The Language Center is an independent unit which provides language services to students from all the faculties at the South-East European University. As a result, it is considered as the largest unit in terms of the number of language instructors who are a part of its organizational structure. In addition, this Center provides the highest number of the members of the Central Observation Team. The teaching staff strives to continuously develop professionally and keep up to date with the latest developments in the field of language teaching and learning. Excellence in teaching is the postulate which is the driving force in the Language Center’s mission statement. The large number of individuals who are involved in the decision-making process is another aspect that makes this center unique. Among the numerous services that the Language Center provides are:

For the students:
- General English course (levels 1-4)
- Academic English and Advanced Academic English courses
- English for Specific Purposes (for Computer Sciences, Communication Sciences, Business Administration, Law and Public Administration)
- Free IELTS testing
- Albanian and Macedonian courses
- English Drama Club
- Founding new clubs (Movie Club, Fashion Club, MAC Club, Tennis Club, Volleyball Club, Basketball Club, Ski Club, Music Club)

For the teaching community on campus, in the country and the region:
- CELTA course, awarded by the University of Cambridge ESOL
- Teacher training workshops and seminars based on need

For the community:
- iBT TOEFL preparation course
- Summer School for Intensive English and Albanian classes
- Language courses to different groups and individuals
Welcome to the global teaching and learning community of the Language Center at the South East European University. This bulletin provides an opportunity to break our silence as educators by sharing our teaching experiences and by learning from each other. We are confident that it will help us identify our strengths and weaknesses as well as give us extraordinary ideas about improving our teaching practices.

Our teaching practices and philosophies have transformed enormously in the last decade. The Language Center has played a tremendous role in transforming the teaching and learning practices from the common traditional perspectives to more contemporary ones. As portrayed in the cover photo, thus far we have managed to open the doors half way and by investing in educational development with projects such as this bulletin, we believe we can fully open them and join the world leaders in teaching and learning. The Language Center remains committed to transforming the way we teach and the way our students learn.

The bulletin is planned for publication once in each academic semester. Its main goal is to present the excellent teaching and learning results that the Language Center has achieved throughout the years of its existence. As a center, we will utilize it to present our research results and practical classroom experiences and share them with all passionate teachers around the globe. The bulletin provides a lively and informative discussion with a single purpose of offering ideas and insights to educators who are passionate about teaching. This issue delivers thought-provoking and inspirational articles on critical topics about teaching and learning. It is particularly special since we have invited dozens of teachers and scholars from different countries and disciplines to contribute with their articles with topics ranging from classroom experiences, teaching philosophies, application of theories in practice, to developing university partnerships.

What makes the bulletin even more unique is the international editorial board which is comprised of professors, scholars and teachers who are committed to the development of the concept of effective teaching in a global setting. They come from five different universities in Europe and the United States. I would like to wholeheartedly thank them for accepting my invitation to offer their input into the whole process and for making this publication possible. Similarly, the establishment of a peer-review process makes the publication particularly strong and credible.

We invite you to join us in this rather ambitious journey on changing and improving our teaching practices and help our students learn better. Please enjoy reading the articles and do not hesitate to send us any comments, questions or suggestions you might have. On behalf of the editorial board and the Language Center I thank you for your support and we hope you find the bulletin useful to your teaching career.

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Talking About Learning
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Message from the Provost

In the name of South East European University (SEEU), I welcome the initiative of our Language Center to further the discussion on teaching and learning through this bulletin “Talking About Learning”. SEEU is a young university (not even ten years old) yet we have established a name for ourselves in the Balkans and a locus of innovation and good practice. The number of “firsts” that we claim is impressive and growing each year: we were the first trilingual University in Macedonia and perhaps the Balkans; we may or may not have been the first Balkan university to adopt the credit transfer system known in Bologna parlance as ECTS (European Credit Transfer System); but I am most proud, of one new practice - we have made the students the center of our university, not just in name, but in practice.

The Language Center at SEEU has been at the leader of our efforts to introduce new methods of teaching, not just languages (Albanian, Macedonian, English), but all subjects. It has not been an easy task to return teaching and learning back to their proper places, but the results are palpable and immediate. Our students are subjected to vastly different pressures and stresses than those of a generation ago and it is always difficult to see the world from the perspective of a first-year University student in the year 2011. Still, once we close the door of our classroom, roll up our sleeves and see the eager eyes of young people ready to learn, we know why we chose to be teachers in the first place.

I am sure all teachers will find much useful information and new practices in this bulletin and I look forward to future issues.

Paul M. Foster
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
Vice Rector for Academic Affairs
South East European University
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Reflections on Learning - Teaching

I recall two early personal experiences that strongly influenced my current philosophy of learning-teaching. The first experience was my first summer job teaching swimming shortly after having earned my Water Safety Instructor (WSI) certificate from the American Red Cross. At that time, the Red Cross insisted that swimming instructors follow a prescribed set of instructional procedures, using command style teaching to introduce a strict progression of basic swimming skills such as breath holding, front and back floating, kicking, and gliding. As I think back, I recall this being one of the most frustrating teaching experiences I have experienced. Not a single child seemed to learn to swim that summer, despite my enthusiasm and efforts. I initially thought I must just not be good at this “teaching stuff.” It is a testament to my stubbornness, stupidity, or persistence that I didn’t quit teaching altogether at that point.

The following year during my undergraduate studies in physical education at SUNY- Cortland I enrolled in educational psychology. During this course I first read about contrasting theories of psychology ranging from Skinner’s operant conditioning to Rogers’ humanism. It was during this course that I began to appreciate the concept of learner-centered teaching. I got a glimmer of insight that learning doesn’t always require teaching nor does teaching always result in learning.

These two personal instructional experiences, one in which I played the role of teacher and the other where I was the student, provided me key information and ideas, first-hand experience, and a continuing set of opportunities to reflect on how teaching and learning may be related. It has taken me 35 subsequent years of interacting with infants to older adults to better appreciate and understand the implications from those early personal educational experiences.

I found that my educational experiences provided me with a readiness to embrace the work of L. Dee Fink, author of Creating Significant Learning Experiences (2003). On virtually every page of Fink’s text and other works, I have found nuggets of ideas and information that resonate with my own experiences. For those readers who are not familiar with Fink’s work, I strongly recommend his body of work which includes his hands-on work as a faculty for institutes sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). In the subsequent paragraphs, I summarize some of Fink’s particularly valid and key points.

I believe Fink’s integrated course (a.k.a., learning) design model is one of his most important contributions to learner-centered teaching (Fink, 2003, 2004). As the reader can note in Figure 1, Fink has proposed that any educational experience, whether it be a single learning experience, a course, or a four-year program curriculum, should be characterized by four key elements: 1) situational factors; 2) learning goals (or outcomes); 3) feedback and assessment; and 4) teaching-learning activities.

Figure 1. Key components of Fink’s (2003) integrated course design model

The situational factors an instructional learning designer should consider include a whole host of contextual qualities. Any learning “situation” is strongly influenced by the “who, what, when, where, why, and how.” Of course, characteristics of the learners (the who) that include the students’ age, cognitive capacity, general educational background, motivation, and specific prerequisite knowledge and skills are very basic elements that need to be considered in designing learning experiences. Equally important considerations include the “what,” or particular disciplinary content to be addressed. The time of day, day of week, season of the year (the when) also may influence the learning capabilities of students. The physical learning set up (the where) can facilitate the
types of pedagogy and learning capable in learning activities. Whether the learning experience is optional or required, face-to-face or online, should be considered in how the learning experience is constructed.

After considering these myriad and complicated situational factors, Fink (2003, 2004) says that, like one of Stephen Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (1989), “beginning with the end in mind” (p. 97), the first thing a learning designer needs to do is carefully and precisely describe the learning goals (a.k.a., outcomes) that learners are expected to achieve in the learning experience, whether that be a single class session, a term length course, or a four-year college program. Bowling Green State University as an institution has embraced the concept of learning outcomes since the 1990s, designing learning outcomes for courses, programs, colleges, and the entire institution. I describe learning outcomes to my students as the ways that those students are going to changed as a result of the learning experience, from the beginning of a session to the end or from the start of the semester to the end. I like to structure learning outcomes using a form, “Upon successful completion of this learning experience (or course), the student will...” Importantly, Fink (2003, 2004) has designed a “significant learning taxonomy” to decribe six critical learning goals including foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn.

Following the identification of the learning outcomes for a learning experience, the learning designer needs to construct the mechanisms by which the both instructor and learners will know the degree to which the outcomes have been met. Identifying the feedback and assessment procedures addresses two key elements of evaluation: accountability and facilitating student learning. In too many educational settings, the assessment and evaluation procedures are either an afterthought or only loosely connected to the learning outcomes. My personal pet peeve in higher education is the overwhelming use of point systems to derive grades. Such point systems rarely if ever relate directly to the achievement of the learning outcomes. Even at their best, the number of points cannot tell either instructor or students what students have learned or diagnose what they have to do to improve their learning, aside from simply earning more points. Feedback needs to be provided to students throughout their learning experiences as formative evaluation. Assessment needs to allow an evaluation of the degree to which the learning outcomes have been achieved by students.

The final element of Fink’s integrated learning design model, teaching and learning activities, too often is not tightly integrated with either the learning outcomes or the feedback and assessment procedures. Fink (2003, 2004) provides a three-part iterative model for engaging students in active learning within learning experiences. Figure 2 illustrates the three elements of active learning. I have already identified these three components previously in this essay from my own learning experiences: information and ideas, experiences, and reflections on learning. It is intriguing to realize that active learning must contain all three of these elements, but the experience may commence with any of these elements, not just with the traditional information and ideas.

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Teachers as Sources of Informal Social Support

Entering university is exciting. It also causes apprehension for many students. Do I fit in? Will I be able to pass my classes? Students who begin their academic journey vary in skills and motivation but it is as, if not more important what happens after the beginning (Brock, 2010). The quality and regularity of interactions between students, faculty, and staff impact the students’ experiences and influence their commitment and self-perceived fittingness to the university (Tinto, 1993). I propose that teachers can help students with positive appraisals of themselves by incorporating strategies of social support into their class routines.

Social support is an effective means to help people cope with upsetting circumstances (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002) and make them feel better— even physically and emotionally healthier (Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). Albrecht and Goldsmith (2003) have depicted social support as verbal and nonverbal communication, which helps manage uncertainty that a situation, self, other, or a relationship causes. Such communication functions to enhance another person’s perception of personal control over their life experiences.

Teachers have an important role as mediators of academic distress. Bippus et al. (2003) suggest that students are more motivated to interact with instructors they believe to be competent in psychosocial support. Their study examined how students’ assessments of teacher’s behaviors and abilities influence their beliefs that extra class communication (ECC) would be potentially valuable or rewarding to them. Bippus et al. (2001) characterize ECC as informal faculty-student interaction that is more than formal in-class instruction. These interactions happen between a teacher and a student, e.g., before or after class, during office hours, spontaneously on campus, or via email. The findings showed that students presume the non-class encounters to be most rewarding with teachers who have the potential to guide students in their course needs and career goals but who are also perceived as very easy to talk to (Bippus et al., 2003).

Even though universities today have official support strategies (i.e., student health and counseling centers), much can be done in terms of teachers providing support to students. Certainly the boundaries of informal social support between a teacher and a student are challenging to negotiate. However, the benefits of support in increased student motivation, participation and well-being (cf. Deci et al., 2006), and teacher’s own experience of professional fulfillment are worth investigating. My objective was to experiment on ways teachers could incorporate further support into not only extra class communication but also to class accomplishment without overburdening themselves.

This particular experience stems from teaching a basic course in Public Speaking and Argumentation (PSA) in 2009. It is a compulsory course for communication students and Finnish language and education majors and an open course for all other students within a large university in Finland. In recent years, the PSA course has been taught in a lecture format (approximately 75 students). For majority of students the course is one of the first they enroll into.

During my teaching of the course I focused on expanding the usual support strategies. My main attempts were to further assist students to manage uncertainty related to their studies and to enhance the students’ sense of social acceptance and integration into the scientific community. This I pursued by explicitly communicating my expectations, motivation, and commitment to the students’ learning and completion of the course.

In matters of uncertainty, I prioritized addressing verbally and in writing the issues of course content (e.g., syllabus, readings, exam type) and conduct (e.g., lecture note availability, no required public speeches). I repeated the information during the second lecture and made sure all student questions were answered. In terms of social acceptance, I concentrated on providing additional nonverbal immediacy. Nonverbal immediacy includes behaviors such as close proximity, leaning forward, active facial expressions and gaze, which communicate interpersonal warmth (Jones & Guerrero, 2001; Jones & Wirtz, 2007). During the lecture I approached the students’ desks and made sure I took eye contact with everyone. I encouraged participation but did not target my questions to anyone in particular. Instead, I shared my own experiences as a student taking similar classes and my successes and failures as a public speaker. In order to encourage extra class communication, I arrived 15 minutes early to the lecture hall to converse with incoming students and stayed behind to do the same. I encouraged students to contact me if they had any matters they were concerned about and paid specific attention in delivering the my messages with ‘interpersonal warmth’ (cf. Jones & Wirtz, 2007).
The general feedback gathered from the course revealed that students had experienced high support availability. The most common answer to open-ended feedback questions (none of which asked about support in specific) showed that students had felt "very supported," enjoyed classes "more than expected" or "more than usual," and reported increased motivation to study communication, take more courses in communication, or even "change my major into communication?"

My experience of the amount of actual emotional, informational and tangible support provided outside class was minimal. Also, the amount of email inquiries I received during the experimental period was nominal. Even though preliminary, teacher solicited support during class seems to have potential in at least enhancing positive class experience and perceptions of the subject matter.

It is worth noting that the student population in Finnish universities is still rather homogenous. In a more multicultural context teachers benefit from the awareness of different support needs that students from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds may have. For example, Mortenson (2006) studied how the experience of academic failure leads to healthy and unhealthy forms of coping among European-American and Chinese students. He found that in terms of emotional well-being, Chinese students are less inclined than American students to engage in seeking emotional support but more prone to engage in avoidance behaviors. This indicates that different types of support elements need to be incorporated into the study environment. I encourage further research on students' experiences of available support and the impact such support has on their emotional well-being and academic success during college years.

REFERENCES
Differentiating Instructions to Enhance Students’ Interaction and Learning in the EFL Class

Effective teaching and learning means reaching all students in the same classroom. Using standardized lesson plans is not an efficient way towards achieving success in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom because students are different and do not come in an identical form, therefore lessons should be tailored to meet their different needs. In their effort to make teaching and learning successful, teachers should enter their classrooms having students’ differences in mind. This article aims to give guidelines on what differentiation is, give reasons why we should differentiate instructions, present the ways of differentiating instructions, as well as give ideas for adapting current materials that teachers use to address students’ diverse needs. Differentiating instructions is a solution towards engaging mixed-level students in the EFL classroom by adapting our lessons to their individual needs and skills.

What is differentiation?

In order to challenge teachers to start thinking about the differences existing among their students and to enhance their students’ interaction and learning, teachers initially have to know what differentiated instruction is. According to Hall, “Differentiated instruction is teaching with students’ variance in mind” (Hall, 2009, p.1). If teachers become aware that there is a way to help each and every student in the same classroom by just considering their different needs then this is a step towards helping them learn in a way that suits their needs. Moreover, an important aspect to be considered is that the teachers are “sensitive to the needs of students and (find) ways to help students make the necessary connections for learning to occur in the best possible way” (Teachnology, 2007). If the teacher’s goal is to offer an environment that will provide necessary conditions to their students to attain success then differentiating instruction offers them means to do so. Furthermore, differentiated instruction is described as “the proactive planning of varied approaches to what students need to learn, how they will learn it and/or how they can express what they have learned” (Survey of Best Practices in TESOL, 2010). As a result, by identifying students’ individual needs teachers will help them learn the necessary material, by offering them different ways to achieve and express their acquired knowledge.

Why Differentiate Instruction?

Bearing in mind that students enter the classroom by carrying with them the baggage of different backgrounds and necessities, they should not be treated in the same way, but special treatment should be offered to satisfy the existing diversity. In today’s classrooms students “form a mosaic of diversity – academically, culturally, linguistically, economically, socially, and motivationally” (Hall, 2009, p.1). In order to help students work at their own pace, today’s teachers are challenged to think differently and plan their lessons differently by offering various learning opportunities. Therefore, “a teach to the middle’ or ‘one size fits all’ classroom is less responsive to and less effective in meeting the needs of the diverse populations in our classrooms” (Hall, 2009 cited in Haddaway, 2010). Teachers should strive to identify their students’ needs and abilities and then be able to offer choices to them. A significant aspect that helps us understand the importance of differentiation is the brain research findings that show that when the activities are “too hard” for students the brain “downshifts” to the limbic area that does not think. In this case students who are weaker than their classmates will not be able to complete the assigned task. However, even when the activities are too easy students “do not show thoughtful brain activity”. The solution to maximizing students’ success is to make the tasks “moderately challenging” which will help the brain “think in a way that prompts learning” (Survey of Best Practices in TESOL, 2010). As a result, tasks should be neither too easy, nor too difficult, but rather reasonably challenging in order for learning to take place.

How to Differentiate Instruction?

While differentiating instructions, teachers should tailor the instructions according to students’ individual differences by “engaging (students) where they are, rather than where they are expected to be, according to a prescribed curriculum” (Hall, 2009, p.1). In the EFL classroom it is the teacher’s responsibility to identify students’ levels by not simply expecting that they should all be in the same level. For example, although in a particular EFL classroom the students are all expected to be at an intermediate level, not all of the students will necessarily have the same abilities; some of them will be weaker and some of them stronger. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher has to discover the existing differences among the students, by pre-assessing their strengths and weaknesses, their background knowledge and skills, and thereby to identify their interests in order to be able to teach them accordingly. According to Hall, there are three key areas for DI:

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• Pace at which student learns
• Depth of knowledge and understanding, and
• Student interests (Hall, 2009, p.1).

In one classroom there should be alternatives offered to students that will suit their diverse natures. In this way students will be enabled to learn at their own pace, work on tasks that fit their level of understanding as well as on the tasks that are in accordance with their interest so they can enjoy them better.

Moreover, Hall identifies ways to DI, which include differentiating:
• Content
• Process
• Product (Hall, 2009, p.2).

Differentiating the content involves differentiating the knowledge and skills. Then differentiating the process refers to performance task or practice. Finally, differentiating the product refers to the outcome of the lesson. In order for differentiation to work well all these aspects should be taken into consideration and applied carefully in our teaching.

**Tasks for Differentiating Instruction**

In most cases teachers are supposed to follow a course book that does not suit the needs of all the students in the classroom. Therefore, effective teachers who aim to differentiate instructions have to adapt their course books, requiring them to be more flexible in order to meet the needs of weaker and stronger students. Bowler and Parminter (2002) offer examples of some useful tasks called “Tiered Tasks and Bias Tasks” that can help teachers adjust any of their materials to address mixed-level classes. They compare Tiered Tasks with the wedding cake and according to them the activities for different ability learners should be arranged in tiers as in a triple-tiered wedding cake. Since the top tier of the triple-tiered wedding cake offers the most support (because it has the most supporting layers underneath) it is described as a suitable activity for weaker students who usually need more support. The bottom tiers of the wedding cake, however, which has no supporting pillars, is described as a suitable task for stronger students. Finally, the middle tier (which has some support, but not as much as the top tier) is described as a good activity for midlevel students. Furthermore, Bowler and Parminter continue with their metaphorical comparison, but this time they compare Biased Tasks to a pie sliced unequally. In reference to EFL classroom, they state that the bigger slice of a pie is appropriate for stronger students, or those with “bigger appetite”. The smaller slice is appropriate for weaker students or those with “smaller appetite” (Bowler and Parminter, 2002, p.60). These simple descriptions and comparisons of the tasks with the wedding cake and a pie can help teachers better picture how they can more easily and efficiently adapt their teaching materials.

**Summary**

Since it is obvious that the differences among our students exist then we should not waste time but hasten to apply mixed-level teaching. Differentiating instructions helps us address the needs of mixed level ability students in our classes by offering us ways, strategies and tasks to achieve our aim. Although it is a challenging and time consuming job to think about each student as a unique being, it can become a rewarding and enjoyable job when all the students will be enabled to interact and participate at their own pace, with their own level of understanding and interest. By having in mind principles of tiered and biased tasks, teachers can very easily adapt their course books to suit their students’ diverse needs and they can achieve that through differentiated instruction, which provides a “vehicle” for meeting students’ needs” (Hall, 2009, p.5). By applying differentiated instruction in our teaching we are going to help our students arrive at the concept we want to teach by taking different approaches.

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Online Learning: One Solution to the “Chilly Climate”

Roberta Hall and Bernice Sandler (1982) coined the term “Chilly Climate” to refer to the ways that women are treated differently in schools and in the workplace. They write that people outside the dominant culture may also experience some of these characteristics, and they may be exaggerated if multiple minority cultural identities, sometimes called micro inequities, are at play. The problem is that the effects of any one of these “chilly” behaviors may be downplayed by those involved, but over time, the behaviors have a cumulative effect which can impact the self-esteem, participation, and future aspirations of those to whom the behavior is directed.

Examples of behaviors which foster the “chilly climate” include: communicating lowered expectations for women and girls, relying on internalized stereotypes (i.e., using examples which reflect stereotypes), “excluding women from participation in meetings” and decision-making roles, treating people differently when their behaviors are the same, giving “less attention and intellectual encouragement,” “discouraging women through politeness,” “singling out women” (i.e., asking “what do women think about this?”), “defining women by their sexuality,” and engaging in “hostile behavior toward women” (Sandler, Silverberg, and Hall, 1996).

When Sandler and her colleagues were writing in the late 1990s, they provided numerous ways to combat the chilly climate (Sandler, Silverberg, and Hall, 1996). One option they may not have anticipated was the development of online opportunities for learning. Today more and more universities are experimenting with online pedagogy and eLearning. More than simply a correspondence course, online learning enables universities and professors to take advantage of emerging technologies while engaging students “where they are.” This essay brings together research about online learning and the author’s experiences teaching communication studies courses online to begin to theorize ways that online learning suggests a more positive opportunity for the online learning environment not only to engage female students, but also provide an environment in which male students come to reflect on their communication behaviors as well. I have developed and facilitated one Advanced Public Relations course at SEEU during the winter 2007-2008 term and two upper level undergraduate communication courses at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI): 1) Persuasion and 2) Gender and Communication. I have taught Persuasion online for the past four summers and Gender and Communication online for the first time in summer 2010. Anecdotally, my observations lead me to conclude that women communicate more extensively in the online classes than men, even to the point of identifying the online learning atmosphere as what facilitated their interactions with their peers more so than face-to-face classes. Students were given a variety of learning opportunities including discussion forums, blog posts, and wiki development and were asked to complete assignments individually and with a group to which they were assigned for the entire duration of the course.

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Of course, the gender make-up of the course may have influenced the communication strategies of the students. The Gender and Communication course consisted of 14 females and four males. The Persuasion course consisted of 10 females and four males. This abundance of female students has been a trend in each of my online courses. So it appears that female students may seek out this alternative learning format, but in the end they find that it is a space in which they excel.

One of the most interesting outcomes of my online courses has to do with the evolution of the groups in each class. Students are assigned to a group at the beginning of the course and are instructed to discuss with this group in order to complete some of their assignments. In the most successful groups, a group identity emerged that was completely of the making of the students. In these groups, students were more likely to engage in supportive yet critical communication behaviors. They felt comfortable offering praise as well as constructive critique and the end result of the work was very strong. Students admitted that they felt connected to their group and did not want to let down their fellow group members; they did not want to be “that person” who brought down the success of the group. Additionally since online work is public in the sense that others in the class can see the posts and online work of each individual student and group, there was an investment in the public performance of the engaged student and group. The supportive climate that developed provided an atmosphere in which the students became accountable to themselves and their classmates rather than only to the instructor.

Student evaluations are generally positive of the online learning environment and the freedom students feel when participating. For example, a female student comments:

I think the virtual classroom space was ideal for this course as it allowed the sharing and communal commentary on a variety of media formats. . . . A traditional classroom would not have allowed the same level of diversity. Further, I think the forum discussions were much less hostile than some live classroom discussions I have witnessed regarding discrimination and similar issues. I felt that everyone was respectful and offered even opposing commentary in a positive approach. Humans are not always so good about keeping emotions in check face-to-face.

A male student writes:

This online experience has changed my face-to-face communication in the sense that I am more aware of what kind of things I say to women and minorities. I used to talk a lot of sports language and did not even realize I was using those terms. Now, I realize that if I used a different language that my communication might be more successful with certain groups of people. Overall, I really enjoyed this class and learned more than I thought I would about gender communication and the steps that have been taken to ensure equality in our society for everyone.

The communication of the instructor in an online environment has a great deal to do with the success of the class. Fauske and Wade (2003-04) develop a “Continuum of Instructor Involvement in Computer Mediated Discussions,” but stop short of making recommendations because of differences in course goals, instructor style, course make-up, etc. One of the challenges of an online course is that the instructor must be willing to disrupt the power dynamic typically associated with the teacher-student relationship. Instructors may function as co-discussants, modeling appropriate online behavior according to the goals of the class, while also praising model assignments, encouraging supportive and critical communication, providing multiple online options for students to engage one another, course concepts, and ultimately succeed. For example, when I participate with students online in discussion forums, they may not even realize I am the instructor. I will sign my first name rather than Professor, and I do what I can to participate with them rather than observe. Of course this makes an online course in some ways very time consuming, but the initial outcome appears to be a step toward warming the “chilly climate.”

This essay has outlined some of the initial research on online pedagogy in an effort to suggest ways that online classes may become an inviting space for women and other marginalized groups. Online courses are more than simply correspondence courses. They take a great deal of planning on the part of the instructor in order to develop learning opportunities for students that take advantage of the available technology in a way that does not alienate but rather fosters community and learning. The make-up of the course, the opportunities for students to develop online connections in this alternative “public” space, as well as the communication of the instructor have a great deal to do with the success of the course. Based on the experiences of this author, online pedagogy does indeed provide an alternative to combat the “chilly” climate.

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The Importance of Overcoming Cultural Divides in the Classroom

In the current global context student learning is far more important than instructor teaching as a measure of classroom performance (Bain and Zimmerman, 2009). Thus it is important for faculty members to make the shift in perspective from one of “instructor as the source of knowledge” to that of “instructor as classroom manager and learning facilitator.” This shift presents a number of challenges in the simplest of circumstances, but when a teacher enters a classroom that is populated by students from differing cultures, especially ones with a history of clash, dislike, and lack of trust, the obstacles can be formidable. Yet, this is the situation on many university campuses serving heterogeneous populations. However, although difficult, instructors and students alike benefit from classrooms that diminish the obstacles that cultural barriers can create.

Although instructors can walk into the classroom and simply lecture and ignore the issues, several good reasons support not taking this approach. First, the world is competitive and a diploma gained without much in the way of learning has less value than in the past. In an earlier era, a smaller number of people had access to higher education limiting the competition among those who had graduated. This is not to say that those who received a university diploma were not or are not educated, only that the competitive demands were lesser when fewer people had access. As a greater percentage of the population receives a university diploma, employers are increasingly able to shift from simply finding an educated person to differentiating among those who are graduates.

The competition among university graduates is even greater in regions, such as the EU, where people can seamlessly move across borders to seek employment. Over time this creates a larger pool of competition among graduates of universities from any given country. This added pool of university graduates is of real benefit to employers, be they business or NGOs, but it means that the individual student must be prepared to match the quality of a greater number of people who also have a diploma. Thus a greater pool of domestic graduates added to a larger number of internationally mobile graduates forces a given student to be ready to offer something that separates them from the crowd. This is facilitated by not only having a diploma, but a high level of learning to match it.

As if an increasing number of graduates combined with greater transnational movement were not enough to squeeze the graduate, the Internet facilitates the mobility of work in unprecedented ways. This means that surplus graduates in one country can displace the work of graduates in another country without the need to move there. For example, while many law student graduates in the USA are having difficulty finding work, the amount of US legal work being done in India is growing. Such displacements are a growing international phenomenon that affects university graduates in every country to some degree. We have probably only begun to feel the impact of this technology on the future employment of university graduates.

Increased pressure from the supply side of the economic equation is only part of the issue. There is little question that while economic circumstances are poor at the present moment, over time the world will need a greater number of well-educated people. Economies that are going to grow and prosper will do so only in so much as they develop a high number of university graduates with competitive levels of education. Therefore the prospects of those with university diplomas are strong over the long term. However, the best jobs in the thriving economies will go to those who have a solid education to match their diploma. This puts pressure on universities to create strong learning environments on their campuses, especially in the classroom.

Increasing competitive pressure on graduates forces greater pressure on university faculties to create highly educated well-prepared students ready to face the world. Students must do more than pass through courses and performing well on exams. They must learn the substance of their major as well as students in any other university; at the same time develop the life skills necessary to work in highly competitive global commerce. Whatever instructors can do to facilitate student performance contributes to their student’s ability to achieve after graduation. Instructors who care about the quality of their student’s future and the strength of their communities will embrace any tactic that might enhance student learning. In multicultural environments instructors need to not only neutralize the potential difficulties posed by cultural differences, they must enable students to rise above difficult histories and improve subject matter learning simultaneously.

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THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

It is important to let students know that what they learn matters and that how well they learn it is just as important (Miller, 2009). As each one of them goes out into the world they can participate in strengthening the reputation of their university and their degree or they can diminish it by their performance. Because of this, it is in their best interest to make sure that every one in their class learns the material and learns it well, regardless of their cultural background. An instructor should remind students over and over again that they each have a vested interest in how well all of their classmates learn, no matter what their cultural background. This will help to facilitate cooperative learning.

Instructors can reinforce this perspective by engaging each student as an individual and avoiding the pitfalls of stereotyping. Although some students behave in ways that can reinforce such perceptions, the instructor best serves their purpose and that of their students by encouraging the student to approach learning in a more inclusive manner. Put another way, it is critical for students to learn about the world, as it will be, not only as it has been. This includes not using pejorative terms, dissuading students from using them, reinforcing the commonalities of the students, calling on students in equal measure, and setting up each student for success but not causing them to lose face in front of their peers.

Instructors, by choosing assignments that reward intercultural cooperation, facilitate improved performance across the cultural divides in their classrooms. It is extremely useful for students to understand that the ability to cooperate with classmates or coworkers is critical to their individual and collective ability to compete with others. Assignments of this nature can range from group activities to the type of questions that are found on examinations. Getting students to engage either the course material, or each other, in a way that encourages multicultural cooperation reinforces both content learning and improved intercultural skills among the students. The more instructors and students work at becoming skilled in intercultural interaction, the greater the learning, and the easier it becomes for the instructor to manage the classroom as a learning environment. When this happens, everyone wins.

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Creating an Inclusive Classroom: How My Teaching Experiences Transformed My Teaching Philosophy

“I entered the classroom with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer...[a conception of] education as the practice of freedom...education that connects the will to know with the will to become. Learning is a place where paradise can be created.”

bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 1994.

I come from highly diverse teaching and learning traditions that have provided me with plenty of opportunities to both observe and apply a variety of teaching methods and practices. During my student years, I was fortunate to have had incredible experiences to be taught and mentored by professors who excel in their teaching and in establishing good relationships with their students. These experiences have greatly influenced my thinking about teaching to this day. I have had the chance to teach in several different disciplines, locations and settings and this has also contributed to the development of my teaching philosophy. The diverse teaching and learning experiences have greatly influenced my teaching philosophy, which strongly relies on progressive methodological approaches with a focus on critical thinking, freedom of expression and diversity of opinion.

Progressive Education as a movement started in the beginning of the twentieth century initiated by John Dewey (1900; 1916/1966), whose main philosophy was placing the student at the center of educational endeavors. The vision of progressive teaching includes recognition of the uniqueness of every student, the importance of personal relevancy in the learning process, an active and engaged quality in learning environments, and an image of the school as a microcosm of and preparation for life in a democratic society (Sherman, 2009). Progressive ideals to teaching were reintroduced in 1990s, and besides the above mentioned ideas, educators added a focus on embracing the multiple cultural perspectives of the students, inclusive decision making practices, interdisciplinary curriculums and critical thinking (Semel, 1999; Sherman, 2009). I strongly believe that teachers in a democratic society must enable their students to think critically in order to give them opportunities to make sound decisions about their personal and civic affairs. Teaching and learning are critical to our individual and collective survival and to the quality of our lives (Palmer, 1998). Utilizing critical and progressive pedagogies in the classroom becomes vital to the very state of our wellbeing as a nation, community, or organization.

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Without a doubt, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has provided me with the foundations of methodology. Student participation and active learning, which were emphasized at the time I was teaching English, still remain my primary guiding principles in the classroom today. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to teach at the very beginnings of the Language Center (LC) at SEEU, and the experience gained here as well as the collaboration with LC colleagues has provided the groundwork of my teaching philosophy. Those experiences made me realize that learning is a very dynamic process and that different students possess different learning styles. As a result, I believe that diverse teaching methodologies should be utilized and that active learning styles should be encouraged.

Upon receiving my Masters Degree in Applied Communication from Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI) in Indiana, I was given the opportunity to teach core communication classes in the Communication Department at SEEU. This gave me a chance to think about adapting the language learning methodologies to communication classes. Communication is a multidimensional discipline as it draws from both the humanities and social sciences, giving instructors an opportunity to create assignments that are applicable in the real world. It is in fact one of the rare disciplines that allows students to think how particular theories can be applied into practice while specifically considering each student’s interest. This plays a tremendous role in stimulating critical thinking while at the same time allowing students to create a ready-to-use portfolio for their academic and professional life. This is in line with the concept of democratic education, which sees teaching and learning as taking place constantly, both inside and outside the classroom (hooks, 2003). Hence, critical thinking skills and application of theory into practice became two of my additional guiding principles in my teaching.

In 2008, upon being awarded a teaching and research assistantship at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, I took the opportunity to teach a core course in the Department of Communication titled IPC 1020 Introduction to Speech Communication as well as an online course in the Women’s Studies Department titled WS 2000 Introduction to Women’s Studies. These two courses further deepened my thinking about teaching and learning. First, the fact that I was exposed to a group of students from another continent who didn’t share my native language and culture gave me a lot to think about and as a result I adapted and evolved in my teaching strategies and practices. Second, the two courses being much applied in nature, yet highly intensive in terms of assignments and course requirements, greatly contributed to my development as a teacher. And third, having the opportunity to teach both in face-to-face and in online settings made me think about ways to apply in-class activities online and made me aware of the endless possibilities that different software applications provide for online and face-to-face teaching.

While considering all the learning and teaching experiences I mentioned above, the bell hooks quote at the beginning of this essay really sums up my current teaching philosophy. These experiences have made me a firm believer in critical and progressive teaching methodologies that stress on the critical engagement of students both in the classroom and outside as civic members of their communities. As a teacher, I see my role as facilitator who guides academic class discussions, provides challenging assignments, clarification, and in no way as simply a “spoon feeder” of information. In an information age, with all the current advances of technology, I believe that students have access to a vast amount of information, and it is our duty as teachers to guide them in choosing and applying that information. Thus, I expect my students to be prepared, engaged, think critically, investigate and evaluate the information they are receiving about the different topics we cover.

Deliberating the advantages and disadvantages of ideas is the basic principle of democracy and should be the fundamental tenet of education in a democratic society. Likewise, assisting students to understand theory and its application always leads to an improved clarity and sense of renewal in my own personal development as a teacher, researcher, and scholar. I view the classroom as a cradle of knowledge and inquiry that offers an opportunity for improvement to both the teacher and the student. Therefore, I believe that every teacher should keep in mind that we are also learners, and as Paulo Freire rightly pointed, “there is no teaching without learning” (1998, p.31).

Moreover, the classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility where we as teachers are given plenty of opportunities to work for freedom, as well as request from ourselves and our students an openness of mind and heart that will allow us to transgress collectively (bell hooks, 1994). Consequently, besides treating students as active participants in the classroom, I see the classroom as a place where differences can be articulated and analyzed, and I try to achieve this by strongly encouraging disagreements and celebrating differences of opinion between the students and myself. I believe that it is very important for us to recognize that teaching itself is a political act, and that as instructors we are political agents with certain ideologies and agendas. The fact that we have the freedom to decide on the methods of instruction, choice of readings, nature of the assignments, and forms of assessment makes us very much political agents with very definitive ideologies that align us with certain groups but, differentiate us from others. Thus, every semester I start the class with this recognition by giving the students the opportunity to reflect self-consciously about teaching methods and the teacher-student relationship.

Consistent with democratic pedagogy, I strive to create a nurturing and inclusive classroom environment. I also emphasize the psychosocial dimensions of teaching such as empathy and cultural sensitivity and I encourage the students’ skepticism and critique. Developing a critical awareness about problems of power, and inequalities is essential in a classroom where freedom of speech and diversity of opinion are set as primary goals. This can be achieved by placing issues surrounding class, disability, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation at the center of inquiry that can be the main focus of their practical projects. Emphasizing praxis, active inquiry and investigation, also stresses on the value of the students’ prior experience that comes from hands-on research and community, as well as bases collective learning from each student’s personal experiences.

Last but not least, I believe that teacher and student relationship is one of the core conditions for effective teaching and learning. This, in my opinion, can be achieved only if the teacher places herself/himself as a mentor in the classroom. The mentoring approach to teaching fosters teacher-student immediacy and is an important aspect that plays a fundamental role in the classroom and beyond. I consider teacher-student relationships as the major determinant whether we as instructors will or will not meet the class objectives. As a student I have learned much better when I have been able to relate to the teacher and my success in such courses has always been excellent. Moreover, as Palmer (1987) observes, only our willingness to desert our “self-protective professional autonomy” (p. 13) and depend on our students on the same way they depend on us, can move us closer to the interdependence that the community of truth requires. “When we say ‘please’ because we need our...
students and ‘thank you’ because we are genuinely grateful to them, obstacles to community will begin to fall away, teachers and students will meet at new depths of mutuality and meaning, and learning will happen for everyone in surprising and life-giving ways” (Palmer, 1997, p. 13).

By reflecting on my teaching philosophy and its evolvement through the years I wanted to share my personal journey as a teacher towards creating a more inclusive classroom. However, I would like to emphasize that I’m well aware that this journey has only just begun, and I expect that my classroom and teaching practices will continue to evolve over time in order to best meet the needs of my diverse students. Teaching, just like learning, is a dynamic process and we as teachers have to constantly adapt to the needs of our time, our environment and our students. As a communication scholar I believe that it is important for both teachers and students to be curious about the interrelationships among the various topics we study, see, hear, and think about. This enables us to pursue together the questions that arise from the well-known Socrates’ quote that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” I hope that my teaching and my interactions with students serve to help us all come closer in order to achieve stimulating connections with the kinds of knowledge that will help us to live the “examined life.”

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Developing and Sustaining International Teaching and Learning Partnerships

In his article, "Dealing Effectively with Culturally Diverse Classrooms" in the first issue of this publication, Artan Limani (2010) analyzes effective teaching in learning environments comprised of students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious back-grounds. Drawing from his work, we wish to extend the analysis to effective teaching in both in-and out-of-class settings, particularly in the scope of global educational partnerships. Such partnerships, primarily those in the Global South and those between the South and North, offer exceptionally fruitful learning opportunities.

We are colleagues engaged in a global university partnership who have worked together across the Atlantic, across rich levels of linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity, and across institutional differences. We have been collaborating for more than six years in a variety of curricular innovation efforts, educational leadership building activities, scholarship of engagement, and democracy building efforts all with a view to create sustainable programs that will enhance reforms in the region, and foster peaceful communication and interaction between students, faculty, administrators, and civil society members. Our project, “Partners for a Sustainable Future: Aiding Future Practitioners in Algerian and Tunisian Environmental Journalism and Communication", is a professional and cultural exchange partnership between 1) the Institute of Press and Information Sciences (IPSI), of the University of Manouba, Tunisia; 2) Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences and Information, for what is now the University of Algiers III, and 3) the School of Media and Communication, Bowling Green State University (BGSU). The partnership program is assisted financially from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State under the authority of the Fulbright-Hayes Act of 1961, as amended. The program aids future media practitioners in Algeria, Tunisia, and the US to gain hands-on media experience in environmental journalism and communication, while building links with civil society and media organizations – all in the context of a full cultural exchange which takes North African faculty and students
to the US States and faculty and students from the US to North Africa.

Along with the Partners for a Sustainable Future program’s three key institutional partners, the partnership is also working with several civil society organizations, including, but not limited to, The Tunisia International Center for Environmental technology (CITET), The Tunisian Arid Lands Institute (IRA) and the Université de Sousse in Tunisia. The partnership also works with various governmental organizations, including the US Embassies in Tunis and Algers, and the Tunisian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Through our diverse cultural, geophysical, and linguistic back-grounds, we create a space for our students to prepare themselves for an increasingly multicultural world. Eaton, MacGregor, and Schoen (2003) argue the type of work we have been doing prepares students for a “diverse democracy. Students attending college today often come to their campuses with little if any experience with peers outside their own social identity group. Ideally, an undergraduate education should help students encounter alternative perspectives, listen across boundaries of difference, and understand the experiences that have shaped the lives of others” (p. 1). The lack of alternative perspectives is particularly evident in a midwestern US university. Although the student population may come from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, their experiences may be quite limited geographically. Most of these midwestern students have not traveled extensively; most concentrate their attention on local, regional or national issues. Working with peers from other continents, nations, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds opens students’ eyes to alternative perspectives. These perspectives are needed to raise students’ self-reflexivity, critical thinking skills, and commitment to making positive social change in their worlds, both locally and globally.

Working together on social change efforts within an international teaching and learning partnership may “help students move beyond their isolated ‘comfort’ zones as they study and work with students from difference backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, class, and geographic region” (Eaton, MacGregor, and Schoen, p. 1).

Learning partnerships compel us, teachers, researchers, and practitioners, to move beyond our comfort zones as well. It is quite comfortable to serve our own communities, those about which we are very familiar and feel very much at home. Getting on a plane, traveling many thousands of miles to another region, particularly one that has been situated by dominant discourses as the “Other” (Lengel, 1998; Lengel, 2005), provides scope for great discomfort. Working with colleagues from extremely different university cultures and structures, can bring confusion and opportunities for miscommunication and misunderstanding. Applying for and managing grants, fellowships and institutional re-sources to support international partnership activities can be daunting. However daunting, recall John Parrish-Sprovil’s assertion elsewhere in this publication, “Instructors who care about the quality of their students’ future and the strength of their communities will embrace any tactic that might enhance student learning” (Parrish-Sprovil, 2010).

While the challenges of developing and implementing a sustainable international teaching and learning partnership can be daunting, we will embrace, with enthusiasm, strategies to enhance students learning. The benefits of international teaching and learning partnerships far outweigh the challenges (see table 1).

Our partnership combines in-person and online contact between Maghreb and US faculty and students with the cultural knowledge and both traditional university learning environments our respective univer-sity campuses, and online through our online course delivery program, email, and Facebook.1 The project serves both undergraduate and graduate students at both partnership universities, enhances faculty instruction and curriculum development, and creates sustainable and wide-reaching partnerships between academic institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and policy makers. Here we share a few points key to creating and sustaining international teaching and learning partnerships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create culturally-appropriate education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage positive impact of each partnerships’ faculty and students being exposed to students and practitioners from other cultures and nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide evidence as to how university partnerships can develop professional standards for students and alumni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase critical thinking and awareness</td>
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<td>Enhance intercultural communication skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide a most compelling and lasting opportunity to learn about diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build civil society, through increased interaction between higher education institutions and civil society organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance skills in minimizing and managing conflicts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fight negative stereotypes that often emerge, for example, as a reaction to governmental and corporate media discourses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build capacity to strengthen democratic practices</td>
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Source: Cassara & Lengel (2008)

First and foremost, partnerships can only be created and sustained if there is commitment on the parts of all participating institutions. Along with the broad commitment to the partnership, a shared commitment to similar program development and enhancement goals, across both key faculty and administrators of each institution is also important. Along with commitment at the institutional level, primarily by directors and key leadership of each institution, another key to successful partnerships is the commitment and expertise of those who will lead the partnership.3

One crucial aspect to successful teaching and learning partnerships is access to ICT and other facilities and resources to students, faculty, and practitioners at all partner institutions. For example, during one of the partnership workshops held on the BGSU campus, we met in one of the university’s computer classroom labs. After the presentations by practitioners in environmental journalism and communication and by experts from environmental CSOs and NGO, student participants used the discussion board our online learning management system to share their reflections about the presentations as well as their overall impressions of the multicultural interaction of the workshop specifically and the ongoing partnership generally. We found that the online dialogue was particularly useful because students, particularly those whose first spoken language is either the Tunisian or Algerian dialects of Arabic (with Modern Standard Arabic as their first written language), whose second language is French, and whose third language is English, that often they were more comfortable in speaking in class. Online, however, they opened up with ease. They were also more able to engage in dialogue more freely about cultural issues, including breaking down stereotypes, working through biases about US media and cultural imperialism, the construction of cultural identity, and the diverse social, cultural, economic and political aspects of each nation’s efforts toward environmental sustainability. In a previous partnership grant program (see Lengel, Cassara, Azzouz & el Bour, 2006), there were also student participants from China, Lithuania, and Russia, and providing additional opportunities for intercultural interaction and dialogue.

Another key aspect of the “Partners for a Sustainable Future: Aiding Future Practitioners in Algerian and Tunisian Environmental Journalism and Communication” program is experiential learning. For example,
the learning program for sustainable development of our partner organization, the Tunisian Arid Lands Institute, environmental education is taught and enhanced through experiential learning (Talbi & Gasmi, 2010). In the case of environmental education, this type of experiential teaching and learning is both in and for the outdoors to extend and enrich the curriculum. According to the UNESCO T’bilisi Declaration (1978), environmental education for sustainable development is a learning process that increases awareness about the environmental challenges, develops skills and expertise to address these challenges, fosters attitudes to make informed decisions and make informed and responsible decisions and actions in the future (Talbi & Ben Mansour, 2010; Talbi & Gasmi, 2010).

This international teaching and learning partnership has provided important opportunities to work in a contexts of shared interests in ethics and values and given us some of our greatest learning and growth opportunities of our academic careers, and has enhanced the preparation of students in all three partnership nations to successfully negotiate an increasingly globalized world.

ENDNOTES

1 The “Global South” is comprised of those parts of the world that have experienced the most political, social, and economic upheaval and have suffered the brunt of the greatest challenges facing the world under globalization: poverty, displacement and diaspora, environmental degradation, human and civil rights abuses, war, hunger, and disease. While many of the nations under this contextualization are, in fact, situated in the southern hemisphere, the term is not geophysically limited to it. For more on the Global South see, for instance, Maj-Lis Follér (2010), Stayton (2009), and the United Nations (2005).

2 For current activities and outcomes of the international teaching and learning partnership, please see Cassara (2010), www.environmentaljournalismworkshop.org

3 Please see Lengel, Cassara, El Bour, & Azzouz (2006) for details on the qualifications and teaching, research, and administrative experience of the partnership directors.


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**Peace-building Practices in the Multicultural Classroom**

Globalization is often extolled for the virtues of creating, in the words of panglossian journalist Thomas Friedman (2005), a “flat world” that overflows with technological, social and cultural collaborations and benefits. What is less talked about when we explore the exigencies of globalization are the conflicting ways that diverse people with vastly different ethnic identities, religious practices, cultures, languages, and habits are often uncomfortably placed side by side with the expectation that folks will just magically get along somehow (Bernhard et al, 2005). Enter the discomfort and sense of helplessness experienced by any teacher who has faced multicultural classrooms that are full of students who might otherwise never want to be seen on the same side of the street together, or for that matter on the same side of town, much less in the same room. Therefore, in this brief discussion I will share a few helpful ideas for fostering a peace-building orientation in teaching practices for multicultural classrooms such as those of SEEU.

The multicultural classroom scenario described above is, in the words of SEEU faculty member Artan Limani, “the struggle that the whole country of Macedonia” is facing at the present time (Limani, 2010). It is just as much the struggle of the whole world so, hopefully, a few relevant and applicable teaching considerations may contribute to creating a space for a more peaceful future. Although I am writing this in part from the perspective of an American educator, because my spouse is Macedonian, and since I have recently gained citizenship in Macedonia, I have a sense of being invested in peace-building initiatives in Macedonia, especially through education. Clearly, part of me speaks from the standpoint of the culture of the U.S., and, given the long American history of the unresolved ‘bussing’ issue in American schools (a racially charged issue in the U.S.), and considering the de facto segregation American society still practices in many areas, the U.S. as my birth nation may not grant me an ideal ethos for discussing proactive reconciliation efforts, are best approached through cooperative learning methods that emphasize dialogue’ (p. 479). Thus creating in-class, student-centered, group experiential activities and assignments through team work in which different members of the class’s various ethnic, linguistic, or other socio-cultural identifiers are intermingled and mixed is essential to creating the cooperative climate and atmosphere of true sharing that fosters success in the multicultural classroom (Clarke 2005). Whether it is through one group research assignment, or, as in Clarke’s (2005) study, the creation of a whole course, titled “Remembering, Forgetting and Forgiveness: Justice and Reconciliation from the National to the International,” with goals of “crossing disciplinary boundaries and fostering [student] discussion from diverse standpoints,” it is important to let students study global conflicts and local conflicts internal to their own nations or regions. Through the objectivity gained by studying conflicts that are at a great geographic distance, students then may be better able to return home intellectually, to apply the knowledge gained from conflicts as varied as Kosovo or South Africa and then apply understandings and insights gained to their home culture’s situation (Clarke, 2005, p. 482).

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Dr. Gorsevski’s research is on contemporary rhetoric (suasory discourses) of peace-building, especially the communication practices and artifacts of leaders in peace and social justice movements. Her research interests span international/intercultural rhetoric, political and social movement rhetoric, media criticism and propaganda, and nonviolent conflict communication. Her research encompasses visual and spoken communication, culture, and rhetoric in the Gandhian and Kingian tradition. She earned her doctoral degree from the Pennsylvania State University, where she was Edwin Erle Sparks Fellow. She teaches at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in the School of Media and Communication, and she is active in contributing to BGSU’s newly established Peace and Conflict Studies Minor.
At the same time, as educators we must be open to exploring our own uncomfortable complicity with barriers to multicultural acceptance. For instance, speaking from my own perspective as an American, it was not until my master’s degree program, when I studied the systematic oppressions and human rights abuses suffered by Tibetans in China since 1959 that I began to appreciate and understand the similar suffering and human rights abuses that native American and other indigenous populations inside the U.S. experienced at the hands of Europeans and their settler descendents not only in North America, but also in Central and South America. Such knowledge or awareness of indigenous suffering was simply not taught to me during my K-12 or undergraduate education, much less as a part of a privileged ethnic group or prevalent popular culture such as television or film that portrayed only European American perspectives. Correspondingly, my positive experiences in working with diverse scholars and colleagues over the years has enabled me to adopt a perspective that does not demonize individuals, even if they may happen to come from a national, social, cultural or ethnic group that may have perpetrated recent or historic cultural and socio-political mistakes with human rights implications. Being a descendent of early European settlers, I am ever cognizant of my forbears’ possible complicity in human rights abuses such as ethnic cleansing or in the American systems of slavery followed by segregation, and my current inheritance of socio-cultural privilege as a result of violent institutions. As educators, by adopting a frame of humble learner, we, along with our students, are modeling a more open-ended, albeit uncomfortable times, perspective that invites healthy discussion and intellectual expansion toward adopting a peace-building perspective (Clarke, 2005, p. 485).

Another crucial element to fostering a viable multicultural classroom experience, particularly in higher education, is to recognize the unique challenges that first-generation college students experience not only as often being culturally different from other students, but also in not knowing the “unwritten rules and expectations of academia” (Jehangir, 2008, p. 33). As educators we need to develop support mechanisms in individual classes as well as academic departments and across curricula to promote the retention of all students, especially those who face invisible socio-cultural challenges such as simply not knowing the rules or having to undergo the rigorous and emotionally draining process of code-switching, in which a student must adopt a different linguistic, cultural, or other framework in order to survive on campus, while reverting in one’s social or family circles to other, more comfortable roles (Jehangir, 2008). As educators we need “to find ways simultaneously to challenge and support students who often feel isolated and marginalized … They need to have bridges that help them cross the divide” (Jehangir, 2008, p. 36). Jehangir (2008) recommends one way to approach this challenge is to develop support groups and networks for students from vulnerable populations that will enable them to cope and ideally, to thrive. By helping marginalized students to manage the unique stresses they face helps them to remain and be active, equal participants in the classroom; this, in turn, contributes to sustaining a multicultural campus climate and a wider array of viewpoints that enrich learning environments for all students and faculty.

To foster multiculturalism in the classroom, one effective strategy is for educators to “develop communities of practice” (CoPs), such as the readership for this SEEU newsletter, so that likeminded educators can share findings of their ongoing research and teaching training, as well as commiserate and brainstorm when, for instance, lesson plans or assignments go awry and need reconfiguring (Bernhard et al, 2005, p. 272). Likewise, CoPs should also be developed to address students’ needs. Sometimes the challenges of the multicultural classroom and the greater nationalist and ethnocentric tendencies in many societies make it difficult to persevere with a multicultural, peace-building perspective; having a community of practice as a sounding board, support system when one is feeling down, and a “cohort” with whom to share ideas and innovations can even make the difference between sticking with or quitting educational careers or aspirations altogether (Bernhard et al 2005, p. 272; Jehangir, 2008).

In closing, these are just a few among many helpful pointers that open up entire worlds of new challenges to educators of the multicultural classroom. When educators adopt roles as life-long learners, then it is easier to model new and often difficult behaviors and modes of learning that are required in a globalized context. Faculty and students are increasingly grappling with the upsetting frustrations and emotions as well as fruitful knowledge gained from pedagogy that is designed to promote mutual respect for the rich diversity of members of the contemporary classroom, and, by extension, their communities, cultures, and other social markers which, through fostering multicultural perspectives, can sow seeds of peace.

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Rahul Mitra (M.A., Bowling Green State University) is a doctoral student and Ross Fellow at the Department of Communication, Purdue University. He is interested in researching the social role of organizations, specifically corporate responsibility, leadership, career/work discourses, socialization, and gender in organizational contexts.

Sharing Some Key Pedagogical Tools: Conversations, Case Studies and Fieldwork

During my second year of doctoral study at the Department of Communication at Purdue University, I was asked to teach Small Group Communication, one of the core classes related to my discipline of organizational communication. While grateful to be teaching an advanced level class, I was also a bit flummoxed: I had not taken any classes myself on the topic, nor was I expressly sure I had the credentials to teach what I saw (at the time) as steeped in quantitative organizational psychology rather than the discursive tradition (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Bakhtin, 1981; Foucault, 1980) in which I located my work. Here, I will describe how -- despite these initial misgivings -- I successfully navigated this course with my class of 22 students.

I began with making two key decisions. First, it was important to decide what aspects of group communication I would be focusing on. Accordingly, I structured my class to address how communication (both external and internal) influences group formation, decision-making, leadership, climate, culture, innovation, and so on. While the textbook I was assigned to teach belonged to an organizational psychology tradition, I found enough scope to consider issues from a communicative perspective. Second, it was crucial to know who my students were: what were their major areas of study, what year of the program were they at, how did they hope to use the class material in their careers, and so on. As it turned out, the bulk of my class were mechanical engineering and computer technology majors, followed by some in marketing, human resources, management and agro-business. Most were fourth and fifth year undergraduate students. The challenge then was to provide them a communicative lens to group processes, which they could gainfully employ in their respective fields.

Through trial, some error, and a whole lot of listening to the students (Fassett & Warren, 2007), three pedagogical tools stood out as most effective. The first was an emphasis on conversation. Too often, at least in the U.S., undergraduate students are brought up on a diet of PowerPoint slides with little interaction and critical questioning. As teachers, our task is to encourage students to analyze the theoretical concepts we inform them about, and attempt to apply them or see where they may be applied in workplace situations; yet PowerPoint often hinders this fundamental goal by providing a blinkered and abstract view of theory. I believe theoretical concepts can be much more effectively engaged when students are asked to comment and critique them. I have often sat down among my students and thrown questions at them, asking them whether they agree with certain ideas laid down in the textbook, why or why not, and how would they justify their stance. Talking about “creativity”, for instance, as not just another group process through particular stages but as an aspect of corporate life that has important implications (both positive and negative; see Levitt, 2002), yielded a much more lively discussion than I believe using PowerPoint slides alone would have. I do not mean to bar slides from classroom teaching altogether -- I use them myself, quite a lot, to explicate concepts -- but to argue that conversation as two-and-fro communicative technique is vital in any classroom interaction (Freire, 1977).

The second approach that came in handy was using case studies. At the start of the course, I asked each student to fill in a “personal information” form that asked (among other things) what they hoped for or accepted from the class. Chief among these was applicability to their diverse disciplines and future jobs. Realizing that most of my students would be graduating within the next year, I strove to bring in a professional perspective to my course material from the start, and case studies were very effective in showing how these could be translated to everyday situations at the workplace. While I sourced some cases for longer-term class assignments from journals such as the Harvard Business Review, I also fashioned smaller cases to use for in-class assignments (which suggests imagination and creativity are not just topics to be studied in class, but also aspects to come out in pedagogical practices!). For instance, in a class on decision-making, students were broken up into groups and asked to consider various paragraph-long cases, each using a different problem-solving technique. After they had made their decisions, they (and the rest of the class) were then asked to consider what perspectives might have been missed via the technique used, how a different technique might have come up with other aspects (more or less useful) in the given case, and so on.

Finally, I emphasized out-of-class fieldwork for my students. This was important both for them to understand and get to know each other as a group, and to see for themselves how communication becomes vital in group processes. For their final project, each group was asked to work with an external organization, which could be national, local or even campus-based, to implement a creative or administrative project as the need may be. So, while one group tied up with a national child hunger prevention organization to organize a week-long fund-raising event, another designed and implemented a publicity campaign for a local animal shelter.
Fieldwork was important not just for group projects, but also individual assignments: for instance, one of the assignments required each student to join a local group or organization, attend their meetings for two months, and write a reflection paper framing their experiences through the material discussed in class. At the end of those two months, I found myself reading some of the most insightful and incisive ethnographies I have ever come across.

The active learning (and teaching) described here was successful because the three pedagogical tools – conversations, case studies, and fieldwork -- were developed as a result of listening to the students, rather than imposing standard ways of doing and teaching upon them (Fassett & Warren, 2007; Freire, 1977). It helped them to engage more effectively with the class material, and enabled me to teach a subject I was initially unsure of in ways that harnessed my research and personal experiences. I found myself using literature from topics as diverse as organizational socialization, public relations, social responsibility, diversity, and leadership in our classes to provide a holistic communicative vision of group processes. In conclusion, I emphasize that conversations ensure a steady interaction of ideas, case studies keep theory grounded in reality, and experiential fieldwork builds appreciation for the matter in ways that other tools seldom do.

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Current Challenges of the South-East European University’s Language Centre

The Language Centre within the South-East European University faces a number of challenges. Some of those challenges are external, i.e. imposed by higher authorities and institutions, whereas some others are internal. The internal challenges are the ones that each and every individual who is a part of the Language Centre can help overcome, and thus, make a difference in the functioning of SEEU’s Language Centre.

There are several external challenges that SEEU’s Language Centre is currently facing. The future of the senior and junior lectors within the Language Centre is the major challenge which derives from the new Law of Higher Education. Our centre is one of its kind as there are no other language centres which operate within universities in the Republic of Macedonia. The language centre category does not exist in the current law, and, as a result, there is a query whether the senior/junior lectors at SEEU would be part of the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communication or they will continue to exist as a part of an independent unit, i.e. the Language Centre. Another cause for concern is the fact that no doctoral studies programs are offered at any of the large number of universities in the country. As a result, it is impossible to pursue a PhD, a new requirement stipulated by the Law of Higher Education for anyone who is teaching at a university.

The internal challenges of the Language Centre are associated with the issues that can be addressed and influenced directly by each and every person who is a part of this centre. The relationship between the Language Centre and the five faculties within the university is one of the most general internal challenges. A perception exists that individuals at different organizational level do not entirely understand the distinction between Basic Skills English courses and English for Specific Courses. It leads to ineffective communication, and, in the long run, the
students are the ones who face the negative consequences of this situation. Improved communication between the English instructors and the respective faculties by discussing the obstacles in a constructive way is one of the most practical solutions to this issue. The results will be immediate and the issues will be discussed as they crop up, without any delay.

Curriculum development is another internal challenge that has been pinpointed by the Language Centre’s management. It is identified as a challenge due to students’ poor results on the final exam as well as their overall low performance in the productive skills, speaking and writing. A possible improvement of this aspect is changing the content of the courses by choosing a different coursebook. Another option is to continue to experiment with the integrated-skills approach to motivate the students to study more and better prepare them for the job market. In addition, continuous revision of the syllabi is a must in order to ensure that the most informed choices about the materials and assessment mechanisms have been made.

The third internal challenge associated with the Language Centre is assessment. Even though the Language Centre has experimented and defined appropriate assessment tools, assessment is a challenge in any context because of the element of subjectivity involved in it. Every institution and language instructor should strive to reduce subjectivity to the minimum. The assessment tools that are presently used in our centre are a combination of both summative and formative assessment. Students are assessed continuously throughout the semester by means of quizzes, in-class readings and in-class writings as well as through a final exam at the end of the semester. The following can be done to improve the assessment in our context: to revise and adhere to the grading criteria; to try out different grading components (e.g. speaking exam); to improve the exit exam mechanism, to raise awareness about the washback effect of the exams; to polish the grading rubrics; to organize writing/speaking evaluation training for the instructors and to compile a document with the guidelines for administering the final exam.

Albanian and Macedonian courses are yet another challenge of the Language Centre. Throughout the university, there is a general belief that students are not learning what they are supposed to in these courses. As a result, they do not possess the appropriate functional ability in these two languages. According to the Language Centre’s action plan, the aim is to enhance the communicative teaching that will further lead to greater communicative competence of the students. This can be achieved by curriculum development according to the communicative approach framework. Also, the assessment should correspond to the teaching and learning that take place in these language classrooms. The profile of these two courses may be raised by improving the learning outcomes. The Albanian/Macedonian instructors will engage in professional development workshops and be a part of informal peer observations followed by constructive discussion.

The fifth challenge of SEEU’s Language Centre is associated with community outreach and this centre’s autonomy. Currently, there are a few activities offered to the community and most of them are non-profitable. As the largest teaching unit in terms of student enrollment, the Language Centre is very often referred to as a strain on SEEU’s budget due to the large number of teaching instructors. For this reason, the Language Centre has to come up with independent programs that will lead to its autonomy and sustainability.

One possible option is designing and offering language courses in English, Albanian and Macedonian for the local as well as the numerous expatriate population. More intensive marketing will help the centre raise the profile of the CELTA courses in the country and the region as the CELTA centre within the Language Centre is the only authorized centre in the country for this kind of courses. IELTS, TOEFL and Matura preparation courses are another way of making money independently. In addition, teacher training workshops may be offered to primary and secondary schools as well as other higher education institutions, based on their needs.

The Language Centre is unique in many aspects. Apart from being the largest teaching unit, it is also a cradle of innovation and good practice. We have established strict standards of course design and our syllabi are updated every semester. The English language classes have the trait of being multinational as this is the only place on campus where students of all nationalities meet to study together. The Exit Exam, i.e. the monitoring of student progress, is the first study on learning outcomes at SEEU. Moreover, the Language Centre provides the largest number of teachers who are members of the Central Observation Team. The transparent grading policy and the way exams are administered (i.e. with scheduling proctors, preparing multiple versions of the exam and blind checking) are another trait that makes the Language Centre special. The tests are results of teamwork and they are unified across levels. The Language Centre’s staff is dedicated and highly trained as the Centre itself provides numerous opportunities for professional development. Also, a variety of individuals are involved in the decision-making process. The achievements are a source of pride for every Language Centre instructor and they serve as a springboard for finding ways to cope with the different challenges we face daily.
Kujtim Ramadani works as a high lector at the SEEU Language Center. He has been teaching English for more than nine years now, including EGP and ESP. He has a BA in English Language and Literature and an MA in Comparative Public Administration in the EU and has also accomplished an on-line certificate program in ESP - Best Practices with the American English Institute at the University of Oregon. He works as a translator and an interpreter, too. Kujtim has participated and presented in several national and international conferences in the field of ESP as well as Public Administration and Political Sciences.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at SEEU

At the beginning of 2010, exactly one year ago, I was fortunate enough to enroll at an eleven-week online certificate program (teacher training course) at the University of Oregon - American English Institute in the field of ESP, Best Practices.

During the first, introductory, week we were given some questions to discuss, and I want to share just two of them with you this time, which I thought were and still are the most significant ones to deal with.

The first one was as follows:

1) How do you see ESP helping in the development of the nation where you work?

This is what my response was:

ESL is generally a new concept in my country. It was first introduced at the university where I am currently working, i.e. the Southeast European University in Tetovo, Macedonia. Since this institution was established by international factors, including the OSCE, some western European countries and the United States (particularly the Indiana University), a lot of new approaches, methods and techniques were introduced to the local staff that were generally used to the old way of teaching known as Ex Cathedra. Plenty of training sessions, workshops, seminars, and conferences have been held since 2001 (the year when the university was established) and they have incredibly contributed to the improvement of the general teaching/learning environment at SEEU.

In this respect, ESP was a new subject to us. We first started at the Business Administration Faculty teaching Business English and expanded later to other faculties such as Public Administration, Computer Sciences, Communication Sciences and finally to the Law Faculty. It was very difficult at the beginning because none of us had done any training in this field earlier, and it took a lot of time for us to prepare and get to class well-equipped. It is still a problem, especially in those areas where there are no ready-made materials, textbooks, etc., as is Public Administration. But we have managed it somehow by crating our own materials that are related to the students’ needs and their area of study and it’s getting better.

The students seem to appreciate our hard work but generally, find it difficult to deal with a completely “New Type of English” which they have never seen before. But, once they are introduced to the course they get interested and curious because they see the importance of the subject itself. All skills are basically practiced in ESP at our institution (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing) with special focus to some more difficult grammatical structures as well as vocabulary banks related to students’ needs and areas of study. What is positive in all this is that the students get familiar with similar (or even the same) materials which they attend in their mother tongue (Albanian or Macedonian) and they can easily compare and contrast.

Even though we are still at the beginning of our long and tiring journey, I can say that our students benefit a lot from our ESP courses since they get prepared for their further professional life and have better chances to apply for different jobs once they graduate from our university. Actually, ESP is what makes our university different and unique in the region, so I am proud to be one of those that contribute towards the development of our institution and the society as a whole.

And, here’s the second question:

2) How has ESP opened up new opportunities for you and/or the individuals you teach – economically, socially, or personally?

I actually agree with what Orr says in his introductory part “The Nature of English for Specific Purposes” that “The growing demand for highly proficient speakers of specialized academic and workplace English is drawing increasingly large numbers of teachers into the ESP profession and awarding them higher salaries and prestige than were previously given to language instructors.”

I feel much better when I teach ESP than EGP. It gives me strength, self-confidence, motivation and courage to search for more, to challenge myself. I have gained new knowledge in fields like business or public administration by teaching it through ESP, which is an invaluable wealth for me. It has also made me attend seminars, workshops and trainings like the one I am currently enrolled in and it all counts towards my professional development and perfection. It is also economically beneficial since it gives you the opportunity to offer ESP courses not only to students but to the community, too, because everyone is trying to grasp a share in the now highly competitive labor market and free market economy.

In conclusion, due to the fact that English is now offered as a core course from the very first grade in our primary schools, it implies that most of the students will already come with very good knowledge of English at our university, so ESP remains as the only long-term sustainable solution for our future engagement and work in higher educational institutions.

REFERENCES
Being a good teacher means not acting like a teacher: Building rapport that breaks the bonds.

A colleague once told me that students thrive on discipline in the classroom because it demonstrates to them that you, as the teacher, have their best interests in mind. This notion, if it is to be useful, must be founded on a relationship between teacher and student that is built upon mutual trust and respect. Building rapport with our students, more importantly, “good rapport,” means developing relationships where teachers and students are able to effectively relate with one another both in and out of the classroom (Murphy & Valdez, 2005). Building rapport with our students, then, is one of the most important things we do as educators. For teachers, rapport building serves to ground respectful and creative learning environments that encourage students to ask questions, think critically, and actively participate in the construction of knowledge. For students, effectively building and maintaining positive relationships demonstrates by example that we as educators actually care about them and that we take an investment in both them and their education.

Research on student-faculty interaction has clearly demonstrated the importance of developing a sense of connectedness, between students and teachers, in positively affecting student performance and overall satisfaction in their educational experience (Yoon 2002; Filene 2005; Cox & Orehovec 2007). While the literature is important, as educators we see first-hand exactly how the choices we make in the process of building rapport directly influence the learning environments of our classrooms. The question still remains, then, as to how we go about building relationships with our students in ways that positively impact their performance as well as their active participation in their own learning.

As the title suggests, building a meaningful rapport means breaking the bonds of the traditional teacher-student model wherein the teacher simply delivers information to the passive student. In each of my classes I make great efforts to relate with students on an equal level. Taking the time to get to know my students fosters an open environment that is more interactive. Bain (2004) argues that this openness produces trust and an “interactive environment” where students can “ask questions without reproach or embarrassment” so that a “variety of views...could be freely discussed” (p. 142). In each of my classes I set aside time, which I have come to call warm-up time, for me to simply engage in conversation with my students as a class. We talk about their lives, their weekends, their interests and I share with them some of mine. This has proven to be a useful tool as it engages in open and equal interaction. Further, it helps to overcome the “professional distance” in a way that builds the necessary trust and respect (Cox & Orehovec, p. 361, 2007). When I demonstrate to my students that I am invested in them and that we can be open with each other they begin to identify with me as a person and as their teacher. Of particular importance is how this then fosters a sense of loyalty and commitment between my students and me.

Not acting like a teacher also involves rethinking the power structure between teacher and student. That means allowing students to make choices about the direction of the class. I invite students to offer suggestions about assignments, class activities, outside readings, and even grading criteria. Incorporating their ideas empowers them. It also shows that I trust and respect them as independent thinkers – that I have their best interests in mind. The significance of this is found in developing the type of relationship with my students where we can clearly and openly communicate our expectations of each other. I have found that by ostensibly relinquishing some of my power as the teacher my students are in fact more engaged and more likely to exceed my standards of achievement. This, however, is only possible because I invest the time to co-create with my students a strong bond of trust that is clearly felt and communicated.

In many ways, building positive rapport involves a reconsideration of how we as educators think about and interact with our students. If we change our thinking from building rapport to creating meaningful interactions with our students we can offer them the creative environment, founded on mutual trust and respect, which is so crucial to participative learning. In this sense, then, not acting like a teacher involves engaging our students in a different way – one that centers on developing the types of relationships with our students that provides them a sense of autonomy while guiding them in the right direction.

I always joke with my students that I am too honest with them. When I make mistakes I admit them and usually have a good laugh with my students at my own expense. While research shows that personality has little to do with building rapport (see Bain 2007), I argue that being true to who you are is an effective way to build open and honest relationships with your students. I have an idea of who I am as a person, as an educator, and as a scholar. My students also develop ideas of who they are as well as develop ideas of who I am. I have always found that the closer those ideas match-up the more genuine and impactful the relationships with my students become. As Bob Marley sang, “none but ourselves can free our minds.” By not acting like traditional teachers we can connect with our students in ways that empower them to do that very thing.

REFERENCES
The Status and the Position of the SEEU Language Center viewed from a European Perspective

Last year the SEEU Language Center (LC) became a full member of the European Association of Language Centers within universities (CERCLE’s). This membership allowed us to become a part of a large family; since we are the only LC in Macedonia and as such we have felt isolated, yet unique. Membership provides valuable information about all the latest developments related to issues that affect the status and work of these institutions. We then, use the information about the latest events and changes to compare with our practices, learn from them and try to be compatible with other, already affirmed and well established Language Centers in Europe.

One recent event, a seminar for the Directors of Language Centers (Rome, Nov. 2010) devoted to setting a framework for Quality Assurance (QA) of Language Centers, was used as an opportunity to consider the criteria under the QA scheme as applied in our situation. This seminar was also a chance to exchange experiences with colleagues from all over Europe about the current position of Language Centers under the universities’ structure.

Language Centers are affected by the budget cuts and the financial crises in many countries. That this is not restricted to Europe only, can be illustrated by the following news headline from ACTFL SmartBrief, an American weekly newsletter on education and languages from December, 7th 2010: “Colleges struggle to preserve foreign language programs”. On the other hand, the Modern Language Association Report informs on the greatest number of students attending foreign language classes since 1960 and growing popularity of the foreign language programs among students.

The most convenient and the least painful course of action for the university authorities may be to restrict language programs, especially having in mind that Language Centers do not offer degree programs. In most cases, as it is with the SEEU LC, Language Centers do not have their own students, unless they run preparatory programs, which is the case with some big international universities. In all other cases, the existence of the Language Centers depends on the good will of other Faculties which devote some of their credits to languages. This situation and the traditional struggle of the university language teachers to win parity of esteem with ‘academics’, have led to setting a framework for QA and establishing an agency for QA of Language Centers within universities.

The aims of the Agency for QA correspond to those of the British Association of Lecturers for Academic Purpose (BALEAP): “To enhance the quality of foreign language provision in institutions of higher education and to support professional development of the staff, provide an accreditation scheme for these courses, as well as to promote and disseminate foreign language research through conferences and workshops”.

The criteria which will be considered are still in the process of review by all members of CERCLE’s that took part in this seminar, including the SEEU Language Center Director and Quality Adviser, but they will be based on the criteria already defined by the BALEAP:

- Management and administration (treatment of staff, clear lines of responsibility, professional standards);
- Staffing (qualifications, terms of employment, induction, development);
- Resources and facilities (students’ full access to University facilities, suitable premises, teaching equipment);
- Course design (based on student’s needs, clear progression, clear aims, appropriate materials);
- Teaching and learning (class size, number of teachers, consultations, appropriate assignments);
- Assessment (regular assessment and feedback on progress, explicit criteria, accessible reports);
- Student welfare (well-informed student support staff, social program, accommodation, if applicable);
- Course evaluation (gathers feedback from students and staff for continuous evaluation and review).

SEEU LC was evaluated externally in March 2010 under very similar terms of reference drawn by the then Pro-Rector for Academic Issues, the Quality Advisor and the Director of the LC. The results of this evaluation showed a very well developed organizational structure and high quality teaching and learning opportunities for SEEU students, provided by qualified and committed staff. The external evaluation resulted in short term and long term recommendations to be implemented for more successful and efficient English language programs and a special focus on the two local languages, Albanian and Macedonian.
A year after the external evaluation, we made progress on the recommendations by adapting the course syllabi to respond to students’ needs taking into consideration the broader community needs. This mostly refers to employers’ statements about the need for improved speaking skills of our students. We greeted the initiative for establishing a QA agency that could provide external evaluation as an objective and professional measure of the quality of language provision.

At the aforementioned meeting of European LC Directors, it was a pleasure and a bit of a surprise to realize that out of about thirty centers, only three have undergone the external evaluation, one of which is the SEEU LC. What is more, the terms of reference, the procedure and the documents reporting the findings from LC external evaluation were taken as models for designing the draft documents that will be used for creating the common European Quality Assessment Criteria and for establishing the accreditation agency.

It is comforting to know that although quite young, existing for nine years, the SEEU LC shares similarities with other European Language Centers with a longer tradition. In some segments is the SEEU LC even ahead of them. It has a very good administrative structure that guarantees servicing of about 2500 students at any time; it has 35 full-time highly qualified teaching staff; the curriculum is frequently updated and is based on students’ needs; the LC is well positioned within the university in terms of providing language courses for all students, without exception, no matter what they study; it has well equipped classroom space and resources; a well organized staff performance evaluation based on instruments such as teaching observations and student evaluations; it has conditions to reach the community and gain profit. Finally, it had the external evaluation. What a relief! Let’s get back to work.

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Intercultural Learning in Cyberspace: Using Skype in EFL Instruction

Thanks to Skype, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a global setting is no longer a utopia. Students can engage in projects and conversations with their peers from all over the world, provided that they have a computer with internet connection, a webcam, a headset (with earphones and a microphone), and the free video calling software Skype installed on their respective computers. Interaction with native speakers of English, which sometimes may be a problem in an EFL setting where the everyday language is not English, becomes much easier with a tool like Skype: “Skype can be used to provide a variety of authentic learning experiences to students” (Eaton, 2010). Recent research indicates that online interaction through Skype and similar devices can serve to enhance students’ intercultural competence (O’Dowd, 2007). According to O’Dowd, telecollaborative activities are especially “useful for making students aware of how aspects of the target culture are perceived within the culture itself, and what are the significant events and people in the target culture’s ‘national memory’” (p. 147). Further, including periods of dialogue (i.e., explicit comparison of the cultures at hand and direct exchange of reactions) in telecollaboration helps best to develop cultural awareness (p. 147). Thus, Skype transcends traditional boundaries of the EFL classroom as students meet and learn in cyberspace, enhancing their intercultural competence.

This article looks at Skype as a potential tool for EFL instruction, especially with regard to intercultural learning. In the following, I will first explain what Skype actually is, and then go on to make some suggestions on how it can be used in EFL teaching to enhance students’ intercultural competence. While thinking about promising Skype projects, it is also important to be aware of what might go wrong. Therefore, this article is also a cautionary tale for teachers wanting to prepare a project that involves the use of Skype. As with most teaching, careful planning is key to success.

So what is Skype? Skype is free software for video and voice calling, as well as instant messaging and file sharing that is possible with other Skype users. Skype also offers calls to landline and mobile phones, which have to be paid for. Different Skype versions are available for Windows, Mac, and Linux based systems. Generally, (free) face-to-face video calling works if both parties are online and have logged in to their Skype accounts. As mentioned earlier, callers also need a...
webcam (which must be turned on once the call has been answered), speakers/earphones, and a microphone. Skype’s chat and file sharing functions might also be helpful, depending on the nature of the learning activity at hand.

So how can Skype be used in a meaningful way in the EFL classroom? Utilizing Skype or any other kind of technology always holds the risk of using it for its own sake. Therefore, it is important to ask oneself as a teacher what students are supposed to learn and whether a certain activity that involves technology actually helps students learn better what they are supposed to learn. Thus, careful preparation is key to a successful project.

As O’Dowd’s (2007) study suggests, Skype can be used as a tool for ethnographic research: Students engage in conversations with each other to find out certain aspects about their respective cultures. With regard to this approach, telecollaboration enhances the development of intercultural competence best when using a combination of different online tools. E-mails provide students with “in-depth written descriptions about the target culture” (O’Dowd, 2007, p. 148), whereas video-conferencing offers an opportunity to communicate more quickly, clarify doubts, and engage in ‘real’ interactions. Thus, O’Dowd proposes using Skype together with written communication, which means that students practice their listening and speaking skills as well as their reading and writing skills. While O’Dowd’s study is geared towards university-level classes, I contend that a similar approach, with appropriate preparation of the students and guiding through the teacher, can be used at the high school level.

For the high school level, classroom projects on specific topics that require students to partner up with a student from another (English-speaking) country to learn about certain aspects of a culture seems most appropriate. Topics that might be of interest include, but are not limited to: customs and traditions; school systems; sports; popular culture; etc. When a teacher decides on a Skype project, it is relevant to constantly keep in mind what students are supposed to learn and how they might best be able to succeed in this endeavor. If a class engages in a Skype project that is concerned with some ethnographical aspects it might seem a good idea for students to come up with questions that guide their research; the teacher might also think about providing some background information on ethnography as a way to study cultures. O’Dowd’s study offers some helpful insights into what this might mean. In offering a different approach to learning, that is, learning in cyberspace, Skype might also give quieter students a chance to perform well (Mirtschin, 2008).

Learning about other cultures is vital in times of globalization. Preparing students for a global job market also includes helping them learn to build intercultural competence. Skype can be a helpful tool to enhance students’ intercultural competence. It can be used as a tool for classroom projects on specific cultural topics that are based on ethnographic research; but it might also be used in other contexts, such as during preparation for school exchanges, author interviews (Eaton, 2010; Messner, 2010; Rosen, 2009), guest lectures (TeachingDegree.Org, n.d.), as well as after-school help/tutoring (TeachingDegree.Org, n.d.). If used in a meaningful way, Skype can open doors to the world and help to transform the regular classroom into a borderless learning space, helping students to improve their intercultural competence.

Acknowledgment

The idea of using Skype in EFL instruction that I present in this article goes back to several discussions between my sister, Linda Mölders and myself. I would like to thank her for sharing her insights with me and for her feedback on this article.

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My teaching Philosophy

There are many valuable intellectual disciplines where its practitioners must memorize important dates or write moving essays in every language. But mathematics is valuable for other reasons, and is the discipline where my natural skills thrive. Sharing one’s skills with others as a teacher or instructor requires a well-considered teaching philosophy, which I share here.

I write as a teaching assistant at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where I have taught introductory Math courses ranging from Precalculus to Calculus I. My students have been mostly non-Math major freshmen. The challenge that I found most students face with Mathematics is a psychological one. Most students view Math as some complicated and abstract formulae, and this preconceived notion prevents them from even trying to understand the concepts behind the formulae. Rather they take the approach, What will be on the Exam? How do I pass the course? My goal as an instructor is to properly instill the motivation to critically and deeply internalize the subject.

In my experience, students tend to believe that examples always illustrate a general rule.

This belief is easily dispelled using mathematics, since there are many examples where there seem to be a general rule, but in fact the believed rule fails. For example, when first asked, student’s intuition will lead them to believe that the derivative of product of two differentiable functions is equal to the product of the respective derivatives. So, while teaching the Product Rule in class I take the example \( f(x) \cdot x \) and \( g(x) \cdot x \) and show how it fails. In practical terms, this helps students understand that the things they believe must constantly be tested, against new evidence, because the new evidence may contradict their previously held belief, forcing them to reevaluate how they understand the world. This is easily illustrated with Mathematics because in many cases we can easily demonstrate that what at first appears to be a general rule is false.

The more nuanced issue that I must confront as an able instructor is the cumbersome range of skills and motivations of my students. Frankly there are some students who will not help themselves. My solution is to establish an active learning community. For example, I break students into small learning groups. I give a quiz on the first day of the semester and use their scores to assure that each group has the most valuable mix of math skills and backgrounds.

Learning groups also promote active learning. I give each group a different problem set and have one student from each group present their solutions on the blackboard. While doing so I take into consideration the international students and try to keep each group culturally diverse. This value is a reflection of my global view of the academic mathematics profession, and my personal ability to culturally acclimate. I have come to believe the more students communicate with each other, the better they learn math.

While teaching I encourage students to come up with answers on their own rather than me giving them. The real issue is not the math problem, but the learning attitude. I give each student permission to take the risk of being wrong and to connect with the excitement of learning. As with many of my efforts, my aim is to help my students see the ‘bigger picture’ and concepts rather than settle for the easy to digest calculations. Surface learners always try to memorize isolated facts and thus have low memory retention capacity. My goal is to promote deep learning. I expect my students to be able to understand and argue with proper counterexamples why the hypothesis of the Mean Value Theorem is necessary for drawing conclusions of the Mean Value theorem, instead of getting lost in the technicalities of the proof.

One way to promote critical learning is to give students time on task. Periodically I ask them challenging questions in take-home quizzes where they are expected to work independently. For instance I derive the Quotient Rule in class using the Product Rule and I ask them to come up with a different proof using the limit definition. This way of showing them multiple approaches on the same problem also help them to develop problem solving skills.

While explaining the solution I mention that this is the same method that we used in class to prove the Product Rule. This helps establish a pattern.

My teaching philosophy and techniques remain a work in progress. As I continue to gain experience, I find new and effective methods to reach a wider circumference of my students, irrespective of their educational backgrounds. I have made it to this point of my academic career thanks to the professors who influenced me by teaching how to fish for a lifetime rather than fish for a day. I hope when my students walk out of my classroom and take the plunge into their life that they too would be able to fish for a lifetime.
What is Extensive Reading and what are the benefits for second language learners

Extensive reading is an approach to the teaching and learning of second language reading in which learners read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence. Harold Palmer (as cited in Bamford & Day, 1998) is a pioneer of language teaching in modern times, and explains the term “extensive reading” as abundant reading. Extensive Reading means “rapidly” (1921/1964, p.111) reading “book after book” (1917/1968, p.137). The reader’s attention should be on the meaning, not the language, of the text. The texts that are read according to the conception of extensive reading are clearly being read for the purposes of language study, but, because the attention is on the content not the language, it could be that the texts are also being read for ordinary real-world purposes of pleasure and information. An extensive reading program for EFL learners:

1. Encourages learners to read texts at a lower level than their academic reading requirements.
2. Improves learner’s motivation as they read a growing number of texts.
3. Improves language fluency as learners develop active and passive vocabulary.
4. Helps learners to become more conscious of written mistakes and develop comprehensive awareness of grammatical structures (Davis, 1995, p.108).
5. Gives learners the opportunity to improve their language level in a comfortable environment, outside the classroom.
6. Allows learners to read at their own pace, without using the dictionary.
7. Encourages learners to self-select appealing Graded Readers.

I used Extensive Reading Program with students that were mostly repeaters and my aim was to prove that by reading extensively two times per week for 20 minutes, students’ reading skills may improve and their awareness of the need to read may increase. My procedure was to give the students an approximate time of 20 minutes to read and complete activities connected with the chapter they read that class. During the Extensive Reading Program which lasted for two months, students read one book and two short stories in class and one book at home. I prepared the activities according to students’ needs and I used a variety of tasks: before reading, during reading, after reading as well as open-ended questions, multiple choice and filling the blanks questions in each class for 20 minutes. The activities were focused on target vocabulary structures and lexical and grammatical concepts that students can spontaneously acquire during the Extensive Reading class time; the activities also focused on students’ needs and helped them improve their knowledge of English. Moreover, as a teacher I took the role of active participant and a model reader supporting the activity. Students were able to share their experiences by talking in class about what they read. These actions were intended to raise students’ motivation. I used a simplified version of the Graded Reader and the grammar structures and other consecutive sentences were short and not too complex, in order to create a climate for student engagement and relaxation. Having in mind all these facts mentioned above, I used the Graded Readers as a tool to stimulate students to read and increase their reading abilities. Students were able to select Graded Readers, and read it in class and at home, according to their interest in specific subjects: fiction, non-fiction stories, love, detective and adventure stories. The intent was that students would be able to learn new things through reading as well as widen their knowledge on topics that they liked to read about. Moreover, students’ comprehension was supposed to increase and build up their background knowledge through reading. The more reading that was done in class and at home, it is supposed that the more proficient students would become. The reader matures over the time and develops cognitively, as he gains experience with more challenging tasks.

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Effect of a Local Non-Profit Organization on the Socio-Cultural Adjustment of New International Students

Bowling Green is a small Ohio town of over 35,000 people and the home of Bowling Green State University—a mid-sized university of 20,000 students. For the size of Bowling Green, it is a very culturally diverse town consisting of over 700 International students studying at BGSU, over 100 students attending the Bowling Green Language Institute (a private intensive English program housed at BGSU), International faculty, International business people, International seasonal workers employed on area farms, immigrants and many family members of all of the above. Global Connections, a non-profit organization comprised of local churches and BGSU campus ministry organizations, was started in 2000 to unconditionally serve the International community. Made up of several hundred local volunteers, the organization has the following as its mission: (1) connect with the International community by serving them and providing cultural events for them to participate in; (2) make friends by inviting them into our homes; (3) learn about their culture while sharing aspects of ours; and (4) create opportunities for them to observe and participate in our spiritual communities, if they choose to. GC organizes annual events such as its Free Food & Furniture, Barn Dance, International Potluck, Spring Break trip to Amish Country, a Welcome Picnic for International Seasonal Workers and more (see GC’s website, www.globalconnectionsbg.org). As well, it offers various services such as a free English class, a free TOEFL-iBT prep class, shopping trips to International markets in Toledo, and weekly shopping trips to local stores.

Since Global Connections welcomes new International students every semester, I have been very interested if we play a role in facilitating students’ adjustment to life in the United States and especially to Bowling Green. Socio-cultural adjustment is defined as the ability to fit in and negotiate interactive aspects of a new culture (Searle & Ward, 1990). During the summer of 2009, Shanshan Huang, a graduate student in the Cross-cultural & International Education program and GC’s intern—whose research interest was the socio-cultural adjustment of new International students—and I organized a Welcome Night for New International Students before classes started. Though new students are required to participate in orientation programming with the University’s Center for International Programs, the length of its orientation has been shortened over the years, and based on Shanshan’s input and that of other International students, we felt that GC’s Welcome Night could supplement CIP’s orientation and provide new students with additional resources to aid in their adjustment. Using research on the areas of adjustment new International students must make, we created workshops centered on four key subjects: academic, cultural (concentrating on values that shape US culture and academia), intercultural (facilitating relationships in a new culture), and intracultural (dealing with culture shock and stress). In addition, we added a workshop on life in Bowling Green to provide Internationals with information on drinking, driving and biking laws and getting around without public transportation. We asked various professionals and University faculty to lead these workshops. We also put together a skit showcasing some of the humorous areas of adjustment particular to life in Bowling Green and combined this with a raffle of donated prizes, several student guest speakers sharing their own stories of cross-cultural adjustment, and a pizza dinner. Based on feedback forms from students, the Welcome Night was extremely well-received and appreciated.

In addition to planning this Welcome Night, Shanshan and I created a questionnaire that was sent to almost 100 new International students on GC’s database later on during the fall 2009 semester. Of the approximately 25 who responded, we found out the following:

• Before arriving in Bowling Green, 38% thought they might have slight difficulty in adjusting, 38% moderate difficulty, and 24% great difficulty.
• Having been in BG for two months (at the time the survey was sent out), 14% found that they actually had no difficulty in adjusting, 48% had slight difficulty, 19% had moderate difficulty, and 19% had great difficulty.
• 33% strongly agreed that participating in Global Connections’ events and services had been helpful in facilitating their cultural adjustment with 47% agreeing and 14% neutral.
• When asked in what areas Global Connections helped in their adjustment
  • 72% felt that Global Connections provided a platform whereby they could interact with other International students and develop friendships.
  • 61% thought that GC provided them an opportunity to learn about and engage in American culture and experiences.
  • 55% received furniture and household items they needed.
  • 40% felt that Global Connections provided a platform by which they could interact with GC Volunteers and develop friendships.
  • 33% received information about academic, cultural, interpersonal, intrapersonal adjustment and about life in BG when they first arrived.
  • 22% received information about Bowling Green and Global Connections when they first arrived.
  • 17% received rides to banks and stores.
During the spring 2010 semester, Shanshan and I conducted a follow-up focus group with 12 International students participating. Based on their feedback, we tweaked our New Student Welcome Night in August (offering two Welcome Nights—one for graduates and one for undergraduates). We also began a new program this semester—Community Conversations—where we invited guest speakers from the area to answer students’ questions about specific topics. This month, we brought in a weather forecaster from a local Toledo, Ohio news station; he was able to provide students with information about how to prepare for winter, the different types of winter storms, the levels of emergency, and how to dress for winter. We also began some service projects, where Internationals have the opportunity to give back to the community. Currently, we are serving at a non-profit organization that provides a free meal to those in our area who need one. For many Internationals, this is their first exposure to the poor in our community.

The research we conducted last year and are in the process of conducting this year underscores the fact that Global Connections is helpful in facilitating new International students’ adjustment to the United States and to Bowling Green. Our desire is not only to get to know International students but also help them feel like a part of our town. We trust that with ongoing feedback from students, we can continue to offer quality programming and services that benefit all Internationals in our community.

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The Language Center Classroom

It is rare to find an environment where two or more languages are used in teaching and learning. The SEEU Language Center is one of the rare places where different cultures and ethnic groups in Macedonia and beyond are united in learning English. Students have the opportunity to develop their verbal and written language skills across a variety of languages.

Through this short article, I would like to present two standpoints: First, through English classes at the Language Center, different communities in the country come together to strengthen community connections and foster good will among them, contributing to the enhancement of the campus cultural life by promoting diversity as an attraction for SEEU and the country in general.

Second, the multiculturalism or multilingualism that is promoted by the SEEU Language Center brings together different ethnicities and cultures in the English language classrooms and is an advantage towards increasing students’ learning achievement.

The students’ approach towards learning outcomes is more comprehensive than in single-ethnicity classrooms, since different groups have different interest for learning. This offers multiple opportunities for students to explore, discover, and grow academically.

This diverse environment is greatly encouraged by the management of the University as well, who support the socially positive interactions between different ethnic groups in the English language classes. This inclusive approach taken by the Language Centre staff could prove to be a model for the society in general.

There are many aspects of multilingualism in a culturally diverse setting that we can address and regard as positive. First, in this multilingual environment, there is a different state of mind. Students of different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds have different opinions about numerous topics that can be discussed as part of their English language acquisition.

This mixture of cultures, ethnicities and religions in the classroom creates a better learning environment. Students challenge one another with their different ideas and backgrounds, a process which activates and develops their speaking skills. They can continue to improve their language skills through debating various topics or provocative questions. As a supporting example for this environment I would point out some examples from my recent teaching experience. Namely, last semester I taught an ESP for law class. In some of these mixed cultural classes, on several occasions, we discussed and debated about topics such as the death penalty, abortion, and homosexual rights etc. These classes turned out to be very lively and all students participated and expressed themselves. I think this happened because the class was highly diverse. The subjects discussed, and the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the students all combined, encouraged all class participants to speak out and present their ideas in English language.

What I have observed as a teacher was that the students’ attitudes and assessments of one another was highly participatory Many times I have noticed that during interactions with speakers of another language students eradicate stereotypes toward the other culture and judge their classmates based on other criteria such as language skills rather than on cultural background.

As we move along the semester I always see how students of different cultural backgrounds get to know each other better and feel closer to one another. Many times they assert that it is the English language class which brings them together and helps them better understand their differences.

Therefore, mixed ethnic classes during English Language courses must be supported and encouraged even more in the future. Students of different ethnicities must sit together somewhere, chat together, even argue together, to better understand their differences. All of these contacts, regardless of their nature, contribute to a mutual understanding and peace building among students of various ethnicities and religions at SEEU, and in the wider in community.

SEEU is known as an Institution for higher education with its unique values. One of its most important values is that it offers equal studying opportunities for all youth in the country and in the wider region regardless of their cultural, religious or ethnic background. The Language Centre, with its multiethnic structure, exemplifies the unifying mission of SEEU, and the Centre’s English classes provide an excellent forum for language acquisition and cultural understanding.
My Experience at SEEU; A Multilingual and Multicultural Adventure
Kalin Markovic, Department of Communication Sciences

As my studies come to the end, I started thinking that it would be nice to analyze my experience at SEEU, how I can benefit from it, the formal as well as the informal part of my education, and so forth. So, I started thinking that overall it’s all been good, I got to learn all about communication, theory, and I got to read a bunch of books. But did I actually learn anything?

I spent 3 years at SEEU and I had the opportunity to interact with a lot of professors, a lot of different kinds of people, people from different ethnical, social, religious and lingual backgrounds, and for this I am very grateful. Sure, Macedonia is a multicultural society, and I grew up with people from different backgrounds, but then again it is still difficult to overcome some barriers while communicating. I believe that my experience at SEEU helped me overcome most of those barriers and helped me mature as a person in general. I got to meet people from so many different countries, with such diverse cultures and totally different mindsets. Communicating with these people I learned to respect the diverse and different mindsets and I also realized that people don’t have to speak the same language to understand each other. Speaking of languages, most of all I praise my experience at the Language Center, here at SEEU. It was the only place where I had the chance to have classes with non-Macedonian friends. It was a place where our teachers implemented modern methodology to teach us not only languages but also helped us acquire useful skills on our day to day communication, our organizational and professional communication, and also taught us about the different backgrounds they come from. The Language Center is the place at SEEU where all the people, despite their language of studying can interact in class together. I think this benefits everyone because there is no better teacher than life experiences and exchanging them brings life to the same. I would strongly recommend for the future generations that will study at SEEU to take part in these kinds of classes, especially language and Communication Sciences students. Also the management of SEEU should provide students more opportunities to take more of these classes.

So again I ask myself, did I learn anything? - Yes I did, and then some. I learned that communicating with different people helps us become more educated, better and smarter people. I learned that people of different background can have conflict, overcome that conflict and benefit from that experience, professionally, emotionally, and socially. I learned that learning different languages is awesome, and that knowing any language is a treasure. I made a lot of friends and a lot of contacts, which can help me as a person, acquaintance or a friend today, but also as a communications expert tomorrow. Ultimately, I will get a diploma, just like everyone that studies and works hard would, but what I value the most about this three year adventure is what I learned while communicating with all these different kinds of people, accepting their different mindsets and learning about their backgrounds, which really helped me become a better person today. I value this three year adventure and as my time at SEEU comes to an end I know that these three years will benefit me in many aspects of my life. Three years of a multilingual and multicultural adventure that will give me knowledge and strength to embark on new adventures in life.

Arta Reshiti
Department of Business Administration

Languages are a huge asset for all of us. Nowadays it’s not enough to only know your own language, but you have to know the others too.

SEEU provides the possibility to all the students all around to go there and to become what they want, it is the real place where you can feel that being part of it is the right choice that you could ever make.

The Language Center in particular has so many assets to offer. It has a big area where everyone can feel comfortable. All the things are in order and that gives you the possibility to learn more and of course to achieve more. The fact is that not just the students that are studying any languages can be part of that place, but every single student no matter which faculty they came from, have the right to be a part of the others while they are learning languages.

The idea of making all the students to study English language is something that is in our favor. The faculty has enough classrooms and other modern facilities where we can study, the atmosphere is lively, so everyone tries to get as much as he can just to achieve the point he/she wants. Everything functions in a perfect way. The most important thing is that we have professors that make us understand the reason of studying English language. They are all professionally prepared and they give the maximum to make us understand what we don’t know. The teachers make us feel independent and more creative in our ideas and give us the inspiration to achieve more through their methods of teaching.

Another important fact is that classes are just with few students and it allows the professor to pay attention to everyone. After a short period of time they will make you think differently and fortify your dictionary with their motivation that they provide you all the time. During the classes we have debates where we can share our ideas with the others and discuss about different topics. We frequently have quizzes and in this way the professors will see if we are going in the right way. They also provide us with books to read during classes and we try to give explanation of what we have understood from them. Throughout the whole time we are informed what we need to do.

Finally, I can say that having a Language Centre like we do at SEEU provides us with opportunities to expand the range of knowledge and to share our experiences with the others as well as proves that learning languages is the best benefit for all of us.
From our students

Krenar Abazi
Department of Business Administration

The learning environment in any academic setting should be welcoming, friendly, warm, working, and inspiring. Unfortunately, this is not true with every academic setting that I have had a chance to be in. Maybe it is so due to several factors that may influence negatively. However, now that I am an SEEU student I have to say that I am fortunate enough to be able to utilize all the opportunities that the university has to offer.

I believe that the biggest asset of SEEU is the Language Center. It is one of a kind possibility for all students to upgrade their English skills and as a result be able to pursue a much better career with any given degree they pursue at SEEU. English being the lingua franca will allow us to be competitive in the global market.

The learning process at the Language Center is absolutely inspiring. One great thing about it is that one can increase the knowledge, to prepare better and in a more effective way for a future career, to get a new experience and to meet new people.

However, from the other side, while in other university departments we listen to what the professor has to say, while not being entirely actively involved, personally, I think that at the Language Center we learn how to cooperate and listen to each other which is a very important element in today’s education. It’s like living with a roommate even when you are in the classroom. From the first sight, it may be difficult to loosen up to a completely strange person, but the classes are the ones that help one to be friendlier and more supportive.

As we all know, students will be better trained with a systematic and a practical education which basically happens in any English class. Hence, those changes will make any student proud of her/his education.

To summarize, beyond the great resources this center has to offer, besides the great teaching methods, I am suggesting that some changes occur. I am not trying to be funny or anything but maybe the chairs could be replaced. Overall, I think that at the Language Center students can improve their communication skills and have better conceptions of things around. This opportunity could rise dramatically the chances to choose what we really like to do and make us realize that the study of a foreign language is not only basis to new communicative skills, but it also provides a new way of learning experience of culture and society.

Viola Idrizi,
Department of English Language and Literature

My name is Viola Idrizi and I am a 3-rd year student at SEEU. Being an SEEU student is a great privilege for me. I have always wanted to pursue a degree in an international setting where multiculturalism and multilingualism are promoted. SEEU is a great example for promoting such an atmosphere and I think the best example of such a setting is the Language Center. I would describe it as one of the most dynamic places in our university. This is due to the presence of individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds which results in a diverse environment where all the students learn together and share their experiences. A very important issue is the respect and approval of the existence of diversity both by the staff and the students themselves.

The general atmosphere is warm, welcoming, and comfortable. The staff is friendly and very helpful. The Language Center is modern, lively, creative, relaxed and it creates a magnificent atmosphere which is ideal for studying. Walking down the halls you can hear different languages but the one that dominates most is English language, whether it is among the staff, students and professors or the opposite. In general, the Language Center cultivates a sense of community where multicultural and multiethnic society corporate together.

The very first time I had class in English Language, the experience was quite different from the classes I had in secondary school. The classroom organization was very up-to-date with active teaching methods that were highly inclusive toward the students. Moreover, the best teachers I’ve had at SEE University were English Language teachers and the experiences I’ve had in these classes cannot be compared to anything else I’ve experienced during my studies.
Our Mission

We are dedicated to contributing to achieving SEEU’s general mission as set out in the Statute and especially to promoting a multilingual and multicultural approach to learning, stressing both the importance of local and international languages. Our main goals are to recognize and support excellence in teaching and learning, to realize the maximum potential of our students and staff and to encourage professionalism, compassion, diversity and social responsibility.