

THE QUERETARO CULTURAL IMMERSION PROGRAM

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During the fall of 1978 a Preparatory School of Bicultural Understanding was instituted in the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey at its Querétaro campus. The purpose of this program is to create broader bonds of humanistic understanding between the peoples of Mexico and the United States. As a part of the required curriculum, a one month, summer immersion course was designed to allow students to smoothly enter the Preparatory. To better implement the aims of the immersion program, the Department of English and the Bicultural Preparatory combined their respective resources and instructional methods.

The primary goal of the Querétaro Cultural Immersion Program is to create an atmosphere whereby students who are not completely bilingual, but wish to enter the Bicultural Preparatory, can do so in a short period of time. To accomplish this, techniques from both ESL and the Bicultural Preparatory are employed.

The subject area around which this program revolves is American folklore. Folklore is here used to encompass such diverse elements as culture, language, festivals, dances, and music, all of which have been combined with ESL techniques to produce an effective introduction to the Bicultural Preparatory.

Variety is essential in designing a four hour class block. Even with an interesting curriculum, constant change is necessary to maintain student interest and involvement during such an extended period. As a result, the following format was used:

9:00-10:30 AM: Use of textbook, Living Language: USA Culture Capsules for ESL Students (Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1979). Each culture capsule provides an introduction to American life. Follow-up studies on student progress have shown that

this is an ideal way of integrating students into the Bicultural Preparatory. Living Language stresses the use of current idiomatic expressions. Our approach to the book is dynamic in that the students literally act out scenes from American life in such a way that new vocabulary and idiomatic expressions become self-apparent. This avoids the crutch of translation and provides for a high level of student satisfaction.

Prominent features of this session:

- (1) Constant changing of teachers between two small groups of students, provided different voices and maintained interest.
- (2) Having students on their feet, moving about the room constantly, demanded an active student involvement.
- (3) Teacher assuming the role of a participant in dialogue studies avoided the possibility of a teacher-dominated classroom situation.
- (4) Difficult idiomatic expressions were acted out by teacher / students.

10:30-12:00 NOON: Folk/Popular Music and Dance.

By listening to music one is able to include techniques that greatly enhance listening comprehension. Varying from American Revolutionary War folk music to current popular music and by listening to and writing what is heard, we are able to develop both a high interest and keen listening skills. As a result, students who have gone through this program tend to have much higher level of aural comprehension than students who do not attend the program.

Prominent features of the second session:

- (1) Playing varied types of music with students listening to small segments several times and writing the words.
- (2) Singing songs after the students have written the words.
- (3) Asking a series of questions about the words, which improves comprehension of content.
- (4) Traditional folk dancing.

12:00-1:00 PM: Writing, Directing, Acting Plays.

Full use is made of a campus television studio. Using vocabulary and idiomatic expressions from Living Language students write, direct, and act out plays in front of cameras. Afterwards, the film is criticized by the students themselves. This is an excellent ESL technique in that it allows for students to see and hear themselves speaking English. Followed by a session of constructive criticism and re-acting the play, the students are able to make tremendous improvements in fluency, intonation, and ease in speaking English. This session is particularly exciting for the students, who enjoy the sheer fun of acting and seeing themselves on television.

Prominent features of the third session:

- (1) Writing plays with American cultural themes' is done for homework.
- (2) Practice of plays, filmed, criticized, re-filmed, criticized. . . as many as six or seven times.
- (3) Use of costumes and props, made by students at home. This carries class activities away from the classroom and heightens interest.

The Querétaro Cultural Immersion Program has experienced a 100% success rate of student capabilities toward entry into the Bicultural Preparatory. On the average, the grades of these students are equal to those students who have a stronger basis in English and have not taken part in the program. The course of study functions independently of grade level, assuming the student has the basic maturity to understand similar concepts of speech and idiomatic expressions in his own language. Although the method has not been elaborated in its entirety in this paper, it might also provide an excellent introduction for newly-entering students in bilingual high schools or for newly-entering foreign students in American colleges and universities.