Culture Bump™: A Toolkit for Culture & Communication
From Books and Boxes to Digital

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Abstract

In a time of increased need for digital support in internationalizing curriculum and acquiring global skills, the Culture Bump™ Approach is an idea whose time has come. This paper is the adaptation of a presentation at the 2020 Spring Phi Beta Delta 34th Annual International Conference that described the three stages involved in the tool's evolution: creation of a face-to-face cross cultural course at the University of Houston in 1978, its appearance as a multi-media boxed Toolkit in 2004, and now an online course at Auburn University in 2020. The authors describe the changes in each stage that contributed to the effectiveness of the course as well as the explicit changes that were necessary to move from face-to-face training onto a fully digital platform. Finally, they provide specific examples of how online access to *Culture Bump™: A Toolkit for Culture & Communication* can be a resource for faculty members in various disciplines to teach not only cultural and communication skills but secondary skills of self-reflection, evaluation, analysis, synthesis, detachment and emotional intelligence.

Keywords: cross-cultural, intercultural, emotional intelligence, common ground, digital learning, on-line courses

In a time of increased need for digital support in internationalizing curriculum and acquiring global skills, the Culture Bump™ Approach is an idea whose time has come. This paper, an adaptation of a presentation at the 2020 Spring Phi Beta Delta 34th Annual International Conference, describes the three stages involved in the evolution of a face-to-face cross cultural course at the University of Houston in 1978 through its conversion to a multi-media boxed Toolkit in 2004 to, ultimately, its current, online iteration at Auburn University in 2020. It gives practical guidance in how to transition from a traditional intercultural, face-to-face course with a textbook to a boxed, multi-media Toolkit and finally to an entirely online program. This analysis begins with an exploration of the three historical stages that ultimately resulted in the online *Culture Bump™: A Toolkit for Culture & Communication*, along with the specific lessons learned in the transitions. Finally, the article provides specific guidance as to how higher education instructors can use elements of the online *Culture Bump™: A Toolkit for Culture & Communication* as resources in classes that range from sociology to nursing to veterinary studies.

In order to understand the development of the Toolkit and its application for higher education today, it is necessary to understand some definitions.

Definitions
Culture Bump™.

  A culture bump™ is simply a cultural difference. According to Archer (1996), "A culture bump™ occurs when an individual from one culture finds himself or herself in a different, strange or uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture" (pp. 170-171). Archer & Nickson (2019) enlarge on that definition when they describe a culture bump™ as, " ...those things that catch our attention—things that we find "odd," "different," "rude" or even "aww nice"—things that we do not expect" (p. 9). This simple definition has evolved into a theory that explains the relationship between stereotypes and a "bump" as well as an 8-Step protocol to deconstruct a culture bump. The 8-Step Protocol consists of the following steps:

1. Pinpoint the culture bump™
2. Describe what the other person(s) did
3. Describe what you did
4. List the emotions you felt when the bump happened
5. Find the universal situation in the culture bump™
6. Describe what you would do or would expect others to do in that universal situation
7. List the qualities you feel that action demonstrates
8. Ask or think about how those qualities are demonstrated by other people

Culture Bump™ Approach

  The Culture Bump™ Approach uses this culture bump™ theory and 8-Step protocol as the organizing principle for developing intercultural competence in six areas: (1) cross-cultural communication, (2) cultural adjustment, and understanding (3) cultural perceptions, (4) cultural values, (5) human commonalities and (6) emotional intelligence. This list of competencies uses personal experience as the entry into understanding these six aspects of cultural differences, which literally represents a paradigm shift from understanding cultural characteristics as a means of dealing any type of cultural difference to dealing with the specific difference itself. This approach has provided the underlying structure for the Toolkit from its inception as a course at the University of Houston in 1978.

The First Stage: 1978-2002
University of Houston Language & Culture Center (LCC)

  In 1975, Dr. Joyce Valdes founded the intensive English as second language program Language and Culture Center (LCC) at the University of Houston. In 1978, she instructed one of her teachers, Carol M. Archer, to do a review of the best practices in teaching cross culture communication and, based on that, to develop a course that would provide cross cultural instruction for upper level ESL students as well as American students and other LCC teachers. To that end, Archer attended and was certified by Stanford University Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication, in corporate training design and implementation, attended an intensive workshop with Dr. Pierre Casse of the World Bank, and observed the University of

Texas ESL program. She blended these approaches with her own Culture Bump™ theory and methodology into a course designed to develop cross cultural competencies coupled with ESL support.

The first class was taught in Fall 1978 and consisted of units about perceptions, cultural values (using Casse's (1980) Staircase and Roller Coaster Models as well as Hoopes and Ventura's (1979) list of cultural values), communication styles, the cultural adjustment cycle, different orientations toward time and space, and a synopsis of Stewart's (1972) explanation of American cultural patterns. In this respect, the course followed the outline of a typical cultural orientation program in the corporate world, which was also the outline in most intercultural communication textbooks. However, students in her course also studied units on culture bump™, the theory underpinning the idea of a culture bump™ and practiced the 8-step protocol for dealing with their own culture bumps. T

By 1991, Archer had gathered these various concepts into an ESL reader entitled *Living with Strangers in the USA: Communicating beyond Culture*. In this text, the traditional content was woven together with ethnographic stories from the point of view of students from different countries —including the USA—and the teacher of their cross-culture communication class . These students sharing that cross-culture communication class provide a global view of these intercultural topics. Lili from People's Republic of China demonstrates the stages of cultural adjustment with letters to her grandmother written over the space of a semester; Nobuhito from Japan provides an opportunity to understand different cultural styles of communication. Aziz from Saudi Arabia and Brian from the USA offer two very different perceptions about a shared experience. And Luz Maria from Colombia provides an understanding of the theory behind the culture bumps that fueled their differing perceptions. Alfred's story highlights cultural values from his native Venezuela and also examines different cultural values from other countries in the world. Phi from Viet Nam introduces the reader to different cultural orientations to space, and Nejwa from Syria does the same for cultural orientations to time. A final chapter provides a comparison of American individualistic values and collectivism values as they are manifested in relationships among the eight students and with their teacher.

The Second Stage: 2002 - 2009
University of Houston Continuing Education

The second stage of development was in response to the attacks on September 11, 2001. A collaborative effort between Carol Archer, the Office of Tech Transfer and Innovation (OTTI) and the Office of Continuing Education (OCE) at the University of Houston resulted in a multi-media boxed Toolkit for Culture & Communication. The OTTI and Archer developed this product based on the 25 years of experience of face-to-face training of international and American students and teachers at the LCC, and it was marketed through OCE.

The boxed version of the Toolkit was highly interactive, including games, posters and videos. The content areas and games were demonstrated and explained by four Culture Bump Guides - Buki from Venezuela, Katie from Korea, Josh from the USA, and Mazen from Syria.

They were featured in a DVD which also contained a short movie based on the story of Brian and Aziz from the text, *Living with Strangers in the USA*.

      This new boxed version of the Culture Bump™ Approach to cross cultural communication reflected the research and experience of the previous decades of experimentation with global audiences. As a result, it retained the basic modules of Perceptions, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Styles and Communication Styles. However, realizing the need for more understanding of the function of emotions in cultural competences, a module for understanding and developing emotional intelligence was added. In addition, a module called "Universals" was added that clarified specific areas of human connection and commonality. In this boxed version, the Culture Bump Approach™ was fully integrated into each of the other subjects as well as being treated as a separate subject.

      Furthermore, the new boxed version was designed to move beyond its ESL and language learning roots and was marketed to corporations, school districts, and community organizations. In these programs, the basic modules were able to be applied to situations beyond national cultural differences. They were also used to understand and transcend gender, religious, socio-economic, and even blue/white collar differences.

The Third Stage: 2011 - Present
Auburn University's Biggio Center and Center for Educational Outreach & Engagement

      The third stage of development began in September 2011 as a collaborative effort between Carol Archer and Auburn University's Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. From March of 2011 to March of 2014, the Biggio Center used the Toolkit extensively at Auburn and other universities in faculty development as well as in a "Train the Trainers" Program for professionals from a variety of disciplines—from military trainers to educators to personal coaches. In 2019, Auburn's Center for Educational Outreach & Engagement translated the Toolkit into an on-line version in order to reach a much wider audience. The year-long project was completed in April, 2020, when Auburn's Office of Professional & Continuing Education began offering the Toolkit to students, teachers, and the community at large.

Lessons Learned in the Three Transitions
First Lesson

      While it may seem obvious, the first "ah ha" moment was realizing that "hands-on material" such as books or workbooks and other interactive materials provide a comprehensive learning experience. Books encourage the reader to spend more time absorbing and self-reflecting. In other words, the first two versions of the Toolkit were hard-wired for critical thinking and acquiring knowledge—not just information. In contrast, on-line learning is much less inferential. Learning online encourages the viewer to skim the text quickly and look for keywords and quick information.

Second Lesson

In order to provide a comprehensive online learning experience, it is important to use visual cues that help the viewer pause and self-reflect. Some of the visual cues that were implemented in the online Toolkit include pop-ups used in various ways. Examples of ideas were added in the form of a text box that popped up when the mouse hovered over a particular word rather than simply being a part of a long passage. Another type of visual cue was memes that were pulled from previously watched videos and inserted into passages of text. Still another type of visual cue consisted of frequent changes in font size, color, and type.

Third Lesson

In moving from text to digital, it is important to fill in more blanks than would be necessary in a textbook. For example, the topic of perceptions has been present in all three versions. However, in the textbook, *Living with Strangers in the USA: Communicating Beyond Culture*, all that was necessary was a chapter that presented several basic assumptions about perceptions. Essentially, the text stated that we human beings perceive the same things in different ways because of our cultural backgrounds, our life experiences, and our language. In addition, the same story about a meeting between Brian from the USA and Aziz from Saudi Arabia was presented in two separate chapters but told with background information about each young man and their very different perceptions of the same meeting. In the book, the reader is allowed to reflect on how each of the two is disappointed in the meeting. However, in the boxed version of the Toolkit, the story of the meeting is told in a 10-minute movie. The movie script follows the story in the textbook very closely, but, in the boxed version there is a second alternate ending that shows how the two young men could face their culture bumps and have a conversation that connects rather than separates them.

In addition to the basic assumptions that were written in the textbook, the boxed version has an activity in which participants look at the same poster and record their perceptions, which they then share with one another. There is also a video of the Culture Bump™ Guides talking about their perceptions of the same poster. In this way, the participants actually experience having different perceptions from other people. Next, they read the actual story from the point of view of the people in the poster. Afterwards, in the on-line Toolkit, they are also shown exactly how to separate cultural bias from individual bias and find the human commonality in the real story. Finally, they practice the Culture Bump™ steps in relation to their own perceptions.

The content in the textbook, the boxed Toolkit, and the digital Toolkit is basically the same—a theoretical explanation about perceptions and an example. However, this basic information is translated through three versions with visual cues, activities, and providing complete contextual information in order to meet Culture Bump's mission. And the *Culture Bump™: A Toolkit for Culture and Communication* has the tools needed for humans to find common ground.

The Toolkit as a Resource

The past decade of using the Toolkit at Auburn University for faculty development provides specific examples of how it can serve as a resource for faculty members in various disciplines, to teach not only cultural and communication skills but secondary skills of self-reflection, evaluation, analysis, synthesis, detachment and emotional intelligence. This, coupled with its ease of access, makes the Toolkit and modularized curriculum an online option for faculty in various disciplines to provide their students cultural and communication skill development.

This approach has been used at Auburn University with both graduate and undergraduate students. Executive MBA students completing a marketing course while preparing to visit multi-national companies in South Africa were able to see both professional and personal results. Using the Toolkit, the MBAs' professor was able to provide a set of tools and modules for the students to study and apply to cross-cultural communication, cultural adjustment, and cultural perceptions. In this case, the application for students was two-fold. Students were able to apply the modules to the learned concepts of international marketing, while also applying them to their preparation for a personal experience in a foreign country.

In the School of Nursing, a professor of fourth-year students incorporated six modules of the Toolkit with their curriculum in preparation for their nursing practicum in marginalized communities and third-world countries.

In a third example, Dr. Nickson asked students in the Africana Studies 2000 course to select modules from the Toolkit and align them with course themes, giving them greater context and connectivity. For instance, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade viewed through the lens of Toolkit modules informed students of the perspective of the Africans newly initiated to chattel slavery.

In a final example, in August of 2020, the Alabama Department of Education provided 50 online Toolkits and 300 individual modules from the Toolkit for professional development in the areas of culture and communication for teachers across the state of Alabama.

Over this 10-year period faculty members from Nursing, Africana Studies and Business have used the modules to increase their students' knowledge and experience in the areas of communication, cultural values, human universalities, emotional intelligence, and cultural differences, thereby enhancing the academic experience for them.

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About the Authors

Dr. Carol Archer is an experienced international trainer with a history of working with nonprofit and for-profit organizations. She has a strong business development and professional background. Dr. Archer has served as a cross-cultural trainer and coach, faculty developer, and cross culture communication and language consultant. She received her EdD from the University of Houston in 2006, where her dissertation was entitled: A Qualitative Study of the Communicative Experiences of a Venezuelan and a North American. In addition, she founded and developed the Culture Bump Approach to managing differences.

Dr. Stacey Nickson has served as an educator and educational administrator in higher education and K-12 systems during the past four decades. She also administers the Auburn University partnership with Culture Bump Approach©. She was awarded a Fulbright in 2012 and she served as a Fulbright Specialist at the University of Cape Town's Center for Higher Education Development in South Africa in 2013 and a Fulbright Specialist at the University of Cape Coast's Basic Education Department in Ghana in 2017. She is the past president of the Alabama Fulbright Association. Dr. Nickson earned a bachelor's degree from Indiana University-Bloomington and a doctorate from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Dr. Nickson's publications reflect her research interests and include book chapters and journal articles on preparing faculty in South Africa, cross-cultural communication across disciplines, diversity leadership and technology, and learning theories.