

DEALING WITH CULTURE CLASHES

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Annotation: This paper is grounded on the credence that virtual realia can effectively improve students' performance in English, especially in the area of spelling, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. It manifests the author's commitment to further integrate virtual realia in the English language classroom.

Key words: Social media, exchange of culture, foreign language, communicate, syntax and lexicon.

If you've been reading our blogs or following us on social media, you might have noticed that we talk a lot about sharing your culture. By sharing aspects of your culture, you are creating an exchange that has many benefits—you can hold on to the heritage and traditions you left behind, while also introducing your world to your new home.

This cultural exchange can create a new level of awareness for people in your new home who may not yet know about your culture, and lead them to an understanding that we are all more similar than different.

The exchange of culture has already inspired so much of American life. The tradition of the Christmas tree? German. Cowboys, a symbol of the American Old West? Spanish. The saying, "As American as apple pie"? Apple pie isn't even American—it's a British recipe. Even democracy, the tenet of the United States government system, came from ancient Greece. Contributions from different countries have shaped the United States from the beginning. Your contributions can help shape it for the future.

Culture is all the accepted and patterned ways of behavior of a given people. It is that facet of human life learned by people as a result of belonging to some particular group; it is that part of learned behavior shared with others. Not only does this concept include a group's way of thinking, feeling, and acting, but also the internalized patterns for doing certain things in certain ways . . . not just the doing of them. This concept of culture also includes the physical manifestations of a group as exhibited in their achievements and contributions to civilization. Culture is our social legacy as contrasted with our organic heredity. It regulates our lives at every turn.

The goal of this unit is to demonstrate to foreign language teachers how they can incorporate the teaching of culture into their foreign language classrooms. In this curriculum unit, I will define the different types of culture; demonstrate its relevance to second language learning; and give suggestions as to when and how both formal and

deep cultures can be incorporated into the already existing curriculum of a beginning language course. Although this unit is intended for use in my introductory French and Spanish classes, parts of the unit are interdisciplinary.

Of what value is culture to second language learning? For the foreign language teacher, the reasons are many. Culture shapes our view of the world. And language is the most representative element in any culture. Any item of behavior, tradition or pattern can only be understood in light of its meaning to the people who practice it. A knowledge of the codes of behavior of another people is important if today's foreign language student is to communicate fully in the target language. Without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete. For foreign language students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who speak it or the country in which it is spoken. Language learning should be more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon.

Humanistically, the study of different cultures aids us in getting to know different people which is a necessary prelude to understanding and respecting other peoples and their ways of life. It helps to open our students' eyes to the similarities and differences in the life of various cultural groups. Today, most of our students live in a monolingual and monocultural environment. Consequently, they become culture-bound individuals who tend to make premature and inappropriate value judgments. This can cause them to consider the foreign peoples whose language they are trying to learn as very peculiar and even ill-mannered. In 1980, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies stated, "Foreign language instruction at any level should be a humanistic pursuit intended to sensitize students to other cultures, to the relativity of values, to appreciation of similarities among peoples and respect for the differences among them." (Wilkes, p. 107)

When should the study of culture begin? Should culture be postponed until students can study it in the target language? Won't special emphasis upon culture be wasteful of precious class time? Shouldn't cultural materials be postponed until students have greater maturity and greater language competence? Ideally, the study of culture should begin on the very first day of class and should continue every day thereafter. Because of the large decrease in enrollment in second and third year language courses, the concept of culture can be communicated to only a small number of students unless this is done in the earliest phases of their instruction.

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