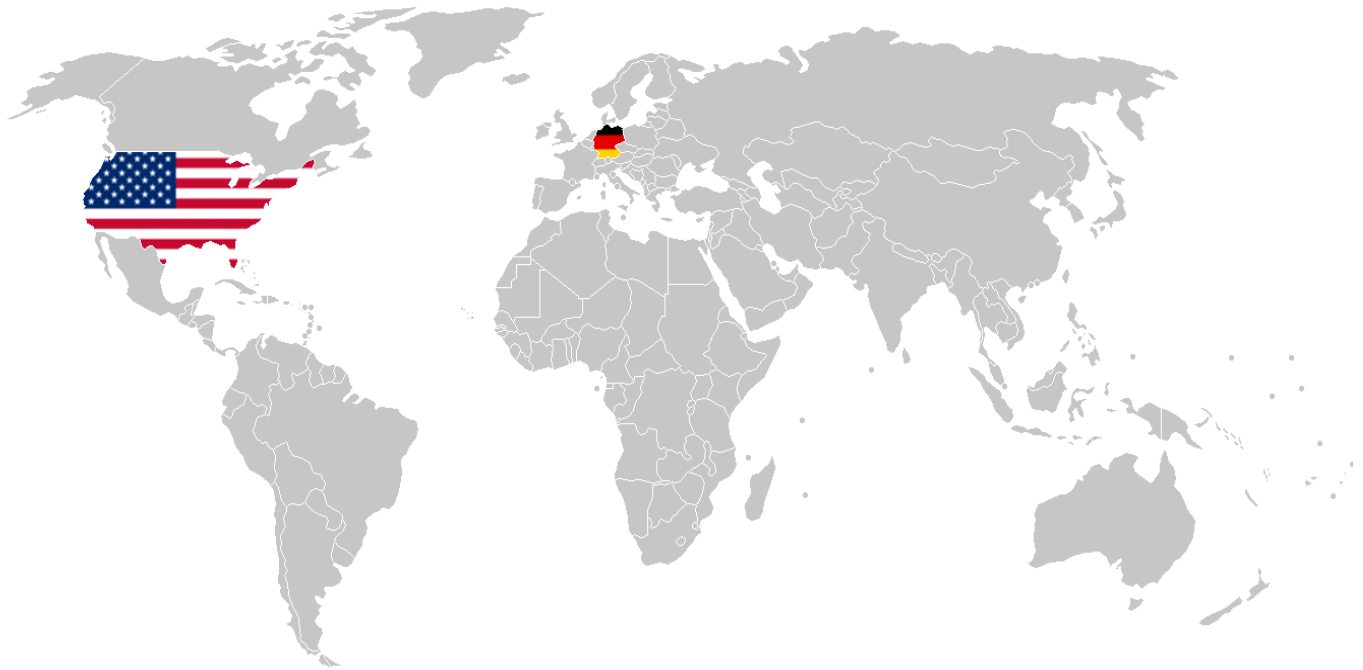


Parallels in Intercultural Learning: The Transatlantic Orientation Exchange Project



A joint project between AFS-USA & AFS Interkulturelle Begegnungen
Robin A. Weber AFS-USA
14 October 2008

Background

A grant from the former Marshall Fund was given to AFS Germany and AFS USA to develop handbooks and training materials for Host families

Target Groups

Families in the USA
hosting a German
student

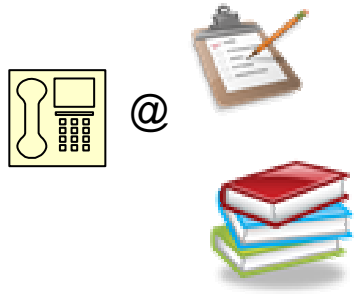
&

Families in Germany
hosting an American
student

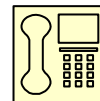
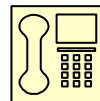


Project Timeline

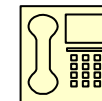
Selection



1st National meeting



2nd National meeting



1st International Meeting

2nd International Meeting

Evaluation through August 09

Jan 07

Sept 07

Oct 07

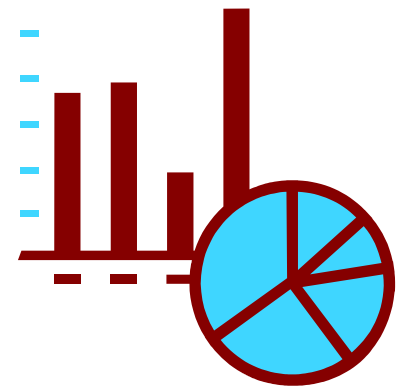
Mar 08

May 08

Oct 08

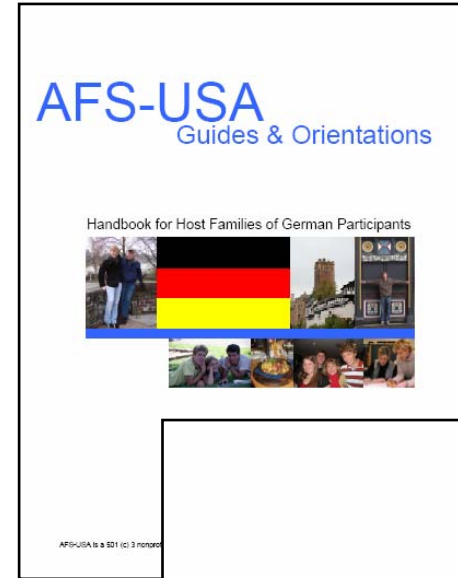
U.S. Evaluation Phase

- **Sept 08**
Survey host families
- **May 09**
Survey host families and participant family liaisons
- **August 09** – Data analysis re:
 - Host family changes
 - Support cases
 - Program completion rates
 - Host family satisfaction
 - Participant satisfaction



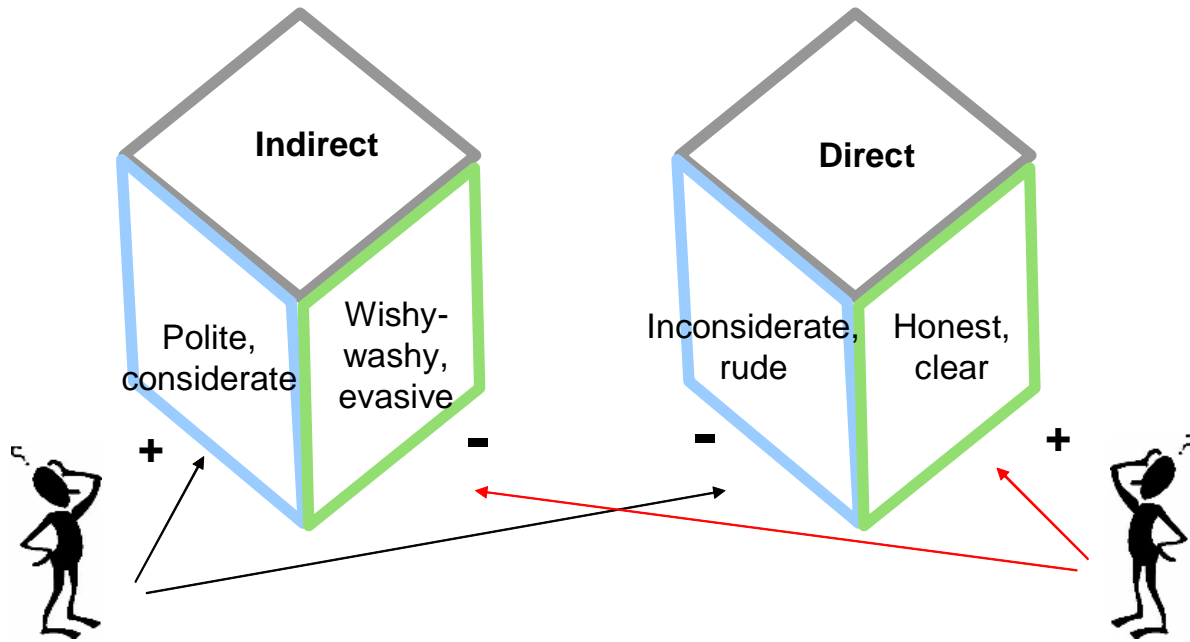
Topics in Both Handbooks

- What is culture?
- Generalizations and Stereotypes
- Communication Styles ←
- Space ←
- Patriotism
- Relationships ←
 - sibling, teacher, parent, peer
- Nudity and Sexuality
- School systems ←
- Alcohol and curfews
- Food Culture



Indirect vs. Direct Communication

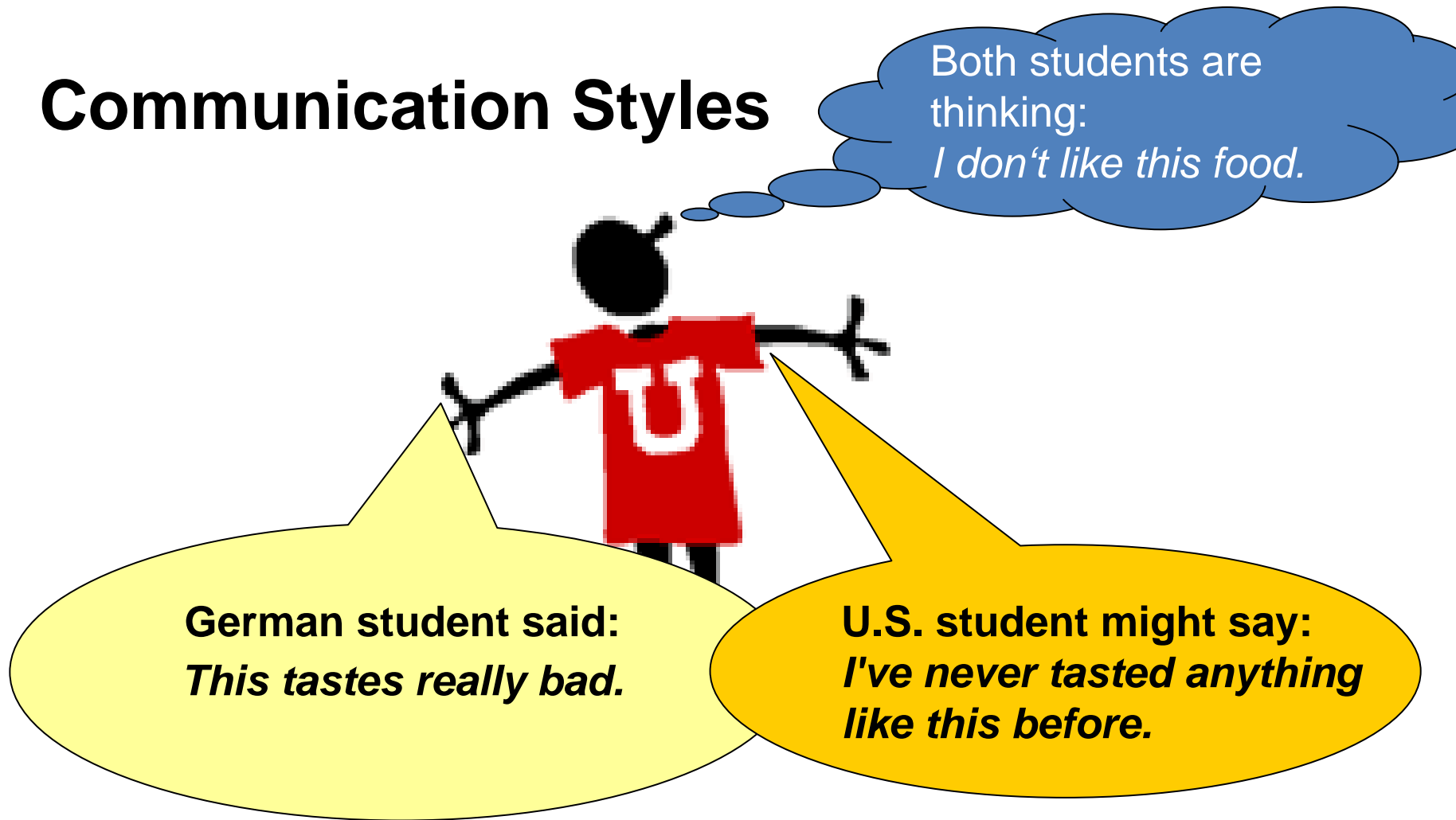
Communication Styles



U.S. Host Parent

German Student

Communication Styles



According to the US Host mother of the German student who reported this incident, her student was "blunt" so that 1) she could fix the dish or 2) not waste her time making it again.

Differences in Non-Verbal Communication



Germans	Americans
Use their tone of voice to express negative emotions (anger, frustration, etc.)	Use their tone of voice to express happier, positive feelings.
Silence/pauses are longer in German speech (indicates thoughtfulness)	U.S. Americans are not as comfortable with this.
Smaller personal space bubble due to high population density: e.g. passing by someone without acknowledging them	Larger personal space bubble
Value long eye contact (indicates trustworthiness)	Constant eye contact could be seen as too intense
Smiles are a sign of real affection	Smiles are an indication of politeness



Communication

Current U.S. Host Family Perspective

Her speaking style is very direct and if we were not prepared we would have thought she was unhappy or critical. This section truly helped us to communicate comfortably from the very beginning. [USA](#)

Communication

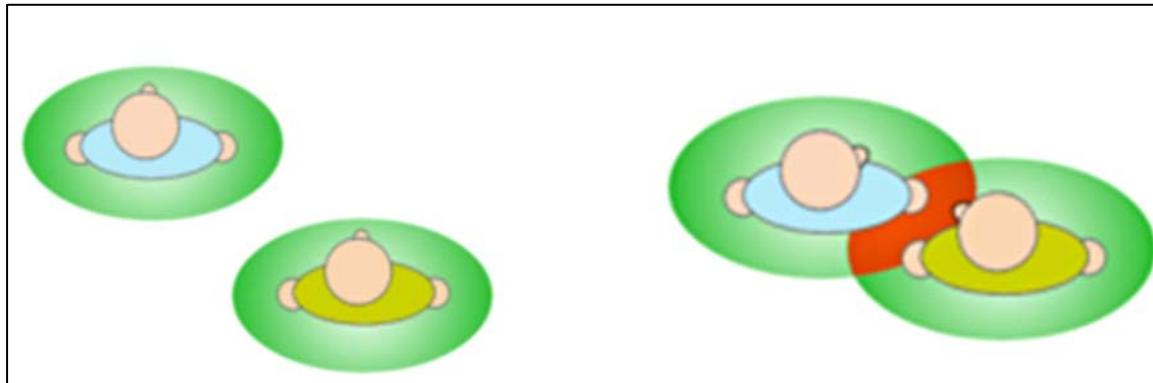
Former U.S. Host Family Perspective

I would say that our student was confrontational at all times but in a constructive way. Always asking questions and many times refusing to admit he was wrong in topics of discussion. Politics was a very tough subject as he wanted to talk and argue (usually about Bush) and we are not ones to discuss politics. His host grandfather gave him more than enough challenging conversations and he left us alone! USA

Personal Space

*“For Americans 100 years are a long time –
for Europeans 100 kms are a long distance”*

How does this affect the feeling of space and the need for space?



German Activity re. Space

1



2



3



USA: 33 individuals per square km -
Germany: 230 individuals per square km
That represents a ratio of 1 to 7.

Relationships

- Student/teacher
- Parent/child
- Peers



How friendships are formed



In general, people from “coconut cultures” may appear to be cold, but once the hard outer shell is broken, very deep and long-lasting friendships can develop.

People from “peach cultures” generally appear very open and they have many “friends.” In contrast to the “coconut” pattern, it’s easy to break through this soft exterior, but the core is nearly unbreakable and very deep and long-lasting friendships are less common.

“Peach and Coconut”

Current Host Family Perspective

Our exchange student has only just arrived, so I can not determine if the coconut description truly applies to him. However, I think the peach description truly describes how I and my family interact with people.

USA

School Systems

- Student/teacher relationship
- Course offerings
- Role of homework vs. in class participation
- “Cheating”
- Extracurricular activities
- School Spirit

School Systems – Host Parent Perspective

I have noticed that he doesn't wear his sports uniform on Spirit days and he changes out of his uniform into his street clothes the minute the game is over - right on the field! USA

School Systems

Current U.S. Host Parent Perspective

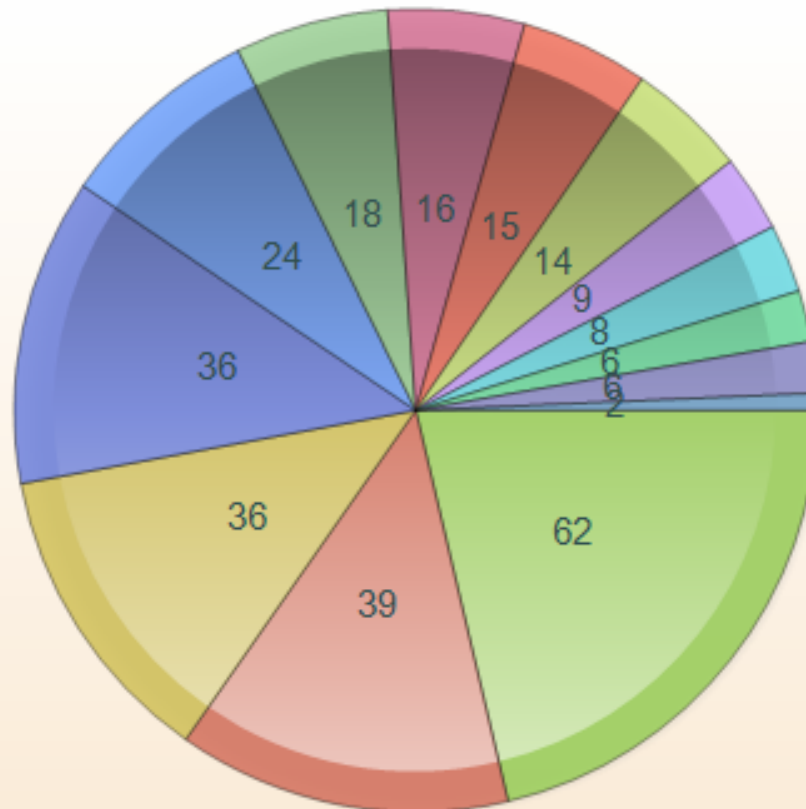
Just knowing about the school structure and how they do things over there, gave us a really good way to discuss the differences. He still has trouble knowing that he can go to a teacher.

USA

Preliminary Feedback on US Handbook

Which sections of the handbook have been most helpful in building understanding between you and your host son or daughter?

- | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Communication Styles | Food and Food Culture | Patriotism | Holidays and Travel |
| Relationships | Laws and Rules | Religion | Nudity and Sexuality |
| School System | What is Culture? | Dating | Other, please specify |
| Personal Space | Diversity | | |



Most Notable Topics

German and U.S. Host Families vs. **Group Members** ★

- ★ • Communication Style
 - Nonverbal Behavior
 - Discussion Style
- Personal Space
- School System
- Relationships
- ★ • Food and Food Culture
- Patriotism
- Nudity and Sexuality
- ★ • **Cognitive Style**



Communication – Direct/Indirect

When I received feedback on my draft topics from my German partner, I had to mindfully receive the comments that were very strong and seemingly critical by my U.S. standards. USA



I realized that in Germany we have less awareness of political correctness. And sometimes we really had to “read between the lines” to understand the US-Americans’ critiques as they would be too polite to tell us straight ahead. GER

“Would you like...”

Communication – Compliments and Praise

I realized how often in a conversation small details were commented, always in a very nice way, like: "He has such a nice smile." ... "You have a nice shirt." So after a while I thought that I might be perceived as being cold and not nice because we are not used to make such a lot of small and nice compliments. I enjoyed this a lot but also found it quite exhausting to communicate in such a way. GER

Communication – Humor

A German colleague pointed out that she had made a conscious effort to insert humor into her presentation and training as she knew this was a common practice in the US. Until I heard this, I hadn't considered that the use of humor in this context might not be appropriate in other cultures!

USA

Cognitive Style



- Task oriented
- Efficiency
- Goals and objectives
- Faster
- Experiential



- Process oriented
- Thorough analysis
- Facts and figures
- Detailed information
- Slower
- Concrete



Cognitive Style – Group Members

Our German approach to our theme was to gather as much information as we could, put it in a grid to structure it (with our number systems 1.1 and so on) and then to see if and how this information could be helpful to host families while the US-American's structure had this last aspect as the general headline.

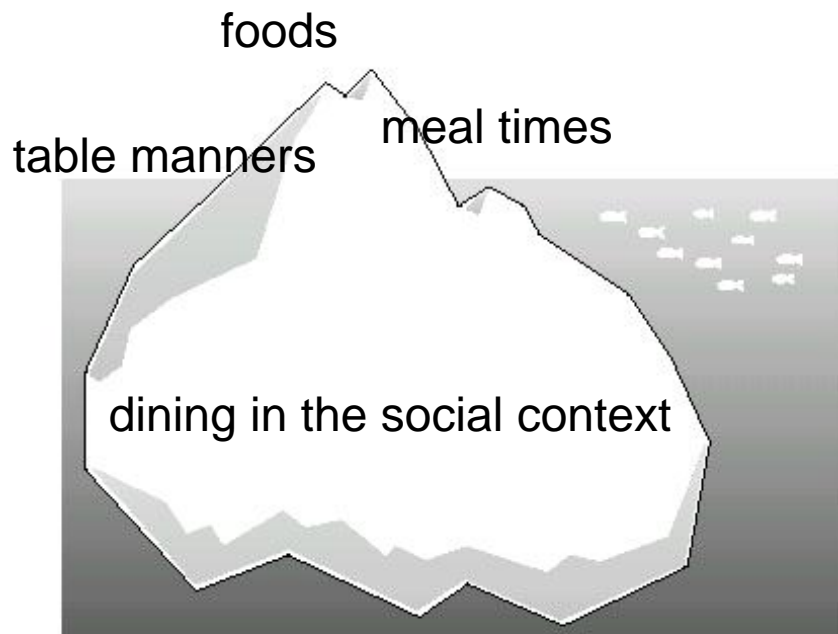
GER

Cognitive Style – Group Members

The structure of AFS volunteer training differs between the two countries. Germany tends to be more risk averse. There you don't learn by observing, you need to have training and receive a certificate. This also enforces uniformity. USA



Food Culture – Group Members



Food Culture – Group Members



The Big Picture
What did we learn?

Next Steps

- Record project process/results on the AFS Wiki
- Replicate project with other AFS partners
- Developing smaller scale project plan



Questions?

Thank You!

Modesty

