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# Teaching Across Cultures: A Review of the Personal Accounts of Twelve Teachers

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Teaching Across Cultures:  
A Review of The Personal Accounts of Twelve Teachers

Independent Professional Project

of

Nicholas Hilmers

MAT VII

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#### ABSTRACT

This is a review of the personal accounts of twelve teachers who have worked in cultural settings other than their own. It is intended to be useful to teachers who plan to enter a different culture. The twelve critical reviews are supplemented by a commentary which points out the limitations of the literature and discusses common adjustment problems which appear. It is argued that the success of a teacher in adjusting to a different culture can be attributed to certain qualities of personality. Briefly stated, these qualities are adaptability, a strong will, creativity and a humanistic attitude.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Part I	The Reviews .....	1
Part II	Recognizing and Overcoming Adjustment Problems..	15
Bibliography	.....	28
Footnotes to Part II	.....	29

## INTRODUCTION

The number of Americans teaching overseas is steadily increasing, especially in the field of English as a second language. Many receive extensive training in methodology before entering another culture. But there are also many who go abroad without much preparation. While training in specific skills is certainly desirable in any profession, it is my feeling that the success of teaching abroad depends less on methodology than on the ability to adjust to a different cultural environment. This ability can be developed, just as one can learn to play a better game of tennis. One way the teacher may develop it is to learn the language of the culture which he or she plans to go to. Another is to study its customs and traditions by reading books about it, seeing films, attending lectures, etc. Yet another way is to learn from the experiences of other teachers who have worked overseas. One means of access to their experiences is through literature, as a number of teachers have written accounts of their trials and successes in other cultures. My review has two purposes: one is to bring the accounts which are available to the attention of those who intend to teach in a culture other than their own; the other is to discuss the contributions of these accounts to the understanding of what adjustment problems are most common and how the teacher can overcome them. The organization of the review reflects its two purposes. Part One critically reviews the literature discussing the particular strengths and weaknesses of each account. While there is some emphasis on the treatment of adjustment problems, the reviews attempt to appraise and evaluate each account as a whole. Part Two is a commentary on the reviewed literature which points out its limitations and clarifies the common adjustment problems

This report by Nicholas Hilmer is accepted in its present form.

Date December 18, 1976 Principal Advisor Raymond Clark

Project Advisors: Raymond Clark  
David Rein

found therein as well as the qualities of personality which are associated with teachers who are able to adjust to living and working in a different culture. These qualities are adaptability, a strong will, creativity, and a humanistic attitude. I suggest that they are critical to the success of any teacher who goes overseas. It is my opinion that these qualities can be developed by a teacher, although I don't know exactly what the best way of doing that would be. Perhaps every teacher must seek his or her own answer to that question. Hopefully this review will stimulate greater awareness of the sorts of problems that teachers commonly encounter in other cultures and of the kind of person a teacher needs to be to overcome those problems.

PART I: THE REVIEWS



1. Experiences of a Fulbright Teacher by Effie Kaye Adams

Written for the most part as a diary, this book concerns the experiences of an American teacher in Pakistan under the Fulbright program in the early 1950's. Potentially, this is a fascinating subject, but what the author tells us about her encounter with a different culture is disappointingly superficial. Much of the book resembles a travelogue, recounting Adams' wanderings through Pakistan and India. Apart from the frequent sightseeing, there are, to the author's credit, a few meetings with various groups of Pakistanis as well as visits to local schools, offices, and businesses. Only one brief chapter is devoted to the author's teaching experience, and there is no discussion here of adjustment problems, except for the author commenting that she would have had more communication with her hosts if she had learned some Bengali before arriving in their country. We do find out that she enjoyed good relations with her students, despite tensions and disruptions attending a political strike, which the author perhaps too casually dismisses as "petty politics."

The only section of the book that really engages the reader's interest is a penetrating look at the status of women (Chapter 6) at that time, and at the stirrings of change in that regard. The book as a whole, however, is neither very informative nor entertaining, and it offers no serious examination of the question of teaching in a cross-cultural context.

2. Spearpoint: Teacher in America by Sylvia Ashton-Warner

This is Sylvia Ashton-Warner's most recent book about teaching since the popular Teacher, which introduced her "organic method" to the

words" emerge more slowly and in new patterns, Miss Ashton-Warner suggests that the native imagery of American children is being repressed by overstimulation through the media. A provocative notion, but can such a sweeping statement about American children be made with assurance on the basis of contact with only one small group of them for a relatively short time? The final chapters present a host of speculations as to the future of American society which are equally, if not more, untenable. This one, for example: "The blood of each other is the only thing which really interests space-woman, who crave the elixir of another's agony as an earthener craved water." Who can understand that? This sort of abstruse speculation should either be supported with some reasoning or evidence, or else excluded from an otherwise intelligent book about education.

Apart from these weaknesses, Spearpoint: Teacher in America is an absorbing story about the testing of exciting ideas in a classroom, and a thoughtful self-portrait of a remarkable teacher adjusting to a different kind of school in a different culture.

3. Nine Months is a Year at Babaquivara School by Eulalia Bourne

Imagine being the only teacher at a one-room school in the country, many miles away from the nearest town. You live in the room next to the classroom. It has running water, but lacks heat and electricity. Your students are Mexican-American children, more fluent in Spanish than in English. The few textbooks you have are all in English. You can't give the same lessons to all of your students, because they range over five different grade levels. In addition to teaching, it is your responsibility to provide medical care, prepare lunches, publish a monthly magazine, coach a baseball team, and drive students home in your car when the bus breaks down.

Such was the experience of Eulalia Bourne at an isolated rural school in Arizona during the late 1930's, and this is her account of part of that experience. Anecdotal and impressionistic, it is her story of one school year in an extraordinary teaching and living situation. Many interesting writings by the author's students are included to complement her own memories, as, for example, intriguing stories about ghosts, magical lights and caches of gold in the mountains. The common thread which unifies the book is the unwavering commitment to the school and to learning that is demonstrated by Ms. Bourne and by her students. They are eager to learn, and she is eager to help them. Skeptics advise the author that her students, the daughters and sons of poor vaqueros and farmers, will never benefit from education. But she recognizes that her students will have some opportunities that were never available for their parents. "My little children," she wisely observes, "must go out into the changing world and change with it."

Presumably, Ms. Bourne had a few adjustment problems in her first year of teaching at Babaquivari school, but this book concerns a later year, and thus doesn't mention them. Its value lies in being a reflection of an inspired teacher who worked and lived at one time in circumstances to which many teachers today would be either unwilling or unable to adapt.

4. To Sir, with Love by Edward Ricardo Braithwaite

This is a marvelous story about a teacher who, overcoming many obstacles, brings about a profound change of outlook among his students, inducing them to change from seemingly incorrigible delinquents into well-mannered and sensitive young men and women. This would appear to be too good to be true, but Braithwaite is quite a talented writer, and he shapes the elements of his plot into a believable form. And since he's writing

about his own experiences, he should know the plot rather well. The story begins immediately after World War II, during which the author, a black man from British Guiana, served in the British Air Force. He is seeking a job as an engineer in which his previous education and training could be applied. But nobody wants to hire him because he is black. He turns then to teaching, not out of any great desire to teach, but because he needs a job, and teaching openings are plentiful. The appointment offered him is at a secondary school in London's East End, a poor and predominantly white community. At first, he finds this an impossible and enervating task. The students use every kind of impolite language and disrupt the class at their convenience. Desk tops are slammed down to make as much noise as possible, only a very few students revealing a disposition to learn anything. It appears to Braithwaite that they are trying to drive him out, which had been the unhappy fate of his predecessor. But he doesn't give up. He takes stronger measures, lecturing the students, who are to graduate at the end of the term, that they will be expected to have some basic skills as well as respect certain rules of conduct in the working world that they will soon enter. He insists that they begin to treat him and each other as adults, refraining from interruptions and using surnames. Somehow this works. Derision is supplanted by respect, carelessness by a sense of purpose. A relationship of trust and affection grows between the teacher and his students, who, despite their social conditioning, come to see Braithwaite as a person rather than as a black man with certain stereotyped characteristics.

To Sir, with Love is a most uncommon story told with consummate skill. It portrays a sensitive and determined teacher who comes to terms with a new and very difficult teaching situation. We should note, though,

that it is not only Braithwaite who makes adjustments, but also his students, and that their adjustments are made at his instigation. He demands more change on the part of his students than what is demanded of him. We apprehend that the burden of adjustment does not necessarily fall entirely on the teacher.

5. May I Speak: The Diary of a Crossover Teacher by Manie Culburtson

Here is an account very unlike the others of this bibliography in that it concerns a teacher who adjusted to an unfamiliar situation against her will. A court order to desegregate the faculties of public schools in her area required that Manie Culburtson and other white teachers transfer from a traditionally white school to a school where nearly all of the students were black. The author felt that she was being forced to leave a school at which she had taught for many years. Her fear of going to a black school was intense, assuming the physical reactions of nausea and sleepless nights. With great resentment and reluctance, she decided to accept the unwelcome transition, but to do a minimum of work in her new position. The new situation, however, turned out to be at variance with her preconceptions of it. Anticipated problems, such as violence and racial incidents, did not materialize. But there were problems which she had not envisioned. She encountered a paucity and mismanagement of supplies. The habits of the black children were different in some respects from those of white children she had worked with earlier. For example, there was more talking and eating in class, more frequent absenteeism, and more liberal use of profanity. The author had to learn to live with these and other habits. But more significant was the desire of her students to learn. This so impressed her that she quickly abandoned the idea of doing the minimum in favor of teaching with the same energy and enthusiasm that had been integral to

her work before.

The author's most important discovery was that the supposed equality of education for black and white children in her area was more a myth than a reality. Her conclusion was that the outside appearances of things had obscured the truth: "The outside appearances have given the impression that the Negroes were receiving a separate but equal education. It is obvious .... they were not."

This is a very honest and thoughtful diary. The author deserves a lot of credit for discussing her attitudes and biases so frankly. Its major contribution to the understanding of teacher adjustment problems is the demonstration that a teacher, before entering a different culture or subculture, may make incorrect interpretations of those problems. This underscores the need for a teacher to be as objective and dispassionate as possible in assessing adjustment problems that he or she will face. Every teacher will have a particular and unique set of problems, but care should be taken to avoid worrying about problems that don't exist. As Manie Culburtson puts it: "If I had only listened to that guy who said something like ninety per cent of what we worry about never happens, think of the agony I would have avoided".

6. An Empty Spoon by Sunny Decker

Referring to the school at which she taught, the author comments that "the whole trouble with the institution is that it tells kids they should think, and then refuses to acknowledge or tolerate any new ideas." If this is a correct diagnosis, Sunny Decker shows us how one teacher, at least on some occasions, might transcend this institutional inadequacy. This particular transcendence is an exceptional one, for An Empty Spoon is the story of a young white teacher at an all-black Philadelphia high school in her first year of teaching. It is the story of an inexperienced

teacher who, unlike many with experience, did not give up on her students as being unable to learn. Decker does not offer us a blueprint for reforming education in ghetto schools, but does relate some imaginative ideas for teaching that seem to have worked. However, her success was probably due less to any specific ideas or methods than to the rapport she had with her students. Once she told them that someone had advised her that a white teacher could not work effectively with blacks. Her students disagreed, one of them saying that she was too smart to believe something like that.

Decker seems to have had fewer and less serious problems of adjustment than did the other white author's who taught at all-black schools (Culburtson, Herndon, and Kendall). Indeed, she reports that she was hardly conscious of racial barriers until a riot occurred near the end of the school year, which her students did not take part in.

This would be a better book if it related the author's experiences in more detail, and if the style of writing was less banal. Nevertheless, An Empty Spoon merits reading as the faithful account of a teacher who, although from a very different background from that of her students, was able to help them learn a few things in the sort of school where that did not happen everyday.

7. How Full the River by Omar Eby

This is a book based on recent experiences of Mennonite teachers in Africa. Eby has drawn upon his own experiences and the reports of other Mennonite teachers to create composite characters. The author's style is smooth and expressive, and he reveals a keen perception of the problems that a particular group of American teachers have had in African schools. For instance, they may be asked to teach courses for which they have little or no training. They have to learn the various ways of making and of main-

taining social contacts with Africans. African concepts of knowledge and education need to be better understood. Sometimes the American teachers learn by making mistakes, as in the case of a teacher who tries to organize a hiking club for his students only to discover that walking for pleasure is not compatible with their customs.

Eby's book is not imbued with Mennonite beliefs, but here and there the tone does become somewhat proselytizing. The principal characters are teachers in practice, but missionaries in spirit. The reader can benefit from their practical experiences whether or not he shares their religious convictions.

One book about American teachers in Africa is not enough material from which any generalized conclusions can be drawn about their problems and achievements. Even if there were five or ten such books, we would have to be cautious in reaching conclusions. Thus we don't know to what extent Eby's book reflects the experiences of other American teachers in Africa. But it does accurately depict the adjustment problems and the accomplishments of a particular group of teachers at a particular time and place. For those who are concerned with that, How Full the River is an intelligent book that merits reading.

#### 8. An African School by Kit Elliott

An African School is a detailed and informative description by a Scottish teacher of his experiences at a Nigerian secondary school in the early 1960's. His primary task was to teach English and history, and this proved to be quite a challenge. Many of the students entered the school with practically no facility in English, and all subjects were instructed in English. Materials for teaching history were in short supply, and their content was generally slanted toward Europe. Moreover, there were serious administrative problems. In the author's words, the school



was "squalidly maintained, incompetently run, and autocratically administered" by the Catholic priests in charge, although a shakeup at around mid-point of his five-year stay resulted in many improvements. Like Bourne in Arizona and the teachers in Eby's book, Elliott was expected to do other things besides teach. He directed a play, trained an athletics team, and edited the school journal. His lesson planning often suffered due to these activities, but the author found that outside the classroom there was more meaningful interaction between teachers and students. His most interesting encounters with African culture were visits to the ancestral homeland of a local tribe, and to a nearby village, where he obtained an oral record of its traditions from a group of its oldest men. (In his history classes, Elliott had students investigate and report on the traditions and customs of many tribes in the area, which represented a creative departure from his usual practice of giving lectures).

In comparison with Eby's account, Elliott's book is considerably longer, and he discusses the physical aspects of his school and his relations with other staff members in greater detail. Eby, on the other hand, tells us a lot more about teacher-student relations, which are described as having been more personal and complex. This difference may have been not a question of personality, but the consequence of a fundamental dissimilarity between Elliott's school and those which Eby describes: Elliott's school was administered entirely by Europeans, who had always led a kind of self-contained existence, shunning social contact with Africans. In contrast, the schools Eby discusses were run by Africans, having multinational teaching staffs with many African members. While there were some cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, meaningful interpersonal relationships between staff members of different cultural backgrounds were not uncommon.

An African School is a good chronicle of the author's experiences as a teacher over five years in a complex society moving away from the patterns of colonialism, seeking to construct new designs. Elliott emerges not as a brilliant teacher, but as a capable and dedicated one who concentrated on doing a few things well, realizing that he could never solve all of the problems at his school. He also emerges as a teacher who had a sincere interest in his students and in their culture.

9. The Way It Spoized to Be by James Herndon

It might seem that a teacher would always want to adjust to a new situation. This is James Herndon's story of how he perceived that the prevailing scheme of things wasn't any good, and of how he, defying his superiors, attempted with some success to improvise a viable alternative. Herndon was a white teacher at a virtually all-black junior high school in San Francisco, but this is not a story centered on racial tensions and animosities. What it concerns is a teacher who saw that his students were not learning much through conventional methods, and then set out on his own to experiment with new approaches. The administration of Herndon's school stressed the maintenance of order in the classroom by the teacher as the basis for learning. It did not take the author very long to figure out that the imposition of order did not actually facilitate education.

"The purpose of all these methods was to get and keep an aspect of order.....But the purpose of this order was supposed to be so that 'learning could take place'. So everyone said....while at the same time admitting that most of the kids weren't learning anything this way." (p.76)

So he quickly threw the established methods out the window, and tried out ideas that required his students to order their own learning. Of course, the administration was not approving of his experiments. Herndon wasn't

exactly pressured to change his ways, but he was constantly given advice by his superiors as to what he was doing wrong. Herndon, ignoring their advice, persevered with his ideas. He had many failures, but also some remarkable successes. By the end of the academic year, his students exhibited more initiative and more willingness to cooperate with each other. But the administration saw nothing beyond a lack of order, and he was given a very unfavorable evaluation. The author resigned before the ax could fall.

This is the only book of this bibliography to depict a teacher's refusal to adjust to a new job (it was Herndon's first teaching position). The conclusion to be drawn is self-evident; the teacher who rejects most of the customary ways of teaching at his or her school will ultimately be asked or compelled to leave that school. Some degree of conformity to the status quo is required for survival. The dissident teacher must decide either to sacrifice principle in the interest of survival or to assert principle and risk losing a job.

The Way It Spozed to Be is a humorous, yet scathing indictment of American big-city schools that disputes traditional conceptions of them and raises broader questions about the quality of education in America. Many things may have changed since 1968, when Herndon's book was first published and widely acclaimed, but the chances are that many schools not unlike the one where he taught are still in existence. Anyone who wants to understand what is happening in them ought to read this book.

#### 10. White Teacher in a Black School

This book, based on the author's own experiences, is ostensibly the story of a conscientious young white teacher who chooses a predominantly black school in the inner city for his first teaching assignment, unaware of the trouble awaiting him. He is shocked to find his students react

to him with either open hostility or total indifference. Every class is marked by violent disruptions. This might provide the basis for an appealing story: the underdog teacher struggling to overcome prejudice and to do his job in extremely adverse circumstances. Unfortunately, the plot is merely a vehicle by which the author attacks the concept of "progressive education," which he describes as an erosion of academic and moral standards to permit students to pass courses and get diplomas by demonstrating only slight academic progress. Like vegetables for a stew, various dramatic incidents are thrown into the book which supposedly show us the terrible consequences of "progressive education." There is an assault, a stabbing, a student sex orgy, and a teacher's party featuring pornographic films. As if that wasn't enough, the new teacher is unjustly accused of discrimination and threatened by Black Muslims. The credibility of the book is doubtful in light of the obvious orchestration of these events. Other weaknesses are the artificial quality of the dialogue and the repeated use of the simplistic phrase "the Negro problem." The discussion of the author's teaching experience, which the title implies is the focus of the book, is brief and largely superficial. There is no mention of even one serious relationship with a student or another teacher. The plot is merely a crude device by which Kendall seeks to advance his views on education and other issues. The material may be autobiographical, but the use of the third person in place of the author's own name and the orchestration of sensational incidents indicate the presence of manipulation. White Teacher in a Black School is a good example of propaganda in the guise of literature. It is not a good book about teaching.

11. Teacher as Learner: A Year with the Mississippi Choctaw Indians  
by Jan Paukert Peterson

This is the account of the experience of a speech teacher with young

Choctaw Indians in a special program combining college and vocational courses. It is a succinct description of the adjustments made by the teacher to the cultural patterns of her students. Cooperative learning habits, time concepts, unwillingness to give personal criticism, and eye contact were among the patterns to which the teacher adjusted. Unlike the previously reviewed books, which typically discuss adjustment as one aspect of a broader experience, this paper sharply focuses on a specific adjustment problem.

12. Dr. Sunday Comes to Town by Leslie Rich

This is an article concerning the experiences of a Nigerian teacher in the United States. It relates some of his teaching experiences in American schools, stressing his encounters with student misconceptions about Africa. The similar misconceptions of American teachers and administrators are also discussed. The article provides a good example of teacher adjustment to preconceptions about his or her culture, demonstrating that a teacher does not have to accept those preconceptions, but may correct them.

PART II: RECOGNIZING AND OVERCOMING ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS

( A Commentary on the Literature )

Of the numerous teachers who have worked and lived in a different culture or taught students of a different subculture, only a small minority have ever published accounts of their adjustment problems. Most of these accounts are thoughtful and substantive, but a few are superficial and unrevealing. The literature which is critically discussed in the attached review represents, according to the extensive research of this writer, nearly all of the accounts or discussions of such adjustment problems which are currently in print. Considering the breadth and complexity of this subject, the available pertinent literature is remarkably incomplete. There are, for example, almost no relevant articles. This may seem astonishing, but the fact is that virtually all of the articles about cross-cultural or cross-subcultural experiences of teachers concern their activities and accomplishments, not their adjustment problems. Two explanations for this are evident: one is that most of the articles appear in news-oriented magazines that stress events and achievements; the other is that they are generally written by journalists, and thus are second hand as opposed to subjective accounts. Because adjustment problems are often of a very personal nature, an observer cannot tell us as much about them as the teacher who has lived with them can.

In addition to being limited in a quantitative sense, the available literature exhibits many qualitative deficiencies. There are no books, for example, relating to cross-cultural adjustment problems of teachers

in Asia, Latin America, or Europe. There is almost no literature on the particular adjustment problems that women might encounter, or on any that men might have. No Peace Corps teacher has published a book about his or her teaching experience in another culture. The Fulbright program has apparently yielded only two books, and the one that is available at many libraries casts little light on the adjustment problems of its author. These are among the most obvious gaps in the literature. One could undoubtedly find more.

Given the limitations of the available literature, any conclusions we draw from it should be cautious and tentative. Even the existence of two books about the cross-cultural experiences of teachers in Africa hardly provides sufficient data from which we could make generalized statements or predictions as to teacher adjustment problems in Africa. We simply can't describe a forest on the basis of having seen two trees.

Another problem is the precise definition of adjustment. The most appropriate one is "to adapt or conform, as to new conditions."<sup>1</sup> But what if a teacher tries to change those conditions? Does adjustment mean the complete acceptance of the status quo, or can a teacher adjust to a different culture or subculture and at the same time advocate or effect its transformation? This is not a semantic problem, but a cultural one involving the questions of conformity and deviance with respect to established norms of behavior. While it is usually difficult to determine exactly where conformity ends and deviance begins, any culture or society will tolerate some degree of deviance. A teacher in a different culture or subculture will not necessarily be expected to adhere to all of its norms of behavior, just as absolute conformity is not expected of the indigenous people. For example, in Spearpoint by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, the very dissident ideas of a teacher regarding the policies of the school



where she works are accepted by her colleagues. On the other side of the coin, The Way It Spoized to Be by James Herndon is the story of a teacher whose dissident ideas and actions lead to his losing a job.

Having briefly discussed the problem of defining adjustment and the deficiencies of the available literature, the most important question remains: What can we learn from this literature? There are two answers to this question. One is that teachers have certain kinds of adjustment problems in common. The other is that there are several qualities of personality, which, as we shall discuss later, account for the success of teachers in making adjustments to different cultural or subcultural environments.

The common teacher adjustment problems are these:

- 1) Adjustment to students of a different culture or subculture.
- 2) Adjustment to educational policies or resources of a different culture or subculture.
- 3) Adjustment to social attitudes of a different culture or subculture.

Of these problems, the first is reported by nearly all of the teachers, whereas the other two are mentioned by slightly more than half of them. To avoid redundancy in discussing them, the term "the teacher" will refer to that person as a teacher in a culture or subculture other than his or her own, while the term "adjustment problem" will refer to such problems of teachers in a cross-cultural or cross-subcultural sense. Books will in some cases be referred to only by their authors, avoiding unnecessary repetition of titles.

Of the three common adjustment problems, that of the teacher to

his or her students is the most prevalent. This is not really surprising, as teachers are generally more involved with students than with other teachers or administrators. The primary role of the teacher is to assist his or her students to learn, and that requires that adaptations be made to their cultural or subcultural values and patterns of behavior.

A problem which the teachers in the literature often have with students is the adjustment to unexpected behavior on their part. This may assume the form of disruption or of noncooperation. In To Sir With Love, Braithwaite describes such an unexpected encounter:

"I felt shocked.....My vision of teaching in a school was one of straight rows of desks, and neat, well-mannered, obedient children. The room I had just left seemed like a menagerie."2

Similar shocks are reported by Kendall in White Teacher in a Black School, and by Decker in An Empty Spoon, although Decker seems less affected by them than Kendall. Ashton-Warner reports a somewhat different kind of unexpected student behavior: her "free school" students have been told they can do just about anything they want to, and thus do not recognize their teachers as authorities. This conflicts with her values and prior experience, but she has to get used to the idea of having no recognized authority over the children in her class. In May I Speak, Manie Culbertson becomes accustomed to student conduct that first strikes her as being disruptive, but that she eventually realizes is reflective of their culture. A white teacher who is forced by a court order to transfer to a black school, Culbertson learns to accept the different habits of her new students such as their absenteeism, eating in class, and noncompetitive approach to learning.

Another sort of adjustment problem which many teachers experience with students is one of communication. This may result from linguistic

barriers or from divergent cultural patterns of communication. Decker and Culburtson, for example, mention their difficulties as white teachers in understanding the speech of black students. Kit Elliott, author of An African School, discusses the problem of teaching history in English to students having very little facility in the language. A paper entitled "Teacher as Learner" by Jan Peterson concerns the author's adjustments to the cultural communications patterns of her Choctaw Indian students such as their disapproval of eye contact and unwillingness to criticize others. In How Full the River, Omar Eby also discusses several problems stemming from cultural differences. One such problem is illustrated by an incident he relates through which a teacher realizes that, unlike Americans, his African students do not distinguish criticism of their ideas from criticism of their character. The incident occurs when the teacher uses the word rubbish to characterize the opinion of a student:

"Stop speaking such rubbish!"

He (student) sprang from his seat, trembling with shock. "Rubbish, rubbish, sir! Did you call me rubbish?"

"I did not call you rubbish. I described the stupid remarks you said as being rubbish."

"And what is the difference, sir? My words are me! 3

The third and final type of problem in student-teacher relations is adjustment by teachers to the expectations and preconceptions of their students. Elliott and Eby, for example, are expected by their students to present only material that will be on crucial examinations they are to take. The teachers don't know exactly what will be on the exams, but they find that they usually can't teach something which the students decide won't be. Herndon and Culburtson also discuss experiences with student expectations. Herndon's students expect him to use the same conventional procedures which he rejects, while Culburtson's expect her

not to assign them any homework, as they haven't had any before.

Occasionally, student preconceptions about their teacher or his culture pose problems. Braithwaite's students, for instance, have many distorted ideas about his homeland, British Guiana, which he tries to set straight. Elliott's students don't understand his marriage, and how it differs from their marriage customs, which prompts him to give a lesson about it. In "Dr. Sunday Comes to Town" by Leslie Rich, a Nigerian teacher corrects the preconceived notions about Africa held by his American students.

With regard to teacher adjustments to students, the following sections of the literature may be recommended:

Ashton-Warner, pp. 43-52, 149-162  
Braithwaite, chapters 2,3,6,8, and 9  
Culburtson, pp. 46-63  
Decker, pp. 5-8, 24-29, 61-71  
Eby, chapters 3 and 4  
Elliott, chapters 4, 15 and 16  
Herndon, pp. 89 - 100  
Peterson, its entirety

Teacher adjustments to other teachers or administrators are given only cursory discussions, and most of these are more inter-personal than cross-cultural in nature, reflecting the fact that most of the teachers are of the same cultural background as their colleagues. The one exception is Eby, who in Chapter 2 of his book discusses African administrators and their relations with American teachers.

The second common adjustment problem, that of the teacher to educational policies or resources, is not as noticeable or as important as the teacher-student problem, but there are many cases of it in the literature. Concerning policies, Ashton-Warner, Elliott, Herndon, and Kendall are all at odds with the prevailing educational policies at their schools. The former two reconcile themselves to these policies, but the

latter two oppose them, consciously declining to make the adjustments required of them. (The veracity of Kendall's account, however, is questionable, as explained in the review). Teacher adjustments to resources are generally adaptations to shortages of books or other materials. In these cases, the teacher either improvises with what he or she has or else looks for new materials. Such adaptations are mentioned by Bourne, Elliott, Herndon, Eby, and Culburtson.

The third common adjustment problem is that of the teacher to cultural attitudes or values. As a black person in England, Braithwaite experiences discouraging and painful encounters with racial prejudice. Adjustment in his case entails not his acceptance of that prejudice, but the control of his reactions to it (see Ch. 4 of his book). Elliott and Eby also discuss adjustments to cultural values; Elliott's treatment of this subject is unfocused, but Eby's is fairly specific and direct, particularly in pages 17-24 and in Chapter 6 of his book, which concerns the adjustment problems of women teachers, stressing their adaptation to African attitudes toward social contact with Americans. Other teacher adjustments to cultural values are related by Bourne (pp. 17-34) and by Culburtson (pp. 46-63).

The only authors who discuss cultural shock are Ashton-Warner, whose poetic description provides no specifics, and Eby, who gives us a more apt description:

"All that had been picturesque became dirty; the quaint folk or custom, curious or stupid; the indigenous cuisine, insipid and glutinous; everything suddenly sounded wrong and smelled wrong."

4

The author goes on to explain that in his observation, it takes American teachers in Africa from four to six months to adjust to African ways of life.

It is interesting and instructive to note what the common teacher adjustments are in the literature, but difficult to reach any firm conclusions about them. The available literature might well be compared to the tip of an iceberg, which may or may not indicate the nature of that iceberg as a whole. Certainly, teachers who enter another culture or subculture will meet with many of the same adjustment problems that we find in the literature. But to what extent will they experience them? And what problems will they have that are not discussed in the literature? Systematic research is required to answer these and other questions. We might, for example, obtain data from many teachers representing a broad spectrum of cross-cultural and cross-subcultural experience, and then evaluate it to determine the precise extent of common adjustment problems, and how they might vary according to sex, cultural background of teacher, marital status, previous experience, prior training, etc. This would, of course, be a mammoth research project.

While the literature provides a number of insights into common teacher adjustment problems, its more significant contribution is what it tells us about the character of the teachers it discusses. With the possible exception of Kendall, all of the teachers in the literature can be considered successful - by any common definition of success. What really matters, though, is not their success per se, but what accounts for it. It is the thesis of this writer that their success can be attributed to several shared qualities of personality, which are as follows:

1. The ability to adapt to new or unexpected responsibilities.
2. A strong will to succeed.

3. The ability to conceive and/or implement new ideas or approaches.

4. A humanistic attitude.

The first quality refers to the capability of taking on a role or performing a task that one has not had before, and that one may not have expected. Associated with this quality are character traits such as versatility, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Some teachers in the literature demonstrate this quality outside the classroom, as Elliott does when he directs a play or edits a journal, or as Bourne does when she provides medical care for her students. In these and in other cases, teachers prove capable of carrying out tasks which they did not anticipate, and which represent additional responsibilities. Moreover, they do these tasks willingly, not in a spirit of resignation.

Teaching itself is a new responsibility for some teachers in the literature. Braithwaite, for example, accepts a teaching position only after failing to find employment as an engineer. He goes into his job at a London secondary school with no substantial training in methods, or in educational psychology, or in anything else that would generally be taken for granted today. Herndon is also a first-year teacher, as is Decker, who is honest about her initial confusion in observing: "I really didn't understand my position in the class. I did not understand a great deal of what I was doing or why I was doing it." <sup>5</sup> Decker's book indicates, however, that as she acquired experience, she gained an understanding of what she was doing.

An experienced teacher adjusting to a new responsibility is one of the major themes of Ashton-Warner's book as well as of Culburtson's diary. Both teachers adapt to roles which are unexpected and unlike any of their previous roles.

For a teacher who is to enter a different culture or subculture, the ability to adapt to new responsibilities is a very important asset, because that teacher may be expected to do things that he or she has not done before.

The second shared quality of personality, a strong will to succeed is demonstrated by the purposeful actions of the teachers and by their sense of dedication to their work. This will embraces traits such as commitment, decisiveness, and perseverance. It is manifested most obviously in the literature by the refusal of the teachers to abandon their goals in the face of disappointments or setbacks. Thus Braithwaite and Herndon fail and fail again in their first attempts to teach without losing confidence in themselves or giving up on their students. Thus Bourne perseveres when the funds for her school and her salary are both reduced. A strong will may also be manifested by patience, which is what Ashton-Warner exhibits in waiting for her students to ask for certain "organic words" which she considers especially important.

None of the teachers discuss their own will or sense of purpose with the exception of Braithwaite. The strength of will of all the teachers is illustrated by the expression of his determination to succeed in a new role:

"Today I was a teacher, employed. I was also a teacher untried, but that could be an advantage. I would learn, by God I'd learn. Nothing was going to stop me."

6

The third common quality, the ability to conceive and implement new ideas, refers essentially to creativity and innovation. It is the quality by which a teacher departs from his or her routine, however good it may be, to do something new that is intended to meet a special need of his or her students. The literature is replete with examples. Elliott, a



history teacher in Nigeria lacking adequate textbooks, conceives the idea of having his students provide needed information about local history by interviewing tribal leaders. A teacher in Eby's book develops a course in sociology at a school where there is none. Decker teaches her students to write haikus, knowing that anything presented as poetry would not be well received. She also has her students write letters to her, giving them a means of private expression and giving her insights into them as individuals that she would not otherwise have had. Culburtson's innovation is to set up a small library for her students, whose own is depleted, while one of Bourne's ideas is to form a baseball team for her students. Knowing nothing about the game, she proceeds to learn its rules and basic skills, and then to organize and coach a team. An imaginative idea of Braithwaite's is to ask his students to address him and each other formally, using surnames, his theory being that acting as adults would lead them to think of themselves as adults.

Herndon tries a fundamentally different kind of new approach. Instead of experimenting with his own ideas, he implements the ideas of his students when he feels they are appropriate. For example, he lets them write the "top forty" songs on the blackboard, finding that they give more attention to the correct spelling of these songs than to any spelling exercises in their textbooks.

Ashton-Warner falls, of course, into a category by herself. Everything she does is a kind of innovation in that it represents a part of her unique theory and method of teaching.

This brings us to the fourth shared quality of personality which figures in the success of the teachers in the literature: a humanistic attitude. This is manifested primarily by the respectful and considerate treatment of students by the teachers. The evidence for this quality lies

in their actions more than in their comments about life or education, of which there are not very many. The teachers in the literature generally reveal a keen interest in each of their students, perceiving individuals with particular abilities, aspirations, and problems and not putting them into stereotyped groups. Observations about individual students are numerous in the writings of Herndon, Braithwaite, Bourne, Elliott, Decker, and Ashton-Warner. The humanistic attitude of the teachers is also evidenced by their respect for and interest in the culture or subculture of their students. Bourne, for example, encourages her Mexican-American students to write stories about their customs and traditions, and to study Spanish as well as English. Teachers in Eby's book leave the shelter of their school to live in a small African village for several days. Peterson's paper entitled "Teacher as Learner" concerns the author's experience as a teacher who learns to appreciate the different communications habits of his Choctaw Indian students.

A humanistic attitude is also suggested by the style of teaching that is preferred by the teachers, which is to facilitate rather than provide education. A "provider" of education sees students as objects which have to be moved toward predetermined objectives. The teachers in the literature are "facilitators" who see their students as individuals with particular interests and abilities who are capable of assuming responsibility for their own learning. Herndon is an excellent example. He thinks that his students, given the opportunity, can control themselves, and that they would learn more in such a condition than they would under the control imposed by a teacher. As he explains to his principal: "I don't want to control them. I want them to see some reasons for controlling themselves." <sup>7</sup> Another very good example of a "facilitator" is Ashton-Warner, as her method is founded on the principle that the student should

provide his or her own material for learning. The other teachers in the literature may not be such pure "facilitators," but their styles of teaching are closer to that model than to the model of "provider."

The four qualities of personality that have been discussed here would certainly be of importance in any profession. But they are critical for teachers who enter a different culture or subculture. Their work entails not only the performance of certain tasks. It involves also the adaptation to new ones as well as the cultivation of understanding and rapport with people who have different values and customs. In addition, it may involve disappointments or stressful adjustments which only a strong will can see through. What a teacher knows is not as important as what kind of person he or she is. Teachers and teacher educators should be concerned with the qualities which are called upon to teach in a different culture or subculture.

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FOOTNOTES TO PART II

1. American Heritage Dictionary
2. Braithwaith, Edward Ricardo, 1973, To Sir with Love, pg 13
3. Eby, Omar, 1972, How Full the River, pg 48
4. Ibid. pg 15
5. Decker, Sunny, 1970, An Empty Spoon, pg. 25
6. Braithwaith, Edward Ricardo, 1973, To Sir with Love, pg 36
7. Herndon, James, 1969, The Way It Spozed To Be, pg 114