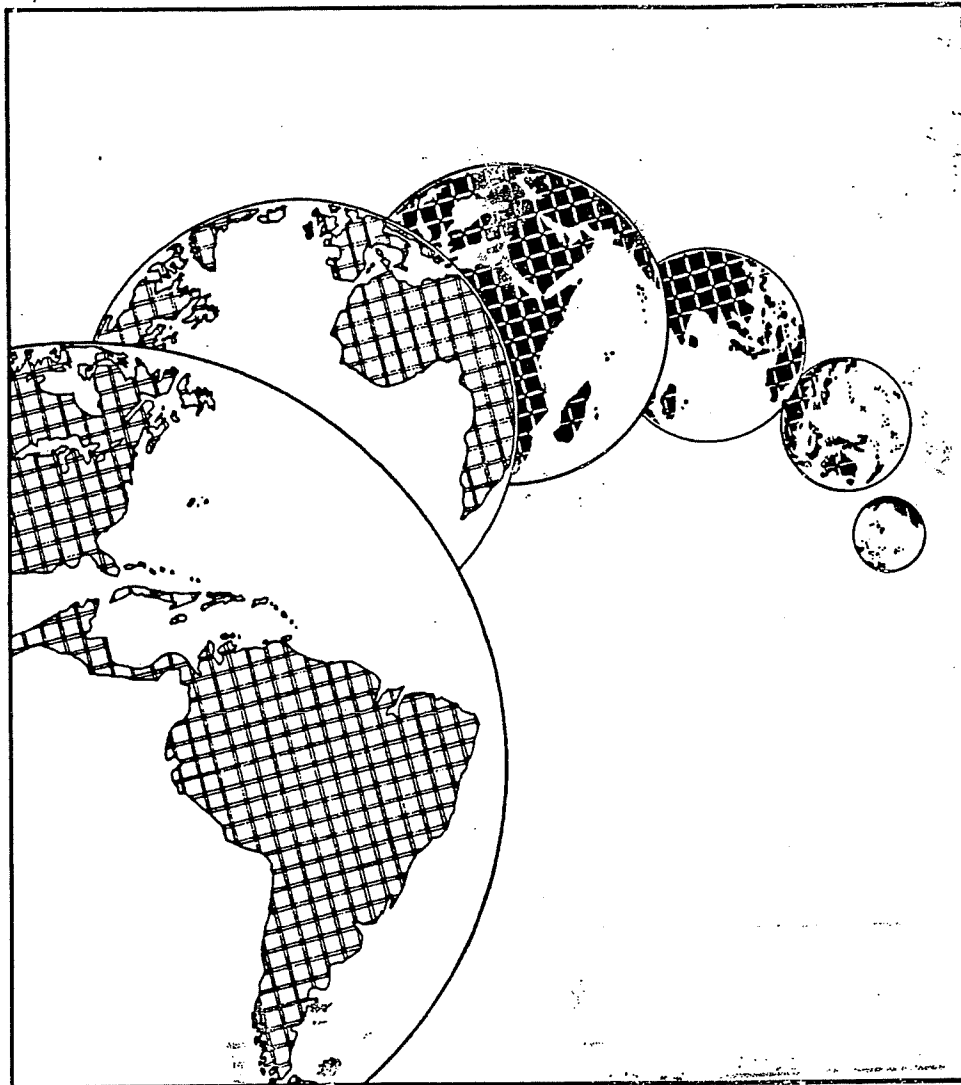


Latin America and the Caribbean from a Global Perspective



A Resource Guide for Teachers

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Cross-Cultural Awareness

RETRAIIDOS

Rationale

In an era where business transactions take place within an intensely competitive global economy, success will increasingly be defined in terms of cross-cultural understanding. This will require not only speaking the language of the customer, but also developing a deeper sensitivity to, and an appreciation for, the values, beliefs, and customs of the host culture. This lesson illustrates how a lack of cross-cultural understanding might affect a business transaction between an American and a Latin American businessman.

Objectives

The student will:

1. explain the concept of cross-cultural awareness;
2. identify cultural factors that might affect international business transactions in Latin America;
3. evaluate the importance of cross-cultural understanding to doing business in other countries.

Key Concepts

Culture, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, interpersonal space

Infusion Area

Sociology, current history, Latin American history, economics, drama, creative writing

Materials Needed

"Wish I Was There"

Tape measure

Masking tape

"Things to Watch Out For"

"Skit Sheet"

Suggested Time

Three class periods

Learning Activities

Suggested Activities for Day 1:

1. Initiate lesson by reading (or writing on the board) the following statement:

"You can buy in any language,...You sell in the language of the customer."

Robert L. Carothers, Chancellor
Minnesota State University System

Ask students to respond to the statement and explore its possible meanings.

Remind students that because we live in a competitive global economy, many American firms today do business in many countries throughout the world. Ask students if they can think of reasons that might attract American companies to Latin America. Next, ask them if they can think of some of the problems an American businessman might encounter in doing business in a Latin American country. List and discuss these briefly with the class.

2. Distribute copies of "Wish I Was There" and read aloud in class. Provoke discussion by asking the following questions:
 - a. Who is Dave and what is he doing in Colombia? Who is Mr. Martinez?
 - b. According to Dave, what happened during the meeting with Mr. Martinez?
 - c. What were some of the specific things that irritated Dave?
 - d. How would you have felt if you had been in Dave's shoes?
 - e. How might you explain Mr. Martinez's behavior during the meeting?
 - f. What went wrong here? Why wasn't Dave successful in closing the deal?
3. Distribute "Things to Watch Out For" and review it with the class. Ask students to read the material carefully and answer each of the questions in writing. Ask students to complete this assignment at home and bring it to class the next day.

Suggested Activities for Day 2:

1. Before class, measure a distance of 20 inches on the floor and mark each end with a piece of masking tape. Next, place a second piece of masking tape on the same line. This spot should be 10 inches from the opposite end of the line:

*xxxxxxxxxxxx*xxxxxxxxxxx*
0" 10" 20"

Ask for two student volunteers to come to the front of the class. Ask one student to be the "buyer" and the other to be the "seller." Inform the "seller" that his/her goal will be to sell the "buyer" a revolutionary new product that will make her/him the most popular student in school. Ask the "seller" to stand on the spot indicated by 0" in the diagram above. Take the "buyer" aside and ask him/her to move gradually from the 20" spot to the 10" spot during the course of the transaction. Ask the rest of the class to observe the conversation carefully. Allow about five minutes for the transaction to develop. Debrief by asking audience to share their observations about what happened. Ask each of the two volunteers to share their feelings and reaction to the situation.

Inform the class that a male raised in the northeastern United States stands approximately 18-20 inches away when talking face to face to a man he does not know very well; when talking to a woman, the distance increases about four inches. In parts of Latin America, however, the comfortable distance for conversation is 10-13 inches. Often in Latin America, touching is more common; North Americans are often disturbed by how close Latin Americans stand when they converse. They, in turn, complain that people in the United States tend to be "retraídos"--distant, aloof, cold. Ask students to consider in what ways this might have presented a problem for Dave and Mr. Martinez.

Review and discuss student responses to "Things to Watch Out For."

2. Inform the class that today they will focus on how Mr. Martinez might have reacted to Dave's behavior during their business transaction. Ask students to pair off and develop a skit in writing that will be the equivalent of Dave's letter to his wife. The skit will take place at Mr. Martinez's home on the night of September 19 (the day the meeting with Dave took place). The conversation will take place between Mr. Martinez and his wife, Elsa, as they unwind from the day and prepare to go to sleep.

Distribute "Skit Sheets" and allow students to work on their projects. Inform students that they should be prepared to share their skits with their classmates on the following day.

Suggested Activities for Day 3:

1. Ask students to read and/or role play their skits in class. Discuss, clarify, emphasize the dynamics of cross-cultural communication as they surface and you see fit.

Conclude the lesson with a discussion based on the following questions:

- a. What are some things that persons doing business abroad need to know to be successful?
- b. How did lack of cross-cultural understanding affect the transaction between Dave and Mr. Martinez?
- c. How might companies better prepare their representatives for doing business in other nations?
- d. What additional ideas might you add to the statement: "You can buy in any language,...You sell in the language of the customer."

Assessment

Working in pairs, the students will write a skit that illustrates the problem of cross-cultural communication from the perspective of another culture.

Additional Activities

Contact representatives of transnational corporations to address the cross-cultural aspects of doing business in other nations.

References

Fersh, Seymour (ed.). *Learning about Peoples and Cultures*. Evanston, Ill.: McDougal, Littell, and Company, 1974.

Rothman, Robert. "Create 'National Endowment' for Foreign Studies, Coalition Urges." *Education Week*, 13 December 1989.

"Wish I Was There"

Bogota, September 19

Dear Marge,

I can't tell you how much I miss you and the kids. I've only been gone for two weeks and it seems like two months. I'd give anything for an all-American burger right now!

Everything is so different here. I was really excited when I was promoted to the international division, but my experiences doing business in Latin America for the past week make me wish I could have my old job back. After getting the run-around for two days, I finally met with Mr. Martinez from Guatavita Textiles and the entire meeting turned out to be a disaster. I can't imagine how these people can make money and stay in business down here. This outfit would probably not last a week in the States.

Imagine this Marge: I was told the company's business hours were from 8 to 6 and that Mr. Martinez would be there to see me. So, I got there extra early and waited for him for an hour and fifteen minutes. Can you imagine? His secretary did her best to cover for him and tried to calm me down by offering me "tinto"--their word for brewed coffee, and --would you believe?--cigarettes. This only increased my frustration.

Martinez finally strolls in at 9:15 unaware that there was anything wrong. Are you ready for this? He greets me as if I was an old high school buddy, tells his secretary to get me more coffee and makes me wait another ten minutes!

By the time I finally got in to see Martinez, I was really tense and irritated. I was especially uncomfortable by how physically close he got to me during our discussion. Martinez's easy-going style gave way to visible hostility as the meeting progressed. Needless to say, the deal fell through. Losing a half a million dollars in new business is going to make the folks at the home office very upset. If what happened today is any indication of how these people do business, this market is likely to prove tougher than I thought.

Wish me luck. After all, tomorrow is another day.

Love to you and the kids,

Dave

Things To Watch Out For

Communicating across cultures involves much more than merely speaking the language of the host culture. Since cultures often differ in their perceptions of time and space, in what is considered appropriate behavior, dress, values, and gestures, it is important to know as much as possible about a culture before one can expect to communicate effectively within it. This is particularly crucial for individuals attempting to do business abroad.

The following are three important factors to watch out for when interacting with another culture:

Cultural Context

Often, when persons interact with another culture they tend to perceive new information and experiences within the framework of their own cultural context rather than that of the one being studied or encountered.

In what ways did "cultural context" affect Dave's meeting with Mr. Martinez?

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism has to do with the tendency of people to evaluate other cultures according to the standards of their own culture. This usually involves the belief that one's homeland, people, language, and customs are not only different but also superior to those of other people --ours is "the culture"; theirs is "a culture."

Is there evidence that Dave was ethnocentric in his description of the meeting with Mr. Martinez? Could Mr. Martinez have been ethnocentric in his reaction to Dave as the meeting progressed?

Interpersonal Space

Cultures often exhibit differences in the amount of physical distance/space between people that allows them to be comfortable in their interactions with each other.

In what ways did interpersonal space affect the meeting between Dave and Mr. Martinez?

SKIT SHEET

TITLE OF SKIT:

CHARACTERS: Eduardo Martinez, description:

Elsa Martinez, description:

DESCRIPTION OF OPENING SCENE:

DIALOGUE: