

Communication styles of international students: Teaching to their strengths

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The situation

The Programme: The Certificate in Applied Technology (level 4) - popular with international students, from **high context cultures** in which human relationships are valued over task orientated behaviours (Iowa State U. 2014).

The students: minimally qualified academically and practically focussed from educational backgrounds where teacher-centred instruction is likely to be the norm (Huba & Freed, 1999).



A high context culture

In high context cultures, information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person. Behavioral rules are implicit; in other words, the context is supposed to give you the cues you need to behave appropriately. In these cultures, members tend to use a more indirect style of communication.

Examples of societies that value this communication style include Japan, Korea, China, and many of the Latin American countries.

The underlying social theory

[An individual] from an individualistic culture strives to improve work performance because of the recognition he or she may receive, [those] from a collectivistic culture [seek] improvement because of the gains his or her group may receive.

Early (1994, p.89)

The research

Aim: To investigate whether the communication styles of the students were compatible with the nature of teaching they were receiving.



Steps:

- ▶ Identify the communication skills held by the programme participants
- ▶ See whether the findings of this research indicate that teaching strategies need to be modified to improve their learning experience.

Research tool: Casse Survey Instrument (1981)

This tool not only considers the ethnic diversity of the students but also relates value orientations to the four different communications styles identified by Casse.

Casse's 4 styles:

Action

Process

People

Ideas

Examined from 3 aspects:-

What they value,

Talk about,

How they react.

C o m m u n i c a t i o n style	Action	Process	People	Ideas
Value orientation	Doing, achieving, getting things done	Facts, organisation, strategies	Teamwork, relations, communication	Concepts, theories, innovation
C o n t e n t characteristics - they talk about ...	Results, objectives, performance, productivity, efficiency, moving ahead, responsibility, feedback, experience, challenges, achievements, change and decisions	Facts, procedures, planning, organising, controlling, testing, trying, analysis, observations, proof and details	People, needs, motivations, teamwork, communications, feelings, team spirit, understanding, sensitivity, awareness, cooperation, beliefs, values, expectations, relations and self-development	Concepts, new ways, innovation, new methods, creativity, improving, opportunities, problems, possibilities, potential, grand designs, alternatives, issues, what's new in the field, interdependence
P r o c e s s characteristics	Pragmatic, direct, impatient, decisive, quick energetic and challenge others	Systematic, logical, factual, verbose, unemotional, cautious and patient	Spontaneous, empathetic, warm, subjective, emotional, perceptive and sensitive	Imaginative, charismatic, difficult-to-understand, ego-centred, unrealistic, creative, full of ideas and provocative

International students' difficulties

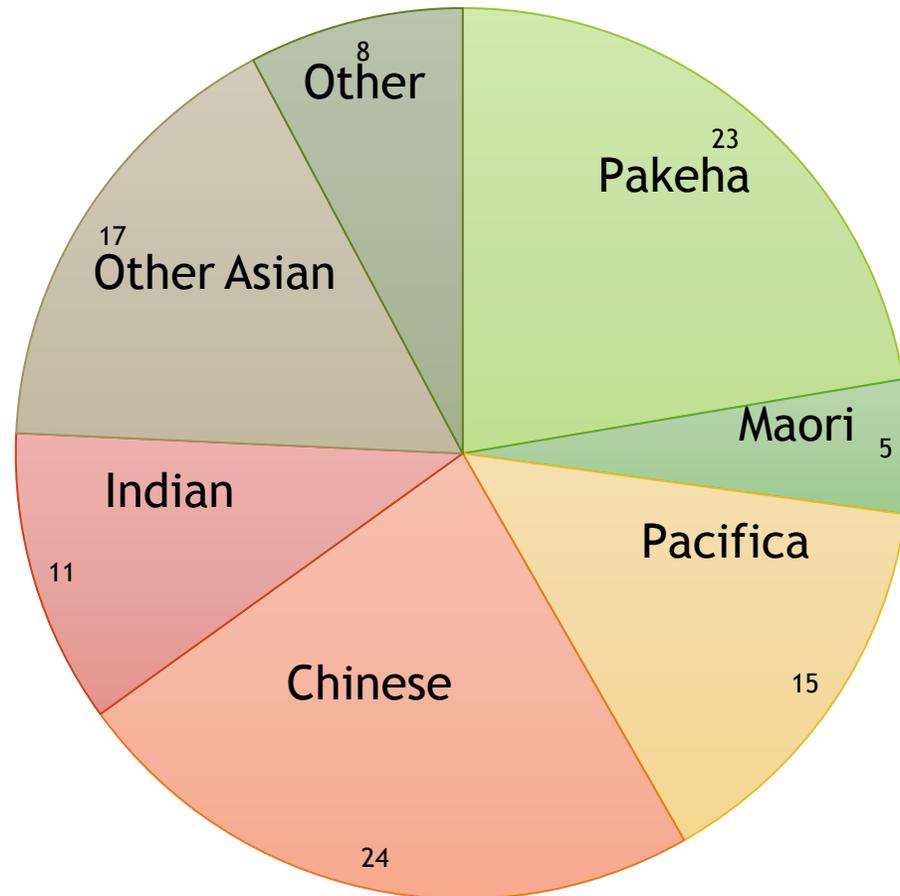
Earlier research (Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000) showed that lecturers had identified poor critical thinking skills amongst their international students and we argue that this aspect would be contained under Casse's category of 'Ideas'.



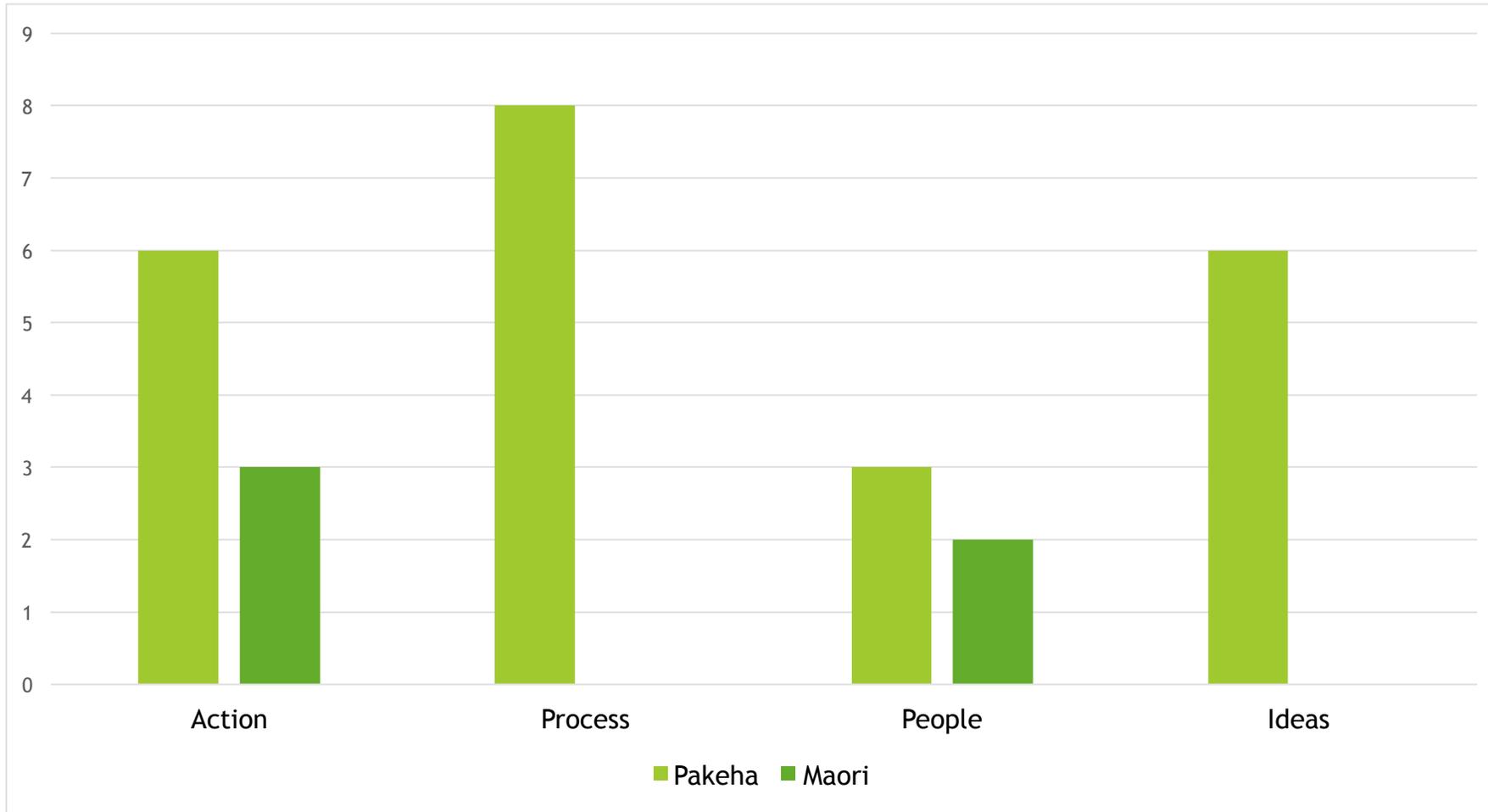
Methodology

- ▶ Printed questionnaires were issued to 113 students in the Certificate of Applied Technology Automotive programme across 7 theory classes. All the students who participated were in their first year of study, either in their first or second semester, and were all male.
- ▶ The survey comprised 40 questions and students were asked to make a choice out of the pair of alternative answers provided in each case.
- ▶ They were then asked to identify their ethnicity.

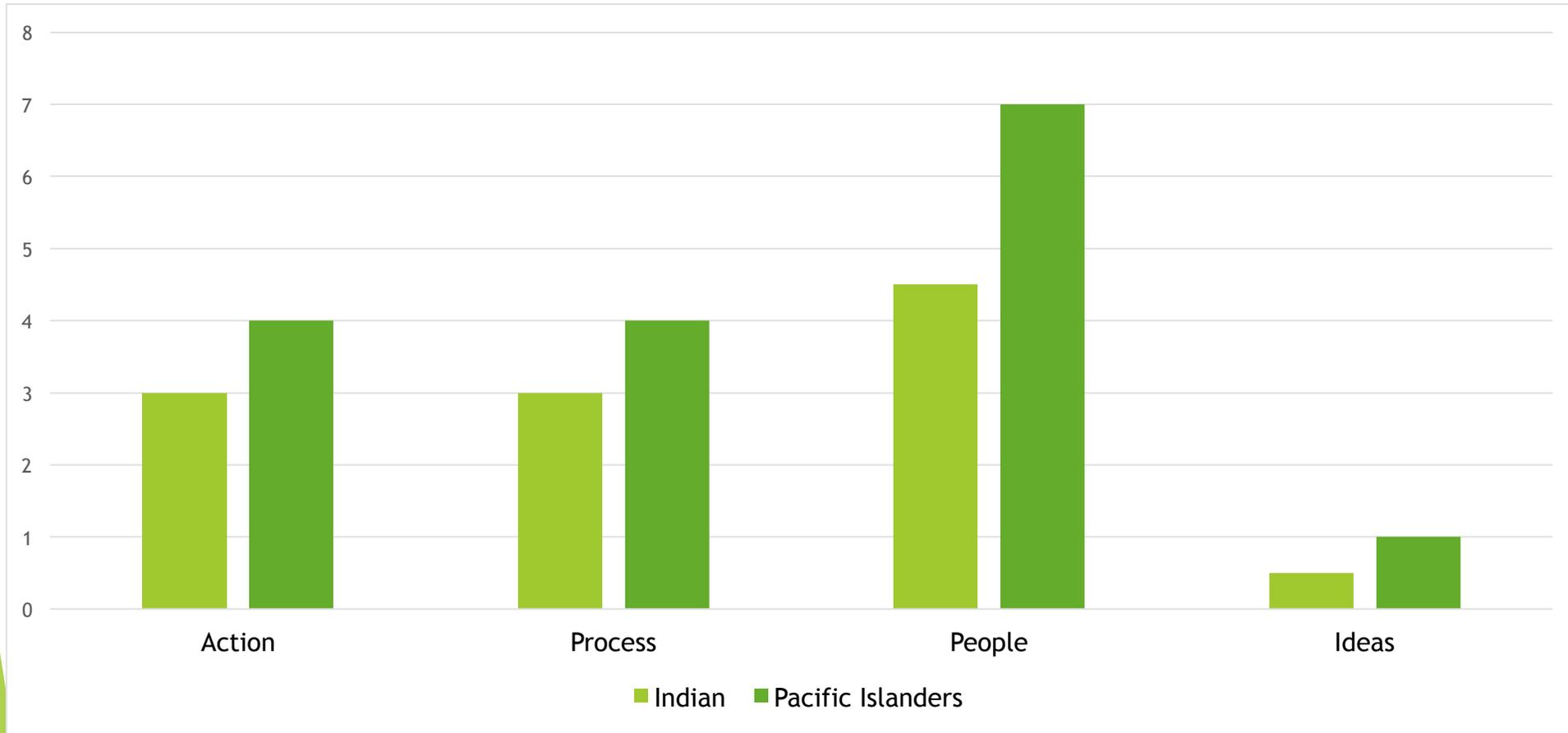
Self-identified ethnicities



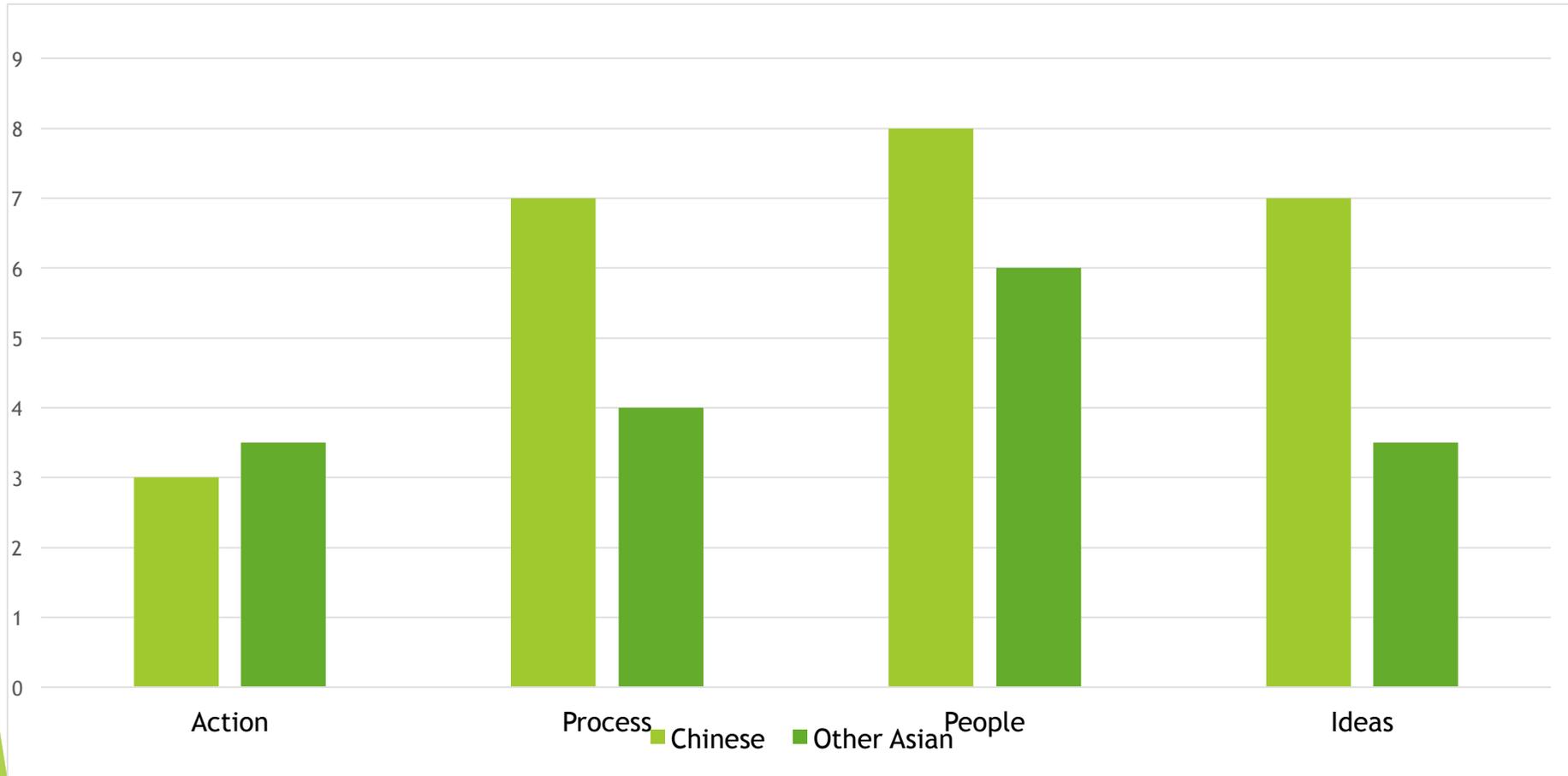
Communication styles of Maori and Pakeha



Communication styles of Pacific Islanders and Indians



Communication styles of Chinese and other Asian students



Outcomes

- ▶ Most students are “People” orientated, yet by end of course are expected to develop an “Ideas” bias.
- ▶ Therefore, there is a need to use their social strengths to grow ideas and critical thinking skills by:
 - facilitating a series of complex conversations between staff and among students, with the texts (both printed and Online), with industry and with oneself (critical self-reflection).
 - Emphasise the socially constructed attributes through the establishment of Communities of Practice and the opportunities for students to develop shared and collaborative understandings.

Using technology to achieve improvement

Hypermedia, hypertext and web-based collaborative environments will play an increasing role in enabling the development of socially constructed, people-based learning as a comfortable tool for students from any part of the globe, thereby using the strengths that students already have to develop the attributes they need as qualified professionals.



Recommendations

- ▶ Using pair and group work (thereby enhancing the 'People' aspect of students' values) so international students use their social strengths to help one another develop critical thinking capabilities;
- ▶ Taking time to check that international students understand the language and terms being used by lecturers;
- ▶ Promoting a mentoring scheme - using people from the same ethnicity to act as learning support.
- ▶ Highlight the need for international students to see their courses as socially focussed and which lead to people-focused, teamwork orientated careers. (Potangaroa & Murphy, 2004)

References

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