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**March 23rd 2020**

**Section A: Culture**

**The Culturally-fair Classroom:**

**An analysis of Brazilian culture as it relates to education and cultural biases in the classroom**

**Question 1: What are the key differences in culture, including education, compared to your own that you will need to grasp and understand before taking up your post”**

“You are unique, just like everybody else.” Steven Wright comedically makes this point, but it also rings true for culture, and Brazilian culture is no different. Brazilian-American counselor Joao Festa brought to light three key cultural differences in our interview that would be imperative for me to understand should I take up an ESL position in Brazil. These relate mainly to the average Brazilian home life, work prioritization, and the roles therein.

Brazilians have a very family-centric culture with very clear roles. The mother is the head inside the /home, father the outside, and children are to listen and obey without delay or complaint- unlike America, children do not speak out of turn or argue when told to do something. And most of these commands have to do with physical tasks or chores because household upkeep is almost never outsourced. You would not call a mechanic, plumber, or painter; you do the task yourself or call your grandmother to direct you to someone in the community for assistance.

This type of culture instills a great work ethic at a very young age and makes the family and work the main priority. Because of this, entertainment, social outings, hobbies, and other things Americans would typically do with their free time are extremely limited. Education also takes a backseat to vocation unless the family is well-set financially. Typically, the youngest child has the highest chance of a college education because the family is more likely to be in a better position to help when the opportunity arrives. Festa’s father, for example, only had a 3rd grade education, his older siblings never went to college, and he was only able to go to college later in life. His little sister, however, went to college right after high school, has her master’s degree, and is presently working on her doctorate.

In order to effectively teach ESL to Brazilian students, these cultural differences must be fully grasped and understood. Their culture is very family-centric, their home life is very work-oriented, and their education can be either very high or very low on their list of priorities. In either case, they are very respectful of the differing roles and have a strong work ethic- it is up to the teacher to capitalize on this effectively.

**Question 2: What biases do you think teachers of English should be sensitive to when teaching in a non-English speaking country? How can we strive to be culture-fair in the classroom? You can focus on one specific non-English speaking country if you wish to.**

Teachers of English to Brazilian students should be sensitive to the different cultural biases in the classroom in order to create a culture-fair environment. Without this cultural understanding it would be very easy to confuse a quiet classroom with an understanding class and poor performance with learning deficiencies.

Most Brazilian students have a very role-oriented background. The mother oversees everything that goes on inside the house, the father the outside, and the children are to listen and obey without question or back-talk. This is a result of the culture being very family and community-centric. Americans, on the other hand, are raised to be very independent and vocal. If they do not agree with something, they argue their point; if they want something, they speak up.

American teachers expect students to raise their hands when they have questions. However, Brazilian students will usually remain quiet unless specifically asked or prompted by the teacher. In Brazil, a quiet student is a good and respectful student, but it does not mean that he or she understands. It is imperative that the teacher checks for understanding throughout the lesson to maximize classroom comprehension.

Brazilian students usually also have a very strong work ethic with very little to no free time. Therefore, analogies, icebreakers, activities, homework, etc. should reflect this. For example, opening a class with the question “what do you like to do in your free time?” would probably result in a lot of blank stares because at home there are always things needed to be done around the house.

Similarly, students will much more likely be engaged in task-related exercises or work-related analogies than they would be with assignments based around a favorite hobby or social activity. Focusing on the latter would result in poor performance or poor comprehension, not because of a learning deficiency, but because of a cultural difference.

Cultural understanding goes hand-in-hand with sound instruction because of the uniqueness of the students and their upbringing. To be an effective teacher, one must be a culture-fair teacher, and a big part of this is being sensitive to the different biases in the classroom, both of the teacher and the student. Because after all, “You are unique, just like everybody else.”