Theory Connections, Reflections & Applications
Tuesday, May 31, 2:30-3:45 PM

Chair: Inge Steglitz
Presenters: Barbara Kappler, Bruce LaBrack, Inge Steglitz, Gayle Woodruff
Facilitators: Shelley Smith, Gavin Sanderson, and Anne D’Angelo

AGENDA

(1) Welcome and introductions (Inge)

(2) Session overview (Inge)

(3) Reminder about evaluations (Inge)

(4) Introduce TCRA Web resource (Barbara)

(5) Exposition of sample theories (5 minutes each)
   a. Cultural Adaptation, Culture Shock, and the “Curves of Adjustment” (Bruce)
   b. Student Retention (Barbara)
   c. Face Negotiation (Gayle)
   d. Perspective-taking (Inge)

(6) Audience participation (all, with facilitators)
   In small groups, discuss what theory you have recently used to help you
   a. Plan an event
   b. Solve a problem
   c. Improve your practice

   Name the theory/ies and explain how it/they helped you.

(7) Debrief: collect names of theories and examples of their impact

(8) Conclusion (all)

   Summarize and refer to disciplines/areas whose theories are of particular interest to IE:
   • (IC) Communication
   • (Social) Psychology
   • (Cultural) Anthropology
   • Organizational Development/Communication/Behavior
   • Student Development
   • Adoption of Innovation
   • Others?

We should probably have two for each of these since we may have more than three tables.
• Group A: analyze existing practice in terms of underlying/implicit theory: how might awareness of underlying theory help improve practice (I could do this on pre-departure orientation for U.S. undergrads – applying adult learning theory to this – have an MSU example program I could use) [Inge, other ideas?]
- Group B: reflect on and apply sample theory (e.g., how might "communication styles" theory influence programming for international students?) [Barbara, others?]
- Group C: identify theory that might help address a case problem [Bruce, Gayle?]
Theory Connections, Reflections, and Applications for International Educators

NAFSA: Association of International Educators 63rd Annual Conference, Vancouver, BC

Notes from Bruce La Brack, PhD, related to the Theory Connections Entry
'Cultural Adaptations, Culture Shock and the “Curves of Adjustment”
<https://www.nafsa.org/resourcelibrary/default.aspx?id=20162>

Growth of Theory: Intercultural Sojourning as described in selected literature

1951 Anthropologist Cora DuBois first uses the term "culture shock" publicly to describe the disorienting experience that many anthropologist face when entering different cultures, although Ruth Benedict may have been the original source.

1954 Kalervo Oberg expands DuBois’ term to be applicable to all people who travel abroad into new cultures (<www.smc.edu/academics/internationaled/Pdf/cultureshockarticle.pdf>). Postulated “honeymoon-crisis-recovery-adjustment model.” Termed culture shock an "occupational disease" that international travelers face, complete with symptoms (e.g., feeling of helplessness, home-sickness, irritability, etc.).


1963 Gullahorn & Gullahorn discuss the “U-curve” model for initial entry and continue the curve post-sojourn. They propose a “W-Shaped model of intercultural sojournning” in: An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. Journal of Social Issues, 19 (3), 33-47


1977 Janet Bennett suggests that culture shock is but a variation and subset of reactions caused by significant change in “Transition Shock: Putting Culture Shock in Perspective,” International and Intercultural Communication Annual, 4, Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association (December)


1991 G. Hofstede revises the original Culture’s Consequences as Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, McGraw-Hill

2001 Young Yun Kim publishes compendium of adaptation theory in Becoming Intercultural : An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Sage Publication

2001 Colleen Ward, Stephen Bochner, and Adrian Furnham provide a superb review of study abroad and international student adaptation research as part of The Psychology of Culture Shock 2nd, ed. Philadelphia, PA: Routledge (includes extensive bibliography on 'culture shock' and reentry shock).
Assumptions and Variations Related to the Original Concept

U-Curve Model of Cross-Cultural Adjustment
Lyssgaard (1955) studying 198 Norwegian Fulbright students: "Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a 'crisis' in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community." (1955: 51)

W-Curve Model of Cross-Cultural Adjustment
An extension of the U-curve model, first posited by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963): The W-curve model suggests that sojourners face a second U-curve of adjustment when they re-enter their home culture.

Common Assumptions About the U-Curve Model
1. There is one main pattern of adjustment that most people experience.
2. The model can be applied to various kinds of sojourners.
3. There are fixed times over which the U-curve typically occurs.
4. The model has empirical support.

Disconcerting Facts, (Lack of) Empirical Backing, and other Criticisms

Disconcerting Fact
1. A certain percentage of students (10-15%) always report no experience of 'culture shock' going or coming back!
2. Patterns of adjustment are significantly and persistently different for certain groups (Global Nomads, TCK's, heritage-seeking students, children of recent immigrants, minorities, etc.)!
3. When problems are encountered, their severity is relatively unpredictable; at times, they may extend over years—especially post-reentry!

Empirical Backing (or lack thereof)
- Church (1982): "U-curve support is: 'weak, inconclusive and over-generalized'" (542).
- Black & Mendenhall (1991): "The lack of methodological rigor in many of the studies makes generalizing their results problematic." "a rejection or acceptance of the U-curve by scholars or cross-cultural trainers would be premature." (231)

Top Conceptual Criticisms
1. Vagueness of 'phases' especially Initial Euphoria ('Honeymoon')
2. Simplicity of the Model
3. One Pattern Assumption/Lacks Allowance for Variability
4. Doubts about General Applicability & Usefulness

Recent Dismissal in Academia...
"The U-curve has been on-trial now for almost 40 years, and the time is long overdue to render a verdict. Despite its popular and intuitive appeal, the U-curve model of sojourner adjustment should be rejected." (Ward, 1998: 290)
Why have ‘Curves’ found Popularity in Practice?
“How has the model survived conceptual criticisms and empirical arguments?” (Ward et al, 2001: 82)
1. it is intuitively appealing
2. it has occasional support in research
3. there are currently few alternatives.
4. it has perceived face value for CCT purposes
5. it is typically presented as a overall package with ‘culture shock’ and stages of adjustment
6. the controversy and lack of backing have been generally overlooked due to a ‘photocopying effect’
   because the models have been used over a long time and in many contexts (familiarity = intuitive validity!)

Moving Forward with the U-Curve: Suggestions

Until a new paradigm and/or models emerge, study abroad advisors and international exchange professionals are likely to continue to use the “U” and “W” curves. To insure proper representation of the U-Curves in the literature and in cross-cultural training there needs to be an acknowledgement that:

- there is a continuing lack of supporting research
- there has been an overt dismissal of the models by many theorists
- there is a high degree of variability and individuality in adjustment patterns over time
- an extreme variety of patterns are possible, and have been documented in studies
- the greatest variability seems to be in the initial period of euphoria (honeymoon stage) and this often remains unacknowledged
- the applicability of the models to all sojourners is severely limited

In short, if educators continue to use these models for their heuristic value, there needs to be an honest discussion of what these models do and do not adequately cover. Specifically, the ‘curves’ models are neither predictive nor accurately descriptive of many (most?) sojourners’ experiences when adjusting abroad. They are, in fact, blunt, if not, misleading, characterizations of behavior and psychological states—if taken at face value! Be cautioned (and caution others) when referencing these models!

Source
Much appreciation to Kate Berardo whose MA thesis, “The U-curve of Adjustment: A study in the evolution and evaluation of a 50-year old model, Luton Business School: University of Bedfordshire, UK. (2006) and our subsequent discussions over the past five years inspired me to reevaluate and modify my usage of a model I had used uncritically for decades...which is why the constant interaction between theory and practice should always be an ongoing and integral part of building and testing intercultural communication theory and preparing students to go abroad. Kurt Lewin noted: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory", which is why the ‘practice-to theory-to practice’ feedback loop is such an important part of the research and training process in study abroad.
Theory Connections, Reflections, and Applications Session

(Steglitz presentation)

Perspective-taking: from child development theory (e.g. Lawrence Kurdek: developmental psych; Michael Barnett: interpersonal communication)

– a cognitive ability that allows people to infer other people’s cognition; that is, thoughts, intentions, motivations, attitudes, etc.

Gist:

• concentric circles from child developing this ability within a local/domestic culture where frames of reference are known →

• this will, of course, be problematic when multicultural contexts are encountered where the frames of reference are suddenly different →

• need for perspective-taking ability in multicultural contexts: ICPT

In child development: first a child takes “mother’s” perspective in a general kind of way, then learns to differentiate various contexts: e.g., mother in a good mood, not so good mood, etc.

Development of ICPT is similar, becomes more differentiated: e.g., “Germans,” becomes: German men or women, older vs. younger Germans

Recently, Chickering & Braskamp have claimed that many developmental tasks of college students have become much more challenging in modern environments that require that we “understand, empathize, and communicate with persons who differ dramatically in national origin, ethnicity, religious, and spiritual orientations, as well as in race and gender” (2009, p. 27).

Application examples for ICPT

General applicability in seeing where students are at and helping them to develop a more differentiated way to take the perspective of culturally different others.

“What would you do?” exercise in AL 200:

• relative ease of “perspective-taking” in known cultural contexts, but what happens when that context changes?
• First: change context domestically: how does our answer change depending on whom you’re talking with?
• Then: change context culturally: is a grandma a grandma a grandma?
• Domestic exercise shows students that they are engaging in perspective-taking, they know how to do it in familiar contexts, don’t even think about it. –
• Then need to extrapolate and problematize this automatic process: bring it to awareness and show key role of culture in this process.

Concept of “poverty” – not monolithic.

• Use in predeparture orientation for students going to less developed regions of the world.
• Students brainstorm words they associate with “poverty” (using “Associative Group Analysis” Szalay et al.) – create concept map – then read World Development Report 2000/01:
• For example, U.S. individuals may be perceived as poor by members from other cultures because many of them don’t live near/with family.
References


