

Does Classroom Culture Vary Across Different Educational Levels? A comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Classroom culture knowledge is essential for researchers and educators as it gives important tips for learning environment and outcomes. Knowing the elements of classroom culture, it is easier to interpret the classroom practice and learning elements. With the rising importance of classroom culture in the last decade, the aim of this study was to explore differences and similarities about cultural elements of two classrooms from different educational levels: K-12, and Graduate. These classrooms were both in the United States of America, Indiana. With a description of the settings, participants, instruments, and procedures, the results are presented in the article signalling the different formations of K-12 and graduate classrooms. The two classrooms shared culture of the same authority; however, K-12 classroom was found to be more libertarian.

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Keywords:

Classroom culture; educational level; learning environment

Introduction

Although investigation into *classroom culture* [CC] had not been largely executed until within the past ten years (Allard & Cooper, 2001), research in this field has suggested, in general terms, that this concept refers to a process in which teachers and students build and negotiate a set of regulations that define the character of their interactions inside the classroom, and that these can affect students' motivation, learning (Quay & Quaglia, 2004), and social performance *in situ* (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). It seems to be clear that the construction of CC plays a fundamental role in students' success. However, researchers tend to disagree in some aspects related to its study.

One of these points of contention concerns the understanding of what we mean by the concept of *culture* itself. Allard & Cooper (2001), for example, assume culture as a set of beliefs, values, and practices used by individuals within a particular group in order to comprehend the world around them. Others like Quay & Quaglia (2004) talk about culture, in a broader sense, as a set of conditions in which a group of people lives in. McGrew (1998), in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible because he is pondering the presence of culture in non-human species, defines culture as "group-specific behavior that is acquired, at least in part, from social influences" (p. 305). He is correct in asserting that we must not restrict our definition of culture too greatly, for doing so we risk imposing ethnocentricities on the definition itself. Nonetheless, in this wide theoretical landscape we have found one proposal that seems to us a more accurate and thoughtful way to understand culture in classroom contexts. Airhihenbuwa (2007) states that culture should be understood as "a collective sense of consciousness active enough to influence and condition perception, judgment, communication, behavior, expectations and the location of power in a given society" (p. 4). In essence, a classroom is a society in which children spend much of their time; aside from sleeping,

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there is no other activity that occupies a child's time as much as school (Jackson, 1994). Thus a collective sense of consciousness is inevitable. We agree with this definition of culture not only because of its comprehensiveness but also because of its adaptive ability within various locations, including the classroom. We also believe that the positivity or negativity of the resulting societal consciousness is constitutive, and therefore the identification of contributing factors is extremely important. In this study, three components of culture – communication, behavior and location of power - were taken into consideration as they were thought to be more effective in terms of classroom base.

Without doubt, investigating the presence and nature of all these cultural elements inside the classroom can give researchers important clues regarding how teachers and students work together in the attainment of suitable learning outcomes. This being said, we have decided not to explore the classroom culture concept in terms of its presence and stability across different classroom contexts (i.e., we do not propose that one prescription for classroom culture is appropriate in all educational settings), but instead set out to determine whether there are specific elemental similarities that might be observed across different educational levels. In this sense, our main goal is not to define the nature of culture inside the classroom, but to try to find common cultural patterns despite dissimilar educational and subjective characteristics of the institutions and authors implied (e.g. institutional goals, curriculums, students' age, gender, and educational background, teachers' experience, among others).

The concept of classroom culture, much like the definition of culture itself, is highly subjective and diversified. Airhihenbuwa (2007), in addition to providing our working definition of culture, also posits the following: "The challenge often faced by educators engaged in promoting strength in diversity is how to legitimate the coexistence of unique as well as shared values in a culture" (p. 4); in other words, there is a unique balance that must be struck in order to achieve the most effective and efficient classroom culture for a particular educational setting. Consequently, a number of authors and researchers have devised different methods for creating a desirable classroom culture. For example, Hunter (2008), in attempting to create a culture of peace in the elementary classroom, focuses on four major skill sets that include empathy training, diversity training, community awareness, and conflict resolution. While she chooses to emphasize concepts that will foster values like compassion, social justice, and service, she identifies two barriers that are likely to appear in most, if not all, formal educational settings making this fostering difficult and in some cases impossible to achieve. The first is that implementing a classroom culture format imposes "an additional agenda on the already full and academic expectations" of the institution (p. 54). The second challenge is identifying an age-appropriate curriculum. Additional barriers certainly merit further discussion and will appear later in our analysis.

One particular clarification is necessary before further examination of classroom culture techniques: culture is a collaborative and dynamic effort. Wolf, Milburn, & Wilkins (2008) emphasize the participatory role of culture, noting that it is a "way to help teachers and students recognize the value of understanding their role in creating culture each time they choose how to act [and] how to evaluate others' behavior" (p. 182). Furthermore, Cole (2005) emphasizes the processual nature of culture, positing "both culture and education refer simultaneously to process and product" (p. 196). This important clarification, combined with his recommendations for research into how to best create "mixed educational environments that capitalize on inescapable cultural diversity" (p. 211), highlights the fact that classroom culture cannot simply be planned and executed as a static tool. It must be flexible and all participants must know that it will grow and change. Perhaps the vital role of the instructor is an appropriate starting point as to how this process might begin.

Educators have a very important role in optimizing student academic achievement and nurturing social, emotional, and physical development of students. As Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman (2008) explain, "educators are faced with the dual roles of optimizing student academic achievement and nurturing children's social development" (p. 130). In addition to these responsibilities, teachers build external environments in order to facilitate or contribute to the student's learning (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). However, doing this is very difficult for teachers in today's world, because classrooms are becoming rapidly diverse in terms of cultural norms, languages, and values. This growing diversity situation makes a teacher's work more challenging than ever before (David &

Capparo, 2002). Cole (2008) notes that classroom interactions are both embedded in and rest upon “an enormous amount of cultural conditioning” (p. 211), and too often these qualities are seen as barriers rather than strengths and/or opportunities within the classroom. In fact, the framing of cultural differences as a barrier is a formidable barrier in itself. Because a student’s perception of the classroom is positively related to his or her social and academic outcomes, a teacher’s teaching style, behaviors, and perceptions regarding classroom environment are very crucial in creating a comprehensive, positive classroom culture or environment (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). Though children need to be receptive and have notions of motivation and support in order to be successful in social and academic life, as the cultural environment is participatory in nature, the instructor essentially “sets the stage” for the nourishment of the culture.

In a diverse classroom culture, the students’ population is comprised of children with varying linguistic, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. For example, in a typical South Texas classroom, the class might generally consist of six low socio-economic status (S.E.S.) Hispanic students, four low S.E.S. Anglo students, five middle class Hispanic students, four middle class Anglo students, two high S.E.S. Hispanic students, and two high S.E.S. Anglo students (David & Capparo, 2002). The authors assure readers that this kind of diversity is more often the case than not. Furthermore, as Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Benet-Martinez (2000) point out in their positivist constructionist approach to the code-switching phenomenon, bi- or tri-cultural students will have internalized loose networks of domain-specific knowledge structures. These different knowledge structures will be accessed at different times depending on which cultural knowledge is accessible, relevant, or has been primed by either the instructor or the setting. This classroom composition also makes reaching each student individually difficult, if not impossible. A teacher who fails to create a classroom culture or community will classify students by their abilities; this behavior will likely lead to decreased learning and social, emotional, and academic development of the students.

The classification of abilities occurs even when a classroom culture is in place. It is how others see this classification in the classroom that can lead to the decreased learning in the many respects mentioned above, presenting yet another barrier. As a result, teachers need access to various methods and strategies to assist in developing a positive classroom culture and environment for diverse classroom populations (Wolf, Milburn, & Wilkins, 2008). The classroom community can be built by myriad different means. Most importantly, students should play an active role in creating and developing a practice of understanding, sharing, compassion, and empathy. Moreover, the classroom should be recognized as “our classroom,” not just the “teacher’s classroom.” Teachers should move from doing things TO students to doing things FOR [*sic*] their students or classroom (David & Capparo, 2002).

In order to provide an optimal classroom environment for students, teachers have to help create or build a classroom community. A classroom community presents each student with an opportunity to both develop his or her specific abilities and experience self-confidence and inner balance with the wholeness of classroom (David & Capparo, 2002). A second important tool for building positive classroom culture or community is the effective usage of language. It is clear that fluent and mutual oral communication between teachers and students or students and peers are very crucial increasing the level of empathy, understanding, and positive interaction (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). As a result, an instructor must construct or build the oral communication channel of classroom in a way that enriches and enhances optimal interaction opportunities for the students (Au, 1993 cited in David & Capparo, 2002). Another important strategy involves the teacher encouraging student participation, classroom discussion, and expression of students’ own experiences. Moreover, a teacher should try to emphasize on varying metacognitive abilities of the students in order to reach the diverse population in the classroom (David & Capparo, 2002).

In summation, today’s educational settings consist of diverse populations, and as a result, teachers may experience difficulties in building a positive classroom culture or community. Additionally, there is no standardized prescription for creating and maintaining a positive classroom culture across all cultural settings, nor should there be. By encouraging oral communication, discussion, and experience sharing among students in the multicultural classroom environment, addressing the six major components of culture indicated in our working definition, and closely examining and evaluating metacognitive abilities, student-

based teaching can indeed be a possible and effective means for facilitating a successful classroom environment. In this sense, the main aim of this study was to explore differences and similarities about cultural elements of two classrooms from different educational levels: K-12, and Graduate.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was designed as a quantitative study and a descriptive study. As the aim of the study is to observe the culture of two classrooms and to compare them, it is hypothesized that no interference would provide better results. Also, as the aim of the study is 'to compare', quantitative methods were determined to be more effective. As a result, two classrooms from different levels – one K-12 and one graduate – were selected via purposeful sampling. In this way, the comparison would be more efficient as the levels were different from each other.

Settings

Setting A. One of the settings was a sixth grade classroom located in a school where many of the students' parents have a college degree and come from middle to upper middle class families. In addition to this, the school is located several miles from Purdue University. Since Purdue has many visiting professors from other countries there are many different cultures, languages, and countries represented at the school; this includes the classroom observed.

Explicit goals. In order to know what needs to be formally taught in this classroom the teacher has access to state standards. It is these standards that determine what needs to be taught in this particular grade. These include what is to be covered in speaking skills, computer literacy, language arts, math, science, and social studies. In addition to this, the teacher has developed goals for her students to reach by the end of the year such as having the students being able to work with a variety of people successfully.

Implicit goals. Along with explicit goals, there are implicit goals that occur in this classroom setting. Some of them are:

1. The students will be aware that there are different types of people that approach situations in a variety of ways.
2. The students will realize and understand that there is more than one way to solve a problem.
3. The students will learn how to approach others, including the teacher, if there is a problem in order to provide solutions to that problem.
4. The students will come to the realization that they might not receive the answers to their questions immediately and that finding the answers might require perseverance and access of multiple sources.

Teaching-learning process. Learning in this classroom occurred in a variety of ways. One example of this is student- centered learning. This can be observed when the students are working on their genetic projects. The students are able to select their own topic in the area of genetics, research it, and then teach the class what they learned about the particular topic. This suggests that the role of the students is independent, and more self-regulated in some sense, while the role of the teacher is to give students guidance for the well-development of their projects. Another way in which learning occurs is through classroom discussions, such as a Socratic seminar. Here the teacher acts as an observer, and is only there to help guide the class discussion. A third way of learning occurs when the teacher give a lecture to the students (e.g., about the equation of the circumference of a circle). In this case the role of the teacher is more traditional; in other words, learning is for the most part a responsibility of the teacher.

Barriers. In terms of language, there are students in the class whose first language is not English. For these students, the instructions are broken down and modifications given in order for success to be obtained. To help with this, the students are seated near students who speak their native language.

Concerning learning disabilities, several students have various learning disabilities and these vary by the student and the services required by each student in this category. Along with legal modifications,

various ways of displaying knowledge such as through verbal answers, drawings, and classroom discussions can be used so that all students might participate.

Regarding cultural differences, along with language difficulties some students have different values such as how to address the teacher and how to handle situations such as when a person accidentally walks into another person. To help with these differences, the teacher pulls the student to the side in order to avoid embarrassment. If an impulsive decision was made, then the teacher can have the student to reflect on what he/she could do differently the next time. Another way to handle these situations is to pair the student with a “buddy” to help with this.

Setting B. The classroom that was observed is located in Beering Hall at Purdue University, and in which graduate students taking a course called Culture and Cognition. The classroom had various technological conveniences, such as computer, projector, and audio, among others; also it is a very calm environment where distractions are rare. In general terms, it like a comfortable and appropriate place for teaching and learning. Moreover, the classroom was too big for the number of students, which allowed observers opportunity for much space and movement.

Explicit goals. The main goal of the classroom was to help students develop a critical understanding of cross disciplinary research on culture and cognition and its implications for teaching and learning. This can be understood by the readings of the courses. These were from diverse disciplines including psychology, education, anthropology, sociology, and language and communication. At the beginning of the course, students were informed about a number of assignments that they must complete during the duration of the course. These were:

- Make *Talking Points* for every reading before every class.
- Lead a *Discussion* based on one of the readings.
- Work in groups in order to develop a *small project* where they must apply the concepts learned in classes.
- Present a *Book Review* at the end of the course.
- Actively participate in all classes.

Also, during the course, students were asked to think about questions such as the following: How does culture influence thought and learning? What do biology and culture contribute to thinking and learning? And what does research on the role of culture in learning and teaching imply for educational practice?

Implicit goals. Along with explicit goals there were implicit goals that occurred in the classroom. On the one hand, it that some students’ main goal was just to fulfill the minimum requirements of the course, while others seemed to be more involved in all of the classes. On the other hand, although it was very difficult to discuss about the instructor’s implicit goals, we could say that it seems she implicitly asked students to participate more in the discussions about the articles.

Teaching-learning process. In this classroom, the course was taught in a variety of ways. Teaching and learning was generally based on a student-centered model. Every student had freedom and independence to share his or her thoughts and experiences in all classes. For example, each student leads a discussion about the content of one reading each week. In some sense, as happened in setting A, students acted like the teacher. In those moments, the instructor was a participant in classroom, just like a student. Most of the classes were facilitated with the same pedagogical style.

Barriers. In terms of language, there students in the class whose first language not English. Moreover, for some of them this was their first time in the United States. Thus, they had some difficulties in speaking English, which sometimes affected their classroom participation. However, the teacher and the other students paid much attention to their thoughts; they always encouraged their participation.

Regarding cultural differences, the classroom was formed of students who came from different cultural and religious backgrounds (there were Turkish, Colombian, Russian, and South Korean students). For example, Turks and South Koreans came from a collectivistic culture, while Colombian and Americans came from an individualistic culture. Although such cultural differences understanding each other difficult at times, differences among the students contributed to classroom culture in a positive way. This is because

different cultural background meant different opinions, and this helped the students to see the different dimensions of the relationship between culture and education.

Participants

The participants from setting A were 20 sixth grade students (10 male and 10 female) who were from middle to upper middle class families, and who came from different countries. On the other hand, participants from setting B were 14 graduate students (10 female and 4 male) who pursue Master's and PhD's degrees in different areas such as Communication, Educational Psychology, Gifted Education, and so on. Participants came from different countries (Turkey, Colombia, Russia, China, United States, India, Puerto Rico, and South Korea, among others); however, almost 50% of them were from the United States.

Instrument

In both settings, the only instrument used was an Observation Check List. This instrument consisted in 19 questions pointing to 3 different elements of the classroom culture: Location of power, communicational patterns, and behaviors (roles). These elements were operationalized in terms of observable patterns of behavior among students and professors of both settings. Also, the form was controlled by two experts in education and made revisions before implementation. Most of the questions were designed using a 5-level Likert scale (1=never – 0% of the time, 2=rarely – 25% of the time, 3=sometimes – 50% of the time, 4=often – 75% of the time, 5=always – 100% of the time). This way, besides the presence or absence of an item, the density of the item would be determined.

Procedure

In order to achieve the main objective of this study, we started with making a literature review about research in classroom culture. With this review, we could have an opinion about the illuminated parts and the gaps in the literature as well as present problems and questions. We noticed that a comparison of two levels in the literature and selected the problem as the comparison of culture in low and high levels of classrooms. To compare these classrooms, we developed a methodological approach and decided upon quantitative approach as the aim was 'to compare' rather than to investigate, analyze or describe. When the classrooms (participants) were selected purposively, the instrument was designed with the help of experts in the field.

The collection of data in the classrooms was performed by the researcher himself. While collecting data, explanations and field notes were also taken to support the quantitative data. This small-portion qualitative data was not analysed through thematic analysis, so this data was only used to understand the quantitative data much better. Then, the data was categorized and tabulated for further analysis. Then, the data was analysed quantitatively with frequencies and cases and examples were given. While analysing data, two researchers worked collaboratively and discussed the results. The preparation of this paper and visual presentation of the study was performed later, and the study was shared with a graduate class.

Data Analysis

As the observation form was designed as a Likert-type scale, the researchers used descriptive statistics to analyze the data. After collecting, data was gathered together and typed into MS Excel program. With this program, the frequency, sum and mean scores could be calculated. Three sub-scales of the observation form – location of power, communication patterns and behaviors (roles) – were analyzed separately and frequencies were drawn. For each sub-scale, the items under that category were collected and analysed together.

Results

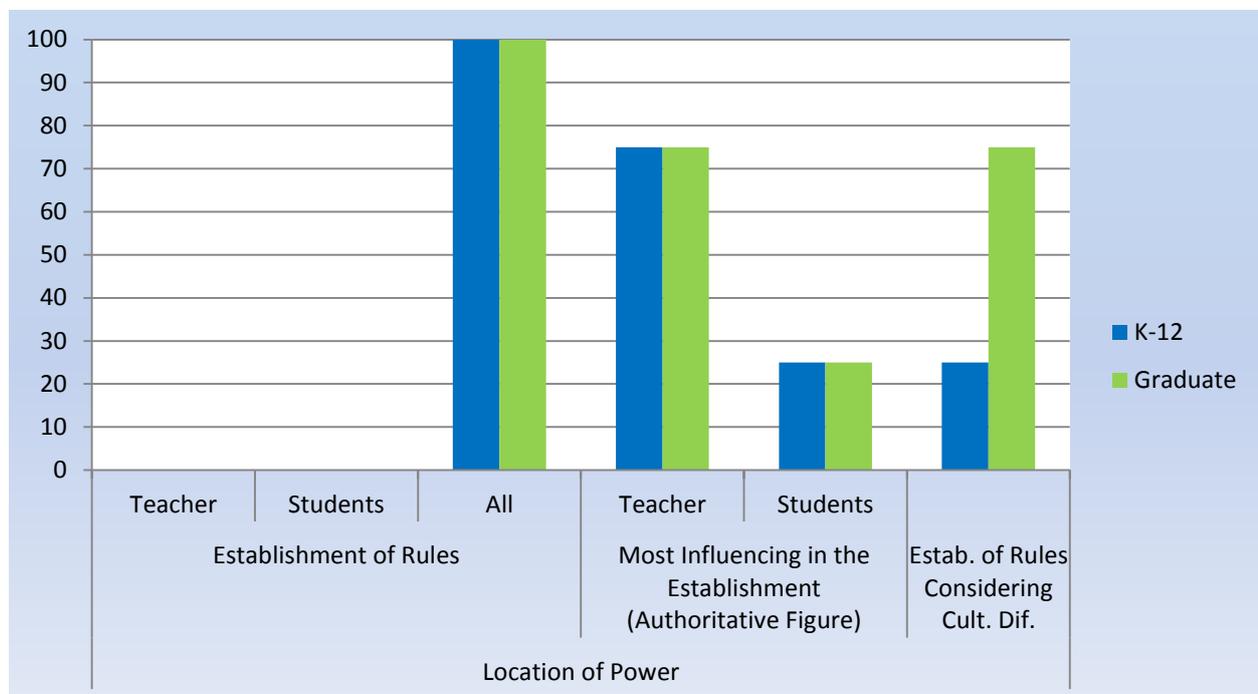
The results of this study are presented in terms of three *major categories* of analysis: location of power, communicational patterns, and behaviors (roles). In each of these major categories we identified some *subcategories*, which are the ones that determine the essential characteristics of the classroom culture in both settings.

Location of Power

As we can observe in Graphic 1, in both educational levels (K-12 and graduate), we observed that more or less 100% of the times both students and teachers participated in the establishment of rules inside the classroom. However, when we look at which figure is the most influential in the establishment of those rules, things do not appear to be that democratic; during the observations, almost 75% of the time, both teachers influenced the establishment of rules. For example, at the beginning of the semester, as both classrooms discussed the rules and expected norms, they considered cultural differences. This is because considering and respecting all cultural differences is key in creating a positive classroom culture.

In the K-12 classroom, although it is evident that both the students and the teacher work in establishing power, the students do take the lead of the teacher in determining what is acceptable and what isn't. For example, while observing the classroom the students looked to the teacher before completing a task in order to receive approval that the task was acceptable before following through.

Although on these last subcategories the results are very similar, this is not the case when extended cultural differences are taken into account. Graphic 1 shows us that more or less 25% of the times cultural differences were fundamental in the establishment of rules in the K-12 classroom, while it happened 75% of the times in the graduate classroom. An important point to consider here is that the K-12 classroom rules are simultaneously governed by state and school board standards and policies.



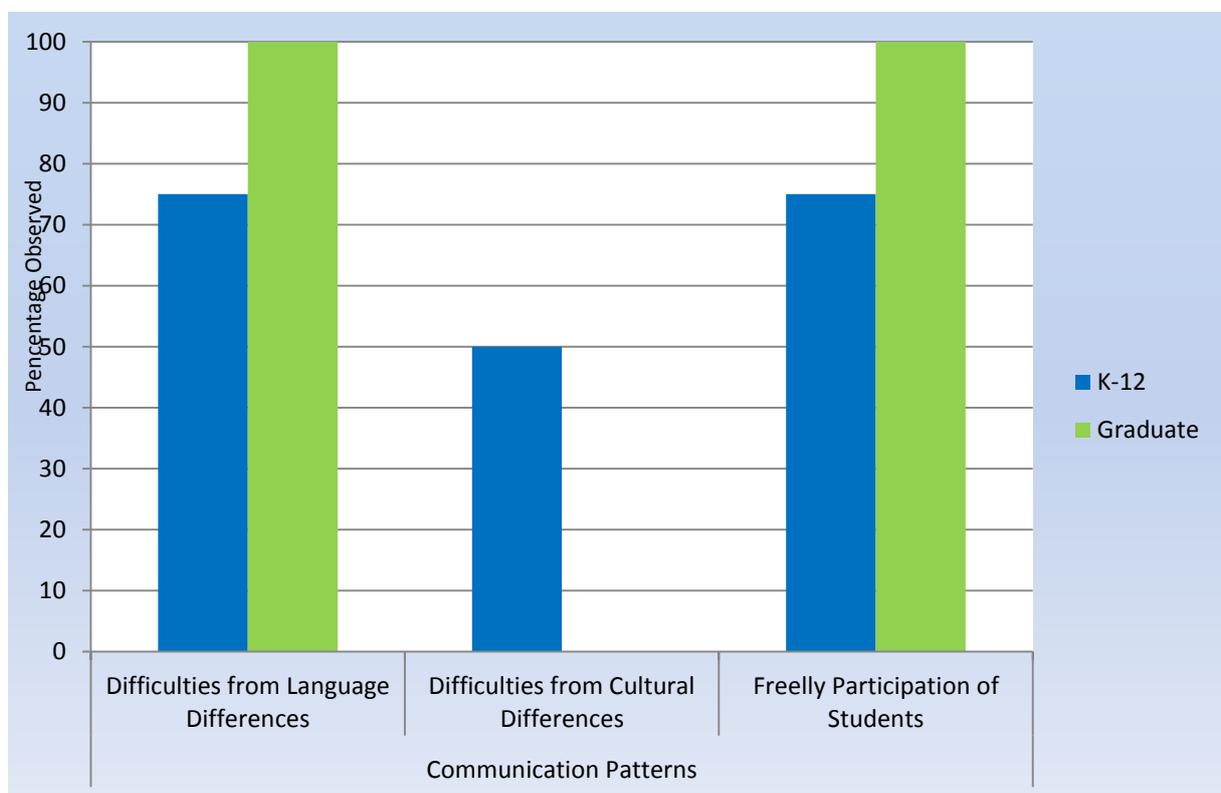
Graphic 1. Percentages of times observed for the establishment of rules, influence in the establishment, and the establishment of rules considering cultural differences.

Communication Patterns

Now, when we compare communication patterns among the two classrooms, the results suggest the presence of some differences (see Graphic 2). In the graduate classroom, we observed that the majority of the time (almost 100%) students experienced difficulties in trying to communicate their ideas. In the K-12 this happened three quarters of the time (almost 75%). In this last setting, because there are difficulties with those students whose native language is not English, the sixth grade teacher makes use of several items to help minimize the difficulties. These items include making use of other students who speak the native language, allowing the student to use a language dictionary, and making use of alternate explanations and pictures if needed.

We found very similar results when we observed if students participate freely during the classes (go to Graphic 2). This also happened almost 100% of the times in the graduate classroom, and more or less 75% in the K-12 classroom. These results show that despite difficulties in expressing ideas, students have the will to participate in the classes. Students of K-12 can participate fairly frequently in the classroom; however, there are times that they are not allowed to. Generally, unless it is during free time for the student or a group assignment, the students need approval before speaking. This is not to say that communication is entirely regulated. For example, in math class, if another student is having trouble with a concept, another student asks the teacher if she/he can go up front to explain the concept in a different way. In the graduate classroom, although some students may have difficulty expressing themselves in English, they have a chance to express their feeling and opinions related to classroom topics; both teacher and students always show respect.

However, when we look at the difficulties related to cultural factors that students showed when they attempted to participate in classes, there are larger differences among the two classrooms. Almost half of the time (50%), K-12 students showed troubles trying to communicate their opinions, when cultural matters were involved in classroom discussions. This communicational pattern was not observed (0%) among the graduate students (see Graphic 2).



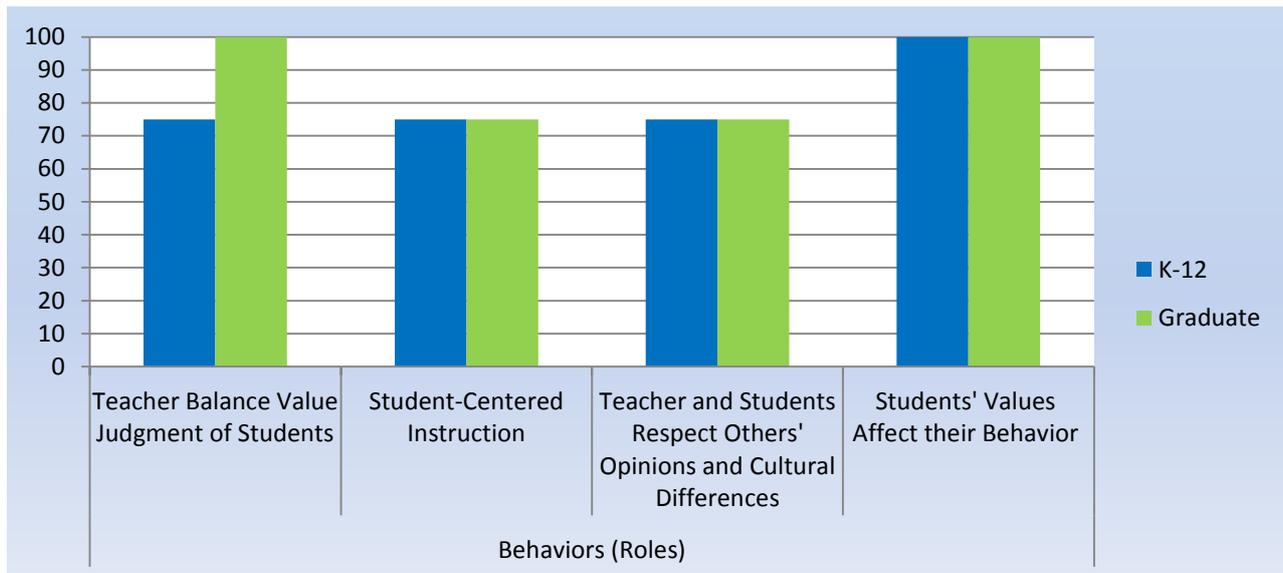
Graphic 2. Percentages of times observed for difficulties from language and cultural differences, and freely participation of the students in the classroom.

Behaviours (Roles)

The last category that we targeted through the observations was the kind of roles that both teachers and students assume inside the classroom. Graphic 3 show us that in both classrooms, 75% of the times students were the “protagonists” of their own learning. For example, during a Socratic Seminar in the K-12 classroom, the teacher relinquishes the power and places it into the students for the discussion, enabling them to participate more actively in their learning process. The role of the teacher in this case is to observe and administer assistance, if needed. Similarly, in the graduate classroom, student-led presentations and discussions contribute to the collaborative atmosphere.

In the other subcategory (respect other's opinions and cultural differences), almost the same number of times (75%) we observed a respectful reception of opinions and cultural diversity in students and teachers among the two classrooms (see Graphic 3). In the K-12 classroom we saw this during a Socratic Seminar; the students communicate with some honesty not necessarily providing the comments that the teacher would agree with, but these statements are accepted by the teacher, who then decides if the statements contain adequate explanation and evidence. In the graduate classroom, conflicting viewpoints were at times very apparent but did not taint the generally positive class tone.

The final similarity we observed between students of both classrooms addressed whether their values affected their behaviors inside the classroom. Graphic 3 shows us that in both cases, students seemed to be guided by their cultural values almost all of the times (100%).



Graphic 3. Percentages of times observed for balance of value judgment, student-centred instruction, respect of opinions and cultural differences, and the effect of values on students behaviour

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the most interesting results that came out from this study is that in K-12 and graduate classrooms both students and teachers seem to actively participate in the establishment of rules. This leads us to infer that despite differences in the content taught, the goals (both explicit and implicit) and the educational backgrounds of teachers and students make it possible to find very similar patterns in terms of how power is located inside the classroom. Similarly, Li (2013) pointed out that culture plays a crucial role in students' academic learning and social integration in educational settings. Moreover, teachers of diverse classrooms must learn about their students' cultural background and they must need to know how to integrate their cultural practices and social realities outside of school. In this sense, they might recognize the students' cultural practices and their own cultural dynamics to enhance the learning and teaching. More, in both classrooms, the most influential individual in this process is the teacher. In the end, most of the power in making decisions about what, how, and when the activities are going to take place during the class was located with the teacher, which suggests that the teacher was seen as an authoritative figure in both cases. In fact, aforementioned, teacher is the key person for the students' learning; however, Gregory and colleagues (2016) emphasized on changing teacher practices to close racial discipline gap in diverse classrooms. They pointed out that authoritative teacher practices might lead to increase in discipline referrals for black students. Therefore, building classroom rules and sharing the power with students are significant dynamics of the development of positive behavioral and social orientations among diverse student populations.

Nevertheless, it is important to notice that despite these similarities, considering cultural differences was more relevant in the establishment of rules inside the graduate classroom than in the K-12 classroom. If

we accept the fact that both teachers were the most influential actors during this process, we could say the graduate teacher was able to take more liberty in deciding how different cultural backgrounds of students can play a crucial role in the dynamics of the classroom. As Hong et al. (2000) suggest, individuals are equipped with representational frames that they have acquired through a process of acculturation in particular settings (or cultures in a broad sense), which guide the decisions they make when solving specific problems. This means, for example, that in a classroom with students from diverse cultural conditions, the teacher should be aware that the contents, pedagogies, and dynamics (like the establishment of rules) that take place inside the classroom, could be interpreted differently by the students. Being aware of this can help the teacher avoid time-consuming misunderstandings among the students.

Another interesting finding was that even though free participation of students was a common factor in both classrooms, and language differences did not seem to prevent students from communicating their ideas, cultural differences appeared to jeopardize free communication of K-12 students. The specific reasons for this occurrence are beyond the scope of this study, but the possibility for observation is proof that communication does play a major role in classroom culture, regardless of the educational level. Similarly, Kraft and Dougherty (2013) examined the effect of teacher – family and teacher – student communication on student engagement. They found that positive teacher – family and student interaction increased the students' homework completion and intellectual engagement in learning tasks. Moreover, positive communication was more likely affected engagement by building stronger teacher – student relationship and warm classroom environment.

One apparent similarity observed within the results were the marked similarities in both the K-12 classroom and the graduate classroom when considering the behaviours of the students and the roles that both the students and the teachers played in the environment. Both classes exhibited much student-centered involvement and respect for individual differences. While only two classrooms were observed and analysed in this study it would make one wonder if the same results would have been obtained in a multiple-classroom study. Is it possible that both teachers knew the influence of culture and of student ideas and that the results were obtained due to this?

Culture, as is illustrated by Airhihenbuwa's (2007) definition, is all-encompassing. How its role is determined and moulded is dependent on which aspects of culture are salient and emphasized. While we observed just three of the components of culture (i.e., location of power, communication, and behaviour), there is much more to be uncovered. For us, and our definition, even this small cross-section is extremely significant in the formation of classroom culture. We already know that culture is ubiquitous, and it should be embraced and incorporated rather than ignored or suppressed. Perhaps the next question to ask, then, is what happens to the classrooms where culture is not a determining factor? This question could be answered by further research.

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