-known and the fresh perceptions gained in the new, different environment; factors may surface such as concealing attitudes and yielding to social custom or approval so as not to make the questioner uncomfortable (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). However, in answer to the question, the first author's response will probably always be that although "they do things differently" here, there are points of connection in every culture. Learning the bio-rhythms of new environments will always be highly complex interactive processes and our pre-existing knowledge structures, and beliefs coupled with new experiences will all play their part in gradually attaining better cultural competence in new surroundings (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999).

The central challenge for teachers on Indian Reservations is to provide opportunities for authentic learning experiences that are both relevant to their lives and cultures as well as applicable to life outside of reservations. Teachers, curriculums, and standardized tests should be cognizant of and relate to the specific needs of marginalized and American Indian students through trainings, supplementation, and appropriate accommodations. To be effective, especially on Indian Reservations, the academic framework should include an understanding of the cultures of the students (Freedman and Liu, 1996). Hermeneutics, ethnography, value analysis, and qualitative approaches to education especially on Indian Reservations must, in the end, address the twin issues of meaning and purpose, and coexist with the established paradigms of quantifying and correlating variables. The need for effective pedagogical reading and education cannot be addressed solely by the imposition of any particular method or methodology but only by the exercise of the creative (hermeneutic) imagination. As DeVillar and Jiang (2011) persuasively put it: micro-cultural cohesion at the expense of meta-cultural cohesion is not the appropriate response to our national dilemma.

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