**Paper #2: Primary Research: Cultural Differences Based on Fieldwork Observations**

We have read several texts that explore cultural differences. In “Shooting an Elephant,” the narrator comments on Burmese culture as an outsider. In “Teacher’s Classroom Strategies…” Tannen explores the different cultural behaviors related to language use in the classroom between males and females. We have also discussed Amy Tan’s essay, “Mother Tongue” highlighting the way Tan incorporates another language (i.e., her mother’s culture) into her writing, a language that exhibits “culture” different from English.

The concept of culture is vast and encompasses the behaviors, values, and beliefs of a particular group. Consider particular aspects of culture that differ between what you’ve observed in America and those you know inherently from home. Which struck you the most forcefully? Examples could range from behaviors you’ve noticed at BC, for example, communication between peers, interactions between students and professors, the culture of the classroom, sports culture, rituals related to dating, rituals related to eating and mealtime (in the dining halls at BC vs. those with which you’re familiar.) You may consider behaviors you’ve witnessed beyond the campus, for example, the different beliefs and practices employed when raising children, the treatment of the elderly within each society, the different views of work/career in each culture, the ways in which each culture views/values the arts, sports, etc., different forms of greeting between cultures, different definitions of personal space and how this is understood in public contexts, the way in which people from each culture respond to governmental/political systems, different views/treatment of immigrants and foreigners in each culture, views and behaviors toward minority groups, issues with racism, homophobia, stereotyping, interracial/intercultural relations, etc. There are *many* different aspects of culture you could consider: you need not draw solely from this list.

Once you have chosen a topic, you should devise a *working* thesis. (This may change as you conduct research.) Your research will involve fieldwork to document the differences in cultural behavior. The methods you will draw on to conduct your fieldwork include observation and interview. For example, if you decide you will focus on the upbringing of young children in each culture, you could observe the interactions between parents and children in a public space. You might interview several American friends about their experiences being raised in an American family. You could contrast this to the experiences of those from your culture and interview compatriots here at BC or those back in your country through email, Skype, etc.

You should gather all of your fieldwork in an organized fashion. Make sure you have full names for those you have interviewed. (We will discuss release forms in an upcoming class.) You should also provide enough context so it is clear why you have chosen to interview a particular person. For example, if you interview a family psychologist about interfamilial relationships, it will be important to let you reader know this. If age is related to the type of inquiry you are conducting, make sure you have recorded this information. If you are observing something, make sure you give enough context about who you are observing (names are not necessary but alert your reader that it’s an exchange between a mother and child, for example) and make sure you indicate where and when it occurred if this is significant (at the candy counter in a grocery store, for example).

After you have gathered enough fieldwork, sort through it to determine how you will state your thesis (your fieldwork will help shape this) and which of your observations, and excerpts from interviews you will use in your paper. Make sure the fieldwork you choose to use in your paper touches on examples from each culture so that you can illustrate the difference.

Write a paper (6 to 7 pages) detailing the different ways each culture handles the particular cultural practice you have chosen to explore. Build your arguments around the fieldwork you incorporate in your paper. Be certain to have examples illustrating practices in both cultures so that you present a balanced contrast.

PODCAST

Finally, a component to this project is to produce a brief audio-recording (much like a radio podcast) exploring this topic for a listening audience. You will learn to write for a listener (a very different approach) and record yourself reading a two-minute podcast. I will explain more in class next week.

All due dates TBA.

*N.B.: We will handle this project in stages and I will support you with all aspects of the paper and podcast: you will submit a fieldwork proposal to me; you will read about interviewing and do a practice interview in class; we will work together to excerpt interviews and weave them into a paragraph of evidence; we will look at sample papers from previous semesters; you will meet with peers to discuss first drafts; you will read about “writing for radio, etc.*

**Conducting Fieldwork**

Observations: Observe the behaviors that unfold around you. Be ready to jot down notes about any details that help to characterize the behavior.

Face to Face Interviews:

* Use a recording device (memo app on your smartphone is good for short interviews). If you don’t have access to this, you can take notes. Just remember to look up from time to time as you write and ask the speaker to slow down or repeat something when necessary so that you are certain to get it right.
* Ask whomever you’d like to interview for permission to do so. Explain you are writing a paper for class and it will not be published.
* Prepare questions ahead of time. Be culturally sensitive in the kinds of questions you pose. Ask the person you are interviewing to provide details and explanations whenever possible.
* Begin the interview with small talk to create a comfortable atmosphere.
* Listen carefully to responses and follow an interesting point that might lead to important information.
* Pose only one question at a time. Make sure you provide ample time for the interviewee to fully consider and answer it. Don’t be afraid of silence. People often need time to gather their thoughts, form an opinion, etc.
* Pose open-ended questions rather than simple yes/no questions. (See below.)
* Don'tstick to your questions rigidly. If an interesting subject comes up that relates to your research, feel free to ask additional questions about it.
* Don't allow the person you are interviewing to continually get off topic. If the conversation drifts, ask follow-up questions to redirect the conversation to the subject at hand.
* Never interrupt. However, you should guide the interviewee with your questioning if s/he gets off-topic.
* Don’t push the person you are interviewing. If he or she does not want to talk about an issue, you should respect that desire.
* Finally, NEVER misrepresent something a speaker has said (or written) by changing its content, taking it out of context, etc.

Remote Interviews: You will most likely use email or skype for this. Again, first ask permission of your interviewee. If you are using email, you might send a list of questions and ask for detailed responses or, you might offer your correspondent a synopsis of the type of information you’re looking for and ask them to respond to it in a more general manner as a way of beginning the inquiry. This might lead you down avenues you hadn’t initially considered.

If you use SKYPE or IM, you’ll explore the topic one question at a time. Again, always ask that your interviewee be specific and follow up with further questions, perhaps asking the correspondent to provide more detail and explanation when needed.

Finally, be certain to record full names of interviewees, date, place of interview/observation, manner of interview (email, SKYPE, etc.)

Suggestions for Questioning:

\*Avoid yes/no questions: Do you….? Rather, ask the kinds of questions that demand a more complete answer: “How do you…” or “Why do you…”

\*Ask the interviewee to elaborate s/he’s responded to a questions. Ask her to provide more details about something that interests you and could be useful to your research or, ask her to elaborate on a particular point.

\*Try to get the interviewee to share a story. Frame a prompt in a way that will lead to this: Would you describe a time when you…

\*Ask questions and LISTEN. If you are doing most of the talking, you are not conducting an effective interview.

**Incorporating Sources into Your Paper**

The research you will use for this paper will be drawn from your fieldwork. Your observations and the people you interviewed (primary sources) will be the basis for your analysis. Of course, your fieldwork should support your thesis which will succinctly articulate the way in which this particular cultural practice differs between the two groups. Therefore, you may not use all of your fieldwork in your paper. Read through your fieldwork carefully to determine which is most germane to your thesis and helps to build your analysis of the cultural difference.

REVIEWING YOUR FIELDWORK:

*\*Interviews and Correspondence*: When you read through your interviews, you will excerpt portions of the interview to make your point, rather than including the interview in its entirety in your paper. Determine which parts of the interview are most relevant to your thesis.

*\*Observation*: After you have observed the cultural practice, you should make a list of questions and conclusions that your observations raise. This will help you direct your analysis.

TECHNIQUES FOR INCORPORATING THE FIELDWORK INTO YOUR PAPER:

You will use the techniques of *summary, paraphrase*, and *direct quotation* to incorporate your fieldwork into your paper. You should vary your use of each; do not overly rely on any one technique.

*\*Direct quotation* is an effective technique when the author or speaker’s particular phrasing seems important. Always respond critically to the words of another author or speaker. Therefore, don’t let a quotation stand alone without illustrating the way it connects to your thesis.

*\*Summary* is a condensed version of another writer’s text or, in this case, interview, correspondence, even observations. It’s an effective technique when it’s important for the audience to understand the main point of an author’s argument rather than particular details. You will certainly use summary to relay your observations.

*\*Paraphrase* is an effective technique to convey a difficult or wordy idea in more straight-forward and concise terms to your reader. Paraphrase also demonstrates your understanding of the source. Again, it should clearly indicate how the fieldwork is relevant to your thesis.

**IN-TEXT CITATION GUIDELINES**:

Your direct quotations, summaries, and paraphrases should contain the following:

1. A *signal* or *introductory phrase* which alerts your readers that material from a source is coming next. It should identify the source and provide any other contextual information your reader will need to understand the relevancy of this source to your thesis.
2. The example of your fieldwork (*direct quotation, summary*, or *paraphrase*).
3. *Follow-up statement* relating the fieldwork to your thesis. This should be a clearly stated analysis or interpretation that clearly transitions from primary source’s ideas to your own.
4. An entry in your “Sources” page if the item of fieldwork is based on a primary source.

The sources list should be on a separate page at the end of your paper. The format for citing primary sources is as follows:

**SOURCES**

Smith, John. Personal Interview. 5 November 2014.

MacKenzie, Susan. Email Interview. 7 November 2014.

Le, Xiufeng. Skype Interview. 10 November 2014