

## INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION-SUPPORTED BY CULTURAL- INTEGRATED PROJECTS

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**Abstract:** *Most often students are not interested in reading the piece of literature assigned by their teacher because they cannot identify with that particular work. Teachers of English as a second language (TESL) should teach the language in the context of its culture. Such an approach gives students, a familiar perspective of the world. Introducing students to the cultural context of the time is an extremely important teaching goal. This paper explores the benefits of a motivational teaching approach of a novel using New York city as a cultural context. Two Montreal four year secondary school groups were reluctant to reading Edith Wharton's Age of Innocence till the task was presented as part of a cultural project, a visit to New York. Students who finally received high grades were to be included in the project. At the end of the trip, these students had to compare their reading impressions on New York to their perceptions of the actual New York culture. Students benefited of deeply meaningful learning as they were connected with the culture of the city. Writing their final impressions was a reflection over their global understanding of the culture, not only about the past but also about the present.*

**Keywords:** *teaching; intercultural; perspective; education*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Most often teenagers are reluctant to study topics that they do not personally identify with. They lack motivation, interest and do not make much effort to get involved in the lesson. Such experiences lead teachers to avoid certain classic literary texts. Even when choosing adolescent literature, not all students find those texts relevant and meaningful. In such cases, when planning the Learning and Evaluating Situation (L.E.S.), teachers need to consider a better way to structure their classes in order to enhance motivation. Many researchers have found their motivating way. The collection of the volumes entitled *Adolescent Literature As a Complement to the Classics* illustrates such approaches. Among them, John Kaywell thought of *Using Young Adult Literature to develop a Comprehensive World Literature Course around Several Classics* (Kaywell, 1995:111). Patrick Daniel explains her approach of *Using Killing Mr. Griffin as an Introductory Core Novel* in view of helping students "make connections to the characters in Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (Daniel, 1995:146). Many other researchers have followed this concept of using other works of interest to teenagers. Another way of motivating teenagers is by

integrating a cultural project while teaching literature. It contributes to both their personal and academic development.

### 2. THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When English teachers decide on the syllabus for the semester, they consider the criteria in the ministerial program, the specialization of the institution but also the type of study material (literary works). (Brown, 2001:72) thinks that motivation is difficult to install among students. He disagrees with some teachers' conclusions that "Motivation is the difference, I have heard people say, 'between success and failure. If they're motivated, they'll learn, and if not, they won't.'" Some other researchers, such as Gillian Lazar, insist on the importance of choosing the best way of presenting the outline of the course to students. He suggests the most relevant types of areas to be included in the lesson plan "biographical information about the author," "places, objects or other texts referred to in a text," "relationship of the text to the literary movements of its time," "historical, political or social background against which the text was written" (Lazar, 2002:38). Some researchers think that not only deciding the

pedagogical goals of the lesson is important but also having students feel that

“the activities chosen to be worked on during the class are meant to have a direct impact on them”<sup>1</sup> [...] “it’s the case in which students consider certain activities as complementary to their education because they correspond to their personal interests” (translation mine)<sup>2</sup> (Archambault & Chouinard, 2003:222).

The International Baccalaureate program, whose main objectives focus on international education, enables “people to better understand and manage the complexities of our world” and allows students to achieve success “in school and in life beyond the classroom”(2014:3). This program also explains that teaching approaches that value education “as the transformation of personal understanding and collaborative construction of meaning” contribute more effectively to a student’s overall learning. Supporting the same concept, Kimmel and Volet (2012:227) also think that

intercultural interactions represent unique relational, socio-emotional and socio-cultural activities with their own, specific underlying cognitive, motivational and emotional dynamics.

Jin and Erben’s findings of their intercultural project show that their students “developed self-reflection capacities, critical thinking skills, and greater sensitivity and respect for intercultural differences” (2007: 291).

Brown (2001:72) talks about the “intrinsic” motivation as possible to be acquired by considering two paradigms “behavioral,” which “stresses the importance of rewards, and the cognitive one, which” focuses on the sources of motivation and the power of self-reward. According to Michael Byram (2008:104), when studying a language, the learner is required:

to be familiar with the native context, and by implication that there was just one native context: ‘every language is situated in a socio-cultural

context and implies the use of a particular reference frame which is partly different from that of the foreign language learner; socio-cultural competence presupposes a certain degree of familiarity with that context. (van Ek, 1986: 41).

It’s only teachers and parents who could offer students opportunities for such an intercultural learning horizon. Getting familiar with the cultural context of the language studied enlarges students’ worldview in more other ways.

### 3. THE STUDY

This study was applied to two Montréal four-year secondary school groups of students, which would correspond to the age group of 16-17 years old. Students had been presented the outline of the English course during that semester. They had started to read the novel Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*, much to the chagrin of the students. They were tasked with having had to summarize the chapters they had read and then to analyze the readings and participate in group activities and class discussions.

During the third class, I came with the news that the English department had just got the approval for our request to go on a five-day trip to New York as a reward for students with high results in the English course at the end of the semester. I could see an amazing and impressive change in their attitude. Their complete involvement was evident and assignments started to be submitted on time. Knowing that part of the project consisted in comparing their impressions on the New York city’s life to what they perceived about the old New York presented in the novel, they became very interested in learning about New York’s history and tried to spot any description of it in the novel.

### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Creating any kind of contextual opportunities for the topics planned to be taught ensures students’ motivation for learning. When conceiving the lesson plans, teachers should think of including access to learning possibilities about the social context referred to in the book. They need to evaluate all details related to their course and also organize the classes according to the principles corresponding to both behavioral and cognitive psychological viewpoints.

Students were rewarded with the trip offering them an opportunity for further learning about the

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<sup>1</sup> “[...] c’est à dire de percevoir que les activités proposées en classe constituent des moyens de les atteindre (Ames et Ames, 1991)” in original.

<sup>2</sup> “[...] c’est le cas lorsque les élèves considèrent certaines activités comme un complément valable a leur formation parce qu’elle correspond a leurs intérêts individuels” in original.

actual New York and also to explore such an experience as a group. All these aspects remind of Brown's presentation of the cognitive paradigm (Brown, 2001: 74).

Having to compare the old New York in the novel with the actual New York, students had the opportunity to express their views according to their way of thinking and feeling; likewise, they fulfilled their need for autonomy. A society that functions efficiently requires educated and experienced professionals with a wide view of the world.

The real-life in New York being analyzed was not only compared to the society as presented in the novel but also to the goals of the lesson. Interviewed, students showed much satisfaction willing to express themselves:

I loved to get so deeply involved in the project. I tried to visualize the story in the novel to make sure I was finally able to compare the old society to the actual. (Student 1)

It was not only about studying a piece of literature. Finally, it was about getting my mind and feelings better connected with the city in some way. It was also about me, about my perceptions. Really cool! (Student 2).

What I imagined is totally different. What I could see is modern, typical to the nowadays society. There is no feeling of high society and misogyny (Student 3).

Not only did students have a chance to visit New York, but they could also get into contact with people there as well as adjust their perceptions about the city to what they could really discover during their experience. Lara Lomicka notices Byram *et al.*'s statement that

the intercultural dimension in language teaching seeks to 'develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity' (Lomicka, 2009:1227).

Students could conclude that such a cultural framework is way more efficient to their understanding of the material studied during the English classes. They could relate their background knowledge to the real, actual culture they had learned about.

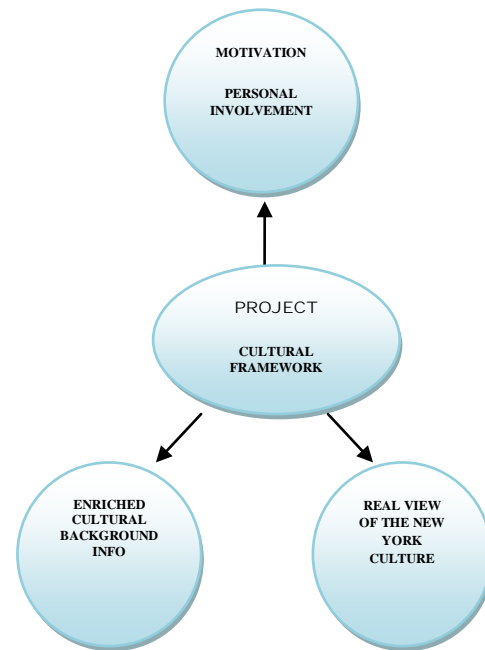


Fig.1. The impact of the intercultural project in the students' motivation

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