

UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE, ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

BACHELOR'S DEGREE STUDY PROGRAM

ESSAY - 7

COMPREHENSIVE ESSAY READING - Part 1

CULTURE, COUNTRIES AND LANGUAGE

[Instructions: Read the essay and when you encounter each set of questions, indicate your answer on the separate sheet.]

MODULE – 24

CHAPTER 1: A CHANGING WORLD – WHERE IS IT HEADED?

By Rick Benz

INTRODUCTION

The culture and language of today's world has caused many to pause in what they are doing in life to consider how it affects them. More and more we are finding ourselves confronted with new cultures and new ideas as the worlds shrinks. With the advent of jet aircraft that allow us to be anyplace on

the earth within hours, the lines have been blurred as to race and cultural identity.

In the past, the image of which culture is the best and which language is superior to others has drawn many down a road filled with racial discrimination and xenophobia. With technology bringing the peoples of the world closer, it was hoped that the diversity of culture and language would stimulate us as humans to appreciate the diversity of life and improve our interpersonal skills. When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, hope was given that advances would be made in these areas. Sadly, many have been disillusioned with the world we live in today.

Understanding more about the effects of culture and race in today's world may help us to broaden our outlook on who we are and where we fit in as part of the human family.

WHAT IS RACE?

Hitler put forth a dangerous myth about a superior race some years ago. The results of such thinking led to social upheaval and a world divided. Such thinking was not new and this mentality has not disappeared today. From discrimination against ethnic groups in Europe – such as the Gypsies and others – to race riots in the United States, humans have placed boundaries on what they think is acceptable. Look at how various language groups are viewed and you can see a clear distinction between those who are accepted and those who are not. “A symbolical-abstract language is the dominant sign of any culture. The language of any group is directly connected to the worldview of the group. Humboldt wrote regarding language: ‘Die Ver-

schiedenheit der Sprachen ist nicht eine Verschiedenheit an Schällen und Zeichen, sondern eine Verschiedenheit der Weltansichten.' ("The difference in languages is not a difference in sounds and signs, but a difference in worldviews")."¹

Basing such assumptions on language, culture, and where one was born, millions have been relegated to the sidelines, so to speak. Placed in an inferior position, they and all their accomplishments are looked down on with disdain.

What many fail to understand, though, is that no race on this earth can say that they have a pure race with standard physical features. This is because "there is no naturally occurring group of people in which all the members are uniformly alike in such features."² In fact, according to the book *The Human Species*, "Not only are there no populations in Europe today of which most of the members are of one type; there never were such populations."³

In recent years there has been a great influx of refugees moving from one country into another due to war, unemployment and natural disasters. These have brought along their beliefs, cultures and their languages. Recent statistics show that, worldwide, country after country has had to deal with such changes. In France, 8% of the population is made up of 4.5 million migrants according to a report in 1996. In Australia, 20% of those that live there are foreign born. Since 1975, 900,000 Southeast Asians have moved to the United States. Worldwide, people are on the move, and their influence on other cultures has prompted both positive and negative views.

Look at Africa and you will notice that one influential factor affecting this land was the influx of Muslims to the country. Some feel that the mixture and

interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims has contributed to the demise of institutions that for many Africans have long held a place in their lives. Others feel that it “brought with it new ways for the indigenous African to express not only their beliefs but also a more diverse range of patrons and audiences.”⁴

Recently in Toronto, the Pope put together Youth Day with the hope that this would unify youths from differing cultures in their worship of God. Whether this had the desired effects remain to be seen, yet around the world it shows that many see the need to bring together people from other cultures. Even though some of us may not agree with the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ movement, we do have to admire them for their recognition, over many years, that differing cultures are just one more beautiful aspect of this world we live in. As their *Awake!* magazine put it, “Your recognizing that all races are equal in the eyes of God can have a dramatic effect on the way you view yourself and others. It can move you to treat others with dignity and respect, to appreciate and admire their differences.”⁵

□ Which statement is the most accurate?

437. Some years ago, Hitler started out with a noble concept of the superior German race. The results of such thinking led to the creation of a healthy, strong race, but along with it social upheaval and world war.

438. If everyone accepted the notion that all races are equal in the eyes of God, this would have a dramatic effect on the way we view others and ourselves. It could move us to treat others with dignity and respect, to appreciate and admire their differences.

439. With technology bringing the peoples of the world closer, soon the diversity of skin colour, music, dress, history and language will be appreciated by all.

With differing views we might wonder, what does the observer look at? This differs, and yet it can play a crucial role in accepting and integrating with those whose language or culture is quite different. One source pointed out that when we look at culture, it might be described as the layers one might find in an onion. Each layer could be likened to the things we might observe. On one layer, it might include such things as food and language or style and architecture. This layer might be likened to the outer layer. Next would be that which connects with our morals and how we view what is wrong or right. Then we come to the innermost layer which would have to do with assumptions, such as how to handle problems that affect our everyday lives.

The inflexibility of some to accept other cultures was commented on by S.G. Summer with the concept of “Ethnocentrism,” in which he referred to people who think of themselves and their culture as the “center of the world.” This reminds us of those who for years thought the earth was the center of the Universe, with any dissenters being branded as heretics deserving of death.

Interestingly, the word “culture” originally comes from the Latin word “colere,” which has a positive sense. It means to foster, to build on and to cultivate. Over the years, the concept of this word changed and, with it, the way people looked at objects, status and values. Many feel that they don’t want or need the culture that foreigners bring with them. This has caused many problems. Today, countries have adopted tough measures for trying to keep out

foreigners. A *Time* magazine article mentions one high-ranking official who said, “We don’t want them to feel too comfortable because we want them to go back.”⁶

On the other hand, many organizations recognize the need to be more open to cultural diversity because of the marketing niche that has been created. Observing how the world today is interconnected by commerce, the advantages of creating new customer bases has not gone unnoticed. According to Ernest Thomson of Proctor and Gamble, “To succeed internationally, we need to understand the cultures of the world; and we have all the cultures of the world represented right here – a tremendous competitive advantage.”⁷

Is asking people to face up to the challenges of accepting other cultures and other languages demanding too much? Is it wrong to take pride in one’s place of origin, language or culture? In today’s world, these questions need answers.

CONCLUSION

Like language, culture is learned as we grow up and share ideas, customs and beliefs. Recognizing that other cultures exist and knowing more about them would go a long way towards avoiding the view that “my culture or my language is the best.” It has been said, “Culture is a lens through which we see the world.”⁸ This can sometimes interfere with our acceptance of other cultures. For example, in many European countries people are encouraged to have a conversation at mealtimes. Yet, in Africa children are discouraged from talking at mealtimes as this is seen as impolite. Or look at Switzerland, where you are required to apologize if you are a few minutes late for an

appointment, while in other countries someone might be an hour late and yet feel no need to do so.

This indicates that while we might view other cultures and their thinking as strange or wrong, rarely would we consider our customs as such. An anthropologist put it well, "The last thing which a dweller of the deep sea would discover would be water. He would become conscious of its existence only if some accident brought him to the surface and introduced him to air. ... The ability to see the culture of one's own society as a whole ... calls for a degree of objectivity which is rarely achieved."⁹

The key is learning to better appreciate the cultures of others. Building walls around us, yes, distancing ourselves from other cultures and languages, can only create serious problems. For example, look at how many myths there are about race. Some of these myths are the following:

- Northern Europeans are racially pure
- Jews are non-White
- The Portuguese are mulattos
- North Africans are black
- Italians have black ancestry
- Greeks are no longer Indo-European
- Sickle cell is an indicator of black ancestry 10

Sadly, ignorance crops up and, in turn, has caused many to believe such lies or to become paranoid. Feelings of hostility may even lead some to violence and genocide. Recently in Rwanda, people of similar roots yet with cul-

tural differences used violence to destroy one another, with estimates of nearly 1 million lives being lost.

Time and again, history has shown that humans have failed to broaden their outlook on life in trying to understand and trust others. How do we want to be viewed today – as tolerant or intolerant? Each of us needs to make self-examination and see where we stand on this. Being narrow-minded can rob us of the joy that we can experience if we are willing to accept new ideas and new ways.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the human race as a whole needs to be more balanced in how they deal with and view others. Oppression and mistreatment are often the end result of intolerance, and the future “remains unstable and dangerous.”¹¹ Reaching out to other people whose culture differs from our own would go a long way toward creating a unified world. As individuals we may not change the course of ethnic conflicts, yet each of us can be more trusting of others and display greater understanding of foreigners.

□ Which statement is the most accurate?

- 440. Reaching out to other people whose culture differs from our own would go a long way towards a unified world. As individuals we can change the course of ethnic conflicts because each of us can be more trusting of others and display greater understanding of foreigners.
- 441. For example, look at how many myths there are about race. Some of these myths are: Northern Europeans are racially pure, Jews are non-White, the Portuguese are mulattos, North Africans are black, Italians have black ancestry, and Greeks are no longer Indo-European.
- 442. Many organizations recognize the need to be more open to cultural diversity because of the marketing niche that has been created. More and more, the world today is interconnected by commerce, and the advantages of creating a new customer base have gone unnoticed.
- 443. Feelings of hostility may even lead some to violence and genocide. Recently in Uganda, people of similar roots but with cultural differences used violence to destroy each other, with estimates of nearly 1 million lives lost.

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MODULE – 25

CHAPTER 2 – Multiculturalism and Education

By Amos Clarkson

Introduction

In times past, teachers were educating children who all basically came from similar backgrounds, yet more and more we see children from many different cultures in the same classroom. This modern multicultural classroom has an inherent diversity and the differences seen can be a divisive factor. As teachers, we need to work to use multicultural education as a unifying factor. We need to make our students aware that the differences add flavour to our life experience and can encourage positive change in society and, of course, in the classroom. We can work to introduce our students to cultures other than their own and allow them to understand the similarities between all peoples and to value the differences as well.

Multicultural education is based on six main principles, as follows:

Students...

- learn how to handle diversity
- learn a feeling of fellowship and teamwork
- learn solidarity
- learn to know and respect other cultures
- understand the narrow-mindedness of nationalism
- understand the narrow-mindedness and risks of prejudice and racismⁱ

Multicultural education requires of the teacher:

- That his basic assumptions are not based on only one culture
- That he is on the alert regarding racism
- That he is vigilant with respect to stereotyping
- That he avoids exalting his own culture at the expense of another
- That he emphasizes the importance of tolerance and the feeling of fellowship
- That he is prepared to adopt changed methods of teaching where heavy emphasis is placed on teamwork and interrelations between studentsⁱⁱ

The historical roots of multicultural education lie in the civil rights movements of various historically oppressed groups. Many trace the history of mul-

multicultural education back to the social action of African-Americans and other people of color who challenged discriminatory practices in public institutions during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s in the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to Dorothy Blum and Carla S. Toenniessen, “As school populations become more culturally diverse, students need skills to accept and appreciate differences. Cultural diversity can create friction among students and result in a negative school climate, which may lower individual student self-esteem and inhibit learning. A student who does not feel accepted by his or her peers may exhibit the following behavioural responses: withdrawal, anxiety, disruption, aggression, increased absenteeism, or a decreased interest in learning. A program that develops pride in and awareness of cultural differences builds a positive school community that enhances student achievement and high self-esteem.”^{iv}

A multicultural education attempts to be inclusive and allow for all students to increase their awareness and appreciation of the differences and similarities amongst all people. Teachers must take these experiences and build on the students’ knowledge base so as to develop a better understanding of differences and similarities in our society. This involves having an understanding of the students’ family values and traditions. In order to accomplish this, the following needs to be ascertained:

- What is the country of origin of your students’ families?
- Are they immigrants?
- How long have they lived in the community?

- Do they maintain family ties to the mother country?
- What language is spoken at home?
- What foods do they like to eat?
- What holidays, or other traditions (religious or otherwise) do they celebrate at home?
- What do they want to be when they grow up?
- How is authority distributed among family members?
- What are the attitudes, expectations, and behaviours toward individuals at different stages in the lifecycle?
- What behaviours at home are appropriate or unacceptable for the students?

In order to ascertain the above you could use group activities. Perhaps discussions may be held in small groups or as a whole class. Caution must be exercised with direct questioning, as we must avoid putting any child on the spot or making them feel uncomfortable. The differences and similarities in their own classroom can then be discussed as a group.

Whenever possible acknowledge existing cultural values and practices, build on cultural strengths. This is important, since cultural factors such as family values, religious beliefs, and communication styles affect how education is accepted and internalized by students.

In the book *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, Kymlicka suggests that culture is crucial to and necessary for individual freedom. He argues that we must look more closely at where beliefs, self-respect, and ideas about value

come from and concludes: “The decision about how to lead our lives must ultimately be ours alone, but this decision is always a matter of selecting what we believe to be most valuable from the various options available, selecting from a context of choice which provides us with different ways of life. This is important because the range of options is determined by our cultural heritage”.^v If we accept that this is the case, that our range of options is determined by our cultural heritage, this makes a strong case for multiculturalism because it can, if successfully implemented, enable a student to absorb the best from multiple cultures. This in turn will expand the range of options available to the student. It will also enable the student to better function in today’s multicultural environment as the student will have been exposed to different mindsets when younger and so will more readily adapt to a different mindset in their adult life.

□ Which statement is the most accurate?

444. As teachers, we need to work to use multicultural education as a uniting factor, making our students aware that differences add flavour to life and can encourage positive changes in society. We need to encourage our students not to view such differences negatively.
445. Attending a multicultural school has been known to raise prejudices that hinder students from functioning in today’s environment.
446. Students who have been exposed to different mindsets when younger will more readily adapt to different mindsets when they are adults – even if their parents or others corrupt their natural tendency toward acceptance of all cultures.
447. Whenever possible, it is not recommended to directly bring to the Students’ attention existing cultural differences. Of course, cultural values should be encouraged and this will build a stronger student bond. This is important since cultural factors such as family values,

religious beliefs, and communication styles affect how education is accepted and internalized by students.

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