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## **Discussing Ethical Issues in the Classroom: Leveraging Pedagogical Moments That May Otherwise Undermine Important Discussions**

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### **Abstract**

The authors identify, examine, and clarify three kinds of hindrances (dismissive/evasive tactics, logical stoppers, and ad hominem arguments) to teaching about ethical issues in P-12 schools. In discussing these three types of obstacles, they stress that the barriers themselves provide both challenges and opportunities for teachers. Indeed, they argue that properly understood and utilized the pedagogical impediments to open, educative discussions can be leveraged into superb learning experiences. The authors provide illustrations of how questions may inhibit teaching as well as examples of how teachers may turn them into opportunities for productive educational discussions. In addition, the authors emphasize the importance of teachers being prepared to discuss ethical controversies in teacher preparation programs and through professional development activities and, in turn, preparing for and guiding students to discuss controversial ethical issues. Embedded in their arguments is the claim that a democratic society is partially dependent on teachers for the critique and expansion of democratic values and processes and that educators need to support one another as well as be supported by others in their districts and communities as they pursue their educational responsibilities.

**Keywords:** Ethical Issues, Silencing Voices, Teaching, Democratic Schools

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## Introduction

*Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation  
and memory. It instigates to invention.  
It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity.  
John Dewey (1922, p. 300)*

Most of us have probably been silenced in various situations—more than once—as children, students, colleagues, and teachers. Women, people of color, recent immigrants, individuals with alternative lifestyles, gays and lesbians, and people with non-traditional religious affiliations in particular settings may have their voices silenced more routinely. Indeed, it is difficult for many people, regardless of their backgrounds, to develop their voices, to question established mores, or to express their ideas in paternalistic, patrician, or oppressive situations. In addition, many teachers may find it disappointing to encounter pedagogical situations where students consciously or unconsciously make comments that silence or intimidate their classmates and, thus, thwart learning opportunities. Perhaps, even more distressing, are accounts of how a colleague responded to students in ways that silenced them, invalidated their ideas, or inhibited discussions.

## Discussing Ethical Issues

Discussions involving ethical issues are especially vulnerable to silencing because they are filled with controversial assumptions, delicate nuances, personal sensitivities, problematic arguments, cultural issues, and religious controversies. Thus, encouraging students to express their reflective opinions about ethical issues may be as risky for both students and teachers as it is desirable for everyone. Even when dialogical parameters are identified and agreed upon (e.g., Freire, 2003, pp. 88-92), some discussions (e.g., racism) are “excruciatingly difficult” for many if not most of us (Nieto, 2000, p. 5). Holder (Weiss, 2009) clarifies that part of the difficulty of discussing racism is that many people are afraid to express their views. However, fear-filled issues are often the ones that are most in need of guided, insightful, open, informed, and sensitive analyses (Forrest, 2009; Oakshott, 1991). Yet, preparing for these difficult conversations can help reduce the fear and anxiety of individuals and, thereby, encourage silenced voices to engage in dialogues that are essential in democratic institutions and societies (Center for Faculty Excellence, 2004; West, 1993).

## Teachers’ Perspectives

In view of the personal discomforts, conceptual ambiguities, knowledge-claim controversies, social tensions, and pedagogical challenges, a teacher can understandably decide not to discuss important ethical issues rather than raise educative questions and encourage students to think and learn together. Indeed, an ethically sensitive teacher may not even want to initiate a discussion that could lead to misunderstanding, class disunity, or distrust. Ethical issues are frequently, however, too important to ignore. Plus, merely condemning unethical attitudes and affirming ethical ones are insufficient responses if we want to nurture democratic citizens, expand democracy, and help students discover their voices and identities. So, it

appears that teachers need to help students understand why some behaviors are proscribed, others are prescribed, still others are tolerated, and yet others are ignored.

Notwithstanding some teachers' personal discomfort with ethical controversies, a democratic society depends in significant ways on teachers recognizing and promoting democratic ethical values, and these include the free exchange of controversial ideas (Dewey, 1916). To advance the development of democracy, Holder (Weiss, 2009) adds that society must overcome its fear of conflict and develop the courage to discuss its most pressing issues. How is such possible if many teachers avoid cultivating both courage and communication? Fortunately, many other teachers (Claire & Holden, 2007; Williams, 1994) want to do a better job of creating classroom environments and atmospheres where democratic values—respect for persons, arguments, evidence, academic freedom, and so forth—are genuinely practiced and not simply professed.

Given the interest of many in becoming more effective as teachers and the need for such, this study identifies several hindrances to classroom discussions of ethical matters and offers suggestions on how to facilitate discussions of ethical controversies in more knowledgeable, approachable, reflective, and respectful ways. In particular, the study focuses on three types of comments that inhibit rather than invite student and teacher discussions: *dismissive/evasive tactics*, *logical stoppers*, and *ad hominem arguments*. For the purpose of this study, a statement is *dismissive* or *evasive* when a person uses it to extricate her- or himself from some form of ethical responsibility or moral accountability; a statement or action is a *logical stopper* when it specifies or implies that a conversation will or should not continue; and a statement is an *ad hominem argument* when it explicitly or implicitly attacks a person for some real or assumed personal characteristic rather than addressing the individual's arguments. In discussing these realms, we draw upon relevant research, experiential knowledge, and literature, including fictional and nonfictional, to clarify and illustrate ideas.

## Two Qualifications

Two qualifications regarding our focus are important. First, our examination is restricted to three types of comments that often have a silencing effect on dialogue. Many of the ideas discussed, however, apply to other settings, including informal learning situations. Further, we focus on questions rather than declarative statements, because they can appear more innocent and disarming yet be more pedagogically deadly. Our classification system, of course, would be misleading if it influenced us to think in discrete, trichotomous categories. A comment by a person may simultaneously fall into all three categories.

Second, questions themselves may be pedagogically and ethically neutral, positive, or negative depending on a host of factors, e.g., a person's intentions, body language, prior comments, verbal inflection, tone, pitch, and emphases. Moreover, as Habermas (1984) notes, different cultural gestalts are embedded in our linguistic creations and usages and should be recognized if not appreciated and critiqued. Our specific concern is with those questions that are frequently "burning statements;" the kind which may or may not be accompanied by the "killing tools" of laughter (Hurston, 1978, p. 10). Instead of employing burning and killing actions in

classrooms, we encourage a dialogical model that is partially Hurstonian, one where at least part of the time people sit and pass “around the pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see” (Hurston, 1978, p. 81). Or, as Camus (1995, p. 70) observes, there are times when argumentative comments need to be set aside so people can simply talk and seek mutual understanding. The other part of our dialogical model is the evaluation of ideas, arguments, and data that should be encouraged when the goals and grounds of discussion have been clarified and accepted at least provisionally and the diversity of epistemological orientations<sup>1</sup> is acknowledge and, perhaps, encouraged (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 2003; Habermas, 1984). Eryaman (2007, p. 18) identifies another fundamental presupposition of our model when he raises the question: what does it mean “to be an agent in the world”? Indeed, what might it mean for teacher educators, teachers, and students when they are intellectually, emotionally, and existentially recognized as agents?

### **Evasive/Dismissive Tactics**

#### **The Tactics Themselves**

Evasive and/or dismissive tactics take many forms. Central to identifying them is that the person raising a question attempts to evade or dismiss personal responsibility. A high school student, for example, described his former dismissive attitude toward others’ problems: “If it doesn’t affect me, why bother?” (Freedom Writers with Gruwell, 1999, p. 170). But what, we inquire, happened to change his mind? A variety of experiences, no doubt, but visiting the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was so upsetting for him that he demanded, “How could this have happened? Why didn’t someone stand up for these people?” (Freedom Writers with Gruwell, 1999, p. 169). At a minimum, this student’s case illustrates how dismissive tactics can be partially overcome by informal educational experiences and underlines the importance of learning outside of the school and classroom.

#### **Examples of Evasiveness**

Among a plethora of examples of evasiveness are some that may be seen as relevant to personal responsibility, fairness, and practicality: (a) Why should my parents pay higher taxes to provide safety nets for the lazy? (b) Why should we allow undocumented immigrants to stay here when they pay no taxes, deprive us of jobs, and disrespect our values?, and (c) How can she be held accountable when her principal told her to do it? As we recognize implicit and explicit evasive and dismissive—not to mention stereotypically loaded—questions, we can become better prepared to use these same statements as valuable educative opportunities. Indeed, we can even have students analyze these questions before they are raised and, thereby, avoid the discomfort of preventable awkward situations for a students who might raise them.

<sup>1</sup> The authors employ a form of classroom dialogue that is designed to be democratically situated, epistemologically inclusive, and educationally oriented. Although there are problems and challenges that are intrinsic to this approach, we think our approach can be substantially justified by considering our conception of dialogue itself when undertaken in public institutions in a liberal democracy. An introductory explanation of our rationale is found in Endnote v.

Sometimes an evasive or dismissive comment can be, on some level, at least partially correct. However, such comments often need contextual positioning to ascertain their significance. For example, few, if any, twenty-first century students could possibly have participated in the legal exploitation, torture, rape, and murder of indigenous peoples or Blacks in North America. Consequently, we might not be surprised to hear, “Since I didn’t have anything to do with slavery or oppressing Lumbees and Blacks, why do people keep trying to make me feel guilty for what others have done in the past?” While the speaker may be partially correct, that does not mean she or he is adequately informed about the multilayered dimensions of racism. In reality, the questioner can still be largely incorrect in his analysis of a larger racial issue and, if not reflective, develop an attitude that is offensive. Thus, the previous student’s question—like the earlier ones—opens the door to potentially fruitful discussions. For instance, consider an illustration about discussions of racism in its personal, institutional, and systemic forms. First, as Nieto (2000, p. 37) observes, it is important that students understand that even today, hundreds of years after racist atrocities were introduced to North America that:

Racism as an institutional system implies that some people and groups benefit and others lose. Whites, whether they want to or not, benefit in a racist society; males benefit in a sexist society. Discrimination always helps somebody—those with the most power—which explains why racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination continue.

If Nieto’s ideas are correct, a person who is not a racist and was not involved in the establishment of a systemically racist society can still profit from it. An individual can still be an heir and beneficiary of racism—inheriting privilege, status, resources, property, stocks, bonds, and power—even when he or she is not personally racist. So, if we are interested in mutual respect, equal opportunity, equity, justice, reparation, and freedom, we need to speak openly to the question, “Why do people keep trying to make me feel guilty for what others have done in the past?” *and* proceed further to other queries, such as, “What can we do in the present to identify and diminish current forms of racism and their effects?” When we pursue these kinds of questions, our hope is that the critically self-conscious student comes to understand that “right thinking belongs intimately to right doing” (Freire, 1998, p. 42). To effectively advance our antiracist education, even to understand what is at issue, we need to retain the ability to dialogue about the persistent malignant power of systemic racism and distinguish between the pernicious racist beliefs and practices of individuals and systemic racisms wherever they appear in the world (Bales, 2004; Bhattacharyya, Gabriel, & Small, 2002).

Evasive and dismissive tactics seem most common when complexity surrounds a controversy, and, as Campbell and Huxman (2009) state, topics are complex when they are experientially remote, embedded in other issues, or require technical expertise. Dialogues on ethical matters are regularly complex because many of them are experientially remote and require expertise in several realms of inquiry, e.g., ethics, history, law, culture, and epistemology (Wagner & Simpson, 2009).

## Logical Stoppers

Paul Hirst (Gribble, 1969, p. 35) is credited with using the phrase *logical stopper* to indicate when a person implies, claims, or acts as if there is a point at which no one can question a particular claim. Inquiry may be accepted up to a point or in certain spheres, but then a number of other beliefs fall into a “No Inquiry Zone,” where no one who has any doubts may enter. Importantly, the “No Inquiry Zone” may be implicit or explicit and often includes prohibitions that are connected to ideas about truth, virtue, and reality. In this realm, Holder’s (Weiss, 2009) call for courage is a reminder of the obligation to ask unwanted questions and to be aware that unwelcomed inquiries are usually related to people’s highly cherished beliefs (Campbell & Huxman, 2009).

### Truth Claims

Hirst’s idea is beautifully—and appallingly—illustrated in life and literature. Jun-ling, in Mah’s *Falling Leaves*, encounters an interrogative statement that may be intended as a logical stopper. When she asks her brother Zi-jun if he wants to read letters that have a bearing on her truth claim, he responds, “‘Is there such a thing as absolute truth?’” and quickly adds “‘It all depends on a person’s viewpoint.’” As if to emphasize that Jun-ling has entered a “No Inquiry Zone,” Zi-jun dismisses her question: “In any case, it’s all water under the bridge” (Mah, 1997, p. 269). Consequently, Jun-ling did not continue her inquiry.

Truth, Zi-jun argues, is entirely determined by—“it all depends on”—one’s perspective. The popular assumption that truth depends utterly on one’s perspective can easily derail discussions and immediately discredit anyone who questions another person’s truth: “You may believe that, but I don’t. Each of us is entitled to her opinion.” This kind of logical stopper can have educationally deadening implications and may have hidden in it a questionable ethical assumption: I have a right to silence a person anytime I disagree with her. Similarly, the stereotypical implication that everyone who pursues understanding also wants to find, make, and impose claims about “absolute truth” can end inquiries. This inquiry-ending capacity is what makes a statement or question a logical stopper. If these logical stoppers concerning perspective and truth are unchallengeable absolute claims, discussion of nearly every ethical issue may be nullified, even a discussion of ethical principles that are promoted by national charters and constitutions and international organizations and courts, such as the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and the International Criminal Court.

In reality, we can accommodate the notion that our perspectives influence what we see, think, and value, while validating the idea that truth or knowledge claims are not absolute, without coming to the conclusion that one opinion is as good as another. Like Dewey (1929), we can conclude that, if possible, all perspectives and data need to be examined as we seek to identify secure but not certain knowledge. But whatever our conclusions about truth claims and perspectivalism, neither we nor our students are well served by allowing logical stoppers to keep us from examining important claims.

## Value Claims

A second common logical stopper regards explicit values—especially virtues—and so nearly any kind of ethical claim. Alexey, in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, tells us that virtue is a relative matter, presumably governed exclusively by one's culture. He asks "[W]hat is virtue?" and answers his own question by claiming, "It's one thing to me and another thing to a Chinaman—it's a relative thing" but then seems to vacillate: "Or is it?" (Dostoyevsky, 1982, p. 696). Are virtues completely a matter of what one's culture teaches and are the teachings of different cultures hopelessly antithetical? At a minimum, recent empirical research raises serious questions about these as absolutist empirical assertions (Alexander, 2007; Axelrod, 1984; Coles, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and philosophical inquiry has long indicated multiple conceptual, logical, and evidentiary problems for unsophisticated ethical relativism (Barrow, 1991; Dewey, 1948; Ennis, 1969; Holmes, 2003; Peters, 1970; Wagner & Simpson, 2009; Wong, 2006). Again, whatever our conclusions are in this realm, neither we nor our students are well served by allowing logical stoppers to block our inquiry into beliefs that some want to remain unexamined.

## Reality Claims

Corrine, in McInerney's (2006) *The Good Life*, provides another example of a possible logical stopper. She notices a man, named Luke, who staggers toward her a day after 9/11. She stares at him: "His knees showed through the ripped legs of what until recently had been a pair of dress slacks. The hard hat looked anomalous, and indeed, as he tilted his head back, it fell to the curb, exposing a dark tangle of hair, streaked with ubiquitous talcy ash" (McInerney, 2006, p. 70). As Corrine talked with Luke, she discovered that he had had an appointment postponed approximately twenty-four hours earlier, an occurrence that had probably saved his life. As he pauses to get his bearings, he volunteers to Corrine that she is the first person he has seen and adds, "Unless I'm imagining you" (p. 70). Corrine takes time to assure him that he is not imagining her but then pauses to qualify her declaration: "It's hard to tell, though. What's real, I mean" (p. 70). No doubt, such a response was understandable considering the circumstances surrounding the story. Used as a logical stopper, however, a question—e.g., "We can't really tell what happened in the Jewish holocaust, can we?"—may seek to reduce historical inquiry to ideological propaganda and dogma. Ethically, thinking that denies the possibility of any knowledge of reality may trivialize some of the greatest past and current issues, relegate them to private impressions, and not allow public research and debate. Hence, we then have no way of determining when Muslims, atheists, and other groups are excluded from the opportunities and resources that are legitimately theirs in a democracy.

Cumulatively, these three queries and related ones can easily stymie classroom discussions and silence, if not slay, would-be gadflies. Consequently, we could have students, including future teachers, who conclude that every detail of reality is always hopelessly fuzzy, virtue is completely relative, and truth claims are entirely subjective perceptions. These conclusions frequently seem to be reached, not as a result of sustained study, but as a consequence of accepting cultural clichés. But logical stoppers predicated on clichés are educationally important because of their potentially

dialogue-closing effects on discussions. While these conclusions may be arrived at via persistent and reflective inquiry, passing them on without an open examination appears to be educationally counterproductive.

The silencing of critical deliberations may become more serious if someone intimidates others with extensions of these three logical stoppers. Namely, a student may ask, “Who are we to decide what is right or wrong for a student or school?” Further, someone may personalize the question, implying that each class member should ask her- or himself, “Who am I to say that a certain act is ethical or unethical?” Or, a person may inquire, “Who are *you* to decide what is right or wrong for your students and colleagues?” Happily, these questions and similar ones can be raised with praiseworthy intentions in mind and should not be avoided by teachers (Dewey & Tufts, 1932).

These questions can also open the door to educative dialogues and may not even be designed as logical stoppers. The questioner may merely want some suggestions about how to answer these questions. Regardless of the reasons for the questions, like Dewey (1922), we can appreciate the provocative nature of these questions and the stimuli they provide for reflection. Future and current teachers do, indeed, need to be able to discuss how these and many other questions might be examined and addressed. One way of addressing these questions is to examine them, first, in university teacher education programs by well-prepared professors (Center for Faculty Excellence, 2004) and, later, by well-prepared classroom teachers (Hess, 2009). A re-articulation technique—rephrasing questions—can be employed so that the ideas more easily stimulate classroom discussions, e.g., “Does a teacher ever have the responsibility to determine if a particular act may be wrong and, if it is, forbid it?”

### **Ad Hominem Arguments**

Attacking people rather than evaluating their ideas is a perennial challenge in institutions and society. The seeming proliferation of personal attacks in political circles and on the World Wide Web is regrettable and probably has residual effects in classrooms. Even if this is not the case, the need to work toward open, inquiring climates in classrooms is a largely but not totally uncontested suggestion and nowhere more evident than in discussions of values. An ideal that is difficult to abandon, particularly if we are teachers, is expressed in *The Known World* by the character Barnum: “A body should be able to stand under some ... kinda light and declare what he knows without retribution” (Jones, 2003, p. 303). For socially and academically vulnerable students or teachers, retribution for doing just that can come in many forms. A student’s fear of being silenced during a discussion and being emotionally slain by others can make him or her feel particularly exposed to retaliation. Here Holder’s (Weiss, 2009) exhortation to be courageous is sobering, especially if institutional and classroom safeguards are not in place. When safeguards have not already been institutionalized, a priority for educators should be to help encourage and establish policies, regulations, and laws regarding the study and teaching of controversial issues. With the backing of professional associations and unions and legislative leaders, educators need to work toward the passage of laws, policies, and procedures that enhance teaching controversial ideas in all kinds of educational institutions (Fisher, Schimmel, & Kelly, 1999; Stadler, 2007; Wagner & Simpson, 2009).

## Psychological Effects

Problems with classroom attacks go beyond their logical irrelevance and pedagogical destructiveness to their psychological effect. While some questioners might be just seeking to expand an issue or place it in a context, genuine attacks can be so insidious that they gnaw on our psyches for days, weeks, and months. The inner anguish experienced is sometimes nearly overwhelming. We, much like Jadine in *Tar Baby*, might be tempted to declare, “I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me” (Morrison, 1982, p. 48). Accepting externally imposed stereotypes and definitions that others foist on us—and maybe rejecting our identities in the process—shows the destructiveness of some ad hominem comments. Why would we willingly reject our own identities except for the exhausting attacks some of us endure? As teachers, we have an obligation to collaborate with our students and one another to help create healthy classroom and school spaces for inquiry and for developing the strength to reject the cutting definitions of definers (Morrison, 1987, p. 190).

## Illustrative Situations

Illustrations of ad hominem arguments abound, but we use just one that shares a person’s experiences with both school and university classmates and teachers. We begin with Walls’ (2005) scenario about her informal conversation with another university student and continue with her formal discussion with a professor. During both, Walls was attempting to keep her past nomadic, dysfunctional, and impoverished family life and her parents’ current semi-stable, but homeless lifestyle, secret. The context is her description of her family’s sometimes self-inflicted, occasionally compelled, but recurrently painful struggles and treks from California to Arizona to West Virginia to New York.

In back-to-back examples, Walls’ stories illustrate how ad hominem ideas and arguments can bring public embarrassment, personal stress, and self-hatred. The first describes part of a conversation she had with a fellow student as they walked down Broadway. In keeping with her habit of giving homeless people spare change, she offered a young fellow some money and was interrupted by Carol, her companion, who said: “You shouldn’t do that.” “It only encourages them. They’re all scam artists” (Walls, 2005, p. 256). Hearing this stereotype of homeless people, Walls wanted to exclaim, “*What do you know?*” (p. 256). Her legitimate anger almost led her to orally attack her acquaintance rather than respond to her typecasting. Instead, her fear of revealing part of her history and her parents’ circumstances caused her to say nothing. She silenced herself, going her “way without saying a thing” (p. 256).

Walls’ (pp. 256-257) second scenario is more detailed, multilayered, complicated, and may have caused her to recall a fifth-grade experience. Her professor may begin her assault after Walls stated in class that some homeless people did not fit into the either/or (i.e., conservative or liberal) explanations that were mentioned. No doubt thinking of her university-educated parents (depicted as an eccentric want-to-be-artist-despite-the-traumatic-consequences mother and an alcoholic want-to-do-things-my-own-way-regardless-of-the-outcomes father), she said, “I think that maybe sometimes people get the lives they want” (p. 256). After making her statement, the ensuing professor-student interactions occurred:

“Can you explain yourself?”

“I think that maybe sometimes people get the lives they want.”

“Are you saying homeless people want to live on the street?”

“Are you saying they don’t want warm beds and roofs over their heads?”

“Not exactly.”

“They do. But if some of them were willing to work hard and make compromises, they might not have ideal lives, but they could make ends meet.” (pp. 256-257)

The three professorial questions might have been an innocent attempt to get Walls to examine, explain, or justify her thoughts. The professor may have been using sound pedagogy. Maybe her probing was well intentioned even if her use of personal pronouns was ill timed. But when the professor walked from behind the lectern to ask two additional questions, her intentions seemed either to change or become more manifest. Walls heard her own previously unarticulated question—“What do you know?”—echo in her mind:

“What do you know about the lives of the underprivileged?”

“What do you know about the hardships and obstacles that the underclass faces?” (p. 257).

Seeing a student who appeared to be a white, middle class, privileged female, the professor may have assumed that Walls knew nothing about the topic at hand and was merely voicing her unrecognized ignorance, unexamined ideology, or, worse, her own deep-seated prejudices. Like Hurston’s Janie when speaking to Jody, Walls may have wanted to whisper to her professor, “Mah own mind ha tuh be squeezed and crowed out tuh make room for yours in me” (Hurston, 1978, p. 133). Surveying the stares of her fellow students, she may have recalled her fifth-grade teacher’s question (“Perhaps you’d like to explain yourself?”) and her classmates as they “swiveled their heads around to stare” (Walls, 2005, p. 138). In the end, she acquiesced: “You have a point” (p. 257). She, like Simone, concluded, “Who am I to argue?” (Belenky, Clincy, Goldberg, & Tarule, 1986, p. 216).

Like Walls’ professor, we can make faulty assumptions about students and combine them with defective reasoning and poisonous pedagogy and use an ad hominem argument. In the process, we can silence not only the voices of those who are more knowledgeable, better experienced, and more reflective than we are, but we may also quell opportunities for genuine class inquiry. But even if Walls were an ill-informed, privileged white female, her ideas needed to be analyzed, not her personhood attacked. Even if Walls had misconstrued her experience and her parents’ choices and preferences, her professor’s response was toxic. Forgotten were some pertinent clichés that a student is “entitled to her opinion” and that “[r]easonable people can disagree about this” (McInerney, 2006, p. 226). As teachers, we may be well-advised to reflect on Nafisi’s (2004) declaration about “the most unsympathetic

characters” who appear, lecture, and scold in novels: Their “incapacity for true dialogue implies an incapacity for tolerance, self-reflection and empathy” (p. 268).

### Conclusion

Several ideas deserve attention at this time. First, though we have been critical of several kinds of questions, it is clear that sound pedagogy makes generous use of numerous queries. Raising questions is a vital part of many—perhaps most—classrooms. Asking questions, in our opinion, should be encouraged not discouraged. Indeed, we want to encourage students and teachers to become reflective, questioning gadflies and work toward school environments that nurture settings to facilitate the intellectual, social, and emotional development of everyone involved. To help students think clearly, evidentially, cogently, critically, and comprehensively about ethical issues in our fields of expertise is no insignificant part of their educations. We are only discouraging the use of questions that are actually “burning statements” that are sometimes combined with other anti-educational behaviors that are “killing tools” (Hurstun, 1978, p. 10).

Second, even though many questions are inappropriate because they stymie discussions, they may be invaluable indicators of related matters that we need to discuss. The questions—and statements—may be more important than the planned curriculum. So in a way, no matter how unfortunate the thought behind a question may be, we may thank students for providing educational opportunities when they express their dismissive/evasive tactics, logical stoppers, and ad hominem arguments. They help us, or at least create opportunities for us, to become better teachers.

Teachers also have to grapple with legal mandates (e.g., curriculum specifications and standardized tests) and administrative obstacles (e.g., leadership fear of community mores) that can silence or inhibit classroom learning. These and related obstructions can disrupt the work of many teachers, especially new ones who are often the most defenceless. Certainly, legal threats and administrative impediments that inhibit reflective teaching and student engagement may contribute to teacher attrition (Kozol, 2005, 2007). Of course, when teachers and schools focus on which instructional approach is effective in a certain situation and neglect social environments, teachers may end up implementing a technological, manufacturing, pre-determined approach to education (McLaren, 2010; Schwandt, 2002). While these emphases may help some students perform successfully on standardized tests and in market-driven classrooms, they may limit the flexibility that teachers have to adapt the curriculum to students’ personal and local backgrounds (Eryaman, 2006, 2007). Encouraging teachers to develop and exercise good judgment or wisdom, however, can broaden classroom perspectives and provide students with opportunities to discuss sensitive issues while providing a counterbalance to the narrow view of the teacher as classroom manager (Kozol, 2005). In all of these situations, it is important that teachers understand and remind one another that “the world is not as dangerous as many in the older generation want to believe” (Kozol, 2007, p. 193). So, teachers and their allies need to work wisely toward their ideals less they “choke on their beliefs [and] ... never know the taste of struggle in a decent cause and never know the thrill of even partial victories” (p. 193).

Third, we seem to be well-advised to anticipate patterns of student comments so as to be able to use their ideas in non-inflammatory but stimulating ways. So, if students appreciably control our classes by comments that tend to obstruct educative conversations, we need to reconsider our instructional practices (Schon, 1983). Staying abreast of contemporary student cultures and beliefs can be a very useful means of professional development and enable teachers to better anticipate students' expressions of their beliefs. Staying abreast of our legal rights as educators is also important. Hence, as teachers we need to keep abreast of recent developments in the field of school law, support local workshops on educational law, and attend professional conferences that address our rights and freedoms as educators. Moreover, we need to study dialogical practices as a profession so that we better understand and utilize the limits of our freedoms and rights as professionals (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, & Thomas, 2009; Essex, 2006; Fisher, Schimmel, & Kelly, 1999; Siegel, 2007; Stadler, 2007).

Fourth, as teachers we are not only responsible for nurturing healthy classroom environments but also for examining our own passions and prejudices and ensuring that they do not prompt us to mistreat students or unfairly present ideas. If we ignore our ethical responsibility to treat students with respect (regardless of how ill-founded we may deem their views), we run the risk of creating an ethical chasm between what we say our interests are and what we do in class (Gay, 2000). As Freire (2003) observes, when we act contrary to what we profess, we enlarge the gap between our ethical profession and our ethical practice and lose our credibility.

Fifth, if as teachers we are also teacher educators, it is at least arguable that we have a responsibility to better prepare aspiring teachers to address ethical questions in their classrooms. That is to say, we appear to have a professional duty to help our university students understand ethically significant questions and to handle delicate issues in pedagogically sound and intellectually honest ways. Preparing students who intend to be teachers and contributors to the development of democratic citizens demands such, for democracy itself is loaded with ethical questions and concerns (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1998; West, 2004). Moreover, we may need to challenge our university students to critique their and our assumptions, reasoning habits, and linguistic patterns that tend to inhibit rather than facilitate discussions and that have a tendency to close rather than open minds to important realms of inquiry. Extrapolating from Hess's (2009) remarks about preparing to teach high school students, we can say that preparing future teachers for these activities takes a great deal of preparation and study of positive examples of how to discuss controversies in the classroom. Together with the previous thoughts, it seems that we should assist aspiring and practicing teachers as they seek to understand how they may maintain open-minds about the credibility of longstanding and emerging knowledge claims (Hare, 1979, 1993), dig into their ideological assumptions and presuppositions for clarity (Shermer, 1997), interrogate their privileged beliefs and practices (Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, & Farahmandpur, 2006), think critically about their everyday and professional beliefs and values (Paul & Elder, 2005; Stone, Patton, & Heen, 1999), identify their fallacious ways of thinking (Ennis, 1969; Norris, 1992) and scrutinize their beliefs in order to determine which are intelligent beliefs and disbeliefs (Noddings, 1993). The reflective spirit, as is widely known, is a two-edged sword and calls for an examination of our own beliefs—whether we are teacher educators, teachers, or students—and not just those of others. Similarly, Paz (1985) tells us that

we must begin to identify and evaluate our own ideologies before we can expect others to do the same. Even so, these preparations alone may not be sufficient: A teacher education program that seeks to foster reflective practitioners who acquire practical wisdom is also demanded (Eryaman, 2007).

Finally, in a Siegelian (Siegel, 2007) spirit, we conclude that we think we have offered ideas which appear credible and worthy of further consideration. We hope that multiple kinds of gadflies will critique, if not apply, our ideas. Rather than automatically condemning gadflies as being on the side of devils and designating ourselves as being on the side of angels, we hope they—with all of their idiosyncratic, irritable, questionable, and irreverent tendencies—will be encouraged to inquire into “indiscussible” questions, the protected dogmas of contemporary societies (Pinker, 2008). Of course, we need not be as optimistic as Mill (2004) in order to encourage gadflies to join more discussions. Likewise, we need to remember that in encouraging warranted discussions of sensitive and controversial topics we are not interested merely in open discourse but in dialogues that enable us to grow in our understanding of and acting with one another for the common good of our schools, communities, societies, nations, and world (Freire, 2003).

Perhaps it is almost superfluous to say that we are not encouraging a false open-mindedness where teachers feel obligated to provide a so-called fair study of everyone’s proposed issue, such as, say, the views of those who claim that the peak of African slave trade was limited to a few thousand people (Hare, 2009). Nevertheless, teachers need to be prepared to address when and why a question is ever closed and what needs to occur if a closed topic is to be reopened in a classroom setting (Hess, 2009). Likewise, toxic speech practices have no room in educative settings. Instead, classrooms need dialogue that avoids both “overly controlled” and “undisciplined” interactions (Freire, 2005, p. 81). Unfortunately, many of us seem to lack the courage that Holder (Weiss, 2009) supports so that we can discuss important topics in appropriate ways. Likewise, dialogical cultures that facilitate considered or educative discussions are often lacking in schools and communities, and that lack probably accounts for part of the fear Holder noted (Hess, 2009; Wagner & Simpson, 2009). In view of these circumstances, much culture-and-courage building is needed in schools and classrooms. Leveraging pedagogical moments that may otherwise undermine important dialogue provides opportunities for culture-and-courage building by teachers and students and, thereby, opportunities for ethical and democratic growth, not to mention the intellectual and emotional development that occurs in fields of inquiry and creativity.

### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The terms *teachers* and *teacher* are used throughout this work to include anyone who teaches in a university teacher education program or a P-12 school. Similarly, the terms *students* and *student* are employed to include anyone who is studying to become a teacher in a university preparation program or studying in a P-12 school.

<sup>ii</sup> The word *colleagues* is an inclusive term that includes anyone who meets the previously stated definition of a teacher.

<sup>iii</sup> The focus of this paper is on those occasions when inappropriate silencing of students occurs, not on those instances when a student or teacher violates legal or institutional free speech laws or policies. This focus, however, does not assume that all legal and/or institutional free speech laws and policies are ipso facto flawless.

<sup>iv</sup> Our general model is implied, in part, by references to Zora Neale Hurston (1978), Cornell West (2004), Paulo Friere (2003), Albert Camus (1995), John Dewey (1916), and Jurgen Habermas (1984). In short, our theoretical orientation is rooted in a liberal and humane view of a deep democracy (Green, 1999), one that is concerned with learning from the diversity of thought and values that exist in society, and one that is founded at a minimum on a tolerance of ideas that are repugnant but also a critique of ideas that are both disagreeable and agreeable (Vogt, 1997). Of course, there are numerous other thinkers who have helped shape out dialogical model and democratic ideals, such as Wong (2006), Siegel (2007), Peters (1970), Mill (2004), Noddings (1991, 1992), Hare (2009), and Campbell and Huxman (2009).

<sup>v</sup> The teacher, of course, has difficult decisions to make regarding which if any form or forms of dialogue to employ in a classroom. For example, challenges to engaging in dialogue in public schools might range from those who question any form of dialogue to those who question gender-specific forms to those who question culturally-specific forms to those who question comprehension-only forms to those who question epistemologically-diverse forms to those who question religiously-diverse forms (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2009). In addition, there is often the temptation to pursue a pseudo dialogue that leads nowhere and discredits sincere efforts to engage in dialogue (Simpson, 2010). While there are no absolutely non-controversial answers to the multiple dimensions of these challenges, we utilize a number of forms of dialogue for several reasons, including student, cultural, epistemic, gender, religious, and contextual preferences. We are sensitive to these dimensions because of our views of the conception of dialogue and the nature of public institutions in a democracy. While space does not permit us to delineate all of or elaborate on our reasons for our selecting and allowing students to select different kinds of dialogue, it is important for us to make several explanatory points and clarifications.

First, we begin by revisiting the idea dialogue. For us, dialogue is largely a way to understand others' ideas, reconsider our own thoughts, ask others to reassess their beliefs and to stimulate ourselves and others to act on what we learn and unlearn. Dialogue is made possible, in part, because we can communicate in our own literal and dialogical languages. Hence, we speak or use, for example, Deweyan, Freirean, Habermasian, Hurstonian, and Noddings-like kinds of dialogue when we or students have a preference for one kind over another. Occasionally, we engage in a more Deweyan or Freirean dialogue. Sometimes our dialogue may be more Camusian or Hurstonian. In a sense, we see being bi- or multi-dialogical as similar to but not identical with being bi- or multi-lingual. From an instrumentalist perspective, then, we want to facilitate communication. From an equal respect of persons viewpoint, we want to nurture a common interest in and respect for everyone in a dialogue. If learning other dialogical languages and epistemologies furthers these goals, we think it is worth our efforts to do so. If Scott (2009) is accurate, being versed in various epistemologies may also nurture a hospitable environment in which serious discussions about critical issues may occur.

Second, we think that understanding our diversity, including our different forms of dialogue and their epistemologies, is a critical part of living in a liberal democracy and provides powerful opportunities for educational experiences (Delgado, 1995; Wegner, 2006; Williams, 1994). For instance, even when a student voices opposition to dialogue, an educative moment is present. The student who indicates an opposition to dialogue may feel comfortable enough—in private if not in public—to discuss her or his view of particular dialogical shortcomings she or he has observed and, sometimes, may be willing to, paradoxically, dialogue about being anti-dialogical. In the process, the teacher may gain insight into the student's reasoning, culture, and identity and the student may learn that her or his agency, voice, and culture are important to her or his teacher.

Third, we think that our preference for certain forms of dialogue may open as well as close some doors of learning. Hence, we listen carefully to reasons for believing that a form of dialogue that is being employed is—or at least is perceived to be—embedded in cultural, ethnic, racial, ideological, nationalistic, and sexist biases (Delgado, 1995). Indeed, we welcome these stimulating discussions which may be as important as some of the topics we have selected for classroom analysis. Thus, we are comfortable adjusting our pedagogical and dialogical parameters so that students do not feel demeaned, silenced, or coerced (Forrest, 2009).

Fourth, we think that using different forms of dialogue—especially those that have different standards of truth, understanding, and action—are provocative. Or, in Dewey's (1922) framework, different forms of dialogue can be gadflies of reflection. From one perspective, then, exposing and

evaluating antithetical suppositions of forms of dialogue is a wonderful pedagogical opportunity to expand students' understanding to ideologies and ethical theories that they may not otherwise encounter and provide an occasion to dialogue about their non-commensurate theories of knowledge. Camus (1995), as noted earlier, welcomed dialogue with Catholics so that he and they could better understand each other during a time of international crisis. With this form of epistemologically non-commensurate dialogue, he and we have the opportunity to affirm others' identity and agency as we gain a better understanding of their ideas and yet we can continue to reject their ideologies. And, on occasions, we may modify our thinking on an issue if not our basic beliefs. This kind of growth in understanding often occurs on numerous occasions when diverse groups interact, e.g., pro-life and pro-choice proponents, capitalists and socialists, Muslims and Jews, atheists and theists, pacifists and just war proponents. Comprehension-only dialogue, therefore, may well be merited if we need to step out of our social and intellectual circles to avoid misunderstanding, stereotyping, and, even, overt hostilities.

Fifth, since we highly value the personhood and agency of each student and teacher, we encourage them to think reflectively, choose intelligently, build coherently, and act prudentially as they go about their professional and personal responsibilities, including developing their dialogical styles and practices. We want them to learn and experience dialogical paradigms we think are philosophically and pedagogically incongruent, because we think this practice can help them better construct their own theories of dialogical practice by experiencing and evaluating multiple forms. As fallibilists (Cohen, 1988), we recognize that students—as have we—will reach at times ill-informed conclusions and make ill-advised decisions. But that is a risk that accompanies a pedagogy that seeks both to evaluate (Dewey, 1938) and to avoid normalizing itself (Foucault, 1977). It is also a risk of teaching the maturing in public schools in a liberal democracy. Even so, we prefer these risks to the alternatives we have examined.

Sixth, but in conjunction with our prior notion, we believe it is important to emphasize that we do not think each form of dialogue is always ipso facto just as effective, meritorious, or valid as any other one. Thus, a study of forms of dialogue that involves a critique of them in theory and practice is warranted and can be a significant educational experience. This critique probably needs to include, at a minimum, an understanding and interrogation of school and classroom contexts and rules that favor some students and disadvantage others because of their cultural, class, gender, ethnic, religious, and language differences (Bernstein, 1990; Gay, 2000; Moore, 2005). But biases are complex, complicated, nuanced, convoluted and, off-and-on, opaque. And we may be simply mistaken on occasions about what we claim is a bias. Consider, for a moment, what might be viewed as a culturally biased form of dialogue by some. Both Hurston (1978) and Jones (2003) promote, through their characters, a form of dialogue used by some African Americans that is at least initially a comprehension-only one and similar to Camus's (1995) use of dialogue with Catholics. Is this form of culturally-specific dialogue inappropriate all of the time? We think not, in part, because a cultural group may find the form facilitates their speaking their minds and clarifying their thoughts without the interruptions and distractions of queries and cross examinations. Plus, we think a culture-specific dialogue can be open to non-culture members if they are interested in learning about another culture and willing to honor that culture's preferences. Either way—with or without people from another culture—a so-called comprehension-only form of dialogue may well plant the seeds of gadfly-ish intellectual inquiry.

Finally, while we recognize that there are historical connections between certain philosophical beliefs and particular forms of dialogue, we hesitate to conclude that these relationships are always of a detailed deterministic or logically causal nature. That is to say, we think that the precise details of a dialogical theory and practice are not necessarily determined by a straight-line extension from one's ontological, epistemological, and ethical theories (Hall, 2008; Magrini, 2009). Sometimes the relationship seems to be more a matter of influence and philosophical boundary setting for dialogical practice than it is an if-then paradigm, e.g., if I subscribe to Deweyan experimentalism, then I must use a specifically prescribed pattern of dialogical interaction. Instead, he (Dewey, 1938; Simpson, Jackson, & Aycocock, 2005) seems delighted when teachers use their knowledge of what is being communicated, who are the people engaging in the dialogue, where are the people situated culturally and geographically, and what is their understanding of the ideals, skills, and attitudes to be learned to make judgments about how to initiate, guide, and close a dialogue. But he adds other qualifications to his dialogical theory, such as how will the imagination, creativity, and passions of the teacher affect her teaching and interactions with students and what unique interests, needs, and purposes of the students will be brought to the dialogue? Moreover, the weight and priority that a specific teacher places on a

subject and its subparts will influence her dialogical interactions. In the end, the teacher's ability to place the multitude of variables of Dewey's theory of dialogue into a gestalt and to weight each unique situation to make wise decisions about the dynamics of dialogue are contingent upon her or his precise views of democracy, dialogue, agency, and public education. They are also contingent, in part, on the uniqueness of the every changing student, teacher, and curriculum that are situated in schools in a dynamic democracy and evolving global world and our ability to identify border crossings that allow us to interact in ways that engage one another in educative and sensitive ways (Forrest, 2009; Vokey, 2010).

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## **Being an Exchange Student in Turkey: Adaptation to a New Culture**

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### **Abstract**

Late adolescence is a critical period of development during which individuals experience crucial changes in their social lives. Several developmental tasks appear during this transition to be accomplished by the late adolescents in order to achieve adulthood and to develop healthy psychological and social functioning. A significant task in this developmental stage is developing the ability to adapt to a new environment. This ability includes the processes of how the late adolescents effectively integrate themselves to a new culture, how they become efficient members of this new culture, and how they make sense of the elements in the new culture. In order to explore the adaptation ability, this study aimed at describing what sorts of experiences that exchange students had while they pursued some of their studies abroad. The participants were 50 undergraduate and graduate students who were attending two higher education institutions in Turkey. They were predominantly from three different regions: (a) European Union, (b) North America, and (c) Other (Australia and Ukraine). There were three main data sources: Focus group meetings were held approximately twice in a month in three rounds. The first round was done with 22 students in Ankara during October-December 2008. The second one was done with 7 students in Canakkale during December 2009 and January 2010, and the third round with 21 students in Canakkale during October-December 2010. In addition to the interviews, the participants were also asked to note down their adaptation experiences. The participants were also asked to complete a short survey after they returned to their countries. The results basically showed that the adaptation to a new culture was modifying the clashing elements between host culture and native culture and modifying those elements according to the rules in the host culture.

**Key words:** Adolescents, Adaptation, Content Analysis, Exchange Students

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## Introduction

A student exchange program is a type of program that allows students, often attending a higher education institution, to pursue some parts of their scholar work in a foreign country. It is an agreement established between two (or more) higher education institutions in two (or more) different countries. The common goals rooted in these various student exchange programs are (1) to increase the participants' understanding and tolerance of other cultures while they interact with people in the host country, (2) to broaden their social horizons and thus increase their intercultural abilities, and (3) to improve their language skills. Although the programs aim to provide new skills, new opportunities for exchange students, once they are exposed to a different culture from their own cultures, they are faced with the problem of adapting themselves to the new settings. In order to explore the adaptation process, this study followed 50 exchange students attending two higher education institutions in Turkey.

A student exchange program is basically an agreement of at least two higher education institutions, located in different countries, allowing their students to follow some parts of their scholar works in the agreed institution in the other country. Having an opportunity to study abroad automatically opens a door for the students to have an experience with the host culture. The experience with the host culture, i.e. the cultural experience in the new setting, involves closely interacting with the local people in the host country, practicing their language, becoming familiar with their customs, and thus gradually becoming a member of this culture. Having established its framework of cultural adaptation as "socially established structures of meanings" (Geertz, 1973, p.12), this descriptive study presented reports from the exchange students' accounts of how they gradually became efficient members of Turkish culture.

Students pursuing some parts of their university degree in a culture different from their own cultures are assumed to be undergoing some changes in their sense-making process in this new setting. The sense-making process of this new environment is basically uncovering the novel or clashing elements in the host culture and then modifying them to live comfortably in the new environment. If the exchange students resist and keep the clashing elements or resist adapting to the novel elements in the new setting, the cultural shock occurs and then persists as long as resistance continues, and thus the students have trouble adapting to this new culture. As a result, cultural shock has become the central theme in explaining the adaptation process in any setting.

It is also a well-known fact that human beings are naturally driven to adapt to a new environment, and thus majority of exchange students are able to acquire and cope with daily life in their host societies. A vast number of studies have been recently focused on the exchange students' learning experiences in their specific cultural (or sojourn) context. For instance, Taylor (1994) suggested that it was crucial to understand the actual learning process embedded in the cross-cultural adaptation process in order to develop effective education programs designed to encourage foreign students obtain abundant diverse cultural experiences. According to Brody (1970), adaptation means "the process of establishing and maintaining a relatively stable reciprocal relationship with the human, social, or interpersonal environment" (p.14). In the literature of cross-cultural perspective, Church (1982) proposed that

foreign students (or sojourners), adaptation practices should be considered as cultural adaptation which refers to a more long-term assimilation within the host culture.

There are three main theories centering on the role of culture shock in explaining the adaptation process of people living in a different culture (Zhou et al., 2008). The theory of *culture learning* regards culture shock as the main drive to acquire culture-specific skills that are required to engage in interactions in the new cultural environment (see Furnham & Bochner, 1986). The *stress and coping* theory views culture shock as rooted in stressful life changes leading people who engage in interactions in the new cultural environments to develop coping strategies (see Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As a result, adaptation is considered to be a process of managing stress at different levels. *Social identification* theories focus on the cognitive aspect of adaptation process. Any person having a sort of cultural shock tends to perceive himself in a much broader and unusual setting. The change in self-perception consequently leads to the change in self-identity (see Berry, 1994; 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Different from the three theories outlined above, the underlying framework in this study is rooted in Geertz's understanding of culture as the system of meanings (Geertz, 1973). For Geertz, culture is

a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life (1973, p. 89).

Following his formulation of culture and his way of finding culture in the details of everyday life (i.e. thick description) (Geertz, 1973), this study frames adaptation as a sense-making process of the cultural elements in the new setting. Thus, adapting to a new culture and thus becoming a functioning member of this new setting are basically the sense-making process of local mutual interactions in the host culture. More specifically, cultural adaptation is rooted in the gradual sense-making process of what sort of behavior in a certain context can be practiced and thus is considered by the local participants as either acceptable or unacceptable, or acceptable under specific circumstances.

The common custom, taking off shoes before entering home in a Turkish context, can be taken as an example. As a participant expressed in her observation of Turkish culture, "*you expect to take your shoes off before entering a house, and if they don't offer you slippers, you feel like you've lucked out.*" It is unacceptable to enter home with shoes on in the Turkish culture. As a result, the acceptable behaviour in this context is taking off shoes and then putting on the interior slippers. However, at a wedding or funeral, it is acceptable to enter home with shoes, especially when the number of people coming home is huge. Taking this example as guide, cultural adaptation is making sense of what sort of actions in a certain context can be considered as acceptable or what actions as unacceptable or what actions acceptable in certain conditions by the others in the new setting. Hence, the primary aim of this study was to find out what practices in the Turkish culture led to trouble in exchange students' making sense of their new environment.

### **The study**

The data for this descriptive study were collected from two main sources: (1) focus groups and (2) exchange students' notes on their daily activities in Turkey. The focus groups were held by three different groups of students. The first focus group meetings were held once a week between October and December 2008 in Ankara, and the second set had three meetings between December 2009 and January 2010 in Çanakkale, and the third set involved four interviews between October and December 2010 in Çanakkale. The exchange students were also asked to note their observations on their adaptation process and to share them at the meetings. Aimed at collecting thick description of the exchange students' experiences in the new settings, i.e. Ankara and Canakkale, the study purposefully asked the participants to elaborate on their personal accounts of what sorts of troubles they had while they interacted with local people in the new setting. All of the discussions in the interviews and their personal notes were asked to be in English.

### **Participants**

13 male and 37 female undergraduate and graduate exchange students agreed to participate in the study. The students were mainly from the European Union countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and Spain) and from Australia, Canada, Ukraine and the United States (see Table 1 for distribution of participants in three rounds). The participants were aged between 20 and 30, with an average of 24. At the time of data collection, these students were attending two higher education institutions located in Ankara and Çanakkale.

Convenience sampling strategy was used in the selection of exchange students. The exchange students who agreed to participate in the study were included in the study. This brought up some problems. Since all of the communications in the meetings and writings were done in English, some of the exchange students due to the lack of speaking and writing skills in English did not want to take part.

The first higher education institution is a state university located in Ankara. The university puts special emphasis on research and education in engineering and natural sciences, offering about 40 undergraduate programs within 5 faculties, and 97 masters and 62 doctorate programs within 5 graduate schools. It has approximately 23,000 students, of which 15,800 are enrolled in undergraduate programs, 4,500 in masters, and 2,700 in doctorate programs. The second higher education is a state university located in Çanakkale. It has 19,000 students participating in a wide variety of programs in 2 graduate schools, 9 faculties, 2 polytechnic colleges (four year programs) and 11 vocational colleges (two-year programs).

The amount of time that the participants spent in Turkey ranged from 3 months to 10 months, with an average of 5 months. Most of the exchange students in Ankara stayed in student houses located in the campus while the students in Canakkale were staying at homes which they shared with either local students or other exchange students. Most of them stayed in Turkey to complete their exchange programs and then returned back to their countries, but a few continued in or returned to Turkey for other purposes, such as internships or working.

Table 1. The distribution of participants in the rounds.

	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	
	Ankara	Çanakkale	Çanakkale	
Male	6	2	5	13
Female	16	5	16	37
Countries	Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Ukraine, US.	Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Spain.	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia.	
Total	22	7	21	50

### Student exchange programs

Most of the participants (40 students) were funded by ERASMUS program, 2 by EMECW and 8 by CIEE. ERASMUS (*European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*) is a student exchange program functioning as an operational framework for the European Union's initiatives in higher education. Established in 1987 as the major part of the EU Lifelong Learning Program, ERASMUS enables around 180,000 students to study and do work placements abroad each year. By mid 2009, two million students had experienced an Erasmus experience, lasting from 3 months to 12 months (an average of 6.2 months), in one of approximately 4000 higher education institutions in 31 participating countries within the EU (Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009).

EMECW (*Erasmus Mundus External Co-operation Window*) is a co-operation and mobility scheme in the area of higher education launched by Europe Aid Cooperation Office and implemented by the Executive Agency Education, Audiovisual and Culture. EMECW is a cooperation and mobility program that aims to enhance the quality of European higher education and to promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with Third Countries (Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency, 2010).

CIEE (*Council on International Educational Exchange*) is a non-profit organization basically promoting international education and exchange. Established in 1947 in the United States, CIEE operates 95 educational/study abroad programs in over 33 countries, and organizes seasonal work experiences in the United States for approximately 45,000 university students each year through its Work & Travel USA program.

### Data analysis

The data from interviews and personal notes were subjected to content analysis. Content analysis involves searching for meaningful points in the data, assigning them descriptive codes and exploring their relations to arrive at themes and to describe the data as a meaningful whole (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley,

1979). The researchers first read through all the data from the notes and interviews to identify meaningful units based on the research questions and assigned descriptive codes to these units. For example, codes like “friendliness,” “cuisine,” “religious expectations,” “male-female relationships,” and “helping” were used to describe the data to uncover what sort of adaptation problems the exchange students had while they interacted with local people in the new settings. Second, the descriptive codes which fit together meaningfully were grouped in categories such as “religious expectations,” “hospitality,” “intimacy,” “practicing Atatürk,” and “material elements.”

In order to validate the codes and themes gathered from the two sources, the researcher also took some field notes while the participants were travelling in Turkey or when they met for fun, e.g. going out on Friday nights, going for theatres. In addition to the field notes, after the participants turned back to their countries, they were asked to complete an online survey. The survey mainly asked (1) how much time they spent in Turkey, and (2) what they remembered from their stay in Turkey.

## Results

The results from the talks at the interviews and the notes about the exchange students’ experiences in the new settings were organized under four certain themes. The first theme discusses the helping practices in Turkish culture, *understanding Turkish hospitality*, which was the most frequently stressed trouble among exchange students. The second theme uncovers how helping practices led to *intimacy with local people*, which was another problem often mentioned by female exchange students. The third theme discusses how offers in Turkish culture are repeated many times, which was a problem for the exchange students to cope with. The other themes reports the difference between what exchange student were thinking of Turkish culture in terms of religious practices and what they experienced while they lived in Turkey. Lastly, the study talks about how exchange students gradually adapted to Turkish food practice in Turkey.

### Understanding Turkish hospitality

The first striking theme that was recurrently emphasized in the participants’ sentiment was Turkish people’s hospitality and friendliness. Coming from a different “cultural pattern of group life” (Schutz, 1944, p. 499), the exchange students said:

R3/L1: Turkey also impressed me with friendly and helpful people. For the first days of my stay while I was new there, I could feel understanding smiles of people in the streets. It’s not a secret, not everyone in Turkey can speak in English [...] I was lost every time I could find a people who helped me.

R1/U3: I recall people [...] very hospitable. People would readily invite you to join their activities or social interactions.

R3/P2: What I remembered the best is Turkish hospitality which made me feel like at home (even better).

R3/B2: I will really miss that everyone's friendship and help they offered to me.

R1/C1: First of all, the people in Turkey are one of the friendliest people I have encountered in my recent travelling on different continents.

R1/G2: This is also one of my impressions: everyone helps you everytime.

R1/U5: I was able to interact better with the locals, and realized how helpful the Turks were to us.

Before going into detail about what was meant with Turkish hospitality, the action of helping needs to be uncovered. Any interaction in a *helping* context requires the sense-making process of what behaviour at each help offer is acceptable, or unacceptable, or acceptable under certain circumstances. As a result, accepting one's help offer requires what sort of help is offered at what context. The offer by a stranger to open the door for you when you have bags at both of your hands after shopping is acceptable, for example. However, the offer by the same stranger to carry the bags for you to your home is not acceptable. The same offer, carrying the bags to your home, can be considered acceptable if the person who is accepting the offer are old, disabled (or that person is specifically asking for that help under certain circumstances). Acting as a functioning member in a social setting in a helping context as a consequence requires the experience of these permutations at different settings.

The helping context in Turkish culture is an unfamiliar circumstance for the exchange students since they have not had the repertoire of how helping operated in Turkish culture. Thus, as they put it, the type of helping that they were exposed to in their first days was different from the one that they were familiar in their native cultures:

R1/D1: I experienced this [hospitality] for the first time when the plane landed in Esenboğa airport. People were actually giving space in the path so you could go out before them.

R1/G4: I could imagine this picture [too much food served in the dinner at a dinner] pretty well but I wasn't aware that in fact hospitality is far more than I could imagine. I don't think there is a word describing this in my language in a proper way.

### **Intimacy with local people**

The other theme frequently stressed by female exchange students was the close relationship with local people in their new settings.

R1/U2: Body language is one difference that I have experienced, especially between members of the opposite sex. Walking down the street I have to be careful not to make eye contact with men because that apparently means I am interested in them.

R1/D1: To say 'no thanks' to a beer can be very rude but to say 'yes' can mean that you have accepted the guy.

R1/U1: Before you go into a restaurant, you make sure you see other females inside, just in case.

Making sense of how a close relationship operates in a new setting is a complicated and challenging adaptation process for "the strangers" (Schutz, 1944). Putting it differently, making sense of what sort of behavior in a casual encounter or close friendship is considered as an acceptable signal for further intimacy and what sort of behavior is unacceptable in a casual friendship requires experience and closer interaction with the members of opposite sex. Having a short talk, making an eye contact, or giving a smile in the Turkish culture for the opposite sex can refer to a signal to have closer relationship in a casual meeting or even while walking on the street.

R1/U2: Especially walking at night, men occasionally grab my hand if I am walking close enough and make catcalls. I have come across this many times, most notably with an event that started on the subway. A man was riding the subway with the CIEE group and asked where I was from. We ended up having a short conversation with him ending with me getting off the train or so I thought. About 15 minutes later while the group was entering the police station to obtain our resident permits, I caught a glimpse of the same man from the train. He had taken time out of his day to follow me around the city. This is not an isolated incident, but has actually happened multiple times since my arrival. Being followed and being constantly looked at, pointed at, and being the subject of conversation is one of the things that I have had the most difficulty in adapting to.

R1/C1: The only real problem, in my eyes, is the perception of Turkish guys towards foreign girls. I feel that anywhere I go, I have to be careful not to look at one guy in the eyes because, if I do, he will interpret it in a wrong way.

R1/A1: You accept that giving a broad smile and saying 'g'day' to people on the street isn't considered normal here and can give off a very wrong impression.

R1/A1: You understand why Turkish boys are so interested in the foreign girls.

R1/D1: Turkish men can easily misunderstand your behavior. It can be difficult to find out if the guy that you are talking to just think that it is a nice conversation or he thinks that you should be his girlfriend now. The signals between the sexes are hard to figure out.

### **Waiting for the second offer**

One of the points that exchange students had trouble in making sense was saying "No" to an offer in Turkish culture. In an offer/accept context, most often, the

person, who is being offered for something, is expected to refuse it in the first place regarding that he or she does not want to accept it. A good illustration of this takes place in meals. Traditionally, in Turkish culture, local people offer twice or more to the people if they reject it in the first place or later. The multi-offer practice at a rejection context continues until the people offered say “No more.” “Not really,” etc. However, this multi-offer practice is unfamiliar to exchange students.

R1/K1: Is it like a tradition here [in Turkey]? Maybe I'm wrong. I'm not sure. If someone asks you, if you want anything, you know. My roommate, if she's going out, if I want anything from outside, usually I have to say no. I mean. Is it polite way to say no? Someone told me it is a tradition if someone asks you something, you have to say no?

### **Religion**

Many exchange students in the talks talked about their projections about the religious status in Turkey. Most of the exchange students coming to Turkey through the Erasmus program had their first image of Turkish culture through the observations they had with the Turkish immigrants living and working in Europe. The typical Turkish culture, from their points of view, involved Turkish people practicing Islam regularly and strictly.

R3/P4: The first night one terrible thing happened for me. About 5 am I hear terrible sound outside. I thought the war started or something like this. But it was just Muslims praying time. I was jumping like this all month, 5 times per day, this sound was terrible for me. Only after one month I started to take it like normal sound and stopped jumping every morning.

R3/P7: Prayer few times in a day from minarets which you can hear everywhere.

R3/L4: That sound invite to pray. At first look strange, but later it became normal.

After being exposed to Turkish culture in Turkey and after travelling around Turkey, the exchange students observed that some people in different parts of the country or different people in the same places did not practice as much as they were anticipating before coming to Turkey. A good illustration of this was their trip to Amasra, a small town located on Black Sea coast in the north of Turkey, in the Ramadan period. Ramadan is the Islamic month of fasting, in which participating Muslims are not supposed to eat or drink during day. In our Amasra trip, they noticed some Turkish people drinking alcohol during the day, not even practicing the fasting.

R3/P7: I traveled little around Turkey. So it was difficult to me because in all different cities there are different rules. In one cities, you can walk with mini skirt and drink beer near the sea, in others it is forbidden.

### **Turkish cuisine**

One of the elements that the participants in the study found easy to adapt was Turkish cuisine.

R2/O1: I miss Turkish breakfast, my lovely simit<sup>1</sup> with black tea.

R3/P3: Olives, ayran<sup>2</sup>, salty white cheese, lentil soup, meals with aubergines, tea in small glasses with very small teaspoons, bazaar, even extremely sweet baklava [...] are all I miss now.

R3/P6: The thing I miss most is Turkish food which I'm trying to make from time to time in my country but have to face with lack of original components.

One of the local practices the exchange students had little trouble in adapting was drinking *çay*, Turkish way of serving tea. Turkish tea is typically prepared using two stacked kettles (*çaydanlık*) specifically designed for tea preparation. Drinking coffee for social purposes, like meeting for coffee to chat or drinking coffee while working, was replaced with tea in Turkish culture. Shifting the status of coffee to tea was respectively easy for the exchange students. However, one practice associated with Turkish tea was challenging to make sense for them. They could not make sense of the practice of tea being served almost in each local store they visited to shop.

### **Discussion**

A student exchange program is supposed to bring about some changes in the student's life. The program is constructed on the idea of cultural interaction and thus understanding of a new culture. Interacting in a new environment and understanding a new culture in this new environment require modifying the strangers' existing sense-making patterns or building a new repertoire for the cultural pattern of group life in the new setting (Schutz, 1944). The aim in our study was basically discovering how the exchange students were adapting to Turkish culture, and to find out what problems or troubles they had during this process.

The results from (1) the talks in the interviews, (2) notes from the exchange students' experiences with the local people in their new settings, (3) their responses to the survey and (4) the field notes showed that adaptation to a new culture was a process of transforming the existing sense-making patterns into the ones that could function properly in the new setting. Namely, the study demonstrated that the adjustment to interpersonal aspects of the new cultural context takes more time than the adjustment to basic living conditions within the new cultural environment. This appears to be case because the cultural adaptation of the foreign students requires the acquisition of new values and change in the existing beliefs and attitudes. A good illustration of this is the female exchange students' re-formulation of helping practices. Helping has a different pattern in their native cultures, while helping in the

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<sup>1</sup> Simit is is a circular bread with sesame seeds, usually served plain, or for breakfast with tea, jam or cheese.

<sup>2</sup> Ayran, a yoghurt based beverage, is the mixture of yogurt, cold water, and sometimes salt.

Turkish context might lead to intimacy problems. Saying “yes” or “no” to a help offer from a local man, without being rude and without meaning further in terms of intimacy, requires close experience with the local people.

A limitation of the study was the number of participants. The number of volunteered students was 50, few of whom stopped attending the interviews or gave up the study. Further, one of the students participating in the second round had a traffic accident, and thus she had to be excluded from the study, which also made the researchers stop at that point. The other limitation was the language barrier. Since the whole data collection was done in English, some exchange students, especially from post-Soviet states and countries from the Mediterranean Sea region, had difficulty in speaking and writing in English. The other limitation was the discussion of delicate issues with the researchers. Since the interviews were guided with a local person, discussing delicate issues like dealing with Turkish boys got challenging. At this point, the researcher followed the students in their interactions with local people.

This study was essentially a descriptive one that aimed at demonstrating the adaptation process of the exchange students in Turkish culture. Some key elements that were frequently mentioned by the participants were presented. However, there were some elements to be discussed further in follow-up studies. One element was the role of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic, in today’s Turkish culture. The exchange students were questioning his role and came up with different ideas. The other elements included traffic in Turkey, traveling around Turkey, and Turkish as a second language.

In conclusion, one of the basic objectives of a student exchange program is to eradicate prejudices by presenting opportunities for student mobility and intercultural dialogue, and by strengthening the interaction within member countries to unite societies around an international mentality and an international consciousness. The findings from other research studies also support our thesis. According to Otero and McCoshan (2006), Erasmus students assessed their Erasmus period abroad very positively. Around 87% of students considered their overall experience abroad to have been positive/very positive. Further, the findings of this present study, that throughout the student exchange experience, students were open to new cultures and that their prejudices were broken down. This is the consistent evidence parallel another study in Turkey that mentioned a majority of Erasmus students were open to new cultures and any type of differences (Yağcı et al., 2007). On the other hand, the findings of this study generally support that moving to a new culture and establishing new interpersonal relations and social life is a stressful experiences. This process makes the foreign students become tolerant to uncertainty, try to adapt new experiences, and make efforts to integrate the cultural patterns of new culture into their existing value system. In considering the experiences of foreign students in this particular study, it can be suggested that there should be some educational or training programs in order to increase understanding of the processes in which foreign students perceive their adaptation challenges and overcome these challenges by using different strategies available for them. These educational programs should provide basic knowledge about their host country in terms of geography, history, customs, and religion. In addition to the issues outlined here, the program may need to encourage the foreign students using host country language abilities to ensure effective communication skills.

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# Miscellany

## Scope of the IJPE

International Journal of Progressive Education (IJPE) (ISSN 1554-5210) is a peer reviewed interactive electronic journal sponsored by the International Association of Educators and in part by the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. IJPE is a core partner of the Community Informatics Initiative and a major user/developer of the Community Inquiry Laboratories. IJPE takes an interdisciplinary approach to its general aim of promoting an open and continuing dialogue about the current educational issues and future conceptions of educational theory and practice in an international context. In order to achieve that aim, IJPE seeks to publish thoughtful articles that present empirical research, theoretical statements, and philosophical arguments on the issues of educational theory, policy, and practice. IJPE is published three times a year in four different languages; Chinese, Turkish, Spanish and English.

The IJPE welcomes diverse disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. Manuscripts should focus critical pedagogy, multicultural education, new literacies, cross-cultural issues in education, theory and practice in educational evaluation and policy, communication technologies in education, postmodernism and globalization education. In addition, the *Journal* publishes book reviews, editorials, guest articles, comprehensive literature reviews, and reactions to previously published articles.

## Editorial/Review Process

All submissions will be reviewed initially by the editors for appropriateness to IJPE. If the editor considers the manuscript to be appropriate, it will then be sent for anonymous review. Final decision will be made by the editors based on the reviewers' recommendations. All process -submission, review, and revision- is carried out by electronic mail. The submissions should be written using MS-DOS or compatible word processors and sent to the e-mail addresses given below.

## Manuscript Submission Guidelines

All manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the form and style as outlined in the American Psychological Association Publication Manual (5th ed.). Manuscripts should be double-spaced, including references, notes, abstracts, quotations, and tables. The title page should include, for each author, name, institutional affiliation, mailing address, telephone number, e-mail address and a brief biographical statement. The title page should be followed by an abstract of 100 to 150 words. Tables and references should follow APA style and be double-spaced. Normally, manuscripts should not exceed 30 pages (double-spaced), including tables, figures, and references. Manuscripts should not be simultaneously submitted to another journal, nor should they have been published elsewhere in considerably similar form or with considerably similar content.

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International Association of Educators is open to all educators including undergraduate and graduate students at a college of education who have an interest in communicating with other educators from different countries and nationalities. All candidates of membership must submit a membership application form to the executive committee. E-mail address for requesting a membership form and submission is: [members@inased.org](mailto:members@inased.org)

\*There are two kinds of members - voting members and nonvoting members. Only the members who pay their dues before the election call are called Voting Members and can vote in all elections and meetings and be candidate for Executive Committee in the elections. Other members are called Nonvoting Members.

\*Dues will be determined and assessed at the first week of April of each year by the Executive Committee.

\*Only members of the association can use the University of Illinois Community Inquiry Lab. In order to log into the forum page, each member needs to get an user ID and password from the association. If you are a member, and if you do not have an user ID and password, please send an e-mail to the secretary: [secretary@inased.org](mailto:secretary@inased.org) .

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