

Elt as a Tool to Bridge Cross-Cultural Gaps

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a part of an ongoing research, namely “AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFL LEARNERS IN A MULTICULTURAL ELT ENVIRONMENT: THE CASE OF A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN MACEDONIA”. In this part of the study I tried to answer the question, “Can we use ELT to bridge cross-cultural gaps?”

My premises are;

-Language and culture are reciprocally inextricable. Language is the biggest conveyor of culture. Learning a language is learning that culture. This can be evidenced that members of similar cultures learn each other’s language more easily than members of remote cultures.

-English has long been a lingua franca in many parts of the world. The status English language gained today makes it unavoidable in school curricula worldwide.

-Our virtually shrinking world faces problems among its various ethnic groups. Misconceptions, prejudices, or stereotypes are prevalent in today’s multicultural world.

-One aspect of school education is to help solve the problems of society.

Following this thought sequence I asked the research question: Can ELT be used to facilitate its learners to overcome cultural barriers? Can we use ELT to bridge cross-cultural gaps?

To explore the question, in the beginning of the academic year 2012-2013, I first added an extra line into the aims section of my annual plan as; “to develop better cross cultural understanding among students.” To achieve this, I planned to use various cross-cultural materials in my classes. Our course-book “Solutions” has been a great help as it has a lot of direct culture related topics. As the implementation of the plan, we studied culture, its aspects and elements like music, food, clothes, reactions and gestures in various instances. As a final stage I conducted a questionnaire to test the change in their perception of the “other.” The analysis of the questionnaire gave encouraging results. Students developed more acceptance towards other cultures.