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S2 lecture 3: Teaching culture in EFL Classes

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Introduction

Kramersch (1993, p. 264) notes that: 'talk about talk is what the classroom does best and yet this potential source of knowledge has not been sufficiently tapped, even in communicatively oriented classrooms'. Teachers who view language simply as a code make acquiring grammar and vocabulary the primary goal of language learning. However, understanding language as a social practice means engaging students in tasks in which they create and interpret meaning, and in which they communicate their own personal meanings and develop personal connections with the new language.

Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words . Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into Thoughts (Henry Sweet).

Culture is the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior. According to Tavares & Cavalcanti (1996), the main aim of teaching culture is "to increase students awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the target culture and their own, to make comparisons among culture" (p.19).

The importance of teaching culture in language classes

Culture provides a context for the use of the language while Language reflects the beliefs, customs, and traditions of the culture in which it is spoken. Understanding language in its cultural context is vital for an effective communication and language learning. It is difficult to learn a new language without gaining cultural insights. Teaching culture contains of worthy moral values of life, history, literature, customs, etc. We can cite the following roles:

Encourage Cultural Competency: Understanding culture and language enables learners to communicate competently and appropriately.

Provide rich context & input: Learning about cultural elements is as important as learning vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation because it provides a context for the use of language and promotes effective communication.

Strategies to incorporate culture in teaching

1. Expose students to authentic cultural materials: Use authentic cultural materials like books, films, TV shows, and music as teaching tools. These materials can provide insights into the cultural context of language use and promote cultural understanding.
2. Bring culture into the classroom: Integrate cultural activities into the classroom, such as festivals, holidays, or special events. Incorporate cultural topics, themes, and perspectives into language lessons.
3. Use cultural comparisons: Compare and contrast the target culture with your students' culture. Such comparisons can give insights into the cultural values and perceptions that underlie language use.

Things to consider in teaching culture

Language: Language is the most obvious way to teach culture, as language and culture are interconnected. Teaching the way native speakers use expressions, idioms, intonation, and pronunciation to convey meaning helps learners understand cultural values that are reflected in language.

Customs & traditions: Learning about such things as etiquette, celebrations, and holidays can provide the learner with a sense of the underlying cultural values and beliefs that are embedded within them.

History & geography: Teachers should convey information about important events, people, and places that are significant in shaping the native speakers' cultural identity.

Cross-cultural comparison

Comparing and contrasting the learners' culture with that of the target culture can be effective in helping learners understand the cultural differences between their own culture and the target culture.