

UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE, ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

BACHELOR'S DEGREE STUDY PROGRAM

ESSAY - 8

COMPREHENSIVE ESSAY READING - Part 1

Environmental Studies

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

MODULE – 26

CHAPTER 1 - “Why More American Students Need To Study

***CHAPTER 2 – Incorporating Cross-Cultural Issues and Diversity into the
ESL Curriculum***

Abroad – By Laura Rodgers

“Why are you wasting your time studying Spanish?” “You know, you can find people who speak English anywhere you go.” “Why do you want to go THERE?” I heard endless variations on these themes during the years that I was studying a foreign language and then planning to move to Ecuador to do volunteer work. All of this points to a prevalent attitude in the U.S. that

it's not necessary to experience other cultures up close. We live in a time, however, when the world is becoming increasingly interdependent. The economy is global and what happens in one part of the world can have a dramatic impact on the rest. Therefore, it is essential that American students enlighten themselves about other cultures by studying abroad.

Although the situation is improving, we can see the ethnocentric view that still pervades America reflected in the number of college students that choose to study overseas. During the 1998-99 school year, 113,959 American students studied in foreign countries. However, this is only 1-2% of the total number of U.S. college students. Equally interesting is the fact that the vast majority of these students chose to go to other developed western countries. The following were "the most popular destinations for American students who earned college credit for studying abroad in 1998-99: United Kingdom (27,720), Spain (12,292), Italy (11,281), France (10,479), Mexico (7,363), Australia (5,368), Germany (4,534)."¹ Consequently, of the small minority of American college students who study abroad, an even smaller number actually get a chance to experience and understand a non-Western culture.

Increasing Foreign Language Skills

Perhaps the best way to truly understand another culture is to learn to speak the local language fluently. Students often cite improving their language skills as one of their major reasons for studying abroad. How can

they be more successful in accomplishing this goal? Obviously, a language immersion experience will be more beneficial to intermediate level students since they already have a framework of knowledge on which to build. Since they are already familiar with the basic grammar structures and pronunciation, it will be easier for them to “plug in” new words and phrases. By putting themselves in a situation where they are surrounded by the target language, intermediate students can often make rapid progress. In fact, those who later go on to use a foreign language professionally almost invariably feel that they could not have become fluent without a prolonged language immersion experience. Often, it is not until people get to spend some time outside their native countries that they see how their culture has restricted their viewpoint. Usually, upon returning home, they find themselves more accepting of other ways of doing things. Personally, I’m convinced that even though I spent four years studying Spanish, I wasn’t able to “feel” the language and think in it until I had spent at least a year abroad. “Second Language Acquisition And Study Abroad: The Immersion Experience,” confirms this point: “A prior study shows that the immersion experience proved to be an important part of L2 acquisition for 90% of language professionals, and 80% do experience it before teaching the language.”² So we can deduce that immersion is almost essential for real fluency. It also appears that it is the most efficient way for intermediate level language students to progress. “Maintaining Foreign Language Skills,” highlights this point, stating: “Results of the Ottawa-Carlton French Project, for example, indicated that the students enrolled for one year in a program where half of

each day's classes were conducted in French, made more progress than students exposed to the same number of hours' instruction spread over two years (Stern, 1976). Intensive programs of instruction have been reported to yield better results than less intensive programs of the same number of hours of instruction."³ Language students overseas are not only exposed to much more of the target language but also hear it used in a variety of ways. Neither should we discount how much more motivation they have to learn quickly. Food vocabulary is much more important to the hungry student in Thailand than to his classmate in the States.

□ **Which statement is the most accurate?**

448. Immersion into a foreign language is the only way to achieve fluency. It also appears that it is the most efficient way for intermediate level language students to progress.
449. The most popular destinations for American students who earned college credits for studying abroad in 1998-99 were United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, France, Austria, Mexico, Australia and Germany.
450. Often when people return home from a foreign country they are more receptive to doing new things and accepting other people's ideas – they are not so close-minded.
451. During the 1998-99 school year, 113,959 British students studied in foreign countries. However, this is only 1-2% of the total number of U.S. college students.

Meeting the Needs of Global Business

Culturally competent people are also greatly sought after in the business arena. Since effective communication is so critical in business negotiations, those with international experience can provide a valuable service to their companies. As global trade continues to grow, especially with countries such as China, Japan and Korea, those familiar with the non-

Western world will see great opportunities open up to them. “The Need for Linguistic Proficiency in Global Business” comments on this point, saying: “Perhaps the most compelling reason for learning the language of one’s international business partner is that it provides considerable insights into that culture ... through its structure and vocabulary it reveals the important values found in the culture; it gives insight into how directly or indirectly people in a particular culture communicate with one another; and it reflects social realities, such as status differences, within a culture.”⁴ Thus, with the exception of being born into a particular culture, nothing will help a person to understand how the people think and feel like knowing the local language well. The goal of real communication is to be able to go beyond just understanding what people say. More important is what they mean. Many other countries seem to see the value of this kind of communication. A record number of foreign university students (547,867) chose to study in the U.S. during the 2000-01 school year. It is significant that most came from Asia. The majority came from the following countries: “China (59,939), followed by India (54,664), Japan (46,497), S. Korea (45,685), and Taiwan (28,566).”⁵ Apparently, the U.S. could learn from the value other countries place on communication skills in the business sector.

Self-Development

Perhaps the greatest benefit of living abroad is the opportunity to step outside one’s regular life and see it from a new perspective. Paul Brown, a study-abroad advisor for Clark Atlanta University, notes the following. “The

students we send abroad aren't always a polished, finished product ... They are usually students who have the ability but lack the confidence. Once they arrive in the country, we see a transformation. They begin seeing themselves as world citizens and stop seeing America as the beginning and the end of everything".⁶ Obviously, people who have developed this kind of flexibility will benefit in many ways. Students who study and improve their command of a foreign language while overseas reap additional educational rewards. A recent study highlights the following: "Students who had taken no foreign language in high school achieved a mean score of 366 on the verbal portion of the SAT, and 409 on the math portion ... students with two years of foreign language showed more dramatic increases (417 and 463). Each additional year of language study brought a further rise in scores, with students who had studied a language for five years or more achieving an average score of 504 on the verbal and 535 on the math portion of the exam."⁷ So we see that students who are willing to make the move overseas come home with greater mental flexibility and a more global outlook on life.

Conclusion

As we have seen, due to entrenched attitudes, relatively few American students choose to study abroad. It is my hope that educators will keep in mind all of the personal and employment opportunities awaiting students willing to go overseas. With encouragement, many more young adults can learn to walk comfortably in a larger world.

□ **Which statement is the most accurate?**

452. Students who had not taken a foreign language in high school achieved a mean score of 366 on the verbal portion of the SAT and 409 on the language portion ... students with two years of foreign language studies showed more dramatic increases (417 and 463).
453. As global trade continues to grow, opportunists will see the need and value of learning a new language. However, in countries such as China, Japan, and Korea, English is all that is needed in order to participate in trade relations.
454. The goal of real communication is the ability to understand what people say, as well as what they mean. Many other countries seem to see the value of this kind of communication.
455. All students who studied a language for five years or more achieved an average score of 504 in math and 535 in the verbal portion of their exams.

MODULE – 27

CHAPTER 2 - INCORPORATING CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES AND DIVERSITY INTO THE ESL CURRICULUM

- By Kathleen Firrantello

INTRODUCTION

Today's ESL classroom is a virtual melting pot of cultures, languages, religions and gender. These factors all influence learning and behavior on the part of both student and teacher. Teachers must take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity that exists in their classroom in order to reach the hearts of their students and make a difference to their lives. Thus, we will teach in a manner that is conscious of ways in which we might be offensive to our students, as well as incorporate culture into language teaching. Remaining aware of our students' values, beliefs, backgrounds and

experiences, we develop lesson plans that will enhance our approach and the learning environment of the student.

STEREOTYPES AND HOW THEY AFFECT LEARNING

There is no room or excuse for intentional gender, cultural, disability or language stereotypes in the classroom. While we cannot confront and destroy every stereotype, as we endeavor to become culturally aware there are things we can do to cope with some of the problems created by such stereotypes on the part of both the students as well as the teachers.

Teachers of English who are not native to the country they are teaching in are often viewed as outsiders, even when they speak the language of that country fluently. I have traveled extensively and observed this to be the case in such places as Ireland, small villages of Nova Scotia and other communities in the United States, especially in the South, where Northerners may even still be considered “Yankees.” Imagine how much more difficult it is when one does not speak the language fluently of the country they are in or observe the customs when possible. One writer commenting on foreign teachers in Japan noted that children will often “point their fingers at them ... yelling ‘hey, there’s a foreigner!’(gaijin).”¹ Often their thinking has been influenced by past events in history, particularly world wars, in which the enemy, on *both* sides, was stereotyped.

In order to counter preconceived ideas and misconceptions, Mr. McKenna suggests the importance of “thinking and acting locally,”² taking into consideration the time and place that one is currently in and not all the wounds of the past. In addition, he encourages “showing students your real daily life,”³ by means of pictures, mementos, postcards, and money used in your country. We can even use music to break down barriers in the ESL classroom. Music is part of the human experience, and with access to the Internet and foreign music distributors, English lyrics are well known to speakers of foreign languages who can often sing popular songs, even without knowing what the words mean. Music speaks to the heart and soul of people and can be used effectively to teach the language. According to Kevin Schoepp of Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey, music can be used as follows:

- “To practice a language point, lexis, etc.
- To focus on common learner errors in a more direct way
- To encourage extensive and intensive listening
- To stimulate discussion of attitudes and feelings
- To encourage creativity and use of imagination
- To provide a relaxed classroom atmosphere
- To bring variety and fun to learning”⁴

With music, we can utilize a resource we have in common, helping our students to embrace diversity and the differences each one brings to the classroom, while at the same time having a good time.

CULTURAL FACTORS AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE ESL

CLASSROOM

Since millions of people want to learn English, the ESL classroom is a magnet for attracting a variety of students with varying cultural backgrounds. Through training and experience, one is able to navigate through the sea of diversity with little difficulty. However, problems can and do arise. Mary McGroarty of Northern Arizona University relates several experiences that I found most enlightening. One particular area she focuses on is gender related issues, particularly as they relate to those in western countries that speak English and those from Middle Eastern countries who do not. She discussed the importance of finding out if students have participated in classroom instruction where both males and females were present. This would be important to ascertain before using teaching techniques involving group work and interaction. For students whose culture imposes restraints upon such interactions, such class work will be very uncomfortable. She tells the story of an ESL class she was teaching and how after she “put the desks in a circle to promote interaction and communication” ... she was “concerned to see that, after a few minutes, one of the men in the class turned nearly rigid and stared straight ahead.”⁵ When asked what was wrong, she relates, the student said “that with the class sitting in a circle, and thus moving their heads to look at each other when conversing, he was sure the other men were looking at his wife, a behavior he considered inappropriate.”⁶ Had she taken into account his cultural background, she notes that she might have

been able to alleviate the stress that was caused by her configuring the classroom in a circle. She also would have been able to incorporate into her lesson plans the reason and purpose for configuring her classroom in such a way and what she hoped to accomplish by doing so.

Emphasizing the importance of understanding gender related issues and their impact on learning, she notes the differences between women in the United States and women who have immigrated to the United States from other countries, particularly from the Middle East. Mixed-gender interaction is uncommon. Culture again affects learning. While women in Western cultures are encouraged to pursue their goals and aspirations – including education and careers – foreign women have been discouraged from pursuing an education, speaking up for themselves, learning to read and write, and working outside the home. They will usually be uncomfortable in taking an active role in the ESL classroom. Such women may also have “ambivalent feelings about speaking English, due to resistance to the identities others were creating for them, not from lack of motivation.”⁷ In such cases, “teachers can also make special efforts to structure activities so that all learners, not just those who volunteer, have equal opportunities for practice and discussion.”⁸

Sensitivity has to be displayed on the part of the teacher in terms of topics for conversations, role-playing and language practice in the ESL classroom. Issues dealing with the home, jobs and family might be very difficult for those who are refugees and whose “families are frequently broken up during the flight from danger zones.”⁹ Topics dealing with food, shopping

and cooking might have to include the dietary restrictions students abide by due to their religion and country of origin, such as abstaining from pork and/or beef, as well as the types of cooking facilities they are familiar with. Incorporating such cultural issues into our curriculum will serve to embrace the differences in our students rather than to disparage them. This in turn can foster healthy and correct views of cultures different from one's own as students interact and learn from one another. At the same time, through language learning, the students will learn a new culture, one that is decidedly different from their own, without feeling that their own culture is being berated.

□ **Which statement is the most accurate?**

- 456. Teachers need to display cultural sensitivity toward those in the classroom. Through the process of ESL, a new culture emerges with which students can identify, or at least gain some understanding of.
- 457. A person's mind is in a sense the centre of his identity, so if a person thinks in Chinese in order to speak Chinese, one might say that he has, in a way, almost taken on a Chinese identity and should therefore eat only Chinese food.
- 458. Emphasizing the importance of understanding gender related issues and their impact on learning, there is a difference between women born in the United States and women who have immigrated to the United States, particularly from the Middle East. Mixed-gender interaction is common in the Middle East.
- 459. Teachers of English who come from different countries than the one they are teaching in are often viewed as outsiders, until they speak the language of that country fluently.

Language and Culture

Are we able to teach language without teaching culture? The very nature of language involves identity with a group of people who use that language and, consequently, a culture. Therefore, while displaying cultural sensitivity toward those in our classroom, through the process of ESL a new culture will be emerging for our students to begin to identify with or at least have an understanding of. This does not mean they will necessarily adopt that culture for themselves by virtue of speaking the language.

Motivation to learn a language can be for a variety of reasons. I learned American Sign Language to communicate with my sister, and so I feel a real kinship toward that community since my sister is part of it. I have learned Spanish in order to be a teacher to Spanish speakers, and have a particular affinity for this culture and care about them as a people. In both cultures, I have endeavored to learn the mode of acceptable behavior, styles of communication, history, rules about body language and eye contact; in addition, with the latter, I've enjoyed their food, music, and variety of cultures within a culture. Others learn language for purely functional purposes, such as obtaining employment, communicating with neighbors, landlords, shopkeepers, the business community, etc. Such learners are not necessarily concerned with the culture their newfound language is exposing them to, or interested in identifying with it. For many, they can maintain their own culture, live in their own communities, and never have to become fluent in the target language of this country. While I feel we cannot govern a student's feelings about the language they are learning, we can and do expose them to culture, which is intertwined with the very words we use.

CONCLUSION

Whether or not our students choose to gain more knowledge of the target language they are learning, or to adopt and identify with this culture, will be an individual decision depending on their motivation. It has been noted that to “speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language, and thought is extremely powerful. A person's mind is in a sense the centre of his identity, so if a person thinks in French in order to speak French, one might say that he has, in a way, almost taken on a French identity.”¹⁰ This is indeed often the case with second-language, native-like speakers who are able to move quite seamlessly between two cultures. However, this is not always the goal of the ESL student. In any event, sensitivity to the culture and diversity that exists in our classrooms, and the effect these have on the learning environment, cannot be minimized and will actually work to the advantage of all when taken into account.

□ **Which statement is the most accurate?**

460. There is no room or excuse for intentional gender, cultural, disability or language stereotypes in the classroom. We should confront and destroy all stereotypes. We must also endeavor to become aware of the many things we can do to cope with some of the problems created by both students as well as teachers who stereotype.
461. Today's ESL classroom is a virtual melting pot of cultures, languages, religions and gender. These factors all influence learning and behavior on the part of both student and teacher. When teachers take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity that exists in their classrooms they will reach the minds of their students and make a difference in their lives.

462. It is quite common for people to maintain their own culture, live in their own communities, and yet become fluent in the language of this country.
463. Music is part of the human experience. Because of access to the Internet and foreign music distributors, it is not rare to witness foreigners singing foreign lyrics of popular songs without even knowing what the words mean.
464. Whether or not our students choose to gain more knowledge of the new language they are learning, or whether or not they choose to adopt and identify with its culture, is the responsibility of each ESL teacher. This is not for the students to decide individually; the teacher must be the motivating force.

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