The Adaptation of the Didactical Course ‘Learning that LASTS’
to the Needs of Indigenous Students in Mexico

by Marc Schwab

(Summary of "Die Anpassung des Didaktikkurses ‘Learning that LASTS’ an die Bedürfnisse indigener Studenten in Mexiko”, written by Marc Schwab as term paper for the course "Intercultural Learning and Teaching" under Dr. Craig Ott at the branch of Columbia International University in Konstal, Germany, August 2013)

Note: This summary was written for people who are familiar with LtL. It does not summarize any of the information about LtL.

The paper first presents some foundational information about the LtL course and its basic principles and content. Next, it summarizes some of the experiences with DURAR (one of the existing Spanish versions) in Mexico. There were very marked differences in both reception and success in the course between the Mexican indigenous and the urban (Western and Latin) students (each group comprised about half of the students). All students had at least some formal school education, but the cultural background of the indigenous participants is one of learning by watching and imitating. Learning contents in this environment are typically not abstract. Their indigenous cultures characteristically value tradition over progress and change. The school experiences of the indigenous students (and some of the Latins) were typically characterized by a strong focus on memorization and exact repetition rather than understanding.

The paper then looks at a revision of the Spanish version of LtL, now in progress. The main focus of this reworking is to replace abstract concepts (usually noun phrases) in the material with complete sentences describing an action (e.g., replace "teamwork" with "together, we learn better", or "challenge" with "we apply what we have learned"). This is evaluated as a positive step towards the indigenous reality of concrete applicable abilities (instead of abstract possibilities.) This change is likely to effect other changes in ripple effects (for example, it will make the use of acronyms very difficult.)

The next section reviews and recommends other areas of possible adaptation for the course. (This abbreviated version of the paper does not allow all the fine differentiations of the original.) These are:

- In the initial overview of the material, show more clearly how the different "key topics" relate to each other (e.g., the 7 planning questions, the 5 principles, the 4 phases of a lesson.)

- Stretch the course to give more time to process all the new information and apply it in the exercises. It is not necessary to spend more time lecturing, but, for example, to instead teach for half-days only, for two weeks.
• Give the students more guidance in asking questions or giving assignments. For example, pick somebody to answer instead of asking nobody in particular.
• Use stories to transmit principles. (Jesus is explicitly mentioned as a model teacher or Master Teacher in LtL!)

In an appendix, the paper then explores factors which could or should impact the selection of a teaching style in an intercultural context:
• student's age
• course content (some requires experiential learning, some requires transmission of theory)
• cultural context:
  ▪ cultural background of the teacher
  ▪ teacher's expectations for students
  ▪ cultural background of the students
  ▪ students' expectations for teacher
  ▪ relationship between teacher and students

A result of the study of the problems inherent in intercultural teaching situations is that it is necessary for the teacher to
• explicitly communicate their expectations and teaching methods
• adapt his teaching to culture (knowledge, experience, needs) of his students
• possibly teach the use of his methods

Let me finish with two quotes from Geert Hofstede:
"[...] cross-cultural learning situations are fundamentally problematic for both parties."¹

and

"It is possible that in order to be effective as trainers abroad, teachers have to adopt methods which at home they have learned to consider as outmoded or impopular [sic]."²

There is a place for incarnational teaching following Jesus' example as outlined in Philippians 2:3-7, giving up our own preferences for the sake of others!

²Hofstede, 316