

Book Review

Carolyn Kessler and others. Making Connections: An Integrated Approach to Learning English. Three Levels. Heinle & Heinle Publishers. 1994.

Mary Lou McCloskey and Lydia Stack. Voices in Literature. Three Levels Heinle & Heinle Publishers. 1995.

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Both of these admirable books were written for use in American ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classrooms. *Making Connections* was designed for middle schools (*secundarias*) and *Voices in Literature* for high schools (*preparatorias*). Both series use various readings as a take off point to practice the English language with young immigrants in the United States.

Making Connections is based on an integrated approach where readings and activities in various content areas such as science, social studies and literature are used to reach four goals:

integrate language areas through active learning

integrate language with academic content and processes

integrate students with one another, and

integrate the school with the home culture and with the greater community (Book 1: v-vi)

Students are presented with basic functions, structures and useful study strategies as they study interesting units such as: “Setting goals”, “Making changes” (Book 2) and “Breaking down barriers” and “Crossing bridges” (Book 3). Students are presented with themes that are directed at problems they could find as they adjust to their new culture in the States. For example, in the first book, they practice counting dollars and cents and talking about the weather. In Book 3 they examine racism.

The entire package consists of the hard-covered student's text and a workbook, teacher's edition, activity masters, color transparencies, audio cassettes and an assessment package.

Voices in Literature is similar to *Making Connections*, however it includes more literature and the level of English is higher. There are three levels designated as *Silver* (Book 1), *Gold* (Book 2), and *Bronze* (Book 3). There are Teacher's Manuals and Activity Masters for each level.

This series has also been designed for immigrant students who have recently arrived in the United States from any part of the world. The introduction states:

This book was written so that you, students from many cultures and language backgrounds, could learn English, talk about literature, and explore themes that are found in many cultures. We have tried to find selections that will help you understand North American culture, selections about moving from one culture to another, and selections that reflect the many cultures that make up North America (p. v).

The most wonderful aspect of these texts is the use of literature. Just a short summary of the famous authors from all over the world who have works represented in one or both of the series is impressive. English-language and Hispanic authors such as Pablo Neruda, e. e. cummings, Carl Sandburg, William Shakespeare, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelo and José Martí share the pages with authors from diverse cultures whose work may be unknown to us, such as Ok Kork, Kim Van Kieu, Laurence Yep, Huynh Wuang Nhuong and Mary TallMountain.

Although I would be the first to praise these beautiful series on a theoretical and aesthetic level, I wonder why they are being promoted for use in Mexican schools. I feel that many of the themes used are not culturally relevant for Mexican students. Even in bilingual schools, children usually have never lived in the United States, even if they have traveled there. The themes related to immigration and the culture-shock felt by many recent arrivals in a new culture are not relevant for students who are living and will probably continue to live in their own cultures. Also the often subtle, if necessary, American nationalism presented in the texts could possibly find a negative response on the part of some students, especially at the *preparatoria* level.

These texts, while possibly supplying a teacher with supplementary material for both young people and adults in EFL and ESL classes in Mexico, are not designed to meet the reality our students live daily.