

*Silvia Vernier*  
*Silvia Barbuzza*  
*Sandra Del Giusti*  
*Gabriel del Moral*  
Universidad Nacional de Cuyo  
silviavernier@hotmail.com

## **THE FIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM**

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the relevance of integrating culture with the four traditional language skills in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom from the perspective of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI). The article also explores how WebQuests as a learning tool offer valuable opportunities to develop foreign language skills in an enhanced environment which promotes cooperative and autonomous learning in the EFL class.

**Key words:** Integrated-skill approaches – Content-Based Instruction (CBI) - Task-Based Instruction (TBI) - Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills - Culture and Language - WebQuests

**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza la importancia de integrar la cultura de la lengua meta con las cuatro destrezas lingüísticas tradicionales en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera en el marco de dos posturas pedagógicas que integran las destrezas lingüísticas: una perspectiva que hace hincapié en el contenido del material auténtico

a incorporar en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera por sobre el sistema lingüístico, y la otra perspectiva que parte de la asignación de tareas que integran contenido de la materia a estudiar con las destrezas lingüísticas propiamente dichas. El artículo también destaca la importancia de las denominadas *WebQuests* como herramientas pedagógicas que ofrecen invalorable oportunidades para desarrollar las destrezas lingüísticas en un ambiente propicio que promueve el aprendizaje cooperativo y autónomo en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera.

**Palabras Claves:** Métodos de instrucción integrativos de destrezas lingüísticas - Content-Based Instruction (CBI) - Task-Based Instruction (TBI) - La expresión oral, la comprensión auditiva, la expresión escrita, la comprensión lectora - Lengua y cultura – *WebQuests*

## **THE FIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers have recognized the importance of the underlying dynamics of culture in second language communication. In fact, second language learning exceeds the limits of memorizing vocabulary items and grammar rules; other areas of knowledge such as social, cultural and discourse conventions are definitely to be included in the classroom input.

This article focuses, in particular, on the importance of integrating culture and the four traditional language skills into the EFL classroom. The first aim is, therefore, to show EFL teachers how to integrate the language skills from the perspective of Content Based Instruction (CBI) and Task Based Instruction (TBI). A second major concern is to explore the vast realm of computer science and its application to the teaching and learning of EFL, thus promoting the use of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as a tool to enhance the teaching of EFL. These approaches have proven to promote meaningful engagement with content learning, language skills development, culture and technology, turning learners into more knowledgeable citizens of the world. The challenge is to offer ideal conditions for language learning through thematically organized materials, coherent and meaningful information, the development of students' ability to process challenging material, and the reinvestment of knowledge in a sequence of progressively more complex tasks.

The present paper is structured into four sections. Firstly, the Integrated-Skill Approaches in the EFL classroom are introduced. Secondly, the interrelation of listening, speaking and culture is heightened. Thirdly, the integration of the reading and writing with culture skills is illustrated. Lastly, the use of Webquests as a means to integrate the language skills is presented.

We hope this paper, written in collaboration, will provide some pedagogical basis for the development of intercultural communication

skills, helping our colleagues in the different kinds of decisions they need to make in their daily class routine. Let us begin discussing the theoretical framework underlying the integrated-skill approaches in the EFL classroom.

## **2. INTEGRATED-SKILL APPROACHES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Perhaps one of the most suitable images used to describe the task of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is that of Rebecca Oxford's (2001: 1), a renowned scholar in the field of language learning motivation, learning strategies, and instructional methods, who claims that teaching EFL conjures up the image of a tapestry. As a tapestry is woven from many strands, which must be interwoven in positive ways to produce a strong and colorful piece, so are the strands of the tapestry in EFL teaching made up of the characteristics of the teacher, the learner, the setting, and the relevant languages, in this case, English and the students' mother tongue.

The question that immediately comes to mind is how EFL instructors can interweave these strands to produce successful classes. Oxford (2001: 1) considers three key factors. First, the instructor's teaching style should address the learning styles of the learners as much as possible. Second, the learner should be motivated to learn the target language. Third, the setting should provide resources and values that strongly support the teaching of the language. If these strands are not woven together effectively, the EFL class is likely to become almost as boring as a teacher-oriented lecture class.

The EFL professional can therefore resort to *other strands* when faced with the complex task of teaching the target language. One of them is to attend to the practice of the four primary skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing because acquiring a new language necessarily involves developing these four modalities in varying degrees and combinations (Oxford, 1990: 5-6). These four skills also include associated skills, such as knowledge of vocabulary,

spelling, pronunciation, syntax, meaning, and usage. Thus, the skill strand of the tapestry can lead to effective EFL communication when all the skills are interwoven during instruction. If these language skills are effectively interwoven, EFL students are likely to become communicatively competent.

## **2.2 Language Skills and the Integration of Culture as the Fifth Skill in the EFL classroom**

The four traditional language skills are essential components of integral EFL classes, but are they enough to help our students become communicatively competent? In other words, are the skills enough to enable students to use the language system appropriately in any circumstance? Given that communicative competence is the goal of most EFL language classrooms, EFL instruction needs to attend to all of its components: organization, pragmatic, strategic and even psychomotor strategies (Bachman 1990: 87; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, Thurrell (1995: 17). According to Brown (2000: 29), communicative goals are best achieved by giving attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to the students' eventual need to apply classroom learning to unrehearsed contexts in the real world.

But how can we pay attention to language use, fluency, authentic language and context in our EFL classrooms? Damen (1997: 12) contends that, firstly, we should remember that language learning implies and embraces culture learning; i.e. we should remember that whenever we teach a language, we are teaching a system of cultural customs, ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Brown, 2000: 25). To be successful EFL teachers, the environment of the classroom should be made as open as possible to meaningful cultural learning. According to Damen (1997: 13), culture learning, along with the four traditional skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening, and speaking, can be accorded its rightful place as a fifth skill, adding its particular dimension to each of the other four. The caveat to Damen's statement is that culture and grammar are sometimes called skills,

but they are somewhat different from the traditional four skills, as both of these skills intersect and overlap with listening, reading, speaking and writing in particular ways (Oxford, 1996: 6).

Moreover, teaching culture as a skill, compared with reading, writing, speaking, and listening, has been undermined in language instruction. The language instructor assumes that emphasizing the four mentioned skills is sufficient as students may have already acquired some knowledge of a particular culture. When it comes to teaching the culture of the English-speaking peoples with their social and political underpinnings, many EFL students know very little if anything. Thus, teaching the culture of these countries to its learners should assume an even more important position in the curriculum as it enhances students' overall learning experience. What is worth mentioning, however, is that culture should not be considered, as Kramsch (1993) puts it, an "expandable" fifth skill tacked on to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. If language is viewed as social practice, then culture should become the core of language teaching to the extent that cultural awareness should be viewed as enabling language proficiency (Kramsch, 1993: 8). Be that as it may, course planning and course design should integrate the language skills within a context of meaningful cultural learning when teaching within a communicative framework.

### **2.3 Integrated-Skill Instruction (ISI) vs. Segregated-Skill Instruction (SSI)**

In past decades, EFL classes gave prominence to one or two of the four traditional skills discretely, sometimes precluding the other three; each skill did not support or interact with each other. Rather, these segregated-skill-oriented (SSI) courses had language itself as the focus of instruction to the extent that excessive emphasis on rules and paradigms taught students a lot about language at the expense of teaching language itself (Brown, 2000: 218). As Oxford (1990) maintains, in SSI-courses, language learning was, and sometimes still is, separate from content learning, which did not ensure adequate

preparation for later success in academic communication, career-related language use, or even everyday interaction in the language.

In recent decades, however, a trend toward skill integration has ensued. Curriculum and course designers have taken a whole language approach whereby reading, for instance, is treated as one of two or more interrelated skills. The experts have realized that by emphasizing what learners can do with the language, rather than using the forms of language, EFL instructors can incorporate any or all of the language skills that are relevant into the classroom arena. According to Brown (2000: 218), the richness of integrated-skill courses give EFL students greater motivation that converts to better retention of principles of effective speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

But how can EFL professionals maintain an integrated-skill approach in their teaching? Five models of integrated-skill approaches are in common use: Content-Based Language Instruction (CBI), Task-Based Instruction (TBI), Theme-Based Teaching, Experiential Learning and the Episode Hypothesis (Brown, 1994: 219). Despite their differences, they all draw upon a diverse range of materials, textbooks and technologies for the EFL classroom.

Because they are the most commonly used models of integrated-skill approaches, let us draw our attention to the first two, i.e. CBI and TBI, to understand the differences between these integrated-skill modes of instructions.

## **2.4 Content-Based Language Instruction (CBI)**

Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989: 2) define CBI as “the integration of particular content with language teaching aims, or as the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills.” In CBI approaches the second language is the medium to convey informational content of interest and relevance to the learner, rather than the immediate object of study.

It is worth noting, though, that oftentimes what EFL instructors teach in any kind of content-based course is not so much the content

itself, but some form of the discourse of that content. For example, the instructor does not teach literature itself, but how to analyze literature. According to Eskey (1997: 139-40, referenced in Oxford 2001: 2), for every piece of content recognized, there is a discourse community which somehow provides us with the means to analyze, talk about, and write about that content. Hence, the task for EFL instructors in CBI is to acculturate students to the specific discourse communities.

Research in second language acquisition (SLA) also offers support for CBI; empirical research findings provide evidence that language learning becomes more concrete. For instance, Genesee (1994) contends that the integration of language and content in instruction respects the specificity of functional language, i.e. students can realize that meaning changes depending upon context, and the fact that more sophisticated language is learned within a framework that focuses on complex, authentic context.

As EFL instructors, we may question whether CBI is valuable at all levels of proficiency. Oxford (2001: 2) maintains that CBI is indeed valuable at all levels of proficiency, although the nature of the content may differ according to proficiency level. For instance, the content in beginner courses may involve basic social and interpersonal communication skills, but at intermediate to advanced proficiency levels, the content can become more academic in nature.

On the whole, CBI allows for the integration of language skills. Why? Because CBI is aimed at the development of use-oriented second and foreign language skills and is distinguished by the learning of a specific content and related language use skills (Brinton et al., 1989). As the structure of CBI classes is dictated by the nature of the subject matter, students are likely to get involved with all the language skills as the instructors have the students reading, discussing, solving problems, analyzing data, writing reports, etc. Thus, students practice all the language skills in a highly integrated communicative fashion while learning content, such as science, math, and social studies.

## 2.5. Task-Based Instruction (TBI)

The other integrated-skill approach is known as Task-Based Instruction (TBI). Nunan (1991a: 279) characterizes TBI as an approach which highlights learning to communicate through interaction in the target language, introducing authentic texts to learning situations, enhancing the learner's own personal experiences, and linking classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom. Although the course goals are linguistic in nature, they center on the learners' pragmatic language competence.

Two caveats are worth noting, however, with respect to the term task. According to Brown (2000: 83), a task is any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those students who undertake the task. Consequently, a task is not a special form of teaching technique because several techniques may comprise a task. For example, a problem-solving task may include a grammatical explanation, followed by the instructor's initiated questions, and then specific turn-taking procedure. On the whole, tasks are bigger in their ends than techniques.

A second caveat worth mentioning is that TBI is not a method. It puts tasks at the center of one's methodological focus, and the learning process is a set of communicative tasks that are linked to the curricular goals they serve. As CBI, the purpose of TBI extends beyond the practice of language for its own sake.

Far from being a hodge-podge of useful things all thrown haphazardly into the classroom, TBI is characterized by the development and sequencing of tasks. The EFL instructors are called upon to consider several dimensions of tasks since they should specify what learners will do with the input and what the respective roles of the teacher and learners are. Thus, instructors who embrace TBI should consider that the priority is the functional purposes for which language is used. For instance, as TBI resorts to real-world tasks, the input for those tasks can come from various authentic sources. Among others, Brown (1994: 229) mentions speeches,

conversations, interviews, media extras, etc. The pedagogical task should therefore specify what learners will do with the input, the roles of the teacher and the learner, and the evaluation thereof forms an essential component that will determine its success for performing the task again with another group of learners.

On the whole, EFL instructors can organize their classrooms around practical tasks in which language learners engage, either inside class or in the real world. For instance, a pedagogical task designed to teach EFL students to give personal information in a job interview might involve exercises in comprehension of wh-questions, listening to extracts of job interviews, analyzing the grammar and discourse of job interviews, modeling an interview (teacher and one student), role-playing a simulated interview (students in pairs) and understanding crosscultural rules of etiquette in a job interview. Hence, this job interview task serves to illustrate how the principles of listening, speaking, reading, writing and culture become subsumed under a rubric of what the learners are supposed to do with language, which allows the instructors to disengage themselves from thinking exclusively in terms of the traditional four language skills.

In sum, CBI and TBI are just two exponents of Integrated-Skill approaches. Their advantages are various both for learners and teachers. To begin with, learners are exposed to authentic language, are challenged to interact naturally in the language, and gain a picture of the complexity of the English language for communication. As the language becomes a means whereby students interact with people, they develop their communicative competence. For teachers, these approaches allow them to track their students' progress in multiple skills at the same time. As opposed to just dissecting language forms, teachers who endorse CBI or TBI can promote the learning of real content, which highly motivates students of various ages and backgrounds.

Is it feasible to apply integrated-skill approaches in the Mendocinian EFL classroom? How can we possibly do it? Firstly, the EFL instructor should learn more about the various ways to integrate skills in the classroom, either by applying TBI or CBI separately or in combination. As EFL professionals, we should think over our approach to the teaching of EFL in our environment and evaluate the extent to which the skills can be integrated. Once we decide to

adhere to one of these approaches, we should carefully select materials, textbooks, technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking, writing and culture, which will eventually enhance our learners' communicative competence. On the whole, going back to Oxford's image of a tapestry, EFL teachers can integrate the language skills, and in so doing, they can strengthen the tapestry of language teaching and learning.

In the following section, the integration of two of the language skills, listening and speaking, is addressed, illustrating how these two skills may be interrelated with culture in a CBI/TBI-oriented class. Before plunging into the integration of these two skills, let us briefly illustrate the crucial role culture has come to play in the EFL class.

### **3. FOCUSING ON CULTURE, LISTENING AND SPEAKING**

#### **3.1. Culture: A Design for Living**

*To enter another culture with only the vaguest notion of its underlying dynamics reflects not only a provincial naiveté but a dangerous form of cultural arrogance. (Barnlund, 1991: 73)*

In recent years, culture has become a much discussed topic in English language teaching discourse. Questions such as how to teach culture, whose culture to teach, the relationship between language and culture and what constitutes culture have fueled considerable amount of research. The EFL setting raises questions about what culture to focus on and it is, no doubt, useful for students to reflect on their own since, by exploring their own culture, they will acquire the vocabulary with which to describe values, expectations, behaviors, traditions, customs, rituals, forms of greeting, cultural signs and identity symbols familiar to them.

What is undeniable is the fact that cultures are formed to meet human needs. Abraham Maslow (1962:247) has suggested classifying the needs that all cultures try to meet into lower order and higher order needs. Lower order needs are the ones related to

physical requirements (food, water, shelter) while the higher order needs are the ones related to formal education, self-development or self-fulfillment. It is not surprising then that culture and needs should be closely connected to behaviors. According to Straub (2005: 2) behaviors are culturally prescribed norms intended to meet expectations or needs shared by the members of a culture. What might appear to be polite behavior in our culture may not necessarily be regarded as proper behavior in the target language culture and the other way about.

Perhaps one of the most suitable definitions for culture is the one given by Tylor (1871: 246), who considers culture a design for living; more precisely, he regards culture as a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by the human being as a member of society.

An example of what Tylor defines as culture may be found in the following article by Charles O'Malley (2006: 21). This article exemplifies the importance of cultural variables that need to be respected if our students are to benefit from new experiences when learning a foreign language in a Content-Based and Task-Based Approach class.

*It is every foreigner's nightmare to get into a crowded room full of Argentines and have to greet and kiss every one of them. You squeeze past chairs, step around sofas, lean over tables; elbowing pizza and stepping on people in a clumsy effort to do as the locals do. Finally, satisfied you have not omitted or offended anyone, you lean back into a corner and cast a baleful eye for something alcoholic.*

*Suddenly, your phone rings and it is your rich great aunt sitting in the airport wondering where you are. It is time to make a quick exit or lose your inheritance, but part of you is screaming: "No! You cannot leave until this entire room empties!" Frozen with etiquette fright you spot some people doing exactly what you want to do – methodically cheeking and hugging towards the doorway. You get behind them, following their kissing slipstream and hoping nobody thinks*

*you are an idiot who has suddenly realized he joined the wrong birthday party.*

*This is why men invented waving and indeed the more savvy of us know that in a situation like this, most Argentines just wave. It is only foreigners who think; "I must kiss everyone!" I must kiss everyone that is, except men. The easy physicality between Argentine males unnerves the Northern European. Inter-hugging for us is restricted to weddings, funerals and football games. So imagine our surprise when an everyday telephone conversation with an Argentine male friend ends with him saying "un beso." More disturbing is the urge to say "un beso" back.*

*I have one English friend who gets around the problem of kissing by embracing it enthusiastically. He dispenses wet sloppy kisses to everyone he encounters. So much so he leaves people in his wake wiping the saliva from their faces and remarking how all Europeans are just free thinking perverts. (O'Malley, 2006: 21)*

The discussion of O'Malley's article in an EFL class may exemplify the way norms and behavior are culturally defined and varied, and EFL learners need to be aware of the cultural codes of their society to better understand the codes of conduct of the target language. But how can we raise awareness among EFL students when addressing cultural issues? How can this be achieved through listening and speaking tasks? Let us first discuss the main tenets of listening and speaking in the EFL class before we apply these principles to the class itself.

### **3.2. Focusing on Listening and Speaking**

One of our major concerns as EFL professionals is to maintain an integrated skill approach with meaningful cultural learning within a communicative framework. In this process, the importance of listening

in language learning can hardly be over-estimated. Through reception we internalize linguistic information without which we could not produce language. In classrooms, students always do more listening than speaking. Listening competence is universally larger than speaking competence. No wonder, then, that in recent years the language teaching profession has placed a concerted emphasis on listening comprehension. Perhaps human beings have a natural tendency to look at speaking as the major index of language proficiency. Consider for example our commonly used query "Do you speak Japanese?" By no means do we intend to exclude the notion of comprehension in the knowledge of the language, but when we think of foreign language learning, we first think of speaking (Brown, 2000: 233).

Listening, as a major component in language learning and teaching, first hit the spotlight in the late 1970's with James Asher's work on *The Total Physical Response* (1977) in which the role of comprehension was given prominence, as learners were given great quantities of language to listen to before they were encouraged to respond orally. Similarly, the Natural Approach identified a significant "silent period" during which learners were allowed the security of listening without being forced to go through the anxiety of speaking before they were ready to do so. These approaches were an outgrowth of a variety of research studies that showed evidence of the importance of input in second language acquisition.

However, it is undeniable that the emphasis has been put on speaking proficiency in the last years. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, many of which are traceable to the widespread popularity of audiolingual methodologies in the 1960s, and the communicative competence movement that began in the 1970s. Yet the legacy of our past is not the only reason for a continued interest in oral proficiency. Many language students consider that developing the speaking skill should be one of their primary goals of study, either because they would derive some personal satisfaction from it or because they feel it would be useful in pursuing other interests or career goals.

This emphasis on oral proficiency does not and should not mean that other skill areas ought to be neglected. Since the ability to function adequately in speaking continues to be an important goal for

many second language learners, it is incumbent upon us as language teachers to identify effective strategies for teaching oral skills in the classroom that will maximize opportunities for the development of useful levels of proficiency in speaking and listening as an integrated skill whole.

### 3.3 Listening and Speaking in an Advanced EFL Classroom

For students to process their own learning experiences when practicing the skills discussed above, the following lesson plan has been designed. The proposal is to work on the movie based on the novel *The Joy Luck Club* written by the Chinese American author Amy Tan. This film is about four mothers who tell tales of their past lives in China and of their present lives in America. Their daughters weave in tales of their experience in the United States. Together their stories create a rich and colorful fabric of family relationships and of a community searching for its identity. In an attempt to bridge the cultural gap between these immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters, both generations help each other in the hard struggle to lead a normal life with a stable relationship. The following activities have been designed to assist the instructor in developing students' English language skills (in particular listening and speaking) as well as increasing their understanding of the American and Chinese cultures. The class is divided into five steps:

- Preparing to watch the movie: The teacher may introduce the subject by telling the members of the audience that they will see a film called *The Joy Luck Club* based on the novel under the same title, written by Amy Tan. In this movie, the Chinese mothers reflect on their childhood and past life in China that made them live a completely different life from that of their daughters', who are born and raised in America
- Watching part of the movie

- Filling out a number of tasks after watching the film to check comprehension, and listening to the recorded version of the novel (getting the gist, writing down unfamiliar words or expressions, guessing their meaning from context, etc.)
- Watching the movie a second time for better understanding
- Making connections beyond the script through guided questions after discussing the novel thoroughly

To conclude, it may be said that this section of the paper has been an attempt to highlight the importance of integrating the language skills with the cultural variables. They are a major ingredient in any language learning process and, at the same time, these cultural variables determine our lifestyles and behaviors, helping us reach across our many borders.

Now let us illustrate how the reading and writing skills can be integrated with culture in a CBI/TBI class, but before plunging into the integration of these skills, let us briefly refer to the principles behind the teaching of reading and writing.

#### **4. INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING SKILLS**

Should reading be taught in isolation or associated with other language skills? EFL teachers constantly ask themselves this question. As H. Douglas Brown states, “reading ability will best be developed in association with writing, listening, and speaking activity” (Brown, 1994: 283). Even in those courses labeled as ‘reading’, the interrelationship of skills, especially the reading-writing connection, proves to be advantageous. Thus reading appears as a component of general second language proficiency, but only in the perspective of the whole picture of interactive language teaching.

#### 4.1. Principles for Reading Comprehension

Reading is a *bottom-up* process in which readers "must first recognize a multiplicity of linguistic signals and use their linguistic data processing mechanisms to impose some sort of order to these signals" (Brown, 1994: 284). The reader chooses among all the information meaningful data and infers meanings, decides what to retain and what not to retain in his memory, and moves on.

Meaning is thus constructed through reading not because a text carries it but because the reader brings information, knowledge, experience and culture to the printed word. This theory, known as Schema Theory (Brown, 1994: 284) emphasizes the conceptually driven, or *top-down* processing that brings background information to make decisions about meaning.

It is worth mentioning that we might not subscribe to either process in particular; rather learners should be encouraged to combine bottom-up and top-down processes in reading, which implies in practice doing such things as discussing the topic of a text before reading it, arousing expectations, eliciting connections between references in the text and situations known to the learners (Ur, 1996: 141).

#### 4.2. Principles for Writing

A few decades ago teachers used to focus on the final product of their students' writing and its format. Nowadays, the focus lies on content and message since learners are seen as creators of language. This is known as the *process approach* to writing instruction.

Teaching focuses on the process students go through when writing. Students then learn different strategies for prewriting, drafting and rewriting which give students opportunity to return to their work and improve it.

Unlike oral language, written language involves thinking as it can be planned ahead and revised. Within this approach, revision is crucial since students get feedback throughout the composing process either from their teachers or peers. However, the process approach does not disregard product. Process is not the end; it is the means to the end.

EFL teachers should not forget that native language patterns of thinking and writing can interfere with second language writing. However, EFL teachers' role is to value students' native-language-related rhetorical traditions and guide them through a process of understanding them rather than rejecting students' backgrounds. Hence, culture is at play.

### 4.3. Reading and Writing at Play

A series of classroom activities can be devised to integrate reading and writing without disregarding listening, speaking and culture, as was discussed in section 3. To serve that purpose, a lesson plan on the topic of co-education has been designed. Because it addresses this topic, the movie *Mona Lisa Smile* (Newel, 2003) has been chosen to raise EFL students' cultural awareness of the differences between single-sex and coeducational schooling in America.

A powerpoint presentation with specially selected scenes from the movie has been created to foster listening comprehension and oral discussion followed by accompanying texts extracted from the textbook *Raise the Issues* by Carol Numrich (2002) on coed vs. single sex education, a topic relevant both in the United States of America and in Argentina. Let us now illustrate how the class is taught.

First, students are shown photographs from *Mona Lisa Smile*. Then, they are asked whether they have attended a single sex or a coed school and they are invited to share their personal experiences. This introspection can have them reflect upon their own schooling thus giving significance to the discussion. Some of them may find the effects of single sex education negative, some others positive. Since

co-education may or may not have influenced personal growth, controversy is likely to break out.

The analysis of three movie scenes from *Mona Lisa Smile* can bring about vivid memories among the audience. *Mona Lisa Smile* is about Katherine Watson, a Californian Art History teacher, who gets a position at Wellesley College, an all-girl conservative institution, in the fall of 1953. In the post-war era, Katherine Watson expects that her students, the best and brightest girls in the United States of America, will take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. However, Katherine soon discovers that the prestigious university fosters marriage as the only key to success in life.

Discussion may center on only three scenes from the movie. This discussion can set the ground for the introduction to the reading material '*Better Dead than Coed*' (Numrich, 2002: 24). Next, students read the following passage from the text mentioned above:

*When you stop and think about your high school or college alma mater, were your experiences more positive or negative? Do your feelings of success or failure in that school have anything to do with whether or not your school was single sex or coed? More and more Americans are electing to send their children to single sex schools because they feel both boys and girls blossom when they study in the company of students of the same sex. They tend to achieve more. (Numrich, 2002: 22).*

After reading this introductory paragraph, students answer the following questions:

- Did you attend a single sex or a coed school?
- What was your experience like?
- Did you find advantages or disadvantages?

- What do you know about the effects of coeducation on students?
- What do you know about single sex schooling?

After answering these questions, students read the remaining of the text in pairs and complete a chart (See Chart 1) on the ideas the author of the commentary agrees and disagrees with.

**Chart 1: Values Clarification**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Girls blossom when they study in all-girls schools.		
Boys blossom when they study in all-boys schools.		
Girls are more exuberant about school before adolescence.		
Separate education can never mean equal education.		

Once students become familiar with the vocabulary, they listen to a radio program on the same issue but from a different perspective. Completing a few sentences helps students grasp the main concepts made by the commentator. Then, they listen to the commentary again and complete sentences with specific information. As a follow-up activity, they read and comment on a newspaper article with opposing views on single-sex schools.

Comparing and contrasting ideas from different sources motivates students to adopt a clear position and provide evidence to support it. Finally, to fully integrate reading and writing skills, students may be asked to write an argumentative essay answering the

following issue question: Should English as a Foreign Language (EFL) be taught in a single-sex or a coed classroom in Mendoza, Argentina? With this last activity they are given not only the opportunity to express their opinions but also to relate the concepts of single-sex and coeducation in both countries, thus enhancing cultural awareness.

Let us now consider the use of WebQuests as an overall means to integrate the language skills.

## 5. WEBQUESTS AND INTEGRATED LANGUAGE SKILLS

The language skills integration advocated in this paper and developed so far by means of different activities and tasks will be taken a step further in this section through the deployment of a computer-based activity called WebQuest, which allows precisely the type of skills integration proposed in this article.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been among us for about three decades, affecting the way we approach the teaching and learning of EFL. It offers an invaluable source of learning opportunities and material through tools which provide teachers with an enhanced medium for helping learners acquire the target language, thus developing all language skills in an integrated manner.

One such tool is the Internet with its myriad of sites, many of which contain material with high educational potential. An example of this is the so called WebQuest developed by Professor Bernie Dodge from San Diego State University in 1995 (<http://weQuest.sdsu.edu/>). According to him, "a WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet." ([http://weQuest.sdsu.edu/about\\_webQuests.html](http://weQuest.sdsu.edu/about_webQuests.html))

Although not originally devised to teach EFL, but rather K-12 and adults on a variety of curriculum subjects, the content and approach of WebQuests can be perfectly adapted to this field. Actually, in late years several WebQuests have been developed by

teachers of EFL and other foreign languages and contributed to the site. WebQuests are content and task-based activities which provide opportunities for developing English language skills and gaining experience of the target language culture. Teachers can access any WebQuest they wish through a matrix which lists all the WebQuests available in the site or can use a quick access feature through a search engine.

### 5.1. Fundamental Features of WebQuests

WebQuests present the following critical attributes:

- 1- An *introduction* that sets the stage and provides some background information
- 2- A *task* that is doable and interesting
- 3- A set of *information sources* needed to complete the task. Many (though not necessarily all) of the resources are embedded in the WeQuest document itself as anchors pointing to information on the World Wide Web. Information sources might include web documents, experts available via e-mail or real time conferencing, searchable databases on the net, and books and other documents physically available in the learner's setting. Because pointers to resources are included, the learner is not left to wander through webspace completely adrift
- 4- A description of the *process* the learners should go through in accomplishing the task. The process should be broken down into clearly described steps
- 5- Some *guidance* on how to organize the information acquired. This can take the form of guiding questions, or directions to complete organizational frameworks such as timelines, concept maps, or cause-and-effect diagrams

- 6- A *conclusion* that brings closure to the quest, reminds the learners about what they have learned, and perhaps encourages them to extend the experience into other domains

Some other non-critical attributes of a WebQuest include the following:

- 1- WebQuests are most likely to be *group activities*
- 2- WebQuests might be enhanced by wrapping *motivational elements* around the basic structure by giving the learners a role to play (e.g., scientist, detective, reporter), simulated personae to interact with via e-mail, and a scenario to work within (e.g. you've been asked by the Secretary General of the UN to brief him on what's happening in sub-Saharan Africa this week)
- 3- WebQuests can be designed within a *single discipline*, or they can be *interdisciplinary*<sup>1</sup>

## 5.2. WebQuests and EFL

In order to exemplify how WebQuests can be used to develop language skills and aspects of the foreign language culture in the EFL classroom, the WebQuest “Critical Consumerism: Advertising Awareness” (<http://www.getyourowntots.com/weQuest>) was chosen for this workshop as it was considered to be highly motivating to students, to contain relevant language and tasks, and to be representative of the target culture, in addition to providing opportunities for cross-cultural comparison as advertising bears culture-specific significance.

In this WebQuest learners are invited to enter the world of advertising and to look into it with a critical eye. In the *introduction*

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://weQuest.sdsu.edu/about\\_weQuests.html](http://weQuest.sdsu.edu/about_weQuests.html)

they are told that the WebQuest will show them some of what advertisers do in order to get their attention and are instructed to take a prequiz and reflect their knowledge of and attitudes towards advertisements. In fact, this pre-quiz acts as a pre-listening, prediction task which in turn activates learners' schemata related to the topic. Next they are directed to watch the first chapter of a documentary called *The Merchants of Cool* ([http://webQuest.sdsu.edu/about\\_webQuests.html](http://webQuest.sdsu.edu/about_webQuests.html)) about how advertisers go about creating ads targeted to teenagers. This constitutes the listening section of the task, after which learners and teacher go through the prequiz to confirm or correct their predictions. Thus, listening is directly catered to, in addition to listening to teacher and classmates throughout the development of the WebQuest.

The *task* section describes what learners are required to do; that is, to research and analyze advertisements and then to create their own ads. By learning how advertising works, they are expected to become more aware of how it affects them, the choices they make, and how they can affect others. Learners are supposed to keep a portfolio of advertising analysis, which will eventually be used as part of their assessment and final grade. This section also describes commercial and non-commercial advertising and provides examples of each type. In this way the stage is set for learners to begin working, while reading input is provided through task description and examples of print ads, thus helping learners develop reading skills.

Reading and writing skills are further developed in the next step where the *process* is outlined, which constitutes the core of the WebQuest, with learners being guided to explore selected websites which contain information and examples of each step in the process. Each stage is allocated a certain amount of time ranging from 1 to 3 days. In stage 1, learners have to choose and analyze ads using an analysis log supplied by the teacher (tips for critical viewing and analysis are also provided). After this, they have to choose the message they want to convey as well as the medium. Links to tutorials are suggested for learners to make more informed choices and to guide them in the process. The mediums they may choose from are the following:

- Television advertisement
- Radio advertisement
- Print advertisement, example: magazine
- Billboard/poster design

In addition, this WebQuest offers plenty of resources for students to explore and prepare to create their own ads, deploying different skills as they work their way through it. Reading is practised throughout the development of the WebQuest, while writing is exercised to some extent by having learners fill in logs, peer editing and team evaluation forms, in addition to actually writing the ads. Cooperative learning is also enhanced as all tasks are carried out in teams.

Finally, students present the ads to the entire school providing an authentic audience and decide how they would like them to be presented (for example, over the announcements, in the media center, etc.). But before they do so they deliver in-class presentations of the advertisements. At this point, but also in earlier instances of work with the WeQuest, learners practice speaking. Thus, all skills are developed in an integrated way. The cultural aspects of the target language are highlighted in the ad analysis section with the added advantage of comparing and contrasting commercials in L1 and L2.

In the *evaluation* section guidelines are provided on how learners' work will be assessed, taking into account its quality, according to specific rubrics. The work to be evaluated includes:

- Portfolio of research on advertising
- Advertisement creation
- Team evaluation
- Presentation

In the conclusion learners are congratulated for having become advertisers themselves and are encouraged to watch the full

documentary *The Merchants of Cool* and to continue reading and doing research on the issue, for which end further links are included. Thus, the WebQuest activity has come to an end providing learners with plenty of language practice on an authentic topic and in a relaxed atmosphere.

WebQuests as a learning tool offer valuable opportunities to develop foreign language skills in an enhanced environment which promotes cooperative and autonomous learning. Not only are the four traditional language skills catered to, but cross-cultural awareness can also be tapped through the choice of culture-laden topics. Technology in itself is not the key, however, to promoting improved learning which "appears to lie in how effectively the medium is exploited in the teaching and learning situation" (Ouston, 1997). Existing WebQuests can be adapted to cater for teaching and learning needs, and new ones can also be developed to suit more specific topics and purposes. Students themselves could develop their own WebQuests as part of a class project. The possibilities are only bounded by imagination, and WebQuests are a starting point in this learning adventure.

## **6. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

We hope that after reading this article EFL professionals will become more acquainted with the various forms of instructions (particularly CBI and TBI) whereby they can integrate the traditional four language skills with culture. At the same time, we also hope that fostering the use of WebQuests may be another useful tool for EFL teachers in the integration of the language skills as presented in this article.

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