

What Do We Really Know and Understand about Our Multicultural School Population

by Carolyn Boyles

<http://mail.google.com/mail/?hl=en&tab=wm#inbox/1244bd85ab3a1278>

1. Beckon with index finger.

- While this means "Come here" in the U.S., to motion with the index finger to call someone is insulting, or even obscene, in many cultures. Expect a reaction when you beckon to a student from the Middle or Far East; Portugal, Spain, Latin America, Japan, Indonesia and Hong Kong. It is more acceptable to beckon with the palm down, with fingers or whole hand waving.

2. Point at something in the room using index finger.

- It is impolite to point with the index finger in the Middle and Far East. Use an open hand or your thumb (in Indonesia).

3. Make a "V" sign.

- This means "Victory" in most of Europe when you make this sign with your palm facing away from you. If you face your palm in, the same gesture means "Shove it."

4. Smile.

- This gesture is universally understood. However, in various cultures there are different reasons for smiling. The Japanese may smile when they are confused or angry. In other parts of Asia, people may smile when they are embarrassed. People in other cultures may not smile to indicate a friendly greeting as we do in the United States. A smile may be reserved for friends. It is important not to judge students or their parents because they do not smile, or smile at what we would consider "inappropriate" times.

5. Sit with sole of feet or shoe showing.

- In many cultures this sends a rude message. In Thailand, Japan and France as well as countries of the Middle and Near East showing the soles of the feet demonstrates disrespect. You are exposing the lowest and dirtiest part of your body so this is insulting.

6. Form a circle with fingers to indicate "O.K."

- Although this means "O.K." in the U.S. and in many countries around the world, there are some notable exceptions:
 - In Brazil and Germany, this gesture is obscene.
 - In Japan, this means "money."
 - In France, it has the additional meaning of "zero" or "worthless."

7. Pat a student on the head.

- This is very upsetting to students from Asia. The head is the repository of the soul in the Buddhist religion. Children from cultures which are influenced by Buddhism will feel uncomfortable if their head is touched.

8. Pass an item to someone with one hand.

- In Japan this is very rude. Even a very small item such as a pencil must be passed with two hands. In many Middle and Far Eastern countries it is rude to pass something with your left hand which is considered "unclean."

9. Wave hand with palm facing outward to greet someone.

- In Europe, waving the hand back and forth can mean "No." To wave "good-bye," raise the palm outward and wag the fingers in unison, this is also a serious insult in Nigeria if the hand is too close to another person's face.

10. Nod head up and down to say "Yes."

- In Bulgaria and Greece, this gesture means "No."



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