



# Learning in England ∞ Cultural Orientation

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**Culture** has to do with the beliefs, values, symbols, customs, and social norms of a particular people or society – “the way we do things around here.”

A national identity can be distinctive: “English people are always talking about the weather.” Yet there can be regional variations; and individuals within a culture do not necessarily embrace every aspect of their own national identity and culture.

The difficulties come when there are misunderstandings in four key areas:

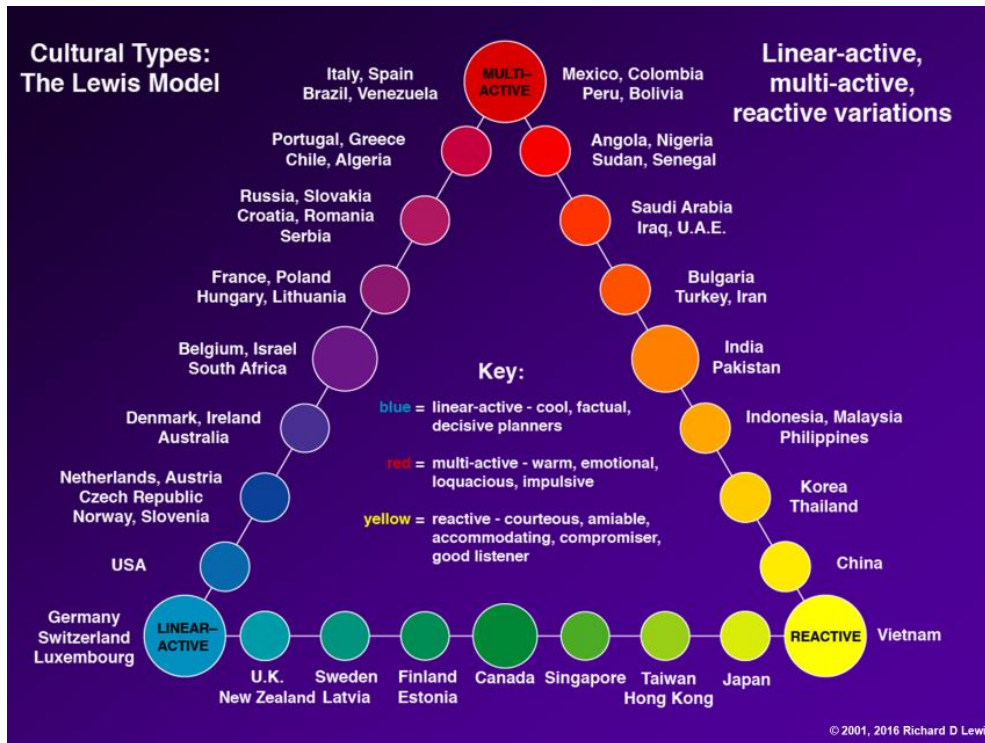
- > Values
- > Communication
- > Time
- > Space

Consider how people of different nationalities may say ‘I disagree with you.’

Country	What the stereotypical answer may be	
German	I don't agree.	
American	You gotta be kidding...	
Italian	Let's have a Campari now, then talk about it in the morning...	
Finn	.... [expressionless]	
Swede	Let's arrange a meeting.	
Chinese	I agree ...but let me check with the organisation.	
British	That's most interesting, (meaning: I am not interested, but I do not want to be impolite by disagreeing).	



Having travelled widely around the world, I am conscious of the range of cultural understandings and expressions that there are. The Lewis Model has identified three different behaviour groups: Multi-Active, Reactive and Linear-Active which through all the explanations are colour coded with the primary colours. The countries at the corners of the triangle demonstrate the key features most clearly shown in the columns below.



LINEAR ACTIVE	MULTI ACTIVE	REACTIVE
Talks half the time	Talks most of the time	Listens most of the time
Does one thing at a time	Does several things at once	Reacts to partner's action
Plans ahead step by step	Plans grand outline only	Looks at general principles
Polite but direct	Emotional	Polite, indirect
Partly conceals feelings	Displays feelings	Conceals feelings
Confronts with logic	Confronts emotionally	Never confronts
Dislikes losing face	Has good excuses	Must not lose face
Rarely interrupts	Often interrupts	Doesn't interrupt
Job-oriented	People-oriented	Very people-oriented
Uses mainly facts	Feelings before facts	Statements are promises
Truth before diplomacy	Flexible truth	Diplomacy over truth
Sometimes impatient	Impatient	Patient
Limited body language	Unlimited body language	Subtle body language
Respects officialdom	Seeks out key person	Uses connections
Separates the social and professional	Interweaves the social and professional	Connects the social and professional



*“I was part of a group of eight that went to Uganda to live, in pairs, with four families for six months in 1989. It was shortly after the end of the civil conflict. I was told to be prepared for ‘culture shock’ and ‘reverse culture shock’.*

*Margaret Sentamu, a Ugandan, prepared us with some cultural orientation. She described the deep courtesies particularly in relation to greeting, how women would kneel to men, how having asked about your own welfare, you were then asked about your parents and siblings, your husband, your children and then eventually about the matter that was the reason for meeting! We learned that Africans “don’t have watches, but they do have time.”*

*Relationships are fundamental and you do not leave a gathering until the business is done. It does not matter if that makes you late for your next appointment because you have honoured those you have been with.*

*There was very little food, but it was shared. We learned that water is very heavy and how to be economic in our use of it, as we had no running water, but had to collect what we needed each day. We learned that we could manage without a shower every day and we did not need to straighten or curl our hair.*

*There was delight at the beginning in discovering all these different ways of thinking, customs and norms, but it gave way to shock, as we found ourselves frustrated that some of the things we loved from home were not there! It amused us that Samson, who had just had eight years in the UK, but returned to Uganda permanently, came to our house and talked to us on many occasions about the Cricket Tests, the weather and what the BBC was reporting on the World Service.*

*As we adjusted to and embraced this different culture, we came to value so many aspects of it. Of course, by the time we got to month four, we realised that it was not long until we were to return home and we realised that we were going to be without some of the precious things that we had so come to enjoy.*

*The reverse culture shock came when I got back to the UK and found the noise and the pace overwhelming. I remember going to a superstore... and walking out, without even taking a trolley, because the choice was overwhelming — even obscene.”<sup>1</sup>*

Cultural Orientation is concerned with being aware of the Values, Communication Styles, and attitudes to Time and Space of another culture. It may be necessary to embrace those aspects which are important to another culture, in order to have understanding and cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> Felicity



When parents send a child to a school in another country it is all so exciting, novel and different for him or her. You may feel surprised, and perhaps even hurt, that they settle in so quickly and don't seem to display signs of homesickness. However, it may be a few weeks later, after the period of grace, when the school has been making allowances for your child to settle in, that the reality of adjusting must begin more seriously.

We will be running Cultural Orientation Days for families; and are planning to run a full week Course in August each year for both parents and their children: **'Understanding the English and so much more.'**

Topics we will address include what marks out the British as distinctive on the world scene:

- > How has being an island shaped our identity?
- > How has our history, without invasion since 1066, affected us?
- > How has Christianity shaped our laws, values, buildings and charitable activities?
- > What has been our contribution to humanity through the arts and technology?
- > What are the marks of our language, idioms and humour that have shaped our society?
- > Where is our place in the world in the light of the significant political changes of the last century?
- > What are the marks of Englishness: flag, Royal Family, anthem, Parliament, St Pauls, the NHS; what we talk about – sport, weather?
- > What is distinctive about a British education?

Delivery of the course will be in ways that are reflective of the typical British classroom: with participation by all - drama, role-play, games, show and tell, music, art and literature appreciation, and creative writing. Presentations will be made by participants about their own country so there may be a mutual understanding and respect of one another's cultures. Watch this Space!

We see that parents may even need more support than their children! We want the move for your child's education in the UK to be a success for the whole family.



*How will Cultural Orientation help my daughter when she comes to the UK to boarding school?*



She will find differences both in the minor details of daily life and in the big four areas of Values, Communication, Time and Space. If she is aware of them, she will adapt more readily. Also, we want to show her that going home, especially for the first time may present some surprises, and she can be prepared for those too!