Understanding the Two Instructional Style Prototypes: Pathways to Success in Internationally Diverse Classrooms

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You are a researcher observing a secondary school class. From your seat on one side, you watch the teacher assign a term project. She says, "I want each of you to select your own topic for this project, then bring it to me for approval. Then I want each of you to do your own discovery and writing. I'll be available for consultation, but I hope you'll work as independently as you possibly can." You observe that some students remain calm. Other students appear deeply if silently dismayed. You wonder why.

This paper will answer that question and other similar questions asked often by frustrated classroom instructors who are trying to have a positive impact in a classroom where the learners are from national cultures different from the instructor's. This paper will address many "Why?" questions. It will go on to address a few of the "How can I do this better?" questions that instructors ask. All answers offered in this paper will come from research on "instructional styles," not from research on "learning styles."

Educators, psychologists, anthropologists, journalists, and social reformers have been studying classrooms in schools, universities, and businesses around the world for decades. Teachers, trainers, professors, and students have written their own insider accounts. A few accounts from long-bygone eras can be found as well. These descriptions either reveal classroom activities within a single nation, region, or ethnic group, or contrast the classrooms of two selected nations, regions, or ethnic groups.

Careful study of these descriptions reveals that classrooms worldwide have unique features *and shared features*. The shared features are what concern us here. Across nations, regions, and ethnic groups, and across historical eras, a single continuum exists that links two prototypal instructional styles. So I now invite the reader to join me in considering three propositions about these styles:

1. *Instructional style* research is different from *learning style* research and yields insights that illuminate events and outcomes within classrooms of many types worldwide;
2. Differences between the two prototypal instructional styles are not random but have patterned integrity, substantial predictability, and useful feature-by-feature contrasts;
3. An understanding of the two instructional styles provides *immediately applicable benefits* for classroom instructors worldwide who are facing learners from other national cultures.

1. "Learning Styles" and "Instructional Styles"

It is important at the outset to clearly distinguish between *learning styles* and *instructional styles*. Their connotations overlap; their denotations do not. We begin with their precise meanings or denotations.

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Those who have a research or pedagogical interest in *learning styles* are engaged in an effort to discover the particular mix of processes and stimuli that best enable each *individual* to learn, i.e., to come to know certain facts or perform certain behaviors. David A. Kolb of the U.S. has been the leading proponent of learning styles since the early 1980s. He postulates (1) that individuals have preferred "ways of perceiving" that range across a continuum from "concrete experience" at one end to "abstract conceptualization" at the other; and (2) that individuals also have preferred "ways of processing" that range from "active experimentation" to "reflective observation." These continua are often depicted as the *x* and *y* axes of a graph, yielding four quadrants or learning styles. Kolb's *Learning-Style Inventory*, a one-page, 12-item, sentence-completion instrument, is said to reveal the style in which an individual best learns. Its interpreted data can be given to an instructor to help him work with that individual.

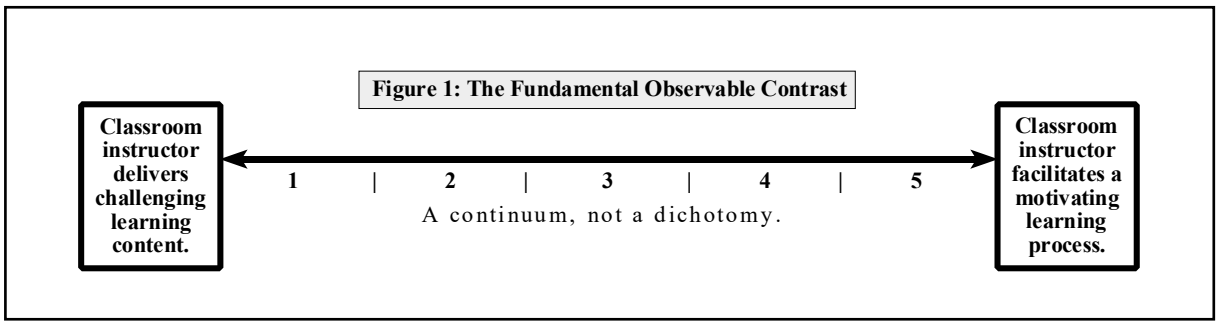
Those of us committed to *instructional styles* are doing something different. To understand how people best learn, we directly observe events using our five senses. We rarely use any instrument yielding data that requires interpretation. We look for the *patterns of collective behavior of the group of people in a classroom*, usually one instructor and many learners. What is going on in those people's heads interests us only to the extent that we infer their assumptions and values from their observable behaviors. The findings of our research also can be given to instructors as an aid to their work.

"Patterns of collective behavior of a group of people" is a short definition of "culture." Therefore, this paper will refer to "classroom culture" as often as to "instructional style."

Despite their contrasting denotations, the *connotations* of "learning styles" and "instructional styles" overlap because both types of researchers are committed to supporting instructors who face learners from abroad. This was not an original motive for learning-style researchers such as Kolb, but it has been adopted by them – Kolb's instrument, cited above, is also available as *Inventario de los Estilos de Aprendizaje de Kolb*. In the case of instructional style researchers, there has always been a commitment to support instructors who face learners from abroad. Note that most instructional style researchers are anthropologists, ethnologists, and interculturalists. Most learning-style researchers are psychologists.

2: The Patterned Integrity of Instructional Styles Worldwide

If you spend an hour or two patiently observing events in any school or university classroom, or business training room, anywhere in the world, what you see, hear, and otherwise experience will reveal itself as categorizable into one or another of the sectors of the continuum in Figure 1.



This contrast is well known. In 1895, a reference to it appeared in a publication of the National Educational Association in the U.S.[2] In 1901, the poles of this continuum, termed *scholiocentric* (left) and *pedocentric* (right), were the focus of an article by the U.S. psychologist G. Stanley Hall.[3] More recently, the scholar Adrian Holliday has called the left pole of this continuum "traditional" and (after F. Tönnies, 1957) "*Gemeinschaft*-type," and the right pole "rationalized" and "*Gesellschaft*-type."[4] The editors of *The Wall Street Journal* recognize the difference: Commenting on the Bush administration's education policies in 2003, an editorial spoke of two approaches to teaching, "What" and "How" (left and right, respectively, in Figure 1).[5] More dramatically, in the U.S.S.R. during the 1930s, educational personnel favoring one of these instructional styles, including internationally renowned professors, were ruthlessly purged.[6] As we will soon see, the distinction can be traced to mid-18th century Europe.

Each description in Figure 1 is an observable feature of a prototypal instructional style or classroom culture.[7] The one on the left will be called the **Knowledge-Focused Prototype**; the one on the right will be called the **Learner-Focused Prototype**. Each prototype has multiple features that are integrated, patterned, and mutually reinforcing; each contrasts feature-by-feature with the other prototype.[8]

Specifying this patterned integrity, its reinforcing relationships, and its cross-prototype contrasts is my contribution to this ages-old discussion. Others have studied the trees. I am surveying the forest.

The Critical Distinction Between the Two Instructional Styles: The fundamental feature of the prototypal Learner-Focused instructional style is that the instructor's attention and concern are largely focused on the learners who are arrayed before him. Assuming that the learners are there to learn specified knowledge or a skill – this is not always the case – the instructor needs to pay at least a little attention to that content. But his preoccupation is far more with attributes of the learners such as their states of mind and emotion, both as individuals and as a collective.

The fundamental feature of the prototypal Knowledge-Focused instructional style is that the instructor's attention and concern are almost entirely focused on the *content* of the knowledge or skill to be learned. By "content," I mean everything having to do with that knowledge or skill, considered comprehensively and with all its substantive ramifications. The instructor is accepted by everyone, including himself, as legitimately *an authority* with respect to the knowledge or skill to be learned.[9]

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[2] National Educational Association, *Addresses and Proceedings*, 1895, p. 242: "Modern education emphasizes the opinion that the child, not the subject of study, is the guide to the teacher's efforts."

[3] "The Ideal School as Based on Child Study," *The Forum*, XXXII (1901-2), pp. 24-5. *The Forum* was a literary magazine.

[4] Adrian Holliday, "Large- and small-class cultures in Egyptian university classrooms: A cultural justification for curriculum change," in Hywel Coleman, ed., *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 86-104. For still another approach to conceptualizing instructional style differences, see in the same volume (H. Coleman, ed.) Figure 1 in Birgid Ballard, "Through language and learning: Preparing overseas students for study in Western universities," p. 151.

[5] "Teacher Liberations," unsigned editorial in *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 July 2003, p. A10.

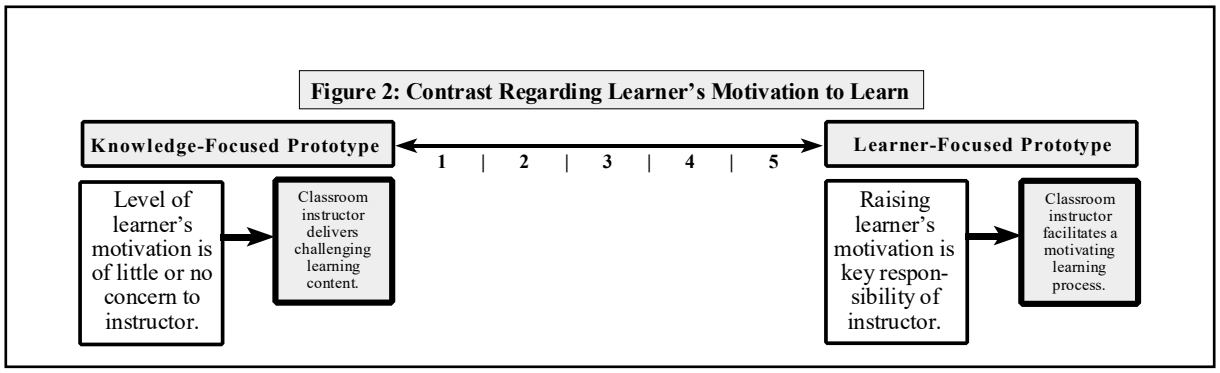
[6] Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*, Simon & Schuster, 2000, Chapter 6, "On the Social Frontier." Those who were purged were advocates and practitioners of the instructional style on the right in Figure 1.

[7] "Prototype" here does not mean "mythical" or "theoretical ideal." Classrooms of the two pure types can easily be found.

[8] The continuum in Figure 1 is divided into five sectors merely for convenience. Sector 1 is strongly Knowledge-Focused; sector 2 is moderately Knowledge-Focused; sector 3 is more or less balanced between the two poles; and so forth.

[9] There are many references in the literature to "teacher-centered" or "teacher-focused" classrooms. This term does not appear in this paper. A prototypal Knowledge-Focused classroom is sometimes called "teacher-centered" because *the observer reacts negatively* to seeing an instructor act as authority-figure. (Of course, it may sometimes be true that a mentally unbalanced instructor is exercising inappropriate power over the learners, but this is an aberration of *both* instructional style prototypes.)

The Learners' Motivation to Learn: When we explore beneath the observable contrasts, we make a key discovery. It concerns assumptions about each *learner's motivation to learn* and the instructor's stance with respect to this. In Learner-Focused classrooms, the reigning assumption is that the learners have little motivation to learn, and what little there is will soon dissipate; therefore, something must be done. In Knowledge-Focused classrooms, the learners' level of motivation is of little or no concern to anyone.



This contrast is stark. In Knowledge-Focused cultures, it is almost impossible to find material or activities of any kind that even allude to learner motivation. In Learner-Focused cultures, materials and activities of every imaginable variety are infused with constant, urgent concern for learner motivation and with myriad ideas for increasing it. To cite one of literally hundreds of readily available examples: In 2004, Corwin Press published the book *101 Stunts for Principals to Inspire Student Achievement*, by Frank Sennett.[10] Examples of sustained preoccupation with motivation are everywhere in Learner-Focused cultures. They are instantly visible and tangible, and the flow of new ideas is constant.

A defining characteristic of the Learner-Focused Prototype is an urgent, sustained preoccupation with the presumed necessity of motivating the learners to want *to learn. A defining characteristic of the Knowledge-Focused Prototype is the absence or near absence of concern about learner motivation*.

From this point forward, this paper will borrow and use a term currently popular in the business world: stakeholder. A stakeholder is anyone with a "stake" – an interest or concern – in the matter at hand. In the world of education and training, stakeholders include instructors (teachers, professors, trainers), supervisors, department heads, principals, headmasters, superintendents, practice leaders, training gurus and education professors, parents and tax payers and, yes, the learners themselves.[11]

Assumptions About, and Expectations of, Learners: In the case of prototypal Knowledge-Focused classrooms, virtually all stakeholders share a set of conscious expectations and out-of-awareness assumptions[12] about the learners, depicted on the left side of Figure 3:

1. Each learner's academic success depends largely on his own persistence;
2. The learners present themselves as "receptive" *vis-à-vis* the content of learning;

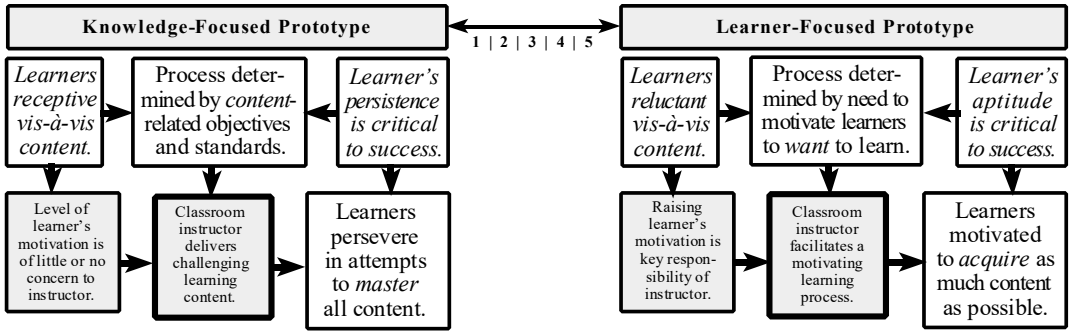
[10] Corwin Press's catalogue has a testimonial from Gerald Tirozzi, Executive Director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals: "Contrary to popular belief, school can be fun. Frank Sennett's motivational stunts provide examples that make learning an enjoyable experience. Principals can choose a stunt level that they are comfortable with…"

[11] Because all stakeholders share a common set of expectations and assumptions, we are able to speak of "their *culture*."

[12] An assumption is an assertion about the nature or processes of reality that one accepts as true or certain to happen, but without proof. "Out-of-awareness" qualifies this by underscoring that many assumptions are below the level of consciousness. One of my purposes in this paper is to bring into consciousness people's assumptions related to instructional styles.

3. The instructor's process is determined by content-related objectives and standards of excellence; it is *not* determined by reference to the learners' states of mind or emotion;[13]
4. Each learner will persevere in trying to *master* all learning content.

Figure 3: Assumptions about, and Expectations of, the Learners



In the case of prototypal Learner-Focused classrooms, virtually all stakeholders share a sharply contrasting set of expectations and assumptions about the learners, which are depicted by the statements on the right side of Figure 3:

1. Each learner's academic success depends largely on his own aptitude;
2. The learners present themselves as "reluctant" *vis-à-vis* the content of learning;
3. The instructor's process is determined by ideas about how to motivate each learner to *want* to learn the content, and to *want* to apply his aptitude to that end;
4. Each learner will become motivated to *acquire* as much content as he possibly can.

Receptiveness, Reluctance, and the Instructor's Responsibility: In the case of a Knowledge-Focused classroom culture, I infer that learners are assumed to be "receptive" to learning the content. "Receptive" is a mildly positive word; "eager" would be too positive.[14] I infer receptivity from the fact that instructors are not preoccupied with how to handle the learners' states of mind or emotion. If they are concerned about the learners' mental abilities, it is only in terms of what topics are age-appropriate.[15]

In the case of a Learner-Focused culture, I infer that learners are assumed to be "reluctant" to learn the content. "Reluctant" is a mildly negative word; "opposed" would be too negative. I infer reluctance from the fact that instructors are preoccupied about how to respond to the possibility – indeed, to the *assumed probability* – that most or all of his learners have little self-generated interest in the content. Therefore, if the learners are going to acquire as much content as they can, then the instructor's first responsibility must be to motivate each learner to *positively want* to engage his mental abilities to their maximum level.[16] We will revisit both "receptive" and "reluctant" later in this paper.

[13] With the exception that highly complex topics (e.g., quantum physics) would not be introduced to very young learners.

[14] The learners have also been termed "docile." John Biggs, "Western Misperceptions of the Confucian-Heritage Learning Culture," in D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs, eds., *The Chinese Learner*, CERC, University of Hong Kong, 1996, pp. 45-67.

[15] In Knowledge-Focused cultures, Intellectually challenging content is introduced earlier than in Learner-Focused cultures.

[16] U.S. training guru Gary Kroehnert declares: "The more motivated the participants are, the easier it is for the trainer to train effectively. The trainer is responsible in most cases for motivating the participants." "You have to let the individuals know that by listening or

It is not accurate to say that in Knowledge-Focused cultures *all* learners are interested in content, nor that in Learner-Focused cultures *all* learners have no interest in content. Rather, we are observing stakeholders' recurring patterns of behavior (including their statements), and from those patterns we are inferring the *assumptions that those stakeholders tend to make about learners in general*.

It is important to recognize that these assumptions, being very widely shared, are endowed with the power to steer all stakeholders' day-to-day thought and behavior. Assumptions are the foundation for the paradigms – the enduring patterns – within which discourse is formed, conscious expectations are set, research and planning is carried out, and routine activity occurs. In a Learner-Focused culture, for example, thought and behavior are preoccupied with fine-tuning the process of instruction so it aligns with or engages the learners' states of mind and emotion. On the day I drafted this paragraph, an article illustrating this preoccupation appeared in *The New York Times*: In "How We Learn," a professor of psychology discusses research on young children and what it means for how teachers ought to teach. She proclaims, "Schools don't teach the way children learn."[17] My translation: "It's the teacher's responsibility to align the instructional process with the pupils' states of mind and emotion."

This preoccupation crowds out attention to content. The questions instructors and instructional leaders ask almost all begin with "How…" Relatively few of their questions begin with "What..."[18]

Typical of the Learner-Focused Prototype are constant attempts to fathom the states of mind and emotion of learners in different demographic categories – age, gender, ethnicity, residence pattern, etc. – and to adjust the process of instruction to take advantage of these states. Absence or near absence of this concern is a defining characteristic of the Knowledge-Focused Prototype.

What Accounts for Learner Success or Failure? At the top right of each side of Figure 3 is a box beginning "Learner's…" The alternative sets of words reflect another key difference between the two cultures: whether *persistence* or *aptitude* is given more weight in accounting for a learner's success or failure.

In Knowledge-Focused cultures, all stakeholders including the learners are likely to reference *effort* – i.e., each learner's persistence – as the reason for his or her success or failure. Among the numerous researchers who have addressed this question, a few go so far as to say that aptitude is presumed not relevant to learner success. For example, John Singleton (1991) reports that Japanese teachers regard *gambaru* [to persist, to hang on] as the key to academic success, as measured by a student's test scores. The teachers Singleton studied knew that students' IQ scores were easily available in a certain nearby file cabinet, but the teachers regarded the scores as "not an item of interest or concern."[19]

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participating in your session they will have some of their needs fulfilled. It's up to you to identify these needs and describe them." "It's the trainer's responsibility to remind the participants that they want to learn, and to supply them with the incentive." Gary Kroehnert, *Basic Training for Trainers: A Handbook for New Trainers*, 3rd Ed., McGraw-Hill, 2000, pp. 137-8.

[17] Alison Gopnik, "How We Learn," *The New York Times*, "Education Life" section, 16 January 2005, p. 26. An article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on the next day that also probed learners' mindsets: Kevin J. Delaney, "Teaching Tools," 17 January 2005, p. R4-5; the subtitle reads, "How do you communicate with students who have grown up with technology? Schools are looking to technology for the answer." A constant stream of U.S. publications addresses learners' states of mind and emotion.

[18] In 1990, the Educational Testing Service surveyed U.S. teachers about what is most important to understand. Out of 64 choices, the top six were: "how to select motivational techniques, how to use different disciplinary styles, repertoire of teaching strategies, relation of instructional activities to learning characteristics, affective development stages and patterns, and climate for learning." Anita W. Hoy, "Educational Psychology in Teacher Education," *Educational Psychologist*, Vol. 4, 2000, pp. 263-4.

[19] John Singleton, "The Spirit of *Gambaru*," in B. Finkelstein et al., *Transcending Stereotypes: Discovering Japanese Culture and Education*, Intercultural Press, 1991, pp. 119-122.

Paradoxically, in Knowledge-Focused cultures effort is viewed as *the path to egalitarian outcomes*. Since effort is wholly under the individual learner's conscious control, he can take steps to bring himself up to his group's standard. For example, Lee Wing On (1996), in exploring the origins of the Chinese preference for effort-based explanations, concludes that mastery is attainable by *all* learners through the differential application of effort. Aren't learners with low aptitude at a disadvantage? Not at all. *They work harder!* Lee quotes Confucius as saying, "If another man succeeds by one effort, he will use a hundred efforts …and, though dull, he will surely become intelligent" (*The Mean*, XX.20-21).[20]

In Learner-Focused cultures, all stakeholders including the learners are likely to prefer *aptitude* – a learner's native intelligence – as the principal explanation for his success or failure. Although effort attributions *can* be heard in Learner-Focused cultures, few there would join Confucius in his contention that diligence can overcome an aptitude deficit. Rather, a common refrain of learners who are having difficulty with a course is, "I've done my best but I just can't get it!" My translation: "I've studied *to the limit of my aptitude*; no added effort can possibly result in a breakthrough of that fixed limit."

It can be said with reasonable certainty that, for most of recorded human history, learning activities everywhere were Knowledge-Focused, and that effort, not aptitude, was viewed as the critical success factor. Where did the idea of congenital limits on a person's performance originate? It is beyond the scope of this paper to answer this question, but it can be said that this idea became popular among educators in the U.S. in the late 1800s. Closely associated with it was the psychologist G. Stanley Hall, whose opening salvo was a paper published in 1883, "The Contents of Children's Minds."[21] Hall was hardly alone, for around this time "child study associations" were being formed not only in the U.S. but also in other nations. In those days, people fascinated with the study of children and their minds were likely to quote liberally from *Émile, or On Education*, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).[22]

Typical of the Learner-Focused Prototype is the assumption by all stakeholders that a learner's academic success is largely dependent on his congenitally given aptitude. If a learner's effort is referenced, it usually is in terms of taking him to the limit of his aptitude, not to mastery of the content. Typical of the Knowledge-Focused Prototype is the assumption by all stakeholders that a learner's mastery of the learning content is assumed to depend almost entirely on his effort or persistence.[23]

Who Evaluates Whom? In Figure 4 we add another observable characteristic of the two classroom cultures. In a prototypal Knowledge-Focused classroom, the instructor evaluates each learner's content mastery; the learner is judged to have succeeded or failed on this basis. But in a prototypal Learner-

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[20] Lee Wing On, "The Cultural Context for Chinese Learners: Conceptions of Learning in the Confucian Tradition," in D.A. Watkins & J.H. Biggs, *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological, and Contextual Influences*, CERC, University of Hong Kong, 1996, pp. 25-42. For insight into the Japanese case, see Robert A. LeVine & Merry I. White, *Human Conditions: The Cultural Basis of Educational Developments*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, Chapter 5; for example, they note (p. 114) that "…what your grades in a *juku* show is your ability to apply yourself diligently, an ability theoretically available to everyone."

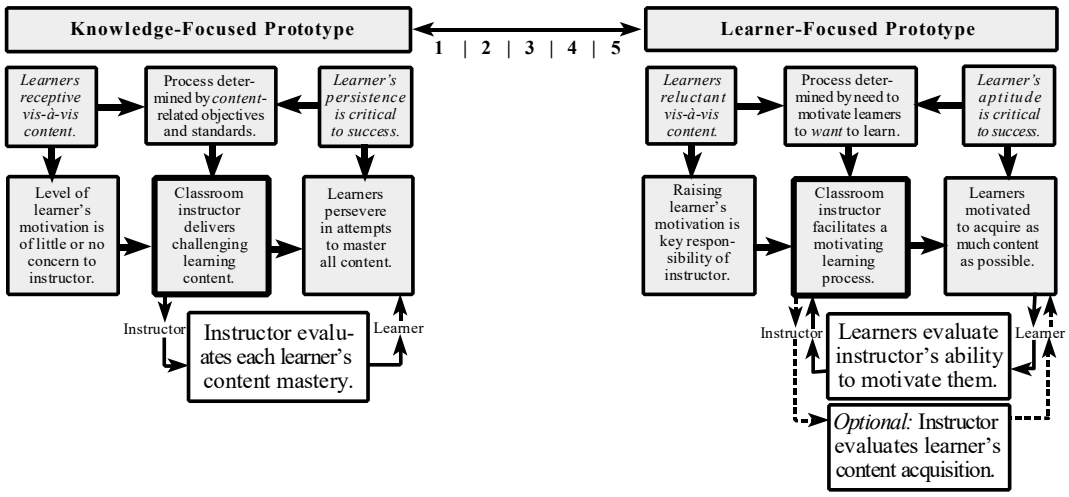
[21] *The Princeton Review*, XI, 1883, pp. 249-272.

[22] Rousseau's treatise elaborates the view that humans are at their best when they are youngest. Book I of *Émile* opens by saying, "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man." In Book II Rousseau opines that "Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling that are proper to it. Nothing is less sensible than to want to substitute ours for theirs…" (Alan Bloom's translation, Basic Books, 1979, pp. 37 & 90) Rousseau's opinions guide a reader to an educational philosophy that is relentlessly child-centered if not precisely *laissez faire*.

[23] After long experience in China, Barlow & Lowe report, "People assume that students will learn, no matter how difficult the subject matter or how untalented the student." And, "All approaches to learning emphasize patience and endurance, and give students an almost passive faith that no matter how difficult the subject matter, given time, they will all master it." Tani E. Barlow & Donald M. Lowe, *Chinese Reflections: Americans Teaching in the People's Republic*, Praeger, 1985, pp. 139-40.

Focused classroom, this procedure is optional. "Optional" means that in *some* Learner-Focused classrooms, the learner is judged by no one (other than, perhaps, himself) to have succeeded or failed. If you have attended business training events, especially those originating from or influenced by U.S. corporations, then recall in what percentage of those you received a direct indication from the instructor of his evaluation of your degree of content acquisition. The percentage is almost certainly very low.

Figure 4: Evaluation Alternatives and Options



What is not optional in a prototypal Learner-Focused classroom is that the *instructor's* performance is evaluated. In a classroom of any type or level in which "a defining characteristic is deep and durable concern about learner motivation," the instructor's capacity to motivate will be evaluated by *someone*. That evaluation is likely to come from learners themselves, especially in the case of learners who are beyond childhood. Recall again U.S.-inspired business training events you have attended; it is universally expected that time for "evaluation" or "feedback" will be set aside just before the end of the event. These invariably include an explicit request for each learner, usually anonymously, to evaluate the instructor's performance.[24] Learners may also be asked to evaluate the quality of the course content. Finally, each learner may be asked to evaluate the extent of his own learning and/or the probability that he will be able to apply what was learned in a practical way, usually at work.

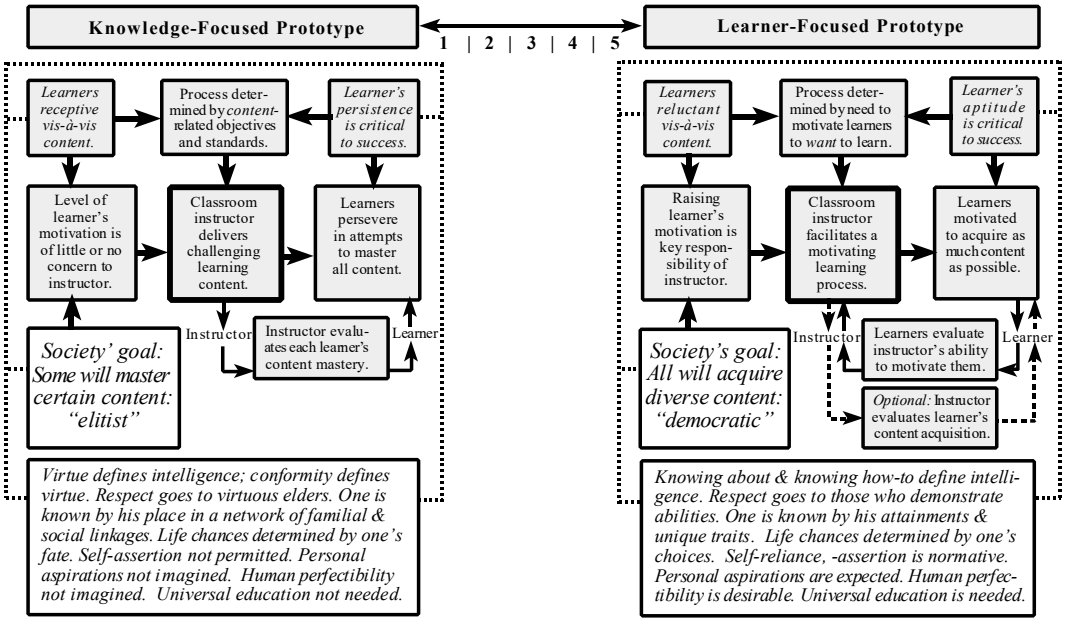
In a Knowledge-Focused classroom, success or failure is a judgment made largely or entirely *about the learners*. In at least some Learner-Focused classrooms, success or failure is a judgment made largely or entirely *about the instructor*, not about the learners. The basis for judging the instructor's success or failure may or may not include the extent to which the learners acquired the content. More likely is that the judgment will be based on the instructor's ability to motivate and engage the learners.

A readily observable and flawless indicator that the Learner-Focused value system is driving any given classroom occurs when the learners are asked to evaluate the instructor's performance. This practice is virtually unknown in prototypal Knowledge-Focused classrooms.

[24] In the U.S., these documents are sometimes called "smile sheets" because they ask learners to carry out the evaluation by using drawings of smiling, neutral, and frowning faces; if you feel happy with the instructor, circle the smiling face, etc.

Let us now step back from all these details in order to gain perspective on how prototypal instructional styles are influenced by the assumptions broadly shared by all members of the larger society in which a given classroom exists. See the new statements in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Societal Assumptions Underpinning the Two Prototypes



Assumptions Supporting a Focus on Knowledge: Let's begin with the Knowledge-Focused prototype, which prevailed worldwide into the 18th century. What were the characteristics of societies long ago in which classroom instruction could be found? For ease of discussion, let's refer collectively to these societies as "agrarian." Relying heavily on the thoughtful exposition of LeVine & White (1986), I posit that, at the level of deep assumptions, the relevant characteristics of agrarian societies were, and in a some locations still are, the following:

1. The ideals of societal progress, human perfectibility, and the possibility of attaining one's *particularistic individual* aspirations are all absent and unimagined;
2. What Westerners now call "identity" – the notion that an autonomous "self" with a unique "personality" resides within each individual – is also absent and unimagined;
3. One's life chances are set by fate; unimagined is that one could choose among life chances;
4. The way one is known to self and others is in reference to one's place in a network of life-long, pervasively *inter*dependent, familial and social linkages;
5. No distinction is made between intelligence and virtue: all who conform to local social conventions are assumed intelligent, and those admired for exemplary moral virtue are deemed the wisest;
6. Deep respect for elders, especially for one's parents, is a "given," and one's life course is foreseen as following the pattern of one's forbears;

7. Self-assertion and individual freedom (*if* they are imagined) are vices, while "face"-consciousness, conformity, and mutual support are virtues;
8. "Book learning" has little or no observable or imaginable applicability to daily work.[25]

Imagine that a society such as this comes to have what we call a "classroom." What would be the purpose of this place? What behaviors might occur there? Given this set of assumptions, what could we predict in terms of interactions between the instructor and the learners?

First of all, the purpose of this classroom would be much more related to virtue than to content. The instructor would be expected by all stakeholders to not only teach about virtue but also to embody virtue. As a conspicuous virtue-advocate and -model, the instructor would be considered wise and therefore worthy of respect and obedience, and his "face"[26] would be carefully preserved.

To the extent that content learning *is* a purpose of this classroom, the content would be something deemed both useful and virtuous in the local agrarian community, as determined by its elders. Any notion that learners might have a say about what that content would be, or whether they should learn it, would scarcely be imagined, and if imagined, never spoken of. The role of the learners, one and all, would be unambiguous: Learn the content. Given learners of more or less sound mind and body, not one of their personal characteristics would be relevant to this role.

This is why, in prototypal Knowledge-Focused classrooms, content *mastery* is expected. There are no extraneous factors to distract from content mastery. From our post-agrarian, American-influenced perspective, it might be objected that this or that learner is deficient in aptitude. This is not relevant. For all agrarian stakeholders agree that the learner will conform, persevere, and master the content. Period.

Now we encounter a troublesome reality. Some learners master the content, but others do not. Some fall by the wayside early, others later on. Doesn't this fact eventually lead agrarian stakeholders to decide that instructors need to pay attention to each learner's aptitude, motivation, and other traits?

The answer is "No." One must pay attention to such things if, *and only if*, society's conscious goal – its "public policy" – is what we post-agrarians call "universal education." Such a goal is grounded in a constellation of values – individualism, human perfectibility, equal human dignity, democracy, progress – not imagined by agrarian people. Agrarian stakeholders all expect learners to conform, persist, and master the content. They notice that some learners don't do that. *C'est la vie*. Some learn, others don't. Those who don't learn still are capable of agrarian work, and "book learning" isn't essential to agrarian work. What we call "slow learners" still have a secure place in the life-long, interdependent linkages of the community. If they conform to local social conventions, they still have virtue.

Thus, when some learners fail in an agrarian community's classroom, it is not imagined that the classroom's instructional style could be adjusted to conform to the individual needs of those learners. *Failure is ascribed to the learner, not to the instructor*. The learner is responsible for conforming to the expectations of, and preserving the "face" of, the instructor (a virtuous elder). The instructor is not responsible for conforming to the unique traits of any learner or group of learners. The instructor is responsible for carrying out two tasks: (1) teaching and modeling virtue and (2) delivering content.

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[25] Robert A. LeVine & Merry I. White, *Human Conditions: The Cultural Basis of Educational Developments*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, chapter 2. Reading this book is critical for anyone seeking to understand the value underpinnings of education.

[26] For a detailed exposition of the meaning of "face," see Hu Wenzhong & Cornelius Grove, *Encountering the Chinese: A Guide for Americans, 2nd Ed.*, Intercultural Press, 1999, chapter 10. Note: Chapter 8 is "Education and Training among the Chinese."

An agrarian society's goal is that *some learners will master certain content*. "Certain content" because a characteristic of agrarian societies is that content is stipulated by tradition, by wise elders, and by local needs; its range is restricted. "Some learners" because it's not imagined that all learners will master the content, or even ought to. It is acceptable for some to fail. In the American-influenced West, we call this practice "elitist," a pejorative reference to the fact that only a fraction of the learners make it to the system's top rung. Viewed from the *inside*, however, this practice leads to socially desirable outcomes.

My statement that the "learners are *receptive* vis-à-vis content" in a Knowledge-Focused classroom now makes sense. Learners *receive* content. It is their role, their destiny.[27]

Assumptions Supporting a Focus on Learners: Referring again to Figure 5, let's consider certain assumptions broadly shared by the members of a society in which are found prototypal Learner-Focused classrooms. These are the societies that I've been referring to broadly as "post-agrarian." They vary greatly among themselves in a multitude of ways, and it is risky to generalize about them. On the other hand, a significant percentage of societies today harbor very few of the assumptions posited above as "agrarian." It is likely that, among contemporary societies, the United States is the one whose foundational assumptions are the most *unlike* those of pre-18th century agrarian societies. With my explicit recognition of cross-societal diversity clearly stated, I now posit that, at the level of deep assumptions, the relevant characteristics of many "post-agrarian" societies include, *to some extent*, the following:

1. The ideals of societal progress, human perfectibility, and the possibility of attaining one's *particularistic individual* aspirations are consciously recognized and widely "believed";
2. What Westerners call "identity" – the notion that an autonomous "self" with a *unique* "personality" resides primarily within each individual – is also recognized and, by many, viewed as desirable;
3. One's life chances are viewed as determined, to a large extent, by one's personal choices;
4. The way one is known to self and others is, at least in part, by reference to one's life accomplishments and unique set of personality traits;
5. One's intelligence is defined very largely in terms of *knowing about* and *knowing how-to*; virtue has little or no role in defining or identifying intelligence;
6. Respect is felt for those who demonstrate abilities; one's life course is viewed, in part, in terms of attaining individual abilities that were personally selected;
7. Self-assertion is normative to at least some extent; conformity and dependence are seen by some as, on the whole, undesirable; "face"-consciousness tends to be low;
8. "Book learning" has immediately observable and practical applicability to much daily work.

[27] For portrayals of Knowledge-Focused classrooms, see: (1) Amy Stambach, *Lessons from Mount Kilimanjaro: Schooling, Community, and Gender in East Africa*, Routledge, 2000, pp. 113-7. (2) Pauzia Shamin, "Learner Resistance to Innovation in Classroom Methodology" [in Pakistan], in Hywel Coleman, *Society and the Language Teaching Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 116-8. (3) Virginia LoCastro, "English Language Education in Japan," in Coleman, *ibid*., pp. 40-58. (4) Daniel A. Wagner, *Literacy, Culture, & Development: Becoming Literate in Morocco*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 45-54. (5) Nicholas Dawidoff, "Tough Love: The Ferocious Teaching of the 'Great Gerschenkron'" [a legendary Harvard professor], *Harvard Magazine*, July-August 2002, pp. 48-55.

Note first the preoccupation of post-agrarian societies, especially the American-influenced ones, with *The Individual*. This "self," bounded by skin, is viewed as autonomous from all other selves including parents and other relatives. The individual is said to be "unique," with uniqueness defined in part by his "personality," a combination of traits, preferences, motives, etc., that are experienced by acquaintances as endearing, boring, outrageous, or whatever. He is also defined by his actions and their outcomes – what he autonomously can do, actually does, and has done in the past. To the extent that his doings are many, complex, varied, and initially challenging, he is presumed to be more or less intelligent.

The critical element in each individual's uniqueness is *choice*. In order for one to be credible to self and others as unique, he must make daily choices that are alleged to be independently decided upon with little external influence, i.e., with little reference to anyone else's expectations or "oughts." Modern societies cooperate by making available a limitless smorgasbord of options: shoe style, phone ring tone, cheese preference, bathroom décor, vacation destination – literally hundreds of thousands of options that can best be grasped during a visit to a Wal-Mart, Carrefour, or other "big box" store. One's choices also include one's career and spouse – these two being not necessarily once-in-a-lifetime selections!

As proposed by Darendorf (1978) and applied in the context of education by LeVine & White (1986), any human being's "life chances" are the joint product of the *options* (choices) and *ligatures* (social attachments) made available within his social structure.[28] In an agrarian society, one's life chances are determined almost entirely by ligatures, which come laden with expectations that must be fulfilled if virtue is to be preserved. In some post-agrarian Western societies, especially the United States, one's life chances are determined very largely by options. Options are *genuine* options if, and only if, each person exercises freedom of choice publicly, frequently, and with at least *the appearance of* autonomy.

The backdrop for this set of assumptions and values is modern industrial-cum-technological society, in which much of people's daily work is dependent to a considerable extent on what was discovered, developed, and perfected by their forebears. Oral tradition simply isn't good enough to pass down this knowledge and know-how. It must be *formally transmitted* to some of the workers entering the system.

Let us inquire now along the same lines as we did before: Given a society such as this, what would be the purpose of a "classroom"? What behaviors might occur there? Given this set of assumptions, what could we predict in terms of interactions between instructor and learners?

Earlier we looked at the fundamental purpose of a classroom in an agrarian, Knowledge-Focused culture in terms of people's social attachments – *ligatures* – which come with behavioral expectations and obligations that must be conspicuously fulfilled if one's virtue is to be demonstrated. A learner is "receptive" *vis-à-vis* the content because, in the classroom, he is fulfilling one of the expectations that give direction, texture, and inclusion to his life. These expectations are received, not questioned.

AGRARIAN: Ligatures → Many expectations must be conspicuously fulfilled → Virtue
POST-AGRARIAN: Options → Many choices must be conspicuously made → Uniqueness

[28] Ralf Darendorf, *Life Chances*, University of Chicago Press, 1978. Robert LeVine & Merry White, *Human Conditions: The Cultural Basis of Educational Developments*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986; the footnoted sentence is from p. 18.

Let's consider the fundamental purpose of a classroom in a post-agrarian, Learner-Focused culture, evaluating it in light of the critical importance of *options*. Options carry the behavioral expectation that each individual must publicly, frequently, and "freely" make choices[29] (including choosing *to*, choosing *not to*, and choosing *the opposite of*) so that his uniqueness will be demonstrated to himself and others. With this in mind, let's revisit the idea that learners are "reluctant" vis-à-vis the content.

If individual-choice-of-options is central to post-agrarian societies, and *if* classrooms are key exemplars and (for the young) transmitters of the core values of that society, then everyone in that society needs to assume that learners will exercise – *should* exercise – free choice with respect to what occurs in the classroom, including the content presumably presented there. Regardless of what might be true about one or another individual learner, learners *en masse* must be regarded as "reluctant." That is to say, most or all of them must be viewed as skeptical about the value of the learning content set before them. For each learner to demonstrate uniqueness (or, in the case of the youngest ones, to learn how to demonstrate uniqueness), he needs to be persuaded *to choose to learn* the content set before him, rather than choosing some competing content, rather than choosing to learn no content at all. The persuasion of learners is critical to the task of instruction. Instructors must be marketers, motivators, and engagers above all, for *the learners must freely choose to learn the content*. The learner's mindset takes precedence over the knowledge.

We need to entertain the possibility that a basic purpose of Learner-Focused classrooms is more about the provision of opportunities *to choose which content to acquire*, and less about the provision of opportunities to acquire content. Learning institutions of all types and levels must have a range of content options, the wider the better, so that learners have ample opportunity to demonstrate their uniqueness via content choices. The number of required and prerequisite courses is kept to a minimum because they deny learners opportunities to demonstrate uniqueness. Incidentally, this helps to explain why, in the most Learner-Focused cultures, narrow content specialization occurs late in one's academic progress; and why well-roundedness – academic and non-academic – is perceived as desirable by all stakeholders. In a society committed to maximizing choices, early specialization would be counter-cultural.

What about the instructor? He is expected by one and all to promote and embody this culture of uniqueness-via-choices, which he does primarily by being a marketer, a motivator, and an engager *vis-à-vis* the learners. (Learners! Learn this! Come, we'll have fun! It will be interesting. You'll gain know-how. And you'll gain an ever widening range of options in the future – higher-paying job, non-routine work, upscale neighborhood, more opportunities to travel…) Even in cases where the institution is unable to offer a wide range of content options, it and its instructors nevertheless treat the learners as though they may freely choose – and, after all, they *are* free to choose not to learn.

Let's turn our attention now to what is (or is not) chosen: the content. The learning of content – i.e., the acquisition of know-how and knowledge by individual learners – is certainly a major feature of what can be observed in any prototypal Learner-Focused classroom. All stakeholders understand that content-learning is an important objective. But it's also a qualified objective. For we cannot say, as we did in the case of agrarian classrooms, that "The role of the learners is unambiguous: Learn the content." Why not? Because of the necessity to constantly acknowledge each learner's uniqueness. And a critical element of each learner's uniqueness is his aptitude.

[29] "Freely" is in quotes because I believe that the majority of choices are actually guided and limited by "ligatures" and culture.

This is why, in prototypal Learner-Focused classrooms, *mastery* of content is rarely expected of the learners. All stakeholders accept that some learners will be incapable of actually *mastering all* of this or that content. All stakeholders accept the proposition that it would be "unfair" to expect mastery by those with insufficient aptitude. Thus, an array of alternatives is devised – heterogeneous grouping, simplified textbooks, exams that depend on recognition (multiple-choice) instead of recall (essay), grade inflation, sharply reduced homework expectations,[30] and so forth – all of which add up to lowered content-acquisition expectations.

A second reason why content mastery is rarely expected is related to the foundational importance of options, choice, uniqueness, and aptitude. In comparison to agrarian societies, post-agrarian societies value well-roundedness, both within the academic realm and between it and the non-academic areas of life. A well-rounded person has more opportunities to make choices that demonstrate his uniqueness, more paths along which to play out his aptitudes. These goals conflict with the goal of totally mastering specific content, which is attained through long, narrowly focused, single-minded effort. If one spends 14-15 hours a day, seven days a week, studying in order to genuinely master, say, higher mathematics, then one is not simultaneously learning yoga, practicing the flute, going on soccer trips, reading novels, tending the garden, seeing films with friends, and all the rest of it including romancing the opposite sex.

These are the reasons why I have always used the word "acquire," not the word "master," when discussing what learners in a prototypal Learner-Focused culture do with the content.

So the challenge of genuine mastery is eliminated for all learners except those with a deep desire for specific content. Performance expectations are lowered across the board for the majority of learners. In spite of these lowered expectations, some learners acquire the content, but others do not. In post-agrarian classrooms, as in agrarian ones, some learners fall by the wayside early, others later on. How do Learner-Focused stakeholders regard this fact? What is their response to academic failure?

In a Learner-Focused classroom culture, "*C'est la vie*" cannot be the attitude of the stakeholders or of other members of society. Their attitude, rather, can only be "Something must be done!" Why?

There are two reasons. First, fundamental assumptions: Learners who fail to acquire knowledge are not participating in some of society's cherished values, such as human perfectibility and egalitarianism, and they certainly have fewer options from which to choose, thus contradicting The Good of personal uniqueness. Something must be done to bring them into full participation with everyone else. Likewise, something must be done to insure that democratic values are perpetuated by all of society's youngsters' gaining at least a modest store of knowledge and know-how. In the U.S., this principle was adopted recently in national legislation raising minimum graduation standards: The "No Child Left Behind Act."

Community economics presents an equally compelling (and far more widely understood!) reason why something must be done about failing learners: Most options for employment require at least a modest level of know-how and knowledge based on "book learning." Those who lack this are widely recognized as an economic and social burden to themselves, their families, and their community. (Few post-agrarian drop-outs and failures have a realistic option of laying down the books, then wielding a hoe for the rest of their life!) So "universal education" truly does need to become a public policy goal.

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[30] According to Thomas L. Friedman, in May 2005 "a special report on the Indiana University High School Survey of Student Engagement, which covered 90,000 high school students in 29 states, was published. Even though 55 percent said they *studied no more than three hours a week*, 65 percent of those students reported getting mostly A's and B's." Column entitled "Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?," *The New York Times*, 13 May 2005, page A23; italics added.

Who is responsible for a learner's failure? *Failure is ascribed to the instructor, to the learning institution, and to environmental factors far more often than it's ascribed to the learner himself*. The relevant facts about a learner are his fixed aptitude and other features of his overall life situation that he did not choose: his parents, his neighborhood, his ethnicity and economic class, his local TV channels' offerings, and so forth. He cannot be held responsible for these. In the educational institution itself there are other factors that are thought to account for his failure: lack up up-to-date technology, "boring" textbooks, run-down classrooms, and of course that perennial scapegoat, class size.[31] Finally, there's the instructor himself. If he had only applied the latest findings of brain research, the newest approach to classroom management, and the most up-to-date curriculum, then surely he would have – could have, *should have!* – been able to adjust his motivational efforts and content delivery to conform to the aptitude, learning style, and natural interest of each and every unique individual in his classroom.

Typical of a Learner-Focused culture is that the inevitable failure of some learners to acquire content is viewed by most stakeholders as very largely the result of shortcomings of the instructor and the learning institution, and of problems in the environment. The great majority of solutions are directed towards changing the way instructors and learning institutions do their work. Many ameliorative and preventative measures are sought, tried, and improved in an interminable effort to devise ways and means of making it more likely that learners will be (a) effortlessly able to acquire, and (b) positively motivated to acquire, the learning content. Such effort is not typical of Knowledge-Focused cultures.

The Instructor's Characteristics in the Two Cultures: Let us now contrast the roles and characteristics of the instructor in each prototypal classroom culture. Refer to Figure 6.

First, and as previously noted, the instructor embodies the foundational values of the culture. In an agrarian, Knowledge-Focused culture, he embodies virtue-via-conformity-to-group-expectations. In a post-agrarian, Learner-Focused culture, he embodies uniqueness-via-personal-choices-among-options.

Second, in a Knowledge-Focused culture, an instructor embodies virtue and therefore *by ascription* is the recipient of respect and deference from the learners and other community members. Despite modest economic means, an instructor is near the top of the local social hierarchy, [32] where *anyone* in that role will be unless he conspicuously ceases to be virtuous. In a Learner-Focused culture, the instructor needs to gain the respect of learners and others, for he is *not* automatically presumed to embody exemplary virtue, nor to possess authoritative knowledge or know-how, nor to necessarily be anything grander than a conventionally respectable, middle-class, working professional.

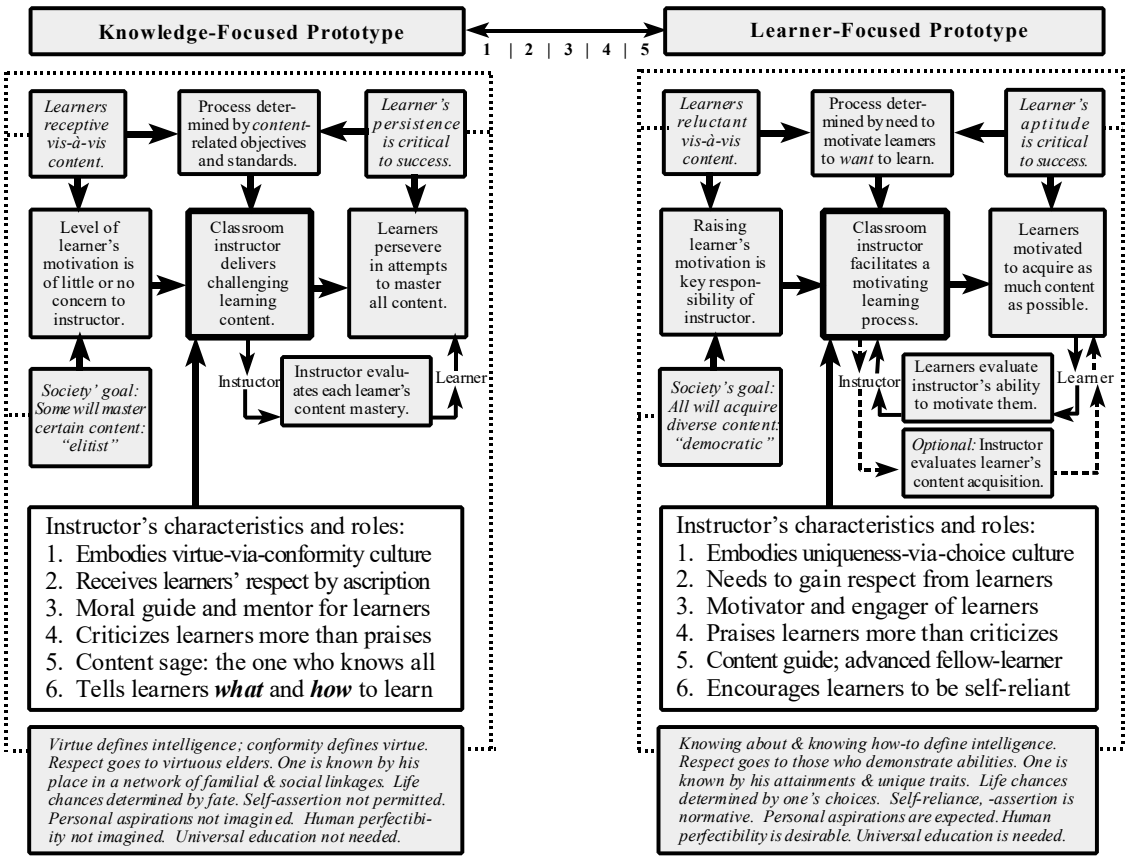
Third, as the embodiments of community norms, Knowledge-Focused instructors are expected to serve *actively* not only as moral guides and mentors, but also as practical life-coaches for their learners. The instructor's role is similar to the parents' role, and stakeholders may call him a "second parent" in relation to younger learners. The moral-mentor and life-coach roles may be appropriately exercised in relation to

[31] A news report here in the U.S. while I was drafting this explains that one reason why children aren't learning is that they cannot hear the teacher. So classrooms are now being fitted with sound systems, and teachers are beginning to wear microphones. The State of Ohio has mandated that every classroom, statewide, receive this technology.

[32] In the 1970s, my wife and I lived in a remote Portuguese *aldeia*. We came to understand that at the top of the social hierarchy was the medical doctor, followed by the priest, followed by the *aldeia*'s only resident elementary school teacher.

adult learners as well.[33] In Learner-Focused cultures, stakeholders expect that instructors will be, or will appear to be, virtuous in an ordinary way, but instructors are not defined by their virtue. In some nations, instructors are legally proscribed from overtly dispensing ethics and morality to learners. The latter, after all, should have free rein to make their own self-defining ethical and religious choices.

Figure 6: The Instructor's Characteristics and Roles



Fourth, researchers have noted that in Knowledge-Focused classrooms, instructors often criticize and censure the learners, whereas in Learner-Focused cultures, instructors seem to be looking for opportunities to praise the learners.[34] In a virtue-oriented, norm-referenced culture, making sure that everyone abides by local social expectations is of great importance. Learner transgressions offer opportunities to heighten their determination to live up to expectations – including the expectation that learners will master the content. As the recipient of ascribed respect (indeed, as a "second parent"), the

[33] Many researchers have documented the instructor's role as a moral guide in Knowledge-Focused cultures. For example, see Norman A. Chance, "Chinese Education in a Village Setting," in George & Louise Spindler, eds., *Interpretive Ethnography of Education: At Home and Abroad*, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987, pp. 227-229. For a charming vignette about an instructor's acting as a sort of life coach for an adult learner, see Mark Salzman, *Iron & Silk*, Vintage Books, 1986, pp. 36-37: Teacher Wei advises Mr. Salzman, among other things, as follows: "Laugh less. People think you are a bit crazy, or perhaps choking."

[34] Farideh Salili is a primary contributor to this finding. See her "Teacher-Student Interaction: Attributional Implications and Effectiveness of Teachers' Evaluative Feedback," in D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs, *Teaching the Chinese Learner*, CERC, University of Hong Kong, 2001, pp. 77-114. See also her "Accepting Personal Responsibility for Learning," in D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs, *The Chinese Learner*, CERC, University of Hong Kong, 1996, pp.85-105.

instructor need not worry about the learners' reactions to his criticisms. In a Learner-Focused culture, praise is believed to serve motivational purposes. It's a "carrot." And since the instructor receives little ascribed respect, praise makes him seem likeable – positive, approachable, and non-authoritarian.[35]

Fifth, in a Knowledge-Focused culture the instructor is regarded as *the one who knows all* with respect to whatever he is instructing. The deeply respectful words "sage" and "master" are appropriate here and remain in daily use in some cultures. I am not claiming that every instructor knows literally everything about his specialty. Rather, I am observing that the expectations of all stakeholders are such that instructors are dealt with *as if they were all-knowing*. A notable outcome is that "I don't know" is never an appropriate response to a learner's question. As the one who knows, an instructor is expected to give an immediate response to *every* content question, for to do otherwise is to lose "face" and respect. In Learner-Focused cultures, we find sharply contrasting expectations. An instructor is expected to be an advanced fellow-learner, and thus a *guide* to the content. The ethos of the Learner-Focused classroom is democratic, participatory, and egalitarian – so that an instructor who really *is* a content authority had better not flaunt this fact too ostentatiously! Regardless of his own level of content-mastery, it is desirable for him to respond with "I don't know" occasionally, and in other ways to appear as an approachable, non-authoritarian, fellow traveler in the pursuit of content acquisition.[36]

The final contrast is that the instructor in a Knowledge-Focused culture is expected by stakeholders to tell learners what to learn and how to learn it. As master of the content, he proactively directs the learners' efforts to do what they are "receptive" to doing – mastering that content. The instructor is *directive*. And here is a critical insight: *The learners perceive his directiveness as positively supportive*, not as overbearing, for he is aiding and abetting the learners' efforts to master the content.[37] The scene in a Learner-Focused classroom is different, immersed as it is in a culture that emphasizes self-reliance and self-assertion, and that is more concerned with learners' well-roundedness and unique choices than with their content-mastery. The objective is for the learners to become self-reliant (or self-directed) as soon, and as much, as possible. Each learner is encouraged to "do his own thing" in the hope that he will "discover" valuable content on his own, which is thought to be superior to his being "lectured at."[38]

Resistance to Change: In a strongly Learner-Focused culture such as the U.S., the popular belief in the superior efficacy of self-reliant "discovery learning" has some of the characteristics of orthodoxy in that proponents avoid evidence to the contrary. An example occurred in the U.S. during the 1970s. A decade-long, billion dollar federal research effort, Project Follow Through, found that directive methods of teaching (such as those termed "Knowledge-Focused" in this paper) yielded superior learning outcomes for disadvantaged youngsters. With the participation of both the Ford Foundation and

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[35] Knowledge-Focused instructors need not be irascible and unpleasant. For a fascinating inside look at how a gifted instructor can gently yet firmly handle children in a Knowledge-Focused classroom (in France's Auvergne region), see the outstanding documentary film *Être et Avoir* [To Be and to Have], Maïa Films, 2002; available at www.dvdsoon.com and www.amazon.ca.

[36] Training guru Mel Silberman writes: "Let the participants know that you are confident in your abilities, yet don't pretend that you have all the answers or the final word… Neutralize the traditional teacher-pupil relationship as quickly as possible during the opening moments of the training program. Let participants know that your purpose is not to preach *at* them but to interact *with* them." *Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples, and Tips*, Lexington Books, 1990, p. 198.

[37] Researchers who have revealed the instructor's supportiveness include (1) Sally Chan, "The Chinese Learner – A Question of Style," *Education + Training*, Vol. 41, No. 6/7, 1999, p. 8; and (2) Irene T. Ho, "Are Chinese Teachers Authoritarian?," in D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs, *Teaching the Chinese Learner*, CERC, University of Hong Kong, 2001, pp. 99-114.

[38] For an insightful series of comparisons between relatively Learner-Focused British trainers, and relatively Knowledge-Focused German trainers, see Astrid Kainsbauer, "Management Training Across Cultures: The German versus the British Perspective," Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration, Center for International Studies, n.d. (2001?).

Harvard University, these findings were relentlessly counterattacked and have had scant influence in the U.S. ever since.[39] Another example is the on-going contest between the step-by-step approach to reading instruction known as "phonics" on the one hand, and the Learner-Focused "whole language" approach on the other. Virtually every impartial effort to analyze the hundreds of studies about these two approaches, most recently by the Reading Panel of the National Institutes of Health, has found phonics to be more effective, especially with poor children. But the U.S. educational establishment continues to act very largely on the belief that children can best learn to read through experiential "immersion" in language, rather than through memorizing letters and sounds.[40]

If one tries to persuade advocates of Knowledge-Focused styles – including the learners themselves – to adopt Learner-Focused methods, one is met with a similar reaction.[41]

3. Benefits of Understanding Instructional Style Differences

This paper began with a vignette about an instructor who assigned a paper to her students, some of whom responded calmly while others behaved in a way suggesting dismay.

The unprecedented ease, speed, and affordability of contemporary transportation has brought about a situation that was rare in the mid-1900s and virtually absent from human experience in the mid-1800s. That situation, now common, is that an instructor from one national culture is facing learners from one or more very different national cultures. But merely because this is now common does not mean that it's easy for an instructor in this situation to perform well, that is, to effectively attain his presumed principal objective, that of helping the learners before him to increase their knowledge or know-how.

The vignette depicts such a situation. This instructor is accustomed to using a Learner-Focused instructional style, so she announces her expectation that the learners will self-reliantly work on their own. To her – if she thinks about – this is a good, indeed laudable, way to proceed. To the learners who share her culture, there are no surprises, and depending on their individual interests and aptitude, some may even feel eager to get started. Other learners, recently arrived from a distant nation, have spent their earlier years sitting at the feet of a Knowledge-Focused instructor. They have different expectations. They need and want a straightforwardly directive *and thus supportive* instructor who wouldn't even think of casting them adrift to fend for themselves academically. Will these newcomers to a Learner-Focused classroom speak up? Maybe. But more likely they will not. For their deep

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[39] See Cathy L. Watkins, *Project Follow Through: A Case Study of Contingencies Influencing Instructional Practices of the Educational Establishment*, Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies (Cambridge, MA), 1997. This massive research effort demonstrated that the "Direct Instruction Model" was superior to some twenty other approaches, which were prototypally Learner-Focused. The Ford Foundation commissioned a rebuttal that was published by Harvard University very soon after the publication of the Project Follow Through findings: E.R. House et al., "No Simple Answer: Critique of the Follow Through Evaluation," *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 1978. Cathy Watkins's study makes fascinating reading.

[40] James Taub, "Does It Work," *The New York Times*, Section 4A, *Education Life*, 10 November 2002, pp. 24-25. For another example, see Sharon Begley, "The Best Ways to Make Schoolchildren Learn? We Just Don't Know," *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 December 2004, p. B1; this article demonstrates the reluctance of Americans to abandon the idea that "discovery learning" is superior; Begley reports research that reaches the opposite conclusion, yet uses "We Just Don't Know" in her title.

[41] See (1) Fauzia Shamim, "Learner Resistance to Innovation in Classroom Methodology," in Hywel Coleman, *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 105-121; (2) Cornelius Grove, "U.S. Schooling Through Chinese Eyes," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 95, No. 7, March 1984, pp. 481-2; (3) Tani E. Barlow & Donald M. Lowe, *Chinese Reflections: Americans Teaching in the People's Republic*, Praeger, 1985, pp. 50-1; (4) Mark Salzman, *Iron & Silk*, Vintage Books, 1987, pp. 166-7; and (5) Adrian Holliday, *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp.53-68.

respect for virtuous, authoritarian instructors might very well dissuade them from taking any step that would even hint that this instructor might have performed her professional role badly.

Again and again, a thorough awareness of worldwide differences in instructional styles can be of *immediate practical guidance* to an instructor who finds himself facing learners from another nation. Let's look at three examples of how such awareness can be a pathway to better learning outcomes.

Question-Asking: We'll begin by looking at question-asking in a Learner-Focused classroom. Here, questions virtually always are asked (1) publicly, (2) verbally, (3) directly, (4) by individuals, (5) with little or no time for reflection, and (6) in order to inquire *or* to challenge. To be specific: With few exceptions, all stakeholders expect a learner to address his question directly to the instructor as soon as it occurs in the learner's mind during the on-going classroom learning activity. The question is spoken aloud, so that all hear it and become aware of the identity of the questioner. And learners feel free not only to inquire about something that just transpired but also to call into question or directly challenge the knowledge or know-how of the instructor, or of each other.

The characteristics of question-asking in prototypal Knowledge-Focused cultures are fundamentally different. Some say that learners in these cultures don't ask questions, but this is not correct. Questions are asked (1) at times and places *outside of* the classroom, (2) verbally in most cases, (3) indirectly in many cases, (4) by individuals or by study groups,[42] (5) often after a significant delay during which self-reliant probing for answers may occur, and (6) in order to inquire (challenges are extraordinarily rare). Question-asking often begins after the class session ends; good instructors know that they must delay their departure from the area. Another common event is that a learner or a study group will arrange to meet the instructor at another time and place (such as in the instructor's home or during an informal class event such as a weekend excursion), at which time deeply thoughtful discussions may take place, in the course of which questions are answered indirectly. Spontaneous in-class question-asking is rare.

As Westerners teaching abroad soon discover, their pleas for learners to ask questions during class are resisted. Why? First, it is not thought seemly for a learner to monopolize everyone's precious time at the feet of this content authority by asking a question that can very well be asked at some other time and place. Second, Knowledge-Focused classrooms are "face"-conscious. The conversation within a perplexed learner's mind seems to proceed like this: "If I reveal that I did not understand something, then the instructor will lose face by my public implication that he cannot explain things perfectly, and I'll lose face for causing him to lose face. If my question makes me appear advanced beyond the level of my fellow learners, then I'll lose face for distinguishing myself from my group. If my question makes me appear below my fellows' level, I'll lose face for being stupid. So I'd better figure out the answer myself, ask others in my study group, or take it up with the instructor privately or during a social outing!"[43]

Knowing this, a Learner-Focused instructor is better able to instruct Knowledge-Focused learners, and a Knowledge-Focused instructor is better able to instruct Learner-Focused learners.

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[42] Spontaneously combined, hard-working, outside-of-class study groups are common in many Knowledge-Focused cultures.

[43] For a discussion of question-asking in China, see Martin Cortazzi & Lixian Jin, "Cultures of Learning: Language Classrooms in China," in Hywel Coleman, *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, especially pp. 194-8.

Memorization: Another significant difference between the two cultures concerns memorization by learners of content material. Memorization is widely employed in Knowledge-Focused cultures. Memorization is rarely employed in Learner-Focused cultures; furthermore, most stakeholders in Learner-Focused cultures accept to the point of orthodoxy that "rote" (a term they use derisively) is positively detrimental to learning. Fortunately, a number of researchers have done us all a wonderful service by trying to discern, from *inside* Knowledge-Focused cultures, the role that memorization actually plays. Their thoughtful findings[44] cannot be fully dealt with here, but I will relay them succinctly. Two facts have emerged: First, memorization is not one thing; there are at least two ways of going about it, each with different outcomes. Second, and significantly, memorization is not at one pole of a dichotomy while "understanding" is at the other pole. Rote memorization, defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as committing to memory "without thought of understanding," is recognized worldwide as one way to try to learn. Most stakeholders *in both learning cultures* would agree that this process achieves little more than the capacity to repeat ("regurgitate" is the often-used pejorative) a mathematical formula, word string, or other data on demand, such as for a test or recitation. Ference Marton and his collaborators comment that rote leads to "surface learning," i.e., to "learning what is signed," and go on to state that the desirable objective is "deep learning," i.e., "learning what is signified."[45]

Is memorization inimical to one's deep learning of "what is signified"? The answer is that *a second type of memorization*, far from being inimical to deep learning, positively promotes it. Researchers have adopted "repetitive learning" as the name for this second type. Watkins & Biggs describe repetitive learning as "learning in order to enhance future recall alongside understanding," and state a revealing finding from research by Dahlin & Watkins (2000):

> Chinese students, unlike their Western counterparts, used repetition for two different purposes. On the one hand, it was associated with creating a "deep impression" and thence with memorisation, but on the other it was used to deepen or develop understanding by discovering new meaning. The Western students…tended to use repetition only to check that they had really remembered something. Whereas Western students saw understanding as usually a process of sudden insight, Chinese students typically thought of understanding as a long process that required considerable mental effort.[46]

Attitudes in the two cultures towards memorization reflect each culture's answer to the question, "What accounts for learner success or failure?" In a Learning-Focused culture, the answer is "aptitude." If one has high aptitude for certain content, it follows that one can learn it, at least partially, by means of insight. Whatever insight is, it is not about arduous effort such as that required by memorization. In a Knowledge-Focused culture, conversely, the answer to the question is "effort." If one devotes exceptional effort, one can learn – indeed, can come to understand – virtually anything, and

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[44] Three thoughtful explorations of memorization in Knowledge-Focused cultures are found in D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs, eds., *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological, and Contextual Influences*, CERC, University of Hong Kong, 1996: (1) Lee Wing On, "The Cultural Context for Chinese Learners: Conceptions of Learning in the Confucian Tradition", pp. 25-42; (2) John Biggs, "Western Misperceptions of the Confucian-Heritage Learning Culture," pp. 43-67; (3) Ference Marton et al., "Memorizing and Understanding: The Keys to the Paradox?," pp. 69-83.

[45] Ference Marton et al., *ibid*., pp. 69-70.

[46] D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs, "The Paradox of the Chinese Learner and Beyond," in *Teaching the Chinese Learner: Psychological and Pedagogical Perspectives*, CERC, University of Hong Kong, 2001, p. 6. The reference is to B. Dahlin & D.A. Watkins, "The Role of Repetition in the Process of Memorising and Understanding: A Comparison of the Views of Western and Chinese Secondary School Students in Hong Kong," in *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 70, pp. 65-84.

a big part of that long and arduous process is "repetitive learning," which is about recall *and about thorough understanding of "what is signified."*

Learner-Focused instructors who castigate memorization as worthless "rote" are disrespectful to learners from abroad; they erect barriers of distrust. Armed with these research findings, those instructors might be able to build upon what has been shown to be a powerful learning tool.

Sequence of Learning Activities: In Learner-Focused cultures, learners are expected to become directly and actively involved with content at once, often the moment the new material is introduced. In other words, the application or demonstration step precedes the skill-acquisition step. This occurs for three reasons: First, there's a strong belief that "active" or "participatory" learning yields better learning outcomes than what is pejoratively termed "passive" learning (i.e., learners "merely" listening and taking notes). Second, instant involvement with the content is viewed as motivating and engaging; anything less is "boring." Finally, there's another belief, carrying moral overtones, that the process of active exploration and creation is highly admirable, more so than the drudgery of painstakingly acquiring a skill.

In Knowledge-Focused cultures, the sequence usually is reversed: Skill mastery precedes skill demonstration or application. The process of mastery includes observation (listening and watching), imitation, drills, repetitive learning (discussed above), directive guidance by the instructor, group study with fellow learners, and hours of private study at one's desk. Note that the learner is expected to publicly demonstrate or apply the content (such as on a test or oral recitation) *only after he has had time during which to master it*. Clearly, this is the opposite of the Learner-Focused case, in which publicly enacted trial-and-error learning is often expected of learners as they first grapple with new material.

Harold Stevenson and James Stigler address this contrast in their study of the differences between U.S. education on the one hand, and Chinese and Japanese education on the other. Noting that Westerners are often dazzled by the virtuoso performances (e.g., on the violin) of Asians as young as three, they say that these are possible because the Asians have "mastered the components of these complex acts," and that U.S. children can perform likewise *when taught in a similar, skill-mastering, fashion*. "Yet Americans resist teaching children in this way, especially in academic matters." Why?

> The resistance stems from criticism that explicit teaching of component skills produces automatons rather than creative children. But there is little validity to this argument. Creativity in a domain depends on mastery of basic skills; it is not inhibited by their mastery. No American adult will argue that his skill in tennis or golf came without attention to details… Yet we uphold in (American) culture a false dichotomy between knowledge and skill on the one hand, and creativity on the other.[47]

Whether or not tiny Americans really are capable of dazzling performances, we do know that people who cross national boundaries to sit in classrooms really are distracted from learning by a reversal of the basic sequence of learning activities. Those new to Learning-Focused classrooms feel woefully unprepared and in danger of losing "face" when expected to *publicly* perform before they have had many hours in private to attain mastery. Those new to Knowledge-Focused classrooms feel bored by

[47] H.W. Stevenson & James W. Stigler, *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education*, Simon & Schuster, 1992, p. 92.

and resentful of an instructor whose duty is to tell learners what to learn and how to learn it, and they may be blindsided by the expectation that, following study, they will perform with genuine mastery.

When instructors recognize these differences, they can take steps to ameliorate their effects by changing their own behavior and/or supportively explaining to newcomers how things are done.

In 1976, I observed immigrant Portuguese adolescents in U.S. classrooms and found that their teachers could have educated them more effectively if they had used an instructional style like the one common in Portugal. Since then, I've learned that instructional style research is valuable not only for instructors facing learners from abroad, but also for instructors and instructional leaders within each prototypal culture who hope to improve their effectiveness with native-born learners.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Cremin, Lawrence A., *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*, Knopf, 1961, 387 pages. An thorough and balanced account of the rise of the Learner-Focused culture in the United States.

Cortazzi, Martin, & Lixian Jin, "Cultures of Learning: Language Classrooms in China," in H. Coleman, ed., *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 169-206. An insightful look at the values underlying many Chinese classrooms.

Henry, Jules, "A Cross-Cultural Outline of Education," Chapter 5 of *Jules Henry on Education*, Random House, 1966, pp. 72-183. An exhaustive and revealing parsing of the myriad ways in which classroom objectives and activities can vary across time and space. Originally published in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 1, No. 4, July 1960.

Ho, Irene, "Are Chinese Teachers Authoritarian?," in D.A. Watkins & J.B. Biggs, eds., *Teaching the Chinese Learner: Psychological and Pedagogical Perspectives*, CERC, The University of Hong Kong, 2001, pp. 99-114. Ho answers the title's question with a "yes" because the teachers are directive, and a "no" because they are simultaneously supportive.

Holliday, Adrian, "Large- and Small-Class Cultures in Egyptian University Classrooms: A Cultural Justification for Curriculum Change," in H. Coleman, ed., *Society and the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 86-104. Holliday reports that in classes of fewer than 50 students, traditional Knowledge-Focused methods were preserved, while in larger classes Learner-Focused methods were usually employed.

Kainsbauer, Astrid, "Management Training Across Cultures: The German Versus the British Perspective," Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration, Center for International Studies, n.d. (2001?), 19 pages. Kainsbauer offers one of the few cross-cultural studies of business training, revealing that British training rooms are relatively Learner-Focused while German training rooms are relatively Knowledge-Focused.[48]

LeVine, Robert A., & Merry I. White, *Human Conditions: The Cultural Basis of Educational Developments*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, 245 pages. Critical background reading.

[48] See also Astrid Kainsbauer's published Ph.D. dissertation: *Kultur im interkulturellen Training – der Einfluss von kulturellen Unterscheiden in Lehr- und Lernprozessen an den Beispielen Deutschland und Grossbritannien*, IKO Verlag Frankfurt, 2002.

Stevenson, Harold W., & James W. Stigler, *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education*, Simon & Schuster, 1992, 236 pages. Essentially a plea for reform directed at the American public, this book carefully documents revealing contrasts at the elementary school level.

Watkins, David A., & John B. Biggs, *The Chinese Learner: Cultural, Psychological, and Contextual Influences*, CERC, The University of Hong Kong, 1996, 285 pages. See especially pages 25 through 106, in which four authors – Lee Wing On, John Biggs, Ference Marton et al., and Farideh Salili – offer a series of insightful articles on "The Paradox of the Chinese Learner," namely that learners in China perform extremely well although their classroom conditions – e.g., class sizes of 40 or 50 – would seem to be detrimental to learning.

Many ideas in this conference presentation found their way into Cornelius Grove's subsequent books:

- *The Aptitude Myth*, 2013, Rowman & Littlefield, 178 pages. www.theaptitudemyth.info
- *The Drive to Learn*, 2017, Rowman & Littlefield, 153 pages. www.thedrivetolearn.info
- *A Mirror for Americans*, 2020, Rowman & Littlefield, 124 pages. www.amirrorforamericans.info

Citation:

Cornelius N. Grove (2006). Understanding the Two Instructional Style Prototypes: Pathways to Success in Internationally Diverse Classrooms. *International Communication Competencies in Higher Education and Management*. Siow-Heng Ong et al., eds. Marshall Cavendish Academic (Singapore), 165-202.