
Using films in teaching intercultural concepts: An action research project at two universities in India and the United States

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Abstract

Films are used as a tool for teaching cross-cultural and intercultural concepts in higher education and in corporate settings. However, the processes and outcomes of using films in intercultural training and education have not been systematically researched. This paper discusses the results of a collaborative project involving faculty and students from two universities, a large public university in the Midwestern United States and a private university in India. The goal of this action research project was to further develop a methodological approach to using a feature film, *Outsourced*, in teaching cross-cultural concepts to graduate students, and to understand how different cultural contexts affect the effectiveness of the use of films. The project involved development and implementation of the new approach and research on the factors affecting the effectiveness of using films in cross-cultural training.

Keywords

Films; intercultural training; intercultural education; HRD students; management students

Films (this term is used in this paper for feature/popular films) are used in management education and in corporate training to provide a backdrop for discussion of various theories and models, and to communicate ideas and concepts in memorable and engaging fashion. According to Champoux (1999), films are a familiar medium to students and, therefore, they can be effective in ensuring students' interest in otherwise dry theories and concepts. Films expose students to powerful and unique experiences not simulated in a classroom that provoke strong emotional reactions, and stimulate animated discussions that could lead to reassessment of one's values and self-image if the scenes in the films have strong emotional content (Champoux, 1999). Champoux (1999) suggested that films could be used in

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different ways in the classroom: as a basis for a case discussion, as an experiential exercise, or as material to discuss metaphors, satire, symbolism, hidden cultural meaning, and differences in perceptions of time and space. There is a variety of instructional approaches that can be used in teaching a film-based course or segment of a course: showing the whole film or large parts of the film, before the discussion or after the discussion; showing individual scenes from the same film at different times in the course; or showing two different films related to the same subject to discuss different perspectives (Champoux, 1999). The instructor could also ask individual students to view films on their own time, and then write an analysis focused on specific concepts, covered in class (Fontenot & Fontenot, 2008; Pandey, 2012).

Dunphy, Meyer and Linton (2008) pointed out that popular films like *12 Angry Men* and *The Godfather* are likely to be more effective in focusing trainees' attention on important moral and leadership dilemmas than a training video featuring the company's CEO discussing management issues. Gallos (1993) argued that popular films (e.g., *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *The Karate Kid* (1984), *Rashomon* (1950), *Working Girl* (1988), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989)), can be powerful vehicles for what she called "reframing": helping students to develop new conceptual frameworks and perspectives.

The use of films in intercultural training has been documented and discussed by a number of management and HRD scholars (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Littrell & Salas, 2005; Littrell, Salas, Hess, Paley, & Riedel, 2006; Summerfield, 1994; Mallinger and Rossy, 2003; Varner & Beamer, 2005; Verluyten, 2007, 2008). However, most of these articles either are presenting examples of the use of films in authors' teaching practice, or are conceptual in nature. Systematic research on the process and outcomes of the use of films in classroom, and especially in intercultural training and education, is still scarce.

The goal of this paper is to report the results of a first stage of an action research-based intercultural study on the use of films in university coursework. The remainder of this paper will: provide an overview of the literature on using films in intercultural training and education, explain how in this study a film was used in the classroom, and how the action research approach was used to investigate the process and outcomes of this educational experience. The research findings and practical implications of the project are then discussed. Finally, the next steps in this project and suggestions for future research are provided.

Literature review and purpose of the study

A number of scholars discussed the benefits of using films in intercultural training and education (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Champoux, 1999; Littrell, Salas, Hess, Paley, & Riedel, 2006; Summerfield, 1994; Mallinger & Rossy, 2003; Varner & Beamer, 2005; Verluyten, 2007, 2008). Cardon (2010) argued that one of the primary advantages of using films in teaching university students is that films are entertaining and engaging and, thus, can stimulate curiosity towards other cultures. Other authors pointed out that films help students decipher other cultures, learn about cultural differences, and better understand features of cultural theories and constructs (Cardon 2010, Mallinger & Rossy, 2003; Tidwell, 2001; Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000).

A number of articles discuss innovative approaches to using films in teaching cultural theory and cross-cultural concepts. Mallinger and Rossy (2003) used the film *Gung Ho*; Tidwell (2001), *The Joy Luck Club* and *Fools Rush In*; and Cardon (2010), *Slumdog Millionaire*. Smith, Shrestha and Evans (2010) discussed their experience of using the film *Crash* in teaching cross-cultural intelligence, and measuring students' progress in improving cultural perception, cultural communication, and cultural relations skills, while simultaneously developing cultural self-identity. An important finding of the Smith et al. (2010) study was that the film increased students' ability to understand the causes of cross-cultural problems; at the same time, the film did not seem to increase students' ability to understand basic cross-cultural concepts.

The authors pointed out that, while students found the film engaging and enjoyable, they chose scenes to discuss in their written reports mostly based on scenes' emotional appeal and not as illustrations of specific cultural concepts.

Cardon (2010) has found that the film *Slumdog Millionaire* can be a useful tool for communicating the concept of stereotyping, providing good examples of stereotyping the Indian culture. Bumpus (2005) provided a valuable review of a collection of six films used to teach diversity concepts in an Organizational Behavior MBA course: *A Soldier's Story* (Jewison, 1984); *The Associate* (Petrie, 1996); *Smoke Signals* (Eyre, 1998); *The Joy Luck Club* (Wang, 1993); and *For Love or Country: The Arturo Sandoval Story* (Sargent, 2000).

Briam (2010) described how the film *Outsourced* was integrated into a course. The article discussed four potential uses of a film. Specifically, it can be used to: create an intercultural experience for students, provide an illustration of the process of cross-cultural adjustment, give tangible and memorable examples of cultural dimensions and intercultural communication concepts (thus making them more meaningful), and focus students' attention on metaphorical images.

Pandey (2012) also reported on effectiveness of *Outsourced* in teaching cultural concepts such as cultural adjustment, intercultural communication, cultural intelligence, cross-cultural competence and cultural sensitivity.

Alexander and Waxman (2000) provided useful insights into instructional uses of films in teaching cultural diversity and ethnicity. They described their use of clips from popular films to expose learners to various real-life issues of family therapy practice, ethnicity, social class differences, and domestic violence. The article discussed two goals for using clips in classroom settings: provide material for guided discussions, and provide a backdrop for subsequent role-plays.

Kuzma and Haney (2001) described their experience in designing and conducting a summer course taught simultaneously at two different universities, using popular films as primary assigned "texts" instead of textbooks. The authors attempted to hold many features of the course design and teaching constant in order to later identify and compare similarities and differences. While they highlighted a number of drawbacks and trade-offs, involved in designing such a film-based course, some of the instructional goals (especially conceptual learning goals) were achieved. They concluded that the overall results of this experiment were positive: students enjoyed learning in this relaxed and novel format.

King (2002) discussed the use of feature films on DVD in teaching English as a Second Language. The author pointed out that feature films have a significant advantage when compared to commercially produced training videos: the latter fail to secure the sustained interest of learners, since "watching the same few actors and actresses appear in episode after episode [becomes] a dull and uninspiring routine for most learners." (p. 509). King also pointed out that special features of films on DVD can be used to enhance learning experiences (e.g., interactive menus, behind-the-scenes commentary, the ability to switch on foreign language captions and subtitles, and easy access to pre-selected scenes). King's article provided a useful discussion of various film-viewing approaches, i.e., sequential, scene-by-scene viewing followed by discussions, single scene or selective approach where only one or a few selected scenes are used, and whole film

approach, when a whole film is screened in one session. According to King, each approach has its benefits and drawbacks. Advocates of whole-film screening argue that the selective scene or sequencing approach reduces the emotional impact of the film, by depriving the viewers of an opportunity to experience the artistic creation in its original intended by the director form.

Roell (2010) pointed out advantages of using films in teaching: films tell an interesting story; they combine learning with pleasure and are able to capture learners' interest; they utilize several sensory channels at the same time, thus helping to incorporate different learning styles and preferences; and they help to address the needs of learning at the emotional level. Roell discussed examples of films that can be used to teach specific frameworks and concepts, such as stereotyping (*The Green Card*), verbal and non-verbal communication (*The Joy Luck Club* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*), mono-

chromic and polychromic perception of time (*The Joy Luck Club*), individualism and collectivism (*Real Women Have Curves*), and high vs. low-context cultures (*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*).

In summary, this review suggests that films can provide significant benefits in teaching intercultural issues. There appears to be an agreement that the major advantages of using films include an ability to capture learners' interest and attention, and provide otherwise hard to simulate intercultural experiences. Films can be used for case discussions and role-plays, providing strong emotional appeal and impact. Films can be used in multiple ways, depending on the learning goals (e.g., whole film vs. selective screening; use of discussions and follow-up assignments, etc.).

Based on the above reported literature review, the purpose of this research study was twofold. First, to determine whether popular films are an effective pedagogical tool in teaching intercultural concepts and theories. Second, to determine whether there are differences in outcomes, when the same film is used in two culturally different settings, and what factors account for these differences.

Study methodology: Action research in educational settings

Educational action research was selected as the most appropriate choice to meet the purpose, stated above. Mertler (2009) pointed out that in educational settings, action research projects activities are, as a rule, incorporated into teaching activities, instructors are also research investigators, and projects involve a number of iterations of implementing the instructional approaches, modifying them, and trying new approaches, based on intermediate research findings.

Mertler (2009) suggested that action research projects might have a number of different goals and foci. Thus, an action research project may focus on a *teaching method*, when instructors may be considering developing or trying a new teaching method or approach. The goal of action research in this case is to conduct a systematic investigation of the effectiveness of the new method, and develop the method further, based on the findings of the project. Another goal of an action research project is the investigation of causes of an observed problem. According to Mertler (2009), a teacher may notice that there is a problem in the classroom and things are not going according to the initial plans, but the causes of the problem are not clear. In this case, an action research project can explore various potential reasons for the problem and various solutions, through a systematic examination of the situation, and implementation of alternative courses of action. A project could also focus on an examination of an area of interest to the teacher. Teachers may be curious about specific questions or topics, and this curiosity may be rooted in their personal experience and events, and observations in the classroom. An exploratory action research project can be designed to study the topic of interest.

Mertler and Charles (2008) provided an additional potential focus of an action research project: The relation of human growth trajectories to education. They pointed out that the instructor/researcher may be interested in understanding how to capitalize on students' interests and learning preferences, or increase the effectiveness of self-directed learning, or make learning more meaningful and interesting to individual learners. In keeping with the educational action research methodology, this study was designed to ensure that instructors were also acting as researchers, and the action (in this case, the process of designing and teaching the course) was intertwined with research on the outcomes of the action.

Method

The review of research literature on usage of popular films in teaching cross-cultural theories/concepts and our past experiences with the film *Outsourced* in our respective courses motivated us to design this study on the basis of Mertler's

framework of educational action research. One of the main objectives of this participative action research project was to explore differences in learning outcomes of usage of the film in two different cultural contexts: one representing developed, western, multicultural, and another developing, eastern, multicultural, society. Realizing that the instructional objectives in the two institutions were not identical, a reasonable level of flexibility was allowed in the teaching approaches. However, uniform approaches of the data collection and analyses were maintained.

The film: Outsourced

The film *Outsourced* (2006) was used by both participating instructors in their respective classrooms. *Outsourced* is a romantic comedy, written by George Wing and John Jeffcoat and directed by John Jeffcoat. This film examines intercultural differences between the United States (U.S.) and Indian cultures.

Features of the two educational settings

The U.S. University

In the U.S. university classroom, the film was used in International HRD, an elective course for graduate HRD students. This course was designed to provide insights into international and cross-cultural aspects of HRD. The course covers: models, frameworks, and definitions related to international HRD, cross-cultural issues in HRD work, design and delivery of international HRD programs, expatriate training, and HRD in international non-profit organizations and in community development. The first section of the course was conducted in the traditional, face-to-face format, and two subsequent sections were conducted in the online format. Before screening of the film, frameworks, models, and concepts from various cross-cultural and intercultural theories were discussed in several sessions of the class. The instructor used the following books as essential reading material for the course: Thomas, D., & Inkson, K. (2009). *Cultural intelligence: Living and working globally*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler; and Gannon, M., & Pillai, R. (2012). *Understanding global cultures: Metaphorical journeys through 31 nations, clusters of nations, continents, and diversity*. (5th Ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

In the on-campus format, students were given three breaks during the screening of the movie to take notes (but no group discussion was permitted). The in-class discussion was conducted after students posted online reflection notes. In the online format, students were able to view the entire movie on their own time, and then posted their reflection notes on an online forum, where other students' notes and posted responses were reviewed.

The Indian University

In the Indian university classroom, the film was used in an elective course called "Managing Cross-Cultural Issues," offered to MBA/EMBA program students. The course was designed to achieve the following learning objectives: (a) to help students in understanding issues related to cross cultural diversity in the workplace; (b) to sensitize students to the need for managing differently in diverse cultural environments; and (c) to develop skills for diagnosing and understanding heterogeneity of cultures, and to function effectively in different cultural environments. The course was conducted in a face-to-face format three times, in all three sections of the course. The instructor chose to show selected scenes of the film in six different sessions. Frameworks, models, and concepts from various cross-cultural and intercultural theories were discussed in several sessions of the class prior to screening. The instructor used the following books as essential reading material for the course: *Understanding Cross-Cultural Management*- Marie-Joëlle Browaeys and Roger Price

(2008), Pearson Education India; *Understanding Cross-Cultural Psychology*- Pittu Laungani (2007), Sage, New Delhi; and *Understanding and Managing Diversity: Readings, Cases and Exercises*- Carol P. Harvey and M. June Allard (2005), Prentice-Hall India.

In the classroom, discussions on theoretical issues were held after each of the six short screening sessions, and continuity of discussions across topics was maintained in all the sessions. At the end of the course, students were asked to submit reflection notes on classroom learning in relation to the film. Assignments specified that notes need to reflect students' understanding on previously learned frameworks and concepts from the cross-cultural and intercultural theory part of the course. Notes were submitted to the instructor and were not accessible to other students.

Study participants

The U.S. University students groups included students from different nationalities and ethnic cultures, representing countries of Asia, Africa, and North and South America. There was about equal representation of male and female students. The total number of participating U.S. University students was 39 (Fall 2012 = 10, Spring 2013 = 12, Fall 2013 = 17).

The Indian University students sample was comprised of culturally diverse group within a national culture (Indian). Students belonged to different castes, communities, different states, were speaking different vernacular languages, and were predominantly followers of Hindu religion. There were few female students (between 0 and 20%, depending on the group). The total number of Indian University participants was 57 (MBA/EMBA 2010-12 = 22, MBA/EMBA 2011-13 = 20, MBA 2012-14 = 15).

Data collection and analysis

At the U.S. University, the instructor analyzed student reflection notes, students' online responses to other students' notes, and instructor's notes, taken during the summary discussions. At the Indian University, the instructor analyzed students' reflection notes and own notes, taken during or after various discussion sessions.

Data analyses were conducted at both universities after each of the three course offerings by the instructors themselves. In the first stage of the analysis, each instructor separately analyzed the data collected in their classrooms. Thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis were used to analyze the data. Next, the two sets of results were compared and a summary of common and divergent themes was developed through mutual agreement between instructors. In keeping with the action research approach, after each of the course offerings, in addition to the thematic analysis, instructors reflected on and discussed the lessons learned regarding instructional design and teaching strategies, and the approaches to using the movie in the classroom.

Results

In this section the common themes that emerged from the comparative analysis of the data in each of the two universities first presented, followed with a discussion of the themes that were unique at each university.

Common themes that emerged in the U.S. and Indian Universities

The comparison of the results identified seven similarities and differences in what captured the U.S. and Indian students' attention, and in what areas the movie proved to be an effective tool for teaching cross-cultural concepts. The seven common themes identified both in the U.S. and Indian contexts are: awareness of cross-cultural differences, cultural stereotypes, culture shock and cultural adaptation process, high-context and low-context cultures, personal space and time orientation, cultural intelligence and intercultural competence, and effectiveness of the film in teaching cross-cultural concepts.

Awareness of cross-cultural differences. In both classes the movie provided rich material for reflection on cross-cultural differences between the U.S. and Indian cultures. There were multiple references to the concepts of power distance and individualism/collectivism as described by Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) in students' reflection notes and discussions in both U.S. and Indian universities. At the U.S. university, students pointed out that the movie provided multiple illustrations of Hofstede's finding that power distance is much higher in India than in the U.S. Furthermore, the U.S. students believed that the movie confirmed Hofstede's observation that India is much higher on the femininity dimension: Students cited multiple examples of Indian culture being more nurturing, caring, and family- and community-oriented. Finally, the U.S. students pointed out that, on the Hofstede individualism and collectivism dimension, India is a collectivist culture, which is clearly depicted in the movie. As stated by a U.S. student: "For example, Puro was very close to his family and lived with his parents and other family members, while Todd was very surprised to hear about this." While three of Hofstede's dimensions were discussed multiple times (power distance, masculinity-femininity, and individualism and collectivism), there were no instances of discussion of the uncertainty avoidance or long-term orientation dimensions.

Similarly, at the Indian university, students used the Hofstede dimensions of individualism-collectivism and power distance to highlight differences between the U.S. and Indian cultures. Here, many students cited conversation between Todd and Puro in which Puro asks Todd: "Why are Americans so individualistic and not attached to their families, as he [Todd] does not live with his parents?" Discussing cultural differences related to the power distance factor, the Indian students described how Todd, coming from a low power distance culture, tries to understand Indian people's behavior guided by high power distance, and is surprised to see power distance in women's behavior towards men in public places. The following comments illustrate students' reactions: (a) "Power distance is very low in America (reflected in the first scene, conversation between Todd and his boss, Dave) while in India his team members call him 'sir' or 'Mr. Todd', not 'Todd'; (b) "Todd comes from a low power distance culture, finds difficulties in adjusting in a high power distance culture, e.g. initial interactions with his team members"; (c) "Power distance is reflected in people's behavior towards their boss, Todd; as well as Ayesha's interaction with Todd on different occasions, when women are not expected to take lead in social situations e.g. booking room in a hotel." Indian students discussed power distance in context of relationships between men and women, young people with elders, and subordinates with bosses. In describing differences between Eastern and Western cultures, students' responses were focused on interpreting cultural differences based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (individualism-collectivism, power distance, and masculinity-femininity).

Cultural stereotypes. Another important discussion, common to both universities, was focused on the issue of stereotypes. The U.S. students pointed out that there were many examples of stereotypes, used by both Americans and Indians in thinking about the other culture. However, while the U.S. students in the first two class sections seemed to focus on the fact that the movie attempts to show that stereotypes do exist, and stereotyping can be observed on both sides, only the students in one of the sections of the U.S. course (Fall 2013), and in one of the Indian students class sections (MBA/EMBA 2010-12) pointed out stereotyped depiction of Indians by the Western director. Inappropriate portrayal of Indian women, and depiction of India as a backward, third world country, was mentioned by a number of Indian students. Some of these comments are: (a) "Outsourced is a biased presentation of Indian culture and people by a Hollywood director. Americans are shown more receptive and adapting than people of other cultures particularly India. Stereotyped presenta-

tion of Indian people is not digestible.”; (b) “The movie *Outsourced* depicts India as third world country in a stereotyped way, a depiction of perspective of a Western Director, e.g. impoverished office, cow entering in the call centre office, building yet under construction, water flooding from nearby farm field, stereotyped image of Indian people as superstitious, conservative, too interfering, noisy, Indian girls are shown as 'easily falling in love relationship' with a foreigner, wrong depiction of Indian women; a cultural bias towards India and Indian people.” It must be noted, however, that along with this criticism, some students in the same Indian student group acknowledged that the film also showed positive sides of the Indian culture: “Indian culture is shown as warm and receptive”; “Good points are shown: cultural harmony of India, its colorful culture through Holi festival, its cultural diversity, cultural adaptation of Todd with Indian culture and people’s religiosity and Indian cultural values are emphasized.”

Culture shock & cultural adaptation process. The concept of culture shock was covered in preparatory readings in class discussions in both courses, and it was prominent in movie-related reflection notes and subsequent discussions in both classes. U.S. university students discussed numerous examples of culture shock, as experienced by Todd. The students pointed out that he lacked knowledge about India, and was completely unprepared in terms of behavioral skills that could be useful in an expatriate assignment. Some students, however, pointed out that he was rather quick in adopting mindful attitude after he went through a number of turning points, and how one of his main assets was flexibility and openness to new experiences. The students were also able to identify several milestones in Todd’s adjustment, including the meeting with another U.S. expat at “McDonnells”, and his participation in the Holi festival.

At the Indian university, culture shock also dominated discussions across many class sections. Students mentioned different scenes to describe culture shock experienced by Todd, beginning with his arrival at Mumbai airport, boarding a moving train at the railway station, reaching Gharpuri, the first encounter with Mr. Purohit and his “different English,” the first welcome at Auntijee’s residence, and many more. Three students specifically cited Bennet’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), that describes ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism and how people learn to adapt when they are exposed to different cultural environments (Bennet, 1986). Students discussed in length Todd’s first encounter with his Indian team members at the training session, when he tried to teach them about American culture, but after listening to their reactions, realized that he himself needs to learn about Indian culture. Students also mentioned the Holi scene and Todd’s “McDonnell’s” experience, and how these experiences changed his perceptions about India and Indian people. Culture shock and cultural adaptation process were also reported as dominant discussion themes in research studies based on the film *Outsourced* (Braum 2010; Pandey 2012).

High context and low context cultures. Another framework for cultural understanding learned in classes at both universities, was Hall’s model of high and low context cultures (Hall, 1977). One of the students pointed out that “a high context society is a society with more non-verbal codes, rituals, silences and gestures,” and that “The movie shows that India has a higher context culture, when compared to the USA.” Another student commented that “This might have been one of the big issues in solving the initial problem, decreasing the average time to solve a customer’s problem. In other words, a conversation among Indians may take longer time, when compared to Americans.” The high and low context culture theme was more dominant in discussions at the U.S. University than at the Indian university.

Personal space and time orientation. The concept of proxemics, described by E.T. Hall as culturally-conditioned perceptions of personal space and as preferences for having larger or smaller privacy zones in public (Hall, 1990), was addressed in theory-related discussions at both universities. However, only the U.S. students in the third section (Fall 2013), wrote about this issue in their online posts, while the Indian students in sections MBA/EMBA 2010-12 and MBA 2012-14 mentioned proxemics in their notes, and focused on the fact that “Todd being American is highly conscious about personal space, finds himself in uncomfortable situations by the 'too personalized', or intruding behavior of Indian people, e.g. asking too personal questions in the first meeting.” Indian students also mentioned how Americans in the movie perceive time and space differently than Indians: “Mr. Todd is sent to India to manage the business and meet tar-

gets, he experiences problems after coming to India, like people in India are deemed to be over-caring, over-sensitive and interfering at some level”; and “Americans are depicted as more conscious of time schedules; Todd and his boss are focused on bringing down MPI to six minutes.” Some students also mentioned Todd’s conversation with Puro in the bar in which Puro tells about the perception of long-term and short-term orientation of time as perceived by Indian people (young workers and a person of his age), and Todd understood his point very clearly.

Cultural intelligence & intercultural competence. In addition to studying models of culture, the U.S. students learned in this course a model of cultural intelligence, consisting of three parts: knowledge, mindfulness, and behavioral skills (Thomas & Inkson, 2009). An interesting discussion, based on the Thomas and Inkson book was related to the difficulty of interpreting observed behavior. A U.S. student pointed out an example of cab drivers’ aggressiveness in trying to win Todd’s business. This student interpreted the cab drivers’ behavior as very aggressive and even intimidating. Interestingly, a student from an African country, enrolled at the U.S. University, did not think that the cabbies were aggressive. His interpretation was that they were just doing their job and were trying to help Todd, while also trying to get his business.

At the Indian university, the students in two sections (MBA/EMBA 2011-13 and MBA 2012-14), discussed multiculturalism, intercultural communication, cultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, cultural intelligence, cross-cultural competence and cultural competence training. One student depicted these issues beautifully: “The film shows that individuals in every nation are nearly powerless before the global economy, a force that shatters traditions and compels people to think of themselves as self-interested free agents. This pragmatic point of view is articulated by Asha, who asked Todd why is it necessary for Indian call center workers to pose as Americans while selling cheap junk made in China. Todd adapts to host country's culture and language and makes them more interested in their jobs by rewarding efficiency gains with products from company's catalogue.”

Effectiveness of the film in teaching cross-cultural concepts. Finally, in both universities, the majority of students appreciated the selection of *Outsourced* as a tool for teaching concepts related to multiculturalism, cultural sensitivity, intercultural communication skills and expatriate training. Some Indian university students’ reactions illustrate this point: (a) “The movie provided a rich window into a global environment, it allowed me to critique and discuss some of its contents and presentations in the classroom;” (b) “The movie raised many questions in my mind and also inspired me to think more about the tensions between cultures and its impact on business;” (c.) “The movie helped us in practically visualizing the aspects of cross-cultural conflicts after which the class deliberated on the issues to arrive at conclusions which students related to problems faced by organizations when dealing with foreign clients, either at home location or in a foreign country.” Earlier studies by Briam (2010) and Pandey (2012) also emphasized effectiveness of *Outsourced* in teaching concepts related to intercultural communication, cross-cultural management, cultural intelligence and Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

Themes specific to the U.S. University

Overall, comparison of results from three different course sections in the U.S. university shows strong consistency of themes across sections. In all three groups, the most often discussed topics were stereotyping, culture shock, U-curve of adjustment, high and low-context cultures, expatriate training, and Hofstede’s culture dimensions. There were also some differences between the groups. Thus, only one group of U.S. students (Fall 2012) discussed the depiction of cultural metaphors in the movie and the fact that the movie is an especially powerful tool for communicating ideas, related to the use of cultural metaphors. In addition, only the third group of U.S. students (Fall 2013) had discussed the fact that moviemakers stereotyped the Indian culture and showed cultural biases.

A significant discussion thread was related to the issues of expatriate training. Who has the responsibility for preparing the expatriates for an overseas assignment, the organization or the expatriates themselves? Students pointed out that even if the organization did not provide any training, Todd himself should have done his homework and studied books about India, watched movies, etc. One of the students referred to Littrell and Salas (2005), who discussed six potential strategies to utilize during cross-cultural training: attribution training, cultural awareness training, cognitive-behavior modification training, interaction training, language training, didactic training, and experiential training. The student pointed out that of these six strategies, cultural awareness, cognitive-behavior modification, and didactic training would have been most helpful for Todd, and could have made him more successful in engaging with India's culture at the start of his experience.

Several students pointed out that no amount of training would have fully prepared Todd for this experience: As stated by one Indian student who is studying in the U.S.: "India seems to be one of the most difficult countries for a first-time overseas experience, and an expat is bound to experience culture shock. However, some training would have helped to mitigate the shock." On cross-cultural training issues, some observations of the U.S. students in the current study are quite similar to observations and comments of Indian students as reported in an earlier study by Pandey (2012). In that study some students commented that it is not an easy thing to learn about Indian culture through training programs, but one has to learn it through feeling and experiencing (Pandey, 2012, p. 343).

Themes specific to the Indian University

Comparative analysis of all three student sections at the Indian University shows strong consistency of some common themes across all the groups. Some commonly discussed topics across all three groups were: culture shock, cultural adaptation, DMIS model (Bennet, 1986), individualism-collectivism, power distance, differences between Indian & U.S. cultures, language & communication issues in cultural context, cultural diversity and harmony of India, religiosity and Indian culture, conservatism/traditionalism and cognitivism-emotionalism in cross-cultural context.

Religiosity and culture have emerged as important factors where differences could be observed in discussions that took place in the U.S. and Indian universities. Students cited examples of culture shock experienced by Todd while looking at a picture of Goddess Kali (a Hindu Goddess) in his room, how he was surprised to see various religious symbols at workstations of his Indian team members, and conversations with Ayesha during their visit to the temple. For example, one student noted, "Todd finds himself surprised and confused about religiosity and spirituality in Indian people's life; image of Goddess Kali in his room." The students discussed the influence of religion on attitudes, values, personality and behavior patterns of people in a country like India. One student talked about the importance of traditions in Indian culture by citing the Holi scene. Another student commented: "Cultural differences between Indian and American cultures are shown in terms of individualism, materialism, emotionality, spirituality, etc." Laungani (2007, chapter 3, pp. 54-81) discussed the influence of religion on social perceptions, rituals, community practices, identities and social relationships in Eastern and Western cultures on the basis of individualism-collectivism, cognitivism-emotionalism, and materialism-spiritualism. The students' comments indicate how well they were able to connect cultural theories/model/concepts with artifacts visible in the movie scenes. The students in all three sections discussed the cultural harmony of India within the context of religiosity, rituals, and community practices.

Discussion

The study findings suggest that the film *Outsourced* served as an excellent background for discussing theoretical concepts and helped to increase students' creativity and innovative thinking. The most important outcome of this education-

al experiment was that in both cultural contexts, students found this film to be effective in stimulating their interest in learning more about cross-cultural differences.

This collaborative project provided a greater understanding of how to improve the effectiveness of using films as a teaching and learning tool in intercultural training. First, various formats for screening the movie were used: showing a number of short segments; showing large segments in one or several screenings; and asking students to view the entire movie on their own. The study results show that learning outcomes were similar in each case, and one format was not more effective than the others.

Second, various types of assignments were utilized and studied. In addition to the requirement to post (or submit in class) a reflection note, students were asked to discuss the movie in class or online. At the U.S. University, they were asked to read other students' notes and post their comments online. The richness of online discussions at the U.S. University suggests that providing students with an opportunity to read all other student's notes and then post their reactions is a useful strategy. According to the principles of constructivist education, students are able to build on others' ideas, develop new interpretations, and build new knowledge in a collaborative effort. Even if the class does not include an online component, providing students with an opportunity to read and react to other students' notes is recommended.

Third, to enhance the constructivist learning in such classes, additional assignments completed by all the students could be used. For example, students could be asked to conduct small research studies on cultural stereotyping of specific ethnic groups depicted in popular films they could find and view on their own.

Fourth, it would be useful to add additional films on cross-cultural encounters and coordinate the use of these films. Both instructors in this study have used in other courses the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," a good example of cross-cultural differences found within one country (USA; the Greek and Anglo-Saxon cultures). Another approach would be to ask students to view a movie about a less familiar culture. Due to wide exposure to media and Hollywood films, Indians have a fairly significant amount of information about the U.S. culture, and students in the U.S. are also exposed to the Indian culture through interaction with numerous immigrants and students from India. Therefore, a second, more challenging stage in a film-based course could be viewing and trying to decipher cultural clues in a film about a culture that is less well known to both Indian and U.S. students.

Limitations

One possible limitation of this study was that the student groups in the U.S. and India were different in their composition. Thus, at large U.S. public universities, there are students from many different countries and cultures, whereas student groups at the Indian universities are more homogenous (including predominantly Indian nationals), but still diverse by ethnicity, religion, and social class. How does this difference in group composition affect the results? For example, should the strong reaction to perceived stereotyping of Indians among Indian students, and the absence of any reaction to potential stereotyping of the U.S. culture in the U.S. University groups be explained by this cultural diversity/homogeneity? And can the fact that students in one of the U.S. groups were more sensitive to the issue of stereotyping be explained by the presence of an especially larger number of students from foreign countries in this particular group?

The use of different textbooks is another potential limitation. However, this limitation would not be easy to address in future comparative studies: The learning objectives of courses are different and instructors' choices of books depend not only on the course content, but also on instructors' personal preferences for different theoretical models and perspec-

tives. Finally, since the courses were conducted by two different instructors, the teaching styles and experience of the instructors may have had a significant influence on the direction of the class discussions.

Implications for training and development

Although this study has been conducted in university settings, its implications can be extended to expatriate training and management development programs. The findings of this study could provide corporate trainers with valuable insights related to effective usage of popular films in intercultural communication training. Films like *Outsourced* can be used effectively during in-company training programs to reduce cultural stereotypes, build intercultural sensitivity, and improve intercultural communication amongst members of diverse workgroups. Furthermore, films can be effectively used in corporate expatriate training programs delivered through online platforms across different countries and multiple locations. Online viewing and sharing of content could be very effective in intercultural training in global settings, leading to significant reduction of costs, associated with travel to training locations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to note that participating in an action research project is like exploring the deep sea. As we go down, we discover many new and unexpected things and we see them from different angles. We also uncover new areas to venture into and explore. This participative action research study was just a beginning of the process. It has provided a further impetus for exploring unanswered questions which we intend to address in future collaborative research projects.

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