**Abstract**

**Thinking about Thinking: Stereotyping and the ESL class.**

**Motivation**

As lecturers we have a moral obligation to contextualize the learning of English language with the learner’s own environment. The added bonus of dwelling in the learners environment make is easy to identify areas where we can increase learner’s cognitive awareness to address areas of stereotyping of culture and groups within the society they live.

**Problem**

Reference was made to the cosmopolitan nature of the city of Jeddah. Because of multiple nationalities prevalent in the city, stereotyping is one means of classifying and labeling people as belonging to one group or another.

**Approach**

Four different activities were given to the students; three of them were designed by the authors while the fourth was an adapted version from our video activity book which is part of our syllabus. The activities aimed at getting students to reflect on their thinking and provoke meaning language exchange through controlled and uncontrolled classroom discussion.

Activity 1: Geographical Survey

The first activity took the form of a geographical survey where students were given a map of the world depicting the six continents in Figure 1. Students had to indicate which continent they would most like to live in.

Activity 2: The ABC Company

In this exercise students were given pictures of 6 people. They were told that these 6 people were their colleagues and all of them were senior employees of the ABC Company. A crisis had arisen in the Company: sales were at an all-time low and the CEO of the Company had convened a meeting of all the senior managers. Students were required to place each of the people at the table.

Activity 3: The Moyota Company

Students were presented with an organizational chart displaying the various positions within the Moyota Company hierarchy. Students were required to match the people in the pictures to the positions on the chart.

Activity 4: "Welcome back to West High"

While Activities 1, 2, and 3 were our own inventions, Activity 4 was adapted from students' video activity textbook, ***New Interchange***. This last activity revolved around the viewing of a video about a high school reunion.

**Conclusions**

We all stereotype to a lesser or greater degree, but the point is we should be aware that we are stereotyping and that our perception/s may not be true. The problem arises when we substitute our stereotype for the reality. We act on our false notions of people and in the process often practice bias, prejudice and discrimination of a negative kind. If students are aware of their cognitive processes in stereotyping then may be all or some of the negatives accompanying this stereotyping can be avoided. Perhaps further exercises, creatively compiled, similar or different to the ones we engaged students in, may assist in this critical self-reflection. Changing modes of thinking takes time. This kind of initiative demands ongoing persistent effort, determination and perseverance, but the end result may well prove rewarding where people begin to interrogate their own thinking and are aware of how their thinking and resultant behavior affects others.