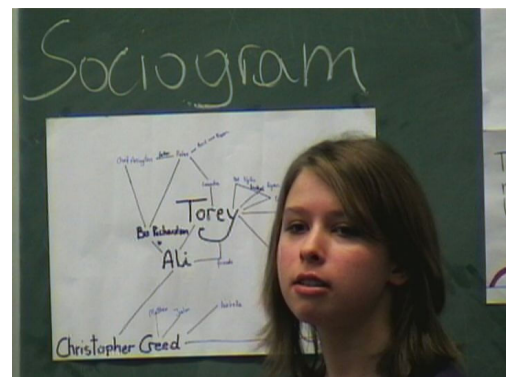


Exploring (Cultural) Values in Young Adult Literature – University meets GIBS

On November 21, 2008, the students of Jennifer Schumm's applied language studies class on Intercultural Communication at the English Department, Graz University met the pupils of Mrs. Pözlleitner's 5b English class to give joint presentations on young adult novels that both groups had read. This day was the culmination of a two-month reading project in which both classes discussed and analyzed personal and cultural values in the young adult literature they read.

What novels did the pupils and students read? The students and pupils read contemporary young adult novels that dealt with topical issues and real-to-life situations in the UK and USA. The novels addressed topics like teenage pregnancy in Nick Hornby's Slam, inventing an internet persona in The Gospel According to Larry by Janet Tashjian, searching for a missing pupil in The Body of Christopher Creed by Carol Plum-Ucci and a court case involving a young adult on trial for robbery and murder in Monster by Walter Dean Myers



What were the presentations like? The pupils and students took different approaches to their respective books in their presentations. In this way different viewpoints and interpretations were presented that not only complemented each other but also gave everyone a deeper insight into the novels read. The pupils of 5b presented the plot, characters and settings of a given book, and then the students of the English Department addressed the cultural values and cultural aspects of the same novel.

After both presentations on a given novel, there was an open discussion. These discussions turned out to be very lively due in part to the inquisitiveness of the pupils in 5b.

So what was the feedback on this project? Did the pupils and students enjoy their joint presentation session? These two questions can be answered with an overwhelming yes! After the project was over a questionnaire was filled out by both the pupils and students. When asked whether they would like to do joint



presentations in future, pupils commented: 'Yes, I would like to do that. It was a good idea that us, the students of GIBS presented more the content and the students of the university more the cultural aspects of the books' and 'Yes, I'd love to!!! It was REALLY interesting to see how people in other age groups see things and hear their opinions.' Student responses were equally positive: 'I liked working with the pupils in GIBS since they put so much effort into the project,' and 'Yes, I think this cooperation was the best part of the project.'

In conclusion, the project was not a positive experience for the pupils and students but also for the teachers involved. A new project is already being discussed for WS 2009-2010.

