

Relationship between Experiential Learning and High and Low Context Cultures

The following shows how Experiential Learning addresses the Low Context/High Context distinction. The third and fourth columns detail the specific distinctions between Low and High Context cultures, respectively; the first column identifies a characteristic of Experiential Learning and indicates whether Low, High or both contexts align with that characteristic. The second column identifies some of the major pedagogical implications of the High/Low distinction. The use of *italics* indicates very subtle characteristics, which, if not explicitly addressed, could lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS	LOW CONTEXT (LC) ¹	HIGH CONTEXT (HC)
1. Interaction			
Nonverbal signals <i>Potential source of miscommunication</i>		Low use of nonverbal signals. Their messages rely more on words than nonverbal cues. Body language is less highly developed, with little attempt to synchronize with words.	High use of nonverbal signals. Voice tone, facial expression, gesture, and eye expression all carry significant parts of a conversation. Body language is highly developed and synchronized with words.
Exploring questions favors HC. <i>Potential source of miscommunication.</i>	HC strong in divergence, but need to be prompted to get to the point; LC strong in convergence, but need to be prompted to elaborate, explore ideas by talking them through.	Communication is direct. They appear to be blunt, even rude, in their directness. LC people spell things out exactly and value being specific. Getting to the main point quickly is highly valued.	Communication is indirect. They avoid getting to the main point of discussions quickly and talk around them to avoid being pushy. They embellish discussions and expect others to gather the main ideas from the context provided.
Problem statements and recommendations favor LC; close collaboration on projects supports HC.	HC can learn succinctness and verbal discrimination from LC; HC can better interpret other HC statements, learn to unpack them.	Messages are explicit and elaborate. Their verbal message is highly articulated with accurate distinctions; context is less important. The information is in explicit code (words, directions, publications, lectures).	Messages are implicit and restricted. Their verbal message is implicit, associated with informal intimate language, and context is important (situations, people, nonverbals). Words are collapsed and shortened to create simple messages with deep meaning that flow freely.
Close collaboration on projects favors HC; developing rapport with partners in projects favors HC.	LC can learn to understand code switching. HC can learn that in-group speech also creates an out-group, which may be unintended.	Messages are literal. Communication is a way of exchanging information, ideas, and opinions but is not intended to unify (identify or associate) culturally with others. Conversations reflect the occasion, but only one linguistic code is used.	Messages are an art form. They see communication as a form of engaging another person, a unifying cultural activity that may include bilingual code switching (beginning or ending sentences or conversations in two languages).
Short-term interpersonal feedback (HC) enhances rapport with project partners.	Relate interpersonal relationships to the learning at hand.	Long-term interpersonal feedback. They avoid interfering with or intervening in others' lives. They take colleagues' mood shifts for granted, attributing them to personal problems that should be ignored.	Short-term interpersonal feedback. Constant checking on emotional status of others is important for group morale. Though this characteristic is attributed to women, HC people in general are especially attuned to slight mood changes among friends and colleagues.

¹ Based on Roberto Ibarra's *Beyond Affirmative Action* (2001), Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 69–78.

Relationship between Experiential Learning and High and Low Context Cultures

Disagreement <i>Potential source of miscommunication.</i>	Use disagreement as an opportunity to discuss perceptions of as complex situation.	Disagreement is depersonalized. They withdraw from conflict and get on with the task. They depersonalize disagreement with a “tough it out” rather than “talk it out” approach. They defuse confrontation by quiet separation. (Force means communication breakdown.)	Disagreement is personalized. They are sensitive to conflict and criticism expressed by another's verbal and nonverbal communication. They must resolve conflict before work can progress. They use a “talk it out” approach to defuse confrontation and unpleasantness, especially at work. (Force means communication.)
2. Association			
Experiential Learning promotes long-term relationships: “personhood” (HC). Written contracts may define projects (favors LC).	For LC, greater attention must be paid to establishing relationships with peers, hosts, and instructors; for HC, relationships must be seen within the context of the learning.	Personal commitment to people is low. Relationships start and end quickly. Many people can be inside one’s circle, but boundaries are blurred. They are accustomed to short-term relationships and are often highly committed to their job or career. Written contracts are important.	Personal commitment to people is high. Relationships depend on trust, build up slowly, and are stable. They are careful to distinguish who is in their circle. People are deeply involved with each other. They have a strong tendency to build lifetime relationships. Written contracts are less important than bonds of personal trust.
Both orientations (task and process) important to accomplishing goals.		Task orientation. Things get done when everyone follows policies and procedures and pays attention to a goal. Being nice to people is not necessary nor is it as important as completing a job.	Process orientation. Getting things done depends on one’s relationship with people and attention to the group process. Being nice, courteous, and kind to people is more important than completing the job.
Using group rewards will allow HC students to have success acknowledged without pointing them out; individual rewards will satisfy LC.	Use a mix of individual projects and group projects.	Success means being recognized. They seek publicity and to stand out among their peers to “get ahead” in society. They value individualism and may ask for more information about someone's accomplishments.	Success means being unobtrusive. They seek less attention for their accomplishments. Talking about one's achievements is considered brash and boastful. They value humility, and such passive behavior may be misinterpreted by LC people as being unassertive.
3. Temporality			
The ability to perform multiple tasks (HC) is essential in Experiential Learning projects.	Balance	Time is monochronic (M-Time). They emphasize schedules, compartmentalization, and promptness. They do one thing at a time and may equate time with money and status. Change happens fast.	Time is polychronic (P-Time). They emphasize people and completion of transactions. They do many things at once (multiple tasking) and do not equate time with money or status. Change happens slowly, for things are rooted in the past.
The ability to work within a schedule (LC) is also important.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They do work on a schedule and do one thing at a time. Their intent is to do things quickly and see immediate results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because life has its own flow, they are reluctant to schedule time, cognizant that the needs of people may interfere with keeping to a schedule.
Speed (LC) and accuracy (HC) are both desirable.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They value speed and efficiency in work. The objective for learning and training is "getting up to speed." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They value accuracy and completion of a job. How well something is learned is more important than how soon or how fast.
Ability to focus (LC) is necessary.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They concentrate on the job at hand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are highly distractible and subject to interruptions at work.

Relationship between Experiential Learning and High and Low Context Cultures

Time constraints may exist that must be recognized (LC).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They take deadlines and schedules seriously. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They regard deadlines and schedules as goals to be achieved if possible.
Plans must adjust to changing conditions and increased understanding of the project (HC).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They adhere religiously to plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They change plans often and easily.
Participants must correctly interpret the promptness/lateness of others (LC/HC)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They emphasize promptness. Being late sends a message about status or importance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They value promptness if they know it is important to the relationship. Being late does not send a message.
Need to be able to complete multiple tasks simultaneously (HC).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They see people who juggle several tasks at once (P-Time) as being totally disorganized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They perceive people who work in sequence as obsessive. Working collegially is more important than achieving work goals.
		Time is a commodity. Time can be spent saved or wasted. One's time is one's own	Time is a process. Time is part of nature; it belongs to everyone.
Synchrony and tempo of life <i>Potential for misunderstanding.</i>		Synchrony is not important and tempo of life is faster. They are less likely to consciously or unconsciously synchronize body movements while interacting with others (kinesics). The pace of is hurried and individualized; synchronizing with others is not valued.	Synchronicity is important and tempo of life is slower. Body movement while interacting with others is consciously and unconsciously synchronized. The absence of synchrony at work or performing with others may cause stress and tension. The pace of life is slower and synchronizing with others is highly valued.
Because specific actions in complex situations can have wide-ranging effects, the implications of change must be carefully considered (HC).		Culture relative to time is superficial. They perceive culture as something that one can change, put on, or take off. Change means discarding (excluding) old ways for new ones. Because they regard culture as a superficial difference, they have trouble accepting difference in others. They tend to expect others to be as willing to reshape their culture as they are.	Culture relative to time is ingrained. They perceive culture as an integral part of everyone and everything. Change means incorporating or adopting (including) new ways with old ones. Because they regard culture as ingrained, they are receptive to what is different in others, and they seldom expect others to reshape their culture.
4. Gender and LC/HC Culture			
An informal, evolving culture is more beneficial in complex, often ambiguous, real-life situations (HC).		M-Time cultures are formal (male oriented). Formal culture is technical, highly scheduled, task oriented, concentrated, and imposing. The official worlds of business, government, entertainment, and sports are shaped by men. Formal wisdom in professions like business and the law give minimal importance to informal culture.	P-Time cultures are informal (female oriented). Informal culture evolves over time from shared personal experiences that tie individuals to the group and its identity. It exists in all cultures. Communication is an informal process with no specific senders, receivers, or identifiable messages. Wisdom is group oriented.

Relationship between Experiential Learning and High and Low Context Cultures

Complex projects may benefit from both team (LC) approaches and group (HC) approaches.	Use both forms of group work.	Formal culture is team oriented. Teams consist of individuals with specific skills who are brought together to work on projects of tasks. Their work may be linked, but it is sequential and compartmentalized (handed off to others).	Informal culture is group oriented. Individuals with general and/or specific skills come together to work as a group to complete projects. Work is interactive, and individuals are not territorial about specific tasks.
5. Territoriality			
Personal involvement (HC) should be encouraged, but awareness of the personal space preferences of others (LC) is necessary.		Space has more boundaries. LC people need more social distance for interaction, with little if any touching or contact during conversation. Personal space is compartmentalized, more individualized, and private.	Space is more communal. HC people are comfortable interacting within close social distances, and constant nonintimate touching during conversation is normal. Personal space is shared, and involvement with others is encouraged.
Collaborative learning favors those for whom privacy is less important (HC).		Privacy is more important. They are concerned about not disturbing others and following social rules of privacy and consideration.	Privacy is less important. HC people are involved with those who are closely related (family, friends, close business associates) and have few concerns about privacy.
Resources may be limited; sharing within the group may be necessary (HC).		Personal property is shared less. LC people tend to show great respect for private property. They seldom or reluctantly borrow or lend things.	Personal property is shared more. They respect private property but tend to borrow and lend things often and easily. My home is your home.
6. Learning			
Both global (HC) and analytical (LC) aspects of a project should be explored, but the global perspective must frame (contextualized) the analytical.	Use Learning Cycle to alternate between these perceptual modes.	Knowledge is obtained by logical reasoning. A rational step-by-step model of scientific analysis yields information. Reality is elemental, fragmented, compartmentalized and thus easier to isolate for analysis.	Knowledge is obtained by a gestalt model. Facts are perceived as complete units (gestalts) embedded in the context of situations or experiences; they can be recalled as wholes, and they are not easily separated for analysis. Things are interconnected, synthesized, and global.
Both analytical (LC) and comprehensive (HC) thinking are important, and they are closely interrelated in the Learning Cycle; symbolic representations (HC) are valuable.	Use Learning Cycle to make the most of both learning types; relate specific observations to general formalizations.	Analytical thinking is important. They prefer an inductive reasoning process, to go from the specific to the general. They focus on compiling details. They have difficulty translating their thinking process into symbols so that comprehensive thinkers can easily understand it.	Comprehensive thinking is important. They prefer deductive reasoning, to go from general to specific. They use expanded thinking ("big picture" actions, ideas, and/or complex forms). They have few problems translating their thinking processes symbolically (nonverbally) for others to understand.
Both approaches are valuable. Our view of real-life problems is embedded in our implicit philosophy; our theories are attempts to represent a coherent understanding of a problem.	Allow for both approaches.	They learn best by following directions. They assemble or combine facts according to the rules they memorize. Things are spelled out with explicit explanations, even in an apprenticeship model. Theoretical and philosophical problems are treated as real.	They learn best by demonstration. They learn by hands-on methods: observing and mimicking others, practicing it mentally and physically, demonstrating it to others, and by apprenticeship. Real-life problems are as important as theoretical and philosophical ones.

Relationship between Experiential Learning and High and Low Context Cultures

Both individual and group learning are valuable.	Provide opportunities for both individual and group learning; use both formally structured groups and informal groups.	Learning is oriented toward the individual. They prefer to approach tasks and learning individually. They tend to work and learn apart from others. Teamwork means individuals are assigned specific tasks to accomplish.	Learning is group oriented. They prefer to work in groups to learn and solve problems. Some groups prefer constant talking (interacting) in proximity when working or learning.
Both problem approaches/ expressive modalities are useful.	Help HC reflect on and articulate their thinking processes; help LC reflect on their thinking process.	Creative learning process is externalized. They prefer to learn or create complex knowledge like mathematics externally—with the aid of pens, papers, books, computers, and so on. The learning process is highly visible and accessible for others to evaluate and correct. Externalized creative processes help to speed up change, but they are slower and less productive than internalized processes.	Creative learning process is internalized. They may be capable of learning or creating complex knowledge like mathematics or music in their heads rather than by using learning extensions like pen and paper. The creative learning process is comprehensive, and integrating complex ideas can happen all at once. Internalized creative processes are less visible for others to evaluate and correct, but they are much faster and more productive than externalized processes.

7. Information

Sharing information within the group is essential (HC); confidentiality (LC) may be necessary.		Information does not flow freely. Data are highly focused and compartmentalized. They make relatively low use of personal information networks.	Information spreads rapidly. It moves as if it has a life of its own. They make relatively significant use of multiple personal information networks.
Information without context is meaningless (HC); a purely conceptual context lacks depth.	For LC emphasize the relatedness of knowledge and the necessity of context; for HC make decontextualized knowledge more accessible by contextualizing.	Information can be separated from context. They can separate the two, an artifact primarily of Western analytical science.	Information without context is meaningless. They prefer information in context; otherwise, it is unreliable.

8. LC/HC academic systems

Complex situations require HC academic approaches; LC disciplines can add to the variety of perspectives.	In complex situations, point out the need of a variety of disciplines to more fully understand the many aspects.	LC disciplines. They may favor traditional scientific fields that tend to conduct analysis with methods that often eliminate context (separate information from context). Research analysis usually deals with large numbers of quantitative and easily measured variables; results are more deterministic and context is less important. New research projects are directed toward strongly projected predetermined outcomes.	HC disciplines. They may favor disciplines that are more directly involved with contextual thinking and research about living systems and people. Research analysis is more qualitative and probabilistic and requires attention to variables in which cultural context is important. New research projects are clear about the direction and methods of analysis, but projected outcomes are less predetermined and more open ended and flexible.
--	--	---	---

Relationship between Experiential Learning and High and Low Context Cultures

There is value in examining ideas (LC) vis-à-vis real-world application (HC). Communicating via words and math (LC) is important, as are more creative modes (HC) of expression.	Use Learning Cycle to demonstrate complementarity of these types of thinking; emphasize purpose of knowledge.	Scientific thinking is emphasized. They value examining ideas rather than broad comprehension of real-world applications. Linear thinking is ultra-specific and inhibits a broad mutual understanding of multilayered events. Scientific thinking uses words and math to communicate.	Practical thinking is valued. They value application of knowledge in real-world events (social skills). Interconnected thinking fosters creativity and broad comprehension of multilayered events.
HC teaching style is more appropriate	Introduce technical style as appropriate for certain audiences.	Academic/teaching style is technical. Their style is individual, less interactive, and teacher oriented. Research interests include people or communities, but they focus on theoretical and philosophical problems. Writing style uses fewer pronouns.	Academic/teaching style is personal. Their style is more open, interactive and student oriented. Research interests are directed to real-life problems with people and the community. Writing style tends toward more use of personal pronouns.
One must understand the patterns of the cultures with which one works (HC) and be able to communicate that understanding to others (LC/HC).	Emphasize the importance of a variety of taxonomies for a variety of purposes.	Science relies on Linnean-style taxonomies. Scientific taxonomies favor linear analysis that classifies living things mainly for information retrieval. Taxonomic systems emphasize the processes of collecting specific information more than its integration into usable, intelligible patterns.	Science includes folkstyle taxonomies. Taxonomies function beyond information retrieval to communicate <i>about</i> the living things being classified. The communication is among those who already understand the cultural significance of the things being discussed. The intent is to integrate the information and contextual thinking to open new areas for research.

Characteristics of field-sensitive and field-independent children and adults

		Field-independent (FI)	Field-sensitive (FS)
1. Relationship to peers			
FS predominates; personhood.	Use both teaching approaches.	Prefer to work independently	Like to work with others to achieve common goals
FS predominates; personhood.	Acknowledge both assisting and individual accomplishment.	Like to compete and gain individual recognition	Like to assist others
FS predominates; personhood.		Are task oriented; are inattentive to social environment when working	Are sensitive to feelings and opinions of others
2. Social relationship to teacher			
FS helps in validating students.		Avoid physical contact with teacher	Openly express positive feelings for teacher
FS helps in validating students.		Interact formally with teacher; restrict interactions to tasks at hand	Ask questions about teacher's taste and personal experiences; seek to become like teacher

Relationship between Experiential Learning and High and Low Context Cultures

3. Instructional relationship to teacher			
Both are important.	Allow both approaches.	Like to try new tasks without teacher's help	Seek guidance and demonstration from teacher
FS helps in validating students.		Are impatient to begin tasks; like to finish first	Seek rewards that strengthen relationship with teacher
FS helps in validating students.		Seek nonsocial rewards	Are highly motivated by working individually with teacher
4. Thinking style			
Both styles can contribute to the project.	Show clear connections between the big picture and specific aspects of it.	Focus on details and parts of things	Function well when objectives are carefully explained or modeled
FS approach is most appropriate in complex, ambiguous situations.	Use both analytic and narrative frameworks.	Deal well with math and science concepts	Deal well with concepts in humanized or story format
Both are important.	Combine or alternate between both.	Like discovery or trial-and-error learning	Function well when curriculum content is relevant to personal interests and experiences
5. Communications			
FS is more appropriate.	Show importance of both types of communication.	Tend to be impersonal and to the point	Tend to personalize communications by referring to own life experiences, interests, and feelings
Both are important.	Help FS articulate thoughts.	Tend to focus more on verbal than nonverbal communication	Tend to focus more on nonverbal than verbal communication
6. Interpersonal relationships			
FS is more appropriate.	Help FI be more comfortable in social settings	Are reserved and cautious in social settings	Are open and outgoing in social settings
FS is more appropriate.		Present as distant and formal	Present as warm and informal
7. Motivation			
FS <i>personhood</i> motivation; FI <i>individuality</i> motivation.	Provide both types of rewards.	Seek nonsocial rewards	Value social rewards that strengthen relationships with important others
FS <i>personhood</i> motivation; FI <i>individuality</i> motivation.	Connect the individual goals to the social goals.	Are motivated in relation to self-advancement	Are motivated in relation to achievement for others (family, team, ethnic/racial group, etc.)
8. Teaching, parenting, supervisory, and counseling relationships			
Both are important.	Use both approaches.	Focus on task or goal	Focus on relations with student, child, supervisor, or client
FS is more appropriate, but self-disclosure must be purposeful.	Use both approaches.	Are formal and private	Are informal and self-disclosing