

Carnegie Scholar Project: Transforming a General Education Course  
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Transformation Theme: Assessment  
Qualitative Data

Student Investigator Comments on Acculturation

What are my students' prior and/or personal experience with acculturation and assimilation?

Students had been learning about acculturation (the process whereby immigrants assume American cultural attributes, such as the English language and the manners and values of the mainstream society) and assimilation (the process by which immigrants are incorporated into the social networks such as work and residence of American society). They had been learning how many immigrants have experienced only limited acculturation and assimilation during their lifetimes. They were then asked this question:

“Provide two examples in which you, your family, or people you know have had to struggle with issues of acculturation and assimilation. (This could be in reference to adaptation to the mainstream U.S. culture OR it could be in reference to adaptation to a subculture such as a new school, membership in a new club, etc.)”

Student 1: Two examples of in which people that I know have had to struggle with issues of acculturation and assimilation are when some of my Asian friends came to this country when they were really young, they had to learn an entirely different language to survive and most of my African friends live in social residence's called ghettos.

Student 2: 1) When an aunt of mine and her family first came to the US from the Philippines she live in all "white" town in the south and they could not speak much English. Her husband had a job waiting for him there but it did not last long. It was difficult for them to find an apartment and my cousins had a hard time with school and no one wanted to tutor. The final outcome was they moved to Los Angeles and have found a "Filipino American" community there and are doing well. They can speak English very well now.

2) When my mother fist came here from the Philippines she too spoke little English. She attended Lincoln University and San Francisco and struggled with the English language immensely. She was not accepted by many of her peers primarily because her race and inability to speak fluent English. By her senior year, she was the

senior class president as well as a member of the debate team. She tried very hard to learn English and when she finally did, she accomplished more than being accepted. Stevens, Sally; When I started my latest and greatest job in a really fancy office I would get really excited and run in and say, "Dude! I found the most incredible....." Or "No way!" and my boss had to tell me that the slang didn't sound very professional and it would probably be a good idea to leave it on the beach. Sometimes it's very hard having the type of career I have and being a lot younger than everyone. It's always embarrassing when we go to restaurants for meetings and people have wine and I can't have any. Also, people that don't work with me on a regular basis, and don't see my work, often have an attitude about my capabilities.

I can only imagine the difficulties that faced my Irish ancestors when they came here from Ireland in the 1800's. I know they worked on the railroads.

Student 3: My husband came to the US from the Middle East in 1967. Over the years his cultural background slowly gave way to the "American Way" of doing things. He has become a sensational chef! Along with his enjoyment of cooking came the acceptance of "becoming" a US citizen and raising a family in the United States.

Student 4: There are certain language problems and understanding the mentality of the Americans, their way of life and cultural values. We could not understand why the Americans smile to unfamiliar people. It seemed strange to us and we could hardly adjust to that habit. The other thing is a very hectic way of life which doesn't leave you time for relaxation and thinking. My family still can not catch up with this style of life.

Student 6: When my mom (Hawaiian/white, lower class) married my stepfather (Minnesota white/ upper class), the entire family went into a period of adjustment and understanding. I went through the same thing as the only black (mixed) child in school during my elementary years.

Student 7: My father is Central Asian. When Russia invaded the territory, all people of Central Asia had to learn Russian language and go to Russian School. Surely, some prejudice existed between Russians and Central Asians. Now, my father's first language is Russian and his culture is mostly Russian. So, he assimilated. Second example: I am in the USA for three years already. I have to follow all the celebrations and holidays of the United States. I got used to food and life over here; so, I think I am gradually acculturating.

Student 8: When I moved to the US, two years ago, I moved here all by myself. The first half year here I did not know many Swedish people in my age group and I lived and

socialized with Americans only. This first half year when I was “thrown into” the US culture and behavior pattern I adapted very fast the American language, culture and became part of American social groups. I found this process very easy, maybe because I was 21 and still not formed “myself” fully. However, the one thing that I still do struggle with is the way the gender roles are different in this society compared to the Swedish society. In one way the US is very “modern” on their gender thinking, i.e. when it comes to females at high corporate levels. On the flip side I over and over again get involved in conversations with women who’s goal is to find a rich guy so they do not have to work. This amazes me, since almost all Swedish women do work, even if they have kids. And there is a pride in to make your own money and almost a shame to live “off” someone else in Sweden. I do not say that either way are better, however I have grown up in the Swedish culture, and therefore it seems more natural to me and I have a hard time to adjust my cultural norms in this issue to the American. Additionally, a second problem I have is the mentality that a lot of Swedish people have, including me, is that not to show out your emotions too much. Sometime people tend to think that I am “unemotional”, cold or even ignorant. I have a hard time to adjust myself to be outwardly emotional and very talkative, even though I sure have as much emotions inside me, I just don’t show everyone this, a lot due to my cultural background.

Student 8: When I started my latest and greatest job in a really fancy office I would get really excited and run in and say, "Dude! I found the most incredible....." Or "No way!" and my boss had to tell me that the slang didn't sound very professional and it would probably be a good idea to leave it on the beach. Sometimes it's very hard having the type of career I have and being a lot younger than everyone. It's always embarrassing when we go to restaurants for meetings and people have wine and I can't have any. Also, people that don't work with me on a regular basis, and don't see my work, often have an attitude about my capabilities. I can only imagine the difficulties that faced my Irish ancestors when they came here from Ireland in the 1800's. I know they worked on the railroads.

Student 9: When I lived in Southern California I worked with a man named Choi who escaped from Communist China by swimming to Hong Kong with the aid of an inflatable pillow. While in Hong Kong he worked very hard to learn English and get an education in chemical engineering so that he could qualify for entry into the US. Even though I felt that he had a very good grasp of the English language, he often felt inadequate in his speech. There was also the matter of cultural differences such as food. The lunchroom at this job was small and intimate and one day I was telling everyone about a kitten that I had just gotten. Choi responded "You have a kitten? You can't eat that!", to which there was a loud outburst of laughter from everyone in the room. Choi was clearly embarrassed

and didn't quite understand our reaction. This led to a discussion about the scarcity of meat in his country and a story about the time they found a rat in their rice barrel, which they cleaned and ate. This brought a unanimous groan from the room. I was also embarrassed both for Choi and by our reaction, much like I felt anytime that I had to ask Choi to repeat something because I couldn't understand what he had said. But Choi and I never shied away from communicating even when it was difficult and I'm sure that this took much more courage and patience on his part than mine.

When I was eleven my family moved to a new town. The first few weeks at the new school were very uncomfortable for me, I definitely felt like the odd ball in the class. Like adults in the work place, kids tend to divide up into clicks and can tend to be standoffish to new comers. To make matters worse, my new teacher suspected that I had a vision problem and sure enough I wound up getting glasses. I was the only boy in the class with glasses and this gave the other boys something else to tease me about. I began to know how the kids with brasses must have felt when they first got them. This was the longest school year of my life and the only year that I failed a subject, in part because I felt so uncomfortable in my new surroundings.

Student 10: 1. I have a friend come from Taiwan always can't understand why in America each time we go to restaurant together but separate the bill. She think who made the suggestion and invite him to go should pay the money.  
2. I think suitable corporal punishment for children is good. But in American, it is illegal. Sometimes I need to control my temper, but don't know what I can do when they make mistakes.

Student 11: Did not answer this question.

Student 12: I have had a hard time adapting a new culture, which was different from Japanese culture, since I came to America. At that point, I could not speak English well so that I had have difficulties to communicate with people. Moreover, people in America were different from people I knew. Americans had different thoughts ad attitudes that Japanese people had never thought of or imagined. It was the most difficult thing for me to understand American ways of thinking and doing things. The things that I thought "usual" or "normal" for Japanese were not applied for American. I had to simply adjust the American ways to make my life comfortable in America.

Student 13: I was born here in the US, but my dad had to assimilate when he came here to attend college. When I went to Mexico I was surprised because even though I was surrounded by American tourists I still wasn't acculturated and was not familiar with many customs and the language.

Student 14: A typical example of struggling with issues of acculturation and assimilation is that, after I came over to the United States for further studies, I became an international student. They involve the difficulties in adjusting the totally different American education system and the force to use English for daily communication.

Student 15: Acculturation: Everytime I would to an Asian restaurant I assume that the Asian people especially the Chinese, Thailander would used chop sticks and other race like American or German for example would used fork because they don't know how to use chop sticks. I assume that Asian restaurants would only serve chopsticks and no utensils. Japanese resaurants would only have sushi as the main course.

Assimilation: Now, everytime I would go to Asian restaurant I would try to use chopsticks and not utensils. It is not because I don't wanna embarrass myself it is because I wanted to learn how to used because I see a lot of different race that uses like especially the non Asian race.