



T E S O L

F R A N C E

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH  
TO SPEAKERS OF  
OTHER LANGUAGES

the  
**JOURNAL**

Teaching and Learning  
of English?

A Cross-cultural  
Approach to the

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# THE JOURNAL OF TESOL FRANCE

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TESOL France, an affiliate of TESOL International and of IATEFL, is a non-profit organization of teachers of English in France. Its purposes are to stimulate professional development, to disseminate information about research, books and other materials related to English, and to strengthen instruction and research.

TESOL France organizes various events and a convention each year in Paris. Members receive *The News*, our newsletter, and *The Journal*, the academic journal of the association.

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# *A Cross-cultural Approach to the Teaching and Learning of English?*

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# Introduction

**Sally Bosworth Gerome, Editor**

Susan Fries starts off this issue of the TESOL Journal by defining and putting into perspective intercultural, cross cultural and intra cultural issues. Her personal experience in teaching these issues helps us to realize the pitfalls to be avoided when we start talking about "culture" which has such deep emotional roots in each individual. We must be careful as we tread the thin line between over generalizations and awareness of differences.

After reading Susan's definition of cultural issues, Terufumi Futaba's description of how the Japanese see teaching English as a foreign language seems to cover both intercultural and cross cultural aspects. An important aspect of the approach of English teaching in Japan is the promotion of Japanese culture. Because many of the people studying ESL in this country do not need to become communicatively competent in English, the government would like second language instruction to help Japanese students to form a homogeneous society and to establish a view of themselves as a group that is different from the culture of speakers of English. By reading about how teacher trainers learn to teach English in Japan, I gained many insights into Japanese culture, including how people feel about testing.

From the example of Japan, Mario Rinvoluceri shows us that how we test our students changes totally from culture to culture, but whatever the country we must think of the poor students who have to take the test. When I first arrived in France, I felt the weight of a test system that seemed highly competitive and unfriendly. I had been led to believe that if everyone in a class failed, then it was more an indication that the teacher had been unsuccessful than the students. I quickly realized that the French didn't feel this way. Mario's humanistic article addresses the problem of testing from the students' point of view rather than from the teachers' viewpoint. Of course, many of his suggestions would not be applicable to French culture, but the basic idea of taking into consideration the feelings of those to be tested is essential to all cultures.

Brain Morgan too has a very humanistic view of teaching pronunciation that includes taking into consideration students' personal identities. He advocates developing

cultural awareness but warns against focusing on cultural stereotypes thereby ignoring personal identities. Forms of expression in general and pronunciation in particular are based on a whole person that include his or her identity as a woman or a man and not only his or her country of origin. This article gives us ideas on how to include this in our classroom activities.

I agree with Brian's focus on personal identities but in my article I have attacked the problem of teaching listening and pronunciation from another point of view. I believe that by teaching English through reading we are keeping our students from opening up to the sounds of a new language.

Personal identities from different cultures are transforming the English language itself as non native varieties, or a new English lingua franca are becoming more and more acceptable. Ian MacKenzie is in favor of taking these non-native 'Englishes' into consideration but questions how acceptable they really are in all contexts. Already there are many varieties of native English that many native speakers cannot speak or even understand. For example scientific English, which has its own vocabulary and grammatical structure, is incomprehensible to the vast majority of ENL speakers. Teaching scientific English to non-scientists would be ridiculous. But which English should be taught in our classrooms?

Are there really two different teacher cultures? Bernard Moro seems to think so when he describes the users and non-users of IT. His practical advice and ideas on how to use computers in the classroom will certainly incite both cultures to become one as the non-users will gain confidence in the simplicity of using the technology and be convinced of its efficiency. His description of the web site and platform at the Université Pierre Mendès France in Grenoble might incite some of us to try to do as well by creating a similar web site.

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## Editorial

**John Overton, president 2002-2003**

Dear members and friends of TESOL France,

A wall of misunderstanding is being built every day between much of the English speaking world - the USA and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Great Britain – and France: the media is blowing up a storm. If we are to believe the Fox Network, (run by the less than charming Rupert Murdoch), then the French are arrogant, ungrateful, self-interested etc. Speaking through a video conference to a French teacher in the USA yesterday, (thanks to James Benenson's wonderful if under attended Forum Evening at ENST) I was informed that sadly much of these black and white views have become commonplace over there.

What has happened? Why has the communication become so brittle, the diplomatic meals between Chirac and Bush so hollow and the opinions of whole nations towards each other so polarized? Does this have any relevance to me, the English teacher?

What a question to ask!!

Who better than English language teachers to try and demolish this wall brick by brick? Our task, in promoting language acquisition and use should go beyond just the form. We can actually contribute something!

Although France has not generally reached a state of jingoism, and knows how to separate one man and his cronies from the populus, the same is not necessarily true across the pond. It struck me how, although the world is getting smaller every day the rifts tend to be getting wider. This must surely be the time for greater cross-cultural understanding and awareness. What prevents us from setting up correspondences internationally through our schools using an Internet site and a webcam costing next to nothing? This is surely the time for building cultural bridges, encouraging discussion and debate. We could be the facilitators of an important cultural shift.

This is but one area where we teachers can feel we are really working for the good of our students, whatever their age. 'Culture' is a wonderful word and in terms of a theme, it is surely difficult to find a more wide-ranging one. But this was our choice for the 2002 Colloquium: "A cross-cultural approach to the teaching of English?" For this latest Journal, of which we are immensely proud, we have managed to cherry pick the most interesting and thought provoking articles and ideas presented at the event - along with some other choice cuts!

Now, more than ever the contents of the TESOL France Journal you hold in your hands should be valued reading, a wonderful reference to be dipped into when it seems that cross-cultural harmony needs a little help.

I would like to wish you all a very enjoyable read and I hope that some of the ideas will light a spark within you.

Have a wonderful and peaceful 2004!