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Cathy Yeulet, Teacher Helping Male High School Student in Classroom, 123RF.

Multicultural competency in religious education prepares both teachers and ethnic students to understand and resolve conflicts between ethnic cultures and the gospel culture.

Multicultural Competency for US Seminary and Institute Teachers

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I remember visiting an early morning seminary class in Laie, Hawaii, held in a chapel next to the high school. The seminary teacher was Caucasian. Her students were Polynesians, Asians, Latinos, and *haoles* (Caucasians). I noticed the Tongans were seated together on one side and the Samoans on the opposite side. The Asians were scattered in the middle. The haoles were in the front seats and the Latinos right next to the back door. The Tongans and Samoans were talking and laughing. The Asians were quiet, heads bowed down, and some were sleeping. The Latinos were always looking at the clock, peeking outside the door, and constantly staring at each other as if a nonverbal communication was transpiring among them. During the class, the teacher was literally just teaching the haoles in the front seats. They were having a great discussion and didn't seem bothered by what was going on beyond the front seats. When the bell rang, the Latinos were the first ones out, followed by the Samoans and Tongans, who intentionally hit each other on their way out. The Asians cautiously picked up their books from the floor and graciously left the classroom. The haoles stayed for a few minutes after and visited with the teacher. I came out of that class asking myself, "What has just happened?"

The current handbook used by Seminaries and Institutes of Religion for training resources does not address multicultural competency of religious educators.¹ An understanding of cultural diversity has become increasingly important with the globalization of the Church.² Even with the globalization of the Church, there are some classrooms that will not be anywhere near as diverse as the classroom in Hawaii. However, the globalization of the Church may be reflected in the potential increase of diversity in students of classrooms that have generally been ethnically homogenous. More students are confronted with potential conflicts between their ethnic culture and the gospel culture. In the class that I observed, the seminary teacher clearly demonstrated a lack of training on how to teach a multicultural class. She was selective and indifferent to cultural diversity. The ethnic students were deprived of gospel learning that could assist them in resolving cultural conflicts. Multicultural competency among religious educators would address these conflicts and respond to other cultural behaviors of learning.

The purpose of this paper is to help seminary and institute teachers understand what multicultural competency is and the importance of developing it in teaching. First, I will discuss the learning patterns and cultural behaviors of ethnic students in our classrooms. To accomplish this, I will define “multicultural competency” and its role in addressing ethnic culture in light of the gospel culture. Examples of conflicts between ethnic and gospel cultures, with possible solutions, will be provided. Second, I will discuss how seminary and institute teachers (hereafter referred to as religious educators) can develop multicultural competency in gospel teaching through cultural discoveries and resolving concerns of ethnic students. This will include potential challenges and concerns that could arise in multicultural classes with a list of applications to address them.

This paper is not intended to address all potential variations of a multicultural classroom. For example, the following special cases will not be discussed: a non-Caucasian teacher teaching Caucasian students (e.g., a Latino teacher teaching American students in southern states along the US–Mexico border), a non-Caucasian teacher teaching non-Caucasian students of a different ethnicity (e.g., a Fijian teaching other Pacific Islander students, a European teaching refugees not from the European Union, or a Malaysian teaching various ethnic groups in Southeast Asia). While these special cases will not be addressed, many principles and applications will still be relevant.

We as religious educators, including our early-morning seminary teacher in Laie, have the potential to create an effective gospel-learning environment for our ethnic students. By becoming multiculturally competent, we will be able to reach out and assist our ethnic students in fully embracing the gospel culture in, and beyond, our classrooms. This becomes increasingly important with seminary and institute classes in 153 countries and total student enrollment exceeding 700,000.³

What Is Multicultural Competency?

Culture is like an iceberg.⁴ There are elements of culture that need to be explored beneath what is visible. Multicultural competency involves understanding these elements, which include the traditions, beliefs, customs, race, and ethnicity of students coming from different parts of the world.⁵ I will use the term “ethnic culture” to refer to these elements of culture. “Ethnic students” will refer to students who are non-Caucasian, such as Black or African American, Latino, Asian, and Pacific Islander. These students may also be refugees or immigrants from other countries.

There will be discoveries of elements that are acceptable and can be enriched by the gospel culture. In religious education, multicultural competency is the ability to assist ethnic students in accepting and living the gospel culture. It is characterized by proficiency in the following:

- Developing cultural sensitivities, interactive awareness, and skills in teaching ethnic students
- Affirming gospel truths found in ethnic culture
- Assisting ethnic students in identifying ethnic cultural elements that are contrary to eternal truths

While this list is not exhaustive, it does provide a starting point for a dialogue in an area of our preparation and training that is often overlooked in religious education. A multiculturally competent religious educator dives deeper to explore what is beneath the tip of the iceberg and discovers what ethnic cultural elements, in light of the gospel, must be forsaken.

The Gospel Culture and Ethnic Culture

It is not the intent of the gospel to encourage our students to adopt a culture of a specified ethnicity or nationality. The intent is to convert our students to

become true followers of Jesus Christ by living his gospel culture. The gospel culture becomes a point of reference for differences in the beliefs and practices of our ethnic students.⁶ It is “a distinctive way of life, a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members.”⁷ The gospel culture promotes and preserves those elements of ethnic culture that support the teachings of the gospel. The Lord of the gospel can redeem our students from the incorrect traditions of their ancestors that take them away from the covenant path.

Ethnic culture is a distinct way of life that our ethnic students bring into our classrooms. It identifies a group of students that have similar backgrounds, physical features, languages, values, norms, behaviors, and so on. They follow traditions, or patterns of life, based on their beliefs and values that have been passed on from generation to generation. Here are a few examples of ethnic cultures:

- Asian students are typically quiet in class. They are trained to be passive learners.⁸ They do not actively engage in class activities or contribute to class discussions. When I was a young student in the Philippines, my teachers set rules in the class, such as “Always raise your hand when you want to say something”; “We have makeup assignments available for those who are not comfortable participating in class discussions”; and “If you have any questions during the lesson, write them down and leave them on my desk.” Providing alternative ways for nonparticipating Asian students to be involved is a way of communicating that they are still valued in class. Asking students to raise their hands to say something sends a respectful message that they do not need to participate if they do not want to. Writing activities are another way for nonvocal Asian students to participate. Teachers with nonvocal Asian students in a class can distribute writing pads and pencils at the beginning of the class and encourage students to write down their questions or impressions.
- *‘Ohana* in Hawaiian means family.⁹ It also describes relationships beyond the family kin. Any group can be made *‘ohana*. I consider my best friends as my *‘ohana*. I also consider my seminary and institute classes as my *‘ohana*. When I started teaching at the Honolulu Institute of Religion, I studied the *‘ohana* culture of Hawaii. I learned that one way to make my institute class an *‘ohana* was to find at least one connection with each of my students. Many of my students were part-Asian,

and that immediately made us culturally connected. Hawaiians love to eat. Food is the binding force of *‘ohana*. During luncheon devotionals, I cooked local food for them. I also made an effort to attend their special occasions, bringing leis and gifts with me. Because of *‘ohana*, trust and friendship developed in our class. Communication became clearer and the learning process improved.

- Chinese students tend to have the highest respect for teachers.¹⁰ In their culture, asking the teacher a question is considered disrespectful. Cultural humility in teachers is a way to address this learning behavior. This is expressed, for example, when a teacher shows interest in the culture of an ethnic student. Asking an ethnic student about his or her culture creates an exchange of roles between the teacher and the student. The teacher, now acting in the role of a student, shows respect to the student by giving him or her the role of a teacher. When cultural humility is manifested and recognized, ethnic students become colearners with teachers. The Apostle Paul demonstrated this kind of humility: “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22).
- The caste system is a class structure that is determined by birth. It is a mechanism for dividing society into hereditary classes.¹¹ I witnessed this ethnic culture on the island of Yap in Micronesia. I could call only seminary teachers of the same caste as the students. Providing combined activities between the higher and lower caste strata was difficult. Ethnic culture only allows students to interact with the same caste. Despite this cultural conflict, we were consistent in holding monthly seminary activities, which allowed students and teachers from different castes to interact and eventually become more comfortable with each other. This did not necessarily solve the problem, but it was a way of acknowledging the problem and taking a stance on the conflict. Not all cultural conflicts have simple and immediate solutions.
- In Korea, ethnic culture provides a relatively high tolerance for dishonesty.¹² Lying is necessary to avoid conflict, contention, violence, or disappointment. For example, a Korean student may lie to save face when asked about completing an assignment or reading an assigned scripture block. Trust is the antidote for this cultural inclination for dishonesty. It promotes honesty. Teachers show trust in ethnic

students by always presuming they have done what they were asked to do. In multicultural religious education, it is encouraging for ethnic students to see their teachers overlook their shortcomings and express trust in their potential. This kind of assumed trust focuses on areas where ethnic students are more successful, such as regular class attendance, memorizing scripture passages, and being respectful. Instead of asking how many have read the scripture block, a better approach would be to say something like, “As you have read the scripture block for today, the Spirit of the Lord will testify to you that . . .”

- In India’s early history, a dowry was paid by the bride’s family to the groom’s.¹³ In Africa, it is the groom who pays cash to the bride’s family.¹⁴ The dowry system incentivizes young people to live together without marriage because of the great financial burden it places on the family obligated to pay. This cultural tradition conflicts with the commandments of the Lord. Paying a dowry is not the Lord’s way. President Russell M. Nelson denounced this practice in his message to the Saints in Kenya.¹⁵ An Asian student once expressed to me that while they do not practice dowry in their culture, the families of the bride and groom are expected to offer gifts to each other as a symbol of the coming together of two families. The problem is that one family often tries to outdo the other family by spending more for the gift. It creates a feeling of rivalry between in-laws instead of unity. A young Polynesian man shared with me his problem of paying for all the expenses of his upcoming wedding. His girlfriend’s family was demanding an elaborate reception, which included paying for the clothes worn by her family, ten bridesmaids, and other escorts. These examples may be considered as cultural variations of the dowry because of the financial burden imposed on the couple. In cases like these, it is important to recognize that some elements of ethnic culture are complicated and do not always have one right solution. Our role is to help ethnic students strengthen their testimony of temple marriage and encourage them to go to the Lord in prayer to receive revelation for their unique circumstances.
- Refugees are people who escaped their countries because of war and ethnic, tribal, or religious violence. Refugee students in our classrooms need utmost care. Having escaped their native countries, many have been physically, emotionally, and psychologically traumatized. They

experience severe culture shock, which is a disorientation in a new environment resulting in depression, anxiety, and a feeling of helplessness.¹⁶ As religious educators, we must not play the role of a therapist or psychologist.¹⁷ Instead, we must put the effort into learning about their country of origin and its conflict. Become aware of community and web resources that can provide support in teaching.

- In the Latino culture, because time is considered relative, deadlines and schedules become irrelevant.¹⁸ Thus Latino students tend to be late to class because it is socially acceptable not to be on time.¹⁹ There is also the culture of *mañana*, which means tomorrow or even never.²⁰ Because of *mañana*, you may find it challenging to get the desired results for take-home projects and assignments. Having a Spanish heritage and understanding of the culture, I have found effective ways to address these challenges. I have developed what I call the piñata principle: To get to the treats inside a piñata, one is blindfolded and must exert effort in hitting the piñata with a stick. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher can invite a Latino student to explain what a piñata is and say *gracias* (thank you) after the explanation. The teacher can then explain that seminary class is like a piñata—it contains a lesson that will delight them, but students need to exercise faith and effort to act on it. The very first act of faith is being on time to class. Any class activity they complete is another act of faith. Each act represents another figurative swing at the piñata and brings them closer to their reward. Having a small piñata hanging somewhere not only adds cultural flavor to the classroom but also serves as a reminder of this principle for the Latino students. Knowing that most youth are motivated by rewards, the teacher can consider providing treats for students who come to class on time and fulfill their assignments or offering other incentives for being punctual, such as eliminating one count of tardiness if they are on time for a whole week.
- In their learning culture, Latinos may not openly show what they know because they do not want other Latino classmates, who may not know, to feel embarrassed.²¹ Consider having discussions in smaller groups and spreading out Latino students in these groups. This may encourage Latino students to open up and participate in discussions.

Developing Multicultural Competency

A multiculturally competent religious educator assists ethnic students in completely embracing the gospel culture. The first step to multicultural competency is to know your own culture. Some questions to introspectively ask include the following: What is my cultural identity? How can I relate it to my students? How can they relate to it? When teachers understand their own cultural identity, it can enable them to find ways to associate their cultures with the different cultures of their students and feel a part of their cultures' groups. Consider the following hypothetical interview with a stereotypical teacher that illustrates a lack of multicultural competency:

Question: "What are some characteristics of your culture?" Answer: "I am Caucasian. My ancestors came from England. They crossed the plains with the Mormon pioneers. I played varsity football in high school. I got a scholarship for college. I served my mission in London. I was married in the Salt Lake Temple. We have annual family reunions. We go on family trips every summer. I am currently attending graduate school."

Describe your style of communication. "I like to talk. I like to talk a lot. I encourage all my students to participate in class discussions. I like to have them think and express themselves freely. I look at their eyes when they talk to me. I move around the classroom. I observe the body language of my students, and I can easily interpret it. I am very animated in teaching. I ask questions. I use questions to get them involved. I use the whiteboard a lot and sometimes show videos. You see these pictures on the wall? I change them each week to match our lessons. Students should have a fun experience in class. My office is always open to my students for help."

What can you say about ethnic students in your classroom? "I don't see differences in my students. I see everyone as a child of God. I treat all my students the same. I don't bring up anything about race or diversity. I want all my students to become united. I do not give special consideration based on their nationality or cultural behaviors. It is nice to know that they or their parents came from another country and that they do things differently from us. But I make sure that no one is disadvantaged in my class. Everyone is equal. They all have their own way of learning, but as long as they stay with me, they will learn something."

This hypothetical interview serves as a basis for comparison against a multicultural competent teacher. Sometimes, it is easier to understand multicultural competence by describing what it is *not*. It is *not* the approach

illustrated in this hypothetical interview. Imagine the Marshallese immigrant student in this class struggling to keep up with this teacher's expectations. After a short period of time, he may feel overwhelmed and eventually stop attending seminary. He will stop attending seminary not because he lost his testimony, but because he was embarrassed that his English was not good enough to communicate with this teacher. He has difficulty responding to questions and is always called on. He does not know anything about football or skiing. He does not think the way his local classmates think. Our hypothetical Marshallese student feels marginalized. He thinks that the gospel, as taught by our hypothetical seminary teacher, is too much for him to endure.

Gospel teaching is not characterized by the mentality represented in the hypothetical interview. Developing multicultural competency among religious educators provides the potential for deeper learning in gospel teaching. Teachers must prepare for, and become aware of, the growing presence of ethnic students in our classrooms. With immigration as one of the driving factors of population growth in the United States,²² our seminary and institute classes will continue to become more culturally diverse. This demographic change in the classroom requires an accompanying evolution of our teaching models.

Challenges and Concerns

Multicultural competency comes with challenges and concerns. Let us consider addressing the following scenarios in a multicultural seminary or institute class:

- *In a group activity, you ask students to choose a partner to read and discuss a passage of scriptures. Two students of the same ethnic background immediately choose each other.* Students of the same ethnicity will naturally want to work together.²³ Departure from this norm can be perceived as unpatriotic. They will come to class together and want to sit next to each other. For group discussions, most teachers tend to say, "Get together with the person sitting next to you" or "Form a group with those seated close to you." Having taught in a multicultural class, I found it helpful to assign numbers to students and call out, "All number ones in one group, all number twos in another group, and so on." This manner of dividing into groups prevents ethnic students

from feeling targeted and avoids any issues of being unpatriotic or disloyal to their friends.

- *More than half of your class is Asian. Every time you ask questions, only the Caucasians respond. When you call on the Asian students, all you get is a smile on their face.* This all depends on the questions being asked. If they know the correct answer with 100 percent certainty, Asians will respond to the question. They feel embarrassed and humiliated when they give incorrect or unacceptable answers to questions. For thinking questions, it may be helpful to say, “There are no wrong answers to this question.” Asians tend to do well on quizzes because they are often trained to memorize answers. I have found that Asian students can easily memorize doctrinal mastery passages and locate them in their scriptures without difficulty. They love to compete in class activities that they know they are good at.
- *It is the first day of class; as you are welcoming students coming into your classroom, a young man from the Pacific Islands gives you a big hug and kisses you on both your cheeks.* A multiculturally competent teacher must be accepting of the different behaviors of ethnic students in greeting their teachers. In New Zealand, *hongi* is when two people press their noses and foreheads together at the same time.²⁴ It is symbolic of exchanging the *hā*, which is interpreted as the “breath of life.” This is also practiced in Hawaii, where it is referred to as *honi*.²⁵ Hugging and kissing is very common in the Polynesian islands. It is a symbol of acceptance and reverence. In contrast, Japanese students prefer just bowing. Indonesian students shake hands gently, not firmly, and touch their chests after shaking hands. In the island of Chuuk in Micronesia, it is a sign of deepest respect and courtesy to shake hands with your left hand supporting your right elbow.
- *After teaching the law of chastity, a student hands you a note with the comment “We don’t talk about sex in our culture.”* I find that ethnic students, generally, are not comfortable discussing things related to the law of chastity or physical intimacy in class. A missionary couple from the United States was teaching a class of young married couples in Majuro, part of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. At the conclusion of the lesson on strengthening love between married couples, they suggested that the students express more of their love by saying “I love you” to one another, concluding with a kiss. This did not go well, and I

received complaints from some students about the impropriety of the recommendation. On the island of Ebeye, also in the Marshall Islands, when teaching about the law of chastity, missionaries would simply say, “Don’t sleep with a man or a woman who is not your husband or wife.” We adopted this in our seminary class on the island, and our Marshallese youth were able to understand the law of chastity better. In observing multicultural competency, we must be cautious in using the word *sex* or *sexual*. With this scenario, a multiculturally competent teacher could respond with a note, a verbal apology, and encouragement for students to consider reading *For the Strength of Youth* or a specific talk by prophets on the subject matter.

- *A Latino student comes up to you after class. As she is talking to you, she starts squeezing your arm.* Latinos sometimes use the sense of touch when conversing with someone who is in authority.²⁶ This is an expression of absolute respect, but it is only expressed by the student to the teacher and not the other way around. For multicultural competency, there must be openness to what ethnic students are doing and an understanding of their behavior. This openness creates better communication for both the teacher and ethnic students.
- *You are teaching about the Word of Wisdom and ask the class if they have any questions. One student asks about the drinking of kava in ceremonies, another asks about betel nut chewing for medicinal purposes, and another asks about rice coffee.* In Tonga, kava is a ceremonial drink used in bestowing an honorary title or coronation.²⁷ It is also consumed during a royal death or marriage ceremony. It is made from a pepper plant and is highly intoxicating. Some Tongan members drink kava beyond its ceremonial purposes, for example, when they hang out with friends or at family gatherings, justifying it as a medium for strengthening friendships and family bonding. However, some men abuse it to intoxication, resulting in abandonment of family responsibilities and physical abuse of family members. Betel nut chewing is prevalent in the Republic of Palau and in the island of Yap in Micronesia. It is a sign of respect and a budding relationship between two people. Betel nut is a stimulant that boosts energy, resulting in a feeling of well-being and euphoria. However, betel nut chewing causes severe side effects, such as oral cancer.²⁸ Rice coffee is a coffee substitute without caffeine. It tastes and smells like coffee. It is made from toasted rice and is commonly used in

the Philippines. My family members were heavy coffee drinkers before we joined the Church. Rice coffee became our substitute following our conversion. The idea came from members who assured us that, in time, we would lose our coffee-drinking habits. Ultimately, it was a better understanding of the Word of Wisdom, and not the rice coffee, that helped us overcome this habit. To be multiculturally competent, one must put forth an effort to become aware of and study such behaviors and practices of your ethnic students. My experience has shown that ethnic students really do know what the right thing to do is when it comes to these kinds of questions. They just need confirmation and support from their teacher.

- *While teaching about the importance of marriage, the following statements are made by students: "In our culture, we can't get married until after all our older siblings are married first." "In our culture, we can't get married until we finish college." "We help our parents finance our younger siblings' college, and we can get married only after they complete college." "Customary marriage is recognized in our culture." "We can't have two marriages in the family in the same year." "My mom married my stepdad, who is the younger brother of my dad, who died when I was little. It was customary in our culture."* The subject of marriage is one of the most controversial topics among our ethnic students. In some ethnic cultures, children are considered investments. Having more children elevates the family's socioeconomic status. It secures financial stability and future care for parents in their retirement. Older siblings are expected to relieve the parents of financial responsibility for the younger children. Education is crucial to a family's success and brings honor to the parents. Many of the Church's young adults in Asia marry in their late thirties because of financial obligations to their family. This financial obligation may also extend even after marriage. Having two marriages in the family in the same year is customarily avoided, not only because of the financial burden, but also because of a belief in bad luck for the couples. Customary marriage is when a man and a woman have lived together for many years without civil marriage and have children. They are then considered married in their village. This practice is common and socially acceptable in Micronesia. Church policy requires unwed couples to be married first before being baptized. Older unwed couples in Micronesia find this unsettling. In

another cultural example related to marriage, I had a seminary teacher in Chuuk who was married to his older brother's widow. Her oldest child was about the same age as he was. He was obligated to marry her to sustain the family. Ethnic students need to resolve these marital issues in light of gospel culture. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" is an important document for our ethnic students to study extensively. Its teachings on marriage—including gender, procreation, and parenting—must be the basis in addressing elements of ethnic culture that conflict with the gospel culture.²⁹ Creating different focus groups in class may help. Each group can focus on addressing one ethnic culture's approach to marriage. Ethnic students may respond better in smaller group discussion rather than in a big class. Consider inviting an ethnic student to be the facilitator for the focus group.

Multicultural competency in religious education prepares both teachers and ethnic students to understand and resolve conflicts between ethnic cultures and the gospel culture. Ethnic students will feel less marginalized as they learn to resolve these conflicts and completely embrace the gospel culture. They will be able to see their ethnic culture with an eternal perspective and learn how to act in faith by choosing to turn to the Lord.

Applications

Here are a few more specific applications of principles that can help teachers support ethnic students in a multicultural class and become a multiculturally competent religious educator:

- Encourage ethnic students to pray in their native tongue. Invite local returned missionaries to pray in their mission languages. Learn the greetings of your ethnic students in their language. Ethnic students are more welcoming and trusting when you speak their language to some extent. It is a manifestation of your interest in, and love of, their ethnic culture.
- At the beginning of the school year or semester, encourage ethnic students to share something about their ethnic culture. Pronounce their names properly. Ask about the meaning of their names. Make an effort to attend multicultural celebrations in your community and share your experiences with your class.

- Use more pictures that represent different ethnic cultures. The Church Media Library has a collection of international images and videos filmed in foreign lands.³⁰ Ethnic students need to feel that even though they are the minority, the Church is global. Use examples from different ethnic cultures that are similar to those examples suggested in the curriculum. Suggested scenarios or case studies in the curriculum can be modified to have an international flavor. Many of our Church leaders refer to people from different ethnic cultures who have made significant contributions to humanity. President Thomas S. Monson included Mother Teresa in his general conference talk about charity;³¹ Elder Dale G. Renlund quoted Nelson Mandela on being a saint;³² and President Russell M. Nelson acknowledged Confucius as a peacemaker.³³
- Move beyond “multicultural moments.” For example, some recognitions of ethnic cultures take place at designated times of the year—black history is observed during the month of February; Asian Pacific history is celebrated in the month of May; and national Hispanic heritage is recognized in September.³⁴
- In a multicultural class, special cultural holidays can be acknowledged. As teachers, we must realize that having ethnic students in our classes is a celebration itself. Such students should be acknowledged and appreciated.
- Local students expect ethnic students to adjust to their culture and not vice versa. A multiculturally competent teacher can address this problem by constantly reminding local students that the perspectives of their ethnic classmates validate the globalization of the Church. I find it helpful at times to say to my local students, “You never know—you might serve a mission in Japan!” In response to this statement, I have seen my Japanese students express appreciation because it created an interest in Japan. Building a connection between local students and ethnic students brings confidence to our ethnic students. This confidence encourages them to share their voices in class.
- Avoid using colloquialisms in a multicultural class. It is difficult for ethnic students to interpret colloquial language because the words are not used literally but metaphorically. Examples of colloquialisms are feeling blue, couch potato, down-to-earth, the cold shoulder, piece of cake, and wrap up.

- Use diversity questions. These are questions that promote inclusion of ethnic students and encourage participation in class discussions. Examples of these questions include “How is this similar to your culture?”; “How do you translate this word in your language?”; “Would this be appropriate in your culture?”; and “Would anyone like to share a different perspective?”
- Remember that the gospel culture is not Utah-Mormon culture. Avoid LDS jargon or pop culture references that are Utah-centric or exclusively American. Do not assume that ethnic students are familiar with popular LDS movies (e.g., *God’s Army*, *The Singles Ward*, *Saturday’s Warrior*, or even *The Princess Bride*) or musicians (e.g., Lexi Walker, Lindsey Stirling, or The Piano Guys).

Summary and Conclusion

My purpose in writing this paper is to initiate a dialogue for an update in our training as religious educators. There is a critical need for multicultural competency in religious education. It is not addressed in our current manuals and training meetings and resources. I began this paper with a story of a Caucasian seminary teacher in Laie, Hawaii. She was not equipped to teach such a wide range of ethnicities in her class. It is easy to forget that while we teach the gospel, we also teach students. Some of these students come from cultures that may not necessarily fit, nor respond well to, the teaching model of the hypothetical seminary teacher discussed earlier. Ethnic students are marginalized in our seminary and institute classes. They are challenged with conflicts between their ethnic culture and the gospel culture. If we do not engage them in gospel teaching, we will lose them. They need affirmation of the gospel culture that they have embraced. If we expect them to make a difficult change in their way of life, we must be prepared to help them by training on, and developing, multicultural competency.

To develop multicultural competency, I have presented some examples of ethnic cultural behaviors that are acceptable and those that are not. These examples describe some of the learning patterns and behaviors of ethnic students. I included how best to address them based on my personal experiences and academic study of multicultural education. I brought up some challenges and concerns in a multicultural classroom and how to appropriately address them. A few applications were also included to support our ethnic students in our seminary and institute classes.

Multicultural competency in religious education is based on the principles and teachings contained in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* handbook and in the *Doctrinal Mastery Core Document*. There is great potential for further studies in the field of multicultural competency, which I intend to pursue. It is my hope that this paper generates discussion and scholarship among religious educators concerning this important need. **RE**

Notes

1. See *Gospel Teaching and Learning: A Handbook for Teachers and Leaders in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012).

2. The globalization of the Church is taken from the general conference talks given by President Howard W. Hunter and Elder Joseph W. Sitati of the Seventy. In his opening statement, President Hunter said, “The gospel of Jesus Christ, which gospel we teach and the ordinances of which we perform, is a global faith with an all-embracing message.” Howard W. Hunter, “The Gospel—A Global Faith,” *Ensign*, November 1991, 18. Elder Sitati bore his testimony, “From humble beginnings in Fayette, New York, nearly 180 years ago, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has become a global faith. I stand here as a witness of this marvelous work.” Joseph W. Sitati, “Blessings of the Gospel Available to All,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 103.

3. Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, Annual Statistical Report, 28 January 2018.

4. Peace Corps, “Culture Is Like an Iceberg,” <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/culture-iceberg/>.

5. These are the dictionary definitions of traditions, beliefs, customs, race, and ethnicity: tradition is “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom); belief is “a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing”; customs are “long-established practice[s] considered as unwritten law”; race means “a group of persons who come from the same ancestor”; and ethnicity is defined as “a people having a common language, culture, and body of traditions.” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

6. Eric B. Shumway, “Bridging Cultural Differences,” an address delivered at the Intercultural Communications Symposium, 30 November 1978, BYU.

7. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel Culture,” *Ensign*, March 2012, 40–47.

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