TEACHING IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: LESSONS FOR THE MONOCULTURAL TEACHER

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The first question this paper deals with is the following: How will we define "multiculturalism", as teaching to students of at least four different cultural backgrounds, none of them Western, in the same class poses problems for the teacher who comes from a distinctly Western culture. Before we can attempt to discuss multiculturalism, we will need to define the simple, or not so simple, term: culture. Once we can agree on working definitions, we willproceed to address the problems inherent in such a classroom. The context of this study is Israel where the cultural differences often represent also major political disagreements, understandings, and the basis for much conflict. There is also the problem of immigrant vs native residents where even the "natives" come from at least 40 countries around the globe. When the teacher is also an immigrant, but does not share the culture of any of the majority "natives", the difficulties are compounded. Israel is, after all, in the Middle East which is a hodge-podge at best of multiple cultures, none of which is solidly Eastern or European. This discussion will offer examples of land-mines encountered throughout a career in the field. The lessons learned and suggestions of how to make of this multicultural classroom one in which everyone can and must participate to maximize learning English, is the major goal of this paper. While the framework is teaching English as a Foreign language, which should have evened the playing field and mostly did not, the lessons are applicable to nearly every academic discipline taught in similar multicultural classrooms.

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