

**Teaching from the Orchestra:  
Cultural Values and Dimensions of Power  
Within  
Role Relations of an EFL Classroom**

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Brown (Principles of Language Learning and Teaching 2000: 192) suggests various ways in which the values inherent in 'collectivist' and 'individualist' societies might affect student-student and teacher-student interactions. Choose from either 'uncertainty avoidance' or 'power distance' and list how your choice of dimension might affect student-student and teacher-student interaction in your work setting. Discuss how the items on your list might affect the methodology you adopt.

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## **1. Introduction**

Inherent within patterns of society are social constructions of power that influence not only the roles of individuals, but their relationships to one another. Such roles and relationships are especially significant within educational settings for learners and teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Breen (2001a: 309) states that:

Social relationships in the classroom orchestrate what is made available for learning, how learning is done, and what we achieve. These relationships and the purposeful social action of teaching and learning are directly realised through the discourses in which we participate in the lessons.

To better understand how role relations within the classroom are shaped by cultural values and variances of power this paper will discuss the interactions of learners and teachers within an EFL classroom in relation to cultural dimensions of Power Distance and Collectivist/Individualist cultures and the influence of these dimensions upon the teaching methodology of this author.

## **2. Cultural Dimensions**

Cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1986) refer to four areas of cultural difference. These areas are: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity/Femininity and Collectivism/Individualism. This paper will focus only on Power Distance and Collectivism/Individualism. Cultural dimensions were originally developed through statistical analysis of answers in response to a questionnaire conducted by Geert Hofstede for employees at IBM throughout their international locations in 50 countries and 3 regions of the world. Each of the dimensions is utilized to reflect different values of an

individual's culture by grouping together a number of phenomena within a society (Hofstede, 1997: 14). It is important to note that these characteristics are used as generalities to help explain cultural responses to problems and not as stereotypes to proscribe cultural responses to individuals.

## 2.1 Power Distance

The dimension of Power Distance reflects the extent to which those with less power will accept those with more power and consider that extent normal (Hofstede, 1986: 307). Cultures can have a small power distance, as in the case of the USA, or a large power distance as in the case of Japan. In societies with small power distance teachers are generally expected to treat the students as equals as the educational process is student-centered (Hofstede, 1997: 34). In the case of societies with large power distance education is teacher-centered as teachers are generally expected to outline the intellectual paths for students to follow (Hofstede, 1997: 34). See Figure 1 below for list of characteristics describing Power Distance for teacher-student and student-student interactions.

Small Power Distance Societies	Large Power Distance Societies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress on impersonal "truth" which can in principle be obtained from any competent person</li> <li>• A teacher should respect the independence of his/her students</li> <li>• Student-centered education (premium on initiative)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress on personal "wisdom" which is transferred in the relationship with a particular teacher (guru)</li> <li>• A teacher merits the respect of his/her students</li> <li>• Teacher-centered education (premium on order)</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher expects students to initiate communication</li> <li>• Teacher expects students to find their own paths</li> <li>• Students may speak up in spontaneously in class</li> <li>• Students allowed to contradict or criticize teacher</li> <li>• Effectiveness of learning related to amount of two-way communication in class</li> <li>• Outside class, teachers are treated as equals</li> <li>• In teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the student</li> <li>• Younger teachers are more liked than older teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students expect teacher to initiate communication</li> <li>• Students expect teacher to outline paths to follow</li> <li>• Students speak up in class only when invited by the teacher</li> <li>• Teacher is never contradicted nor publicly criticized</li> <li>• Effectiveness of learning related to excellence of the teacher</li> <li>• Respect for teachers is also shown outside class</li> <li>• In teacher/student conflicts, parents are expected to side with the teacher</li> <li>• Older teachers are more respected than younger teachers</li> </ul>
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Figure 1: List of characteristics for societies with large and small Power Distance (Hofstede: 1986).

## 2.2 Collectivism and Individualism

Collectivism and Individualism within cultures each reflect the extent to which societies are integrated. Collectivist cultures are viewed as being tightly integrated, while Individualist cultures are viewed as being loosely integrated (Hofstede, 1986: 307). Within Collectivist cultures, such as Japan, individuals belong to one or more in-groups that they cannot separate from. Education tends to focus on acquiring skills and virtues necessary to becoming an acceptable member of society. Hofstede (1997: 63) states, “This leads to a premium on the products of tradition...[learners] have to learn how to do things in order to participate in society.” In Individualist societies, such as the USA, each person is expected to be responsible for themselves and their family. Education “aims at

preparing the individual for a place in a society among other individuals...The purpose of learning is less to know how to do, as to know how to learn (Hofstede, 1997: 63).” See Figure 2 for list of characteristics describing Collectivist and Individualist societies.

Collectivist Societies	Individualist Societies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive association in society with whatever is rooted in tradition</li> <li>• The young should learn; adults cannot accept student role</li> <li>• Students expect to learn how to do</li> <li>• Individual students will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher</li> <li>• Individuals will only speak up in small groups</li> <li>• Large classes split socially into smaller cohesive subgroups based on particular criteria (e.g. ethnic affiliation)</li> <li>• Formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times</li> <li>• Neither the teacher nor any student should ever be made to lose face</li> <li>• Education is a way of gaining prestige in one's social environment and of joining a higher status group</li> <li>• Diploma certificates are important and displayed on walls</li> <li>• Acquiring certificates, even through illegal means (cheating, corruption) is more important than acquiring competence</li> <li>• Teachers are expected to give preferential treatment to some students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive association in society with whatever is "new"</li> <li>• One is never too old to learn: "permanent education"</li> <li>• Students expect to learn how to learn</li> <li>• Individual students will speak up in class in response to a general invitation by the teacher</li> <li>• Individuals will speak up in large groups</li> <li>• Sub-groupings in class vary from one situation to the next based on universalist criteria (e.g. the task "at hand")</li> <li>• Confrontation in learning situations can be salutary; conflicts can be brought into the open</li> <li>• Face-consciousness is weak</li> <li>• Education is a way of improving one's economic worth and self-respect based on ability and competence</li> <li>• Diploma certificates have little symbolic value</li> <li>• Acquiring competence is more important than acquiring certificates</li> <li>• Teachers are expected to be strictly impartial</li> </ul>

(e.g. based on ethnic affiliation or on recommendation by an influential person)	
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Figure 2: List of characteristics for Collectivist and Individualist Societies (Hofstede: 1986).

### 2.3 Limitations of Cultural Dimensions

While Hofstede's cultural dimensions undoubtedly have valid points of reference in identifying patterns within cultures, there are also limitations in regards to the quality of the data used in identifying the cultural dimensions. First, the sample group for the original survey all came from a single company, IBM (McSweeney, 2002: 95). Such a narrow group calls into question the validity of identifying the characteristics of a national culture as all of the data originates from individuals who work not only for a single company, but may also come from similar economic brackets. Secondly, Hofstede supposes that within this group there exists "a singular, uniform and monopolistic organizational culture (cf. Parker, 2000; Risberg, 1999 cited in McSweeney, 2002: 97)" and that no other alternative forms of organization exist within this group. The interpretation of the data may, like the sample, be too narrow. McSweeney (2002, 97 citing cf. Jelinek et al., 1983; Smircich 1983 Spender, 1998) states that:

The extensive literatures which argues for recognition of multiple, dissenting, emergent, organic, counter, plural, resisting, incomplete, contradictory, cultures in organization is effectively ignored.

### 2.4 Validity of Cultural Dimensions

Regardless of the limitations to the means by which the evidence was collected,

Hofstede's cultural dimensions clearly offer valid concepts in analyzing the cultural environment individuals are educated within. First, by understanding the cultural dimensions that shape either the culture of the learner or the teacher, individuals can gain understanding into not only their own roles within culture, and that of others, but also into their own assumptions about choices affecting teaching and learning. Richards and Lockhart (1996: 108) state that, "Differences in cultural assumptions about teaching and the role of teachers can lead to different expectations on both the teacher's and the learner's part." Secondly, in surveying the choices of individuals and identifying the unspoken rules that they follow it should be possible to discover which societies share similar or different rules in regards to education. Van Lier (2001: 92) states, "Just as in a game...the social world is governed by rules that allow certain moves to be made while disallowing (or disfavoring) others." Clearly, understanding the unspoken rules a culture has towards the expectations of socialization within society can allow teachers to make decisions within educational settings that take into account social rules which can facilitate learning. Being aware of any potential constraints within an Individualist or Collectivist culture gives teachers greater sensitivity to the social environment of the learners and a stronger understanding of the new choices presented to learners within this teaching environment.

### **3. Values in Education: Examples of Collectivist and Individualist Societies**

#### **3.1 American Educational System**

The American educational system, specifically higher education, focuses on the function of enabling individual learning. Learning is the primary value and goal of education and

it can be viewed as a process for each individual. The purpose of learning within the educational system is to “change students in both the cognitive and affective aspects of their personalities to prepare them for practical affairs (Bowen, 1977: 8).” Additionally, Bowen (1977: 7-8) states that:

The...functions of higher education are based mostly on a single unifying process—*learning*. Learning in this sense means knowing and interpreting the known (scholarship and criticism) discovering the new (research and related activities, and bringing about desired change in the cognitive and affective traits and characteristics of human beings (education).

However, a criticism of the American education system is that its practices are too standardized to meet the demands of such a diverse clientele (Bowen, 1977: 7). Because of this, America has been accused of being unable to attain a depth of learning (Bowen, 1977: 4).

### **3.1.1 Cultural Dimensions and Personal Experience**

As an Individualist society with a small Power Distance, American education is concerned with providing opportunities for students to learn how to learn, rather than merely what to learn. Criticisms of American education may focus on a lack of depth within American education, however, it seems they fail to take into account the freedom given to individuals to discover new information and choose what they want to learn.

For this author, growing up in California the educational setting focused not only on



building character through extracurricular activities, but on using the knowledge gained in and out of the classroom to strengthen character and relationships. Education was always a combination of personal experience and social experience. Just like the peers at this author's schools, a great many choices were presented to this author to stimulate learning and discover which skills were enjoyed the most. This author's experience reflects Hofstede's assumptions that learning within an Individualist culture is about learning how to learn within an educational environment that is both social and academic.

### **3.2 Japanese Educational System**

In contrast to the American educational system's focus on desired change through learning, the Japanese educational system instead concentrates on building character collectively as a pathway to learning. Wray (1999: 11-12) describes this process as a, "A deep-seated Japanese attitude...that if you don't suffer, achievement lacks merit and satisfaction...Frugal circumstances create an attitude among students that education is a serious business." Additionally, Wray (1999: 4) states that:

Japanese schools' usage of noninstructional times for class meetings, self-reflections time...and special activities are considered an integral part of the curricular goals to build character.

However, just as criticisms of the American system focus on a rigid standardization based solely on learning being responsible for a lack of character building among students, opponents of the Japanese system state that it is the very type of character building imposed upon students by the educational system that hinders any true depth of character

formation. Wray (1999: 94) states:

Many students complain that they have become so accustomed to an environment where everything is proscribed that they lack confidence and judgment for appropriate behavior and decision making. Rules foster distrust, conformity, and an interesting paradox. At the same time students yearn for greater freedom and choice, they gradually internalize the view that a controlling and conforming environment is “comfortable,” “protective,” and “easy,” that is, it becomes easier to conform than to oppose or to be different from others.

### **3.2.1 Cultural Dimensions and Personal Experience**

As a Collectivist society with a large Power Distance, Japanese society seems to be concerned more with the rigors of education than education itself. Criticisms of Japanese education may focus on the undo necessity of conformity by students within the classroom, however they also seem to fail to take into account the possible expectations of this conformity by society and teachers. Just as American education focuses on an individual’s choices towards learning, it seems that Japanese education focuses on the demands required of being educated, rather than on the process of education.

In regards to this author’s experience in Japan, one of the first sayings learned to describe the educational experience in Japanese was, “The nail that sticks out gets hammered in.” It seems this attitude is still prevalent within Japan, as many learners do not want to stand out as being greater than or worse than their peers. However, while individuals understand that not being different is culturally expected of them, they seem to still desire the satisfaction of being rewarded for their efforts, they are just waiting for organized activities that will instruct them on how to properly make the effort. This author’s

experience within Japan appears to validate Hofstede's assumptions that Collectivist societies focus on instructing students how to acquire the necessary skills within the traditions of their culture in order to achieve the rights for participation.

#### **4. Mediating Language and Learning**

For teachers and learners, studying English as a foreign language involves the engagement of different forms of communication that may not only involve new types of grammar and new choices of words, but entirely new concepts of how to communicate. For teachers though the experience of teaching English through communication is continually based upon basic cognitive, socioaffective, and linguistic principles that influence language learning. Scrivener (1994: 8 cited in Holland and Shortall, 2000: 67) states that:

Teaching is about working with other human beings...[the teacher] has an awareness of how individual and groups are thinking and feeling within her class...Her own personality and attitude are an active encouragement to learning.

However, for the student, aware only of the personality of the teacher and unaware of the principles being implemented within the class by the teacher to improve their learning opportunities, effective teaching is based upon the successful implementation of relationships within the class.

As a teacher, one of this author's strongest beliefs is that learners must believe in the teacher. By developing relationships with learners in the class teachers are able to guide

class activities, inspire students to reach their goals and work with them as they discover new modes of communication within English. To do this, teachers must earn the respect of students by understanding not only their interests and relationships, but how they learn.

#### 4.1 Principles of Language Learning and Teaching

Teaching that is based on a set of underlying cognitive, socioaffective and linguistic principles “allows method to be shaped by the specific demands of local context and personal style... (Edwards et al, 2000: 23).” Brown (2007: 43) states, “[principles] are a dynamic composite of energies within you that change, or should change, with your experience in your learning and teaching.” Additionally, Holland and Shortall (2000, 67) state that many teachers develop a second personality within the classroom often built upon a primary factor: sensitivity to the needs and feelings of learners. In understanding and being aware of the needs of individual learners and groups of learners teachers are able to mediate language, learning and group dynamics via the following 12 basic principles of teaching for a more constructive and communicative experience within the classroom:

Boundaries	PRINCIPLES	MEANING
<b>Cognitive (mental and intellectual functions)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Automaticity</li> <li>Meaningful Learning</li> <li>The Anticipation of Reward</li> <li>Intrinsic Motivation</li> </ol>	<p>-absorption of language</p> <p>-student connection to interests and knowledge</p> <p>-engaging the students with enthusiasm and encouragement</p> <p>-desire to learn comes from within the student based on their needs,</p>

	5. Strategic Investment  6. Autonomy	wants and desires  -individual student interaction vs. whole class interaction  -student initiative for their own success outside the classroom
<b>Socioaffective (emotional involvement)</b>	7. Language Ego  8. Willingness to Communicate  9. Language-Culture Connection	-new perceptions of self and culture via new language  -encouraging risk-taking  -Language is storehouse of culture, customs, values, ways of thinking, feeling and acting
<b>Linguistic (learner and linguistic systems)</b>	10. The Native Language Effect  11. Interlanguage  12. Communicative Competence	-native language maintains facilitating and interfering effects on production and comprehension  -acquisition of language as a systematic developmental process that requires feedback  -focus on organization, pragmatic, strategic and psychomotor components through language use and context

Figure 3: Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (Brown: 2007)

#### 4.1.1 Principles of Language Learning and Personal Experience

For this author, the principles of Meaningful Learning, Intrinsic Motivation, Language-Culture Connection and Communicative Competence have had the strongest impact on relationships within the classroom setting in Japan. First, in regards to Meaningful Learning, this author strives to be aware of what learners are interested in. Often times, Japanese students expect a teacher to begin conversations or to nominate students to begin a conversation. By understanding what students wish to talk about, a teacher can

shape lessons that introduce grammar, lexis and topics of discussion that gradually raise a student's emotional and intellectual response to the topics and foster an environment in which the student feels comfortable initiating conversations. Second, by developing relationships with the class between teacher-student and student-student the principle of Intrinsic Motivation can also heighten student interest in communicating with others. Different students have different strengths and weaknesses within language and communication. Teachers must recognize these strengths and weakness and provide learners with the appropriate contexts via relationships to allow them to improve upon their strengths and move beyond their weaknesses. Third, the Language-Culture Connection allows teachers to be representatives of their culture. However, the teacher may be the only conduit students have to English speaking culture outside of media. As such, teachers can provide opportunities for learners to discover cultural ideas and values through personal interactions. Finally, the Communicative Competence principle allows teachers to understand the process of learning that students' experience. Teachers can select material appropriate to the educational context and the dynamics of the class.

## **4.2 Approach to Teaching**

By understanding established principles of language learning, teachers can more readily decide on the approach they take towards teaching within different educational contexts.

Richards and Lockhart (1996: 104) state:

Teachers create their own roles within the classroom based on their [approaches towards] teaching and learning and the kind of classroom interaction they best believe supports these [approaches].

A key decision though is whether to implement a deductive or inductive approach towards language. Edwards et al (2000: 72) state:

A strong distinction is made between deductive and inductive approaches, where a deductive approach implies the explanation of rules before practice and an inductive approach requires students to infer rules from contextualized practice.

For this author, working with Japanese students often requires using a deductive approach. Many rules of grammar within the English language are opposite to that of the Japanese language. The author feels that by explaining grammar and then providing contexts in which the students can use the grammar to discuss issues relevant to their own lives they are better able to internalize the grammar.

#### **4.2.1 Communicative Language Teaching**

Methodology, as defined by Brown (2007: 41) is the “systematic application of validated principles to practical contexts.” Additionally, Richards and Rodgers (2001: viii) state:

The teaching of any subject matter is usually based on an analysis of the nature of the subject itself and the application of teaching and learning principles drawn from research and theory in educational psychology. The result is generally referred to as a teaching method or approach, by which we refer to a set of core teaching and learning principles together with a body of classroom practices that are derived from them.

One of the current methodologies is Communicative Language Teaching. This is teaching that is concerned with facilitating lifelong learning among students through various interpretations and manifestations (Brown, 2007: 45-46). Nunan (2001: 193) states:

...a [communicative] methodology will show learners how to use grammar to get things done, socialize, obtain goods and services and express their personality through language.

Through cooperative learning tasks teachers implement classroom activities designed to intrinsically motivate students desire to learn. Communicative Language Teaching can be described via the following seven characteristics:

- Overall goals
- Relationship of form and function
- Fluency and accuracy
- Focus on real-world contexts
- Autonomy and strategic involvement
- Teacher roles
- Student roles

While Communicative Language Teaching does not seem to be popular within the Japanese educational system, it has generated a great deal of interest by many teachers of English because of its focus on communication, its use of relationships to mediate language and its balance of form and function. Van Lier (2001: 90) states:

Most current views of language education are based on the assumption that social interaction plays a central role in learning processes...



Communicative Language Teaching allows teachers to orchestrate within a teaching environment that facilitates learning new concepts through the maintenance of relationships and the enthusiasm of relevant ideas. By understanding the cultural dimensions that affect language input teachers can provide students with meaningful interactions within the class.

## **5. Cultural Dimensions Within the Classroom**

Hofstede (1986: 304) states that, “Part of the ‘mental programming’ that represents a culture is a way to acquire, order and use concepts.” Clearly, our roles as teachers include implementing concepts from the culture we teach within to better facilitate contexts within the class that can aid our learners in acquiring, ordering and using the new concepts they learn from communicating in English. Breen (2000b: 124) states:

In essence, either the teacher must facilitate comprehension through the provision of linguistic input sensitive to individual learner inclinations, or the teacher should endeavour to shape individual learning behaviours so that each learner may attain a repertoire of efficient processing strategies.

### **5.1 Teacher Beliefs**

Richards and Lockhart (1996: 106) state that:

A teacher’s style of teaching may thus be thought of as resulting from how the teacher interprets his or her role in the classroom, which is linked to the teacher’s belief system.

For this author, effective teaching is influenced by the goals of Communicative Language Teaching and the basic cognitive, socioaffective and linguistic principles of language learning. However, one of the most important tools available to teachers is the relationship with students within a class. Developing relationships with students is one of the great joys of teaching. The better a teacher knows and understands a student, the better a teacher can gauge which information will be relevant to the students' learning and character development. Because of cultural differences, teachers must also learn about the student's culture as a way of understanding the student. Hofstede (1986: 314) states, "Together with a foreign language, the teacher acquires a basis of sensitivity for the students' culture." It is this basis that allows teachers to assess how students learn best in relation to others.

As a teacher of English within Japan this author's relationships with students is most influenced by the following three characteristics of Power Distance that are representative of American education:

Student-centered education

Effectiveness of learning related to two-way communication in class

Stress on impersonal truth which can in principle be obtained from any competent person

### **5.1.1 Student-centered Education**

#### *Theory and Application*

Students are often unaware of a teacher's approach to learning. One method of maintaining the necessary social contexts for effective teaching is through routines. By providing learners with classroom routines teachers can instill within learners a sense of control, enabling them to predict what's next in a given lesson. For example, within this author's classes, lessons often begin with a series of questions related to the day's topic. Each lesson sees different topics, tasks and activities, however students are aware that lessons will begin with a question and answer session related to the material being introduced. Additionally, the act of spontaneity is a significant component to any lesson and should be incorporated into class routines. While learners should understand what to expect within the learning process, it is also important to surprise them with contexts that are new and unexpected as a means of maintaining interest and alertness.

### **5.1.2 Effectiveness of Learning Related to Two-way Communication in Class**

#### *Giving Knowledge And Facilitating Understanding*

As a language teacher this author is very passionate about language and working with students to see how language can be applied in their lives to learn about others, share about themselves and discover new information about the world. By presenting the students with information that they can explore which is relevant to their lives this author is able to help facilitate their understanding of language not only through functions, but also through meanings. For instance, students within this author's classes often want to discuss music with other students and with the author. Introducing activities that focus on discussing the learner's interests allows students to share their thoughts and communicate their opinions through different grammatical functions. By presenting

grammatical structures related to this topic students are able to learn how to accomplish this function and utilize the meaning potential within their communication with others (Breen, 2001b: 126). Nunan (2001: 192) states:

As teachers, we need to help learners see that effective communication involves achieving harmony between functional interpretation and form appropriacy (Halliday 1985) by giving them task that dramatize the relationship between grammatical items and the discoursal contexts in which they occur (Nunan, 2001: 192).

Through these interactions with language, and with others, students not only learn to use the English language, but they also learn about topics related to culture, how to use listening strategies, how to make choices from different types of lexis and how to improve their general communication skills.

### **5.1.3 Stress on Impersonal Truth**

#### *Promote Positive Foundations for Lifelong Learning*

This author does not believe the process of education should be as rigorous as many Japanese educators believe, however education should be challenging and rewarding. By focusing on short-term goals within the class this author aims to have students develop long-term goals related to learning that reflect positive relations not only with themselves and others, but learning in general. To develop the foundations for life-long learning the following strategies are promoted within each class:

Stimulate learners with new ways of thinking

Encourage learners to try new things

Develop their personalities through interactions with others and new ideas

While the experience and the information presented and explored within the classroom is important in working towards fluency within English, the overall combination of each lesson is vital in the promotion of developing the foundations for lifelong learning. Students are not only learning English, they are learning about themselves. Learner's experiences within the classroom will influence their character as individuals. For instance, learners may internalize the grammar and acquire the ability to communicate in English, however their topics of communication outside of class will most likely center on their social experience within the class, not the grammatical structures they learned or the lexis they acquired. Through this they will continue to participate in their own learning as they focus on using English to communicate.

## **5.2 Teacher-Student Interaction**

The reality of the classroom experience creates a situation in which the environment of any class is in part a reflection of the teacher's personality and teaching beliefs and that of the individual students within the class. Breen (2001: 130) states:

The culture of the classroom represents a tension between the internal world of the individual and the social world of the group, a recurrent juxtaposition of personal learning experiences and communal teaching activities and conventions.

This tension within the class is often referred to as group dynamics: the interaction of students among one another and in relation to the teacher. Because learners study English for a variety of reasons, English represents different things to different learners (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 32). Brindley (1984: 95 cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 34) states:

When learners and teachers meet for the first time, they may bring with them different expectations concerning not only the learning process in general, but also concerning what will be learned in a particular course and how it will be learned.

Additionally, some learners who study English are not doing so by choice. In the case of such learners, this author often has relationships with learners within class that are built upon not what English is, but what it is not. For them, it is not their native language and it is not functional or practical for them to use it outside the doors of the classroom. Richards and Lockhart (1996: 55) state, “Students bring to the classroom very specific assumptions about how to learn a language and about the kinds of activities and approaches they believe to be useful.” While relationships within the class are fun for such learners, their usage of English and their assumptions about what they need to study are based upon having to fulfill a graduation requirement rather than gaining a lifelong skill. However, in the case of learners who choose to study English it is this author’s experience that English is fulfilling a function as part of a larger narrative within the learner’s life. For these learners, they are often at the beginning of a lifelong dream that may include working and living abroad or working with international speakers of English

in Japan. Hofstede states that:

Language is the vehicle of culture... [it] categorizes reality according to its corresponding culture (Hofstede, 1986: 314).

For these students English is a means to immerse themselves in a different reality through new experiences and opportunities unavailable in their own language and culture.

### **5.3 Student Beliefs**

As a teacher of English within Japan this author believes that student relationships are most influenced by the following three characteristics of Collectivism that are representative of Japanese education:

Students expect to learn how to learn

Formal harmony in learning situations should be maintained at all times

Individual students will only speak up in class when called upon personally by the teacher

#### **5.3.1 Students Expect to Learn How to Learn**

##### *Building rapport*

Within formal learning situations is the necessity of the teacher to create an atmosphere that is conducive to not only learning, but to the formation of friendships as well. In order for learners to feel comfortable learning it is best if they have friends within the class from which to engage the material and the experience. Richards and Lockhart (1996: 52)

state that, “Learners, too, bring to learning their own beliefs, goals, attitudes, and decisions, which in turn influence how they approach their learning.” In this author’s experience one of the key beliefs that Japanese learners bring to a class is that they will make new friends. Having a friend within a class to share in the excitement and frustrations of a lesson can equip learners with a sense of rapport that allows them to learn with their peers how to learn. Tumposky (1991, cited in Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 52) states that:

Learners beliefs are influenced by the social context of learning and can influence both their attitude toward the language itself, as well as toward language learning in general.

This author’s experience of observing learner interactions within the class seems to indicate that the goals and attitudes of learners are significantly influenced by the friendships within the class. Because learners have different strengths and weaknesses as individuals and as learners, students can aid one another in different areas of the learning process.

### **5.3.2 Formal Harmony in Learning**

#### *Working with learners to want to learn*

From this author’s experience part of the joy of teaching is watching learners use English to build and maintain relationships with other students in the class. One of the key principles inherent to this success within the classroom is the intrinsic motivation of the student. The role of a teacher within Japan seems to focus less on motivating students and more on learning how to teach students to want to motivate themselves. By developing



class interactions that facilitate an enjoyable class atmosphere from the outset of a class students will more likely motivate themselves within the class. The more a student shares about themselves, the better teachers can then guide course topics to student interests and allow students to continue motivating themselves for the sake of their own learning. However, it seems from the Japanese learner perspective it is the role of the teacher to promote such types of atmosphere within the class. This strategic investment by the teacher can make each class unique depending on the group dynamics of the individuals within a class. Olsen and Kagan (1992: 8 cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 192) state that:

...learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others.

### **5.3.3 Individual Students Will Only Speak When Called Upon**

#### *Attitudes and Decision Making*

While learners of EFL often seek to emulate and adopt the roles of communication allocated to speakers of English, they are still entrenched within the lessons of the educational process of their culture. One of the main lessons of their educational process seems to dictate that learners do not speak unless called upon. Hofstede (1997: 34) states that:

The educational process [within Collectivist societies/societies with large Power Distance] is teacher-centered; teachers outline the intellectual paths to be followed. In the classroom there is strict order with the teacher initiating all communication.

Because of differences within expectations of power, learners are often uncomfortable in initially engaging in acts of communication that require independence within the classroom. However, as relationships within the class develop learner's attitudes towards independently initiated interaction becomes more positive.

#### **5.4 Student-Student Interaction**

As learners seek to gain fluency within English it seems that they often focus less on the process than on the product. For learners in Japan, the acquisition of English is viewed more as an end-product in fluency than as a process of socialization within discourse. Roberts (2001: 108) states:

...despite the concentration of collaborative dialogue, language is still conceived of as a product to be acquired rather than as a discourse—a social process—into which members of a community are socialized.

However, as learners acquire more English speaking skills, familiarize themselves with new concepts and communicate with one another in class it is clear that they enjoy using the ability to engage others in discourse that often reflects a socialization of foreign values and new ideas.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Social constructions of power as discussed in relation to Power Distance and Collectivism/Individualism influence not only the interactions and relationships of

teachers and learners, but also their expectations of what can be made available with an EFL classroom. Within educational settings cultural values significantly shape the interactions of teacher and learners by affecting not only the teacher's expectations of culture and learning, but student assumptions of what learning can be and what teaching should be. Nunan (1999: 25) states that, "The ultimate rationale for language instruction is to enable learners to do...things using language..." By implementing language learning theories that present the student with a challenging and rewarding learning environment, Communicative Teaching Methodologies can be applied to engage students in areas of learning that stress basic cognitive, socioaffective and linguistic principles of language development. Different skills can be integrated to allow students to learn how to use the English language for communication purposes in various contexts and in different types of relationships by presenting them with a diversity of issues that actively engage their mind. Focusing on strengthening English communication skills as a way of building relationships within the class can motivate students to achieve greater goals towards learning not only during the class, but throughout their lives.

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