



## **Building Narratives: Self-expression through Literature and Art in the select prose pieces of Francis Bacon**

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper entitled “Building Narratives: Self-expression through Literature and Art in the select prose pieces of Francis Bacon” is an attempt to bring out a result of how an international literature taught, build up the communicative competence and cultural understanding, in a classroom of particular country like India. Literature is very helpful in language learning process. After a better understanding of the literature studied, students try to make use of the language learnt in their day-to-day life. They start to believe that their competence in communication and the culture has been improved. It is a kind of motivation which encourages the students to read the literature further. It will help them also to make their own creative writing. Literature is being an important tool in language learning.

Keywords: literature, language, community, culture, creativity

Teaching is an art in which the relationship between teacher and taught, is crucial to real success. This research paper entitled “Building Narratives: Self-expression through Literature and Art in the select prose pieces of Francis Bacon” is an attempt to bring out a result of how an international literature taught, build up the communicative competence and cultural understanding, in a classroom of particular country like India. The piece of literature that I take as a sample is Bacon’s selected essays like *Of Parents and Children*, *Of Love*, and *Of Death*. I teach the essays in a classroom that comprises Tamil Nadu English Literature students. I would like to register how the students understand the culture by comparing it with their own and how they develop their communicative competence.

Community Language Learning was developed by Charles Curran, a Roman Catholic priest and a professor of clinical psychology. Curran worked with adults for many years, and he developed the *counselling – learning approach*, according to which, the teacher was more a ‘counsellor’ than a figure of authority and a judge of right and wrong. Curran discovered that adults often feel threatened in new learning situations: one, because they are coming into contact with something unfamiliar; and two, because they are afraid of appearing foolish. To counter this, the teacher must become a counsellor – a person who not only know the target



language, but who also understand the struggle learners face while learning something new. By being understanding, teachers can help them to overcome their fears and work more positively towards learning a new language. CLL takes place in groups, either small or large, and these groups form the community. This method lays emphasis on the learners' personal feeling while learning a foreign language.

According to Elliot, a more important aim of teaching foreign language, if it is properly taught, is the development of imaginative insight into the way of life of the people who speak it. Such an insight is of the greatest value in widening the pupil's experiences and thus in contributing to his general education. The study of a second language gives an insight into the quality of the mother-tongue by means of comparisons – comparing the two cultures. By learning a foreign language we get an opportunity to compare our own way of life and social system with those of the people who speak that language. There is one higher aim of teaching a foreign language – developing a sense of social tolerance and responsibility as citizen of the world.

Language competence can be developed through literary texts in a better way. McKay (2001) advocates three major benefits of using literature in language classroom:

- it demonstrates the importance of authors' choice of form to achieve specific communicative goals,
- it is an ideal resource for integrating the four skills,
- it raises cross-cultural awareness.

Lazar (1993) also explains the following benefits of using literature in the language classroom:

- it is very motivating
- it is authentic material
- it has general educational value
- it is found in many syllabi
- it helps students to understand another culture
- it is a stimulus for language acquisition
- it develops students' interpretative abilities



- students enjoy it and it is fun
- it is highly valued and has a high status
- it expands students' language awareness
- it encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings

These are some of the common advantages of using literature in language classroom. Based on these advantages, a course objective should be formulated. The followings are some sample objectives for reading literature suggested by Campbell (2007):

- Students will develop a variety of reading strategies in support of comprehension.
- Students will identify literary terms and examine how these terms contribute to the craft of writing.
- Students will develop skills in support of analyzing literature.
- Students will develop discussion skills that enable them to converse with peers about the literature they read.
- Students will discover connections with the literature they read: text to self, text to text, and text to world.
- Students will recognize the role literature plays in telling the story of cultures.
- Students will read literature as a model for the kinds of writing they are doing.

Some of the Bacon's essays which are considered to be suitable for this study: *Of Parents and Children*, *Of Love*, and *Of Death*. Sir Francis Bacon is the Father of the English Essay. He has been given the credit of introducing the *essay* into English literature. His *Essays* have no artistic form. His philosophy of life can be constructed from his striking observations on various aspects of man's personal and social life which is applicable to the human beings of all ages undoubtedly. The qualities of his style are simplicity, strength, brevity, clearness and precision.

By dealing with the essay, *Of Parents and Children*, it is easier for any teacher to make their learners understand and compare it with their own life. There is no constraint of being the Tamizhan or the American or the British. It is a matter of fact in all their walks of life. The essay begins with, "The joys of parents are secret; and so are their griefs and fears." While it is being started like this in a classroom, the students can express their own thoughts by comparing it with their own life. They can start telling how their parents enjoy at their



well brought up and how they feel when they have some shortcomings and their fear of their future in their simple language. The lines “The difference in affection of parents towards their several children is many times unequal; and sometimes unworthy;” provoke the pupil to list out the partialities of their parents which make them feel sad. This is the simplest essay which can be also used in the first year classroom. It enables the students to think, compare, raise questions and respond in the classroom confidently. These are the references which are common to all sort of the cultural background.

The next essay *Of Love*, there should be no hesitant of dealing this essay in a teenager classroom. This is the essay which can be used to teach them indirectly. The following lines are taken from this essay *Of Love* to impart the teaching of defectiveness in love:

“The stage is more beholding to love than the life of man.”

“...there is not one that hath been transported to the made degree of love: which shows that great spirits and great business do keep out this weak passion.”

“That it is impossible to love and to be wise.”

“For it is a true rule, that love is ever rewarded either with the reciproque or with an inward and secret contempt.”

“Nuptial love maketh mankind; friendly love perfecteth it; but wanton love corrupteth and embaseth it.”

All these quotations give an impression of Bacon’s cynical attitude towards love. But towards the end, he justifies all his statements. He tries to teach that only pure and friendly love should be emancipated in our life. Meanwhile he advises to avoid the wanton love that corrupts and debases the human character. It can be taught to our students that love can create, perfect and destroy human nature. This essay can also help to build a rapport with our students. They can easily share their feelings and infatuations with the class teacher. It will help a teacher to rectify the issues of their pupils.

The next essay *Of Death*, death is the natural and unavoidable end of everyone’s life. Shakespeare says in Julius Caesar, II. Ii. 34-37:

Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,  
It seems to me most strange that man should fear,  
Seeing that death, a necessary end,



Will come when it will come.

It is this idea that has been expanded in this essay *Of Death*.

Men fear death because no one knows what happens through the process of death and thereafter. Many write about this death. For instances, Seneca says in *Epistles*, 4.2: “Boys fear trifles, children fear shadows, we fear both.” A similar sentence occurs in Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*: “As children in bland darkness tremble and start at everything so are we afraid in daylight.” Similarly, Bacon says, “Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other.” He advocates a great thing in simple terms in this essay:

... death is no such terrible enemy when a man hath so many attendants about him that can win the combat of him. Revenge triumphs over death; Love slights it; Honour aspireth to it; Grief flieth to it; Fear pre-occupateth it...”

Death is not actually so dreaded a thing as it is generally believed to be. There are many human Passions which are stronger than the fear of death. Revenge, love, honour, grief and the passion for martyrdom are stronger than the fear of death. Bacon implies that death is simply a natural process and nothing more. A good man is loved and admired more after death than when alive: “He who was envied when alive, will be loved when dead”.

Literature is very helpful in language learning process. After a better understanding of the literature studied, students try to make use of the language learnt in their day-to-day life. They start to believe that their competence in communication and the culture has been improved. It is a kind of motivation which encourages the students to read the literature further. It will help them also to make their own creative writing. Literature is being an important tool in language learning.

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