

Cultural Clues and Cues: One World - Tips for Successfully Navigating Our Rich and Diverse Community with Competence and Comfort

Dear reader – Parents, Grandparents, Educators, Bosses, Community leaders, Professionals of all kinds, Schools, universities, churches and all those involved with education are expanding their tools and adding skills in order to effectively communicate with others.

Thanks to organizations and companies sharing a global view, like World Vision, Microsoft, school districts, states and people like you and me - Americans and citizens of other countries - all are searching for answers to their need. We need to share developing resources to shape our skill sets and to aid us in communicating effectively with good will to all.

Needed most – to understand and to be understood; to teach, to listen and learn.

Whether trying to understand a neighbor or someone you work with/or for, or realizing how many different languages and cultures are represented in your presence, you need tools for understanding. It is critical for safety on the street and for community tolerance.

Combine patience, attentive listening and a desire to show respect and honor to the individuals surrounding you, with efforts to understand and assist each with unique needs and goals, and we can achieve satisfying new relationships here and abroad.

It is all too easy to insult and push away our friends and partners by simply not doing our homework to learn about what their real feelings and understandings are. When gifts are not pleasurable but insulting, when compliments are not received as compliments, when we nearly or completely *miss the boat* when it comes to communicating our feelings and needs, and understanding theirs, we can lose friends and respect. How do we treat people with respect unless we continuously seek to know their culture, their religious or national beliefs and their traditions?

USEP-OHIO recognizes that in our efforts to seek the best for parents, children and families, we need to offer support and education for communication. As we navigate the changing population in our country, in school or church, on the job, in the neighborhood and community; and as we travel outside the U.S., we have an awareness of the new world in which we live.

USEP is dedicated to:

- the safety of families and communities
- emotionally secure families that recognize the importance of physical, social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual development and growth for all
- the recognition of individual differences and the richness of honoring diversity

Our new America is the realm of an increasing diversity. We hope this information will aid you to reach new levels of understanding, expanded success in partnership, and your striving to increase the character of these partnerships will turn communication into conversation. We hope *One World: Cultural Clues and Cues* works for you.

Cindy McKay, Executive Director, United Services for Effective Parenting - Ohio, Inc.

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One world: Clues and Cues is designed to be a guide for those wishing to communicate with those of diverse background and culture, recognizing uniqueness and honoring the character they bring to us.

The following descriptions are written for our understanding as relating to the workplace, the neighborhood or school. They are largely based on opinion and resources shared by a number of people who emigrated to the U.S., those who have been in this country for some time, and those who were born here. We thank them for being willing to discuss their cultures, traditions and the misunderstandings that can occur in what we call this American “quilt”.

Since these ideas are mostly opinion and may differ from the cultural values of people in your experience, we can only assume that because experiences differ, therefore opinions vary. This is meant to simply be a guide to enhance our understanding, not hard and fast rules for behavior, communication or culture. Some of the behaviors are probably common to *most* immigrants, but may be the same for differing reasons. This is a work in progress. We hope you will keep track of your stories to share with others as you experience the joys and challenges of trying to understand and communicate effectively.

Some Basic Tips – *always* helpful, but *critical* with other cultures

Watch for uncomfortable body language in the other person. If you ask for a favor and get shifting around, wrinkled brow, downcast look or other signs of discomfort, consider altering your request gracefully.

Listen for trailing off at the ends of sentences, hesitant voice tone and other vague responses.

Ask leading questions to probe for more information rather than open-ended questions.

Cultures that fall toward the more indirect side of the spectrum include China, Japan, Korea, India, sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Latin America and more. Large portions of the world communicate in this way and it pays to be tuned in, especially in a business environment.

Individuals from some cultures find this distressing. Co-workers might say, "I don't want to have to figure all that out! I don't have time. If someone can't just come out and say something, that's their issue."

Be aware that people from indirect cultures might use third parties to communicate sensitive or difficult issues; this is in their view another way of saving you from the embarrassment of direct confrontation.

Widen your spectrum of what "communication" is. For example, if someone does not call you back in response to a favor you asked, is this communication? Yes, it might be. That person might feel it is best to spare you from a direct, embarrassing "no" by not returning your call.

Start by bumping your conscious listening up to at least one level above your norm. When you have a conversation with a friend from your own culture or background, you can listen a little more passively because the cues are familiar and known. When listening to someone from another culture, tell yourself to be extra alert.

Many of our connections with colleagues come in whispers, subtle but important messages that are easy to miss if we do not listen attentively. Moreover, all forms of listening are not alike. Sometimes we listen more passively, taking in what the other is saying and giving them our attention. At other times we listen actively, seeking out what is not being said and reading between the lines.

Bump your conscious listening up to at least one level above your norm. When you have a conversation with a friend from your own culture or background, you can listen a little more passively because the cues are familiar and known. When listening to someone from another culture, tell yourself to be extra alert.(Article Source Basic Tips:

<http://EzineArticles.com/533749>)

Native American and Alaskan Native Students

Cultures - The Native American groups in our communities and neighborhoods represent a variety of tribal groups. Each of these tribes has a distinct culture. There is a great deal of cultural diversity between these tribal groups, so it is incorrect to identify one "Native American" culture.

Languages - Most Native American and Native Alaskan people speak English and the home language is English. However, some may speak a form of Indian English at home. Some say the term Indian English refers, to the broad category of English dialects used by American Indians that do not conform in certain ways to what is commonly considered to be standard English.

There is little homogeneity among native tribes. There tend to be some social and cultural similarities among native tribes, but each group is characterized by a specific history and culture that is unique. Any large American city probably includes members of a variety of tribes in its population, representing a geographic area that includes the entire United States.

These Native people may be affiliated with a tribe that is recognized by the federal government; or a tribe that lacks federal recognition; or they may not associate with any tribe. In addition, Native American and Native Alaskan people vary in the degree to which they are acculturated into the mainstream society. It is very important that we do not expect them to look a certain way, to know everything about their tribe or heritage (who does?) or to participate in activities assumed to be for native people such as Pow Wows.

Trina came to Columbus on a plane with her four year old son. It was the first time she had left the reservation she grew up on in California. She had never lived away from her mother and grandmother, but had a master's degree in engineering earned entirely on the reservation, and sponsored by a large U.S. communications company. It was a daunting task to help get Trina settled in the community. She had never searched for housing or a school. It was a challenge for her son to become a part of a preschool class, for Trina to shop and drive and to be independent, and not helpless or dependent on others.

Social Scenarios:

Mrs. Dadick knows that her intern, Theresa, is a member of a particular Native American tribe. Her staff is studying Native Americans in order to write a community program, and she asks Theresa to tell them something about her tribe. Theresa blushes and does not answer.

Explanation: A native intern, student or worker may not know any more about her tribe's culture and history than any person knows about family history. It may be impossible for a Native American to share information about her culture or historic events that her ancestors participated in. Some Native families teach their children the history and culture of their tribe, others know very little about their heritage. Native persons may share this information if they feel comfortable with the situation. A teacher or boss might ask the person in private if she has information about her tribe she would like to share and if she would feel comfortable sharing it.

David has red hair and blue eyes. He is an enrolled member of Haida tribe. He is invited to participate in a Native American Kids Day and his classmates say, "You are an Indian? You don't look like one." David is embarrassed and ashamed.

Explanation: Native American and Alaskan Native children can come from one of more than 50 different tribes. These students may not always "look Native American". That is they may not have dark hair, dark eyes, long hair, or have facial features that are stereotypical. You cannot determine a person's Native heritage simply by looking at him or her.

Never assume. Ask if it is acceptable to inquire about a person's heritage in neighborhood or workplace. A boss or teacher may wish to check office records and ask to know the heritage of their workers or students. We all need to be sensitive to a Native person's background and help others understand about stereotypes and how these affect Native Americans.

Robert is in first grade and comes home from school very upset about the way his teacher is planning to celebrate Thanksgiving in his class. She wants to have a feast and have some of the boys and girls dress up as pilgrims and others wear paper headdresses and "be the Indians". He does not want to go to school that day and his parents agree to keep him home.

Explanation: For many Native people Thanksgiving, as celebrated in the United States, perpetuates a myth that has almost nothing to do with reality. It is a reminder of much of the history of this country in which the Europeans often exploited Native Americans. It is also a time where images of "cute Indians" appear on greeting cards and children in schools dress up like "Indians". This may be degrading to Native American and Alaskan native children and upsetting to their parents.

Silence/Eye Contact:

Bosses or teachers may notice that Native American and Alaskan Native workers or students are quiet, and talk little in a group. This may start as early as age 10, is common in middle and high school, and can even go into adulthood. Such silence may result from discomfort with attitudes in classroom or in the workplace that are different from their homes of when appropriate to speak; from student resistance to school and the teacher; from the isolation of being the only Native American person in the class or the workplace; or from feeling the person in charge does not care. To address issues around silence, bosses or teachers can provide increased individual attention and foster warm personal relationships. Bosses and teachers who are successful with Native students tend to relate to them in a personal way rather than keeping a "teacher persona" or a professional distance.

Some Native American and Native Alaskan people tend to speak more softly and may look down to express politeness. Bosses and teachers should respect this and not repeatedly ask the individual to speak up or look up. When silence comes in response to question or during a classroom conversation, it may be a result of inadequate "waiting time". Research shows that "wait time" is substantially longer in Native American culture than in Euro-American culture. Native American students will perform better when given extended "waiting time" as Native students tend to wait until they know the answer before they respond.

Research shows that Native students tend to participate more actively and verbally when they're able to participate voluntarily and are less apt to perform on demand when put on the spot and expected to answer questions in front of others. To increase the participation of Native students in class discussions, reduce the amount of questioning and instead word questions as comments to respond to and allowing dialogue and group problem solving.

In many Native American and Alaskan Native cultures, looking down is considered a sign of respect, and looking another person directly in the eye is considered impolite or aggressive. This is particularly true in the relationship between children and adults. When adults are speaking to a child it is considered disrespectful for the child to look down. They are labeled as "not paying attention" or stubborn and defiant. Leaders, bosses and teachers need to be aware of cultural issues that affect eye contact.

Explain that value eye to eye contact in the school and workplace is valued, but be patient about changing cultural habits.

Distrust of Institutions

The parents of many Native American and Alaskan students have often had negative experiences themselves. The history of Native American and Native Alaskan education in the United States included removing Native students from their homes and putting them in boarding schools where they were not allowed to practice their culture. This is a recent history and many of the parents and grandparents of Native students were affected by this system. As a result they have a fear and distrust of schools. This makes it uncomfortable for these adults as parents to visit schools and classrooms or to trust the business or organization in which they work. To make these people feel more trust, a boss or teacher participate in the local native cultural events such as culture nights, sporting events, or Pow Wows.

A teacher or principal might casually suggest that parents visit the class to observe or volunteer, offering an open window to visit instead of setting an appointed day and time. Such an open invitation is non-threatening, and will help the parent feel welcome.

Resources:

- Brownfield, Sally **Motivating: Native American Students: Strategies that Work**. US Department of Education, Washington State University
- Office of Superintendent/Public Instruction, Washington State. **Reading and the Native American Learner: Research**

Countries: Latin America

Culture: Latino

Language: Spanish (There are many indigenous languages spoken in Mexico and other Central and South American countries as well.)

Hispanic Americans are called Latinos, because most are of Latin-American origin. There are differences of opinion about what individuals prefer to be called. Many Hispanic people in the U.S. simply call themselves Americans. Others identify themselves according to their cultural or national background referring to themselves as Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican, Cuban Americans, etc.

There are others who refer to themselves by their country of origin only. For instance, some persons who are Brazilian and speak Portuguese, refer to themselves as Brazilian, but others may identify themselves as Latino or Hispanic. Never refer to all Spanish language speakers as Mexican. And when using Latino, remember it refers to the male. The female is Latina. We need to also remember that many Latinos were here long before many of our families. Most of us came to the U.S. and have origins in other countries. The culture differences between us are more notable in families who have been here a relatively short time.

Social Situations:

Since moving to the U.S., Oliveria and her family have been unable to visit their family in Mexico. Suddenly the family leaves for Mexico and stays away for more than a month. Juan leaves his work rather abruptly and the children are taken out of school, missing tests and important homework for the duration of the trip.

Explanation: In their family culture, the extended family is of the highest value. The family may have been saving for the trip, and planned to take it when Juan's vacation occurs. But if a family member becomes ill, the visit is crucial. Juan may feel that his English is not good enough to adequately explain, or may overestimate, assuming that his explanation is adequate for the employer. Or the non-English speaking parents may not realize that their children are not able to adequately explain to the school staff why they must be away. Americans tend to view our way as the best and only way. Work and school must come first. But we must explain the expectations of attendance at work or school.

Alberto is not turning in his homework. His parents do not speak English. His teacher complains and notes that his parents have not come to meet the teacher or attended during parent conferences.

Explanation: Alberto's parents are not able to help with his homework because of the language barrier, but are otherwise very good and loving parents. They teach Berto to be responsible and respectful and to do his own homework. The hope is that sensitive teachers will understand and arrange to see that Berto is matched with a mentor or another student who can help him go over his work and help him.

Dating in most Latino cultures may mean that there is acceptance of extensive public displays of affection. The personal boundaries are diminished, touch is close, warm and frequent. Flirting gestures are common and considered to be a compliment. In the U.S. they can be considered harassment.

These differences can be critical to understand in the workplace, neighborhood or school. Deciding what is appropriate in each setting needs to be understood before judgment and punishment is too harsh. Holding hands, a man placing hands around the waist of the girl all may be acceptable in the home country. We need to communicate the rules of behavior here and communicate the expectations of each setting in the U.S.

Shyness or hesitation to speak is common among the newly arrived immigrant families. They have been taught to show respect to authority figures, to listen, to behave and obey. These individuals, young and old, may be carefully observing respect that they have been taught, instead of being shy.

Central American countries often stand when a person of authority enters the room. This custom is expected in school and sometimes in the workplace. If this happens, the person of authority may simply say, "Thank you. Please sit down now," rather than laughing or scolding.

Interrupting while the boss, speaker or teacher is speaking to another person is not considered impolite in many Latino countries. Explain if this occurs.

Eye Contact with a person in authority is considered disrespectful. One on one conversations while looking down are considered respectful, especially with children talking with adults. But an adult or supervisor may request the person to make eye contact as they speak together.

Touching, embracing is normal because Latinos are generally affectionate and warm and hug and touch their children and friends. Latinos are friendly and do not consider that demonstrated affection has anything to do with playing favorites at school or work. But the standard for workplace behavior is important to explain.

Dress may be very casual for people who come from warm countries. Women and girls sometimes wear clothes that are short, tight fitting or bare-shouldered by the standard of beauty in their home country, and may be considered provocative in some work or school settings here. The femininity value may have to be explained in order that the mode of dress becomes appropriate for settings at work or school in the U.S.

Food is considered hospitality but culture dictates that good manners mean quiet eating. They may not understand until it is explained, that in other cultures, noisy eating may show appreciation for the food.

Family/La Familia is an important concept as it involves a commitment by members to the family and extends beyond the nuclear family, to include grandparents, children, relatives and godparents acting as a support system. The family frequently includes more than blood or legal relationships. Close friends can become members of the family and as such assume special roles and responsibilities to one another.

Dealing with Time - Punctuality is less valued than greeting and showing kindness for everyone. Workers and students may need a clear explanation of the consequences of being late or tardy to work or school.

Across Latin America, people are accustomed to spontaneous visits. The spontaneity creates problems when family members show up on the job or at school to visit. It may also mean that patient description of the appointment process is important.

Attendance at work or school is affected since family comes first if there is a family problem or illness. Parents are protective of their children when putting them in the care of others. They may be reluctant to give permission to join in an event or field trip because they are fearful that their child will not be safe. Fears may come from things asked on a permission form like permission for medical attention or surgery – a concern to parents who do not understand.

Holidays Cinco de Mayo is NOT observed by Mexicans outside of Mexico. It celebrates a military victory against the French in the city of Puebla, Mexico.
Fiestas Patrias IS widely observed as Mexican Independence Day (Sept. 16) inside and outside Mexico.

African Countries: Eritrea and Ethiopia

Culture: Eritrean

Language: Tigrigna

Culture: Ethiopian

Language: Amharic

Eritrea existed inside Ethiopian political boundaries for decades before gaining independence in 1993. These two peoples have fought a long war, including an armed conflict over borders until the ceasefire in 2000. People of different ethnic groups live in these countries making the cultures within the two countries a composite of different groups. Eritreans may prefer not to be equated with Ethiopians and commonly request Tigrigna interpreters.

Body Language:

Eye contact by a child with an adult or with the person in charge is considered disrespectful. Looking down is considered respectful. But it is OK for the person in charge to *request* eye contact while giving instruction.

Speech should be soft and is thought to be polite even when giving instruction. It is considered rude and aggressive to speak loudly.

Social situations: An Eritrean child's parents were called to the school because the teacher complained that the six year old was **touching other students** on their shoulders, backs and hands.

Explanation: The child making body contact with another of the same gender, such as hugging or putting an arm around the shoulders is expressing friendship, affection and closeness. Acceptable levels of touching should be explained to children who are new to the US.

A child who seems **quiet in class** may be perceived as shy. When in fact children are raised with the expectation that they listen to elders, and are taught not to talk back.

Dating is a cause of concern. Parents are offended that there is talk of dating in the school or neighborhood. In their culture, marriage is usually arranged by parents. Dating is rare.

Communication with these families can be tricky. They may not read or write English. Parents expect schools to take immediate action, and to notify them if there is a problem as soon as possible. They are not used to initiating communication with the school or community center. Parents may not understand that participation is valued, and assume that it is the school or community center's responsibility to deal with the students.

Countries: Ethiopia, Kenya (East Africa)

Culture: Oromo

Language: Oromiffa

Some African cultures may be very old and have remained distinct, with members residing in more than one country. We must remember that political borders in some parts of the world have been redrawn more than once, frequently forming new boundaries that split areas where members of a culture live. The Oromo are an example of a group who seek to retain their identity and language and would prefer Americans to refer to them as Oromos rather than Ethiopian.

Body Language: Touching a person on the head signals a negative intention or insult.

Eye Contact: Eye contact with an adult or authority figure while being disciplined is considered disrespectful. But it is appropriate for the boss or teacher to request it.

Scenario: An adult summons a child with her finger indicating “Come Here”. The child responds with an angry expression and mumbles something in his language which seems to the adult like a lack of respect.

Explanation: From the child’s point of view, the disrespect is in the adult’s hand gesture. The student refuses to be belittled, and expresses concern.

Food and Eating: Pork and pork products are not allowed. Food is eaten with the fingers of the right hand. Western utensils may be used in homes in America.

Giving Gifts: Gift giving is accepted, and reciprocating with a gift of similar value is appreciated. Supporting others with help in time of need is encouraged.

Names: Male and female children are given their father’s first name as their surname, and keep this name throughout their lives.

Social Interaction: It is customary to yield to a person of higher authority. A group that doesn’t accept a higher authority may risk condemnation or punishment.

Respect for adults and elders is expected. But the elders and adults must maintain their status by being model citizens, worthy of respect.

Formality is expected. An adult or authority figure may confuse others by being too informal and causing disrespectful behavior.

Dating without parental consent or promise of marriage is not allowed.

Health Practice: It is customary to see a doctor only if one is seriously ill, since clinics here will not prescribe medicines for minor illnesses such as colds and flu.

Religious Practices: The majority of Oromo in the U.S. are followers of Islam, reflecting a Muslim majority within Ethiopia. Other Oromos have adopted Christianity. Members of the two faiths co-mingle peacefully. Holidays such as Ramadan and Eid al Fitr, a feast day at the end of Ramadan, are observed here by Muslims.

Country: Somalia

Culture: Somali

Language: Somali

Background

Somali society is an Islamic society with Islam as the major influence on cultural practices. Ohio, especially Columbus, has a large Somali population, consisting of those who emigrated in the last few years. Some adhere strictly to the rules of the Islamic faith, and there are those who are less strict. A long war disrupted this country since 1991, and continues to affect the public services, including public education, usually provided by the government. Many of the Somali students have not had the benefit of free, Somali public education before leaving their homeland. Some Ohio students have spent time as refugees outside their country before coming here.

Body Language/Eye contact: Eye contact with an adult while being disciplined is considered disrespectful. In fact, in one-on-one conversations (child/adult, employee/boss, student/teacher), looking down is considered respectful. It is appropriate, however, for a teacher to request a student to look at him/her during instruction.

Personal space: It is generally considered inappropriate to come closer than one step from a person. To come any closer would cause discomfort to another. Exceptions to this are seen in girl-to-girl interactions and boy-to-boy interactions. It is common for same gender friends to hold hands, hug, or touch.

Using your fingers to request someone approach, a beckoning gesture, is considered demeaning to the person signaled.

Clean vs. Unclean

Feet are considered unclean: A Somali would never put his or her feet on a piece of furniture, because feet are not clean and should remain on the floor. Pointing to a person with one's foot is considered very disrespectful.

The right hand is considered clean: It is the polite hand to use for daily tasks such as eating, writing, and greeting people. Somali parents often discourage left-handedness:

Social Situations: Mrs. Smith, the boss, entered the room and met a Somali gentleman who had just moved to the city. She held out her hand and introduced herself, intending to shake the man's hand. He refused to shake her hand. She wondered if the man disliked her or disapproved of her, even though they were meeting for the first time.

Explanation: Americans typically shake hands in greeting, and a refusal to shake hands may be understood as a sign of rejection or disapproval. The Somali rules of culture and Islam forbid him to shake hands with a female who is not a close relative. Some less conservative Somali men, or those who have accepted American custom, may do it. Shaking the hand of an opposite gender family member, women shaking hands or men shaking hands are all acceptable.

Young Somali boys who recently came to the U.S., may simply walk away from their trays and trash in the lunchroom, leaving their mess for someone else to clean up.

Explanation: In Somalia, food preparation and cleanup is a part of the female role, and they are discouraged from entering the woman's domain.

Asian Countries:

China Republic, Taiwan, Hong Kong

Culture: Chinese

Languages: There is a large family of Chinese languages and dialects. Cantonese and Mandarin are most commonly spoken In the U. S.

Social Scenarios: An American guest is invited to the home of a Chinese family for dinner. The guest compliments the hostess on the delicious foods that she serves. The hostess responds that this is just a casual dinner, nothing special, even though she spent hours in preparation.

Explanation: Being humble is a virtue In Chinese culture. Accordingly, no matter how much effort a Chinese hostess puts into the preparation of a meal, knowing she is really a good cook, she will still say the foods she has exquisitely prepared are "nothing special". She will not accept compliments openly, or say "Thank you, I'm glad you like it!"

Body Language:

Eye contact: Bosses/Students will avoid eye contact with elders, parents, and teachers out of respect.

Personal space: When Chinese talk to each other they remain about three feet away from one another.

Work/Classroom behavior:

Addressing the boss or teacher: Employees/Students are taught to address the boss or teacher with their title, "Boss" or "Teacher" or Mister or Miss, to show respect.

Keeping quiet: New Chinese students may keep quiet in class; they may be reluctant to ask questions, and usually avoid eye contact.

Verbal expression: Chinese tend to speak loudly when they get excited. People might misunderstand and think that Chinese like to yell at each other. They raise their voices when they feel comfort, enjoyment, when they want to get the attention of another, or when they are in the midst of a noisy environment.

Luck and supernatural forces:

Color red is considered to bring good luck. Wearing a green hat means a husband's wife is unfaithful. Wearing white flowers in your hair means that a family member has died. White is worn for mourning.

Gift Giving:

It is considered impolite to open a gift in front of the giver. Instead of giving a gift, Chinese prefer to give a card with "lucky money" in it. Chinese are practical preferring to give money so the receiver can buy something needed, and are reluctant to show the value of a gift.

Country: Kampuchea (Cambodia)

Culture: Khmer

Language: Khmer

Body Language:

Giving eye contact is considered disrespectful, especially from a youth to an elder.

Male/female greeting forbids kissing or shaking hands, but consists of "SAM PEAS," which is bowing, joining one's hands together at different levels for people of differing levels of-respect or importance.

When beckoning someone, extend the arm with the palm down.

Touching: Male/female touching is prohibited, as is head touching of an older person or authority figure by a younger person.

Classroom behavior: Students are taught to be respectful to a teacher or adult, and are taught to stand up for a visitor to the classroom. Students are to completely follow the teacher's directions. It is not the customary role of parents to help much with discipline problems in school.

Verbal Expression: It is good form to use a soft voice when speaking to children. Yelling or screaming is considered bad form. Children are traditionally guided to use good words and good ways through storytelling.

Parenting Child Rearing: Children are expected to respect adults. The father is considered the head of the family. Average family size is about 5 people. In the absence of parents, the older children are expected to look after the younger siblings.

Dating: Traditionally, there is no dating before marriage; girls are restricted from having relationships with boys.

Clothing: Traditional costumes are worn during traditional ceremonies; materials made from silk with vivid designs; skirts and scarves are wrapped around the body; much jewelry is worn. Traditionally, pants extend over the knee, especially for women. People take off hats when greeting an elder or in a religious ceremony. A Khmer man wearing earrings is considered gay.

Food and Eating: Foods are put on a large, round tray, surrounded by the whole family. Children and women sit flat on the floor. Eating with hands is acceptable. There are three full meals eaten per day. There is no talking or singing during mealtime. Blowing one's nose at the table is bad manners. Wash your hands before eating with them.

Health Practices: Tea or hot water is consumed for good health. Spices are used in foods. Herbs, traditional medicine, chiropractic, are all used. Spiritual practice is used for healing.

Religion: Buddhism is the principal religion. Some Buddhist practices are teaching morality in

class and during traditional ceremonies, parents need to bring children. Two hands are used to hand anything to an adult. Donating money to elders or the monks at traditional ceremonies is customary.

Housing: Most strangers use the pagoda (residence of the monks, holy sanctuary) for temporary shelter. Some poorer students use the pagoda for housing when they study in high school. Shoes are not worn inside a shelter or home.

Holiday Practices/observances

New Year (In the month of April)

Wear wrapping skirts and prepare special foods. Gifts given to parents (money, food, clothing)

Traditionally, family goes to pagoda (for 3 - 7 days) or at least 4 times per month

Prayer to Buddha, ancestors and traditional games, dances, music are played (no gambling)

Boys and girls gather to listen to a sermon by the monks

Pchum Ben is a special holiday in remembrance of ancestors at the full moon in early September. Special foods (especially a traditional cake) are eaten and given to elders and monks; special clothing is worn. Families gather to pray.

Traditionally, time was determined by the sun's position. The Khmer also used the stars to determine direction. The sun rises exactly at 6:00 a.m., is directly overhead at noon; and sets at exactly 6:00 P.M. Those Khmer who work in the fields can rely on the sun's pattern without having to wear a watch.

Country: Laos

Culture: Laotian, Lao

Language: Laotian

Scenario: Both adults and children tend to address others by title not name.

Explanation: Laotians are taught to address one another by title not name. Calling someone by their last name is considered disrespectful.

Body Language/Eye contact: Children and youth are not supposed to have eye contact with adults when disciplined. It would be a sign of disrespect.

Head touching: Most Laotian people believe their head is the highest place. It is not supposed to be touched or put down by anyone else, except an authority figure.

Male/female relationship:

It is considered shameful in Laotian culture for a woman to touch the body of another man except her husband. Men and women not married to one another do not shake hands or hug. Male and female traditionally greet each other - hands clasped together and bowing. Students of same gender DO hold hands or put an arm around one another.

Manner of offering: Laotians do not accept anything offered improperly, as something which is

thrown their way. It is considered not being given from the heart of that person.

Parenting: Laotian parents consider it their right to spank their child if needed.

Country: Philippines

Culture: Filipino

Languages: Tagalog and Ilokano are most common

Scenario: When called on, workers and students may address the boss or teacher as Sir or Madam.

Explanation: Filipino culture is one of respect to persons in authority.

Scenario: A Filipina woman rode with a male colleague to a conference. She worried when he committed some driving errors, because she wondered how she would explain being with him in case they were in an automobile crash.

Explanation: A married man and a married woman riding alone together is enough to make others assume they are having an affair.

School Behavior:

Filipino students are taught to

- raise their hands if they need to say something. Usually they are quiet.
- not answer a teacher unless called upon
- always greet staff with respect; teachers are second parents/authority figures
- stand up when answering a question/not show ignorance by asking a question
- never argue with an adult or even explain their side of the story
- work hard to satisfy ALL requirements if they wish to be promoted
- be on their “good/best behavior” as a part of requirements to being promoted
- pass all of the frequent tests and quizzes, common in every grade
- address all teachers, principals as sir or madam as a courtesy toward authority

Body Language:

Whistling: It is not considered impolite to summon a child by whistling. It is common in the Philippines, though in U.S. mainland schools, children are accustomed to being summoned with a hand gesture, not a whistle.

Eye contact:

Eye contact with an adult while being disciplined is considered disrespectful. Infact, in certain one-on-one conversations looking down is considered respectful. It is appropriate, however, for a teacher to request that a student to look at him/her during instruction.

Parenting:

Filipino parents would take a risk to care for children. They do not always understand the cautionary measures we employ, such as hesitating to give medical attention in an emergency.

Sometimes there is a tendency for immigrant parents to try so hard to help their children, that they spoil them with the latest luxuries such as cell phones, and devices that distract the

children from schoolwork.

Religious practices:

Many Filipinos practice Catholicism and follow its traditions. With more intercultural marriages and more generations of Filipino-Americans born in the U.S., these traditions are observed less strictly.

A note on Pronunciation:

The Tagalog language has no "F" sound. When spoken in primary language, the term Filipino will be pronounced "Pilipino."

Country: Vietnam

Culture: Vietnamese

Language: Vietnamese

Situations:

Kim was working with her colleagues and pointing different objects with her middle finger. The other students began covering their mouths and laughing.

Explanation: They explained that in the U.S. using the middle finger is an obscene gesture.

A young Vietnamese mother in our Cleveland Family Life Program was invited by her American friends to go out to lunch. When the bill came and she saw all her friends looking at the bill and putting money in the middle! She suddenly realized that she was expected to pay for her own lunch. She was embarrassed because she was \$2 short.

Explanation: To be invited in Vietnamese culture is to expect that those who invited you will pay your portion.

Body Language:

Using your fingers to request someone approach: This is a gesture used for animals, not people. Using the whole hand with palm facing down is an acceptable gesture for this purpose.

Eye contact: Looking down is a sign of respect to an adult or person in authority.

Public behavior: A nod of the head is an appropriate greeting, male and female do not allow a hug or kiss.

Terms of address:

Calling someone by their last name is done when they are being scolded, not as a term of respect. Adults call themselves by first name, and younger people use a term of address such as "aunt" or "uncle" with an elder's first name. Women do not change their name when they marry.

Parenting:

Young adults live with their parents until they are married. Male children are still important for the need to carry on the family name. Respect for parents includes caring for elder parents or in-laws at home instead of putting them in a care facility.

In the classroom:

Independent expression in U.S.: Vietnamese students may feel awkward at first when encouraged to engage in group conversations and classroom participation. In their culture, teachers talk and students listen until directed to respond.

Priorities: Students are first taught how to behave politely, then the priority becomes academics.

Health/Human Sexuality: Vietnamese students expressed embarrassment when they were expected to discuss sexual terms during health classes. Most of the Vietnamese parents were upset that their kids were exposed to this education. They remain skeptical even when the curricula are explained.

Respect for teachers is critical in Vietnamese society. Teachers are allowed to punish students who misbehave. Students are expected to bow or nod to their teachers in greeting, or to stand when a teacher enters. It is confusing for them when students in U.S. schools do not.

Right vs. Left handedness: In Vietnamese culture, using the right hand is considered correct, and a child would be considered socially abnormal if he or she used the left hand to write or eat. It is important to educate families that both left and right-handedness are acceptable in the United States.

Holidays: The Lunar New Year Is the most important holiday. Vietnamese remind us that this is not just "Chinese" New Year. Observing a death anniversary is more important than observing a birthday.

Food: American foods are too plain and contain too many dairy products for most Vietnamese. Most Vietnamese foods contain fish sauce, which may smell unpleasant to some Americans. In the Vietnamese tradition, the host provides everything guests are not expected to bring food or drink.

Gifts: It is considered impolite to open a gift in front of the giver.

Appendix

Thanks to friends and colleagues like Kathie McWilliams, Timmy Ong, Oliveria Rangel, Juan Ixchiu, Sarah Wanthal, Jerry George, Tanya Goodrich, Sam Szeba, Yonas Getachew, Barbara Martin, Diana Allen, Joe and Jamile Igram, Rosemary and Karl Restle, Taichi Matsunaga, Don and Dottie Mitchell, and my family members John, Sandy Horning, Susie and Conrad Tollefson and grandchildren William, Christy and Jonathan Tollefson who have taught me much about the need to learn and to reach out to include others in our circle.

These and many others have helped me to grow in understanding how and why to respectfully communicate with those of a variety of cultures. Their experiences and stories have added richly to my personal experience in teaching, community endeavors, work and the enjoyment of a more global view that has increased throughout my life.

Working in a quickly diversifying culture and living in a diverse community in many of my adult years made a difference. Blessed by experiences like those with The American Field Service, community action agencies, the Family Life Program in Cleveland that welcomed Latin American, Palestinian, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian immigrants, meant our family was never the same. We still “blow it” and make mistakes of misunderstanding because of doubts and cultural differences. But thanks to each of these people and many others not mentioned, for the ways in which they influenced us, changed my family and me, and stretched our view forever!

Cindy McKay

Diversity Calendar: Many traditions and cultural markers are connected to the holidays and dates that relate to cultural history. Understanding these may help to offer an understanding of the persons in your circle of influence. The following calendar or ones similar can be found in several places in a variety of resources. Most dates move ahead with the year. Some dates stay the same based on the calendar or time after the New Year.

Note the Resources at the end of this section to help you find current information.

For instance in 2011, Rosh Hashanah will be September 29, Yom Kippur on Oct. 8.

The links in each holiday and those at the end are sources for much more information. They should help you to identify corrected dates and present more ideas for understanding the religion, history and culture of those you are interested in reaching.

September 2010

Hispanic Heritage Month

8* Rosh Hashanah (New Year) <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/index.html>
Jewish

8-9* Eid al Fitr (End of Ramadan) http://www.islamicity.com/ramadan/Eid_default.shtml
Islamic

11 Enkutatash (New Year) <http://www.rastaites.com/Ethiopia/newyear.html> Ethiopian

16 Mexican Independence Day <http://www.inside-mexico.com/featureindep.html> Mexican

18* **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement) <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/index.html>
Jewish

22 **Tet Trung Thu** (Vietnam)

Moon Festival (Hong Kong,China,Taiwan)

Chu-Sok (Korea)

<http://www.familyculture.com/holidays/tettrungthu.html>

<http://www.adoptvietnam.org/vietnamese/tet-links.html>

<http://www.regit.com/hongkong/festival/mooncake.htm>

<http://www.pbs.org/hiddenkorea/chusok.html>

Vietnam, Hong Kong, China,

Taiwan, Korea

22* **Sukkot** <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday5.html> Jewish

23 **Mabon** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mabon_%28Wicca%29#Mabon Pagan

30* **Simchat Torah** <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday6.html> Jewish

October 2010

Cultural Diversity Month/Coming Out Month/Filipino American History Month

1* **Shemini Atzeret** <http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday6.html> Jewish

11 **National Coming Out Day** http://www.hrc.org/issues/coming_out.asp LGBTQ and allies

12 **Indigenous People's**

Day/Columbus Day

<http://www.homemadejam.org/rethinking-columbus.html> European American

12 **Dia de la Raza** <http://www.lasculturas.com/aa/aa100800a.php> Latin America, Mexican

20* **Birth of the Báb** <http://bahai.org/> Bahá'í

31 **Halloween** <http://www.history.com/topics/halloween>

Keep in mind that not all families view Halloween positively

USA

31 **Samhain** http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt_va.html?a=usaz&c=holidays&id=12905 Pagan

November 2010

Native American Heritage Month

1 **All Saint's Day** <http://www.churchyear.net/allsaints.html> Anglican & Roman Catholic

1 & 2 **Dia de los Muertos** <http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/> Mexican

5 **Diwali** <http://hinduism.about.com/od/diwaliFestivaloflights/a/diwali.html> Hindu, Jain, Sikh and Buddhist.

11 **Veterans Day** <http://www1.va.gov/opa/vetsday/> USA

12* **Birth of Bahá'u'lláh** <http://bahai.org/> Bahá'í

17 **Eid ul Adha** (Feast of Sacrifice) http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_feast.html Islamic

26 **Thanksgiving** <http://www.oyate.org/resources/shortthanks.html>

www.CulturesConnecting.com

Keep in mind that not all students view Thanksgiving positively

December 2010

1-9* **Hanukkah** http://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah/default_cdo/jewish/Chanukah.html

Jewish

6* **Al-Hijra (Muharram)** <http://www.islam.com/MFMuharam.html> Islamic
 8 **Bodhi Day** <http://www.doityourself.com/stry/bodhi-day> Buddhist
 8 **Feast of the Immaculate Conception**
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/immaculateconception.shtml>
 Catholic
 12 **Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe** <http://www.inside-mexico.com/guadalupe.html>
One of the most important dates in the Mexican Calendar
 Mexican Catholic Tradition
 16 **Simbang Gabi (Christmas)** http://www.filipinocatholicministry.org/simbang_gabi.html
 Filipino Catholic Tradition
 16-24 **Las Posadas** <http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/2816-las-posadas> Mexican Tradition
 21 **Winter Solstice/Yule** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheel_of_the_Year Pagan
 25 **Christmas** <http://www.history.com/minisites/christmas/> Christian
 26-Jan 1
Kwanzaa <http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/index.shtml> African American

January 2011

1 **New Years Day** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Year's_Day World Wide
 6 **Dia le los Reyes (Three Kings Day/Epiphany)**
<http://www.inside-mexico.com/ReyesMagos.htm> Mexican
 17 **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day** <http://www.mlkday.gov/> USA

February 2011

African American History Month

Feb &
 March

Lenten Season <http://wilstar.com/holidays/lent.html>

Many Filipino families return to the Philippines during this time
 Christian

1 **Imbolc** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imbolc> Pagan

3 **Lunar New Year (Year of the Rabbit)**

http://www.asianamericanbooks.com/lny_ch_a.htm#general China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Singapore, Korea

14 **Valentine's Day** <http://www.history.com/minisites/valentine/>

Be mindful that not all of our students celebrate Valentine's Day
 International

19 **Day of Remembrance**

http://www.imdiversity.com/villages/asian/history_heritage/DOR_Landing.asp USA

21 **President's Day Holiday** <http://usparks.about.com/library/weekly/aa021499.html> US

March 2011

Women's History Month

- 7 **Orthodox Lent** <http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/pascha/> Christian
- 8 **Internatn'l Women's Day** <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/> International
- 9 **Ash Wednesday** <http://christianity.about.com/od/holidaytips/qt/whatisashwednes.html>
Christian
- 17 **St. Patrick's Day** <http://www.history.com/minisites/stpatricksday/>
<http://www.irishclub.org/irwk.html>
Irish
- 20 **Persian New Year**
Nowruz
http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/03/0317_050317_nowruz.html
<http://www.funsocialstudies.learninghaven.com/edu/naw-ruz.html>
Iranian
- Bahá'i
- 21 **International Day for
Elimination of Racial
Discrimination**
http://www.hrea.org/index.php?doc_id=975 International
- 21 **Ostara** http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt_va.html?a=usnc&c=holidays&id=13389 Pagan
- 31 **César Chávez Day** http://www.ufw.org/_page.php?menu=research&inc=history/07.html
USA

April 2011

- 6 **National Tartan Day** <http://www.tartanday.org/> Scottish American
- 12 **Vaisakhi (Sikh New Year)** <http://www.sgpc.net/festivals/festival.asp> Sikh
- 15 **Pimai (New Year)** http://goseasia.about.com/od/laos/a/bun_pi_mai.html
Begins on the first full moon in April
Laotian
- 15 **National Day of Silence** <http://www.dayofsilence.org/index.cfm> LGBTQ and Allies
-Apr.16-23
- Holy Week** <http://www.crivoice.org/cyholyweek.html> Christian
- 17 **Palm Sunday** http://www3.kumc.edu/diversity/ethnic_relig/palm_wc.html
Christian/Orthodox
- 19* **Pesach/Passover (begins)** <http://www.jewfaq.org/holidaya.html> Jewish
- 21* **First Day of Ridván** <http://bahai-library.org/encyclopedia/ridvan.html> Bahá'i
- 22 **Good Friday** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_Friday Christian/Orthodox
- 24 **Easter Sunday** <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/easter-sunday> Christian
- 24 **Orthodox Easter** <http://www.factmonster.com/spot/easter1.html> Eastern Orthodox
- 29* **Ninth Day of Ridván** <http://bahai-library.org/e>

May 2011

- 1 **Beltane** <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beltane> Pagan
- 2* **Twelfth Day of Ridván** <http://bahai-library.org/encyclopedia/ridvan.html> Bahá'i
- 5 **Cinco de Mayo** <http://www.mexonline.com/cinco.html> USA/Mexican
- 10 **Mother's Day** <http://www.mothersdaycelebration.com/mothers-day-mexico.html>
Mother's Day (always May 10th in Mexico) is a huge deal for Mexican families.

Mexican

21 **Vesak** <http://www.buddhanet.net/vesak.html> Buddhist

23* **Declaration of the Báb** <http://bahai.org/> Bahá'í

29* **Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh** <http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art31523.asp> Bahá'í

30 **Memorial Day Holiday** <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nyseneca/memorial.html> USA

June 2011

8-9* **Shavuot** <http://www.holidays.net/shavuot/> Jewish

12 **Pentecost** <http://www.stpaulskingsville.org/pentecost.html> Christian

12 **Philippine Independence Day** <http://www.msc.edu.ph/centennial/independence.html>

Filipino

19 **Juneteenth** <http://www.juneteenth.com/> African American

21 **Summer Solstice** http://www.witchvox.com/va/dt_va.html?a=usnc&c=holidays&id=13389

Pagan

July 2011

13-15 **Obon** (Also in August) <http://www.buddhistchurch.com/events/Obon.html> Japanese
Buddhist

* These holy days begin at sunset and go to sunset of the following day.

Muslim holidays are based on actual sighting of the moon and therefore the day may vary.

<http://www.culturesconnecting.com/docs/DiversityCalendar20102011.pdf> (holidays+)

<http://www.globaled.org/guidelines/index.php>

<http://www.culturesconnecting.com/docs/wpcworkbookrevisions.pdf>

http://proximityone.com/sd_oh.htm (diverse populations in Ohio/US by school district)

<http://www.osu.edu/diversity/>

<http://ezinearticles.com/?When-Yes-Means-No---Active-Listening-For-Hidden-Cultural-Cues&id=533749>

End