The importance of cultural awareness in today’s globalized world.

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According to Friedman (2005), the world is “flat” now. Geographical borders and boundaries are perhaps becoming increasingly irrelevant in today’s globalized world. Different societies in East and West are in much greater direct contact with one another. Therefore, it is critical to be aware of cultural variation, to develop intercultural communication skills, and to become more effective at working across cultures. For example, Grosse (2005) points out the importance of trust and personal relationships in Asian business, which are often overlooked by US business partners doing business in Asia. Also, a study by Stadler (2009) shows that some fundamental aspects of intercultural communication and business values that may seem obvious to some are still often overlooked; these include knowing the culture of Asian clients, greeting appropriately, showing respect, and gift giving. Not knowing these things can pose unexpected problems while doing business in the global market. But if cultural awareness and intercultural competence are essential components for efficient communication in a modern, globalized world, how do we teach these skills, especially awareness of eastern cultural behaviours to college students in/from North America?

By referring to four American study abroad programs at the college-level in China (total 50 participants), this presentation will demonstrate how cultural concepts and language are incorporated in study abroad programs in China. For example, how Chinese exchange business cards, apologize, refuse, and inquire. Students learn the culture and understand what to say and how to interact with Chinese appropriately in a variety of situations. Eastern and Western cultures are so distinct that one can only truly understand and appreciate them through concrete examples. Learning language and culture in a target country not only provides language learners a clear context but also shows them how foreign customs are carried out in real life. This presentation will further illustrate how to design activities that can increase learners’ cultural awareness.

References