Dear Intercultural Communication Professionals,

First, a couple of propositions (to which I hope you will all agree):

(a) We no longer have the luxury to be only language teachers. We have to teach all the other
“stuff” that goes with (English) in order for anyone to have successful communication:
understanding of cultural conventions, values, and beliefs; a knowledge of appropriate
behaviors and practices; a sense of the roles we should play and how people in different roles
interact with each other, and we have to help our learners explicitly and efficiently develop
some of the habit of processing the work that learners in the target culture were socialized
into—maybe long ago.

(b) Our job is not just to help our learners fit into the target culture/discourse system, but to help
them find their voice in that target discourse system. Also we want to distinguish between
“complete membership” in a discourse system and “full membership” in a discourse system.
There are many ways one can be seen as a full member of a community, but communities are by
nature dynamic, changing and diverse, so there is no way that anyone could be seen to have
complete membership.

(c) We learn (that is, see the meaning in a particular experience) because of the context in which
the experience occurs. However, for learning to be useful we usually need to decontextualize
learning (that is, determine the learning’s essence so that we can then take it and apply it
appropriately to other related situations). However, decontextualization is not sufficient, to
apply learning in new situations, we have to recontextualize it (that is, make sense of it anew)
based on the new situation. Thus all learning is about crossing cultures (where “cultures” are
roughly equivalent to contexts), and teaching is about showing learners strategies they can use
to successfully cross cultures/contexts.

We have worked hard to eliminate redundancy between readings and class content, while still making
sufficient connections to bridge the two. We have worked to make TESL-527 very interactive, task-
oriented classes which will make a concerted effort connect course content to what you can do in the
classroom. Finally, while we have edited content and reduced the assignment load to be able to fit what
is normally a 15 to 16 meeting course over that many weeks into a 14 meetings in seven weeks—we
have a lot to cover and a lot to do. So we need your cooperation and will do our upmost to earn it.

Consequently, we would like to avoid as much as possible taking up too much of the first class discussing
administrative matters and assignments. One way to do this is to ask you to familiarize yourselves with
the syllabi and the courses’ orientations before arriving in the first class on May 12th. To do this we
would like you to answer the five questions you find below and send your responses to me in an email
(at bbrady@american.edu) sometime before we meet class at 5:30 pm on Tuesday, May 12th. I think
that in the process of answering these questions you will need to survey the syllabi and available
assignment supports well enough to understand (a) how the courses are structured, (b) where you can
find resources, and (c) what you need to do for assignments. **Completing these questions will account for 20% of your classroom participation grade.**

If you are receiving this message you have been added to the Blackboard (henceforth Bb) site. There is also a web page associated with the course (which you’ll need to visit to answer some questions) at http://www.american.edu/tesol/TESL-527.html. Welcome. Here are your questions:

1. What is the last entry in “Culture Terms—a glossary.”

2. What is one element of the “Fitting In and Being Yourself” PowerPoint slideshow (done as part of each semester’s orientation for AU international students) that would be a concept helpful to use with your student audience—an idea that would be good for them to think about?

   Note: if you can’t think of anything or you’re not teaching now—what is one question **you** have about the slideshow?

3. In the Key Concepts for the 1/12 Class (yes, please read the entire text, sorry), what are two ideas that were relatively new or interesting to you about why we have to teach language AND culture?

4. Describe the general structure of your team C.A.P. assignments

5. In addition to Key Concepts and your textbooks, where are three other places that readings can be found?

Finally, log into the Blackboard site for TESL-527 and go to the discussion board. There you will find a thread where you can get to know each other by recounting a cultural learning experience you had. A cultural learning experience is simply an experience where you realized you learned something about another culture (or perhaps culture in general). In addition to recounting your story, please try to indicate what it was in the context of your life that helped you see that this experience had cultural meaning (and when you log into the Bb site you will see how I modeled doing this.

Now before class on Tuesday we ask that you (a) post a cultural learning experience you've had (and be sure to include the context that made the experience culturally meaningful (however you don't have to highlight or change its color as I did), and comment on at least two of the other cultural learning experiences your peers have shared.