IMPROVING THE CULTURAL AWARENESS OF STUDENTS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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We know that anthropologists define culture as "The whole way of life of a people or group. In this context, *culture* includes all the social practices that bond a group of people together and distinguish them from others" **[Montgomery and Reid-Thomas, 1994:5]**. Based on this definition, it is our opinion that the classroom context is an example of a cultural group and by being so, is an excellent phenomenon to be analyzed and observed. In fact, some researchers have already investigated classroom settings under two complementary viewpoints: social interaction and language learning. These two viewpoints led some investigators to realize that culture is not only present in the classroom setting but also in the language that is being taught.

So, nowadays, some researchers claim that cultural learning positively affects students' linguistic success in foreign language learning. Others state that culture can be used as an instrument in the processes of communication when culturally-determined behavioural conventions are taught **[Byram et al. 1994]**. These two conceptions are far too narrow for our purposes here, however. We believe that culture should not be seen as a support to language teaching but that it should be placed on an equal footing with foreign language teaching.

On regardless of different points of view, culture has taken an important place in language teaching and learning studies. It has been widely recognized that culture and language are interrelated and that language is used as the main medium through which culture is expressed **[Montgomery and Reid-Thomas, 1994]**. In our opinion, in foreign language classrooms, "pure information" is useful but does not necessarily

lead us to insight, whereas the development of people's cultural awareness leads us to more critical thinking as citizens with political and social understanding of our own and other communities.

How can we "teach" culture to Uzbek foreign language teenage students who usually do not have close contact with native speakers of English and have little opportunity to discover how these speakers think, feel and interact with others in their own peer group? How can we stimulate their curiosity about the target culture when, sometimes, they do not even have sufficient time to learn the formal properties of the language. Perhaps one of the ways of doing so is by exploring culture-based activities.

The idea of developing a set of activities arose from the fact that although the teaching of English language has become widespread in all levels of Uzbek education, teachers still lack resource material for exploring the target culture in the classroom. Actually, there are some books in the area, but they are not specifically concerned with the similarities and differences among Uzbek culture and those of English-speaking countries. Note: The activities described in this article are suitable for primary, secondary, and tertiary English teachers and private school professionals who desire to develop a programme in which language and culture are interrelated and have the same level of importance.

Intercultural Communication is the exchange of information between individuals who are unalike culturally. This definition implies that two or more individuals may be unalike in their national culture, ethnicity, age, gender, or in other ways that affect their interaction. Their dissimilarity means that effective communication between them is particularly difficult. The cultural unalikeness of the individuals who interact is the unique aspect of intercultural communication.

Culture is defined as the total way of life of people, composed of their learned and shared behavior patterns, values, norms, and material objects. Culture is a very general concept. Nevertheless, culture has very powerful effects on individual behavior, including communication behavior. Not only do nationalities and ethnic groups have cultures [for example, Japanese culture, Mexican culture, African-

American culture, etc.], but so do communities, organizations, and other systems. For example, the UzDaewoo Corporation has its own culture. Cultural Markers Many people have a culturally identifiable name and, perhaps, a physical appearance that conveys, or at least suggests, their cultural identity. For example, imagine a brown-skinned, dark-haired person named Dilshod. He identifies himself as Asian. But many individuals are not so easily identified culturally. Theree million people in Uzbekistan are culturally mixed and may identify with one or two or with multiple cultures. A person named Dilshod might be expected to be Uzbek, judging only from his last name. "Amirov" actually comes from his adoptive parents, who raised him in the Uzbek tradition. When individuals change their religious or ethnic identity, they often change their name to reflect their new identification. For instance, when the world heavyweight boxer Cassius Clay became a Black Muslim, he changed his name to Mohammed Ali. Likewise, basketball player Kareem Abul-Jabbar was Lew Alcindor before he joined the Muslim faith. Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values Culture is stored in individual human beings, in the form of their beliefs, attitudes, values. Beliefs are an individual's representations of the outside world. Some beliefs are seen as very likely to be true. Others are seen as less probable.

Beliefs serve as the storage system for the content of our past experiences, including thoughts, memories. Beliefs are shaped by the individual's culture. When a belief is held by most members of a culture we call it a cultural belief. Attitudes, like beliefs, are internal events and not directly observable by other people. Attitudes are emotional responses to objects, ideas, and people. Attitudes store these emotional responses in the same way that beliefs store the content of past events. People express opinions, observable verbal behavior, and engage in other behaviors, partially on the basis of their attitudes and beliefs.

Values are what people who share a culture regard strongly as good or bad. Values have an evaluative component. They often concern desired goals, such as the values of mature love, world peace. Values also concern ways of behaving that lead to these goals, such as valuing thrift, honesty, or speaking and acting quietly so as not to make noise that disturbs other people.

Cultural Clash A cultural clash is defined as the conflict that occurs between two or more cultures when they disagree about a certain value. A cultural clash may involve strongly held values, such as those concerning religion. When each participant in a communication exchange represents a different culture, the likelihood of effective communication is lessened. Communication between unalike individuals does not have to be ineffective. For instance, if the participants can empathize with each other [that is, put themselves in the shoes of the other person], then they may be able to overcome the ineffective communication. Further, the individuals can try to learn about people of different cultures.

Communication is dynamic. This means that it is not a single event but is ongoing, so that communicators are at once both senders and receivers. When we are communicating with another person, we take in messages through our senses of sight, smell, hearing – and these messages do not happen one at a time, but rather simultaneously. When we are communicating, we are creating, maintaining, or sharing meaning. This implies that people are actively involved in the communication process. Technically, one person cannot communicate alone – talking to yourself while washing your car does not qualify as communication.

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