

Neutralizing the Uncanny through Culturally Relevant Teaching

Roberto Ollivier-Garza

Department of Language, Literacy & Sociocultural Studies
College of Education - The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM, USA

Abstract

At the height of the Roman Empire's power, Marcus Aurelius, emperor and stoic philosopher, identified his positionality as neither Athenian nor Roman but rather as "a citizen of the universe." For a man of his time, power and privilege to have been able to think beyond himself, in terms of the global rather than the local, suggests that he had benefited immensely from the guidance and wisdom of teachers, who through culturally relevant instruction imparted an awareness and holistic appreciation of the value of all of humankind. As one observes the multitude of current global conflicts, one questions why humanity has not been able to move beyond petty grievances to achieve the equitable global harmony and citizenship that Aurelius aspired to so long ago. Motivated by the purpose of improving academic, economic, and social equity, this exploratory essay examines historic and current North American pedagogical theories of culturally responsive teaching practices with the juxtapositional purpose of examining and evaluating the best method for minimizing Drs. Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud's theories on the uncanny and the uncanny valley-effect phenomena-the objective being the discovery of improved teaching praxis to minimize educational and social cognitive dissonance in refugee, immigrant, minority, and socioeconomically subordinate students both domestically and internationally.

Keywords: cultural competency, international education, teacher training, uncanny

Cite as: Ollivier-Garza, R. (2017). Neutralizing the Uncanny through Culturally Relevant Teaching. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (4). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no4.22>

“As seen from the outside, the massive upheaval in Western society is approaching the limit beyond which it will become ‘meta-stable’ and must collapse.”

-Solzhenitsyn, *The Camp of the Saints*, 1973

Introduction

The days of individual nation states choosing to exist in self-sufficient, privileged isolation are long since past. Over the past 24 months, the world has observed with respective mouths agape the mass migrations of desperate populations of peoples from Syria, Iraq, as well as North and Sub-Saharan Africa in numbers never before seen. Not since the end of World War II circa 1945, have populations of such diverse cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic origins been displaced in such numbers. As a direct result, modern technological societies are now tasked with trying to assimilate massive numbers of culturally, religiously, socio-linguistically, and economically diverse populations into their own highly entrenched hierarchical sociocultural and arguably hegemonic systems.

To make matters more complicated, the ready availability of mass transportation and advanced technology facilitates these waves of migration and possibly even fosters and fuels the fires of continued diaspora of other Third World peoples, resulting in a steady flood of refugees and immigrants placing an unsustainable onus of receivership and good stewardship upon those countries and peoples whose borders are now being breached by the “tired, poor and huddled masses that are yearning to breathe free” (Lazarus, 1883).

If the everyday feeding, clothing, sheltering, and providing of basic medical care to these new arrivals were not taxing enough, these countries of receivership are now also tasked with identifying and remediating the future needs of their new countrymen. To meet these needs, these countries must now create new systems or revise traditionally engrained societal mechanisms to provide the tools (read: education) that these new arrivals require to access the language, culture, and skills necessary for successful incorporation into a first world way of life.

Assuming the best efforts of all parties involved are put forth, there will inevitably exist intangible phenomena that will retard the successful acclimation and assimilation of these groups and their progeny into the societal mainstream of each particular first world nation state. Of these phenomena, those that should be of particular heightened interest to pedagogues and that ought to be considered most necessary for immediate resolution or addressment are the requirements necessary for improving pedagogical praxis to better address these receiver nations’ new national demographics. Through improved pedagogical praxis i.e., culturally relevant teaching, the presence of the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect of these newly arrived peoples can be addressed, minimized, or mitigated, thereby offering the best and most equitable access to future opportunities, a belief supported by multiple studies that demonstrate that when teachers recognize the differences in students’ linguistic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds as instructional resources and incorporate them into their pedagogy and curriculum, students experience greater learning growth (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; O. Lee, 2002; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; Nieto, 2002).

Incumbent in this process is also the requirement that the chronological age of these refugees, immigrants, or newly arrived minority or subordinate group peoples be considered. The age of many of these new arrivals will obviously preclude them from attending primary schools where their initial uncanniness and the subsequent uncanny valley effect phenomena could be addressed or minimized over a more natural or extended period of time. For these newly arrived adults, who like their children are now facing the uncanniness of attempting to assimilate into a new culture, new language, and new systems, the education they are most likely to receive will occur or be presented to them via secondary or tertiary school faculty and curricula. Because of this, one imagines that additional inherent difficulties will exist in rectifying or remediating the already established or entrenched cultural biases or perspectives that might, if not superscribed, limit future opportunities at success.

Of course, it is not merely the refugee, immigrant, minority, or socioeconomically subordinated other that will benefit from improved teacher cultural competency. Uncanniness and the uncanny valley effect phenomena will also have to be addressed to overcome the engrained perspectives of native-born traditionalist or nationalists who imagine and profess that new arrivals, minorities, and others must renounce their belief systems to fit the contemporary culture of education (Pewewardy, 1993, p. 455) if they have any true desire to assimilate into the dominant cultural paradigm. Of course, suggested or demanded abdication of historic cultural values is unimaginable, and untenable, and the objective should instead be a pedagogically guided professional-educational attempt at a successful amalgamation of cultures. The question then becomes how modern societies can best and most successfully deliver this new culturally appropriate curricula to students, regardless of age, who are experiencing this uncanniness, while simultaneously training, empowering, or creating culturally competent or “canny” instructors who will work to minimize or mitigate the gaps between these new arrivals who possess their own intrinsic cultural values and systems and those nativist value systems of the home country.

To achieve this objective, this exploratory essay will examine established North American culturally competent teaching practices, focusing on the United States, because it has traditionally possessed a larger, more diverse demographic composition than its traditionally insular European counterparts. By examining and borrowing from historic practices, one hopes that a novel means for minimizing the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect phenomena in educational practice, as identified by Ollivier (2017), and can be identified and addressed. One also imagines that through combined efforts, newly arrived refugees, immigrants, minorities, and socioeconomically subordinate others and their new host nations can develop mutually accepted awareness of these phenomena and collaboratively develop new culturally competent practices that will ensure that all parties are working with parallel objectives of success in mind.

These objectives should be the establishment of a culturally competent and successful educational amalgamation that will prove most beneficial by addressing the greatest good of the many peoples that it hopes to serve, while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls of antiquated prejudices of the past. To ensure this success, government policymakers and educators must work collaboratively to understand what is truly necessary for these changes to occur. Only by engaging appropriately trained academics in the policymaking process can governments avoid the negative consequences of selecting inappropriate pedagogical patterns or techniques that have failed

previously-and instead focus and pursue those objectives that are the most likely to generate success.

To realize this success, it is prudent to locate, cultivate, and produce educators who are qualified and willing to work toward securing these objectives. To do so, the Academy should consider drawing experience and expertise from within those demographically diverse groups considered uncanny or “other” that are currently struggling to successfully integrate into modern, westernized societies (Ollivier, 2017). Logic suggests that the most qualified candidates to lead a pedagogical culturally relevant renaissance are those same people who have experienced, been subjected to, and successfully transcended the uncanny experience and “othering” meted out by dominant hegemonic systems. Because these people have already demonstrated an ability to successfully navigate their way through these restrictive educational systems, they are potentially best suited to lead this new global pedagogical reformation.

The sort of people who should be considered part of the vanguard of this pedagogical reformation movement are those members of recent generations of the uncanny globalized other of which the author is definitely a part. For purposes of explanation, this belief is supported by those experiences acquired as the adopted Hispanic son of Anglo parents, raised and educated internationally in Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, Republic of Congo, and Spain. These multilingual and multicultural experiences demanded that the author learn to navigate and master the channels of the uncanny, the uncanny valley effect, and skirt North American teacher cultural incompetency while successfully advancing through the minefield of the Anglocentric-American educational system.

Notwithstanding all statistical probability to the contrary, as supported by the 2013 data report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which identifies Hispanic educators and professors as comprising only 4% of the national average, the author earned academic credentials in International Studies, Secondary Education, Spanish, and English, which allowed him to secure international secondary school employment and subsequent cultural experiences in Korea, Japan, Bolivia, India, and mainland China. Although these successes may make him an outlier domestically, because of globalization, a multitude of uncanny, educated, multilingual professionals currently exist whose academic backgrounds and abilities to surmount systemic barriers mirror his own. These uncanny others are precisely who should be incorporated into the ranks of the teaching profession because they possess the requisite backgrounds and positionalities to redress the topics and policies necessary for improving teacher cultural competency. Instead, they continue to face stubborn resistance from inveterate pedagogues and policymakers who fail to recognize that these young, highly educated, multilingual, global professionals are the key to bridging the gaps between traditional hegemonic pedagogical paradigms and newly imagined, albeit uncanny, globally directed culturally competent teaching. Until these uncanny pedagogical gaps are recognized, explored, and paired with improved culturally competent teaching practices, it is likely that the uncanny valley effect and its accompanying cognitive dissonance will remain a hurdle, limiting or preventing educational and professional equity, domestically and internationally.

Discussion

Based on the introductory, albeit theoretical information provided above, and for purposes of clarity in this exploratory essay, it is first necessary to identify and define “cultural competency” before attempting to address and subsequently minimize the presence of the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect that exist in and plague multiple academic settings. For the purposes of this essay, cultural competency will be defined as the “combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge needed to perform a specific task” (Houston, 1974, p. 32). Teacher cultural competency-based initiatives then are or will be those actions or practices implemented by primary and secondary schools and their respective faculty, directed at defining, assessing, and refining cultural competencies across their respective school systems in a way that will allow faculty and students the best chance of generating safe spaces where this amalgamation of cultural competencies and curricula can be explored, decided upon, and put into effect. Good practice suggests that this plan to apply improved teacher cultural competency to offset the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect be initially implemented as a pilot project but also recognizes that it could set the stage as a template for other programs to mimic or follow.

Because of the breadth and scope of the material relating to the topic of teacher cultural competency, it seems best to select and briefly discuss a few seminal texts and incorporate passages from other articles and journals to substantiate the generally recognized themes considered pertinent and applicable to these coupled topics. Foremost, in this exploration, is the recognition of W. Robert Houston’s text *Exploring Competency Based Education* (1974). This highly influential text stated: “The movement toward cultural competency based and/or performance based education now permeates every aspect of American education.” (p. 36) By the fall of 1972, Houston identified that 17 U.S. states had devised teacher certification procedures based on the CBE/PBE concept (Competency Based/Performance Based), which addressed the need for teacher education programs to develop an awareness of “cultural competence” that would provide teachers with the tools necessary to interact effectively with students of different cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds. In his text, Houston (1974) shares his belief that improved teacher cultural competency was the bridge between traditional measures of student achievement and a future learning revolution. Current global conditions prove that Houston could not have been more correct in his assessment, and when his idea is juxtaposed with the modern problems of how to best improve globalized education, his statement that “A person can no more perform what he doesn’t know than he can come back from where he hasn’t been”(p. 38) resonates all the more significantly.

Houston argues that to be successful in diverse classrooms, educators must first understand why it is vital to evaluate and implement cultural competency-based initiatives in their respective primary and secondary schools, particularly if they ever hoped to determine or achieve culturally competent teaching success. The primary reason posited at the time, which in hindsight highlights the crux of our current problem, was that dominant or hegemonic culture faculty-driven identifications, articulations, and expectations of suitable cultural competency levels informed and guided the basis of subsequent assessments at the course, program, and institutional levels. Houston also posited that these dominant culture-specific competencies, determined by dominant culture faculty and other stakeholders, such as future employers and government policymakers, drove the development and implementation of a monocultural specific understanding about the

specific skills and knowledges that primary school and secondary school students should master during and as a result of their learning experiences.

Assuming that primary school and secondary school faculty used a formalized process to collect feedback about what the student competencies should be, then the culture-specific future stakeholders would be more likely to accept and value them. Houston also hypothesized that specific dominant-culture competencies provided direction for faculty members in the designing of learning experiences and assignments that were believed to help students gain practice via the using, applying, and replicating of these unidirectional competencies through a variety of academic, social, and professional contexts.

Using Houston's report's findings as a leaping-off point, this exploratory essay means to help drive or guide the production of a contemporary plan that can and will serve as a hands-on resource for internationally and globally aware primary and secondary school practitioners who seek to develop, implement, or refine their own respective teacher-cultural competency-based initiatives that minimize the presence of the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect's cognitive dissonance to improve refugee, immigrant, minority and subordinate other's academic success rates. To achieve this end, a variety of multiple case studies and respective academic articles were reviewed, condensed, and synthesized with the hope of identifying practices that could help minimize the uncanny and its subsequent educational effect disparities.

By identifying and incorporating the possible presence of the uncanny and uncanny valley effect phenomena into this conversation, a novel perspective and examination of earlier practices is now possible and should help generate new potential pathways toward improving pedagogical cultural competency praxis with the purpose of minimizing the uncanny valley effect that plagues primary and secondary educational institutions throughout the United States and their equivalent international institutions. Although this exploratory essay may yield only a few new insights, one should be assured by the knowledge that a review of current or common practices from a new perspective or through this new, uncanny lens will be beneficial to those educational professionals who remain dedicated to improving teacher cultural competency-based initiatives.

Of foremost importance in the pursuit of this improved teacher cultural competency is that educational professionals possess a desire and willingness to understand and implement new cultural competency-based initiatives. If this is to be the objective, then as previous literatures suggest, educator preparedness programs must recognize the crushing imperative to prepare all teachers, regardless of race, socioeconomic or cultural background, to teach in what we can anticipate being increasingly culturally diverse classrooms. The structure of these teacher-preparedness program revisions must be "holistic, integrated and comprehensive" (Winfield, 1985, p. 52) and must consider the diversity, composition, and future changes in the demographic composition of primary and secondary student populations. To achieve this end, it would be wise for university-based teacher preparedness programs to work in conjunction or collaboration with existing, well-established international schools, thereby better preparing future teachers to work domestically and internationally. Additionally, to effect the sort of changes that this topic addresses, teacher education programs should also consider implementing the following fundamental recommendations (produced over the previous 30 years), for revising the curriculum

and structure of teacher education programs so that new teachers will be better qualified to instruct any and all students under any given circumstance or situation (Manning, 1985, p. 34). Therefore, if policymakers and pedagogical professionals believe that the aforementioned argument and data are sound, then the following recommendations should be evaluated and considered to determine if they possess the merit necessary for pedagogical and culturally competent reformation.

To achieve the identified objectives, the following items are suggested:

- Senior administrators must be recognized as public advocates, leaders, and facilitators for creating institutional cultures that are open to change, willing to take risks, and foster innovations by providing real incentives for participants.
- Global business stakeholders must fully participate and advocate for the need to better identify and define a consensus about the need for cultural competency.
- Cultural competencies must be clearly defined, understood, and accepted by relevant global stakeholders.
- Cultural competencies must be defined at a sufficient level of specificity that can be assessed and recognized by international educational institutions.
- Multiple assessments of cultural competency will be crafted and will provide useful and meaningful information relevant to decision-making or policy-development contexts.
- Internationally comprised faculty and staff must fully participate in making decisions about those assessment instruments used to measure desired specific cultural competencies.
- The precision, reliability, validity, credibility, and costs will be considered and examined in making selections about the best commercially developed assessments and/or locally developed approaches.
- Culturally competent-based educational initiatives will be embedded within larger internationally and institutional-based planning processes.
- Assessments of cultural competencies are and will be directly linked with the goals and ambitions of internationally based learning experiences.
- Assessment results will be used to make critical decisions about strategies necessary to improving international and culturally based student learning practices.
- Assessment results will be clear and reported in meaningful ways so that all relevant global stakeholders fully understand the findings.
- Institutions will experiment with new ways to document students' mastery of cultural competencies that supplement traditional academic transcripts.

These recommendations were generated, compiled, and revised from multiple texts written by a spate of academics over the past 30 years. Of course, some texts that predate that time period, but for the purpose of addressing these relatively current research and development options, as well as for the purpose of efficacy, articles had to be selectively limited.

One of the articles deemed pertinent and selected for review is *Preparing Teachers for Culturally Diverse Classrooms*, by Garibaldi (1992), which said that it is critical that teachers be exposed to a wide variety of liberal arts and science courses during their undergraduate training because "The latter core requirements are essential for every pre-service teacher since it is that substantive knowledge that must be conveyed to elementary and secondary students." Once

prospective teachers have mastered these areas or “cores” of content knowledge, they are considered “ready” to learn and to apply the general and specific foundations and behavioral aspects of teaching. However, as they acquire this professional knowledge and become familiar with a variety of methodological and pedagogical techniques, they must also be instructed to recognize that the practice of teaching is influenced by many “contextual factors.” These factors include, but are not limited to, racial, cultural, and linguistic background differences, ability, and motivational levels of the students, the geographic or sociocultural setting of the school (rural, urban, or suburban), and the adequacy or amount of available instructional resources (textbooks, equipment, laboratories, class size, etc.)

For these reasons, Garibaldi and his contemporaries have argued that the professional preparation of teachers must include additional academic knowledge related to diversity and multicultural contexts that can be incorporated into their professional educational curricula as well as into their clinical teaching experiences. The question then becomes what does this additional academic knowledge or course work look like when located within the parameters of increasingly diverse globalized and uncanny academic settings? Perhaps teacher preparedness programs should require additional classroom training to include international studies, foreign languages, and global histories to better provide new teachers with the supplemental knowledge they require to work with, and teach (read: acculturate) children and adults who increasingly come from culturally, racially, and socioeconomically diverse, or otherwise uncanny backgrounds.

Paralleling the Garibaldi’s argument is Donna Gollnick’s *Understanding the Dynamics of Race, Class, and Gender* (1998), which shares her theories, based primarily on (Banks, 1988), that the ethnic, linguistic, and class differences of students must be valued as teachers try to provide the best education for all students. Gollnick (1998) emphasizes that intrinsic to education is the idea that multicultural and cultural competency are significant for all students, yet simultaneously she argues that perhaps more importantly is teacher awareness and classroom recognition that cultural competency and diversity awareness are “critical in culturally diverse communities” and that those students who come from or are newly arrived from communities with broad cultural diversity must learn or be taught to incorporate the larger aspects of the host nation’s history and experiences into their own cultural awareness. Although Gollnick does not identify the uncanny or the uncanny valley effect phenomena by name, her warning that teachers must be wary of categorizing students, and of dismissing individual cultural identities by enforcing a belief in a “single micro-cultural membership” and her emphasis that teachers must maintain a hyper vigilant state while remaining leery of the belief in, or expectation of, certain behaviors that might be considered “inappropriate or incorrect” suggests an awareness of themes that indirectly relate to them.

Gollnick (1998) and her contemporaries warn that teachers must remember that cultural competency demands an awareness that interactions are complex and dynamic and they cite McCarthy and Apple (1988), who clarified that “the operation of race, class and gender relations at the level of daily practices in schools, work places, etc., is systematically contradictory or nonsynchronous.” More precisely, “individuals (or groups) do not share similar consciousness or similar needs at the same point in time,” (p. 23), and as a result the core component to implementing multicultural education and curricula successfully is through integrating race,

ethnicity, and class and gender issues throughout the curricula as well as throughout the customary activities of the institution.

Supporting Gollnick's theories, Allington (2002) clarified that revisions of teacher training, curricula, and textbooks are essential if the multiple voices, and the educational, psychosocial, and uncanny needs of a culturally diverse community are to be recognized and addressed. In short, arguing that the school setting itself should become the model for human rights, and if policy becomes the norm, "In time, education itself would become a transformative force in the community" (Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 55). To achieve this understandable and desired outcome, the argument *de rigueur* holds that the preparation of teacher candidates must be reconceptualized and that the Academy and its faculty must engage in offering courses that simultaneously provide broad knowledge-based understanding of how to incorporate cultural differences, influences, voices, and perspectives as well as provide the training necessary for minimizing the "impact of racism, sexism, and classism on schooling and society" (Catterall, 1988, p. 12) if there is to be any hope of developing canny, fledgling teacher candidates.

Through redesigned and successful cultural competency training, teacher candidates will learn how to overcome their own as well as others' discriminatory pedagogical practices, while also acquiring a global awareness via "multiple opportunities to observe and practice nonracist, nonsexist and non-classist teaching" (Calfee, 1998, p. 36), designed by more-seasoned professional educators.

To achieve these objectives, the Academy must determine what constitutes good cultural competence praxis in existing teachers and subsequently identify how teacher education programs can assist new teachers in developing or improving their own cultural competency levels. Siegel (2000) argued that cultural competency reflects preservice teachers' own abilities and socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. He argued that for fledgling teachers to be successful, they first must be trained to first assess their own cultures and value systems before being taught to recognize and respond to cultural differences in ways that appropriately celebrate the cultural, sociolinguistic, and economic differences of others. Siegel also posited that teacher cultural competency directly relates to preservice teacher's perceptions, attitudes and dispositions, prior experiences, and the quality of their field placements (Braskamp, 1984, p. 65) all of which are directly applicable to the minimization and eventual mitigation of the uncanny and its subsequent uncanny valley effect.

Although teacher education programs have little control over the experiences causing bias that preservice teachers carry into their course work and field experiences, these course work and field placements do in fact pose a large influence in the shaping of teacher attitudes and dispositions about student cultural diversity. Barnes (2006) found that preservice teachers who volunteer or who actively take part in courses and field experiences that emphasized culturally responsive teaching preferred to focus on course content and pedagogy as opposed to examining their own more intimate and personal dispositions. Although that finding seems on its face to be discouraging, the study inherently and simultaneously suggests that preservice teachers were independently capable of reflecting upon their own perceptions and beliefs about diversity. This led to a greater understanding of the views of others, and especially allowed for the development

of personal openness, self-awareness, and a growing commitment to social justice--despite personal experiential factors, including prior experiences with different cultures and with placement or field experience.

Making the transition from improving teacher cultural competency to improving practices in the classroom, thereby minimizing the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect is the next required step in considering how to best improve overall cultural competency-based development and success benefitting both teachers and students. In the "*Curricula for Cultural Literacy*," text Garcia (2005) argues that there is no "one best curriculum for developing literacy or for reflecting diversity" and that instead of a change in pedagogical canon, what is required is a change in attitude, formed by progressive perspectives and grounded in methodologies and 21st century pedagogical thinking. He posited that institutions situated in "White" suburbia encounter difficulties providing diverse field experiences for preservice teachers. As a result, he stressed the importance of diverse placements, arguing that educational institutions must strive to find diverse placements for preservice teachers if they hope to train the next generation of educators to deal effectively with the anticipated forthcoming demographic shift in mainstream American culture. Although some educational institutional programs view these diverse placements as highly desirable, many institutions instead choose to rely on university classroom courses that focus on multiculturalism as stand-ins for real-world experiences otherwise acquired in diverse settings. Simultaneously, many preservice teachers who were interviewed believed that the required courses in multicultural education did not provide them with the practical skills they required to work with students from diverse backgrounds, while at the same time these required courses affirmed their continued belief in the importance of working with diverse populations in their respective fields.

In a similar study designed to explore culturally based biases held by preservice teachers, Moore (2004) found that preservice teachers recognized that their respective biases came from possessing limited cultural experiences and that an increased awareness of their own limited thinking allowed them to find new ways to practice teaching in culturally diverse classrooms and that early acquired experiences in culturally diverse settings or classrooms provided the foundation upon which they built their future course of study.

Tragically, too many teachers are "culturally illiterate and blind," Austin argued in her (1976) text, and this ignorance leads many teachers to experience "fear, confusion, anger and despair," feelings eerily comparable to markers identified by Jentsch and Freud in their respective definitions of the uncanny, which if unaddressed, clearly negatively impact the culturally undifferentiated classroom. This lack of culturally competent teaching, the resulting educational psychosocial conflict, and its impact on students, teachers, and institutions alike is well-described and documented in the Irvine (1992) which shares anecdotally how:

A black girl, unlike the white girl, did not share with the teacher an implicit understanding of cultural nuances, gestures and timing, which resulted in frustration and missed opportunities for both parties. In contrast, the white girl's shared cultural and racial identity with the teacher produced many instances of shared expressed affection and created learning opportunities (p. 15).

The passage above clearly supports the theory that the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect phenomena negatively impact North American learning environments and must be addressed and mitigated by improving culturally competent teaching. The minimization or mitigation of these phenomena requires or demands that faculty and students begin recognizing the presence of these phenomena and adjust their instruction and curricula to accommodate the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect if they hope to correct the resulting cognitive dissonance that presents in multiple academic environments. To be fair, refugees, immigrants, minorities, and socioeconomically subordinate students must also be educated about the presence of these phenomena if there is to be any hope of overcoming them. Simultaneously, academic environments, institutions, and their representative dominant culture faculty must also be restructured or better educated so that their own culturally competent awareness is improved, thereby accommodating these uncanny students, improving academic success rates, and increasing the number of uncanny minority faculty populations.

For this transformation to occur, Mills and Buckley (2014) argue that changes need to be affected at the institutional level, beginning with the adjustment of institutions' missions and goals to reflect their commitment to a culturally pluralistic campus climate including but not limited to "campus wide academic support systems to promote sensitivity to the special needs of minority students, and internal monitoring and evaluation systems of all such restructuring efforts and outcomes" (p. 20). According to Mills, there are five techniques for accommodating cultural differences during instruction that are recommended practices for teachers who intend to improve their classroom cultural competency. These are:

- Initiate each new classroom situation by negotiating with students a subculture of learning to fit the needs of that particular group. Be sure that expectations are made public. The negotiating process should include these elements of a culture: value system, worldview, social organization, academic technology, form of governance, language, and key components of the educational process for the new subculture.
- Implement a system of checks and balances by frequently conducting, with the assistance of students, short-term action research on perceptions of verbal and nonverbal putdowns, sarcasm, and inappropriate use of humor. Students may tally or list instances of each behavior that occur during instructor-student interactions over a specified period of time. A reporting system that allows discussion and clarification of misperceptions should be made available to students.
- Distinguish publicly personal opinions from facts and give students the option to agree or disagree. Teachers' and students' opinions are closely tied to their cultural backgrounds and life ways. To deny students options is to force them to assume another's culture without having an experiential point of reference.
- Strive to see oneself as actually seen by students, not as one desires to be seen. Attempt to determine the reasons for students' perceptions by asking them. Educators must also be ready to hear students' responses and help them to clarify abstract words and broad generalizations. Students should always be required to speak with a high degree of specificity, giving times and places and using specific verbs and adjectives.
- For personal evaluation only, faculty should periodically audiotape their lectures, conversations, and conferences.

Conclusion

According to the literature and research examined, once the identified teacher cultural competency practices were put into effect, there should have been obvious and immediate changes in the academic and social performances of institutions and those students that attended them should have been apparent. However, this did not prove to be the case, and unfortunately, more than 30 years after the publication of *Exploring Competency Based Education*, the data compiled and distilled seems to suggest that all mitigating factors can be condensed into one common theme, the role and impact of the teacher in the process. The data suggests that a top-down dominant culture directed educational reform movement thus far has not been effective. Therefore, the solution must lie in a bottom-up revolution of sorts, one that is teacher enforced and designed to affect change one classroom or crop of students at a time.

According to Shyman and Hargreaves (2013), the teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement. Teachers do not merely deliver the curriculum they develop, define, and interpret it too. It is what teachers think, what they believe, and what they do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that students receive (p. 43). Therefore, the research suggests that teacher cultural competency must be the focus area and that this cultural competency training or improvement must be a mandatory and more intensively encouraged priority of teacher educational training, particularly if it is the teachers themselves who are expected to play an active and significant role in affecting the changes in the society that pedagogical reformers and global corporate stakeholders expect to see. According to existing literature, if society imagines an inclusive school or classroom to be the place where all students can make evaluation-based progress while simultaneously receiving appropriate support from culturally competent teachers and staff, then new canny culturally competent curricular benchmarks need to be developed, and it is these new, improved benchmarks that educational institutions and pedagogues need to refine and develop if they hope to begin working toward and overhauling a clearly antiquated conceptual, procedural, curricular, and educational system that thus far has failed to be effective.

These previously noted and recognized techniques for improving teacher cultural competency appear to identify the most current pedagogical praxis reform suggestions available, while simultaneously, albeit unknowingly, identifying how best to minimize or mitigate the uncanny and uncanny valley effect. Based upon the past three decades of material read, reviewed, and analyzed, this author believes that he has successfully identified the paramount academic suggestions and posits that those made by Mills and identified above are the most comprehensive and solid methodological and pedagogical theories of the day.

These suggestions appear to condense the findings of the previous three decades of epistemological thought and practice, and it is these suggestions that the author believes offer the best hope of minimizing or neutralizing the presence of the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect in dominant culture-designed and driven educational institutions.

Therefore, by identifying the uncanny and the uncanny valley effect phenomena that exist within and currently plague our educational institutions, and by addressing and attempting to modify teacher cultural competency, it is the author's hope that new or improved pedagogical

practices or praxes can be effected and that maybe teachers can begin to “be the change [they] hope to see in the world” (Gandhi, 1938). Of course, one recognizes that there is still a very long way to go to achieve an enlightened understanding of what the best cultural competency practices look and sound like. Arguably, there may never be a solution that works comprehensively with all students all of the time, but because teaching is a “practice,” one that improves with consistency, frequency, patience, and time, we can remain eternally encouraged by the promise of an exciting and more globally humanistic future, one in which we can all play a substantial and active role.

About the Author:

Roberto T. Ollivier-Garza, Ph.D. is a graduate of the Dept. of Language, Literacy & Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, USA. Roberto was raised and educated internationally and it is the experiences in Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, Zaire, Spain, Korea, Japan, Bolivia, India, & China that motivate his work in the fields of literature, language, education, culture/ identity, & pragmatics.

References

- Allington, R. L., & Cunningham, P. M. (2002). *Schools that work: Where all children read and write*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (1988). *Teacher education pipeline: Schools, colleges, and departments of education enrollments by race and ethnicity*. Washington, D.C: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- Austin, G. R. (1976). *Early childhood education: An international perspective*. New York: Academic Press.
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. G. (1995). *Handbook of research on multicultural education*. New York: Macmillan Pub.
- Barnes, . (2006). *Child*. Marrickville, NSW: Elsevier Australia.
- Braskamp, L. A., Brandenburg, D. C., & Ory, J. C. (1984). *Evaluating teaching effectiveness: A practical guide*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Brown, M. C., & Davis, J. E. (2000). *Black sons to mothers: Compliments, critiques, and challenges for cultural workers in education*. New York P. Lang.
- Calfee, C., Wittwer, F., & Meredith, M. (1998). *Building a full-service school: A step-by-step guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Catterall, J. S., & Educational Resources Information Center (U.S.). (1990). *A reform cooled-out: Competency test required for high school graduation*. Los Angeles, Calif.: UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing.
- Dilworth, M. E., & American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (1992). *Diversity in teacher education: New expectations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- Garcia, R. L. (1982). *Teaching in a pluralistic society: Concepts, models, strategies*. New York: Harper & Row
- Garibaldi, A. M. (1989). *Teacher recruitment and retention: With a special focus on minority teachers*. Washington, D.C: NEA Professional Library, National Education Association
- Gollnick, D. M., & Chinn, P. C. (1986). *Multicultural education in a pluralistic society*. Columbus: C.E. Merrill.

- Hall, G. E., & Jones, H. L. (1976). *Competency-based education: A process for the improvement of education*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.
- Herring, R. D., & White, L. M. (December 01, 1995). School Counselors, Teachers, and the Culturally Compatible Classroom: Partnerships in Multicultural Education. *The Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, 34, 2, 52-64.
- Holland, R. (2003). *To build a better teacher: The emergence of a competitive education industry*. Westport, Conn: Praeger.
- Honigsfeld, A., & Cohan, A. (2012). *Breaking the mold of education for culturally and linguistically diverse students: Innovative and successful practices for the twenty-first century*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Houston, W. R. (1974). *Exploring competency based education*. Berkeley, Calif: McCutchan Pub. Corp.
- King, J. E., Hollins, E. R., & Hayman, W. C. (1997). *Preparing teachers for cultural diversity*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Korn-Bursztyn, C., & Bursztyn, A. (2002). *Rethinking multicultural education: Case studies in cultural transition*. Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey.
- Lazarus, E. (1990). *The new colossus*. Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg.
- Levin, M. R. (2000). *Cultures of control*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic.
- Lipman, P. (1998). *Race, class, and power in school restructuring*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Manning, P. (2009). *The African diaspora: A history through culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Masny, D., & In Cole, D. R. (2014). *Education and the politics of becoming*. London: Routledge.
- McCarthy, C., & Apple, M. W. (1988). Race, class and gender in American educational research. In L. M. Weis (Ed.), *Class, race, and gender in American education* (pp. 9–39). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- McDiarmid, G. W., & Educational Resources Information Center (U.S.). (1990). *What to do about differences?: A study of multicultural education for teacher trainees in the Los Angeles unified school district*. East Lansing, Mich: National Center for Research on Teacher Education.
- Mills, M., & McGregor, G. (2014). *Re-engaging young people in education: Learning from alternative schools*.
- Moore, R. (2004). *Education and society: Issues and explanations in the sociology of education*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Oregon Commission on Children and Families. (2009). *Cultural competency*. Salem, Or: Oregon Commission on Children & Families.
- Oregon Commission on Children and Families. (1998). *The Links between children, families and communities*. Salem, OR: Oregon Commission on Children & Families.
- Pewewardy, C., Hammer, P. C., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, Charleston, WV. (2003). *Culturally Responsive Teaching for American Indian Students*. *ERIC Digest*. Archives at <http://www.ael.org>.
- Raspail, J. (1975). *The camp of the saints*. New York: Scribner.
- Sleeter, C. E., & Grant, C. A. (1988). Making choices for multicultural art education: Five

- approaches to race, class, and gender. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Shyman, E. (2013). *Beyond equality in the American classroom: The case for inclusive education*.
- Siegel, D. J. (2003). *The call for diversity: Pressure, expectation, and organizational response in the post-secondary setting*. New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Solzhenitsyn, A. I. (1974). *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An experiment in literary investigation*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Teachers as Cultural Workers*. (2005). S.I: Perseus Books, LLC.
- Tutwiler, S. W. (2005). *Teachers as collaborative partners: Working with diverse families and communities*. Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Winfield, R. D. (1988). *Reason and justice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.