

Herbert B. Wilson

Cultural Literacy Laboratory

The Cultural Literacy Laboratory (a systematic series of individualized tests, learning experiences, source materials, communication methodologies and field tasks) is designed to combine the theoretical aspects of crosscultural communication and field work with practical application. The goal of the laboratory is to assist a person in a "helping profession" acquire skills and techniques for more effective crosscultural communication. The laboratory has been field tested and used with a variety of ethnic, national and racial groups in the United States southwest. However, it might also serve as a potential model for identifying cultural conflicts among French- and English-Canadians who may have difficulty recognizing their areas of cultural similarities and differences.

cultural literacy

Recognition of areas of continuity or discontinuity provides the base for cultural literacy. While total continuity between two cultures is not desirable, knowing the degree and range of discrepancies between cultural areas and belief system components will indicate potential communication problems that need to be ameliorated in order to develop more effective transcultural interaction. "Cultural literacy" is defined as insight into one's own culture and includes some understanding of one's own frustration and tolerance levels, the ability to work effectively with people who are culturally different and to demonstrate the skills this requires. Cultural literacy is being aware of one's ethnicity and possessing the skills of transcultural communication.

The Cultural Literacy Laboratory was developed as part of the activities of the Multicultural Education Center in the College of Education at the University of Arizona. It was originally designed for students teaching or preparing to teach target populations, i.e. in programs involving bilingual education, education for the American Indian, and education for the culturally diverse in rural or urban areas. It has been used with undergraduate and graduate college students, as well as with seniors in high school in Tucson and on the Papago Reservation at Sells, Arizona. The C.L.L. also has great potential for preparing people for work in international and intercultural settings abroad.

Over the past years, it has become apparent that intellectual insight alone does not produce a person who can fully function in multicultural situations. Something more is needed to join theory with practice. And since most students have very little understanding of the methodology and the skills or techniques required to become involved in cultures that are "different," the laboratory is designed to provide experiences to develop effective transcultural communication. It attempts to incorporate and reinforce the participant's previous social science concepts and methodology, to introduce him to new processes, and to allow him to practise communication skills and techniques in a variety of experience-based activities. Many people have had the experience of learning more about their primary language through the systematic learning of a second language. There is a parallel in the development of cultural literacy. Linton indicated, "He who knows no culture other than his own, cannot know his own." Just looking at another culture and participating in it is not enough. There is a specific methodology and point of view that is essential to develop effective crosscultural communication, which tends to start by knowing one's own culture.

underlying assumptions

The learning experiences of the laboratory are based on these major assumptions:

1. The entry behavior of each individual is unique and is accommodated in the laboratory by self-directed extension of skill sessions and reading.
2. Cultural literacy is developed through the identification of the intra-relationships between self and the "generalized other," through the phenomenological self and the phenomenological field.

3. Learning is an outgrowth of practical, goal-directed, problem-solving behavior. We comprehend ourselves primarily through what we do.
4. Most learning is more effective through a combination of intra-action and inter-action of theory and practice in small and large, familiar and unfamiliar groups.
5. Experiences emerge out of behavior as interpreted by the self. The nature and content of knowledge is relative to whatever conditions are at hand and is determined subjectively through the processes of practical (instrumental) response with respect to existing problems and values. Ultimately man is his behavior.
6. Impact tasks seemingly focus on tasks, but in reality they are to focus on self and the influence of the self-system on the situation. The individual creates the impact and alters the relationship and cultural environment by his presence.
7. The theoretical base of laboratory learning inherent in one set of practical circumstances is designed to transfer to another set of circumstances.

the model and its premises

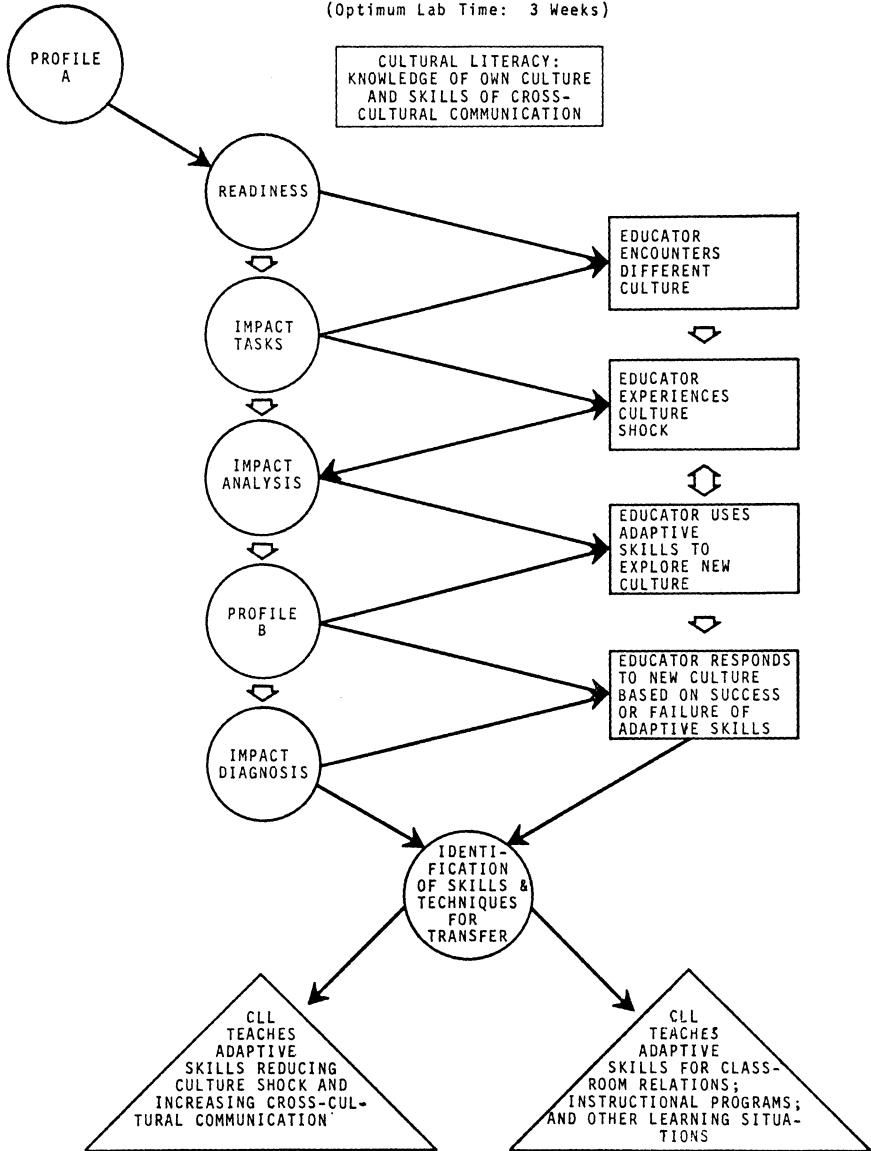
The laboratory was developed in an independent studies seminar with several graduate students.³ The model was based on four major premises:

1. Insight into one's own culture is essential to enlarge a person's recognition of his ethnicity and to communicate effectively in transcultural situations.
2. A combination of intellectual input and interaction develops attitudes and skills for transcultural communication which more effectively prepares the participant for more in depth penetration of a target culture, and specifically a culture that is different from his own.
3. There must be an opportunity for the participant to have an impact in the target culture in order to test the tools, skills, and techniques acquired during the readiness period. The impact period or tasks cannot be haphazard, they must be planned and structured.
4. Upon the completion of the first three stages in the development of cultural literacy, there must be an analysis and diagnosis based upon pre-test and post-test scores. Diagnosis and analysis are designed to identify and develop areas

THE CULTURAL LITERACY LABORATORY (CLL)

Process and Intervention

(Optimum Lab Time: 3 Weeks)



PROFILE A

READINESS

(10-12 class hours)

IMPACT

(3-4 days)

PROFILE B DIAGNOSIS & TRANSFER

(4 class hours)

Cultural Literacy Inventory; Rokeach E; Personal Questionnaire.

Interaction Skills; Cross-Cultural Communication Skills; Fieldwork Techniques; Interviewing Techniques; Use of Informants; Cues (verbal and non-verbal); How to Observe (observation and participation); Field Diary (recording); Values Clarification; Fieldwork Assignments and Feedback.

Impact Tasks in Target Culture; Fieldwork; Use of Hall's Map of Culture for Impact Tasks; Practising Cross-Cultural Communication Skills Developed in Readiness. Cultural Literacy Inventory and Rokeach E.

Identification of Skills and Techniques with Implication and Application to Professional Role and Other Learning Situations.

that might transfer to the situation that is the professional goal or milieu of the participants.

The laboratory model is developmental and the process sequential. While it is recognized that each participant's laboratory entry behavior is idiosyncratic, the skills and the out-of-laboratory assignments can be practised at many levels of sophistication.

profile A

Profile A consists of the Cultural Literacy Inventory which was developed as a part of the laboratory and designed to measure the participant's perception of his own culture and his perception of the target culture. It is anticipated that much of what the student records of the target culture may reflect a stereotype of that culture. This alone is important to discover if the student is to have some insight into how to ameliorate his misunderstanding in dealing with people who are culturally different. In the research thus far, there tends to be between a 40% and 45% agreement between areas on the inventory of own culture and target culture.

The items on the inventory are based on the primary message system developed by Hall.³ The primary message system includes ten categories: interaction, association, subsistence, bisexuality, territoriality, temporality, learning, play, defense, and exploitation. Greatest agreement tends to occur in the areas of subsistence and association. The inventory requires that the participant respond to sixty items as he perceives they exist in his own culture and in the target culture. Any culture may be designated as the target culture. It may even be a subculture within the participant's own culture.

Several sample items from the inventory appear below:

	Own Culture	Target Culture
Formal education is regarded in this culture as:		
(1) the way to the "good life"	_____	_____
(2) a means of upward social mobility (moving up in the society)	_____	_____
(3) as not necessary to the "good life"	_____	_____
(4) a necessary evil	_____	_____
(5) not essential	_____	_____
John, age 15, earns money. Which of the following will he probably do?		
(1) give the money to his mother	_____	_____
(2) give the money to his father	_____	_____
(3) keep the money for himself	_____	_____
(4) give some of the money to his mother for room and board	_____	_____
(5) spend it on himself and his friends	_____	_____

	Own Culture	Target Culture
Teenage females are:		
(1) chaperoned at all times	_____	_____
(2) only supervised at mixed parties	_____	_____
(3) free to come and go as they please	_____	_____
(4) subject to family restrictions	_____	_____
(5) only permitted female company	_____	_____

Profile A also includes the administration of Rokeach Scale E which is designed to measure openness and closedness of belief systems.⁴ In addition to this inventory and the Rokeach Scale, a person participating in the laboratory also completes a personal questionnaire which includes the usual demographic information plus items concerning mobility, ability to make friends, and reactions to people who are "culturally different." These three instruments are coded or scored in order to derive a measure of the entry behavior of each participant in the laboratory. This is used to compare with Profile B which is administered toward the end of the laboratory.

readiness

The *Readiness* period is designed to reinforce or develop skills and techniques of crosscultural communication. *Readiness* takes from around twelve to fifteen hours over a period of three weeks. Participants are expected to do out-of-laboratory assignments in conjunction with some of the input sessions. The readiness sessions include practice in interaction skills, such as the fishbowl technique, the Johari Window, role playing and giving and receiving feedback. These sessions are used to "unfreeze" the participants and to provide some notion of their awareness of their interaction levels and some understanding of what is required for effective interaction.

Participants are given specific guidance on how to write field diaries, how to record their daily life styles both objectively and subjectively. They are also given instruction on how to observe and understand both verbal and nonverbal cues. The SWCEL Crosscultural Communication multimedia presentation is used to review culture theory and its application. A great deal of time is spent on field work methodology which includes, in addition to observation skills and recording procedures, interviewing techniques, questioning categories, the

use of informants, and the introduction of how to use Hall's "Map of Culture." An important session is devoted to valuing and value orientation. A reading box is available in which copies of articles and materials relating to the target culture and to the processes and skills of crosscultural communication are provided for the participants.

impact tasks

Before beginning the *Impact Tasks* phase, participants are prepared to select one primary message system from Hall's "Map of Culture" and develop a series of questions and field procedures associated with their selection so they can begin field work at the point of entry into the target culture. Many students in the laboratory who are in the College of Education choose the area of instruction and learning, which tends to enlarge their understanding of the formal and informal educational system of Mexico. When the laboratory is given on campus, the participants are expected to spend four to five days in Hermosillo, Mexico, the capital of the state of Sonora. This is some 250 miles from Tucson. Participants must use public transportation from the border and obtain their own border-crossing documentation and housing. They are expected not to use American tourist accommodations, but rather to live in boarding houses or low-cost hotels. They are encouraged to spend two working days and a weekend in the target culture so that they can see how social activities affect cultural differences. As part of the ongoing learning experience, participants are expected to maintain a field diary during impact sessions and not to travel in groups of more than two or three at a time. The diaries are reviewed and returned.

Toward the end of the *Impact Tasks* period, a large group session is held prior to the participant's re-entry into his dominant culture. This generally includes a fishbowl interaction session where the participant discusses what he has observed and the kinds of things that he has participated in while in the target culture. He also compares his reactions with those of other participants. Several weeks after returning to his own culture, the participant completes the instruments of Profile B which is a re-administration of the Cultural Literacy Inventory and Rokeach Scale E. After these scores are computed, several sessions are held for diagnosis, the identifying of cultural literacy skills, and consideration of the possibility of transferring these skills to professional situations.

culture shock

One of the important aspects of the laboratory is to provide the student with some sense of culture shock and the opportunity to ameliorate this shock with some guidance. Oberg stated that,

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs are cues which include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life—when we shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to servants, how to make purchases, and when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not to.⁵

Culture shock is often expressed in the way we reject “the environment which causes the discomforts.” Oberg suggested that there is a developmental process of cultural interaction from the “honeymoon stage to a stage of hostile and aggressive attitudes toward the host country known as culture shock, to the process of adjustment.”

The Cultural Literacy Laboratory recognizes the value of culture shock. Philip Bock stated that “the value of culture shock lies in liberation and understanding that comes from such an experience . . . other customs, etc., that are not meaningless to those participating in them.”⁶ We find that students in the laboratory experience culture shock in various ways. Many of them experience it after they return from their Impact Tasks to the routine of their daily lives in their own culture. It is not important when culture shock occurs, but that when it does, the student has some skills to cope with it and some techniques to ameliorate its influence and to learn from the situation.

Most of the students who have participated in the Cultural Literacy Laboratory have been highly motivated and impressed by the kinds of experiences the laboratory provides. An American Indian undergraduate student who participated in the laboratory wrote in her diary:

Just by involving yourself with the foundations of a culture you can gain so much insight, not only in a physical, concrete sense, but maybe now in the abstract. This is because most of what a culture is made up of is what the expectations were in the minds of these people and how they developed their culture with the basis of some kind of survival as a guide.

A graduate student wrote that her four days in Impact Tasks in Hermosillo, Mexico, provided her with more understanding and insight into a culture that is different than her recent six-week tour of Europe. An undergraduate had this reaction:

Suddenly I realized how my presence had altered the cultural environment of Mexico, how in four days I had been sending and receiving cues without saying a word. . . . I have found out how deeply emotions are tied into attitudes. For four days I was the subculture. I was the stupid body who no one could talk to—yet I knew I was shallow. My entire life for those days was based on survival. And I survived. This I think can transfer to my future teaching when working with children who come from a different culture.

research and follow-up

The Alumni Association at the University of Arizona provided a modest research grant to field test the Cultural Literacy Laboratory in the fall of 1971. In the research design one group of students participated in the total model. One group participated in the *Readiness* session but did not go to *Impact Tasks*. The third group did not participate in *Readiness*, did no reading, but went to *Impact*. Each group participated in the rest of the model. It was discovered that the students who participated in the full model tended to have a more adequate cultural literacy potential score than the other two groups. This score is based on results of Profile A plus Profile B.

It was also discovered that the students who went to *Impact* only and did not have the intellectual input through *Readiness* scored better than those students who had *Readiness* only. The sample was small and additional funds are being sought to further research this area. At this time, however, the participants reinforce our notions about the efficacy of the total model and the usefulness of the sequential development in the laboratory. There is also some indication that experiences in the laboratory tend to transfer to classroom intern situations. More research is needed on the long term effect of the lab experience on the participant.

Meanwhile, feedback from participants and the interest shown in the laboratory have indicated that this model is tending to help bridge the gap between theory and practice in transcultural situations. Students have developed a higher sense of their own ethnicity and exhibited progress in the skills of cultural transaction. The laboratory data also appear to support the notion that awareness of one's own culture is ac-

celerated through a conscious effort to participate in a culture that is different. But it takes more than a tourist or a haphazard approach. Cultural literacy is developed through a deliberately planned sequence.

references

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4. Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind: Investigations Into the Nature of Belief Systems and Personality Systems*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1960.
5. Kalervo Oberg, "Culture Shock and the Problems of Adjustment to New Cultural Environments," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Institute, 1958. (Mimeographed.)
6. Philip Bock, *Culture Shock*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.