

Pedagogy across Cultures

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The term “pedagogy” has Greek roots meaning “the child” and “to lead.” In our era, pedagogy has meanings of different breadths. More narrowly, it refers to the theory and practice of how to go about instructing children in classrooms, although it generally does not address questions of *what* to teach (curriculum). More broadly, pedagogy refers to the bringing about of children’s overall development into adulthood, thus addressing issues beyond as well as inside the school’s walls.

Given that the purpose of this entry is to consider cultural differences in pedagogy, it is the second, much broader, meaning that will underlie what follows. The distinction is similar to the one usefully made between “instruction” and “education”: the former concerns the transmission of specific content, while the latter addresses all facets of learners’ development. When broadly construed, pedagogy is about the *how* and *why* of parents’ activities as well as teachers’, and is a richly nuanced source of distinctions among various cultures’ conceptions of ideal humanness.

The term “pedagogue” has pejorative connotations. The British and American public may be familiar with Charles Dickens’s novel *Hard Times*, in which a key character is Thomas Gradgrind, the headmaster who demanded “facts, facts, facts” from his students and insisted “You are never to fancy!” In other cultures, “pedagogue” and “pedagogy” are associated positively with those who guide children’s growth and development.

The reasons for studying cross-cultural differences in schooling

Researchers fascinated by culture often are drawn to study schools because, together with homes, schools are the leading transmitters of a culture’s values and practices. A more focused motive for such research arose with the advent of inexpensive transportation: educational boundary-crossing. Not only instructors but also learners began turning up in distant educational facilities, where they often perceived the *how* of local knowledge transmission as intriguing, strange, or misguided. Beginning around 1970, such situations drew the interest of researchers. Some worked in support of national efforts to bring educational equity to indigenous peoples and immigrants. Others supported Western instructors in Africa and Asia, primarily English teachers whose “communicative” methods (requiring in-class spoken participation) were being resisted. The flow of instructors soon was matched by a westward flow of students

from Africa and Asia. They, too, encountered unsettling situations, especially in how to relate with instructors.

As more became known about education worldwide, it was recognized that children in some nations were learning critical school subjects faster and better than children in other nations. In nations revealed as deficient, concern burgeoned among parents and educators. Researchers sought causes and remedies, mostly focusing on readily identified factors such as class size and teacher training. But some explored cultural factors in homes and schools to uncover the values and concepts people *think with* when they think about child development.

For all these reasons, there's been an outpouring of school-culture and child-rearing research since the early 1970s, initially by Americans and other Westerners, and since 2000 by more and more non-Westerners. These studies have looked at children of all ages, at parenting and homes, and at schools of every conceivable type within settings ranging from remote traditional to urban fashionable. Tracking these investigations is David F. Lancy of Utah State University, whose 2015 book has an index listing 440 cultures about which child development information is available.

The nature of research into pedagogy across cultures

Insights into cross-cultural differences in parenting, children, teaching, and learning have come largely from anthropologists and other qualitative researchers *who primarily use their five senses to observe the patterned behaviors* of teachers, students, parents, and children; who consider all they observe within the context of the community's shared values; and who inductively derive for each cultural group its prevailing assumptions about the objectives and practices of child development. This distinguishes these researchers from others, such as psychologists, who attempt to "get inside the heads" of individuals to reveal each one's cognitive abilities and preferences related to learning. Formerly relying heavily on self-report surveys, psychologists since around 2000 are turning to neuroimaging technologies to explore the workings of brains.

Prominently emerging from all these studies is a finely calibrated grasp of the many contrasts between, on the one hand, the Anglo-Saxon "West," especially the United States, and, on the other hand, East Asia, principally China and Japan. Strongly disproportionate attention has gone to these two regions due to the many educational exchanges between them and the motivation provided by the findings of international comparative tests that East Asian students consistently outperform their American counterparts. What we know from this richly nuanced trove of data provides the knowledge base for the remainder of this entry.

Children's development and learning within schools

Out of the prodigious volume of findings collected within schools has arisen a distinction between two fundamental types of instructional cultures, first noted at the turn of

the 20th century and applicable to classrooms in most corners of the globe. This distinction is known by a variety of names; here names are used that express a key characteristic of each approach:

- *Knowledge-focused*: The principal responsibility of the instructor is *to deliver content* that (a) transmits to learners accepted knowledge while also (b) guiding them to gain virtue, that is, to embrace relationship patterns reflecting core community values. Termed “scholiocentric” (school-centered) in 1901, it is also termed “the *What* approach” and “traditional” instruction.
- *Learner-focused*: The principal responsibility of the instructor is *to facilitate a process* that (a) respects each learner’s inborn capacities and (b) strives to motivate each learner to desire to learn. In 1901, it was termed “pediocentric” (child-centered); some like to call it “the *How* approach.” It is associated with the ideals of many Westerners about “progressive” education.

This knowledge/learner distinction is best viewed as a framework for understanding, not as settled theory. The rise of e-learning could prompt a fresh attempt at categorization.

The knowledge-focused approach: Confucian, collectivist

The knowledge-focused approach to instruction is characteristic of classrooms across millennia of time and in many regions of the world; it is not Chinese in origin. Nevertheless, it frequently is associated with the Chinese sage Confucius, who died in 479 BCE, about 50 years before the birth of Plato in Greece. The teachings of Confucius emphasized the transmission of accepted knowledge by instructors who were revered by their students, in accord with the value of societal harmony via respect for hierarchical relationships, which strongly prevailed in China at that time.

During 13 centuries of Chinese history (605–1905), the highest goal of learning was appointment as a civil administrator, the result of obtaining a top score on a grueling, three-day imperial examination. These exams gauged one’s mastery of the classics and literary style; they were not tests of one’s creativity or critical thinking. A top score was far less dependent on a candidate’s innate ability than on years of relentless study under instructors who themselves had thoroughly mastered their subjects. An instructor was—and still is—The One Who Knows.

As The One Who Knows, the instructor may, and usually does, tell his students *what* to learn and *how* to learn it. That, in turn, is embedded within the tradition of *senior–junior reciprocity*, in which the junior exhibits filialness (reverence) toward the senior, in return for which the senior exhibits concern and caring for the junior, a parent-like responsibility that *actively guides the junior* toward attainment of virtue as well as knowledge. It’s important to note that the juniors expect this guidance, perceiving it as supporting their attainment of key objectives. Research shows that most juniors do *not* perceive a senior’s guidance as unwelcome.

A senior’s principal goal for his junior is virtuous behavior, which in many cultures outside the West emphasizes self-abnegation in support of intragroup integrity and

harmony. As explained by Jin Li of Brown University (2003), a major component of virtuous behavior is learning that strives toward mastery through indefatigable effort, driven by heart and mind (*hao xue xin*). Virtuous effort includes reading, listening, note-taking, pondering, inquiring, discussing, imitating, practicing, perfecting, and memorizing—all repeated until mastery is attained, aided by the senior's direct criticism and authoritative guidance.

In a knowledge-focused learning environment, a student's inborn abilities and preferences have little or no impact on content, process, or expected outcome. For example, Confucius recognized that learners have varying abilities. His path to equivalent outcomes never involved the instructor's making adjustments to "fit" a learner's needs. Confucius was convinced that individuals with modest intelligence could close the gap with their brighter peers through persistent study and practice.

There's no need for an instructor to try to induce motivation within any student. The resolve to learn, and to learn well, is a given: The culture in which instructor, student, school, and family are immersed regards the persistence needed to gain mastery as deeply virtuous. Some students may choose to ignore this aspect of virtue. Some, exhausted, may give up. Those who persevere to mastery are rewarded by the recognition of family and society. Responsibility for learning—and for fitting into the local scholastic culture of learning—belongs to the each student.

A knowledge-focused instructor does not encourage any student to produce creative materials or otherwise express her sense of self. Demonstrations of any individual's unique perspectives are appropriate far later, after deep mastery of society's admired cultural themes has been attained. And during classroom time, an instructor does not encourage any student to publicly offer her instant reactions to, or even questions about, a newly introduced topic. The time for reactions and questions comes a day or a week later, after the student has had time to study, reflect, confer, and prepare. And the place for such expressions is rarely in the classroom.

During class time, the students' role is to remain receptive to The One Who Knows. At the secondary and tertiary levels, students do this by mindfully observing. The pejorative claim by Western commentators that Asian students are "passive" is explained by the Westerners' belief that student "engagement" is evidenced by their speaking out loud, if not also being physically animated. Older Asian students cite several reasons why they don't speak up with questions or personal contributions during class, including that (a) doing this takes precious time away from their instructor's presentation; (b) they would lose face by speaking publicly without forethought; and (c) they will have opportunities to converse with the instructor outside of class—after class, at social events, and, for some, during visits to the instructor's office or even to his home. With the exception of preschool and lower elementary classrooms, quiet attentiveness characterizes most knowledge-focused classrooms because the learners are *mentally* engaged.

Ethnographic research has been yielding additional characteristics of East Asian classroom culture. For example:

- A teacher's delivery of a lesson often can be described as "experiential" and "constructivist": he first presents a real-world problem, then asks the students to suggest solutions, evaluate each other's solutions, and, with minimal teacher input, work

out which is best. Some scholars describe this ethos as “sticky probing,” intended to maintain *mental* student engagement. The research team of Kawanaka, Stigler, and Hiebert (1999) evocatively described this process in the case of mathematics lessons.

- Teachers view their classroom role as *delivering a performance*. Each lesson, rehearsed and timed in advance, involves delivery of information, explanations, and student activities with clear stages and a sense of pace. Some researchers use words like “virtuoso” and “polished.”
- When students respond verbally to questions, teachers react as follows: The teacher rarely praises a correct response; he moves on to whatever’s next. He rarely criticizes an incorrect response; he asks the other students to critique it. Errors are interpreted as evidence not of failure and loss of self-esteem, but rather of what needs to be fully understood and learned.

Finally, ethnographers such as Lewis (1995) have given enormous attention to preschools in East Asia, especially those in Japan, during the youngsters’ first months there. This period of time is very largely given over to training the pupils *how to go about learning in classrooms*. The focus is on pupils’ practicing of expected behaviors (such as how to sit at a desk) and classroom routines, leading to gains in concentration, self-monitoring, and cooperation. Subsequently, say the researchers, classrooms function with admirable smoothness and, notably, without authoritarian measures being needed from teachers to maintain order, leaving generous stretches of time for instruction.

The knowledge-focused approach is discussed in Confucian terms because research findings from China (and Japan) provide a prototypical demonstration of it. Confucius did not invent the knowledge-focused approach; he famously applied it. So it is more useful to regard it as an expression of *societal collectivism*, including collectivism’s association with high power distance.

The learner-focused approach: Socratic, individualist

The learner-focused approach to instruction originally was largely associated with one cultural region—the Anglo-Saxon West, especially the US and UK—from which it has been spreading to other regions including East Asia. This approach is convincingly on display in the preschool, elementary, and secondary classrooms of self-proclaimed “progressive” and “child-centered” schools, which provide many sharp contrasts with prototypical knowledge-focused classrooms.

The philosophical foundation of the learner-focused approach is traceable to Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle (collectively, 469–322 BCE), that triumvirate of Greek thinkers whose influence on Western thought is immeasurable. During their era, it was believed that a human’s five senses are too inaccurate to correctly observe the external world. Accurate information was said to be available *inside oneself*. Influenced by a belief in mystical insight originating with Pythagoras (an exact contemporary of Confucius), Plato taught that there exists an eternal “Real” world of pure concepts that are perfect

prototypes for everything in the day-to-day world, and that each individual could gain access to that “Real” world *by means of contemplation*.

From that beginning, and in spite of the world-transforming rise of empirical science, Western beliefs about how one can acquire reliable knowledge have always been warm to an individual’s having *insights* or *intuitions*. (The pinnacle of this tendency occurred during the 19th century, when some of the West’s most celebrated public philosophers, notably Herbert Spencer, held that instincts are never mistaken, and that thinking, *by itself*, is a valid means of scientific investigation.) It’s true that empirical research, trial and error, careful calculation, and learning from experts are all thriving in the West today, but this fact has not displaced the faith of many that their own quick intuition is a trustworthy and far more efficient path to certain knowledge.

Socrates has emerged as the icon of the learner-focused approach. An equal-opportunity doubter, he publicly questioned the beliefs of just about everyone he spoke with, regardless of their social status. Socrates gained fame for claiming, after using a series of questions to cleverly steer someone to recognize a fact, that the latter’s new knowledge had been self-generated, which implied that the fact had always been *internally* accessible. This claim expresses a foundational assumption of the learner-focused approach: Whatever is worth knowing has its origin, not in someone of high social status, not in a learned sage or venerated text—all of which may be, and *should be*, doubted—but in the individual’s own curiosity, exploration, and reasoning.

The instructor–student relationship commended in learner-focused classrooms could hardly be more different from that of knowledge-focused classrooms. A learner-focused instructor generally is *in* authority (learning process), but in terms of the knowledge he usually does not need to be *an* authority, that is, he does not need *thorough* content mastery. The stance adopted by many instructors is that of an advanced fellow learner, signaled by a less than fully authoritative tone and a disinclination to dictate exactly *what* to learn and *how* to learn it. In an individualistic culture, each student’s uniqueness must be encouraged through the offering of choices: elective courses, optional readings, term paper topics, and so forth. Regarding virtue, instructors are not expected to demonstrate parent-like responsibility, and (except in faith-based schools) are prohibited from influencing their students’ religious/moral convictions, that is, beyond basic etiquette and social deportment. Such matters are entirely the responsibility of each student’s parents.

In learner-focused classrooms, the intent is that each student will gain new knowledge via her own inquiries, in a manner and to an extent driven by her preferences and inborn aptitude. Instructors are expected to adapt content and process to account for each student’s uniqueness by means of a method known as “differentiated instruction.” Instructors must instruct, but equally or more desirable for them are the roles of individualizer, friendly guide, mentor, and motivator.

The role of motivator introduces us to the first identifying feature of a learner-focused classroom. Generally, the culture in which instructor, student, school, and family are immersed regards students who do well in school with warm approval. But that’s different from a culture’s regarding as *deeply virtuous* the persistence needed to gain mastery. Consequently, some students—often many of them—lack motivation to learn, so it

must be induced by their instructor. Thus, an identifying feature of a learner-focused classroom is that the instructor puts creative effort into drawing students to become “intrinsically” motivated. The result often is an undisguised attempt to make learning enjoyable or fun, ridiculed as “edutainment” by knowledge-focused advocates.

A second identifying feature of learner-focused classrooms is that much encouragement and opportunity are given to each student, even the youngest pupils, to individually produce something creative: artistic, written, verbal, musical, and so forth. In the case of the very young, virtually *any* result receives warm praise and public display at school and at home, suggesting that the goal is less about learning to create skillfully, more about gaining the habit of expressing one’s individuality.

A third identifying feature of these classrooms is that the effectiveness of each instructor is evaluated not merely by those in authority (department chairs, administrators) but also by the learners. In the case of younger pupils, this occurs indirectly: The evaluations of the authorities generally assess the degree to which the pupils appear “engaged,” evidenced by *visible behavior* such as contributing to projects, asking, answering, and generally being energetic. The quietly attentive pupil is liable to be viewed as “passive,” which can lower her instructor’s evaluation.

In the case of older students, evaluations of their instructor often are direct: They complete a survey in which they rate various aspects of their instructor’s performance and effectiveness. Such evaluations often are sanctioned by the authorities, made available online, and factored into decisions about retention and promotion. (Thus, an incentive is created for instructors to try to be “liked,” largely absent in knowledge-focused classrooms.) Finally, note that in educational institutions, instructor evaluations usually consider whether learners perform well in exams; but in business contexts, such as training by an outside consultant, it’s common for the evaluation to be based solely on the learners’ opinions, with no assessment of how well the learners learned.

Ethnographic research has been yielding additional understanding of classroom cultures that are characteristic of the United States. For example:

- Relatively didactic approaches have been found in the US, especially in mathematics classes. Teachers tend to begin by stating concepts, definitions, and procedures, then insure in various ways that the students grasp these, and finally set them to practicing how to apply what was taught. Teachers ask questions that require “yes/no” or short answers; very rarely do they call on students to pose solutions to problems and expound their reasoning. The researchers Hess and Azuma (1991) described the ethos as “quick and snappy,” intended to maintain *visible* student engagement.
- Teachers conceive of their classroom role as *facilitative*, that is, as arranging activities—which include the teacher’s delivery of content—that ideally encourage student curiosity, independent inquiry, and even disagreement with the teacher or text. A teacher’s role is flexible, modestly scripted in advance, and evidences spontaneity, enthusiasm, openness, and friendliness.
- When students respond verbally to questions, teachers react as follows: Correct answers immediately yield praise. Incorrect answers rarely yield direct disapproval, which would endanger the student’s self-esteem. Correct answers including extended explanations are usually supplied by the teacher, not by students. Since

errors are interpreted as evidence of failure, the underlying objective is for correct answers to be supplied as often as possible.

The learner-focused approach is probably associated with Socrates because he attempted to persuade learners to rely on their own inner resources, not to accept what powerful others told them. But Socrates didn't invent the learner-focused approach; he applied a mindset arising in Greece during his era. So it is more useful to regard it as an expression of *societal individualism*, including individualism's association with low power distance.

The key differences between East Asian and Western assumptions about child development are summarized in Table 1.

Children's development and learning in homes

The ethnographic record provides a veritable trove of data contrasting East Asia and the West (mainly the United States) with respect to how parents and other caretakers expect newborns to be molded into adults. Since this entry construes pedagogy broadly, not merely in terms of classrooms, it turns now to a review of key differences in the values and concepts that parents *think with* when they think about raising their children.

Assumptions and beliefs about children

For Westerners, and especially Americans, a common assumption is that each child enters the world possessing certain qualities and aptitudes—his unique “potentials”—and that a critical goal of growth and development is to identify and nurture these so they become actualized. That an individual has one or more inborn potentials is assumed to mean that any other aptitudes are comparatively weak. One gains stature in the eyes of associates, and in his own eyes, by applying his abilities to their fullest extent. If an aptitude falters (e.g., due to exam failure), he is vulnerable to embarrassment because aptitudes are assumed to be fixed and resistant to improvement. This assumption also reduces his openness to constructive criticism.

For East Asians, a fundamental assumption about each child—and about every human of any age—is that *he/she is malleable, that is, capable of improvement in terms of both character and abilities*. East Asians view humans as being in a state of perpetual change, which most likely is grounded in the tenet of Taoism that one should be fluid and yielding so as to maintain harmony with the universe. No one is barred by inborn qualities or aptitudes from attaining a desired state of being. Equally important, a state of being's desirability emerges from community consensus, which itself is changeable. One gains in stature in the eyes of her associates, and in her own eyes, by being receptive to information enabling her to improve in consensually determined ways.

This critical difference between East Asia and the West aligns well with a difference in the individual psychologies of achieving and lagging students, which arose from studies led by Carol S. Dweck of Stanford University. She found that students who believe

Table 1 Key differences between East Asia and the West in the assumptions, values, and patterns of thought about child development.

<i>East Asia</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>West (especially US)</i>
Transmit knowledge, inculcate virtue	Purpose	Motivate learners' desire to learn
Promote content mastery, moral perfection	Objectives	Provide choices; foster curiosity, creativity
The One Who Knows; moral guide	Instructor	Advanced fellow learner, friendly mentor
Shaped by learning content; directive	Methods	Shaped by learners' capacities; facilitative
Learners <i>will be</i> engaged mentally	Expectation	Learners <i>will need to be encouraged</i> to be engaged
Authorities; focus on learning	Evaluation of instructor by	Learners and authorities; focus on engagement
<i>East Asia</i>	<i>Homes</i>	<i>West (especially US)</i>
A human is fluid, malleable	Assumption	A human is unique, has fixed aptitudes
Attain moral perfection in ingroup's eyes	Why learn	Understand, control external world
Cultivate effort, attain virtue and academic prowess	Objective	Cultivate potentials and well-roundedness
Passionate about learning, <i>hao xue xin</i> ("heart and mind for wanting to learn")	Emotions	Rational about learning, "critical thinking"
One's <i>collective self</i> expects to learn	Agency	One's <i>individual self</i> may choose to learn
As shaped by one's parents, other seniors	Direction	As steered by one's interests, potentials
<i>Enabler</i> of one's future potential	Achievement	<i>Enabled by</i> one's inborn potential

intelligence is inborn and stable tend to perform poorly, while others who believe intelligence is malleable and improvable usually perform well. Dweck (2006) termed these beliefs "fixed mindset" and "growth mindset." Her findings about the influence of the two beliefs on students' approaches to learning, failure, and challenges are similar to what ethnographers have described about East Asians and Americans.

Beliefs about, and attitudes toward, learning

Jin Li of Brown University, who as an adult came from China to the United States, undertook during the early 2000s to determine what "learning" means to people in her native

and adopted cultures. One of her objectives was to obtain an *emic* (insider's) understanding of folk beliefs about learning, rather than to bring an outsider's perspectives and categories to her task. The first step of her complex procedure was to ask American university students to free-associate "learn" and "learning," and to ask similar students in China to free-associate *xue xi*. Thus generated were lists of nearly 500 terms for each culture, which further processing reduced to about 200 core terms per culture. Striking differences emerged from these two lists.

For the Americans, the top five words and phrases were (1) study, (2) thinking, (3) teaching, (4) school, and (5) education. Among the others were (9) critical thinking, and (11) discovery. Li (2003) reports that, among the initial list of nearly 500 English terms, not one referred to hard work or lifelong learning, and there were no proverbs about learning. The list of 200 English core terms lacked calls to action and expressions of emotion. But it did include many references to thinking and mental processes, and to external factors such as resources and institutions.

For the Chinese, the top five words and phrases were (1) keep on learning as long as you live, (2) read extensively, (3) learn assiduously, (4) read books, and (5) diligence in one's learning. Other noteworthy items included (9) study as if thirsting or hungering, (10) there is no boundary to learning, and (13) take great pains to study. Many Chinese-generated terms evidenced an expectation of persevering hard work, a clear call for action, and emotions such as desire, passion, and intensity. This list also included proverbs that extolled learning, such as "If you work at it hard enough, you can grind an iron rod into a needle." Li prominently references a native Chinese learning concept, *hao xue xin*, "heart and mind for wanting to learn."

The basic objective of children's learning

Several researchers point to a contrast between the assumptions held by Westerners (again, mainly Americans) and East Asians about why children—and adults—should do the work of learning.

For Americans, the goal is *to understand the external world* including not only its observable features, which are changeable, but also, and more importantly, the presumably stable forces and factors that give rise to and explain the observable features. The reason for amassing such knowledge is *to gain control of the external world* in order to better serve community needs as well as one's own. This objective can be traced to Plato, Aristotle, and other classical Greek thinkers.

For East Asians, the goal is *to cultivate one's self to a state of moral perfection, with "self" and "moral" referencing one's relations with others*. This goal is not about "self-actualization" as conceived by Abraham Maslow, but about harmonious, supportive, and virtuous relations with parents, family members, friends, and those above oneself in the hierarchy (e.g., teachers). The reason one amasses knowledge is to gain perfection in the eyes of others to whom one is close.

Differences in children's motivation to learn

An especially insightful conclusion emerging from the research is that Western notions of student motivation, captured by the terms “intrinsic” and “extrinsic,” are not applicable in East Asia.

The Western worldview assumes that “agency,” defined as that through which an objective is identified and attained, belongs to individual human beings, each one of whom is viewed as self-directed and separate from others, including others with whom he has close relationships. A child possesses agency, too; consequently, he needs to *personally desire* to do the activities that will propel him toward academic knowledge. In other words, he needs to possess “intrinsic” motivation, otherwise the activities are likely to be poorly done and his learning will be shallow. A companion belief is that “extrinsic” (carrot-and-stick) motivation is only temporarily effective because it rarely transforms a student's deep, enduring desires. This is why a feature of learner-focused classrooms is that instructors put creative effort into *intrinsically* motivating students.

The East Asian case could hardly be more different. The crux of the difference concerns the meaning of “self,” which in the West designates a property of each separate person. Researchers in East Asia have concluded that, there, “self” is far better understood as a property of an ingroup, the principal example of which is the family. Thus, the capacity for agency belongs far more to one's ingroup than to one's own self. Put differently, “one's own self” has a *collective* referent: the members (including oneself) of one's family, who participate in a relationship characterized by *interdependence* as well as harmony and a clearly delineated hierarchy. In this context, then, “personally desire” cannot have the meaning it has in the West, nor can a Western concept such as “freedom of choice” be about any lone individual. Desire and choice originate collectively.

Research in 1999 by Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper of Stanford signaled a revision in how Asians are viewed. They found that, for Anglo-American students, individual choice enhanced motivation, while choices made for them by peers or authority figures led to less motivation. But Asian American students were most motivated by choices that had been made for them by peers or authority figures, that is, more so than by their own choices. Around this same time, other studies also were concluding that “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” are not applicable in an Asian context.

The use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) devices has yielded confirming findings about Asian mindsets and motivation. In one study completed in Beijing by Zhu, Zhang, Fan, and Han (2007), Western and Chinese subjects were connected to such a machine. As the control condition, researchers asked them to state a judgment about a public figure. Then they asked each subject for a judgment about him-/herself. Relative to the control condition, self-judgments yielded strongly increased activations in each one's medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), a brain area linked to social behavior and personality; both Chinese and Western subjects showed high mPFC activity. The researchers then asked each one to offer a judgment about his/her mother. During their mother-judgments, Chinese subjects again showed high mPFC activity; Western subjects showed none. This finding supports previous ethnographic conclusions that a

distinguishing feature of East Asian cultures is high interdependence, with “self,” and thus motivation, having a *collective* (family) referent.

Differences in parents’ objectives for child-raising

In the West, and especially the United States, parents assume that their newborn has arrived with a “given” set of aptitudes, that is, potentials that, for now, lie dormant. Parents’ responsibility is to insure that their infant’s potentials are discovered and activated. The assumed list of possible potentials *includes* academic prowess, but does not highlight or privilege it. An infant’s potentials may point in *any* direction: finance, sports, math, music, engineering, and so forth. So he is introduced to a diverse range of events and activities, which provide opportunities for hidden potentials to emerge, and equip him to metamorphose into a “well-rounded” adult. A child is a “project” for his parents, who become diagnosticians and enablers of inborn aptitudes, providers of myriad experiences, and cheerleaders. Because awareness of “self” as a separate, worthy, and assertive being is essential, they also become enhancers and protectors of the child’s self-esteem.

Western parents view doing well in school as desirable, but research shows that they tend to have a relaxed attitude about academic excellence because single-minded focus on grades could endanger the child’s self-esteem and well-roundedness. Creativity, understood as the generation of something different from anything done previously, needs to be drawn out and fostered, for it is a high expression of personal uniqueness. Although delighted with top grades, Western (and especially American) parents are known to be tolerant of grades that are mediocre.

East Asian parents rarely regard their infant as possessing inborn aptitudes that they must discover. Rather, they assume that she is a malleable being and, like a Bonsai tree, will prove responsive to their shaping and cultivation. Their responsibility is to authoritatively nurture and guide her into a state of moral perfection, which encompasses both behavioral and performance objectives. The former concerns harmonious interrelationships within the collective. The latter concerns academic prowess, assumed to result from the child’s persevering effort, which parents must support, encourage—and demand. Whereas Western parents assume that high potential enables academic achievement, Asian parents assume that high academic achievement enables potential. For Asian parents, introducing their child to a diverse range of activities and events in pursuit of well-roundedness holds little interest. But parents do share virtually the full range of their own social activities with the child, fostering her social sensibility and adeptness.

East Asian parents view excelling academically as essential, complemented by their lack of interest in their child’s sports proficiency, extracurricular participation, creative endeavors, or even assistance with chores around the house. To become an outstanding student is the child’s principal responsibility, aided by her parents’ support and expectations. Researchers conclude, however, that East Asian mothers are not unrealistic in their aspirations; this might be related to their belief that the child’s performance is a function of effort, not of aptitude. Other researchers liken an East Asian mother to a coach, whose job is to train and push, not to protect from strain.

Reviewed in this entry have been only some of the findings about children's development at the hands of teachers and parents in East Asia and the West. Educators and citizens on each side of this cultural divide have abundant resources with which to learn more about the other.

SEE ALSO: Cognitive Styles across Cultures; Cultural Assumptions in China and the United States; Intercultural Communication in the Classroom; Intercultural Training for Educators; Training for Study Abroad Programs

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