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Massey Authors:

Sayers, Janet
Ruffolo, Lara

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Janet Sayers
Lara Ruffolo

What lessons can we learn from Babe, a sheep-pig, about cultural adaptation?

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Contact Details

Dr Janet Sayers
Department of Management & International Business
Massey University (Auckland)
Private Bag 102 904
Auckland, New Zealand
Ph 64 9 443 9799 ex 9215
Email j.g.sayers@massey.ac.nz

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the movie *Babe* to discuss inter-cultural adaptation strategies and the role that affection and trust plays in inter-cultural relations. Specifically this paper discusses these inter-cultural themes in the context of who Babe becomes (a sheep-pig) and what his transformation into this hybrid may teach us about the inter-cultural adaptation journey. The paper provides a description of the major themes and characters in the movie, and shows how Babe and other animal characters approach the process of intercultural adaptation with varied degrees of success. We suggest that Babe is a useful resource for educators, and suggest ways that the movie can be used to promote dialogue in the classroom about inter-cultural adaptation strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Babe was a box-office hit in 1995, with a follow up hit in 1999 with *Babe: Pig in the City*[1] . *Babe* won an Academy Award for 'Visual Effects', and was nominated in six other categories, including 'Best Actor in a Supporting Role' for the touching, mono-syllabic performance of James Cromwell as Farmer Hoggett. In the present divisive global environment, it seems pertinent to revisit the first *Babe* movie, which was a gently unassuming and humorous film, from a less paranoid and fearful time. This paper aims to discuss a central theme that we read from this movie, intercultural adaptation. Specifically this paper discusses this inter-cultural theme in the context of who Babe becomes (a sheep-pig) and what his transformation into this hybrid may teach us about an inter-cultural adaptation journey.

We first explain *Babe*'s appeal by discussing the Hoggett's farm. We examine the various cultures that are on the Hoggett's farm; human, pig, duck, sheep, sheep-dog and sheep-pig, and the role that communication plays in the creation and maintenance of cultural norms and values. We show how Babe, the movie's hero, and other animal characters, approach the process of intercultural adaptation with varied degrees of success. Babe, Ferdinand (the duck), and the cat all present us with degrees of intercultural adaptation 'success': but this success is largely conditional on acceptance by the dominant culture of humans on the farm. We show that Babe, the sheep-pig, can be seen as a 'successful' intercultural person (but we also caution about the mono-cultural sub-text that can be read from the movie).

We conclude this paper by suggesting that the movie *Babe* is a useful resource for educators, and suggest ways that the movie can be used to promote dialogue in the classroom about inter-cultural adaptation strategies. We begin this paper by introducing the themes of *Babe*, presenting the major characters, and the social and physical setting of the piggery, the farm, and the house.

'BABE': A READING OF THE MOVIE

Babe begins life in a factory farm, a dark, entirely enclosed environment where the social surroundings consist entirely of pigs and machines: gleaming godlike machines that mysteriously descend from the ceiling to distribute food and water, then ascend back up to

[1] The sequel to *Babe*, *Babe: Pig in the City* (1998), alters the mood of the original considerably, and provides a far darker and more pessimistic reading of post-modern urban life.

heaven. The pigs' culture is a simple one: pigs know each other by their relationships (mother, siblings) but have no need for individual names - that's why Babe's name is Babe, rather than Bob - and when a mature pig vanishes, the rest assume that he or she has gone to another, better world, where they will follow in turn if they behave well.

Imagine the shock, then, of a simple piglet from this background who immigrates to Farmer Hoggett's farm. This farm is an astonishing mixture of species and stimuli, and Babe suddenly has to adjust to a world where he has freedom of movement, and freedom of association with creatures of all shapes, sizes and loquacity capabilities, from the monosyllabic farmer himself to the giggling, singing mice, the worrying muttering duck Ferdinand, and the group that most resembles his old culture, the family of sheepdogs. The bitch Fly has a hefty maternal streak and pities the piglet, realising that he feels lonely and lost without his littermates; she practices empathic listening and finally overcomes the species and cultural barriers to adopt him as one of her own pups.

Despite the fact that all the animals speak the same language there are different cultures on the farm, all neatly enmeshed in a hierarchy with humans at the top and meat animals at the bottom. The dogs refer to Farmer Hoggett as "The Boss" and obey his directives implicitly, then assign everyone else a place in the farm culture according to their usefulness to humans and presumed abilities. Dogs are at the top of the pile and allowed into the house itself because they are smart; they control other animals, guard the humans' assets, and have a relationship of affection and respect with the bosses. Other creatures (aside from the cat, a special case) stay outside; they are useful in various ways, but lower down on the totem pole. Chickens have an independent life as long as they lay eggs and announce the dawn; horses provide entertainment and strength, cows give milk, and at the bottom of the heap are the meat animals, the ducks, the sheep, and Babe, the farm's one and only pig. According to the dogs' mythology, this hierarchy is based not only on animals' usefulness to humans but on their inherent intellectual qualities; dogs are at the top of the pile because they are smart, therefore those at the bottom of the pile must be stupid. Like many dominant cultural assumptions about minorities, this one seems true. The dogs treat sheep as if they are stupid, and the sheep respond in a way that, according to the dogs, proves their stupidity and justifies the humans eating them.

When Fly's children first see Babe they need to know his place in the farm culture; once they know that his use to the humans is to provide food, they ask whether he is a) dirty and b) stupid. They've heard somewhere or other that pigs are dirty, and so although they've never seen one before they want to know if the stereotype is true - and in fact they assume it

is true, protesting at their mother's adopting Babe, on the grounds that he'll wet the bed. Once Fly decides to adopt him she gives him a chance to prove his cleanliness, but he only gets this chance once he proves that he is not stupid.

According to Fly, stupidity for the dogs has two elements as far as sheep are concerned; the sheep don't seem to understand simple English, and they tend to panic for no good reason. On his first day at the farm Babe proves that he is "smarter" than sheep by responding to the canine conversation he overhears on the subject of his intelligence. Just as Fly concludes logically, that since he is a meat animal he must be stupid (and the mice gleefully announce it), he objects, proving that he understands English and can carry on a reasonable conversation. He asserts himself in the face of the prevailing cultural stereotype, and because he has a sympathetic audience, is given a chance to fit into the dominant culture and hang out with the dogs. Although understanding English, the language of the dominant culture, is clearly a prerequisite for acceptance, two other less obvious but significant guiding principles to reception into the dominant culture are a sense of family and the transformative power of maternal love. It is the emotional power of tenderness and love that provides the central mood of the movie, and this is set early through the calming and tender persona of Fly, and of Babe’s attempt to create his new inter-species family.

But the dogs' myth is not the only game in town, and Babe doesn't buy into it wholeheartedly. Despite having heard from Fly how stupid sheep are, when he has a chance to meet one he treats it as Fly treated him, with courtesy and an open mind. Thus he learns from Maa, the sheep, that sheep have their own point of view, in which dogs are not the intelligent heroes they think they are, but are instead rude, brutal wolflike bullies. The sheep think this because that's how the dogs behave around sheep, never asking them to move around politely, but barking, yapping, nipping and crowding them just as wolves would do. From the dogs' point of view the sheep behave like a bunch of scared ninnies; from the sheep's frame of reference, the dogs behave like a pack of unmannerly killers - their panic reaction to dogs is fully justifiable.

Babe is now in the privileged position of knowing about two different mythologies on the farm without belonging entirely to either of them. As a newcomer to both, he can adopt whatever elements he chooses to make his own way in the world and fit into the farm culture. And he manages to do this by using intercultural communication skills. His eagerness to learn and explore, his willingness to take responsibility for furthering the good of the farm, earn him status among the dogs (and eventually among the humans as well), while his empathic listening skills and ability to adapt his language to the sheep's frame of mind bring

him kudos and obedience from the flock. His way of dealing with them is courteous and considerate, a pattern of open communication and positive persuasion, and they are happy to do what he asks because, as Maa says, he convinces them that he is "a nice little pig," instead of a fascist brute of a wolf, giving orders without explanation. Using his intercultural communication skills, Babe succeeds in fulfilling his ambition and becoming, not a sheep-dog, but a sheep-pig: a unique identity on the Hoggett farm. And not only does he achieve self-actualisation of his sheepherding potential, but he does it in a way that affects the overall culture of the farm. Fly observes the ease with which he persuades the sheep to do as he asks, and by the end of the story the dogs have adopted a more polite system of herding.

So far we have examined how Babe makes his mark in the animal world at the farm. But of course his continued existence as well as his success in becoming a sheep-pig, depends very much on his acceptance by the dominant human culture, which originally sees him as so many slices of bacon on the hoof. He succeeds not only because of his own abilities but because of Farmer Hoggett's special understanding of animals and way of communicating with them.

Farmer Hoggett is a unique communicator in the story. He never wastes a syllable; he acts, whistles for the dogs, responds to his wife's stream of talk with a yes or no, and, at the end of the story his highest, most extravagant praise for Babe's performance at the dog trials is "That'll do, pig. That'll do." Coming from the Boss, an actual repetition of words is a mark of extreme emotion. His words are always effective, like God's in the creation of the earth. "Let there be light" and there was light. "Away to me, pig," and a pig rounds up a batch of sheep and drives them all over the trial grounds. A man of action rather than talk, Hoggett's speech is never speculative or empty: when Hoggett speaks, each word is true. When Hoggett acts, he does so with surety of purpose: his gestures always contain depth and meaning.

The first time Hoggett encounters Babe is at the local harvest festival, where the piglet is due to be given to the person who guesses his weight most accurately. Hoggett picks the squealing frightened little beast up and it immediately calms down. They gaze into each others' eyes and Hoggett ventures a guess about Babe's weight; Babe gives way to an uncontrollable urge to relieve himself, Hoggett adjusts his estimate downwards, and wins the contest. From the very first his relation to Babe is a silent conspiracy, a wordless mutual understanding, based on close observation and humour. Babe's development into a sheep-pig depends heavily on this relationship; Hoggett's observations of Babe's behavior are the factor that permit him to get beyond the usual human/pig relationship (consumer and consumed)

and evaluate Babe's sheepherding potential without the occluding lenses of cultural stereotype. When he sees Babe following Fly around as if he were another puppy, learning with her other pups to herd the ducks and chickens, obeying human commands, Hoggett does not try to impose more usual porcine behavior but lets Babe do what he likes, in order to fulfill his unusual potential and achieve his self-actualisation needs. Hoggett gives the command for Babe to join Fly in the truck to the flock of sheep, Hoggett begins to train Babe for the great sheep-herding trials, and Hoggett (with his wife's acquiescence) allows Babe into the house in the evenings, giving him the status of a dog-equivalent. Hoggett's observational powers, curiosity and open mind are the qualities that allow him and his sheep-pig to thrive in an unusual symbiosis.

For his part, the quality of Babe's relationship with Hoggett that enables him to thrive is trust. Never once suspecting that he is originally destined to become Christmas dinner, Babe is happy to exist happily, adopt The Boss's values and goals as his own, explore his environment and powers, and find his place in the world. Nobody on the farm can bring themselves to mention the fact that pigs are supposed to be eaten; when Fly's pups first hint at this she hushes them, thinking it too cruel a thing to say to a lonely young piglet, and eventually nobody thinks about eating Babe at all - he proves his individuality and value to the farm so effectively that even Mrs. Hoggett, whose life revolves around cookery, ceases to have visions of hams, bacon and sausages filling up her larder. Babe's naiveté about his assigned role on most farms is his saving grace; he has a vision of himself as an active protector of livestock, rather than provender, and his trust of The Boss is what encourages him to work hard to make that vision into reality. As proof of this, let's look at what happens to Babe when, on the eve of the sheepherding trials, the housecat spills the beans and reveals the usual fate that awaits young porkers.

The housecat is the communications villain of the story; feeling threatened in her supremacy among the animals allowed into the house, she wreaks the maximum damage possible to the relationship between Babe and the Boss in hopes that this will destroy Babe's confidence and will to succeed. She manipulates him, slyly reminding Babe of the usual farm hierarchy, in which animals are valued only as far as they provide services or fodder for the humans; the dogs are shepherds, the chickens provide eggs, the cows give milk, she herself gives aesthetic pleasure, and pigs provide pork. Her message to Babe is that he may think he is a sheep-pig, but he's really just a pair of walking hams; soon the humans will tire of his antics and kill him. In essence, the cat is a trickster. Tricksters are often animal in mythologies, and this cat is both clever and malicious: she tells the truth in her

communication role between the god-like Farmer Hoggett and Babe and facilitates the overturn of the natural order. This occurs both figuratively and literally as the scene unfolds into a penultimate chaotic event where the Hoggett household is completely disassembled and Babe is left to carry the blame. As with other tricksters though, the role of the cat is ultimately positive in that it requires the overturning of order for a new and more truthful equilibrium to be reached.

This news that the cat imparts has a devastating effect on our hero - that the dominant culture could possibly see him only as a main dish is horrible beyond belief. What were trust and a spirit of cooperation and experiment become betrayal, satanic duplicity, and evil exploitation. Thinking that his trust in The Boss was misplaced, Babe loses the will to compete in the trials, to eat, to live. He develops a fever and depression, and in fact is all set to gratify the cat and perform badly the next day, which would prove to the Boss that he's just an ordinary pig after all - fit for the larder but nothing fancier, satisfying the old stereotype. When the farmer tries to feed him or keep him warm he interprets these acts as expressions not of affection but of a mere interest in his future dinner. The only thing that can save the situation, change Babe's point of view and restore his trust is an entirely disinterested demonstration of love. Fortunately, Farmer Hoggett, that man of no wasted words or motions, realises this in time, and performs his leaping, singing clog dance for the sick pig. When he finishes he looks around and finds Babe gone: to the kitchen, to eat his dinner.

This exchange is particularly important. It comes at the crisis of the plot, at a point where Babe's faith in his ability to belong to his new culture is shattered, and it manages to restore that faith. The farmer's song and dance, so utterly out of character, appear gratuitous until we realise that this is the only way he can express his love for Babe and have it accepted; his previous consistent communication pattern, of highly effective monosyllabic utterances, make it all the more unusual and credible. Since his words and actions have always been simple and effective in the past, this sudden plethora of motion, emotion, and song have a believability that they would lack in a more chatty or demonstrative man. Babe understands their import, believes them, and responds in a way that Farmer Hoggett, superlative stockman that he is, understands in turn; his restored appetite shows that he is a happy pig, feeling loved and valued for his own sake, ready to resume his shepherding project and his unique place in the dominant culture.

This grand gesture by Farmer Hoggett is a most significant and cumulative communicative event, that provides a central pivot in the narrative and illustrates a key lesson in the movie: the dominant culture must cherish the minority for its own sake rather

than from motives of self-interest. This becomes even clearer if we contrast the intercultural journey of Babe with the case of another animal trying to fit into life on the farm in a way that defies stereotypes - the duck, Ferdinand.

Ferdinand is like a Babe without the trust and naiveté that allows Babe to develop. He knows all too well what Mrs. Hoggett plans for him. For Christmas dinner Mrs. Hoggett demands a duck, and all the animals watch aghast as the Boss goes to the duck shed with an axe; they recognize the instrument and know what it does. Up to this point Ferdinand has tried to persuade the humans of his usefulness to them as an alarm clock, rather than dinner; hence his comic attempts to sabotage the alarm clock with Babe's help, and his frantic dash to wake up before the rooster every morning, to beat the rooster on to the roof and greet the dawn with his peculiar ducky crowing. He has tried to assimilate by imitating another species, rather than by developing his own unique qualities, but the Christmas Dinner Incident shows that he is still just a duck, and still disposable. He has nothing to offer the farm aside from his own duckly nature, and realises that it's only a matter of chance that his friend Roseanne becomes dinner instead of him.

Ferdinand's awareness that his very identity as a duck dooms him makes him all the more unhappy and frantic. He knows that his imitation of the rooster is just a plan for survival rather than a way of finding a new place for himself within the hostile dominant culture; he's too busy surviving to explore and develop his other abilities. It's dangerous to be a duck; it's unnatural for him to be a rooster; that is why he runs away. Although he returns at the end of the film, presumably to live happily ever after on this strange little farm, his place in the culture is not secure. He is neither duck nor rooster, neither assimilated nor free of the dominant culture, but is rather confused, perching precariously on the roof with a foot in both worlds. Knowledge and worldliness creates this situation of both instability and foresight: something that Babe's naivety protects him from.

Ferdinand provides a most interesting case study in intercultural mal-adaptation: gifted with both foresight and knowledge (two qualities Babe, for all his intelligence, lacks) his journey to conditional intercultural acceptance is through friendship and loyalty (with Babe), and humor. His comedic potential as a quirky off-sider allows an uneasy equilibrium to be held between his multi-faceted identities. He cannot escape the farm: he is now dependent on it. His relationship will always be uneasy and contingent, with the contradictions inherent in his situation occasionally brought together in odd moments of insight, subversion and comedy.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the *Babe* story so far has aimed to present the flavor of the movie, and provide a reading which deciphers some of the themes of the movie and motives of the characters. In this discussion we now aim to read the movie back into some of the larger inter-cultural contexts into which we believe it speaks, and by doing so, show how the movie can be used to tease out its inter-cultural themes and educate about intercultural adaptation issues.

The United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Australia are all countries whose dominant English-speaking cultures express considerable apprehension over the immigration of non-English speaking, non-European `Others'. The United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Australia were also all countries in which *Babe* did extremely well at the box office. In an era of globalization, with increased contact between cultures, the ameliorating image that *Babe* offers still provides significant soothing power.

The popularity of movies is often explained as vehicles for the fulfillment of widespread cultural desires (Gray & McGuigan, 1993). From this point of view, the success of the Fred Astaire - Ginger Rogers films in the 1930s makes sense; utterly unrealistic, with elegant sets, gorgeous costume designs, and characters who never seem to have heard about the Great Depression, their depiction of carefree, dancing, joking romances fulfilled American desires for a change from the more familiar breadlines, unemployment, and squalor of real life. But, what cultural wishes are fulfilled by *Babe*? What does this more gentle and hopeful tale tell us about the cultural anxieties of the time (and now), and what people wished for that they responded to so strongly? Why would we rather use *Babe* as an exemplar for intercultural adaptation, than say, *Independence Day*?

On one level *Babe* is simply a happy children's story that shows the rewards of good manners. Babe prevails in the end because he is, as a sheep observes at one point, a "nice little pig". This message about how to behave conveniently validates parental and western societal desires that their children learn how to be polite. At another and more pessimistic level the subtext of Babe is 'Adapt or Die'. The constant threat of death hangs over our feathered, fluffy and porcine friends at all times. For immigrants in a 'new' country or a minority culture the message is that survival is precarious and 'niceness' and assimilation is the route to acceptance. However, we would like to argue that *Babe*'s lessons are more complex than these more simplistic readings of the movie's text.

Babe is a uniquely different character, a piglet taken from a factory farm full of pigs, with their own piggy culture, and thrust into a world where he is the sole representative of his

species. Now in a totally new setting, Babe has to learn the languages and cultures of all his fellow creatures, including that of the humans who dominate the environment, and manage to adapt in such a way that he can both survive and express his own individual nature. At one level Babe may be seen as a post-colonial figure as he is 'writing back' into the centre of power with the language of his oppressors: he both modifies and subverts colonial power. Like other examples of postcolonial fiction, *Babe* involves the retelling of a familiar story from the perspective of an oppressed minor character in the story, in the language of the colonizers (Said, 1978). At another level, Babe provides a wish fulfillment fantasy for the dominant culture for the appropriate behaviour of minority cultures, and this may be why it was so deeply appealing: it is no coincidence that this appeal has been very strong in the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere. These are all democratic and permissive countries struggling with issues of indigenous peoples, women's rights, immigration from different cultures, and the complexities of forging comprehensive new cultures without stamping out what was valuable in the old.

The most obvious precursor to *Babe* and the book upon which *Babe* is based, *The sheep-pig* (King-Smith, 1983/1985), is George Orwell's *Animal farm (1946/1993)*. *Animal farm* was a scathing satire on the history and rhetoric of the Russian Revolution and the emergence of Stalin's Russia and the accompanying corruption of socialist ideals in the Soviet Union, and along with *Babe*, involved anthropomorphism, a farmyard setting, and both well-meaning and cruel animal and human characters. However in *Babe* the roles of the good guys and the bad guys are reversed with humans and pigs being fundamentally good, rather than the evil features they are given in *Animal farm.* The pigs begin to walk on two legs, not four, thereby taking on the worst characteristics of the greedy and corrupt humans as they take over the farm. *Animal farm* was also a children's story, a fairy story (its full title is actually *Animal farm: A fairy story*), with its origins in the folk and fairy tale heritage of the Grimm Brothers and with Aesop's fables, both of which also use anthropomorphism to communicate moral tales to children. *Babe* updates Orwell's political tale into the defining theme of this century – globalisation - and the issues that confront us now, but with a less cruel satiric barb.

So where does this animal fable lead? How can we translate it into practical guidance to the fulfillment of our cultural wishes? What are the implications of all this for multicultural societies and intercultural adaptation?

Babe can be seen at the macro level as having two main interest groups: the dominant cultures, and the more fragile minority cultures. *Babe* illustrates a great deal about what compromises dominant cultures expect and are comfortable with vis-à-vis minority cultures. The movie provides idealized preferences for intercultural adaptation strategies for each group.

As a wish-fulfillment fantasy, which of course *Babe* is, a series of strategies are available for the dominant culture. These can be read as being first, if a dominant culture truly desires to become multicultural, it must cherish the minority cultures for their own features, not for the sake of some imagined benefit it can get from them. Second, the dominant culture must be observant, watching and interpreting the events in its midst without being blinded by stereotypes. Third, the dominant culture must be open-minded and willing to change and experiment. And finally, the dominant culture must act in good faith; there can be no public relations messages devoid of action, no empty jargon-filled media releases, no communication without substantial action backing it up. The movie infers that a dominant culture that successfully follows this recipe will become more creative and will be rewarded. The dramatic climax of Mr. Hoggett and Babe, our new form of sheep-pig, winning the sheep-dog competition is the vivid illustration of this point.

For the subservient minority cultures (although numerically they far out number Farmer Hoggett and his wife), there is a strong message that members of a minority culture seeking acceptance into the larger society must also be willing to change. It appears, at first viewing, that it is the minority cultures that are expected to make the most compromises. But, the longer term implications of these compromises for the dominant culture are both significant and profound. These occur largely through the processes of intercultural adaptation and learning that occur on an emotional level through reciprocal gestures of trust and goodwill throughout the movie. In particular Babe symbolically personifies this trust when he implicitly expects all the other characters to value him for his unique identity (and this is made all the more clear when his trustful nature is compromised by the cat in a crucial scene which is discussed shortly). Babe, as well as being trustful of others' good nature, is also expected to fulfill the expectations of the dominant culture to deserve their trust. In particular the movie suggests that the minority culture must take on the dominant cultural norms of individualism and hard work that are fettered as ideal culture norms in many western societies. So, Babe is expected to develop his features to the best of his ability, thereby proving negative stereotypes wrong through hard work and good faith, and keeping the good of the larger society (the farm) at heart. Ferdinand and Duck's main character fault

reinforces this insight into *Babe*'s message regarding the virtue of hard work. Ferdinand is a late riser, and at a critical point in the story's development he decides to abscond. Babe, however, is a diligent little pig, hard-working, always enthusiastic and positive, and undoubtedly an early riser.

Thinking about others' interests is an importance part of the gesture and response rituals that pervade the movie between minority cultures and between the dominant and the minority cultures. The movie does not critique these ideals, but it does present them as a success story for adaptive transformation.

Of course, Babe's trust is built on profound naivety and his ignorance of his place in the food chain. His trust then may be seen as wildly misplaced, and this is no doubt the case for many individuals in minority cultures, but as we have mentioned, this is a movie-fantasy. Consequently it tells us about what we wish for inter-cultural adaptation rather than actual reality. Or, it communicates fundamental ethical and moral issues and contradictions that are not resolved in everyday life, but can be resolved, at least momentarily, in a work of art (Jameson, 1981).

One reason that the audience is able to suspend their disbelief about Babe's complete ignorance of his situation vis-à-vis being meat-on-the-hoof is the delightful character foils around him, who are very aware of their precarious situations and have evolved their own adaptation strategies. In this way the movie explores what happens when these fully aware individuals are either unable or unwilling to change. In particular, the less 'successful' attempt to adapt is shown by Ferdinand the Duck pretending to be a rooster. Here we have an animal that becomes something that he is not, a rooster, in order to avoid the axe. He is the story's 'Uncle Tom'. His life is precarious, his sense of self, his identity, is ambiguous and confused. The dominant culture can be both violent and unpredictable, and Ferdinand's identity is partially explained by the fear that he quite rightly feels: he is not a naive character like *Babe* as he is completely aware of his place in the food chain. His knowingness about his short life span and likely violent and ignomious end is made even more poignant and vivid by the execution of the duck Roseanne, his friend, early in the movie. His attempts to escape his fate, although comically rendered in the movie, are, like much comedy, also poignantly tragic.

The cat provides another anthropomorphic metaphor for survival for a minority culture. Always an outsider, watchful and clever, the cat is both admired and distrusted by the dominant culture. The cat is a loner, an individual, and an independent thinker, but also a conduit between two worlds because of her other-worldly qualities. The aesthetic beauty she

imparts gives her a foothold in the dominant culture and the internal sanctuary of the farm-house. She can retain a more stable identity than Ferdinand, who is always desperately trying to fit in. She is like a Cheshire cat, enigmatic, and balanced between the inside and the outside, poised to go either way. Her self-containment and confidence is the key to her success: she is what she is, and her relationship with the dominant culture is not contingent on the other animals. She is incapable of feeling confused and ambiguous; it is not in her catly nature. She provides a much slyer take on intercultural adaptation. The cat can exist and be herself, but she is never fully trusted by either the other minority cultures or by the dominant culture.

So, is the movie suggesting that compromise is the key to successful intercultural adaptation? If so, does it matter who 'gives away' the most of themselves? Is it through this 'giving away', that new hybrid identities (like a sheep-pig), or multi-cultural persons, are created? Gudykunst and Kim (1992) have suggested that the 'intercultural person' does develop these hybrid characteristics, and does have a huge potential for creating social change for positive benefit to all.

> As we come to terms with our own ethnocentricity and gain new perspectives and outlooks on the nature of culture, we gain an objectivity that comes from not being rigidly limited to one particular cultural group. Such an objectivity enables us to interpret and evaluate intercultural encounters more accurately and thus to act as a communications link between two cultures ... the intercultural person is capable of uniting and reconciling cultural differences and of playing a potentially invaluable role for positive social change (p. 254).

Both Babe and Farmer Hoggett change the dominant culture of the farm through their efforts. Although Babe shoulders the predominant responsibility for change, Farmer Hoggett is also transformed and at the end of the movie we have the distinct impression that even Mrs. Hoggett will be a little less likely to see pigs as so much bacon on the hoof. This is a profound shift in thinking considering the import previously allocated to one's place in the farm's food chain.

This positive shift in attitudes towards one-another, facilitated by the hero Babe, provides the feel-good central message of the movie. In this regard the movie illustrates a journey to optimistic hybrid-ness that many intercultural scholars also moot as being ideal.

But, the movie narrative offers us more than simple recipes for intercultural adaptation. It is a rich resource because it allows for a complex interplay by and about both the ideal and the less than ideal, and gives room to both possibilities. So, Babe's side-kick Ferdinand, for example, provides another way of seeing the dilemmas of identity sublimation. And these other characters provide a reality check: they are farm animals situated in the material and economic context of survival on a working farm. The social norms that arise from their place in the economic system proscribe both their personalities and their potentialities.

Despite a reading of *Babe* that can stress cultural imperialism (the emphasis on conforming to the work ethic, the importance of politeness, and the 'adapt or die' message) *Babe* retains a deep appeal because it is based on a very strong message about the need for simple affection, respect and love. One of the most evocative images of the movie is the slightly ridiculous dance of Farmer Hoggett to display his unconditional love for Babe. This is a key turning-point in the movie and of the message of successful intercultural communication. Affection without motive lies behind good communication, and actions do speak louder than words. In this regard, *Babe*'s narrative confirms the power of gesture (Mead, 1934) in intercultural adaptation and learning. Learning through gesture and response is at the heart of narrative and this seemingly little and unassuming movie. The narrative itself, as explained in the reading of the movie provided in this paper, provides a exemplar of a series of gestures and responses through which intercultural adaptation and learning occurs. The movie thus provides a useful learning tool to help students understand the power of gesture and response as an explanation for the transmission of culture and also a useful platform through which to debate the various strategies for intercultural adaptation highlighted in this paper.

Many educators use movies in the classroom to illustrate issues in such areas as business ethics (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2001), gender studies (Baker-Sheery et al., 2005), entrepreneurship (van Gelderen & Verduyn, 2003), leadership (McMahon & Bramhall, 2004) and more general social issues (Papademas, 2005). This paper provides an example of a movie that can provide lessons on successful intercultural communication. *Babe* provides us with a rich resource for the examination of the process of change and its pitfalls too. In addition we can see a great deal about what we would *wish* intercultural contact to mean for our communities, and this can provide a provocative and useful start to a discussion about intercultural issues and the development of intercultural skills. We hope that our reading of the movie presented here provides a platform for discussion and debate, not necessarily about the movie (this is obviously not a definitive reading as there can never be just one of those),

which we have both found to be delightful and have enjoyed watching again several times with our children, but about the nature of intercultural adaptation, its triumphs and its difficulties.

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