

FIVE STEPS TOWARD CHRISTIAN INTERCULTURAL TEACHING

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1. Foundational procedures

- A. Before teaching cross-culturally, and particularly where suspicion of other cultures is strong, we must focus first upon relationship building with leaders/gatekeepers as a prerequisite for opportunities. Who are these? A missionary proverb is: “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”
 1. Ray Bakke, urban missiologist, notes that knowledge will only intimidate unless there is a good relationship with students.
 2. One white teacher with a D. Min. degree approached a black pastor heading a school for bi-vocational black pastors saying, “I’d like to be your servant.” That teacher taught and administered at the school for over five years.
- B. Pray for open doors to teach (2 Cor. 2:12), since God opens them (cf. Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8). Cultural distrust must be overcome in some contexts to be able to teach at all.
- C. Dialogue with leaders to determine precise local teaching goals. We may submit a rough draft or outline of a seminar, for example, to the pastor where we plan to teach to get feedback, leading to new topics and/or deletions. Or we may have to scrap our teaching and switch topics entirely.
 1. I’d asked for teaching topics months in advance to a venue in Uganda and had received none for a church leaders’ conference. So I taught the subject that I considered to be most necessary—that of marriage. The leaders were obviously engrossed and asked many questions. Yet the pastor in charge wanted me to teach on business principles for micro-economic development the second (and concluding) day of meetings, which I did, although with deep private regret. That was a higher priority to him, and he knew the needs far better than did I. The leaders also responded very well to that topic and the head pastor invited us to return the following year for more meetings.
- D. Carefully define the issue/problem/subject matter and keep that subject clearly in focus as you prepare to teach, particularly when the requirements for a workshop or other teaching responsibility aren’t clearly defined.
- E. Write down your understandings of the truth about the issue as you understand it, together with possible approaches to teaching the truth. Sometimes we know more than we think we know. I was sent, for example, to teach a rural church planter how to plant a church in his own culture—a tribe that I knew nothing about. I’d never planted a church, certainly not in the bush, and definitely not in Uganda. But I had been a trainer for Evangelism Explosion and knocked on many doors, so I taught hut-to-hut evangelism—a locally new concept. At the end of the week the

church more than doubled in size with the addition of seventeen people. Shortly afterward about fifteen Ugandans came to the area and imitated the method so that another 250 were added to local churches. God uses weak people (2 Cor. 12:10). So before researching, write down all that you already know about the subject. Then take out a *second* sheet and continue. You won't need to footnote most of it, either.

- F. Try to identify elements of your personal worldview in "E" above which are relative to your own culture (macro-, sub-, and micro-). I, being Anglo, once taught a time management seminar to leaders in a local church who were African American. My home culture is generally linear (sequential) and future-time oriented, and not crisis-oriented. Various studies have shown that African Americans are more global than sequential in thinking and that time is less precisely differentiated than in the white culture. Blacks have not infrequently mentioned in my presence "Colored People's Time"—CPT, to explain why blacks were sometimes late. Or a linear "life graph" approach to time/goal management may not connect with those with a present-time orientation of whatever culture or socio-economic level.
- G. What do the Scriptures have to say about the issue at hand? The Bible is the only absolute that we have. If you believe that the Old and New Testaments are without error in the originals (autographs), then whatever is affirmed to be true—is. It is "true truth" in Francis Schaeffer's terms. Among postmoderns the issue isn't "truth," but what is personally right. Christian teachers must contend even for the concept of truth, perhaps even prior to the specific topic to be taught.
1. Social scientific research may contain truth, after factoring for researcher biases and methodological and other error, but it is generally inconclusive. For example, scripture give very clear traits for local church leadership (Tit. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-13) and even touches style, as in servant leadership (1 Pet. 5:5-6, per J. Oswald Sanders).
 2. For example, perhaps the main consensus in leadership social-scientific research is the lack of consensus as to even what is a leader. James MacGregor Burns noted, "Leadership is the most observed and the least understood phenomena on earth." Bernard Bass—the compiler of leadership research—wrote, "It is difficult to know what, if anything, has been convincingly demonstrated by replicated research." Thank God for absolutes. We see from Scripture that character is crucial to leadership, for example and that leaders can be made, as implied by 1 Tim. 3:1.

2. Historical context exegesis

- A. How has the issue/problem/subject matter been handled historically in the home culture?
- B. What are the strengths/weaknesses of that historical solution?
- C. Who would be effective role models in the home culture by which to

illustrate your teaching? Some cultures, such as the African America, put great value upon models. The teacher's role models may be irrelevant in the home or target culture. Who from among them can illustrate your concepts?

- D. What is the near history of the issue in the home culture? What are the current needs and valid goals in the local-culture context?

3. **Research/Resources**

- A. What have been empirical and social scientific contributions that impact the issue? Whatever is truly true is consonant with God's reality. What consensus, if any, emerges from that research?
- B. What does the academy in general contribute to clarify the issue? What does popular literature contribute toward understanding? For example, a plethora of popular books exist on leadership.
- C. What do your own observations contribute to clarifying the issue? Take notes on your observations and check them for validity with the views of someone in the target culture, although "informants" (a poor, if necessary term) may have a protective bias in favor of their culture.
- D. What do human resources/informants contribute to your understanding? Puzzling observations need interpretation by a member of the target culture.
- E. What has prayer over the issue brought into greater clarity? We may tend to overlook that God can give understanding. He knows what we need to know and can impart understanding to us through reading, insights and even revelations, as the scientist George Washington Carver illustrated by taking insights gained through prayer in his woods into his biochemical laboratory later that morning. It was through prayer that I struck upon the "theory of survival/security" as I was trying to find a unifying principle behind the tremendous under-representation of African Americans in cross-cultural missions.
- F. What audio-visually can I bring into the cross-cultural context? Will I even have electricity? Will PowerPoint work with elderly ladies?

4. **Contextualized teaching**

- A. Are students mostly field dependent or field independent? Do they learn better independent of close teacher supervision, or do they need close, affirming interaction with the instructor? Should we focus upon group discussion, or upon individual guided research? Are students motivated from within or from without?
- B. How should their dominant learning style impact my own teaching style? Should I teach to the style of learning of the student, or contrary to it, in order to stretch the students?
- C. How does the worldview and local experience of learners impact my approach to the subject? What can I glean from newspapers and magazines to both better understand the way my students think of the world and to illustrate concepts? How much of a factor is the spirit world

in their thinking? If I'm teaching about AIDS prevention, do I need to deal with the subject of vampires, for example?

- D. How can I better refine a *method* or *process* for future problem solving/teaching, in addition to dealing with the current teaching issues?

5. Field development

- A. Obtain open-ended feedback from learners to perhaps modify later teaching. This could be through a questionnaire or simply through dialogue.
- B. Where do I lose students? What concepts excite them?
- C. How can I better teach this in the same culture the next time around? Quickly jot down insights that come to you as you teach or revise your notes as soon as possible. One of the best times for revision is on a jet returning from a teaching venue.