



English as a Second Language (ESL): Strengthening academic writing through a study of American film

A course entitled "Film and Society" by Dr. Marcia Pally, New York University and Fordham University (1998)

Course Design:

Unlike other students, students for whom English is a second language have had few opportunities to practice the conventions and argumentation of specific academic disciplines. Studying one particular subject, in this case film, during the semester gives ESL students the opportunity to practice the cognitive academic learning processes that will be required of them in American academic settings. Dr. Pally seeks to improve her students' academic writing by focusing on their text analysis, paper organization, exemplification, and text questioning through sustained content study.

The instructor uses the course to address both the cultural and academic needs of the students. The course is based on reading, reflection, writing, and discussion. Materials include three example films (*The Untouchables*, *Do the Right Thing*, and *Thelma and Louise*), articles from contemporary periodicals, and chapter-length essays on how American cultural assumptions and conflicts are reflected in film content as well as camera, light, and sound techniques. Students identify the authors' themes and views and are encouraged to express their own opinions. Pre-reading questions serve as springboards for each unit; students integrate the readings with the films in text analyses and writing tasks. Throughout the course, the instructor discusses and models reading, writing, and discussion strategies. Student progress is monitored through student writing portfolios and class participation.

Higher Level Learning:

By focusing on the discipline of film, students develop the knowledge, vocabulary, and experience necessary to undertake college-level reasoning and writing (**Thinking, Acting**). Critical engagement of the material on paper and in class requires students to reevaluate their own views on acceptable classroom interactions and on appropriate academic argumentation (**Self, Others**). Developing and supporting positions about the issues in the films (**Phenomena**) also promotes a more complete understanding of American culture (**Others**).

Active Learning:

Dr. Pally's students learn the necessary organizational and argumentation skills expected of them in American universities through the instructor's modeling (**Observing**) and by practicing with their fellow students (**Doing**.) Writing exercises, accumulated into a writing portfolio, enable students to develop their own views of American culture and films and to monitor their progress (**Dialogue with Self**). Class discussions promote comparing and contrasting personal opinions with those of others (**Dialogue with Others**.)

Pally, M. (1998). Film studies drive literacy development for ESL university students. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 41, 620-628.