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INTERCULTURAL TRAINING WITH FILMS

Films are a great medium to use not only to practice English but also to facilitate intercultural learning. Today English is a global language spoken by people from many countries and cultural backgrounds. Since culture greatly impacts communication, it is helpful for teachers to introduce lessons and activities that reveal how different dialects, forms of address, customs and other cultural elements influence interaction among different groups. Numerous films contain excellent examples of intercultural communication and are highly useful resources for teachers. Additional reasons for teachers to incorporate films in class and encourage their students to watch movies in English include:

- Films combine pleasure and learning by telling a story in a way that captures and holds the viewer's interest.
- Films simultaneously address different senses and cognitive channels. For example, spoken language is supported by visual elements that make it easier for students to understand the dialogues and the plot.
- Students are exposed to the way people actually speak.
- Films involve the viewers, appeal to their feelings and help them emphasize with the protagonists.
- DVDs usually come with subtitles in English, which facilitates understanding and improves reading skills.

Culture, according to one definition, is the values, traditions, customs, art and institutions shared by a group of people who are unified by nationality, ethnicity, religion or language. The language teaching profession's interest in cross-cultural communication has increased during the past decades. According to Kramasch (1995), this development is due to political, educational and ideological factors; even though politicians might feel that learning a foreign language will solve socioeconomic problems, educators think that for that to happen a language course must contain legitimate cultural content. Kramasch (1995) thinks that in the future the language teacher will be defined "not only as the impresario of a certain linguistic performance, but as the catalyst for an ever-widening critical cultural competence."

Intercultural topics that show how people from different backgrounds communicate and interact are becoming more prominent in language teaching. Teachers can benefit from the treasure trove of films that deal with subjects like immigration, xenophobia, adjusting to a new culture, or

the dilemmas faced when one belongs to two cultures. Although films cannot substitute for actual interaction with members of other cultures, they can provide useful preparation for those encounters by fostering understanding and developing sensitivity. “Learning about stereotypes, ethnocentrism, discrimination and acculturation in the abstract can be flat and uninspiring. But if we experience intercultural content with our eyes and ears, we begin to understand it.” (Summerfield 1993) Intercultural contact through films enables students to understand other people’s actions and to have empathy with members of minority groups. Films also vividly represent intercultural misunderstandings and the roots of racism.

There is a wide variety of films with intercultural themes, and the teacher must consult reviews or see the movie firsthand to determine if it is appropriate for the desired lesson.

Depending on the teaching aims and objectives, the class might watch a complete film or only parts of it, as one or two scenes can be sufficient to illustrate a linguistic or cultural point. The following pre-, while-, and post-viewing activities prepare students to discuss films and individual scenes in the classroom.

Pre-viewing activities elicit what students already know about a topic and make the actual viewing of the film more meaningful. When discussing stereotypes as a previewing activity, students can describe how they view a person from a particular ethnic group or minority. While-viewing activities provide an opportunity to deepen understanding of the film and conduct a comprehension check. Post-viewing activities allow students to check their comprehension and use the new language they have learned. Students can also watch the film, prepare the project and produce the summary report that will eventually be presented in front of the whole class. This assignment is suitable for intermediate and advanced students.

Due to the globalization, presentations in English are becoming more and more common in academic and professional life, which makes it necessary for students to develop their presentation skills. For the final stage of the project, students should be introduced to the features of a good presentation, including how to begin and end, include and refer to visuals and signposting, which is informing the audience about the main points you will cover and then referring to those points during the presentation.

1. Kramsch, C. 1995. The cultural component of language teaching. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*: 8-92

2. Summerfield, E. 1993. Crossing cultures through film. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.