

Integrating cultural awareness into language teaching

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Objective

By the end of the workshop you will be able to identify a number of principles of good practice in integrating cultural awareness into language teaching

Good practice?

An English lesson....

Topic: Habits and routines

Objectives:

Learners will be able to:

- express simple statements in English about routines and habits using the present simple tense and adverbs of frequency
- recognise some key aspects of British culture

Good practice?

Examples of language which, through various activities, learners will be able to produce:

- 'In London many people work in banks and offices. Every day, Mr Smith catches the train to a bank in the city of London.'
- 'Mr and Mrs Jones have two children. Like most British families, they often have roast beef for Sunday lunch and then take a walk in the countryside in the afternoon.'
- 'Pubs are very popular in Britain. Most evenings after work, John meets his friends in the pub and plays cards or darts.'
- 'British people take their holidays in the summer. The Evans family fly to Spain every year and spend two weeks in a hotel by the beach.'
- 'British people are very polite. Every week David waits in the queue to buy his lottery ticket.'

What's wrong with this lesson? 1

- Aspects of some of the statements that learners will produce are **inaccurate**; for example,
 - pubs are very popular
 - British people always eat roast beef on Sunday
 - British people are polite(?)
- The statements are **dated**; for example,
 - going to wine bars and restaurants is becoming as popular as going to the pub
 - the two parent, two children family is now a minority arrangement

What's wrong with this lesson? 2

- The statements present a very **narrow** view of British life. If they are regarded as representative, they present a distorted picture.
- In short, they are **stereotypes** and do not present an accurate picture of cultural awareness. They are poor examples of how to integrate cultural awareness into language teaching.

Why integrate cultural awareness? 1

- All use of a language has a context
- Success in communicating through the target language will be limited if learners do not become familiar with the context as they are learning the language
- In some circumstances a lack of awareness and familiarity could create real problems
- Cultural awareness cannot be taught effectively as an 'add-on'

Why integrate cultural awareness? 2

- The most appropriate context for language teaching is usually the accurate representation of the culture(s) in which the language is used
- Fully integrating the development of cultural awareness and competence with language competence is most effective approach as learners are more likely to be able to reproduce language appropriately in relation to the cultural context
- But, representing culture accurately is not easy!

Some guiding principles 1

- Develop skills and attitudes among learners that enable them to interpret and understand other cultures ('intercultural awareness' skills)
- Build the development of these skills and attitudes into the teaching of the language even at lower levels
- Avoid teaching 'cultural awareness' as something separate. Integrate into all aspects of language teaching.

Some guiding principles 2

- Avoid inaccurate representations of culture based on myths and/or dated information. Ensure representation is accurate and contemporary
- Ensure that learners gain very early in their learning an understanding of the essential knowledge and language skills relating to the specific cultural context
- Use a range of relevant authentic media to represent the culture; for example, posters, publicity, books (including contemporary travel guides), newspapers, website, newspapers, magazines, films

Some guiding principles 3

- Ensure language is taught through an appropriately wide range of cultural contexts in order to avoid stereotyping; for example,
 - Show single parent as well as two parent families
 - Use minority ethnic cultural and religious contexts such as Afro-Caribbean and Asian heritage as well as majority ethnic context
 - Look beyond life in the best known centres such as London
 - Represent the wide range of leisure interest pursued; for example, an international range of restaurants and cuisine, sports and hobbies that include those most popular among younger people and among older people.



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