Teaching in a Multicultural Classroom

CENTER FOR TEACHING & LEARNING (CTL)
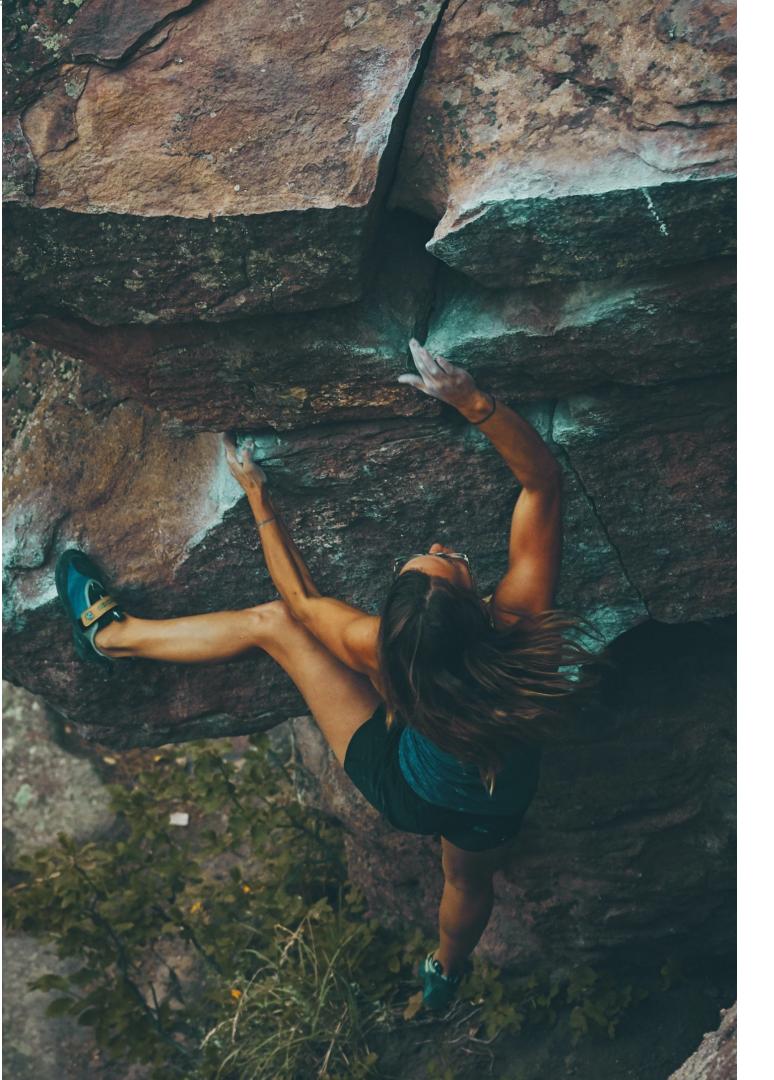
NYU SHANGHAI

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Challenges and Opportunities

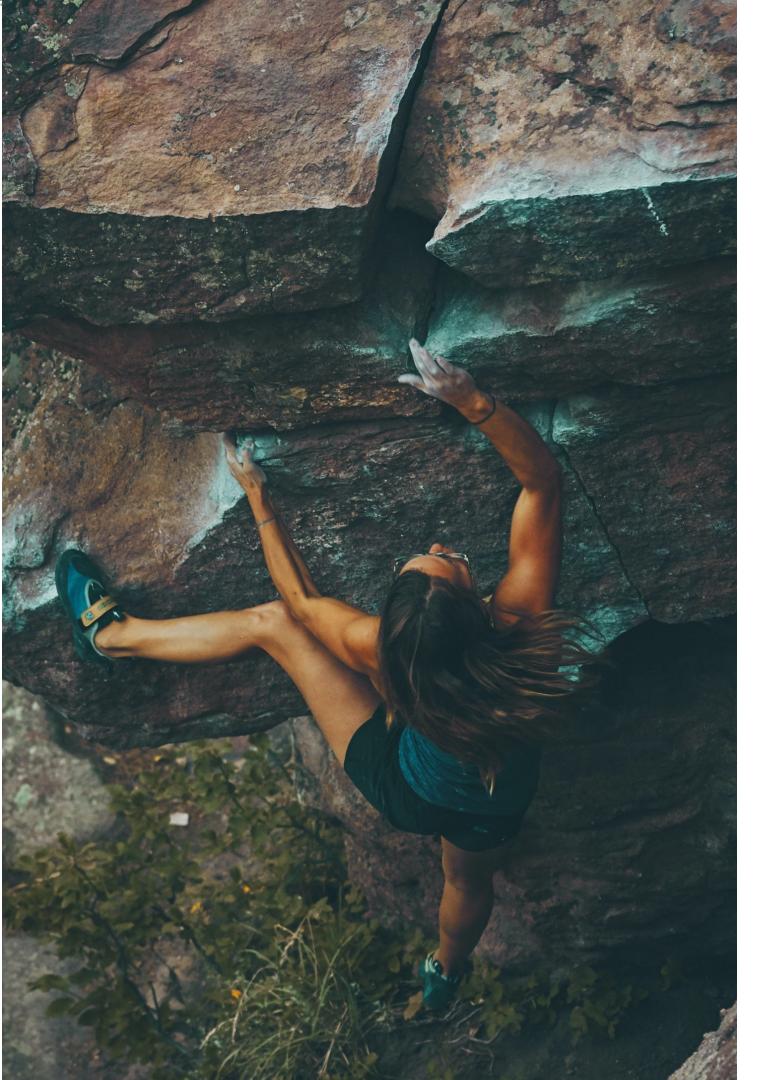While challenging, teaching in a multicultural environment can result in superior performance and deeper learning

But there must be intentionality to foster those gains

(Crose, 2011; Shea Sanger, 2020)

Challenges and Opportunities

Why might a multicultural classroom be richer?

- Opportunities to foster intercultural exchange

- Cross cultural group work results in superior performance over homogenous group work

- Prepares students for an increasingly globalized workforce

(Crose, 2011; Shea Sanger, 2020)

Challenges and Opportunities

-What are some of the challenges of a multicultural classroom?

- Language differences/accent Issues

- Different perceptions of student/teacher roles

- Greater miscommunication risk due to entrenched cultural habits

- Risk of (often unintentional) bias and tokenism

(Crose, 2011; Shea Sanger, 2020; Phuong-Mai, 2006)

Language/Accent Issues

- Slow the pace of delivery / be conscious of enunciating

- Is your vocabulary too complex? Make adjustments, define or ask students to

- Analyze content for culturally specific slang, sayings and metaphors + rephrase or explain, use international examples,

- Use tools, transcription software, audio recording etc. to record lecture

(Crose, 2011)

Inclusive Pedagogy Practices

Creating a sense of belonging is essential for a multicultural classroom.

- Use 'ice-breakers' starting from the first class to allow students and faculty to get acquainted

- Structure informal social interactions with students before assigning formal group work

- Choose course materials with diversity in mind

(Crose, 2011; Shea Sanger, 2020)

Inclusive Pedagogy Practices

Utilize Universal Design Principles in your Course

- Provide multiple modes: verbal, visual, written, oral, for student engagement and assessment

- Plan your curriculum and pedagogy to accommodate students with various needs, and so all students can participate equally

- Consider mandatory office hours, particularly for first year students

(Crose, 2011; Shea Sanger, 2020)

Inclusive Pedagogy Practices

- Solicit feedback from the students with questions that target diversity and inclusion

- Call on all students/watch for your own biases

- Never tokenize students, i.e. ask them to represent or speak on behalf of a group

- Learn about your student's experience-educational background in addition to major, gender pronouns etc.

(Crose, 2011; Shea Sanger, 2020)
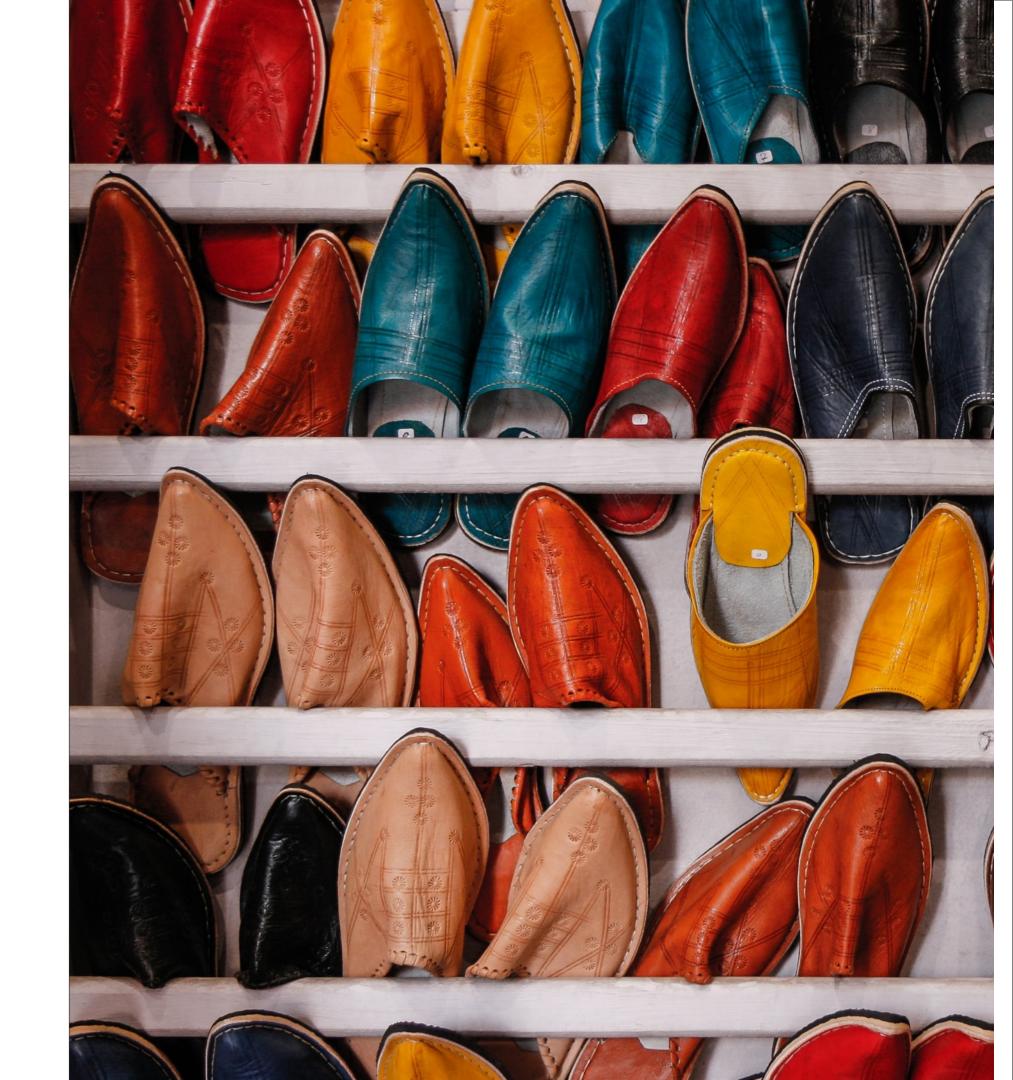
Inclusive Pedagogy Practices

- Lay down ground rules/ expectations for classroom behavior and group discussion

- Point out to your students, inequalities and biases in classroom material, discipline etc.

- Correct hurtful or ignorant comments that arise in class directly in the classroom.

(Crose, 2011; Shea Sanger, 2020)

Pair & Group Work in a MCC

- Group work CAN facilitate learning & cultural exchange if structured well

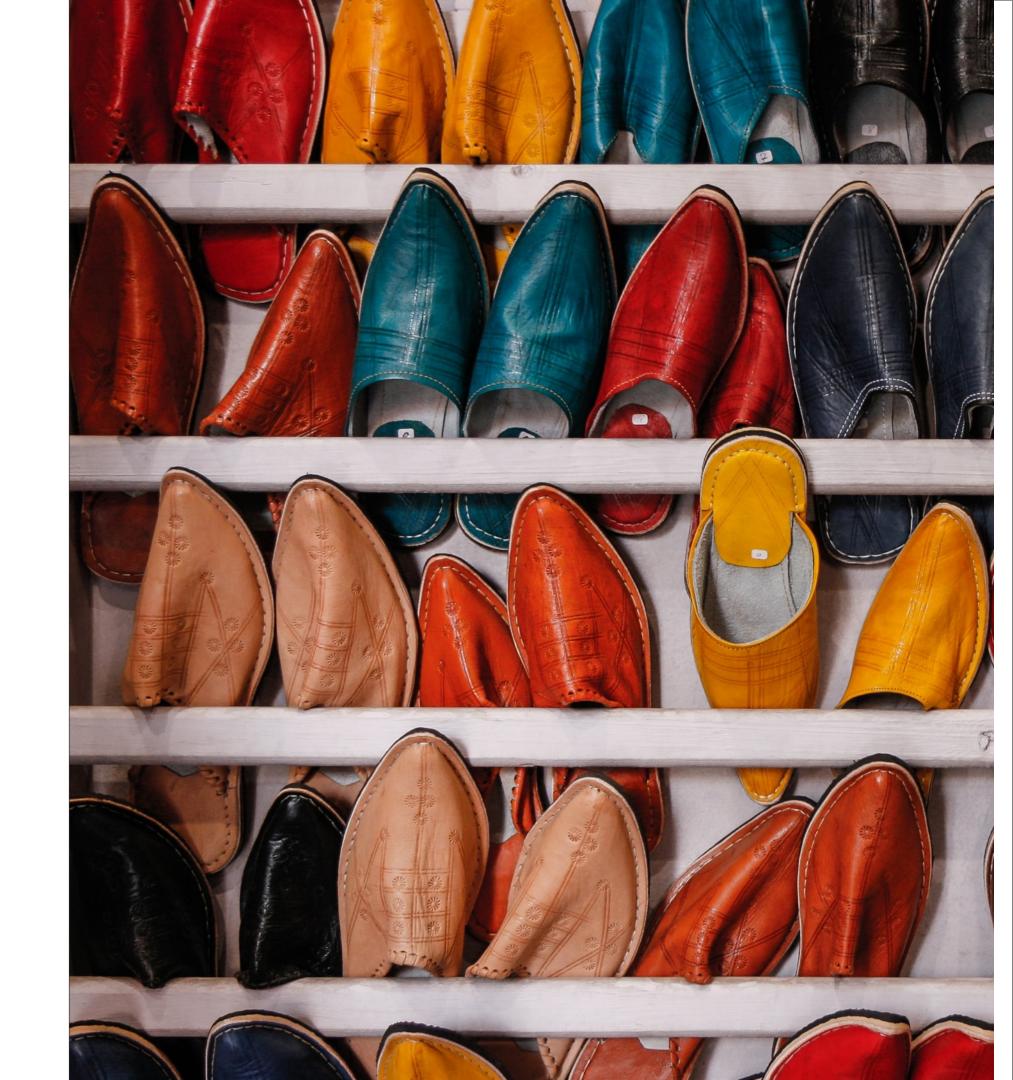- Good group projects = a project that could not be accomplished by 1 student

(Crose, 2011)

Pair & Group Work in a MCC

- Pair students from different cultural backgrounds together

- Pair more experienced students with less experienced students

(Crose, 2011)

Assignments & Grading in a MCC

- Assignments that may seem standard in one culture may be foreign to another

- Be explicit explain why you're assigning students such tasks, and how they connect to LOs

(Shea Sanger, 2020)

Assignments & Grading in a MCC

- Be explicit in your instructions about the assignments to avoid confusion

- Provide students examples of excellent work

(Shea Sanger, 2020)

Assignments & Grading in a MCC

- Group work CAN facilitate learning & cultural exchange if structured well

- Good group projects = a project that could not be accomplished by 1 student
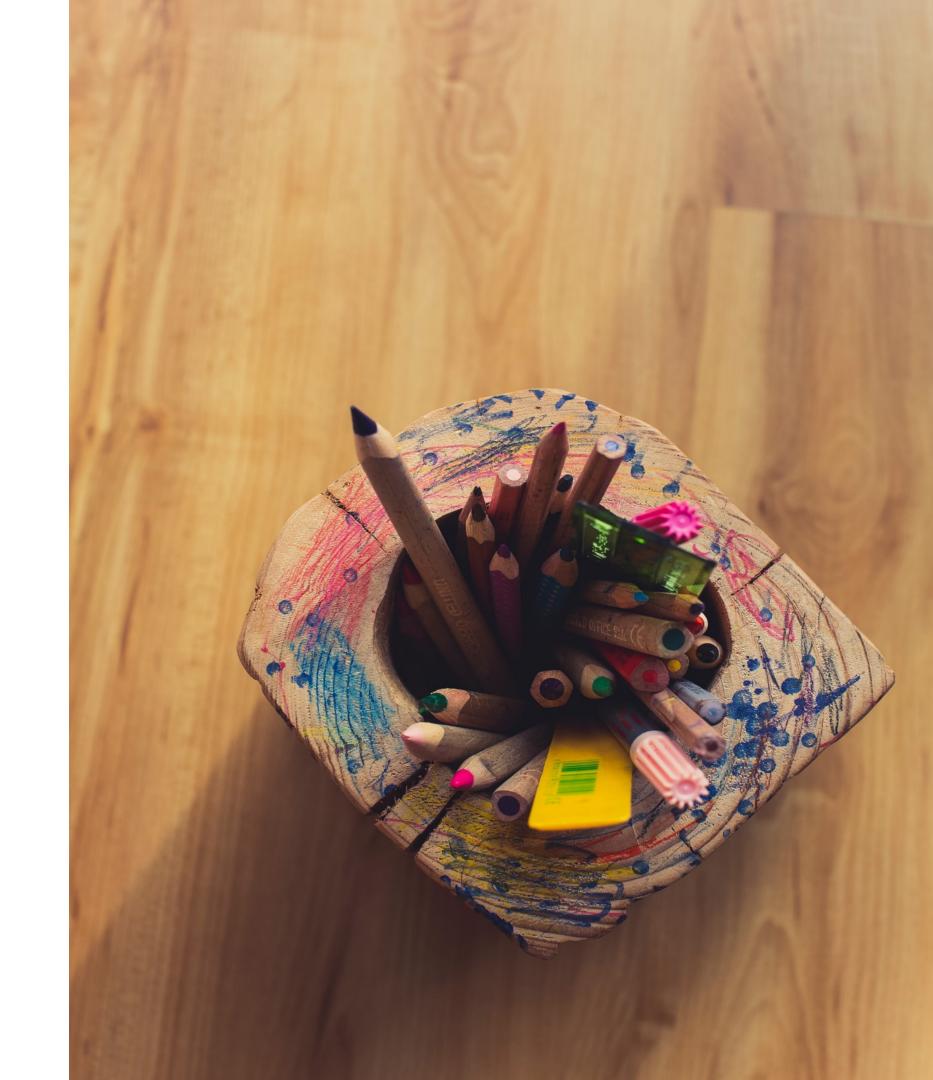
(Crose, 2011)

Assignments & Grading in a MCC

- Rubrics are essential in a MCC to ensure transparency, clarity, and fairness

- Consider blind grading

(Shea Sanger, 2020)

The Cultural Dimension to Learning

- Tailoring pedagogy to target a specific culture is problematic and cultures are clearly not monolithic

- But so is a false idea that educational practices are universally applicable

- Many educational theories from one region are copied and pasted into new contexts with compromised results

(Phuong-Mai, 2006)

The Cultural Dimension to Learning

- Hofsteade's 5 point model of culture difference
    - Power distance
    - Individualism-collectivism
    - Masculinity-femininity
    - Uncertainty avoidance
    - Short vs. long term time orientation

can, when applied broadly, be a useful framework to think about when designing pedagogy.

(Phuong-Mai, 2006)

The Cultural Dimension to Learning

Power distance = the degree to which less powerful members of a community accept the unequal distribution of power
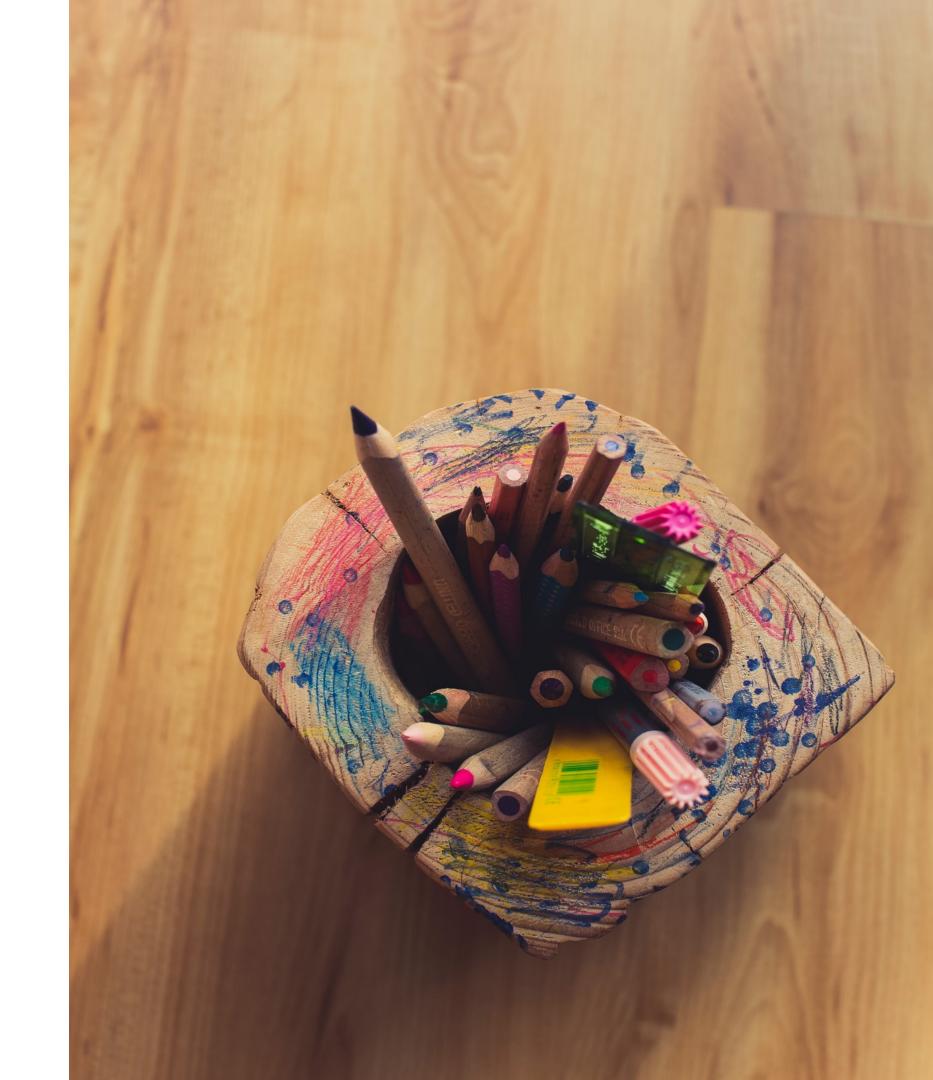
How does this translate in the classroom?

- Some feel the teacher should be an authority, others feel more comfortable in challenging/sharing that authority

(Phuong-Mai, 2006)

The Cultural Dimension to Learning

Individualistic vs. Collectivist societies – In the former ties between individuals are loose, in the latter people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups

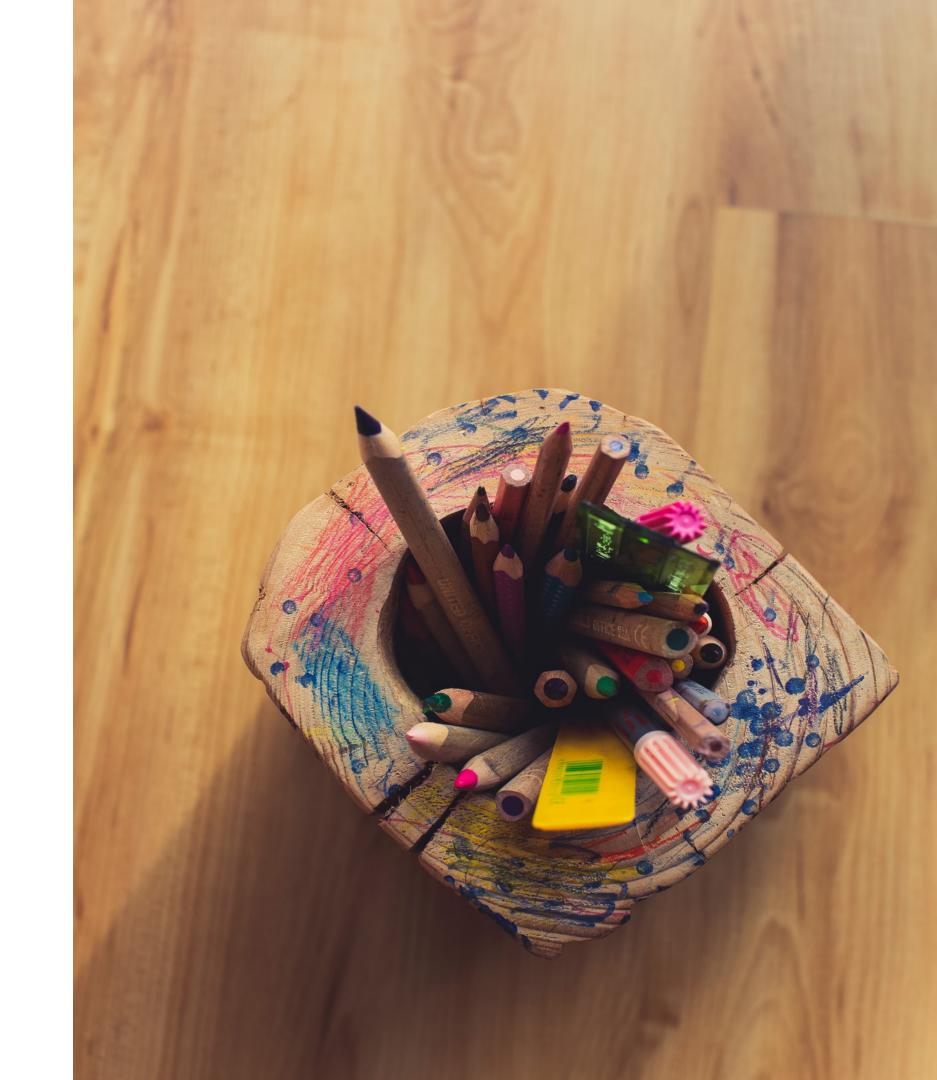How does this translate in the classroom?

- Some may value group harmony over conflict, some may be more comfortable with confrontation

(Phuong-Mai, 2006)

The Cultural Dimension to Learning

Uncertainty Avoidance – the extent to which some groups feel threatened by uncertainty or unknown situations

How does this translate in the classroom?

- Some are most comfortable with structured learning, ie. precise objectives, detailed assignment. others are more comfortable with less direction.

(Phuong-Mai, 2006)

Designing Across Dimensions for a Variety of Cultures

Instead of targeting pedagogy to one type of culture, consider varying delivery modes and assignments to target differences across the cultural continuum.

Some assignments may benefit collective, high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance learners, while others could be targeted to individualist, lower power distance, low uncertainty avoidance learners, and everywhere in between.

In this way you don't privilege one cultural learning norm over another.

(Monro-Smith, 2003)

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