Developing Cultural Competence in Elementary Physical Education

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In today’s globalized society, developing critical thinking, communication, socioemotional and language skills among pre-K–12 students is critical to equip them with the competencies to effectively collaborate with people from different cultural backgrounds, namely cultural competence (Sue, 1998; United States Department of Education [USDoE], 2018). It is within this environment that there are growing expectations for public schools to address cultural competence in directed manners. The USDoE (2018) demonstrated commitment to prepare all U.S. students to succeed globally through international education and engagement and defined cultural competence. The USDoE (2018) defined cultural competence as the ability to understand and appreciate other parts of the world, religions, cultures and points of view.

To provide further guidance, the USDoE (2018) created a framework for developing cultural competencies to advance equity, excellence and economic competitiveness for pre-K–12 learners. In this framework, the USDoE identified four main competencies for elementary students: (a) fostering socioemotional skills (e.g., empathy,
conflict resolution and seeing different perspectives); (b) developing rudimentary skills in another language; (c) instilling global awareness through constant exposure to different cultures, histories, languages and perspectives; and (d) engaging learners in developmentally appropriate civics and learning.

In relation to the pre-K–12 environment, physical education is uniquely positioned to develop students’ cultural competence because of its emphasis on the affective learning domain (e.g., feelings, values, interests and perceptions). Two national standards speak directly to developing culturally competent students. Standard 4 states, “The physically literate individual exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others” (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014, p. 1). Standard 5 states, “The physically literate individual will value physical activity for enjoyment, challenge, health, and social interaction” (SHAPE America, 2014, p. 1). Though these are the national standards developed in the United States, they are applicable worldwide regardless of culture, race, nationality, language, sexual orientation and/or disabilities.

To facilitate the development of cultural competence, the use of information and communication technology has been growing in higher education contexts (Bruhn, 2017). Technology is a cost-effective approach and allows people to communicate and collaborate with peers in geographically distant locations from different linguacultural backgrounds. To our knowledge, there is no documented evidence on the use of technology to develop cultural competence in elementary school contexts. The use of technology is contextually relevant in light of the limited resources that are available to develop students’ cultural competence in elementary physical education settings.

The purpose of this article is to introduce a CULTURE (Cultural Unit of Learning To Understand, Respect, and Empathize) framework, which uses games and activities as tools to develop cultural competence through technology. This unit was executed in elementary schools in the United States and Japan. The second aim of this article is to discuss strategies for adopting the CULTURE framework in elementary physical education settings.

### Summary of the 6-Day CULTURE Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teachers introduce students to the project (i.e., rationale, requirements and expectations). Students select a game or activity that reflects their country’s culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Students plan and practice their games and activities. Students identify what strategies they are going to use to communicate the objective, rules, equipment and safety procedures of their games and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 and 4</td>
<td>Students’ videotape, edit and share their games and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 and 6</td>
<td>Students watch the videos, play the games, and perform the activities and reflect on their experience.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** An additional lesson may be required for students to complete, edit and upload their videos.

### Culture Framework

#### Project Background. The CULTURE unit occurred during fall 2019. The unit occurred between an elementary school in New Jersey and two elementary schools near Tokyo, Japan. The participants were fourth- and fifth-grade students from the United States (n = 123) and Japan (n = 56). The CULTURE framework focused on building elementary students’ socioemotional skills and global awareness. Supporting the design, implementation and evaluation of the project were three inservice teachers from the elementary schools in Japan, four preservice teachers in Japan, two inservice health and physical education teachers in the United States, five preservice physical education teachers in the United States, and three university professors—two from the United States and one from Japan.

#### Unit Design and Implementation. The primary goal of the unit was to introduce, share, play and reflect on each country’s cultural games and activities. In our case, the unit was executed in six lessons. However, the length of the unit can be modified depending on available time, resources and student backgrounds. Table 1 provides a summary of each lesson.

**Lesson 1: Deciding What to Share.** The purpose of the first lesson was to provide an overview of the unit and determine what games and activities to share. First, teachers explained the rationale, requirements, expectations and timeline of the unit to the students. The underlying rationale was that it is important to develop global understanding, respect and empathy for other cultures. The shared requirements were to develop a 2- to 3-min video to introduce games and activities that reflected each country’s culture. In relation to the shared physical education activity, students needed to include the basic objective, rules, equipment and safety procedures in the video.

The shared expectations were that each video needed to be clear, concise and understandable. In addition to these elements, students in Japan learned about U.S. elementary school systems (i.e., school lunch and school buses), which was presented by a preservice teacher who assisted in implementing this unit. Second, students selected games or activities they wanted to share with each other. Discussions were led by the corresponding teacher. Teachers’ roles were to facilitate students’ discussions using a student-centered approach. The use of the student-centered approach was important to give students ownership in this collaboration project. The U.S. students chose a “backyard games” theme, such as Kan Jam, spikeball, cornhole, bocce ball, ladder ball, Gaga, and hopscotch. The Japanese students decided to share cultural pastimes, such as keidoro (tag-like game), jankenpa (i.e., hopscotch-like game), nawa-tobi (i.e., rope skipping), koma (i.e., spinning top), sumo (i.e., wrestling) and origami (i.e., paper folding).

![Table 1. Summary of the 6-Day CULTURE Unit](image)
Lesson 2: Brainstorming How to Communicate. The second lesson emphasized having the students practice playing their selected games and activities. Students also identified strategies for how they were going to communicate the name of their game, basic objectives of the game, equipment, rules and safety procedures. It is important to note that the U.S. students did not know or understand Japanese, and the Japanese students had very limited knowledge of English. Thus, teachers facilitated students’ thinking about how they could overcome the language barriers. To ensure that every student had an opportunity to contribute to the project, students were placed in small groups (i.e., four to five students) and assigned one game or activity to brainstorm and communicate ideas.

Lessons 3 and 4: Videotaping Games and Activities. The third and fourth lessons required the students to videotape, edit and share their games and activities. Google Drive was the platform used to share the videos. Prior to videotaping, teachers secured parental permission for video recording of the students. The U.S. students used iPads, a storyboard, Google Slides, and Google Translate for this process. The iPads assisted the students in videotaping the games and activities, the storyboard was used to help structure the videotaping of the game, and Google Slides and Translate were used to help communicate the basic objectives, rules, equipment and safety procedures in Japanese. The U.S. students embedded a Google slide show in their videos to communicate the important aspects of the games.

Similarly, the Japanese students used a video camera to videotape their activities. They introduced their videos by communicating the name of the game, objectives of the game, rules, equipment and safety procedures in Japanese. These communications were translated into English by a Japanese preservice teacher and embedded as captions in the video. In addition, written English transcriptions were sent to the U.S. elementary schools for assistance in learning how to play the games and perform the activities. It is important to recognize that though these technology tools were helpful, both U.S. and Japanese students relied primarily on play to communicate their games and activities. Play can be seen as a plausible way to teach cultural awareness and respect for other cultures (Monroe, 1995).

Lessons 5 and 6: Trying Games and Reflections. Lessons 5 and 6 focused on the students watching the videos, playing the games and activities, and reflecting on their experience. Equipment was required to play the games and perform the activities. In our case, a teacher in Japan sent the U.S. students an equipment package that consisted of spin tops, different size jump ropes, and origami paper. The U.S. students reciprocated with an equipment package as well. It included playground balls (i.e., Gaga), American footballs, school magnets, and poster boards signed by all fourth- and fifth-grade students. Due to the high shipping costs from the United States to Japan, Japanese schools purchased the equipment used to play the backyard games locally.
To learn how to play the games and perform the activities, the students in both countries followed a specific routine. First, the students watched the videos to get an idea of how to play the games. Next, the students played the games and activities with teacher support and guidance. Lastly, the students engaged in open discussions with their teachers reflecting on their experience with the games and activities. At the conclusion of the unit, students in both countries completed an exit slip to capture their thoughts and views on the entire project. The exit slip (i.e., assessment) contained four questions: (a) what sport/game did you learn from the students in Japan (United States); (b) what did you learn about Japan (United States); (c) what is similar and different between the United States and Japan; and (d) what was interesting to you from learning sports/games from students in Japan (United States)? These questions were helpful in gaining insight into the students’ learning experiences.

Students’ Positive Learning Experiences. Overall, the U.S. and Japanese students found the CULTURE unit worthwhile, meaningful and a step toward building their cultural competence. Following is a list of example comments from U.S. and Japanese students:

Comments from U.S. students to their classroom teacher in the United States:
- I love learning the games ... and origami too.
- I was amazed at the large jump rope and impressed that they are able to all jump together.
- The large jump rope was definitely my favorite!
- Seeing the difference in the games we play was so much fun.
- I loved seeing the different games and trying new things! All of the games were great, especially police and thief!
- I really enjoyed interacting with Japan and learning new things.
- I liked being able to experience different games that I normally wouldn't play.

Comments from Japanese students to their classroom teacher in Japan:
- U.S. games use equipment.
- U.S. games require communications while playing.
- In U.S. games, even nonathletic children can have opportunities to win games.
- I am very curious to see how U.S. students like our games.
- While many Japanese games and activities can be done individually, U.S. games required cooperation.
- I found some similarities among the games in two countries.
- In U.S. games, individual skill differences do not stand out so everyone can enjoy the games.

**Recommended Strategies for Practitioners**

There are seven recommended strategies for practitioners who are interested in executing a CULTURE framework in their physical education program. Table 2 provides a summary of each strategy.

**Strategy 1: Identify a Collaborator.** The first critical step is to find a teacher interested in collaborating on the project. Initiating this process may require networking, word of mouth, or even cold calling. In our case, integrating university faculty members who have some connections in other countries and who were willing to get involved was key to facilitating this process. Depending on the point of contact (e.g., teacher, principal or superintendent), approval may require a top-down (e.g., superintendent, principal, teacher) and/or bottom-up (e.g., teacher, principal, superintendent) approach. Regardless, approval should be obtained from the board of education, superintendent, principal and teacher. A particular grade level or class should be selected that would align well with this project. Once this is accomplished, a letter should be sent to parents informing them of the project, including rationale, expectations and requirements.

**Strategy 2: Use a Student-Centered Approach.** The second strategy is to allow the students to select the sports, games and/or activities that best represent their country, community and/or school. This should be student-centered with input from the teachers to give students ownership. Garnering project buy-in early will help establish the underlying rationale for the unit. In relation to executing the unit, we recommend placing students in small groups where they must work together as a team to complete the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Identify a collaborator</td>
<td>Obtain school district approval and provide parents with a letter detailing the project to acquire support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Use a student-centered approach</td>
<td>Apply a student-centered approach to learn each country’s, community’s, and/or school’s pastimes and give students ownership of what they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Provide ample practice time</td>
<td>Allow students ample time to practice their motor skills, movement concepts, and personal and social responsibility as it relates to their sport, game or activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Select suitable technology</td>
<td>Utilize iPads, iMovie, storyboards, Google Translate and other technological tools to assist students in creating their videos. Create a “contest” for the best video. Obtain parental consent on only those videos selected and utilize Google Drive and shared folders to share the content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Use a sequenced approach</td>
<td>Brief the class on the activity, watch the video, play the game, and debrief as a class. Repeat this sequence for each video and/or game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Take time to reflect</td>
<td>Require pre and post exit slips from the students and provide students opportunities to share their thoughts through open discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Advocate for what we do</td>
<td>Communicate the students’ comments and experiences to the administration and board of education.</td>
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*Note. Although these strategies appear linear in nature, a CULTURE unit requires a lot of back and forth between the steps.*
**Strategy 3: Provide Ample Practice Time.** The third strategy is to provide each group with ample time to practice the motor skills, movement concepts, strategies and tactics, as well as the personal and social responsibilities associated with their sport, game or activity. This requires assigning jobs to each group and allowing students to choose a job based on their interest and talent; for example, equipment manager, referee, film director, video editor etc. These jobs help the students stay on task and gain additional knowledge and skills for their cultural games and activities.

**Strategy 4: Select Suitable Technology.** The fourth strategy is to use various technological tools to help record and edit the videos. Some of these tools include iPads, iMovie, Google Slides, Google Translate (although this is not error-free), and a storyboard. The storyboard is useful in helping students create “scenes” in their movie that display the proper sequence and progression of teaching a sport, game or activity. For example, the first scene can introduce the name of the activity; the second scene can display the objectives of the game; the third scene can provide information on the rules of the game; the fourth scene can include the equipment; the fifth scene can present the safety procedures; the sixth scene can encompass gameplay; and the seventh and final scene can be the conclusion. This framework provides students with a detailed plan for how they can record their activity or game on video.

Additionally, to exchange the videos, the use of Google Drive shared folders is suggested. Prior to exchanging the videos, teachers should check with their technology department to see whether there are any potential issues with data sharing and privacy concerns. Once this is addressed, teachers can create a “contest” and choose the best videos to be shared based on certain criteria. For example, the U.S. elementary school recorded 20 videos between the fourth- and fifth-grade students. However, the teachers only selected 8 videos to be shared with students from Japan. This decision was based on clarity, creativity and quality of the video. After the videos have been selected, teachers should obtain written formal consent from the parents. A smaller number of parents needed to provided consent allows for a higher response rate and thus a more manageable process.

It is important to note that a collaborating school in another country may not have the same access to technology as teachers in U.S. schools. For example, in our case, Japanese schools did not have Wi-Fi in each classroom or the gym. Thus, a university faculty member who assisted with this project copied the videos onto a DVD to share the games and activities with the students. Being proactive and in constant collaboration throughout the unit was key to overcoming this challenge.

**Strategy 5: Use a Sequenced Approach.** The fifth strategy is to use a specific lesson sequence so that students can understand and play their collaborating country’s games and activities. We suggest that teachers watch the videos in advance and consider the following lesson sequence: (a) brief the students on the sport, game and/or activity; (b) watch the video; (c) participate in the sport, game and/or activity; and (d) debrief as a class. This sequence is repeated for each game or activity. This lesson sequence proved to be effective in the unit because the information did not overwhelm the students, students could instantaneously apply what they learned from the video, and teachers could build the students’ cultural competencies.
in a systematic manner. Depending on the number of videos shared, it will take approximately two lessons (i.e., 45 min each) to complete this lesson sequence.

**Strategy 6: Take Time to Reflect.** The sixth strategy is to take time for students to reflect on their experience, from first being introduced to the project to designing and exchanging their videos; to participating in the sports, games and/or activities; to the debriefings as a class. In this particular project, teachers decided to have students complete exit slips in addition to open discussions. The U.S. teachers decided to use Google Forms through the application Google Classroom, and the Japanese teachers decided to use paper and pencil. The use of different reflection formats is suggested because some students are more comfortable with sharing their thoughts through a written format or in discussion. Teachers in both countries, with the assistance of university professors, were able to translate and share the students’ comments.

**Strategy 7: Advocate for What You Do.** The final strategy is to share the students’ comments with key stakeholders, such as the board of education, superintendent, principal, fellow teachers and parents. This is important because it demonstrates the need for cultural competence to be taught at the elementary level, the value of physical education in promoting this knowledge and skills, and the commitment to achieve a higher level of education.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to introduce a CULTURE framework executed in elementary schools in the United States and Japan. The secondary purpose was to discuss strategies for adopting a CULTURE framework in elementary physical education settings. This online international exchange unit was an attempt to address Chamberlain’s (2005) point that “what we learn through our culture becomes our reality, and to see beyond that is often difficult” (p. 197). Throughout this article, the authors described what cultural competence is and why it is important in an era of globalization. In doing so, we described the role of physical education in promoting this knowledge base and related skills as well as key background information from participants in the project. A description of how the unit was designed and implemented and recommendations for how physical educators can execute a CULTURE unit in their respective schools was provided. Developing cultural competence is a lifelong pursuit with no clearly defined end point (Moule, 2012). It is an ideal that requires ongoing engagement, continuous acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and constant reflection (Moule, 2012). Thus, it is important to foster and instill cultural competence in children at a young age.

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