
A Response to Virginia Sauvé

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I was pleased to read Virginia Sauvé's response to my article. I see the two articles as being complementary. Sauvé raised a number of important aspects of culture that I had not touched upon. Together the articles should form the basis for a solid discussion of this important topic. In reply to her article, I would like to examine an issue she raises in her conclusion, namely, that "culture is not about content. It is about the making and remaking of relationships in our society." I would like to argue that there is a strong knowledge basis for any culture.

Our stereotypes of other cultures are based on knowledge of how people act and what they say in different circumstances. The film *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* is completely based on such cultural stereotypes. Cross-cultural misunderstanding or cultural gaffes frequently result from our interpreting the meaning of a certain act or text on the basis of our own cultural knowledge framework. Cultural knowledge and cultural behavior are acquired through the socialization process into one's culture. When this knowledge becomes internalized, it becomes a force that shapes and guides the lives of the members of that culture, a force that is frequently exerted at the subconscious level.

When new Canadians arrive in our country, in our classrooms, they do not have the knowledge base that underlies our culture. They cannot ask themselves if "Doing X" is acceptable in a given context. Native speakers can and do refer to this knowledge base in making their decisions in different situations. They know what it means to "act Canadian" for their own context, class, group, or gender. Even though having this cultural knowledge will not guarantee that people will act like Canadians (many may not want to), it is often a first step along the process toward cultural understanding and cultural acceptance. Not having this knowledge will mean that access to the dominant culture will be restricted (I certainly agree with Sauvé that there is a dominant culture in Canada though many people would deny its existence). As a country, as ESL teachers, we have an obligation to share this knowledge with new Canadians so that they can begin to have some insight as to why we are the way we are. Then, as Morasse (1995) pointed out, they can take this knowledge out into the world for a reality check. This knowledge will also be important in the "making and remaking of relationships in our society," an important aspect of culture, in the renegotiating of a new cultural paradigm based on the interplay of the existing paradigm and the new cultural knowledge that arrives with each group of citizens. Although

cultural knowledge may ultimately not be as important as cultural actions and cultural relationships, it remains an important aspect of any culture.

Our challenge as a profession and a society is to find an effective means of sharing our cultural knowledge with new Canadians, so that they may act on it, internalize it, transform it, and return it to us in a new form that also incorporates the content of their first culture.

Reference

Morasse, C. (1995). *La composante culturelle en enseignement des langues secondes*. Unpublished paper, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa.