

## Book Review

# *Communication and Culture*

by Norman Evans

**COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE: A READING-WRITING TEXT.** Joan Young Gregg. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1981. pp. 236. \$8.95.

As teachers of English to speakers of other languages we are faced with a much more difficult task than simply teaching English. The job, more and more, requires some knowledge and a certain degree of expertise in many other fields, e.g., speech therapy, mathematics, aviation, anthropology, business . . . , and the list can only get longer and more demanding as the list of special purposes for which English is taught grows. Fortunately, material developers have seen this demand being placed on teachers and have started producing to meet the needs. *Communication and Culture* is a perfect case in point. It is a text that has successfully integrated the task of learning useful culture and communication skills into lessons that have the basic function of teaching English as a second language.

*Communication and Culture* is, "designed for college students in developmental English, communication skills, and advanced English as a second language" (vii). Each of the ten self-contained chapters consists of approximately ten pages of reading and 15 pages of writing exercises. All exercises (both reading and writing) are based on unaltered reading selections taken from cultural anthropology e.g., "Culture and Time", "Culture and Food Habits", "Culture and Human Behavior" etc.

When I first picked the book up, I was sure I had found something that would work well in a program where reading and writing are taught as a core class. However, I was, as possibly others will be, misguided by the title. Even though it is supposed to be a reading-writing text, I find the work load is not equally divided between the two skills.

The reading portion of a chapter consists of one reading (about 1,000 words); key

concept questions; vocabulary exercises: suffix, prefix, word form tables; cloze passages, comprehension questions, and summary exercises. This is a fairly healthy list of reading activities, and not too different from the format used in most reading texts on the market today. However, several problems arise from such a format, especially in this text: 1) the students spend more time doing exercises (mostly writing) than they do reading, and 2) the reading activities of any given chapter can be completed in half the time it would take to finish the writing section of the same chapter; consequently, the reading teacher is forced to supplement while the writing class finishes the chapter.

On the other hand, the writing activities are well designed and quite adequate. Such activities as verb tense formation, compounding and combining sentences, formation and placement of modifiers, prepositions, and rhetorical pattern exercises are all structured to help the student compose his/her own sentences, paragraphs, and essays.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect about *Communication and Culture* is the readings—a rather ironical statement but true. The readings help establish some common ground for class discussions and writing assignments (in many ESL classrooms common ground is sometimes hard to find). The readings also present useful vocabulary in context rather than in lists. Furthermore, the word attack exercises intended for reading are very much applicable to writing e.g., prefix/suffix exercises, word form tables, cloze passages, and other vocabulary exercises. In fact, when I piloted a chapter, only 2 out of 10 reading exercises could not be used in my advanced writing class.

*Communication and Culture: A Reading-Writing Text* may be used as an ESL reading-writing text; however, it has much greater potential as an advanced composition text with the readings used as a basis for the writing activities.