WHEN THE INSTRUCTOR COMES FROM ABROAD: SOME THOUGHTS ON CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

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“ATTICUS WAS RIGHT. ONE TIME HE SAID YOU NEVER REALLY KNOW A MAN UNTIL YOU STAND IN HIS SHOES AND WALK AROUND IN THEM” FROM “TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD” BY HARPER LEE
MY SHOES...

WHO AM I?
- Importance that the instructor knows his/her cultural background, this will help the instructor to avoid some cultural mistakes with the students which whim is interacting

What is the teaching style I have received “back in the days”?
- Importance that the instructor is aware of the teaching style he/she has received during school and university
INEVITABLE MISTAKES

During my first experiences teaching in the Canadian system I can report two mistakes I made which I would call as:

- Taking for granted…
- “Are you falling from the sky?”
Taking for granted…

Once I asked to my class to transform the following sentence from singular to plural:

- io sono una studentessa  
  (I am a student)

the solution is:

- noi siamo due studentesse  
  (we are two students)
A student told me he did not know how to make the plural, then I realized that he did not know that “we” is the plural of “I” in English.

- I realized the students did not receive a strong grammar teaching at school

Therefore...

- I changed my teaching style going more “back to basics and sometimes I need to review the English grammar to help them better understand the Italian one
“ARE YOU FALLING FROM THE SKY?”

- In Italy it is more direct the dialogue between students and professor, also the open discussion and open argumentation is accepted in public.
- I realized that students do not like to be put on the spot in front of their classmates.
- One day in 2008 during my very first classes I made a comment to a “peculiar” look of a student while I was reviewing something we already went through in class, and I told that student that she seemed she was falling from the sky, the reaction was negative and I had to confort her and explain to her the different cultural values and that no offense was meant.
BEING IN THEIR SHOES

Those mistakes helped me develop my teaching style. On the very first day I:

- Introduce myself
- Ask questions about their origins, culture
- What would they like to learn from my class
- I change the disposition of desks, to create groups of 4 persons who will work together
- I consider the very first day “the” day to start creating a good empathy and connection with students
TRY TO SHOW MY SHOES…

Then to help them become proficient communicator with Italian native speakers apart from the grammar I make them available on onQ:

- Movies
- Documentaries
- Recipes
- Radio stations
- And much more…
EXAMPLE FROM ONQ
WHY DEVELOPING EMPATHY?

What I believe is that it is important to create empathy with our students because:

- They will be more engaged in class
- They will feel more comfortable in talking in class
- They will remember the experience as a positive experience
- They will learn in an environment which promotes communication and interaction, important elements for their future career at the university and in their job after the university
THANK YOU!

- HAVE A GOOD WALK IN YOURS AND YOUR STUDENTS’ SHOES!