

First Monday July Culture Course, 2003

Dear Everybody,

I like writing letters to people I work with, as the written channel seems better for quite a number of things. Of course this particular way of connecting with people is much more important on a straight language course as the teacher is offering a powerful model to the students (do you find writing to your students useful?)

When I was first asked to run one of these UK culture courses, some 8 years ago I thought *Do I have a degree in anthropology?*

*Do I have studies under my belt in sociology*

*Do I deeply understand political and economic systems?*

The fact that these questions had to be answered in the negative did not boost my confidence. I had to admit that I had read some linguistics, and that language teaching was my passion.

And then I thought again: I looked back to my German Gran from Aachen and to my Irish-English, Lake District-born Grandad, and realised that half my being comes from my Dad and is deeply, locally North Western Italian. My Dad was 100% Piedmontese, and they are sort of the Catalans of Italy, full of sterling virtues other Italians can't deny but which do not always make them loveable to other Italians. Wow....seemed like I was a walking comparative anthropology course!

Working on these Culture of UK courses has been a strong inward exploration for me.

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Have you come on this course to brush up your English but to do it via interesting content?

Have you come on the course to follow up culture of UK reading you been doing?

Have you come on the course to learn things for you, or to find out nuggets to teach your students?

Have you been on other Culture of UK courses?

How much have you read about and reflected on your own local and national culture, which is the inevitable lens through which you will view the bizarre behaviours and beliefs of those off-shore islanders who are known as Brits?

A letter from you tomorrow morning, answering these questions, would be very welcome. However, don't feel guilty if you don't find time to do this. Some of you have just finished teaching and, at Pilgrims we are very good at offering you too much!

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Dear Tuesday People,

You will get this after we have worked with the boys. I have a growing realisation that this group is full of deep cultural awareness, some of which has maybe not been fully articulated. What I hope we can do this morning is to draw some conscious cultural water from the well of your experience.

We will start by reading I■■■■'s marvellous letter, which he has given me permission to share round the group. M■■■■, I wonder what you learnt about yourself and your own culture when you taught in that really scary school in East London. M■■■■ and M■■■■ you must have learnt a lot about Danish culture as you shepherded your charges round those South Coast towns. M■■■■, you must have had a different experience of your Danishness on those courses in Poland. Your meeting of Russians, with a German great, great, great Granny, must have made you aware, B■■■■, of new areas of your own cultural being. I guess many of you have immigrant kids in your classes: their reactions are a mirror to your own culture.

When we have read I■■■■'s letter and asked him all the questions we need I would like to move into a cultural awareness discussion about what we have learnt about our own culture from the multiple foreign mirrors we have met.

Let me give you a concrete learning of mine:

I have to admit that I sometimes find some Swedes a wee bit arrogant ( this is an evolutionist down attitude of mine) They give me a rounded feeling, a feeling that a) they know what to believe, b) they know the best way of doing things c) that they show infinite tolerance to lesser folk. But I have to thank you, Oh some Swedes, in that you hold up a magnifying mirror to the ginormous arrogance of some British people whose smugness and grounded, secure self-satisfaction is amazing, I must sincerely thank you for your mirror function

A thought,

Mario

