

Romildo Ghezzi Perspective Cordell Hull Foundation

I was born in Peru but am now a Canadian citizen. When I moved to Canada in my late teens I found some cultural aspects that were different from those in my native Latin-American culture (music, dancing, language, etc.) vis-a-vis the Canadian (Anglo) culture, where dancing, for example, is usually less frequent and more formal. In Canada I became a foreign language teacher. My passion for learning and teaching foreign languages and for linguistics inspired me to become fluent in French, Italian, Japanese and Portuguese, besides English and Spanish.

My teaching background has taken me to many different countries. I began my career in Canada teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), Spanish and French in a middle school and privately. I spent ten years in Japan as a foreign language teacher where I taught ESL, French, Italian and Spanish at multiple levels in different institutions, elementary and high school and university.

In every culture, I believe there are good and bad points, depending on the person experiencing the new culture. As for the Japanese culture, there were simply new attitudes to learn while I was living in that country over ten years. For instance, in Japan, it is not considered good form to express certain feelings outwardly, which was quite different from my heritage in a Latino culture, Peru. Living in Japan experience helped me broaden my views on the different cultures in the world. Some cultures actually have some [hilarious?] customs such as the one in Thailand where one is supposed to burp after a meal in order to show the host that one enjoyed it! Certainly, that is considered rude in Western cultures.

In Japan, apart from knowing how to use chopsticks, I learned about being modest when talking about oneself or one's own family. I also learned not to show my emotions openly and to always take off my shoes whenever I would go into a house, even if it were my own! As well, as I entered the house, I'd have to say in Japanese: « Sorry for the Disturbance! »

In 1999, I came to the US through the Cordell Hull Foundation teacher exchange program to work in a midwestern public Spanish Immersion School. Through this work experience I explored new horizons and dimensions in the teaching profession. There were aspects to the teaching profession, such as classroom management, special needs and the focus on testing, that American teachers had to learn to cope with to a greater extent than in other countries where I had taught. I was teaching students from urban areas for the first time and needed to acquire new skills for teaching inner city students.

I have fond memories of the schools where I taught and from some schools I visited occasionally in KCMO. I worked with colleagues of many nationalities. Other than those born in the United States, they were those from countries such as Argentina, Belgium, Cameroon, Honduras and Spain. These teachers taught French and Spanish or worked in the Extended Day program. In some elementary schools that I visited, some teachers taught ESL. I noticed that a few of my colleagues tended to eat food from their own countries; however, they would happily eat American food, e.g., Kentucky Fried Chicken, whenever they had a chance. On the other hand, I was already used to eating all kinds of food, including American. I love the burgers and the barbecues and the sauces, especially Gates Barbecue Sauce.

A number of my colleagues noticed that Americans are open and easy-going by and large. Part of my job as a "cultural Ambassador" for the Cordell Hull Foundation enabled me to mix with some Americans had never been unexposed to other countries and their cultures and perceived most matters from an American perspective only. For instance, Americans found the lack of hot water in homes in tropical foreign countries unusual or abnormal, whereas, natives of those countries found it comical that Americans expected that. Besides meeting colleagues, I also established some warm friendships with a number of Americans outside of my workplace. Some of the school programs and activities are still fresh in my mind such as Cinco de Mayo and the drill team presentations.

The school district offered training on different aspects of the education field relevant to today's professional demands. Also, I took methodological courses at the university pertaining to my field of studies such as methods of teaching a second language, and English as a Second Language. After receiving the ESL training I switched schools and worked as an ESL teacher. I found ESL more satisfying ... working with a smaller group of students heightened the sense of accomplishment.

Needless to say, I also learned much about the American culture. Expansion of cultural knowledge is one goal of the Cordell Hull Foundation's teacher exchange visitor program. I must say that the Foundation has an encouraging president, Marianne Mason. I always received good support and feedback when she made her yearly visits to interact with the teachers sponsored by CHF.

I am grateful to the Cordell Hull Foundation for making possible that special opportunity. Now that I am back in « The Frozen North », I am hoping to use the knowledge, experience and training that I have received throughout my professional years, including, of course, those in the United States – very valuable ones – in order to continue advancing in my profession. Here in Canada, I am still in touch with the Cordell Hull Foundation, and am currently helping to update the Spanish and French website translations.